

**MEDIA EDUCATION  
FOUNDATION  
STUDY GUIDE**

**TOUGH GUISE 2**

**Violence, Manhood & American Culture**

Based on the work of Jackson Katz  
Study Guide by Jeremy Earp

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## A NOTE TO EDUCATORS

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This study guide is designed to help you and your students engage and manage the information presented in this video. Given that it can be difficult to teach visual content –and difficult for students to recall detailed information from videos after viewing them –the intention here is to give you a tool to help your students slow down and deepen their thinking about the specific issues this video addresses. With this in mind, we’ve structured the guide to give you the option of focusing in depth on one section of the video at a time. We’ve also set it up to help you stay close to the video’s main line of argument as it unfolds. The structure of the guide therefore mirrors the structure of the video, moving through each of the video’s sections with a series of key summary points and questions specific to that section, followed at the very end by a number of assignments.

**Pre-Viewing Exercises** enable students to reflect on some of their basic assumptions about masculinity and cultural ideals of manhood *before* watching this video.

**Key Points** provide a concise and comprehensive summary of each section of the video. They are designed to make it easier for you and your students to recall the details of the video during class discussions, and as a reference point for students as they work on assignments.

**Questions for Discussion & Writing** provide a series of questions designed to help you review and clarify material for your students; to encourage students to reflect critically on this material during class discussions; and to prompt and guide their written reactions to the video before and after these discussions. These questions can therefore be used in different ways: as guideposts for class discussion, as a framework for smaller group discussion and presentations, or as self-standing, in-class writing assignments (i.e. as prompts for “freewriting” or in-class reaction papers in which students are asked to write spontaneously and informally while the video is fresh in their mind).

**Post-Viewing Assignments** encourage students to engage the video in more depth – by conducting research, working on individual and group projects, putting together presentations, and composing formal essays. These assignments are designed to challenge students to show command of the material presented in the video, to think critically and independently about this material from a number of different perspectives, and to develop and defend their own point of view on the issues at stake.

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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In *Tough Guise 2*, pioneering anti-violence educator and cultural theorist Jackson Katz argues that the ongoing epidemic of men's violence in America is rooted in our inability as a society to move beyond outmoded ideals of manhood. Cutting across racial, ethnic, and class lines, Katz examines mass shootings, day-to-day gun violence, violence against women, bullying, gay-bashing, and American militarism against the backdrop of a culture that has normalized violent masculinity – especially in the face of challenges to traditional male power and authority. Along the way, the film looks at the violent, sexist, and homophobic messages boys and young men receive from virtually every corner of the culture – from television, movies, video games, and advertising, to pornography, the sports culture, and U.S. political culture.

At its core, *Tough Guise 2* argues that men's violence is overwhelmingly a gendered phenomenon. And it suggests that any attempt to understand violence therefore requires critically examining our cultural codes and ideals of manhood. The following points are central to the film's main line of argument:

- Masculinity is made, not a given;
- Media are the primary narrative and pedagogical forces of our time;
- Media images of manhood therefore play a pivotal role in making, shaping and privileging certain cultural and personal attitudes about manhood;
- A critical examination of privileged media images of manhood reveals a widespread and disturbing equation of masculinity with pathological control and violence;
- Looking critically at constructed ideals of manhood – at how, why and in whose interests these ideals are constructed in different historical, social, and cultural contexts – denaturalizes and diminishes the potential of these imagined ideals to shape perceptions of ourselves, our world, and each other.

## PRE-VIEWING DISCUSSION & WRITING QUESTIONS

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1. Ask students to reflect on why it is that men and boys commit the overwhelming majority of violence in America.
2. Draw a large box on the board. Then ask students to name characteristics of what the dominant culture defines as a “real man.” Write these characteristics inside the box. When the box is full, ask students to name characteristics of young men and boys who don’t measure up to this ideal of the “real man,” and write these terms outside the box. Then, using this as a visual backdrop, ask students to reflect on where these pressures to remain inside the box come from.
3. Ask students to look up the terms “masculine” and “feminine,” and to reflect on a) the relationship of these terms to one’s biological sex, and b) how boys and girls are forced to navigate the cultural meanings of these terms.
4. Ask students to reflect on the difference between sex and gender. Are the two terms synonymous? Is it more or less okay to use them interchangeably? Or is there a difference in meaning here that matters?

## INTRODUCTION

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### Key Points

- When we talk about violence in America, whether it's mass shootings in the real world or sensationalized violence in our movies and video games, we're almost always talking about violent *masculinity*.
- The statistics tell the story: the overwhelming majority of violence – sexual assault, mass shootings, murder, and domestic violence resulting in physical injury – is committed by men and boys.
- But even though men and boys commit the vast majority of violence in America, gender is rarely a part of mainstream discussions about violence.

### Questions for Discussion & Writing

1. Why do you think it is that men and boys commit such an overwhelming percentage of violence in America?
2. Does Katz's observation that men and boys are responsible for the vast majority of violence in America imply that most men and boys are violent? Why or why not? Explain.
3. What's the difference between Katz saying that violence is about violent *masculinity* rather than about violent *males*? Explain.

## HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

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### Key Points

- In mainstream media coverage of mass shootings, commentators seem to go out of their way to find gender-neutral ways to talk about these acts of violence.
- The male perpetrators of violence are repeatedly called “shooters,” “murderers,” “assailants,” “killers,” “suspects,” “psychopaths,” and a host of other gender-neutral terms.
- Mainstream media coverage also defects attention away from the gender of perpetrators by routinely describing violence committed by boys as “kids killing kids” and “youth violence.”
- While mainstream analysis of the causes of violence regularly focuses on myriad variables – from guns and drugs to video games and dysfunctional families – there’s often little to no analysis of why it is that girls and women are also affected by such variables yet commit nowhere near the level of violence men and boys do.
- One particularly glaring example of how the gender of perpetrators disappears is in the media’s use of the passive voice: *men’s* violence against women becomes simply “violence against women,” and news reports repeatedly talk about women *being* harassed, abused, assaulted, or raped – with virtually no reference to the perpetrators.
- All of this is partly a function of how dominant ideologies work at the level of language to conceal the power of dominant groups and shield them from scrutiny and critical reflection.
- And when the gender of perpetrators does come under scrutiny in mainstream discussions about men’s violence, the focus usually turns to biological rather than social and cultural explanations, reinforcing the idea that “boys will be boys” and are therefore somehow naturally prone to murder and rape and commit other forms of violence.
- This kind of reductionist biological determinism renders men’s violence inevitable and blinds us to the fundamental role that *changeable* cultural systems play in all of this.

### Questions for Discussion & Writing

1. What are some of the most common gender-neutral pronouns that get used to describe perpetrators of violence?
2. Why do you think people in news media so often use gender-neutral terms to talk about perpetrators? Do you think this is conscious? Do you think it’s simply too obvious to point out that men and boys are responsible for violent acts? If that’s the case, then why

does media coverage of violence go on at such length about other variables that might matter, like whether perpetrators play video games or have access to guns?

3. When women or girls commit acts of violence, why does their gender usually become a prominent and explicit part of the story?
4. What does Katz mean when he says that one of the ways dominant groups shield themselves from scrutiny is by remaining invisible? Can you think about how that might work on a practical level?
5. Katz talks about journalists using the passive voice to describe men's violence against women. What, exactly does he mean by "passive voice"? And why does this matter?
6. What is Katz's concern about the common phrase "boys will be boys"?
7. Does Katz argue that biology plays no role in men's violence? What, exactly, is his critique of those who reduce discussions about male violence to biology?



## A TAUGHT BEHAVIOR

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### Key Points

- For decades, experts and government officials have been arguing that we need to take a closer look at the relationship between violence in the culture and violence in the real world.
- This focus on the culture of violence in America took on new, and bipartisan, urgency in the wake of Adam Lanza's murder of 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, in 2012.
- But unfortunately the debate quickly descended into a superficial debate between defenders of the gun industry and defenders of the entertainment industry – with both blaming each other for America's violence problem.
- What got lost is how both of these industries – and many others like them – have combined to glorify not only violence but also violent *masculinity*.
- The fact is that when we talk about a “culture of violence” in America, we're almost always talking about a culture of violent masculinity.
- Violence is less a “learned behavior,” as it is commonly described, than it is an actively *taught* behavior.
- The culture teaches boys and men that showing emotion, seeming smart, bookish, or sensitive, being thoughtful and self-reflective are signs of weakness, and at the same time says that physical toughness, domination, and control are signs of being a real man.
- As a result, boys and men learn to adopt a “tough guise” to shield their vulnerability and prove their manhood.
- And if men step outside of this rigid code of manhood, they risk being labeled “feminine” or “gay.”
- The result is a social breeding ground for men's violence.
- Boys and men are policed in these ways by their peers, by their fathers, coaches and other male role models.
- And this violent ideal of manhood is reproduced by the culture.

## Questions for Discussion & Writing

1. Why does Katz take issue with the mainstream discussion about “the culture of violence” that took place after the Sandy Hook school shooting?
2. What does Katz say went missing in the debate between the gun industry and the entertainment industry in the wake of Sandy Hook? Why does this matter in his view?
3. Why does Katz say that the term “learned behavior” is inadequate when it comes to looking at the socialization of young men?
4. What does the culture teach young men and boys about what it means, and what it takes, to be a real man? And what does it teach them about what it means when you don’t live up to this ideal?
5. How does homophobia function in all of this? What about sexism? Do you see a common thread between how homophobia and sexism work to keep young men in line with cultural norms of manhood?
6. What does Katz mean by the term “tough guise”?
7. Who or what does Katz point to as the key teaching forces when it comes to instilling norms of manhood in American men and boys?
8. Does your own experience square with the arguments Katz lays out in this section? If so, how so? If not, explain why not.

## AN AMERICAN IDEAL

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### Key Points

- The link between manhood and violence has been cultivated over time in American popular culture, from Hollywood Westerns to gangster films to the full range of today's hyperviolent American movies.
- American movies and television shows have also cultivated the idea that being a real man is about sexual conquest and dominating and controlling women.
- Beyond movies, these ideas and ideals are reproduced in porn culture, sports culture, political culture, and other cultural arenas that glorify male toughness and control.

### Questions for Discussion & Writing

1. What are the specific ideals of manhood that Katz says have been cultivated in American movies over time?
2. How do these ideals relate to violence?
3. What do older films have in common with more contemporary films when it comes to representations of men's violence?
4. What's the basic message about violence that young men absorb from Hollywood?
5. What are some of the basic lessons about sex, and women, that Hollywood teaches boys and young men?
6. What are some other cultural arenas Katz mentions as powerful teaching forces when it comes to violent masculinity?
7. In your own experience, what other movies and television shows fit with the trend Katz is describing? What about other forms of media? How about social media?
8. Do you think Katz's point is that boys and men are exposed to violence in media and then simply imitate it? Or is he saying something else here? Explain.

## THE COOL POSE

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### Key Points

- The pressure to conform to cultural ideals of violent masculinity cuts across racial, ethnic, and class lines.
- In fact, in a lot of ways the pressure to conform is more acute among men whose power and identity are under threat in the real world from institutional pressures like racism and economic inequality.
- In their book *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*, sociologists Richard Majors and Janet Mancini Billson explore how African-American men and other men of color in urban areas often adopt a hyper-masculine, menacing persona to signal that they're still men, regardless of what else has been stripped from them.
- We see these same dynamics at work with a lot of Latino and Asian men: the projection of toughness to push back against feminizing forces in the culture.
- And these dynamics, in turn, circle back to affect a lot of white guys as well, who take on this black, urban hard-guy pose in an attempt to show they're real men.
- The paradox is that in all of these cases, across racial and ethnic and class lines, the test of being a "real" man often comes down to how well you live up to a made-up cultural script.

### Questions for Discussion & Writing

1. Why does Katz say that the pressure to conform to violent ideals of manhood can be even more acute for working class men and men of color?
2. What was the basic thesis of the book *Cool Pose*?
3. What does Katz say about how – and why – middle class white men sometimes adopt urban street poses to establish that they're tough?
4. While Katz is talking about masculinity, race, and ethnicity here, he also seems to be talking about class. What's he saying about how class and economic status can factor into men's identity and violence?
5. How does power factor into all of this? More specifically, what's the relationship between socioeconomic power and the personal projection of power?
6. How does Katz's analysis here link up with Katz's larger analysis of violence more generally? What does any of this have to do with violent representations in the culture and violence in the real world?

## UPPING THE ANTE

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### Key Points

- Over the past few decades, there's been a ratcheting up of what it takes to be considered a real man.
- Even as the cultural ideal for women's bodies has grown thinner and thinner, the ideal for men's bodies has grown bigger and bigger.
- From action heroes to pro wrestlers to toy action figures, the size of men's bodies has grown exponentially over time.
- At the same time, there's been a ratcheting up in the level of men's violence in movies, television, sports culture, video games, and pornography.

### Questions for Discussion & Writing

1. How has the ideal of men's bodies changed over time?
2. Do you think these changes have had consequences for boys and men in the real world? Is this a more or less harmless development, or do you see signs around you that these changes have damaged some guys?
3. What do you make of the fact that the ideal of women's bodies has gotten smaller and smaller even as the ideal of men's bodies has grown bigger? Do you see our cultural ideals negotiating men's anxieties about women and women's power in the real world?
4. Over the course of your own lifetime, have you seen, first hand, the kind of ratcheting up of media violence Katz is talking about?
5. When you think about young boys being exposed to these accelerating levels of violence – whether it's in movies, video games, or porn – what kinds of messages about manhood do you think they're absorbing? What kinds of messages about women? About femininity?

## A CULTURE IN RETREAT

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### Key Points

- Despite the ratcheting up of violent masculinity and men's violence across American popular culture, over the past few years we've been hearing exactly the opposite: that men have grown too soft.
- The heart of this argument is that men are in crisis because women, especially feminists, have been waging a war on traditional manhood.
- As a result, Katz argues that we've been witnessing a culture in retreat – a narrative that tells men that the best way to respond to change is not to adapt, but to re-claim traditional masculine control and dominance from the forces of “feminization.”
- This retreat into traditional forms of masculinity in the face of change is nothing new. Similar retrenchments have occurred throughout history, from the rise of dime novel Westerns and cowboy films to the founding of the Boy Scouts.
- These backlash trends accelerated during the 1960s, when the Civil Rights movement, the Women's Movement, the Gay and Lesbian Equality movements, and the anti-war movement rose up to challenge traditional masculine authority.
- And masculine retrenchment continues to be a subtext in extreme political movements to this day.

### Questions for Discussion & Writing

1. Katz argues that when it comes to manhood, we're witnessing “a culture in retreat.” What does he mean?
2. What are some of the reasons that have been given for why men in America are experiencing a “crisis in masculinity”? Do you agree with these assessments?
3. What's Katz's take on why men are experiencing a crisis in masculinity? And why, exactly, does he feel a lot of men are offering counter-productive solutions to this crisis?
4. How does the crisis in masculinity we're experiencing today relate to other such crises in the past? What are the common threads? And how do women fit into this pattern over time?
5. Why does Katz say the 1960s accelerated the “culture of retreat”? Who's retreating, exactly? Why are they retreating? And what are they retreating into?
6. How does violent masculinity factor into the backlash against change Katz is discussing?
7. How has this backlash played out on a political level? What's the link Katz draws between extremist political movements and manhood?

## ALL THE WRONG LESSONS

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### Key Points

- While masculinity and men's violence are normalized and glamorized across American culture, we nevertheless continue to find it shocking, and perplexing, when men and boys act out violently in the real world.
- Research has found that the more invested men are in traditional ideals of manhood, the more likely they are to behave violently toward women, to be homophobic, and to lash out violently when they perceive that their manhood is being threatened.
- From the Steubenville rape case and the sexual assaults in Tahrir Square in Egypt, to the troubling rise in violent attacks on gay men and homeless men, we've seen a pattern of men and boys in the real world acting out the cultural lessons they've absorbed about men's entitlement, domination, and control.
- And we've also seen men and boys using violence to overcome the shame and humiliation of not being seen and respected as real men.
- These dynamics have been especially acute in a number of high-profile mass shootings, from Pearl, Mississippi and Aurora, Colorado to Columbine High School, the Boston Marathon bombing, and the Newtown massacre.

### Questions for Discussion & Writing

1. According to Katz, what's the common link between the Steubenville gang rape, the rise in gay bashing, and the recent phenomenon of boys beating up homeless people?
2. What does the research show about the relationship between young men's investment in traditional ideals of manhood, violence, and sexual violence?
3. In James Gilligan's book *Violence*, what does he say about the relationship between men's shame and men's violence? What does he base his argument on?
4. How have school shootings and other mass shootings seemed to corroborate Gilligan's theory of shame?
5. Can you think of other instances of men's violence, not mentioned in the film, that seem to validate Gilligan's findings?
6. What, exactly, are so many violent men afraid of, according to Gilligan?

## BEYOND THE TOUGH GUISE

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### Key Points

- When we talk about men’s violence and dominant ideas of violent masculinity, we need to look beyond men being perpetrators and examine the devastating harm these norms can and often do to men and boys, themselves.
- Men and boys comprise the vast majority of gun violence victims, violence is the leading cause of death of African-American men between the ages of 15 and 30, and violence takes a terrible emotional toll on men and boys as well.
- The emotional damage men suffer from being around violence – whether in combat or in civilian society – is compounded by the fact that men are taught to suffer in silence out of fear of being seen as weak and less than a man.
- But despite predictable arguments that equate trying to understand or prevent violence with weakness, the bottom line is that we have to have the strength to confront American culture’s glorification of the “tough guise” and violent masculinity.
- And this starts with examining the dominant stories we tell ourselves as a culture about manhood and violence, and demanding more honest and accurate representations of the personal and societal consequences of violent masculinity.
- Strength is about adapting to change, not about retreating from it and lashing back with violence out of fear.
- And Katz argues that if we want things to change, we need to work toward a culture-wide re-definition of manhood capable of meeting that challenge.

### Questions for Discussion & Writing

1. What are some examples Katz gives of men and boys being victims of violence?
2. If men and boys are so often the victims of male violence, why do you think so many people call it male bashing to call attention to men’s violence?
3. According to Katz, what role does trauma play in men’s violence?
4. What is the basic argument Katz summarizes from the book *I Don’t Want to Talk About It*, by Terrance Real? How does this link up with Katz’s overall argument about men’s violence in this video?
5. Beyond the examples Katz cites, can you think of other movies and TV shows that confront the reality of men’s violence head on, rather than simply sanitizing and glamorizing it?



## POST-VIEWING ASSIGNMENTS

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1. Watch Byron Hurt's film *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* (available from MEF), and write a paper comparing Hurt's analysis of black masculinity with Katz's analysis of dominant ideals of white masculinity in *Tough Guise 2*. Be sure to focus on how violence factors into the kinds of masculine ideals both Hurt and Katz examine.
2. Research mainstream media coverage of mass shootings, and write a paper examining how the reporters or pundits talk about – or fail to talk about – the gender of perpetrators. Be sure to give specific examples of the words these reports use and the variables they focus on. Then compare what you find with the arguments Katz makes about mainstream media coverage of mass shootings in *Tough Guise 2*. (Be sure you focus on mainstream media sources: major newspapers and magazines, network news, etc.)
3. Research visual representations of manhood in American popular culture (from old magazines, old advertisements, or TV shows and movies) in the 1940s and 1950s, and write a paper comparing what you find to representations today. Use *Tough Guise 2* to analyze the meaning of the differences you find.
4. Write a paper about how manhood is talked about in children's movies. Focus on what kinds of lessons or ideas about manhood are being taught. Does the film you chose seem to be aware of how narrow ideas about manhood can be damaging to boys? Or does it seem to be oblivious to the dynamics Katz discusses in *Tough Guise 2*?
5. Jackson Katz served as a consultant on the new White House initiative that was launched to prevent sexual assault on college campuses. Research this initiative, and assess it in light of the arguments Katz makes in *Tough Guise 2*. Do you see signs of Katz's arguments in this initiative?
6. Research the 2014 controversy surrounding domestic violence among NFL players. Write a paper assessing how the NFL has handled this crisis using specific points from *Tough Guise 2* to support and illustrate your evaluation.
7. Use Katz's central arguments about men's violence from *Tough Guise 2* to design an anti-sexual assault program on college campuses. Informed by these arguments, what would an effective program of this kind look like? What would it need to do on a practical level? What sorts of resistance would it likely need to overcome? How would you propose overcoming this resistance? And again, try as much as possible to back up your recommendations with specific points from the film.
8. Do the same as above for an anti-bullying program in middle schools and high schools.
9. Do the same for an anti-homophobia campaign.
10. Research a past presidential campaign and analyze how gender – especially masculinity – factors into how candidates are positioned, sold, and covered. Cite specific points from *Tough Guise 2* to back up and illustrate your points.