

Rather than being given an adequate opportunity to pursue their own careers, women are expected to carry out unpaid labour in the home.

## A Call for Action

Oppressive gender roles and patriarchy are neither morally justified nor practically necessary for a functioning, decent society. We can't have a free society if women aren't equal to men in the degree of control they have over their own lives. Let's act to create a humane world where people are judged not by the gender they were assigned at birth, but by the content of their character. It's time to do away with outdated and abstract notions that constrain people's freedom to decide what they want to do with their lives. Even if they have existed for thousands of years, they remain a barrier to human liberation, which can and should be dismantled.

### Notes:

1. <http://libcom.org/library/sexing-body-gender-politics-construction-sexuality-anne-fausto-sterling>
2. <http://www.policymic.com/articles/84361/intersex-woman-pens-courageous-letter-to-fox-news-bullies>
3. <http://techland.time.com/2014/02/14/a-comprehensive-guide-to-facebooks-new-options-for-gender-identity/>
4. <https://www.genderspectrum.org/understanding-gender>
5. <http://www.parliament.uk/about/faqs/house-of-commons-faqs/members-faq-page2/>
6. <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42964.pdf>
7. <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2012/07/study-proof-that-we-sexually-objectify-women/260339/>

### Get involved:

Revolutionary Anarcha-feminist Group  
UK Feminista - <http://ukfeminista.org.uk/>

List of organisations:

[http://www.thefword.org.uk/resources/websites\\_organisations\\_and\\_charities\\_uk-based](http://www.thefword.org.uk/resources/websites_organisations_and_charities_uk-based)

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## GENDER AND OPPRESSION



Feminism, put simply, has two major components. Firstly, the claim that women are disadvantaged in our society, and secondly, the claim that this disadvantage can and should be dismantled. Although there have been a variety of different feminist movements, there are a number of themes and principles which can be identified in common among these movements. If we're interested in constructing a more egalitarian and libertarian society, understanding basic feminist principles has value, because it gives us a lens through which we can identify, challenge and dismantle the dynamics of gender and oppression.  
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## Sex, Gender and Orientation

The prevailing view in our society is as follows. Everybody has either a penis or a vagina. If you have a penis, you're a man, and if you have a vagina, you're a woman. Men are biologically wired to have sex with women. Men are sexually dominant; women are sexually submissive. Men tend to be competitive; women tend to be co-operative. Men exercise power; women have power exercised over them. That's the traditional view.

Does it hold up? No. Not at all. In fact, almost every single component of this view is completely illegitimate. First of all, at the basic level of reproductive anatomy, although it's true for the majority of people, not everybody falls into the binary of having either a penis or a vagina – intersex people exist, and the failure of our society to recognise this fact forces many decent people in our society to be secretive and ashamed of their bodies.<sup>1,2</sup>

Our society also fails to make the distinction between sex and gender. Sex concerns the biological makeup of an individual's reproductive anatomy, whereas gender concerns the social roles that we assign to individuals based on their anatomy. In other words, sex is biological, whereas gender is cultural.

The failure to recognise this distinction leads to yet another falsehood – that 'everybody with a penis is a man'. This marginalises the great many people who might have a penis, but nevertheless aren't men – people who are transgender, genderqueer, gender fluid, non-binary and so on.<sup>3</sup>

The next problem with the traditional view is heteronormativity – not everyone is necessarily heterosexual. There are plenty of gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, and asexual people. Their sexual orientation is not 'incorrect', and these people have absolutely nothing to be ashamed of.

Sexual orientation exists independent of sex and gender as well. If someone is transgender, that doesn't indicate anything about their sexual orientation – it's important not to make false assumptions about others based on pre-existing prejudices.

The reality is that gender and sexual orientation are a wide, complex and varied spectrum.<sup>4</sup> Although it might seem 'convenient' to lump everybody into two narrowly defined categories, for many people dealing with this inaccurate representation of reality is a daily struggle.

## Patriarchy

As well as being illegitimate, these gender roles are patriarchal – that is to say, men are vested in a position of political, economic, moral and social power and authority, while women are expected to play a subordinate role.

Although some people believe patriarchy is a thing of the past and that feminism is no longer relevant in 'enlightened' Western societies, this isn't the case.

During the last UK general election in 2010, 650 members of parliament were elected to the House of Commons – 503 of which were men.<sup>5</sup> In the USA, just 18.8% of representatives serving in the

113<sup>th</sup> congress are female – and that's the most equitable it's ever been.<sup>6</sup>

Women are subjected to sexual objectification in our society too. That doesn't mean that it's wrong to find a woman sexually attractive – that's a natural part of life. What's wrong is to treat a woman like an object to have sex with, rather than a subject – a human being with complex thoughts, feelings and desires, who is worthy of moral consideration.

Sexual objectification is so heavily embedded in our culture that it distorts our perceptions of women. A recent study in the European Journal of Social Psychology demonstrated that both men *and* women look at women as a mishmash of sexual body parts, whereas men are seen as whole people.<sup>7</sup>

Even children's toys are irrationally subjected to gendered marketing, which merely reinforces culturally conditioned gender roles. Boys get to play with 'creation and destruction', action figures and so on, whereas girls get to play with plastic babies, and Barbie dolls which present a completely unrealistic image to children that wildly deviates from what an average woman actually looks like.

## The Public/Private Divide

A significant feature of patriarchal societies is the exclusion of female involvement in the public sphere. Men are public – they're encouraged to get involved with politics, whereas women are private – they aren't supposed to get involved with the public sphere.