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--Growing up, the idea of “toxic masculinity” was foreign to me. Aside from the occasional snide comment made on the playground to “stop acting like a girl,” I was surrounded by relationships between my parents, grandparents and amongst classmates that were based on mutual respect.

It wasn't until I moved to the U.S for college that I realized respect wasn't ingrained in everyone's consciousness, especially when it came to interpersonal relationships. I saw men around me make demeaning remarks about their girlfriends, regarding them as objects rather than their partners. After witnessing the manner in which women were so casually objectified, I began to understand what toxic masculinity really meant.

I've come to define toxic masculinity as using the stereotypical traits of masculinity (aggressiveness, dominance, brusqueness) as a justification for treating women as subservient. A man who demonstrates toxic masculinity believes it to be implied that his opinion and needs trump everyone else's- especially a woman's.

But toxic masculinity doesn't just pertain to a man's external behavior towards women. It drives the way that some men see themselves and others around them. The result: a need to conceal any emotion that depicts them as vulnerable or sensitive. This is a slippery slope, as one might take drastic measures to prove that they are ultra-masculine and reject behaviors that are often thought of as “feminine,” i.e. empathy, sympathy, and the willingness to compromise.

To me, the solution to this detrimental outlook on life starts from the grassroots. As a father myself, I've engrained the importance of respect in my son, whether it's teaching him out to navigate relationships or calling out inappropriate behavior. I have taught him that it is okay to feel vulnerable and to demonstrate his emotions to others. Similarly, I've taught my daughter to trust her instincts and find the courage to speak out, even when it seems impossible.

A crucial aspect of raising upstanding children is demonstrating what a healthy relationship should look like. Throughout my twenty-one year marriage, my wife and I have had occasional conflicts of opinion. However, we have always come out of adversity as a stronger couple, and I believe that is due to shared respect we have for one another. There will be disagreements that need compromise in every relationship, but I've done my best to express to my children that these differences should be celebrated.

To accept or reject the idea of toxic masculinity is something that every man has been faced with during their lifetime. Not all men are violent or disrespectful, but society has propagated social norms that men inevitably have to choose to follow or not. And by spreading awareness on these

topics to both young men and women, we make it a *community* issue. Perhaps my children's generation will wholeheartedly enjoy the principle of "equality for all" without the toxic masculinity that currently exists in society.