

# 'Mask You Live In' details stresses, constraints on teen boys

March 12 film part of TUHSD 'unmasking' program

By [KERI BRENNER](mailto:kbrenner@marinij.com) | kbrenner@marinij.com | Marin Independent Journal  
PUBLISHED: March 6, 2019 at 6:01 pm | UPDATED: March 7, 2019 at 11:04 am







Scenes from "The Mask You Live In," about the stresses placed on teen boys in the current culture, which screens March 12 at Smith Rafael Film Center, San Rafael. A panel discussion follows the film, which was produced by California first lady Jennifer Siebel Newsom, formerly of Kentfield. (Courtesy California Film Institute)

If the #MeToo movement has shined light on the need to hear and respect the voices of girls and women, a film, "The Mask You Live In," offers a related understanding for boys and men who are often forced to stifle feelings and "man up" in the current American culture.

The 2015 film by California First Lady and former Marin resident [Jennifer Siebel Newsom](#) will screen Tuesday at the Christopher B. Smith Rafael Theater, 1118 Fourth St., San Rafael. It is the third of a four-part film and workshop program organized by Tamalpais Union High School District wellness director Jessica Colvin. The four-part program aims to create a

safe place for teens of either gender to express emotions, get support and be themselves in all respects.

Boys, in particular, from an early age are trained not to be emotionally vulnerable, even to their male friends, Colvin said.

“This is so relevant right now in our current political climate,” Colvin said. “It’s about looking at America’s narrow definition of masculinity — looking at it and expanding it. The narrow definition is to ‘man up,’ exert dominance, control, power, economic success, strength — that’s how we define a real man in America. Boys or young men are not supposed to show emotion — that would be weak.”

Colvin said boys and men who spend a lifetime not expressing feelings are then at risk for acts of violence or self-destruction when they feel they have no where to turn or no way to deal with their emotions.

“Society and the media start giving messages to boys and young men at a really early age,” Colvin said. “We have to address it right away — gender norms and stereotypes are put in place at birth.”

Films “are a way to offer a catalyst for the conversation, and offer stories that are relatable,” said Joanne Parsont, director of education for the California Film Institute, a partner in the series. The first film in the project was “Angst,” about teen anxiety, by Marin filmmaker Karin Gornick, and which screened at the Mill Valley Film Festival in October. That was followed in November by “I Am Maris,” which covered eating disorders and which featured a Bay Area teen who found her way to healing through yoga.

“Films are a great resource for making the conversations a little bit easier to tackle,” Parsont said. “The whole point is to create a community forum for awareness, education and conversation.”

“The Mask You Live In” features an appearance by Ashanti Branch, an East Bay workshop leader who is also coordinating with Tam Union district students on the “100K Mask Challenge,” a worldwide effort to help

teens “unmask.” The “unmasking” is done by expressing the outer personae they wear, and what is underneath, through small drawings of “masks” on post cards.

The teens hand in the postcards anonymously at the wellness centers located at Tamalpais High School in Mill Valley, Redwood High School in Larkspur and Sir Francis Drake High School in San Anselmo. Then at 6:30 p.m. March 26 at the district’s Kreps conference room at Redwood’s campus, Branch will reveal in a “word cloud” the dominant “masks” and emotions for each of the schools. A word cloud is a collection of words grouped together in which the ones that come up most frequently are larger than those that are only mentioned a few times.

Branch, creator of the Ever Forward Club, is also one of several panelists who will lead a discussion after the March 12 film, which is nearly sold out.

“Screening a film created in our community allows us to create a strong panel,” Colvin said.

In addition to Branch, panel members on March 12 are Charis Denison, youth advocate and health educator, Prajna Consulting; Adrian Vasquez, a student and youth facilitator; BJ Wasserman, Inside Circle Foundation and Deb Blum, family communications consultant, co-founder/director, Redwood Parents Connect.

The fourth film in the series is scheduled for April 30, Parsont said.