

Trauma and Masculinity in D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*: A Meninism's Perspective

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Ms. M. Aadhila

BA English Literature

Rathinam College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore

A. Kabilath Begum

Assistant Professor

Rathinam College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore

Abstract

*This article uses meninism to analyse trauma in *Sons and Lovers*. It starts with a summary of the theoretical and historical concepts of meninism, including significant advancements and terminology. Meninism emphasizes how men suffer because of inflexible gender norms, emotional repression, and familial expectations, while feminism has studied women's oppression in great detail. By applying the notion of meninism to analyse *Sons and Lovers*, this study shows how identity, parental dominance, and emotional reliance manifest as a masculine trauma, especially in Paul Morel. This paper examines the relationship between trauma and masculinity in literary studies and psychology, particularly the relationship between familial trauma and hegemonic masculinity. Applying these concepts to D. H. Lawrence's novel makes it evident how Paul Morel's identity problems and psychological anguish are a result of both social expectations and interior trauma.*

Keywords: Meninism, Hegemonic Masculinity, Emotional Dependency, Trauma.

Meninism is a socio-cultural and critical perspective that looks at issues, emotions, and traumas of men, especially those that involve being male. Unlike masculinity studies, meninism does not glorify male power and dominance; it looks at how men silently suffer in a society that requires men to be emotionally strong, endure, and even sacrifice themselves. The novel is about Paul Morel, who caught between his working-class father's environment and his mother's strong influence. Meninism brought attention to the fact that male characters in literary studies frequently experienced pain that was disregarded, tolerated, or mistakenly seen as a sign of strength. Concepts like hegemonic masculinity, which referred to the culturally dominant ideal that valued strength, independence, and emotional control in men, and toxic masculinity, which was first introduced in the 1980s within the Mythopoetic Men's Movement to describe inflexible and harmful expectations placed on men, were crucial to understanding male experiences in earlier discussions. Because *Sons and Lovers* depicted male characters—especially Paul and Walter Morel—as emotionally damaged people shaped by social class, emotional neglect, and family strife rather than just as oppressors, it was an effective text for this type of analysis.

In Hegemonic theory it explains how one dominant group or set of ideas maintains power and control over others by presenting its values, norms, and beliefs as natural, normal, and unquestionable, often with the consent of those being dominated rather than through force. Understanding trauma which requires recognized how social pressures on gender roles can cause profound psychological strain. Trauma in men often arises not only from external events but from internal conflicts between societal expectations and individual emotional reality. The 19th century was a period deeply shaped by patriarchy, industrial growth, colonial expansion, and rigid gender roles. Men occupied positions in almost all the places of life and were considered the standard bearers of power, reason, and control. Masculinity in this period was not only a biological construct, but masculinity as a role was socially constructed and defined by dominance, responsibility, and emotional inexpressiveness. The construct of masculinity in the 19th century is significant in analysing the role of masculinity in the period.

The term “Meninism” was coined by Tom Zatar Kay in 2001. Although there was a presence of concerns about ideals of manhood in past centuries, the use of meninism as a contemporary term is said to have emerged in the late 20th century. Historians argue that the move from manliness to masculinity is part of cultural changes in terms of identity. The term “toxic masculinity” was coined by Shepherd Bliss in the 1980s. The term refers to strict, authoritarian masculine traits that cause harm to individuals. The term has been used in psychology to illustrate how strictness causes trauma. D. H. Lawrence’s novel *Sons and Lovers* has been extensively examined for its psychological complexity, autobiographical features, and the exploration of human relationships. The initial critics mainly concentrated on the novel’s hegemonic theme; however, Paul is located in a society that emphasizes male dominance, emotional control, economic self-sufficiency, and authority - the very essence of hegemonic masculinity. F. R. Leavis was appreciative of the author’s strong psychological realism.

Later on, that approaches have been focused more on gender and masculinity issues in the novel. According to some critics who was influenced by R. W. Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity, Walter Morel is the representation of traditional masculinity and dominance in physical work and power, while Paul is the reflection of fragmented and conflicted masculinity rooted in emotional dependency and artistic sensitivity. Social theorists like R. W. Connell coined terms like hegemonic masculinity in the late 20th century, which sought to illustrate how dominant male identities sustain power in gender dynamics. Under this construct, aggression, emotional unavailability, and independence are prioritized over emotions like empathy and vulnerability. This construct sheds light on why many men struggle with emotional expression and inner conflict when dealing with pain.

Psychological studies show that men experience trauma differently because of social conditioning. For instance, men do not openly express their emotional distress, making their inner conflicts worse. Other authors recognize that men’s trauma is not acknowledged, leading to further emotional alienation rather than healing. William S. Pollack argues that boys are often forced to hide their emotions behind what he calls the “mask of masculinity,” a social expectation that pressures men to suppress vulnerability and present an image of toughness and emotional control (Pollack, 1998). Which makes them unable to express their emotions, thus making their emotional wounds worse. “His soul seemed always torn in two.” (340-350)

This line aligns with the ideology of meninism, which seeks to address emotional denial and not toughness. Critics have argued that Paul Morel’s trauma is not from external sources but from his emotional involvement with his mother. Meninism is concerned with how men experience emotional trauma in their homes. According to studies on the novel, Paul Morel is an emotionally challenged person due to childhood trauma. Through a meninism lens, *Sons and Lovers* becomes a

narrative of male emotional suffering rather than male authority. Paul Morel embodies the trauma of a man emotionally trapped between maternal attachment and social expectations of independence. His mother is really. That takes away his freedom. He feels trapped and cannot even talk about how he feels because of what people think is right.

Walter Morel seems like a person but you can also see him as a man who has been hurt a lot. He has been treated badly because of his class and that has made him feel alone. His bad behaviour and excessive drinking might have been the result of the pain he had experienced from the events that had happened in his life. This shows that men can be mean because they have not dealt with their pain, which is what the meninism movement says. That male brutality comes from trauma that has not been resolved.

Paul's failure to have meaningful relationships with Miriam and Clara shows another aspect of meninism's argument about trauma. He wants to be in a relationship but is afraid of surrendering to emotions. He did not learn to love because of the pain he experienced when he was very young. This is why *Sons and Lovers* shows how men often hide their sadness. This idea matches what meninism says about men suffering inside and not showing their feelings. A feminist view of *Sons and Lovers* says the book is about men's pain caused by society ignoring them and not letting them express their feelings. It's not about family problems or sex but about how society affects men's emotions. The book *Sons and Lovers* highlights men's sorrow. Meninism worries about suffering and emotional invisibility, in men. The emotional pain men go through is moulded by neglect and emotional repression.

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