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COMMUNAL EXPECTANCY AND THE AUTHENTIC SELF OF MEN AND TRANSGENDERS - ARMS AND THE MAN BY GEORGE BERNARD SHAW AND BIRTHDAY BY MEREDITH RUSSO

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Abstract

The very word 'male' accentuates aplomb and emotionless traits. It is commensurate to transgenders as well. Authenticity is the genuine representation of oneself. This article distinctly delineates that emotions are not only meant for women but also for men and transgenders. The aim of the paper is to deconstruct the stereotypical emotions of male and to analyze how transgenders struggle to establish their authentic self. The inception enumerates about the characters from *Arms and the Man* by George Bernard Shaw, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *Birthday* by Meredith Russo. The characters analyzed for the study of male emotions show a complete exorbitant deviation from each other. One is authoritative and tenacious while the other is dreadful and unheroic. The character, Okonkwo manifests the general ideology about the feelings of men. Bluntschli's character is used to break the cliché and prove the aim of this study. The theory of deconstruction emphasizes the dominance of one particular way of thinking over the others. Morgan, the central character of Meredith Russo's *Birthday*, overcomes the fear of ostracism. The German- American psychologist, Erik Erikson's concept of identity and self is used as a tool to investigate the characters of the novel. Morgan's Gender Identity and Gender Dysphoria are also spelled out in this paper. The intention of this study is fulfilled by proving that masculine and trans traits does entail the emotions contrast to valiant and governing nature.

Key words: Aplomb, Authenticity, Gender Dysphoria, Gender emotions, Ostracism, Preconception, Stereotype.

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Introduction

Emotion is a strong feeling rising from the state of one's affairs. The habitual ideology regarding emotion is that women are more emotionally eloquent than anyone. This does not mean emotions and feelings cannot be seen in the vicinity of men and transgenders. It is veracious that men are not encouraged to natter about their feelings often. If paved a space, their inner feelings and humane nature would be acknowledged by masses. Optimism and cheerfulness begin to shrink when one keeps his aches and worries to himself. Many books and movies bring out the vitality of emotions through its characters and plot.

George Bernard Shaw is known for transfiguring comic drama. This is vividly noticed in the success of his book *Pygmalion*. He is definitely a model to all struggling writers. His *Arms and the man* (1894) is a pellucid work which aids to prove that a bloke is not distant to feelings and emotions. The play's title is a direct quote from Virgil's *Aeneid*, the Roman epic glorifying war. It is a jocular as well as a thought-provoking play. Captain Bluntschli, a major character of the play, is a professional soldier fighting for the Serbs. He is the driving force of the diegesis. He hides in the house of Raina Petkoff, protagonist of the play. She falls in love with Bluntschli due to his realistic attitude. She names him the "chocolate cream soldier" in view of the fact that he carries chocolates in his ammunition bags rather than having bullets. Raina and her mother help him to get out of their house safely. In the cessation of the play, Bluntschli's inheritance makes everyone stand in awe and thus, his love becomes successful. Feelings of Bluntschli along with certain incidents prove that men do have feelings which should be respected and accentuated by everyone.

In contrast to the character of Bluntschli, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) gives a stereotypical view to the readers on the emotions of a bloke. Okonkwo is a wealthy clan leader. He tussles to live in the society, which values manliness the most. His manliness with anger and violence draws him down. He is unable to express his feelings. His emotions are suppressed and not so flexible. In the end, he hangs himself. Thus, Bluntschli's character is analyzed in order to prove that

there is a hidden Bluntschli in every Okonkwo around us.

Meredith Russo, an American author known for her young adult fiction, underwent transition. Her debut novel *If I Was Your Girl* published in 2016, brought her significant recognition. The novel is based on her own experience. Her second young adult novel *Birthday* published in 2019, explores the emergence of an intense and emotional friendship between two friends Eric and Morgan who strive for their individuality. Born a boy, Morgan has always felt out of place being a boy. As a teenager, he begins to understand that being a boy was not his part of the play. Morgan freaks out, fearing ostracism. Morgan and Eric's friendship is put to the test as Eric, who initially seems to be drawn towards girls, begins to understand that he is also attracted to Morgan. Russo concludes the novel with a happy note that all have accepted Morgan's true self, for which she yearned for years. Letting the Morgans we meet in our life, live an authentic life will help them to be true to their own unique identity and to not adhere to the stereotypical expectations of the society.

The Hackney Portrayal

A preconceived notion is formed by reinforcing or reverberating a particular theme, ideology, aspect or view without any change in its central field of vision. Reinforcement purges our mind, soul and body with or without our knowledge. On the flip side, preconception is the outcome of unconscious learning at times. Certain facets and ideas are inscribed in our minds without our consciousness. Such notions are very strenuous to be changed or erased even if they are inexact. Considerably, there is a fixed presumption about men and transgenders about their emotions hitherto.

The crowd in today's world and down the age expects the hackney of gender roles to be well played. Specifically, society expects an individual to behave, groom and express themselves based on their gender. For instance, women are expected to be polite, nurturing and meek whereas, men are generally anticipated to be aggressive and bold, transgenders are expected to abide by ostracism. This stereotypical thought has made

mankind view their emotions through a pair of old hackney glasses.

A larger part of the crowd believes in the toxic masculinity and trans traits, which includes aggression, mental fitness, emotional insensitivity and much more. Chinua Achebe's narrative of Okonkwo's character in *Things Fall Apart* portrays the traits of toxic masculinity. The account of violence, physical power, aplomb, stoic behavior, merciless attitude and insensitivity to emotion has been showcased as the traits of a bloke. Okonkwo wants everyone to obey him and never lets his wives raise their voice. If raised, he beats them up casting out his aggressive and dominant nature. The toxic masculine trait of being insensitive to emotions wraps his humane feelings forever. He belonged to the Ibo culture, which encourages and expects boys to be very masculine right from a very young age. The Ibo culture believes that women should be ruled over by men. This is considered to be the most important trait of masculinity. Hence, Okonkwo refused to express the feeling of love to his wives and children. He had the fear of losing his masculine dignity and being shunned by his culture.

Chinua Achebe describes the character of Okonkwo as "Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness..." (Achebe 10). This description of Okonkwo's character holds up a transparent approach that fear, failure and defeat is not meant for a man. A contradictory question arises here. Does it mean that a man should stand still without any fall? Or does it criticize that a man cannot rise from a fall? However, a man is pictured neither as non-stoic nor serene. Be it the arrogant Okonkwo of *Things Fall Apart* or the kind-hearted beast of *Beauty and the Beast*

(1740), everywhere men are portrayed as fearless monsters and insensitive individuals to feelings like love and compassion. Right from fables to commercial advertisements, the term "typical man" points out to a strong, bold, fearless and at times even emotionless figures. Thus, the hackney portrayal of male is set to be fearless, dominant and inconceivably emotionless.

Eric, the major character of *Birthday*, is more interested in playing Guitar. But his passion towards music is diverted to play football, since a football scholarship is the only option to get him out of the little town Tennessee. Morgan's mother encourages him to walk down the lane of music. Morgan also attempts to encourage him by telling him that he is a talented guitarist, but he becomes upset and gives up, half the time muttering that it is a pointless exercise since music will not pay for his education. "It's a lot of stress to have a whole town putting their hopes on you every week, especially in a town like this, where athletic scholarships are the only way out for a lot of us" (Russo 180). So, Eric chose football though he was more interested in music. He strives hard for his recognition throughout the novel. Thus the societal pressure dumbs the thought of giving up their true self and are forced to accept the stereotypical norms of the society.

Morgan wants to be a girl and he secretly buys cosmetic kits from local shops after so many storms of inner thoughts. He feels so happy for himself, as a girl. It gives him self-confidence. "There is a surge of vertigo as I realize *this* is what it's like to bridge the gap between me-the-body and me-the-self.....- I feel clean for the first time in years" (Russo 138).

Transgender individuals may experience a sense of absurdity and alienation in their lives due to the mismatch between their gender identity and the societal expectations and norms associated with the gender they were assigned at birth. In the battle of living up to the expectations of the society, they lose their authenticity.

Authenticity of Men and Transgenders under the Shell

Men and transgenders do have emotions, unlike the stereotypical thought that only women have freedom for emotional space. There is nothing wrong in a bloke exaggerating about his feelings. Love, compassion, fear, grief and happiness are some of the innate emotions of mankind regardless of gender. Though emotions vary based on gender, a visible injustice or toxic ideology is found in the societal expectation regarding the masculine and trans traits.

People tend to forget that gender stereotypes affect an individual mentally. This leads to sexism, unequal treatment due to gender. In reference to gender stereotypes, physical appearance and personality traits are the basic hackneys to be broken.

A person need not be valiant and brave simply because he is a man. Ere being a man, he is a human who has the right to experience and express. Emotional expression is of utmost importance for a jubilant and affable life but, the sad reality of male emotions will be the lump in your throat. Bluntschli of George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* is a soldier, expected to be brave and strong by the readers.

Down that waterpipe! Stop! Wait! I can't! I darent! The very thought of it makes me giddy. I came up it fast enough with death behind me. But to face it now in cold blood---! It's no use: I give up: I'm beaten. Give the alarm. (He drops his head on his hands in the deepest dejection) (Shaw 24; Act 1)

Since he was scared to get down the pipe, it does not mean that success and valiance are away from his vicinity neither does it bring down his masculinity. Fear arises due to unexpected and unwilling circumstances. Considering this as a shameful act, by itself is shameful. Bluntschli loves chocolate creams. He eats them without any fickle, when Raina offers him some. He carries chocolates to battles instead of cartridges and bullets. Gone are the days, when immature insights stated that chocolates are meant for girls. It is of unsound mind to think chocolates are not of males. Hence, it is completely unaffected to state that men can have tender feelings.

A person may experience discomfort if their authentic self and their gender identity do not match. This is known as Gender Dysphoria. Gender Dysphoria is a condition in which an individual experiences significant distress or discomfort as a result of a mismatch between their gender identity and the sex they were assigned at birth. It can manifest in a variety of ways, such as feeling a strong desire to be treated as the opposite gender, feeling a strong aversion towards one's own primary and or secondary sex characteristics, or feeling a sense of disconnection from one's own body.

Some Trans people experience mental health problems due to societal expectations and

failure in recognizing their true self. However for some, gender identity and mental health are intertwined. In most of the cases, this is not because of being a transgender, rather, it is because of the prevalent social stigma. "In this moment, I hate him for being a part of my life. Him and Dad- if I didn't care what they thought about me, if I weren't so desperately afraid of losing them, I'd be that much closer to freedom. I wish they would disappear"(Russo 190). This is particularly true if they feel their authentic selves would not be welcomed by those close to them. Overcoming such ostracization is a process that takes time and effort. It is not easy but with compassion and support, it is possible to move forward and build a fulfilling and satisfying life. This fear can stem from a lack of acceptance and understanding of transgender identities, as well as the potential for negative consequences such as harassment, violence, and loss of employment or housing. Ostracism can lead to isolation, anxiety and depression and can prevent transgender individuals from fully expressing their gender identity. It can also prevent them from accessing healthcare and other resources that are essential for their well-being.

People consign to oblivion at times that men and transgender are human too. The hardships and sufferings of women are being brought to public attention whereas, the very same path of a bloke is seldom known. Rape was considered to be a sexual violence or crime done by men against women in the bygone age. This is because only a very few are brought to the top-spot. The rest remains obscure. Today, the male victims find it difficult to voice out due to the stereotypical depiction of masculinity. Researches about male rape started in the year 1980. The pivot of these studies is the male victims. The two different forms of male rape are male-on-male and female-on-male. Neither of them has been noticed by the public-eye. Men do endure distress and pain. They have all the rights to express what they go through under the sun.

Conclusion

Men, who can shed blood for his children, society and the nation, have all the rights to shed tears himself. The stereotypical knots should be untied and everyone under the sky

should perceive that, it is not unmanly for a man to cry. Restricting one's emotions will lead to physical and psychological effects. Peer pressure and societal fear drags down the male victims from equity and impartial justice. A psychotherapist discloses "males have the added burden of facing a society that doesn't believe rape can happen to them...at all" (Donovan).

To accentuate freedom for transgender individuals, it is important to advocate laws and policies that protect their rights and provide them equal opportunities. An inclusive and accepting environment in all areas of society, including workspaces, schools, and communities should be created. If not, the society will lead them to a pit of alienation, disconnection and a sense of not being understood and accepted. They may also feel a sense of disconnection from their own body. Transgender individuals face significant discrimination and marginalization, including lack of legal recognition and access to appropriate healthcare, harassment and violence.

Social exclusion will remain as a bruise forever, a bruise which cannot be healed. Be it a man or a Trans, the fear of being ostracized will drag them from their authentic-self. Survivors restrict themselves since there are less lending hands than pointing fingers. Every individual should etch the veracious thought in their minds that, be it a rape or a restricted emotion, many bold voices remain meek and unvoiced. Embracing arms is the only way out.

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