

Elizabeth Gagne'

Mentor: Dr. Laura Hakala

Grad Research Symposium

Malfoy, Draco Malfoy: Exploring Toxic Masculinity in *Harry Potter*

When people think about *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, or any book in the series by J. K. Rowling, they typically think of Harry Potter and his friends, Hermione Granger and Ronald Weasley. Rarely do they think about Draco Malfoy. Considering the #MeToo movement and the exposure of toxic masculinity, characters like Malfoy become pivotal in understanding how we identify masculinity in adolescents. Especially since most of the conversations taking place about *Harry Potter*, mainly focuses on Harry himself and those he is in close connection with. This encompasses scholarship as well, where the primary focus is on Harry. Draco Malfoy plays a prominent role in some of the key points and scenes within multiple *Harry Potter* books, and therefore his character and actions are important. Annette Wannamaker believes that “in more than a few contemporary texts written for boys, masculinity is—not always but quite often—portrayed in complicated, contradictory, often paradoxical ways that highlight the difficult negotiations that boys are making as they develop gendered identities within, against, or on the margins of current cultural constructions of masculinity” (*Boys in Children's Lit* 10). Draco Malfoy is a character that develops his masculinity through the influence of what it means to be a pureblood wizard, which stems from the teaching and impact his parents and society have on him. There is also influence from his peers and what it means to be a Slytherin, a Hogwarts house that is known for unsavory characters. This influence allows Draco to perform his gender as a male, in a way that exemplifies traits of toxic masculinity, but Draco's need to continue to

perform in the role that he has been molded into, eventually causes his identity of self to become conflicted and the structure of masculinity and toxic masculinity to collapse.

Defining Toxic Masculinity

In order to identify factors of toxic masculinity and how they are exhibited in the wizarding world and through Draco Malfoy, and to avoid “naturalizing masculinity”, we must first understand the implications of masculinity, how masculinity has been characterized, and what that looks like when depicted in boyhood (Wannamaker 122). This is to help counteract the belief that “boys are just boys” (Wannamaker 122). One of the important factors defining masculinity is that it is based on “white American manhood” and “equated with strength, intelligence, and heterosexivity” (Jackson and Balaji 22). The heteronormativity of white masculinity then becomes the basis for hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is defined by R.W. Connell and James Messerschmidt “as the pattern of practice...that allowed men's dominance over women to continue” (832). This dominance was considered in relationships via the alpha male and in positions of power within the work force, and in that “it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men” (Connell and Messerschmidt 832). This stemmed from the ideals of patriarchy, which put the male/male figure at the top position of power. Toxic masculinity becomes a byproduct of hegemonic masculinity. Toxic masculinity extends the power of men over women, to include the power over other men. Additionally, toxic masculinity puts emphasis on behaviors men perform that can be harmful to themselves and to others, such as “being heterosexual, to the point of displaying homophobia; performing aggression; exerting control and toughness; being emotionally restrictive...and displaying misogyny” (Marasco 227). These forms of toxic masculinity are also seen in

adolescents and in depictions of boyhood in literature, which connects with the imperial boy and “his escape from the domestic sphere” (Tribunella, par. 8). The imperial boy is the one who goes away from home and makes his own decisions. As it pertains to toxic masculinity, the implications of those decisions and how they affect others. Eric Tribunella suggests that “boyhood is not synonymous with masculinity” (par. 11). Boyhood and masculinity may not be synonymous, but boyhood cannot be separated from masculinity, because there are influences of masculinity that shape how boys experience different things in their childhood and how the influences of masculinity shape them into men themselves.

Being a Pureblood

A big part of Malfoy’s toxic masculine traits stem from his upbringing as an aristocratic pureblood. In the wizarding world the bloodedness of a witch or wizard has different stigmas associated with it. Muggle-born or Mudbloods, are witches and wizards whose parents had no exposure to magic. Half-bloods are witches and wizards who have a muggle-born parent and a magical parent. Lastly, purebloods are witches and wizards who have both magical parents. Being pureblood has many connotations in the wizarding world. The negative connotations, such as pureblood being the superior form of witches and wizards, is one of the influences on Malfoy’s identity that allows him to be defined by toxic masculinity. Malfoy constantly focuses on the parentage of his peers. The first time he meets Harry Potter he ask’s him if his parents “were our kind” (*Sorcerer’s Stone* 78) This means that if they are anything less than pureblood they are not worth acknowledgement or being in any type of relationship with and in “wanting to know the pedigree of everyone he encounters, Draco is both classist and a racist” (Ostry 92). This is prevalent in how Malfoy deals with Hermione Granger and her being muggle-born. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* when Hermione calls out Malfoy for essentially buying

his way onto the Slytherin Quidditch team, he retaliates by calling her a “filthy little mudblood” (*Chamber of Secrets* 86). In this moment Malfoy asserts his dominance over Hermione through their bloodedness, “as her parents are both Muggles, she has no status in the wizarding world” (Ostry 91). Not only is Hermione beneath him because of her blood status, but she is also a female and shouldn't be able to talk to him the way that she has.

This notion that Malfoy being superior and dominant over Hermione, as it pertains to her blood status, comes from Malfoy's father Lucius. When Harry accidentally floos himself to Borgin and Burkes, in book two, he sees the Malfoys there. While there, he overhears Mr. Malfoy talking about the Ministry conducting raids and why he needs to sell some stuff, stuff that could get him in trouble by the “flea-bitten, Muggle-loving fool Arthur Weasley” (*Chamber of Secrets* 43). It is unclear whether Lucius Malfoy was raised to believe in the superiority of pureblood witches and wizards, but his involvement with Lord Voldemort and his beliefs and the extent to which he has shown his distaste for muggle-borns suggest that he was raised to feel like he is superior.

There is small insight into how Voldemort believed that purebloods should be the superior beings, which also justifies the Malfoy family's beliefs, and that was through a conversation between Sirius Black and Harry when discussing Sirius' family tree and how his family were followers of Voldemort because they believed in the “purification of the Wizarding race, getting rid of Muggle-borns and having purebloods in charge” (*Order of the Phoenix* 112). The purification of blood means that half-bloods like Harry wouldn't be tolerated in the wizarding world either. Elaine Ostry points out that “wizards universally look down upon Muggles, and being a wizard means joining an elite world” (*Reading Harry Potter* 93). That elite world cannot exist if it is tainted by Muggles and muggle-blood.

This elite world that Malfoy finds himself in, is also associated with money and power, the aristocracy. Malfoy comes from a wealthy family and he has tried to use his wealth to get others to do what he wants. Not only that, but the Malfoy family uses their name as a power symbol. That is shown when Malfoy first introduces himself to Harry and Ron “sniggers” ((*Sorcerer’s Stone* 108). Malfoy believes he is making fun of his name and states that the Weasley’s aren’t worth making friends with, that he is. Malfoy has been use to his name giving him power, which comes from his a rich pureblood family, and they believe that they have power within the wizarding world. Because they believe in that power, they have passed that belief onto Draco. He then uses that sense of power to manipulate situations to benefit him or make him look better than others.

Like Father, Like Son

Continuing with the influence of family, there are several scenes that involve Mr. Malfoy that would have Draco believe that his behavior towards everyone else is justifiable and would further encourage toxic behavior. The first one that further establishes Malfoy’s hostility towards Hermione, is when Harry is listening to the conversation between Malfoy and his father in Borgin and Burkes. Mr. Malfoy criticizes Draco for not having better marks than Hermione and that he should be “ashamed that a girl of no wizard family beat [him] in every exam” (*Chamber of Secrets* 44). Mr. Malfoy is pushing Draco Malfoy to be the best at whatever he deems he needs to be the best at. He then insinuates that Draco won’t amount to anything if he isn’t the best. There is no reason why Draco should be ashamed that Hermione has better exams then him. It does not prove that he is not smart or does not understand what is being taught to him. The interactions between Mr. Malfoy and the Weasley family, when Draco is out with his father to collect his school supplies, allows further insight into why Draco treats them like he does. He is

witnessing his father put down another wizard because they are “a disgrace to the name of wizard” (*Chamber of Secrets* 51). It is only natural for Draco to emulate that behavior and strive to act the same way, especially if he believes that this is how his father wants him to act.

This showcases that toxic masculinity is learned through what is being taught to an individual. In the case of Draco and his father, the toxic masculinity that Mr. Malfoy exhibits in manhood is being passed on to Draco in his boyhood. There is no distinction between the two when the beliefs of what is considered a normal boyhood, is being conditioned and created through manhood. There is a hidden pressure on Malfoy to be this person that is like his father based on what society sees him as, and that pressure is doubled when it is expected of him to act that way when he isn't in the presence of his family.

Slytherin and Proud

Another reason Draco exhibits toxic masculinity comes from the status of being in Slytherin House and how all the members of his family had been sorted into Slytherin. There are negative attributes associated with being in Slytherin, such as “not a single witch or wizard who went bad who wasn't in Slytherin. You-Know-Who was one” (*Sorcerer's Stone* 80) Even the Sorting Hat eludes to Slytherins being good, “*Or perhaps in Slytherin You'll make your real friends, Those cunning folk use any means To achieve their ends.*” (*Sorcerer's Stone* 118). If someone, like Draco, goes into Hogwarts knowing that they will be in Slytherin based on their beliefs and how they were raised, it is easy to understand why there would be negative feelings towards those who are Slytherin. Not only that but the Sorting Hat puts students in their respective houses because it “detects promising qualities” and “sorts them in the House that would nurture their potential and put their characters to the test” (Bahn 41). If Slytherin is the

house that the bad wizards come from, then Draco's upbringing makes him the "quintessential Slytherin character" (Bahn 41).

There are also stigmas coming from the Slytherin house that stem from the founder Salazar Slytherin, who "wished to be more selective about the students admitted to Hogwarts" because he "believed that magical learning should be kept within all-magic families", as "students of Muggle parentage" were "untrustworthy" (*Chamber of Secrets* 114). Malfoy doesn't hide his hatred for those who are muggle-born, nor does he hide his annoyance for those he deems less than himself.

Not Always the Slytherin

It is important to understand that Draco is not the only character to exhibit toxic masculine traits. Specifically looking at Harry and Ron and how they treat Hermione, as well as how they treat Neville, at times. It is important to look at because Harry and Ron, who are protagonists, have the same traits and perform the same treatment of others, in a way that our key antagonists do. When Harry is being sorted into his Hogwarts house, he desperately tells the hat "*Not Slytherin. Not Slytherin*" (*Sorcerer's Stone* 121). Implying that he is better than Draco and the others that had been sorted into the Slytherin house and the implications of what being in Slytherin meant. However, as a Gryffindor Harry isn't as different from Draco as he thinks, nor is Ron. There are several instances with Harry and Ron and their interactions with Hermione where they act just like Draco, especially in thinking that they are better or above her. Like when Hermione tries to teach Ron how to say Wingardium Leviosa. This incident does not take place in a secluded environment either. It is happening in a crowded hallway, where anyone can hear the conversation. By making their thoughts and feelings more public, Harry and Ron have no respect for how Hermione feels or how it will make her feel when other people hear stuff about

her. Although this interaction is mostly between Ron and Hermione, Harry doesn't do anything to stop Ron from talking about her like that or try to correct what he was saying about her.

Allowing toxic behavior to happen is just as toxic, even if Harry was not outright displaying the behavior.

Conclusion

Overall, what is expected to happen is that all these influences that attribute to Draco Malfoy's toxic masculine behavior, will make him the epitome of a toxic individual because of how the influences have shaped his personality and identity. He will perform and act accordingly to what is expected from a pureblood, what is expected from his family, and what is expected from him as a Slytherin. But that is not what happens. Wannamaker postulates that "boys working to negotiate their identity must reconcile feelings they have that may sometimes be at odds with perceived norms of behavior" (Wannamaker 140). While Malfoy is trying to reconcile and create a balanced identity, these influences cause him to have an identity crisis and to question who he is and what he is meant to do. This collapse of toxic behavior starts when he is tasked to kill Dumbledore, which causes him to exhibit "behavior that is not stereotypically masculine" (Wannamaker 144): showing emotions, such as when he was crying in front of Moaning Myrtle and "tears [were] streaming down his pale face into the grimy basin" (*Half-Blood Prince* 522). There is also the lack of confidence, doubting himself, and thinking of the repercussions for his actions or lack-there-of, such as "when his whole body was shaking" and he was worried about his inability to kill Dumbledore and how Voldemort "says he'll kill me" (*Half-Blood Prince* 521). These are behaviors that he has not exhibited in the past, and the reason he is displaying them now is because he can no longer continue to be the person he is expected to be.

What is being established is the need for more stories and scenes to depict the fall of toxic masculinity, especially when society is trying to promote equality and depict masculinity in a way that isn't stereotypical. This needs to happen by relying less on hegemonic masculinity and to "portray broader definitions of what it means to be masculine" in literature (Wannamaker 144-45). Some books that portray this are *Freakboy* by Kristin Elizabeth Clark and *Lost Boi* by Sassafras Lowrey. Boyhood and masculinity cannot be depicted as a set way. Our understanding of masculinity must be an evolving and fluid definition.

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