

The Relationship Between Misogyny and Internalized Misogyny and Its Significance for Women in Modern Society

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ABSTRACT

In the modern, civilized, and progressive society, there is a sense of accomplishment and pride regarding gender equality. Indeed, when compared to the societal structure from a hundred years ago, today's society differs significantly on a number of prominent aspects. However, society at its root remains patriarchal to this day, and hence misogyny as well as internalized misogyny persist, albeit in a subtler form. In this article an attempt has been made to understand how both of these concepts have changed over the years, what the relationship between them is, the reason behind their continued survival, their impact on society, and the importance of addressing them.

Keywords: *Misogyny, Internalized Misogyny, Women in Modern Society*

While the fight for gender equality has a long and arduous history behind it, the actual development of equality has been extremely gradual and fraught with numerous challenges. If the topic is brought up today in general conversation, it is met with both a tone of satisfaction and exasperation. The satisfaction is caused by the perceived amount of equality that has been accomplished by today's society and the ways women are being granted the same opportunities as men. For example, even a hundred years ago, women had no voting rights in India. These improvements are one of the reasons that this topic is also met with exasperation, guided by the thought, "Women are getting so many benefits nowadays. Why do we still need to talk about it? What more do they want?" These sentiments are not only limited to men but also present in women. This is where misogyny and internalized misogyny come into the discussion because both of those sentiments are deeply rooted in misogyny in men and internalized misogyny in women. Both misogyny and internalized misogyny view women as less capable beings and therefore consider more opportunities for women to be a favor granted to them instead of the inherent rights of human beings who make up almost half of the population. These beliefs not only beget complacency and misplaced gratitude in women who feel thankful and placated that society has allowed enough concessions, but also insecurity and helplessness in men who feel that women are being rewarded unfairly.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

There have only been a few studies done on internalized misogyny in the psychology field; even fewer are done on the Indian population, where both misogyny and its counterpart are deeply ingrained and have been for centuries. The few studies that have analyzed internalized misogyny have undeniably found its root in systemic misogyny and the desire for its maintenance. Studies and research have also noted the impact internalized misogyny has on women, both individually and as a community.

In an article titled “Internalized misogyny: the patriarchy inside our heads,” authors Maria Evteeva et al. analyze the underlying causes of internalized misogyny in women and discover that it’s an abundant and insidious presence in all facets of society. This article finds that the root of internalized misogyny is embedded in the patriarchal system and that it profoundly impacts women’s mental health and perpetuates their oppression.

Another study named “Internalized misogyny as the moderator of the link between sexist events and women’s psychological distress” by D. Szymanski, A. Gupta, and others examined the relationship between internalized misogyny and self-objectification and passive acceptance of traditional gender roles. It also examined its relationship with women’s psychological distress. This quantitative study found that internalized misogyny was closely related to self-objectification and passive acceptance. Additionally, it was found that internalized misogyny intensified the relationship between external sexism and psychological distress.

The research titled “How does the internalization of misogyny operate: a theoretical approach with European examples” by Sorana-Alexandra Constantinescu concludes that internalized misogyny parallels the state of gender inequality within a given society, but it follows the trend of gender domination rather than leading it. This means the degree of gender inequality and domination, largely perpetuated by misogyny, directly shapes internal misogyny in a similar vein. The research also reveals that a significant percentage of women display self-sabotaging beliefs and attitudes as a reflection of internalized misogyny.

Finally, the research named “To explore the relationship between internalized misogyny and career choices among Indian women” by Ishaani Jha and Dr. Anjali Sahai Srivastava found some significant data on the Indian population. The results suggested a complex relationship between internalized misogyny and career aspirations in Indian women, emphasizing the negative impact of internalized misogynistic beliefs on their career decisions.

DISCUSSION

Misogyny and Internalized Misogyny:

Misogyny refers to the hatred towards women, based on the belief that they are inferior to men. This cultural practice upholds the power of the dominant male group by oppressing and subordinating women (Findlay & Piggott, 2005). Manne describes misogyny as a political phenomenon. According to him, misogyny is a pervasive system that operates within the patriarchal social order, serving to monitor and reinforce the subordination of women while upholding the dominance of males (Manne, 2019). Misogyny can be of two types. It can be a hatred towards women who do not conform to the societal norm of feminine qualities. It can also be a general contempt towards women as a gender that is seen as inherently inferior or incompetent compared to men. (Brogaard, 2020) Misogyny can be expressed in a number of different manners. Through disrespectful behavior, objectification,

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controlling behavior, or harassment, stereotypes, or aggression. Experiencing misogyny can result in severe psychological distress for women, such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. It is often also the direct cause of physical violence, sexual assault and harassment, and workplace discrimination.

Internalized misogyny in women refers to the internalized feelings of self-hatred that perpetuate the belief in their own inferiority to men and the unjust denial of their entitlement to equal rights (Bearman & Amrhein, 2014). Internalized misogyny is created through internalization of continued social and cultural messages of women's inferiority. As a result, women start to believe themselves to be weak and helpless. In a society where they perceive themselves as powerless, these women often embrace the powerful status of men and choose to rationalize the systemic oppression as something that has been devised to protect them. This internalization can manifest itself through dislike towards women who deviate from social norms or hatred towards self for one's own perceived weakness. Internalized misogyny is, therefore, a psychological defense mechanism. Internalized misogyny can also severely affect women. It can result in significant mental distress, self-hatred, lack of assertiveness, and avoidance of leadership roles. It can also lead to body-image issues, self-sabotaging behavior, and depression. Additionally, it can lead to difficulty in building and maintaining healthy relationships with both men and women. This internal misogyny leads women to distrust and dislike other women, while low self-esteem and over-dependence on men for emotional intimacy can make it difficult for them to recognize and exit abusive relationships.

Misogyny and internalized misogyny are two sides of the same coin. They share an intimate relationship where they perpetuate each other in a cyclical manner. In a society without internalized misogyny, women need only to struggle against others' views of them. In a society without misogyny, internalized misogyny would not exist. However, in a society with both, such as ours, women not only have to fight against others' negative views of them, they also have to endure the much harder challenge of struggling against their own negative views about themselves. Therefore, both misogyny and internalized misogyny need each other to exert maximum impact on women and on society as a whole.

Then and Now - Indian Context:

In the past, the manifestation of misogyny was overt and accepted as a normal part of life by both sexes. Historical practices such as Sati Dahan Pratha, child marriage, or the Devadasi system had their roots in misogyny. Despite a handful of women pioneers, a majority of the women had no opportunity for education and were considered only useful for household duties and child rearing. They also had limited rights to property and inheritance. In modern society, misogyny can lead to major events such as rapes, acid attacks, or honor killings. However, most of the expressions of misogyny have turned covert with increased awareness, elevated desire for justice, and more inclusive laws. Subtle misogyny can be seen in workplace discrimination, pay gaps, and sexual harassment disguised as compliments. In some instances, the misogynistic view has remained similar. Women are still often blamed for their own assaults if their clothes, occupation, or behavior does not conform to the societal standard of femininity. Dowry, child marriage, and femicide remain an issue despite spreading awareness. In a number of cultures across the country, women choosing their own life partner can result in disownment or even death. Women's words and actions also face more critique and ridicule both in the real world and in online spaces.

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Manifestation of internalized misogyny has also changed over the years. In the past, women were generally more accepting of their limited role and others' views of their inferiority. Practices such as Sati were embraced by many women, and incidents such as domestic violence or maltreatment in a family setting were accepted because women believed submissiveness and suffering to be virtuous. Internalized misogyny in modern times is seen in harsh criticism of behaviors, clothing, or lifestyle choices of other women who do not strictly adhere to social norms, as well as attributing the assault of women they do not approve of to these factors. There is a tendency among some women to prefer male children as sons and grandsons, which can lead to domestic abuse or violence. Internalized misogyny can also manifest in unrealistic beauty standards and judgment of other women based on these standards. An aspect of internalized misogyny that has remained unchanged is the resistance of some women towards the fight for equality in society, either because they consider the current state to be the conclusive achievement or they believe that the unequal power dynamic is for their own benefit.

The manifestation of misogyny and internalized misogyny has had to change to a subtler form because over the years there has been a steady increase in awareness, education, values, and sense of justice. However, in recent years there has been a resurgence of overt and direct misogyny in the form of movies promoting violent treatment of women, increased gender-based violence, and online harassment, caused by a shift in the political and religious environment, overindulgence and anonymity of online spaces, and an increasing power struggle between men and women.

Why They Persist:

A large portion of human beings have always fought against changes in the society, considering them a threat towards their traditions and an ominous indication of societal collapse. This resistance to change has a deeper reasoning behind it. The fear of rejecting traditions can be understood by analyzing the reason for their creation and the population that benefits from them. A patriarchal, male-dominated society is structured around men and their comfort. The majority of traditions, cultures, and values of such a society are hence similarly built for males. Changes in the society that aim towards restructuring it for men and women equally pose a threat of changing the power dynamics completely. While the loss of power in itself is a cause for concern, it also brings forth the possibility of some power being handed over to women, which they feel women are unsuited for because the concept of subservient and less-abled women is the essence of misogyny, which in turn is the foundation of our androcentric society.

The reason for the persistence of misogyny and internalized misogyny is thus simple. Modern society, as a rule, almost all over the world, follows a specific patriarchal structure that dedicates the majority of its power roles to males while keeping women's involvement restricted or reserved. This structure needs to be kept intact for the reasons mentioned in the paragraph above, and that aforementioned power struggle and misogyny work as a cyclical system to achieve this goal. Therefore, continuation of misogyny is required to maintain the basic patriarchal structure of the society.

On the other hand, as more advancements are made and women are exposed to more education and experiences, the possibility rises that they will more actively reach for power positions within the society. It becomes pertinent that they remain in their predetermined societal roles. This process is achieved through teaching girl children certain traditional and

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cultural values as well as employing upbringing practices that sow the seeds of internalized misogyny early in life. Another strategy is continuous disregard of women's physical and emotional experiences through invalidation, gaslighting, and manipulation, which not only silences women's voices but also generates insecurity and self-hatred in women. This internalized misogyny teaches women to conform themselves and drives them to oppose other women who seek to achieve changes in social norms. Therefore, misogyny, and in association internalized misogyny, continue because they are essential for maintaining the status quo of an unequal power dynamic in the society. And this is accomplished in the name of honoring our traditions, taking advantage of the belief in our culture that as long as something is traditional, it is unquestionable and absolute.

Significance & Role of Women:

Misogyny is a severe threat to achieving true equality in our country. It cannot be fully eradicated in isolation. Especially because it has been and continues to be too beneficial for the dominating part of the society. But it can be fought and changed through smaller steps, one of which is battling internalized misogyny. As long as women believe themselves to be inferior and remain passive in their acceptance, they will not stand up to the misogynistic beliefs and behaviors around them. Therefore, as people who are directly impacted by the harmful effects of both, women must begin with actively confronting internalized misogyny. Internalized misogyny, like any other misconception, thrives on lack of education and self-awareness, limited experience, and a narrower worldview. Hence, education of women needs to take precedence before any larger changes can take place. Education will bring knowledge, create self-awareness, build confidence, and introduce women to the greater world and better opportunities. But the educational efforts must not be limited to the formal education. Learning about women's history, the reasons behind societal structures, and the dynamic changes within the society, both positive and negative, can help women become more attuned to the world and their attitude towards women. It can also provide necessary knowledge to identify and challenge behaviors and customs that are inherently misogynistic but have been normalized over time, as well as the ability to recognize the aspects in society that need further improvement in terms of equality. Another key step to be taken is promoting a sense of community among women, which not only will negate the misogynistic beliefs such as "Women are the true enemies of other women" but will also build allyship and belongingness and provide strength in numbers.

CONCLUSION

Misogyny and internalized misogyny are not recent phenomena. They have been the flesh and bones of human society for a long time, and even with all the progress made over the years, they continue to be harmful but ever-present parts of the society. Misogyny is extensively and intricately incorporated in the fabric of the societal structure, and it is impossible to eliminate it completely in the existing social framework. However, smaller steps can be taken to start the process, which includes fighting its subtler counterpart, internalized misogyny, which is crucial for perpetuating misogyny. And women need to take an active role in that process in order to maintain their equal rights as well as strive for building a better, more supportive, and egalitarian society. India, with its extensive history of structural misogyny and internalized misogyny, and especially in light of the recent resurgence of renewed misogynistic beliefs, necessitates prompt implementation of such steps to ensure the safety and physical and emotional well-being of Indian women.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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