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Women should treat each other better

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The oldest prejudice in the book is that of women being prone to jealousy, backbiting, and showing covert regression towards each other. Any rational individual would agree that such generalisations can never be representative of an entire group.

However, some women do develop internalised prejudices as they're forced to conform to gender roles and exist alongside unaddressed stereotypes. They subconsciously demean fellow women.

Every girl gets judged for the way she carries herself, and sadly, a lot of it often comes from other women. Women in gender biased environments get gas-lighted into believing that other women wield their femininity and physical appearance to impress the male gaze, often unknowingly.

This is how internalised sexism manifests itself.

Women begin underestimating each other. They become henchmen of the patriarchy, holding women over the same impossible standards they themselves are expected to meet. Some women gradually develop biases wherein it seems only fair to them that their female predecessors stumble upon disparaging roadblocks and figure their way across steep learning curves without a helping hand, the same way they did.

Yet when a woman takes control of her situation, tries to be assertive, or decides to be openly opinionated, there is always scrutiny from fellow females, pointing out how she's being too "bossy" or unladylike.

On one hand, headstrong women tend to doubt the ambition and capabilities of women who choose traditionally "feminine" responsibilities over paid careers. I have witnessed female family members accuse women of being self-centred and callous to their "intrinsic" responsibilities if they prioritise their profession over domesticity.

Women have entombed each other within a conundrum of critique about what they should ideally mould themselves to be like.

Research by British anthropologist and psychologist Robin Dunbar shows that women form intense female friendships. They prefer sharing intimacies through conversations. Several citations found that individual personalities and regular emotional reciprocity influence female friendships very strongly.

So, it's harder for girls to cope with fallouts in friendship. Women put more weight on emotional fidelity. They may maintain "cliques" for example, might not readily accept outsiders into their close knitted circles. Thus, they end up harshly judging, ostracising, or being mean to fellow females while trying to gate-keep their connections.

When women actively endorse the "I'm-not-like-other-girls" rhetoric, are they not trying to validate themselves by invalidating fellow women whom they consider to be "inferior" to them? They end up further consolidating the absurdity that feminine women cannot compete and find success working with other genders unless they privilege masculinity.

Women need to be tolerant of the diversity of feminine identities and shun inclinations if tying expression to a woman's moral compass. They also need to celebrate each other's successes. Discriminatory constructs have more power over us if we can't maintain solidarity within ourselves. Even when competing for limited opportunities, women have to work to further their own prospects, while helping out fellow women every step of the way. Most importantly, they must possess the integrity to openly confront each other about disagreements.

It's not about who can one-up the patriarchy first. It's about finding how we can defeat it together even if it pits us against each other.

Reference:

1. Dunbar, R. (2021). *Friends: Understanding the power of Our Most Important Relationships*

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BookTok is propagating pseudo-feminism

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Book sales are rising after a long period of stagnation and a possible cause for this seems may be an influx of readers from TikTok's reading corner – BookTok. While this can seem like a cause for elation, there lies a problem in the type of books that are being popularised by BookTok. Under the guise of being feminist, these books, a large number of which are of the romance genre, are propagating pseudo-feminist ideas.

It is safe to say that BookTok single-handedly shot Colleen Hoover's books – particularly *It Ends With Us* – to success. On the surface, it seems to be a book about a woman regaining control over her own life after realising she is the victim of abuse. However, the underlying tone of the novel suggests an almost sympathetic approach to the perpetrator.

We see him being provided with a traumatic background to justify his actions and make readers sympathise with him. He is repeatedly shown as regretting his actions and beating himself up over it, further establishing the idea that his actions are done without intent even though there is a lot of evidence to suggest otherwise. There is even something of a redemption arc for him at the end.

Yes, bad people do bad things because they have issues of their own. But what Colleen Hoover does is romanticise his trauma to explain the actions of an abuser, something that the victim seems to resonate with.

Many BookTok romance books use trauma and bad childhoods in this way to make abusers appear more humane. These books strengthen an idea, particularly amongst young girls, that it is okay to be abused if the person has a reason for their abuse.

There also appears to be a repeating theme in BookTok's choice for fantasy books. Series like *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (ACOTAR) and *The Folk of Air* are presented as having strong female characters. However, BookTok's definition of what a strong woman is seems to be deeply reliant on her being physically strong. Any other form of strength is barely counted.

The heroines in these books can be vulnerable but they can never be weak. Failure to be tough is almost synonymous to being a failure. However, despite these heroines' abilities, their male love interests are likely to be superior. Even though the heroine is undeniably strong, there will come a situation where she will be the damsel in distress and the hero will save her. To call these portrayals as being feminist would be blatantly hypocritical.

Then there exists this trope of men who love hard and cannot bear their love interest being hurt. The male characters from the ACOTAR series suffer from this fault. For the sake of protecting the heroine, they try to control their lives, using love as an excuse. This promotes co-dependency and controlling behaviour, saying it is fine for women to have little agency as long as it is for their safety.

It is understandable that what someone likes to read is their own choice and content creators should not have moral responsibilities over what to recommend. However, the type of audience that is consuming BookTok content are young impressionable teenagers who, as a result, often end up idolising problematic characters, thus perpetuating false ideas of feminism.

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