



## Religion, Feminism and COVID-19: Drawing Parallels from Lived Experience and Anecdotal Evidence

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**Abstract**

This biographical narrative paper is embedded in the lived experience which addresses diverse gender-conscious positioning in terms of gender, gender equality and feminism for men, women and gender diverse people. This anecdotal frame of reference points toward the hierarchical practice and tools from decades of engaging in work-based life of man/masculinity. The COVID-19 presents an opportunity to apply the distinct strategies from feminism to adverse gender norms, toxic masculinities and transform inequalities. COVID-19 has become a pathway to establish flexible spiritual growth, theistic existentialism, upend the breadwinner's mentality of men, and promote shared caregiving roles between men and women. The new world-wonder of a pandemic outbreak and consequential quarantine embodied a necessity for not just psychological and spiritual growth but for wellbeing and the meaning of existence too.

**Keywords:**

COVID-19; feminism; religion; spirituality; wellbeing; gender equality

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### **Introduction**

This article aimed at exploring the intersectionalities of masculinity, gender identity, relationships and bodily experience in context to individuals who are surviving in a COVID-19 pandemic era. In doing so, this paper focuses on ethnographical accounts to investigate into how embodied subjectivities are constructing to advance understandings on an embodied way of being a male-bodied in the context of a global crisis. The results suggest that discourse, such as these presented in this narrative, contributive to the constant process of transformation of life and self-imposed interjections in male-bodied persons. Narrative is presented as a form of inquiry and/or representation that may address and communicate the embodied, emplaced and fluid experience in a particular context. In this case study, the discourse is simultaneously the subject, method and analysis in this context. Male-bodied individuals are understood by both personal and historical social contexts conditioned within social manifestations. Eventually a person internalizes this corporal symbolism and reconfigures personal identity, perception of the world or imagination of the future.<sup>1</sup> One of the social construct is religion. It is significant to understand that individuals exist in a risk society where a sense of security is connected with the expectation of an increased presence of religion (spirituality is not correlated with it). And risks can be magnified, dramatized or minimized to the extent that individual roles and sense of self seems to revolve around this belief.

Social inequalities such as being poor and marginalized became the prime victims while the whole society has been locked down. The theme of masculinity and risk perception is also

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<sup>1</sup> Harris, M. "Three in the Room": Embodiment, Disclosure, and Vulnerability in Qualitative Research. *Qual. Health Res.* 2015, 25, 1689–1699.

highlighted in risk-crisis. As a male-dominated occupational and societal arena, the masculinity and bread-winner mentality are exacerbating mental health concerns among male-bodied individuals. It is an institutional gendered division of occupations which reflects gendered subjectivity – formulated and configured with regard to risk as analytical process in masculinize subjectivity. The reactive crisis and risk perception focuses the fundamental aspects of ethics, work, spirituality, practical and intellectual issues for male-bodied persons. Many men and masculinities studies have associated cultural-religious imaginaries as heroism, bravery, masking fear and work management.

Heroism became a constituting feature of the operationalization of masculinity which begins when men leave for work.<sup>2</sup> Work has become a necessary reactive social chain in a society which values productivity as societal contribution and heroic qualities. After this current crisis of pandemic, political structure needs has an opportunity to reassess gender balance ontology in all societies, uniformly. Workers in women dominated occupations are fighting with more courage and human responsibility. The toxic consequences of masculinity on a global scale require reexamination on care-giving, bread-winning and ‘family-head’ roles. Another noteworthy dimension of toxic masculinity is the inclination towards male entitlement, misogynistic mindset and gender stereotyped discrimination on occupational roles. The toxic aspects of masculinity are distancing from femininity, feminism and gender equality. The radically self-centered masculinity needs intersectionalist examination in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, postcolonialism, religion and role of work.

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<sup>2</sup>Whitehead, S. (2002). *Men and masculinities: Key themes and new directions*. Malden, MA: Polity.

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This paper aims to explore a conjunctural cultural theory of the aspects of masculinity, work and religious factors. Cultural masculinity is a key to comprehending its entwinement with toxic masculinity. Structural theory in historical social psychology, cultural studies, feminist studies, gender studies and masculinity studies stresses conjunctural considerations embedded in the embodied historical changes of men's masculinity, stability/instability, crisis management and supposed macho-ness that typify cultural toxic expectations of gendered stereotypes.<sup>3 4</sup>

## **Literature Review**

Many countries and territories immediately implemented partial lockdown resulting in quarantine and national changes in behavioral modification practices like social-distancing, and self-isolation. And while these strategies are mandatory for effective control and prevention of coronavirus, few researches conducted so far are indicating that it has already beginning to exhibit the short-term and long-term repercussions on mental health and psychological and social wellbeing. These impacts on mental health are the paramount indications that immediate identification, prevention and intervention are needed for individual and community level. The current dearth of scientific knowledge about psychological implications demand rigorous scientific cross-cultural studies on perpetuating and protective factors related to coronavirus and associated social isolation's impact. Nevertheless, large-scale traumatic events like mass shootings, natural disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes, or environmental impacts are consequentially summons psychological issues including posttraumatic stress symptoms, depressive symptoms, anxiety, fear, psychological and emotional distress, panic attacks, negative

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<sup>3</sup> Hall, S, Massey, D (2010) Interpreting the crisis. *Soundings* 44(44): 57–71.

<sup>4</sup> Highmore, B (2016) *Culture*. New York: Routledge.

emotions, loneliness, grief and bereavement, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, ambivalence, mood and sleep problems, substance use and abuse, addiction, self-injury, suicidal ideations, suicidal attempts, death by suicide, interpersonal violence (verbal abuse, physical violence, anger, aggression, frustration, abuse, racism, xenophobia, discrimination, bias, prejudice, stigmatization, and marginalization, domestic violence, child abuse), conspiracy theories, misinfodemics and a wide range of emotional behavioral issues. In the situation of COVID-19 pandemic, it has been predicted that there is likelihood of increase in anxiety, depression, substance abuse, prolonged loneliness, and drastically increase cases of domestic violence and child abuse during the quarantine period.

Since the pandemic outbreak of COVID-19, researches have reported the prevalence of mental health repercussion and fear in populations across the world. The COVID-19 related anxiety and fear, similar with past epidemics/pandemics are found to be prevalent of drastic behavioral changes.<sup>5</sup> During the COVID-19 self-isolation and social distancing in quarantine period, individuals experiences complex decision-making pertaining to coping and survival.<sup>6</sup> Coping strategies and problem solving skills rooted in the ideologies and belief systems.<sup>7</sup> Religiosity/spirituality is reportedly coping strategies as spiritual and religious coping during the adverse situations. Spiritual and religious copings used by individuals either by positive coping style (meaning-making, benevolent religious appraisals) or negative style (punishment and reappraisal of God's power).<sup>8</sup> Religiosity/spirituality (R/S) has been used to manage crisis

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<sup>5</sup> X. Tan, "Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Epidemic and Change of People's Health Behavior in China," *Health Education Research* 19, no. 5 (2004): pp. 576-580, <https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyg074>.

<sup>6</sup> Sonia Mukhtar, "Psychological Health during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic Outbreak," *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 66, no. 5 (2020a): pp. 512-516, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764020925835>.

<sup>7</sup> Songnian Zhao, John Wu, and David Ben-Arieh, "Modeling Infection Spread and Behavioral Change Using Spatial Games," *Health Systems* 4, no. 1 (2015): pp. 41-53, <https://doi.org/10.1057/hs.2014.22>.

<sup>8</sup> Myleme O. Harrison et al., "The Epidemiology of Religious Coping: A Review of Recent Literature," *International Review of Psychiatry* 13, no. 2 (2001): pp. 86-93, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540260124356>.

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situations and distress.<sup>9</sup> Studies have reported the impact of religiosity/spirituality in mental health and promoting higher reporting of life satisfaction (wellbeing, sense of purpose, meaning of life, hope) among a range of individuals.<sup>10</sup>

Spirituality and practices are associated with wellbeing and sound mental and physical health among all individuals, all the factors observed significant in the pandemic outbreak. COVID-19 pandemic is marked with manifested impact on psychological and socioeconomic adversity due to both direct effects and the preventive measures of COVID-19.<sup>11</sup><sup>12</sup> The pandemic outbreak has also considerably become a spiritual crisis in terms of faith and a religious crisis (services/gathering which has been severely curtailed).<sup>13</sup> Historically, religious practices or spiritual beliefs offered comfort and spiritual support during the previous epidemics/pandemics.<sup>14</sup> Current researches have reported evidence of positive association between spirituality and wellbeing. These reporting are also support the role of meaning-finding,

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<sup>9</sup> Abbas Ebadi et al., "Spirituality: A Key Factor in Coping among Iranians Chronically Affected by Mustard Gas in the Disaster of War," *Nursing & Health Sciences* 11, no. 4 (2009): pp. 344-350, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1442-2018.2009.00498.x>.

<sup>10</sup> Harold G. Koenig, "Religion, spirituality, and health: The research and clinical implications," *ISRN Psychiatry*, 2012, 1–33

<sup>11</sup> Sonia Mukhtar, "Mental Health and Emotional Impact of Covid-19: Applying Health Belief Model for Medical Staff to General Public of Pakistan," *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity* 87 (2020b): pp. 28-29, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bbi.2020.04.012>.

<sup>12</sup> Betty Pfefferbaum and Carol S. North, "Mental Health and the COVID-19 Pandemic," *New England Journal of Medicine* 383, no. 6 (June 2020): pp. 510-512, <https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmp2008017>.

<sup>13</sup> Sayed A. Quadri, "Covid-19 and Religious Congregations: Implications for Spread of Novel Pathogens," *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* 96 (2020): pp. 219-221, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijid.2020.05.007>.

<sup>14</sup> Nicole Archambeau, "Healing Options during the Plague: Survivor Stories from a Fourteenth-Century Canonization Inquest," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 85, no. 4 (2011): pp. 531-559, <https://doi.org/10.1353/bhm.2011.0081>.

meaning-making and mindfulness with spirituality.<sup>15</sup> These cognitive patterns and behaviors could have directed proportional relationship between personal/social impact and fostering meaning-making in the face of adversity.<sup>16 17</sup>

Contemporary schools of thoughts including psychodynamic, cognitive behavioral, humanistic and transpersonal(ism) have become invested in the role of spirituality and mindful practices.<sup>18</sup> Religiosity and spirituality in the form of coping mechanism uses cognitive behavioral which stems directly from belief system.<sup>19</sup> Religious coping is known to be a more prevalent strategy in the face of helplessness and hopelessness.<sup>20</sup> Religiosity and spirituality provide coping strategies through acceptance and adjustment to novel situations. Studies have suggested that religiosity and spirituality facilitate life satisfaction, emotional wellbeing and faith.<sup>21</sup>

## **Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology**

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<sup>15</sup> Harold G. Koenig, "Maintaining Health and Well-Being by Putting Faith into Action during the Covid-19 Pandemic," *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, no. 5 (2020): pp. 2205-2214, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01035-2>.

<sup>16</sup> Raphael M. Bonelli and Harold G. Koenig, "Mental Disorders, Religion and Spirituality 1990 to 2010: A Systematic Evidence-Based Review," *Journal of Religion and Health* 52, no. 2 (2013): pp. 657-673, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-013-9691-4>.

<sup>17</sup> Waleed Rana, Sonia Mukhtar, and Shamim Mukhtar, "Mental Health of Medical Workers in Pakistan during the Pandemic COVID-19 Outbreak," *Asian Journal of Psychiatry* 51 (2020): p. 102080, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102080>.

<sup>18</sup> Sonia Mukhtar, "Mental Health and Psychosocial Aspects of Coronavirus Outbreak in Pakistan: Psychological Intervention for Public Mental Health Crisis," *Asian Journal of Psychiatry* 51 (2020c): p. 102069, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2020.102069>.

<sup>19</sup> Jeff Levin, "The Faith Community and the SARS-COV-2 Outbreak: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?," *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, no. 5 (February 2020): pp. 2215-2228, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01048-x>.

<sup>20</sup> Curtis W. Hart, "Spiritual Lessons from the Coronavirus Pandemic," *Journal of Religion and Health* 59, no. 2 (2020): pp. 623-624, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-020-01011-w>.

<sup>21</sup> Huang, L., Xu, F., & Liu, H. Emotional responses and coping strategies of nurses and nursing college students during COVID-19 outbreak. *MedRxiv* 52, (2020).18.



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The theoretical frameworks discussed in this paper are determined by the social (cultural) trauma theory, humanistic paradigms (person-centered, gestalt and transactional analysis) and the Critical Studies on Men and Masculinities.<sup>22 2324</sup> Critical race theory, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) scholarship, POC (Person of Color) masculinity studies and culture studies are significant steps to understand the manifestations of intersectionality and identities.<sup>2526</sup> Feminist justice discourse and gender equality discourse are central praxis to approach intersectional analysis. The COVID-19 pandemic has become a traumatic event of social trauma as it leads to unexpected and radical changes in many social segments of life. This pandemic has manifested itself in altering the systemic regulations and the tenants of social functioning at the social and personal level. The personal wellbeing comprised of meaning making, perspective taking, communicating and connecting, values and notions are questioned. The economic consequences of pandemic lead to compromised bread-winning mindset, unemployment and insecurity for people. Additionally, these changes have revealed the inequalities in distributing resources uniformly. Social trauma has exacerbated scarcity of financial resources which in turn

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<sup>22</sup> Alexander, Jeffrey. 2004. "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma." in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, edited by J. C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen et al. Berkeley: University of California Press.

<sup>23</sup> Sztompka, Piotr. 2002. *Socjologia. Analiza społeczeństwa*. Cracow: Znak Publishing.

<sup>24</sup> Pini, Barbara, & Bob Pease. 2013. *Men, Masculinities and Methodologies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>25</sup> Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.

<sup>26</sup> Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. *Signs*, 38(4), 785–810.

has made individuals question existential meaning.<sup>27</sup> Feminist discourses related to COVID-19 pandemic has been still addressing the intersections of sexism, gender bias, racism, patriarchy, ableism and heteronormativity, social power and socializing institutions. Intersectionality refers to the multitudinous ways in which oppressive system acts; and due to the blind compliance to gender norms race, ethnicity, sexuality, economic background, geography and religion has become causes of discrimination and oppression. Individuals with differently positioned social identities have impacted markedly.

This paper draws inspiration from Rambo (2007) and Gloviczki (2016) research methods of autoethnographic sketching.<sup>28,29</sup> An existential phenomenology is integrated in this narrative. This particular approach emphasis is place on more on ontology (Heidegger, 1962/1999) in the framework of COVID-19 lived experiences.<sup>30</sup> The anecdotal narrative further construed the lived experiences to the convergence of gender and religious juncture in the pandemic period. The theme is the product from the interview/case study of these analyses techniques.<sup>31</sup>

## **Result –Growth Process and Psychological Analysis of the Process**

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<sup>27</sup> Frąckowiak-Sochańska, Monika. 2020. "Mental health in the pandemic times." *Society Register* 4(3): 67–78. <https://doi.org/10.14746/sr.2020.4.3.03>

<sup>28</sup> Carol Rambo, "Sketching as Autoethnographic Practice," *Symbolic Interaction* 30, no. 4 (2007): pp. 531-542, <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.2007.30.4.531>.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Joseph Gloviczki, "Leaving London: Three Autoethnographic Sketches," *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 21, no. 4 (September 2015): pp. 286-289, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325024.2015.1067093>.

<sup>30</sup> Heidegger, M.. Exposition of the question of the meaning of being. In C. Polifroni & M. Welch (Eds.), *Perspectives on philosophy of science in nursing (1962/1999)*: pp. 273–301. Lippincott.

<sup>31</sup> Julie Green et al., "Generating Best Evidence from Qualitative Research: The Role of Data Analysis," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 31, no. 6 (2007): pp. 545-550, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-6405.2007.00141.x>.

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The central concerns in this narrative revolve around work, religiosity/spirituality and the significance of feminism for de-normalizing stereotypical gender role expectations.<sup>3233</sup> The lived experiences presented the prospect of spiritual growth instead of telling stories and live in illusion of process. Because collective madness is sanity, many can be fools, but the most foolish are the ones who don't know they are fools; they just keep reiterating what they perceive from others tell them to”<sup>34</sup>as it is challenging to figure out a difference between a game and adult levellor (perspectives of transactional analysis). So it is fundamental to figure out the genuine connection or façade upfront. Thus sometimes it’s complicated to differentiate personal and others ego-state (child, parent or adult) they come from.

Following presents the autoethnographic approach embedded in the anecdotal narrative of a male-bodied individual recounting the lived experiences from quarantine and isolation implemented since the advent of COVID-19. This narrative is written focuses on expected adverse gender roles, only men’s work mindset, toxic muscularity, feminism, and religious/spiritual struggle and growth process. This narrative is interpreted and analyzed in the discussion section examining through multiple psychological perspectives.

*Once upon a time, there was a boy. His name was Adam and he lived in a town that no longer exists, in a house that no one heard of, on the edge of a field that no longer bears the resemblance, where everything and nothing exists in the same field. A boy with no liberty of living a life as a child, cracking a joke or talking in front of elders, taking decision of favorite toy*

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<sup>32</sup> Sonia Mukhtar, “8 Minutes and 46 Seconds of ‘I Can’t Breathe’: A Call for Anti-Racist Feminist Solidarity amid Covid-19,” *International Social Work* 64, no. 2 (2021a): pp. 255-260, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820967417>.

<sup>33</sup> Waleed Rana et al., “Psychological Health of Aging Mental Healthcare Social Workforce amidst Coronavirus Disease-2019 Pandemic,” *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* 36, no. 3 (2021): pp. 461-462, <https://doi.org/10.1002/gps.5456>.

<sup>34</sup> Paulo Coelho, ‘Veronika decides to die’. HarperCollins Publishers: USA. 1998

*or hanging out with friends. After all, his family had expectations and he must be living up to their expectations by embracing the responsibilities. A stick would be a sword, a pebble would be a boulder, and a doll house could be a warzone. One upon a time, there was a boy who lived in a house across the field wishing of stars and moon. He invented thousands of games every night, he was the queen and a knight till the sun rises. He was taught to work and work hard because it constitutes a 'man' and necessary for survival. One simple day, his hand stopped collecting the world in his small hands and the stars-and-moon wisher yielded.*

Crying and tears have always been a taboo for male-bodied persons buried deep in the conformity of toxic masculinity and gender norms in male privileged patriarchy.<sup>35</sup> When Adam (alias) was a child, he was exposed to the death of his class fellows in front of his eyes, exposure of death and never talking or crying created a clutter in the ground. That emerging need didn't meet at that time, the unmet need continues to covert itself and confusions started ascend in middle zone of the awareness facilitated by fantasy activity such as internal debate and day-dreaming. This impasse disallows him for meaningful interaction with the environment.

*Start of the day of Adam (alias after the 'first man') and his employees on a regular day where he stressed the connotation of work. 'Nothing happens or should I put as no miracle happens while you live. The scenery changes, people come and go, that's all. There are no appalling beginnings or abysmal endings as long as you keep working. Work is important because days are tacked on without rhyme or motive, an interminable tedious addition.'*

*Adam needs to work all the time. If he was not working, he perceives his life meaningless. That society no longer requires his services, that nobody needs him anymore. Adam was an*

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<sup>35</sup> Sonia Mukhtar, "Feminism and Gendered Impact of Covid-19: Perspective of a Counselling Psychologist," *Gender, Work & Organization* 27, no. 5 (2020d): pp. 827-832, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12482>.

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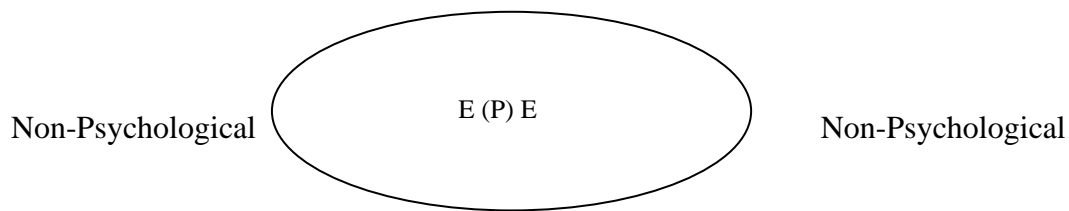
*honest person and wishes to validate his earning along with societal expectations or the needs of his family. He hardly talks to his wife; he was after all a nice, faithful, hardworking man who earns for his family. Most of his friends looked up to him; he had a better degree and a better job. He went to university because someone, at a time when universities used to be important more than anything else, said that, in order to survive and rise in this world, you had to had a degree. And thus the world was deprived of some excellent gardener, dreamer, painter and writer.*

As a result of this unfinished gestalt he started projecting his feelings, needs and preferences beyond himself in the realm of the environment. Adam avoid taking responsibility for his own feelings ('my anger takes me over'), parts of body ('my shoulders are stiff and killing me'), and aspects of own experience which, being "unacceptable" to him, has attributed elsewhere instead. Adam feels the emotions of sadness and insecurities again which the childhood traumatic experience initially shaped and now he is conscious of the similar interpretation (not suppressed memories). The significant difference between merely recalling an earlier experience and *reliving* past exists. It is about figuring out which parts of his self are his own and which are twisted to please others.

Sometimes every task echoes the obtuseness and vainness but life hardly seems to alter its course, it never does for those who encircles without belief and courage. Adam felt the most frustration that he ever could felt in his life; after all it had been months since he worked properly due to COVID-19 pandemic outbreak quarantine. For some reason, that frustration slowly turned first into passive aggressive and within a month, Adam expressed anger overtly by verbal outburst which almost cost him his long-hard-worked project.

This interference binds psychological energy which fades from fully functioning in the present reality. By awareness of needs, flourishing dialogic ‘I-thou’ and engaging with resistance requires full phenomenological awareness - homeostasis, emotions and cognitive process.

*Creative adjustment is not just a case of bodying forth; the creative adjustment can be a bodying back.*<sup>36</sup>



(P+E=Life-space, L)

Figure 1. Phenomenal world and relationship between person and environment

Here oval represented a person’s phenomenal world and relationship between oneself and environment, within personal life-space. Non-psychological is ‘real’ external world and a person live in inter-subjective world (figure 1).

It explains why someone is used to of falling amid deflection/hyper-sensitivity, introjects/refusal to accommodate, projection and confluence.<sup>37</sup> This reflects one of the conditions of worth that has very prominently affected those who are always seeking approval of elders as reinforced by their behavior that they would only be acknowledged if they

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<sup>36</sup> Dave Mann, ‘Gestalt Therapy’, Routledge Taylor and Francid group: New York.

<sup>37</sup> Sonia Mukhtar, “Psychology and Politics of Covid-19 Misinfodemics: Why and How Do People Believe in Misinfodemics?,” *International Sociology* 36, no. 1 (2021b): pp. 111-123, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580920948807>.

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follow/conform to their decisions. The organism's meaningful visceral experience from consciousness requires dis-internalized conditions and introjections.<sup>38</sup>

*Serenity comes from within the heart. Rumi said that there is a large realm beyond right and wrong. We will find each other there.*<sup>39</sup> *Adam who tries to understand his task become a man who looked at the road ahead of him knew in his heart that his journey would be a difficult one. One day, he felt out of love with his life, his aim was confused and lost. He found that he lacks strength and courage to live and feel alive. When things don't change, their sameness becomes an accretion.*<sup>40</sup>

The external locus of control is so intense that abiding by their decisions can cause slight incongruence at the moment though the stringency of self-structure prevent acting upon actualizing tendency. Majority has an array of emotions, attitudes and conducts which are either relics of their childhood, usually resembles parental figures and the rare ones are adapted to current reality. Few have such strong script beliefs for survival circumstance so that it took a while to unscript but scripts pay-off manifest social responses. Their script messages, their injunctions prohibit them to break patterns so they never allowed their children to socialize normally. *Am I ready to change? Am I willing to make a difference in the life I am living? Am I ready to transform within? It's a pity if even a single day in your life is the same as the day before.*<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Sonia Mukhtar and Waleed Rana, "Covid-19 and Individuals with Mental Illness in Psychiatric Facilities," *Psychiatry Research* 289 (2020): p. 113075, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113075>.

<sup>39</sup> Hakim, A, K. 'The metaphysics of Rumi. The institute of Islamic culture'. Shirkat printing press, Lahore. 1999

<sup>40</sup> Khalil Gibran, 'The Prophet'. Wordsworth Edition Limited. Kent. 1996. P.15

<sup>41</sup> Elif Shafaq, 'The forty rules of love', Penguin books: UK, 2010. p336

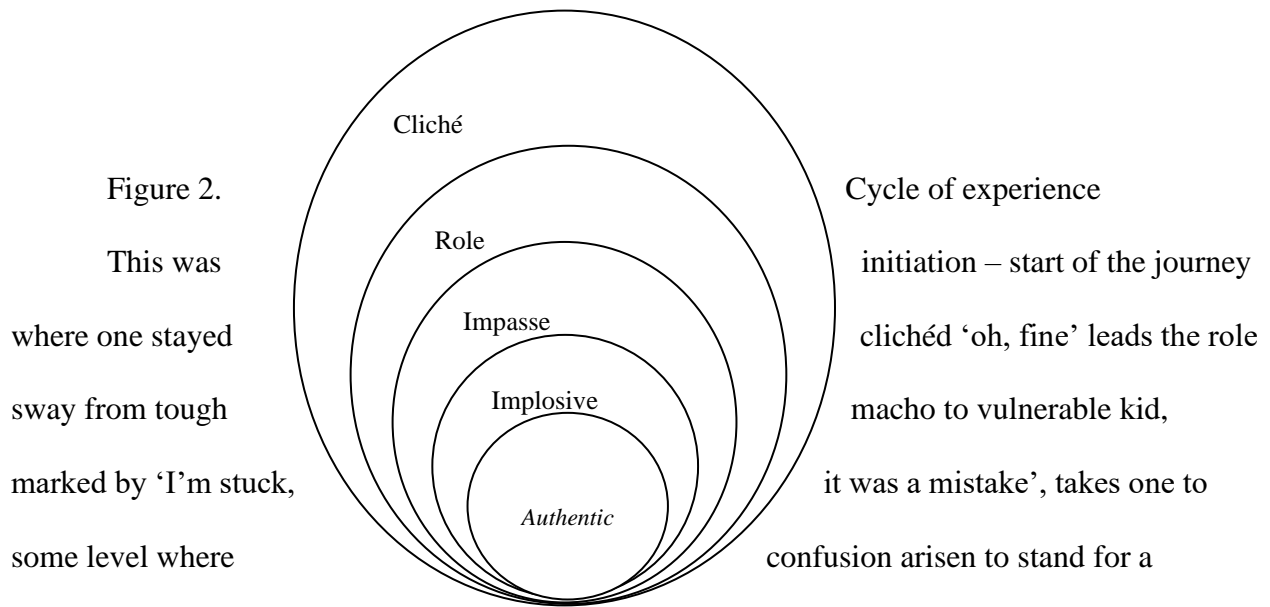


Figure 2.  
This was  
where one stayed  
sway from tough  
marked by ‘I’m stuck,  
some level where

Cycle of experience  
initiation – start of the journey  
clichéd ‘oh, fine’ leads the role  
macho to vulnerable kid,  
it was a mistake’, takes one to  
confusion arisen to stand for a

decision. By changing perspective into the explosion/real self by explosion of grief and anger reflects explosion of joy can shift a perspective.<sup>42</sup> Initially he faced lot of resistance and judgment and he found himself slipping back into disbelief and second-guessing and looking for validation and applause. Prohibitions and injunctions, praise, blame and strokes and punishment are significantly profound actions need to be acted upon freely (figure 2). The process of insight is frequently followed by an intense emotional release. The strive to become free, fully functioning and being holistic brought a growth process and then allowing the actualizing tendency to fully activated. Believing that change could happen at any moment embodied a necessity for not just their happiness but also for the meaning of their existence. Most people avoid the change for the most simplest of reasons: conformism, age, fear of being ridiculed, feeling of impotence, lack of courage and losing hope. Berne said that a loser has no idea what he'll do if he loses but talks about what he'll do if he wins, whereas a winner has no idea what

<sup>42</sup> Sonia Mukhtar and Sakina Mukhtar, “Letter to the Editor: Mental Health and Psychological Distress in People with Diabetes during COVID-19,” *Metabolism* 108 (2020): p. 154248, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.metabol.2020.154248>.



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he'll do if he loses but knows what he'll do if he loses,<sup>43</sup> Adam was scared to know himself beyond society's expectations and gender roles. Transforming the self begins from understanding the "*Cogito, ergo sum*", *I think therefore I am*, - I imagine, I do, I perceive, and I am alive! This facilitates its illusive face to be unmasked, which is a Present moment – an incredible reality paradigm.

We yearn to stand up for our own 'integrity'. We flourish in expressing personal experiences about writing, inspiring poetry, candid drawing, connecting with nature, and expressing thankfulness for fiction, current art, soul-soothing music, and the very period we live in. We like the idea of being fully functional instead of adapting or cowering but it gradually became a self-actualizing experience. This visceral self-exploration of self-expression highlighted the importance of know-thyself rather than justifications or clarifications for behavioral or attitudinal patterns.

### **Discussion**

Coronavirus (COVID-19) mental health problems or biopsychosocial-spiritual consequences should be addressed as such. In this scenario, mental health practitioners can contribute a significant role towards the individuals (affected/infected/suspected/ at-risk) in general public. It is necessary to address the relationship between individualism and hegemonic masculinity as it foresees individual's and society's responses to gendered structures. Hegemonic masculinity has been characterized as the set of values established by men in power that functions to include and exclude and to organize society in gender unequal ways. This also

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<sup>43</sup> Muriel James and Dorothy Jongeward. *Born to win*. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc. 1971

includes individualism, power over others, male entitlement and male privilege.<sup>44</sup> Following presents the comparative analysis of humanistic theories to delineate the psychological-social understanding behind the discussed narrative.

*All 'I' do*, the logo of Socrates wherein lies the emergence of humanistic nativity. Humanistic pragmatism underlies the very principle presented by Socrates, for he stated that the opinion of all men is true. This initiates the argument of *humanism as logical Psychologism*, that fundamental logical operation has psychological aspect. This principal later emerged and emphasized an individual's inherent drive towards growth and creativity. Language is the Rubicon animals never cross; language is the symbolization of human consciousness and latter is the very foundation of human personality, the felt uniqueness of the individual. Goldstein formulated a holistic approach to organismic functioning and self-actualizing tendency. Maslow proposed that people are born functioning and given healthy growth conditions will remain the same way. Things go awry and dis-ease occurs when those growth conditions are not met. Humanistic philosophy focuses on self-development, responsibility, self-awareness and self-directed changes in attitudes, beliefs and behavior towards health and growth of individuals. Carl Rogers applied these humanistic concepts in his formulation of client-centered therapy (Rogsonian psychotherapy person-centered psychotherapy, client-centered therapy, person-centered counseling); later Perls contributed in the form of Gestalt psychology/psychotherapy and then Berne proposed Transactional analysis. Despite their many ingenious views, Person-Centered (PC), Gestalt and Transactional Analysis (TA) share the analogous notion of Humanistic approach.

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<sup>44</sup> Connell, R.; Messerschmidt, J. Hegemonic masculinity rethinking the concept. *Gend. Soc.* **2005**, *19*, 829–859.

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Humanistic believers honored non-rational experiences and the dominance of rationality is not presumed. Moreover, Rogers who never had any particular mentor, offered non-directive, client centered therapy which changes the course of psychotherapy that fully believes in humanism and emerges from humanistic school of thought. While Gestalt and Transactional analysis are two complementary approaches to the psychodynamic factors, share more advanced approaches of humanistic perspective.

The central question of all approaches is not if change will occur, but whether human change will occur in the direction of growth or deterioration, or whether there will be an apparent absence of change in which the individual grows or deteriorates slowly. They share the same principle that an organism is a central focus and they must be understood in the context of their unique humanness. These humanistic approaches tend to focus on phenomenological approach to the study of human behavior. The psychologist/psychotherapist/counselor/therapist aims at rapport building/connecting bond which creates therapeutic conditions to facilitate uncovering blind spots, recognizing personal strengths, understanding own processes and making different choices.

The elevated view of human nature which PC holds is matched by their emphasis on individual uniqueness that that no two organisms are ever the same. The most directional force in organic life is its tendency towards goal-directed response. The organism has one primary tendency: striving to actualize, sustain and strengthen the organism's experiences, according to

person centered psychotherapeutic approach.<sup>45</sup> However, Gestalt is based on holistic view of human beings involved in their striving for self-actualization to fulfill biological, psychological, social and spiritual needs. Every person, plant, and animal, according to Perls, has only one inborn goal: to actualize itself as it is.<sup>46</sup> The circumstances for wholeness and progress are created when people identify with their whole-self, when they acknowledge whatever aspect of them occurs at any given time. In Gestalt therapy, people can only thrive and be truly understood in context of their relationships. Interestingly, Berne embraces valuing human being in shorthand OK-ness and surmised basic drive for love and growth and a need for love-recognition in his existential life-positions. He regarded his life-positions as intrinsically constructive and in this way he envisaged the inborn potential from birth for fulfillment and self-actualization.

It's interesting how Gestalt talk about bodily awareness like erogenous zones in active and passive tactile agents, using all senses in fervent erotic love play. The desire to fill the urn of life, creative intention is yearning in my body and the expression if this creativity is loving assertion of life. Gestalt therapy along with meditation and mindfulness practice really has been about being here-and-now, awareness of sensations and mobilization allows us to live without shame and guilt and tentatively go forward, knowing that it will not happen overnight and is an ongoing and painful journey.

Meditation and mindfulness joins an individual's personal and impersonal self by controlling the activities of mind from outside dis-eases. These activities came from perversion, which came from perception, and perception is an idea of an object without any reality. And it can be controlled by concentration of here-and-now so does mind is controlled and self stays in

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<sup>45</sup> Rogers C: Client-centered therapy: Its current practice, implications and theory, Houghton Mifflin company, New York, 1951

<sup>46</sup> Dryden W: Individual Therapy: A handbook, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1992, p.177

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its native condition. We recommend utilization of the experiment to help clients transition from talking to doing and experiencing. This is a paradigm on growth and development, not simply a set of practices to manage dis-orders.

Transactional analysis can be incorporated when one wants help in changing patterns in their lives that are not productive. Although TA benefits from a vast repertoire of diverse therapeutic practices, with considerable range for the growth of more theoretical and applied approaches to dealing with affective work, bodily awareness, and creative perspective. Because of the simplicity (thinking, analysis and behavior) of TA and the power (*embracing psychological, interpersonal, intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual experience in a holistic way*) of Gestalt has more applicability of these approaches.

### **Integrative Psychotherapeutic and Counselling Approaches**

It is significant to establish therapeutic techniques anew for each client because it's about accepting an individual for who they are. Begin by considering the individual clients as thinking, feeling, and behaving persons and rather than working in a linear method, work with these three dimensions in an integrative manner. Thus, draw on the two approaches which stresses upon expressing and experiencing feelings.

Counseling must use techniques and practices that are consistent with the clients' values, worldview, life experiences, and cultural background in order to be effective. By considering, TA acknowledging colloquial vocalization it explicitly encourages clients to comprehend the theory and viewing Gestalt buoying creativity and experimenting with client's perceptions of reality and phenomenological understanding. Gestalt therapy employs an empty-chair technique

or two-chair technique. During therapeutic session, another way to draw out present feelings could be through autonomy and spontaneity. Rather than exchanging about a circumstance, some make it present by truly carrying to life a conflict; they are undergoing as ‘rubberbands’ or ‘racket feelings’. ‘I’m not OK - You’re OK’.

Insight in Gestalt therapy and TA provides the emotional shift that links the awareness of the multiple emotional transformations with significant growing development. Male socialization and society’s expectations on boys and men’s emotion regulation impact the way they disclose mental and emotional difficulties. Male-bodied individuals are more likely to externalize through maladaptive behaviors and internalizes emotional deregulatory behaviors.<sup>4748</sup>

However, insight without action only could not assist clients in making existential decisions. TA emphasizes the ability to alter early decisions and is oriented toward raising awareness to direct the course of people’s lives. TA considers how the rules conditioned and internalized on children now regulate their actions as adults. Life script analysis in Gestalt Therapy involves regression of an individual to a child script and then having the individual re-experience the scene by decontamination and time-limited re-parenting. The mechanism of change is the new experiences, re-decisions resulting from reenactment of an early scene. An action is a thought made manifest. Gestalt therapy and TA approaches encourage clients to bring up traumatic memories and feelings from both the past and the present. By incorporating Gestalt in existence, exploration of *myself* and others through integration of techniques along with TA

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<sup>47</sup> Scholz B, Crabb S, Wittert GA. Males don’t wanna bring anything up to their doctor: mens discourses of depression. *Qual Health Res.* 2017;27(5):727–737.

<sup>48</sup> Brownhill S, Wilhelm K, Barclay L, et al. “Big build”: hidden depression in men. *Aust N Z J Psychiat.* 2005;39:921–931.

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could be achieved.

### **Integrative Therapeutic Relationship and Approach in Counseling Sessions**

Therapeutic relationship and integrative therapeutic approaches are essentials between the client-counselor activated in here-and-now of the counselling sessions. According to several meta-analyses, the therapeutic approach is the utmost significant process of therapeutic outcome across all integrative therapy modules.<sup>49</sup> The therapeutic relationship between client and counselor has long been considered the most essential to therapeutic progress across all therapies.<sup>50</sup> Safran and Muran have elucidated on the importance of therapeutic relationship in the therapeutic process across the therapy models, henceforth integrating both positions in the argument.<sup>52</sup> A chief idea developing from that work is the importance of therapist's awareness in recognizing and acknowledging concerns in the therapeutic relationship.

The process of counselling or psychotherapy is facilitated by an on-going "push and pull" of both of a psychotherapist's and client's manifestations, which includes underlying core needs, affective states, and interpersonal behaviors, in order to discuss the psychotherapeutic relationship. And based on this notion, therapeutic relationship became an opportunity for the negotiation of an existential encounter as individuals. Both client and therapist contributed to this process.

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<sup>49</sup> Horvath AO, Del Re AC, Flückiger C, Symonds D: Therapeutic relationship in individual psychotherapy. *Psychotherapy*. 2011; 48(1), 9-16. Doi: 10.1037/a0022186

<sup>50</sup> Lambert MJ, Ogles B: The effectiveness of psychotherapy. In M. J. Lambert (Ed.), *Bergin and Garfield's handbook of psychotherapy and behavior change* (5th ed.) (pp. 139-193). 2004. New York: Wiley.

<sup>51</sup> Waddington L: The therapy relationship in cognitive therapy: A review. *Behavioral and Cognitive Psychotherapy*. 2002; 30, 179-191.

<sup>52</sup> Safran JD, Muran JC: *Negotiating the therapeutic relationship: A relational treatment guide*. 2000. New York: Guilford Press.

Within the therapeutic counselling, unmet core needs are an important structure from the client perspective. When the unmet need emerges, one's subjective awareness and then the expression of certain experiences and emotion schemes arose. Emotion schemes are the range of self-organizing principles, which are associated to biographical experiences which interact with the present condition and the innate response repertoire.<sup>53</sup> An emotion scheme functions to incorporate various levels of information processing including bodily awareness, thoughts, emotions, action tendencies affect regarding to core experiences.

It may be postulated that the therapeutic relationship is facilitated by the client's core needs remained unattainable for exploration until the moment interaction and awareness is restored from a dyadic affect regulation perspective.<sup>54</sup> Psychodynamic-experiential theory predicts that this process is accompanied by change in defenses, from major distortions of emotional experience to full access of core affect. Indeed, that holistic transformation seemed to be occurring by transforming from the minimum to maximum productive emotional experience in effective counselling /psychotherapy sessions. Furthermore, it also exhibit that in terms of organismic transformation, there is not only a progression but there is also the range of distinct organismic experiences multiplies for good-sessions for perpetual emotional regulation. Hence, organismic growth is not simply a linear development but rather, it encompasses a quite complex non-linear logic in a form that shows advancements by moving like "two steps forward, one step back".

### **Personal growth process**

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<sup>53</sup> Greenberg LS, Paivio SC: Working with emotions in psychotherapy. 1997. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

<sup>54</sup> Fosha D: The dyadic regulation of affect. *J of Clinical Psychology*. 2001; 57(2): 227-242. doi: 10.1002/1097-4679(200102)57:2<227: AID-JCLP8>3.0.CO; 2-1



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When one is stuck by the impasse where the implosion turns into explosion meanwhile my internal struggle between physis and homeostasis were on. That explosion takes form of grief and anxiety. After getting non-verbal negative unconditional strokes in ulterior transaction one can chose to un-script from banal to winning script by empty-chair technique addressing my split-self/executive self and confronts disowned parts of self. This revelation gave the creative idea of applying this technique onto those who needed.

This may become a considerable impediment to self-acceptance, awareness, and movement toward wholeness, experimentation, and transparency to self. When one embarks to wonder about humanity, mortality, and privilege then this launched an incredible insight.

### **Conclusion**

This anecdotal narrative is presented in the lived experiences to the convergence of gender and religious juncture in the pandemic period. This narrative is interpreted from multiple psychological perspectives to facilitate understanding and implications. The process of psychological and spiritual growth or self-actualization requires meaningful and contact-ful interaction with oneself and other person. This perspective also addresses socially constructed norms of gender. Maladaptive, dysfunctional and toxic patterns of masculinity are exposed fundamentally in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Toxic masculinity conforms to the gendered attitudes and traditional norms which are actively damaging for others and themselves especially in terms of work attitude. Men's belief and behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak can be explained according to male-bodied individuals' socialization pathways. Masculinity schema relies solely on "strength" which has association with "work" and "religious

beliefs” mediates this triad, consequently leads to compromised mental health. The state of the pandemic has impacted social, economic, personal and religious/spiritual aspects of life which consequently causes immense mental health issues.

### **Recommendations**

This paper aims at exploring the lived experience which addressed diverse gender conscious positioning from the perspectives of masculinity, feminism, spiritual crisis and gendered stereotypes.

1. Masculinity relies on presumed/perceived “strength” which is associated with “work” and bread winner mentality. The interrupted occupational activity perpetuated emotional dysregulation. Gendered stereotypes prevented male-bodied individuals to seek help which perpetuated through externalizing and internalizing various mental health issues.
2. Spirituality and practices are associated with wellbeing and sound mental and physical health among all individuals, all the factors observed significant in the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. This ethnographic discourse provides the narrative on spiritual crisis, feminism and holistic growth.

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