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The Role of Media in Perpetuating or Challenging Toxic Masculinity

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Abstract

Media is known to play a vital role in influencing and shaping masculinity, usually turning it towards aggression, dominance and emotional suppression. As often movies, series and new media platforms tend to promote hyper-masculine traits essentially paving the way towards toxic masculinity and contributing to noxious gender roles, media also holds the strength required to challenge such ideas by encouraging a secure masculinity and condemnation of manosphere and incel culture.

Keywords: Toxic masculinity, social media, stereotypes, domination, masculinity.

1. Introduction

Toxic masculinity, a very valid modern plague that impacts gender norms in our society can be defined as harmful beliefs, predispositions or behaviors that are rooted in traditional male roles but taken up a notch. This is a treacherous idea of what 'manliness' should mean or look like and promotes domination, aggressiveness and even homophobia to look down upon others. The media has a significant impact on how such ideas are shaped and further manifested into actions, influencing all societal structures while also holding great power over the society's understanding of gender- norms, stereotypes and roles.

2. Perpetuating Toxic Masculinity

The way media reinforces elements of toxic masculinity is primarily by glorifying hyper masculine or virile traits in male characters in movies and the now prevalent web series that are mass produced for consumers on platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, etc. In such depictions, men are often portrayed as emotionally detached, abrasive and basically as cold-blooded brutes. The Hindi movie *Animal* (2023), directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga stirred discussions regarding its controversial nature that glorifies violence by the male lead, all under the justification of protecting his father. Women characters, throughout the film are subjected to objectification, possessiveness and derogatory statements that gained significant popularity among the male population of the country. While this piece of fiction can be a media guide of what toxic male behaviors should be condemned, what causes worry is how the majority perceived it as a display of 'coolness' and male lead's devotion towards protecting a loved one even if it meant smashing everything and everyone around to smithereens. A similar statement can be said about *Kabir Singh* (2019), also directed by Sandeep Reddy Vanga. Men are fascinated with this idea of a 'woke culture' that actually seeks to emasculate women. Misogynistic men have brick by brick built the 'manosphere' which is where they discuss about masculinity and their relationships. Today, as youngsters have all access to mobile phones and social media, they can easily become a part of an incel culture, radicalizing them and developing a whole new generation of hateful and insecure clones.

3. Challenging Toxic Masculinity

Although media often perpetuates hazardous norms and stereotypes, we also get to see differing perspectives that counter toxic masculinity through unique narratives. Social media platforms are full of influencers, educators of various kinds that seek to create room for

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progressive dialogue and promote men's mental health along with gender equality. Movies such as *Mary Kom* (2014), directed by Omung Kumar shows a strong female character with a supportive husband who believed in supporting his wife without considering her a threat. The Netflix UK series *Adolescence* (2025), created by Jack Thorne and Stephen Graham strongly strikes a nerve. The story follows a 13-year-old boy Jamie Miller who is arrested for murdering his female classmate, Katie. This disturbing yet thought-provoking series isn't a 'whodunit', instead it delves into the 'why' of Jamie being driven to murder the young girl. Andrew Tate is also mentioned, an influential figure who promotes control and domination over women. *Adolescence* so wonderfully depicts real-life consequences of growing toxic masculinity in teenage boys as a result of such media consumption that it has compelled even the UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer to pay attention to this growing problem. Such uncomfortable portrayals in media are crucial in their own way as they can be very efficient in creating waves of change in the world. Since the misogynistic content on online communities is highly effective on impressionable youths, media helps us realize just how important it is to combat the propagation of cataclysmic beliefs that keeps desensitizing men.

4. Conclusion

Media, in this day and age, is both a blessing and a curse based on how the mass-produced content is utilized. Playing a very important role in reinforcing or challenging toxic masculinity, it becomes crucial that media is handled by properly weighing in the pros and cons. With responsible use and healthier portrayals of masculinity and behaviour, our society can have a much better chance at shaping men's belief systems towards others, especially women, eventually edging at least a bit closer to achieving gender equality.

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