



Pulkit is your plain vanilla techie by day and a standup comic by night.

A Subtle Kind of Violence

The phrase domestic violence conjures up the painful image of a physically abused woman with scars, blood, bruises, broken bones and much more. Or, a woman emotionally harassed by the spouse or his family. While this is obviously a serious problem, and nowhere near elimination from our society, a lot of awareness exists today thanks to organizations like Maitri and the women who speak up against their abusers.

But I want to highlight a type of violence that leaves no physical evidence. It is subtle, implicit and invisible to all but the victim. There is no legal recourse for it. It very prevalent, much more than physical or emotional abuse, and even men who consider themselves progressive often inflict it. Forget men, even women propagate it to their own detriment. This comes in the form of “harmless” innuendos, taunts, jokes and derogatory comments. Its sole purpose is to spread the notion that women are brainless, annoying, inferior to men and should know their place. You often see it in a man “instructing” his wife as if he owns her, in jokes painting women as petty and frivolous, in movies and songs depicting women as objects for men’s pleasure.

A few instances:

- WhatsApp forwards portraying wives as constantly nagging and complaining and the husband as an oppressed soul whose carefree life ended after marriage (e.g. husband = hasna bandh)
- Jokes indicating the wife, once attractive, has become an ugly shrew so its “only natural” that husband chases other women (a.k.a. the infamous hot neighbor or office secretary)
- Chats with male buddies often devolving into rating women’s bodies and reducing them into sexual objects. (see recent expose of Delhi’s “bois locker room”).
- Taunts of women being bad drivers when men are equally bad, or even worse due to drunk/aggressive driving.
- Claims that women are too talkative and don’t let men speak (when in reality mansplaining is a serious problem)
- Numerous memes during the COVID lockdown sympathizing with husbands doing house work, as if house work is solely a woman’s job.
- Jokes indicating that women wear makeup to trap poor innocent men in their crafty webs.
- Jokes implying the husband works hard to earn money and the wife only knows how to blow it up on shopping.

Most of us, including myself, are guilty of this subtle violence. We need to be extremely mindful of our words even if they’re meant as “jokes,” because they aren’t funny and are damaging to a woman’s spirit.