



The Achilles Effect: What Pop Culture Is Teaching Young Boys about Masculinity

Crystal Smith

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A discussion of pop culture messages about masculinity, their impact on boys, and the benefits of introducing more gender balance to boys' lives.

When most people think about gender stereotypes and children, they envision princesses, dolls, and pink clothing. Few consider the warriors, muscle-bound action figures, and T-shirts covered in graffiti and skulls that are assumed to signify masculinity.

The pop culture environment that surrounds boys introduces them to a world where traditionally masculine traits-like toughness, aggression, and stoicism-are highly esteemed and where female influence is all but absent.

The Achilles Effect explores gender bias in the entertainment aimed at primary school boys, focusing on the dominant themes in children's TV shows, toy advertising, movies, and books: gender stereotypes of both sexes, male dominance, negative portrayals of fathers, breaking of the mother/son bond, and the devaluing of femininity. It examines the gender messages sent by pop culture, provides strategies for countering these messages, and encourages discussion of a vitally important issue that is rarely talked about-boys and their often skewed understanding of gender.

The Achilles Effect is a guide for parents, educators, and students who want to learn more about male and female stereotypes, their continued strong presence in kids' pop culture, and their effect on young boys.

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