

Chapter 6

‘I Thought That I Am Girly, Girlish Because of All That’: Effeminophobia as Violence in the Context of Child Sexual Abuse and Hegemonic Masculinity in India

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Abstract

While the global body of knowledge on men and boys’ experiences of sexual abuse during childhood has incrementally grown over the last several years, it remains an under-researched area of study. Drawing upon primary phenomenological research with men survivors of child sexual abuse (CSA) in India, in this chapter, I report and discuss findings that explore the gendered meanings that men who have experienced CSA make of their abuse experiences against a backdrop of heteropatriarchal assumptions and expectations regarding masculinity. Specifically, I discuss how effeminophobia – anxiety and disdain regarding feminine-identified behaviors, mannerisms, attributes and presentations among boys and men – is an ingredient and also the product of such meaning making and eventually works as another form of violence against men and boy survivors following the primary experience of sexual violence. More broadly, acknowledging the role of effeminophobia in constructing men and boy survivors’ experiences supports the argument that heteropatriarchy is a double-edged weapon that injures women and gender-expansive people disproportionately but also hurts boys and men.

Keywords: Masculinity; effeminophobia; sissyphobia; child sexual abuse; sexual violence; male survivors

Introduction

Drawing upon a phenomenological research study with adult men survivors of child sexual abuse (CSA) in India, this chapter uses the concept of hegemonic masculinity to interrogate experiences of effeminophobia in the narratives of boys and men who have experienced CSA. Sexual abuse in childhood is an acute violation of a person's fundamental right to live a life of dignity and free of violence. Sadly, this is an enormously prevalent and deep-seated global problem. As CSA is firmly rooted in patriarchy, girl children are disproportionately affected by CSA (Barth et al., 2013). However, boys too experience CSA in large numbers (Barth et al., 2013; Stoltenborgh et al., 2015) and often suffer adverse personal and social outcomes (Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Fergusson et al., 2013; Sharma, 2022b; Viliardos et al., 2023). Survivors' lived experiences of CSA are often gendered in multiple and profound ways, and this is no different for boys and men. For instance, research from different regions of the world has shown that various assumptions and expectations regarding masculinity that are embedded in patriarchy make it difficult for boys and men survivors to disclose their abuse experiences (see, e.g., Alaggia, 2005; Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Attrash-Najjar et al., 2023; Guerra et al., 2021; Kia-Keating et al., 2005; Kramer & Bowman, 2021; Sharma, 2022a). This chapter seeks to deepen understanding of gender and masculinity in the lived experiences of boys and men survivors of CSA by focusing on effeminophobia, which refers to disdain of feminine-identified gender markers among boys and men; this is a central contribution of this chapter as effeminophobia is a topic that has received little attention in scholarship on CSA or sexual violence. Additionally, this chapter is also in conversation with the field of childhood studies, contributing to the scholarship on childhood masculinities through examining gendered experiences of sexual abuse for boys.

Hegemonic Masculinity and Effeminophobia

Masculinity is a social and cultural construct that is critical to understanding and examining men's relationship to violence, whether with regard to perpetration of violence (Cossins, 2000; Cowburn, 2010; Ranger, 2015) or experiencing and surviving violence (Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Hlavka, 2017; Sharma, 2022a, 2022b). Masculinity shapes men's sense of gender – individually and socially; gender is a core concept in sexual violence, including CSA. Therefore, when studying sexual abuse of boys, it is imperative to interrogate the many ways in which gender influences how men and boys experience and make meaning of abuse. It is also important to investigate the role that gender plays in how child sexual abusers construct the violence that they perpetrate.

I employ Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity to understand the patriarchal gender order and to examine what implications it has for boys who experience sexual abuse in childhood. Hegemonic masculinity is the most prized and exalted form of masculinity in a given sociocultural and temporal context. It reflects the conventional ideas about what it means to be an ideal, desired and valued boy or man in a specific context. Men who exhibit hegemonic masculinity

tend to not just dominate over women and gender expansive people but also over other men who exhibit less valued articulations of masculinity. This is not to say that the latter category of men cannot or do not aspire to the standards of hegemonic masculinity, but the title of the ‘real man’ is typically reserved for the former group of men who are able to embody the patriarchal masculine norms in their values and actions.

In India, hegemonic masculinity is steeped in patriarchal norms and values about gender and exists in communication with other axes of power such as caste, religious affiliation and class. The ideal masculinity is typically associated with dominant-caste men embodying attributes such as physical and spiritual strength, paternalism, virility and heterosexuality. This is evidenced in findings of different research studies focused on how gender and masculinities are constructed and how they operate in the Indian sociopolitical context. For instance, [Pradhan and Ram \(2010\)](#) spoke to young men about gender roles that shape youth sexual behaviors and found that these participants believed ‘real men’ to possess characteristics including ‘the ability ... to earn and maintain family, to take decision, to physically satisfy spouse/partner and to procreate besides having a well-built body’ (p. 546). In another survey-based study of over 9000 urban and rural men, [Nanda et al. \(2014\)](#) found that a large majority of participants believed that they needed to be tough to be a man, men need more sex than women and men should have the final say in all family matters. Masculinity in contemporary India is inextricably entangled with its colonial history ([Dasgupta & Gokulsing, 2014](#); [Sinha, 1999](#); [Srivastava, 2016](#)). [Dasgupta \(2017\)](#) has observed that ‘in theorizing the production of masculinities in postcolonial systems, it is useful to remember that these hegemonies were created through a colonial system, where [some] indigenous populations were effeminized’ (p. 96) which led ‘postcolonial popular culture to recreate the Indian male as the virile masculine figure of the post-colonial era’ (p. 97). The British colonial interpretations of Indian masculinities were not uniform but uneven for the various ethnic-linguistic communities in the subcontinent, and while some groups were effeminized, some others were constructed as hypermasculine ‘martial’ communities (see [Arora, 2023](#); [Brunner, 2018](#); [Gurung, 2014](#); [Sinha, 1999](#)). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss at length the complex entanglements between India’s colonization and masculinity, it is relevant to consider this broader historical perspective when exploring contemporary articulations of masculinities and power in India.

Since masculinities are discursively produced identities ([Kimmel et al., 2004](#); [Srivastava, 2016](#)), they require persistent and continuous efforts from those who occupy these identity positions. Boys and men laying claim to the ‘real man’ category as defined by patriarchal norms must display certain traits and behaviors in order to be rendered legible as such by others in their social context. For instance, in [Pascoc’s \(2007\)](#) USA-based research, high school boys frequently lobbed homophobic insults at each other as part of their gender performance. They repeatedly insulted others in this manner, and when they were the recipients of such insults themselves, they tried to engage in behaviors to avoid the ‘fag’ label from sticking to them permanently. As [Connell \(2005\)](#) has argued, the

concept of masculinity is inherently relational and a contrast to femininity is essential to its existence.

Among the key patriarchal instruments that are available to boys and men as ways of attaining hegemonic masculine status are sexism and misogyny. Sexism and misogyny are core features of hegemonic masculinity and tools that boys and men deploy to exert and justify their dominance over girls and women in the patriarchal gender order. Some of the many ways in which sexism and misogyny get manifested in boys and men's everyday practices include sexual objectification of girls and women; physical, sexual and emotional violence against girls and women; denying and erasing women and girls' sexuality; coercive control over girls and women; believing women and girls to be physically or emotionally weak; curtailing and controlling women's workforce participation, etc. Within a patriarchal framework, men and boys also enact sexism and misogyny by distancing themselves in their own articulations of gender from any traits, behaviors or even objects that may be considered feminine. As [Srivastava \(2016\)](#) points out, 'in order to stand in a relationship of superiority to feminine identity, masculinity must be represented as possessing characteristics that are binary opposite of (actual or imagined) feminine identity' (pp. 4–5). I have mentioned earlier that hegemonic masculinity not only works to establish men and boys' dominance over women and girls but also over other men and boys whose masculinities are less valued. So, in patriarchal contexts, men and boys often express disgust or contempt for other men and boys whom they perceive as effeminate in some way. To establish their own congruence with ideals of hegemonic masculinity, boys and men are often anxious about being perceived as effeminate or 'sissy' by other boys and men. Such disgust, contempt or anxiety regarding any perceived associations with femininity by boys or men is called effeminophobia ([Richardson, 2018](#)). This concept has also been termed as sissyphobia ([Bergling, 2012](#)).

Effeminophobia is a constituent element of heteropatriarchy, i.e. the social and political system in which 'heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant, and abhorrent' ([Arvin et al., 2013](#), p. 13). Foundational beliefs of heteropatriarchy include assumptions that a person is either born male or female, that this identity remains fixed throughout the lifespan of an individual, and that sex assigned at birth shapes a person's gender which creates distinct and unambiguous differences in terms of the person's behaviors, interests and personality attributes ([Harris, 2011](#)). Seen through a heteropatriarchal lens, it becomes clear how display of feminine-identified traits by boys or men would be seen as a flagrant violation of the core ideas underlying heteropatriarchy, thus rendering such boys and men vulnerable to rebuke and retaliation from individuals, institutions and systems aligned with heteropatriarchal norms and values.

Thus far, effeminophobia has not been researched as a focus area in Indian or international scholarship on men and boys' experiences of sexual violence or CSA. Within the Indian scholarship on childhood studies also, there has been little analysis of effeminophobia. Effeminophobia has been studied in some detail in the context of gay men's sexualities (see [Annes & Redlin, 2012](#); [Dasgupta, 2017](#); [Eguchi, 2009](#); [Taywaditep, 2002](#); [Zhou, 2023](#)); the focus of such scholarship has largely been to

investigate the derision that effeminate gay men often experience not only in straight but also queer spaces. In the Indian context, Dasgupta (2017) has discussed effeminophobia with regard to the *kothi* identity which is a feminized identity adopted by some biologically male people in the Indian subcontinent who '[adopt] feminine modes of dressing, speech and behavior and would look for a male partner who has masculine modes of behavior, speech, and dress' (Narain, 2004, p. 161). Male partners of *kothis* are called *parikhs* or *giryas* (Dasgupta, 2017). Dasgupta (2017) notes that within the context of *kothilparikh* relationships:

the *parikh* figure is seen as the 'original man'. His sexual choices are not seen as an aberration due to his masculine gendered role ... *Kothis*, on the other hand, because of their gender atypical performance are seen as demasculinized subjects. (p. 98)

A reminder: it is important not to conflate effeminophobia with homophobia. Effeminophobia and homophobia are interrelated and often coexist, for example, when effeminate queer boys or men experience oppression on account of their 'double transgression of sexual and gender identity' (Pascoe, 2007, p. 71). However, it is useful to understand these as distinct concepts. Homophobia refers to the fear and disgust of same-sex desire and sexual contact between people of the same sexual identity, whereas effeminophobia is specific to fear and disgust of feminine-identified traits in boys and men regardless of their sexual orientation (i.e. queer or straight). As Richardson (2018) notes, 'effeminacy may not only inspire anxiety because it is read as the signifier of homosexuality but that effeminacy *itself* may also be a source of fear or concern' (p. 209, italics in original).

Methods

The data and findings reported in this chapter come from a larger study on the lived experiences of adult men survivors of CSA in India. The purpose of this study, conducted from 2014 to 2018, was to address the paucity of research in India on lived experiences of CSA survivors and, specifically, experiences of men and boy survivors. I utilized Smith et al.'s (2009) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach to analyze narratives of men in the age group of 18–60 years who self-identified as having experienced sexual abuse during childhood. Purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants through organizations and individuals working in the areas of sexual violence, child abuse, gender and sexuality or children's rights. All participants voluntarily contacted me and expressed an interest in participating in the study.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 participants who were located in six large cities across the country. Guided by an ethic of care, I encouraged the participants to tell their stories in their own words. The interviews were conversational in nature and covered a wide range of topics including growing up years, family life, messages received about gender, personal attitudes

and beliefs regarding gender, sexual abuse experiences, disclosure and help-seeking in relation to abuse experiences, disclosure recipients' reactions and responses, how and where the participants learned about sex and sexuality and how can men survivors be helped.

Researcher reflexivity was an integral part of the research process at every stage and required me to critically think about my positionality vis-à-vis this research as well as my personal and professional experiences as an Indian cis-gender man and a social worker with several years' experience of working in the field of sexual violence and CSA. Further details regarding this study's methods as well as other findings not reported here are published elsewhere (see [Sharma, 2022a, 2022b](#)). While this study was conducted with adult men survivors, the findings reported and discussed in this chapter pertain to the meanings that the participants made of their abuse experiences while they were children and adolescents. All participant quotes are reported verbatim with very minor edits where necessary to enhance clarity of expression. Any names mentioned in this chapter are pseudonyms to protect participants' identity.

Effeminophobia Is the Site of Violence

Heteropatriarchy forms the soil of the sociocultural terrain upon which sexual abuse of boys takes place, with effeminophobia as one of its key components. Nearly all participants in this study shared examples of how, in their sociocultural environments, there existed clear and strictly obeyed boundaries between boys and girls about behaviors, expressions and attributes that were considered gender appropriate. These ranged from expectations regarding academic achievement and bodily characteristics to individuals' behaviors and mannerisms. As one participant said, 'You grow up in a society which is always dictating how men need to be.' Another participant shared his experiences of growing up in an environment that was based on a rigid set of beliefs and expectations regarding norms for boys and girls:

I remember being a child belonging to a school, and belonging to a neighborhood, and belonging to a family where there was a clear boy-girl distinction in the sense that boys were supposed to be more outgoing ... I mean the [emphasis] on them being academically bright was more than [girls] because they have to have a job, and have to get married, and all of that. So, I remember that as a child I very clearly saw ... very clear gender roles and gender behaviors that were put upon boys and girls.

Holding the binary gender system in place through emphasizing and enforcing differences between boys and girls is an essential feature of effeminophobia as the gender binary makes it possible for gender-based digressions and transgressions to be identified, scrutinized and sanctioned. Several participants expressed a desire, compulsion or expectation to put distance between themselves and anything

socially perceived to be feminine in terms of their everyday behaviors. For instance, Mrinal spoke about his interest in theater during his schooldays and how he was stopped from pursuing it because it was perceived as feminine by adult men in his family:

I remember that during the summer vacation [some schools] would have [theater] workshops advertised. I remember now that there was one workshop that I really wanted to go to. [My mother] explored [the workshop] and said that she was equally excited about it. But then I think it was a decision of the men in the house that no, boys don't do that; if he goes there then something will change in his mind.

Bhaskar shared several incidents from his childhood and adolescence of others picking on certain behaviors and admonishing him because of their perception of these behaviors as innately feminine:

[A] cousin who [used to live] with us would say, "*Tu ladki hai kya?*" [Are you a girl?] because I had the habit of talking on the phone a lot. ... She would say, "Are you a girl? You talk so much on the phone!"

In patriarchal societies, opposing or disrespecting gender norms comes at a cost. While men and boys are typically rewarded for conforming to gender norms, they are often subjected to humiliation or punishment if they challenge or distance themselves from what is considered appropriate masculine behavior. In this study, there was ample evidence in survivors' narratives of boys being shamed, ridiculed or harassed when they displayed behaviors or attributes that were perceived as defying normative gender practices for boys. Akshath, for instance, shared an experience from his adolescence of getting physically hit by his mother for not going out to play sports with other boys in the neighborhood, as a way of being coerced into following rigid gender expectations and practices:

There was this one time when my mom slapped me and beat me and tore my shirt. She ... beat me very badly in a way to, like, push me out of the house ... She broke my shirt buttons. Pushed me out, like "*kyun nahi ja raha hai bahar? Ja bahar, ja bahar.*" [Why don't you go out? Go out.]. She did that because she was just so frustrated by the fact that even though I had friends my age who were willing to play cricket [with me], I did not want to ... And my mom beating me that day, that evening, was because her premise was "why are you not going out like other boys?," "when all the other boys are playing, why are you sitting inside?," "you should be like other boys, you should be going out to play, you should not be sitting inside the house." And though she never explicitly said "you are sitting inside the house like a girl," I know

that if I were a girl and sitting inside, she would not have beaten and slapped me to step outside.

Other participants shared their experiences of being shamed and ridiculed for having feminine-identified mannerisms. For instance, Mrinal talked about feeling inadequate as a man on account of being mocked for his demeanor or mannerisms that others perceived as feminine and, therefore, gender-transgressive:

I think there are times when I have been ridiculed for my mannerisms. Or somebody [caricatured] me for the way I spoke, like the intonation or the inflection of my voice. So, if I did something like that, which probably meant just as a way of being gentle and not being very dominating, ... somebody [caricatured] me. And that has happened many many times. Right from childhood till even adulthood. So, I try to mask that as much as possible. That is where I feel inadequate as a man.

Kaustav shared an incident where he had experienced violence from other students in his school because of his active interest in dance. Dancing is a gendered practice in India and globally, with certain dance forms viewed as masculine whereas other forms are often perceived as feminine and therefore emasculating when performed by boys or men ([Dasgupta, 2013](#); [Gera Roy, 2011](#); [Khubchandani, 2016](#)). Kaustav said:

A de-robing [nearly took] place in a school bus with eight boys trying to strip me. That was very violent. And they didn't manage to strip me, but they had almost undone my pants ... Yeah this was in the school bus ... And I didn't realize it then, but I took a lot of hurt. And that was because I used to dance in the bus. ... And I think that sort of poked them that "oh I don't think you are a boy, I think you are a girl, and we will find out that whether you are or not."

It is evident from participant narratives that the sociocultural climate in which they grew up and lived their lives was infused with effeminophobia. Such effeminophobic climate has significant ramifications for boys who experience sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence, as I will discuss in the following sections of this chapter.

Effeminophobia Is the Product of Violence

One of the meanings that some participants had made of their abuse experiences as children was that the sexual abuse experiences had contributed to or resulted in their perception of self as effeminate. In this respect, these participants perceived sexual abuse experiences to have impacted their gender expression or identity.

Gender identity refers to ‘a person’s deeply felt, inherent sense of being a boy, a man, or male; a girl, a woman, or female; or an alternative gender (e.g., genderqueer, gender nonconforming, gender neutral) that may or may not correspond to a person’s sex assigned at birth or to a person’s primary or secondary sex characteristics,’ (American Psychological Association [APA], 2015, p. 862), and gender expression may be understood as ‘the presentation of an individual, including physical appearance, clothing choice and accessories, and behaviors that express aspects of gender identity or role’ (APA, 2015, p. 861). As an example, Kaustav said that he felt there was a connection between his abuse experiences and his self-perceived effeminate mannerisms and behavior: ‘I wasn’t effeminate ... as a child, but I think after the abuse there was a period ... which slowly moved me towards effeminacy.’ Kaustav attributed this connection between sexual abuse and gender expression to the nature of his abuse experiences in which he was anally penetrated by several perpetrators, starting at age 7–8 and continuing for many years thereafter. He described an incident from his adolescence when he thought that he was, or was becoming, a woman as a consequence of his sexual abuse experiences.

I was standing in front of the mirror, and I said, “I think I’m growing breasts.” ... And my parents laughed and said, “You are not growing breasts, you are growing a chest. These are not breasts.” ... Puberty was sort of hitting me, and I was thinking of myself more as a woman. And I think there was gender sort of stuff going on inside. Because I had always been penetrated ... And during those years I became more and more effeminate, more and more feminized in the classical sense. I thought I had to be the girl, you know. I was more girly ... So, the effeminacy was a very strong complex which formed during that time, and affected my gendered way of growing up because I was just hitting puberty then.

It is noteworthy that Kaustav did not see the impact of sexual abuse on just his gender expression (becoming more effeminate in his behavior) but also on his gender identity (perceiving himself as a girl/woman).

Patriarchal masculinities are phallogentric (Brubaker & Johnson, 2008; Clark, 2019; Khan et al., 2008), obsessed with the idea of the penis as a symbol, site and instrument of dominance and power. Within a phallogentric social and sexual construction of penetrative sex, to penetrate typically (although not always) becomes associated with dominance, whereas to be penetrated gets associated with submission. Such phallogentric constructions of sex are also inextricably entangled with a heteronormative view of sexual intercourse, in which the penetrating person is presumed to be male and the receiving person is presumed to be female. When such heteronormative ideas of sexual intercourse intertwine with a phallogentric understanding of anal sex between males, receptive anal sex comes to be viewed as not only submissive but also feminizing. It is evident that some participants in this study had understood their sexual abuse experiences with

other men and boys to be feminizing with respect to their gender expression and/or identity. This is further evidenced in Nithin's narrative. Nithin said that being subjected to receptive anal intercourse by an older boy led to a sense of confusion in his mind about his gender identity in terms of whether he was a boy or a girl, and he started thinking that perhaps he was a girl.

I remember in the [neighborhood] where I [lived] when I first started getting abused, those boys were actually my best friends, the ones who were abusing ... Much before I started getting abused, I have this vague memory of them talking about sex, and how men have sex with women and then they ejaculate and that's how babies are produced. So, when I started getting abused and I would get ejaculated into, I started figuring out that I was actually a girl, that I must be a girl because otherwise why am I the person who was getting ejaculated into. But I also simultaneously knew that I was a boy. I mean in my rational mind I knew I was a boy ... [I] knew the difference. I knew that my sister was a girl. So that was ... like a shitty secret that I would have inside that oh how everyone thinks I am a boy but what they don't know is that I am actually a girl.

Nithin further shared that he also thought that his abuse experiences had an influence on his gender expression. He said that he internalized the idea that he was a girl based on his sexual abuse, and this belief 'pronounced [his] feminine behavior'. He further said, 'I thought that I am girly, girlish because of all that.' He explained: 'So the effeminate thing started slightly late in school. It wasn't right from the beginning because I think it showed, my sense is it showed after the abuse.'

The participant narratives discussed above reflect internalized effeminophobia. This is evidenced in participants invoking language of shame when talking about perceived feminization resulting from sexual abuse experiences. They characterized their effeminacy as a 'very strong complex' and 'shitty secret'. Moreover, it may be argued that explaining effeminate gender expression as a consequence of sexual violence reflects internalized effeminophobia as it portrays effeminacy among boys and men as an adverse outcome of an injurious experience. Such a view of effeminacy among boys is premised on the idea that a male body can only do femininity when something is wrong with it or something bad has happened to it. In this sense, internalized effeminophobia by men and boy survivors of CSA is a form of 'narrative foreclosure' (Freeman, 2011) where the story that a person is able to tell about their own experiences can become constrained by dominant sociocultural discourses. Also, for some men survivors, interpreting sexual abuse as a feminizing experience could be a way of explaining their effeminacy as not an innate aspect of their self or organic expression of their gender but instead as artificially induced and ill-gotten. This may be an attempt by men to reclaim or reinforce their masculinity by constructing themselves as otherwise masculine men who happen to exhibit effeminacy as an unwanted consequence of abuse. When

feminization of sexually abused boys is viewed through the lens of patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, production of effeminophobia in this process is entirely unsurprising.

Effeminophobia as Violence

Sexual violence against those who are considered subordinates within the patriarchal gender order is one way of 'doing' masculinity for men (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Effeminate men and boys are considered and treated as gender subordinates by men aspiring to enact and achieve hegemonic masculinity. In the context of CSA, it is likely that men and boy perpetrators 'do' masculinity through enacting sexual violence against men and boys whom they perceive as effeminate. Some participants in this study talked about how they believed that they were targeted by abusers for their effeminacy. These participants felt that they were effeminate in their gender expression prior to abuse and that such effeminacy had contributed to their abuse; they believed that their effeminate gender expression was partly the reason why the perpetrator(s) had found them attractive. For instance, both Mrinal and Yogendra thought that they were effeminate as children, and that this quality was responsible for the perpetrator's attraction towards them. Yogendra said, 'Sometimes I think that maybe there was something in me that was a little effeminate or girly that made this man look at me'. Purcell et al. (2004) have suggested that gender nonconformity among boys can be a risk factor for CSA. Their claim found corroboration in a study by Sandfort et al. (2007) which found that gay and bisexual adult men who considered themselves to be effeminate were more likely to have experienced CSA. Roberts et al. (2012) also found gender nonconformity among children before age 11 years to be a risk indicator for CSA. The India-based study by Tomori et al. (2016) on HIV risk within communities of men who have sex with men (MSM) also found gender nonconformity to increase vulnerability to CSA. These studies suggest that boys who are gender atypical or nonconforming may be at greater risk of sexual victimization. When perpetration of CSA is considered from a feminist perspective as an innately gendered practice inextricably linked to patriarchy (Bolen, 2001; Cossins, 2000; Durham, 2003; Whittier, 2016), then one way of inspecting the link between gender nonconformity and sexual victimization is to understand it as yet another manifestation of heteropatriarchal oppression wherein subordinate masculinities are marginalized and dominated over by hegemonic masculinity using the instrument of sexual violence. Also, the sociocultural practices that privilege hegemonic masculinity also mandate policing and regulation of subordinate masculinities, and sexual abuse of gender nonconforming boys may be understood as a manifestation of such policing and regulation. In these ways, effeminophobia is embedded in CSA perpetrators' practices, acting as a motivator and justifier for sexual violence.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that investigating effeminophobia is important from the perspective of understanding experiences of boys who experience sexual abuse in childhood. While the growing field of critical studies of men and masculinities has offered much-needed scholarship on boys' and men's gendered lives, research on boys and men's experiences of sexual violence through a lens of critical masculinity studies is limited. Even more limited is such scholarship that focuses on CSA. Also, effeminophobia has been an under-studied topic within scholarship on masculinities broadly and, more specifically, in scholarship on boys' and men's experiences of sexual violence and abuse. The research reported here hopefully makes a meaningful contribution in these areas.

Another field of scholarship that this chapter is in conversation with is childhood masculinities. This study illuminates how boys construct masculinities and actively negotiate and perform gender in relation to gender norms within the Indian social and cultural context, by examining boys' gendered experiences of CSA. Specifically, it discusses effeminophobia with regard to childhood masculinities, which has heretofore not been explored within the childhood studies scholarship in India. Broadly too, in the international childhood and gender scholarship about boys, there is a predominance of literature which focuses on privileged and powerful masculinities (Paechter, 2019). As a consequence of this nearly exclusive focus on dominant narratives of masculinity, feminine boys and their gendered identities and experiences have not been studied in any significant detail (Paechter, 2019). This chapter addresses this gap in literature by centring the voices and lived experiences of effeminate boys.

Research findings presented in this chapter show that effeminophobia is a significant ingredient of violence for many boys who experience sexual abuse. As I have discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, effeminophobia is the site on which sexual violence occurs, is the product of such violence and may also operate as violence. There is, however, a broader conclusion that may be drawn from these findings, and it is this: effeminophobia *is* violence. The idea that femininity among boys is either the cause or consequence of sexual abuse is permeated with effeminophobia. Uncritically accepting such ideas in a taken-for-granted manner lends strength to gender binary and keeps its damaging apparatuses intact. It is the oppressive confines of gender binary that dictate what behaviors and attributes are to be considered gender-appropriate or inappropriate and which are policed or penalized. Such rigid confines prevent boys and men from accessing and experiencing a fuller range of gender expressions and prohibit many boys and men from recognizing, embracing and valuing their own and other boys' and men's femininities. It may also be argued that perpetrators draw upon effeminophobia when they use sexual violence as a tool to discipline boys' non-normative and nonconformist masculinities.

In several ways, survivors' journeys of healing from sexual abuse are rendered even more complicated by effeminophobic violence. At a broader level, effeminophobia also diminishes the disruptive possibilities innately carried within

gender nonconformity among boys through querying and queering patriarchal constructions of masculinity. Emancipating boys and men victim-survivors of CSA from effeminophobic violence, therefore, necessitates a determined rejection of restrictive and normative notions of gender, including the binary gender system. This also mandates attention to and interrogation of the damaging role that patriarchy plays not only in the lives of girls, women and gender-expansive people but also boys and men.

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