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“Despite living in the 21st century where an ever-increasing number of people are aware of the various issues faced by women, many women still face discrimination - subtle or overt – caused by the patriarchal mindset which still exists in the minds of people. This patriarchal bias doesn’t exist only in the minds of men, but also finds a place in the thought process of women, who have always been made aware of the fact that the female sex is the “weaker” sex among the two.

This belief was reinforced in my formative years back in India where you could not cry in public if you were a boy. I believe that the attitude of educators at an age when children have vulnerable opinions and are still developing self-confidence is vital. Educators must be sensitized about what should and what should not be said on a public forum about their students. However, in my experience I found that educator sensitivity can often be severely lacking. For example, it was considered “girly” behaviour if you cried in public and your fellow classmates would tease you to no end. This gender conforming attitude was held not just by young students, but also by educators. This unfortunate culture led to a whole generation of men who were never allowed to properly express their emotions, opting instead to choose anger and entitlement as an alternative to grief. In our society, crying around classmates not only makes a young boy the laughingstock of his peer group, but also ensures that he never forgets for the rest of his life that he had once cried in school a few decades back. Constantly being reminded of the fact that you cried in middle school “despite” being a boy only reinforces the thought that only females can cry.

An incident I recall from my middle school days is a good example of how educator sensitivity could have helped a young adult better navigate his years in school. A guy in my school had nail polish on his toenails, which the teacher noticed in a routine hygiene inspection. Instead of handling the issue with sensitivity and helping the boy discover his identity, the teacher announced it to the whole class and within no time the boy was being bullied by all his peers for being feminine. This bullying was still a part of his life at least until the end of high school. Over ten years ago, when awareness was not even a percent of what it is now in schools, my friends and I too, often looked down on non-conforming behavior. We were just kids who didn’t know better. Our educators being educated, however, could have led to a much healthier environment for children’s minds and attitudes to be shaped. Even though the teacher meant no harm, she should have known that children can and will use any opportunity to make fun of their peers. Although the children mean no harm, it leads to the reinforcement of certain ideas and ideologies in their minds which might not be right. Propagation of toxic masculinity is caused by educator ignorance and insensitivity, and, if left unchecked, can lead to the propagation of this toxic mindset within the younger generation of our society.

Many men, despite their upbringing, grow up to be upstanding feminists. However, toxic masculinity is still pervasive. A more recent experience was about a week ago. When I was spending an evening with some fellow graduate students, I was surprised at the frequency with which people casually, almost jokingly, use the word “rape”. I kept quiet the first few times, but after what was probably the sixth time, I decided to say something. It wasn’t much, but just a simple question, like “Why do you think using rape in every sentence is funny?” This got the point across without any confrontation. In my opinion, it is

just a matter of educating society about the consequences of downplaying the significance of certain words like rape, and not being afraid to speak up. We need to realize that these issues are more prevalent than we would like to admit, and crimes against women are not going down. It is upto us as the young adults to show people that standing up to sexual violence, and not undermining the significance of words such as rape, can go a long way in generating awareness about the gravity of these issues.

Crimes against women can only be reduced when we decide to collectively educate our youth and educators towards the various issues our women face in the society and how to effectively deal with people who undermine the significance of the various issues faced by the feminine gender.”