

UNDERSTANDING TRADITIONAL MASCULINITY

**Mr.A.Abhishek, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sree Narayana Guru College, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India.*

Introduction

Traditional masculinity refers to the social and cultural norms that define what it means to be a man. These norms are often rooted in values such as strength, dominance, emotional stoicism, and rigid behavioral expectations considered appropriate for men. Although these principles have evolved, they continue to influence contemporary attitudes toward gender roles.

Historical Context

The idea of masculinity has evolved, but traditional masculinity, in its most inflexible form, became more distinct in the early 20th century. In many cultures, especially in Western societies, men were expected to exemplify traits such as physical toughness, emotional control, and supremacy over women. The Industrial Revolution, along with communal changes, reinforced the idea that masculinity was tied to economic productivity, authority, and control within the family unit.

In Western Culture

In Western societies, traditional masculinity habitually idealized men as providers, protectors, and decision-makers within the family. This model barred "soft" traits like emotional expression or caregiving, which were reserved for women. This gendered separation of labor and poignant roles reinforced the hierarchical construction of society, positioning men as leading figures within both the family and the broader social context.

In Other Cultures

In diverse cultures, masculinity may have had various crucial points but still shared general values such as headship, bravery, and self-reliance. These traits often acted as markers of a man's appeal and his role within society, further highlighting the universality and doggedness of masculine ideals, although in different forms across cultures.

Key Elements of Traditional Masculinity

1. Emotional Stoicism

Traditional masculinity places a significant emphasis on emotional control. Men are estimated to hold back vulnerable emotions such as grief or fear, promoting instead a persona of toughness and flexibility. The communal belief that men should "man up" and avoid emotional expression has contributed to a culture that stigmatizes emotional vulnerability as a weakness.

2. Physical Strength and Toughness

Physical strength is another trademark of traditional masculinity. From athleticism to physical labor, men have historically been expected to demonstrate their fortitude and toughness, both as a means of survival and as a display of their masculine power.

3. Provider and Protector Role

In traditional masculinity, men are likely to serve as economic providers and protectors. This includes working to support the family monetarily and ensuring its protection from external threats, whether physical or emotional.

Impact on Society

Traditional masculinity has wrought not only individual identities but also broader communal structures. By reinforcing binary gender roles, it has marginalized traits associated with femininity and perpetuated inequalities in areas such as the gender pay gap and uneven depiction of caregiving roles. Additionally, the occurrence of gender-based aggression is closely linked to the dominant ideals of masculinity that promote control and dominance over others.

Social Implications for Women

Traditional masculinity also reinforces patriarchal structures, restraining women's opportunities and rights. Gender inequality remains insidious in many parts of the world, where communal values about headship and power, often personified by traditional masculinity, prevent women from attaining the same rights and opportunities as men.

Psychological Impact on Men

Some unyielding expectations of traditional masculinity can create significant psychological pain. Men may feel bound to conform to standards that are psychologically unhealthy, leading to higher rates of depression, suicide, and drug abuse. Research has shown that this strain, combined with the stigma against vulnerability, negatively impacts mental health.

Reimagining Masculinity in the Modern Era

There has been a growing movement to redefine masculinity in more complete and healthy ways. The current conversation emphasizes emotional intelligence, susceptibility, and gender equality. Men are increasingly encouraged to explore emotions and identities, breaking free from the obstacles that constrain a male from his mission of following traditional gender roles.

Masculinity in the Media

In literature, movies, and television, the depiction of men has become more nuanced. Modern media often reflects male characters who embody difficulty, moving away from one-dimensional depictions of masculinity. TikTok, Instagram or whatever, these platforms are plagued with degenerates demoting traditional masculinity.

Equality and Allyship

More men are energetically engaging in gender equality discussions, questioning traditional gender roles that have caused damage to both men and women. Men are also advocating for women's rights, acknowledging the significance of allyship in the brawl for gender equality.

Conclusion

While traditional masculinity has played a significant role in shaping societal structures, its limitations and negative consequences have prompted a re-examination of what it means to be a man today. The future of masculinity is likely to be defined by flexibility, emotional depth, and an understanding that traits like vulnerability and nurturing are as valuable as strength and resilience. This shift will not only benefit men but also foster healthier relationships and more inclusive communities.

References

- Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed., University of California Press, 2005.
- Faludi, Susan. *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*. William Morrow, 1999.
- Tannen, Deborah. *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. Ballantine Books, 1990.
- West, Candace, and Don H. Zimmerman. "Doing Gender." *Gender & Society*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1987, pp. 125-151.
- Whitehead, Stephen M. *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions*. Polity Press, 2002.
- Zimbardo, Philip G., and John Coulombe. *The Demise of Guys: Why Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do About It*. Sentinel, 2016.
- Brescoll, Victoria L., and Eric L. Uhlmann. "Can Gender Stereotypes Subvert Justice? Behavioral Dynamics of Jury Decision Making." *Psychological Science*, vol. 19, no. 11, 2008, pp. 933-939.
- Brittan, Andrew. *Masculinity and Power*. Blackwell Publishing, 1989.
- Gardiner, J. K. *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions*. Columbia University Press, 2002.
- Sweeney, Marcia M., and Daniel A. Phillips. "The Changing Role of Men and Women in the Family: Family Structure, Gender Role Attitudes, and the Decision to Marry." *Social Forces*, vol. 83, no. 2, 2004, pp. 649-686.
- Hooks, Bell. *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. Atria Books, 2004.
- Kimmel, Michael S. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. Free Press, 2006.
- Mahalik, James R., et al. "Masculinity and Perceived Normative Health Behaviors as Predictors of Men's Health Practices." *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 64, no. 11, 2007, pp. 2201-2209.