Internalized misogyny needs addressing



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It is obvious to me and most women, the detrimental impact of patriarchy. From inequities in opportunity to targeted violence, to the politicization of the female body, sexism is everywhere, loud, proud and persistent.

But what often falls through the cracks of our criticisms is the pervasive presence of our own internalized misogyny. It's subtle, passive, subconscious and slimy with binary, male-centered thought.

Exemplified in the slut-shaming, body-shaming, victim-blaming and spiteful jealousy that many women exert onto each is something much more than mere cattiness – it is the projection of our own insecurities as a mechanism of misogyny.

While it's true women have greater access to liberation in the present-day, most of us still observe, judge, reward and attribute through a misogynistic lens, perpetuating the collective devaluation of women.

Under the patriarchy, masculinity represents power, dominance, action, intelligence and competence, while femininity is related to passivity, weakness, silence, subservience and lack of intellect.

But don't be mistaken; misogyny is not damaging to just cisgender and heterosexual individuals. In all its backwardness, misogyny is ironically and incredibly inclusive.

In an intersectional perspective, gay men are ostracized less so because of their attraction towards men, but more so due to their stereotypical proximity to femininity, which some gay men may strive for in the cultivation of their desirability.

Similarly, lesbian women, especially butch lesbians, are societally removed from their womanhood because of the general notion that they are hyper-masculine and rugged, which again, are qualities they may idealize to obtain women.

It is essential to note that gender identity and sexual orientation have no defined look, behavior, or particular manner of being, and the assumptions we place onto LGBTQ+ individuals are just a reflection of deep-rooted binary-based biases.

The reality is that the stereotypes we commonly associate with queerness only apply to around 15% of gay men and only about 5% of lesbians, according to a webpage by Queer Cafe.

Misogyny can especially damage the psyche of transgender men and women, as the becoming of a gender can seldom be separated from the confines and consequences in which that gender exists.

Jan Morris captures this experience in her 1974 autobiography, "Conondrum," discussing her transition from male to female.

"The more I was treated as a woman, the more woman I became… I discovered that even now men prefer women to be less able, less talkative, and certainly less self-centered than they are themselves; so I generally obliged them."

So I wonder, are women defined by what they are, or what they aren't?

These gender-based attributions are not merely qualitative differences – but divisions put in place to ensure that men maintain a higher degree of social, economic, and political power while women not only suffer under oppression, but are conditioned to accept it.

Assigned gender is largely responsible for the ways we separate people in society.



GRAPHIC FROM CANVA

Despite that it's socially constructed by the norms, behaviors and roles we associate with being a man, boy, women, or girl, according to a webpage by the World Health Organization.

Not only does the patriarchy operate through a dualistic ideology, but it also protects and caters to men, subsequently pushing women to develop through and for the male gaze.

Though women make up over 50% of the population, the male gaze effectively dehumanizes women, reducing us down to a thing to ogle, have, consume, or discard, according to an article by Very Well Mind.

The fetishization of Asian women and the hypersexualization of Black women, along with tropes like the "blonde bombshell," are just some manifestations of the male gaze, according to the same article.

A woman's beauty must be ideal yet unassuming, her demeanor demure and agreeable; she must be soft, quiet, and nurturing.

The viral buzz word "demure," often accompanied by videos or images of "respectable," "modest" or "mindful" attire, mannerisms, or even meals encapsulates the way women participate in their own suppression.

Though the trend was joking and light-hearted, it highlights how unaware and accepting women can be of their internalized misogyny, especially when it's packaged in a digestible, humorous manner.

When women internalize misogyny, it often manifests as the adoption and endorsement of oppressive beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, effectively positioning us as both victims of oppression and actual collaborators in the system, according to a 2024 article by the Journal of Integrated Social Sciences.

This can result in the acceptance of learned helplessness, where women perceive themselves as weaker, less capable, and less intelligent than they truly – creating hesitance to engage in activities, learn new skills and strive for positions of power.

Instead, women are encouraged to allocate an unproportional amount of their time and effort into controlling their outward image, with some self-objectifying to fall into the favor of men and assert themselves above other women.

It has been shown that self-objection increases body shame, disrupts attention and negatively predicts well-being, according to a study by the National Library of Medicine. Standards set by men dictate that a woman's value lies largely, if not solely, on her physical appearance and sexual desirability, causing extreme levels of internalized shame and consequently criticism of other women and glorification of male ideals.

Even the self-care promoted to women is almost exclusively contingent on beauty-related practices and aesthetic improvement, such as skin-care, make-up, gym-going, or even cosmetic procedures.

It is important to note that misogyny negatively impacts everyone, but it is of even greater significance to recognize that it exclusively targets women because it is fundamentally defined by profound and perverse resentment of femininity and females.

Authors Steve Bearman and Marielle Amrhein describe in their 2014 book "Girls, Women, and Internalized Sexism," the six expressions of internalized misogyny: powerlessness, objectification, loss of self, invalidation, derogation and competition between women.

Becoming aware of the hate we hold against our own gender is crucial in understanding the cause of these expressions and how to overcome them to work towards a greater level of solidarity and sisterhood.

When we project our internal criticisms and doubts onto other women through the use of things like victim-blaming, sexist slurs and passive-aggressive conduct, we reinforce patriarchal standards and perpetuate the systems that seek to silence women's voices and influence.

This kind of phenomenon is illustrated in Phyllis Chesler's 2001 book, "Woman's Inhumanity to Woman," where older women who have endured a lifetime of sexism frequently tend to criticize younger women who advocate for gender equality and combat violence towards women.

While we should hold everyone accountable to their actions, encouraging and supporting other women fosters the necessary trust, unity and community that remedies internalized misogyny.

Bearman and Amrhein propose some of the following methods in their 2014 work: holding high standards for women, supporting, validating, and standing up for women, encouraging women to become leaders, helping women inhabit their own bodies, not criticizing, disparaging, or invalidating women, according to the same article by the Journal of Integrated Social Sciences.

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In the pursuit of a more egalitarian future, the cultivation of feminist awareness is essential to break down the binary and dismantle systems of gender-based oppression.

Writer, professor, activist, and feminist, Audre Lorde, put it perfectly in her 1984 work, "Sister Outsider."

"For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house."

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