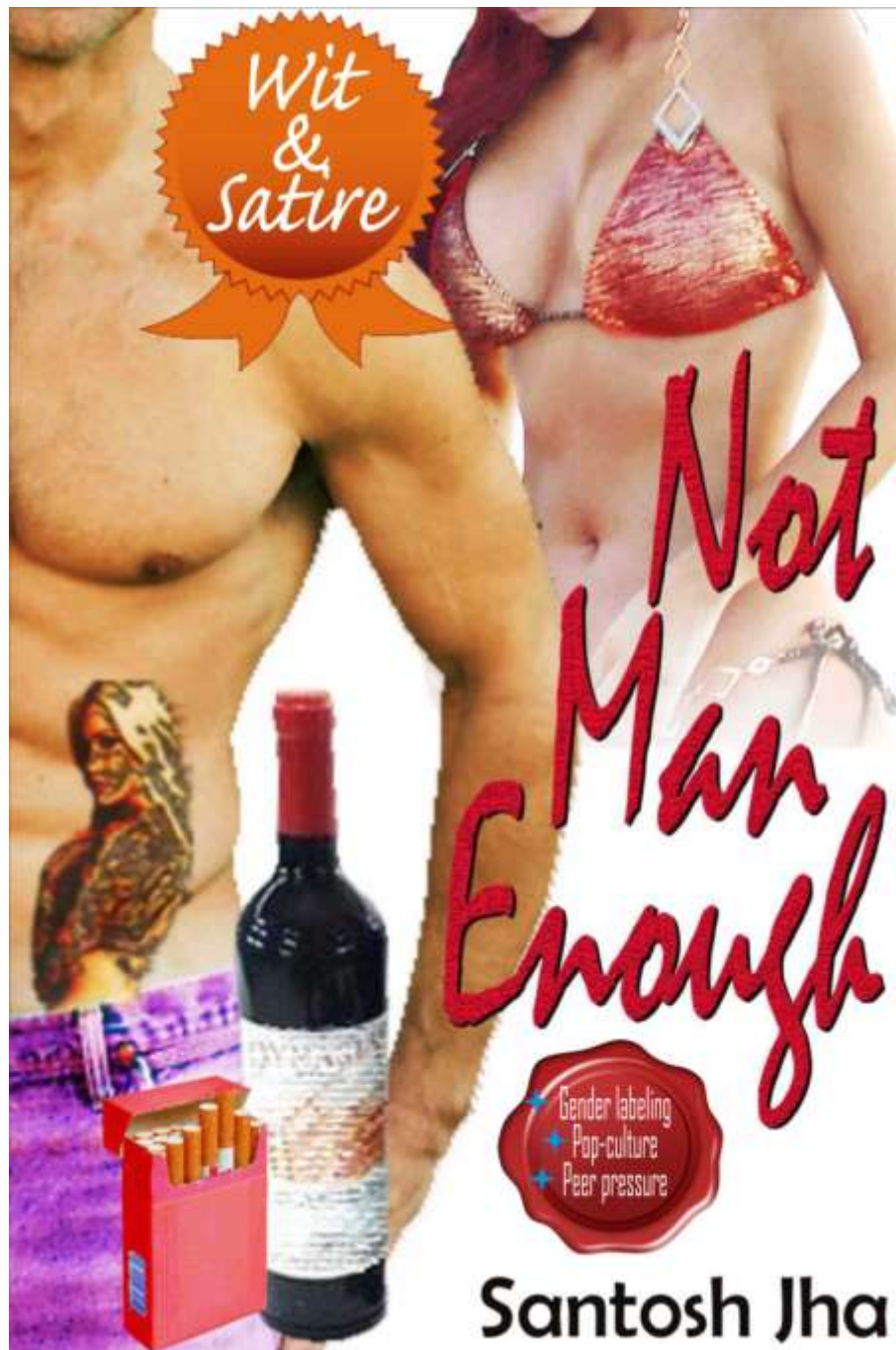


Not Man Enough

By Santosh Jha

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FOREWORD:

There has to be a humble admittance – Any word, however well meant and well spelt, is a possible suspect of misinterpretation. There is a simple reason. People are in different consciousnesses and culturally as well as personally inclined to a specific value-summation of utilities. As a writer, it is a huge temptation to take liberties, with not only imaginations, ideas but also with the words, as against their common and popular use. Do kindly accept my latitude with language, choice of words and interpretation of contemporary realisms, as I understand, many times, they may not conform to popular usages and sentiments.

It is said, the best way to handle life's adversities is making them object of humor. Objectifying the subjective troubles of life by making them the stupidities of fun and laughter is considered the elixir of life-living wellness. I have attempted to put some painful realism of our contemporary life and living in the domain of witty expressions,

with the sole purpose of personal excellence of all. Do kindly accept my endeavor with affection of your own funny self to enjoy what I have mustered up here.

I share with you whatever is part of my consciousness and its honest innocence. All wisdoms say, what stays with you is what sinks in. Wisdom is what we internalize. I share with you whatever I have internalized in my life. This may not be mainstream, however, may have utility in some meaningful way. I believe, as a reader, you shall enjoy this novelty and pleasant awkwardness of the writing.

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I AM ASHAMED... genuinely and profusely... writing all this, which I am about to, as it is something I detest and consider as one of the worst vices of humanity – the ‘ingenuity of personalized inventiveness for justifying oneself’. But then, the issue at hand and things I am about to say is all about it... so, let it be... of course with loads of embarrassment...!

The artistry of humanity in engendering the ingenuities to put oneself a step or two ahead in the incessant enterprise of ‘one-upmanship’ comes natural to most of us. It’s a crazy competitive world, where men enjoy tough enterprise of not only surviving but thriving in a milieu, replete with hypocrisy, debauchery and sado-masochism. Of course, they all come natural to us. That is why, it seems they are everywhere and refuse to die down in any measure.

Success is a premium entity here in the contemporary culture and being one -step ahead; being a master-craftsman in artistry of one-upmanship is the cardinal rule for attaining this premium product. It is altogether different matter that even survival is not easy and sometimes it also becomes a premium thing. Moreover, there always is an

innate inclination in we all to declare most of our success enterprises as ‘survival’ bare-basics.

Euphemizing major successes as survival needs is big part of pop culture. Alternately, for millions of humans, bare survival too is a huge success, given the zeal of success of other millions! Disproportioning of needs to the extent of making them king-sized wants and vice-versa is a favorite enterprise of humanity in all cultures. That is why they say – ‘What you want is not always you need yet, persistent refusal to accept this is what humanity is brilliantly skilled at.’ Most cultures are excellent workshops to impart this training of ingenuity of consciousness to humanity at large.

It seems, in social relevance and cultural appropriates, the primary issue of importance is being a ‘man enough’ to attain the prized positioning of success. I have reasons to believe that. This success-benchmark of one-upmanship, which is core characteristics in all cultures, itself has the word ‘man’ as primary focus. However, my curse is that I have always been on the other side of the benchmarking. This is primary and perpetual blame for me! And I am talking about that.

In 35 years of my life, how many times I have been made to confront this blame, I have even lost counts of. The eternal blame on my head is – “... you are not enough of a man...!” Somehow, some close ones would ensure that it gets more direct by saying, “you are not, man enough”!

Success in life is important; there cannot be doubt about it. It is also clear that as we are many times more than what we may accept as ideal population, the success is not available to many. Seven billion plus people on earth vying for very few resources and pole position of ‘success’ is a tough challenge and that is probably why, benchmarks

of success has one tagline – ‘Be a man enough’. It seems, it has to be like that. However, success apart, even being a man-enough thing has not been easy for me. Rather, it has always been elusive for me and that is why I am trying to make a case in favor of me not being a ‘man enough’. I may be presenting a poor advocacy against the primary indictment on me that I am not man enough; still I wish to do it with all my sincerity.

Of course, my humble and compassionate advocacy against the accusation against me – me being not man enough, also happens to be as much predisposed to the same accusation. It is anybody’s guess that how much courage it takes to present an advocacy of such intent. And as, courage is something directly associated with someone being man enough, I already stand a victim of presumptuous judgment against me. That is why I said I am ashamed to present the ‘ingenuity of inventiveness for justifying oneself’.

All labels on a person usually start early in childhood. They say – characteristics of a tree are ingrained in seeds itself. I am surely no exception. Since my early teen days, my class fellows and friends would gather abusive tongue, as there were cuss words and abusive terminologies all around us. Therefore, it was easy picking for all teenagers, who somehow has the mind training to behave like “man enough” as early as possible in life. To be a man enough, a teenager has a lot of peer pressure to speak as many cuss words, as most ‘men’ would in the social sphere all around. This comes easy and without much effort. Aping is easiest for all, especially kids, who are empowered versions of their close cousins, the ape.

It is truly strange. I can understand that this is our mechanism. We are probably designed this way. The amazing realism is – we all want to be alone and lonely with our virtues but always wish to be in a crowd with our vices. Few teenagers would

compete sincerely, not to allow the person, who stood first in the class, to stand alone and lonely at the top. However, most very meticulously (without much effort though) joined the crowd who spoke foul and sexually explicit language.

Even our popular cultures are designed this way. Prevalent cultures usually are aggregates of collective sense of conveniences and as it is common, most conveniences are designed for averages, commonality and mediocrity. The successful in the society would always love to keep away and above the pop culture. It is only the average and mediocre lots, who would gleefully remain stuck to populism. Most popular cultural appropriates are therefore usually mass-based and have majority backing. The abusive tongue and sexually explicit linguistic behavior are the worst culture of conveniences, having a mass-following and majority support. If not, teenagers would never be happy and comfortable mouthing the wrong language. Instinctively, they go only with majority. It is blame on cultures that mediocrity and stupidity always happen to be in majority! Minority of sanity is culture of convenience for humanity.

It seems, it is a matter of utmost convenience to be man enough to join the majority of the vice of abusive and sexually explicit tongue in all cultures. It takes a huge burden to keep away from this vice of populism and be in the acute minority of being a person with the sanity of senses and tongue. This is probably why; most cultures have only a handful of poets of excellence but millions of master craftsmen of slangs and imaginative sexual linguistics.

Anyways, let us talk about the artistry of ingenuity of my teen associates. Not that teens in my peer group were dumb and followed contemporary populist trends like a stupid. They were smart enough to create such artistries of ingenuities to be man enough, which would make even a man proud or blush. One kid in my peer group would stuff a pair of his socks under the front part of his underpants to give a feel of 'man enough-imagery' to others he wished to impress. This 'man-enough' kid insisted

that doing this was a must thing for him. He was big fan of Elvis Presley and while doing the pelvic gyrations and thrusts, he surely needed to have an impressive 'frontline fortress'. Fortunately or otherwise, a teenager has hordes of people to impress about his status of being a man enough. One cannot entirely blame the innocuous girls for that. It is altogether different thing that this guy did this all to impress a pretty girl next door.

Another genius 'man-enough' contender would drink glass full of crushed ice every day, before coming to school to have a man enough voice. In the class breaks, he would smash into his favorite rock numbers of Bruce Springsteen. He too insisted he need this trick to have the voice symmetry! "What a waste of a man, if cannot do a rock stuff", he declared. There were other tricks too, which I cannot share, as I intend to continue to list myself in the minority of sanity...!

Since then, as I would not succumb to this peer pressure, I would not be accepted as 'man enough'. Mouthing a cuss words every few words in a sentence was labeled by my peer group as 'man enough' benchmark and as I was not obliging, my manhood was always doubtful. I cannot blame them now, though I was not happy with them then. I have read that it is instinctive of humans to hate and see with suspicion anyone who is not like them. This is what psychologists call tribal instinct, still ruling man behaviors and actions. That is why most people fear aliens, even when there is no official data about the possible aliens being antagonistic to us!

One is amazed as how much we can blame on our instincts and lingering tribalism. That is why many women say that men have not been able to come out of the caves! One can understand as why men are always suspicious of women as most men believe, they have come from some other planet called Venus, whereas they have descended from what they believe is Mars! I must admit, this man enough advocacy is not easy for me... not for anyone! This issue is so multi-dimensional...!

Anyway, let us stick to my story. Moreover, me being a fair, beautiful and chocolate boy was 'enough' to add fuel to the fire of the label against my "suspicious manhood". My ignorance with contemporary music and dance would add fuel to the raging fire. My friends would come to me jointly to advise me on the need to deliver a body blow to the accusations I was facing, with a 'man-enough' reply. They had the ingenuity to construct brilliant plans to shut-up my accusers and detractors. My persistent refusal to accept them finally made even my friends accept that there probably was something terribly wrong with my body-mind make up. Some would even join my detractors. As I said, it is always easy for people to be in majority sentiments. I cannot blame my friends for not continuing to be with my minority positioning.

When I was around 12, I could find almost none (barring the women in my family), around me who could speak a language, which should be respectable, decent, lovable and commensurate to the status humans enjoy in the intellectual hierarchy of creatures of the world. I wished, this could be possible! In all languages that we speak, there is so much abusive tongue; such crash overtones of sexuality and habitual use of bestiality. When I was a teenager, I could not understand why even dignified men of our society would speak such demeaning language.

In youth, this struggle continued, not only on college campus, in university buses and elsewhere but also outside. There were growing demands on me to be man enough and I was always caught remarkably short of the benchmark. In the university bus, which I took each day to get to the college, had no reserved seats for girls and there was a virtual war going on to sit on the next seat a girl occupied. Being a winning warrior in the war of prized seats was a hot benchmark for being man enough, which I was poorly unable to even attempt at, let alone winning it.

There were students, man enough and they would proudly tell stories in the college about how many times they were successful in making the most beautiful girl of the college sit next to them. There would be a man-war on making others believe that the said girl was actually in love with him and not others, who claimed the same. I had no stories to tell and therefore was a natural not-man-enough suspect. Frankly speaking, I actually feared the man-war as I had heard that there were actual shoot-outs between contenders and one student was grievously hurt. I probably was not man enough to be part of the gun-war and that is why I quit the university bus ride.

Not only 'men' in my peer group had doubts about my manhood. Girls were not far behind. Girls in my colony would throw paper balls on me and giggle at me as I would pass by their gang, but I would never look up. Though my mom would consider me better looking than the reigning super star of the movies, I would never think of myself as beautiful enough to attract undue attentions. Not that I had no idea about populist and contemporary trends and things in my society and culture. I had seen too many of 'hit movies' of macho heroes to understand, what 'manhood' criteria was existing in the society!

There always were enough free videos in offer to confirm one's label of man enough. Watching a porn movie was a bare essential for a teenager to announce to the world that he had arrived. And it was of utmost importance for every teenager to arrive as early as possible to the final destination of manhood. What better way to attain the goal, without spending a single penny and attaining it in just an hour and half!

However, things could never be easy in the road to manhood. You always were in the tumultuous race for being more man enough than others in the peer group. The 'man' possessing most numbers of porn movie videos would always qualify for the prized success benchmark of being the most man enough thing.

In such cultural milieu, saying no to populist benchmarks were reasons enough to draw the label of me being not man enough. As guys in my peer group would discuss in school about the reigning queens of the porn world and their statistics, I would be always sitting with mouth open in utter ignorance about the vital factsheets. My inability to add to the knowledge pool of my already talented peer group ‘men’ would draw loads of flak and the inevitable label of me being not man enough.

One day, one daring girl from this gang of gigglers confronted me, accepting the challenge from the gang that I would not talk to her. As I talked to her, she was happy winning the bet and in utter joy of celebration, she proposed to be friends with me and she confided in me that the gang believed I was ‘not man enough’, not responding to them. She also told me blankly that every girl in the gang boasted of at least five boyfriends and all of them offered them costly gifts just for a kiss. The girls were sure; something was amiss in me, as I was not responding, even when they initiated things. Most of them felt, I was probably too afraid of my mom or simply too shy... in both cases, a sure benchmark of me being not man enough!

Usually, things settle down with time and many realisms change as time is considered to be the greatest leveler. However, for me, things did not change any bit as this label of me being not man enough grew up and evolved with me too. In job, things did not take any better shape. After prolonged frustration, one day, when he was in good mood, having put in two good glasses of fine wine, my boss confronted me and warned me that I would not rise in my profession, as I was “not man enough”. I asked him as why he thought so poorly of me and why specifically he thought I was not man enough. My boss told me in emotionless tone – “You are a vegetarian, teetotaler, not a womanizer and above all, too soft spoken to last in this tough world where men need

to win tough battles for successes.” Of course, he said this, inserting choicest cuss words and sexually loaded terminologies, every few words to show me a specimen of what it takes to be man enough.

Believe me, my boss was my real well-wisher, I have no doubts. He was being honest to me by betraying me the specimen of success-benchmarks of the popular culture. He of course was being man enough to do what every boss is supposed to do – subordinate development – but to his utter dismay, his subordinate was not being man enough to ride on the wave of development, he intended to instill in him!

My relatives too were never far behind in preaching me about the “requirements and essentials of manhood”. A close relative declared in a family gathering that I was still a minor as despite being 35, not being married disqualified me from being a “man”. He mocked at me for still being a mom’s boy. Later when alone with me, he declared in a solemn voice – “A man’s manhood is not established till he has a woman in his life, who he can dominate and show up his man-mechanisms.” It is altogether different matter that in my family, everyone knew that he was a henpecked husband and supposedly in awe of his beautiful wife. However, this must not be considered a disqualification for a man as what happens inside a bedroom, between husband and wife is nobody’s domain. Anyway, even worthy warriors face reversals in war and as someone said – ‘Losing out to your beautiful wife surely is being man enough as even when she wins, the accrued gains are all his...!’

A close relative, who truly wished well of me told me – “This society is a bunch of mindless conformists. This culture of monotonous idealisms is a baggage of conveniences. Here you follow what others have been following, having seen others follow others. You have to marry to qualify as a cultured man; otherwise, you shall not be welcome in civilized society. It is better to marry and get divorced than being single after 30 as men and women in the society start doubting about your credentials.” I never doubt his good intentions. What he said remains a truth with me. His golden

advise that ‘majority must be respected even when it is an established fact that stupidities of majority have always crushed the minority voice of sanity’, is something many people have repeated to me.

Most people, who advised me to get married as soon as possible in public platforms, would admit in private that somehow, being a single is the preferred state for all men but it is something you cannot live without. A married friend of mine said, ‘Marriage is never a profitable venture of life yet, there is perceptibly no major loss in it. You just do it accepting the hypothesis that men do many enterprises, where the operative prudence is not profit but optionlessness. Anyone, who is born must die and must get married. You need to be man enough to face the inevitability with a smile.’

Another senior relative preached me, “Discipline is good for a man. However, small bit of freelanced and wild adventurism in life is also instinctive for a man. A man should do it. Life is for living and good living must have all colors and shades of life. Enjoy the endowments of life. A man must be adventurer. And who stops you from these adventures... after all you are single, not married like us”. When I told him, I am happy the way I am, he quipped in dismay, “If you have any medical problem, you can tell me as I know many good doctors”. That was, closest I have ever come to the label of being not man enough!

Very recently, someone said, “If there is no grey shade in a man, he is either not real or something is amiss”. This person aired her opinion apparently to disapprove of my priorities. This is common label for me. I have been told that I show so much goodness that it becomes very surreal... often doubtful... reality must be grayish!

I went to some social networking site, determined that as I would not be real there and as I would be unreal, I would definitely attempt to be what I am not and see what happened. However, I could never do that. Here too, this label chased me, as I probably could not be man enough, despite my resolve. A woman from a different part

of the world wished to start a relationship with me, asking me to relocate as she said I was what she was looking for. However, she added, “You are so caring, so nice and make me feel so happy but this makes me distrust you. How can men be so good, are you real or are you faking it?” As I politely refused to relocate, she must have her doubts proved right that I was not man enough!

Sometimes I think, if I talked to them the way men do, and would say to them, “Hey baby, you look so cool, let’s have some real hot fun”, may be, they could have believed I was a real person and “a man enough”. Not sure though! Could never test that; surely was never a man enough to attempt this much....

I do try to tell people that I am probably man enough and enough of a man but what I am is my conscious choice. It has nothing to do with any desire to be great or good. It is simply the ‘common sense’ that I have accepted for myself, after reading and analyzing all possible sources of traditional and modern wisdom. Common sense is what all wisdoms are all about. And it makes me accept myself as a “mind” and a pure mind is positioned higher than the cultured mind.

Being “man enough” or “woman enough” are all purely cultural benchmarks and value-preferences of a societally or culturally trained mind. A pure mind, attained after a cycle of unlearning, is not man or woman in culturally defined sense of term. It takes a lot of persevered mind training to de-culture your consciousness and accept yourself as something beyond the populist benchmarking of gender-appropriates, the contemporary society makes you learn.

It is not only about being not a man enough. This predicament is similar for women too. This label of not man enough also extends to women as being not women enough. Rather, I admit that women in contemporary culture have to struggle with this label far more than men. In modern culture, there are so many stupid and populist

benchmarking of a women's desirable persona and imagery that it is really tough for a woman to feel comfort and wellness with her natural body and mind, let alone with a choice, which does not conform to populist imagery. I have a firsthand experience of this. That is why I am accepting that being not women enough is far more pervading and powerfully destabilizing label than being not man enough.

Few years back, I had a beautiful girl in my life. She was barely 20 and very simple and innocent. She took on me as she found her innocence safe and mutual with me. I was happy being a father figure to her and shared her consciousness with mine in many ways. One day, she came to me in a mood, which was quite unlike her. She was usually very chirpy and playfully teasing, especially when she was with me. That day, she was grim, palpably in conundrum as her face betrayed she was lost in some thought. I asked her and like a child, she narrated her trouble.

A friend of her father visited her and before he left, he asked her something, which she could not understand and that is why she was confused and also a bit unsettled. Yes, it was something associated directly with the label of she not being woman enough!

This friend of her father asked her whether her periods were normal. She could not at first understand the question as it was something very unexpected. She was also not sure, whether this person was within his rights to ask her such private question. She answered him right that it was normal but she surely felt offended. She came to me and asked me as why this man asked her this question.

Surely, I had the answers, as I was also the victim of the similar genre of questioning. I first made her comfortable and then explained things to her. She was a 20-year-old girl and probably her father's friend disapproved of her tomboyish mannerisms, she had in loads. She usually wore boy-like clothes and she was anything but shy in her disposition with anyone. She, unlike a grown up girl, whom many would like to behave like a woman at 20, would not keep distance with people she interacted with.

She would hug anyone and would usually be all touches with people she even knew once. Her language was also loud and she would freely use words, marked exclusive for boys and men in society. As this friend of her father watched her ways and mannerisms, he probably found it not woman enough and doubted her womanhood. His question was a natural doubt that he had about her womanhood, as some people had about mine. To be sure, she was woman enough; this man asked her straight forward something, which would answers his doubts. Though my girl answered him, I doubt this man's doubts were answered!

When I told this all to my girl, she turned very serious. She asked me in utmost innocence, "Do you think too that I am not woman enough? Does this really matter? Can't I be the way I am? Isn't this good enough?"

I understood that she did not need my rational and intellectualized answers. She just needed the assurance, which a father must extend to his doubting kid. I hugged her close and kissed her forehead. I simply told her, "You are the most beautiful woman I have seen in my life because; you have something, which only a few beautiful women have in this world and that is your innocence." She was happy, as she believed in the honesty of my innocence.

She definitely shared my consciousness as I shared her. She was happy once again and returned to her usual self in few minutes. Half an hour later, she was riding her scooter back to her house, all the way howling and chatting up with any known face she saw on the road. She definitely did not bother whether she was woman enough or not. She felt assured, she was good enough as she was innocent and her consciousness was truly beautiful like a real woman.

She was however brave and fortunate. Her innocence and trust in me bailed her out but not all women are fortunate enough. They have to face this label and questioning of not being women enough as the society they live in has hard-lined perceptions of the

benchmarks of the gender divide. I can understand this and that is why, I am adding this issue of being woman enough along with my own issue of not being man enough. This I make a joint advocacy.

The good thing with all cultures is that they are value-neutral in their popular stupidities. Cultures do not discriminate between genders, while throwing up their labels. That is why when it comes to the label of being 'not enough', the men and women are labeled with the golden sense of equality and proportionate postulations! It seems, there are many such positives in the popular cultures across the globe, despite loads of stupidities defining them and that is probably why, all these cultures are continuing to be the way they have been since ages. Humanity's instincts of profound aping and the innate desire to be part of the majority of vices lend the much required strength and support to enable this catalytic continuity of cultures in fixated moulds!

Equality is a big leveler of sorts. When a boy grows up, he is in tremendous pressure to be man enough and if he does not have enough girl friends, he is labeled as not man enough. You think it is a bad thing for cultures. However, in reality, cultures are very leveled up entities. They ensure that equality is always the guiding light of societal acts and behaviors. That is why, even when a girl is growing up, she too has the same pressure to be woman enough. If by a certain age, she does not have enough boyfriends, she too is 'equally' labeled as not woman enough.

You just sample the data available in public domain. Teenage girls are in loads of pressure to have boyfriends and for that they do things, which they may not approve of otherwise. In a developed nation, very proud of its liberal culture and society, more than half of teen girls admit pressure from a guy as a reason girls send sexy messages or images. They fear to lose their boyfriends if they refuse to be what may be construed as not being woman enough.

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