

If the men of tomorrow are to respect women, parents have to teach it

Tue 30 Oct 2018 14.15 GMT

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There is a tide of proud and arrogant patriarchy waiting to sweep up our boys if they are not set on the correct path.

The world of work does not look favourably on childbirth and parenthood, despite the legislation in place. Stay-at-home parents fare no better. This is something that most of us only discover after we take on the role of childrearing.

I used to believe that we had come far in the fight for equality, but giving birth opened my eyes to the truth that, embedded within our culture, the mechanisms that silence women, refuse to take us seriously and sever us from the centres of power, still exist. That patriarchy is alive and well, and it is kicking us when we are down.

As the mother of boys I am acutely aware that it is not just women who are affected by patriarchy. The [high rate of suicide among young men](#) points to a huge problem within society, rooted in our need to tell boys to “man up” and hide their vulnerability.

We encourage dominance in our sons and submission in our daughters, and by doing so perpetuate a cycle that results in the crushing effects of patriarchy.

Our political system, our judiciary and our boardrooms are [still run mainly by men](#). Whether we like it or not, our key decision makers are male. But if change is to come, it will be with men as our comrades and not as our enemies.

This allegiance needs to come from a place of respect and equality, and not formed between double-agents of the patriarchy and men whose egos must be pandered to.

The need for male allies has never been greater. This is a frightening time, and not just for the parents of daughters; it is troubling for those of us who are raising sons, too. Social media talks of men too worried to go on a date alone and of people arming their boys with video cameras and diaries, for fear of being accused of wrongdoing.

But my fear is not that my sons will be falsely accused of sexual crimes against women – countless women in my circle have been subjected to sexual harassment, but not one male has been falsely accused.

Instead, my worry is that if I do not teach my sons to respect women they could get swept up by the tide of pride and arrogance of patriarchy, a tide that tells them they are the masters of the universe and as such can do whatever they like and get away with it; a tide that could steal from them their right to mental wellbeing, healthy relationships with their spouses and with their children.

I navigate all these thoughts, day in, day out, alongside the whirlwind of phonics and pre-school arithmetic. As I pack lunch boxes, watch CBeebies over my boys’

shoulders, and ferry them to and from football and swimming lessons, the quiet voice of good sense and reason remains a constant – “How about we simply teach our sons to respect women?” Let’s do away with colour-coded childrearing, place the baby dolls and toy cars with dinosaurs, and allow our children to choose their own paths. Let’s raise them with stories of strong men and women who worked together with honour and dignity to change the world.

Let’s allow our sons to express their emotions and teach them that feelings stereotyped as feminine are not lesser emotions. Start by supporting them when they cry, so they learn the importance of sensitivity, empathy vulnerability – which, contrary to popular belief, don’t lead to weakness but result in the formation of strong men, confident in their abilities, and steeped in self-belief. And maybe if we do this, the boys we raise to become the men of tomorrow will have no need to control women.

Because men like Donald Trump and [Brett Kavanaugh](#) are the product of a poisonous culture that suppresses genuine emotion in boys, and by doing so deprive us all of a place of emotional safety.

As I watch my sensitive son navigate the world, I am not worried that he will become a weak man because he and I share the same personality traits – traits that have made me strong in the face of adversity, and that can do the same for him if he is allowed to experience them as a positive and not made to “man up”.

As women like [Christine Blasey Ford](#) – Kavanaugh’s accuser – are vilified on our television screens, I find myself feeling powerless. But then I remember that the toxic men responsible for her pain were borne of women. And in that truth lies the answer ...

We are not powerless, we are extraordinarily powerful. As we give birth to and raise the next generation, we can captain the ships and navigate the seas that will set our sons and daughters on a safer path than this.

And although change comes in excruciating increments, this is a battle fight we can win from our living rooms, our schoolyards, our kitchen tables.

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<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/oct/30/men-respect-women-parents-patriarchy-boys>