EXPLORING THE CURRENT CRISIS OF MASCULINITY AND RISE OF FEMINISM AMONGST YOUNGER YOUTH

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Abstract

The recent exponential rise in popularity of masculinity and feminism among young adults such as Millennials, Gen Z, and Gen Alpha could soon be a concern for the current generation. It is important to understand the reasons for such polarity in teens' thinking and how a balance can be restored so future generations are raised with viewpoint neutrality. Studies reveal a remarkable trend: women are making significant strides in primary and secondary education, higher education, careers, friendships, and innovations. Throughout the known history, masculinity has often taken the lead in driving major revolutions in almost all aspects of human civilization. Over the last half century, around the world, esp., in Westernized countries, governments have actively promoted and encouraged women's education, workforce participation, and independence to foster a sense of equality. The outcome has been phenomenal, women outnumbering men in many areas of achievement. As encouraging as it may be, it is equally concerning for the sociologists because men are falling behind in their part of the contribution to the modern society. Studies show that in elementary school boys get into trouble significantly more than girls and are more likely to be disciplined. Also, more boys are being diagnosed with social anxiety disorders in their early childhood. Medical science correlates that men who suffer social anxiety in their childhood are more likely to be diagnosed with substance abuse and antisocial personality disorder. I observed in school, and in social scenarios, that many young boys feel that they are "controlled" and cannot express or act naturally. They grow timidly and are afraid of being frequently socially judged if not faced with repercussions. This I believe starts from elementary school. This hypothesis I expanded into a 15-questtionaire survey with 272 respondents. The survey targeted towards young men and women ages between 12-30. These questions delved into the topics of their upbringing environment, education, family life, parts of childhood, and relationship experience along with their attitude towards masculinity and femininity. The focus of this research is to explore how young adults are suffering from the crisis of identity and purpose today and how this can impact their life and society at large. It is important to point out that man and woman isn't zero-sum: an intimate collaboration is required for a brighter future where boys and girls can grow up freely and to their full potential.

Keywords: Masculinity, feminism, social progression, education, youth, relationships.

1. Introduction

I'm an 11th grade student, and as I learn more about my childhood and understand in a more scientific fashion, I can clearly state that I was a datapoint of being outcasted in social settings, primarily because of a speech delay and context interpretation issues. Often a child's mind sees things in an emotional way and misunderstanding can grow gaps between friends and family members. During my pre-teen years, my father travelled widely to build the family's stability, and I believe that led me to question my masculinity growing up as well as my ability to prove my value to my surroundings. From an adults' standpoint, the finer details of a child's mind are often overlooked. However, I wanted to understand if what I felt is common today and is a reason for why so many young adults gravitate around the icons of masculinity and femininity. Despite being raised in an integrated family where both my parents and my older sister truly cared for me, I felt a need to fall back on social media.

According to 2023 Census Bureau statistics, 23% of US children grow up with a single parent. These children lack consistent interaction with both a father and a mother, leaving them vulnerable and questioning their ability to trust. Consequently, forging friendships becomes an uphill battle. I realized their situation is significantly worse than what I faced. I know this can make them feel lonely and unmotivated towards academics or co-curricular activities, spiraling them downward making them more

insecure about themselves. The current trend of loneliness amongst teens and the rise in popularity for feminism and masculinity prompted me to do this exploratory research. My analysis attempts to connect personality traits and experiences of the vulnerable youth, and how they can become susceptible to social media trends shaping their minds, beliefs, and opinions in our modern society.

1.1. Young women strive better than men in current educational & social system

Research published from Harvard University indicates that in the coming years, there will be a ratio of 2 female graduates to 1 male graduate from higher education institutions (Goldin et al., 2006). Evidence today show that women have been outperforming in higher education and in many other fields. This is an extremely encouraging news for the women of our generation, but it needs to be understood why young men are not adequately performing in today's education system. Ideally, an elite, thriving society should aim for a 1-to-1 ratio between men and women in education and in all other contributions towards progress. Research also shows that boys are 25% more likely to be suspended than girls in public schools. This disparity highlights the trend of boys being disciplined more which can distort their mental growth and curb confidence. On top, today young boys in larger proportion are diagnosed with learning disabilities, disorders, and are more prone to be on prescribed medications for disorders like ADHD or OCD which may hinder their long-term performance (Freeson et al, 2019).

The public school system has never been the best in fulfilling my needs and I can align with most of the above research findings. I started getting demotivated in school as soon as I grew up enough to understand that I was being ignored and I did not have trusting friends in school. It made me lonely, depressed, at times purposeless and even more introverted. At the same time, I observed that girls tend to excel within this system. Many a times their natural tendencies and abilities were sufficient for them to earn accolades. They exhibited exemplary behavior, studied diligently for extended periods, mastered information through intense cramming, maintained focus while sitting still, and consistently achieved good grades. These were areas where girls outperformed boys significantly; their success made me happy, but it also reminded me that I was not adequate for excelling in the US public school system till Covid-19 pandemic hit and I was enrolled in a virtual school. I started excelling in virtual education, not only in academics but also in overall personality development including social skills (Chakraborty, 2023).

As I grew up more, I realized that I am not alone. I figured the modern education system is more congenial for femininity to excel in major strides, however, imposes disadvantage for young men esp., in early education. The education system must recognize that in early childhood, boys and girls take different paths to develop their minds and personalities. The school system should allow both paths to foster development - naturally and unhindered.

In the society at-large, women also seem to be faring better than men. Over the past centuries, the traditional gender roles often depicted men as breadwinners who went to work to support the family economically, while women stayed at home as caretakers for their families. That system is near extinction today. During World War II, the United States championed the iconic figure of "Rosie the Riveter", encouraging young and teenage girls to be independent, enter the workforce, and contribute as successful mothers for their families (Vergun, 2019). From then the change continued. The recent MeToo movement, as highlighted by the Pew Research Center, sheds light on the poor sexual treatment of women in the workplace and other dangerous issues faced by women in modern society. These are important issues to tackle and major milestones for uplifting and equalizing women in society. The statistics show the positive effects. In many cases, women are becoming more economically stable than men by pursuing high-end careers and becoming a role model for promoting independence among young girls and women. From the outside, this looks like a huge achievement for our civilization, but it also comes with a cost. Most families today have both parents as bread-earners, outsourcing the upbringing of their young children to external facilities such as daycare. As pointed out in my earlier research work, this practice can affect introverted boys negatively (Chakraborty, 2024). Contrary to how a progressive society should focus, it seems to me the current social trend takes a fragmented approach and is engrossed in a narrow vision of tackling adults' perceived issues of equality rather than thinking in long term for the future generation. The marriage rate is down, divorce rate is high, many families choose not to have children and in this mix of adult's agenda of personal stride, young children who are shy and loner in nature suffer the most. The issues become way more complex when social media influences are brought into the picture.

1.2. The rise of extremist role models on social media and interference on well-being

In the realm of family dynamics, 10.9 million children under 18 live in single-parent households, 23% of U.S. families are single parents, out of that 23%, 80% of these families led by single mothers. Regrettably, many children lack a close relationship with their biological fathers, presenting a significant challenge for their early-life hand holding need, leaving a long-term impact on their mind (Kramer, 2019). The adult men are equally suffering today. A study conducted in 2021 revealed that 1 in every 7 men lacks close friends—meaning they lack companionship for conversations, activities, weekend calls, or even simple outings to the park (Galloway, 2021). Loneliness creates depression and brings a sense of

failure. The statistics show men's suicidal thoughts have increased alarmingly from 3.5% in 2008 to 4.5% in 2021 (Vankar, 2023)
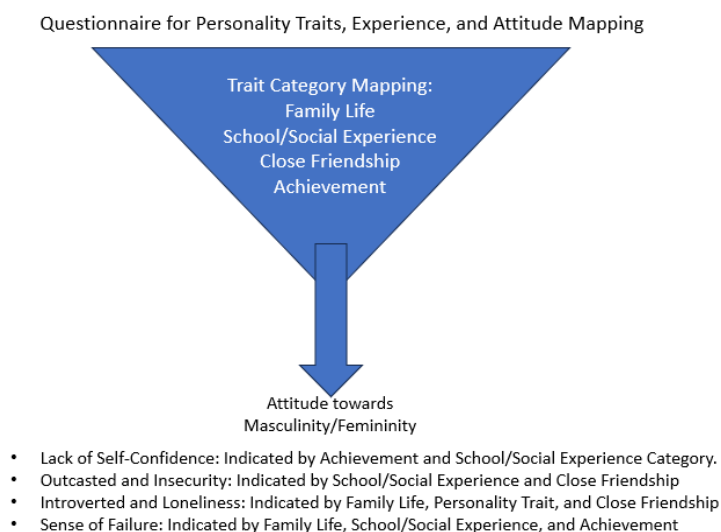
These reasons may play a relation on why crime rates have significantly increased among young men. Men are 9 times more likely to commit a crime than women. According to the FBI in 2019, around 73% of US citizens who got arrested were men, but digging deep into the crime records, specifically in school shootings, over 94% of the perpetuators were young men. Out of that 94%, 32% of the young men were ages 19-24 (FBI, U.S. Department of Justice, 2023). I can observe that for these school shootings, a lot of these young men perform these acts as a sense of grievance. Their upbringing and experience often make them bitter about society and the education system, making them feel worthless and friendless. Could this be the reason why many decide to commit these heinous crimes? The solution may simply be kindness, care, and association time of adults when the kids need it in childhood, not candy and praise for the kids for doing mediocre work. I do not see how law enforcement can provide a solution to school shooting if the problems lie in early education system and broken families.

Growing up with an iPhone and consistent social media exposure, my generation of young men face a lot of information about the masculinity crisis and feminism. This is a new challenge that the young generation must grapple with. Both young men and women tend to gravitate towards the icons of masculinity and feminism to find hope and ways to come out of despair. Many adopt unhealthy and insecure approaches in the name of self-improvement. Social media plays a significant role in forming cult-like culture for the impressionable Generation Z children, especially those raised by single parents. Lacking a proper father or mother figure, they turn to content creators on social platforms for relatability. For example, Andrew Tate, a former kickboxer turned influencer, gained notoriety for promoting his course, 'Hustlers' University.' However, over 100,000 members reported being scammed (Tahsin & Shea, 2023). Tate's toxic ideology includes controversial views on women, wealth, and education (Sinmaz, 2023). Similar trends can be seen among women who follow the icons for feminism.

2. Objectives and methodology

Based on the above trend observations, I formulated my hypotheses that young adults who are born introverted, lack self-confidence and are outcasted in school or social settings, find little or no purpose of their life or have grown a sense of failure are likely to be victims of the social icons of masculinity or feminism. To test my hypothesis, I created 2 surveys which targeted the ages of 12-22 and each had 18 questions. The surveys received a total of 272 responses, with 136 being men and 136 being women. Most of the data was collected electronically, and some are carried out in person. The 15 "Masculinity/Femininity Mentality" questions were organized in a way so the responses can point to some measures of the following traits or life experiences, e.g., "Lack of Self-Confidence", "Outcasted and Insecurity", "Introverted and Loneliness", and "Sense of Failure" and connect with their attitude towards the masculinity or feminism subscription. The questions were intertwined and overlapping cleverly between trait categories, experiences, and their attitudes so response-biases can be minimized. The funneling technique is shown in the figure below.

Figure 1. Survey questions and category funneling.

Questionnaire for Personality Traits, Experience, and Attitude Mapping

Trait Category Mapping:
Family Life
School/Social Experience
Close Friendship
Achievement

Attitude towards
Masculinity/Femininity

- Lack of Self-Confidence: Indicated by Achievement and School/Social Experience Category.
- Outcasted and Insecurity: Indicated by School/Social Experience and Close Friendship
- Introverted and Loneliness: Indicated by Family Life, Personality Trait, and Close Friendship
- Sense of Failure: Indicated by Family Life, School/Social Experience, and Achievement

The answers to the survey questions generated an ordinal data set which is not quantitative enough for deriving a meaningful correlation coefficient but can give a sense of 'preference order' alongside a qualitative relationship between the trait, experience, and preference. That is why I present my results in various comparative graphs rather than using a Pearson or Spearman correlation coefficient.

3. Result interpretation

This survey was targeted towards the modern youth who experienced or are experiencing the US education system whilst living the United States lifestyle. Additionally, it addressed how they felt about the rise in masculinity or feminism in modern society. 72% of people who took this survey were either high-schoolers or college students. As shown in Figure 2, 28% of young men were Asian or Pacific Islander, 22% were Other/Mixed, and African American, Caucasian, or Middle Eastern contributed to roughly 15-16% each. 74% belonged to the age groups of 16-22. I point out that the survey was not discriminatory and was floated to all, but those who chose to take the survey could be the ones who felt connected to the issue which I had no control over.

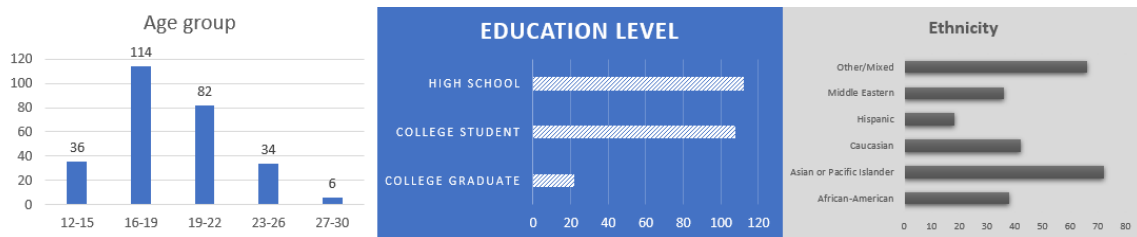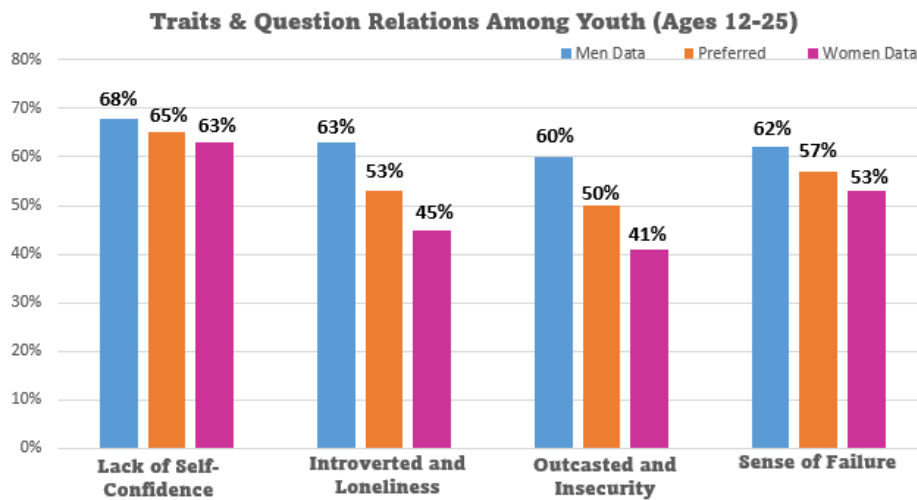*Figure 2. Survey details e.g., total demography, age group, education levels.*

Figure 3 below presents intriguing observations. All those who supported the need of masculinity or feminism when grouped by the four trait categories display the following percentages. The blue bar represents data from young men, whereas the pink bar corresponds to young women. The orange bar signifies the mean percentage of responses from both genders. In all cases, the young men showed a higher percentage than young women when it came to these traits. For example, 68% of men who supported rise in masculinity displayed lack of self-confidence, alongside 63% that are introverted, 60% who felt outcasted, and 62% who have a fear of sense of failure. In contrast to that 63% of women who favored the rise in feminism showed lack of self-confidence, 45% that are introverted, 41% who felt outcasted and 53% had a sense of failure.

Figure 3. Trait and Question Relation Statistics.

If we can trust the survey results as representative of today's young adult society, we can have significant learning from this. Looking at the percentages, it seems that the "lack of self-confidence" is the prime driver for young adults to gravitate towards masculinity or feminism followed by the "sense of failure". These two characteristics are independent of gender that means "lack of self-confidence" or

"sense of failure" cause both genders equally to find support in masculinist or feminist views. However, "introverted and lonely" as well as "outcasted and insecure" young men tend to be more ready to gravitate towards masculinity icons more than their gender counterpart. This is an important distinction that may also correlate to why we see increased gun-violence in schools by young men. Much of this may stem from their loneliness and a perception that was built in school of being outcasted or bullied. In addition, many young men may even believe that the school system ruins their future than building it.

The study makes an even bigger claim: The young men and women who grow up thinking their growth is marginalized by the other gender can never make a successful home and will be incapable of raising kids with neutral and sympathetic viewpoints towards the other gender. This divides society in a very wrong way.

Former President of India, Abdul Kalam in his European Union address in 2007 referred to a 3000-year-old Indian scripture that said, "Where there is righteousness in the heart, there is beauty in the character. When there is beauty in the character, there is harmony in the home. When there is harmony in the home, there is order in the nation. When there is order in the nation, there is peace in the world." (Abdul Kalam, 2007). Human society should strive towards this goal.

4. Conclusions

Though my sample data sets were limited, the preliminary research presented here shows a strong link between lack of self-confidence and sense of failure with positive preference towards the rise of masculinity and feminism. These traits affect both genders equally however, introverted, and lonely young men who experience being outcasted in school or society are more susceptible towards extremism than young women. This could also explain the rise in trend in school shooting, substance abuse as well as personality anxiety disorder.

I extend my thanks to my close friends at my school Fulton Academy of Virtual Excellence (FAVE) my local gym, and to those unknown to me who took the survey electronically and helped me prepare this research.

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