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DOI:10.29052/2413-4252.v9.i1.2023.1-3

Citation: Sarfraz H. They Are Not Just Jokes: Impact of Sexist Humor on Women Empowerment. *IJWE*. 2023; 9(1):01-03

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Funding: The author(s) received no specific funding for this work.

Conflicts of Interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Received 12/03/2023

Accepted 14/09/2023

First Published 01/12/2023

Editorial

They Are Not Just Jokes: Impact of Sexist Humor on Women Empowerment.

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Abstract

The article discusses the prevalence and impact of sexist jokes on women, highlighting their occurrence in various forms of media and entertainment. It explores the stereotypes perpetuated by such humor and its contribution to shaping societal perspectives over time. The harmful effects of disparagement humor on women's mental health and the connection between sexist jokes and discriminatory behavior are examined. The text emphasizes the need to discourage and replace such humor to foster a more inclusive and positive environment for women. It calls for a shift in narratives that empower women rather than perpetuating stereotypes that undermine their capabilities and worth.

Keywords

Sexism, Jokes, Gender Stereotypes, Discrimination, Social Roles.

No matter who we are and where we live, we all have, at least once in our lives, heard a sexist joke. People are seen cracking jokes on women; on their dressing, the way they work, their intelligence, vehicle driving, etc. These jokes are mostly centered around how women are incapable of doing things the right way or how women are good at ruining the task given to them¹. The jokes are not only limited to the work done by them but also associated with their social roles; as daughters, sisters, mothers, and majorly wives. Wives are generally the ones who are most defamed, and husbands in these puns are illustrated as the responsible, wiser, and compromising party. Below are some of the referred puns:

"The average women would rather have beauty than brains because the average man can see better than he can think."

"Question: how do you know when a woman is about to say something smart? Answer: When she starts her sentence with, 'A man once told me.'"

"Women can be really sexist but just like everything else, men are better at it."

Jokes like these have been a center of humor in theaters, stand-up comedy, movies, and television sitcoms. Even many known comedians of Pakistan gained fame by sexist humor. The internet is also full of sexist jokes. These jokes majorly include belittling, hostile, and benevolent sexist humor. Studies have also found a relationship between sexism and mental issue symptoms as men who deal with stress and anxiety are also involved in benevolent sexism because by this they get a chance to justify gender inequality by glorifying traditional subordinate positions of women².

This form of humor not just objectifies women, but it also gives birth to stereotype women as a specific category or group. In some cultures, these jokes have been so rooted that not even females feel the sense of offense while listening to these. It is not just abusing women intentionally, but this humor has affected and shaped our perspective over time. For centuries, we have been listening to jokes on

the dumbness of women and how incapable they are when it comes to decision-making. This has transformed into a belief, and not only men but also women use these jokes as a reference to sideline women from such situations and give priority to men. It is validated that disparagement humor exposes people to higher prejudice and puts them into more frequent discriminatory events³.

Sexist humor is not always harmless for every woman; some women do not enjoy it⁴. Women face this hardship at their homes, public places, and workplaces, and it has been discovered that the men who tell sexist jokes are five times more likely to be involved in harassing women⁴. This sexism is playing a drastic role feeding the misogynist culture of societies which further leads towards oppressing the female gender. An example of this statement is that there are millions of jokes on the bad driving of women, and it has been observed that women are also hesitant to drive a vehicle as they fear people's judgment and failure⁵, but on the contrary, a study conducted at Newcastle University in England showed that women are good vehicle drivers than men⁶. The women who stand against these odds face difficulty in reaching their goals due to this sexism. They have to face so much discouragement and a lack of support that it leads to shattering their self-confidence and they start to doubt themselves⁷.

Labeling women through these jokes is used in both ways. Some use it as light humor, and others do it to victimize women by targeting them with such puns. These jokes may be funny for men, but they become less amusing and more offensive for women⁸. This has become a form of symbolic violence, where the victim has to let go of the abuse in the name of fun, which can actually make sexist messages more dangerous and difficult to confront than a serious comment⁹. Publicly bashing someone has a terrific impact on their emotional and mental health because when gender discriminatory remarks are expressed through humor, they are easily denied by the abuser (of symbolic violence) because humor is a way to

create a cozy environment for expressing their toxic and prejudiced thoughts⁴.

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We need to call for discouragement towards glorifying the humor that ridicules or mocks the personality and capabilities of women because it is difficult to grow and cultivate in an aloof environment. If we want women to prosper, then we need to replace our stories and jokes with those in which women are not shown as weak, dumb, or dependent beings. To create motivation and a positive attitude in women, it is a prerequisite to avoid sexist comments so that women may have a sense of belongingness and they feel associated and welcomed in various situations.

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