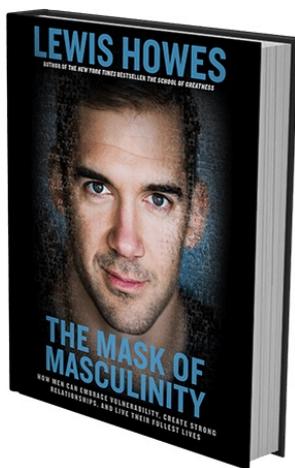


The Masks We Hide Behind

In my last post in this series on the foundations for my God Buddy concept, I wrote about the 5 most common “wounds” men face based on Dr. Robert Lewis’ study, *The Quest for Authentic Manhood*. In that study, we also learned that many men hide behind one of several “masks” in order to cover their weaknesses and flaws. However, Dr. Lewis suggested these masks actually keep us from the deeper discussions that develop the true, authentic relationships we really need.



One book on this very topic is *The Mask of Masculinity* by Lewis Howes. I found his book very helpful to understand why men avoid being vulnerable with each other.

As I wrote about in *Traits of a God Buddy*, vulnerability is one of the important characteristics.

Like many fathers of my generation (I’m a Baby Boomer), Howes’ dad rarely talked about his feelings. He said he and his dad always talked about day-to-day affairs but he never saw his dad cry. He said his dad was a “doer” and not a “talker”.

Isn’t that how many of us guys were raised?

We were taught to just take care of our personal business and not share too much of our feelings with others. Some even suggest that men are conditioned at an early age to wear these

proverbial masks, including several damaging stereotypes about our identities, such as:

- Men don't cry.
- Men love war movies and fighting.
- As a man, you need to always know what to do.



One study of men's experiences at Johns Hopkins University even uses an example of a college-age man who explained: *"I am more of an emotional person... I never really felt much like who I [pretended to be] because I [was]... putting my man-face on."*

Perhaps we wear these masks or put on a "man-face" because we're afraid we might actually reflect who we really are and not who we are trying to be.

Masks of Masculinity

In his book, Lewis Howes breaks down the meaning of each of nine masks of masculinity, how they came about, and what to do about them since he too feels they hold men back from being truly vulnerable. Howes' masks are defined as:

- **Stoic Mask:** "I cannot cry"
- **Athlete Mask:** "I must be physically fit"

- **Material Mask:** “How much I earn defines my self-worth”
- **Sexual Mask:** “The more girls I sleep with, the bigger of a man I am”
- **Aggressive Mask:** “I must fight to prove my manhood”
- **Joker Mask:** “Everything’s a joke to me”
- **Invincible Mask:** “I feel no fear, feel no pain”
- **Know It All Mask:** “The origin of mansplaining”
- **Alpha Mask:** “I must win everything”

Based on his dad’s example, Howes said he only knew how to express his love for others through actions and now realizes that he also actually hid behind a “stoic mask”.

He also says men today are looking to understand themselves better and also want to understand their friends better. He says we’re tired of surface-level conversations around some variation of work, sports, weather, intellectual topics, or current events. Howes suggests that we remove the masks so we are truly known by others.

The Two Sides of Bruce Wayne

These masks remind me of the 2016 movie *Batman vs Superman* and how Ben Affleck portrayed the struggles of being billionaire, Bruce Wayne and of being the caped crusader.



Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice –
2016 DC Comics, Warner Bros. Pictures

Born into a wealthy family, Bruce Wayne had an idyllic childhood but after his parents were gunned down in front of

him, he dedicated his life to battling crime. Wayne became almost possessed and trained his mental and physical abilities extensively for years to reach their peak.

However, during the 20 years of crime-fighting, Bruce Wayne became a psychologically damaged and almost sociopathic individual. Bruce went to a very dark place rooted in the trauma of losing his parents. As his butler Alfred explained it, the rage and feeling of powerlessness can turn a good man like Bruce into a cruel one.

“Taking off that mask to show vulnerability is one thing, but when you do it to show the world who you really are, that is something else entirely. That is true strength”.

– Lewis Howes, The Mask of Masculinity

Batman ultimately realized that his enemy was not himself, then sought redemption for his pain and gain the strength to make the world better.

GBs Learn to Take off the Mask

As you can see, learning to take off our mask to reveal the “real you” to another man is one of the key traits of a God Buddy relationship. I personally found that Howes explained the problem that shows itself in many of the men today: we still hide behind a mask.



Image by Leandro De Carvalho from Pixabay

I have seen many men who were willing to take the risk with other men but then had their confidentiality violated. After, they simply stopped taking off their masks because the violation of their trust and the pain of revealing their past wounds still hurts.

God Buddies know how to take off their mask in order to become honest and very vulnerable with each other. We also recognize who we can trust, even when it isn't always easy to be vulnerable. Once you develop and maintain complete confidentiality with your God Buddy, you can unmask your issues and weaknesses. This allows you to properly display your God-given masculinity, which is a message more men of all ages need to hear today.