



#EngagingMenAndBoys

Men won't sit back and be silent in the movement to end gender violence and domestic violence. Men and Boys are raising awareness and working for prevention, and Shiv Gupta is one of them. Here is a message Shiv:

A Reflection on Masculinity

“The first time I truly thought about what it means to ‘be a man’ was when my grandfather fell terminally ill. With my father handling my grandfather’s entire treatment, I saw the importance in taking on new responsibilities to lighten his load at home. Family friends were pushing me to step up to support my grandmother, mother and two sisters which forced me to grow up pretty fast, and my masculinity became defined as being the anchor for the women in my family. But in my mind, I define ‘being a man’ as being self-assured enough to be an anchor for all of my loved ones, regardless of gender.

Like any discussions surrounding gender, masculinity is an abstract concept, but imagining it in terms of a more concrete idea has helped me better understand it for myself. For instance, I go to the gym to get stronger and boost my own fitness which is completely healthy. But when I start lifting to get bigger than the guy next to me — to the point that I’m sacrificing my own well-being to be the strongest in the room — it becomes toxic. As such, the connotation behind masculinity is commonly negative because people automatically think of aggression and misogyny. However, I internalize masculinity as being in tune with who you are as a man; it isn’t unhealthy until your ego gets the best of you, especially in categories such as strength and power. It becomes toxic when asserting dominance is of higher importance than expressing emotions or asking for help.

Masculinity should not be up to anyone else to determine or measure. Being comfortable to be your complete self is as manly as it gets.

I think a huge component in owning your own manliness is fostered by understanding what healthy relationships entail, from familial to romantic. So many times I’ve seen gender stereotypes perpetuated by ego-driven fathers or power-hungry boyfriends, but relationships need to be based on mutual respect, communication and trust. Not to mention, maintaining a certain level of goofiness is pivotal in a relationship; as I get older and have to face more adult tasks such as taxes and finances, it’s important that my partner and I still have those light-hearted moments to ensure that surrounding negativity and stress don’t taint our relationship.

Paramount to eliminating toxic masculinity is addressing how young boys and girls are raised. For most of history, tasks have been gender-specific, whether it is teaching girls to cook or boys to change a tire. These are both critical life skills, but there should be no discrepancy in how boys and girls are expected to perform them. It’s hard to erase centuries of the cemented status

quo regarding these norms, but being gender neutral in teaching values to our younger generations will allow them to grow beyond harmful stereotypes and expectations.

Social media is an important platform we should look at in regards to young adults and their attitudes towards gender norms. It has certainly brought enormous attention to a host of inequities in our society, and while it can be a positive source of self-expression, it can also be used as a weapon to spread misinformation and perpetuate harmful notions about gender. I also see that many companies are incorporating more inclusive themes via their social media, such as spreading awareness about Pride Month and Black History Month. Many express their firm stance on wage equality between men and women. This sounds great, and is certainly taking strides in the right direction, but social media is not effective enough on its own. Businesses need to find an intersection between spreading awareness virtually and taking genuine and direct action. We can use social media as a way to educate others, but it cannot stand alone without substance to back it up.

Even as a man who is surrounded by people who encourage me to be vulnerable and open, reflecting on masculinity isn't straightforward by any means. Having these conversations is the only way that society as a whole can redefine gender identity into something free of toxic expectations, and to move in the right direction of creating a more equitable and safe environment. I hope that instead of our younger generation being raised to be the 'ideal' man or woman, they are raised to be well-rounded and respectful members of society."

About the participant: Shiv Paul Gupta is a sophomore at the University of Southern California pursuing a major in Economics and minors in Applied Analytics and Business Finance. His favorite hobbies beyond academics are driving and drone photography.

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