

The Same Change, Opposite Feelings

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Abstract

Gender ideological clash is not inevitable, but it is occurring because the same social change is experienced as different psychological threats by men and women. Politics for many young women is emerging as a language of safety, autonomy and incomplete equality for their bodies. The same changes for many young men can manifest as no longer feeling recognized, unstable status and financial insecurity. This is not to say that women's fears and men's grievances are morally on a par. It's a psychological reason: ideology can arise out of what people emotionally mean by the term "social change." Equality that is enjoyed by one group and not yet by the other feels like protection to the first group and less security to the latter, and leads not only to disagreement. It is a conflict over what reality feels like. Education, age, and media exposure are important, but they cannot fully account for why the same event may be interpreted as liberation by one group and humiliation by another. A psychological explanation must address what is threatened, protected or confirmed in the sense of self of individuals in regard to the social change.

Keywords

Gender ideological gap, political polarization, social media, status anxiety, gender politics.

1. Introduction

The first error is to think of the growing divide as a gender war; the reality is that there is a growing divide, but it is not equal. Based on data for 32 European countries and over 466,000 young adults, Nennstiel and Hudde [1] report that the gender gap on the left-right spectrum has been more or less stable in some countries, has increased in others and is barely noticeable in some. The U.S. data reveal a more distinct pattern: women are becoming more liberal, while men's views have changed less [2]. The liberal identity of young women ages 18 to 29 has grown significantly in recent years, and other recent Gallup analysis attributed this growth to increased liberal views on abortion, the environment, gun laws, and race relations among young women in this age group [3]. It is not just that men move to the right, while women move to the left. It's a more particular form of asymmetry in the transformation of political meaning. This is also relevant as gender is also a factor in their friendships and dating relationships as well as in family and work relationships. Class or regional political differences can keep people apart, gender-based political differences intrude into the most intimate parts of life.

2. Gendered Psychological Threats

Many young women move left because political issues are not perceived as just opinions, but are concerns about their own safety, autonomy, and not being quite equal. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) [4], globally, approximately one-third of women have faced physical or sexual intimate-partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. Such facts help explain why gender politics is often more concrete than theoretical. Pain [5] also illustrates that

women's fear of crime is not only personal but also spatial and social which influences women's mobility and risk management in public places. In this context, issues such as abortion rights, sexual harassment, street safety, and reproductive healthcare are not merely symbolic culture-war topics. They are understood through the question of whether women can occupy their own bodies and spaces safely and with enough control.

The gender gap is exacerbated in the online environment, where for many women political expression is a matter of risk management. A nationally representative survey of the UK by Enock et al. [6] reveals that overall men and women report similar levels of exposure to online harms, but women are more concerned about all the types of harms measured, and also less comfortable to engage online. Almost 40% of men, but only about 24% of women, said they felt comfortable expressing political opinions online. This indicates that women face "safety work" in the digital public sphere, in addition to "safety work" in the physical public sphere. A woman's reluctance to speak online is not necessarily a sign of lacking political awareness; it may instead reflect an understanding of the price of being visible in public. Political liberalism, therefore, can be linked not only to views on rights, but also to a demand for secure circumstances of participation.

The notion of unfinished equality is further underlined by the fact that women who assert their autonomy or authority risk negative consequences for their transgression of gender expectations. According to Rudman et al. [7], the punishment of agentic female leaders is likely due to the fact that they violate the gender hierarchy. This is important because women are often told that equality has already been realised, yet they are socially punished for acting as if it has. Sexism does not always manifest itself as overt hostility. Glick and Fiske [8] distinguish between hostile sexism and benevolent sexism; the latter may appear protective, but it can still confine women to limited roles. Jost and Kay [9] also demonstrate that benevolent sexism and complementary gender stereotypes can make unequal systems seem balanced or natural, which in turn increases system justification. For many women, ideological leftward movement is thus in part a reaction to forms of inequality that, although not overt, are nonetheless polite.

The shift among some young men toward conservative or anti-feminist attitudes can be understood less as simple hatred of women than as status anxiety. Vandello and Bosson [10] state that manhood is "hard won and easily lost"; it is not like the case with womanhood because manhood is socially constructed as a status that needs to be earned and is contingent on being lost. This makes men especially sensitive to humiliation, failure, and the loss of respect. In more traditional gender systems men were offered a promise of recognition in work, of economic support and of romantic desirability. However, today it is no longer a sure path to status in the education, employment, housing and dating markets. Then some men read women's progress as their hoped-for recognition being lost, rather than as greater fairness. The outcome of that is not only political conservatism, but a psychological quest for an explanation as to why the masculine script no longer functions.

Anti-feminist grievance can be created out of economic insecurity, as is the case in South Korea, where the expectations of men's success are still strong. As highlighted by Lee [11], the anti-gender sentiments of young Korean men were not merely conservative cultural sentiments, but stemmed from financial insecurity, a bifurcated labor market, traditional familyism, and the need to pursue a "normal life" of marriage and family. In the 2022 South Korean presidential election, young men in their twenties shifted sharply toward the conservative candidate, while young women moved in the opposite direction. This case is important because it illustrates how ideas about gender can arise out of contradiction, since men may be adversely affected by the harsh economic and masculine norms in the society, but may attribute the blame for their failure to feminists.

Male-victim ideology widens the distance further because it turns insecurity into a story of moral injury. As Jung [12] demonstrates, anti-feminism among some young Korean men is

expressed through the belief that men have become a disadvantaged minority and victims of women's empowerment or feminist policy. This is an ideology which is psychologically potent since it does not portray men as dominant but rather as falsely accused, ignored, or supplanted. Jenkins and Kim [13] analyze the Korean presidential election of 2022 and conclude that there was a positive correlation between misogynistic attitudes and support for Lee Jun-seok in the sense that there was a desire for symbolic representation. That is, it is possible to be anti-feminist and still not alleviate the material issues facing men. Anti-feminist politics may not solve men's material problems, but it can help some men feel publicly seen.

3. Digital and Algorithmic Amplification

The private anxieties are converted into collective identities through social media which exacerbates the gender gap. In the study cited above, Horta Ribeiro et al. [14] study 28.8 million posts, covering six forums and 51 subreddits and conclude that older, milder manosphere communities have been replaced by more extreme communities, e.g., incels and Men Going Their Own Way, and that newer communities have more toxic and misogynistic language. Habib et al. [15] also find that involvement in manosphere communities can shape users' language and traits associated with radicalization, especially through influential community elites. That isn't to say all lonely, insecure young men turn "radical." It indicates that a platform can provide instant interpretation: Loneliness is feminine cruelty, rejection is social discrimination, and uncertainty is a sign of the domination of women.

Extreme gender narratives can be made to seem ordinary by being repeated in recommendation systems as entertainment, advice, or self-improvement. Regehr et al. [16] explore the power of algorithmic feed to reinforce and normalize harmful ideologies such as misogynistic content for young people. They found that this is not only about political messages, but also about entertainment, relationship advice, jokes, and men's self-help. Ideological transformation does not necessarily manifest as "I've become political," but as a boy who watches lonely boy videos, masculinity videos, dating failure videos, or self-help improvement videos, he may find himself in a cocoon where it seems normal to resent women. Insecurity is not created out of nothing by algorithms, but algorithms can repeat and aestheticize it to make it an identity.

The gender ideological gap widens when women and men inhabit different emotional information environments. Women face harassment, sexual violence, abortion restriction, backlash and online threat over and over again. Many men, meanwhile, may repeatedly encounter stories of rejection, male loneliness, false accusations, women's unfair advantages, and the loss of masculine status. For these streams to become polarizing, they don't necessarily have to be completely fabricated. They polarise when both sides feel that their wounds are more important than the others and that the others' wounds are overblown and made up. Enock et al. [6], Jung [12], and Regehr et al. [16] all indicate that digital environments are not just about the transmission of gender conflict. They compartmentalize fear, resentment and recognition in their emotional worlds.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Explaining men's anxiety does not excuse misogyny, just as recognizing women's fear does not turn every man into an enemy. Male insecurity may be psychologically understandable, but that does not make misogyny morally innocent. However, if women's fear is extended to all men as threats, then there is no dialogue possible. Both of the truths must be maintained: women's political movement is about real-world issues of safety and autonomy, while some men's backlash is about real-world issues of insecurity, often directed at women. The job is not to make both sides "right." It is to comprehend a social change that holds the promise of equality

can still be protective for some and a loss of status for others. Such a balance is particularly significant in the field of psychology, where emotions can be causes but not necessarily justification. While anger, fear, humiliation and vulnerability can tell us the reasons why a belief is attractive, these feelings do not render every belief, resulting from these feelings, fair or true. When equality is felt by one group as not yet complete protection and by another group as not yet secure recognition, the gender ideological gap widens. Gender politics through the eyes of young women is frequently unfinished business-of safety, autonomy, and authority. The same politics might be seen as a withdrawal of their status to young men who feel economically or romantically insecure. Social media then cements these emotional interpretations as group identities; each side has evidence again that the other is unsafe, privileged, hostile. But the answer isn't to tell women that they are not afraid or to tell men that they are not insecure. It is to stop fear and insecurity from being politicized into hostile group identities. If it is understood as a struggle between emotional interpretations of social change, then the answer must include safety, economic security, healthier forms of masculinity, and fewer algorithmic rewards for resentment.

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