

# Down With The Cisness: Betrayal To Manhood is Loyalty to Humanity

Feminism, in its best instances, is a burning prison: an insistence that life can be worth living and that every person's pleasure matters. It is, too, the practices that make life livable, wresting care free from the market; freely distributing bread, roses, and hormones; desegregating the generations; bailing mamas out of detention; disempowering rapists in kin networks, churches, and social centers; and expropriating golf courses in order to open spaces of erotic (not necessarily sexual—but also sexual!) encounter. Feminism sometimes flashes an unlit pathway toward a world without whiteness or colonizers. In these moments, it's an insurrection halting family policing, forced gestating, and every other reproductive injustice.

Sophie Lewis, *Enemy Feminisms*

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## Intro: Engaging with Feminism as a Cis Man

I am inclined to think that these men act purely out of a selfish desire to claim women as private property. Were it not so, why would a woman's reputation, good or bad, have anything whatsoever to do with them? The men's original intention is not to liberate women but to treat them as private property. In the past when traditional rituals prevailed, men tried to distinguish themselves by confining women in the boudoir; when the tides turn (...) they attempt to acquire distinction by promoting women's liberation. This is what I call *men's pursuit of self distinction in the name of women's liberation*.<sup>1</sup>

He-Yin Zhen, written in 1907

Over a century later, the sentiment expressed in these words from He-Yin Zhen – one of the most important figure of both early Chinese anarchism and feminism – remains strongly relevant because it emphasizes the inherent risk of letting men take part in and talk about about women's liberation. Despite the fact this critique of progressive Chinese men of her time couldn't be further away from my own context as a cis man living in Europe in 2025, it mirrors the endless frustrations of feminists I have heard about in my own life. And I thought it was a good starting point for introducing my own thoughts on this wideranging topic, since I am myself part of the class of oppressors in this patriarchal system.

As I've said in the past, these texts/extended notes are for me as much if not more an opportunity for self-clarification and outlining my own ideas and beliefs, as sharing with others a perspective that might be useful for them. So while I would of course be glad if anyone reading this finds it valuable, it's important to state from the start that I don't consider this a public intervention but at most a personal attempt to come to terms

<sup>1</sup> He-Yin Zhen (1907) "On the Question of Women's Liberation," translated in Lydia H. Liu, Rebecca E. Karl & Dorothy Ko (Eds.) (2013) *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory*, New York, Columbia University Press, p. 60.

with this brutal system and my own positionality in it, which might be relevant for other cis men who want to betray our gender. More importantly, I don't claim any originality in the analysis itself, which is fully based on my readings of and interactions with various cis and trans women talking about patriarchy, gender and transmisogyny.

What is perhaps my own contribution here is that I want to tackle what it means to engage with feminism as a cis man and the concrete socio-political implications. Obviously, instead of this the main thing feminists are concerned about in the context of patriarchy is how to stay safe from men's violence and fight back for total liberation from this horrible system. This is even more true for lesbians and trans women who are not even included in the heterosexual regime (including trans women attracted to men) but constantly struggling to survive the brutality of this society. Moreover, the vast majority of cis men – including on “the left” – have absolutely no desire to engage with feminists seriously nor embrace the process of losing their power as a dominant class.

So for good reasons women and feminists have very little time for this kind of topic; it would be like asking Amazon workers to take time out of their day to think about the feelings of Jeff Bezos, or for Indigenous people in North America and Palestine to have to take care of settlers' egos/emotions when they fight back against colonial brutality<sup>2</sup>. In all three cases the answer to the question of how oppressors can support liberation is also very straightforward (so that an explanation is barely needed), yet very rarely embraced by the latter: betray your own class/camp of oppressors, accept losing the power you have over others, and concretely support their struggle(s).

Oppressors refuse to do so because it's against their interests, so like He-Yin Zhen hinted at even when men claim to be “progressive/leftist” or more “enlightened” than the rest all they do is ask themselves and their victims: “what can I do to retain my privileges and not overthrow this social relation, while getting the social distinction of pretending to care?”.

The purpose of this text is therefore first to outline my understanding of patriarchy, gender and cisness and secondly, to tackle the topic of Manhood and how instead of trying to salvage it, pro-feminist cis men should accept the necessity of its destruction by betraying our own class/gender and embracing disempowerment. I'm also aware of the limitations in terms of the international scope (and Eurocentrism) of my analytical lense, because up to this point I have mostly been able to study the gender system in/of the West. That being said, I do think that partly because of the West's colonial influence – see: María Lugones, Jules Falquet, Nsámbu Za Suékama in the readings/references list – the fundamentals of patriarchy, cisness and heterosexuality are globalized.

As the last disclaimer, I want to finally add that I am specifically talking about patriarchal Manhood™, which I'll describe more below, rather than *masculinity* in a broader/looser sense. I will briefly mention trans men and their positionality within the patriarchal social order, as well as the complicated issue of not emulating Manhood™, but for the most part I am *not* talking about marginalized forms of masculinity such as theirs or those of masculine women or other gender-nonconforming people. Like Lee Cicuta explained [here](#), masculinity is a *continuously contested territory*:

Patriarchy attempts to enclose masculinity, rigidly define it, tie it to domination and control, and punishes all unsanctioned expressions of it. This capture is not inherent nor is it complete. Trans and gnc people have been undermining that project since it began! Many (...) positions (...) take for granted that masculinity is a real and consistently definable phenomena: invented, made material, and defined by patriarchy alone. They assume that patriarchy's word on masculinity has been the only real word, cis men's understanding of it the only real understanding of it, its deployment in rigid gender roles its only possible manifestation. Cis men have been at the wheels of centralized power and thus have had more means to make their own voices drown out the rest of us, but subversive masculinities have always been here, have always been a threat to the patriarchal narrative.

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<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately in that latter case it's often what happens!

Before getting into it all, I want to mention and thank here some of the women and genderqueer/non-binary persons that have influenced me, although it's impossible to be exhaustive. I cannot recommend reading them enough, their perspective is far more important/valuable than mine!

*I've also added links to their GFM's or other ways to support them financially. Please donate if you can!*

- [Talía Bhatt](#)
- [Mia Wong](#)
- [May Peterson](#) [[link to support May](#)]
- [Mallory Moore](#)
- [narcissus](#)
- [Sophie Lewis](#)
- [hari calico \(bloomfilters\)](#)
- [Julia Serano](#) [[link to support Julia](#)]
- [Beth aka Without History](#)
- [Charlotte Séverine](#) and [Joy Kraehenhez Böhm](#) [[support their move here](#); [Paypal link](#)]
- [Béné aka La femme-pastèque](#)
- [Gwen Pallarès](#)
- [Lee Cicuta](#) [[link to support Lee](#)]
- Jules Falquet
- Colette Guillaumin (R.I.P.)

Thank you so much for opening my eyes on so many things, I love you all deeply ♥♥

# Defining Patriarchy as a System of Domination

You've probably noticed that I've used *class* above to refer to cishet men as a group. While this might anger some dogmatic marxists in the crowd, this is a banal category in feminist literature, from He-Yin Zhen herself to the 70's radical feminists in France to some of today's trans-/anarcha-feminists.

For thousands of years, the world has been dominated by the rule of man. This rule is marked by class distinctions over which men—and men only—exert proprietary rights.

He-Yin Zhen, in the same 1907 text as earlier<sup>3</sup>

The reason many people even on the left would push back against calling men a social class, is that they still somehow believe that a) the capital v. labour antagonism is the foremost social relation of modern society, and hence b) the social supremacy of cis-het men is only secondary in comparison. Basically, what they miss is that patriarchal domination preceded capitalism, in some regions by a very long time; yet it is still hegemonic all over the world.

They're perhaps confused by the fact that patriarchy, and therefore male<sup>4</sup> supremacy, are much more horizontal at a structural level, in the sense that it isn't simply a tiny elite which holds the power. Instead it's roughly half of the population who subjugates the other half, and it applies all economic classes. Indeed, in a similar way as racism or nationalism, male supremacy is one of the forms inter-class (reactionary) coalitions sometimes take. It's also to a large extent about intimate, affective relationships, unlike the oppression of proletarians/the dispossessed by capital. These things actually highlight why patriarchy is so powerful as a social system/domination, but the kind of capitalo-centrism of outdated marxist and workerist approaches can't (or rather don't want to) recognize that. What's ironic is that the postwar feminist theorization of "patriarchy" as a comprehensive social totality, was in part inspired by Marx's breakdown of the capitalist mode of production.

Whether or not we like using the concept of class to describe patriarchal social relations, the fundamental starting points are on the one hand the **cis-het male supremacism** – which involves the social domination by cishet men of all other gendered (non-)subjects – and, on the other hand, the **total appropriation of women** by men as a group. This system is also perpetually justified by an **essentialist/naturalist ideology** in which gender, sex, the family and patriarchal prejudices against women, are all normalized as being "natural" rather than socially-constructed.

## Cishet Male Supremacism

The default and only real subject of patriarchal-heterosexual society is the cis man as a property-holder of both his children and cis women, who are reduced to non-subjects assigned the role of reproducing the heterosexual nuclear family. As we'll see below, anyone who doesn't fit in that cis-heterosexual dyad is considered like a monstrous, abject anomaly which has to be brutally coerced back into one of the two patriarchal gender roles, and also simply punished and abused for betraying their assigned gender "destiny".

This means that patriarchal cultures generally afford autonomy, agency, and subjectivity only to cis men. Their sexual gratification, professional opportunities/career, intellectual/creative/cultural/artistic/scientific achievements, political grievances and more, get consistently prioritized over those of other gendered groups. In that system men are meant to be the active agents and subjects of their lives, they are meant to impose their will upon everyone else, who are supposed to kneel before them and be passive subservient non-subjects (aka objects) at best.

To use an analogy borrowed from Frantz Fanon's description of racism, there is a *patriarchal zone of non-being*; the human line is here defined based on individuals' membership (or not) to the to gender of cis manhood (which is inherently heterosexual).

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<sup>3</sup> From p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> To be clear: "male" refers to cishet men (mainly adults) for me.

# The Appropriation of Women & The Arcane of Reproduction

French feminist Colette Guillaumin argued that, unlike the domination of proletarians by capital<sup>5</sup> – but in a similar way as slavery –, the cishet male appropriation of women is total/complete rather than limited to the exploitation of their labor power. It's comprehensive: sexual, psychological, mental, physical, emotional, affective, intimate, gestational, economic, political and social/relational. In this context, *appropriation* refers to a social relation in which the oppressed are reduced to the state of a (re)productive material unit which is meant to be used by the oppressor as he sees fit.

This relation (*rapport social*) of domination and exploitation is *multifaceted* and reproduced through *multiple mechanisms*. Obviously it wouldn't be accurate to strictly separate the means and ends in a functionalist way: "the purpose of a system is what it does".

The enormous amount of unremunerated domestic, care, interpersonal, and sexual labor that women are assigned was eloquently described by Italian Marxist feminist Leopoldina Fortunati as the [arcane of reproduction](#). It underlines the fact that modern society and the capitalist system would probably crumble overnight were it not for the gendered labor that ensures the material, physical and social care/sustenance of the whole community. Yet it exists as an open secret, and this labor – even when it gets commodified/used for capitalist profit – is systematically undervalued socially.

There are many reasons this can't and shouldn't be interpreted with the strict, by-the-sacred-book Marxian terms/framework (as developed by Karl Marx in *Capital* I–III), primarily the fact it isn't about producing value or surplus value directly. I'm not super interested about premodern/precapitalist contexts in this text, but in various regions this patriarchal exploitation of women's labor originated at least a couple thousand years ago. The point is that this form of exploitation reproduces both the proletarian workforce in the case of the capitalist mode of production, and reproduces the community as well, in general.

Always and everywhere, [...] women are expected to [...] clean and tidy up, look after and feed the children, sweep the floor or serve tea, wash the dishes or answer the phone, sew on buttons or listen to men's metaphysical and professional ramblings, etc.

Colette Guillaumin (1978) *Pratique du pouvoir et idée de Nature* (1) L'appropriation des femmes. In *Questions féministes*, n° 2. [My translation]

Women are also discriminated against in the labor market and at work compared to men, with consistently lower salaries/incomes in most sectors, fewer and lesser opportunities for promotion/raises/etc, as well as specifically poor working conditions, pay and social recognition in sectors in which women are majority, and so on. With the postwar and 21st century capitalist globalization, the domestic and care labor has also been restructured and commodified around an international/colonial gendered division of labor wherein immigrant women from the Global South handle of massive part of that underpaid labor, in the Global North and beyond (e.g. Gulf region/countries).

Moreover, not only is patriarchy different from the capitalist class structure insofar as the exploited group's labor is unremunerated and uninterrupted/continuous (24/7). The oppression of women is in a sense far more comprehensive, in that like chattel slavery, it extends to the appropriation of their bodies, their sexuality and even the human beings they bring into the world (who become their father's property, functionally if not literally/legally).

## Male Sexual Domination & Rape Culture

There is so much to say about the sexual violence of modern society because it is the primary gender-enforcing mechanism of compulsory heterosexuality. It is rooted in the social obligation for women to have sex with adult cis men, with their bodily and sexual autonomy being sacrificed because they are assigned as merely men's sexual objects.

Contrary to anti-SW "feminist" (*heavy scare quotes*) ideology, sex work is not a *uniquely* evil form of sexual exploitation. Feminist anthropologist [Paola Tabet](#) showed that patriarchy actually singles out sex work and

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<sup>5</sup> I am well aware of the fact that slave and forced/unfree labor is a significant part of capitalism, but I still think this distinction is useful.

marginalises the women doing it as a way to legitimize the institution of marriage, by stigmatizing extra-conjugal sex as inherently immoral. The absolute dissociation between sex work and marriage as supposedly two polar opposites, functions as a perpetual threat to women that they would become “whores” if they step outside of strict heterosexual sex with their husband. It implies that the only form of transactional sex is commercial sex work, whereas Tabet showed that there is a broad “*continuum* of economic-sexual exchange” within patriarchal societies:

In a general context of male domination over women, relations between the sexes do not constitute a reciprocal exchange of sexuality. Another type of exchange takes place: not sexuality for sexuality, but compensation for a service, payment (in economic value but also in prestige, social status, name) for sexuality that has been largely transformed into a service. The economic-sexual exchange thus becomes the constant form of relations between the sexes and structures sexuality itself.

Paola Tabet, *La grande arnaque. Sexualité des femmes et échange économique-sexuel* [My translation]

In Western societies, the fact transactional sex – sex as a service in exchange of something (not necessarily money) – does happen both within the heterosexual marriage and in general outside of commercial sex work, is taboo and denied, but this isn't the case in all societies. Tabet's argument/analysis is important because it emphasizes how even outside of actual rape and sex work, women are considered as object-like providers of sex for men upon whom they are (made) socially and economically dependent. Since their own sexual agency/desires/autonomy are systematically erased and they are expected to fulfill this “sexual duty” (e.g. in heterosexual couple/marriage), even theoretically “consensual” sex is often *transactional*.

But non-consensual sexual violence and coercion – aka rape – are of course central to the patriarchal social order; there is a multiplicity of such forms of violence by cishet men, and a whole hegemonic cultural apparatus legitimizing it. This is why feminists like [Noémie Renard](#) talk about **rape culture**, because rather than being marginal, rape is omnipresent and arises from *a) the way society functions and is structured, and b) the material and ideological structures that normalize men's sexual domination*. It's not part of “human nature/biology” (men's supposed “natural” sexual needs and “uncontrollable urges”), it's constructed and reproduced socially.

Following [Sortir du capitalisme](#), I define cishet men's sexual domination as:

1. “The subordination of women to men's sexual desires and fantasies”;
2. “A means of disciplining women” (and other gendered minorities);
3. “A demonstration of male power”.

The sexual violence itself takes multiple forms, either as *rape* (non-consensual sex) or *harassment* (daily micro-aggressions/interactions with sexual implications/pressure). Narrow and legalistic definitions of rape are notoriously problematic because sex in general isn't a formal, linear or contractual process where you check a yes/no box and it's settled for good. I know it's basic shit but it's necessary to repeat here that consent isn't violated only when a man ignores a verbal refusal of sex; even initially-consensual sex can turn into rape whenever he does something without approval/permission, such as a specific sexual act or getting violent during sex (i.e. outside of the sexual partner's consent, which can of course include BDSM). For instance, Noémie Renard collected [testimonies](#) about what these kinds of “sexual interactions with gradual coercion”, as she calls them.

Moreover, even outside of sexual interactions *per se* women have to deal – often on a daily basis – with men's constant sexual harassment and objectivation. This extreme dehumanization is considered normal, so it's women and teen girls who are scolded if they complain about it or react aggressively.

We've already covered part of what rape culture is – especially how accepting to provide sex for men is a social obligation, how women's socio-economic precarity/dependence forces them to acquiesce to accept to do it as a ‘service’, and the various forms of sexual violence –, but there's much more. There's a whole legal and institutional infrastructure both at the macro/society-wide level and within organisations/entities (from companies to political parties), which protects men who commit sexual abuse (i.e. rape/harassment). The police and the courts are notoriously horrendous at protecting and helping victims who seek some form of justice; on the contrary they protect the abusers more often than not. The vast majority of rape also never gets reported to the police, because women and other victims are scared of the social backlash, isolation and potential re-traumatizations that realistically know they'd face. While the internet and social media have



made many cool things possible, they've also given a huge amount of new tools for men to violate women's consent, objectify their bodies, and more.

It's important to note that most rape is committed by male relatives and authority figures, that it happens across all classes and ethnic groups (although lower-class men and racialized men usually get punished more), and that basically two-thirds of rape victims are children and teens (although that includes when it's done by other minors), and of course most victims are girls or women (and LGBTQ+ women are particularly targeted). That being said, the sexual exploitation and violent rape of women and girls are *also* widespread in contexts of war, genocide, colonial occupation, civil war, organized crime and gangs.

Borrowing again from [Sortir du capitalisme](#), there is a whole ideological apparatus that underpins men's sexual domination:

1. heteronormativity as a constraint and as a social construct of sexual "complementarity" and emotional dependence between asymmetrical power groups (economically, politically, physically, in terms of age);
2. sexual differentialism: the ideological dichotomy of active, desiring, aggressive, strong, sexually competent men contrasted with passive, romantic, masochistic, weak, sexually incompetent women;
3. (self-)legitimation of male selfishness and phallocentrism;
4. female internalisation of stereotypes (altruism, male sexual 'needs') and new patriarchal sexual norms (fellatio, sodomy, simulation of pleasure).

## Domestic Violence and Femicides

One of the central mechanisms of the patriarchal subjugation of women is their spatial confinement/isolation, wherein cishet men dominate public spaces while women are largely trapped in interior, private spaces in part because of the much bigger share of domestic labor they are burdened with.

This kind of isolation also makes them very vulnerable to their male partners' and relatives' domestic violence, which includes physical, psychological/emotional, verbal, sexual and financial abuse. Like in the case of rape as outlined above, there is a continuum from subtle forms of coercion (like men not letting their wives or daughters speak, or controlling their lives, which has been enabled by modern tech) to more extreme acts of violence (marital rape, disfigurement, femicide, etc.). Femicides are still widespread in all countries (e.g. direct domestic murder by partner/husband/father/brother/son, honor killings, bride burning, and more), yet they're normalized by the powers that be and patriarchal culture.

Like rape, domestic violence is a demonstration of force, a method of disciplining women and other gendered minorities (and kids) and ["correcting them"](#) by coercing/terrorizing them to submit to men's will/domination.

## The Consequences of Patriarchal Domination

The *patriarchal regime of terror and exploitation* that women are made to endure on a daily basis has really harmful and soulcrushing consequences for them. First of all there is an enormous physical and mental burden(s) with all the labor and services they have to do for men, and in general to maintain/reproduce their family and community. There isn't just the physical toll of domestic tasks and caring for men, children or relatives, but also the mental exhaustion and stress of having to always pay attention and be careful everything is okay, make sure everybody have what they need, that relationships and social or family ties are being maintained, etc. – because generally the men can't be relied upon to think about all this.

Secondly, the threats of violence by men and socio-economic precarity mean women are in a constant state of fear and anxiety for their own, their children's and their fellow women's safety, health/well-being and even survival. This obviously has a mental, emotional and physical toll in the long run. This also often traps them within relationships they wish to escape from (often with their kids, which is another problem – there's no guarantee their husband's violence/abuse would actually be acknowledged as a reason to keep the kids away from him).

Thirdly, like with how capitalist domination systematically produces the self-estrangement of proletarians and workers, patriarchy leads to a painful form of alienation for women. Colette Guillaumin wrote in her 1978 article that "when you are materially appropriated, you get mentally dispossessed of yourself/your self" and

that women's existence "is absorbed into/within other individualities" [*my translation*], e.g. the people they have to take care of. This is of course tied to the fact their own subjectivity, feelings and desires are consistently overlooked/dismissed in favor of cis men's.

## The Family & the Couple/Monogamy Form

Full surrogacy is a demand for real surrogacy: a commune, a proliferation of relations rather than a continuation of a logic, Surrogacy™, that is about propping up the propertarian, biogenetic, nuclear private household that is our main kinship model.

Sophie Lewis: [Want to Dismantle Capitalism? Abolish the Family](#)

Despite the socio-economic changes that have happened since the middle of the 20th century, the mode of social reproduction within capitalist society remains fundamentally centered on and around the cisheteropatriarchal, private nuclear household, i.e. the colonial institution of the modern *family*. [Kate Doyle Griffiths & Jules Joanne Gleeson](#) describe its role within the capitalist system as follows:

The family is a vertical institution linking three distinct scales of social reproduction in capitalism. First, families serve as the primary generative institution of social individuals and of individual workers. Second, families (along with workplaces), operate as sites of collective labor through which the working class is objectively constituted (...). Third, families link the working class to the state, and serve a vital function in subordinating the working class to capital's profit imperative. They serve as a means of coercion of individual workers, and against workers as a whole. The costs of reproduction can be externalized from the profit relation to families, both directly in the worker-employer relationship and through the remnants of state social services.

Sophie Lewis summarized the nuclear family/household as the "isolated privatization of human misery", wherein "radical scarcity and overwork" are omnipresent. Contrary to the family's discourse about itself, this *kinship logic* of "belonging to, materially relying on, and being cared for primarily by one's bio-relatives (or one's in-laws)", is a "terrible, unfair, sadistic system". In various regions – and everywhere if you go back far enough in history – the family is also the site not merely of the reproduction of capital's primary condition (a mass of disposable, precarious, dispossessed proletarians), but also of actual (agricultural, artisanal, informal...) commodity production.

Moreover, in *Kinderkommunismus*, Griffiths and Gleeson emphasize how the family's economic role has been changed in the neoliberal era:

Increasingly in the face of global austerity, the family is ideologically and structurally emphasized to such an extent that it is posed as natural and timeless while simultaneously capable of accommodating and facilitating changes in the labor market. This extension of familial hegemony was partly the result of a positive political project to destroy and "streamline" state reproductive services, and in part the negative consequence of the failure of all communal efforts to create inter-generational replacements for conventional family-centered communities. Ultimately both losses are driven by the scarcity of full time, secure work, and increases in worker mobility.

The result is families which are more like those that existed in the early days of capitalist industrialism or which have continuously existed outside of the "first world" in greater numbers during the period in which the family wage pertained for many workers in metropolitan countries. Women have entered the workplace in greater numbers and are "heads" of households more often; maintenance of nuclear families depend on two incomes, a situation which more and more is difficult to consistently arrange. As a result, "social reproduction" at the level of direct care for dependents (children, the elderly, the ill and the disabled) requires the employment of waged help or dependence on the unwaged labor of relatives, often members of an extended family. (...) Those rejected by their families, or otherwise left without one, have faced homelessness and destitution and are left without access to treatment, housing, or other support. In many cases, poor mental health provisions have resulted in the exact inversion of traditional family ideals: with appropriate care givers in short supply, children and adolescents have been left to oversee the subsistence of parents facing chronic illness, severe mental health conditions, and addiction.[2] This return to a reliance on extended families is necessitated particularly by patterns of labor migration and capital mobility and facilitated through advances in communication technology. Families can sustain themselves across physical distances with increasing ease,



from workers dispatching remittances from their low-wage labor to relatives abroad, to bourgeois families funding their children's international studies in the hope of advancing their relative prospects within the ruling class. The success of any one individual has increasingly come to rest on the support offered to them by familial relations, and in that fashion the reproduction of class has become naturalized. Conventions such as deposits on rented accommodation, ever-increasing college tuition costs, financial backing during periods spent in professional training or looking for work, or performing unpaid internships, all ensure that wealthier families will prove able to secure better conditions for their members. The family here operates as a naturalised source for affective labor, with the state serving only as an inadequate and last-resort provider.

Furthermore, [Lee Cicuta](#) provides us with a crucial anarcha-feminist definition of the family as an *institution of power* which "grants structural power to parents and patriarchs to dominate and control other members of the Family". The state and cisheteropatriarchy forces every one of us into these "mandatory relationships defined by blood relation", which are nearly impossible to escape (either until you're no longer a minor, or sometimes ever, e.g. for some disabled people) in case of abuse, which is far more frequent than mainstream patriarchal culture pretends:

The Family's isolated structure is fertile ground for abuse to occur, and to continue without any robust communal forms of accountability because people constructed as outsiders see it as a "family affair" that they have no right to intervene in, even when there is abuse. A child is seen as being the private property of the Family, but they're not the only ones! This is one of the many points at which youth liberation and disability justice intersect: Britney Spears' battle against the conservatorship held by her father is an example of this. Trans and queer liberation are, likewise, deeply entangled with youth liberation. The fact that trans youth are, at time of writing, being specifically targeted by anti-trans legislation is another reflection of how invested the State is in maintaining the institution of the Family as a mechanism of control. Parents are encouraged (via societal transphobia and the threat of State violence) to be the suppressive force on the youth in their care, and parents who resist being this force are threatened with the revoking of their empowered status over those youth. Elder rights, feminist, and working-class struggles all intersect at this point as well, and this reveals what a foundational point of hierarchy the Family is. Many marginalized people are limited in their autonomy and cannot make decisions about their own lives or bodies without family consent.

For the research and data on abuse within the family, let me cite and thank Alana Queer, a non-binary trans activist based in Sevilla, who wrote [this](#):

The family is marketed as a safe space, a place of love and mutual care. Above all, it is said that the family is the best place for children. This could not be further from the truth. According to a [meta-analysis of physical violence](#) experienced or witnessed in the family at the global level, in Europe 12.7% of children have been victims of physical violence in their family, with a higher rate for boys compared to girls (girls are not included in the analysis), and 10.5% have witnessed physical violence in their family. Another [global meta-analysis](#) of more types of abuse and neglect reaches even higher results: 14.3% of girls and 6.2% of boys had suffered sexual abuse, 27% of boys and 12% of girls had suffered physical abuse, 6.2% of boys and 12.9% of girls had suffered emotional abuse, and 14.8% of boys and 13.9% of girls had suffered neglect during their childhood. Overall, boys suffer more physical abuse and neglect, and girls more emotional and sexual abuse. Fathers perpetrate more physical and sexual abuse, while mothers perpetrate more emotional abuse and neglect.

A [study in the United Kingdom](#) concluded that 41.7% of children were exposed to some form of child abuse—physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, or physical or emotional neglect. Some 19.3% witnessed domestic violence between their parents or care-givers within the family. The famous [ACE Study](#) (Adverse Childhood Experiences Study) of 1998 in the United States reached prevalence rates of 11.1% for psychological abuse, 10.8% for physical abuse, 22% for sexual abuse, and 12.5% for exposure to domestic violence against the mother. Children often suffer more than one form of abuse at a time.

In Spain, [an estimated 18.9% of the population](#) has been a victim of sexual abuse in childhood (15.2% of men and 22.5% of women), more than half of whom were perpetrated by a family member. According to a [report by Save the Children](#), more than 25% of children in Spain have been victims of abuse by their parents or care-givers.

Despite considerable variation across studies, all of them show the family as a site—the primary site—of abuse, mistreatment, and neglect. Studies that differentiate by sexual orientation, such as one [from the United](#)

[States](#), generally find much higher prevalence rates of abuse and mistreatment across all categories for LGBTQIA+ people compared to heterosexuals. And children who exhibit behaviours that do not conform to their assigned sex at birth suffer even more abuse of all kinds.

Beyond abuse, 40% of children never develop a secure attachment to one of their care-givers. According to research by the [Sutton Trust](#) in the United Kingdom, “Many children lack secure attachment relationships. Around 1 in 4 children avoid their parents when they are upset because they ignore their needs. Another 15% resist their parents because they cause distress.” According to the same research, insecure parental attachment is the most important risk factor; that is, insecure attachment is reproduced from generation to generation if parents with insecure attachment do not work on their own attachment styles and traumas.

To these figures of child abuse and neglect, we can add the high prevalence of intimate partner violence, gender violence, and domestic violence. Witnessing this violence also has negative consequences for children.

Is the family a safe place of love and care? The numbers debunk this myth. We can say that for children, the least safe and most dangerous place is their family home. With these figures—a prevalence of abuse between 15% and 40%—how can we think that something is wrong at the individual level, that the problem isn't the structure (the family), but a lack of education, resources, etc.?

[Note: this is from a machine-translated English version of the text, published by [Freedom](#)]

Lee also adds that the state relies on parents to “teach us all that we need to know to be good State subjects”, something they are generally willing to do because the paternalistic relation between the state and its subjects mirrors that of parents and their kids. Parents have a vested interest in teaching their children to submit and defer to authority!

The family is also the primary site of incest, which is way more widespread than people think. Here's how [Cécile Cée](#) defined it:

As a reminder, incest is not ‘just’ the rape of a girl by her father or brother. Incest is a mode of social organisation in which the bodies and psyches of women and children belong to the clan – and ultimately to the clan leader: the patriarch, the ‘good’ father of the family. [*My translation*]

While incestual rape can on paper be committed by anyone against anyone else within the family unit, anthropologist Dorothée Dussy, who wrote [one of the most important studies on incest](#) (in French), emphasized that [the bulk of it is against young girls](#):

In reality, rape committed against a child within the family is the only form of incest. In Western societies, approximately 5% of children are victims of incest; typically, the victim is a girl under the age of 10 (7 out of 10 cases), the perpetrator is male, and the sexual abuse lasts for a period of five years. Prevalence surveys, which have been conducted for around 60 years, show that these proportions are stable and consistent across all social backgrounds and political contexts. The banality of sexual abuse committed against children forces us to recognise that, just as much as its prohibition, the practice of incest is a structuring force in the social order. [*My translation*]

To be clear, this doesn't mean there isn't incestuous rape against adult women or other members of the family; but I thought this had to be highlighted. The bottom line is that it's usually adult and adolescent men who – and here's the connection with rape culture in general – treat their female siblings/parents/relatives' bodies as being sexually available to them. Dorée writes further, indirectly hinting at the meaning of this *incest culture* (she also edited a [book](#) with that title, in French):

Children who are victims of incest must learn to cope with the radical contradiction that runs through their experience of family life: that of a family unit that is often loving and protective, as it is supposed to be, but which includes one or more rapists and their accomplices who allow it to happen. Not all children need to be victims of incest for incest to affect everyone. From the cradle, everyone is imbued with the relationships of domination that constitute family relationships, relationships of which incest is an eroticised exercise. Everyone thus learns not to ask questions and to cope with the more or less discreet manifestations of the

suffering of children who are victims of incest. Through the contamination of silence about the practice of rape, the exposure of the eroticised behaviour of some, the wars waged by others to protect against the eroticisation of relationships, and the association with victims and perpetrators of incest, everyone participates, from childhood onwards, in this social order that accepts incest while categorically prohibiting it. [My translation]

What's crucial here is that *everyone is complicit in (enabling and hiding/silencing) it*.

Like with rape culture, part of the social legitimization of incest is through cultural myths and depictions that distort the reality of it. In the aforementioned book on incest culture, French journalist and gender studies scholar Iris Brey mentions that in U.S. TV shows, "among the various forms of incest depicted, the one between a father and his kids is the least visible despite being the most widespread in our societies". She adds that "it isn't the depiction of incest as such which is taboo – mother-son and sister-brother incest is regularly featured on our screens – but presenting it as a form of violence" (p. 107, my translation) and that what's particularly missing is the point of view of child victims themselves.

Lastly, the **monogamous couple-form** is also fundamentally oppressive, especially for women. In our patriarchal society, this isolates them in an intimate and entrapping relationship with the people (adult cis het men) most likely to hurt and abuse them. Because of how confining it is, it's one of the primary sites of what Lee Cicutta calls [intimate authoritarianism](#), as well as/including domestic violence, rape and femicide.

Lee also wrote a [brief text](#) on *compulsory monogamy*, which she defines thusly:

Compulsory monogamy is the social mandate (taught and enforced by family, schools, churches, law, custom, etc.) that for relationships to be considered valid and meaningful they must be romantic, sexual, and exclusive. It is compulsory because it is expected and because other options are either maligned, invisible, inaccessible, or any combination of the three.

This is a really good text – as always with Lee! – so you should read it for yourself, but her fundamental point is that the majority of people are so resistant to non-monogamy because they/we've been taught and have internalized at a deep psychological level that love is a finite resource they/we can only secure by capturing and then solely possessing someone's affection in an *exclusive, romantic* and *sexual* relationship. This leads people to control how their partner can socialize – and with whom they can form meaningful/loving relationships or friendships – because it's a fundamentally *insecure attachment*:

Rather than learning to cope with our insecurity and fears of abandonment when a beloved partner goes out on a date with someone else, and then building up a new feeling of security and trust every time they come back to us with love and affection, we sit in constant fear that our partner in monogamy might run into someone who they have undeniable attraction for and leave us entirely in order to explore it. Rather than being able to be honest about what we can and cannot give to our partners and allowing them to freely fulfill their needs and desires we cannot sustainably give them with others, we manically seek to fulfill their every need, even at the expense of our life-goals and personal projects, just to make sure they never feel unfulfilled and seek out someone else. Rather than finding joy and happiness in seeing someone we love fill their life with all kinds of unique and special loves, we dread the potential for any new friendship they make to become romantic or sexual. Instead of seeing each person we begin relationships with as uniquely valuable because of the person in-themselves, we are driven to find whatever single relationship we believe will solve our insecurities the best.

Monogamy works like a [border](#): it is grounded in a violent assertion of sovereignty that excludes foreign "others" as threats to internal unity; it forecloses people's autonomy, agency and mobility; it accuses them of treason/infidelity if they build meaningful relationships with anybody else. Instead of recognizing humans' inherent vulnerability and need for interconnection with other people – and learning to build relationships that healthily deal with that – it coerces them into exclusive, closed commitments/allegiances. It's also legitimized as "natural", rather than socially constructed and therefore fluid and malleable, boundaries.

There really isn't any legitimate justification for monogamy because as Harry Chalmers [explained](#), it is *openness* rather than *polyamory* which is the essence of non-monogamy. That means that even if you're yourself uninterested in having multiple relationships, you're actually denying your partner's agency and autonomy if you request them to commit exclusively and definitively to you:

Contrary to what people often assume, being non-monogamous does not mean that one must maintain multiple relationships at a time. After all, one can be non-monogamous and in a relationship with only one person at a certain time—for example, in a case in which one simply hasn't found others in whom one is interested. For that matter, one can even be non-monogamous while single, just as one can be monogamous while single. What being non-monogamous means, rather, is simply that one is open to having multiple relationships at a time—open in the sense of rejecting restrictions thereon—both for oneself and whatever partners one might have.

Thus, even if you have little desire to pursue multiple relationships at a time, you can live accordingly while remaining non-monogamous. You can stick to relationships with only one person at a time; the key is simply that you remain open to your partner's having multiple relationships at a time, should she desire it. Now, if your partner likewise has no interest in pursuing multiple relationships at a time, then your relationship with him will, from a certain distance, appear no different from a typical, monogamous relationship. Crucially, though, in being non-monogamous, you and your partner would both remain open to having multiple relationships at a time. That is, you and your partner would recognize that if either of you does come to desire an additional relationship, neither of you will in principle stand opposed to pursuing it. It is this openness, rather than the actual state of being in multiple relationships at a time, that is the essence of non-monogamy.

It's also relevant here to bring up the fact that both (heterosexual) marriage but also divorce have always been fundamentally unfair institutions that enforce patriarchal and male domination. If before the gaining of the right to divorce for women, it was a tool for their husbands to control them (often while themselves enjoying mistresses), it remains deeply hurtful to women who bear the brunt of the social and economic burdens that come with it. Becoming a single mother is one of the quickest ways for them to fall into (deeper/worse) poverty, which also puts their kids in danger; not to mention how the judicial system itself is deeply unfavorable to women compared to men.

Ultimately, monogamy is inherently tied to the heterosexual regime, which means the abolition of the latter will need to involve transcending/escaping the former:

As long as monogamy is taken as the norm, ways of living outside family structures will always be cast as less than ideal, making it difficult to accommodate those who eschew heterosexuality unless they conform to an imitation of the heterosexual ideal. If the primacy of the couple ceased to be recognized, it would be difficult to maintain the forms of privilege that accrue to heterosexuality. If sexual relationships were de-prioritized as the basis for our most meaningful social ties and if they were not exclusive, then who one related to sexually might come to be of less pervasive social significance. Heterosexuality would then lose its privileged, institutionalized status and non-sexual friendships would no longer be regarded as intrinsically less significant than sexual ones.

Stevi Jackson & Sue Scott (2004) The Personal Is Still Political: Heterosexuality, Feminism and Monogamy. *Feminism & Psychology*, 14: 1, p. 154–155.

## Compulsory Heterosexuality/Cisness & Oppressed Genders

Putting it all together, I think a useful way to conceptualize the meaning of 'gender/sex' and the various positionalities of gendered minorities within the patriarchal system, is through a kind of narrative about the compulsory cisness and heterosexuality which are its sociological foundations.

Here is a really good definition of heterosexuality as a regime, from [Talia Bhatt](#):

In the social realm, heterosexuality is not simply an orientation among several, just one characteristic a person may have or lack in a neutrally-regarded field of options. It is the *presumed default*, and moreover, the central social arrangement around which all social relations are determined. Patrilineal property relations, ease of access to divorce and legal recourse in marriage, cultural pressures to procreate and 'continue the (father's) line', the patriarch as head of the nuclear or communal households—these are all institutions that

arise from an enshrinement of heterosexuality, and furthermore entrench it as a *hierarchical, socio-economic* relation.

Crucially, the core insight here is that heterosexuality-as-regime is set up to extract domestic, sexual and reproductive labor from those deemed women under its logics. Its definition of womanhood and the narrowness of her stipulated role in society is oriented around *domestic confinement*, in rigorously naturalizing a positionality of abjection and servility towards others. In a very real sense, autonomous personhood itself is regarded as out of reach for women, as outside the domain to which they belong, a cruelty that is variously justified as done for women's own good, or a consequence of women's "true nature", their inward, subconscious, *biological* preference for their own subjugation. The fact that such subjugation must be ideologically, culturally, legally, economically, politically and violently forced upon women, often over their own vocalized or enacted objections, is never quite taken as contradicting this "natural" maxim.

The patriarchal social order assigns sex and gender to newborns based on cissexist pseudo-biology, and from there onwards your duty/role as a little human is to successfully become one of the two default and legitimate cis-heterosexual gender options. You're categorized from the beginning – before you can even speak! – as either a cis-male being, meant to become the patriarch and the only real subject, or a cis-female non-being, meant to become the dominated servant and property of a (cis) man. Basically, until you reach adulthood you're nothing but a) your parents' – and ultimately your father's – property, and b) would-be, incomplete members of the heterosexual dyad. If you're do not have the "right" anatomical/genital features that the patriarchal medical order uses to file you under either "sex", you might be made to undergo surgery without informed consent (intersex genital mutilation/surgery).

Childhood and teenhood are pretty much all about training, disciplining, policing and punishing young humans into conforming to their assigned cis-heterosexual gender role. While they're being taught at home and at school to become good, submissive, obedient state subjects and workers, they're also being forced into one of these two cis-heterosexual boxes, including by physical or sexual violence, psychological terror, emotional neglect or abuse, and the repressions of expressions of gender and sexuality (or the lack thereof – asexuality) that don't fit neatly into straight, reproductive, patriarchal monogamy.

If you're a nonconforming boy/guy, you usually get beaten, bullied and shamed until you embrace being the soon-to-be wearer/heir of the patriarchal boot. As a girl, you get dehumanized, sexualized, and disciplined into being obedient and submissive to men and accept their advances (even if you don't feel good about them). Despite these sometimes extreme levels of violence/terror/torture, some cis teens keep refusing to fulfill their gender/patriarchal "duties" (in terms of gender, sexuality, monogamy, etc.). So they'll keep getting abused and/or ostracized into/during adulthood, as a form of punishment and correction.

However some people, as kids, teens and/or adults not only don't want to conform to these patriarchal gender roles, but actually refuse to submit/commit to compulsory cisness *altogether*. Transness is the ultimate treason to this cishet dualist order, because it is a total refusal of embodying assigned sex/gender as *telos*.

From the cis-patriarchal standpoint, trans men are considered on the one hand as failed cis women, who didn't submit as cis males' reproductive property/non-subject. On the other hand, they can never become "real" men – that is, cis patriarchs – because the system thinks you're born either man or woman rather than becoming one. They get emasculated in the sense of being degendered and regendered as cis women, never allowed to become men because they betrayed that cisnormative and reproductive destiny they were assigned by society.

And as Talia Bhatt explains in her book *Trans/Rad/Fem*, trans women are held to be both failed cis patriarchs and failed reproductive cis women, a kind of non-being that deserves to be abused in all ways for not conforming to manhood and even worse, choosing to become the hated subaltern gender (woman):

She is the menace against whom any violence can be justified, both the failed man that can be beaten senseless and the failed woman who can be raped with impunity, against whom no amount of harm is unjustifiable.

Similarly, [noorah666](#) wrote (the posts are now deleted, unfortunately):

Now transmisogyny is where patriarchy fights hardest and it's outlines can be seen the most starkly. Patriarchy doesn't know what to make of trans women. It simultaneously sees trans women in two ways: as women who



are infinitely penetrable and who can be denied the safeties of being a precious child bearer AND it sees trans women as failed men. This explains why trans women occupy a strange place in society right now: as sex objects and as the spectre of the child predator like gay men once were. Recycled bigotry that used to target gay men can fit so easily onto trans women because it's the only way patriarchy sees us. An aberration (read: freaky perv) and wholly superfluous. Hence why we're also seen as disposable. Basically seen as sex dolls and nothing else. The two forces of the recent hike in transfem fetishism / sexualization and the recent rapid erosion of rights for trans femmes proves that society views trans women as sex objects and nothing more. It's the sexdollification of an entire population.

*For a masterful explanation of transmisogyny, please check out Talia's book and/or her series of essays titled "Understanding Transmisogyny" (references and links are included at the end).*

In addition, whether cis, trans and/or non-binary, people can also reject the comphet norm through their sexual and romantic relationships. Gays and lesbians disrupt the gender system because they destabilize what it means to be a man or a woman, away from the norms of cisheterosexuality.

*Other recommended reading for this section: hari calico (bloomfilters)'s Talking about sex (link included at the end).*

## Gender/Sex as Essence vs Self-Determination

One thing I learned by following, reading and discussing with trans feminists is that you can't fully understand the meaning/ideology of "gender" and "sex" in the patriarchal social order, without grasping cisness, transness and transmisogyny. Some cis feminists in the 20th c. did a lot of good work deconstructing the misogynist/patriarchal ideas about "sex" as a "natural" thing, but it's only in the past decade(s) that we've really gotten to the bottom of it, thanks especially to trans feminists like Julia Serano and Talia Bhatt.

The patriarchal regime – built on compulsory cisness and heterosexuality as explained above – has its own concept of gender as **an immaterial essence assigned at birth**. This is something a lot of leftists, feminists and liberals still miss: it's not merely "gender" which is *socially constructed* but the idea of sex itself. So-called "sex" isn't a stable/binary anatomical-physiological reality, but **"the gendering of the body, gender but in 'scientific' clothing. And it's a rhetorical device that serves to uphold the traditional gender system while allowing the proponents of that system to present themselves as people who are merely stating 'objective facts'"** [[@2damntrans](#)]. The cis-supremacist order and its ideologues/apologists will never accept that *both* gender and sex are malleable and fluid, rather than fixed, unchangeable essences. This is why arguing about "biological sex" when facing transphobes is fundamentally counter-productive.

This is why I'm largely gonna leave out the actual biological complexity of these aspects of human beings' bodies/development; however I do recommend checking out the scientific work/explainers of [Julia Serano](#) and [Amanda Montañez](#). The bottom line is that contrary to the claims of pseudo-scientific transphobes like [Emma Hilton and Colin Wright](#), sex isn't a straightforward binary "diphormism" determined by chromosomes, gametes, genitals/sex organs (internal/external), hormones, menstruation, or the capacity to have/bear/birth children. The fact is sex is itself socially constructed is easily demonstrated by the mere existence of trans and intersex people, the fact that they're still assigned genders they might not (in intersex people) or don't (trans people) identify with, and the fact nearly everything about their anatomy is changeable through medication/HRT and surgery (if they want it, obviously: it should only be about self-determination). It's likely only a matter of time before synthetic ova/uteri will be possible for the trans women that wish to have them; apart from that there's nothing about one's sex that is impossible to transform. Even outside of people who willingly transition in the course of their lives, there are some intersex people with 5-alpha-reductase deficiency who simply change anatomically during puberty. Sex simply isn't immutable!

What queer people – including trans women and men, enbies, gays and lesbians, intersex people, and so on – show and embody is that against this cis normativity where the self and the body are imprisoned inside rigid essentialist boxes, gender, sex and sexuality do and should exist as *open-ended self-determination and agency/autonomy*. In a dialectical way, *this* radical meaning of queerness – far from the liberal representationism and individualism that some queer orgs embrace – destabilizes the prevailing gender-sexual order by revealing its inner contradictions and negative moments: despite the persistence of the cisheterosexual gendering of individuals, we now know/can see the incredible fluidity and multiplicity of gender and sexuality, revealing a liberatory horizon.



# “Won’t Somebody Think of the Poor Cis Men?”: Anti-Feminist Backlash in Fascist Times

What we’ve seen in the West in the past decade especially, is a reactionary and fascist(ic) backlash against gender non-conforming as well as feminism. There’s been a coordinated and violent political movement to strip back the relative progress made in terms of women and the LGBTQ+ community’s rights, access to healthcare, public existence and aspirations. Moreover, there is a distinctly revanchist aspect to this, with a cruel, sadistic desire to discipline, abuse and make suffer anyone who doesn’t conform to strict patriarchal gender roles. That includes a sort of open and public spectacle wherein cis male supremacism is reaffirmed and the “deviants” get humiliated and dehumanized.

It’s not like this kind of violent patriarchal-masculinist reaction hasn’t happened in the past, nor that the prevailing status quo isn’t itself a regime of terror and torture. For example, things like [muscular christianity](#) in the 19th and early 20th century, the [men’s rights movement](#) (which started in the 1970’s in response to feminism) or the [Promise Keepers](#) in the 1990s were predecessors of this kind of male chauvinist reactionary movements. But this current wave of revanchist violence and attempts to step back progress in terms of gender-sexual equality, basically exploded during the 2010’s, notoriously (but [not exclusively](#)) in the context of [Gamergate](#) and the depressingly popular “anti-SJW/anti-woke” content mill online since then. This has also been one of the major boosts to the far right’s resurgence in the West (and beyond).

Similarly, trans people have become a major focal point of this global fascist drift, with a full-on genocidal onslaught against their existence since 2020 especially (e.g. USA and UK). This was explained brilliantly in a now-deleted set of posts by [noorah666](#):

Here's my nuclear take: I don't think it's a coincidence that fascism in the west has risen in a time when trans people are beginning to gain agency and social rights. Trans people are such a rebuke and shock to the presumed "normal" in his liberal society that fascism rises to re-assert ancient dominance hierarchies. The minute a society accepts that a person can vary their gender, all sorts of "truths" start to crumble. Patriarchy says men are the pinnacle social position yet trans women gladly give that up for a seemingly more inferior one. Trans people existing destabilises the fundamental axioms of patriarchy as a system of organizing people. Fascism is a violent reaction to that fact. (...) It also sadly explains liberal weakness on trans issues because they agree with fascists about the fundamental axioms of patriarchy, they will always side with fascists when the time comes. I don't think the world has ever evolved past the radical notion of the transgender person.

This reactionary backlash truly covers all the dimensions of patriarchy that I’ve mentioned so far in this text, because let’s also not forget QAnon, which is tied to the anti-trans crusade because of the right’s false pretense to be deeply concerned about children’s safety and the [weaponization of the notion of “groomer”](#), as Lee Cicuta explained:

In reality, the right wing is pro-rape and pro-CSA to their core, and any serious look at their rhetoric and practices bears this out. Many of their biggest celebrities actively and publicly talk about the sexual desirability of young girls, and the lion’s share of the sexual assault that happens in their communities is enacted by people they know and approve of. This is because, in practice (and this aspect is not unique to reactionary communities) sexual assault is a tool of patriarchy, and works to reinforce existing power structures. If the right-wing took grooming and CSA seriously, they would be eating each other alive, they would trust youth when they came forward about predatory adults in their community, and they would be affirming youth autonomy. They do not, and will not, do any of these things, because actual sexual assault has never been something they have been concerned about. What actually concerns them, and what they are intending to express when they throw around terms like “groomer” and “predator,” is the maintenance of their property relation to youth.

The manner in which reactionaries are preoccupied with sexual assault or victimization of children is not about care for the person victimized, nor even that they see it as bad in all cases (as we can see, they do not). They see it has a defending their own property relation to that person. The right-wing in general feels an extreme entitlement to shaping the youth under their power as they see fit without the interference of outside influences that reveal to youth that there are other possibilities for them besides the singular narrative the adults in their life offer them. They may cloak their rhetoric in a faux concern for children’s wellbeing, but in practice it is fairly obvious to any attentive observer that what they want is to be the singular authority in

children's lives. Children, in their eyes (and the eyes of the State) are private property, and their ideology dictates that any and all private property can be controlled utterly by those who hold "ownership" over it. Sexual assault then, as long as it happens among those "approved" to interact with their "property" (family members, pastors, friends, etc.), is generally acceptable to them even as they deny that it ever happens. Sexual assault is a rhetorical placeholder for them, it signifies their outrage at outside influence on vulnerable people they see as their property, and it has always been so.

In this seriously horrendous context, one of the central tropes of the masculinist/anti-feminist backlash – which is what prompted me to write this whole text/essay! – has been the so-called "male loneliness epidemic" and the (tellingly) closely-tied idea that it's a big deal/problem that "young men can't get laid anymore".

Let me first quickly describe this horseshit. Basically, it's a misogynist moral panic that frames rising social isolation among men—especially in Western societies—as a widespread and growing crisis. It has often been brought up via claims (with or without legitimate evidence/data) that young men have fewer friends, and tellingly, this often leads to worries that they're not having as much as sex with women as before. In these discourses it's often claimed "it's hard to be a boy/man nowadays" and that we supposedly have to say/show to boys and young men that "it's okay to be men". Feminism, shifting gender roles and the declining of traditional masculinity sometimes is blamed for these alleged trends.

First of all, as Nicholas Sherwood [wrote](#),

There is no male loneliness epidemic. It is simply a loneliness epidemic. By arbitrarily gendering a [universal loneliness](#), our fragmented society becomes further fractured, and the discourse surrounding relationships becomes a breeding ground for misogyny.

Likely contributing to the idea of an exclusively male loneliness crisis, a survey from the [Survey Center of American Life](#) released in 2021 found that [15%](#) of men reported having no close friends, whereas 10% of women reported the same. The statistic was cited in articles by [NPR](#), the [Independent](#) and [Vox](#) about male loneliness. However, that same year and two years prior, [studies](#) were released which found that not only do roughly the same number of men and women report being lonely, but they report equal levels of loneliness throughout their lives.

Likewise, the "[young male virginity on the rise](#)" meme/fake chart which resurfaces every now and then, was [selectively edited](#) based on an original chart [made by the Washington Post](#) in 2019. The charts from WaPo, based on data from the General Social Survey, did show that as of 2018 a) the young adults of both genders (only cis men and women were accounted for) were driving the rise in recent decades of the share of U.S. adults reporting having had no sex in the past year, and b) that the increase especially since the 2000's was sharper among young men. But some online misogynists distorted this as if it indicated a rising "virginity", and as usual with social media fake charts and info often get spread uncritically, sparking discourse based on literal lies.

More importantly though, it's the underlying male chauvinist and misogynist logic at play that must be highlighted here. It should go without saying but "virginity" as such is a fundamentally reactionary and patriarchal concept, that should be given as much importance as the idea of "sin". It's about teaching young girls/women and boys/men that their destiny is heterosexual reproduction. And it's a core part of rape culture: men are taught they'll only be "real men" if they treat women as sexual objects, and women that they have to submit to men's sexual desires and harassment (but not demonstrate any sexual agency themselves, otherwise they're denigrated as "sluts").

The moral panic about men's sexual access to women's bodies – i.e. [against women having the choice to say no](#) – is particularly egregious in a time of intense backlash and rollback against women's autonomy. Besides, the premise is itself ridiculous. By default in this patriarchal society women's bodies and sexuality are held to be at the disposal of men, i.e. regardless of the pretensions otherwise women are considered men's sexual property.

It's also ridiculous because it's not fucking hard to have sex with women, in fact it's still too easy because of the social pressure on girls to submit to/accept/feel like they have to seek and satisfy men's sexual advances/harassment/etc. Women of all ages *often* "don't get laid" for long periods of time (presuming they'd want to and aren't aces, of course), for various reasons (including legitimate fears about men's

sexual/intimate conduct and violence). Not only do we not have an “incel problem” with these women/girls, there's never been any of this kind of uproar about their condition, including again how much of it is tied to male sexual and domestic/interpersonal violence. If anything, we should be *happy* that more and more women are refusing to deal with and endure the abuse and harassment they get from men.

The topic of loneliness is *very* familiar to me, I have actually suffered from it. But there's nothing about this that is *specifically* about sexuality – as if it was a survival need like eating or sleeping, which it isn't – it's just about building connections with people, which can lead to sex but obviously doesn't have to.

Instead of building connections with people of any gender based on kindness and empathy, the moral panic about “male loneliness” or “men not getting laid” puts all the worst patriarchal, homophobic/queerphobic/transphobic and misogynist tendencies that guys are taught by society on steroids and make guys bond based on them, as if they were the victims. In other words, it's indistinguishable from what the fascistic [manosphere](#) talks about. It's pretty much the polar opposite of what men and young men should do, which is disavow, betray, forever abandon Manhood to become actual human beings rather than pathetic imitations thereof who think that dominating women gives them purpose

There are basically two choices for men who are lonely, something I've been very familiar with: either continue down the misogynistic-patriarchal-incel road (and this ends very darkly) or start building actual emotional connections w/ ppl based on mutual care. Try the latter and see your whole world turned upside down! The worst that will happen is \*gasp\* a bro hugs you and you start feeling "damn this feels so good maybe what I needed all along was genuine emotional connection and caring" and at this stage being called a faggot would be an honourful thing regardless of who you actually have sex with (hey maybe that hug felt so good you \*gasp\* wanted some more bromance and \*gasp gasp\* gay sex).

# Beyond Empty Words: Disempowerment & Abolishing Manhood

As a conclusion, let me rewind to the words from He-Yin Zhen that I quoted at the start of this text. What she pointed out is that for the most part even progressive cishet men who claim to support women's liberation, in reality have no intention to give their power up and instead seek selfish gains and "distinction": This is the fundamental issue at stake for those of us among cishet men who truly wish to take the side of women and other oppressed gendered groups: beyond empty self-serving words and gestures, what does it mean to actually support radical gender liberation?

This isn't meant as a definitive answer, nor do I wish to give the impression I consider myself better, more "enlightened" than the rest of cishet men. It's just something I've been thinking about a lot for the past year, and once again it's by listening to/reading some feminists' rants and discussions on this topic that I began coming to terms with it. I would say before anything else a **major epistemic and political decentering** is required. There is absolutely no way for us to begin understanding – let alone challenging! (beyond empty rhetoric) – patriarchal social relations without our epistemic voice/authority, our own sociopolitical interests, our complaints and grievances, our feelings and desire, and so on, being *fundamentally de-prioritized*.

No system of oppression can ever be overcome for good by appealing to the oppressors' interests and coddling their ego's, feelings or wishes. Members of an oppressing group – such as settlers in a colonized region, white people in a white supremacist society, parents in a position of power over their kids, and capitalists and landlords dominating the poor dispossessed masses – not only have a lot to lose were their social and structural privileges to be removed/erased, it's their very identities, worldviews and aspirations that need to be turned upside down. In the case of patriarchy and cisness, the overwhelming majority of cishet men either oppose feminist/LGBTQ+ liberation violently – as we saw in Gamergate among others – or they ask "what's in it for me?". For those of us who seriously intend to transcend this dichotomy and *genuinely* take part in the destruction of the patriarchy as a whole, there is no other way but to embrace our own disempowerment, which starts with a fundamental de-prioritization of our own concerns and demands as a social group. This means feminists don't have to get our permission or to win us over!

This epistemic and political decentering is indeed the polar opposite of the prevailing reactions to and inherent lies built into the so-called "male loneliness epidemic" which I talked about in the previous section. It's actually the feelings, fears, suffering, grievances, demands, aspirations, safety, autonomy and epistemic voices of *oppressed* groups within patriarchy – i.e. cis women, trans and nonbinary/genderqueer people, gays and lesbians, and kids – that matter here, not ours. I will say though, while cishet adult men are the *primary* oppressors within patriarchy, they're not the only ones with power over others, namely other adult parents of any gender/sexuality are also in positions of social domination relative to their kids; therefore similarly these adults' interests are incompatible with child liberation.

By definition, our interests as cishet men are to maintain our epistemic authority, our access to women's bodies, sexuality, domestic/care/gestational labor, emotional support; as well as the reproduction of both the socio-economic dependence that keeps women and our kids unable to leave us even if they want to, and the various (political, legal, cultural...) infrastructures that enable us to keep the power and remain unpunished for our many acts of violence and abuse. To take but one aspect of this and make it more explicit, our interest is to replicate rather than dismantle the male sexual domination and rape culture that legitimizes it. It pressures women into accepting or submitting to our sexual advances and harassment, providing sex for us as a service (economic-sexual exchange), prioritizing our sexual satisfaction/desires/fantasies over theirs, handling contraception and risking their health/bodies (pregnancy) when we don't take any responsibility, internalizing sex as a "duty" within monogamous/marital relationships; it threatens them with further trauma and a reversing of victims vs abusers if they denounce or defend themselves against our violations of their consent/boundaries/bodily autonomy; it traps them inside heteronormative and monogamous sexuality when sometimes (often?) they'd be open to and enjoy other things. This is just with regard to sexual domination, but it shows how we actually have a lot to lose, and why most of us would rather defend this horrendous social hierarchy than renounce any of these benefits.

This brings me to the core idea and takeaway of betraying Manhood – which applies to all cishet men first/primarily, but also secondarily to all individuals who adopt/identify with some form of masculinity, which in our current patriarchal society always [contains the risk \(not inevitability\) of falling back into or emulating Manhood™](#).

In addition, the last thing we (masculine people of any gender) should do is think that because we're on the left and/or sympathetic to feminism, we're inherently better than other men, or immune from all this shit. Far too many do that, I'm sorry... That's how you sometimes get a kind of de facto dismissal of radical feminism on the Left or in queer groups/movements. As Dupuis-Déri wrote:

Whether we consider ourselves progressive or conservative, for or against capitalism, heterosexual, bisexual, polyamorous, trans or non-binary, whether we wear skirts, make-up, feminist T-shirts, have tattoos, are activists in an anti-sexist men's group, or have a library overflowing with feminist books (...), we remain men from a *political* point of view when we treat women as women, that is, as people at our service, who owe us attention, love, admiration, work, care and sexuality at a lower price or, even better, for free. And all this not because of who we are as individuals, with our qualities and faults, but because we are men. It is first and foremost this political question of power that must guide the compass of the pro-feminist man.

Francis Dupuis-Déri (2023) *Les hommes et le féminisme. Faux amis, poseurs ou alliés?* Les Paris, Éditions Textuel, p. 138-139.  
[My translation]

Both to actually support women's/LGBTQ+/child liberation, and in a sense to truly become (liberated) humans ourselves, we must – to borrow from this [post by Alice](#) – **embrace our own self-emasculatation in the sense of destroying Manhood™**. Here's the program:

1. Manhood™ as a hegemonic form of gender subject *cannot* exist in the long run. Counter-hegemonic forms of masculinity can only exist at the margins of our current society; and the liberation of all genders is specifically premised on killing *Man* as a cishet patriarch.
2. This implies not merely a subjective but *socio-material process of disempowerment* in our daily lives, in relationships (romantic, platonic, you name it), at work, in social/political movements, in intellectual/cultural production, and so on. *[More on this below]*
3. The solidarity/fraternity between cishet men must itself be shattered, which means that we have to *betray our own gender as an oppressive class*, breaking apart the patriarchal conspiracy among cishet male relatives, friends, colleagues and strangers.
4. Cis Manhood as the default, ultimate and only autonomous subject must be destroyed: "the thing teenage boys need to hear more than anything else is that it is actually okay if they don't grow up to be men at all. they don't have to feel invested in the political interests of men as a class, bc they don't have to BE men. it's okay if they grow up to be women, or something else :)" [\[narcissus\]](#)

Gender conservatism – as epitomized by the moral panic about teenage boys and young men in the last part, tells us that compulsory heterosexuality and hence cishet men's social domination, is inevitable and must therefore be accommodated, even by the "Left" and feminist/queer/trans movements. Instead, the dismantling of the social, cultural and political supremacy of cishet men has gone nowhere near far enough!

*Side note: I am sorry if this sounds incredibly obvious/basic and repetitive – like what's being asked is simply for men to stop being predatory brutes and treat others with care and respect –, but the patriarchal "common sense" which most of us cishet men take for granted has to be spelled out and countered explicitly.*

There are two processes at play here, one relative to the feminist movement's goals/strategy, and the other about the necessity for cishet men to betray our own gender. Both are closely connected, but it's useful to distinguish them. On the former, I think it's best to quote my friend Beth who really nailed this strategic point ([here](#) / [here](#)):

The bottom line is that feminism must lower the costs of refusing manhood and raise the cost of embracing it.

Which will, of course, absolutely fucking suck for trans guys who will face the wrath of cisheteropatriarchy \*and\* be refused access to women's emotional labour on a non reciprocal basis which is how cis guys survive the "coldness" they are "forced" into.

It is asking a lot of our trans brothers to refuse even the partial access to the benefits of maleness in patriarchy they might get if they manage to pass and play the role hard enough and accept perpetual faggothood, even as trans women join with cis women against the patriarchy.

But I'm afraid that's the ask. And it is no different to what we ask of cis men, although asking a trans man to accept some social feminisation is a much much bigger deal. (...)

But I'm not prepared to give up the central insight of gender as a hierarchy and maleness as a dominant role that must be made more difficult and more unpleasant if we want men to abandon it and join with us.

The assumption is that we are not gonna be able to persuade men away from patriarchy. That there is no universal class that can unite against the bourgeoisie or whatever and that most men will act as enemies to the liberation of women as they lose access to our labour.

This is seen as a contradiction that must be sharpened, not as a downside that must be downplayed and softened. The access to and control of women that manhood gives men access to must be destroyed and it must be destroyed by denying that access.

The central strategy in doing this is raising the consequences of rape. The rapist must not prosper. Non rapist men can no longer be allowed to benefit from the violence of the rapist. Supporting rapists must come with a high social cost.

This is me too, this is KYLR, this is survivor led politics, this is safer spaces. A whole constellation of (not always mutually compatible) strategies to raise the cost of rape, to make it an act with serious consequences for the rapist and their supporters.

There are many, \*many\*, arguments and debates to be had about how this can work - many focussed on the role of the state and carcerality - but the central premise is that rape is a central strategy of patriarchy for keeping women afraid and that fear is a key plank of male power.

This is a strategy that chooses confrontation with men. Men can choose to be traitors to manhood - become faggots of one kind or another (which is a social role more than it is a sexuality - in these enlightened times there are gay men who can escape faggotry lol), but manhood is not liberatory.

With regard to what us cishet men need to do, I think the unfiltered framing used here – inspired by Beth, Alice and others – is important because it goes in the polar opposite direction as what the patriarchal script tells us since our birth: our assigned duty is to become “real men” – meaning concretely being *patriarchs*, i.e. oppressors – whereas the actual requirement/necessity in order to support feminist/gender/queer/trans/child liberation is for us to “become faggots of one kind or another”, in Beth’s words (i.e. self-emasculaton, in Alice’s words).

Let me be more explicit still:

1. Always respect, listen to and learn from women’s lived experience and their own understanding of patriarchy and (trans)misogyny.
2. Instead of asking them to teach you about their oppression, you can just fucking read and listen to them. They’ve been talking about this for ages!
3. It’s crucial to decenter ourselves epistemically and politically: let them speak, let their struggles and issues and liberatory aspirations be prioritized. They also don’t need our permission or our support!
4. Rather than being defensive, we have to acknowledge that as cis men (especially ones attracted to women) we’re ourselves benefitting from this system, that we’re in that sense part of the problem and therefore legitimate/potential targets of criticism from women in our lives. Let’s learn to listen to it and change rather than being “hysterical”. Indeed, as cis men we should embrace the fact we’re on a constant, long-term process of unlearning!
5. Reproductive labor should be shared more equitably, it’s a fucking low bar but something most cis men still don’t do it. Housework, taking care of kids, elders and relatives/friends, making sure the community doesn’t fall apart, affective/emotional labor, mediating and de-escalating conflicts, and so on, is also our responsibility.
6. Break the patriarchal solidarity among cishet men: confront your male friends and relatives (about their sexism, sexual harassment, and so on), practice “boys watch”, support victims of abuse/harassment/sexism including if that means losing your male friends, never tolerate abuse of kids by male friends or relatives.



7. Women's, kids' and other gendered minorities' bodily and sexual autonomy must be not merely respected but supported. That means as cishet (adult) men we have to pay a lot of attention and care to their consent, safety, health and healthcare needs; and in the case of the adult heterosexual women we're dating to support their sexual agency (pleasure, desires, boundaries, etc) as well as reproductive health and safety (which is our responsibility too).
8. Gender liberation requires caring about supporting trans and queer people, whose autonomy and well-being are under constant assault, largely by cishet men. Let's do what we can to defend their rights, their healthcare needs, their physical safety, and so on.
9. The education of children cannot keep being grounded in the reproduction and enforcement of compulsory cisness and heterosexuality: if you have kids you should actively work against that, and support them in becoming any kind of human being, of any gender, sex or sexuality.
10. Monogamy should be challenged, but that doesn't mean self-servingly widening the pool of sexual objects we have access to: on the contrary it should be about shattering male sexual domination and breaking the often authoritarian hold we have over our cis woman partners in the context of the monogamous couple.

On top of the four general principles listed above, a fifth applies to cisness in general: *cis and hetero reformism will not do* ([hari calico \(bloomfilters\)](#)). This is something us cis folks are generally reticent to accept - even (most) cishet women hold on to *cisnormativity* - but "gender liberation cannot start with the premise that cisness must be accommodated first" ([narcissus](#)). I already mentioned this in the fourth principle, but that was specifically about cis manhood because cis men "have way more agency to stop being men than women do to stop being women" ([Alice](#)).

However it applies to cisness in general, because "boys growing into men and girls growing into women coercively is itself a grooming process into heterosexuality" ([hari calico \(bloomfilters\)](#)). This is one of the key insights of transfeminism, which ties radical feminism with trans AND child liberation: it's absolutely essential to reject cishetero fatalism, and instead emphasize that both for children and adults it's neither inevitable nor necessary to walk the path set out for them by/within cisness and compulsory heterosexuality.

Here's another great quote on this from [narcissus](#):

Conservative fixation on trans youth is a product of their fear and rage at the idea of children not being their property, to mold and shape as they see fit and to ensure the reproduction of the existing gendered order, but instead having the self-knowledge to self-mold and let the old order die.

If boys don't HAVE to become men, if they realize they are not fundamentally different being from girls and women, if they don't feel invested in the politics of masculinist futurity, there is a risk that the next generation of patriarchs never emerges to take the reigns.

They're threatened by the simple idea that children are not property. Without that premise, patriarchy makes no sense. Reproductive and sexual labor classes make no sense. Trading children to other patriarchs in "marriage contracts" makes no sense. It all falls apart if children are already people.

While women don't have as much of a choice/agency to betray cisness as cishet men can, and while the short-term priority should obviously be to enable kids to transition if they want to, ultimately I do agree that the revolutionary meaning of *transition* goes beyond trans people themselves, and instead applies to everyone. Like [Sereneblossom](#) mentioned, we're all gonna need to transform ourselves and our social relations away from the prescriptions/assignments/injunctions of gender and (comp) heterosexuality that define what cis genders mean/imply/look like socially in this patriarchal society:

So honestly this is going to sound movie cliché but to me the answer is within all of us as inherent to transition. If your internal sense of sex aligns with a Gender, take the things you like about Gender and make them your own. Weave new context into them. Trans your gender then trans Gender. Then scale that upward or outward. Men and masculine people and women and feminine people can take as much or as little from Gender as they want; the key is to recontextualize it all outside the Social Order, outside the oppressive scripts that the patriarchal order imposes on us.

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