UNIT 4 PRODUCTION OF MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY -MEANING, DEPICTION AND FORM

UNIT STRUCTURE

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4.1LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this chapter you will be able to,

- understand the various contemporary concerns that masculinity and feminity evokes
- examine the interrelationship between masculinity and feminity.
- explain media's depiction of gender and its impact on gender situation.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

The meaning of terms masculinity and femininity is the basic characteristics attached to people. Being a male means having the qualities opposite to that of females and vice versa. "Masculinity and femininity in the broadest sense are a set of attitudes, roles, norms of behavior, hierarchy of values typical of the male and female sex in each specific society." (Il'inykh, 2012). Masculinity and femininity classify the gender stereotypes and sex role expectations and confirms it as 'normal' in order to suit the social expectations. Therefore, it can be said that masculinity and femininity is a strong identification of male and female with their roles. For example, to

society at large, the role best suited for a woman is of a mother or a housewife whereas, man is perfect as a bread earner for the family. This reflects the core traits of the masculinity and femininity as protector and as care giver respectively, In addition to this, fixed personality traits, physical attributes and occupational preferences affirm the sense of maleness and femaleness. However, it is important to mention here that "The concepts of masculinity and femininity are multiple like other gender categories." (Il'inykh, 2012). The concepts of masculinity and femininity serve as the instrument which is constantly contributing in forming gender identity among male and female at its core. We will discuss about these concerts in detail in this unit.

4.3 MEANING OF MASCULINITY :

According to Oxford Bibliographies, "Masculinity" refers to the behaviors, social roles, and relations of men within a given society as well as the meanings attributed to them. The term masculinity stresses gender, unlike male, which stresses biological sex." Thus, the term masculinity refers to the roles, behavior and attitude expected from a man. These roles and behaviors are accepted and appreciated in the society, of which he is a member. The physical appearance, manners, conduct, relations and a core group of men are different and/ or opposite of women. It would not be an exaggeration that masculinities enjoy more benefits than femininities. "Take for example the gender pay gap. Men in general are paid better than women; they enjoy more sexual and social freedom; and they have other benefits that women do not by virtue of their gender. There are variations across race, class, sexuality, and according to disability and other socio-economic measures."(Zevallos, n.d.). However, masculinity does not always favor all males, it brings along the feeling of discontentment, dissatisfaction or disappointment for many. For example a tall, white, highly educated, stout male will always have an edge over a male who lacks these attributes. "Connell argues that culture dictates ways of being masculine and "unmasculine." She argues that there are several masculinities operating

within any one cultural context, and some of these masculinities are:hegemonic; subordinate; compliant; and marginalised."(Zevallos, n.d.). Therefore, masculinities correspond to social inequalities based on age, class, race and so on.

4.4 DEPICTION OF MASCULINITY IN MEDIA AND CULTURE

The distinction between sex and gender is determined through the factors that sex is about the biological factors of an individual whereas gender is a social construction. Sex is determined on the basis of physical traits that are defined by the pair of chromosomes of an individual whereas, gender can be fluid and determined by society's perception of corresponding behaviour by men and women with masculinity and femininity. Society at large under the realm of patriarchy plays a vital role in assigning the gender roles corresponding to the sex of an individual. A male is expected to act strong, emotionless, and male hostility or violent behaviour too is seen as a sign of masculinity.The concept of masculinity shapes young men's thinking and the way they are socialised in their growing years; it forms and sets their understanding, thought process and action for years to come. The reflections of construction of masculinity in a society can be seen through the depiction of masculinity in media as well. Mass media is an integral agent of gender socialization.The media has played a huge role in shaping young men for every generation of the 20th and 21st centuries. The Baby Boomers had Paul Newman; Gen X had Kurt Cobain. Over time, the ideal male lead has shifted somewhat from a handsome, debonair, and untouchable hero to something more relatable, albeit still remarkable in his own way.

Over the years the depiction of masculinity in media has changed with the wave of feminist movement along with the society at large understanding the need of equity with equality to assert a shift in paradigm of overall human development. The concept of hegemonic masculinity prevailed for years not only in the society but it also was apparently depicted

in media forms like television, movies and advertisements. Earlier media was completely andocentric but with the passage of time a slight balance is noticed by not just depicting men in power roles or in hard chauvinist roles but also depicting heroism through the sensitive roles.This evolving take on manhood is arguably shaped by both mass and social media, where young men portray a wide range of characters. Today's many popular male figures are shaped not by their aggressive, stereotypical take on masculinity, but on other factors altogether: their empathy, kindness and intelligence. There's still a place for "traditional" masculinity, but it is just one of several options. Earlier, movies like 'Mard' starring Amitabh Bacchan depicted a man to be the one who does not fear and does not feel pain and can win a woman (Heroine), not by his gentle and sensitive act but by forcing himself on her. But now movies like 'Ka and Ki' have depicted men in sensitive and gender neutral roles. Even in commercials like 'boys don't cry' where it has been depicted that how a child is transformed into a man, conditioning him the do's and don'ts to be a man which eventually is harming him and resulting in his violent behaviour. It shows how the society is reinforcing young boys to act masculine/ chauvinist and harming their overall development. The role men play in movies /mass media have a deep impact on youth and this brings about a huge change in the society. Youth try to depict the same role their favourite heroes are playing from fagging to imposing their wish on others (Heroine again). When the male hero in films, commercials, and advertisement branding something that associates with a gender role, it impacts the viewers and their perception too changes along with it.



Q. a.1. Mention two characteristics associated with masculinity.

Q.a.2. Mention two characteristics associated with femininity.

4.5 Meaning of femininity :

Like masculinity, femininity is the product of patriarchal ideas. This results in giving masculinity a superior position in the social context than

femininity. As Zevallos states that "women and men are not automatically compared; rather, gender categories (female-male, feminine-masculine, girls-boys, women-men) are analyzed to see how different social groups define them, and how they construct and maintain them in everyday life and in major social institutions, such as the family and the economy." Thus, femininity is the collective traits in a woman which are different and/or opposite to that of a man. Femininity is opposite of masculinity. The traits that conform to femininity are nurturing and caring behavior, compassionate, expressive and submissiveness. However, it is not essential that all women in everywhere will have these traits in their personality. Like masculinity, the concept of femininity puts many women down as they do not conform to the respective traits. For example, a slim, fair and family oriented girl is rewarded over and above the girls who lack such traits.

4.6 DEPICTION OF FEMININITY IN MEDIA AND CULTURE

Since the early childhood a girl is reminded and conditioned to be feminine. The society at large marks the do's and don'ts for girls to follow; many prohibitions are levied on her right from the beginning. Media plays a vital role in portrayal of femininity, among all the components like sweet and delicate visual appearance of a girl, and ability to run a household, are some of the social factors that determine femininity. Mass media too over-burdened these components with portrayal of women as somebody who is born to provide food and pleasure to a man in lieu of financial, physical and emotional dependence on him. The most damaging part are the advertisement where women are there to just fill in the background of the scenery. They don't tend to be the protagonists, unless it is for cleaning products. A man stands for humanity, but advertisement only show women if it is something specifically to do with their gender, like beauty. Those have been the archetypes,Positive female role models in the media can help women become more ambitious and

assertive and even help them leave abusive relationships: As described in a 2016 press release, this was based on a survey of 4,300 women in nine countries (Brazil, China, India Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Russia, Australia, the United Kingdom and the U.S.). Over half of respondents (58%) related that female role models inspired them to be more ambitious or assertive with one-in-nine (one-in-four in Brazil) indicating that positive female role models had given them the courage to leave an abusive relationship.A lack of women playing leaders or characters associated to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) careers: An analysis of 11,927 characters from movies and television showed that only a small percentage of C-suite executives (3.4%) and high-level politician characters (4.5%) in "family films" were women. And the percentages of editors-in-chiefs, investors, developers, and chief justice characters who were female was Zero. And less than one sixth (16.3%) in family films and slightly over one-fifth (21.1%) of STEM characters were women. What people see in movies and television can influence the careers they choose and acceptance of people in certain roles.

- In the past, television, movie, and advertising executives largely controlled what roles and images the public would see. They would present either what they thought the public would want to see or what they wanted the public to see. However, the Internet and social media are bringing change is this direction. Now anyone can upload a picture or a video for public consumption. While this has led to a plethora of videos it also has led to influential campaigns. For example, Dr. Heather Logghe started the hashtag #ILookLikeASurgeon to motivate people to post pictures of women working as surgeons to alter the perceived norm of what a surgeon "should" look like. And of course, the #MeToo movement has brought

much more attention to the ongoing harassment, biases, and barriers to advancement that continue to plague many industries.

- With passage of time now, this image of woman's participation in each field where only men are expected to excel. can be seen.

The depiction of femininity, through the medium of advertisement, films, and commercials have changed over the period of time, though even today women are objectified through these platforms. This has changed the roles that now they perform, portray and play, breaking the image of just a house-maker who is dependent on men for trivial things. There are plethora of movies that depict women as a helpless character who depends on the male lead to get justice, vengeance or parity. In a Bollywood movie 'Karan Arjun' the mother of two sons wait for the rebirth of her sons to take vengeance from the negative character in the film whereas now, in 'Mom' a mother takes vengeance from the abusers of her daughter. Even in advertisements the stereo-type of femininity is changing yet there still prevails the objectification of women.Despite the tremendous change that has taken place in the sphere of media the contemporary media are nowhere close to the standards they claim. Even in US and Europe, where feminist ideas are widely spread, and women have legally reached equal rights with men, media continue to have discriminatory attitudes towards women and rely on male worldview when portraying women. Many researchers and analysts have documented the fact that in these countries women are also poorly represented in media which in turn has had a negative impact on the formation of value system.

The image of women and the voicing of women's concern underwent a revolutionary change due to modern technology and emergence of new types of media. Today, all of us, in fact, are part of the media not only as consumers, but also as producers. And anyone, woman or man, can cover their problems and story by themselves, make it public, and turn it into media for consumption.

These new possibilities, however, also bring about new challenges. In case of traditional media, it is possible to work with the leadership and staff to undergo training and achieve some results. In case of social media, not only groups in need of support voice their opinion, and publicize their perceptions freely, but also those people who threaten these groups and spread discriminatory and offensive comments about them. Thus, the quality of information disseminated in social media and the comments on these pieces of information are much more sexist and patriarchal. Change in this sphere can be achieved only through change is value system.

In other words, the sexist traditional media educates sexist citizens who spread their sexist perceptions through social media. Change in the gender policy of traditional media and its compliance with international norms remain to be the most effective way for breaking this vicious circle.



4.7 LET US SUM UP

- Through the above discussion on masculinity and femininity, it is clear that both the concepts are socially constructed and do not come naturally to a male or a female.
- Both are constructed in society and are the results of an individual's socialization.
- The man what think is a man is not him naturally; rather he is conditioned that way.
- Similarly, a woman is feminine, is also the product of her socialization.
- Therefore, the basic understanding of a man and a woman, which appears to us as natural, is actually not like that. It is instead, constructed that way.
- Both the qualities of masculinity and femininity are just opposite to each other with masculinity have an edge over femininity.



4.8 FURTHER READING:

1. Sue Thornham, Women, Feminism and Media (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), p. 23.
2. Margaret Gallagher, The Portrayal and Participation of Women in the Media (Paris: UNESCO, 1979), http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0003/000372/037267EB.pdf.



4.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q.A) Aggresive, Emotionless

Q.A2) Passive, emotional



4.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

i) What is meant by Masculinity ?
ii) What is meant by Femininity?

B) Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300 to 500 words)

i) Critically comnent on the media portrayal of Masculity and femininity with suitable examples?

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