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### Documentary Review of The Mask You Live In

The documentary explores how our culture's narrow definition of masculinity is harming our boys, men, and society at large and unveils what we can do about it. The documentary starts with a group of boys and male adults' self-reflection on how the U.S masculinity culture had a negative impact on their lives. It concludes with constructive solutions proposed by people from different backgrounds.

The major themes are brutal and depressive. Boys in their early lives found nowhere to express their feelings when they felt down. As Dr Michael Kimmel said in the documentary, anyone could start a fight by asking one question, "who's a sissy around here?" Then, the boy that was bullied would either have to fight or run home crying. Boys are discouraged to show their so-called "weak" side, and the idea of being seen as weak or sissy, in the eyes of other guys, starts in our earliest moments of boyhood. What's worse is that it follows us all the way through our lives, and it forces us to prove to other guys that we are men by the specific definition. It deprives young boys' ability to feel secure in their masculinity

The makers of this documentary bring problems caused by the narrow definition of masculinity to the public and alert society that we must take action and voice about this issue. They are communicating a clear and important message: there is freedom outside of these rigid

definitions of manhood, and everyone deserves to feel whole. Each of us can do our part in expanding what it means to be a man for ourselves and the boys in our lives.

Men perform certain actions in order to prove their masculinity to counterparts around them, which is how masculinity is “done”. One of the documentary participants, Ian, grew up with his alpha-type grandfather’s voice and tried to prove himself by cutting his long hair off, wearing it differently, dropping his voice, joining all the sports teams, etc. He soon started to distance himself from people who were less masculine than him. This links to the concept of social conformity, as the power of beliefs, such as that masculinity is a superior characteristic, and norms present in the society can reinforce people’s behaviors. Men behave against the standards of masculinity, which is how masculinity is “undone.” In the documentary, a boy, Mario, cried in front of his mother and his peers. This is an example of how masculinity is “undone.” It was very surprising to me that, his mother, who was supposed to encourage him saying “it is okay to be emotional”, suppressed his expression saying “Mario, football players don’t cry.” This is an example of how masculinity is “done to” Mario by his mother.

As a Chinese and a young male adult, I am able to feel the depressive culture of masculinity. Culture in most Asian countries, such as China, South Korea, and Japan, also has an extremely narrow definition of masculinity, which is accompanied by more severe sexual inequalities than Europe and the U.S.

I was taller than average but much skinnier than other boys in my primary school, which made me an easy-to-bully boy. The first time I ran home and cried due to classmates’ bullying, my dad told me to just deal with it. Although I got bullied twice for my entire school life, which was not as bad as other stories in the documentary, it was still a painful experience. The learned

helplessness made me difficult to express myself, and it made me seem an introverted boy, which further made me weaker in my high school years. I felt like I was not supposed to get help, and I had nowhere to talk about it.

The culture of masculinity is now merged into sports, military, law enforcement, and entertainment. We saw violence in places like football fields and military bases, and we also saw the popularity of addictive video games that advocate bloody killing. Furthermore, many so-called models, those men that men look up to, are not teaching us the right things. Instead of teaching us to be brave and empathetic, they are teaching us things like domination and aggression, which have a profound and negative impact on our society.

We, as members of our society, must encourage both boys and girls to say no to sexism. Parents, schools, and government, who have direct impacts on educating and establishing children's values, should take more responsibility as it is about every person in our society.