Ashutosh Kumar

In my household, the concept of toxic masculinity never manifested in such a way that I had to somehow repress my "emotions" and fit strict guidelines that determine what is manly and what is not. I was raised to believe that expressing my emotions was an essential part of being human -- after all, my parents were never on the side of toxic masculinity and conforming *strictly* to gender roles. I really feel like my parents raised me to confide in them and those I trust around me. There is constant reassurance to express my emotions and disclose any problems because my parents and sister are there to support me. In times when I was going through depression and having a negative outlook on life, my parents were there to offer their reasoning and openness. When I needed professional help to deal with these emotions, this request was taken seriously. I met a therapist, and there was no sense of shame for being there. There is a stigma in society that males can "regulate their emotions better than women," and I think this is completely false. I know that ultimately I would be an entirely different person if I was restricted from expressing my emotions in the way I did.

The topic of normalizing the objectification of women and rape was never even a topic in my household. I rarely encounter a person who is open to these ideas, and I think this is because of the overall environment I live in. Aside from my household, I live in an incredibly liberal area with a value system that defends equality and opportunity, as well as attending an academically-focused private school. My friends at school are not in relationships, and for those who are, I have never seen repression of one of the partners of a relationship as an issue. It could be since I am outsider to toxic masculinity and rape culture, but I personally doubt that it an issue in my community.

Furthermore, there are components of a healthy relationship I have learned throughout my life that may be applicable for other areas where abuse and gender roles are a prevalent problem. Honesty, trust, kindness, and communication are few that are the basis of a connection between two people. However, it is important that each person in the relationship is independent. A relationship of unequal power and complete reliance can be detrimental to one's health and mental state. Unfortunately, this is a tremendous problem in many relationships. There can be sexual abuse or pressure to act a certain way to satisfy the other partner. It is essential that we spread the idea of self-sufficiency in relationships, especially since many abused partners stay in relationships because they are financially dependent or otherwise. We will have to shift our discussions away from victimizing people and move towards understanding the basis of problems in relationships. People ultimately just want to connect with other people and be happy, but it is an imbalance of power that often results in an unhappy, unfulfilling relationship."