**The Mask You Live In – Op-Ed**

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This recent documentary highlights the culture of masculinity in the United States. With information from experts as well as interviews with boys and men who understand the effects of the hyper masculine culture, this movie provides an in-depth look at how boys and men are socialized in America. Devaluation of the feminine (ex. …like a girl), exposure to and acceptance of violence (in media and video games), and dismissal of emotion were common themes throughout the movie.

Emotions are a consistent aspect of the human experience, whether we embrace or dismiss them. Males and females both experience a range of emotions, yet the current culture of masculinity requires males to bottle up emotions, with the exception of anger. Males who exhibit other emotions are often ridiculed as feminine or homosexual by their peers, and therefore learn not to express emotions openly. Females are generally socialized to embrace their emotions, to talk through and work through problems with one another. This gender divide in the socialization of emotion has helped to create a culture of hypermasculinity, encouraging sexist and violent ideologies.

While the documentary highlighted the problems caused by this culture of hypermasculinity, it also reinforced that there is hope for a better tomorrow. One expert recalled conversations with fathers of preschool-age boys who were appreciative of their young sons’ emotional expressions and needs, who vowed to continue encouraging appropriate emotional expression in them. One father interviewed for the movie explained his experience as a single father and how it taught him to be more aware of his own emotional needs as well as his sons. Other contributors discussed how they were socialized into this culture yet realized the importance of emotions and the threat of hypermasculinity and now work to encourage emotional expression in others.

Understanding how we view the world and adjusting our perspective to improve our lives is a large part of human development. Without this understanding and willingness to evolve we can become stagnant in allowing the world around us to shape our views and our lives. NFL great Joe Ehrmann discusses the role of a coach in the lives of young athletes and the power that coaches hold in shaping the lives of these young men. He advocates teaching empathy and teamwork and helping boys to explore and express their emotions in healthy ways. Realizing the power of his celebrity, Joe Erhmann accepts his responsibility to engage the community in the conversations around the socialization of boys. As an inspirational speaker, he encourages teamwork and effectiveness, using insights from his own life and career.

While there is no easy solution to the problems created by this culture of hypermasculinity, there are steps that can be (and are being) taken to minimize the impact and create a new perspective on gender and emotion. Educating parents about the dangers of socializing their children in a hypermasculine culture and teaching children that it’s okay for boys and girls to express emotions in a healthy way, will help to steer us away from this dangerous avenue of socialization.