



Is “status anxiety” making our choices for us?

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When influencers and celebrities share their extravagant lifestyle on the internet, a tiny part of our brain wishes to have what they have. Though they are non-referential to us common folks, sometimes we end up feeling pressured to achieve similar feats.

Replace these public figures with peers and the tables turn. We begin comparing our lifestyle, accomplishments and privileges. You recollect that your cousin has a better degree or works a six-figure paying job. Consequently, there is this pressure from family and acquaintances to exceed that threshold of success and achieve greater things to surpass individuals your age.

“What are the prospective career options?”

“Will you get paid well?”

“Think about the social implications, what neighbours and relatives will think.”

Whether you’re choosing a major for university or making a decision related to your future, sooner or later, you’ll be forced to ruminate on these aspects before making decisions. Consequently, you begin worrying how these choices determine your position on the social ladder.

You might begin relating to Farhan Qureshi’s short monologue from *3 Idiots*, “No degree means no plum job, no partner, no credit card, no social status.”

You see your friends achieve something laudable. You genuinely applaud them because they deserve it. But an uncomfortable emotion keeps plaguing you. It’s not jealousy. Rather disappointment in yourself for failing to be in their shoes. Their success seems to have amplified the bitterness of your failures because you dread being left behind.

British philosopher Alain de Botton has termed this crippling anxiety of ranking low on the status scale for not conforming to the parameters of success as “status anxiety”. He explains how inferiority complex, low self-esteem and judgement instils dread of being perceived as unsuccessful and therefore getting ostracised by people assuming higher positions on the social ladder.

Status anxiety is provoked through such comparison of material ownership. Perhaps watching your peer group lead an economically better life and realising you cannot afford the same lifestyle. Or learning they have bagged the job you have always dreamed of or have gotten into a good university while you are still struggling to achieve the same.

Capitalism has ingrained in us that earning and achieving more invariably decides our worth in the society. That emotional contentment is impossible without accomplishments. Perpetual comparison between what we are and what we could be has muddled the lines between striving for greatness and seeking social validation.

The biggest factor fuelling status anxiety is chasmic income inequality. Bangladeshi farmers and labourers and their families enjoy far diminished social status compared to teachers, physicians or other highly paid careerists, despite playing equally (if not more) significant roles. The standard of life they can afford with their pays determines how validating society is of their contributions.

It’s important to remember that status is fickle. So, it is necessary to challenge the status quo and form ideologies that do not only aim to placate social expectations.

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What’s the big deal with gender pronouns anyway?

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In recent years, the practice of including your preferred pronouns during introductions has become increasingly common. Whether it be during debates, meetings, ice breaker sessions, or Instagram bios, personal pronouns have started to integrate themselves into our interactions with others more so than they ever were before.

However, it is quite unfortunate how the notion of having personalised pronouns is still considered laughable by many. Misinformed beliefs cause a lot of individuals to insist on using the pronouns that they deem right for somebody based on their outward gender expression.

Navigating through this specific topic may feel difficult, so let’s explore what each of these mean.

For us to understand the concept of gender identity, we must first unlearn the idea that biological sex and gender are tied together. Both deal with expression of physical and personal traits, however, they do not necessarily have to act in accordance with each other.

The Spring 2017 issue of *Sex, Gender, and Medicine* by Stanford Medicine magazine says “Gender is inextricably linked to sex, but not defined by it. And it indisputably affects health,” providing backbone to the claim that gender is based on society and culture, rather than solely relying on the chromosomal makeup of one’s biology.

One’s esoteric feelings about their own gender is not necessarily always related to biology. This is where the great debate about whether or not sex and gender are the same thing comes in. Succinctly speaking, they are not. As the world progresses and advances, we have come to know that gender identity has to do more with psychology than anatomy.

Our X and Y chromosomes may determine our biological makeup, but pure biology is not what makes a human, a human. What sets us apart from every other species in the animal kingdom is our ability to think, perceive, feel, and form personalities.

Pronouns act as an excellent tool for people to express their gender identity, and they do an amazing job in doing so as well. For a lot of people, their personalised pronouns are a way for them to communicate their deeply personal relationships with their gender to the outside world. One may choose to use the binary pronouns such as he/him or she/her, or they might choose to go with gender neutral pronouns such as they/them. Whichever set of words they choose, it is important for us to not assign pronouns to them based on what we perceive them as.

Using somebody’s preferred pronouns when addressing them is an act of mutual respect. A standard rule of thumb is to simply ask them, “What are your preferred pronouns?” upon meeting someone new. Know that it is okay to make mistakes, but it is even better if you are to correct yourself.

We as humans continue to learn and conduct more research about phenomena surrounding ourselves, and our habits and perceptions change based on what we have learned. This unique ability allows societies to thrive, and people from various communities to feel more at home.

References

1. Medscape (Dec 09, 2020). *Gender Identity*
- 2, Stanford Medicine (Spring 2017). *Sex, Gender, and Medicine*

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