**Draft 3**

My parents often remind me about how stubborn of a child I was: how I would refuse to eat any form of meat or put on my spectacles. Superficial instances aside, I used this stubbornness to uphold my own moral compass. Living with a sibling made me value equity. If I was not allowed to use the iPad, then my brother shouldn’t too. Despite this willful side of me, I was scared of expressing these values to the external world, especially towards adults, those who owned a higher power.

In grade school, I stumbled upon my older brother’s muted sob, his palms tightly wrapped around his mouth, as he was being reproached by an adult to stop crying, to “man up”. My blood boiled and before I knew it, I had moved forward, ready to shield my brother. Faced with the beast at last, I froze. Everything became a blur as my soul retreated away from my frame. I knew the act would be pointless; I resent that the difference in age placed me in the low ground, that I was diffident and a coward.

Over the years, I witnessed similar cases where my younger male cousin was rebuked by his parents for enjoying a *Barbie* film with his sister, and my male friend mocked for being soft-hearted. I wanted to fight for justice. Unfortunately, the attempt to confront the boys themselves didn’t work. It seems the implanted toxic mindset has led them to dismiss the rights they deserve.

After these failed attempts, I saw an opportunity to bring up this issue with a bigger audience when I had to partake in a high school public art exhibition. I was initially lost with what to create. After several days of thought however, I recalled the past where my eyes stumbled upon males facing aggression for being “too feminine”. From then on, I realized that I must use this chance to relay the issue surrounding toxic masculinity within, at the very least, my community.

I named the piece ‘Bloom’. Filled with the geometrical symbolism of florals, tears, the male symbol, along with the use of contrast, I wanted to portray the ‘blooming’ of a healthy mindset in an ideal world, to say that the standards of masculinity most men face is inhuman and are not sustainable.

Before I knew it, it was my turn to present the artwork in front of everyone. My palms drenched with sweat, my heart palpitated. I wanted to flee from another attempt to express what I stand for. Addressing a notion so controversial in my community felt like a life-or-death situation, especially when adults made up most of the audiences. Taking a large breath in, I read my artist’s statement.

Seconds after I told myself it was all over, a choir of claps filled the room. A mother of a male friend came up to me, sharing how inspired she felt. A group of peers unexpectedly showered me with words of sincere praise. The art teacher requested to feature ‘Bloom’ in the school’s expo and newspaper. It then struck me that it was the elements fused together to put forth powerful emotion, its meaning, and not the imperfections, that moved the audiences.

I realized from then that there are many routes to a resolve. No matter how unconventional the method, the art exhibition provides a platform for me to be heard, as compared to if I were to be direct. Opportunities shouldn’t be taken for granted, even if, at first glance, they may appear unfit for a situation.

**Draft 2**

**Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.**

My parents often remind me about how stubborn of a child I was: how I would refuse to eat any form of meat, or not want to put on my spectacles at school. Superficial instances aside, I used this stubbornness to uphold my own moral compass. Living with a sibling made me value equity. If I was not allowed to use the iPad, then my brother should not too. Unfortunately, I was rather timid and powerless when it came to heavy matters and contending with the values of others. Being heard therefore was out of the question. It felt especially suffocating when I couldn’t stand up for my loved ones.

A shattering moment was back in grade school: I stumbled upon my older brother’s muted sob, his palms tightly wrapped around his mouth, as he was being reproached by an adult to stop crying, to “man up”. My blood boiled and before I knew it, I had moved forward, ready to shield my brother. Faced with the beast at last, I froze. Everything became a blur as my soul retreated away from my frame. I knew it was a part of me that direct speech was beyond my reach. Still, I resent that the difference in age placed me in the low ground, that I was diffident and a coward.

Over the years, I witnessed similar cases where my younger male cousin was rebuked by his parents for enjoying a *Barbie* film with his sister, and my male friend mocked for being soft-hearted. If this were the end, it would be utterly intolerable. There must be another way to fight for justice.

An opportunity came when I took the chance to partake in a high school public art exhibition. It was finally time I put my artistic abilities into good use. Hoping to relay the issue surrounding toxic masculinity within, at the very least, my community, I aimed for an artwork to represent my brother and males alike who are victims of the matter. Starting off with a blank canvas before me, I discerned that I should step out of the comfort of creating realistic illustrations, the art-style I’ve spent over a decade impatiently, and finally mastered. I thought that depicting a realistic scene is unfit to represent the diversity in attributes of males worldwide, regardless of age, size, ethnicity, or culture. There was an urgency to convey a grand scheme, and after about an hour of thought, geometric art came into mind due to its abstract, symbolic nature in which I could represent the male species in a broad scope.

I nearly gave up on ‘Bloom’ as I noticed its flaws; its unappealing lines, the nauseous use of vibrant color, its overall mess of a clump. Time was against me, so I must exhibit the work I had before I could draft another plan. In a blink of an eye, it was my turn to present. My palms drenched with a sea of sweat, my heart palpitating; the child in me begged to flee from another attempt to express what I stand for. Addressing a notion so controversial in my community felt like a life or death situation, especially when the adults made up most of the audiences. Taking a large breath in, I read my artist’s statement.

Just seconds after I told myself it was all over, a choir of claps filled the room. A mother of a male friend I know came up to me, sharing how inspired she felt. An unanticipated group of peers showered me with words of sincere praise. The art teacher requested to feature ‘Bloom’ in the school’s expo and newspaper. It then struck me that it was the contrast in color, the inclusive symbolism of the male species, the elements fused together to put forth powerful emotion, and not the imperfections, that moved the audiences.

I realized then that approaching a problem does not go one way. While my words did not reach the adult who rebuked my brother nor my cousin’s parents, the audiences of the exhibition were a great start. The feedback I got gave me hope that perseverance, passion, and entertaining the many possibilities to a solution is the way out.

Hi Ashley!

Thanks for revising according to our comments. This is a much better draft – I can see your growth and care for others much more in this version. It just needs a little bit more elaboration here and there. As always, I’ve given some guiding questions throughout the essay to help you see which parts need more elaboration.

The biggest part you need to figure out here is to flesh out why you’re afraid to speak your mind on difficult issues if you established yourself as stubborn in the beginning of the essay. What makes these issues different from the trivial stuff you’re comfortable with expressing?

Good luck!

Chiara

**Tell a story from your life, describing an experience that either demonstrates your character or helped to shape it.**

Amongst an orchestra of instruments, I’d consider myself a violin, not simply because it’s one of the few instruments I play and adore. Unlike other instruments with instant playability, only with the application of the rosin can a violin and its bow sound a melody. Despite this, the value of the violin in a concerto is nowhere diminished. It’s ultimately about how well the violinist is able to handle the stringed instrument and maximize its potential.

I was a child of strong inner values and morals, a stubborn one, yet timid and powerless. Consequently, being heard was out of the question. It felt especially suffocating when I couldn’t stand up for my loved ones. A shattering moment was back in grade school: I stumbled upon a simultaneous noise of my older brother’s muted sob, his palms tightly wrapped around his mouth, and a seemingly abusive reproach of an adult that dominated the commotion. I recalled the countless times the adult yelled and demanded my brother to stop crying, to “man up”. My blood boiled that my heart immediately pushed my body forward, ready to shield the poor boy. Faced with the beast at last, I froze. Everything became a blur as my soul cowered away from my frame. Until this day, I’m still uncertain of whether it was the height of the adult, or if it’s the intimidating demeanor, but I knew it was a part of me that direct speech was beyond my reach. My voice was hardly heard this way. Over the years, I have witnessed similar cases wherein my younger male cousin was rebuked at by his parents for enjoying a *Barbie* film with his sister, and my male friend got mocked for being soft-hearted.

Strong-willed, I did not want this to be the end of the story. There must be another way to fight for justice. An opportunity came when I took the chance to partake in a high school public art exhibition. It was finally time I put my artistic abilities into good use. Hoping to relay the issue surrounding toxic masculinity within, at the very least, my community, I aimed for an artwork to represent my brother and males alike who are victims of the matter. Starting off with a blank canvas before me, I discerned that I should step out of the comfort of creating realistic illustrations, the art-style I’ve spent over a decade impatiently, and finally mastered. I thought that depicting a realistic scene is unfit to represent the diversity in attributes of males worldwide, regardless of age, size, ethnicity, or culture. There was an urgency to convey a grand scheme, and after about an hour of thought, geometric art came into mind.

‘Bloom’ is the name of the piece. I nearly gave up on ‘Bloom’ as I noticed its flaws; its unappealing lines, the nauseous use of vibrant color, its overall mess of a clump. Time was against me, so I must exhibit the work I had before I could draft another plan.

The exhibition presentation occurred in a blink of an eye. A choir of claps filled the room. A mother of a male friend I know came up to me, sharing how inspired she felt. An unanticipated group of peers showered me with words of sincere praise. The art teacher requested to feature ‘Bloom’ in the school’s expo, as well as the school newspaper. It then struck me that it was the contrast in color, the inclusive symbolism of the male species, the elements fused together to put forth powerful emotion, and not the imperfections, that moved the audiences.

At this moment, I am barely specked with the white, sticky powder of rosin. Nevertheless, this is the mere beginning; it has only been one performance. It’s even more inspiring to find out that with age, the tune and resonance of the violin improves. Direct confrontation might not work for me, but that is not the only way out, just as instantly sounding instruments aren’t the only ones out there.

Hi Ashley!

This draft has good bones. There is a compelling story about your journey to finding self-expression, but I think it’s a little lost behind the story of your brother and the toxic masculinity. Remember, the prompt is asking about an experience that helped shape your character. In this case, I assume that’s the art exhibition, where you found your voice and your preferred medium of self-expression.

I’ve written comments throughout to reshift the focus onto this story instead of your brother’s, but here is a general structure that you can follow:

1. Your brother’s story as an anecdote – the focus is on you not being able to speak up. How did you feel afterwards?
2. What other attempts did you make (and fail) to express yourself?
3. You discovered art and found that you were able to voice your thoughts through that medium, but you had always just done it in private
4. The opportunity for the art exhibition arrived – how did you think to join it and to raise the issue of toxic masculinity?
5. The public’s reaction
6. Conclusion: how did you feel upon exhibiting your self-expression in public? What did you learn about yourself?

Good luck!

Chiara