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Modeling Manhood: Adam Sandler's Portrayals of Masculinity and Manhood

K. B. Chapman

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K.B. Chapman spent over three years studying and analyzing the filmography of Adam Sandler in preparation for her Master's Thesis. In Modeling Manhood: Adam Sandler's Portrayals of Masculinity and Manhood, she provides a concise look into the reasons behind the films. Her analyzation of his characters and the females he is attracted to in each film became a study in gender dynamics. Chapman avoids the typical feminist rhetoric, looking instead through a lens of intelligent common-sense reasoning about the day to day performances of masculinity in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century America. This book is invaluable to students of gender, sociology, psychology, and film, as well as to news and entertainment reporters and critics. Modeling Manhood: Adam Sandler's Portrayals of Masculinity and Manhood is a study of Sandler's character formation as he grew up in late 20th century America. The book analyzes the roles American popular culture, politics, and current events played in helping with that formation, as well as the role Sandler's father played. Sandler himself acknowledges his father as, "My father, my mentor, my teacher, my coach, my idol, my hero, my family's leader, my mom's best friend, and by far, the coolest guy I have ever known." These are the character qualities Adam learned from his father; the traits he associates with ideal fatherhood. They are what drive his efforts to influence ideas of masculinity, manhood, and fatherhood. Sandler's movie portrayals of masculinity and manhood usually begin with characters who are attempting to live out the fantasy of Playboy bachelorhood. Through the course of the story these men always fall into line with American middle-class behavior in order to attract 'The Girl,' who is necessary for his maturation. Sandler chooses these film roles to contribute to the ongoing conversation about what it means to be a man, and his portrayals of masculinity are in effect, efforts to mentor males of all ages into mature manhood. Chapman's in-depth reviews of I Now Pronounce You Chuck & Larry, Grown Ups, Spanglish, and The Waterboy give readers insight in what film scholar Timothy Shary's calls the "challenge [to] perceived norms about sexuality and sexual preference, social identities and expectations, power and strength, and the very essence of what 'being a man' means." Chapman also analyzes the recurring themes and characterizations are used to reinforce Sandler's message: the bully, the sensitive guy, the man-child, LGBT acceptance, the jock, college education, and engaged fatherhood to communicate the values his father imparted to him.

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