

Why We Need to Steer Clear of Not All Men

SHOUNAK REZA

“Not All Men” is basically an expression that is used to refer to the posts, comments and statements by people to claim that not every man out there has sexually harassed or abused someone, or harbours any such intention. When such incidents are reported, or when a woman comes forward with allegations of sexual assault, there is, more often than not, someone saying something along the lines of “Not All Men”. This intentionally or unintentionally drowns the woman’s voice by taking the focus away from her and placing it on the protection of the image of men. These comments gain hordes of supporters because as they try to put it, not all men harbour such desires.

In the patriarchal world we live in, it is not easy for women to come forward with allegations of sexual harassment or assault. Very few incidents make it to the news and when they do, united efforts are needed to address them. In a situation that is already fraught with so many challenges, “Not All Men” alters the course of discussions, accomplishing nothing except making things worse and hindering progress.

Anupa Ahmed*, who works for an international organisation and is vocal about women’s rights, expresses utter disapproval of it when I approach her, “When someone makes a ‘Not All Men’ comment, protecting male image becomes even more important than discussing violence against women, preventing conversations that are actually necessary.” She tells me how incidents of sexual harassment and the normalisation



of rape culture left her traumatised and how she used to blame and doubt herself at a young age. Things like Not All Men, she says, make it even harder for women to find the courage to protest.

Discussions regarding men are necessary when it comes to preventing violence against women, but instead of screaming “Not All Men”, it is important that

we understand, among other things, that the way boys are brought up in a patriarchal society is one of the many reasons sexual violence takes place.

To get an insight into this, I approach Laila Khondkar, a child protection specialist. “Most parents follow gender stereotypes while raising children. Children (both boys and girls) get used to stereotyped images of men and women through books, films, advertisements etc,” she says. “Social conversations and jokes also fuel this. Because of such stereotypes—and in many cases, witnessing a kind of power imbalance between their parents—boys grow up having a sense of sexual entitlement over women. This is one of the reasons many boys do not learn to respect women and understand consent.” After talking to her, I realise how important it is to address parental flaws, something that often gets overlooked in our society.

When a woman comes forward with allegations of sexual violence, the only discussions should be on the need to educate men on consent and gender equality. There should be conversations about the need to end the normalisation of rape culture and jokes (which are neither funny nor harmless).

While no man can possibly live through what a woman goes through from the day she is born, they can at least try to empathise and make the path to justice easier instead of screaming “Not All Men” and drowning the voices that have always been shackled and muffled by patriarchy.

**Name has been changed to protect anonymity*

REWRITE THE BRO CODE

SYEDA AFRIN TARANNUM

We all know the bro code. You know the one pop culture and social media insists is over other forms of ethical scriptures. For those who don’t, the bro code is a poorly strewn together set of excuses often used by the male population, to validate inappropriate behaviour or sympathisers of such behaviour.

It is the prerogative of the male species that they have a voice in situations women often don’t. Put it to good use. If such a playbook does exist, it should do so to improve the species and hold them accountable. Make changes to it, the world will be better for it.

NO MORE ROOM FOR LOCKER ROOM TALK

Men are often more prone to participate in social settings where women are being talked about in a not-so-respectable manner. Now, of course not everyone takes part in this. But if you’ve looked at a photo that wasn’t meant for you or laughed at a sexist joke about female friends, then you have also participated in perpetuating the locker room culture.

Regardless, that needs to stop. Not only are such conversations breeding grounds for ideas that need no popularity, it gives men the idea that vile things can be said about women and they can’t be held accountable for it just because they didn’t “do” anything.

DO NOT CONDEMN FEMINISM, WE ALL NEED IT

It is sad that in 2020, this still needs to be said: everyone needs feminism. It simply wants equality for all genders. That’s it.

So every time a woman does something questionable, don’t ask, “Where are the feminists now?” Feminists want equality; they want to get rid of gender stereotypes. Something all genders can benefit from. There’s nothing more to say about it.

STOP SAYING, “SO, DOES THIS MEAN I CAN HIT YOU NOW?”

No. You cannot hit them. You cannot hit anyone, be it another man, woman, or child. That is assault, and violent behaviour. It’s illegal.

The fact that the first response to the discussion of feminism is violence is a gravely concerning matter. This also goes to show that deep-rooted internalised misogyny is prevalent even in educated and well-to-do households.



NO MORE SWEARING WITH CONTEXT TO OTHER WOMEN

If you’ve lived in Bangladesh for over a week, you’ve probably heard profanities using others’ mothers and/or sisters. As disgusting and gut-wrenching as it sounds, somehow, these are some of the most common terms I’ve heard. Somehow, the women of the family are always used to point out or humiliate a person when the situation has nothing to do with them.

Stop people from using them, it’s as simple as that. They, too, are human beings who deserve respect and have no role in this feud whatsoever.

TALK TO YOUR BROS ABOUT CONSENT

Consent is a simple matter. Nothing apart from a “yes” constitutes consent. Notice your friends and the way they behave around women. Explain to them that a yes is a yes and no does indeed mean no.

If you are a man, you are already privileged. Put the privilege to good use. Be more vigilant in public areas or transport, you’ll be sure to notice at least one person being made uncomfortable. Create a safe space for your friends to be able to speak about their trauma, or things they need clarification for. The bro code only serves you well when it makes the entire population it serves, better. Collectively. It is not just enough to be good by yourself anymore.