Man and Masculinity Versus Power: Analytical Essay

It is a Man's World. The public and international discourse on the debate for gender equality is a long-fought fight, and rightfully so. However, equality largely focuses on the oppression of women. I have experienced and educated myself firsthand on the subpar treatment of being both a woman in society and in politics, however, as argued by Edwards; "the influence that traditional male stereotypes have on the perpetuation of gender inequality" also needs to be addressed (Edwards, 2015). Throughout this essay, when referring to 'gender', unless otherwise stated, I am making a cisgender comparison between the male gender and power. Thus, the downfall of masculinity and power has stemmed from the lack of a solid definition of what masculinity is, being a man within society and the uprising of gender equality and feminism.

Similar to femininity, masculinity is challenging to define because it is plural and changes historically and culturally. This change can be presented through the shift of traditional masculinity to metrosexuality. Examining metrosexuality from a sociological perspective challenges gender and sexuality through an interest in feminised practices, separating gender and sexuality as an asexual aesthetic lifestyle (Hall, 2014). Furthermore, as argued by R.W. Connell, masculinities are plural and there are a range of subordinate and dominant masculinities, as presented in her work Masculinities. The term 'hegemonic masculinity' was first used in a 1982 report from Connell's project, after analysing masculine hierarchy within secondary schools (Connell, 1993). By definition, hegemonic masculinity is defined as a practice that legitimises men's dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of the common male population and women, stressing the legitimating power of consent (Jewkes et al, 2015) and other marginalised ways of being a man. In line with hegemonic masculinity, Connell argued that white, middle class masculinity was the dominant male identity, and the identity to be sought after (Connell, 1993). Those who do not achieve such identity stand in a subjugated position. As a sociological concept, the nature of hegemonic masculinity derives from Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, analysing the power relations among social classes of society. Therefore, it can be argued hegemonic masculinity refers to cultural dynamics within a cisgendered society. Thus, the supremacy of white, middle-class masculinity can be comparable to the dominance of the male career. Husbands are freed from day-to-day family obligations. When the supremacy of the male career is piled atop of further patriarchal ideologies, it provides reasoning for husbands' entitlements that obscures the gendered power structure. Therefore, despite the definition of masculinity being fluid, desirable masculinity is still hegemonic. The concept of breadwinning overwhelmed manhood; brutal, violent, pseudo-natural and psychologically contradictory, yet economically prosperous (Donaldson, 1993). Thus, hegemonic masculinity demanded power, and this power dominated gender hierarchy and social embodiment.

Firstly, we must understand what gender and power is. Feminist interactionists and ethnomethodologists conceptualise gender as an emergent property of situated interaction rather than a role or attribute (Pyke, 1996). Furthermore, we must understand the relationship between gender and power. As argued by Carli, "evidence indicates men generally possess higher levels of expert and legitimate power than women do and that women possess higher levels of referent power than men do." (Carli, 2002). This is a result of gender differences in

social influence. Men and women are believed to differ in how influential and easily influenced that they are: men are thought to be most influential; women are thought to be more easily controlled (Eagly, 1983). The erosion of modern democracies is argued to have stemmed from a distaste of rendering women subordinate to men, once favoured by the masculine structure of politics and governments. Despite this erosion, we need to continue to think about power and politics in gender discussions. Gender, is one of several systems that divide power encourages division based on class and ethnicity. One must understand gender roles are power relations, and thus gender interacts throughout hierarchical power relationships. Focusing upon only one group - and in the modern day one would argue this group is cis women, reduces divisions to the views of their most powerful, reinstating power relations. Furthermore, it is impossible to study women on their own terms due to categories of analysis established by male social sciences. Our understandings of women in power may likely be a result of men's power over women, an example of this being through the Political Economy Analysis in Malawi 2013, which found women's specific priorities were systemically neglected in relevant decision making due to the power male traditional elders held over society (Oxfam, 2015). Consequently, power has been conceptualised by privileged men, and when born from the perspective of the privileged, naturally subjugated individuals will fail to understand power.

Lastly, I will analyse how men have lost their relationship with power throughout the years. Four key identifiers that have affected a man's relationship with power. The first of which being the impossible task of defining what is masculinity, as previously stated. Secondly, the increase of suicide rates amongst young men. In the UK, men are three times as likely to die by suicide than women, and the rate is four times as likely in ROI. Furthermore, in 2018, the suicide rate for young people increased by 52.7% with an increase in suicide for young men, the highest it has been since 2007 (Samitarians, 2019). As previously mentioned, the traditional ideal for a man is to be the breadwinner, however this is not well reflected or received in modern society. Isolation from home can be just as deadly, as proven by `'more than one construction worker [losing their life] every day to suicide". The construction industry is 80%> male, and workers spend long periods away from home, friends and family, surrounded by a high-pressure environment (Rice-Oxley, 2019). These statistics support the work of Farrell and Goldberg, who argued "men are in crisis because society imposes restricted roles on them", given the heavy burden of being providers without access to emotional support. Farrell and Goldberg argued the male role was so stressful it made men physically ill, and as evident through the previous statistics, psychologically ill too. Farrell and Goldberg argue that power is an illusion, and women are the most powerful in society; which is the truest imbalance (Maddison, 1999).

In opposition, the rise of feminism and feminist theories has allowed for men to explore their own expression. Stoltenberg (1994) seeks for men to disassociate violence and aggression from masculine identity, and Kimmel argues that men must acknowledge masculinity has many negative aspects through dominating women and other groups, and this must be faced head-on. Masculinity cannot be reformed without change. However, despite the "masculinity crisis" feminism has not shifted the gender power to women. Farrell compares women to a slave master, with men feeding the woman fruits of their labour (Farrell, 1986). Thus, Feminism has been key in exposing men to their problems with masculinity, however women continue to earn less, own less homes and have smaller pensions, and uphold the burden of single parenthood. Therefore, exposure to inequality has further exposed men's distaste with the fight for equality and women in power.

To conclude, a patriarchal society upheld the strong relationship between masculinity and

power. Men were the breadwinners, the head of the house, and society supported this by providing more significant opportunities for their male counterparts and confining women to the household. However, the impossible definition of what 'masculinity' truly is led to the downfall of its power. Introducing vulnerability through mental health and metrosexuality, led to the erosion of the undefeatable man in power. The Men Defense Association only led to criticism, as its defense of men was a result of undermining femininity. Thus, as society strives forward, it is inevitable that men will lose their stronghold to make way for equality. However, this equality has lifted the burden of toxic masculinity promoting the 'free man'; when this is accepted, that is when masculinity will be potent.