Season 3, Episode 2: Youth Examining Gender Dynamics

**Nandini**: Hello everyone, my name is Nandini Ray, and you are listening to the Maitri podcast, conversations with friends, with my production team members. I am welcoming you all to this episode. As you know, on our podcast, we talk about gender-based violence, domestic violence, partner violence, and related issues so that through multiple discussions, we can raise awareness about this community problem. Today, we will focus on examining the connection between physical gender norms and gender-based violence. Who is responsible for fostering harmful physical gender norms, are they men, women, or both? Is it possible for men and women to work in partnership to identify and eliminate gender-based violence, gender inequality; our main perception is that gender-based violence and partner violence are women's issues, so it's women's responsibility to eliminate these social ills. Let's find out the answers to these questions with four teen community members. I cannot wait to dive deep into this discussion with our guests. Welcome, you all to our show, I am so glad that you are here. This project was made possible by funding provided by the Santa Clara County Office of Gender Based violence prevention. Would you please introduce yourselves to our audience?

**Guest**: Hi, my name is Angelie Nagahali and I am super excited to be a part of this project today. I am going to be a senior this fall, and I have been an active member of Maitri Teen outreach branch for the last year and a half. During this time, I have helped develop the engaged men and boys project, acted in a short film about acceptance, and participated in podcasts related to toxic masculinity gender norms. I am the editor in chief of my school's newspaper the Saratoga Falcon and play competitive soccer at the elite competitive national level. My journey with competitive athletes has sparked an interest in nutrition and fitness and I co-founded the fitness club at my school which has been very enthusiastically received during the pandemic. I am a member of girls who code and have worked on several projects and AI and machine learning. Again, I am super excited to be here today.

**Nandini**: Thank you.

**Guest**: Hi, I am Anasi Gurgh, and I am an incoming freshman at Stanford university with plans to study economics and political science. I am really excited to be here and have an insightful discussion today.

**Nandini**: Thank you.

**Guest**: Hi, I am Avid, I just finished my first year at the University of Madison, Wisconsin. I am an undergraduate student. I study computer science and data science there. I am super excited to be a part of this podcast today.

**Guest**: Hi, my name is Sean, and I am a rising junior at Saratoga high school. I am super interested in politics and law, and I am a member of my school's mock trial and model UN clubs, like Angelie, I am also a part of my school newspaper the saratoga falcon and I am super excited to be here.

**Nandini**: Thank you all for coming to our show. I am also excited; I am very much excited to talk to you. In your work with survivors of domestic violence, we have noticed that traditional oppressive patriarchal gender norms are harmful for individual well-being as well as human relationships. And so, it is crucial to have multiple discussions on this issue. Exchanging ideas and sharing knowledge so that all of us can identify our biases and responsibilities in eliminating those social conditions. So, let's start with some simple questions. I am saying simple questions, they seem simple, but they are not, they are very deep. Let's see how you answer these questions. So, the question is: are boys and girls equal? Should they be raised equally, or would there be different sets of rules? What do you think?

**Guest:** I can start with this one. I think that every child is different regardless of gender so it is hard to create such a stark divide between how girls should be raised versus how boys should be raised. But I think that if we are working towards a more equitable society, we need to start with raising our youth with equal sets of values that gender really has no bearing on. For example, respet, compassion, and inclusivity. And i think that by ingraining these values in our youth, we are not priming them to be the ideal man or woman but rather just a good person. I think that is the first step in moving towards an equal society regardless of gender.

**Guest:** Yeah, no I agree. I don't think gender on its own is a reason to treat a boy or a girl differently but she's right. Different children respond differently to different things. So, while boys and girls should be taught the same values, given the same opportunities, maybe there's different ways of guiding them towards these values, guiding them towards this ideal society. Yeah, I think the values that we should be teaching our kids at young ages should be equal and the same for both boys and girls. But I think that while raising both boys and girls, parents just can't ignore that girls and boys are treated differently by society and we can't act like if a girl versus a boy is walking alone down the street at night in a big city at ten pm, you must raise them differently. Like what to expect and what to do in certain situations, i think it is an unfortunate reality, but something that you can't ignore.

**Guest:** One other thing to consider is that especially currently with access to the internet, children are half raised by their parents and half raised by random youtubers. Something i've noticed a lot with young boys right now, and i've heard it from my friends who are older sisters is that a lot of them have parents who raise them with ideal like equality and respect for everyone but then they get sucked into weird internet pipelines that influence them and teach them that women are lesser than men or that women are objects and i think that parents have to work extra hard to rectify those kind of values that children see on the internet. Especially now. I feel like it's important to raise, especially boys with, to place an extra emphasis on treating women with respect and having them engage with systemic issues. Not just, "oh don't hit girls," but having different conversations about how women have been systematically oppressed in this country and around the world and what we as individuals can do to undo those systems. I think it's important that parents start having those conversations with their children, even from a young age.

**Guest:** So, what I'm hearing is that all of you agree that boys and girls should be raised equally, and with the same sets of rules. Like Sean said, we need to inform girls that there are some situations that they can face differently than boys. Right Sean?
Yeah, just as a byproduct of society being where it is right now. Girls and boys unfortunately aren't fully treated equally. And I think parents need to inform them, but not treat them differently.

**Nandini:** Yeah, you are right. We need to inform them that there are still men and boys, women, girls, and boys who are treated differently by society and this is our job, here to have this conversation so we can break that mindset so that we can treat our boys and girls equally. Think about it. I was reading a research article and I found that in 1972, women were allowed to compete officially in the Boston marathon for the first time. In 1972. And now, because at that time, people thought that women cannot compete in marathons, it's a male sport. But now, a new study that tracked ultramarathons running times worldwide for two decades found that women tend to outrun men after 195 miles. So, on average, 0.6% faster than men during super long races beyond the 200-mile mark. So, before 1972, they were not even given the opportunity to run marathons because at the time, people in society thought that this was not a women's sport. But think about it, now, we are seeing these statistics. Even like in voting power. In 1868, the voting amendment to the US constitution granted full citizenship rights, including voting rights to all men born or naturalized in the United States but women, no. they needed, they had to wait until 1920. The 19th amendment to the US constitution ratified the right to vote for white women nationwide. So, you are right, in many cases, that our society, our community, even sometimes our families knowingly or unknowingly, treat their girl children differently than their boy children. And that is why we are having this discussion. Do you want to add anything, any of you or should i move to the next section.

**Guest:** I think we covered it.

**Nandini**: So various research in our work we see every day, various research statistics, and recently, I saw some statistics that accordingly to national sexual violence resource center, over 71% of women and over 55% of men experience intimate partner violence, sexual or physical violence or stalking under the age of 25. They are so young. And one in four women experience intimate partner violence prior to the age of 18 and women between the ages of 18 and 24 are most abused by an intimate partner. So, seeing this statistic it is obvious that mostly women are abused and statistics-wise are mostly abused by men. So, do you think only men and boys are responsible for dating partner violence or are women also responsible for enacting violence? What are your thoughts on this?

**Guest:** Yeah, I think when we're looking at men as the perpetrator there's often this idea of victim blaming where people question the way women act. If you were in such a difficult situation, why didn't you get out of it sooner, why didn't you ask for help? But I think that if the solution was that easy, domestic violence shelters would not be overridden with female victims asking for help and asking for resources that are not easily accessible to them. I know there is the argument that females can be perpetrators as well, there are other forms of dating violence

such as emotional manipulation or sexual abuse but in cases where men are the perpetrators, we really need to step away from this idea that women are to fault for their own situations and horrific things that happen to them and instead need to give them the resources they need to get help.

**Guest:** And about the statistics, the statistics are clear. It is mostly men who are causing this, so I think the question is why it is mostly men. I think the answer is that society leads and creates norms and creates a structure such that men are given and feel that men think it is okay to do that more than women feel it is okay to do that [abuse their partner]. This is a problem created by patriarchal norms. I think that that's the root cause of higher numbers of instances of men causing it as opposed to women.

**Guest:** I think and feel that what always comes up, at least in my conversations about these issues is I hear a lot of "not all men abuse men," "not all men do this," that kind of rhetoric, but i have to say that that is maybe, maybe it's just one man who abused his wife or partner, but then there's ten men who come running to defend him and make excuses for him and the woman has to take care of their own. I think what's most hurtful for me is that I feel like I've never seen a man who is willing to call out their friends and hold them accountable for any violence committed against women. I've never seen a man who will openly or public support a woman who has come out with allegations against one of their friends and to me i think that's why the question "do women also have equal or some responsibility," it kind of reminds me of that "not all men are bad, some women are abusers too." of course some women are abusers, I would never deny that, i would never deny the fact that a lot of men are also victims of domestic violence but i kind of hate that when we're having conversations about this: patriarchal norms, kind of holding up that the fact that it's usually men committing violence against women, i hate that we have to bring into that conversation, "oh some women do this too." Like that's not the point, we are trying to have a conversation about why it is always most men hurting most women.

**Guest:** There are probably cases where women have abused men but it's not nearly the size of the problem facing women. It's not like such an obvious pattern where like most women have experienced situations where they feel uncomfortable or have been abused or faced domestic violence. Using the "oh some women have abused men too" as a counterargument is completely messed up because they are essentially unrelated situations where women are facing a systemic problem where these other cases are not okay but their much more of a chance in nature. To try to distract from the bigger problem is bad.

**Guest:** Here in this podcast, I am not trying to put men versus women. I'm not trying to set you up for a battle or an argument, I am just trying to find out who can take responsibility for this dating violence and partner violence. So yeah, mostly men are perpetrators and if you see the statistics, women are abused but somewhere, everybody in this society, we all must take the responsibility because if we see how many women, how many men, we say something if we see something. Like many of us, we talk about these issues openly with our friends and family. How many of us raise awareness, we think that whatever is happening, no matter who the statistics

wise are the majority, but it is happening in our community and all of us can do something to prevent that abuse from happening. It's like all men and women, all of us can take responsibility to prevent gender-based violence or dating violence. It is statistics wise, all of us are on the same page that mostly men are perpetrators, but why are we blaming men for violence. Probably his mom or aunts are responsible, when they saw that their boys were doing something wrong, they didn't step up, they didn't say anything. So, they are also carrying the responsibility along with their male family members. Somehow, I feel all of us should take responsibility. We cannot blame each other, just take responsibility so that we can solve the problem. Do you agree with me, or do you have a different opinion?

**Guest:** Yeah, I mean I absolutely think that everyone is responsible for preventing dating violence in any sort of violence they see. I thought that what you brought up with how a lot of women are complicit in these situations is interesting because it almost feels like a lot of women who are trapped in a patriarchal family, like a lot of times when moms, when their son does something, they will try to silence it. It's interesting and makes you think about how a lot of times it feels like those women are blaming Stockholm syndrome almost. It makes me feel like the only way they can maintain their position in the power structure, especially being a mom in a patriarchal family structure; if you are married to your husband, this gives you power. I think it's interesting how it's almost like a survival technique for these women to victim blame other women to keep their graphs on their own power.

**Guest:** Yes, some women will say boys will be boys even if they know that their boys are doing something wrong, they will be with them. They will be supporting them; they will be saying okay boys will be boys and my son did that bad thing because that girl was asking for it. And in cases like that we can easily blame that. Also, we blame the mom or aunt who are supporting the abuser. In many domestic violence cases, we have seen extended family members, even female family members, take the side of the perpetrator, they are helping the perpetrator indirectly or directly to continue the abuse or violence. It is kind all of us, we must take the responsibility and blame so that we can do something to prevent gendered violence and gender discrimination. Sometimes gender discrimination and violence are connected. If someone is being abused, whether in a male or female in a family setting, anything and anywhere they are allowing this gender discrimination to happen, then they are also taking part in that larger picture of gender abuse and gender violence and family violence. You know, sometimes we see that rigid gender roles often result in the expectation that women be submissive to male family members. When male family members expect women to obey their husband even when both partners are working, mostly women are held responsible for taking care of kids, cooking, and household chores. So, who do you think contributes more to establishing and maintaining harmful patriarchal norms that provoke partner violence: men, women, or both?

**Guest:** I think that putting the blame at either adult men or women we are almost missing the point because i think that once people reach a certain age, they become kind of cemented in the values and perspectives they've developed so i think we can trace the responsibility back to upbringing because i think that when we are raising young children, they are so impressionable and they tend to soak up everyone that is swirling around them. This is the most pivotal time in

their lives where the mentors, peer groups, and family members around them can either diminish or perpetuate these really harmful gender norms and i think  that from a young age, sons maybe taught by the people they look up to that they do need to treat women with the same amount of respect as boys and this traps them in toxic masculinity of being the breadwinner and constantly having to keep their guard up so people can't see how they really feel. We need to teach girls from a young age that they carry value beyond being a caregiver or a wife and that they don't have to constantly accommodate for their male counterparts and bend over backwards for them. I think that instead of looking at men and women who are already so established in their own set of ways, we need to trace it back to the people from their nurturing stage that really shaped them into who they are for the rest of their lives.

**Guest:** I think that people are mostly shaped by society when they are a kid, I mean there are instances of this happening, most of the time it's not someone specifically telling these children "Look women are there to cook and clean the house." It's just that people are a product of their society more than I think we think they are. I think this is what leads to patriarchal norms being perpetuated and i think that you can't blame men or women, i think the blame is more so on society that has these patriarchal norms that stay established. I think the solution isn't to just simply say men need to stop doing this and women need to start doing this, I think the real solution is to change how society operates and functions because that is what influences people to do the things that we are saying are bad.

**Guest:** I think that I agree that we internalize a lot of what we see around us even if it's not within our own household but i think it's a little too vague to blame it on society because ultimately the systems we live under were created by individuals and are upheld by individuals, many of whom are around us and in our own lives. If you, if we want to talk about breaking down patriarchal values in society, it must start within ourselves and within our families and within our own communities. It must start with conversations with your family about these sorts of things. In a way, you also must think about who is complicit or raising children with those value and often it is the parents, both, if talking about heterosexual relationships, both the mom and the dad who are upholding patriarchal norms even if they don't know, that what they are upholding is patriarchal or wrong.

**Guest:** I think there are a lot of factors from culture and religion at play too, what families do as culturally appropriate and religiously appropriate, what culture they have and practice. I know in my family, we don't have, there are none of these stereotypes going on, but my grandparents had traditional values, and they are not the same as the values of, say, my generation. The discrepancies, you can see how my parents would believe certain things and believe our family should operate certain ways versus how my brother would view the world and how families should work. It's difficult to combat because, I mean, people often model families on their own or make improvements along the way but it's a slow process. There are a lot of families in America where the mother is expected to do almost all the household work while the father goes out and is the breadwinner. But they have equal responsibility. It's hard because those children, automatically, their idea of family is going to be entirely based on their own and trying to essentially teach an entirely new concept of life is difficult.

**Guest:** Yeah. I mean the question then becomes how we as individuals start to unlearn misogyny. Because I think like what Sean said, I relate to that too. I think both of my parents are super progressive and I wasn't really raised in a household where gender and equality were a big issue, or where I felt oppressed. But I still think that there is so much underlying misogyny in our lives and in every interaction that takes place. I always wonder how we do the work of helping others and other people in our generation start to break those cycles. I don't know if anyone has the answer to that and I would be interested to see more research on that.

**Guest:** I think, all of us can play a key role in addressing gender discrimination and abuse with multiple discussions on our social settings. If we are having a conversation with our relatives, friends, and by collective actions we can create perception, attitudes, and practices that are critical for gender justice. We can start from our own homes to learn what to do. If we can see, we can find out and identify any form of gender inequalities and abuse around us and then stand firmly against those actions and attitudes. We can talk with our friends, and families about this equality and why we are doing what we are doing. If we do this, we can identify and dismantle these very age-old perceptions of gender dynamics. Are we following these dynamics without realizing it, blindly following it, is it tradition, or is there any meaning to it? We can start that conversation at least with our family members and friends to see if that role is bothering someone. This way we can challenge traditional gender norms and create societal change. It may seem like a complex task but if we all do our part, we can make a meaningful impact. That's what I think. What do you all think? I would like to know your thoughts.

**Guest:** I think combating gender violence boils down to making men and women equal in the eyes of society. And I think, for younger generations, which are inherently more progressive, it's easier but each older generation is more traditional and there are values that are difficult to shake off and are very gender based. Senior generations, for the most part, at least in my experience, strongly believe that man is the breadwinner, and the wife is the mother and must do all these household tasks that even when it comes to marriage, a lot of older generations, a lot of older generations have a very narrow view of marriage as only being between a man and a woman. This baked in value, and values like it, from their own upbringings and from culture and from their own friends who are likely similar, I feel like that's what must be broken for men and women to really be equal in society and then for gender-based violence to decrease. I don't know if any of you have ideas but trying to shake those types of norms is very difficult.

**Nandini:** I think we can start with multiple discussion, conversations with our friends and families to see if they are thinking in a different way and why they believe what they believe. If we have civil interactions and conversations, then we may find human connection and exchange knowledge and ideas. This way, we can move towards a path of understanding and gender equality. That leads to the next question: is it possible for boys and girls to work in partnership to end gender-based violence in the youth?

**Guest:** I think it's possible, and not only is it possible, but I also think it's necessary. I don't think any problem is going to be solved if only fifty percent are working towards a goal and the other

fifty percent are not or are actively working against it. I think that both working together, to go back to something Sean was talking about earlier, I think one of the biggest problems is that the idea that men are dominant, and women are supposed to be submissive is one of the biggest conceptions that leads to abuse and violence. I think Sean is right, but I think that values are currently going in the right direction. Generations are getting better as time goes on, but I don't think we are yet at a point where we can say we don't need to make any more progress. A lot more progress needs to be made. I think by rewriting the idea of the man as dominant, and the woman as submissive, I think that is one of the biggest notions that would decrease domestic abuse and violence. I think that the effort to rewrite that idea must be something that comes from everyone, not just one gender or another.

**Guest:** I might be a little bit cynical, but I will only believe it when I see it. I think that the biggest that male allies can play is holding other men accountable. That's the biggest role I think men can play if they want to help women. They need to center women's voices and not try to take over the discussion. To me, the biggest thing is holding other men accountable for their actions and being willing to give up power in this society. I think it's difficult for me to believe in theory right now because when you are the group in power, i think we can all agree that men are quote unquote in power in society just do to the fact that most people in positions of political power and in private industry as well, it's mostly men. No one wants to give up power when they have it, it's very difficult to. I think if men were willing to do that, if they were willing to elevate women higher in society, then it might happen. But I feel like it's difficult for anyone to give up power when they have it so I would be interested to see if it really does happen. I think, going off what Sean said earlier about preventing gender violence, I think the two biggest factors are things that have already happened, like legally protecting women and enabling them to be financially and physically independent of men, if they want to be. I think giving women the right to vote, the right to an education, and the right to work, earn their own money, and participate in the free market has been crucial to empowering women to feel like they can live independently of other people, especially men in their lives. The other thing is, I feel like a broken record, I feel like I've said this over and over, I just want to see men hold other men accountable. That is my biggest ask for any male allies. Please be willing to protect and uplift women and take action to hold all the perpetrators accountable because I feel like I've never seen that. I feel like in my life, I've only ever seen men make excuses for each other and hurt women. I must hope that things will be different in the future, but I will believe it when I see it tangible. I don't care for a lot of the performative activism I've seen from men right now where they are all talking about gender equality but then go on to defend their friends who have done very inexcusable things.

**Guest:** And just to add on, I know, obviously the thing that needs to be fixed is the way society views men and women, but just to add on, I think that at a high school level specifically, I've seen men talk about how much they respect women Ina public setting but when they're with their friends, you hear the rape jokes, you hear the assault jokes and it just a few seconds of awkward laughter and then no one says anything. Because of this, I think if there's any teen boys listening to this podcast who view gender norms as this intangible scary issue you can make a difference by calling out your friends when they say stuff like that. And then secondly, for the question about whether boys and girls need to work together, I mean, I do think that to move

forward as an entire community, men and women do need to be on the same page but I feel like so much of the time, women are bringing in men because the only way men will listen to what women are asking and demanding is if women make men feel like they have something at stake. It becomes "we're working for you as well; we're looking to help you and give you resources," because I feel like that's the only way a lot of men are going to listen if they think it's about them. That's why it's a little tricky for men as well, to just say men and women need to just hold hands and stroll together with one consensus because at the end of the day, it's not about men, it's about giving women the opportunities that they've deserved all along but the only way they are going to listen is if men somehow think that it's about them when they just need to be an ally, which is what we've been asking for forever. That's my thoughts on that.

**Guest:** I agree. I think when the guys have these discussions, other guys will act like they're being attacked, and assume it's all men and get angry. This is used as an excuse for them thinking that the movement is out to get us, and I think a big message to boys is that the feminist movement isn't there to put you all in some cancel culture jail, in the end it's improving everything. We don't want to be seen as these terrible people, so why don't we weed out the ones that are; if we can all just work together and get rid of all this discrimination and sexism and violence from people around us, it's literally a win-win. Men always feel like we need something out of it, and that's what you're getting out of it. It's quite literally better for everyone if we can just weed out people that are abusing their partners and making all these inappropriate jokes. The movement isn't out to get men. I feel like that's something, that when people make a joke about that, I'm always like why, why you feel like they're out for you unless you're doing something wrong in which case you need to work on yourself.

Yeah, I would like to add one more thing. I personally feel like I have spent a lot of my life trying to engage men, especially how we see South Asian men. All my family is obviously south Asian, in these kinds of conversations. I have personally will continue to do so, but having those conversations and arguments is very emotionally draining for women because you are basically arguing for the right to be treated as a human being with a lot of men who don't get it and who don't think that you should be, or that other women should be treated like that. I feel like if a woman feels like she just wants to establish independence and disappear from the discourse that's valid because it's, at this point, in the movement, I feel like men need to start doing that emotional labor of talking to other men too. I feel like I don't want women to feel like they need to put themselves out there and constantly be arguing and constantly trying to defend themselves all the time because it is really draining and depressing. I have had many anxiety attacks over things like this before and I think it's difficult to be a woman who is trying to defend herself against women who don't think that she has the right to do certain things. It's very challenging to do and I don't want other young girls to feel like that's a position they need to be in. I don't want other young girls to feel like they need to be on the defense for their entire lives. Therefore, I want to call in men to also play the active participant and initiate conversations. It's just so important to me.

**Nandini**: Thank you so much for all your personal thoughts and personal experiences with us. That will help many people out there to understand their own thought process. I believe that if we want to build a society that is safe and just for all genders, then men and women must work

in partnership to eliminate those harmful cultural conditions that are the main obstacles in ensuring the relationship between men and women in our households and the public sphere. I think it is high time that all of us think critically about when we see domestic abuse survivors, they are mostly women. We need to consider why this is? Why are we still seeing child brides? In many parts of the world, even in the US, you see child brides. Girls and women are still suffering from female genital mutilation, every day, women, and girls are trafficked, and raping women and girls is used as a tactic of war. In many countries, girls are not getting opportunities to receive an education so all of us, it is high time for all of us to think seriously and to do our part in ending gender discrimination and gender-based violence. It's not that we women need to engage women and men, we need to invite men and ask them to think about this issue and do something. It is also their problem too; the problems we are talking about, they are all community problems. They are not individual problems. Thank you all for this energizing discussion. Unfortunately, we must pause here due to time. I am sure we will have this kind of meaningful conversation again over and over on our podcast and outside of this space. We believe these things have the power to end gender-based violence. It is great to see that you guys have broken boundaries and challenged gender norms. You all are analyzing different aspects of gender dynamics to identify the root causes of gender violence and you are using their power and voices to create a world that is inclusive for all genders. This is your host, Nandini Ray signing off today. I will be back soon with another important topic. Keep listening to the Maitri Podcast Between Friends: conversations with Maitri. Find all our episodes on sound cloud and on other podcast apps. Please like and share if you haven't already. Bye for now, stay safe, and stay happy. Thank you all for listening.

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