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Intersectional Feminism and Men

Intersectional feminism is the key to creating a healthy environment for young boys to become healthy men. By employing intersectional feminism, we can rid ourselves of gender norms and create space for men to garner strong interpersonal relationships. In teaching boys feminism, feminism will act as a harm reduction strategy and create better men to further society.

Basics in Intersectionality

Authors of the book *Threshold Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies: Ways of Seeing, Thinking, and Knowing*, Christie Launius and Holly Hassel, define intersectionality as “a theoretical framework that posits that multiple social categories intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect multiple interlocking systems of privilege and oppression at the macro, social-structural level” (163). Intersectionality is a complicated subject because it requires us to understand the multifaceted nature of identity. Intersectionality is also inextricably linked to privilege and oppression. “Structures of oppression and privilege are interconnected and mutually reinforcing” (Launius and Hassel 101). Everyone is afforded privileges and everyone is oppressed in some way. While that seems easy enough to understand, it's not easy for most people to accept they may have privilege over someone else. By taking an intersectional approach to feminism, the conversation becomes open to anyone of any identity. Intersectionality explains why feminism is no longer “just for women.” When thinking about feminism and the way feminism is perceived, it's also important to note gender social construction. C. Wright

Mills, an American sociologist, defined the social construction of gender as how an “individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances” (qtd. in Launius and Hassel 37). Someone's gender expression and gender display are influenced by the way we socialize children into gendered norms, and our current form of socialization is causing an identity problem in boys and men.

The Patriarchy is Bad for Boys

Identity is a tricky subject for boys. The male identity has been a topic of conversation for a long time. In 1993, there was an article published in *The Washington Post* called “The Sexes: Male Identity Crisis” author Barbra Mathias writes about “men’s search for their softer, sensitive side.” Planned Parenthood’s section on gender identity and roles says “men are generally expected to be strong, aggressive, and bold” (Gender Identity). The male identity crisis is connected to the way men are socialized starting in early childhood.

In “The socialization of boys and men in the modern era: An evolutionary mismatch” author Anthony Biglan et al. writes about the “traditional male phenotypes.” In this section they said “traditional male gender norms include toughness, restrictions on the display of emotions, the importance or sex, dominance of women, and negativity towards sexual minorities” (Biglan et al.). These norms lead men to go to the doctor less, take riskier jobs, struggle with their mental health in silence, and become socially isolated.

In the years 1997-98, the Center for Disease Control found out that women were 33% more likely to visit the doctor than men. In 2019, Integris Health published an article called “Why Don’t Men See Doctors?” that found closer to 60% of men don’t regularly see a doctor. Harvard and Rutgers reported that men who adhere to traditional masculinity are less likely to

consistently see a doctor (qtd. in “Why Men Don’t Go to the Doctor”). In Harvard Health Publishing’s 2019 article “Mars vs. Venus: The Gender Gap in Health,” the author cites two groups of social factors that stop men from seeking medical attention: “work stress and hostility” and “social networks and supports.” Focusing on “social networks and supports,” Harvard Health states “people are good medicine.” Men tend to foster less personal relationships than women due to their socialization. Around the ages of three and four years old is when children start to become more independent and confident in themselves (Key). Immediately, societal pressures are placed upon children and boys are told to toughen up or that they shouldn’t cry. This pushes many to lose the ability to safely and healthily express themselves. The inability to express emotions and show vulnerability affects male friendships. An article in the Newport Institute states “as young boys, they haven’t yet felt the societal pressure to ‘be manly’ and hide their feelings. But as they age, it often becomes harder for them to buck stereotypes of how men are ‘supposed’ to act” (“Male Friendships and Mental Health”). Harvard Health identified social isolation as a heart disease risk factor and the American College of Cardiology said “both social isolation and loneliness increased the risk of hospitalization or death from heart failure by 15% to 20%.” Mens’ lack of emotional development and struggle to make meaningful connections doesn’t only affect their personal health. It becomes a dangerous game for society as a whole.

The Red Pill, Incel Culture, and Rape Culture

In the online sphere, the idea of becoming “red pill” has flooded young boys’ and mens’ algorithms. The red pill and the blue pill are references to the 1999 film *The Matrix*, where taking the blue pill allows someone to live in “a state of blissful ignorance” (Red Pill) or “[accept] a painful reality” (Red Pill) if they take the red pill. This idea of becoming red pill has been taken over by an anti-feminist subgroup online called the manosphere. The term

manosphere plays off of blogosphere referring to the blogging community of the early 2000s. Ian Ironwood, an author and pornography producer, popularized the term in his 2013 book *The Manosphere: A New Hope For Masculinity* (Sugiura, 23). The online red pill community takes place on websites like *Reddit* and *4Chan*, but have quickly leaked into *TikTok*, *YouTube*, and *Instagram*.

So called redpilled individuals often blame women for the downfall of society. In Stephen Marche's 2016 article "Swallowing the Red Pill: A Journey to the Heart of Modern Misogyny," he said red pillers believe "women run the world without taking responsibility for it, and that their male victims are not permitted to complain." The manosphere is staunchly anti-feminist and often perpetuates incel and rape culture spreading it to young, impressionable boys.

An incel, short for involuntarily celibate, is a man who blames women for the lack of sex in their lives and incel culture has ties in mass violence and rape culture. On May 23, 2014 Elliot Rodger killed seven and injured 14 others after sending his incel manifesto to his therapist (Fugardi). The Southern Poverty Law Center said "despite their emphasis on sex, misogynist incels are more interested in violently controlling women than they are with having relationships with them" (Fugardi). Jackson Davison, the Plymouth gunman, "expressed strongly misogynist views and despair about his own life in the months before he killed five people" (Morris). *The Guardian* also states that Davison also idolized Rodger and researched information about Ted Bundy and other incel murders days before he carried out his own attack (Morris). Both Rodgers and Davison described themselves as loners and expressed extreme self esteem issues. These are just two examples of a quickly-growing problem that blames feminism as its root cause.

Incel violence is an extreme, but the threat is real and growing due to social media algorithms. Sally Weale, *The Guardian's* education correspondent, wrote an article called "Social

Media Algorithm 'Amplifying Misogynistic Content'" in February of 2024. "Researchers said they detected a four-fold increase in the level of misogynistic content suggested by *TikTok* over a five-day period of monitoring, as the algorithm served more extreme videos, often focused on anger and blame directed at women" (Weale). The study Weale is referring to is the Safer Scrolling study that was conducted by teams at University College London and the University of Kent. Safer Scrolling found that "young men from generation z ... are more likely than baby boomers to believe that feminism has done more harm than good" (Weale).

Southern Connecticut State University defines rape culture as "an environment in which rape is prevalent and in which sexual violence is normalized and excused in the media and popular culture." Red-pilled ideology and incels help to perpetuate rape culture by glorifying misogynistic language, sexualizing women and encouraging division between the sexes. These key elements are causing harm to the development of young boys and men.

Feminism is here to help

On the *Reddit* page r/AskMen, the user Substration_2 posted, "men, how do you deal with loneliness?" User after user replied with "I just deal with it," or "I pretend I'm not." Others encouraged the original poster to focus on himself, get fit, make more money, but rarely did anyone suggest things like find meaningful connections. Even when someone suggested going out to a bar or finding a new hobby, they talked about doing it alone. Eleanor Wilkinson wrote an article called "Loneliness Is a Feminist Issue" published in the journal *Feminist Theory*. In Wilkinson's article, she said that "feminism helps us see that loneliness is not just personal but political." Wilkinson's idea comes from the common feminist slogan "the personal is political," meaning the experiences one has are "rooted in their political situation and gender inequity" (The Personal is Political).

Intersectional feminism works to break down patriarchal structures and dissolve traditional gender norms. By including men in the feminism conversation, we open up spaces for them to connect with their emotions. Circling back to the conversations about red pill culture and incels, many of those men cite feminism as the reason why they are so lonely. They feel feminists are trying to take power away from them rather than create an equal power structure where the sexes are on an equal level. True feminists don't want to take power away from men. By teaching boys feminism at a young age and bringing them up to express themselves freely, we are granting them more power—the power to express themselves openly and honestly. Involving men in feminism will dismantle gender norms and increase social connectedness between the sexes and between themselves because there will be no more shame in vulnerability. Feminism is the key to ending male loneliness and advocating for the health and well-being of men both physically and mentally.

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