

Psychology behind Mansplaining and its Effects

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Introduction:

Mansplaining is a term that is derived from two words that is 'ftan' and 'Explaining'. But the meaning it holds is not just literal. A writer named Rebecca Solnit wrote an essay "Men Explain Things to Me: Facts Didn't Get in Their Way", published on TomDispatch.com on 13 April 2008 and from this the term mansplaining was inspired. Solnit narrates an incident in the essay where she was being lectured by a man about a book she had written at her own party. She didn't use the term mansplaining then but she described the phenomenon as "something every woman knows". After few months the word started appearing on social networking websites in the discourse of people online. Then it was added in the Oxford online dictionary in 2014.

Definition and Usage

The Oxford online dictionary defines mansplaining as - 'the practice of a man explaining something to a woman in a way that shows he thinks he knows and understands more than she does'. It is often used in cases where a man goes on to explain to a woman about something in a condescending and patronising manner which she didn't even ask for.

Such incidents mostly occur due to the deeply rooted male chauvinism in the society. Such men have big superiority complex and they are convinced that they are better than women in terms of intelligence, ability etc. So when a woman tries to tell something she is often interrupted and corrected by such men to show they know better, even if the woman is an expert and more experienced on the subject matter than those men. For example when a woman doctor is explained by a man about the female anatomy or child birth especially when the man has nothing to do with medicine. Author Rebecca Solnit ascribes the phenomenon to a combination of 'overconfidence and cluelessness'. This term is widely used on social media in criticism of such male chauvinist behaviour.

Psychology behind mansplaining

Women have been subjugated for a long period of time by men. Society progressed, gender discrimination started fading, new laws were made to protect women and they were given equal constitutional rights as men. But the tendency to objectify women still remains. Men have believed for quite a long time that women are objects of their imagination and should therefore do and behave the way men want. Because apparently men know what is best for women as they have been taking care of them for so long.

There are numerous incidents where women were advised and mansplained by men to do something they had no interest or will to do. Like for example men telling women on social media what to post and what not to, or even mansplaining women how their face would complement dark hair colour and so therefore should change their hair colour from blond to dark black. This tendency to invade into women's private life and advise or mansplain comes from a deeply rooted prejudice that men know better about women and therefore should listen to them for their own good.

Mansplaining is an issue arising from gender conflict, from the culture that values and lauds men's voice over women's. There is no denying the fact that men account for the major part of speech in business meetings, they usually dominate a group discussion also men's tweets are shared twice as much as those of female Twitter users. The whole human discourse is implicitly men's discourse majorly speaking.

There is nothing wrong with a man explaining something to a woman and vice versa, because explaining and sharing information is indeed great. But when a man 'mansplains' something to a woman, he interrupts or speaks over her often correcting her about something she already knows, in which she may be an expert, on the assumption that he knows better than her even though he has nothing to do with the subject field.

Observe an example given below. The woman who is a professional athlete tweets about her injuries she got in a bicycle race and the man goes on to reply to her tweet by mansplaining how to ride a bicycle.



A blog on internet named ‘Academic Men Explain Things To Me’ where women share such incidents of mansplaining is getting quite popular.

One post reads

“Today a male co-worker, who is into reading ‘popular science’ books, explained to me what a black hole was, and that 'COMPLICATED MATHEMATICAL EQUATIONS’ were used to predict the existence of black holes. I had just told him I studied nuclear astrophysics at university.”

Another incident where an astronaut is being explained by a man about ‘simple thermostatics’. Well she already knows that now doesn’t she? Or else she would not have been in space.



In many cases, the explanation has to do specifically with things that are unique to women—their bodies, their experiences, their lives. Many incidents show that men at some point have tried to prove that they know more about women than women themselves. This is indeed a classic case of mansplaining the psychology of women to women. Because there is no way a man can relate to or understand the lives and experiences they have as women.



A man can only see from his own point of view which he thinks is better than that of the woman's and hence will try to impose his opinion by mansplaining apparently for her own benefit.

It is very common for men to brag about their achievements and try to look an expert in any given subject matter. Men do this while conversing with other men as well but with women the intensity doubles and they suddenly become an expert on every subject matter. They do this because conventionally speaking it is believed that women are attracted to men who are successful and excel in their respective fields. So when an opportunity presents itself they try to lecture woman on the topic and pretend to know much more than the woman.

Posing as an expert on a subject grants them a sense of power, showcasing their talents to woo the woman just as a peacock flashing his feathers. Acknowledging the fact that women might be just as knowledgeable or even more informed about the topic makes them feel less powerful and it lowers their self esteem. Hence the only choice they opt for is mansplaining.

Effects of Mansplaining : A world where the voices of women are already marginalised, mansplaining becomes a big problem considering the fact that women still have a long way to go in terms of liberty and freedom. Mansplaining essentially silences the voice of a woman and tries to establish superiority and dominion. The incidents of mansplaining doesn't get the mainstream media attention because it is a subtle thing, something that is not explicit. But it affects the subconscious mind and tries to validate the traditional belief that men indeed know better, that they are undoubtedly superior than women.

The subtle hints and suggestions, interruptions and unasked for explanations that women receive make them wonder if they are actually being patronised or they are simply being overly sensitive. The most putrid consequence of this phenomenon is that it make women feel as a culprit for not listening to the so called expert when in reality she is a victim. It may not seem like a big deal in that particular moment but it deeply affects the psyche of women and it reflects in how women move and operate in the world.

Explaining something in a civil manner when asked is not a problem at all, but when the attitude is patronising and condescending then it no longer is about the subject matter. It becomes a deliberate attempt to subjugate the ideas and voice of the woman, to show her that she knows very little as compared to the man, to impose on her the image that men still are intelligent than them. This becomes a huge barrier when women are still grasping the notion of free speech and are still adapting to the modern society. Phenomenons such as mansplaining may further demotivate them or even make them doubt themselves when it comes to speaking their mind.

These men who are "helping out" women with unsolicited and misinformed explanations fuelled with overconfidence and ignorance, are products of the culture we are living in, a culture that conditions everyone to accept these conversational dynamics as the norm.

Criticism

The term has been misused a lot of times and has thus invited a lot of criticism. As an ideal society that we strive to achieve where both man and woman are equal, it seems unfair to men in general who are on the receiving end of this tag. Some support the fact that 'man' is used as a derogatory prefix and this tendency is a part of misandry. The term has been used a number of times to silence a debate or to invalidate everything a man is saying even if he may

be speaking the truth.

Pseudo feminists have been misusing this term to take out revenge on men who have silenced voices of women for years, just for the sake of making men feel guilty about themselves. In 2015 Los Angeles Times article, wrote that "To suggest that men are more qualified for the designation than women is not only sexist but almost as tone deaf as categorising everything that a man says as mansplaining."

It is most definitely true that women face this phenomenon in everyday life and even more on social media. Calling out such men in public and pointing it out that they are indeed mansplaining has made quite a stir on the social media among men, as they now tread carefully on this path. On the other hand the misuse of this term has resulted into the silencing of debate or has put a stop on exchanging information. As soon as this term is used, it makes the man a sexist and everything he says further on becomes invalid. This will lead to an unhealthy human discourse where women start presuming that every man is sexist and is trying to mansplain resulting in marred communication and eventually fuel the idea of misogyny. The term mansplaining essentially addresses and calls out men who are prejudiced against women but if misused, it can be seen as prejudice against men. Therefore the term becomes the very thing that it meant to stand against.

References:

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