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Male Perspective on Construction of Masculinity: Issues and Challenges in Lahore

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Abstract: Masculinity is the dominant gender discourse of masculine behaviour embedded in men's everyday practices, behaviours, and actions. Since at least the 1980s, these gendered social norms have been argued to create stress, strain, and conflicts for men. Investigating those experiences and circumstances where gender patterns are less or more open to change is an important task of this research. Therefore, this study aims to include men in the "study up" approach of the gender research domain and include their experiences in the conversation of gendered lobbying under patriarchal perceptions. Using the Gender Role Strain paradigm as a guiding framework, the study intends to explore the male perspective on the construction of masculinity in contemporary Pakistani society. A qualitative phenomenological research design has been used, and snowball and purposive sampling techniques are used in conjunction for the recruitment of participants with the help of pre-defined inclusion criteria. The participants of the study are diverse in terms of age, educational background, and family situation. Each participant was interviewed at length using an in-depth interview guide, including topics from the beginning of childhood across the lifespan. The result of the interviews supports the social constructionist perspective of masculinity and also focuses on the strain and challenges of the masculine norms associated with the existing conceptions of masculinity and gender role strain.

Introduction

"Everybody has heard the women's stories. But nobody has heard the men's" (Clark, 2014).

Gender is considered a system in which men and women act out the roles attributed to them on the basis of their sex, i.e., assigned societal divisions (Ewing & Schacht, 1998). Hearn and Collinson (1998) argue that gender is essentially linked to sex categories but socially constructed and changeable. Connell (1995) and West and Zimmerman (1987) maintained the fluid nature of gender. Two debates exist in reference to sex/gender categories: first and foremost, it is related to the apparent naturalness of gender/sex; and the other is in relation to power. Perhaps, it was feminists who initiated the

concept of power into the social constructionist views of gender and argued that it is this existence of a power that serves and encourages the gender dichotomy (Brod & Kaufman, 1994).

Feminists (Daly & Lind, 1988; Heimer, 2000) argued that gender must be seen as a product of power relations between both sexes: males and females, not simply the conformation of roles and configuration of masculine or feminine behaviours. Scholars like Coles (2009), Connell (1995), and Tranter (2005) said that men are the main holders of all the powers. So, the superordinate position that men have relative to the other sex is seen as certain and accepted, too. This male dominance is embedded in all

institutions, such as the economy, religion, ideology, family and politics (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Lorber, 1994). Through these institutions, gender norms of hegemonic masculinity and femininity are learned and perpetuated (Bozok, 2012). As endorsed by Lorber (2005), masculinity and femininity are not inborn, i.e. children are taught these traits. Therefore, gender is not simply seen as roles and attributes of males and females but as power relations between the two groups. Society and cultures have prescriptive standards of masculinity and femininity, which are directed and judged in order to maintain male domination.

Within a patriarchal cultural context, there are definite socially constructed gender roles and behaviours about what it means to be a man (Thomos & Levant, 2012). Expectations related to masculinity have been shown to influence men towards certain behaviours, which are mostly exercised to avoid feminine behaviours, restricting emotions, assuming authority and being a provider & breadwinner of the family, striving for status and achievement, especially in sports and work (Edwards & Jones, 2009). Males and females understand their masculinity and femininity through family, peer groups and acquaintances and learn how to socialize into dichotomous “traditional” gender roles. These systems of social learning are considered identity processes that the family and other primary groups help to create and maintain (Carter, 2014)

So, it is expected to be a man in any patriarchal culture. Men must follow the traditional ideals of masculinity. Traditional masculine ideals are the main source for males to execute sexist and patriarchal values, which have negative outcomes and affect their interpersonal relationships (O’Neil, 2008). It distresses family in the form of husband & wife relationship, fatherhood and even their own selves because family is the primary institution which perpetuates and rationalizes masculinity and femininity (Amin, Adebayo, Chandra & Kageston, 2018). Masculine traits are demanded from boys

more strictly than feminine behaviour is expected from girls, and it is demanded and promoted from a very early age. These superior traits must be seemed and followed by any male child (Taubman, 2018). Consequently, men are constrained by cultural norms and standards of society to show masculine traits.

Table 1

Robert Brannon (1976) presents traditional ideals of masculinity

Masculine Ideals	Traits
Breadwinner	Earns money/Provider of family
Independent /Aggressive	Takes action /Violent if necessary
Achieving /Unemotional	Solves problems/Enjoys “masculine” activities
Hard-working/Physical	Gets the job done
Dominant /Competitive	Takes control
Heterosexual/Forceful	Initiates sex

These traditional gender roles of men, endorsed by various theories of gender and researchers, are masculine ideals for being a real man in any patriarchal society (Bozok, 2011; Connell, 2005; Davis & Lacker, 2004; Fields et al., 2015; Hadebe, 2010). Focusing on traditional gender roles of masculinity, whether obeying these ideals or not, believes that experiences associated with it are purely reactions to masculinity (Harris & Harper, 2008; Kahn, 2009). These traditional gender roles are produced in specific situations, and these might include the educational system, customary laws and regulations, the state and its mechanism, religion, culture, media and especially family, as discussed earlier.

Stages of Development of Masculinity

Gelfer (2016) presented a model for a better understanding and thinking of masculinity called the Five Stages of Masculinity (FSM).

Stage 1: *Unconscious masculinity* signifies that the normative social construction of masculinity has been accepted by both genders without even thinking about it. The rationale of this stage is prone to the practices through which it negatively influences the world: aggression, violence, dominance, power and control, economics and mismanagement of the social settings as a whole.

Stage 2: *Conscious masculinity* has variations of all the stages. The general idea of these variations is the understanding of masculinity. There is a level of adaptation of rules that takes place around contemporary masculinity.

Stage 3: *Critical masculinities* are highly associated with feminism. As society operates via domination, which oppresses atypical men (such as gay men and straight men who resist patriarchy), masculinity is not natural but rather socially constructed. Masculinity is not only singular but plural too. In other words, changeable.

Stage 4: *Multiple Masculinities* are largely aligned with queer theory. Five stages of masculinity interpret queer theory as wider than the experiences of LGBTQ people.

Stage 5: *Beyond Masculinities*, stand by the bottom line. That is, masculinity does not exist. As it doesn't exist, there can be no crisis of masculinity. Of course, that is the reification of masculinity, and that is the problem (Gelfer, 2016).

The key assumption of the FSM is that masculinity is not a fixed thing, and it is changeable. Also, if we see it from a social constructionist perspective, gender is not fixed. The feminist movement in the 1970s created

conflict between men and women. In response to feminist movements, male liberation assembled for men to liberate themselves from sex stereotypes; they claimed that women were not the only gender who was subjugated through constrained gender roles. Society expects men to behave accordingly to traditional male ideals, too. Conformity to masculine ideals of perceived expectations and refusal can further lead to strains and conflict (Sawyer, 1970). This stance instigated the men's discourse, and literature started to propose that masculine roles were also troublesome to men as it is to women (Chodorow, 1978; O'Neil, 2008).

Numerous empirical kinds of research have consensus that strong devotion to male gender norms is associated with a wide range of negative psychological outcomes, including shame, depression, anxiety, anger, substance use, lower relational satisfaction, and domestic violence (Blazina & Watkins, 1996; Burn & Ward, 2005; Schwartz, Waldo & Daniel, 2005). However, despite these negative effects, many men stick to the male gender role, saying that there is a strong drive for them to do so. Social learning theories on gender suggest that this motivation is the reward and punishment of the socialization process (Busey & Bandura, 1999). So, if masculinity is the reason for various ills and if it is not fixed, then we should think first and act accordingly towards the way out of these problems (Gelfer, 2016). Usually, in gender hierarchy, we are prone to "study down", which means investigating the subordinate groups, women and transgender peoples, and focusing on their lives and experiences. But in the gender domain, studying up means studying the superordinate category "men", and as men are at the top of the gender hierarchy and get privileges from the subordination of women and other genders, it still met with resistance (Peretz, 2016). Because there is a general argument that studying subordinated groups is needed to achieve equality and human liberation, while studying men re-centres men's experiences, draws attention and resources away from

women, and thereby supports the male chauvinist status quo. However, scholars, activists and feminists are now increasingly acknowledging the importance of including men (Connell, 1995 & 2005; England, 2010; Esplen, 2006; Peretz, 2016).

The work on gender-related issues has been carried out in Pakistan, too. Being head of the family and being breadwinner, and being non-expressive were dominant roles of a Pakistani man. Family is the primary institution that sustains these gender ideals. A Plethora of research (Akhtar & Akbar, 2016; Ali & Gavino, 2008; Hussain, Habib & Akhter, 2014; Rehman & Roomi, 2012; Rabbani, Qureshi, & Rizvi, 2008; Raza, 2007; Tahir, 2017) were conducted on feminism, and transgender peoples, women rights, possibilities and limitations of women often presented men as problematic, but the problem of other sex male is invisible in the Pakistani literature. So far, studying the down approach can be seen clearly in the domain of gender research. Gender researches in Pakistan, mainly working on masculinity, only focus on shifting tradition of masculinity, changing gender patterns, representation of masculinity in linguistics, masculinity & psychological well-being of men, economic and breadwinner role of men (Ali et al., 2011; Adil, Shahid & Arshad, 2017)

Due to the absence of a study approach in a gender research area unavailability of literature on male role attitudes and relatable strains, it has not yet been studied in a local context that draws its importance for a researcher to explore it in Pakistan. Therefore, this study aims to include men in the “study up” approach of the gender research domain and include the male perspective on contemporary masculine models and possible threats by exploring their experiences in the conversation of gendered lobbying under patriarchal perceptions. The present study may be a pioneering step in this particular area of masculinity and aims to explore the severity of gender role strain related to men. Moreover, to understand gender and masculinity,

two broader theoretical positions are used: essentialism and constructionism. This study stresses the argument that the social constructionist approach is more suitable for understanding the complexity and diversity of masculinity and exploring how masculine identities are formed and facing strains in the situation of changing gender roles and relations. Connell (2005) states that in the popular ideology of masculinity, it is often believed to be a natural consequence of male biology for the better understanding of these problems, strains and challenges. Pleck (1981) first proposed the “gender role strain” paradigm of masculinity, and according to this paradigm, *Strains arise when males’ gender role displays deviate from the dominant, or hegemonic, masculine ideology, defined as a set of socially constructed norms that dictate appropriate male behaviour* (Thompson & Pleck, 1995). Up to the present theories, Pleck’s GRSP has been an extremely recognized and endorsed theory in both psychological and sociological fields, and it proposes that when men are socialized in a traditionally masculine way, they suffer from the negative consequences of the social pressure to perform that traditional masculinity.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology is mostly used to gather an in-depth understanding of individuals, phenomena, or events when quantitative methods are not suitable or limited (Patterson, 2002) as this study explores an in-depth understanding of masculinity and gender role strain, its propagation and its existence in Pakistan. It is appropriate for a qualitative approach to be taken. For the selection of the right sample size for a phenomenological research design study, it has been recommended that interviewing as few as five participants is sufficient, and twenty-five are acceptable until saturation is achieved. In this study, 25 participants were interviewed, which is seen as the ideal sample in phenomenological research design. In this qualitative study, two sampling

techniques were used, i.e., Purposive and Snowball sampling, as techniques can be used alone or in conjunction with one another (Creswell, 2018). The sample was selected by purpose with the help of pre-defined inclusion criteria. But for the recruitment of participants, snowball sampling was used. Participants were recruited through acquaintances and colleagues. The target population is Lahore, as it is one of the main urban centres of Pakistan where gender roles are beginning to change through modernization, women empowerment and awareness of rights, adopting western cultural values through the influence of media as a supportive agent and increasing literacy level (Ali et al., 2011). To explore the research questions of the study, in-depth interviews have been taken. After completing the interviews, data were analyzed by listening to audio recordings and transcribing each tape precisely, highlighting and grouping the statements into themes, and sorting out those themes in addition to the final narrative information and making the required changes. In this whole process of interviewing and keen observation of the participants, constructive information and themes that were directly linked to their own perspectives, challenges, and experiences emerged.

The individual responses were then analyzed, compared and categorized with the results of transcription of the in-depth interviews and afterwards triangulated and interpreted to illustrate results. The data from interviews were transcribed and analyzed by using thematic analysis.

Results

Following themes have emerged from the findings of the study, which depict masculinity beliefs and changing role ideas among the participants. Quotations mentioned in this section are taken from the interviews, which are discussed and support the finding of this research.

Masculine Normative Standards

Several concepts have emerged from the data that mirror participants' understandings of masculinity. These concepts included: tough guy/ machoism, financially independent, and decision-making power. Some of the concepts, such as being gentle and having successful women, were seeming as the contemporary requirements of masculinity, while being a breadwinner and having economic power were considered traditional and still persisting male roles as professed by the participants.

Brave/ Tough man/ Machosim

Having a muscular body and rough and tough appearance was a distinct feature of dominant masculinity for the participants, as they associated it with the idea of power and dominance.

The most important traits a man should have that he must be and he should be courage and brave. He can do anything that he wants; he should have the quality to achieve something. As females are not so brave and courageous, it's a manly trait "ye Mardon ki shaan hai wo nidar hotay hain," 34-years old man.

"A man should be dominant, bossy, strong and tough, be authoritative and aggressive in times of need and whenever required. He is not supposed to be shy like a girl" 36-years old man.

Different codes were slowly integrated and connected with the conception of masculinity, as far as interviews continued. They associated the male muscular body with a dominant form of masculinity as it is a plus for them to be endorsed and expected by society and attract females also for heterosexual relationships.

Breadwinner/ Family man

Attributes associated with the male, for instance, the breadwinner: earner, dedicated and tough guy, and good father, all are compatible with this theme. Being a provider and family guy was one of their insights into masculinity. Male

participants' point of view about masculinity seems to be learned from their father's role, and their opinions were influenced by their religion too. The most male often referred to religious belief in their answers, specifically when they talk about their family responsibilities and breadwinning role:

"A man carries the responsibilities of his family on their shoulders, and his children and his wife are simply sitting in the house and doing the domestic chores. I always thought and believed we are the man who will earn and run the family, not our wives," 34-year-old male.

"Our religion stresses that it's a man's duty to take complete responsibility for his family, he should be a responsible man, and if we talk about man, he should be capable enough that he can look after his family and fulfil the needs of his family in every possible way" 32-years old person.

So, when it comes to a man, you should not be dependent on anybody and must stand on your own feet. You should be the breadwinner and provider for your family. I understand a woman might be the earner or provider for her family, but I strongly believe that the breadwinner is more a masculine role." 36-year-old man.

Decision-making power

The potential for decision-making power must belong to the male gender as it is vital for their insight into masculine identities. They considered it obligatory to develop harmonic interaction and respectful connection with their spouses. In this regard, a participant said that;

"Even our spouses are our working partners, but the final decision is ours. We allowed them to work. It's our choice, not theirs. We will select which profession is best for them to work and when to quit," 36-year-old male.

Admit new concepts as a compulsion for the sake of society's acceptance and evade conflicts

"Gender roles are changing, girls are also doing the work that boys did, and the dominance of the man in

society is not like before. His command and sub-ordinances are not like before. So, by brainwashing my wife, I kept telling her that her job was not so important and you are doing this because of her own choice. There is no competition between us. The last decision will be mine in every matter. Always remember I'm the man of the house, so" 34-year guy

Discussion

Numerous key concepts evolve, which unfold the participants' viewpoints about traditional meanings of masculinity. This study highlights and endorses the reality that gender roles are in transition in the urban centre, but still, we follow the stance of essentialism while dealing with masculinity as Connell (2005) asserts that there is a popular belief about the ideology of masculinity that it is a natural product of male biology. Men accept and endorse an essentialist stance of their masculinity, that masculinity is fixed. Similarly, the ideology of essentialism limits the debate on gender as its stand of biological determinism, which is regarded as naturally given. Smiler and Gelman also suggest that males are more essentialist than females (Smiler & Gelmen, 2008). However, the fluid concept of gender is only permissible when we deal with femininity. For instance, a participant said that: *Even today, the expectation of most people from us is that males of the family should work and earn money. Though if men choose to stay at home will be devastating for their marking because they might, even in our modern world, be looked at as weird, whereas women doing a job or staying at home get idealized.*

It also reveals that multiple masculinities exist in Pakistani men. Males construct their own masculine hierarchy within their social spheres, like family and workplace, which places more worth on some males than others, e.g. males who are stronger financially and have big achievements and authority are those who have the tendency to feel extra special and respected by other males. Thus, they ensure to articulate their authoritative traits in social settings in such

a way that they can be distinguished and get respect. The same participant claim that: *It provides them with a feeling of acceptance and excites/soothes their masculinity.*

This study also pictures these two facts that normative standards of masculinity are compromising, or we can say that it is in crisis. As mentioned earlier, the term crisis in masculinity discourse refers to the transformation of roles instead of ruination. Hamber's (2010) scholarly work asserts that male role strains are caused by the social transitions through which traditional masculine roles have become obsolete and dysfunctional. In order to deal with these challenges, it is necessary for them to recognize their pain and suffering. The effects caused by a certain type of masculinity caused emotional, physical and psychological damage to their well-being. Shortly, they have to be a "new man."

The contemporary composed masculinity develops to eliminate a few facets of traditional normative masculinity and its practices but not all aspects, for instance, occupational achievement, breadwinning and heterosexuality which cause strains and role confusion. In accordance with another study in Pakistan, the supreme masculine roles caused extreme gender role strain among Pakistani men, and now the changing gender roles in urban spaces are adding fuel to the fire (Adil, Shahed & Arshad, 2017). Similarly, a participant said:

"One of his colleagues confronted him that His wife is BS-17 Officer and he is BS-15 (as the breadwinning and authoritative role is associated with the Male gender). It gives him psychological stress, and as a consequence, he has become a chain smoker and can't be much friendly to his wife. He is more reluctant and reserved in front of her, even though he understands the fact that there should be no scale or educational differences between them, but still, he is unable to cope with these feelings because of societal pressures within his family or public gathering."

In this research study, most of the participants claim that they are not opting for changing gender roles as they should be considered for an egalitarian society, but they are taking it as a compulsion because of economic crisis, unemployment issues, status and evolving new society. It also demonstrates that being true to the expectations of society rather than to oneself does not really lead to contentment but causes stress and discrepancies to one who expects wealth, fame, and social position to offer. Just as Levent et al. (2017) and Brannon (1976) also stressed that this transition of gender roles could potentially result in role confusion and strains. The outcomes indicate that males have experienced conflicting and unclear criteria for masculinity. As be successful turns out to be more challenging as a product of a perplexing and changeable standard of masculinity that is shrinking and exalted. Among the more prominent findings has been the connection in men between low self-esteem and restrictive emotionality, restrictive affectionate behaviour, and discrepancies between work/family relationships and a strong element of religion regarding the primary breadwinner

Conclusions

This article illustrates that the Pakistani context owes to a specific culture which creates and makes stronger the understanding and meanings of masculinity. Having an awareness of the existence of the crisis of masculinity and its multiple meanings challenges prejudgments and notions about the normative masculine ideals in men. The findings reveal that the structured patriarchal system has extreme effects on males' early childhood and adolescent socialization.

Predominantly, it reveals that the persisting culture of masculinity has been traumatizing and damaging the emotional and socio-psychological development of men, their sexual orientation and exaggerated gender patterns and difference. Males are positioned in a cultural context in such a way that they are propelled to live up to the

standards of masculinity and condemned if they are expressing their emotional, mental, and overall feelings. One of the main reasons for male gender victimization or suffering is anxiety, addiction and abuse related to gender roles because they are not prone to connect and interact efficiently with others in friendly and long-term behaviours. Therefore, males stray within a challenging space and compromise their human agency. So, to fulfil this gap and to get rid of their anxiety entirely, they become obsessed and addicted to behaviours, such as risky abusive behaviour, drug consumption, money and work.

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