



THE CONCEPT OF MASCULINITY AND ITS PLURALITY

SYED AZEEM ALI

Research Scholar
Department of English
Osmania University
Hyderabad, Telangana.
INDIA

ABSTRACT

The male world is represented with various aspects of masculinity and its internal conflicts. Masculinity is overvalued in certain cultures and at times resorts to violence to maintain its hegemony. Hegemonic masculinity is problematic to any given culture and usually arises in times of war and power struggle. Hegemonic masculinity is not stable due to institutions and cultural influences historically; it is positioned and is resisted in numerous ways. Masculinity has a continual relation of struggle between institutional power and other forms of power. The images of the loving father, the stay-at-home dad or the male nurse might serve as key representations of this brand of masculinity. The performance of ideal masculinity can evoke the difficulty and anxiety resulting in a parody of masculine values.

Key Words: Masculinity, Conflict, Hegemonic, Struggle, Anxiety and Parody.

INTRODUCTION

Our world is male-dominated but has a strong consciousness for change. The conflicting forms of knowledge about gender betray the presence of different practices addressing gender. The knowledge of gender used by Sigmund Freud is connected with practice of psychotherapy. Freud understood that adult sexuality and gender were not fixed by nature but were constructed through a long and conflict-ridden process. Alfred Adler's argument started from the familiar polarity between masculinity and femininity, but immediately emphasized



the feminist point that one side of the polarity is devalued in culture and associated with weakness.

The link between Marxism and psychoanalysis circled around the issues of masculinity without directly addressing it. Wilhelm Reich developed a method of ‘character analysis’ which shifted attention from the individual symptom to the style of the entire personality. His attempt to synthesize Marxist economic analysis and Freudian sexual science led to a brilliant analysis of ideology. He highlighted the ‘authoritarian family’ as the site where the reproduction of class society and patriarchy is accomplished. Reich’s “The Mass Psychology of Fascism”, analyses the concept of a condensation of larger structures of authority in the psychodynamics of the family provided exactly the dimension of social realism that Freudian and Jungian speculation about masculinity lacked. Reich lacked the appreciation of feminism that illuminated Adler’s work. He did not treat masculinity itself as a problem. In the work of Max Horkheimer, Eric Fromm and Theodor Adorno, ‘authoritarianism’ emerged as a distinct character type, if looked from feminist eyes, a type of masculinity.

It was Simone de Beauvoir who applied existential psychoanalysis directly to gender, in “The Second Sex” (1949). Her best-known argument showed woman being constituted as ‘other’ to the male subject. Gender emerged in her treatment as an evolving engagement with situations and social structures. Different gender forms are different ways of life rather than fixed character types. This approach has never been explicitly applied to the First Sex, as a theory of masculinity. In existential psychoanalysis the contradictions of gender are not fixed and their result is not an identity. They are produced socially, but they become contradictions precisely by being taken up as incompatible courses of action. Sex difference research met up with the concept of ‘social role’. Which has become common in our everyday speech; in which being a man or a woman means enacting a general set of expectations which are attached to one’s role- the ‘sex role’.

“The concept of sex role identity prevents individuals who violate the traditional role for their sex from challenging it; instead, they feel personally inadequate and insecure”.

The Masculine Conflict

The vast changes in gender relations around the globe produce ferociously complex changes in the conditions of practice with which men as well as women have to grapple. No one is an innocent bystander in this arena of change. We are all engaged in constructing a world of gender relations. Men no more than women are chained to the gender patterns they have inherited. Men too can make political choices for a new world of gender relations. Yet those choices are always made in concrete social circumstances, which limit what can be attempted; and the outcomes are not easily controlled. Men continue to be detached from the defence of patriarchy by the contradictions and intersections of gender relations; new



possibilities open for reconfiguration and transformation of masculinities. Discursive constructs of masculinity should not, therefore, be viewed as stable elements of institutions or of culture, since even as they are positioned; they are resisted in numerous ways. They should be viewed as constantly agonistic, or as in a continual relation of struggle between institutional power and other forms of power. From this perspective, it is difficult to talk about male power per se, as a stable or monolithic phenomenon. It should be seen as diffuse, complicated form of power in constant relation to opposing forms of gender power.

Approaching masculinity in this way has implications for what is commonly called gender fluidity. This kind of approach to the sign means that all masculinity is somehow always fluid or unstable, that masculinity always bleeds or risks bleeding over into its definitional others, despite efforts to the contrary. The idea of fluidity is based on the assumption that there is some stable notion of gender that is subsequently destabilized in some way. The images of the loving father, the stay-at-home dad or the male nurse might serve as key representations of this brand of masculinity. Most scholars of gender would say that any study of masculinity has constantly to take femininity, homosexuality, and other common forms of alterity into account in order to articulate definitions of masculinity fully. A certain brand of masculinity might be thought about as constant movement. Masculinity would be conceived of as something that is fully outside a binary system, in a constantly changing process of movement, always mutating. So masculinity might become like a woman at some point, but that becoming would be only one its stages, one way in which it moves on to something else that may or may not have to do with the category of women. In this sense, then, there is no masculine being, but only a series of becoming.

The Masculine Fluidity

The basic elements of this model have been famously articulated by Eve Sedgwick in her important book “Between Men” (1985), often considered the text that launched masculinity as an object of inquiry in a literary/cultural context. Of prime consideration here will be relations between masculinity and what is commonly called the love triangle. Men sometimes comment, that their relationships with other men are easier or less of a problem than their relationships with women because women are so different from men. Men may also imagine mutual protection with other men or an absence of rivalry. Various elements of maleness and masculinity can be taken for granted or assumed.

Another reason to think about masculinity as a kind of style is that it implies something open to change. Like a style of clothing, a gendered style might be in at a given time period, but it will not be in forever. So, a collection of masculine acts might seem to define masculinity in a given time or in a given place, but that style will change as well. The knight might have been a kind of masculine style in the middle ages, but it has since passed away as a major style. Knighthood is a series of masculine performances, composed of acts and styles. The



idea of the knight as definitional of masculinity did not disappear as gender at the end of the middle ages, but remains as one aspect of modern masculinity.

Parody is another important aspect of the breakdown of male gender performance, in the special as well as the common sense of the word. People parody masculinity at numerous points in day-to-day life, of course, but they may also parody what Butler calls ‘the very idea of an original’, Butler, “Gender Trouble”, 138. The parody of masculinity performance can evoke the difficulty and anxiety of performing an ideal masculinity and then restabilize that difficulty as new type of masculinity that makes it appear as a new, coherent brand of masculinity. Masculinity itself could be viewed as always moving between parody and performance. If masculinity can be defined through opposition with its others especially women and gay men, it can also be articulated through another opposition- the split or tension between the male body and masculinity by which the male body is viewed as a possible form of alterity for male subjectivity.

This kind of tension or anxiety can be highly stressful for masculinity and suggests an important way in which men are ‘dominated by their domination,’ or in which masculinity functions as other to the male body and vice versa. National groupings function in ways similar to race; the German may be assumed to be more masculine than his French counterpart, simply by virtue of his nationality. While race, ethnicity, and nationality are all closely interrelated forms of subjectivity-all with connections to gender further problem is that ethnic, racial, and national constructs are themselves so unstable, and so culturally and temporally determinate, that any attempt to discuss them in theoretical terms necessarily hides their complexity and oversimplifies them. Despite the number of Latino men in the US, Latinos may not be on the radar screen in terms of gender subjectivity for some, even as a form of alterity. Similarly, Jewish or Native - American masculinity might not be perceived as in opposition to white or other masculinities, and fall outside the system of binarized constructs.

Gendered binarism can thus exclude on two levels: by making the non-hegemonic half of the opposition an inferior or less valid form of masculinity, and by keeping a group out of the opposition in the first place. Exclusion serves to maintain one group's hegemony. A construct of Native American masculinity may be predicated on instability because the group is perceived as without a national homeland. Gender may be indeterminate because Native-American masculinity is imagined in a borderless space, perhaps in opposition to white American masculinity whose borders are defined and clear.

CONCLUSION

Certain traditionally patriotic characteristics, such as courage and honour, are often viewed as inherently masculine traits, whether exemplified by a man or a woman. Perceptions of the



masculine cultural character of the men of a nation may also engender the nation by extension. Some might apply stereotypes of Italian machismo or a hearty German constitution to Italy and Germany as a whole. But applying stereotypical masculinities to an entire country in this way suggests that the gender of a nation is in no way naturally linked to its physicality, but exists in the realm of representation. A further important commonality between nation and masculinity is that both can be considered ideological. Though any person might be assumed to have a nationality and a gender, these forms of subjectivity are not actual possessions, but are both ideologically constructed. A key ideologically defined aspect of subjectivity; nationality and gender are often put in dialogue with each other since one can help prop up the other. The point about historical approaches to masculinity is that, while a new morphology might arise for various contextual reasons and seemingly appear out of the blue, key elements that predate it. Morphologies can explicitly evoke previous masculinities, or they may not be linked to them in any explicit way. While the ability to wage war has not really disappeared from masculinity relate to war and battle have changed over time and current definitions of military masculinity are dependent on previous ones. The medieval morphology of the knight is quite different from the image of the Napoleonic soldier, who is quite different from the American soldier fighting in Iraq. Yet all of these forms of masculinity are centered on the ability to wage war in a certain sociohistorical context.

WORK CITED

1. Butler, Judith. *Gender trouble*. Routledge, 2002.
2. Chodorow, Nancy J. *Femininities, masculinities, sexualities: Freud and beyond*. University Press of Kentucky, 2014.
3. De Beauvoir, Simone. *The second sex. Social Theory Re-Wired*. Routledge, 2023. Pp. 346-354.
4. Edwards, Tim. *Cultures of masculinity*. Routledge, 2004.
5. Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve. *Between men: English literature and male homosocial desire*. Columbia university press, 2015.
6. Reich, Wilhelm. *The mass psychology of fascism*. Macmillan, 1970.