

Editorial

Men's relationship to patriarchy. Reflections on masculinity and role models

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In today's patriarchal and capitalist society, issues such as feminism and patriarchy are often seen as "women's issues" and the role of women is often discussed, while men's relationship to patriarchy is often neglected. Yet, this is a very important aspect if we want to describe the system we live in holistically. But what is men's relationship to patriarchy?

To answer this question, we first have to clarify what masculinity really is. I define masculinity as a way of looking at the world. It arises from a set of ideas that shape our everyday lives, but that we can also discuss and change. These beliefs about gender roles are often closely related to education at school, church, or university, which can lead to the idea that gender roles are natural or ordained by God or determined by hormones.

These beliefs then lead to a traditionally male image and worldview: Firstly, men feel they have a clear vision. From an early age, we learn that male bodies are supposed to be very simple and always work the same way. They have no cycle, no period, the body just runs and runs without rest. A real man is always in control of his body. When it comes to eating and sex, he has simple needs and hardly any feelings except hunger, anger, and lust. These assumptions can lead to the suppression of one's emotions.

Secondly, men are and always think rationally. Related to the sense of simplicity is the idea of always being rational. Men often ask or show others to please be rational. On the face of it, this is a request for arguments and statistics. However, the consequences of sexual harassment, for example, cannot be expressed in figures; that requires empathy. If you see yourself as rational

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and always emphasize that, you will get nowhere. Men try to subject everyone else to exactly the same kind of rationality and their own way of discussing things, so they limit what you have to deal with and fix things from the start in order to feel comfortable.

Thirdly, men feel at ease in the world—who feels safe in the street and when? Men are rarely told to dress a certain way, to avoid certain streets, and to carry pepper spray. Men are less likely to be assaulted in a café or to be touched against their will in a discotheque. The world is their living room, the underground is the club of drunken men’s clubs. In sport, it is almost always men’s football, political leaders are mostly men. And when men defend themselves against this, I get the feeling that they are actually defending their comfortable living room against people who have supposedly suddenly appeared and are sprawling on the sofa. But these people have always been there, the world has never been your living room, men!

Fourthly, men feel they can welcome others into the world. Mansplaining is a particularly good way of illustrating this: the belief that one has grasped the world rationally and with the only correct perspective and can now make others see it in the same way. Mansplaining does not mean “welcome to my world” but “welcome to the world as it is”. It is unthinkable that others can see the world differently or even more clearly than oneself.

The fifth is the expectation that the world will be ordered according to one’s own desires. Male encroachment. Traditional masculinity leads to feeling very much at home in the world and therefore triggers the expectation that you can have what you want and that everyone else really wants what you want, or at least should want. That a woman, for example, wants to be approached or to dance closely, even though she makes it clear that she doesn’t want that. Because in reality, according to expectation, everything falls under male need and if that doesn’t happen, it’s a mistake that needs to be corrected. This makes people blind to equal needs and, in the worst case, leads to the neglect of other people.

This personal definition of masculinity already contains many aspects and causes of our current patriarchal system, in which, by the way, men and women are born equally. For the most part, children are pushed from an early age by education, society and the church into a binary, heterosexual gender system in which everything “different” is considered unnatural and/or inferior. Today’s heavy media consumption also promotes patriarchal ideas. In the early 1990s, there were a number of publications on this topic due to the role of gendered male body visualization and the representation of masculinity on screen (Horlacher, S., et al., 2016). However, men are not determined from birth to be patriarchs, they are made to be patriarchs. There is no natural gender order in which one gender dominates and oppresses the other.

This oppression manifests itself, on the one hand, in normal everyday life, but also in crime statistics around the world. In the late 1980s, it was also recognized in South America that the impact that masculinity has on so-called macho violence is problematic and needs to be investigated (Horlacher, S., et al., 2016). Anthropologists subsequently examine the central issues of machismo and identity. The problem is that biological and social gender are equated as natural and this almost creates pressure on men to oppress women. Together with other negative phenomena in our society, such as increasing anonymization and harassment on the internet, this can make men feel attracted to oppress women, which unfortunately can also lead to acts of violence. And it certainly does not help that the leadership of the state and the judiciary around the world is still largely in the hands of men. Today, patriarchy quietly pervades all areas of society, from the hospital to the supermarket, from the church to the state. It influences us subconsciously and, if we do not look closely, we do not realize that it occupies us and affects us every day and everywhere.

Personally, I too was born into this patriarchal society and was forced to play a role from an early age, but it did not cause me any major problems, on the contrary. It is only in the last two years or so that I have questioned this role and dealt with it. Sometimes I find it difficult to resist my role as a patriarch because I get a lot of headwinds from it. Examples are men's groups in real life or chat groups where you are insulted as "gay" or "faggot" if you make feminist statements. But also, the statements of women who rejected me in puberty with the argument that they were looking for a "real man" and not a "sissy" used to intimidate me when I resisted the stereotypical masculinity explained above.

So sometimes it seems easier to go with the flow and just accept your position in society and, in my opinion, that is also the reason why many men prefer to keep quiet and not change anything, because they can be happy with their role anyway. Giving up or losing hegemonic privileges causes anxiety and identity crises, which also explains why some men adopt radical and anti-feminist positions (Horlacher, S., et al., 2016).

If men are not born as patriarchs but are made as patriarchs, this also means that it is possible to escape from this system or to step out of their prescribed role. Basically, I observe that more and more people all over the world, both men and women and non-binary people, question the binary gender order, the dominance of men, as well as the "naturalness" of a gender-defined at birth (Horlacher et al., 2016). If we really want to control the big problems of our time, such as wars, social injustices and climate change, we need a systemic shift away from capitalism and patriarchy, which can only be done from below. By this, I mean that each and every individual, whether male, female or non-binary, should start with themselves. For me, as a man, this means resisting any urge to fit into the traditional image of masculinity described above. And that is the beginning. Every man should critically question his attitude toward patriarchy. I think it is not

easy for many men to understand at first that renouncing privilege in this case can represent an added value for society as a whole, i.e., also for ourselves. Moving away from patriarchy and overcoming traditional ideas of masculinity can lead to a change towards a more inclusive, more social, and therefore more productive society.

Referencias

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