

Analysis of the Roles of Men in Gender Equality Issues

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Abstract: This paper discusses what kind of role men have in gender equality and what they can contribute to gender equality based on relevant literature research and data. The paper examines the comments made and views expressed by most men on gender violence in online media, summarizes feminist speeches made by celebrities on social media, and aggregates what men can do for women's rights, such as male paternity leave. Finally, it was concluded that men are also victims of gender equality. They are bound and pushed by unreasonable demands to be a "masculine man", and some of the male victims of gender violence are rarely taken seriously. Men should be a major driving force in promoting gender equality, and they should not be seen as hostile or outsiders.

Keywords: men, gender equality, gender-based violence, social media, public opinion

1. Introduction

Current research on the role of men in gender equality issues, as far as the author could find, is relatively scarce. In contrast, speeches on related topics, such as Anne Hathaway's and Emma Watson's feminist speeches at the UN and some talks at TED, would be plentiful. There are also more books with related content, such as Tom Digby's *Men Doing Feminism*[1]. Whether it's a speech or a book, they all mention that feminism and men are now two opposing individuals. For a man who has the advantage in most fields, such as politics and business, claiming that he is a feminist seems perplexing[2]. The purpose of the paper is to discuss a selection of past and recent incidents of gender-based violence — and the public opinion directed towards them on the Internet — and the different evaluations of news about men and women on the Internet. By investigating the opinions and comments on different social media platforms, it is possible to conclude the common denominator — men and women receive contrasting comments on social media. For example, if two decent-looking male and female individuals post pictures of themselves on the internet simultaneously, the male's comments were positive and encouraging, while the female's were mocking and malicious speculation. Objectively, these extremely differentiated comments usually come from men. This study could broaden the horizons of gender equality from different perspectives. More multifaceted forces could also be invested in women's rights. If this could be achieved, it would be of great benefit to both men and women. Women will have more rights, and men will be treated with a more equal standard.

2. Social Media and Its Influence

Social media, based on the definition in Britannica, is “communications on the Internet through which users share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content(such as videos)”[3]. Social media is about using social networking sites and related platforms to build an audience. It allows people to understand the world in a convenient and efficient way, and thus has a very wide audience. Due to the vast number of people to whom social media is applicable, their comments are more easily disseminated to the general public and reap billions of views, resulting in great influence. Such comments form online public opinion — an influential public expression of opinion on public affairs (according to the definition given in “Online Public Opinion and the Steering of Online Public Opinion”)[4]. Generally, online public opinion is formed rapidly and decentralized, spreading widely in a short period of time. Public opinion usually arises because of certain characteristics in the news that capture public attention. The main reasons for opinion formation can be divided into three categories. One is the conflicting nature of the news topic, such as the conflict between the upper class and the lower class, which gives the public a strong sense of conflict. The second is the typicality of news content, which is in line with the public’s perception of an event so as to create the expectation of “indeed again”. The third one is the ambiguity of the incident details, which arouses the public to discuss the issue and contemplate the value behind it. As we can see, the direction of public opinion is usually determined by the news that is broadcast. Their views, thoughts, and evaluations of the event, as well as the attention generated by the news reflect what most people believe. Therefore, while public opinion exerts significant influence on the event, how the news is presented has a great impact on public opinion.

3. Gender-based Violence

Whether in the past or in the future, gender-based violence is occurring all over the place, even with the law in place. Only recently recognized by the United Nations as a human rights issue, “gender-based violence is related to the power imbalance between men and women that is present, to a greater or lesser degree, in all societies, including emotional, physical, and sexual violence.”[5] Gender violence is violence committed by one person against another person out of his or her own gender dominance. As an example, the U.N. Women researched on sexual violence around the world and found that “97 percent of women aged 18 to 24 have experienced sexual harassment in public spaces, and more than 70 percent of women of all ages have endured such behavior”(97% Of Young Women Have Been Sexually Harassed, Study Finds, 2021)[6]. It is proven that women are more likely to be harassed than men. This is known as gender-based violence. The sense of superiority generated by gender leads some people to desire to commit violence against others, and in doing so, to adopt the innate advantages given to them through gender, such as physical size and strength. Typically, females are the majority of the victims of gender-based violence. Within and outside of the home, they are at high risk for violence from males. Women who are sexually assaulted within the family are definitely not in the minority. According to U.N. Women, in the worldwide, “1 in 3 women have experienced physical or sexual violence — mostly by an intimate partner”(Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from the Who Multi-Country Study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence, 2006)[7]. All this violence is extremely injurious to women, both psychologically and physically, leaving numerous women suffering from illnesses as a result. Gender violence is likely to affect at least one-third of women at at some point in their lives.

4. The Roles of Men in Gender Equality Issues

4.1. Inappropriate Behavior of Some Men in Dealing with Gender Equality

Fortunately, the ubiquity of modern social media has brought many egregious incidents of gender-based violence to light. Some are bystander or online media exposures, and some are the victims' own voices. Either way, these exposures have undoubtedly pushed gender violence in a positive direction. More incidents in small, unseen cities are being discovered, and modern women have a heightened awareness of how to protect themselves. On social media, more and more people also engage in discussions on issues such as women's affirmative action, digging into social hot-spots. Take, for example, the hot topic discussion about women's maternity leave. Anne Hathaway once gave a speech at the UN about this topic that has been troubling women for a long time. In her speech, she mentioned that "one in four American women go back to work two weeks after giving birth because they can't afford to take any more time." [8] More importantly, she not only talked about the difficult situation of women but also gave the help that men could give — a study in Sweden on the state of the world's fathers reveals that every month fathers take paternity leave, the mothers' income increases by 6.7 percent [9]. It means that male maternity leave can be a good counterbalance to a company's bias against women. Those mothers don't have to risk being fired for taking maternity leave, because they are no longer "special". Her powerful speech has received tens of thousands of likes and comments on social media platforms such as Youtube and Twitter.

A portion of men play a villainous role in the comments section, reporting on gender-based violence against women. Always anxious to empathize with the men who commit violence, they pick on the women who are victimized. "Wearing exposed clothes", "traveling at night", "slow to react" are all reasons why women are targeted. Most commonly, and overwhelmingly, men choose to avoid the issue by ignoring the matter of gender equality. In refusing to acknowledge the violence as gender violence, they feel it is just a brawl. Meanwhile, those who point out the inequality between men and women are stirring up confrontation between men and women, and they are the righteous ones to defend the equality of men and women.

The most representative case is the recent incident in Tangshan, China. From the reports of the major news media, one can roughly reconstruct the incident. Three young women came to the barbecue at midnight to have a late-night snack, rejected the accost of the man at the next table, and resisted the harassment that followed, receiving a violent beating from the man and his companions. Once the surveillance video was released, it caused an uproar on the internet. The first thing that arose was concern and empathy for the female victims. Females are most likely to empathize with females. Being treated with tragic and malicious intent simply for refusing a male pickup creates a great sense of insecurity for all women. Because they do not know if the next victim will be themselves, they fear the unknown tomorrow. They consider it a gender issue, a series of atrocities caused by men's unfulfilled sense of supremacy over women.

In fact, the Tangshan incident was a case of gender-based violence. It originated in gender — the men who committed the violence were rejected by the women, believing that their so-called male strength was not manifested in women. It occurred in gender — the men who committed the violence deliberately beat women in public, relying on their size and strength. The men who avoid the issue on the internet are undoubtedly inflicting another blow on the female community in dire straits: they feel that women's fear is far less valuable than their own anger. Women should not be afraid of them. Men's empathy-free statements on the Internet have pushed gender equality to another freezing point, at least in this case by not doing enough to demonstrate what they can contribute to women's rights.

4.2. The Roles of Men Can Play in Gender Equality Issues

Nevertheless, the fact is that the issue of gender equality also plagues many men. In the case of gender-based violence, the CDC(Center for Disease Control and Prevention) survey, for example, showed that “nearly 1 in 4 men in the U.S. experienced some form of contact sexual violence in their lifetime”(Intimate Partner Violence, Sexual Violence, and Stalking among Men, 2020)[10] Men also suffer from sexual violence. But when they speak about their experiences to those around them or on the internet, the comments they receive are usually skeptical and derisive, especially from internet users who are also men. The public believes that men should not be vulnerable and should not cry. This fundamentally rejects the truth that they are victims, and therefore discourages more and more people from raising their voices. They are wrapped up in the “machismo” promoted by other men on the Internet and are denied the opportunity to defend their rights. As a result, men can never be outsiders in gender issues, but rather insiders who contribute to the situation.

4.2.1. Opponents of Some Gender Equality Issues

Confronting the place of men in gender equality issues is critical to gender equality. The power that men can give is not to be underestimated. Yet there are still many men on social media who deliberately misinterpret feminism to mean a nation of female dominance. Extreme feminism is certainly undesirable, but many men stigmatize feminism as a whole in relation to partial extremism. This has led to a majority of people targeting and being hostile to feminism on the internet. It is clear that men dominate this. While they do this, women’s interests are not only squeezed, but their peers, who are also men, are also harmed.

4.2.2. Things Men Can Do to Promote Equality

What can men do for women’s rights and gender equality in today’s world of intertwined and sophisticated information? Unsurprisingly, a large part of women’s insecurity in life comes from the men around them and on the internet. Even if a man does not intend to alienate women, he should avoid insecure behaviors in everyday life. For instance, he should not ask for a woman’s contact information on the street casually, and he should try to avoid following women all night long. On the other hand, on the diverse platform of social media, men should show more of their inclusiveness and empathy. In terms of the number of men and the nature of gender issues, they should be able to make the greatest impact.

4.2.3. Results of Men’s Behavior

Moreover, women, as victims of gender-based violence in most cases, should not always put men in opposition to them and should not seek to bring them down. The role that men can play in gender issues should also be emphasized. It is a valuable proposal that will considerably improve the situation and status of women in the future. The reason is that if men contribute, women will be more valued in the workplace as their colleagues or supervisors will be more understanding; women will not have to constantly worry about gender-based violence as more men will notice that some of their subconscious behaviors can cause women to panic; women will not be afraid to share their experiences of sexism on the Internet as men will be able to empathize. For every effort men make to advocate for women’s rights, every time they do, their mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters will be empowered to live in the world and be treated well by other male strangers. Solutions such as the aforementioned maternity leave for men are also the result of the inclusion of men in the consideration of gender equality issues. Men will be able to express their true selves in a more

gender-equal world, and men who suffer from gender violence will not be mocked or ignored. Neither will feminism be a topic that everyone avoids anymore.

5. Conclusion

The paper explains and defines social media, public opinion, and gender violence. It is evident that social media, as an integral part of modern life, is extremely proliferating and diversifying, and that more events related to gender issues are being spread through social networks, making more people aware of the importance of gender equality and the urgency of achieving it. In addition, the pressure of public opinion is forcing the public to face the issue of gender equality seriously. Comments posted by men on social media are analyzed from the perspective of recent incidents of gender violence, and conclusions are drawn: some of them usually act as antagonists in gender issues with secondary attacks on victimized women. To fully address the root causes of gender issues, however, the power of men cannot be neglected. While most perpetrators of gender-based violence are men, a number of men are also deeply disturbed by it. The paper concludes with a proposal and its benefits: men should not be seen as outsiders but should join in the fight for gender equality. The roles that men can play in gender equality issues are, first of all, to stabilize women's fear of men. If they can understand women and realize the inequality and fear women suffer in society, they can be stricter in what they say and do, in reality and on the Internet. More victims of gender violence would also have the courage to speak out. Second, reduce gender violence against women in the workplace. Many women will be dismissed from companies for reasons such as taking care of their families or having children. But when men's maternity leave is also put into practice, women's maternity leave will not be a special thing, much less a reason for women to be fired. Finally, as victims of gender inequality, men can also speak out and make the public more fully aware of gender issues. This paper also has some current shortcomings. It does not provide sufficient statistics about the percentage of men who make bad comments on social media. Subsequent research will focus on how to push men to make changes so that they can join the affirmative movement and contribute to a change in the broader social environment.

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