



The Internet and New Technologies: Impacts Upon Gender and Masculinities in Contemporary Societies

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Abstract

This article investigates how masculinity and gender have transformed through the internet and new technologies. Much of the research is based on work by Michael Kimmel and Katharine Charsley, whose work explores the evolution of masculinities over time. This article presents examples of how the internet and new technologies have impacted upon masculinity and gender, focusing especially on case studies that show how globalisation has led to this evolution. More specifically, this article analyses data from articles on biomedical technology developments to reflect the benefit for trans people, as well as uses case studies to reflect negative implications of evolving internet/technology for trans people. Moving to discuss how migration and the internet has impacted masculinity, family structures and gender roles, a case study on Pakistani and Punjabi marriages is introduced, followed by a discussion on the impact of migration on men. This study finds that the impact of the internet and technologies is extensive, ranging from shifting attitudes and vehicles for gender expression to consequences on men's roles within family structures.

Key words

Masculinity; Globalisation; The Internet; Technologies; Migration

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Introduction

Masculinities and gender are constantly evolving in contemporary society. A major contributor to this change is the development of new technologies and the emergence of the internet and social media. The process of globalisation has been a decisive component in these changes and has helped develop modern ways in which gender and masculinity interact and play a role in contemporary society. This article will highlight these changes through discussion on how new technologies have had positive and negative effects on transgender individuals. I will then discuss how migration and the internet has impacted masculinity, family structures and gender roles.

The impact of new technologies on transgender individuals

The progression of information, communication and biomedical technology has served as a great benefit to the transgender community, allowing them to express their identity in safer and more equal environments. The first major advancement is the development of Telemedicine. Telemedicine is 'the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the delivery of health services at a distance' (Wong et al., 2022). This advance has not only benefited trans people who live in rural areas or who may be at risk of persecution, it has also been incredibly useful at eliminating unequal barriers to access healthcare, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. Transgender individuals are disproportionately affected by health problems like anxiety and depression due to discrimination and stigmatisation, so telemedicine is a useful tool in 'offering transgender persons flexible, safe, private and comfortable ways to connect directly with transgender health specialists virtually' (Wong et al., 2022). Biomedical technology has also progressed significantly and now gives transgender individuals the chance to 'become parents outside the context of adoption' (Condat et al., 2018). This is a highly significant progression, as it allows more opportunities for transgender people to experience parenthood. The United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO) both acknowledge the ability to procreate is a human right and, with the development of Assisted Reproductive technology (ART), trans-persons have a greater possibility of experiencing parenthood (Condat et al., 2018).

Conversely, there have been negative impacts of new technologies and the internet on gender expression for trans individuals. Gender expression is hindered due to the 'rising trend of applying strict real-name policies online' (EDRi, 2020). Due to reasons such as strict national laws on name changes on official documents or the expensive costs associated with this, many trans individuals cannot upload official documents with their preferred names and verify their accounts. Eventually, in these cases, they are taken offline (EDRi, 2020). Certain contemporary societies have made

it easier to express gender identity than others. Regardless, there is always a looming threat to those who don't conform to the norm. We see this with the impact of location technology, allowing devices to be tracked on certain apps. This continues to put LGBTQI+ people at severe risk. An example of this is when the Egyptian Security services used the app Grindr to pinpoint and persecute LGBTQI+ people. They did this by creating fake dating profiles 'to collect evidence, imprison, torture and prosecute for illegal sexual behaviour' (EDRI, 2020).

From these examples, it is evident that with the emergence of new technologies and the internet there have been impactful progressions as well as new limitations for gender roles and expression.

The impact of globalisation on masculinity

Globalisation plays a major role in reshaping certain masculinities. Technological developments have resulted in modern-day society sharing ideas on a global scale. Westernised and Eurocentric ideals are predominately projected in popular media, like television and the internet. The internet has transformed our societies. As masculinities are constructed in accordance with the gender order of a society, new egalitarian ideas have been able to spread as a result of globalisation, which has led to reformed and new ideals of masculinity (Kimmel, 2001). The impact of globalisation is evident when considering the experiences of migrant men and their notions of fatherhood.

A case study on Pakistani and Punjabi marriages in Bristol reflects how masculinities are affected through migration. Traditionally, the role of men in Pakistani marriages are as heads of the household, above all other family members. Male migration challenges the ability to maintain this status, as often, when coming from Pakistan, the financial burden of a wedding means the man may have to remain with the wife's family as a *ghar damad*, meaning son-in-law (Charsley, 2005). This creates new power dimensions within the home between father and son-in-law and can severely challenge whether the 'imported Pakistani husband' (Charsley, 2005) can act in accordance with traditional masculine ideals associated with South-Asian culture. Feeling as though their masculinity and status is under threat, these men may act in violent and aggressive behaviours to assert their masculinity and maintain their status.

Additionally, the 'culture clash' (Charsley, 2005) between Pakistani men in contemporary British society can also contribute to the feelings of emasculation. An example of this, as described in a case study by Charsley, is when a man emigrates and sees his wife speaking to men who are not related to her, but who call her by her first name. Not understanding cultural norms, it may result in a breakdown of the marriage or violence and aggression from the man (Charsley, 2005).

Additionally, global migration reshapes gender roles within family structures. Patriarchal views expect women to be subordinate to their husbands. However, household relations have changed 'through women's increased participation in wage labour' (Jansen, 2008), an idea spread through ICTs. This shift in masculinities and femininities is often enough to disturb men (Jansen, 2008). This is evident with cultural differences between contemporary society in England and Pakistan. Each society has different expectations of men and women, which can prove difficult in the upkeep of a marriage, as some 'consider the differences between people raised in Britain and Pakistan to be too great' (Charsley, 2005).

Furthermore, ICTs play a role in shifting masculinities for migrant men. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook have become places where right-wing anti-immigration ideas spread. So for migrant men, it is not only their private status that is impacted, it is also their public one. An example of this is with Bosnian refugees whose chances of getting high pay and skilled employment were affected by their surnames (Jansen, 2008). Incidents similar to these made them feel 'irrelevant in their new place' (Jansen, 2008).

The conflict in Bosnia in the 1990s also reflects how changing power structures in the private sphere, as a result of forced migration, lead to the feeling of emasculation. When Bosnian refugees relocated to Western countries after the war 'women were more likely to be employed than men' (Jansen, 2008), a direct result of the gendered division in the labour market. Women were less likely to take up employment in low paid and unskilled labour, which allowed them to establish themselves as heads of the household with 'social benefits and health insurance for their households' (Jansen, 2008). In the case of Bosnian men, first-hand accounts reflected how many men struggled to cope in societies where their status as men were under threat. Some men turned to alcohol, which led to breakdowns in marriages and abuse (Jansen, 2008).

These studies are a reflection of how global migration can result in the alteration of hegemonic masculine ideas. The higher inclusion of women in the labour market in contemporary society can make men feel emasculated. Migration and ICTs force individuals to conform to new standards and assume new gender roles which can be seen to threaten dominant notions of masculinity.

The internet and new technologies challenge ideas of masculinity around fatherhood and have created new caring masculinities. A cultural shift in the 1980s resulted in elevated levels of beliefs for a father to take up a more caring and nurturing role in a child's life (Wall & Arnold, 2007). This occurred as a result of the higher level of women entering the labour market. As women became wage-earners and not just caregivers, fatherhood changed. The internet and new technologies were a useful tool

in projecting feminist ideas worldwide, leading to a more globalised society where women had a new status. They were also used as a method of showing how men were to become 'more emotionally involved, more nurturing, and more committed to spending time with his children, during infancy and beyond' (Wall & Arnold, 2007). The emergence of a caring masculinity in the media and internet did impact the amount of time fathers spent with their children, however it failed to eliminate societal expectations of mothers as caregivers (Wall & Arnold, 2007). Gender roles have slightly shifted, but the pressure of raising a family is still largely left to mothers, as Wall and Arnold show:

It is for the most part women who have to struggle with whether to put careers on hold in this series and women who are described and quoted expressing guilt over the time their jobs take away from their children (Wall & Arnold, 2007).

Reshaped and changing masculinities are a direct result of globalisation as it 'disrupts and reconfigures traditional, neo-colonial, or other national, regional or local economic, political and cultural arrangements' (Kimmel, 2001). With this, both the public and private realm of society is impacted. Men's shared feelings of emasculation can be associated with the impacts of new technologies and the internet, as they have made contemporary society more connected and led to the spread of modern ideas, through which both masculinities and femininities have transformed.

Conclusion

Masculinities and gender have been greatly impacted through the evolution of the internet and new technologies. As this article has shown, while the development of biomedical technology and ICTs have benefitted transgender people, limitations to gender expression have also followed. Through case studies of Pakistani and Bosnian migrant men, this article has described how changes in technology can result in feelings of emasculation. Lastly, this article has shown how the internet has been a useful tool in creating new expectations for men as parents, one where women are not seen as the primary caregiver. This article has explored some of the ways that developments in new technologies and the internet have impacted upon masculinity and gender in contemporary society.

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