

Masculine Viewpoint

Masculinity is a set of qualities, characteristics or roles generally considered typical of, or appropriate to, a man. It can have degrees of comparison: "masculine", "more masculine", "most masculine", (Wikipedia). The definitions of masculinity vary across historical and cultural contexts. The dandy, for instance, was regarded as an ideal of masculinity in the 19th century, but is considered effeminate by modern standards.

The extent to which masculinity is a result of nature or nurture, a matter of what someone is born with or how they are socialised, has been the subject of much debate.

Gene research has yielded much information about the development of masculine characteristics and the process of sexual differences specific to the reproductive system of human beings. There is an extensive debate about how children develop gender identities. On the nature side of the debate, it is argued that masculinity is solely linked with the male body. In this view, masculinity is something that is associated with the biological male sex. Having male genitalia, for instance, is regarded as a key aspect of masculinity.

Others have suggested that while masculinity may be solely influenced by biological factors, it is also culturally constructed. As such, masculinity is not restricted to men and can, in fact, be female when women display behaviour, traits and physical attributes that are considered masculine in a given context.

On this side of the debate, it is argued that the "masculine man" does not have a single source of origin. Masculinity is viewed differently in different cultures and religions and has also been viewed differently historically. While the military, for example, has a vested interest in constructing and promoting a specific form of masculinity, they did not create it from scratch. In some religions a boy becomes a man when he starts to shave, (Judean adolescent change, 1990, Kline).

History:

Ancient times

"*Viri autem propria maxime est fortitudo.*" Cicero, *Tusculanae Quaestiones*, 1:11:18.

In translation, Cicero states: "a man's chief quality is courage." Ancient literature includes both explicit statements of what was expected of men in laws, and implicit suggestions about masculinity in myths involving gods and heroes. In 1000 BC, the Hebrew Bible states King David of Israel told his son "Be strong, and be a man.

Scholars of the time suggested integrity and equality as masculine values in male-male relationships and virility in male-female relationships. Legends of ancient heroes include the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Such stories are considered to reveal qualities in the hero that inspired respect, like wisdom or courage.

Medieval times

Jeffrey Richards describes a medieval masculinity which was essentially Christian and chivalric, (From Christianity to Paganism), Morals, Ethics, courage and generosity are seen as characteristic of the portrayal of masculine men

Victorian times

In the Victorian era of Great Britain, masculinities were undergoing change from their traditional 'heroic' viewpoint. As the Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle wrote in 1831: The old ideal of Manhood has grown obsolete, and the new is still invisible to us. ('Victorian masculinity').

Modern times

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the traditional family structure consisted of the father as the 'bread-winner' and the mother as the housewife. During World War II, women entered the workforce to replace the men sent overseas as soldiers. While some women resumed the role of housewife after the war, others remained in the workplace, by choice or because their husband had been killed and they needed to earn money to support the family.

After the war as House prices went up, and the cost of living went up women's earning power became an essential part of the household income and, for some households, it resulted in some women becoming the primary income-earners and men the primary care-givers. As of 2007, 159,000 dads were primary care-givers in the UK, and this number is increasing, (Stay at home Dads by Dawn Rosenberg McKay 2009).

Dubbed "stay-at-home dads", these men are performing duties in the home previously undertaken by women

Changes in Viewpoint

The approach to the study of the 'characteristics of men' was prompted by feminist and racial equality campaigners trying to achieve a better parity or equality between Men and Women This led to the investigation of masculinity to be part of the investigation into social discrimination instead of an impartial study of the basic masculinity traits.

The unfortunate effects of masculinity being studied as a discriminatory practice and not as a separate entity is that the idea of being masculine is frowned upon by certain groups. Academic study of masculinity underwent a massive rise in interest in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with courses across the UK dealing with masculinity rising from 30 to over 300, however of these only 7 were courses set out for the historical and religious study of what masculinity means to communities and individuals, (Wisconsin University Dept. Psychology Press). The other courses were for the benefit of students wishing to learn about the abuses of Men and their roles against Women in general.

"The abuses by the 'masculine' man against women", 1985 – 1995, Huddersfield College of Further Education. 3 Month courses running continuously, Government funded.

"How Men abuse their position in the workplace", 1989 – 1992, Brent social Services Dept of Social Work, In house training course, funded for Women only.

"I can do that too", 1989, Liverpool council Women's group. Government funded.

"No point in applying". 1991, A study by Cardiff City Council Women's action into why women are less likely to be interviewed for a council position than a male colleague. Government funded.

The study resulted in a new approach to application sorting. **"All female applicants must be granted an interview whether they meet the criteria for the post or not", when a female applicant is being interviewed a Women's Action Group member must be allowed to take part in the interview.**

It should be noted that the author is not anti-change or, anti-women. The author does however believe that the levels that some Women's groups have went to in their efforts to stop discrimination has in fact been discriminatory in practice.

Masculine gender role stress

In 1987, Eisler and Skidmore did studies on masculinity and found three mechanisms of masculinity that accompany masculine gender role often result in emotional stress. They include:

- The emphasis on prevailing in situations requiring body and fitness
- Being perceived as emotional
- The need to feel adequate in regard to sexual matters and financial status

Because of social norms and pressures associated with masculinity, Men with spinal cord injuries for example, have to adapt their self-identity to the associated losses which may lead to feelings of decreased physical and sexual prowess with lowered self-esteem and a loss of male identity. Feelings of overall loss of control are also experienced.

Masculinity is something, that some fear, is becoming increasingly challenged, especially in the last century, with the emergence of Women's rights and the development of the role of women in society. In recent years many advertisements on TV have been created as a way for men to re-affirm their masculinity. A popular example is the "Miller Lite" advert, depicting a Male lumberjack chopping down trees in the middle of a -20deg snowfield whilst enjoying a Cool Beer or "McCoys" Man crisps where a man who has to ask directions could not possibly be 'man enough' to eat McCoys. Although these adverts are offered in a humorous manner they attempt to define masculinity and indicate that proper gender is a matter of how the man performs rather than simply feeling masculine.

Men feel they have to be masculine, " Don't be emotional, Be strong, Be sexually active. When any of these " Masculine " traits are taken away, the man may become unsure of his masculinity.

Masculine effects on health care

There has always been an impact of masculinity on men's health, help-seeking behaviour. American men make 134.5 million fewer physician visits than American women each year and men in the UK make only 29.8% of all physician visits, that is, if women's visits for pregnancy are included. A quarter of men between 45 to 60 do not have a personal doctor. Many men should go to annual heart checkups with doctors but do not, increasing their risk of death from heart disease. Men between the ages of 25 and 65 are four times more likely to die from cardiovascular disease than women. Men are more likely to be diagnosed in a later stage of a terminal illness because of their reluctance to go to the doctor, especially bowel or testicular cancers.

Reasons men give for not having annual physicals and not visiting their physician include fear, denial, embarrassment, a dislike of situations out of their control, or not worth the time or cost.

The media plays a role in promoting masculine attitudes to health. Arran Stibbe (2009) analysed issues of a prominent car magazine in the year 2007, and claimed that while ostensibly being focused on cars, the magazine also promoted (traditional) masculinity. These potentially damaging male behaviours included the excessive consumption of convenience foods and meats, drinking of alcohol, and unsafe sex.

Men find it difficult to discuss health matters with a stranger, particularly a female stranger. Problems arise when making a doctor's appointment and the receptionist, normally female, asks "why do you want the appointment?". Many men do not even attempt to make the appointment because of this.

Conclusion

In many cultures, displaying characteristics not typical to one's gender may become a social problem for the individual. Within sociology such labeling and conditioning is known as "gender assumptions", among men, some non-standard behaviors may be considered a sign of homosexuality, which frequently runs contrary to cultural notions of masculinity. When sexuality is defined in terms of object choice, as in early sexology studies, (Freud), male homosexuality is interpreted as feminine sexuality. The corresponding interpretation of excessive masculinity may be expressed in the term machismo. Women also display masculine traits and the term for a masculine woman is butch, which is associated with lesbianism. Butch is also used within the lesbian community, without a negative connotation, but with a more specific meaning (Davis and Lapovsky Kennedy, 1989).

The Masculine viewpoint and the argument "Is masculinity in crisis", will continue to change depending on the pressures placed upon it by Society, Politicians and outside influences such as women's groups. Australian archeologist Peter McAllister stated, "I have a strong feeling that masculinity is in crisis. Men are searching for a role in modern society; the things we used to do aren't in much demand anymore". Others see the changing labour market as a source of the alleged crisis. De-industrialisation and the replacement of old industries with new technology industry

has allowed more women to enter the labour force and reduced the demand for male physical strength.

The changes have also been frequently attributed to feminism and a resulting questioning of the rights which have been granted to men solely on the basis of their sex. British sociologist John MacInnes argued that "masculinity has always been in one crisis or another" and suggested that the crises arise from the "fundamental incompatibility between the core principle that all human beings are equal (regardless of their sex) and the belief by some that men are naturally superior to women."