



CYBER

HEROES

An Educational Guide
for Youth Workers
and Parents

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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Objectives	5
The Impact of Stereotypes and Prejudice	6
Normalizing Emotions	12
Building Healthy Relationships	17
Digital Literacy	21
Viewing Guide	24
Resources	26
Bibliography	28

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Introduction

At its core, cyberviolence is about control. It involves trying to control someone else's life and can manifest in various ways, such as online harassment or non-consensual sharing of intimate images. To address this issue, Les 3 sex* has created this guide to help boys resist the influence of the manosphere and its harmful messages. The goal is to prevent sexist, misogynistic, transphobic, and homophobic attitudes and behaviours from becoming the norm. Research shows that boys who engage with manosphere content often hold ideas associated with dominant masculinity even before encountering it online. That is why early intervention matters.

For those interested in exploring this topic in greater depth, Les 3 sex* has also published a [research report](#) on cyberviolence and the manosphere.

This guide is intended for parents, youth workers, teachers and school staff. It offers practical strategies for identifying early warning signs of cyberviolence and provides concrete ways to respond. The content is organized into four key themes: stereotypes, emotional skills, social skills, and digital literacy. It also includes a media viewing guide. The sections can be explored in any order, depending on your needs and interests.

"When we think about boys online, we often think about screen time and video games, or the gravitational pull of Andrew Tate and ChatGPT. We think about YouTube and TikTok, toxic group chats and pornography.

These things matter. What's missing, however, is the centrality of friendship in boys' online lives.

For the boys in our survey, time spent connecting with others by chatting (75%) or video gaming (68%) was comparable to time spent solely on entertainment (80%). Perhaps most critically, when we asked them about the most positive way the internet had impacted their lives, the most common answer was social connection (36%)."

Source: Andrews, S., & Reed, J. (2024). *Boys will be ... The online lives of boys who are embracing positive masculinity.* Next Gen Men.

Objectives

This guide contains questions for adults to reflect on in their personal or professional lives and questions to spark conversations with boys. Alongside these prompts, you will find practical tips for initiating discussions and strategies for directing boys towards reliable sources of information or encouraging them to think more deeply.

The guide has four main objectives:

- 1.** Challenge and break down stereotypes and prejudices tied to masculinity
- 2.** Build emotional skills
- 3.** Strengthen social skills
- 4.** Apply the principles of digital literacy

As you work through the guide, you may feel overwhelmed by the scope of the challenge. You may even feel discouraged by the amount of work involved. But remember, this is not about completing every exercise or achieving perfection. What matters most is integrating the core ideas and maintaining them over time. Change is gradual, and consistency is more important than speed.

The Impact of Stereotypes and Prejudice

Stereotypes are preconceived ideas about groups of people, often based on characteristics such as gender, skin colour, religion, or body size. We all carry stereotypes. Our brains are wired to simplify reality, helping us to process information and make quick decisions. However, stereotypes are sweeping generalizations that place people into categories, overlooking the unique combination of traits, interests, and aspirations that define each individual.

So, how can we recognize our own biases and avoid passing them on to younger generations? The first step is introspection: taking an honest look at ourselves without harsh self-judgment.

Straightforward Questions

When I think of gender-specific professions such as firefighting or nursing, what comes to mind? Do I recognize that people who do not fit these stereotypes also work in these fields?

Do I assume that certain groups of people are less capable of participating in politics? Where does that belief come from?

What are my true feelings about people who openly express their religion, sexual orientation or gender identity, or who embrace their bodies even when they don't fit societal beauty standards? If that makes me uneasy, how does that uneasiness manifest itself?

How would I react if a teenage boy told me he wanted to do ballet, or another activity often seen as “for girls”?

Do I think that school dress codes are fair for both boys and girls?

How would I feel if I saw a boy wearing a skirt? Why would I feel that way?

Do I think certain games are “for boys” and others are “for girls”? Where does that idea come from?

Unlearning stereotypes is a lifelong process. It's normal for our initial reaction to someone to be influenced by bias. What matters is our second thought: stepping back, challenging that automatic response and replacing it with a more thoughtful and fair perspective.

Breaking free from stereotypes also means staying curious and empathetic towards others. Here are a few everyday practices that can help:

Best Practices

Watch films or shows, or read books that feature different lives and perspectives to your own.

Follow people on social media whose experiences differ from yours, such as people who are racialized, migrants, fat or living with disabilities.

Volunteer in community activities that bring you into contact with people from diverse backgrounds.

Join a sports or arts class and connect with your fellow participants.

Travel.

Travel, even locally, and take part in neighbourhood life to better understand the people around you.

Meeting others, whether through conversation, volunteering or reading fiction, helps to build empathy, which is a key part of emotional growth. For example, a film can provide an intimate insight into the effects of sexual violence on a character, making it easier to understand realities that might otherwise seem distant. Similarly, volunteering can provide insight into the specific challenges faced by LGBTQ+ communities.

To learn more

Empathy involves curiosity and active listening.

This means asking questions, paying close attention to the answers, and striving to understand. To learn more, visit

→ <https://positivepsychology.com/empathy-worksheets/>

Boys who buy into sexist stereotypes and narratives are more likely to engage in cyberviolence. Some of the most harmful narratives are:

- Traditional gender roles
- Gender hierarchy
- Rape culture

Traditional gender roles reinforce the belief that there are fundamental differences between genders. Some boys and men feel compelled to live up to narrow definitions of masculinity, being strong, dominant, or aggressive, while rejecting anything linked to femininity for fear of being seen as weak. This mindset often contributes to the devaluation of girls and women.

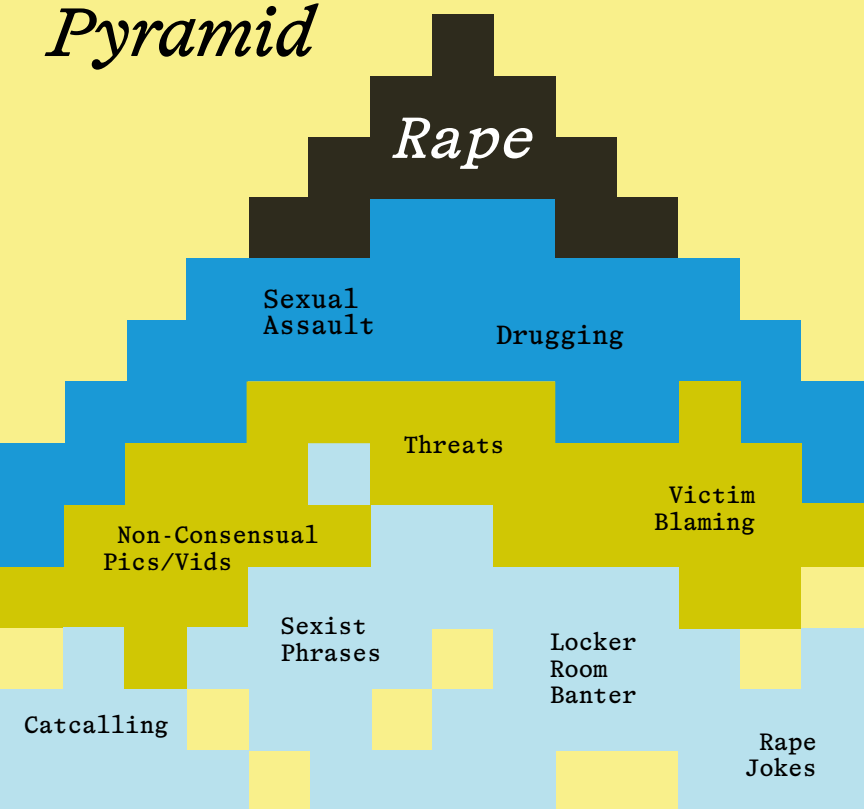
The narrative of gender hierarchy claims that men hold a higher social status than other genders, fuelling hostility toward women, girls, and LGBTQ+ people.

Rape culture refers to the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours that normalize, excuse, or trivialize sexual violence. It shifts responsibility away from perpetrators and minimizes the harm experienced by victims. The rape culture pyramid illustrates how these attitudes and behaviours are interconnected:

A recent Canadian study of young men aged 18–30 found that 41.46% believed accusations of cyberviolence are used to harm men, while 39.87% claimed women lie about the severity and frequency of the cyberviolence they endure.

Source: Deshaies, T. (2025). *Cyberheroes: Research Report. Les 3 sex**
<https://les3sex.com/medias/document/file-document/Cyberheroes-Research-Report-EN->

Rape Culture Pyramid



Stereotypes affect everyone. Debunking them paves the way for a society in which people can live authentically and freely, without the burden of false beliefs related to gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, body type, skin color, religion, and physical and mental abilities.

Source: Next Gen Manual: A Program Guide for Engaging Boys in Positive Masculinity (p.52)

Normalizing Emotions

Did you know that one emotion can hide another? For example, when a teenager seems angry, that anger may actually be hiding sadness or fear. We use different tools to help young people sort through these feelings. For younger kids, we use brightly colored charts with expressive faces. For older youth, we use a tool called the emotion wheel.

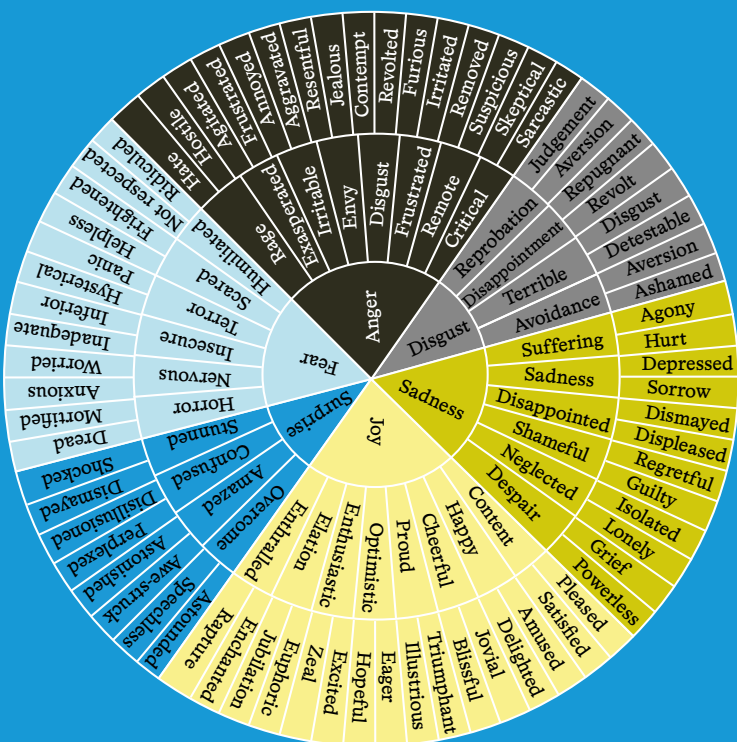
It is important to take a teenager's emotions seriously, even when they seem exaggerated or misplaced. They should be welcomed without ridicule. Adolescence is a time when many emotions are experienced for the first time, making them feel especially intense.

Here are a few guiding principles for responding to emotions in a supportive way:

- Do not minimize or mock what the teenager is feeling. Instead, name the emotion, acknowledge its validity, and reassure the teenager that their feelings are real.
- Listen attentively and without interruption, and allow for silence.
- Thank them for trusting you enough to share their feelings.
- Help them sort out what is within their control and what is not.
- Offer support in a collaborative way. For example, ask: "Would you like to just talk about it, or would you like us to look for solutions together?"
- If appropriate, share a similar experience from your own life to show that these feelings are normal at any age.

Emotion Wheel

1. First, identify one of the six core emotions at the center of the wheel: anger, disgust, sadness, joy, surprise, or fear.
2. Next, narrow it down to a more specific feeling that stems from it. For example, fear can turn into insecurity.
3. Repeat the process, moving gradually outward along the wheel, for example, insecurity developing into inferiority.



It's also important to normalize everyday conversations about emotions. One of the best ways to do so is by asking questions and listening with genuine interest and without judgment. Here are some examples of questions you can ask:

Conversation Starters

Is there something on your mind that you'd like to talk about?

Is there anything I could do to help?

When was the last time you were really happy?

What makes you feel calm or at ease?

If you could change one thing in your life right now, what would it be?

Where and with whom do you feel safe?

What are you looking forward to this week? What are you most nervous about this week?

How do you feel about a friend moving away, switching schools, or a teacher leaving?

Is there someone bothering you right now?

What was your favourite part of this week?

A direct yet compassionate approach can be most effective when navigating difficult situations:

Straightforward Questions

How have you been since your father passed away/your mother fell ill/your brother was hospitalized?

What are your thoughts when you're lying in bed, unable to sleep? What worries you?

Are you afraid of moving, changing schools, or starting college? What specifically worries you about that?

What challenges are you facing right now?

If you are worried about someone, it is best to ask them directly if they are thinking about suicide. Asking directly makes it easier to connect them to the right support, such as the Montreal Suicide Prevention Centre. Contrary to popular belief, asking about suicide will not put the idea in someone's head. In fact, it often brings relief to those who are already having these thoughts.

Depending on the young person's age and the signs that raised your concern, you may need to phrase the question differently. Start by asking if they think about death in general, and then clarify if they think about their own death.

As adults, it is our role to create a safe space for sharing. If we want teenagers to open up about their struggles, we must listen without judgment and refrain from offering solutions unless asked. Pay attention, avoid interrupting, and ask follow-up questions to show your genuine interest. If the moment feels right, you can also share a personal experience, such as a time when you felt rejected during adolescence or more recently.

To learn more

Emotion Diary

This emotion diary is another useful tool that can help young people better understand and process their feelings.



Building Healthy Relationships

Although we are naturally social beings, social skills do not always come easily. They require practice. If we want the young people in our lives to exhibit prosocial behaviours¹, we must lead by example. One of the most effective ways to demonstrate positive masculinity is to reflect on our habits and relationships. Here are some questions to get started:

Straightforward Questions

Do I have friends that I regularly see in person?

How would I describe my friendships, my relationships with colleagues, and my relationships with family members?

Do the people around me reflect positive, respectful models of how to treat others?

Do I show genuine interest in others?

Are there people in my life with different gender identities or cultural backgrounds?

Do I make time for activities that don't involve my phone or computer?

1. Prosocial behaviours are the ability to connect with others and develop and maintain relationships with friends, colleagues, family members and/or romantic partners.

Like any other skill, social skills improve with practice. Young people can develop their social skills by trying new hobbies or visiting places where they can meet others, such as a youth center or a YMCA Teen Zone. As adults, it is also our role to take an interest in their hobbies and encourage them. Over time, this can strengthen our relationship with them. Here are some simple ways to do so:

Best Practices

Ask questions such as:
“I know you love Minecraft/collecting fossils/playing soccer. What do you enjoy most about it?”

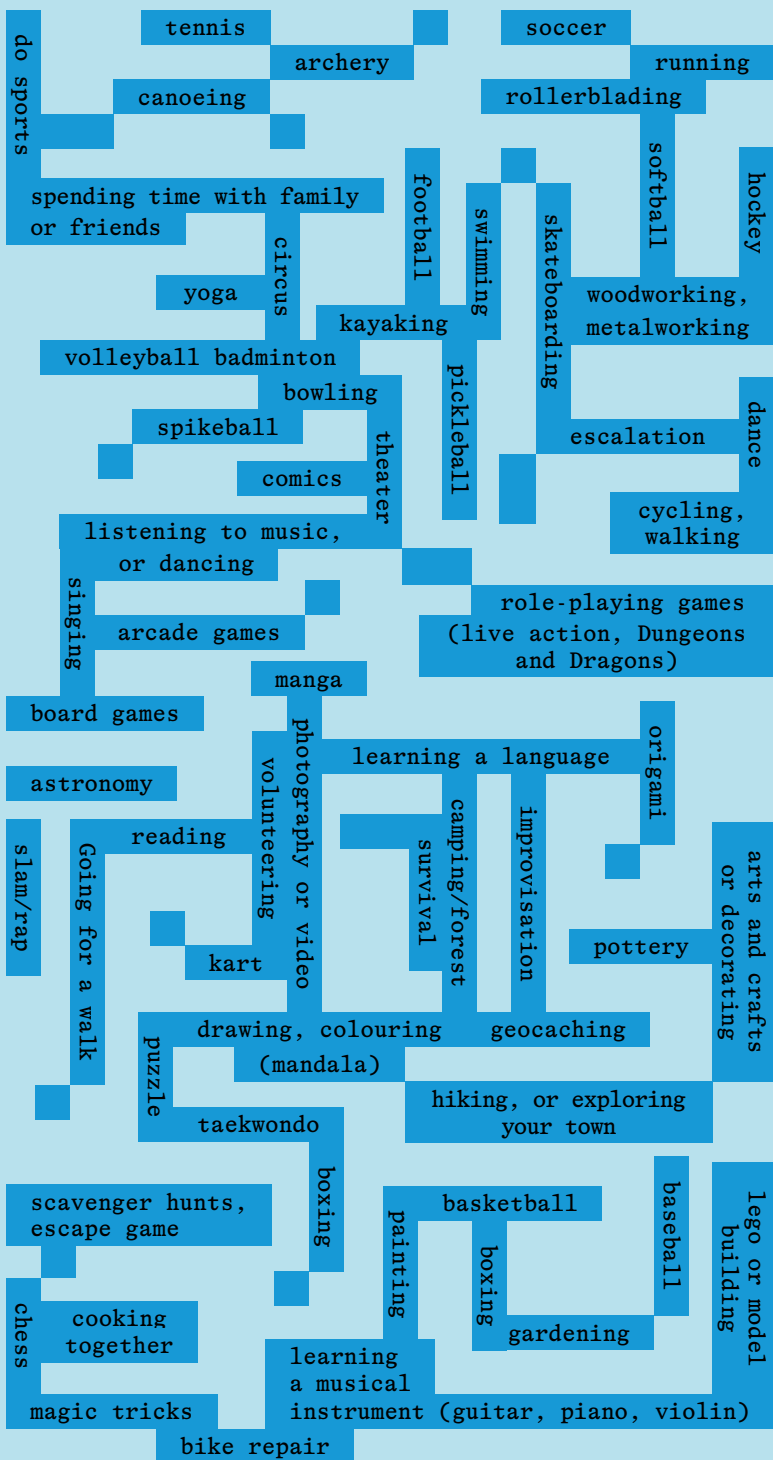
If they play video games, ask them to show you how it works. You might even try playing it yourself. This is a great reminder of why it matters to take an interest.

Help them discover a new hobby or activity.

To learn more

My Life as a Gamer: A Letter from a Son to His Parents





Taking a Break from Screens

Do you think you don't spend much time on your phone? Try checking your screen time settings: you might be surprised.

On Android devices, look under *Digital Wellbeing & Parental Controls* in the Settings app.

On Apple devices, check *Screen Time* in the Settings app.

Best Practices

If you want to reduce your screen time, here are some helpful strategies:

- Set time limits for certain apps. For example, restrict TikTok to 60 minutes per day.
- Use *Night Mode* to block certain apps during specific hours. For example, from 10:30 p.m. to 7:30 a.m.
- Switch your phone display to black and white to make it less appealing.
- Leave your phone in another room for a few hours.
- Plan phone-free moments at home, such as during family dinners or board game nights.

These habits can help you create distance from your device and build a healthier relationship with it. Change won't happen overnight, but over time, you may notice a difference in yourself and those around you.

By setting an example and showing that it's possible to live without being constantly glued to a screen, you encourage young people to do the same and develop healthier relationships with their phones.

Digital Literacy

Digital media literacy is the ability to critically, effectively and responsibly access, use, understand and engage with media of all kinds.¹

We are bombarded with information every day. Since anyone can create content, it can be hard to determine if someone has the knowledge or expertise to speak on a subject.

Misinformation or disinformation?

Misinformation is false information that is shared mistakenly, often because the person sharing it does not know the full story. An example would be reposting a video of a water bomber dropping flames into a forest without first verifying the facts.

Disinformation, on the other hand, is the deliberate and harmful spread of false information. Using the previous example, it would mean sharing the video knowing it is fake.

To learn more about this case, watch this video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lTeM8155odk>

How to Spot Reliable Content

There are a few simple indicators that can help you determine whether content is trustworthy. These indicators are also good practices for content creators:

- List or cite credible sources.
- Indicate the date the content was created.
- Share your professional title, training, and place of practice when applicable.
- Clearly state the purpose of the content, whether it is meant to inform, share an opinion, or tell a personal story.

1. Media Smarts. (2025). *Digital Media Literacy Fundamentals*. [https://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/fundamentals](https://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/general-information/digital-media-literacy-fundamentals)

Before sharing content yourself, it helps to:

- Use a search engine such as Google, DuckDuckGo or Bing to track down the original source.
- Check who posted it first.
- Verify where the story comes from.

Ressource

The [Teen Verify Network](#) project led by MediaSmarts offers several relevant examples for learning how to verify information.

To learn more

You can also use fact-checking sites such as:

AFP Fact Check

<https://factcheck.afp.com/>

Reuters Fact Check

<https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/>

Snopes

<https://www.snopes.com>

Be wary of content that oversimplifies, stirs up strong emotions, or makes bold claims without nuance. Remember that context matters and that very little in life is black or white.

Advertising by Content Creators

It is not always clear when a social media post is actually an advertisement. Many creators blend promotions into their everyday content. Sometimes it is easy to spot, but other times it is not. In Canada, content creators are legally required to disclose commercial partnerships, so watch for hashtags like #ad, #advertising #advertisement or #gift.

In this video, beauty influencer Scott Friesen explains how to identify undisclosed advertising in online media and offers practical strategies for viewing content more critically and informatively.



Video

Crash Course: Media Literacy

This YouTube playlist introduces core media literacy concepts, such as bias, message analysis, and media influence.



Website

MediaSmarts: Digital Media Literacy

This website offers extensive online resources for educators, parents, and youth on fact-checking, online ethics, media representation, and more.



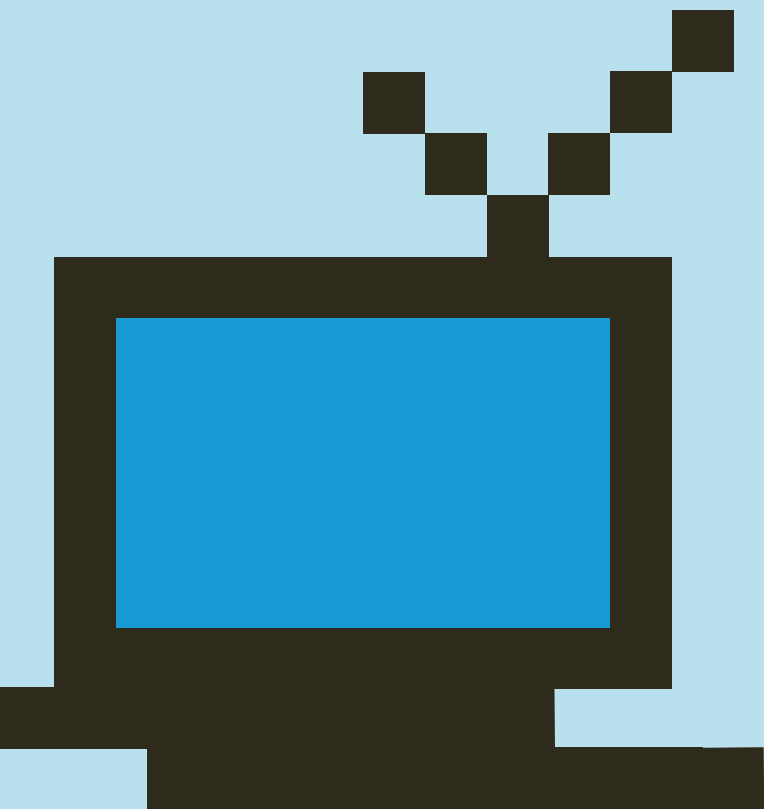
Guide

Ubiquity University: Critical Thinking – Concepts & Tools

This short handbook outlining elements of thought, intellectual standards, and tools for structured reasoning.



Viewing Guide



The media we consume shapes how we see the world and the people around us. Its influence can be positive or negative, and no one is completely shielded from it. Recognizing this impact is crucial to maintaining a critical perspective.

One of the best ways to develop this perspective is to actively question what we watch, read, and listen to. A practical approach is to talk with teens after watching a movie or TV show, watching a YouTube video, listening to a podcast, or reading a book. These conversations encourage teens to take a step back, think critically, and recognize the messages behind the content. Here are some questions you might ask:

What message was the story trying to convey? Which themes stood out the most?

Were there symbols behind certain objects, events, or choices?

Were any of the characters portrayed in a stereotypical manner? If so, which ones (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, culture)?

Why do you think the work was created the way it was, when it was, and where it was?

What emotions did the work bring up for you? Did you laugh, cry, or feel scared? Why?

Were boys or men mainly portrayed as saviors, protectors, or in positions of dominance?

Did female or LGBTQ+ characters seem as important as the others?

Were romantic or sexual relationships portrayed as healthy and respectful?

Was consent clear and present in what you just saw?

Did the story suggest that there is a right or wrong way to be a boy?

Could this content hurt or exclude certain groups of people? If so, which groups?

Did the work encourage respect for others, or did it encourage judgment?

How would you have reacted in that situation?

Resources

Organization

Center for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence

An organization dedicated to preventing violence by promoting inclusive and harmonious communities.

<https://info-radical.org/en/>

Podcast

Mano a mano Podcast

FR

Men reflect on their lives and break down what shapes their sense of masculinity.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLH3eWJ5qv8Py-JPhCL23dLgjfmKPOAfuqw>

YouTube channel

Cinema Therapy YouTube Channel

A therapist and a filmmaker discuss issues such as family dynamics, romantic relationships, and mental health through the lens of popular movies.

<https://www.youtube.com/@CinemaTherapyShow>

The Violence Meter

A tool designed to help you determine whether your relationship is healthy or abusive. <https://oivf.seinesaintdenis.fr/app/uploads/2022/06/violentometre-2019-anglais.pdf>

Plateform

NAMEN

Advancing gender equality, preventing violence, and promoting the health of women, men, and children across North America by working in partnership with men and boys. <https://namen.menengage.org>

Plateform

Next Gen Men

A small but mighty Canadian nonprofit on a mission to change the way we see, act, and think about masculinity. <https://www.nextgenmen.ca/>

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