

## FEMININITY IN MEN AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

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**ABSTRACT:** Social exclusion of feminine men is an issue often overlooked where these men face struggles and backlash for being feminine. The purpose of this study is to examine the correlation between femininity in men and social exclusion within social, economic, and familial dimensions. This study employed a quantitative method among 122 Malaysian men. Measurements are made with a 29 Likert-type item self-conducted online questionnaire which includes the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) as a measurement of femininity in men. The findings demonstrate a minor correlation between femininity in men and social exclusion in the economic and social dimensions. Furthermore, a negative association is shown between femininity and exclusion in the familial or affective dimension.

**Keywords:** Social exclusion, effeminate men, femininity

### INTRODUCTION

Extensive literature had been written about gender inequality and exclusions faced by LGBT communities [1,3], however, residual groups of gender minorities are often overlooked as they may not fit conveniently into readily classifiable groups. One of these groups, namely the group of feminine or effeminate men, confronted with equally substantial inequality and exclusion, are in many instances left out of academic discourses.

According to researchers [1], effeminate men face an array of a social dilemma involving multiple levels of discrimination directed towards them in the domain of tertiary education, these acts of ostracism include mockery, harassment, criticism, and declination of opportunities. Effeminacy is even referred to in certain discourses as a "crisis" and "peril to national security" in the manner that is held in negative connotations and misconstrued [2]. When men show vulnerability, act nicer, display empathy, express sadness, exhibit modesty and proclaim themselves as feminists, they often confront many difficulties and backlash because they do not conform to masculine gender stereotypes [3]. Instances of gender nonconformity or transgression in gender-roles are often met with prejudicial, discriminatory confrontations [4]. This study intends to fill the much-required understanding of effeminate men in their confrontation of structural inequality and social exclusion, through an assessment of effeminacy (or femininity in men) and its correlation to social exclusion in multiple dimensions of social life.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Conceptual definition

The paper requires a clarification of several recurring definitions that is central to the study:

#### Social exclusion

As a primary concern of investigation, the concept is at times equivocal, at times used synonymously with other terms that refer to forms of social inequalities such as poverty, therefore must be made precise for operational purposes. Social exclusion, in general, denotes a "non-participation in general social, cultural, economic, and political activities in society" [5]. Researchers [6] define the concept as "a 'state' in which people or groups are assumed to be 'excluded' from social systems and relationships", that exclusion being a set of "dynamic, multi-dimensional processes driven by unequal power relationships". Predominant features describing the concept

emphasize an individual's extent of ability to participate in social processes of multiple dimensions, restricted by power relationships within each dimension. SEKN model of social exclusion, developed by [6], demonstrated the exclusionary process wherein interactions between dimensions of power relations engender systems of stratifications which restrict access to resources in terms of "gender, ethnicity, class, caste, ability, and age". For the aim of this research, three dimensions of social exclusion will be given focus, which is respectively social, economic, and affective dimensions.

#### Effeminacy

The phrase effeminate is defined as a man possessing "characteristics regarded as typical of a woman". This definition, although not enough for operational purposes, gives an idea of components of the concept, which constitutes of features associated with the feminine gender-role. Researches [5] in their effort to define the concept in scalable terms, developed the Effeminacy Scale, emphasized heavily on behavioral aspects of effeminacy, collapsing effeminacy into an array of "behavioral fragments" pertinent for evaluation, such as speech, mouth movements, hand gestures, etc. Nevertheless, previous analysis of the concept in terms of behavior, in such ways aggregating "effeminate activities" [7], does so by reinforcing pre-established gender-roles, as well as disregarding psychodynamic dimensions of effeminacy. This study uses the term "effeminate men" to refer to male individuals who actively transgress socially prescribed gender-roles, specifically who manifest qualities considered to be feminine. The term is used interchangeably with "feminine men" as they are both treated as similar constructs. The concept is therefore closely related to femininity.

#### Femininity and Masculinity

Femininity and masculinity are used in this paper to refer to the construct to which an individual identifies, forms one's self-concept, and manifests in both behavioral and psychological dispositions. These manifested constructs are assumed to align with gender-role stereotypes prevalent within society. According to the researcher [8], masculinity is "associated with an instrumental orientation" and femininity "associated with expressive orientation", often entail respective corpora of socially ascribed behavior and psychological dispositions. Thus, reinforcing the previous statement, femininity, and masculinity, put simply, are

descriptions of gender roles, that is, those "behaviors, expectations, and role sets defined by society and culturally regarded as appropriate to males or females" in which individuals identify themselves with [9].

**METHODS**

A quantitative design is adopted for the study. The study attempts to assess effeminacy in men and their correlation to multiple indicators of social exclusion. A questionnaire was distributed online. Correlation and regression analysis is employed for the quantitative analysis of data. The chain-referral sampling method is used in the study. A 29 item self-conducted online questionnaire is randomly distributed to 121 male respondents by distributing through online social media. Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) is employed for the study to measure effeminacy in me. Developed by researchers [10] as means to "operationalize masculinity and femininity as two orthogonal constructs" and "explore the construct validity of androgyny" (Choi, Fuqua, & Newman, 2008), the instrument allows the researcher to measure individual's psychological femininity and masculinity through evaluation of self-descriptive personality traits [11,12]. The BSRI scale operates on the premise that femininity and masculinity constitute logically independent dimensions, wherein each is built up of socially stereotyped gender characteristics considered "desirable" for males and females [8, 12]. The study employs a 10-item Bem sex-role inventory consisting of both a Masculine scale and a Feminine scale. The masculine scale is made up of five descriptive traits that are selected by the researcher [8] to be among the "socially desirable" personalities assigned to males, including assertive, decisive, independent, self-reliant, and aggressive. In respect, the Feminine scale is composed of

five descriptive traits that are considered desirable among females, which include: compassion, nurturing, sympathetic, understanding, and emotional. These traits, according to researchers [8], are sex-typed standards of masculine and feminine sex-roles (gender-roles) which reflects the "prevailing definitions of masculinity and femininity in the culture at large". Subjects are instructed to rate from 1 to 7 the degree to which the traits above describe their personality, where 1 indicates "not at all descriptive" and 7 represents "completely descriptive". Masculinity score is a composite score computed by averaging the total scores of masculine items, and vice versa for femininity score. The output is representative of a subject's gender-role disposition. Thus, a male with a higher femininity score is regarded to manifest effeminate psychological quality.

Social exclusion is measured in terms of individual experiences of debarment from participation in various social processes. Predictors are segmented into four different social spheres, namely school, workplace, family, and public. Measurements are made through a 5-point Likert scale where subjects rate from one to five the frequencies of occurrence of a given item, each item depict a possible instance of discrimination or ostracization that led to decreased participation in key social processes or as Peter Townsend puts it, "ordinary living patterns, customs, and activities" [13]. Each facet or spheres contains 7 to 8 items that will be rated from 1, which stands for "Never occurred to me" to 5, "Frequently occurred to me" by the respondents. This classificatory approach is to capture the "multi-faceted and processual character" of social exclusion [14].

**Table 1: Pattern Matrix - Factor Loadings of Principal Component Analysis**

Items	Factors		
	1	2	3
I find it hard to make friends.	.793		
I have experienced being excluded by peers.	.790		
I still feel uncomfortable in some public settings.	.680		
People always look at me differently.	.671		
I have experienced a bully in my school.	.667		
I have been influenced by others not to be friends with those classified as "effeminate" men.	.649		
I can't get the chance to hold any position in a society or club.	.639		
Peers would treat me differently because of my gender.	.577		
I experienced harassment in public space.	.545		
I have difficulty in joining a sport as a team with others.	.542		.460
Some associations do not welcome me.	.475		
I always become the joke of classmates and teachers.			
I have experienced unfair denial of an increase in salary in my organization.		.899	
I get lower wages as compared to the other colleague of the same level.		.884	
I was denied promotion in my organization.		.879	
I was not trusted with tasks appropriate to my ability.		.524	
I get offended or insulted during job interviews.		.517	
Most service attendants shown a bad attitude towards me.		.500	
I have received offensive remarks from my colleagues or superiors.	.422	.485	
I have experienced harassment from my colleagues or superiors in my workplace.		.453	
My teacher dislikes me during school time.			
Parents would treat me differently from my siblings due to my feminine characteristics.			.853

My parents feel ashamed of my feminine characteristics.	.837
My family insulted me sometimes due to my feminine characteristics.	.759
I find it hard to talk to my siblings.	.699
My family has asked me to change my behavior.	.644
I find it difficult to talk to my parents.	.568
I feel uninvited by my relatives.	.524
I am unwelcomed in religious spaces and practices.	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.<sup>a</sup>

a. Rotation converged in 8 iterations

**Table 2: Structure Matrix - Factor Loadings of Principal Component Analysis**

Items	Factors		
	1	2	3
I have experienced being excluded by peers.	.815		
People always look at me differently.	.759	.411	.430
I still feel uncomfortable in some public settings.	.751		.498
I have been influenced by others not to be friends with those classified as "effeminate" men.	.727		.522
I find it hard to make friends.	.715		
I experienced harassment in public space.	.704		.559
Peers would treat me differently because of my gender.	.692		.515
I have difficulty in joining a sport as a team with others.	.682		.628
I have experienced a bully in my school.	.680		
Some associations do not welcome me.	.630	.473	.471
I can't get the chance to hold any position in a society or club.	.568		
I always become the joke of classmates and teachers.	.504		.450
I was denied promotion in my organization.		.880	
I have experienced unfair denial of an increase in salary in my organization.		.852	
I get lower wages as compared to the other colleague of the same level.		.818	
I was not trusted with tasks appropriate to my ability.	.508	.645	.406
Most service attendants showed a bad attitude towards me.		.619	.516
I get offended or insulted during a job interview.	.422	.616	
I have received offensive remarks from my colleagues or superiors.	.569	.611	
I have experienced harassment by my colleagues or superiors in my workplace.	.544	.603	.466
My teacher dislikes me during school time.		.452	
Parents would treat me differently from my siblings due to my feminine characteristics.			.833
My family insulted me sometimes due to my feminine characteristics.	.441		.810
My parents feel ashamed of my feminine characteristics.			.809
My family has asked me to change my behavior..	.459		.719
I find it hard to talk to my siblings.			.633
I find it difficult to talk to my parents.			.619
I am unwelcomed in religious spaces and practices.	.571	.403	.590
I feel uninvited by my relatives.			.574

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization

The 29 Likert-type items are then run through a principal component analysis in order to reduce dimensionality, and examine the interrelatedness among the items as well as with the factors. Three components or factors are obtained to which each constitutes a dimension of social exclusion, including the social dimension (school and public spheres), economic or employment dimension (workplace sphere), and familial or affective dimension. Factor scores of the three components are used as an index for each dimension of social exclusion in which femininity of subjects will be

measured against. Correlation and linear regression analysis are employed to assess the magnitude of the correlation between femininity in men and exclusion in each dimension.

**FINDINGS**

A principal component analysis was performed on the 29 Likert-type items, which reduced the variables into three factors which represent three dimensions of social exclusion. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling

adequacy and Bartlett test of sphericity produced value of  $KMO = 0.818$ ,  $> 0.5$ , and  $\chi^2 > 0.005$  shows that data is suited for factor analysis.

From the factor extracted, three dimensions were derived, with the first constituting social dimension, the second economic or employment, and the third for familial or affective relationships. Correlation analysis and linear regression analysis performed on femininity (composite score of 5 feminine items of Bem sex-role inventory) and the three dimensions mentioned above produced these results.

Linear regression produced function as such:  $Y' = -1.09 + 0.2x$ , with significance level of  $p = 0.144$ ,  $p > \alpha = 0.05$ . Thus, the regression model is not statistically significant to draw inferences on population parameters. A somewhat low correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.174$ ) indicated a weak but positive correlation between femininity in men and exclusion in the social dimension. Items incorporated in this dimension include that of school and public spheres, for instances, "I have experienced being excluded by peers", "I have experienced bully in school", and "I still feel uncomfortable in some public settings", as well as Linear regression produced function as such:  $Y' = 0.26 - 0.05x$ , with significance level of  $p = 0.733$ ,  $p > \alpha = 0.05$ . Thus, the regression model is not statistically significant to draw inferences on population parameters. A low correlation coefficient of  $r = -0.41$  posited a weak, however negative association between femininity and exclusion in the familial or affective dimension, which measures items such as "Parents would treat me differently from my siblings due to my feminine characteristics", "My parents feel ashamed of my feminine characteristics" and "My family insulted me sometimes due to my feminine characteristics". This coefficient may infer to an inverse relationship between two variables, where femininity rather than causes exclusion of men in familial social processes, strengthens familial bonding in minimal ways.

## DISCUSSION

Correlation is demonstrated in both economic and social dimensions with social exclusion of effeminacy, despite a relatively low degree. The result is unable to form a statistically significant case against the null hypothesis, which states there is no correlation between effeminacy and social exclusion in both dimensions. Nevertheless, discussing within the range of the observable sample, correlation is still present. Regarding the economic and occupational dimension, it is found that the degree of femininity correlates positively with a lower income level (or inversely with a higher income level). Occupational segregation is partly traced to the "culturally enforced prescriptive gender-roles", wherein lower earning potential is constantly paralleled with feminine qualities, while masculine roles are given more prominence [15]. Researchers [16] has related this occurrence to a normative stereotype of feminine character as subordinate to and incompetent of leadership ideals, in which they noted, the relative invisibility of those 'feminine men' who locate themselves in feminized discourses of caring and compassion which are in tension with those concepts of 'masculine' maleness which are associated with leadership and power...This has inadvertently led males with pronounced female qualities to be classified within those who are not capable of higher-level managerial or leadership positions, which resulted in exclusion from occupational opportunities. However, it is noted that the inverse could equally apply in "feminized" occupations such as nursing and teaching, in which masculinity is

"People always look at me differently". This inferred a rise in the probability of being excluded from peer socialization and general social interactions with strangers or in public spaces. Linear regression produced function as such:  $Y' = -0.46 + 0.08x$ , with significance level of  $p = 0.537$ ,  $p > \alpha = 0.05$ . Thus, the regression model is not statistically significant to draw inferences on population parameters. A low correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.074$  demonstrated a weak but positive correlation between femininity and exclusion in the economic or employment dimension. The dimension consists of items such as "I have experienced unfair denial of an increase in salary in my organization" and "I get lower wages as compared to other colleagues of the same level". The coefficient accounts for a very low probability of exclusion of men with feminine dispositions despite positively correlated.

Non-parametric correlation analysis on income level and femininity show an inverse association between the two that is higher femininity correlates to a lower monthly income ( $r_s = -0.133$ ). However, the significance level of  $p = 0.264$ , which is higher than  $\alpha = 0.05$  proves the data to be statistically insignificant. placed in a disadvantage, while instances of the male being "alienated" and excluded from their female counterparts is not uncommon [17,18].

Exclusion in the social dimension indicates a higher probability of being excluded from participation in school and public social processes. Studies on gender nonconformity and prejudicial life events had shown prejudices in the public sphere and school settings exist in forms of "tease, ostracize, or bully" by peers [4]. These are repercussions of traditional male gender-role socialization at work, wherein "fear of femininity" socialized in most individuals was projected towards external objects, in this case, the effeminate males. The pressure generated by male-oriented socialization, according to researcher [19], are disproportionately exerted on male who does not meet the accepted cultural definition of male gender-role and singularly penalized. As posited by McGuffey and Rich's formulations of "gender boundary negotiation", individuals negotiate between their gender identities by constructing "spheres of gender-appropriate activities", thus, children learn to distance themselves from those who transgressed prescribed gender boundaries or the "effeminate", thus bring about "exclusion" among those who are labeled as such researchers [20]. The researcher's [9] model of "fear of femininity" can also extend into the realm of general social interactions within commercialized or transportation settings.

An inverse correlation is observed between male effeminacy and exclusion in the familial dimension. Family is regarded as the primary sphere of preliminary gender-role socialization, and equally the arena in which conflict takes place, where multiple stressors combine to influence the individual psyche [21]. Socially endorsed standards of femininity incorporate "expressive", "interpersonally oriented, or communal" qualities, which include traits such as nurturance, sensitivity, compassion, and emotionality [22]. Whereas masculinity is commonly associated with restrictive emotionality which led to detrimental issues in affective relationships and family violence [23]. Rather than the cultivation of restrictive emotionality, effeminate males espouse feminine character which does not shun away from expression, vulnerabilities, and intimacies, thus making them more accommodating and better in navigating effective relationships. As suggested by researchers [24], "feminine persons should be more likely to employ

accommodation” in managing interpersonal conflicts, such accommodating behaviors include compromise and collaboration, with higher concerns of maintaining a relationship. On a subjective level, the observation appears to be coherent with the employed gender-role strain model, however, conflict does occur in familial context for intermittent cases, which is not to be examined in the sample.

### CONCLUSION

The study revealed insights into social exclusion encountered by men who are in gender-role transgression. Results from the study generally corresponded to the model of gender-role strain and gender-role conflict, where socially prescribed norms of masculine gender-role propelled acts of ostracism against effeminate men, however, the relatively low level of correlation may be indicative of the different cultural context of Malaysian society which may not agree with theoretical models made particularly for western societal context. Gender ideologies in the Malaysian context may not reflect that of western standards, thus resulting in a different norm of treatment towards effeminate men.

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