

Between Feminism and Masculinity: Understanding the Role of Men in Feminist Theorizing

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Abstract

A prevailing approach in the study of feminism is the focus on the oppressive nature of masculine thinking. Most feminist studies focus on the exclusionary dimension of masculine theorizing which results in the suppression of the feminine imaginary. Within this grammar, masculinity is understood as a dominant theoretical view that prevents the recognition of the feminist voice. Because of this, the role of men in feminist theorizing is approached from the standpoint of suspicion since the insights derived from the masculine perspective represent a privileged position, a limited and exclusionary way of presenting reality. This essay explores alternative views in order to expand the role of men in theorizing. Moreover, this essay asserts that the agonistic tension between masculine thinking which emphasizes theoretical unity and coherence, and feminist thinking which emphasizes otherness and difference can be beneficial not only for feminist theorizing but for theoretical conceptualization in general. The agonistic tension can reshape the trajectory of theorizing.

Keywords: feminism, masculinity, manhood, women's identity, agonism

Introduction

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The struggle of women for recognition is almost antithetical to the concept of masculinity. The masculine perspective is considered responsible for the exclusion of the feminist voice in the philosophical and theoretical domain. It is due to this that the feminist struggle is unable to consider the role of men and masculine thinking other than its privileging of universal ideals that leads to objectification and exclusion. Any inclusion of men or masculine perspective in feminist discourse is always a suspect in that there is the assumption that the discussion will be hostage by masculine thinking where the discourse will be framed in the perspective of men.

The tendency of masculine thinking to dominate the discursive field is represented in a position that is referred to as masculinism. It is a view opposite feminism and is characterized by “pervasive patriarchal ideologies of masculine cultural dominance.”¹ Masculinism normalizes male domination which results to various forms of oppression and exploitation particularly of women.² Through such dominance, women in particular loses power and consequently their rightful place within the discursive arena.

The predominance of masculinism, thus, rendered masculine thinking always antithetical to feminism. The constant threat of masculinism has defined the feminist struggle as one that puts into constant scrutiny the perspectives that prevent women’s realization of their identity. The critical feminist approach challenges masculinism’s myopic representation of reality. By doing so, it prevents masculine thinking from dominating the theoretical discourse to avoid the problem of women considered as either a non participant or one that is given secondary importance.

However, the suspicion directed toward the masculine perspective has created an unproductive relationship between masculinism and feminism where masculine thinking is exclusively associated with the suppression of the feminist voice. It creates a gap that renders masculinity and feminism in constant antagonistic

¹ A.L. Bain and C. Arun-Pina, “Maculinism” in International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (Second Edition), 2020. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/masculinism>.

² Catherine J. Nash, “Patriarchy,” in International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (Second Edition), 2020. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/masculinism>

tension. By defining the gap as unbridgeable, the antagonism has forestalled the important contribution of each framework to the overall theoretical trajectory.

It is within the problematic relation located in the theoretical discourse that this study was undertaken to explore a productive approach to understanding the relationship between feminism and masculinity. This essay will pursue the thesis that there is more to the antagonistic relationship between feminism and masculinity. By transforming the relation to one of agonism, masculinity and feminism can be seen as both contributing to the theoretical trajectory of their respective frameworks but in a productive tension that ensures the element of mutual correction.

The main claim of this study will be developed in three stages. The first part will show the conventional way of understanding masculinity which equates it with masculinism. This view is characterized with the suppression of the feminine voice. By moving away from the monopoly of masculine thinking, the element of the feminine can be recovered and the identity of women reclaimed. The next part will show that the rise of feminism has contributed to a rethinking of masculinity. There is also a counter effect on how masculinity is reshaped in the light of the feminist challenge. The reshaping rescues the masculine perspective from the limitations of masculinism and focuses more on deeply understanding the characteristics that should define manhood. The third part will show that the agonistic tension between masculinity and feminism can provide a productive approach to theorizing. This agonistic tension will illustrate that masculinity and feminism provide a mutual correction to the limitations of each other's theoretical views and ensure a holistic and expansive approach to theorizing.

Feminism as Shaping Women's Identity

The earlier version of feminism is primarily focused on the task of reclaiming women's identity. This undertaking which is geared towards the recovery of the feminine is a reaction to what is observed as the dominance of masculine thinking. The monopoly is subtle since it is masked in the assertion for equality where it is claimed that the

problem presented by women is a non-issue. In an ideal setting, men and women are treated as equals.³

Luce Irigaray, however, observed that in the theoretical formulations of equality, the reference point is always masculine. She refers to this persistent reference to the masculine as reflective of the Phallogentric Order. This means that as revealed in various discourses primarily in the psychoanalytic domain, the reference point is the phallus or the male organ. The phallogentric view is typified by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) when he characterized women's identity through his understanding of femininity. For him, femininity is premised on penis envy. Irigaray quotes Freud:

So we must admit that THE LITTLE GIRL IS THEREFORE A LITTLE MAN. A little man who will suffer a more painful and complicated evolution than a little boy in order to become a normal woman! A little man with a smaller penis. A disadvantaged little man. A little man whose libido will suffer greater repression, and yet whose faculty for sublimating instincts becomes weaker. Whose needs are less catered to by nature and who will yet have a lesser share of culture. A more narcissistic little man because of the mediocrity of her genital organs (?). More modest because ashamed of that unfavorable comparison. More envious and jealous because less well endowed. Unattracted to the social interest shared by men. A little man who would not have any other desire than to be, or remain, a man.⁴

Irigaray also observes that this phallogentric view is not just limited to the domain of psychoanalysis but the representation of reality in various discourses as well. It takes the form of logocentric thinking that privileges the abstract and transcendental. Phallogentric

³ The stress on equality is a main characteristic of the proposal from liberal feminism represented in the works of John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797). For a summary discussion see Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought A More Comprehensive Introduction*, 4th Edition (Charlotte: Westview Press, 2014) pp. 11-49.

⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Women*, Translated by Gillian Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 25.

thinking is, thus, represented in scientific thinking with an emphasis on absolute and objective truth. This notion of truth however is designed in such a way that it erases the important role of intuitions.⁵ As Irigaray would invoke the epistemologist of science's claim that "our subjective experiences or our personal opinions can never be used to justify statements."⁶ This generally means that masculine discourse excludes women's representation of reality based on the specificity of their experience.

Since there is an exclusion or erasure of women's perspective, male representation renders an incomplete grasp of reality. While masculine thinking has tended toward the search for objective knowledge and absolute truth, its representation of reality fails to account for the other dimensions, such as the material, the fluid, the different, and the relational. The problem is magnified because the masculine perspective does not only render a one-sided view but also assumes that it is the ultimate view of reality.⁷

Given the myopic framework characterized by masculine thinking, Irigaray argues for a reading of reality based on sexual difference. The idea of sexual difference would allow the recognition of a reality that is not simply based on the collective history of the male subject where women are being treated as inferior or secondary. In presenting reality based on sexual difference, there is a critical analysis of male dominance and an acknowledgment that women's identity can be independent of male perspective. In the recovery of women's identity, the dimensions such as materiality, passion, relationality, and common bond among women should also be valued.⁸

The feminist view forwarded by Irigaray is representative of a perspective that is premised on the treatment of masculinity or masculine thinking as an anti-thesis that needs to be overcome. This also means that the masculine project is always suspect as there is an inherent tendency to direct the discursive goal to favor the interest of men or to privilege masculine representation. This tendency has a

⁵ Luce Irigaray, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Translated by Gillian Gill (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 121.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 122-124.

⁷ Ian Clark Parcon, "Irigaray's Ethics of Sexual Difference: The Parousia of Femininity" in *Being Human: Selected Essays on the Philosophy of the Human Person*, Edited by R. Maboloc, I. Parcon, & R. Pilapil, pp. 100-110 (Davao City: Ateneo de Davao University Research and Publication, 2004), 104-105.

⁸ Parcon, 106-110.

general character of othering which is to treat women and the feminine as inferior to men and masculinity, or as something that is subsumed into the masculine perspective. It is for this reason that Stephen Heath makes a distinctive claim that “Men’s relation to feminism is an impossible one.”⁹ This reflection is contained in his discussion of male feminism.¹⁰ For Heath, the project of male feminism involves men’s engagement with feminism which always include “male positioning.”¹¹ What this refers to is that when men engages in projects related to feminism, they always carry a theoretical baggage which include their patriarchal biases where women are treated as objects to be studied and therefore to be controlled.¹² Given this, men’s inclusion in the feminist discourse creates a precarious situation because their presence will open the possibility for men to dominate the field of discussion and render the feminist voice silent.

Rethinking Masculinity

The emphasis on equating masculinity singularly with masculinism is a limited perspective. This perspective fails to recognize the contribution of the feminist position in shaping the understanding of the masculine viewpoint. This leads to the inability to take into consideration that the rise of the feminist movement has also been instrumental in the re-shaping of the understanding of manhood and masculinity.

Sam Keen and Robert Bly who have undertaken the project of rethinking the notion of manhood today, assert that the view of masculinity, manhood and manliness has also been affected by the current developments of the feminist movement. In re-examining the role of men in society, they have diagnosed several problems that have resulted from some misplaced and shortsighted representation of masculinity. This includes a dismissive attitude to attributes like gentleness and the capacity to care. Manliness is often associated with

⁹ Stephen Heath, “Male Feminism,” in *Men in Feminism*, Edited by Alice Jardine and Paul Smith. (London: Routledge, 1987), 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

being too detached to care, too insensitive, too violent, and attachment to power and authority.¹³

This view of manhood that Keen and Bly criticize includes many flaws associated with masculinity such as the propensity for violence, abuse of authority, and lacking of relational dimension. It is for this reason that many have lost trust in the dependability of men and masculine thinking to deal with the myriad of problems. Men are more of a problem than the source of the solution.

What Keen and Bly seek to provide is an alternative - a re-envisioned role of men. This perspective is geared towards a mature understanding of manhood. This means there should be a movement from raw force to a greater understanding of their social roles. What this requires is an internal balance that also incorporates the not-so-typical characteristics such as gentleness and compassion without fully surrendering the characteristics of authority and decisiveness. The invitation then is to see manhood in terms of harmony between fierceness and gentleness. This further means a greater emphasis on decisiveness rather than machismo. For Keen and Bly this maturation process is a movement from wildness to harmony.¹⁴

The same thrust of providing a better account of manhood is at the core of a re-reading of Plato provided by Allan Bloom. For Bloom, a key to the understanding of manhood is located in Plato's notion of courage as a virtue. The Greek word *adrea* which refers to man or manliness also means courage. This would further mean that courage is the primary virtue of manliness and such virtue best represents what manliness is.

Plato's idea of the virtue of courage is best explained in terms of the guardian or the warrior class, and the training that these groups of citizens undertake. The guardian class is defined by the virtue of courage. This virtue, however, is not isolated from other virtues such as wisdom and moderation. This means that there is a certain balance of characteristics associated with force and with gentleness. In the training of the guardian class, the harmony of the soul is emphasized. A proper understanding of the tension within the soul such as that of primitive courage or wildness is transformed towards a greater concern for the common good, the concern for the polis, and the

¹³ Sam Keen, *Fire in the Belly: On Being a Man* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), 3.

¹⁴ Sam Keen, *Fire in the Belly*, 289-290 and Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1990), 410-413.

movement from one's limited personal concerns to more political concerns.

This balance between force and gentleness takes a specific form where the spirited part is developed. It is the spirited part that distinguishes the guardian as a warrior class since it is described as a kind of willingness to fight, the kind of daring, and the capacity to rush to the defense of the city. The spirited part is important since it involves a particular tempering of the appetitive part by overcoming desires through the value of honor. The warrior class with the spirited trait can rise above the concerns of life (hunger, thirst, desire for sex) in their valuing of honor. The spirited part is responsible for the sense of savagery that can overcome desire but at the same time, link that lower part (desire) with the highest part (reason).¹⁵ Bloom describes the courage of the warrior class as a virtue governing and perfecting spiritedness, especially if spiritedness is coupled with reason and even appetite or desire.¹⁶

The balance between reason and appetite or desire is important because if the spirited part is not properly tempered by moderation, it can lead to excesses like violence or tyranny. Plato characterizes this balance as one that needs wisdom or guidance. Similar to the case of the city, wisdom is paralleled with the need for rulers like a ship in need of sailors. This is why the soul is also in need of wisdom to be able to direct the spirited and the appetitive part to the right direction.¹⁷

Plato emphasizes a kind of harmony of the soul or a kind of mastery over the less desirable part of the person. Plato uses the word stronger than oneself or master over oneself.¹⁸ It is this kind of harmony that provides unity in the soul similar to the unity in the city where the different classes in society's work as one in singing the same tune. This harmony should not, however, be mistaken as the merging of differences into a singular unity. In fact, Plato would emphasize that each one (the parts of the soul and the classes in society) should function according to its nature.¹⁹ Thus, this harmony

¹⁵ Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd edition, trans. Allan Bloom (USA: Harper Collins, 1968), 49-54.

¹⁶ Allan Bloom. Interpretative Essay in *The Republic of Plato*, 2nd edition, trans. Allan Bloom (USA: Harper Collins, 1968), 351-353.

¹⁷ Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 167-183.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

is a unity that respects differences in nature and the need for each nature not to infringe on the nature or function of the other. To summarize this unity that manifests the different virtues, Plato emphasizes that a good city then must be wise, moderate, courageous, and just.²⁰

Plato also emphasizes the importance of education in order to achieve this type of harmony. Education entails a developmental approach that involves gradual preparation of the soul for the right disposition. Education is also referred to as a kind of preservation that Plato uses to describe courage. He uses the analogy of dyed cloth wherein proper preparation through a gradual process involves the right mixture for proper absorption to happen. In other words, courage through preservation takes a slow and gradual process through education.²¹

This kind of education crucially involves especially in the earlier stages the training in music and gymnastics. These two crucial areas of study are important as a priority over the others (rhetoric and dialectic) since it prepares the soul for the right disposition. Both actually train the soul towards the truth. It is important to note here that part of the understanding of music involves a critique of the predominant literature of his time primarily the works of Homer.²²

The education that Plato envisions is an education that softens the spirited part and hardens the philosophical part.²³ This is attained through training in music and gymnastics and later in dialectic. The exposure to music gives the soul grace and harmony and even cosmic harmony that tempers the spirited part. Gymnastics on the other hand does not only lead to physical development but more importantly to the hardening of one's reason that Plato would consider as often weak. Education or training is also referred to as involving a harmony of the spirited and the gentle. This harmony involves tightening and strengthening.²⁴ It also involves the proper tension and relaxation. Gentleness is emphasized since, without gentleness, spiritedness can lead to brute force and savagery.²⁵ Bloom observes this harmony involves the proper understanding of Plato's work in *The Republic*,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

²² *Ibid.*, 82-91.

²³ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

²⁴ Plato, 122.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

that is Plato, after all, is concerned with reason but not reason alone. Education must be a mix of the rational element which tempers the wildness or harshness of the pre-philosophic and philosophical natures.²⁶ It is in this education as well where courage is transformed from the primitive courage of the warrior-guardian to the civil courage that concerns the common good. The idea of the common good as the direction of this courage is important to note. The harmony of the city is also, after all, manifested in the harmony of the soul. Thus, when Plato talks about the harmony, he talks of a model of manliness. Manliness or courage is organically connected with other virtues of moderation, wisdom, and the harmony of the three constitutes the ideal of manliness and consequently, the proper understanding of justice.

The virtue of courage that the guardian class seeks to attain is actually representative of Plato's general philosophy, which is to be understood as a way of dealing with the tension of opposites. For Plato, the different dimensions of the soul should not be subsumed into a singular perspective. There should be no collapsing of one to the other. This is the way to understand harmony that is more fluid and dynamic, rather than static. This static type of harmony is often associated with masculinity's attempt for unity and coherence.

The representation of manhood through the virtue of courage has clearly illustrated that masculinity should not be characterized only through the perspective of rigidity, abstraction, and exclusion. The harmony that courage seeks to develop in the understanding of manliness is one that respects individuality, boundaries, and tensions. It is a process that involves the development of virtue propelled by the self-reflection of men in their understanding of manhood.

The self-reflection on manhood by men and masculine theorists has therefore resulted in a decentered view of manhood²⁷ – one that does not revolve around the masculine imaginary as the main reference point but one that incorporates seemingly opposing views of feminism to provide a holistic representation of what manhood should be. This is the main position of Heath in reference to male feminism. Furthermore, this decentered view also involves man's constant self-reflection with regard to their role. This view is also an invitation to embrace the tensions that challenge the self-assurance of men's position in discourse. This has been the contribution of Keen, Bly, and

²⁶ Bloom, "Preface" in *The Republic of Plato*, xxii.

²⁷ Heath, 24.

Plato. They all recognize that the decentering of men involves greater thrust towards harmony, balance and therefore a broader perspective of coherence and unity.

The better account of manhood also salvages masculinity from its essentialism and therefore direct the discourse away from masculinism to the recovery of manhood. This means that the re-understanding of manhood also rehabilitated masculinity to free it from its excessive focus on universality, rigid coherence and unity, and immovable objectivity. In this regard, masculinity can be understood also as a project of redeeming manhood from its myopic lens to expand its perspective and strive for a holistic view.

Between Feminism and Masculinity²⁸

The tension between feminism and masculinity, therefore, is not a one-sided story. It should not only be limited to the effect of masculine theorizing on feminist discourse. It should also account for how the feminization of discourse has also contributed to the understanding of manhood and reshaped the trajectory of male theorizing. Given the need for equal consideration of these two sides of the tension, the relationship placed in agonistic relation rather than in antagonistic relation becomes an important contribution. Borrowing the insight of Chantal Mouffe, an antagonistic relationship is understood as treating the opposite framework as an enemy to be destroyed. By turning it into a relationship of agonism, the tension becomes one between two adversaries whose views might differ but their respective positions are considered legitimate.²⁹

The tension between feminism and masculine thinking, if understood from the perspective of agonism, can be a constructive discourse since it facilitates mutual correction. This means that it enhances the underdeveloped aspects of each stance or fills in the limits of each perspective. The mutual correction is already well represented in the feminist approach to masculine thinking where it

²⁸ The proposal to understand the tension between feminism and masculinity might be construed as a position towards dualism. However, given that the study is on the role of men in feminism, the tension that results from the relation involving men and women or feminism and masculinity is inevitable. By emphasizing on the tension, the trajectory is not towards simply maintaining the dualism but ensuring that the dual perspective has flexibility while also generating productive results.

²⁹ Mouffe, *Return of the Political* (Verso: 2005), 4.

renders the latter vulnerable to the excesses of universalization. Since excessive universalization can lead to problems of abstraction, objectivity, and exclusion, the role of feminism is to ensure that male forms of representation become decentered, therefore more considerate in the recognition of plurality, specificity, intuitions, and other feminine forms of representation.

The decentering of male thinking, however, should not put aside the value that is inherent in the masculine perspective. This is the importance of coherence and unity rather than objectivity and universality. The thrust of masculine thinking towards greater theoretical coherence and unity should not be surrendered albeit understood in a decentered way where men are not the center. In other words, it is a movement towards coherence and unity that does not lead to absolute and unchallenged truths.

Meanwhile, the thrust of the feminist perspective is more than just preventing the problem of othering brought about by the myopic masculine representation. This means more than considering the masculine representation as an enemy to be resisted. In its reshaped form, male theorizing is an adversary to contend with. This means the recognition of the coherence and unity that masculine thinking brings to the table but constantly challenging it from the perspective of otherness and difference. The role of feminist theorizing should still be one of constant scrutiny and interrogation. Any movement that is poised towards unity and coherence should be challenged, especially when these movements actually lead to exclusion and distorted representations of reality. This is particularly true for both masculinism and feminism as social movements. Both shared a tendency to become essentialist by either silencing or subsuming the opposing view or by preventing the recognition of plurality within its position.

Feminist theorizing should never put aside the value of coherence and unity. This means that the emphasis it assigns on otherness and difference should be towards equal recognition of how the identity of women as other and different should be shaped in contexts where it can arrive at some points of synthesis reflective of some coherence and unity without necessarily resulting in permanence and lack of flexibility. This means that the position of feminism should be one that avoids essentialism by recognizing the

position of Irigaray that Margaret Whitford (1947-2011) affirmed that feminist views and perspectives are always plural and diverse.³⁰

Chantal Mouffe's contextualization of the agonistic tension can expound on the insight relevant to the understanding of feminism. The conventional view of feminism is caught in the trap of identity politics that seek to navigate the tension between gendered and neutral views. Mouffe provided a view of feminism that is situated within the social movement milieu. For her, instead of understanding feminism in identitarian terms, it is more constructive to view feminism in terms of its contribution to social movement politics. Such a movement should move away from defining feminism based on women as women. What she proposes is a reconstruction of identity based on identification. The identification point is defined based on social roles and anchored on social ideologies and primary of which is the experience of subordination. This understanding of feminism should put a premium on the role of power in how it shapes identity as the oppressed and provides an alternative to move out of the oppressive situation. This shared consciousness is what allows women to identify with other women and thus providing a performative role where resisting subjects are brought to the fore. It also facilitates how women can provide a venue for greater collaboration with other women.³¹

The tension, therefore, between feminism and masculinity has allowed the reshaping and deepening of both their respective positions. The reshaping entails that both positions have to move out of their essentialist perspective. In the part of masculinity, this means moving away from conventional self assurance of manhood towards greater recognition of their vulnerability and decentered position. For feminism, this means moving away from preoccupation with identity that fails to account for the plurality of women's voices. The deepening would mean that in each of their respective positions, the reshaped understanding of feminism and masculinity both actually seek to

• ³⁰ Margaret Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine* (London: Routledge, 1991), 11. For an elaborate discourse on the plurality of feminism see Jennifer Curtin and Heather Devere, "Plurality of Feminism," *Political Science* 45, 1 (1993): 6-26 <https://doi.org/10.1177/003231879304500102>

³¹ Mouffe, "Hegemony and Ideology in Gramsci," in *Chantal Mouffe: Hegemony, radical democracy, and the political*, edited by James Martin, 15-44 (London: Routledge, 2013), 53.

combat in different ways and in different forms the faces of patriarchy and patriarchal perspective.

Conclusion

The approach to feminism particularly to the understanding of feminist theorizing entails a rethinking. The long-standing emphasis on seeing masculine thinking as the enemy and therefore as something that should be shunned and resisted has some limitations. What is needed is a rethinking of the relationship between feminism and male theorizing that would contribute to the expansion of the theoretical horizon.

The essay so far has shown that the contribution of understanding feminism based on reclaiming women's identity has provided an important impetus for the feminist movement. The need to emphasize sexual difference allowed women to resist the patriarchy inherent in masculinism. It has also allowed women to reinstate their place in the discursive field. However, the thrust of feminism that focuses solely on resisting masculinism is also overshadowed by the singular insistence of treating men as an enemy rather than an adversary. This necessitates the reshaping of the understanding of the relation between men and women, of feminism and masculinity. This also entails reshaping the view of masculinity away from the theoretical self-assurance of manhood that renders only a limited view of reality. The view of manhood should be based on virtue that is holistic but at the same time one that values tensions. It is a view of manhood that is decentered.

This essay has argued that the relation between feminism and masculinity should be transformed from one of antagonism which leads to the eradication or subsumption of the other to one of agonism where the opposing framework is seen as equal adversary. This is a productive approach since it renders the two frameworks legitimate albeit in an agonistic tension that prevents the dominance of one over the other.

This rethinking provides a recognition of both the values of feminine thinking geared towards difference, plurality, and masculine thinking geared towards coherence and unity. Neither one should be privileged. Instead, it should be seen as a constant tension where the opposing views continuously correct each other and enhance the opposition of the other views. Only through this can an expansive

framework be ensured and a dynamic, as well as vibrant theoretical trajectory, be provided.

The equal recognition of both masculinity and feminism's contribution re-affirms the important role of men in feminist theorizing. Men should be considered not as an enemy but as an adversary. This means that men's perspective brings an important contribution to feminism. Other than the shared task with feminism to combat the ill effects of patriarchy, masculinity in a reshaped version constantly reminds feminism to avoid the limits of an essentialist perspective and therefore affirm the importance of plurality and difference. Moreover, it also prompts feminism of its important task of critical scrutiny where the position of men in feminist theorizing should be constantly examined of the theoretical baggage of patriarchy. Furthermore, men's role should also be a reminder for feminism that the focus on plurality and difference should never be pursued at the expense of the thrust towards theoretical coherence and unity.

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