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Gender ISSUE



THEY

FEMINIST

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LARGE AND IN CHARGE

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MATRILINEAL SOCIETIES AROUND THE WORLD

A matriarchy is a "family, group or state governed by a matriarch (a woman who is head of a family or tribe)" and includes a matrilineal system where one can trace their lineage through maternal ancestry, or inherit a property through the female line.

You may be familiar with legendary matriarchies like the (now extinct) Amazons, but there's still a handful of female-led societies still surviving in the real world today that are matrilineal (where ancestral descent is traced through maternal instead of paternal lines) – and interestingly, most of them are in Asia.

MINANGKABAU, INDONESIA

Currently, the largest known matrilineal society is the Minangkabau, a 4 million-strong tribe living in Indonesia's West Sumatra. The Minangkabau treasure girls, and firmly believe the mother to be the most important person in society – the property, family name, and land pass down from mother to daughter.

When couples marry, the husband moves into his wife's home – he may sleep with her, but must leave early in the morning to have breakfast at his mother's home. Boys leave their mother's home by the time they're 10 to stay in men's quarters and learn practical skills and religious teachings.

While religious and political affairs are the responsibility of men, and women rule the domestic realm, nearly all decisions require consensus between men and women. They feel the separation of powers keeps them on an equal footing. The clan chief is always a male who's selected by women but if he fails to fulfil his duties, they can remove him from office.

MOSUO, CHINA

Living within the borders of Tibet, Yunnan, and Sichuan provinces of China, the Mosuo are perhaps the most famous matrilineal society today. They're classified as an ethnic minority, known as the Naxi although the two are distinct in culture and language.

Like many Asian matrilineal societies, the Mosuo live in large households with the extended family, with a matriarch at the head of each. Mosuo women typically handle business decisions, while men handle politics. Since the lineage is traced through the female side of the family, children take their mother's name and properties are passed down through the matriline.

Interestingly, the Mosuo practice "walking marriages" where women choose their partners by literally walking to the man's home! There's no such thing as "marriage" either, as couples never live together. Children are always raised under their mother's care – the fathers sometimes play a little role in the upbringing, but in some cases, the identity of the father isn't even known. Even if he does take part in a child's life it's usually in his own matrilineal home.

GARO AND KHASI, INDIA

Both the Garo and Khasi (as well as Jaintia) tribes are matrilineal and live in the mountainous northeastern part of India, mainly in the state of Meghalaya. The Tibeto-Burman-speaking Garos and the Mon-Khmer-speaking Khasis both pass property and political succession down the matrilineal line – typically from the mother to the youngest daughter, who has a special position with regard to inheritance and succession. Marriage is typically arranged for her to a specific relative, and once married, the husband lives in his wife's house. Should a couple not have a daughter, they'll adopt one from their family tree.

With 1.4 million people, the Khasi is the largest of the three matrilineal ethnic groups in this region; their name khasi means "born of a woman." For them, the youngest daughter plays the role of khaddu, a person of great importance who takes over the house and land, manages family income, leads family councils, and makes important decisions with her uncle (the second most important person in a household). For the Garo, their youngest daughter is given the title nokha, which means "for home." However, in both tribes, the men govern the society and manage property as well as the household.

AKAN, GHANA

The Akan people predominantly reside in Ghana, where they are the majority. Their social organisation is built around the matrilineal which determines one's identity, succession, land tenure, and inheritance. While all matrilineal founders are female, men traditionally hold leadership roles in the society, with the major positions in financial and political ladder assigned by looking at the mother's side of the family.

These inherited roles are passed down through maternal ancestry – through his mothers and sisters (and their children). Often, the man is expected to support his family as well as those of his female relatives and interestingly, they play an important role in the life of his sister's son, but not his own son.

The Akans practice polygamy where men are more associated with the female members of his family, while the women are focused on the management of the entire clan.

BRIBRI, COSTA RICA

At just over 13,000 people, the Bribrí are a small indigenous group living in the Talamanca cantón of Costa Rica. Living in the mountains, they're known for their agriculture.

The Bribrí's social system is divided into clans that follow the matrilineal system. Each clan comprises an extended family which is determined through the mother/females. Every child belongs to and is raised by the mother's clan (and extended family). The awa, or shaman, holds a very important place in Bribrí society and boys are trained when they're about 8 for about 10-15 years. However, an awa cannot teach his own sons, only the sons of his female relatives.

In Bribrí culture, only women can traditionally inherit land and their since their spirituality favours women, the right to prepare a drink called Theobroma cacao – which is essential to their sacred rituals – is also reserved for women.

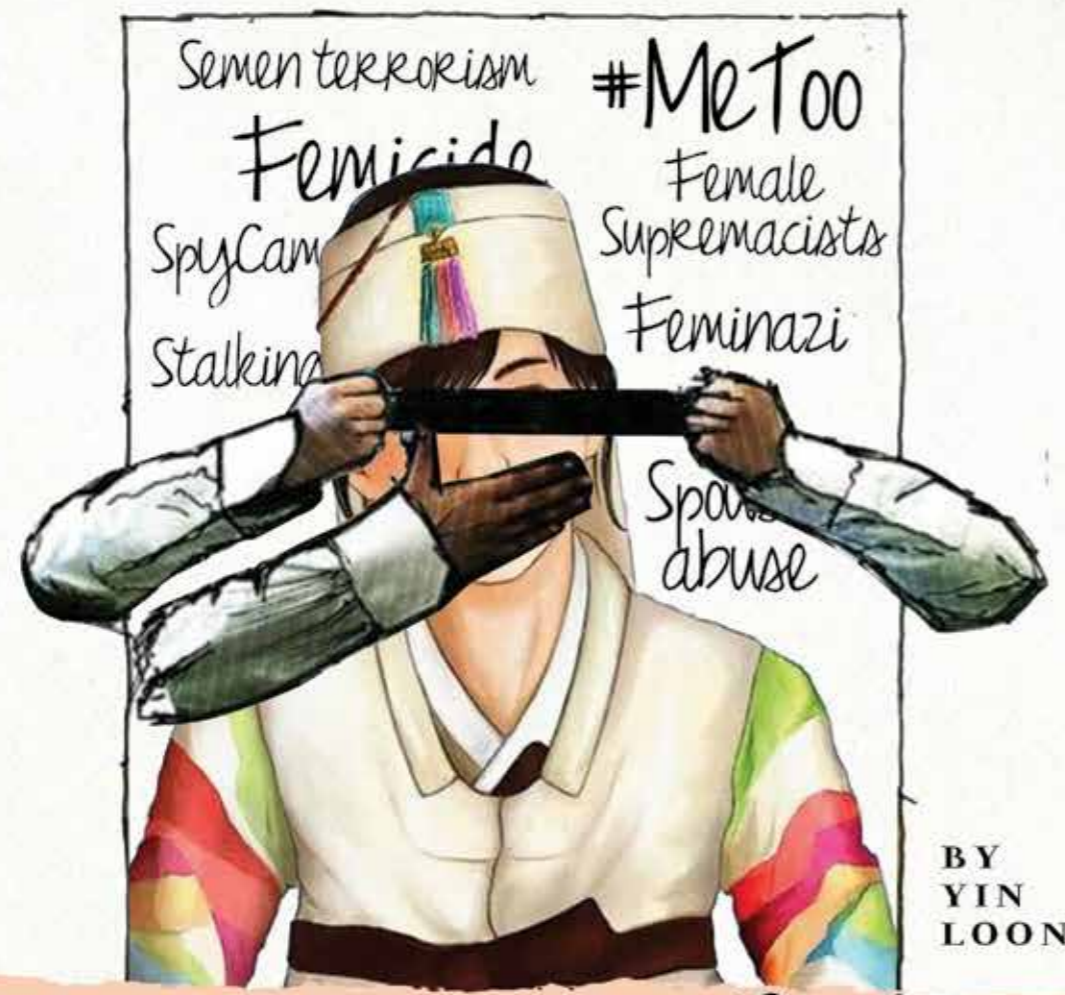
NAGOVISI, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The Nagovisi are one of three tribes that live on the tropical island of Papua New Guinea called South Bougainville. Their society, as noted by anthropologist Jill Nash, is divided into two matrilineal moiety, which are divided into matrilineal.

Every adult woman takes most pride in working the land entitled to them, with husbands of the tribe only assigned to tasks like clearing the land. The land is passed down via the female line, and since food plays a dominant role in Nagovisi society (it's the basis of all wealth), refusing the food she serves is considered disrespectful.

When it comes to marriage, the Nagovisi woman value gardening and shared sexuality with equal importance. However, marriage isn't institutionalised – but if she sleeps with a man, and he assists her in her garden, they're considered married. This shows how men are dependent on women's cultivation for food, and how women take pride in their gardening responsibilities.





SOUTH KOREA

HAS A MISOGYNY ISSUE

From chart-topping K-pop girl groups to strong K-drama female leads, South Korea's pop culture would lead you to believe it's a nation that's on par with the world in terms of economy, entertainment, and gender equality. However, beneath its polished surface, the reality is not quite perfect. South Korea may have risen from the ashes of war to become one of the world's top economies, but still lags behind much of the OECD in terms of gender equality.

For decades now, deep-rooted patriarchal ideologies and practices have given way to an

undercurrent of resistance to South Korea's progress in gender equality. There's been increasing anti-feminist backlash among young men - an issue which was brought to the nation's forefront in March's presidential election in which Yoon Suk-yeol, who's been an open critic of feminism, emerged victorious.

Misogyny has never come to the fore in South Korea like it has recently, and it has taken shape in multiple forms, from patriarchy and gender discrimination to sexual harassment, violence against women, and sexual objectification.

AT THE GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL

South Korea's 2022 presidential election showed a pronounced divide by gender, especially for Gen Z: around 60% of women in their 20s supported progressive candidate Lee Jae-myung of the Democratic Party, while 60% of their male counterparts supported Yoon of the conservative People Power Party. This gender divide has been exploited by politicians.

In order to court young male voters, one of Yoon's more contentious promises was to dissolve the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (or Ministry of Women and Family" in Korean), which he says focuses too much on women's rights and is no longer necessary. However, the

ministry doesn't just promote equality, it helps victims of sexual violence and single mothers.

Yoon has also openly blamed feminism for low birthrates, and has promised to enhance punishments for false accusations of sexual violence, which could deter more women from stepping forward.

Ironically, according to a poll in May, nearly 79% of Korean men in their 20s feel they're the victims of serious gender discrimination, citing reverse discrimination that stems from feminism and women-focused policies.

Many young men regard women's advancement as a threat to their financial security. They fear losing out to women in the cutthroat competition for tertiary education and jobs - especially when they have to serve mandatory military service (a touchy subject that's also at play here in Singapore).

Among contention also is the country's affirmative action, which was implemented in 2006 to expand women's employment and counter deeply-rooted discriminatory practices in public and private companies. Ironically, while the policy only called for women to represent a certain percentage of the workforce, there were no stipulations on wages, resulting in a huge wage gap between men and women - it was 35.9% in 2020, which is far higher than the OECD average of 12.8%. Yet women's enrollment rate in higher education was 5% higher than that of their male counterparts as of 2020.

MEN AGAINST FEMINISM

The resentment of feminism has been around since the beginning of the #MeToo movement back in 2018, when South Korea was thrust into global news for the nation's digital sex crimes - over 30,000 cases of illicit filming using hidden spycams were reported between 2013 and 2018. The images were uploaded to websites where men pay to access them. Prosecutors dropped 43.5% of sexual digital crimes cases in 2019, and it remained difficult for women to get justice, according to a Human Rights Watch (HRW) report in June 2021.

South Korea has also seen a bizarre form of sexual violence dubbed "semen terrorism," where men would ejaculate onto unsuspecting women's possessions, from coffee tumblers to shoes. So far,

"semen terrorists" have gotten off lightly (pardon the pun) since their crimes were punishable as mere property damage.

These incidents prompted mass protests by South Korean women; at a marathon #MeToo protest in Seoul in 2018, almost 200 women voiced their experiences of sexual harassment for 2018 minutes non-stop.

Instead of sympathising with women, Korean men instead went on protests of their own with their mantra "Feminism is a mental illness!" The most prominent anti-feminist group, Man on Solidarity, targets anything that smacks of feminism. Groups like that create a culture of misogyny in male-dominant online communities, depicting feminists as radical misandrists or "feminazis" and arguing that feminists are "female supremacists" rather than champions of gender equality.

They've also threatened businesses with boycotts, simply because they were insulted with the pinched finger emoji which they said ridiculed the size of their manhood. Weirder still was that companies actually pulled ads with those images because of them. In January, a McDonald's worldwide Twitter campaign asked followers to reply with a pinched finger emoji to "steal a fry" which wouldn't go down well in South Korea.

In addition, these "men's rights groups" also forced a university to cancel a lecture by a woman they accused of spreading misandry, as well as vilified prominent women - like the three-time Tokyo Olympics gold medalist archer An San - simply for having a short haircut.

According to South Korea's National Human Rights Commission, "women" and "feminists" are two of the most common targets of online hate speech in the nation. But protests and boycotts are nothing compared to the next level of anti-feminism: femicide.

THE MURDERS

South Korea has a femicide problem; just last year alone, there's been a spate of murders targeting women. These include two young girls who spoke out against sexual assault, a woman who just started dating her murderer, two karaoke room assistants, and a woman who was murdered by her long abusive husband.

And there seems to be a pattern among South Korea's femicide: 36% of these murders of women by an intimate partner (ie. husband or boyfriend) have a history of abuse, and 67% of these

murders happened in the home. An analysis of the murders reveal that among various reasons for men committing these crimes, the most common included "resentment," "feeling disregarded," and "jealousy." In about 29% of the cases, men actually murdered women for breaking up with them and refusing to get back together.

There's been several cases in the news where women have been killed by their abusive partners despite warning signs or even being under police protection. In one case, a murderer stalked the victim but was arrested - oddly, an arrest warrant was rejected by the prosecution. So he returned days later and stabbed her to death.

Even when the perpetrators were arrested, their average sentence for killing a female spouse was 12.8 years, compared to 14.4 years for homicide. A large part of it is due to opposition to punishment by 17% of the surviving members of a femicide, compared to just 9% of homicides.

Korea Women's Hotline notes that men's reasons for killing women are "tied to a very simple reason: the woman didn't do what the man wanted her to do." It simply reveals that the fundamental motive for killing women is a patriarchal desire to control them, as well as Korean society's tendency to downplay crimes against women.

A CHANGE IN THE WIND

There's been a quiet determination, especially among young South Korean women, to shake the pillars of this once patriarchal society. These days, many women work as professionals and over 60% of teachers, including university professors, are women. The share of female members in government has also increased dramatically over the years, while women have led 40% of businesses as of 2017.

In terms of laws to protect women, a Cyber Sex Crime Investigation Team has been set up in every city and province in the country to prevent digital spycam crimes, while prosecutors are seeking ways to make "semen terrorism" a punishable sex crime.

South Korea is kind of in an unusual situation. From the standpoint of GDP or cultural influence - like Squid Game and BTS - it looks like South Korea is on par with other nations in the OECD. However, when it comes to gender equality, it still lags behind a lot of other countries.

BY LYDIA TAN

Beyond the Binary:

GENDER IDENTITY AND PRONOUNS

For many years, the use of personal pronouns has become the topic of much controversy and discourse. However, there's no denying that pronouns are an essential part of grammar to identify yourself and others. In an increasingly inclusive world, we have come to realise that pronouns like "he" and "she" are not enough to express the spectrum of gender identities.

GENDERED GRAMMAR

Some languages like French and Spanish categorise nouns as "masculine", "feminine" and sometimes "neuter". This is known as grammatical gender and can be seen when words related to the noun inflect (change their form) to agree with the noun's gender. Depending on the language or word, the association can be based on the meaning of the noun or can be completely arbitrary.

Modern English no longer uses grammatical gender but gender is still very much built into our lexicon, as seen with third-person pronouns. However, the genders associated with these pronouns are conventionally limited to just male (he/him/his) and female (she/her/hers). This doesn't really accommodate people who identify with a gender outside of the male-female binary or move between both genders fluidly. As such, the use of "gender-neutral" pronouns is a reflection of how gender is more of a spectrum than a binary.

THE SINGULAR "THEY"

One of the most common gender-neutral pronouns is "they/them". It is also one that is most rife with controversy as many argue that these are plural pronouns and it is "ungrammatical" to use them singularly. On the contrary, they/them is used to refer to unknown individuals in many situations – and we don't even realise it most of the time.

The use of the singular "they" seems like a modern phenomenon but in fact, it has quite a history. Famous writers like Shakespeare and Jane Austen used it to reference a person of unspecified or unknown gender. At some point in the 18th century, the use of the male pronoun "he" started being used generically to refer to both males and females. Some believe that this word choice stems from the androcentric view that men are the default gender.

CREATING YOUR OWN PRONOUNS

As its name suggests, neo-pronouns are new gender-neutral pronouns that go beyond the usual personal

pronouns in English, albeit less common within the LGBT+ community. Some common examples include "xe/xem", "fae/faer" and "ze/zir". These pronouns can give non-binary people a lot more autonomy in choosing a pronoun that best represents their identity. Despite being "new", early forms of neo-pronouns were used from as early as the 1840s. One prominent example was The Sacramento Bee newspaper using "hir" for 25 years from the 1920s to the 40s.

Given its arbitrariness, neo-pronouns can easily be abused. There have been cases of public figures using random words and turning them into neo-pronouns as a joke, which undermines the people who use these pronouns to identify themselves. A recent case of this is British Internet personality Oli London, who became controversial for having multiple plastic surgery procedures to look like BTS member Jimin. Oli came out as "transracial Korean" and non-binary in 2021 with the pronouns they/them and the neo-pronouns kor/ean and ji/min. Many Kpop fans address Oli only by their they/them pronouns but refuse to accept their neo-pronouns as it is viewed as insulting to Koreans and Jimin himself.

DIFFERENT COMBINATIONS

Some people might choose to use more than one pronoun to identify themselves. They might interchangeably use 2 or more pronouns or use either one in different situations. Some people might place their pronouns in order of priority, with the default one placed first. Others don't have any particular preferences and will accept any pronoun when addressed. In even rarer cases, some people choose to not have any pronouns at all!

When meeting these people for the first time, you can first observe how they refer to themselves in front of others. Whenever in doubt, it's always best to respectfully ask which pronouns they prefer and in which contexts.

Over the years, pronouns have shifted from simply grammatical words to a marker of personal identity, which is why many social media sites like Instagram and LinkedIn now allow users to include pronouns in their bios. Finding the right pronouns to express one's gender identity accurately can be extremely empowering and affirming. This is why it is important to respect one another's pronouns and address them correctly, even when the other party is not physically present.



BY YIN LOON

WHY MEN SHOULD BE FEMINISTS

It's not uncommon to hear that once women identify themselves as "feminists," they'd almost always be labelled a "man hater" or even "feminazi." Perhaps this stems from the problem that many of us still haven't grasped the true meaning of being a "feminist". There are, of course, women who say that they believe in feminism, but end up indulging in what many would consider "misandry" – which is the female version of misogyny. However, this is far from what "feminism" actually means.

WHAT IS FEMINISM?

"Feminism" is defined as "the belief that women are and should be treated as potential intellectual and social equals to men" (according to Urban Dictionary). The findings of the 2020 UN Development Forum gender index found that 90% of the population in 75 countries is biased against women.

The core idea of feminism is to help raise the social standing of women to be at least on par with men, and therefore it's essential for everyone to understand that empowering women does not equate to disparaging the opposite sex. It's not a competition – in the game of feminism, everybody wins.

The concept of feminism – and gender equality – also shouldn't just be fought by women. In a world where men are still valued over women, there's a need for the opposite sex to help fight for women's rights. Men CAN (and should) be feminists as well because feminism is just as beneficial to them as it is for women.

WHY MEN CAN BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

Sadly, we live in a world where sexism against women can result in girls and women suffering from domestic violence or sexual harassment by strangers. Sexism against women extends to the workplace too; women consistently make less than men for the same job, or are ridiculed for being too "assertive."

While not all men exhibit sexist behaviour or commit violence, they can consider how to play an active part in promoting change and in encouraging other men to do so. Men shouldn't tolerate violence, aggression, and bullying or participate in male camaraderie built on mocking women and those who are different. Instead, they can play an important role in challenging other men over their sexism, misogyny, and violence by calling it out, supporting victims, or bearing witness. For men, the first step to fighting for feminism is recognising their own privilege.

As Edmund Burke puts it, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

AGAINST PATRIARCHY, NOT MEN

To reiterate, being a feminist does not entail belittling the opposite sex. As Canadian author Justine Musk writes, "The enemy of feminism isn't men. It's patriarchy, and patriarchy is not men. It is a system, and women can support the system of patriarchy just as men can support the fight for gender equality."

Ironically, the progress of feminism has been met with the emergence of incels and men's rights activists, who believe "the efforts to enhance the rights of women have become toxic efforts to undermine the rights of men." However, women's rights isn't to blame for their issue – it's the patriarchy.

A WHO report comparing 41 European countries found that men are more satisfied with life in countries where the sexes are more equal, and they're half as likely to be depressed too.

In his book "Why Feminism is Good for Men," Dutch activist Jens van Tricht argues that feminism is not just about improving the perception of women, but also about freeing men (and women) from the restrictive gender "codes" that hold them back. For example, toxic masculinity mandates that men must act tough, and have an inclination for violence, chauvinism, homophobia, and other traits.

Feminism can facilitate the shift towards more equal relationships and eradicate toxic masculinity. The good news is that there are organisations like White Ribbon (working with men to end violence against women), MenEngage Alliance, and Promundo that focus on changing the social norms of male behaviour and advancing gender equality.

Some women and women's organisations may fear that attempts to engage men will distract from the primary task of empowering women, or that "men will take over" women-led actions and campaigns. However, only with united support from both sides can we truly make a change to achieve sustained gender egalitarianism for all, and make our society a better place to live.



GENDERED OPPRESSION

THE CASE OF INCELS

BY NINA GAN

The incel – a portmanteau for “involuntary celibate” – community is notorious for rampant misogyny, violent rhetoric, and fatalistic attitudes toward modern relationships. We’ve all heard of news reports about violent incels committing violence due to their own perceptions of women. Now there’s a new US Secret Service report that identifies incels as a rising threat, as they’ve been responsible for several violent attacks across the US and Canada since 2014.

In 2018 there was a shooting at a yoga class in Florida where a man who described himself as a misogynist shot and killed 2 women before shooting himself. In 2020 the son of a female US district court was murdered by a shooter who believed “manhood is in serious jeopardy in America.”

In 2021, in Toronto, a self-proclaimed incel rammed into a crowd with a van, killing 10 pedestrians. That same year, another incel in the British town of Plymouth went on a shooting spree, killing 5 people including his mother before shooting himself.

Most of these men venerate fellow incel Elliot Rodger, a self-described “kissless virgin” who back in 2014 in California killed 6 innocent victims as “revenge” against those who denied him sex. He too shot himself in the aftermath.

THE INCEL IDEOLOGY

Interestingly, the incel community began way back in the 1990s, and it was founded by a woman named Alana based in Toronto. As a teen, she found dating terrifying – it was compounded by the fact that she was confused about her own sexuality. However, she finally committed to her first real relationship (with a woman) at age 24 and her experience

with the dating pool spurred her to launch a website called Alana’s Involuntary Celibacy Project to help others with her experience.

The initial years of the forum saw a more inclusive group – there were both men and women, and many of them were simply in a sexual dry spell or were unable to seek love; they never saw themselves as victims. However, after Alana left the forum in 2000, the incel community split into two forums: IncelSupport and LoveShy.

IncelSupport was similar to Alana’s original forum which tried to foster a healthy culture: it had a mixed-gender user base, moderators banned misogynistic content, and members advised each other on how to overcome shyness.

In contrast, LoveShy was less moderated and was full of men blaming women for their lack of sex. This community also mingled with other similar online subcultures, including 4chan, which also blamed their sexual frustrations on women. This group formed the basis of the “modern incel” as we know it.

THE BLACK PILL

Modern incels were shaped by misogynistic websites under the umbrella of “manosphere,” which subscribe to the “blackpill” conspiracy theory. The groups were full of “men’s rights” activists who believe that men are victims of gendered oppression, and that feminism is the reason that male power has been usurped.



THE BLACK PILL

The blackpill incels believe that a man’s sexual success is entirely determined by their physical appearance (ie. eyes, jawline, etc) like a sexual class system. To them, the top of the incel hierarchy are “Chads” who are the most attractive and account for about 20% of the population. A “Stacy” is a term for the most attractive women, who will only have sex with a Chad. They also believe that while about 80% of women are interested in Chads, the bottom 20% will consent to sex with the vast majority of men who have average attractiveness – they’re called “betas” or “cucks.” Incels, as you’d expect, are believed to be on the bottom rung and seen as so unattractive that no woman will sleep with them.

Modern incels also believe that women choose men based on their functions, like marrying a beta for financial gain while cheating with chads for sexual gratification, and won’t hesitate to hurt men for their gains. This leads incels to think that a society dominated by women is oppressive to them.

Of course, their lack of vision doesn’t include the fact that women have been oppressed, abused, and judged more harshly by men since forever. While early incels are less likely to blame women for their shortfalls, modern incels were probably spurred on by the era of #MeToo and #TimesUp movements which all but halted men’s relatively unfettered access to women’s bodies.

This was probably what spurred Elliot Rodger’s first-ever deadly incel attack in 2014, when he wrote: “All I had ever wanted was to love women, but their behaviour has only earned my hatred. I want to have sex with them, and make them feel good, but they would be disgusted at the prospect. They have no sexual attraction towards me.”

THE SPREAD OF INCEL BEHAVIOUR

There’s no denying that there are lots of sexually frustrated young men looking for someone to blame for their dating problems. Many of them have taken other forms of aggressions against women.

For example, a group of male gamers who were angry at the rise of feminist video game criticism harassed several prominent women in the gaming community during the 2014 Gamergate controversy. However, incels don’t seem to limit themselves to online harassment.

A scan through incel forums reveal chilling accounts about outright sexual assault. There have been claims of users serially assaulting women on public transit, ranging from rubbing themselves on unsuspecting women to groping them with fantasies of rape.

While incels are often thought to be a product of the west, there’s a growing trend in Asia spurred on by young male populations who see their (generally) uncontested patriarchy being challenged by the growing women’s rights movement. The trend is most visible currently in South Korea. A Realmeter poll in 2018 of more than 1,000 adults found that among Korean men in their 20s, 76% of them oppose feminism, while nearly 60% think gender issues are the country’s most serious source of conflict.

This has given rise to South Korea’s unique brand of incel: there are groups like Dang Dang We that are “fighting for justice for men” and the rise of the term “semen terrorism” where men would secretly smear semen onto an

unsuspecting female. In one case, a man soaked a woman’s shoe with his semen, while another man ejaculated into a female colleague’s coffee tumbler multiple times.

Incidents of outrage of modesty in Singapore can also be considered actions of incels; they’re perpetrated by men who often share their views with other men in online forums or chat groups such as Telegram. According to a RSIS commentary, young Singaporean men may also feel a sense of male victimhood when it comes to issues like National Service (and how it sets men back in their careers) as well as the dissatisfaction of “losing girls to white immigrants.”

HOW TO STEM THE SPREAD

While not all incels are violent, it’s often the online ecosystem that breeds and encourages extreme attitudes. The incel community is mainly present online on dedicated incel websites, but also on social media (ie. YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, etc) as well as unregulated forums like 4chan. Every day, boys are logging on to sub-Reddit, 4chan, and other social media and being introduced to misogynistic ideas that may lead to violence.

Detecting incel-motivated violence before it occurs may not be feasible, but monitoring online harassment may help to assess misogyny indirectly, before it manifests as physical harm or mental distress. This is where tech companies can help: they can deny the incel movement’s online presence by de-platforming them (ie. some sub-Reddit incel pages have been banned due to harmful content).



The worldview of incels is that they believe their situation is beyond their control, so they blame everyone and everything else (especially women) for their misery. This belief in not being in control can lead to mental health issues like anxiety and depression, which is why raising awareness of the topic early on may help prevent boys from becoming violent incels, and also strengthen their mental health so that they don’t see themselves as victims.



Racism

STILL CLOUDS PROGRESS FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN MULTICULTURAL SINGAPORE

The path to gender equality has been long and winding, partly because in multicultural Singapore, issues such as racism still clouds the way a lot of people think.

When Priscilla Shunmugam, founder of local fashion label Ong Shanmugam, participated in an online event for the Asian Civilisations Museum (for the ACMtalks: Designing Singapore's contemporary fashion identity session) on Sept 16 last year, a comment she made about cheongsam and Chinese women rubbed audiences the wrong way. However, it wasn't until Mar 24 this year that her comments went viral when it was shared by the Instagram page of Kebaya Societe.

It went down like qi-pow

The issue of race was actually brought up by Priscilla herself, when she was asked about the recurrence of the cheongsam (or qipao) silhouette in her collections.

In her reply, she said that "Chinese women have progressed significantly faster and further as compared to their Malay and Indian counterparts," and that Chinese women were the "first Asian women to shake hands with men long before it was acceptable for Indian and Malay women to do so" in Singapore. She also mentioned that Chinese women were the first Asian women to adopt Western-style clothing, like the dress or the miniskirt.

In reference to the social norms of the era, she even went on to question if Malay (and Indian) women

were "allowed by their husbands, fathers or brothers to dress a certain way or to go out and work" and how soon they were released from those social shackles.

While she intended to showcase the cheongsam as a representation of Chinese culture in terms of their openness to adapt to new influences, the way she phrased her answer drew a lot of flak. Many viewers were also surprised at the lack of moderation from fellow guest Nadya Wang and moderator Jackie Yoong.

Priscilla has apologised for her comments, but the issues she raised are worth discussing because they reflect a way of thinking that isn't uncommon.

Racism and the colonialist mindset

Equating "progress" with Western customs – like shaking hands or wearing revealing clothing – points more towards a colonialist mindset; in essence, it's going from one social conformity to another. It undermines the conventional meaning of "progress" where women are released from the social shackles of patriarchy.

So what metrics do we use to measure "progress" when it comes to women's freedom, especially in multicultural Singapore?

Kebaya Societe commented that "progressive" is a mental state of mind, and not about "shaking hands with men" which reduces physical touch as a measure of progression. This undermines the efforts of Malay and Indian women who've progressed in society as educators, entrepreneurs, and the like – for example as early as the 1940s, we've seen the rise of women like Hajjah Maimunah and Hajjah Fatimah who were successful entrepreneurs.

It's also worthy to note that speaking of fashion, traditional attire of all cultures – from Chinese cheongsam to Indian sari and Malay baju kurung – were common in Singapore until the 1950s. Those who wore Western-style clothes weren't more "progressive" – they were simply more wealthy, because one needed to buy imported clothes from high-end boutiques.

In the 1960s, the Women's Charter improved the rights of females in Singapore: more women went out to

work, and their fashion choices expanded, influenced by television and magazines. Even the traditional baju kebaya had adopted Western and Chinese influences in their designs, as seen in their necklines and body-hugging silhouettes. Women of all races were wearing Western-style clothing because they were less restrictive and more comfortable to wear in our climate.

Perhaps Priscilla should've correlated handshakes and western-style clothing to openness in adopting other cultures or habits, rather than "progress." Even if cultural attire was used as an analogy of progress, what women wear (according to their culture) shouldn't be used to measure women against each other. By doing so, it suggests that one race is better or more progressive than the other simply by their heritage and not their abilities.

Regardless of race, every woman plays an essential role in dismantling gender inequality both past and present. As AWARE puts it succinctly: Championing progress for women means working to dismantle racism, and not perpetuating harmful and historically inaccurate stereotypes.

The good news is that since the 1960s, the gender gap in Singapore has only become smaller, and our tiny nation recently ranked 54 out of 156 countries in the latest World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2021. We should celebrate how far we've come and celebrate our diversity, not homogeneity.

Since we're talking about gender equality...

It's not just minority women who have to fight an uphill battle to get recognition. For the LGBTQ community, the idea of progress isn't just about fighting for the freedom to love – racism also taints its progress.

A recent research paper documented how sexual racism among users of the app Grindr has caused some members to internalise their subordination. The report found that users were pigeonholed into racial categories which considered the Chinese majority to be more desirable, causing racial minorities to attempt to pass as Chinese. Even as the LGBTQ movement is fighting for equality, there seems to be no escape from racial preferences.

It's especially troubling when being non-Chinese can put one at higher risk of poorer mental health outcomes, especially when one is not cisgender and/or have a BMI above 25. Even if racism isn't outright hostile, it can still cause suffering and disempowerment for racial minorities.

What is needed are nuanced examinations of how and why racial minorities are marginalised, because when it comes to the fight for gender equality – including LGBTQ rights – who will get to enjoy the fruits of success? From Priscilla's takes to Grindr preferences in Singapore, it shows that no matter what strides have been made in the field of gender equality, it'll always have the hurdle of racism to overcome before we truly become an equitable society.

CLINGY GUYS and WEIRD APPENDAGES

Procreating in the Animal Kingdom



You've probably been through sex ed – or at least know how baby animals are made – so you probably know that it normally involves inserting Tab A into Slot B. But in the animal world, there is more than one way to procreate. Forget what you know about the birds and the bees, because some of these animals procreate by throwing the gender book out the window.



PROBLEMATIC RELATIONSHIPS: *The Clingy Guy*

While having a clingy partner isn't most people's idea of a relationship goal, some of you have probably been through one or two sticky partners who were hard to shake off. But what if your partner is way more clingy, like a male deep-sea anglerfish?

You see, when a male deep-sea anglerfish sets his sights on a female (who is much, much larger than he is), he latches onto her and literally becomes part of her – his circulatory system is looped into hers, reducing him to the role of a gonad whose only purpose is to contribute sperm.

It's a similar fate for the male Spoonworm, who simply gets

sucked into the female's genital chamber where he becomes something like a slow-release sperm tablet. Interestingly, a Spoonworm larvae has no gender until it lands on the seafloor, where it becomes a female that releases a toxin called bonellin which essentially turns other larvae it touches into males – for sperm duty, naturally.

Perhaps a more lonely male fate is reserved for the mysterious Argonaut octopus, whose sole purpose in life is to pass their sperm – via a detached arm that's found under its eye – to a passing female, and then he dies.

FEMALE POWER: *She's All That*

Who says females are the weaker sex? Certainly not the Clownfish! For one, they're all born as males, and when one of them emerges as the strongest, dominant one... turns into a female and then mates with the other guys! This sex change is called protandry, and the reason the strongest male is tasked with reproduction is because it's a job suited to only the strongest of the species. Plus, the baby Clownfishes that he produces will be of stellar stock.

In some cases, females don't even need males to do the job at all. A female Copperhead snake, like some reptiles and sharks, can actually fertilise their own eggs without even needing a male. Unlike hermaphrodites, this ability is called parthenogenesis, and the female snake has the ability to literally give "virgin birth" to live babies (no eggs!).



PENIS ENVY: *The Weird Appendages*

Did you know that with the exception of some ducks, birds don't actually have penises? They have what's called cloacas – openings that are either filled with semen or eggs – so they literally bump and grind to procreate. No appendages necessary.

Speaking of appendages, not all of them belong to the males. Take the Neotrogia, for example, which is a type of lice. The females have penises, and the males have the equivalent of a vagina – the weird thing is, she penetrates him... not to deliver sperm, but to collect it.

The Neotrogia isn't the only female with a male-like extension – the female spotted hyena has a 'pseudopenis', which can get up to

7 inches long! The weird part is that it isn't used to penetrate at all – to mate, the male has to go through her entire shaft with his own penis (in this case, it's fair to say that size matters). As if that's not bad enough for her, she later has to give birth through this pseudopenis.

Speaking of penises, marsupials are a weird bunch – did you know that the appendage of an adorable male echidna has four heads? Most other male marsupials, like possums and wombats, only have... two heads. The reason is simple: female marsupials have two uteri (and kangaroos have 3 vaginas – it's complicated).

BLUE BALLS: *Precious Family Jewels*

While some of you guys may have heard of the term 'blue balls', and even fewer of you have actually experienced it, everyone knows how sensitive a pair of gonads are. There's a reason nobody sends photos of them to random people.

On the contrary, male monkeys (like vervets and mandrills), love to advertise their dangly bits – because their family jewels are bright blue in colour – by sitting with their legs spread open. It's a sign of machismo, since the bluer and bigger they are, the more they get swiped right on monkey Tinder. And mothers kick blue-balled juveniles out of their group so they don't inbreed.

Turning balls blue isn't the only way hormones advertise their presence. Anyone who's owned hamsters, gerbils or other rodents will notice that males will develop enlarged goolies once in a while. Larger goolies create more sperm, because to stand out from the rat pack (and to get his genes passed

on), he needs all the help he can get. Even if this means he has to put up with looking like he's dragging a couple of bowling balls in his sack.

Since we're on the topic of testes, everyone knows the testosterone within is the reason males develop strong breeding instincts. However, for male semelparous animals, sex is a fatal once-in-a-lifetime affair. For example, the Antechinus (a marsupial) stores a month's worth of sperm in his gonads and then goes on a breeding rampage until his tank is empty, exhausting him so much that his fur falls off, he bleeds internally, and then he dies.

At least he gets to keep his body intact: when a male drone bee mates, his explosive ejaculation actually rips his penis off (and then he dies).

Too bad these males don't have the skills of the Arctic squirrel – thanks to bitterly cold and long winters,



BOY MEETS GIRL: *When Two become One*

We all know that hermaphrodites have both sexes within them, and that calls for some pretty bizarre mating-fencing rituals. Snails and their slug cousins are a great example: they both perform a mating ritual that can last hours. When snails mate, they literally shoot each other with their calciferous "love darts" which penetrate the other snail and inject them with hormones. There's no winner or loser, because the act is mutual: yep, both snails will end up laying eggs. In sea slugs, the dart can be so big that it completely penetrates the body and protrudes out the other side of the recipient!

When it comes to the slug world, love really hurts.

On the other end of the size spectrum are polar bears. Some female polar bears in Svalbard, Norway have been found with both male and female sex organs, despite not having the Y chromosome to indicate they're male. This makes the polar bears pseudo-hermaphrodites, and the reason is heartbreaking: toxic pollutants in the ocean – particularly polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and polybrominated biphenyls (PBDE) – can interfere with their hormones, giving them appendages they never asked for.



STREETWEAR VS RIBBONS: GENDER MARKETING IN KPOP

BY LINDSAY WONG

Along with its addictive music and intense choreography, the K-pop industry is a profitable business that entices fans of all ages to open their wallets in order to obtain pieces of paper with their favourite idol's selfies, or travel across the world to attend a concert. Fans are willing to spend exorbitant amounts of money on both boy groups and girl groups alike to have a chance of interacting with their idols or growing their merch collection. Nevertheless, entertainment companies may use different strategies to market boy groups and girl groups in an attempt to retain fans and attract new ones.

DARK VS LIGHT

One of the basics in K-pop 101 is that each group's comeback (when they release new music) follows a certain concept. Concepts may range from dark to bright – darker concepts use darker scenes and have a colder vibe, while brighter concepts use light and vivid palettes. More often than not, dark concepts are for more beat-heavy songs, or even ballads, and bright concepts are for cheerful and uplifting songs. Based on the concept, the music video and album/song convey different moods to the audience and add to the group's image.

Traditionally, dark concepts are employed more commonly for boy groups while girl groups go for bright concepts. Masculinity and femininity are used to differentiate boy groups and girl groups – boy groups will play on their masculinity in comebacks with dark concepts, while girl groups play on their femininity for cute concepts.

This may be through their outfits, or even how much skin they show on screen. Boy groups going for a darker, sexy concept are likely to expose their toned bodies or don streetwear. Girl groups may wear frilly dresses or big ribbons for girly or cute concepts.

Boy groups will almost always try out dark concepts because it follows a formula that is known to be successful for them. For example, Stray Kids' latest music video for "MANIAC" follows that concept. The same goes for girl groups and cute concepts, as can be seen in BLACKPINK'S "Ice Cream" music video. These are both instances in which idols will play on their masculinity or femininity to make a concept work.

This is not to say that there aren't exceptions to the rule, especially in the current generation of K-pop. 2NE1 is one of the oldest veteran girl groups that do not rely on feminine concepts. Their oldest and most successful songs have dark concepts that thereby added to their "girl-crush" image. (G)I-dle has not done a cute concept but they are currently one of the top fourth generation girl groups.

Nowadays, more and more groups are going for the "girl-crush" image, which tends to appeal to both male and female fans – many of whom are tired of the cute concept mold and want to see girl groups in the industry becoming more versatile with their music.

There are even some male idols that are not afraid to show off an ambiguous look, for example, by adopting certain makeup styles (like ATEEZ) or donning long hair and skirts (like Taemin from SHINee). As such, gender marketing is becoming less relevant in the K-pop industry and fans buy into different concepts and looks.

BUYING INTO GENDER

In terms of global appeal, it seems that K-pop boy bands dominate in terms of popularity and fandom numbers. Fans would also pack out stadiums of boy band concerts more often – for instance, BTS's 2019 "Love Yourself: Speak Yourself" world tour had a audience of 2 million, while the most popular girl group, BLACKPINK drew around 260,000 concertgoers for their "Kill This Love" world tour.

This could be attributed to the fact that it was male musicians who pioneered the Korean boy band movement, with groups like Seo Taiji back in the 90s. Back then, there were virtually no female groups so it's no surprise that the entire marketing (ie. merchandise, concerts) of K-pop revolved around boy bands. While female groups existed in the late 90s, women were expected to behave in a certain way, and female groups were often marketed as being hypersexualised.

However, while boy bands may be more lucrative for talent agencies in terms of concerts and merchandise, girl bands actually have the upper hand when it comes to digital streaming power. For example, on streaming platforms like Melon, female bands' tracks are often ranked higher on the charts, largely (presumably) because their songs are more easy-listening and appealing to the general public.

As boy bands evolved, it was clear that their loyal fanbase were predominantly women, and they were very willing to spend money on their idols. There were also less male fans of boy bands, probably because of the social stigma attached. By contrast, girl bands have their share of both female and male fans; however, with the exception of a small percentage, male fans generally tend to be more casual fans than their female counterparts. Based on fanmeet surveys, some of the most popular girl bands have a heavier female audience, with BLACKPINK (61%), MAMAMOO (96%), and Red Velvet (83%) leading the way.

Therefore, regardless of whether they're boy bands or girl bands, fandom marketing is more often geared towards female fans as they tend to be serious fans who spend more. As with any industry with gendered marketing, they go where the money is.



STRESS RELIEF

The global gender gap – which is measured across health, education, work and politics – has narrowed slightly to 68.6% in 2020. The average gap left to close is now 31.4%, compared to 32% last year. But it's estimated that it'll take 99.5 years to achieve full parity between men and women at the current rate of change. If you need an activity to relieve your stress, why not guess the top 6 countries for gender equality? Fill up the white boxes, and then cut them out and pin them on the map.



Write the countries and stick them on the map above

COUNTRIES WITH GENDER EQUALITY*



* According to the 2020 World Economic Forum

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Gender ISSUE

