

# **Movies, TV, and Literature as Discussion Tools for Critical Social Issues**

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# DOCUMENTARY



*The Mask You Live In* follows boys and young men as they struggle to stay true to themselves while negotiating America's narrow definition of masculinity. *The Mask You Live In* ultimately illustrates how we, as a society, can raise a healthier generation of boys and young men. Pressured by the media, their peer group, and even the adults in their lives, our protagonists confront messages encouraging them to disconnect from their emotions, devalue authentic friendships, objectify and degrade women, and resolve conflicts through violence. These gender stereotypes interconnect with race, class, and circumstance, creating a maze of identity issues boys and young men must navigate to become "real" men.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Was there any one aspect or moment in THE MASK YOU LIVE IN that resounded the most within you? Were there any statements or facts that you found shocking? Which aspects of the Im were you already familiar with?
- Do you ever wear a metaphorical mask when facing the outside world? If so, describe this mask. What function does it have? Does it serve you well?
- “‘Be a man’ is one of the most destructive phrases in this culture,” states former NFL player Joe Ehrmann. Why so?
- Research shows that compared to girls, boys in the U.S. are more likely to be diagnosed with a behavior disorder, prescribed stimulant medications, fail out of school, binge drink, commit a violent crime, and/or take their own lives. From your personal perspective, where does this stem from?
- Almost every boy interviewed in the Im mentioned loneliness as an overriding emotion. Why such isolation and solitude?



# BOOKS

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With the courage, honesty, and compassion that have made her one of America's most provocative authorities on modern culture, bell hooks takes on the interior lives of men and answers their most intimate questions about love.

Everyone needs to love and be loved -- even men. In this groundbreaking book, bell hooks gets to the heart of the matter and shows men how to express the emotions that are a fundamental part of who they are -- whatever their age, ethnicity, or cultural persuasion.

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# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Written in response to the author's in-depth discussions with men who were inspired by her trilogy, *All About Love*, *Salvation*, and *Communion*, bell hooks's *The Will to Change* addresses maleness and masculinity in new and challenging ways.

- What does it mean to be a “good man”?
  - What qualities do the men you respect and admire have?
  - What values and morals do they live by?
  - What kinds of things do they say and do?
- How do you define intimacy and when was the last time you shared an intimate moment?
- When was the first time you experienced someone telling you that emotions weren't “manly”? What do you remember about that moment and how you responded to it?
- Where and when did you learn “how to be a man”? This can include lessons from your family/guardians, popular culture, or peer-to-peer interactions?
- After reading this book, what is a part of you that you want to reclaim?



# TELEVISION AND FILM

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As men aren't usually taught to have a healthy relationship to sex, that can compound the already important role that sexual desire plays in their psychological makeups.

Being able to talk openly and frankly about sex in a real way that accepts difference, embraces weakness and confronts fear, like Otis Milburn does all throughout "Sex Education," is the version of masculinity we should strive for.

Conscious of how awkward sex can be, he treats Adam like any of his 'clients' — meeting them where they are, and trying his best to work with them on developing a relationship to sex and sexuality that makes sense for them — whatever that may be.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What was the first piece of advice you got on sex? Was it helpful and how has your perspective changed?
- How do gender stereotypes/expectations play out in sex and sexuality? How does this affect the quality of romantic relationships?
- Ask the young person to collect messages about masculinity — positive or negative — that they come across in their daily lives, whether on television or in advertising, the news media, video games, movies, books, music or anywhere else.
  - Next, have them rewrite a favorite children’s book, show, or other work of art -- one they feel could represent a healthier and fuller view toward boys and men.



**THANK YOU!**

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