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Society's Expectations of Men

The documentary *The Mask You Live In* is a powerful exploration of how society's expectations around masculinity shape boys and men in America. In personal interviews, personal stories and expert insights, the book shows how the main ideas of masculinity can lead to depression, isolation and even violence. It asks us important questions about how these pressures affect young boys and even grown men's mental health, relationships and their own identity and challenges us men against the rigid stereotypes today. This book challenges the read to rethink what it means to be a MAN in today's world, showing a healthier and more compassionate expressions of what masculinity is today. By doing this it not only addresses the struggle that men face but also offers more hope for a more balanced and fulfilling life.

One of the central themes of *The Mask You Live In* is the damaging impact of rigid masculinity on mental health. The film reveals how societal expectations force men to suppress emotions such as sadness, fear, and vulnerability, which can lead to a range of mental health issues. For example, the documentary features interviews with boys and men who describe the emotional isolation they feel from having to "man up" or hide their feelings. This suppression of emotions often leads to depression, anxiety, and a sense of disconnection from others. Psychologist Dr. William Pollack, featured in the documentary, explains that boys are often taught from a young age to prioritize toughness and dominance over empathy, which can stunt their emotional development. This unhealthy dynamic increases the likelihood of men suffering

in silence, as many internalize the belief that seeking help or showing vulnerability is a sign of weakness. As a result, men are more likely to experience loneliness and mental health issues but are less likely to seek professional help, exacerbating the problem.

The documentary also highlights how the pressure to conform to traditional masculine ideals can affect relationships, both romantic and platonic. From a young age, boys are often socialized to believe that being emotionally distant or assertive is key to gaining respect and maintaining control. This belief can lead to strained relationships, as men may struggle to communicate openly with others, particularly in intimate partnerships. As sociologist Dr. Michael Kimmel explains in the film, many men feel the need to assert their dominance through aggression or emotional withdrawal, which harms their ability to form deep and meaningful connections. The impact of these behaviors is far-reaching, contributing to the cycle of isolation and loneliness. By limiting emotional expression, men are deprived of the relational intimacy that could otherwise offer them support and comfort. This pressure to conform to traditional masculinity not only damages their personal relationships but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes that affect how men view themselves and others in society.

Ultimately, *The Mask You Live In* serves as a call to action. It invites us all—men and women alike—to dismantle damaging stereotypes, promote mental health, and create space for a more balanced and humanizing understanding of masculinity. The future of masculinity lies in embracing a diversity of expressions, which leads to stronger individuals, healthier relationships, and a more compassionate world.

