

Internet Memes and Normalisation of Sexism in the time of Covid-19

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Abstract: In the time of Covid-19, the stay-at-home orders to contain the spread of the virus forced most people to remain indoors for the first time in contemporary history. As the patriarchal machines retreated to the home and were sitting still, the hegemonic domination within the domestic space did not pause, rather it found an outlet in virtual space. With more people spending significantly longer time online than ever before, it was also a time when many of them were openly prepared to share sexist memes and jokes, which indicates a public acceptability of casual sexism. In this article, we explore the sexist content of 35 online memes. Our focus here is on individual will and action of men and women rather than structural sexism in online space. Our analysis demonstrates that sexist memes and jokes during the pandemic reinforced patriarchy even when it retreated to domestic space and continued to dehumanise women as sexual objects and devalue their abilities. Implications of such jokes and humour are discussed.

Keywords: Internet memes, sexist jokes, humour, casual sexism, online misogyny, social media, Covid-19, pandemic, feminism

Introduction

Though unprecedented in contemporary history, most people—men, women, and transgender—were forced to remain indoors for the most part of 2020 due to Covid-19 pandemic. Staying with family for such a long stretch of time was unique. Yet, instead of human solidarity developing, the internet culture came out to be more frequently sexist and misogynistic than before, with a wide range of stories, messages, images, and videos being posted every day despising women and transgender people. The sheer persistence of online sexism in the form of internet memes was staggering. Interestingly, these sexist acts were no longer done by some unknown abusers hiding behind a virtual screen but living in the comfort of their homes and displaying their names and identities without making any attempt to mask themselves. It suggests that the modern day sexism and misogyny in online platforms became even more normalised, or the “new normal”, during the pandemic.

At the outset, we need to clarify what online sexism is and how it reproduces contemporary gender regimes in an increasingly mediatised society. Though the term “sexism” is generally defined as “prejudice or discrimination based on sex or gender, especially against women and girls”¹, in recent times it has also been used to include the oppression of transgender people. In a world rife with sexism, many people are now openly expressing insensitive, derogatory or biased sexism online. The manifestations of sexism vary widely depending on the landscape of their operation. Sometimes they can be blatant, when the production of difference based on sex or gender is violent, or sometimes they can be subtle, when it is wrapped in “humour” and “joke”. Nonetheless, all sexist manifestations share the characteristic that they are deeply rooted in patriarchy.

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Apparently, stereotyping and misogyny ingrained in memes are a minor issue. When these sexist acts or views are pointed out or challenged, the usual response is that it is “just for fun” or “haven’t you got a sense of humour?” Such a euphemistic reaction sends the message that it is a trivial or harmless thing, and the often spontaneous nature of subtler sexism makes it even harder for the victims to be not taken seriously. It is too often a matter of interpretation, and so the perpetrators can easily claim misinterpretation excuses. There is also a strong tendency to view sexism as an opinion, which in effect leads to the conclusion that anyone is entitled to their sexist beliefs and expressions. All these suggest that there is a public acceptability of sexism, and the expectation is that the women should stop complaining and accept it as a joke. After several decades of feminist struggles, many people started to acknowledge the problem of sexism, but the age of the social media has changed the direction. When the social media was introduced, only a handful of people would show sexist aggressions against women, but they would try to hide behind masks. Over time, things have changed. The instantaneous and unrestricted reach provided by the social media allows latent and underlying sexism to appear, and now sexism, misogyny, and patriarchy are again getting more ingrained, especially in many users’ everyday online behaviour without much fuss from either men or women.

In the pre-Covid times, the issue of casual sexism was focused primarily on minor sexist aggressions on the streets and public places, which are the sites of ‘real’ incidents, it has now moved virtual for women. The traditional outer spaces—where patriarchal machines are fully operational—have little, but increasingly expanding, spaces for women. In contrast, women in general have a strong presence in newly emerging virtual social spaces as they tend to use social media more than men². Due to such a high level of women’s participation, the virtual social spaces can potentially offer a more inclusive “public sphere” than as originally conceived by Habermas (1989). Yet, they are far away from becoming inclusive, as masculinity is found deeply embedded within the internet culture. In the digital age, online sexism, being an integral part of modern patriarchal knowledge reproduction systems, has strong consequences for women and transgender people in both virtual space and community. When women and transgender people are either idealised or dehumanised in online platforms, new restrictions and limitations are imposed on their bodies and their lives. It creates new processes of othering and exclusion which push those groups to the margin. This is why it is important to reflect properly on the ideological functions of online sexism in maintaining masculine domination.

In this article, we explore the sexist nature of 35 internet memes that were produced and shared in the social media during the pandemic. Our focus here is on individual will and action of men and women rather than structural sexism of virtual space. Through discourse analysis, we examine the manifestations of gender stereotypes and cultural norms in memes and explore how they contribute to masculine pleasure and dilemmas.

Memes, sexism and social distancing

In recent years, the virtual space has grown enormously and has become one of the main sites for reproducing and circulating sexist jokes that belittle women and trivialise unequal social relations under the guise of benign amusement. Many people casually post offensive memes about women and transgender people. Given the social media’s ever-

expanding and essential presence in our daily life, the relationship between communication technology and sexism is coming under more scrutiny than ever before. Some communication scholars have explored the intersection between gender and power online (Herring 2008; Foster 2015). The meme-terrain grew on the back of the technological developments that transformed the way people share jokes, and the mostly anonymous nature of memes is partly a reason for their success.

Lockdown, quarantine and other measures taken by the government to contain the spread of Covid-19 accelerated memes' move into the mainstream internet culture in Bangladesh. Though not a new phenomenon, memes drew renewed attention and emerged as a form of digital mass media during the pandemic due to the unprecedented expansion of social media. However, this enormous change also facilitated the spread of hegemonic masculinities. It was a new development in the sense that many young people, previously confined to private or closed groups, found new outlets to forge their patriarchal ideas in the form of online networks and then spread and live those in the real world. Interestingly, a large part of the distributed memes were visibly hostile toward marginalised people, including women, who form a huge section of their audience. A set of memes were transphobic, some even went as far as questioning whether they were really human beings. These manifestations show that sexist memes place real and imagined barriers based on sex or gender to exclude these people from enjoying the internet's original emancipatory promises. Instead of giving voice to the voiceless or developing inclusive digital spaces, governed by the ideals of democratic, openness and transparency, it unleashes a new path rooted in the online platforms for the growth of gender-based inequality.

To explain the reasons behind the recent explosion of sexist memes, it is important to look at the processes through which memes communicate meanings. Memes work broadly through the processes of appropriation and recontextualisation. In the usual lifecycle of memes, a harmless image or idea is appropriated and then repositioned in a new context to make maximum impact. Memes, ideal for visually communicating lighter content, are not funny unless they are recontextualised. However, pulling a benign image or idea out of its specific context and placing it in front of a much larger audience allows it to acquire a new meaning, something that is potentially dangerous and chaotic. This is usually the case because the debasement that occurs reflects certain negative values of the dominant ideologies. A reverse recirculation is also possible, as exemplified by the counter-culture memes carrying feminist and anti-racist messages. However, those attempts have so far been marginal in the history of memes.

Memes communicate meaning by virtue of generating humour and laughter. To be able to pass off as humorous is a key criterion for the memes' reproducibility. Being a new entry in the tradition of humour, memes play a similar social function as humour: they are simultaneously uniting and divisive social activity (Fine 1976; Meyer 2000). Memes, just like jokes and humour, decrease social distance (Coser 1959); play an important role in uniting interlocutors (Coser 1959; Fine 1976; Meyer 2000); have participants in 'agreement about the social world' (Critchley 2002). While jokes and humour aid in social affiliation and group formation, memes focus more on differentiation, rather than on the social. Memes' lifecycle is premised on endless hierarchical distinctions, making them divisive and capable of generating and reinforcing social boundaries, social

distance, and inequalities (Billig 2005; Meyer 2000). To further elucidate how sexist memes reproduce deeply embedded masculine worldview, we argue that the main tendency of a meme is rarely to capture the complexities of social relations, but to ridicule them, which can be utilised to target, discipline, marginalise, and alienate groups and individuals who are ‘othered’ (Billig 2005; Lockyer and Pickering 2005; Weaver 2011; Pérez 2017). Hence, sexist memes propagate marginalised positions for gender ‘other(s)’ by reinforcing the existing societal power imbalance. Critchley (2002) elaborates that most humour “... in no way seeks to criticise the established order or change the situation in which we find ourselves... much humour seeks to confirm the status quo either by denigrating a certain sector of society, as in sexist humour, or by laughing at the alleged stupidity of a social outsider”. Thus, humour can play a “socially normative role” (Butler 2015) by ridiculing an individual’s identity or behaviour.³ Given that the joke-sharing practices utilise sexist and racist content, sexually inappropriate, misleading, and offensive language and imagery every day (Castella, 2011) to elicit positive emotional reactions like joy and laughter, online jokes embody a strong potential to offend rather than entertain (Lockyer and Pickering 2005). “Ironic poisoning”, or online ironic memes having realworld consequences, sometimes violent, is also a matter of growing concern among digital media scholars⁴. If we consider historic and continued inequities and discriminations against women, it will make more sense why the jokes in which men ridicule women are more consequential, socially and politically, than those in which women ridicule men.

Memes problematise the issue of sexism, making its manifestations generally seem inevitable, a historical, culturally transcendent and uniform. Thus, sexism does not remain context-specific, and nobody is required to take responsibility for it. Again, they also appear to be ideas of isolated individuals, not a tool of social domination.

Fraser (2013) has offered a balanced feminist remedy to sexism which she formulates as “a two-dimensional mode of subordination, rooted simultaneously in the political economy and status order of capitalist society”. For women, she argues, sexism results in trivialising, objectifying, and demeaning stereotypical depictions, exclusion or marginalisation from public spheres, and denial of full rights and equal protections of citizenship. She calls these harms ‘injustices of misrecognition’ and contends that they are relatively independent of political economy. Thus, Fraser (2013) proposes that remedying sexism requires eliminating sexist stereotypes and breaking the cultural association of breadwinning with masculinity and a “feminist politics of redistribution”.

Men’s retreat to homes and the feeling of unease

From the last week of March 2020, the government of Bangladesh instructed the cessation of all public events, religious, political and cultural gatherings, and all educational institutions and other public engagements were shut down, with majority of the people who devoted most of their time in the public moving back into the domestic spaces for an uncertain period. Governmental and non-governmental organisations were on general holidays from March 27, 2020 through May 26, 2020, before starting to reopen with restrictions. As many male world leaders adopted the war metaphors to describe the COVID-19 threats, the female prime minister of Bangladesh also embraced the rhetoric—a terminology that largely excludes women—before laying out plans to fight the challenges of the pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic caused a global interruption of unprecedented nature and initiated a Working from Home (WFH) work culture across the world. In an opinion piece, Nasreen (2020) have explored how this great shift of workplace had different implications for men and women. It was a time when the whole family was forced to stay indoors for a long stretch of time. However, it was difficult for many men to accept being forced to remain indoors as they were not used to consider home as men's domain. The WFH times, when mostly middle-class families must manage without their domestic helps, encouraged men to share the burden of domestic work more equitably than they did in the past (Deshpande 2020). Since in South Asian countries, especially in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, the most unequal norms of sharing domestic chores and housework have been observed (Deshpande and Kabeer 2019), the WFH situation could fuel little changes in the domestic work-sharing culture for most men. While bored and angry men sitting at home found an outlet in virtual social space to express themselves, women had to accept additional burden of caring for more people and for longer hours during the lockdown on top of their regular WFH and managing daily chores⁵.



Figure 1: “5 days at home listening to wife” (collected from Twitter)

The Figure 1 shows a man with disproportionately long ears with a text caption overlaid: “5 days at home listening to the wife”. This meme went viral in social media during the early days of Covid-induced lockdown. It forges the idea that a woman is so nagging and annoying that the husband's ears grew oversized just after listening to her constant complaining for five days. Such memes made people laugh and received thousands of ‘like’ or ‘love’ reactions on Facebook and Twitter. Though this meme apparently seems funny, it is not power-neutral, rather it is dehumanising and insulting for women. It plays into the power imbalance between women and men, a kind of a sexist politics⁶. Indian film star Rishi Kapoor shared the meme on Twitter, adding the caption: “On a lighter note! Side effects of the Coronavirus”. It did not go down well with some users who labelled it misogynistic and sexist⁷.

The lockdown was frustrating not just for men but people across the gender spectrum. In the memes, however, it was almost always the men who were getting bored and losing interest in everything there was at home – watching television, playing indoor games, or communicating with friends and families via digital platforms. Men’s reluctance to engage in household chores often received celebratory treatment in the memes. In contrast, women overloaded with additional household responsibilities for the pandemic became the subject of ridicule and laughter. These trend was well exemplified in the memes about men showing discomfort in household tasks like cooking, cleaning, washing and so on. We found memes in which the man was seen threatening to divorce his wife for requested him to help her with washing clothes, which is traditionally considered a women’s job. Suchmemes often portray a wife’s request for help as nagging in order to undermine the request and belittle what women are trying to say.



Figure 2: “Maintain good relationship with your wife. It seems new lockdown is coming soon”. (collected from Facebook)

A set of memes present a view of gender relations in which women are perceived as seeking to control men in an altered situation. While the demand of staying at home all day long goes against the masculine characterisation of men as strong, superior and breadwinner, as the conventional gender relations associate women to the home and men to the outside world, it was expected during the lockdown that neither should go out. But it was difficult for men to lock their masculine supremacy inside home. Hence, men are shown in memes to be desperate for breaking out of their homes, sometimes a metaphor of prison for them with women as the warden, instead of trying to reorient themselves in

their new roles at home in a lockdown situation. As a meme goes, a male police officer stops a man and asks why he is outside during lockdown, the man responds that his wife have thrown him out. In response, the officer asks if she is his real wife. The officer sympathises with the man's situation and accepts his excuse, and thus their masculinity is reinforced at his wife's expense. Here, the wife exercises power over the man who is frightened of her at home. Moreover, another set of memes highlighted the sufferings of men at home and their helpless efforts to adjust. Some memes were even asking women to be polite, accommodating and submissive to men so that their life at home became bearable. Here is a meme (Figure 2) that takes it even further with the wife being visibly violent at her husband's reluctance to cope with the new situation. The text overlaid in Figure 2 says, "Maintain good relationship with your wife. It seems new lockdown is coming soon". Here, the woman is portrayed as cruel, ruthless and dictatorial. It also hints at how painful an experience it is for a man to remain confined at home with the wife 24 hours a day. Married men after all are not socially expected of spending the entire day with the person they married. So the frustration finds expressions in memes that suggest some men prefer contracting the virus over remaining confined with the wife and children.

As the patriarchal machines retreated to the home, the hegemonic domination within the domestic space did not pause, rather it found an outlet in virtual space. With more people spending significantly longer time online than ever before, it was these frustrations that they vent out on Facebook in the form of openly sexist jokes. Though these memes may seem just a reaction to the new realities of the pandemic that have shaken conventional masculinities, they are not new but a condensation of earlier patterns or trends of sexism.

Mocking women's body and self in memes

Quarantine or lockdown was a whole new experience for both men and women. Many men adapted to the new situation by expressing amusement at sexist memes and jokes, which would help them appear more masculine and distance themselves from traits they did not want to be known for. A research conducted by the Center on Gender Equity and Health of the University of California San Diego showed that there was a substantial increase in the daily percentage of misogynistic tweets during the pandemic⁸. At the initial stage of the lockdown, a set of memes directed at women's body emerged, with some brooding over how women and girls were getting ugly while the others preoccupied with how "sexier" they would become for the lockdown. For the former group, the general arguments were like: because women and girls were staying home and not making usual efforts to look beautiful, they were getting ugly. When they would come out of the lockdown and get out of home, nobody would be able to recognise them. Some memes extended even further and suggested that women and girls would gain weight sitting idle at home, and some poked fun at feminine helplessness by showing that women grow facial hairs and look ugly after weeks of quarantine with no beauty parlour open. Not that men were immune to these lockdown realities, but they were rarely portrayed to gain fat or grow facial hairs. Here, negative body talk and shaming of women for the way they look are the tools of imposing patriarchal bodily control over women. For the latter group, women would become slimmer and more beautiful by losing body fat due to the reality of working extra hard to manage household chores on their own in absence of any domestic help for the lockdown. While these memes point to

the invisible labour in the women's household works, they simultaneously discourage men from sharing housework by essentially associating housework with women and thus contribute to the reproduction of gender inequality in the household.

One of the key features of sexist memes was the characterisation of women as less capable than men, especially women were deemed intellectually inferior and, by extension, not to be taken seriously. This bias finds expression in the following meme (Figure 3) with the text caption overlaid: "The world's first fortunate husband who shuts his wife's mouth immediately after marriage". This meme forges the idea that women do not really say anything serious or significant. The suggestion that women cannot deal with serious issues does not encourage the feeling that they can lead and simultaneously implies that they are best suited for conventional gender roles associated with the kitchen and the home.



Figure 3: A viral meme taken from Facebook

In some instances, the concept of "feminine weakness" is utilised to reassert gender domination, while in others women are portrayed as sinister, dangerous, and tragic to put forward narratives of masculine supremacy. A meme reflecting household pressure came out in the early stage of familiarity with the virus, when many prejudices and stigma were circulating towards Covid-infected patients. In that meme, a wife threatens her husband that she will call the emergency services to tell them that her husband has been infected with COVID-19 if he refuses to wash the clothes and dishes. We also came across memes that draw similarities between women and Covid-19. The text overlaid in a meme nods at the view that the nature of coronavirus is like the wife who at first seemed like easily be brought under control, but later it became clear that the only way open was to negotiate with her. This meme reinforces the idea that the wife should be controlled by the husband. Trolling campaigns with memes, especially against famous women figures, reached new heights during Covid-19 period. Women were not spared even after death. Trolls went into overdrive after the death of two women celebrities, a film actor and a

singer, and memes surfaced attacking their religious beliefs, dress preferences and even their children's appearance. Such trolling campaigns were another manifestation of the patriarchal power in society.

Apart from the dehumanising and insulting attributions of being talkative, irritating, nagging, always-on-makeup, sexist memes reduce women to 'ultra-feminine' or domineering characters who are either too possessive of the husband or excessively controlling. While sexist jokes and memes are dehumanising and demeaning for women, they also contribute to masculine dilemmas which we will discuss in the following section.

Masculine dilemmas

Many people initially wondered why men were getting more infected by the virus. When the lockdown measures were implemented the scenario remained unchanged. It was understandable that men were going out more than women, but why was the infection rate disproportionately high for men? One possible explanation could be the masculine dilemmas of not being associated with home or private sphere—it was hard for men to negotiate with their masculinity to confine themselves within the boundary of a home for the entire day. The altered domestic reality demanded of them to be more accommodative with household works, but the patriarchal ideology—reinforced through sexist memes, jokes, texts and videos, among other activities—was pushing them in the opposite direction.

The functioning of masculinity was also complex during the pandemic. We encountered some memes that depicted men's attempt to negotiate with household works. In Figure 4, it is seen that a man in shirt and tie is taking part in a zoom meeting using a mobile phone while cleaning the floor with a broom. It was not merely his posture that invited laughter in social media, but also the fact that the people in Bangladesh do not usually relate a white collar male professional with house cleaning.



Figure 4: Zoom meeting and housework for men (collected from Facebook)

However, the manifestations of masculinities varied widely, and sometimes in contradictory ways. As Nasreen and Caesar (2020) highlights, many men who share household burdens may not wish to admit it to friends or the public for fear of masculine backlash or “masculine shyness”⁹. Therefore, we are not sure how and in what form masculinity will work since it is very often much fluid.

Reiterating masculinities

“Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present... Eating, sleeping, cleaning – the years no longer rise up towards heaven, they lie spread out ahead, grey and identical. The battle against dust and dirt is never won.” – Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p 451-452

During the Working from Home (WFH) period, working women in Bangladesh had to take on additional burdens on top of their dual responsibilities of the job and usual household management. They had to look after children for longer period of time. Detached from friends and without any outdoor activities, they would frequently feel bored at home, and it was mostly women’s duty to keep them busy, manage their anger and help them cope with the new home routine. Women burdens would increase if the household included external family members, for there would more distractions for women. The presence of an elderly, disabled and/or persons with autism in the household would further complicate things for women.

The effect of the virus containment measures was quite different for men and women¹⁰. Working from home with care responsibilities made life more difficult for women. Due to the virus, combined with those measures, more people, especially older people and children, were needed to be cared for. In lockdown, it was not expected that men staying would suddenly change their attitude and start taking major responsibility for childcare. For many women and gender diverse people, the “stay home” directive meant they were wedged with a bored and angry partner or others who were abusive and violent. “Stay home” had not only served to increase the incidents of domestic abuse but also made curative access to medical and mental health support perplexing (Gupta 2020). In Bangladesh, gender-based violence increased significantly as women had no way to escape staying with their abusers due to exhaustive lockdown. A survey conducted by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) confirmed the rise in gender-based violence, showing 672 women experienced domestic violence for the first time during the lockdown. Job loss, anxiety and uncertainty resulting from Covid-19 increased the possibility of conflicts between partners (MJF 2020). To further our understandings of how this sudden increase in domestic violence relates to memes or jokes shared on Facebook or Twitter, and how the seemingly ‘unserious’ practice of onlinememe-sharing can contribute to the reinforcement of patriarchal gender relations, especially when both men and women are asked to work from home, we argue here that a sexist public joke initiates a process through which sexism and other associated terms start to lose their meanings, making objecting to such acts more difficult. Nasreen (2020) elaborates, “laughability and unserious nature of jokes make them more ‘likeable’ than to be rejected: when a lot many

people ‘like’ masculine jokes reiterating patriarchal ideology instead of gender equality in the household, it further embeds existing societal perceptions of gender relations and makes confronting that ideology even harder”. Many women would put up with these events and never complain as the events are so normalised that to protest at each one may feel trivial and do not seem exceptional enough to object to. This lack of rejection gives the message that the gender roles should be governed through the lens of masculine ideology.

Conclusion

In this article, we focused on the sexist memes shared on social media, particularly on Facebook and Twitter, during the Covid-19 pandemic to uncover the power of memes within society and their effects on gender relations. Noting that memes and jokes are not an ‘unserious’ apolitical issue but media of reproducing and reinforcing power, we have explored masculine power through examining some instances of representation of women’s and their stereotypical gender roles in sexist memes. We have argued that sexist jokes are not “just jokes”, “free expression” or “opinion”, rather they reproduce and reinforce masculine power and pleasure in the form of “like”, “laugh” and “share”. We have tried to unpack how these jokes contribute to re-invigorating masculinity in the household when extra housework was the reality and draw a connection between sexist representation of women and domestic violence. We have also highlighted that the men who were not used to share responsibilities at home needed to cope with the new work-life pattern for Covid-19, and that the men’s failure to negotiate with masculine expectations in a transformed reality have mostly contributed to the rise in domestic violence during the pandemic.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, the explosion of sexist memes makes many people to think that online sexism and hatred of women is an acceptable part of public discourse. These events of sexist public ‘humour’ show that sexism and misogyny are not the things of the past, they are here, now and thriving. The examples we discussed here also highlight the prevalence of sexist rhetoric taken up by ordinary people very close to home. The impact of such sexism is potentially devastating. Online sexism has a silencing effect on women as they are often forced to change the way they use social media¹¹. Sexist memes reinforce the relationship of subordination and reiterates the position of sexual object. Social media has thus far been structurally incapable of tackling sexism, and it has also failed to offer practical and emotional help to those who suffered sexism. We have rarely seen any solidarity for the women victims from other women or men unless it was a strongly aggressive event. The social space created by social media has thus far been an unequal setup for women. As Artificial Intelligence and machine learning have started to transform the way people conduct their lives, urgent actions are required now to tackle sexism and misogyny. If machines are feed the data with sexist and other tendencies of hatred, which are prevalent in social media, then Artificial Intelligence “can corrupt the way software makes decisions, effectively immortalising” (Bano 2019)¹² those ideologies of hate in cyberspace, making the struggles for a fairer society even harder.

In the time of Covid-19, women and transgender people were the real and imagined victims of sexism. Responding to such sexism depends on the landscape in which they

operate. Sexism in memes is hard to confront as such a manifestation of sexism – despite operating in an individualising digital domain – does not generally assign anybody the responsibility for it. Sometimes the real and imagined victims quietly endure sexism when responding seems futile or even aggravating, and sometimes they fight back, demanding their rights and dignity. Any vision of emancipation must fight sexism in all its endless variation, and strive toward making internet a non-sexist space free from sexist oppression and violence. However, this fight should not be the responsibility of the victims alone. It needs to be fought within communities and in online platforms, individually and collectively. Resistance to dominant sexist practices and attitudes has the potential to actively reconfigure the unequal sex/gender-based power relations as well as the landscape in which they operate.

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¹ Masequesmay, G. (2020, May 28). Sexism. In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/sexism>

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/08/28/men-catch-up-with-women-on-overall-social-media-use/>

³ Barbara Plester, Take it like a man!': Performing hegemonic masculinity through organizational humour

⁴ https://static.nytimes.com/email-content/INT_4981.html

⁵ Vandana Mohandas, <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/misogyny-time-coronavirus-lockdown-can-sexist-jokes-stop-now-121316>

⁶ The language of the meme itself creates a context that justifies the expression of prejudice against women and facilitates the tolerance of sexism.

⁷ <https://www.india.com/entertainment/trending-bollywood-news-rishi-kapoor-gets-trolled-by-netizens-for-sharing-sexist-joke-during-coronavirus-lockdown-3980538/>

⁸ https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/UCSD-Brief-3_BigDataGenderCOVID19SouthAsianMisogyny.pdf

⁹ Though in the South Asia, 'shyness' is associated with femininity. In this article, we are reinterpreting the term to associate it with masculinity.

¹⁰ <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2020/03/feminism-womens-rights-coronavirus-covid19/608302/>

¹¹ <https://www.newstatesman.com/2017/11/social-media-and-silencing-effect-why-misogyny-online-human-rights-issue>

¹² <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/harmless-sexist-jokes-are-as-insidious-in-ai-as-in-real-life>