

Francis Bracewell, Zahedul Islam, Florance Ebun

Professor Sabatino Mangini

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Masculinity's Impact on American Boys for a Positive Society

The Mask You Live In is a documentary produced and directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom that explores the negativities of masculinity within the American culture. Newsom's inspiration for the documentary originated from her getting pregnant with her son. When she toured for Miss Representation film, during an interview with audience she said, "It was really important to me that I could nurture a son who could be true to his authentic self, who wouldn't always feel like he had to prove his masculinity. There's so much loneliness, pain, and suffering when one is pretending to be someone that they're not." We imagine the mixed views that people had after watched the documentary. Some view the film message as gender bias against men and the wrong view of masculinity by female. In the film, Kimmel argues, "We've constructed an idea of masculinity in the United States that doesn't give young boys a way to feel secure in their masculinity, so we make them go prove it at all time." Also Dr. Caroline argues, "Masculinity is not organic, it's reactive. It's not something that just develops. It's a rejection of everything that feminine." This research paper will traverse masculinity and redefine masculinity as it relates to how American parents raise their sons. We believe this documentary's definition, *The Mask You Live In* on masculinity ("Be a men," "Men don't cry," "don't be a pussy") toward boys and their parents are harmful to society and has the propensity to initiate violent among boys. We agreed with the documentary and have therefore, designed thesis "Parental attention and care as well as moral values" will positively impact the lives of boys in America.

1. Parental Attention and Care

Attention means the time or effort that you are willing to give to help someone or something because you care about that person or thing (Cambridge dictionary). There is usually a strong bond between parents and their children that attracts concern about their wellbeing. Especially when they are boys and begin to play with peer groups, parents worry a lot. At that period, the film suggest parents would start talking to the boys about boldness among their peers, that they should not allow anyone to bully them or that they must not cry as boys because the society would see them as being weak. Referencing the film, *The Mask You Live In* in scene:

My father, we didn't really have a great relationship. His night job was drinking, he was an alcoholic. I was afraid of him. He was a mean man. He was emotionless, he didn't care about much. In his eyes, going to school wasn't the power behind what we should have been doing. It was get a good job, get a lot of women, and then you're a man. My mother was more of my striving force. She taught me that education was important. So every year on Mother's Day, of course, I would send her a Mother's Day card, but also I would send her a card on Father's Day. And I would just thank her for playing both roles in my life. The moment I found out I was going to be a father was very scary for me. I was an undergrad, and my son's mother told me she was pregnant. And we were no longer together. And I told her if she wanted I would raise him. I would take care of him. My father didn't raise me, and this is very important for me to raise my son. It's been very hard to play both roles as a mother and father for Jacksen Because I was taught that men are tough, they're strong. I spent a lot of nights crying. Because he did have feelings and I had to, you know, take care of that. And then one day, it clicked, and it clicked because Jacksen said to me, "Daddy, I'm sensitive." And I was like, "Okay...okay." So then I just started like, I started reading a lot, you know, doing Google searches on how to be sensitive and

stuff like that. I started just asking him how he felt, Like how do you feel, why are you sad, are you okay? He taught me how to be more in touch With my own emotions and his as well. He would cry sometimes, I would cry with him. And I would tell him, "Daddy wasn't allowed to cry growing up, but its okay, if you need to cry, cry. It took some time for me to get there (18:13-20:04).

The scene shows lack of parental care. They were disconnects between the child's parent which lead the child to become withdrawn and hide his emotion as well. Unfortunately, some parents here in America due to busy schedule or other issues find it difficult to spend time with their boys or have personal discussions with them. Some parents are not aware of the pains the boys are facing; and they feel that once their child's material needs are met that clears every other thing. The film also suggest lack of attention by parents, can lead boys to feeling of frustration or depression, and might lead boys to experiencing series of troubles such as drugs, crime, suicide and murder, just to mention a few.

The need for parental attention and care is one of the two factors for redefining masculinity. Giving listening ears or building friendly environments would definitely encourage the boys to open up whenever they are going through any challenges. Parents need to speak to the boys about masculinity rather than give them a negative impression. To support the point on parental attention and care, Sandi Schwartz argues in *How a Parent's Affection Shapes a Child's Happiness for Life* article, "Higher self-esteem, improved academic performance, better parent-child communication, and fewer physiological and behavior problems have been linked to this type of affection. On the other hand, children who do not have affection parents tend to have lower self-esteem and to feel more alienated, hostile, aggressive and antisocial." This is obvious that giving attention to boys

would definitely improve their lives in every facet such as good moral up-bringing, good education and better interpersonal relationship.

2. Moral Values

Another factor for redefining masculinity in America is moral values. Moral values are the standards of good and evil, which govern an individual's behavior and choices. Individual's morals may derive from society and government, religion, or self. When moral values derive from society and government they, of necessity, may change as the laws and morals of the society change. "Moral values such as integrity, determination, loyalty, truthfulness, honesty and giving respect to each other should be inherited by every individual as it helps distinguish between what's right or wrong and good or bad (Quora.com)." To back up this claim, Jeff Bryant stated that, "Parents, teach your children to express themselves. Teach them to be in touch with their emotions, to speak honestly to people, and to maintain integrity and stick by their principles in all they do. This is perhaps the highest morality you can instill." Unfortunately, some parents do not have what it takes to instill moral values as they themselves do not have morals. One can only teach boys morals if and only if they were taught by their parents or guardians.

In the documentary *The Mask You Live In*, shows how a father was an alcoholic while his mother was the one who raised him and played the role of a father and mother so as to see her son become a success. His father did not have a moral value and could not offer any to his son. Some of the reason why so many boys in America are going through pain is because some parents are not doing enough for their boys by grooming them daily with moral values. The first major assignment for redefining masculinity in boys is for parents to start re-orientating themselves about the reason and importance of moral values because you cannot teach what you do not know. Once

that is done and followed ritualistically, parents will see the positive side of bringing boys up with moral values.

There is nothing wrong with “Masculinity of Boys in America” but what is wrong is the negative impact it has on boys based on the ideas behind it, which states that “Be a men,” “Men don’t cry,” “don’t be a pussy.” Unfortunately, such ideology does not help the boys deal with their individual emotions, suffering, moral up-bringing, loneliness, social interaction, insecurity and failures. On the other hand, it kills their self-esteem, independence, confidence, success, social interactions, while confusion, pain, frustration, hatred and timidity would set in among boys and thereby lead to crime, drug addiction, rape, school drop-outs or even gun handling and suicidal. To minimize these negative menace, it is important to redefine masculinity among boys in America.

Parental attention and care as well as moral values will help redefine masculinity positively to boys in America. This is because parental attention and care by parents towards boys will help to achieving a meaningful and self-esteemed life, improved social interaction, security, self-discovery of purpose and improved academic performance among others. Parents will be inform about of challenges their boys face and they’re going to build confidence and be aware of the realities of life. Also, moral values will assist in shaping the lives of boys by working according to the principles of moral values which likely lead to success in all they will do. It is very important that parents check themselves and from time to time re-orientate themselves about moral values to enable them transfer same to their boys not just for themselves as a family but for the boys and the society at large.

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