



Male-on-Male Violence in a Masculine World

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Understanding a Masculine World

Judith Butler's thought-provoking idea of gender performativity asserts the fact that gender(s)[1] is a social construct, thus, the result of socialisation. The way an individual is said to behave and appear in certain circumstances or throughout everyday life determines the gender(s) of a person. Society's expectations regarding gender roles and gendered behaviour create discrimination and oppression of certain gender identities at the hands of others. When gender(s) is seen in the backdrop of the process of socialisation, one cannot undermine the role the notions of masculinity and femininity play in constructing gender identities. In the end, there is some sort of idealism attached to the notions of masculinity and femininity in every culture that are supposed to be attained by an individual. Such idealism tends to differentiate between males and females and motivates them to attain the ideal gendered role, such as males being dominant and females being subordinate and submissive in their code of conduct. Given the fact that patriarchy is a dominant social system across various societies and cultures, it must be noted that the patriarchal social system dwells on the idea of males enjoying dominance, in which one or another sort of masculinity is deemed a higher virtue. Such masculinity that dwells on the idea of subordinating one or another sort of feminine or masculine is called toxic or hegemonic masculinity. (Donaldson, 1993) In a patriarchal system, masculinity becomes an instrument to create hierarchies based on the division between feminine and masculine. In such a system, femininity is rendered subordinate and lower than masculinity. Women, thus, face discrimination, oppression, and violence at the hands of men who have a close association with violence and possess aggressive masculinity. However, the debunking of the categories of 'Man' and 'Woman' leads one to think about the way these categories are not only socially constructed but also come into play with each other, resulting in the creation of power dynamics. Taking this into account, one questions the notions of masculinity and femininity, whose polarisation leads to discrimination, oppression, and violence against one another. Also, the question arises whether there are power dynamics that play a role when masculinity or femininity is taken into the plural. The singularity of masculine and feminine has for a long time created gender discrimination against marginalised gender identities. The emphasis on certain masculinity or femininity renders limited space for debate over marginalised gender identities when seen in relation to the masculine or feminine. The polarised notion of masculinity subordinates the feminine as well as other forms of masculinity that are rendered non-masculine or feminine due to non-adherence to the stereotypical notions of masculinity.

[1] The writer believes in plurality of gender, thus, the term gender(s) is employed.

Therefore, this article will employ masculinity in its plural form, as in masculinities, so that the various forms of masculinity can be debated in relation to each other. In doing so, an attempt has been made to understand the existing power structure among the masculinities in its social interaction. This article tries to explore the much-unexplored realm of male-on-male violence through the lens of an analysis of social interaction among males.

Male-on-Male Rape and Masculinities

Rape can be defined as forced sexual act or attempt at a person without obtaining his/her consent. Being non-consensual also includes the attainment of consent through manipulation. Rape is an extreme form of sexual assault marked by the attempt or act of penetration in the vagina, anus, or mouth of a person. Due to the feminine being deemed subordinate to the masculine in a patriarchal social system, rape becomes a tool to subordinate women. It also becomes a method to subordinate any other masculinity deemed lower to hegemonic masculinity due to their association with feminine or non-masculine. The psychology behind rape is to control, install fear in someone or provide legitimation to hegemonic masculinity through the use of violence. In this sense, hegemonic masculinity seeks to hegemonize itself through the use of violence against feminine and other subordinated masculinity. The power dynamics between the hegemonic masculinity, feminine, and other marginalised masculinity is marked by strict adherence to stereotypical notions of masculinity, and on the other hand its relation to stereotypical notions of feminine. Patriarchy, thus, leaves no space for the transgression of such a strictly held notion, and any transgression deemed punishable. Violence, in this sense, is used to punish the transgressors, and the act of rape is deemed legitimate in the name of punishment. The transgressors here are often the individuals who question and challenge hegemonic masculinity by non-adherence to the stereotypical notion of masculine or feminine. Male-on-male rape, thus, also constitutes a power dynamic between adherence and non-adherence to the hegemonic masculinity, where the adherent could be seeing non-adherent as a potential threat to his masculinity and thus, adheres to male-on-male rape.

Othering among Masculinities and Male-on-Male Violence

As we have dwelled on the phenomenon of male-on-male violence, one should dive into the notion of male-on-male social interaction now. The plurality of masculinities brings into its ambit the various forms of masculinity that exist as well as hegemonic masculinity. In implying such a linguistic notion one does not undermine the existence of the marginalised masculinities, those that otherwise are excluded due to emphasis on stereotypical notion of masculinity.



In implying such a linguistic notion one does not undermine the existence of the marginalised masculinities, those that otherwise are excluded due to emphasis on stereotypical notion of masculinity. The singular notion of masculinity also paves the way for the process of othering within a social interaction that provides ground for discrimination based on gender identities and locating various factors that intersect with gender-based discrimination to create hierarchies. Othering can be understood as a process by which a group of people or individuals can be seen or perceived as different due to various factors such as race, colour, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. (Montreal Holocaust Museum) Othering leads to discrimination and marginalisation. Seeing masculinities in plural lets one explore the way through which othering can take place in a group of people and become a ground for discrimination and marginalisation.

The Ministry of Women and Child Welfare, supported by the United Nations Children's Fund, Save the Children and Prayas took out a study in 2006 to comprehend the magnitude of child abuse in India. The results were that 53.22% of children faced one or more forms of sexual abuse. Out of these; the number of boys abused was 52.94% and of girls was 47.06%. (Subramanian, Vyjayanthi Kanugodu Srinivasa, et al., 2017) Crimes against children are also an understudied phenomenon as well as the study regarding adolescence as a formative period and the role of the notions of masculinities and femininities in the period of adolescence. The power dynamics between an adult masculine as the perpetrator and a young masculine as the victim, which is often found in such cases, brings out the notion that the young masculine is deemed effeminate in comparison to the adult masculine. Also, the crimes committed by adolescents, whether against females or male, brings out the distorted or unhealthy notion of relationship among masculinities. The fantasization of rape through everyday talk, cinema and songs, and watching porn leads to the normalization of the relationship between masculinity and sexual crimes. Young masculinities are often kept out of the discourse on gender inequality and rendered a space in child rights discourse that undermines their distinct needs of self-assertion and personality development in those crucial formative periods. Often the young masculinities engage in the process of othering through othering of the self or by others. The emphasis on stereotypes such as growing moustaches, having chest hair, anxieties around puberty, and feeling guilty for having sexual fantasies, etc. in the adolescent years also form the basis for the process of othering. Non-adherence to stereotypical notions of masculinity becomes a basis for discrimination and harassment. The young adults lacking chest hair, not having a muscular body, not having a deep voice or any other qualities that marked them as feminine become a reason to other them. The death of 21-year-old Pranshu Yadav, a digital content creator, who faced online bullying and harassment because they[2] created make-up art as a content creator shows the apathy when it comes to treating the choices one tries to enjoy as an individual. (Harshi, 2023) The strict adherence to the occupation deemed 'manly' attributes to the othering of the men who are involved in menial work or work considered feminine. This leads to harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

[2] They/Them were Pranshu yadav's chosen pronouns to call them to. Choosing pronouns is another way of asserting one's gender identity.

The intersection of caste with masculinity creates power dynamics between the so-called upper caste males and males belonging to the so-called lower caste. In Surekha and Priyanka Bhotmange rape case, 2007, the two males of Bhotmange family were forced by a mob of upper-caste people to rape Dalit women, Surekha and Priyanka. On refusal, the genitals of the two males of the Bhotmange family were mutilated and later, the two women were raped by upper-caste men in front of their male family members and then, the women were beaten to death. (Roy, Ambedkar, 2014) Such displays of brutality assert the need to see the intersectionality of gender and caste. The relation between upper-caste masculinity and Dalit masculinity also needs to be analysed. The question to rape one's relative does not only show the assertion of the notion of stereotypical masculinity but also its association with sadomasochism. In a patriarchal system, in which women are considered property of the men, transgressing a woman's boundaries is intended to hurt the dignity of a man, to whom the woman is related by blood or by marriage. The usage of female-oriented cuss words also shows the mentality of hurting the dignity of the masculine that ties itself with the feminine. The mutilation of the genitals of the males in the Bhotmange rape case also shows how much significance phallus can hold in a patriarchal system. Phallocentrism, the idea that the phallus enjoys significance in its social relation appears here. The absence of a phallus renders one weak and subordinate in comparison to the signified who possesses a phallus. Mutilation of the genitals, thus, becomes another way of violence perpetrated against males by males. In this way, within the masculinities, hierarchy takes place through a struggle for dominance, subordination of one another, strict adherence to the stereotypical gender roles, and othering. Thus, to understand the nuances of male-on-male violence, it is needed for the social interaction among masculinities to be critically dealt with.

Gendered Laws and Apathy of Male-on-Male Violence

Male-on-male violence becomes a tough phenomenon to deal with when seen in the context of a gendered law. The state does not acknowledge the varied manifestations of masculinity. Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code that deals with rape considers 'man' a rapist and 'woman' a victim. It also does not take into account the question of marital rape and considers it consensual no matter what. The lack of gender-neutral laws leads to discrimination. By keeping 'men' out of the category of the victim through the law, the state neglects the phenomenon of male-on-male violence or female-on-male violence. The denial of same-sex marriage by the Supreme Court of India also led to discrimination and harassment of the LGBTQIA+ community that does not enjoy the freedom to assert their gender identities and sexual choices. It leads to the marginalisation of the other masculinities or femininities that are already marginalised by disabling them from accessing the law to uphold their fundamental rights or human rights.

Male-on-Male Violence and its Aftermath

Violence has a deep impact on the victim's mental and physical health. Physical assault or sexual violence results in Post Trauma Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, low self-esteem, severe eating disorder, and suicide. (Roos, Kaltz, 2003)



Violence against someone can also lead to severe damage to the body including loss of parts of the body. Violence can also have social significance in regulating the interaction among various stakeholders of society. The person adhering to violence might subordinate the victim leading to the creation of a hostile and fearful atmosphere for the victim in which hierarchies are marked. In such an atmosphere, it becomes difficult to uphold the fundamental rights of individuals and human rights that guarantee a right to a dignified life in any given circumstance.

Way Forward

The need of the hour is to critically engage with the notion of masculinity and its varied manifestations of masculinities. The stereotypical notions of masculinity and its unhealthy relationship with marginalised masculinities and femininities should be questioned to redefine masculinities and to break the shells of patriarchy, a system that dwells on the expectations laid out on an individual. The men need to take the responsibility that the patriarchy has not only created a system oppressive and discriminatory to women but also that it is a system that is equally unhealthy for men.

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