



# **The Mask of Masculinity: How Men Can Embrace Vulnerability, Create Strong Relationships, and Live Their Fullest Lives**

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At 30 years old, Lewis Howes was outwardly thriving but unfulfilled inside. He was a successful athlete and businessman, achieving goals beyond his wildest dreams, but he felt empty, angry, frustrated, and always chasing something that was never enough. His whole identity had been built on misguided beliefs about what "masculinity" was.

Howes began a personal journey to find inner peace and to uncover the many masks that men – young and old – wear. In *The Mask of Masculinity*, Howes exposes the ultimate emptiness of the Material Mask, the man who chases wealth above all things; the cowering vulnerability that hides behind the Joker and Stoic Masks of men who never show real emotion; and the destructiveness of the Invincible and Aggressive Masks worn by men who take insane risks or can never back down from a fight. He teaches men how to break through the walls that hold them back and shows women how they can better understand the men in their lives. It's not easy, but if you want to love, be loved and live a great life, then it's an odyssey of self-discovery that all modern men must make. This book is a must-read for every man – and for every woman who loves a man.

## **The Mask of Masculinity: How Men Can Embrace Vulnerability, Create Strong Relationships, and Live Their Fullest Lives Details**

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# **From Reader Review The Mask of Masculinity: How Men Can Embrace Vulnerability, Create Strong Relationships, and Live Their Fullest Lives for online ebook**

## **Mark Henderson says**

This was a disappointing book. Healthy masculinity is a topic close to my heart. However, I've rated this book quite poorly. Why? Howes has made an honest attempt here and I think he means well.

Despite Howes' efforts in this book, I received the uncomfortable and unpalatable feeling that this book was not about shedding masks. It was about trading stereotypical, toxic masks for new masks. Perhaps I should start at the beginning.

First, my bias: I am a heterosexual white male. I did not fraternize much at all with males during any of my school years from gradeschool through college. It is by virtue of luck - and not my own virtues - that I found it extraordinarily difficult to empathize with the content that the author chose to focus on in this book. The failure of empathy for the capital-M Man that Howes describes is my own. (Hopefully) sitting past that bias, I feel that this book could have been so much more.

Howes posits: Men are the problem. Look at the statistics of murder, suicide, sexual harrassment, and nearly any other statistic. Men sit at the center of the problem and yet we - men and society - seem unable to confront what causes so much suffering. I'm on board so far.

Then begins the diversion off the tracks of relatability: Howes describes the stereotypical male experience. The experience is this: That of a man that was once a boy, a boy that was picked on by meaner and tougher boys. The boy fights back not immediately, but by eventually becoming that meaner boy. By proving himself in sports. His struggle is his own because he is not allowed to experience sadness or pain. Numbness is his guide and his norm. Throughout life, he puts on several "masks":

1. The Stoic: Man is invulnerable. Emotions are suppressed. Man must not show that he feels emotion - or, even better, he must not feel the emotions at all.
2. The Athlete: Man is built for domination. Athletics are a pure and physical representation of that divine mandate from evolution.
3. The Material: Man is represented by what he owns and what he has acquired.
4. The Sexual: Man is not only obsessed with sex, but he dominates it.
5. The Aggressive: Men take what they want and hate those who impede their desires.
6. The Joker: Man takes nothing too seriously, except the other masks; he especially does not take emotions seriously.
7. The Invincible: Man does. He always has everything under control.
8. The Know-it-all: Man has all the answers and no one else.
9. The Alpha: There are winners and losers, and Man must, by way of exclusion, be the winner.

This describes a wide range of possible experiences as a Man. I not only find it plausible, but know from experience that many men will empathize with these masks. They will read these descriptions, recognize that which is holding them back, that which is falsely defining them, and thank Howes for the revelation.

The hope that the fact that I am not one of these men is not the only reason I rated this book poorly. I did not connect with any of the 9 chapters on the masks. What I did find valuable were some of the paragraphs at the

end of each chapter, titled, "For Women". These paragraphs provide advice on how to approach men who are deeply hidden beneath these masks.

What could have made this book better?

1. A clear definition of what Man's alternative is. It is not simply to recognize masks or to shed them. It is to illuminate a simple fact: Man is defined by what he does, and not by who Man actually is. This book focuses on the facade, but not what is left beneath the facades.
2. More nuanced masks that do not fit the male stereotype.

About trading masks for new masks: A potential pitfall of failing to recognize the fundamental plight of Man is that, in shedding (for example) the mask of The Stoic, Man is left without any backup. He still does not know how to find fulfillment. He is still chasing an external definition of himself, even if he recognizes that the toxic external definitions are no longer serving him.

All of us humans crave external reflection and for someone else to tell us who we are at times, to tell us why we are here, and how we can derive meaning in our lives. Most healthy humans still strive for meaning on their own. Man happens to be a toxic subset of this general case in which he has no sense of personal value or meaning outside of external definition.

For example, in shedding the toxic, stereotypical masks, Man might adopt The Mask of Virtue (or Wokeness). The author himself may fall into this category. I may fall into this category. Man is the height of decorum. He is the epitome of politeness. He offends no one. He makes Woman feel comfortable and safe. In return, he receives the praise of Woman. He receives the love he has so long been without, and finally, in that acceptance, Woman gives him the meaning he has been unable to attain or create for himself.

Or there is the Mask of Anti-Identity. Man2.0 hates Man for all of the harmful things Man does to the world. Man seeks to alienate himself as much as possible from the Toxic, Traditional Man. In doing so, perhaps he will finally be accepted and given his meaning. Again, instead of creating it for himself.

There is a huge range of depth and conflict behind the basic struggle of Man to consider ourselves inherently worthy of and embodying meaning. That depth is entirely hidden from the reader in this book.

Howes has made a start. He tried. That matters quite a lot. I sincerely hope this book has helped some men identify the toxic masks that they were in order to improve their lives. There is so much more to be done. Readers might look instead to the book by bell hooks, "Men, Masculinity, and Love".

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## **Eric Feunekes says**

I liked the concept of recognizing and removing the "masks" that we wear. The problem is that this book comes at the issue by saying a "real man" doesn't need money or success, a "real man" is true to himself and those around him, etc. Again, I agree with part of that idea, the issue is the concept of there being a "real man". The author doesn't seem to notice that he's advocating for taking off the masks we wear (man = money, or power, or athletic success) but in doing so he's promoting another mask, which is that of the "real man" -- it's just another mask, to use his terms.

In the end, I like the idea, it may be worth reading for some and it certainly made me think about these concepts, even if I don't agree with the author. That said, I didn't finish it as I got fed up with the repetitiveness and shallowness of it.

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### **Anel Kapur says**

Thought provoking.

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### **Tim says**

Better than I expected.

My first reaction upon seeing this book was that this guy was a narcissist, and just one of the thousand modern self-help gurus trying to sell you something.

However, there is more depth here than I assumed.

It might not be the most original material, but the author's message is driven home by his effective use of examples.

He has interviewed very interesting and qualified people from a wide range of backgrounds, and then he uses bits and pieces of their life stories to support his theme.

Essentially, he argues that men are afraid to be vulnerable.

But vulnerability is a bit of a buzzword these days. What does it really mean?

I think the idea to use masks as a metaphor was a really good choice. We all wear masks to present a certain version ourselves to the world. As men, we're often expected to abide by social norms in regards to masculinity. But this isn't a healthy way to live.

It's just really interesting to read this book and reflect upon the experiences of me and my friends. We've all lived behind various masks during different phases of our lives. It's hard to be vulnerable as a man and let our true self shine through.

Altogether, this book is relatively simple and doesn't have the most groundbreaking material. However, the author does a good job of articulating and communicating his message.

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### **Adii Pienaar says**

This feels authentic and open; unlike other "serious" books that were written with only a commercial goal in mind. I feel that this book starts and adds to an important conversation about what it means to be born a male / be a man in society today.

I also had a bit of an epiphany in reading the book: I consider myself an open, transparent, heart-on-the-sleeve guy that is mostly comfortable being vulnerable. But when I spoke to my son about how it is okay to cry, he told me that he had never seen me cry. I was stunned. I had never consciously tried to hide my tears from my boys. In fact, most of the most significant people in my life would've seen me cry. Yet for whatever reason, my son had not yet seen me cry and subsequently I had contributed to his skewed perception about crying/being a man.

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### **Caleb says**

I checked this book out of my library as a bit of a joke. I was looking forward to many eyerolls and snickers at what I presumed would be a facile treatment of the issue. Instead, what I read was a rather interesting introduction to masculinity studies. Howes made each of his chapters easy to understand through personal and third-party narratives, while peppering academic and scientific stories throughout to support his points.

This book ultimately received three stars from me because it lacked any nuance when it came to gender (which the author admits) and the spectrum of masculinities (something the author did not really touch on). With some minor tweaks, this could definitely be a 4-star read.

I will be recommending this to many people in the days to come. Three hefty, masculine stars.

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### **Spek says**

I struggled to finish this book. I put off finishing this book on several occasions and felt tempted to put it down as a DNF and move on. But I didn't. My reluctance to keep my DNF shelf as empty as possible and my stubbornness were my only motivation to power through this book because it is flawed on several fronts. First, I was turned off by the egotistical writing. I understand that he colors his lessons with personal stories, so a lot of it is written in the first person. But it reeks of vanity. This book reads as if the author has all the answers. This author is not an academic, has no writing experience, and although he admits it, he always follows it up with some vain excuse as to why we should listen to him, whether it is his experience from networking or interviewing certain people or his former glory as a professional football player. It wouldn't be so bad if it was a memoir of some sorts, but this is a self-help book about personal improvement and it looks particularly bad when you fail at such a basic level: humility.

I was also not a fan of his almost formulaic approach to the different types of masks and I failed to connect to any of them. This, I think, played a crucial part in my feeling detached from the writing or the personal experiences described in the book. His use of trite and unremarkable examples or stories to back-up his point did not help. Moreover, he would use the same story or the same person ad nauseam to illustrate the different types of masks, and most of the times, it felt forced or artificial.

In sum, I thought the premise of the book was promising and I was disappointed with how it was executed.

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### **Marco says**

Lewis Howes presents a few of the masks that men hold up over their true selves to help identify self-destructive behavior before it corrupts male relationships with friends, families, and partners.

Howes is not a professional therapist but does a good job of showcasing why so many men act the way they do, which is namely as jerks. An entrepreneur, Howes turned a football career-ending injury into a self-made business that encourages others to live their best lives, in the same idea as Brene Brown or Tony Robbins.

In "The Mask of Masculinity", Howes goes over 9 self-identified masks that men wear to disguise true feelings of vulnerability: Stoic, Athlete, Material, Sexual, Aggressive, Joker, Invincible, Know-It-All, and Alpha. Going over each one, anecdotes are given from a few interviews Howes has done over his career through his podcast "The School of Greatness". Some stories, quite frankly, are gross (I could've done without the Mike Rowe story) and every once in a while there's a OMG moment of crassness that might make you cringe, but doesn't take away from the book as a whole.

From what I can read in this book, he and a lot of other motivational speakers concentrate on the idea of fear being a big motivating factor in why we act the way we do. Men especially have generations and generations of damaging "man up" behavior that they have to get over to realize that expressing your feelings, showing people who you are, is not such a bad thing. Reacting in violence or anger doesn't prove how much of a man you are, in fact it says the opposite.

Advice is also given for women at the end of each chapter on how to deal with each of these "masks of masculinity" but that advice, for some of the masks, can be used by friends of these types of men or others.

I, personally, don't know if these types of men can be changed only because society, media, and others still promote the idea of the "manly man", you know, the one who punches guys in bars, drinks as a form of "living life", doesn't have serious relationships or express "feelings", which to them are gross and dangerous. But, Howes does a good job of letting us see behind that mask at who these men are and why they act the way they do.

Adequate looks into men's personalities and why they act like jerks most of the time and what to do about it from good-guy Howes.

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## **Bella says**

I'm finally aborting this book after trudging along with it until I'm more than halfway through.

I borrowed this book from the library because it was a new acquisition and I was the first patron to take it out. The title and the premise of the book both sounded promising.

You can begin anywhere in the book based on which type of mask you are most interested in reading about. I picked the sexual mask because I found it most relatable. It was when I had finished my section of choice and began reading cover to cover that the trudging started.

The first thing that jolted me into seriously considering why I was spending my time with this book was the elaborate mention of the guy who spammed YouTube videos with ads to sell his rags-to-riches formula, in houses and next to cars he purportedly rented for the shots. I read on because I couldn't imagine aborting any books and I wanted to "give this book a chance."

The references to facetious anecdotes from the author's personal experience and the "manly men" he reveres soon became tediously repetitive and it became apparent that most of the points made are circuitous and

seem to always come to a mention (or repeated mentions) of the his podcast and apparently a previous work.

If you are looking for properly postulated arguments with some semblance of research and methodology involved, it's not what I'll suggest.

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## **Cody Lasko says**

This is a review for the audiobook version read by Lewis himself.

I'm gonna be biased because this book struck a chord deep. But hey, it's my review, so... here we go.

I'm a man and I've struggled in the past. I've had emotional difficulties, intimacy issues, over-aggressive tendencies, and trouble building relationships. In fact, I still do. A lot.

Over the years I've come to understand why. Or at least partially understanding why.

This book hooked in so deep because it cuts directly to these reasons and utilizes examples from the author's own life experience himself (who in doing so exposes so much vulnerability it helps to remove the reader's own emotional barriers). Beyond that real world exemplars of the more extreme variations of each masculine archetype are provided within, tossing their own thoughts into the mix. Travis Pastrana as the "Invincible Man" is a great example here.

The combination inexplicably brings out your own past transgressions and allows a deep reflection on how each instance has informed who you are as a man today. Often this is in stark conflict to who we really are as people deep inside.

If you couple this read with Lewis' other work, and particularly that done on his podcast, this is a book that could prove invaluable to so many men out there in the world.

I know the self reflection it brought to my life has already proven to be invaluable. Maybe it can for you too

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## **Marina says**

This is more 3.5 stars for me, but Lewis is so darn likable and genuine that I can't get myself to round it down.

I am quite interested in the topic of masculinity and in psychology in general, so there wasn't tons here in terms of theory that was very new to me. But I really liked the anecdotes/case studies Lewis used and I also liked the idea of the different 'masks'.

Many of the things he talks about are essentially about how to have a good life, and apply nicely to both men and women, though with a particular focus on how our culture(s) can get men off course in specific ways. Some observations I liked:



- Sports as soap opera - lots of heightened emotion (over something not very real) in players and viewers
- For many athletes after they stop playing sports, the selflessness of team play disappears and all they're left with is competitiveness and the need to win. Ironically this often expresses itself in relationships.
- Five core life areas to focus on: health (mental, physical, emotional), relationships, wealth (finances, career, education, business), contribution, spiritual. How would you rate yourself on each one? What would a ten look like in each area for you?
- "That's the day I became a wealthy man. Because I still didn't have any money but scarcity left my body." - Tony Robbins on giving all his remaining money to a boy in a restaurant so he can take his mom out for lunch
- Unaddressed anger is the glue that keeps the aggressive mask stuck in place. Fear, sadness, pain are usually under it.
- Anger is one of few emotions men and boys find ok to express (boys see this in games, on TV)
- Society will accept you with your flaws, as long as you're funny
- Humour as a way of maintaining distance
- Beware of experts - especially people who think they know something but have very little experience with it
- Two ears, one mouth.
- There are no competitions for best listener, and many for best speaker. We are not taught how to listen well.
- When you let go of the know-it-all mask, these things can flood back into your life: people want to be around you, freedom to not know, ability to learn and grow, deep wisdom from others, deeper intimacy and support
- Most of all, (unempowered) alpha males want control and respect -getting all they're asking for is only third on the list
- Looking like you're on top is not the same as getting what you want. Don't let your ego get in the way of getting what you really want. We often mistake posturing for the real thing.
- What makes you special is the unique combination of strengths you have. But men who wear the alpha mask (or any other mask?) feel like they can only count on this one developed muscle - they're not sure if investing into strengthening other ones would pay off and they worry it would weaken their one developed muscle. Embrace a fuller view of what masculinity means.
- Do what you feel is right and true. That's your only obligation as a man and as a human being.
- Two things that matter in life: your relationships, and how you've made a difference/a mark
- How to build a legacy - doing something that is meaningful to you that brings value to others

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## **Dustan Woodhouse says**

I paused this book just a few minutes in, back on Nov 12, and set it aside for six weeks. Because I had work to get done that I didn't need some introspection jamming up.

I reserved introspection for Boxing Day. Arising very early allowed me the few hours of zero interruptions or interaction to power all the way through the book from start to finish.

Can you make it through the book without having to stare too deeply into your inner abyss? Yes, most likely you can.

Will the book have you evaluating the value in expending the resources required, (time, money, internal disruption, external disruptions) in order to delve into your inner abyss? Yes most likely it will.

Consider this a baby step on fixing a few things with your psyche. Minor or major.

It's a call to action easily ignored, but it's a call to action worth tuning into...and then hopefully not ignored.

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## **Matthew says**

### **I guess I'm not a man either**

Look, I get it. We all have stereotypes of what men are and the masks they use to hide the pain. I totally believe in this ideal and understand some men suffer from this.

I'm like Lewis in the fact I was sexually abused. I have a lot of history in that. However, none of the mask types in here (disappointed there are ONLY 9 and ONLY stereotypes) do not apply to me.

I get it. I am already an outsider looking in. I had to deal with a lot so my mental wiring is not like other man. I might as well be called Omega Man for how "beta" I am.

I hate the fact I bought this book. I got hooked on the interviews and decided I would give Lewis one more try. We were cut from the same twisted cloth.

Except I am not on the male list.

If you have a typical male in your life with typical problems of being a male in the normal society, then this book might be for you.

If you're one of the few Omega males in the world, save your money. We aren't even Sigma enough to register on the book's scale. Go see a therapist instead.

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## **Tziggy says**

I received this as an ARC! (And thank goodness)! Let me start by saying that I went into reading this book being very optimistic and open minded and I am so glad I did. So many things were brought to light. I wish I would have read something like this while in my 20's. The author has a previous book out and a popular podcast that has given him the opportunity to utilize the experiences of many well-known people. Which were helpful. But, for me the most enlightening experiences and thoughts came from those that most of us have never heard of. A retired service veteran who is "old school" and helps you realize how wrong and outdated some of his ideals are. A story about the first oil rig out in deep waters and how if the workers acted like know it all's and didn't have the guts to ask a simple question, the screw up could mean their life as well as others. The most meaningful parts of the book for me was when the author spoke of his own past. One is that you realize that for how much you sense that the author has a clue about all of this, that at one time in his life he did not. And, by the way he never comes off as one who knows everything or much of anything for that matter, he left that up to his guests, for the most part. The other was how he was so open to express those instances in his life and how it came from the heart.

He also left the book open enough and broad enough for it to not just be a book for men. He had parts in their specifically for women.

As I read I saw myself wearing many of the "masks" and how I must have come across to those around me at those times and cannot wait to have those types of situations again so I can adjust my actions during those instances. As the authors states, we are not perfect and never will be. We will always wear this mask or that one from time to time. But it is the skill of limiting and the containing of the wearing of these masks.

I would highly recommend this book for all men and for those, men and women with young boys at home. It can help in their nurturing into becoming an upstanding young man and human being. as well.

One last thing. As with anything, diet, working on a relationship, or most tasks for positive betterment, this book will not do the reader any good unless the reader goes into it with an open mind.

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## **Malcolm Bradford says**

Solid Read, with some actionable takeaways.

Very easy read and the voice/tone of the book is written in a way that anyone can pick it up and understand the points Lewis makes in each chapter.

The end of chapter summaries also make it nearly impossible to not at least pull 1 or 2 things from each chapter.

Lewis leverages his experience from interviewing thought leaders and industry leaders from his podcast, and extracts various masculinity lessons within these interviews and places them in individual chapters on ego, sexuality, arrogance, and other "masculine" topics.

The insight provided his podcast interviews add color and perspective throughout the book, but all his points are made at the subjective level from personal stories and anecdotes.

Personally, would've loved to see some more science, factual evidence, and cited studies to provide more objective evidence to Lewis points.

However, all in all definitely enjoyed the read and feel like I became more self-aware of some of the masks I hide behind in my everyday life.

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