

Media/ Narratives and Gender Performatives

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Abstract

The nature of narratives has undergone a complete transformation, a transformation which was never conceived earlier. Narratives create the 'human' world in the sense that the human truths are always narrated truths. The same is true of gender identities. The symbolic narratives in the form of images/visuals accompanying sound over social media spaces and the socio cultural narratives in the form of concrete behavioral patterns in actual human settings cannot be understood in isolation. The virtual narratives in a way mirror the actual conditions of life and both influence each other dialectically. The present paper deals with analysis of content on a popular channel over YouTube with the view to bringing about an understanding of reasons for proliferation of such gendered discourse on social media platforms and also with an inquiry into the ready acceptance of them at the hands of the victim of the stereotypical narrative itself.

Keywords: Social media, YouTube, Stereotypes, Sex role socialization, Feminism.

"Equality, what does it mean? What's the use for it? I've said it before and I'll repeat: women are second - class citizens and not only biologically. A female's duty is to bear children and rear them. With the exception of a few fresh water fish, most animals follow the basic rule."
- Mary Hemingway (qtd in. Pierce 244).

"I don't like the word feminist. I don't think women trying to be men is feminism. I also don't believe in being outspoken for the sake of it, or just to prove a point. Feminism is just an overused term and people make too much noise about it for no reason. Women have been given these bodies to produce children, and the spirit and tenderness to take care of people around us. It's fine to be an outspoken and working woman. I don't want to be a man. One day I look forward to making dinner for my husband and children. I don't want to be a career feminist."
- Lisa Hayden (qtd in. Bardoloi).

“It’s about labeling. For me feminism is bra-burning lesbianism. It’s very unglamorous. I’d like to see it rebranded. We need to see a celebration of our femininity and softness.”
- Geri Halliwell (qtd in. Holmes).

Literature and media is abundant with statements made by women about their own inferiority and the superiority of men (biologically and socio-culturally), abundant with instances of women enjoying and laughing graciously on rape/sexist jokes, bluntly snubbing feminism as a movement and trying in all their capacity to avoid being called one, admiring an overtly sexist treatment of them and also taking on themselves to educate everyone on how such an attitude is perfectly normal and not condescending to women at all. Of late social media has extended its ambit from just being confined to few social networking sites where people can indulge in networking with family and friends, to platforms that encourage people to start their own online channels with videos on what in pop culture is called ‘entertaining stuff’. Such platforms are an easy path to fame for individuals keen on getting attention which is their measure for success in the external world. Hence a plethora of YouTube channels on subjects from makeup tips to public polls and pranks. “Recent evidence shows a trend of increased desire for fame among younger individuals,” says Dr Sharon Coen, a senior lecturer in media psychology at the University of Salford. “In the UK, 16 per cent of children between 16 and 19 years old believed they would be famous, and 11 per cent planned to stop formal education in pursuit of fame.” (Tait). These individual YouTube channels are not just something people pursue as a hobby but also as full-fledged careers as they are the means of considerable financial rewards. Once they reach a certain number of views, they become profitable - which explains why many on YouTube choose to post sensational content on their channels. Now, one could fall into a long winding debate on the pros and cons of freedoms over social media platforms as social media sites have a wider dissemination and, as a result, greater influence, especially when the greatest number of users/audience for such sites is between the age group of 18 – 29. There are ways in which such sites could encourage further embedding of stereotyping related to gender, caste or religion as people are free to share their ‘opinions as content’ in the videos they make. Also, the comment war on these videos can turn rather ugly, and it does several times. There is enough evidence on the comment section, and from a purely philosophical standpoint these might drive people further into the ‘world of narratives’ around us, and cause them to become far-removed from reality. The present paper concerns itself with the ‘YouTube universe’ so far as much of its content causes the reiteration and reinforcement of stereotypes related to women in society, in general, and into the curious tendency of women willingly giving in to support stereotypical images of them and their kind, in particular.

Of late several you tubers have started posting crass pranks they play on their partners as videos, for the lack of a better and more meaningful content. While there are channels where both partners participate in pranking one another alternatively, the ones where guys film their wives’ or girlfriends’ misadventures throughout the day and post them as ‘funny content’ are more. What is startling is that such videos that don’t even qualify as ‘averagely funny’ have more than a million viewership. The cats and dogs videos are infinitely funnier to be honest, but maybe people have a greater appeal for ridicule and mockery. A YouTube channel that goes by the name, Brad Holmes, and is owned by a guy with the same name has a list of videos where Brad Holmes himself plays pranks on his girlfriend (Jenny Davies) and his father (Stephen), but

the content of the videos he makes on his dad is different from that he makes on his girlfriend. The videos with Jenny in it are mostly based on showcasing how unaware she is on topics related to politics, history and math, also a few where Brad plays ridiculous pranks like shaving her eyebrows and putting chilli pepper on her tampon and then capturing her reaction on it. These are meant purely for his own and the viewers' sadistic delight. The videos are mostly math questions, sometimes simple trivia questions which probably Brad picks up over the internet and puts to his partner and records her answers/reactions on them. One of the questions he asks Jenny is, "what do you call a bear without an ear?" to which she replies, "an earless bear". The question is repeated and the answer is repeated too. He keeps asking her the same question and recording her different replies, and her frustrated reactions make for a video that has about 5000 likes and a viewership of over a hundred thousand along with comments like "im sorry but am i the only one who thinks that this girl didnt go to school" (Emile) and "How dumb can you get". (Brandon) Bradley's answer to it is equally stupid. The answer he offers is "B". In another video Bradley asks her "you over stood the top of a building, to your right you have a ton of bricks and to your left you have a ton of feathers, which would hit the ground first?" Jenny replies, "the bricks, because they are heavier" and the same ridiculing laughter and question repetition round follows. After the act ends, Bradley patronizingly tells the answer and explains it as he would to a little kid. What one should note is that Bradley always ends most of these videos by saying something like, "you are impossible Jen", or "you are ridiculous". Another one of their videos that got them a huge fan following and likes was where Bradley asks Jenny that if she went to a restaurant and ordered a pizza how many slices would she want it to be cut in, eight or twelve, to which Jenny says eight because she can't eat the extra four. Bradley laughs out load and repeats the question again and when she doesn't get it he calls her a din and keeps laughing at her all through. Towards the end of the video like all others he announces the answer and tells Jenny how wrong and stupid she is, also the subject line he puts up on this video is, "pizza problems- taking dumb to a whole new level". Viewer's comments on this video go something like, "This is why such girls end up in porn industry" (tomfooljet_) "She's lucky she has a vagina" (Donkey time) "She is beautiful though. I like her like this. Dont change her" (Daryl) "Women's logic!!! Lol Morons!!!!" (Gabriel) "sexy and stupid, the perfect woman in all respects..." (Duc) "That's why women should stay in the kitchen at all times." (Iaint_2) After a few initial hits, any sensible person could make out that the pranks he played are scripted and acted out by both him and his partner, though the point of contemplation is not why these videos were contrived and set up but the fact that the actor (his partner) readily agreed to play the 'butt off jokes' in these videos.

The present paper aims to study the prevalence of gender stereotypes over social media in the present age, taking the equation of Brad and Jen under the lens, and argues from various articles on sex role socialization and gendering to bring about the reasons for women's acceptance of their subjugation and ridicule at the hands of men. One major point of study and analysis for people involved with gender equality is whether the psychological and behavioral differences between men and women are culturally/socially motivated or they occur 'naturally/biologically', as some might like to assert. It becomes an important point to be delved into as it is an important factor that affects and perpetuates certain kinds of stereotypes related to men and women. When Bradley Holmes tries to ask his partner questions on camera, that she isn't able to answer correctly and posts the subsequent videos made as super funny content, what

is it that entices him to make such an exaggeration of it, except for the usual human inclination of laughing at other people's expense? Why does he have more than a million views on these videos; note that viewers are both men and women who share their experience of watching them in the comment section and most of them find it (rolling on the floor funny)? Why does Jenny Davis not object to such a treatment of her rather than becoming an accomplice in the crass acts? Is it because she feels that she deserves it? Or that she rates herself very low intellectually to hardly care? Or does she feel that being dumb is an asset for a female rather than a matter of shame because of course many of the viewers who laugh out at her ignorance also call her innocent and cute, and is that a reason why she prefers being ignorant? In fact in one of his replies to a comment on one of these videos where a guy abuses Jenny, Brad tells us about how Jen knows and loves being called that. "Brad himself often makes an appearance in the comments section. "Those people calling her a thick cunt or whatever, she knows, loves it & so do I", he wrote under a pancake day video in which Jenny forgets to add flour to the mix" (Tait).

Ever came across occurrences as, 'nature did not make men and women equal', or 'women are naturally fragile and men naturally aggressive', or 'men are naturally sexually active and women naturally passive', or that 'women are naturally less intelligent than men or naturally bad at math, politics and science or are naturally less ambitious and goal oriented than men are'? The answer is yes, almost all the time:

"What are big boys made of? What are big boys made of?"

Independence, aggression, competitiveness, leadership, task orientation, outward orientation, assertiveness, innovation, self-discipline, stoicism, activity, objectivity, analytic-mindedness, courage, unsentimentally, rationality, confidence, and emotional control.

"What are big girls made of? What are big girls made of?"

Dependence, passivity, fragility, low pain tolerance, nonaggression, non-competitiveness, inner orientation, interpersonal orientation, empathy, sensitivity, nurturance, subjectivity, intuitiveness, yieldingness, receptivity, inability to risk, emotional liability, supportiveness (Bardwick and Douvan 225).

Often people try to justify their socio cultural recommendations by pinning them to the sphere of 'natural' or in other words that which occurs in majority within nature (plant or animal kingdom mostly), and the subsequent likening of natural to that which is 'proper' or 'good'. Such claims have majorly been used in order to curb a woman's freedom of choosing her roles. Often women who choose a lifestyle or a profession or an attitude contrary to what the society has so far attributed to strictly 'female', their choices are labeled 'unnatural' or 'improper'. We should however question ourselves as to why it is that something that is labeled natural is 'the only good or proper way of doing things', or that why something that occurs naturally means that it is good?'

For centuries people have appealed to the "natural" to back up their moral and social recommendations. The ordinary uses of the term which everyone hears

from time to time demonstrate that such efforts are still very much with us. We are told, for example, that suicide, artificial means of birth control, and sexual deviation are wrong because they are unnatural. Now and then the argument takes a positive form; because monogamy is natural, it is the only proper form of marriage. This particular belief, that only one to one is natural in intimate relationships, lends plausibility to a legal excuse appealed to in cases of passion shooting: that jealousy (at least on the part of men) is natural. Arguments against women's rights to equality often cite the "proper sphere" and the "nature" of women, which supposedly renders them inherently inferior, thus making any just empirical test unnecessary (Pierce 243).

An appeal to 'natural' has been made since ages to put women under strict stereotypes, some of which are that 'women are naturally the more beautiful of the species', or that 'they possess inherent traits for rearing and nurturing children', or that 'they have a huge propensity for sacrificing their needs and wants in order to satisfy people around them', and also that 'they are more submissive and docile in relationships'. These stereotypes in turn fix a certain 'role' or 'function' to a particular gender, for instance if women are naturally more nurturing and caring they should pick up the responsibility of bringing up children or that if they are naturally the 'fair sex' as some claim, then they must without fail look good or if they are more sacrificing they must give up their individuality for their families, kids and partners. The problem with putting down a gender within certain fixed categories is that it leads to them being judged and rated according to them, as if these categories were a yardstick to measure the character of a person. Almost all women feel a pressure to stick to these stereotypes in order to be considered good and worthy:

To be able to say what a thing is in terms of its function or purpose is simultaneously to set up standards for its evaluation. Once we can state the function of any "X", we can say what a good "X" is, or more precisely, we can say that "X" is good to the extent that it fulfills its function.

It is usually granted that in citing the function or role of something, we are setting certain standards which it must measure up to in order to be called good (Pierce 246).

So, Jenny Davis feels her 'role' is to look pretty and be submissive and she scores well in that department, above average according to many of her YouTube audiences and as long as she aces that department she doesn't have to worry about whether she knows her knee from her elbow. The problem with people sticking with such stereotypes and rationalizing a person's worth on the basis of them is that it is going to make life difficult for people who do not possess these qualities thought of as 'inherent' or 'essential' part of a person's personality. For instance, what about the women who do not fit within the 'conventional beauty standards' laid down by society? Does that mean they are any less worthy of appreciation or adoration than the ones who do? Or the ones who do not marry or have kids? Would that mean that they are incomplete and should that bring them disrespect at the hands of the society? Or the women, who refuse to

sacrifice their careers for their kids and family, are they to be considered selfish or any less womanish?

The main target of my concern is the pervasive belief (amounting almost to an article of faith) that woman's primary and most valuable social function is to provide the tender and compassionate components of life and that through the exercise of these particular traits, women have set themselves up as the exclusive model for protecting, nurturing, and fostering the growth of others.

...This arbitrary social definition of woman's prime function (in value terms) has encouraged the hypertrophied growth of a single circumscribed area of the feminine psyche, while other qualities have been subjected to gradual but persistent attrition

The compassion trap, with its underpinning philosophy and social systems, is one of the strongest forces in today's world that subverts and distorts both the individual identities and the social roles of women. It represents a residual and anachronistic perception of their innate characteristics and social capacities; its uncritical perpetuation leads to an extremity of confused thinking as well as a great deal of frustrated and basically ineffectual activity. The resultant misplacement of vital energies has equally negative effects upon women, who are caught in these self-defeating trivialities, and upon society, which is deprived of the vital and significant contributions that women might make (Adams 556).

Women more often than not know how, and in what ways they are deliberately being limited by these social criteria but they accept the stereotypes and are happy to comply. What is deeply unsettling is the fact that not only do they adhere to these social norms but they even become perpetuators of the stereotypes themselves. Hence when Mary Hemmingway calls her own kind 'second class citizens', and then goes on and on, on how she loves being known as somewhat inferior to her partner Ernest Hemmingway, and loved to be reminded of it, "Equality! I didn't want to be Ernest's equal. I wanted him to be the master, to be the stronger and cleverer than I, to remember constantly how big he was and how small I was." (Pierce 248) when Jenny Davis readily collaborates with her partner in making pranks on her unawareness on general knowledge and math questions, or when celebrities like Lisa Hayden and Geri Halliwell accept a woman's primary function as being a caretaker and a birth-giver and docility and sacrifice as their inherent traits, they accept the stereotypical ways in which society treats them, and remain unaffected by its effects on their self esteem or maybe they don't have anything to do with this thing called 'self esteem' that comes from being intellectually sound and informed when they can very well go on through lives by flashing off their pretty faces and toned bodies or finding their all round fulfillment through their partners (Mary Hemmingway's and Jenny Davis's case)

Glittering and smiling in the media, looked at by millions, envied and ogled, these ideal beauties teach women their role in society. They teach them that women are articles of conspicuous consumption in the male market; in other words, that women are made to be looked at, and that females achieve success in the world by being looked at. "My face is my fortune", said the pretty maid in the nursery

rhyme, by which she meant that her pretty face would enable her to get a husband — the prettier the face, the richer the husband.

...Every woman in our society, like the few beautiful ones in the media, is a flesh peddler in the harem of this man's world.

The ideal beauties teach women that their looks are a commodity to be bartered in exchange for a man, not only for food, clothing, and shelter, but for love. Women learn early that if you are unlovely, you are unloved (Stannard 194-95).

So, does all this mean that women naturally/biologically are meant to be second rate because they really do not have an intellect to even understand how they are being subjugated and limited by a society that functions by keeping women under control in the fear that they might dominate and control it in return? Or are these specific 'womanly traits' of docility and dumb-headedness instilled in them through sex role socialization which happens within cultures at a time when boys and girls are very young so that they learn to function according to the roles society wants them to fulfill and not digress and damage its fragile fabric?

The culture discourages women from achieving the kind of glory that does last, the glory that results from using one's mind. The little boy is asked what he's going to become when he grows up; the little girl is told she is — pretty. A girl's potential is only physical. Like an animal, she is expected to create only with her body, not her mind. The quickest and easiest way for a woman to get ahead (besides hitching her body to a man's star) is by displaying her body, like an animal in a zoo, as a topless waitress, a belly dancer, a model, an airline stewardess, a Miss U.S.A., or that ultimate glory, a Raquel Welch, who at present embodies the height of woman's attainments. Women are supposed to be bodies, not differentiated complex minds. Who would think of talking to the virtually indistinguishable, vacuous faces in Playboy? Women are supposed to be a man's sexual outlets, not his work colleagues, not his intellectual companions. The girl who tries to show off her mind instead of her body is penalized. On a date the girl who stops listening and starts talking is considered rude and aggressive; the girl who presumes to argue, disprove, and refute is not asked out again. In the eighteenth century Mary Wortley Montagu advised her daughter to hide her learning "like a physical defect." No one minded Jayne Mansfield's 160 I.Q. because she kept it hidden well behind her bosom. Men want their women dumb, their beautiful lips sealed. "No dress or garment is less becoming to a woman than a show of intelligence", decreed Martin Luther (Stannard 196-97).

Nancy Chodorow brings together some cross cultural examinations on the socialization of men and women in her article, "Being and Doing: A cross cultural examination of the socialization of males and females", and concludes that there is a wide disparity between how little girls and boys are raised, and whatever gender specific roles they are given have their sources in the already existing stereotypes, and in turn lead to a further embedding of them. Her article is a valuable document in understanding the ways in which gender roles are learnt and practiced within cultures and how they form an inseparable part of a person's personality through

her/his life. She takes into account Margaret Mead's, Herbert Barry, Irvin Child and Margaret Bacon and Beatrice and John Whiting's survey conducted on the sex role differentiation and similarities between certain cultures and takes note of the fact that within most cultures mothers are the primary socializers of both girls and boys as most society's give importance on a mother's rearing of children on the pretext that it comes 'naturally' to them, and the father remains a distanced figure or is only available for a short period within the day whereas it is the mother who is there to encourage or discourage children from activities, to instruct and guide them and base them firmly within the societal fabric. Nancy takes a psychosocial stance in building up her arguments to show the problem with sex role socialization which happens from a young age for both girls and boys. She notices that boys go through a lot of confusion in their early years due to the contrast between what their situation in life is during their younger years and what society expects out of them as an adult. In a society which looks with contempt at everything that is remotely feminine, all men are expected to be wary of any activity or lifestyle that would make people judge them as not 'masculine enough' or worse 'feminine', and such an attitude is what defines 'a real man' in most of our societies. For this reason boys in their very initial years find it hard to come to terms with their situation and placement in life, which is, a close proximity with a strong female figure i.e.; the mother, who is the epitome of femininity for them, loves them, provides for them and deals with all their whims and fancies and society's yardstick of denigrating anything that is feminine which is important for a boy to develop gender specific roles, in short a criteria for 'earning masculinity', that has to be done at every step and every point in the life of a boy to 'become' a boy:

Margaret Mead claims that from the time of birth, girls can begin to take on feminine identity through identification with their mothers, while for little boys, masculine identification comes through a process of differentiation, because what would be his "natural" identification—identification with the person he is closest to and most dependent upon—is according to cultural values "unnatural", this works against his attainment of stable masculine identity. The boy's "earliest experience of self is one in which he is forced, in the relationship to his mother, to realize himself as different, as a creature unlike the mother, as a creature unlike the human beings who make babies in a direct, intelligible way by using their own bodies to make them" (Chodorow 271).

While boys have to 'do' to become men, girls just have to 'be' in order to attain their feminine identity. Boys have to differentiate themselves, consciously to distance themselves and 'create' a sense of antithesis between themselves and the womankind, which is how they 'earn' their identities every minute, every day. Boys tend to learn to be self reliant, independent and start practicing their individual preferences because of the importance society lays on 'doing' in order to attain a masculine identity. Society expects men to be providers and protectors and such roles make it only natural for them to be taught to be egoistical, assertive, and unemotional because these qualities are beneficial to develop a self reliant and protector/provider image when they are adults. Girls on the other hand, have an easy time (at least in their childhood) in developing their identities. Girls 'relate' to the mother, they 'copy' them and the role she plays. Girls have a concrete ideal of femininity in front of them all the time i.e. the mother. So they tend to learn

docility, submissiveness, caring attitude and love because these qualities are potent for the kind of image we expect out of them (mother, wife):

...girls and women “are,” while boys and men “do”: feminine identity is “ascribed,” masculine identity “achieved.”

Culturally, too, “maleness ... is not absolutely defined, it has to be kept and re-earned every day.” Parsons suggests that women have an attainable goal—to marry and have children — and that how well they do this may bear on how people judge them, but not on their fundamental female status.[30] He contrasts this with male status, which is constantly dependent in a basic way on a man's success at work, at getting promotions, and as a provider.

Simone de Beauvoir sees positive rather than negative effects on boys (from this differentiation).[32] She describes girls' upbringing and contrasts it with boys', rather than attempting to explain how these contrasts have arisen. For her, boys' “doing” becomes men's transcendence: men are artists, creators, risk their lives, have projects. Women, on the other hand, are carefully trained to “be.” A girl's natural inclination would also be to “do,” but she learns to make herself into an object, to restrict herself to the sphere of immanence. Female destiny is foreordained and repetitive; men can choose their destiny:

The young boy, be he ambitious, thoughtless, or timid, looks toward an open future; he will be a seaman or an engineer, he will stay on the farm or go away to the city, he will see the world, he will get rich; he feels free, confronting a future in which the unexpected awaits him. The young girl will be a wife, grandmother; she will keep house just as her mother did, she will give her children the same care she herself received when young—she is twelve years old and already her story is written in the heavens. She will discover it day after day without ever making it. (Chodorow 272-73)

Nancy Chodorow observes that in most cultures the primary socializer for both boys and girls is the mother, and this has separate consequences for both. In boys it leads to a dread of her. This dread of the mother is rather abstract and uncanny, she is the one to have a total control over his impulses during the childhood and hence the boy starts dreading her in an unexplained way. This fear is further aggravated by his masculine ego suffering in front of a woman, whom he can neither identify with nor reject as a kid: the boy has to suffer ego lapse there. In his relationship with the father the fear is still concrete and happens very late for reasons available directly to him unlike with his mother:

... fear of the mother (women) in men is even greater and more repressed than fear of the father (men). The mother initially has complete power over the child's satisfaction of needs and first forbids instinctual activities and therefore encourages the child's first sadistic impulses to be directed against her and her body. This creates enormous anxiety in the child. Fear of the father, on the other hand, is not so threatening. For one thing, it develops later in life, as a result of

specific processes which the child is more ‘aware’ that he is experiencing, and not in reaction to the father's total and incomprehensible control over the child's livelihood: “dread of the father is more actual and tangible, less uncanny in quality.”[36] For another, it does not entail a boy's admitting fear of a different sort of being and “masculine self-regard suffers less in this way.”[37] Because all men have mothers, these results are to a greater or lesser degree universal: “the anxiety connected with his self-respect leaves more or less distinct traces in every man and gives to his general attitude to women a particular stamp which either does not exist in women's attitude to men, or, if it does, is acquired secondarily. In other words, it is no integral part of their feminine nature” (Chodorow 274).

Dread of the mother evolves into dread of the womankind as the boy matures and almost all men deal with it in a dual way. One is by either creating a dark image of her, like many of the folk legends and even religious texts talk of; things like women are untamable, hysterical if left unmonitored, witches that eat up men alive and the like, and so they need to be controlled and kept in place. The other way is to glorify them, treating them as children or harmless little individuals who can neither do nor mean any harm to them. This also resonates with the ‘Madonna Whore dichotomy’ that we are well aware of. Bradley Holmes’s making videos that highlight his partner’s unawareness and the joy he derives out of publicizing her dumbness is nothing more than a way in which he deals with the female dread, putting down his woman to an inferior level in most matters plasters and nullifies the dread he has of her and her kind. The threat to his masculine identity and same is the case with the dudes commenting that she is adorable on many of his videos where she behaves ignorant or dumb, for instance, one of the videos Bradley shared stars himself and Jenny, and in that video Bradley asks her to make him a fruit salad and she does, only that the bowl she brings contains fruits and salad, upon which Bradley laughs on her apparent stupidity and posts it with a subject “I asked Jen for a fruit salad...and she gave me this! FFS! ” He argues with Jenny Davis telling her that she was wrong and in the end tells her that he is not eating it and that she should take it away. Now in the first place, why was he not making his own fruit salad or fruit bowl or whatever he wanted and second, how does this incident pass off as funny content? There is another video he posts of the same kind where he asks Jenny to make him a cup of tea and get him custard creams from the store to go along with that and she does but after she makes him a custard with cream in it he laughs at her and tells her that what he wanted was the biscuit which comes with the name ‘custard creams’ and not ‘custard and cream’, he laughs at her for this.

My question is

- a) Why wasn’t he making himself a cup of tea and getting himself his custard creams?
- b) He didn’t specify that he wanted ‘custard cream’ biscuits, so whose mistake was it in the first place?

And c) Anybody could have made that mistake if they were asked for a confusing thing like this, so how is laughing at her ignorance or apparent mistake justified?

The answer is, Bradley Holmes is the image of an insecure little boy who isn't informed enough on what his childhood sex role socialization has done to his psyche, or on the dread that he has of the feminine in him and so he carries on ridiculing and bashing women as a reaction to the insecurity within him, the insecurity of not being man enough! Same is the case with the dudes commenting on these videos, calling jenny a "fucking psycho" or "silly but adorable".

Individual creations, as well as folk legends and beliefs, are often attempts to cope with this dread. For instance, there are poems and ballads that talk about fears of engulfment by whirlpools, allurements by sirens who entice the unwary and kill whom they catch. Women and symbols of women in these creations and fantasies are for grown men what the all-powerful mother is for the child. But if this power can be named and externalized, it can possibly be conquered. Another way of coping with dread is to glorify and adore women—"There is no need for me to dread a being so wonderful, so beautiful, nay, so saintly" — or to debase and disparage them—"It would be too ridiculous to dread a creature who, if you take her all round, is such a poor thing" (Chodorow 274- 75).

Chodorow talks about how many psychologists put this down as the 'fear of bisexuality' in men. According to Freud, every person has both masculine and feminine personality traits to some extent. But in case of men the feminine qualities are repressed and a show of them is highly criticized. Men are often penalized for acting womanly or showing traits which are even remotely feminine while such is not the case when it comes to women. Girls are allowed to wear clothes categorized as 'men's' like shirts or jeans, can very well indulge into sports, biking, and racing etc, though sometimes the parents will have their reservations if they are very successful professionally, dominating or have a controlling personality. They still won't be reprimanded severely and all these activities are not a serious blow to their 'feminine identity' in any way so they continue doing them. Whereas for men to flaunt a skirt or a sari would be tabooed, a show of feelings, too many emotions or fragility and low resilience will be highly criticized and they will be severely dealt with at the society's end. Society always creates a narrative of shame around a man desiring or doing things considered womanly and educates men on how such traits are harming their 'masculinity'. What happens as a result of this is confusion in the little boy's mind as he grows up, where he likes and wants to be like the mother but is criticized for the same. This causes the dread, a fear of these qualities that remains buried in his psyche and in order to overcome them he devalues and disregards everything womanly or feminine, same as Bradley Holmes does:

...All this evidence—of cultural institutions that exercise or attempt to gain control of feminine powers for men; of institutions that provide for the assertion of compulsively masculine behavior; of the threats of bisexuality or femininity to boys and men—suggests that it is not sufficient to attribute the devaluation of female work roles and personality to external and conscious "dread of women," to known fear of woman's power. Rather, it must be attributed to fear of that womanly power which has remained within men—the bisexual components of any man's personality. This is so threatening because in some sense, there is no sure definition of masculinity, no way for the little boy to know if he has really

made it, except insofar as he manages to differentiate himself from what he somehow vaguely defines as femininity. “For maleness in America [and, I would suggest, elsewhere] is not absolutely defined, it has to be kept and re-earned every day, and one essential element in the definition is beating women in every game that both sexes play, in every activity in which both sexes engage” (Chodorow 280-81).

But one big question that still remains is why Jenny Davis lets her partner degrade her like this, and why she lets him make money and fame at her own expense? The answer to that lies in the sex role socialization that women go through during their initial years at the hands of their mothers, even fathers and peers. Chodorow’s research tells us about the contradiction that girls go through in terms of their identity and their preference as they go from their childhood to a mature being. For a girl, feminine identity might come easy as she has to pick gender roles from her mother and in whom she easily finds a feminine ideal to imitate: the little girl learns qualities like friendliness, kindness, docility and acceptance from her younger years but when she steps in the school or the world at large, she realizes that the traits that make her feminine, that form her essential being are not really appreciated in society in terms of material importance. They are rather assertion, independence and competition that are the qualities that are appreciated. These are the qualities that she has been always kept wary of. Moreover she is required to earn good grades and be good in studies and sports in order to achieve recognition in school; this creates a sense of conflict within her regarding her own value and identity. She stands nowhere when she calculates on society’s scales and so she starts preferring masculine choices over feminine; her self esteem and respect towards herself and her kind is always low, which she tries to overcome by making what society terms as masculine choices. Later in life society starts to tell her how her assertiveness, her outspokenness and opinionated self is bad for her feminine identity, that ultimately society will only value her on her excellence at the feminine roles. So most women give up all other preferences and traits and keep the ones that are required for fulfilling the feminine criteria. Women for most parts of their life devalue themselves and their kind but at the same time attend and conform to all those personality traits which make the society regard them as less important individuals. So when Jenny Davis plays an accomplice to her partner’s ridiculous jokes of her, she is conforming to society’s devaluation and degradation of women as a species, and she finds nothing wrong in it because her identity is so broken and dependent on a fellow human being, that she knows no better than sticking to the stereotypes:

As she gets older, however, her peers and the adults around her cease such tolerance of this envy of males and of these attempts to engage in male activities or to achieve like men: “any self-assertion will diminish her femininity and her attractiveness.”[71] She is supposed to begin to be passive and docile, to become interested in her appearance, to cultivate her abilities to charm men, to mold herself to their wants. This is not a one-sided requirement, however. At the same time she is supposed to continue to do well in school, but must expect to be stigmatized or reproved if she does. In American society she continues in school to be instilled with “American (masculine) goals— success, achievement, competition. She fails as a good citizen, as a successful human being, if she does not succeed, and as a woman if she does. Mead sums up the girl’s position:

We end up with the contradictory picture of a society that appears to throw its doors wide open to women, but translates her every step towards success as having been damaging—to her own chances of marriage, and to the men whom she passes on the road [whom she must pass, in a society where success is defined only by beating other people].[72]

And it does seem that the society succeeds in imposing its demands. We can recall Brown's finding that fifth-grade (prepubertal and pubertal) girls make a dramatic switch and all of a sudden develop strong "preferences" for feminine activities and objects; we remember the "unexplainable" fact that girls on the kibbutz, formerly creative and interested in their work, moral and social leaders and organizers in their children's group, suddenly in high school become uninterested in intellectual activities, unconcerned about politics, uncreative and unartistic. We know that in general, as children grow up, girls become less successful in school and drop out of the role of equal participant in activities that they once held (Chodorow 285-86).

That brings us to the conclusion that maybe when Mary Hemmingway mentions that women are second rate and are not a man's equal, it is her sex role socialization talking for her. Her devaluation of herself and her kind occurs because she has been taught since the very beginning of the inferiority of women, and that her job should be to look good and be a support to her husband's ego and not to tread the forbidden path of intellectual stimulation and employments that would leave her 'femininity' in tatters. Also when Lisa Hayden and Geri Halliwell wash out feminism as a movement that is damaging to the ideal feminine image society recognizes they are scared to go against society's dictates of what a woman should do and is supposed to. Also feminism as a movement can only be led by women who are aware and assertive enough to demand equality, which makes all feminists not 'feminine' enough because the word 'feminine' in society's rule book is defined as what Lisa Hayden describes, bodies that should reproduce and take care of people, or as Geri Halliwell claims, a celebration of softness.

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