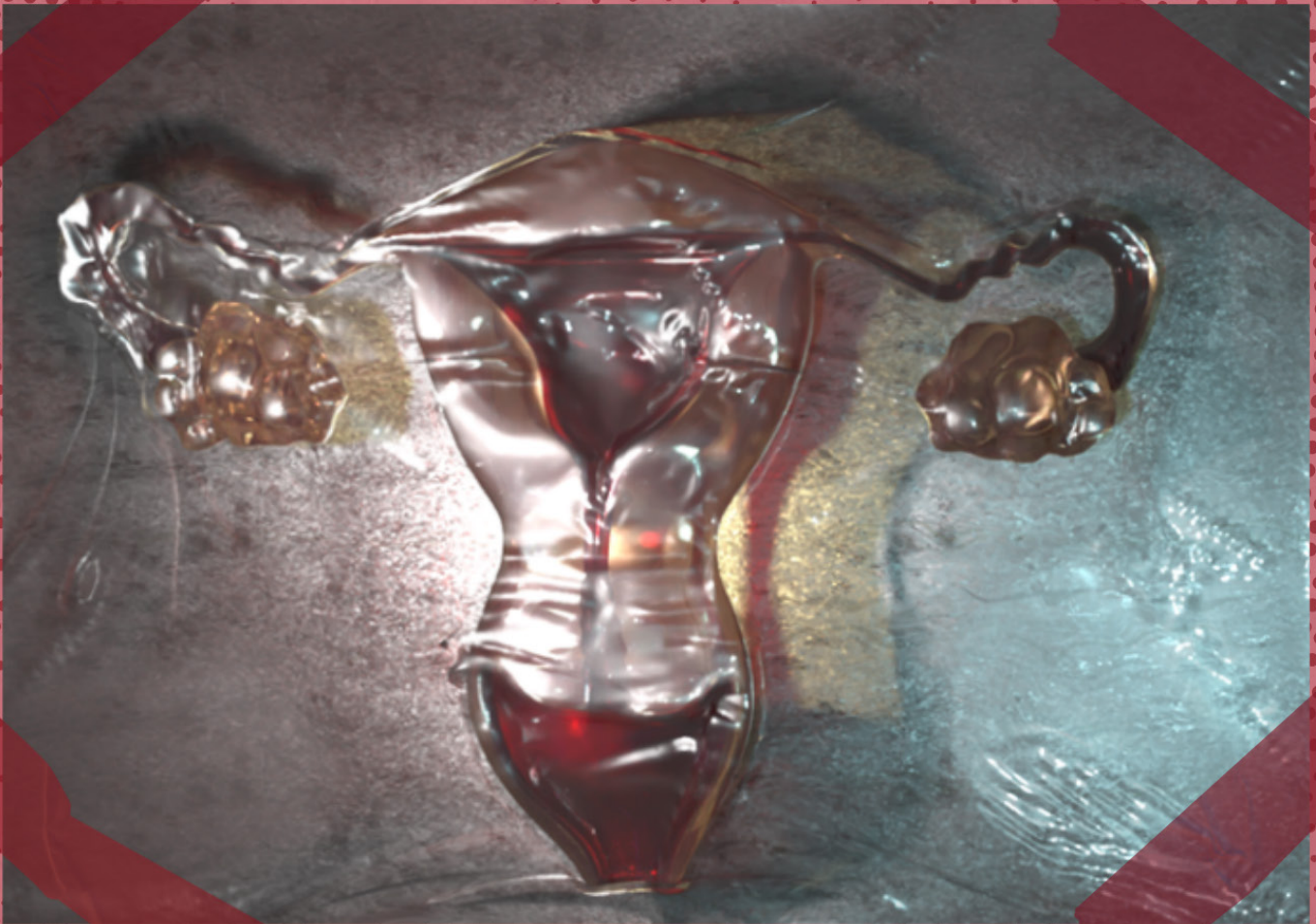


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TOTAL WOMAN
Victory



the POLITICS OF sex

Total Woman Victory is a quarterly radical feminist newsletter that aims to amplify the voices of women across the globe. We have a responsibility as students of feminist theory to reach the masses of women in desperate need of radical politics. We are dedicated to making a space where women can speak unapologetically about the issues that affect us. The collection and codification of the stories of survival of Third World women takes precedence to uphold our anti-imperialist line of struggle.

Volume 1 Issue 2: The Politics of Sex

The Politics of Sex explores how sex is wielded as a mechanism of power by patriarchal, capitalist, and colonial structures to commodify women, enforce female sexual subordination, and naturalize male dominance. This theme challenges the myths of “empowerment” and “consent” within exploitative culture and systems, with 20 different contributions analyzing the material realities of prostitution, pornography, sexual violence, reproductive control, and the ideological conditioning that obscures women’s sexual oppression. In contrast, we also examine feminist resistance, exploring the ways in which women have globally defied sexual subjugation and built the feminist movement and methodology for liberation. This issue rejects the male narratives that depoliticize sex and instead reclaims the analysis of sex as the site of struggle for women’s total victory.

Total Woman Victory is a collection of art and writing submitted by feminists from all over the world. This publication is made possible because women have generously given their time, creativity, and ideas for free. Each issue is a testament to the power of community-driven content and the contributions of women who believe in sharing their voices. We invite others to participate as well, as submissions for art and writing will be open for every issue. **To stay updated, announcements for when submissions are open will be made on our Twitter, and submission forms will be posted on our website at totalwomanvictory.com.**

Special Thanks to our Contributors:

Sathi Patel, Judith Lark, Joci, Edie V, Winnie Lark, Salwa, Maya, Pardis, Safira, Rafa, Saaleha, Jahanvi Rao, A. Tatiana, FemFederation, Anusha, Practice 4B, and all Anonymous Authors and Artists

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The Sex Contradiction

By Sathi Patel

Feminism is not a mere ideology or political line: it is a theoretical framework that seeks to expose, analyze, and ultimately dismantle women's oppression. What all feminists share is an acknowledgment of women's subjugation, born out of personal experience and collective consciousness. The realization that something is fundamentally wrong with women's lives—the very problem Betty Friedan famously described as “the problem without a name”—has driven generations of women to name, dissect, and resist our subordinate status in the male hegemonic order.

Every revolutionary movement must be rooted in a correct understanding of its primary contradiction. For women, this contradiction is sex—both as a social class and as the defining act of male power. An effective feminism must undertake a scientific analysis of sex under male dominance.

To develop a fundamental understanding of the mechanics of women's oppression, we will apply sex to Mao's analysis of key philosophical problems in studying the law of contradiction, which are listed as: “the two world outlooks, the universality of contradiction, the particularity of contradiction, the principal contradiction and the principal aspect of a contradiction, the identity and struggle of the aspects of a contradiction, and the place of antagonism in contradiction” (*On Contradiction*, 1937).

Two World Outlooks

There are two fundamentally opposed world outlooks within feminism. One is *dialectical*, seeking to abolish male supremacy entirely by understanding women's subjugation as a material, sex-based contradiction that is driven by

social and labor relations and must be resolved through revolutionary transformation. The other is *metaphysical*, aiming only to modify the terms of male domination, as it views patriarchy as static and unchanging.

The metaphysical world outlook treats contradictions as fixed and determined by external causes. The metaphysics of sex reduces women's sexual roles to a permanent, natural phenomenon. In every society, women are defined by patriarchal sexed roles: we are half a totality whose labor, reproduction, and bodies are controlled and exploited by the other half. Women's sexual labor is often rendered invisible and treated as a natural extension of our role as caregivers. Metaphysics denies the internal contradictions within sexed relations, treating this exploitation as inherent to human nature rather than as the dialectical product of social, economic, and class forces.

The sexed roles in intercourse are enforced by the metaphysical construction of gender, which seeks to define women as the (unchanging) subjects of sexual subjugation, particularly in the role of the penetrated. Patriarchal control over our sexuality serves the broader function of maintaining these gendered relations: women are not regarded as autonomous people capable of making independent choices—instead, we are forced to conform to external demands, particularly male desires, in order to fit the narrow, objectified image of femininity. The idea of free choice is a myth when our bodies, behaviors, and values are molded to male sexuality from youth.

Contradiction is universal, present in all things and at all times. Internal contradictions, such as exploitation and gendered roles, drive the development of sexual relations and, by extension, social development—therefore, contradictions are

tensions and oppositions within social structures that arise as society evolves, with new forms of organization emerging through conflict.

The metaphysical view treats patriarchy as something that can be ameliorated through legal changes, individual empowerment, or ideological persuasion, failing to recognize the violent and reigning nature of the contradiction as well as how it structures the sexual dichotomy. Because contradiction itself is rooted in historical material processes, only a dialectical understanding of the sex contradiction, one that accounts for these internal power dynamics, can equip feminism with the tools to dismantle male supremacy at its root.

Universality of the Sex Contradiction

Historically, the sex contradiction is a primordial aspect (not a biological determination) of human existence that has always been intertwined with evolution and labor. From the very beginnings of human life, the assumed roles of males and females were determined by reproduction and rearing of the species. Evidence from biological anthropology suggests that the evolution of postmenopausal lifespans in female hominids was deeply connected to the sexual divisions of labor: older females not only played crucial roles in food provisioning and child-rearing, as argued in the Grandmother Hypothesis, but also as midwives whose assistance was vital to ensuring the success of childbirth for their female kin. The patriarchy didn't invent the sex contradiction; it found fertile ground in it to concretize the division between the sexes.

Sexual antagonism predates class society in the very sense that class society itself depends on this division of labor between the sexes. The emergence of class societies certainly shaped and formalized how the sex contradiction would unfold: by institutionalizing patriarchal control, commercializing sexual and reproductive labor, and subordinating women to male authority in every aspect of social life. The sexual exploitation

of women, in both marriage and prostitution, becomes more pervasive in the development of the global capitalist economy, as contradictions intensify as they progress through different stages.

Women's unpaid labor of subsistence is critical to sustaining the class order as it maintains and produces the next generation of laborers, while also ensuring the physical and emotional support of individual men so he can continue to sell his labor-power. The exploitation of female labor sustains both local and global capitalist systems, reinforcing patriarchal control over women's time, energy, and productivity.

“The patriarchy didn't invent the sex contradiction; it found fertile ground in it to concretize the division between the sexes.”

The exploited sexual labor of women is also the means of reproducing all lineages, castes, classes, nations, and empires. These power structures harness the reproductive capacities of women to maintain the flow of labor and wealth across generations, enabling the ruling classes to reproduce themselves and their dominance. Even in national liberation and class struggles across the world, the modern intensification of the sex contradiction has involved backlash against feminist gains as patriarchy attempts to reassert itself under national sovereignty and socialism.

Particularity of the Sex Contradiction

The particular cultural dynamics of a given society, whether in the context of conservatism, fundamentalism, or postmodernism, also determine how the sex contradiction is experienced by women. Moral teachings around the purity of women, the sanctity of virginity, and the role of

women as dutiful wives and mothers reinforce male supremacy. This particular contradiction of sex is shaped by millennia of commodification, degradation, and objectification of women's bodies, which manifests in the social treatment of women as inherently obscene and disposable. Women are denigrated as perverse in religion, pornography, music, philosophy, literature, art, psychology—with it also being our responsibility to hide or mutilate our bodies into conformity.

Colonized men rely on pre-existing patriarchal systems to assert power and control over their own lives, and primarily over their nation's women, to control the global narrative of their nation. From the garments women produce, to the food we prepare, to the social rituals we must maintain, women's labor is foundational to the cultural production of a nation. The implications of this exploited female labor remains true to the sex contradiction: it is women's responsibility to create culture, and thereby a nation's identity, with no meaningful recognition in its social order.

Sex as the Principal Contradiction & the Principal Aspect of the Sex Contradiction

Just as socialists describe the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie as central to the dynamics of capitalism, the contradiction between men and women, or more specifically, between the patriarchal control over women and women's fight for autonomy, underpins the very structure of male hegemonic society. Women's oppression, as the foundational paradigm of domination, is reproduced at every level, from the household to the state to the plunder of the Third World, thus making the liberation of women the *principal* contradiction in any analysis of class, imperialism, or colonization.

The 'principal aspect' of the sex contradiction refers to the most significant way it manifests in society at a given time. While forms of patriarchal control are numerous and far-reaching, the

principal aspect shifts in accordance with historical and social conditions. In feudal societies, the principal aspect may have centered on women's role in the family and kinship structures, ensuring the continuation of male bloodlines, property, and social status. In imperialist contexts, the principal aspect becomes preoccupied with women's labor as a critical resource for the functioning of the capitalist order.

The mechanics of the sex contradiction and women's resistance to it also shift over time. This transformation can be seen in the changing role of women in the economy, in politics, and in culture. The ever-changing nature of the sex contradiction's principal aspect across history and social contexts—the ongoing movement from subjugation to resistance—demonstrates the dialectical nature of the sex contradiction. The sex contradiction (like all contradictions) is revolutionary; it contains the potential for transformation as women's struggles evolve and challenge the cultural, economic, and political male structures that have long held us in subjugation.



The Identity and Struggle of the Aspects of the Sex Contradiction

The concept of identity in contradictions reveals that each contradiction exists in a dialectical relationship with its opposite. In the sex contradiction, male control over women's bodies, labor, and reproductive capacity exists in opposition to women's resistance to this control. These two aspects, oppression and resistance, are not merely two isolated forces; they are interdependent. Patriarchy relies on the continued oppression of women, but it also sustains itself through the creation of female resistance, rebellion, and revolutionary potential. The oppression of women cannot exist without the possibility of women fighting back, and as our resistance grows, the form of oppression itself transforms.

In early stages of struggle, the change may seem incremental. Women's suffrage, access to education, and the invention of oral contraceptives may appear to change society slowly and without immediate, conspicuous effects. However, as this struggle intensifies, the contradictions between patriarchy and feminism become more apparent and lead to more dramatic systemic changes. For example, the struggle for women's reproductive liberation gradually forces male society, the state, and imperialism to reckon with women's chosen delayed age of conception or outright rejection of motherhood.

The interdependence of these two forces means that any feminist action taken against male dominance also serves to reshape and redefine the nature of patriarchy. Every challenge to male power forces it to adapt, reconfiguring its methods of control; for example, as the sanctification of virginity loses its grip over women, patriarchy reconstitutes its dominance through the pornification of society, shifting the ownership of women from desexualized property to sexual commodities. This unity of contradiction suggests that the liberation of women cannot be understood as the mere absence of patriarchy; rather, it is the

result of a continuous, active struggle. The struggle against patriarchy is not simply the fight against male authority but also against the ideological justifications that underpin it, such as religion, marriage, prostitution, and sexual divisions of labor.

The accumulation of small changes reaches a tipping point where the sex contradiction becomes increasingly irreconcilable. The cultural, economic, and political structures that support female oppression begin to crack, leading to more visible and profound shifts in the social order.

The Place of Antagonism in the Sex Contradiction

An 'antagonistic' contradiction is one in which the opposing forces have fundamentally incompatible interests with no possible reconciliation between them. In the sex contradiction, the antagonistic nature of the relationship between male supremacy and female resistance is clear: just as the working class and the bourgeoisie cannot reconcile their interests in a capitalist system, women cannot reconcile with men's domination over us in a patriarchal one. The antagonism therefore arises from the fact that these two forces are locked in a zero-sum struggle: the liberation of women necessitates the destruction of patriarchy.

Whilst non-antagonistic contradictions can be resolved through discourse, antagonistic contradictions require struggle. In the case of the sex contradiction, no amount of dialogue or negotiation will resolve the fundamental clash between male domination and women's liberation. Patriarchy will not willingly relinquish its control over women; instead, the sex contradiction can only be resolved through a revolutionary struggle—one that challenges male power and patriarchal institutions at every level.

Transformation of the Sex Contradiction

The sex contradiction, like all fundamental social contradictions, will not dissipate through ideological shifts alone but through intensifying struggle between the forces of patriarchal control and women's resistance. As women's defiance against sexual oppression grows, so too does the crisis within the system that upholds it. The structures that once stabilized male supremacy—marriage, prostitution, reproductive control, exploited female labor—begin to fracture under the weight of their own contradictions.

Historical development of contradictions, or historical materialism, teaches us that no ruling order concedes its power voluntarily. Women's subjugation is not an inevitable condition of human society; it is a historical development, shaped by material forces, and therefore, subject to historical negation. History shows us that no system of oppression is eternal; all are subject to change through the collective struggle of those who resist. The revolutionary resolution of the sex contradiction will abolish the oppressive social, economic, and cultural systems that define women through our exploitation, uprooting the structures of the sexual dichotomy at its material base rather than seeking reconciliation within them. Feminism must look to the examples of protracted people's wars and slave rebellions, where coordinated, collective resistance movements have successfully confronted deeply entrenched power. Through sustained mobilization, strategic unity, and revolutionary discipline, women can build the power necessary to dismantle the male hegemonic order.



Politicizing Sex

By Judith Lark

Feminism today finds itself paralyzed by fragmentation. Battles over identity and language have become all-consuming, drawing our collective energy away from addressing the material conditions that structure women's oppression. Much of our political discourse has been depoliticized into symbolic debates over inclusion, individual affirmation, and discourse policing, while the material system of patriarchy continues to reproduce itself. To stop the cycle of argumentation around abstract theory, our theory must be informed by the material situation throughout history and today, and must be oriented toward use in political action. I conclude from an examination of the material conditions from which patriarchy emerges that sexual difference is a contradiction with revolutionary potential. Additionally, if we reflect on the decades of co-optation and divide-and-conquer strategy, it becomes clear that politicizing sex is crucial not just for feminists, but also for all opponents to the imperialist/capitalist system.

The Origin of Patriarchy

The aim of feminism is to end systemic oppression of women, which cannot be done without an understanding of the dynamics of the system. Patriarchy did not arise arbitrarily; it emerged from fundamental biological asymmetries in reproductive investment. In other words, asymmetric reproductive investment is the starting condition that leads to women being disadvantaged at the systemic level. Species in which one sex invests significantly more in reproduction tend to develop social hierarchies where the lower-investment sex competes for access to mates, while the higher-investment sex becomes a resource to be controlled.

In human societies, female reproductive investment (pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing) has historically been exploited to justify social structures that enforce women's economic dependence on men. However, while this biological reality may have provided the *initial conditions* for patriarchy, it does not determine our destiny. The task of feminist politics is to disrupt and restructure the social arrangements that turn reproductive labor—specifically, the disproportionate burden of pregnancy, childbirth, and child care on women—into a site of oppression.

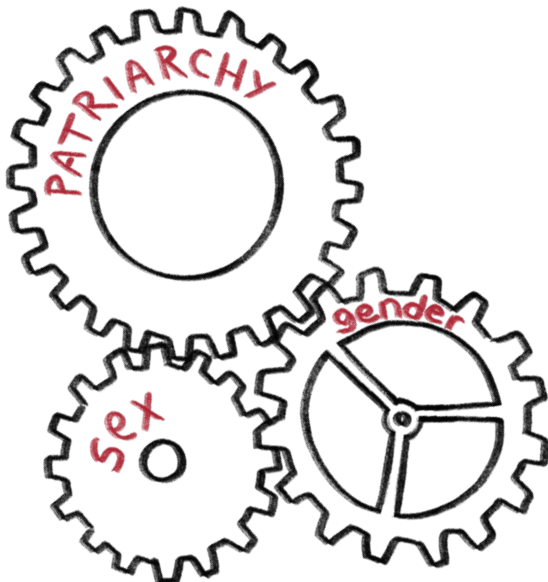
In the past, feminists emphasized the similarities between men and women to combat misconceptions about the comparative ability of women in fields dominated by men. This is an important emphasis in that context, and does not contradict a simultaneous recognition of how pregnancy and childbirth can disadvantage women on the level of the social system if not balanced with similar levels of investment from men. Rather than rejecting biology outright, radical feminism should incorporate these insights dialectically—*recognizing* that sex-based differences exist while rejecting the patriarchal framing of these differences as hierarchical or deterministic.

Just as other species have evolved alternative social strategies (cooperative breeding, shared child care), human societies can and must reorganize to eliminate the structural disadvantages imposed on women. As an example, we could examine the resulting social dynamics in species of primates where the males assist with child care enough to lessen the asymmetry in energy investment between males and females. Many different paths could be taken, as long as we work to mitigate this asymmetry (the root of patriarchy) by adjusting the social structure accordingly.

The Corollary: Politicization of Sex

We've stumbled upon a crucial point that follows from this identification of the origin of patriarchy—sex must be central to feminist politics. We must politicize sex not in the essentialist sense of valorizing biological difference, but in the structuralist/dialectical sense of recognizing that sex, in conditions of asymmetric reproductive investment, functions as the organizing principle of women's oppression. This means organizing around reproductive labor and reproductive self-determination, forcing state institutions to absorb the costs of caregiving, dismantling economic dependence on men, and perhaps abandoning the nuclear family structure in favor of larger family or community support systems.

Effective politics requires clarity. Therefore, I will attempt to peel back the deeply confusing layers of gender that have complicated politicization of sex. I do not intend to arrive at a fixed blueprint for feminist praxis in regards to gender, nor do I claim to have definitive answers for the most divisive questions in our movement. Instead, my purpose is to make clear the political dynamics of gender so that we can learn from history and sidestep political fragmentation.



Historical Dynamics of Gender

The historical development of gender ideology follows a pattern that reminds me of the historical progression from essentialism to existentialism to structuralism. To grotesquely simplify hundreds of years of philosophy, essentialists believed that things have a fixed meaning, or “essence,” often ordained by a god; existentialists denied this and declared that one can determine their own meaning; and structuralists critiqued both for having an incomplete analysis divorced from context. In reaction to the contemporary emphasis on individuals/particular elements, structuralists focused more on relationships between elements in a system as the origin of meaning.

Throughout much of human history, gender has been understood in essentialist terms. In many religious and traditionalist frameworks, a person's sex determines not only their reproductive role, but also their temperament, social function, and political status. To be a woman is to be nurturing, passive, and domestic; to be a man is to be assertive, rational, and dominant. These roles were presented as natural, self-evident, and immutable.

The feminist movements of the 19th and 20th centuries challenged this essentialism, exposing it as an ideological construct designed to justify women's oppression. Thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir shifted the discussion from biological determinism to social construction. This existentialist turn in feminist thought emphasized agency: gender was not an innate truth but something imposed and, therefore, something that could be changed.

However, this rejection of essentialism created a new set of contradictions. The existentialist deconstruction of gender—especially as developed in postmodern and queer theory—sought to dissolve rigid categories altogether, arguing that gender is simply a fluid performance,

a repeated stylization of the body that has no necessary connection to biology. While this critique was useful in challenging normative expectations, it also introduced a paradox: if gender is entirely socially constructed, then what remains of the material basis for women's oppression? If "woman" is merely an identity anyone can adopt, then what happens to political movements that seek to identify and abolish the root of systemic oppression of women?

This is where structuralist and dialectical approaches become crucial. Both essentialism and existentialism fall into the same trap: they treat gender as something that exists *apart* from the social/material totality in which it is embedded. Essentialism views gender as a timeless, natural truth; existentialism sees it as an individualistic, subjective choice. But gender is neither purely biological nor purely performative—it is a historically contingent social structure that emerges from the material conditions of sexed reproduction.

Structuralist critiques of existentialism point out that human subjectivity is not self-contained—it is always mediated by broader linguistic, cultural, and material systems. Consciousness does not operate in isolation; it is shaped by the structures within which it exists. In this framework, gender is not merely an individual performance, but a system of meaning that arises from sexual difference and is reinforced through economic, political, and ideological structures. This means that gender cannot be simply "abolished" through linguistic revision or identity claims; oppressive gender roles must be dismantled at the level of social/material organization. The categories of "man" and "woman" are not just personal identities—they are positions within a system of power that structures labor, reproduction, and political agency.

What drives the historical struggle around the meaning of gender? Universal concepts, such as "woman" or "man," are always in contradiction with their particular material instantiations. This contradiction generates tensions that demand

resolution—either through reinforcing the universal concept (essentialism) or rejecting it altogether (existentialism). Essentialism enforces a rigid, hierarchical division of gender roles, creating alienation for those who do not conform. Existentialism reacts to this by dissolving the category of gender entirely, which paradoxically leaves existing power structures intact by making them invisible. These two positions radicalize one another: essentialism tightens its grip in response to existentialist deconstruction, and existentialists become more extreme in their rejection of gender categories.

"If radical feminism is to regain its transformative edge, it must reject both the biological determinism of essentialism used to justify oppressive gender roles and the individualist detachment of existentialism."

A structuralist, dialectical perspective allows us to see both perspectives as partial truths that must be sublated. Yes, sexed differences exist, and they have real-world consequences. But no, these differences do not justify rigid social hierarchies. The contradiction within gender—between its biological basis and its social construction—cannot be "solved" through identity claims alone. Instead, it must be politicized as a site of *collective* struggle against patriarchal exploitation.

If radical feminism is to regain its transformative edge, it must reject both the biological determinism of essentialism used to justify oppressive gender roles and the individualist detachment of existentialism. The way forward lies in an understanding of gender that takes into account *both* the social and material systems of which it is a part. This framework could take

many diverse forms; throughout this article, I have spoken of a structuralist framework because of the utility in learning from the history of structuralism as a response to previous schools of thought. For a more accurate and robust analysis, I would advocate for the use of complex systems theory—the approach that is currently revolutionizing science and sociology, and that bears a striking resemblance to dialectics. The important point for our purposes is not that we have a hyper-specific dogma, but rather that we align with people who have shared material goals. That means refocusing on material struggle by moving away from the liberal political project of inclusionism and toward reproductive and economic issues as the primary battlegrounds of feminist politics.



Imperatives

There are two vital imperatives which necessarily follow from a material analysis of the present contradiction between women and men. In order to address patriarchy, we must understand its dynamics and identify root elements that could be leveraged to facilitate a process of transformation. In primates (and other mammals), females typically have higher energy investment in reproduction than males (due primarily to gestation, childbirth, and

lactation). This fact does not guarantee (but often leads to) a hierarchical social system. A variety of social systems have been observed (even within the same species): male-dominant, female-dominant, co-dominant, and more egalitarian systems. While females' bodily investment in reproduction is immutable, investment in child care is mutable. There is a correlation between social systems and the allocation of parental investment in primates. In more egalitarian or female-dominant systems, males and/or other group members tend to participate more in child care.

The first imperative: **Women's disproportionate share of investment in reproductive and domestic labor must be counterbalanced by higher investment in child care and domestic labor by either men, other family members, the community, or a combination thereof.**

Many other political demands follow from this recognition of women's reproductive labor and women's current disproportionate share of child care and domestic labor: **reproductive self-determination, universal healthcare access, state-subsidized child care, state-subsidized housing.** But patriarchy is a complex system that manifests at many other levels, such as cultural, as well: **commodification of women's bodies, harmful beauty standards, sexual violence, gender roles, limitations on women's mobility and education.** As demonstrated by the reversal of policies like legalization of abortion in the early USSR, transformation of material conditions must be paired with transformation of cultural conditions.

The second imperative, which necessarily follows from the need to reallocate investment in child care and domestic labor: **Economic surplus must be captured, redirected toward productive use and improvement of living standards, and maintained under a system controlled by the many (not the few) oriented toward living standards over maximization of capital.**

From a political economic analysis of sex, we arrive at the basis of Marxism. A distinction can be made between subsistence economies (which produce less than or just enough food, shelter, and basic goods for everyone to survive) and surplus economies (which produce more than enough for everyone to survive). Now the crucial questions: **Who has the surplus and how do they use it?** When the few are allowed to capture the surplus (both within countries and internationally), the surplus is drained and instead of being reinvested in production or living standards, it is used unproductively (e.g., asset price inflation) to further consolidate wealth and the economy polarizes. This leads to increasing inequality and stagnation under austerity. The second imperative necessitates **struggle against imperialism and neoliberalism, sovereignty for the Global South from systems of global finance that seek to extract wealth, and study of economic history and mechanisms.**

Whether we refer to this as Marxism, socialism, or communism, it is inextricably tied to our most basic political imperatives. I believe that if we keep these two imperatives at the center of our political project, they can help us remain focused on making material gains and act as a filter to determine whether cooperation with other political forces can be fruitful.

Dialectical materialism allows us to examine a contradiction in both its universal form and particular forms and to perceive contradictions as being interconnected. The contradictions between women and men, productive and non-productive forces, and racial/ethnic divisions each simultaneously have a universal form and a variety of particular forms, and each contradiction exists in an interconnected system. To take into account only the universal form of struggle or *only* a particular form of struggle is to abstract away from material reality.

This framework can be used to understand why, in a material and historical sense, co-optation

and division has been successful both between and within feminist and Marxist groups. In feminist groups, counterrevolutionaries exploit the tension between a strictly universalist feminism and a strictly particularized feminism. The same occurs in Marxist groups, and the same occurs when either feminists or Marxists attempt to subsume one struggle completely under the other. Marxists who completely exclude women's struggle from their politics, insisting that economic struggle must completely succeed *before* women's struggle can be addressed, are counterrevolutionaries. Feminists who insist on the complete and full emancipation of women *before* any struggle for economic or national sovereignty can begin are also counterrevolutionaries.

To leftist men who insist that patriarchy is a peripheral issue, I suggest a reading of Thomas Sankara's *Women's Liberation and the African Freedom Struggle*, 1990. Our black-and-white thinking in the west makes us feel as though we can only cooperate with people who fully share our complete list of priorities in the same exact and distinct order of importance. A solely universalist politics can alienate groups who suffer particular struggles—but intersectionality (specifically of the kind that reduces oppression to personal identity rather than a system of power) can also be used as a weapon to alienate others. A look at the history of relations between feminists and Marxists shows that we are stronger and more successful when we work hand-in-hand toward our shared goals while simultaneously working on our particular goals and maintaining our autonomy as a political union of women.

As with practice and theory, the universal struggle for emancipation must inform and in turn be informed by particular struggles (for women, racial/ethnic groups, national sovereignty, disempowered classes and groups) in a synergistic feedback loop. Good examples of a similar structure in practice are the ongoing efforts to de-antagonize the contradiction between rural and urban communities in China and women's

role in the political structure in Burkina Faso under Thomas Sankara.

The struggles of sex/gender, race, and economic class are interconnected—not competing—and we should maintain a sovereign women-lead structure while collaborating synergistically with groups that share the goals of our two imperatives. Feminists must expose and politicize the systemic contradictions emergent

from sexual difference, and opponents of the imperialist/capitalist system *must politicize sex also*. The only viable feminist political framework is one that recognizes these contradictions as fundamental—capable of either dismantling patriarchy or enabling its persistence, depending on whether they are mediated by a just social system.

In Remembrance of Eve

By Joci (@joccywow)

When I was a child, I felt sorry for Eve. I recall sitting in my Sunday school class and hearing the story of Creation once again followed by the Fall of Man. My Sunday-school teacher reminded us that this Fall was prompted by Woman: Eve. It was a curt reminder of whose fault the Fall truly was and who must therefore bear the consequences. I couldn't bring myself to blame Eve, even then. She couldn't have known what she was doing. She was only naive. Eve had only known of love in the garden of Eden; how could she know of deception? How could she have understood the serpent's intentions, when God had not warned her of such evil?

My empathy for Eve was not shared by my peers. I remember the other children calling her stupid and cursing her for cursing Adam—and more importantly for cursing them. I remember that night I cried for Eve and I prayed to Jesus to forgive her. I laid awake, thinking of how beautiful the garden was, and how beautiful she was there. I wondered why God had to blame all of us for one woman's mistake. As I have gotten older, this seems to be the case both inside and outside of religion, as women still bear the weight of societal expectations and judgments. Whether she be a whore, a witch, or a Jezebel, she will be forever blamed for the sins of her mother, and her mother, and so on: a cultural scapegoat.

A woman cannot be seen for her personhood, but rather her status as “woman”. We cannot be seen as anything more than a spawn of Eve, and western patriarchal culture cannot see past the paradise that we have cost them.

This series of collages, titled **In Remembrance of Eve**, is a narrative exploration of my contemporary experiences in womanhood and my inner battles through not only girlhood, performative femininity, and traditional gender roles, but also my own mental health and Christian upbringing through the lens of radical feminism. Each piece is composed of magazine clippings and cardstock, layered with gouache paints. Magazine clippings were the ideal material for this series, as they are commonly marketed towards women and promote hyperconsumerism, gossip culture, and ever shifting feminine expectations.

The first piece (**Sex and Drugs: The War on Women**) is a chaotic and hyper feminine composition teetering between the beautiful and grotesque. Surrounding the composition are examples of feminine performance, various leaps and bounds to squeeze themselves into the male gaze. Some classic examples of beauty standards exist between contemporary examples, showing how as time goes on, the lust of man has grown. A panel of masculine voyeurs lie at the bottom of the



Sex and Drugs: The War on Women

composition. They judge the performance, and divvy the women's validity to those who pass their test. The demands for the woman's performance grow more insatiable, pushing women toward deviancy and depravity. At the center of it all is the ultimate performance: a woman's death on display. The reaper, clad in pink, stands close to her side, waiting. She represents the taboo fascination of women's death in media, and also a reflection of a woman's death of self outside the gaze. The loss of who we are and who we could be. A panel of masculine voyeurs cry out below her, "Don't miss this!", as though they are clambering to the edge of their seats. One's inner child stands upon the left side of our star performer, desaturated of color, scratching her head and staring out at the viewer. On the other side, a mistreated Barbie doll whispers and weeps through the facade, "Please... please don't... no, no, no... you have no right to hit me." She suffers the abuse that occurs if the performance does not meet the male standards. Pink sparkling wine and sweet treats come our way to dull the pain. Little offerings from our greatest male supporters. The show must go on.

The second piece of the trilogy (**Dreaming of Eden**) quite literally envisions a dream of paradise untouched by the Fall. Predator and prey lie together in peace and tranquility and abundance eliminates all need. There is no fear; there is no sadness. I look into my own dream and I see myself among them, though I am not myself. I am above it all, now a voyeur looking in. Who I am down there is not of "mankind". I am stripped of my humanity and I wear the head of an animal happily. I lie with my fellow beasts. It is a paradise that has been preached to me since childhood. It is a paradise I yearn for and I will never know, forever unattainable to humanity because of Eve. Even if such a paradise existed today, it would remain out of reach for me, a descendant of Eve. I long to stay in this dream. I'm exhausted from the relentless performance but I know in my heart I cannot stay. The angel numbers 888 and 999 serve as a sobering reminder that this dream is fleeting, and the reality of the world we inhabit is



Dreaming of Eden

one of struggle and imperfection; regardless, that reality must reign.

The third and final piece of the trilogy (**Should I or Shouldn't I**) strikes a balance between the chaos of the first and the tranquility of the second. It is a calmer composition, retaining the hyper feminine visuals of the first, but there is room to breathe. It is as though a fragment of Eden has seeped into reality. There is a seed planted in my mind from a dream that things can improve, that there is a capacity in this world to change. There are possibilities, and my eyes are finally open to them. One may say this is "waking up", but I believe there is something subconscious that we must be attuned to. This value of hope and the drive to move mountains that may have possessed us in our years of youth, long ago squashed due to our unfortunate sex. Now that we have awakened, the inner child returns in this piece,

fully saturated, her gaze kinder and more knowing. I can hear her voice, represented by the text with pink backing. She challenges the negativity and offers a counter-narrative of resilience and hope. It is laced with pop-psychology messages, a coping mechanism many women use to bear with the reality they feel they can't control. The urge to fall back into the performance lingers. It's the norm, it's what I know—but honestly, I feel like crap. I don't want to do it anymore. Having a glimpse of paradise, I will strive to create that here in my own life and the lives of other women. There is still a touch of desaturation in this image, a man and woman sitting above alcohol cans, waiting for the performance to resume. While there are many issues still lingering, the overall tone is one of cautious optimism. A belief that paradise, though lost, can still be pursued. It may not be unreachable Eden, but it will be something new on the horizon.



Should I or Shouldn't I

The Political Economics of Sex

By Edie V

Civilization was created in part through the development of social stratification and labor specialization. Both phenomena gave men the opportunity to divorce themselves from the meat of life, offloading the labor of subsistence onto women: child-rearing, growing and cooking food, cleaning, hygiene. This primitive accumulation of resources and exploitation of women has evolved throughout the centuries, mainly under the institution of the family, the organizational force through which these contradictions are enforced.

In *Mothers and Others*, Sarah Blaffer Hrdy¹ tracks the evolution of humanity towards civilization and the subsequent shift towards patrilocal communities. Where resources were accumulated, paternity had to be ensured; women were confined to the “private” realm as property and policed as such, creating the division of labor in which men were “protectors” and conquerors of property: warriors, religious and political leaders. During this time women began giving birth earlier with shorter intervals between. Women had more children—and more work—with less help: first separated from their family by their husband, then from their husband through customs that defined manhood.

This division of labor made the toil of waged labor during the industrial revolution an easy sell for men: being divorced from the necessities of life was considered “freedom,” or at least an elevation above being a woman who must toil for free. In this sense, Silvia Federici reframes the concept of “wage slavery,” choosing instead to focus on what she calls the “patriarchy of the wage”: “if it is true that male workers became only formally free under the new wage-labor regime, the group of workers who, in the transition to capitalism, most approached the conditions of slaves was working-class women.”² Men, to this day, operate under the

belief that women must be made to birth children at an early and unhealthy rate solely because it keeps them tied to the labor of subsistence, often in addition to exploitative “feminized” waged labor, retaining the realm of “freeing” waged labor for men.

For most of recorded history, women’s access to money and financial stability was only possible through proximity and deference to men. Relatively recently, a substantial minority of women have been able to accumulate their own wealth through participation in well-paid waged labor, thereby gaining independence from men. Under current conditions, some women can only be “freed” by emulating a man: remaining childless and single, her ability to perform waged labor unencumbered by unpaid domestic labor. This is evidenced by the findings of sociologist Joya Misra: motherhood is now a greater predictor of wage inequality than sex.³



While it is true that waged labor creates independence for women, freeing us from the interpersonal tyranny of men, it cannot be the basis of a liberatory politics. This conception of “freedom” can only be achieved through the means that men first achieved it: by offloading the labor of subsistence onto others, primarily lower class women, often in poorer regions of the country and across the world. And yet liberal “feminism,” the most powerful feminist political movement today, has rallied around this goal. Many women in wealthy countries fight only for a future in which they are freed from the constraints of everyday necessity. The work of this ideology stops there—without concrete ideas of what comes next, consumerism has filled the time “freed” from subsistence.

Consumerism, in this respect, has adopted the intersections of class and sex. A minority of women’s newfound ability to accumulate wealth has transformed into conspicuous consumerism, a way to advertise their “empowerment” as women whose class position is recently decoupled from their relations to men. As a consequence, there is a burgeoning industry built on selling women “empowerment.” Social media has become nothing but advertisements and “influencers” hawking an image or a lifestyle through carefully curated content and affiliate links. In the words of Neil Postman, these influencers “tell nothing about the products being sold, but they tell everything about the fears, fancies and dreams of those who might buy them. What the advertiser needs to know is not what is right about the product but what is wrong about the buyer.”⁴ “Empowerment” is being sold to women in response to their alienation, encouraging them to spend their new leisure time on crafting mere images of themselves at the expense of their lives and communities.

Economist John Kenneth Galbraith warned, “the servant role of women is critical for the expansion of consumption in the modern economy.”⁵ Prices can remain low enough for most women in wealthy countries to “express

themselves” (consume) because of the stagnating wages of marginalized women in their own countries, where women make up the bulk of the lowest paid jobs, as well as the result of the staggering exploitation of women in poorer countries. As more women in wealthy countries grow increasingly poorer under the global totality of the feminization of poverty, liberal “feminists” will grow more reliant on conspicuous consumerism to maintain their class status, strengthening their allegiance to capitalism and reinforcing their “freedom” as inextricable from the exploitation of waged labor, alienating themselves further from their sisters.

“While it is true that waged labor creates independence for women, freeing us from the interpersonal tyranny of men, it cannot be the basis of a liberatory politics.”

The acquisition of commodities, then, cannot be “empowerment” nor can it even be a “privilege.” Consumerism divorces us from ourselves, our communities, and our sisters. Maria Mies said it best: “Empowerment can only be found in ourselves. This power does not come from dead money. It lies in mutuality and not in competition, in doing things ourselves and not in only passively consuming. It lies in generosity and the joy of working together and not in individualistic self-interest and jealousy. This power also lies in our recognition that all creatures on earth are our relatives”—that all women are our sisters.

Concurrently, labor that exists outside of commodification isn’t profitable nor is it taxable, which is why we’ve been taught, as Marie Mies argues, that “overcoming the realm of necessity is supposed to open the doors to freedom”⁶—we’ve been taught to look down on those who

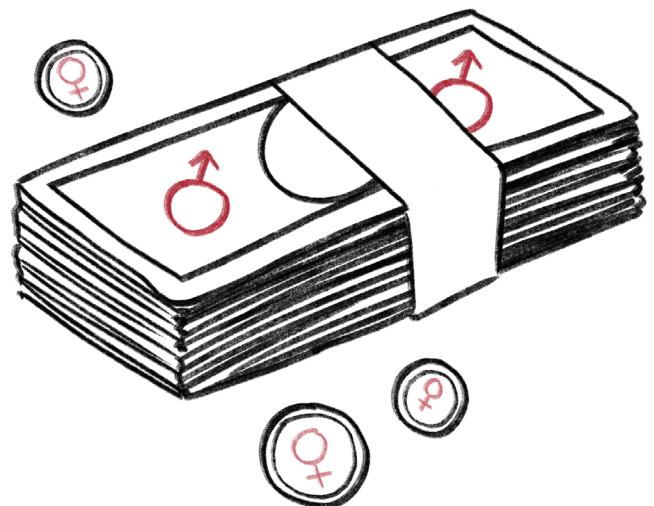
attend to the immediate everyday needs of human beings in order to make ourselves more vulnerable to exploitation. Barbara Kingsolver addresses this propaganda in her novel *Demon Copperhead*: “money-earning [people] pay taxes. Whereas you can’t collect shit on what people grow and eat on the spot, or the work they swap with their neighbors. That’s like a percent of blood from a turnip. So, the ones in charge started cooking it into everybody’s brains to look down on the land people, saying we are an earlier stage of human, like junior varsity or cavemen.”⁷ In this way, Marie Mies argues, anyone who works outside the reaches of capitalism, laboring for something other than profit, occupies a similar social position as women in regards to labor.

Buying into consumerism is an inherent denigration of women’s labor because capitalism, as a whole, is built on patriarchal sexed divisions of labor. As Claudia von Werlhof pointed out in 1983, “There is no cheaper, more productive, and more fruitful human labour”⁸ than the housewife. Marilyn Waring, founder of feminist economics, noted that “evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that women’s invisibility [as housewives], institutionalized in the so-called developed world, was exported to the rest of the world via the national accounts as another tool of colonisation.”⁹ Men in poor countries are already aware that what Maria Mies calls “‘housewifisation’, that is, the flexibilisation of labour, has become reality for men also.”¹⁰ As unions in wealthy countries gained numerous rights for male workers over the past two hundred years, capitalists naturally set their sights on ways to make those gains redundant.

The flexibilisation of labor for everyone has led to a crisis: Phil Jones notes in *Work Without the Worker*, “There is a disjuncture growing between the ever slowing rate of job creation and the ever more rapidly expanding pool of workers dependent on a wage. As stagnant growth infects the global system, workers are pushed into ever more precarious and petty service work.”¹¹ Many of those workers, across the globe, are women,

who will always lose to men in competition over waged labor, as evidenced by women bearing the brunt of job losses during COVID—the loss of economic advancement dubbed the “women’s recession.” Staking “freedom” on waged labor will always be a riskier gamble for women.

Liberal “feminists” myopic disregard for the intersection of sex and class has made them unable to realize that the miniscule gains they won through waged labor made misogynistic backlash inevitable. Gerda Lerner said, “In class society it is difficult for people who themselves have some power, however limited and circumscribed, to see themselves also as deprived and subordinated.”¹² Liberal “feminists” believed their ability to participate in waged labor, their newfound financial independence, could save them from the plight of other women. Yet conservative ideology is now raging across wealthy countries and reproductive exploitation is once again becoming the law of the land through attacks on birth control and abortion. Liberal “feminists” are shocked to learn the system they’ve chosen to embrace sees women, including them, as an exploitable resource. What they fail to understand is that they had already positioned themselves as an exploitable resource when they based their “freedom” on waged labor, yoking the value of their lives to capital.



Sociologist Arlie Hochschild asked, “The homemaker of the 1950s is no longer at home, and so we must ask, ‘Who is going to do her work?’” The answer should have been obvious: it was always going to be another, more marginalized woman. A more pressing question for feminists now is not who will continue shouldering the outsized burden of subsistence for all, but how we can collectively reframe this “burden” as the valuable labor necessary for building up ourselves and our communities. Humanity has been wildly successful at resource accumulation and labor productivity to the extent that a more fair allocation of resources is beyond possible: anthropologist Jason Hickel and social scientist Dylan Sullivan found that, “provisioning decent living standards (DLS) for 8.5 billion people would require only 30% of current global resource and energy use.”¹³ A better world is possible, especially for women.

Thus the answer is not for women to strive to live like men, relying on waged labor to define them, with little responsibility outside of waged labor, but rather for men—and some women—to understand that accepting the exploitation of someone else for “freedom” is no freedom at all; if one person is exploitable, then we all are. Emulating men within capitalist patriarchy was never an admirable goal nor was it a solution to either exploitative system; rather it’s a lowering of women’s potential and a turning away from the collective action required for feminism—for women, for society, for the Earth—to be healthy and vibrant. As Maria Mies contended, “In a contradictory and exploitative relationship, the privileges of the exploiters can never become the privileges of all. . . Hence, a feminist strategy for liberation cannot but aim at the total abolition of all these relationships of retrogressive progress. . . As long as exploitation of one of these remains the precondition for the advance (development, evolution, progress, humanisation, etc.) of one section of people, feminists cannot speak of liberation.”¹⁴ The feminist project must work towards creating value outside of capital and building communities, and more broadly a society, in which we all—especially men—share in the labor that makes life worth living and a world worth living in.

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Will Boys Be Boys? The Scientific and Radical Feminist Case Against Biological Determinism

By Winnie & Judith Lark

Radical feminists frequently have to explain that “radical” does not mean “more feminist,” “extreme,” or reactionary in any way—radical is an adjective, meaning “of, relating to, or proceeding from a root.” Investigating the root causes of oppression is imperative for not only consciousness raising and feminist organization, but enacting material progress. Since the advent of feminism, feminists have debated the factors that contribute to men’s oppression of women. Why are males, our oppressors, the way they are? Is their tendency towards violence innate, or learned? Are we fighting a biological war, or a social one?

Valerie Solanas suggests in her *SCUM Manifesto* that “[the] male is a biological accident: the Y (male) gene is an incomplete X (female) gene, that is, it has an incomplete set of chromosomes. In other words, the male is an incomplete female, a walking abortion, aborted at the gene stage. To be male is to be deficient, emotionally limited; maleness is a deficiency disease and males are emotional cripples.” (Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, 1967, p. 3) This reversal of misogynistic talking points, while humorous and enjoyable to read, is unfortunately an empty platitude that we cannot afford to base our politics on. We cannot tirelessly debate nature versus nurture without analyzing the real material conditions.

The idea that biology is the underlying cause for patriarchy is rooted in the visceral reality of male violence; however, we must acknowledge that these same lines of thinking are used against women. How often have we heard from men, even those who claim to be feminists or “leftists,” that women are better suited biologically to serve

revolutions on the sidelines, watching on from the kitchen as we raise their progeny? That our innate, nurturing tendencies make us prime candidates for “care work,” but never leading or organizing?

The assertion that males are biologically doomed to enact violence for eternity is not just scientifically flawed, it is also a political dead end. If we base our feminism on biological fatalism, we will doom ourselves in the process. How do we fight against something that is supposedly biologically inextricable from humanity? Do we turn to sci-fi phenomena, engineering men to be “fixed?” Solanas suggests in her manifesto: “If men were wise they would seek to become really female, would do intensive biological research that would lead to men, by means of operations on the brain and nervous system, being able to be transformed in psyche, as well as body, into women.” (p. 38)

Biological determinists might suggest we should cull the ultimate scapegoat of the patriarchy: testosterone. Testosterone is often cited as the reason why “boys will be boys.” Many of us have seen firsthand that boys undergoing puberty—riddled with testosterone—act differently from how they did before. They are more aggressive, less reasonable. Therefore, society makes excuses for their behavior. They can’t help it; it’s their biology. But is this idea based in reality? Robert Sapolsky, professor of biology, neurology, and neurosurgery at Stanford, writes:

When people first grasp the extent to which biology has something to do with behavior, even subtle, complex, human behavior, there is often an initial evangelical enthusiasm of the convert, a massive placing of faith in the biological components of the story. And this enthusiasm is typically of a fairly reductive type—because of physics envy, because reductionism is so impressive, because it would be so nice if there were a single gene or hormone or neurotransmitter or part of the brain that was it, the cause, the explanation of everything. And the trouble with testosterone is that people tend to think this way in an arena that really matters. (Robert Sapolsky, “The Trouble with Testosterone” in *The Trouble with Testosterone and Other Essays on the Biology of the Human Predicament*, 1997, p. 115)

Turning to biology to rationalize male aggression is tempting; biology seems more tangible than socialization and environmental factors. It also appears promising, as on average, men have higher testosterone levels and tend to be more aggressive than women. Life stages when testosterone levels peak tend to correspond with periods of increased aggression, which is supported by the anecdotal experiences of many women. The scientific basis of a link between testosterone and aggression comes from subtraction and replacement experiments—remove the source of testosterone, and aggression levels fall (but only to an extent). Inject synthetic testosterone, and aggression levels rise again.

But what if we look at the individual level? If we observe differences in aggression among a group of males and then check their testosterone levels, is there a correlation? Yes—however, as Robert Sapolsky further explains, this is not causation: “Study after study has shown that when you examine testosterone levels when males are first placed together in the social group, testosterone levels predict nothing about who is going to be aggressive. **The subsequent**

behavioral differences drive the hormonal changes, rather than the other way around. (p. 110–111)

Testosterone is a hormone with what endocrinologists refer to as a “permissive effect”. It has a modulatory role, not a causal one. You need a bit of testosterone (roughly 20%) to see normal aggression levels; remove it entirely, and aggression usually decreases; increase it to four times the normal levels, and aggression does rise—but only in specific contexts.

What does that look like in action? Sapolsky describes a typical experiment with a group of male monkeys. Allow the group to form a dominance hierarchy and number them 1–5. Observe that monkey number 3 is domineering and aggressive towards numbers 4 and 5, but subservient to numbers 1 and 2. Inject number 3 with significantly more testosterone than you would normally see, and on average you will observe an increase in aggressive interactions. Does this indicate that testosterone causes aggression? No. The increase in violence is not universal, it only increases in contexts where it had already been occurring. Monkey 3 will not begin to terrorize 1 and 2, it will only become more aggressive to those it had previously targeted (4 and 5). As Sapolsky clarifies, “This is critical: testosterone isn’t causing aggression, **it’s exaggerating the aggression that’s already there.**” (Sapolsky, p. 113)

“There is a false dichotomy presented between nature and nurture; only the dialectical interaction between the two is based in material reality.”

Why is this relevant to radical feminist politics? Let's consider Andrea Dworkin. In the fall of 1983, Dworkin found herself in front of a crowd of 500 men. She was speaking at an event that many modern day radical feminists would balk at: the Midwest Regional Conference of the National Organization for Changing Men. She thought it was an interesting opportunity—a chance to say anything she wanted to mankind. She chose to ask them for something small, just to start with: A 24-hour truce where no man would rape a woman or girl. “Every three minutes a woman is being raped. Every eighteen seconds a woman is being beaten. There is nothing abstract about it. It is happening right now as I am speaking,” Dworkin addressed the room teeming with men. “And it is happening for a simple reason. There is nothing complex and difficult about the reason. Men are doing it, because of the kind of power that men have over women.” (Andrea Dworkin, “I Want A Twenty-Four-Hour Truce During Which There Is No Rape” in *Letters from a War Zone*, 1989, p. 163)

If men are raping and beating because of the biological power that men have over women, we must closely examine where that power emerges from. The violence Dworkin describes is not inevitable. Our society celebrates and encourages male aggression, but male aggression cannot be explained away as mere biological flaws. Male violence rises and falls depending on cultural norms, legal consequences, and socialization.

To learn more, let's take a look at a curious case of female animals that are uniquely affected by their biology and environment. Spotted hyenas are mammals that feature a sex-reversal system—females of this species secrete more testosterone than males and socially dominate their male counterparts. They are more muscular, more aggressive, and even possess masculinized genitals to the point that it is difficult to differentiate between male and female sex organs. This piqued the interest of scientists, which led to zoologist

Laurence Frank transporting a group of hyenas far from their homeland in Kenya to California in order to study them more intimately.

In the hills of UC Berkeley, female hyenas appear identical to their sisters in Kenya. They sport the same elevated androgen levels and pseudo-penises. However, having been forcibly removed from their country of origin, the hyenas' social system does not function the same.

Removed from their established systems, these female hyenas do not *learn* to dominate their male counterparts, and thus, it takes much longer for social hierarchies to emerge. (Sapolsky, p. 114–115)

Similarly, in subtraction experiments with males, castration lowers aggression *on average* (rarely to zero; sometimes not at all). The more there is social experience of aggression before castration, the more aggressive behavior persists, as social conditioning can more than make up for the hormone. Sapolsky explains in more scientific terms that “If and only if the amygdala is already sending an aggression-provoking volley of action



potentials down the stria terminalis, testosterone increases the rate of such action potentials by shortening the resting time between them. It's not turning on the pathway, it's increasing the volume of signaling if it is already turned on. It's not causing aggression, it's *exaggerating* the preexisting pattern of it, *exaggerating* the response to environmental triggers of aggression." (Sapolsky, p. 114)

It can be a hard pill to swallow, but we must accept that castration, merely reducing testosterone, is not enough to eliminate male violence against women. The sad fact is that men could be better; there is nothing biologically preventing them from changing their ways and deciding to stop beating and raping women. To dismantle male supremacy, we must eliminate the conditions that sustain it—those that demand and glorify aggression and imbalance of power. We are capable of real change. Feminists around the world have worked to protect newer generations from the struggles they endured: they've fought tooth and nail to outlaw child marriages, to provide us with abortions, to raise their sons and brothers to view woman-hating practices as the disgusting systems that they are.

As radical feminists, we must base our politics in reality while also keeping our mission at the forefront. There is a false dichotomy presented between nature and nurture; only the dialectical interaction between the two is based in material reality. We cannot allow ourselves to fall prey to fatalism and apathy because of the false yet popular narratives that men push about both themselves and us. As Andrea Dworkin told that crowd of 500 men: "I came here today because I don't believe that rape is inevitable or natural. If I did, I would have no reason to be here. If I did, my political practice would be different than it is." (p. 169)

Her words are a reminder that radical feminist resistance is not rooted in passivity or naïveté—it is a conscious, relentless belief in the possibility of real change for women. We must reject the distorted biological explanations and faulty assumptions society offers to explain why men harm women so that we can begin working towards the targeted elimination of male supremacy.



Honor and Sex

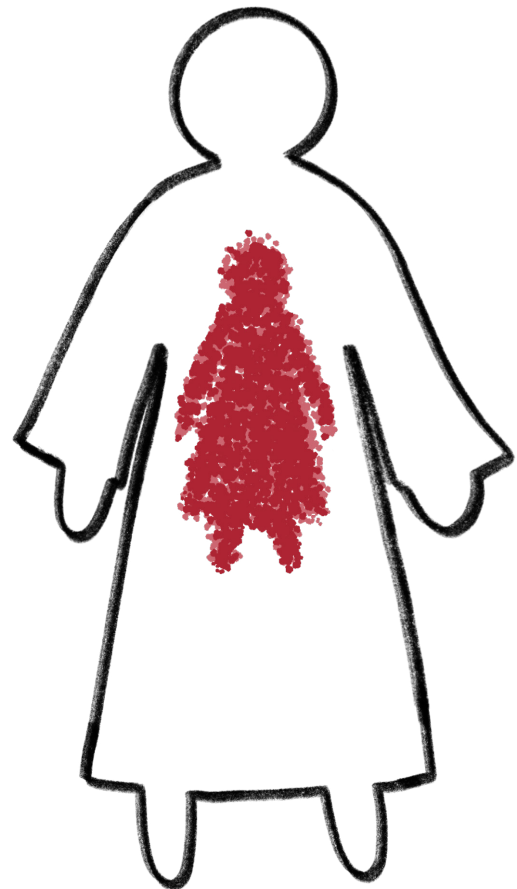
By Salwa (@Sahrawiia)

Honor culture in the Global South refers to a belief system where a person's reputation, family dignity and social standing are all directly tied to their behavior and adherence to collective values. Family honor and gender roles are valued and emphasized in these cultures, while violations sometimes lead to marginalization, punishment or even violence. They especially regulate women's behavior—their modesty, relationships and obedience are regarded as a reflection of their family's honor.

Across the Arabic-speaking world, we have numerous words to express shame, which vary from region to region: **فُضِّحَ** (fdaha), **حشومة** (hchouma), **عَيْب** (aib), **حرام عليك** (haram a'lik), etc. It's not just any type of shame, but a specific, accusing and directed shame. The type of shame that lays bare the meticulously concealed defects of a highly reputed family. Often, the source of this shame is a non-complying daughter. The objects of these expressions are not exclusively female, obviously. But I find there to be a subtle variation when these words are spoken against a woman as opposed to a man. There are types of shame that are easily forgivable, humiliations that are brushed off the shoulder when committed by a son. Sons have unconditional, inflexible love, they're easily forgiven. Their mistakes are inconsequential. Daughters, on the other hand, carry with them the weight of the family's honor. The higher the status of the family, the bigger the pressure. Sons live free whereas daughters live under hypervigilance, under a perpetual state of surveillance. This isn't a temporary state of affairs, this is training for life.

For instance, I was once having a conversation with my aunt. We were speaking of a girl we knew, who was 21 years old and had just had a baby overseas after secretly marrying

a foreign man. We spoke of her mother, who was bordering on depression due to this situation. Words from my aunt that stuck with me were "Our society doesn't forgive mothers". What is a mother if not a daughter that was raised to take careful steps, to watch as her brother's mistakes are forgiven whereas hers are punished? A daughter taught to repeat the cycle, to ensure her children won't stray away from the "right" path, to ensure they won't attract judgement from the neighbors and the family's acquaintances? She knows this judgement will be inflicted upon her, since fathers are absolved from any responsibility they might've had in raising their kids. If children stray from the model they were instructed to follow, it is the mother who failed to raise them.



In these cases, there is a very specific dynamic between the mother and the daughter. As a girl, your mother will let you know that she holds responsibility for everything you might do. You are a girl; you don't get to grow in innocence or be shielded from societal expectations the way your brother does. Whatever you're doing, you're doing it to your mother. It's like a leash tied to the mom that simultaneously strangles the daughter.

This is due to the fact that we are not regarded as individuals of our own. As daughters, we are as much a part of our mothers as their organs are. We belong to our mothers, because they know what's best. Our bodies belong to our mothers, because they know what's best. Don't cut your hair. Don't dye it. Gain weight. Lose weight. Don't wear that. Cover your chest. Don't talk like that. You can befriend boys, but not too much. If I find you too interested in boys, you're a whore. If I find you too disinterested, are you a lesbian? If you are, you're no daughter of mine. As soon as I find you old enough, I will make sure you know you can only marry who I want you to marry. You're mine as I was my mother's, you'll obey me as I obeyed my mother, and that way, we will stay a respectable family. Your dad won't punish me, society won't punish me. *"If we were nobodies, if we came from a low tribe, you might as well do as you like. But we are not, and you have to make sure you won't bring shame to your family name."* —My mother.

As soon as you get your period, here comes "the talk": take care of your virginity. Women are fed lies, scaremongered, made sure they know that their worth resides in the construct that is virginity. To avert a woman from exploring her own sexuality, she is made to believe that her body is dirty (e.g. periods, body hair, masturbation), that trying to delve into that world makes her filthy, discardable, unlovable. She is made to believe that she must not get close to men, that penetration is inherently painful, that vaginal sex is a gift she must reserve for her husband, that she must not feel pleasure during it. When these beliefs are

inculcated in a woman's mind continuously, they can be reflected on her body as a reaction of self protection. This is the case of vaginismus.

Vaginismus is one of the most frequent causes of "non-consummation" of marriage and infertility in Muslim countries. A study was conducted in which cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) was carried out for four different patients, with the objective of proving the link between the attitude towards female sexuality in these cultures and vaginismus ([Zgueb et al., 2019](#)). This CBT consisted essentially of two techniques: sexual education and hierarchical exposure. I highlighted the next sentences in the paper:

"Several risk factors have been identified for the development of vaginismus: for example **the way sexuality is taught** in families and schools, **or the way it is viewed by religion.**"

(On Patient 1): "Her mother-in-law was very **intrusive** (...), she was worried about the **status and reputation** of her son within the larger family structure".

(On Patient 2): "The patient had a strict and very conservative religious upbringing which also gave her **the belief that men were superior to women**. She **felt guilty because she was supposed to satisfy her husband in every way.**"

(On Patient 4): "**Her education was mainly focused on the necessity to stay virgin until marriage**, and to keep away from men, because 'they are all dangerous'."

"Her husband repeatedly raped her. **The family of the patient was aware of these rapes but accepted them** as they stated 'it was the **husband's right** to have sexual intercourse with his wife'".

In all the cases CBT proved effective, as the root of their condition was psychological. The reason why I highlighted these sentences is because I felt like they convey concisely the relationships between a woman, her sexuality, her family and her husband's family (the husband's family even more in certain cultures), the education and beliefs instilled in her, reputation, and the complete disregard towards her boundaries and her rights over her own body.

In the case of Patient 4, we read about an extreme case where the woman lives through traumatic rapes repeatedly by her husband; she is isolated as her family believes he has the right to do with her as he pleases, and her education provides no comfort for her as she has been indoctrinated to hold these beliefs. This research highlights the importance of sexual education for women, not just for the sake of health but to retrieve the sense of ownership over our own bodies.

As if the psychosexual effects of honor weren't enough, female genital mutilation still exists and is a common practice to control female sexuality in countries like Somalia, Mali, Sudan, and Egypt. Knowing that sex isn't supposed to be painful for a woman, that a woman's body has its own mechanisms to experience pleasure, assuming that lies and threats won't suffice to make a woman obey, she is cruelly robbed of her own bodily autonomy. Her body is violated and mutilated to fulfill their societies' sick fantasy, to "close" her off and ensure she will be property to no one but a single man. This is all done most commonly when she's a child, robbing her of her childhood and preparing her for marriage way before she even understands the concept of it. They don't even give your body a chance to "close off" on its own, retreating in trauma, creating an impenetrable wall, like the case of vaginismus. They make sure you will never experience anything close to sexual pleasure in your life, thus guaranteeing your chastity and purity, your eligibility for marriage.

“Whatever you're doing, you're doing it to your mother. It's like a leash tied to the mom that simultaneously strangles the daughter.”

Countries such as Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Saudi Arabia uphold so-called “honor killings” to this day, operating as culturally and religiously motivated femicides for disobeying the rules. Fathers, brothers, and uncles tend to participate in these, indicating that any male relative has a right over a woman's sexuality, a right to punish it by death. A woman may be killed for having a boyfriend or a girlfriend, for dressing “inappropriately”, for having premarital sex, refusing an arranged marriage, for apostasy, for even getting raped—whatever her family grasps as a violation to their damned honor.

In conclusion, honor culture in the Global South, and particularly in Africa, as well as the regions of the Middle East and South Asia, is a deeply entrenched system that binds women's bodies to family honor and dignity. It is based on control, surveillance and silencing of female agency, which reduces women to vessels of familial honor rather than agents of their own lives. From policing of modesty and virginity to forceful imposition of patriarchal values in the form of acts like FGM and honor killings, the female body becomes a war zone of societal norms and expectations.

The examples discussed here (psychological root of vaginismus, the agony of FGM, gruesome honor-motivated femicides) share a common thread: systemic denial of women's rights over their own bodies. We are socialized from childhood to believe that our worth is tied to our virginity, our submission, and our readiness to obey these rigid norms. We are burdened with the implacable weight of family honor, whereas men

are accorded a free pass to live as they please. This double standard supports a cycle of oppression, whereby mothers, themselves victims of the same system, become instruments of such norms, passing on the shackles to their daughters.

Nonetheless, there is resistance. The efficacy of CBT in the treatment of vaginismus, for instance, serves as a reminder that such conditions are not biological but cultural, that they can be changed through education and reclamation of bodily autonomy. Similarly, movements against FGM and honor killings led by brave women in these regions challenge these practices. We can never speak enough about these cases, we can never amplify the testimonies of women who survive through them enough, as they are a call to action for justice. There is no honor in dominating women's bodies. Honor lies in the courage to free them.

Feminist Funnies: Invisible Women

By Maya



“The formula to determine standard office temperature... may overestimate female metabolic rate by as much as 35%, meaning that current offices are on average five degrees too cold for women.”



“Women tend to sit further forward than men when driving. This is because we are on average shorter. Our legs need to be closer to reach the pedals, and we need to sit more upright to see clearly over the dashboard.”



“The average smartphone is now 5.5 inches... The average man can fairly comfortably use his device one-handed - but the average woman's hand is not much bigger than the handset itself.”

All quotes are taken from *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* by Caroline Criado-Perez.

The Poverty of Sex

By Pardis

The female proletariat has been erased, and with it, any care for liberating her. Thus, predominating analyses of Marxism focus on the male, similar to the international human rights system, which centers on the male regarding basic needs and human rights. In doing this, the natural order of the human rights system, as well as any male-centric liberatory methodologies, are doomed to fail because with male-exclusivity comes a reification of patriarchy and male supremacy—insufficiently providing solutions for all proletarians, which is particularly detrimental to the female-class.

Although women are more likely to have attained a tertiary level of education globally, unlike men, women do not receive the higher wages often associated with higher education. This statistic rises when it comes to women in the West—given that the West has a surplus of resources due to its exploitation of the Global South, education for women is heightened within a privileged state where women are not as repressed. Regardless of the exacerbated challenges faced by women in the Global South, we still lead in intellectual growth. Despite this, we also lead in poverty, ranging from 388–446 million women and girls living in poverty compared to 372–427 million men and boys. These numbers are split between two regions: sub-Saharan Africa (63%) and Central and Southern Asia (21%); however, “in all regions of the world, female poverty rates are higher than male poverty rates in at least one poverty threshold,” ([United Nations](#), 2022).

Interestingly enough, once women began to lead in educational attainment, [white] males declined, and education has been branded as “useless” and “unnecessary” despite it reigning for years as the projected and desired future. This is not unique to education: women are also



pushed out of wage-providing fields, which not only limits our ability to access higher wages but also forces women into a perpetual cycle of working low-wage jobs that are deemed “unimportant” for the fiscal benefit of the male. Before data science and coding became male-dominated, women were at the forefront and responsible for important tasks such as producing calculations. When women dominated the field, it was not considered a serious career. However, once it was realized how data science could foster the future of technology, women were pushed out and replaced by men trained to do the tasks women were already being exploited for ([Becky Little](#), 2021). This erasure of women in academia and within the realm of scientific fields slowly began to force women into the liberal arts, a field deemed unimportant and, thus, a field underpaid for women.

A “woman’s work” has always been labeled as work done out of love; therein, the labor a woman does for her family or occupation is expected, not appreciated nor taken into account of a country’s GDP—as if the work women do is not important to the reproduction of a nation’s economy. It is estimated that unpaid labor accounts for 10–30% of GDP, continuing to grow due to exacerbations of climate change and global inequity ([UN Women](#), 2017).

Females globally perform over 76% of unpaid care work, collectively making up about 16 billion hours of work done every single day ([Aina Salleh](#), TEDx, 2022). Regardless of the patriarchal framework of a society—for example, how the West considers itself advanced in terms of sex equality compared to Global South countries that they frame as backward—women and men still rarely split unpaid domestic labor. Policies that provide women with longer maternity leave compared to paternity use the same sexist framework of expecting women to spend more time child-rearing than fathers, thus forcing mothers to suppress her life to spend more time with the children while the male gets to provide for the family through waged work. This gap is most prevalent in Ghana and India, where women’s time spent on unpaid labor is upwards of ten times that of men ([ActionAid](#), 2013; [UNRISD](#), 2008).

Enslavement of the female still exists, both sexually and in the family. Single women with no children are not only happier but are fiscally advantaged compared to women who are forced into patriarchal financial dependence as mothers of a family unit. In addition to being confined to the home as housewives, women also find themselves bound to and economically dependent on men in prostitution. Globally, over 42 million people are involved in the prostitution industry—96% being women. Sexual exploitation, labeled by liberals as the “oldest form of female labor” (this is untrue and sexist; the first-ever female work is anthropologically agriculture and hunting), will always function as a form of slavery.

The socially liberal consensus is that one’s next meal or housing should not rely on being owned by any individual or institution, so it is frustrating how social liberals can see just how progressive it is to be against the use of prison labor but do not hold this moral position for sexual labor.

The ontological pretense of poverty has been weaponized against the racialized class. Regarding single women in America, white women’s median wealth is ~\$15,000, while Black women earn \$200 and Latina women \$100 ([ProsperityNow](#), 2018). These numbers can be attributed to racialization within state policies and social relations—such as the history of chattel slavery, redlining, sterilization of black women, racial and sexual discrimination within jobs, the US state bombing of affluent Black neighborhoods—alongside the part most often left out: white women’s exclusion of non-white women. The white women, too, are at fault, and it is exhausting hearing non-feminist women and feminists alike attribute white women’s racial prejudice to simple ignorance, furthering the infantilization of the white female. Thus, *They Were Her Property* by Stephanie Jones-Rogers becomes an intra-female contention of whether those white women (who both advocated for and did enslave Black people) were wrong for desiring to be equal to their male counterparts or if they were wrong for perpetuating slavery, murder, rape, and treatment of Black people as subhuman period.

Thus, white women’s pursuit of power—under the guise of feminism—within white supremacy sustains the poverty of sex. First World women, on top of being net beneficiaries of Third World labor exploitation, own all that they do at the expense of proletarian women toiling to produce the food, garments, and luxuries of the imperial core; they also own the means of plundering the homes of these very women to protect and serve First World imperialism. For example, Phebe Novakovic and Marillyn Hewson are two white female General Dynamics and Lockheed Martin

CEOs, respectively. They represent the small percentage of women in weapons manufacturing, serving the larger military-industrial complex that plunders the Global South. Liberal feminism is empowering bourgeois women in militarism at the expense of proletarian women affected by the circulation and imperialization of arms. We have abandoned a race-sex-class analysis within the realm of female poverty; therefore, we forget that the women owning some of the largest weapons manufacturers are causing the circulation of the mass arms embargo, landing these weapons in female-populated, poverty-stricken areas—particularly within the Global South—perpetuating ongoing femicide and female rates of poverty.

In 2023, globally, four out of ten deaths during armed conflict were women, while the rates of sexual violence rose by 50%; this number has doubled from 2022 ([UN Women](#), 2023). Armed conflicts predominantly impact female people in the Global South living in poverty. The circulation of arms across the globe cannot only be attributed to weapon manufacturers but also to large imperialist organizations such as NATO. NATO requires that any country joining its international alliance contribute +2% of its global GDP to national security (militia) annually ([NATO](#), 2024). Therein, every year, a country's militia gains 2% of said country's GDP, leading to increased conflicts in impoverished regions. This increase contributes to ongoing armed conflict, leading to an increase in domestic violence, rapes and assaults, and civilian casualties of primarily women and children. In addition, women [and children] bear the brunt of mental exhaustion and illnesses, such as depression and anxiety, due to the care work and emotional labor that women are burdened with before and during conflict ([Bendavid et al.](#), 2022).

Just as international organizations rely on the exploitation and vulnerability of women, various industries—including technology, beautification, and agriculture—also contribute to the rise in female poverty and sexual and domestic violence.

Technological industries such as SpaceX, electric vehicle manufacturers, and AI development rely on slave labor to extract tech-based materials from the Global South, forcing women and children to risk their lives in mines every day just to survive. The beautification industry, including makeup and fast fashion, sources its products from forced labor, particularly that of women and girls in the Global South. Meanwhile, agricultural and fast food industries rely on female laborers to work the fields to produce agricultural goods while operating on land stolen through the displacement of Indigenous populations, destroying families and healthy social relations. These industries, built on the backs of the most vulnerable women, not only sustain economic subjugation but also deepen the conditions that fuel the enslavement of womankind to men and capitalism worldwide.

“We have abandoned a race-sex-class analysis within the realm of female poverty; therefore, we forget that the women owning some of the largest weapons manufacturers are causing the circulation of the mass arms embargo, landing these weapons in female-populated, poverty-stricken areas—particularly within the Global South—perpetuating ongoing femicide and female rates of poverty.”

For example, the Berlin Conference allowed European powers to continuously steal resources from Africa by dividing up the continent for Western use of land, leading to the extraction of natural African resources employed by illegal enslaved labor of African people, particularly African women. This theft of African resources for European fulfillment, satiation,

and expression not only directly harms African people by extracting and obtaining resources through slave labor but also encourages men of imperialized nations to reassert control through tightening patriarchal control over the nation's women, further exacerbating ongoing sexual violence against African women through practices of rape, femicide, and female genital mutilation ([ENDFGM](#), 2020; [ZELA](#), 2022). For example, 48 women every hour are raped in the DRC, which amounts to 1100 women a day ([American Journal of Public Health](#), 2011). Resource extraction does not justify the abuses of women but contextualizes these massive amounts of violence against women: enslaved mine workers weaponize rape, sexual assault, and domestic violence to scare women from leaving the home instead of sharing in the public productive labor force ([Warnaars](#), 2023; [Atim et al.](#), 2020). The abuse of women also operates with state impunity, as these crimes against women are rarely investigated, and abusers are seldom prosecuted (Atim et al., 2020).

The structures that bind women—especially those in the Global South—are not merely the byproducts of an unequal system but its very foundation. This system thrives on the exploitation of female labor, both visible and invisible, sanctioned and coerced, through which capitalism perpetuates itself. The false promises of progress under patriarchal frameworks obscure the reality that women's suffering is not incidental but rather a necessary condition for the survival of global economic and imperialist systems. Any movement that does not critically interrogate the intersections of race, sex, and class or that fails to confront the entrenched structures of male supremacy risks reinforcing the very inequalities it claims to challenge. The poverty of sex—manifested through systemic violence, economic dispossession, and sexual commodification—is an engineered function of capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchy. Therefore, true liberation for women, particularly those who occupy the lowest rungs of society, can only emerge when we reject

the myths of progress and center the voices and realities of those whose labor has been erased, whose bodies have been commodified, and whose liberation has been postponed for the benefit of systems of domination. The struggle for genuine equality must embrace a radical feminism that sees the eradication of male supremacy as inseparable from the dismantling of capitalist and imperialist structures. Until we begin there, any so-called liberation will remain a hollow ideal.

State Control, Sexual Politics: Reproductive Resistance against Bio/Necropolitics in Occupied West Papua

By Safira & Rafa

In 1965, the overthrow of Sukarno as Indonesia's first President by US-backed General Suharto's military coup marked the beginning of an authoritarian era. Sukarno's anti-imperialist policies accompanied by strong presence of communist groups such as the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI), were viewed by the United States as a direct threat to them. The period after the coup became infamously known as The Jakarta Method, referring to the systematic violence of mass murders that took place under Suharto's regime, which occurred with significant material support including weapons and financial aid to the Indonesian military by the US. This violent anti-communist purge targeted suspected communists or those who were deemed as political enemies, which oftentimes were unarmed innocent civilians.

In the 1970s, through agencies like USAID¹ (United States Agency for International Development) and the Ford Foundation², the US became a driving force behind Indonesia's

family planning program called Program Keluarga Berencana (KB) (hereinafter 'Program KB'). What initially appeared to be "humanitarian initiatives" aimed at controlling population growth has revealed itself to be a far more sinister project.

Framed as a means of stabilizing the country's growing population with the famous slogan "Two Kids are Enough!", these initiatives were deeply intertwined with the US's imperialist goals. They represented a form of biopolitics—a method of controlling populations through state-sanctioned practices, policies, and interventions. Under the guise of population control, Suharto's developmentalist regime actively reduced women to mere baby-making machines, removing their reproductive rights and blatantly dehumanizing women. Reproductive decisions were no longer personal, but imposed by the state.

The program enrolled married women as automatic "acceptors" of state-mandated contraception, forcing them into a system of



surveillance and control. This program was not just about controlling birth rates, it was about controlling life itself—an exercise in necropolitics³, where the state dictated who could live and thrive, and who would be reduced in number, strength, and resistance.

In her article ‘*Kita habis...we will be gone*’: *The politics of population, family planning, and racialization in West Papua*, Rasidjan (2023) wrote about how Indigenous Papuans expressed concerns about their extinction (*kepunahan*) and being “eradicated” (*kita habis*) due to a steadily decreasing Indigenous population. Program KB alone resulted in a declining birth rate by over 50%, from a rate of 5.9 to 2.6 children per woman from 1970 to 2000. The 2000 census showed a significant gap in fertility rates between non-Papuans and Papuans in West Papua, with the ratio reaching 10:1.

A Dani priest (Indigenous ethnic group in West Papua) described birth control as government genocide (Butt, 2001). In West Papua, where the Indigenous population was already being politically marginalized, the initiative of Program KB was a direct tool of genocide—pushing the Papuan population into demographic decline and facilitating their eventual erasure.

The biopolitics of Program KB resulted in racialized subjectivities, because it produced a dichotomy between ‘Indonesians’ and Black Indigenous Papuans, thus concretizing racism. This form of racism was not enforced through anti-miscegenation laws, such as bans on interracial marriages, but rather through the increasing presence of ‘mixed marriages,’ which is seen as a form of racial and cultural assimilation, wherein ‘being less Black’ is equated with ‘being pretty’ and a symbol of progress. The image of the idealized Muslim Malay two-child family, which was framed as the model of modernity and national progress, marginalized and othered Indigenous Papuans in contrast to this vision.

Quoting from Rasidjan’s article (2023), she cites a Malay-Western Indonesian government health clinic midwife who reflected on the transformation of the region. The midwife commented,

Before, the road from Sentani to Abepura was just all trees. It is so amazing now, if I may say so. When I arrived in 1985 as a newcomer (*pendatang*), it looked far and away different from now. It appeared that the people from this area and newcomers were quite distant from each other. And now, it’s so different! Papuans are pretty (*cantik-cantik*) now. They are in mixed marriages, so they’re very pretty.

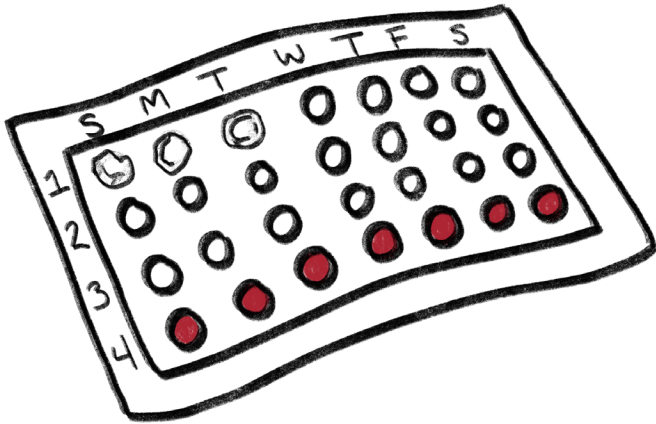
That statement revealed how Indigenous Papuans are positioned as subjects to be destroyed by the dominant power structures of the Indonesian state. The reduction of forested land and the increasing presence of ‘mixed marriages’ reinforces a racist vision of development that associates environmental degradation and mixed marriages with a desired cultural and racial transformation.

While the Indonesian government has long promoted Program KB to control population growth, local leaders, including midwives, have taken a different approach. Some local leaders, seeing population growth as vital for the survival and empowerment of the Papuan people in the face of Indonesian colonization, have actively incentivized Papuan women to give birth. They offer prizes to encourage childbearing, attempting to counter the impact of state policies that would reduce their population; a few examples in many cases:

- In 2014, Papuan governor Lukas Enembe awarded cash prizes to heads of Indigenous Papuan families (who were mostly men except for two women) who had 10 or more children;
- Bapak Dortius’s administration in 2011, following Lukas Enembe, began a pronatalist

program where women were offered a cash “incentive” each time they showed up pregnant to the local government-run health clinic. He introduced the program by noting that it would “increase the growth of Papua’s *orang asli* (Indigenous population)”.

The quote from Ibu Teresa, a midwife, highlights this tension in Rasidjan’s piece (2023). She acknowledges that encouraging women to have more children could be “good for Papuans to perhaps increase [in number].” However, she raises concerns about the potential risks involved, particularly when women, motivated by the financial incentives tied to childbirth, might be encouraged to have children at older ages.



Midwives—caught in a tug-of-war between the Indonesian government and local Papuan leaders—face an ethical dilemma as providers and deniers of birth control. They are trained and employed by the Indonesian government, which expects them to promote Program KB. However, they also serve Papuan communities where local leaders discourage or outright ban contraceptive use. Despite the pronatalist policies, many midwives continue to provide contraceptives to women who request them. They recognise the individual needs and desires of their patients, even when those desires conflict with government mandates. Midwives also recognise that women have diverse needs and circumstances. They aim

“Indigenous Papuan and Indonesian women’s bodies are reduced to tools for reproduction, serving the needs of the community and the state, rather than recognizing women’s self-determination.”

individual needs, rather than simply adhering to programmatic targets. They carefully calculate what to reveal to whom, building trust with their patients to understand their needs and provide appropriate care.

These dynamics reveal that despite women’s bodies being controlled externally where reproductive choices are policed and manipulated by political and economic agendas, women (in this context patients and their midwives) persist in personal resistance and navigating these struggles.

Reproductive technologies like contraception are often considered “feminist technologies” because they give women the “choice” to reproduce, an illusion of agency by liberal feminism. However, we believe reproductive technologies that are considered feminine—such as birth control pills, tampons, pregnancy tests, etc.—cannot be automatically classified as feminist technologies. For example, contraception historically has been used as a tool for men to control women’s bodies, especially Black women. Program KB and other biopolitical programs like it are often invisible to the rest of the world, and it exposes contradictions of reproductive technology when used within colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal systems. The patriarchal contradiction here is that contraceptives as a reproductive technology, which could support women’s reproductive rights and autonomy, are instead used to control and limit women’s bodies

and completely eliminate women's autonomy. Indigenous Papuan and Indonesian women's bodies are reduced to tools for reproduction, serving the needs of the community and the state, rather than recognizing women's self-determination.

While these technologies can be helpful, they do not necessarily lead to substantial improvements in women's lives within patriarchal societies. Instead, they only allow women to adapt to the existing social structures, rather than fundamentally shifting the power imbalance between women and men, and eventually destroying the shackles of women's oppression.

While the Indonesian state implemented Program KB through institutions like BKKBN, Papuan local leaders imposed their own restrictions on women's reproductive autonomy through the outright ban of contraceptive use. Despite the apparent contrast in their approaches, both systems are rooted in the idea that women's bodies exist as objects of control, whether through population control in the form of contraception or through the rejection of contraceptive technologies to resist population control. At the heart of Program KB lies the exploitation of women's reproductive capacities, where they're culturally pressured to make their bodies an arena of political contestation dictated by male leaders, the state, and imperialist forces.

On the basis of the reasons and stories we have unfolded above, we firmly reject the use of technology to control women's bodies and reproductive organs by male leaders, as well as the practice of necropolitics and biopolitics for the imperialist state or for any other reasons imposed upon us.

We also would like to highlight a fundamental dichotomy between state-imposed control and autonomous reproductive choice: while the states and local leaders enforce reproductive control and coercion through its

policies, midwives and their patients made a space where reproductive choice could be autonomous. **Reproductive technology, in the hands of midwives and their patients, could be an example of this more autonomous exercise of reproductive resistance.** In this context, women are able (albeit in limited ways) to decide what to do with their bodies, whether to access reproductive technologies like contraception, or to reject coercive practices such as Program KB and instead choose to bear children.

The involvement of midwives and their patients in this process highlights the potential for feminist institutional change. In contrast to the patriarchal control embedded in Program KB, this grassroots practice shows the potential for a feminist and localized form of reproductive care that values self-determination. If institutionalized nationally, this approach could benefit all women in Indonesia.

We believe that women, as an oppressed and marginalized class, must seize technology from the hands of our oppressors and turn it into a tool of collective liberation by tearing down this oppressive system and rebuilding it with a more just and equal system, based on Feminist Ecosocialist Technology (FET)⁴ values. We reimagine technology as a force for collective good, capable of nurturing both human and ecological life. This is the feminist technology that we demand—one that nurtures life and liberates both women and nature.

Notes

1. USAID had a 35-year partnership with Indonesia's national family planning board (BKKBN)—which still exists today
2. In their public website, Ford Foundation announced Indonesian Planned Parenthood Association (*Perkumpulan Keluarga Berencana Indonesia*) as a recipient of their grant, which has received two grants since 2006
3. Necropolitics is fundamentally “the politics of death” as described by Mbembe (2003). In this context, sovereignty has the power and capacity to define who may live and who must die. Mbembe illustrates this through historical and contemporary examples such as slavery, colonialism, and modern warfare, highlighting how necropower operates by instrumentalising human existence and materially destroying bodies and populations. Furthermore, racism is identified as a technology aimed at permitting the exercise of biopower and regulating the distribution of death, making the murderous functions of the state acceptable.
4. Feminist Ecosocialist Technology emphasizes the value of sustainability and the respect for both nature and human beings. This means that it seeks to dismantle the “technology” that has been built on patriarchal-colonial-capitalist logic. We believe such technology can radically change the construction of women's lives with structures that benefit women and is able to substantially shift the power imbalance between men and women because through its lens, we can identify the intertwining oppression of gender, class, and nature.

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On Prostitution

By Sathi Patel

I. Prostitution as the Class Condition of Women

Prostitution is a global market of male sexual access to women's bodies. It is sustained through alienation, a process that separates the prostituted woman from her body as a site of personal autonomy by reducing her to an objectified commodity. Prostitution functions as a slave relation representing the most brutal and explicit manifestation of the sex contradiction. The sex contradiction under patriarchy organizes sexual relations to subjugate women as objects to be bought, sold, traded, and discarded for male consumption. This social stratification is essential to understanding prostitution—not as a “choice”, but as a forced submission to the logic of patriarchy that reduces women to the sexual property of men.

Women's social identity under patriarchy is fundamentally intertwined with our sexual availability, our worth tied to our ability to serve male desires. Women are forced into sexual servitude from childhood; the grooming of female children represents the reproduction of the next generation of wives or prostitutes. The socialization of women to accept our bodies as vessels for male consumption cannot be reduced to a mere ideological construction—it is materialized in reality through this ubiquitous social order. The entrenchment of sexual entitlement within postmodern patriarchal society has deepened male access to women's bodies, embedding itself within various cultural mechanisms such as pornography, marketing, and the popular media apparatus. These cultural products are deliberate tools of a sexed economy designed to reproduce the subordination of women.

Sexual essentialism is the interpretation of this female socialization and gendering as an innate, apolitical essence of the person, rather than a disabling social construction. Sexual essentialism frames men's sexual access to women as a biological inevitability, justifying prostitution as a “natural” expression of male desire in the free-market economy. This pretext is also used to justify the initiation of women and girls into wifhood and motherhood in marriage, where men are guaranteed sexual access to women and a claim over women's domestic and reproductive labor. In both cases, men are securing the right to sexual domination.

The sex industry, in many ways, is an extreme and hyper-visible manifestation of these sexed social and class conditions imposed on women. Prostitution simply reveals patriarchy's fundamental interest: the subjugation of women as a permanent, pliable reserve labor force, constantly available for exploitation through various means, especially in sexual exchange.

II. Economics of Prostitution

Under capitalism, women are systematically dispossessed of our material means for survival. We are alienated from the production of wealth while our labor (reproductive or productive) is subordinated to the needs and desires of men. This enforced economic dependence ensures that women remain a vulnerable class, easily funneled into prostitution just to survive. Men create the market for prostitution by insisting on the right to purchase public access to women and sex, in addition to private access to women and sex in marriage. The pervasion of violent male sexuality at the expense of women sets a dangerous precedent: money can replace consent, effectively legalizing coercion through economic desperation.

The very existence of prostitution (and marriage) sacrifices womankind to the demands of men: unlimited access to sex with no regard for female safety, autonomy, and dignity.

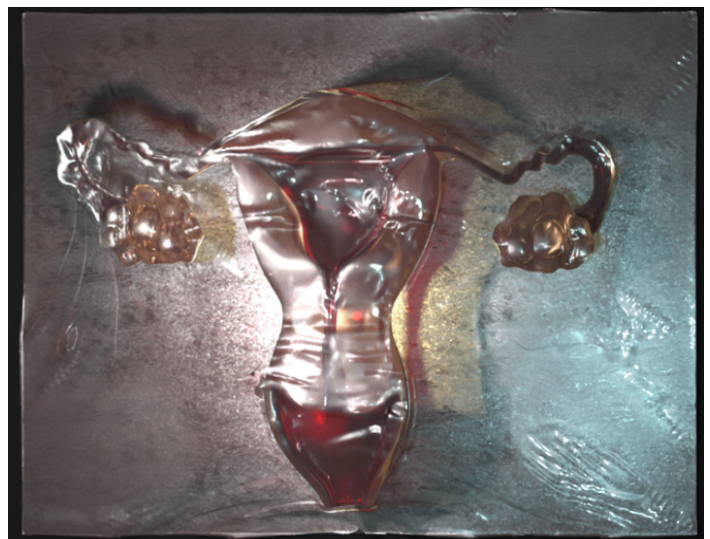
“On the premise of divorcing the contradiction of sex from the political structures of exploitation that organize it, radical liberals have effectively shackled women into commercialized rape and patriarchal captivity through the perception of ‘consent.’”

Women in prostitution are overwhelmingly from marginalized communities: racialized women, poor women, trafficked women from the Third World, and those with histories of subjection to abuse and sexual violence. Prostituted women are often expropriated from privatized patriarchy and rejected from the “normal” trade of women in marriage, cast instead into the public marketplace of sexual exploitation. Women trapped in cycles of poverty, abuse, and neglect are left with no viable economic alternatives. Capitalism, with state and social impunity, exploits these vulnerabilities, turning women’s bodies into sites of profit for pimps, traffickers, and brothel owners.

The industrialization of prostitution is a direct consequence of neoliberal economic policies, foreign intervention, and imperialist plundering of the Third World. The dismantling of social welfare programs for free-market development has exacerbated poverty through the widespread privatization of essential social services. The sex trade preys on this growing global population of women living in destitution, thriving where the state and organized crime converge to commercialize sexual exploitation under the guise of regulation. For example, the brothel model of prostitution offers housing where the state fails to provide

even basic material support. Militarization of the imperial periphery also increases prostitution through the direct establishment of military bases, foreign troop deployments, and war economies that systematically create sex industries around them. The presence of military forces in occupation, imperialist wars, or “peacekeeping” missions facilitates the trafficking and sexual enslavement of local women and girls to be sold to foreign soldiers. Imperialism destabilizes local economies, shatters social structures, and intensifies patriarchal control over women’s lives.

The trafficking of Third World women for low-waged domestic labor and mail-order or arranged marriages are extensions of prostitution, all functioning within the same economic and patriarchal structures that exploit the labor (especially sexual labor) of women. Just as prostituted women are funneled into the global sex trade to satisfy male demand, migrant domestic workers are trafficked under economic coercion to perform feminized labor as caretakers and nannies in the imperial core, often under exploitative and abusive conditions. Mail-order brides and arranged marriages further reflect prostitution’s core logic, where women are legally bound to men who claim ownership over their labor and sexuality.

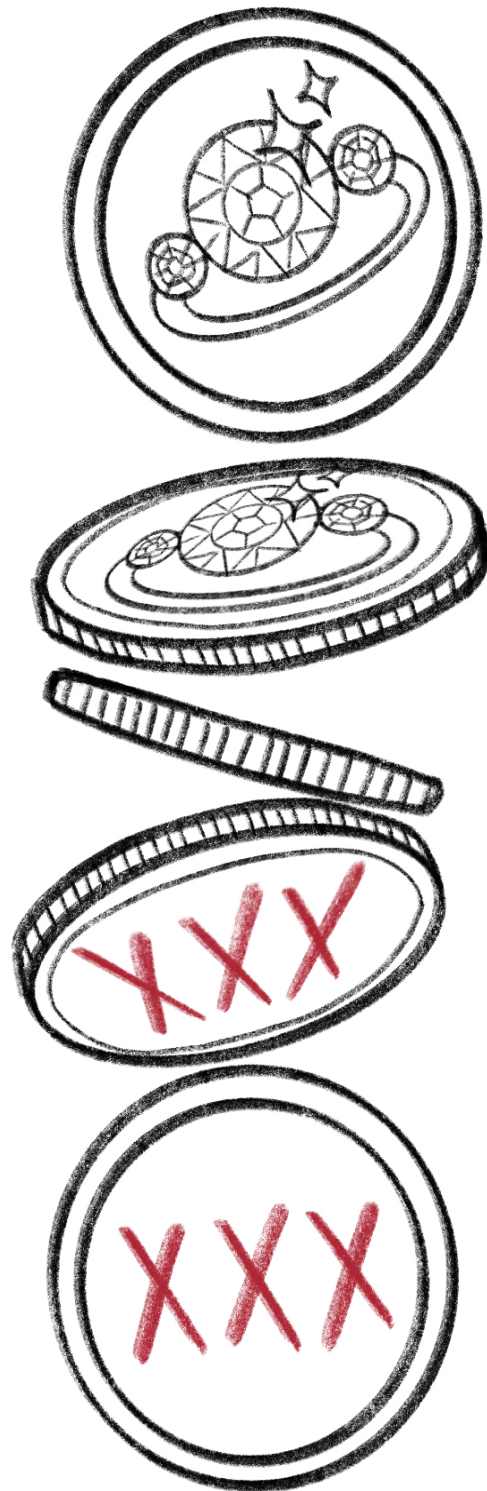


"Commodity," Anonymous Artist

III. Liberal Myth of Consent

The concept of “consent” as understood in liberalism presupposes the existence of equality, autonomy, and free will. None of these conditions exist in prostitution as a global market for coerced sex. Women are forced into prostitution due to destitution, a lack of access to education, and systemic male abuse. Prostituted women are traumatically subjected to economic, social, psychological, and physical intimidation to manufacture their consent. Similarly, the liberal ideal of consent in marriage fails to acknowledge the ways in which women’s ‘choices’ are shaped by economic dependency, gendered socialization, and patriarchal expectations, rendering submission to an arrangement that exploits female labor, sexuality, and reproductive capacity.

The liberal ideal of female agency ignores the violent preconditions of male domination, fabricating the exploitation of women as consensual. On the premise of divorcing the contradiction of sex from the political structures of exploitation that organize it, radical liberals have effectively shackled women into commercialized rape and patriarchal captivity through the perception of “consent”. The fallacious attempts at legitimizing prostitution as labor only serve to protect and expand a multibillion dollar industry of rape; any examination of illusory choice cannot be disentangled from the sexual and social patriarchal control underpinning the very structures of institutionalized rape. The money generated through prostituted women’s bodies is taken by pimps anyway, leaving women with little to no control over the selling of their “labor-power”. This is not dissimilar to the reproduction of heirs through women’s bodies in marriage; women create life and their babies take on men’s names and wealth. The myth of consent places the blame of sexual enslavement on women’s shoulders while absolving both men and the system of responsibility.



IV. Psychology of Prostitution

Prostitution is sexual exploitation sustained over time, with sex itself as the commodity being sold. In prostitution, commodity exchange separates sex from the human being, requiring the gradual psychological dissociation of women from their bodies. This process unfolds in three interrelated stages: distancing, disengagement, and disembodiment.

The survival of sexual slavery begins with distancing. Women must separate their personal identities from their role in prostitution, beginning with physical distancing—leaving home, family, and avoiding any social relations that might connect them to a legitimate world. Women take on new names, often imposed by pimps or chosen as a way to detach from their former selves. This process is similar to the distancing of women from self in marriage: women leave home, which decreases access to other social relations, and take on new names. This distancing makes it harder for women to reclaim their own humanity.

To endure prostitution, women create emotional distance from the men who buy them. Women report “not being there” during sex: a psychological withdrawal, a disengagement. The preconditions of prostitution, however, require women to actively participate in their own violation, forcing them to perform desire, degradation, and submission in accordance with the demands of the buyer. This disengagement is analogous to that of women in heterosexual sex, the defining act of male power. Women endure to serve male sexual desires because that is our prescriptive role. The fragmentation of the self forces women to divide our bodies and minds into usable and sellable parts—a division that is ultimately impossible to maintain without trauma and damage.

In addition to men purchasing the female performance of docility, racialized women are also expected to sell racial subjugation. Men are paying for the ability to enact racialized and colonial

fantasies on women’s bodies. The eroticization of racialized women in prostitution is evidenced by the travel of men from the imperial core to the periphery to sexually consume women and girls. Sex tourism is one manifestation of the plundering of imperialized nations, turning entire regions into brothels for foreign men. The collusion of traffickers, the state, and travel agencies openly marketing destinations for men seeking racialized sexual access has enslaved millions of women and girls in commercial sex exploitation around the world. Sex tourism has left millions of destitute women in states of dissociation. In this way, the advertising of various women for sale is practically identical to the creation of biodatas for mail-order bride services and arranged marriages.

In order to survive the psychological rupture of dissociation, women in prostitution disembody—separating one’s consciousness from her material reality. Within this disembodiment, a reconstructed, subordinate self emerges: one that understands she must perform engagement with reality. Women must feign interest in male buyers, simulate male sexual desires, mimic pleasure and arousal; women must embody sexist and racist impositions, making them appear as extensions of the self rather than the demands of sexual enslavement. Prostitution requires both detachment and the forced enactment of embodiment, making the performance of sex indistinguishable from the process of dehumanization itself. If prostitution demands this level of self-negation and alienation for male sexual access, what does this reveal about the expectations placed on women in marriage and in heterosexual sex?

V. Abolition of Prostitution

The abolition of prostitution is fundamental to women’s liberation. Women must remain steadfast in our confrontation of the sex trade and its expansionists. Men, sexual liberals, and the global imperial order will not relinquish their ability to control and access women.

The abolition of prostitution requires:

- Economic and geopolitical restructuring to create real alternatives for women, such as socialized production, education, and claim to a sovereign and self-determined nation.
- The fall of imperialism—the global division of oppressor and oppressed nations—through eradicating the financial strangulation of the majority of the world's population by First World states.
- The revolutionary transformation of the sex contradiction through the obliteration of male-dominant social orders, such as patriarchy.
- The elimination of the cultural machinery that legitimizes male entitlement to women's bodies.
- Re-education programming that dismantles sexual essentialism, empowering future generations to reject the commodification of women in both prostitution and in marriage.
- The rehabilitation of prostituted women into the formal economic sector, as well as the social exile and legal criminalization of those who violate women and exploit female labor.

The broader struggles against the sex contradiction, the exploitation of the proletariat, and the parasitic imperialist looting of oppressed nations are inextricable from the struggle to dismantle the hegemonic male order. As we understand oppression and resistance as interdependent forces in a dialectical relationship of contradiction, we expose the sustainment of male supremacy through the creation of female rebellion: the oppression of women cannot exist without the possibility of women fighting back. Contradictions undergo a final transformation when internal struggle between the opposing forces reaches a critical point—so long as we remain committed to the dismantling of exploitative divisions of labor, male dominance will ultimately produce its own gravediggers. The patriarchy will not fall on its own; it is womankind's struggle that will bring about its final defeat.

Q&A: Sisters Speak

Every issue, *Total Woman Victory's* Editorial Team answers questions sent in by our readers!

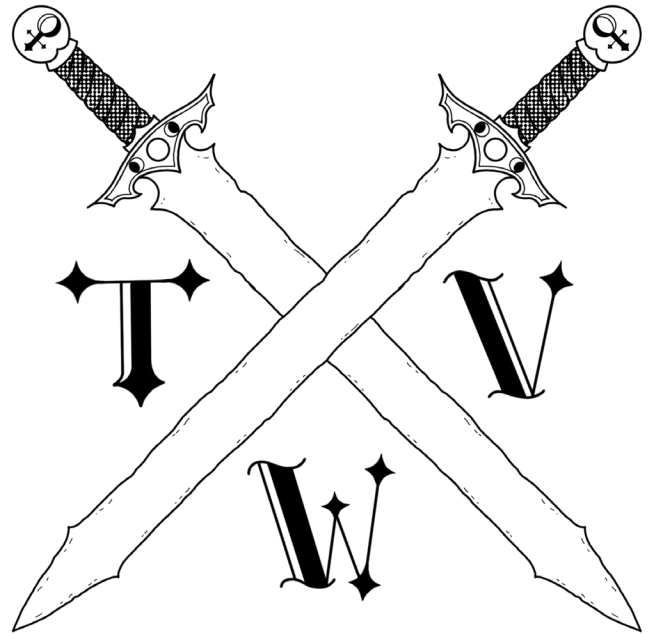
Q: What are the best radical feminist books for beginners?

A: *Sathi*: *Intercourse* (1987) by Andrea Dworkin

Intercourse by Andrea Dworkin was the first radical feminist text I had ever read, and to this day, it is one of my favorites. *Intercourse* is a political analysis of penetrative sex, especially in heterosexual social relations under patriarchy. Dworkin rigorously analyzes sex as the defining act of male power over women, discussing the implications of female objectification and dissociation in sex on the livelihood of women as an oppressed class of people. She exposes the contradictions inherent in the subordinate status of women in social and civil society, despite postmodern sexual liberalism and attempted egalitarian measures by the state, both of which proclaim the sex contradiction to already be resolved. What makes *Intercourse* essential for beginnings is how it develops a radical feminist perspective on one of the most intimate areas of female life—one most women share as the subjects of a class condition. *Intercourse* demands readers to confront uncomfortable truths, while also offering a vision for female liberation.

Isa: *Invisible Women* (2019) by Caroline Criado-Perez

Invisible Women by feminist Caroline Criado-Perez is not a distinctly named radical feminist text; however, it outlines an incredible database of statistical analyses for how women—therein, the female sex class—undergo oppression globally. It turned me radical through the realm of mathematics, showing us that our lives as women are inevitably going to be oppressed just by the sheer fact that our world is statistically outlined for us to fail, for us to be oppressed and killed, for



us to be silenced. The importance of this book is centered on evaluations of numbers; contrasting popular feminist literature, there are very few historical and contemporary female-liberatory works written in such statistical bulk as Criado-Perez has provided for readers. She allows a new sort of literary interest for those centered around facts based on statistical analyses not always provided in many other feminist texts.

Winnie: *Beauty and Misogyny* (2005) by Sheila Jeffreys

Beauty and Misogyny is a great book to start learning about beauty practices and how they harm women. The way she speaks incisively about even the most common beauty practices forces you to see how silly, limiting, or even physically harmful they can be. It's a book that makes you examine your personal choices a little more than before, and can lead to taking real, actual steps to divest from misogynistic ideas about beauty—not to mention give you more time to sleep in in the

morning. It inspired me to stop wearing makeup every day of my life.

Judith: *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1977) by Nawal El Saadawi

The Hidden Face of Eve is a particularly relevant book for feminists in the west to read right now because of its focus on the material effects of patriarchal systems and its nuanced analysis of the imperialists attempt to co-opt feminism as a weapon against Global South countries. Knowledge of history and global politics can sharpen your analysis and is the best protection against co-optation.

Q: How can we come to tackle tricky, difficult to read and understand feminist theories and texts as someone who hasn't read anything substantial on this topic before?

A: Sathi: Before I ever read feminist theory, I read and rigorously studied works that first taught me how to name, analyze, and critique social and material conditions: to name a few, Marx's *Capital*, Mao's *On Contradiction*, and Lenin's *Imperialism*. I'm aware of the hesitancy many young women have with engaging with revolutionary theory written by men—especially when so much of male intellectual tradition has erased or distorted women's realities. But I would not have developed my feminist consciousness without the theoretical artillery necessary for identifying contradictions, especially when the oppression of women permeates the most private and intimate realms of social relations. These texts provided me with the methodology to expose exploitation at its root, to understand that oppression isn't random or natural, but historically produced and materially enforced.

Without that foundation, feminist theory would have felt much more abstract to me. Feminist works are not inherently harder to read, but without the grasp of a scientific method of analysis, they can seem incoherent or disconnected from reality. But

when I approached them with the tools of dialectical and historical materialism, everything just clicked. The feminist struggle isn't separate from the class struggle or the fight against imperialism; women's liberation is deeply embedded in all contradictions.

For anyone new to feminist theory, my advice isn't just to start with the 'easier' books. It's to start with the books that *teach you how to organize your thoughts* and be decisive in your politics. Don't waste time simplifying the development of your consciousness by reading books with false analyses and politics just because they are easier to read. Begin by learning how to analyze contradictions in society; then, when you read Dworkin, Mackinnon, or Barry, you'll see not just their words but the entire social stratification they're struggling to dismantle. Women worked painstakingly to produce and publish feminist knowledge. Reading theory cannot just be passive learning, it must sharpen our ability to struggle.

Q: Hi, I'm currently getting my Bachelor's in feminism and what we're taught is essentially gender and queer theory. My question is, how should I navigate such an anti-feminist environment as a student of feminism? During debates and seminars, should I stay quiet or risk voicing my opinion? We're graded on participation and I'm tired of having low marks because I'm scared of sharing my views, but I also don't want to compromise my integrity by pretending to agree with my professors' and classmates' misogyny and lesbophobia. What would your advice be?

A: Winnie: I really relate to your situation! I took a women and gender studies class while I was in college, and the experience was so different from what I expected. I also struggled with voicing my opinion—I'll never forget being in a huge lecture hall while my class debated what "losing your virginity" means. Classmate after classmate spoke to the crowd, and every single definition included being penetrated by a penis. I mistakenly assumed that my professor would address the fact that this

idea of virginity excludes lesbians, but she moved on without mentioning us once. I left feeling extremely disappointed not just in my professor and classmates, but in myself for not speaking up.

I think a lot about how when we silence ourselves out of fear, we keep other women from hearing things that are important. Of course, we might not be making ourselves popular at the time, but planting those little seeds of ideas that have the chance to transform into full fledged shifts in thinking are so worth it. Had I never been surrounded by radical feminists loudly voicing their opinions, even if I disagreed with them at the time, I would have never thought to delve deeper into radfem theory. Another thing to keep in mind is that the men in your classes will never silence themselves the same way you do. I had classes where we were graded on participation, and there were male classmates who made the whole room roll their eyes every time they opened their mouths. This never stopped them from yapping for far too long and inevitably receiving better grades than I did. My advice is to practice speaking up for yourself, even if at first it's just to get a better grade! Eventually it will become so much easier.

Q: I want to stop wearing makeup but my acne makes me so insecure. I'm taking good care of my skin, and it's slowly improving, but the dark spots and redness destroy so much of my confidence. My desire to feel beautiful contradicts my views as a radfem, and it makes me really frustrated with myself. How do I even go about getting over this, especially when I'm treated noticeably different depending on how I look?

A: Isa: Beauty as an industry has been pushed upon the female (thus, feminized) body, so it is very common for women to feel ashamed in our natural appearance. The first step is by not caring for what others perceive you as, which is the hardest part. Many women are socialized, as we grow up, to aim to be likeable. We quiet ourselves and prioritize looks over genuineness. This isn't

your fault because from young girls we are told that beauty is power, that our power lands in the laps of men, and we must be their lap dog to gain it. So, sure, we are treated differently based on how we look, but regardless, we will always be treated as women, even if we choose to not "look like" what the [feminized] patriarchal standard of woman is. Therefore, there is no "better" way to be treated as a woman, because regardless of feminized or not feminized, "beautified" or natural, we will always be sexualized, underestimated, and suppressed for our sex—for simply having the female reproductive system, we are perceived as inferior. If a man is "nicer" to you because you're wearing makeup, it does not make you more beautiful than you were, it means that man has particularly found liking in the mask you put on, but his "liking" (which is not nearly the same as the male liking for his peers) for you is limited to whatever sexual gratification he gains when you wear that mask; but the moment it is taken off, washed away, and your natural beauty is present, and his dick is no longer hard, you become dehumanized.

Winnie: I'm currently on my own anti-makeup journey, and I relate to you a lot. I also suffer from acne as well as rosacea, and I'm also a redhead with very light eyebrows and eyelashes. I know that I "look better" (successfully conform to patriarchal beauty standards) when I wear makeup. I realized I hated putting on makeup during the pandemic when I had to start masking at work, which led to me foregoing foundation/concealer since no one could see me anyway. Being able to just roll out of bed and not closely scrutinize my face every morning was so freeing. Once people stopped wearing masks, I struggled "having" to put on makeup again.

I realized I didn't care what the people at my job thought about my looks and that I didn't enjoy the process of putting on makeup, so I decided to begin slowly weaning off of it. I started by wearing just concealer and powder, which might sound silly, but even just not wearing foundation drastically changed how my skin appeared. Then,

I stopped wearing powder and mascara. Soon I stopped wearing any of it at all. This isn't to say I don't still struggle! When I know I'm going to be photographed or I'm going to a big fancy event, I still find myself covering up my acne and throwing on some mascara. A thought that helps me in my day-to-day life is that men never have to go through what we do with makeup. They never cover their facial redness, contour their noses, or put on mascara, and no one thinks less of them for it. There were no men at my job that were liked any less for having acne scars. I refuse to live my life differently from them, waking up every morning and having to alter my face, just because I'm a woman.

Q: Is separatism required in radical feminism as an ideology? It's part of the reason I consider myself "radleaning" in terms of ideology rather than rad identifying because I have a boyfriend. I don't think it's necessarily bad for it to be exclusive in that matter... Surely you can appreciate an ideological premise without fully identifying with it?

A: Winnie: I know many radical feminists advocate for separatism, but it's not an inherent part of radical feminism. There are many speeches and texts spanning from decades ago to our present day where feminists debate over whether or not it is necessary for women. I think separatism is amazing for those of us that are able to do that, but I personally don't think it's a requirement, especially since it was so contentious back in the big radfem heydays. If we didn't consider women "radical feminists" because they had husbands or male children, we would be disavowing huge swaths of radfem work and literature that we reference constantly to this day.

Judith: Honestly it bothers me a lot that we've gotten to a point where people feel like radical feminism does require separatism. Maybe my perception of the history of radical feminism is disproportionately informed by the history of Redstockings, but I feel like it doesn't reflect the

history of radical feminism or address the most important problems faced by women. Part of why it bothers me is that it just leaves women who aren't able to engage in separatism to face the problems of relations with men and pregnancy/childbirth/childcare on their own. And it's my perception that it would be women in the Global South that would have more difficulty engaging in separatism.

Sathi: I don't think it's a requirement, and *I also don't think someone "is" a radfem, in the same way that self-IDing as a Marxist is ridiculous.* Ideologies and political analyses are not limited to lifestyles you adopt. Radical feminism needs to engage with the world as is, specifically male society, in order to liberate women. Separatism is a lifestyle choice, not a political conviction. I'm not leaving mothers behind in my feminism because they're mothers with husbands. It's the same way anarchists dogmatically live in communes and don't engage with the world at all. No critical threat to any social order, just anti-social hiding from society.

Q: What would you say to women who think we don't need feminism? Specifically, stay at home moms and tradwives?

A: Sathi: To stay-at-home mothers and "tradwives" who believe feminism is unnecessary, I would first acknowledge the deep and often unspoken labor you perform. The work of sustaining life, raising children, managing a household, and caring for networks of people, is the foundation of society; yet, under capitalist patriarchy, this labor is made invisible, devalued, and exploited for the interests of men without even bare recognition, let alone compensation. It is precisely because of this injustice to women, as a class of people with this shared class condition, that feminism remains vital.

Radical feminism understands that women's oppression is rooted in male domination, through the systematic control and exploitation of women's labor, bodies, and reproduction.

Feminism exposes capitalism's dependence on this unpaid labor to sustain the public workforce of male laborers, where women are already ostracized from participation. This means that even if a woman "chooses" to stay home, her role is shaped by an economic system that benefits from keeping her dependent on a patriarch and ensuring that men claim ownership over women's domestic, sexual, and reproductive labor, as well as dictate the reproduction of classes, nations, and empires through the control of inheritance and decision-making.

You deserve more than dependence. You deserve security, autonomy, and the ability to make choices not out of necessity or coercion, but from true freedom. If I only need to be penetrated a few times to contribute to the reproduction of humanity, why must my entire life be oriented around reproduction? Why must I live my entire life out as a wife, guaranteeing a lifetime of sexual access to a man while eternally confined in the role of motherhood? Why was I raised to be a wife and mother? Why are we raising young girls to be wives and mothers? We are groomed to give up our names and old social relations to reorient life around the needs of a husband, making it that much harder to reclaim our humanity, especially if that marriage results in inescapable abuse. Feminism does not seek to destroy family life—it seeks to transform it so that love and care are shared, not unevenly burdened onto women, so women have the opportunities to explore and contribute to this vast and beautiful world as much as men do.

A world where women are free is a world where motherhood is supported, where domestic labor is valued, and where no woman is forced into a role against her will. You should not have to submit to men to feel secure in your humanity. And you should not have to reject feminism to embrace the joy of caring for others. Feminism is the fight for a world where your labor, your love, and your life belong to you—not to the men who

are guaranteed a right under patriarchy to own them.

Q: What would you say the definition of "woman" is?

A: Anonymous: I would say that "woman" is a socially constructed category that has historically been used to classify female people, just as other species have sex-ascribed terminology—hens for female chickens, cows for female cattle. However, over time, the meaning of "woman" has shifted beyond biological sex to refer to those whom society deems "feminine", encompassing both female people and trans women who adopt femininity as an identity.

Radical feminism rejects the notion that being female comes with an inherent social role or innate gender identity. Femininity is not an innate quality of female people but a set of expectations imposed on them. A female person should be free to exist however she chooses, without being defined by traits that have been socially coded as "womanhood." Since social constructions require cultural participation to sustain them, no one can lay an exclusive claim to what "woman" means. Rather than staking ownership over the term, radical feminism seeks to dismantle gendered categories altogether, envisioning a future where female people exist on their own terms, outside the constraints of imposed identity.

Q: I've identified with radical feminism for about 5 years now. Unfortunately, for the last 2 years, I've really struggled with not performing beauty and femininity. I have an eating disorder and dysmorphia. Growing up, my mom didn't allow me to wear makeup because she thinks it's not age appropriate and harmful for the skin. I myself made a conscious decision not to wear makeup, shave etc. Now though, I'm at the point where I booked a consultation for face filler because I'm so obsessed and dissatisfied with the way

I look it consumes me. My question is, how do I go back to being confidently gender non-conforming and having my actions align with my beliefs? I don't know how I lost that part of me, I've strayed so far I'm about to poison my face with acid to reshape it...

A: Isa: I grew up with similar values in my household—as in, my family never pushed me to entertain Western products of femininity, whether it be through makeup, clothes, or changing my body/face. However, growing up in a Western society placed me in a similar predicament where I began to face challenges through bullying from my female peers for my weight, lack of interest in makeup, and my non-white features. I ended up getting a nose job at the age of 16 because of how I was bullied for my nose; I suffered from bulimia and anorexia from ages 15–19, and I still struggle with the desire to change my face and body in terms of Western beauty standards. I try not to hold any regret for my choices, but if anyone asked me, I would claim to wish I never changed any part of myself. I sometimes wish I could go back to my 16 year old self and tell her that her nose is beautiful; I would tell 15-year-old me that my body did not need changing. When I was 18, I opened up to my ex-boyfriend about my eating disorder; he told me that I “looked better” after the change. Everyone around you, especially men, consistently tells you you are not enough. You will always be said to be skinnier or thicker or have a smaller nose or better shape. It doesn't matter what you change about yourself because it will never be enough for everyone; therefore, you will never be enough for yourself. Until you can love who you are without the voice of outsiders—male or female—you will

always feel like you are not enough for anyone; thus, you must be good enough for yourself. To love yourself, you will love everything that comes with it, which means loving your body rolls, your face as it wrinkles, and your hair while it greys.

The unfortunate reality is that capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy benefit from our insecurities. The cosmetics industry feeds on the things we hate about ourselves, the features we look at in the mirror with disgust and hatred. It's painful, truly, but a process all of us living under patriarchy go through to become who we are today. I can't tell you not to have an eating disorder or not to hate your face or body, because I understand that regardless of what we proclaim, how you view yourself is dependent on your perception of yourself. All I have to say is, don't let them win. Cherish yourself: your legs that aid you in traveling, your hands that allow you to grab and feel, your eyes that provide you with vision, your mouth that sensationalizes every meal. There is so much beauty in the human body simply living that we forget all this capitalist, colonialist, and patriarchal-centric noise surrounding us is inevitably useless when it comes to our happiness because, even if face fillers are all you get now, it will simply not be enough for you when you no longer are insecure about that and become insecure about something else. We will always find things we hate or love about ourselves if we look hard enough; I suggest choosing the latter.

You are loved, whether by the TWV team or your loved ones around you. We love everything that comes with your natural existence, and we hope you can also find this love for yourself.



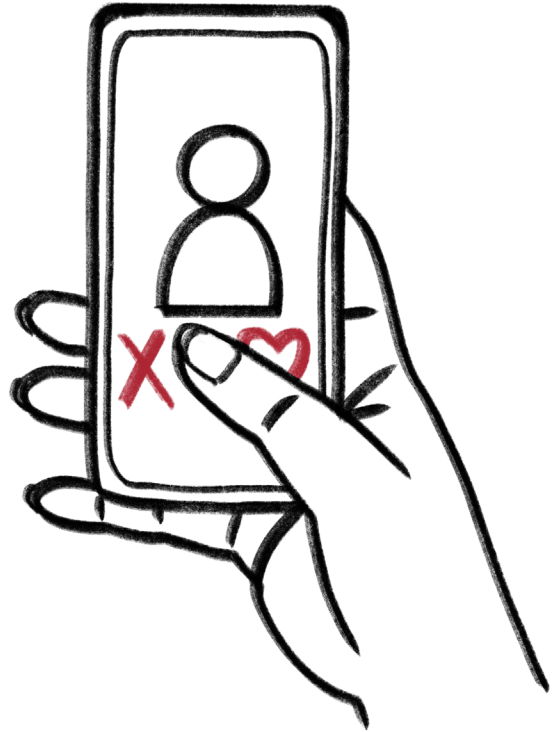
The Promise of Flesh

By an Anonymous Author

Birth control has a very long and complicated history. Oral contraceptives have only been around since 1957 when the FDA first approved the pill to “help women regulate their menstruation”. In the 1960s, the first oral contraceptive to be labeled and advertised as birth control was Envid. The number of women using the oral contraceptive doubled after the pills that were once said to just help with acne were now rebranded as a contraceptive. With the boom of women being able to access resources to prevent pregnancy came the rise of casual sex. As casual sex became normalized, many women and feminists put their efforts toward the cause of the so-called sexual revolution.

While the promise of sexual liberation was proclaimed by the introduction of birth control, these advancements have failed to deliver any true feminist liberation. Things that have been promised as liberation have done the opposite: the burden of birth control, hookup culture, and prostitution. That is not to say, however, that medical advances such as birth control are not helpful; in fact, the pill is probably the only modern invention that has alleviated the burdens of women’s duties. The problem is instead the burden of birth control is unduly placed on women. The problem with casual sex is not the fact that women are having sex, but because heterosexual sex is always unequal. In the end, like most things, women are the ones suffering the short end of the stick. Before liberation, we must first acknowledge and aim to change the conditions of women. The negative repercussions of the postmodern normalization of casual sex through dating apps being used as a sexual marketplace are subjugating women as a class.

Everything is now becoming more and more online, including dating. Dating apps may



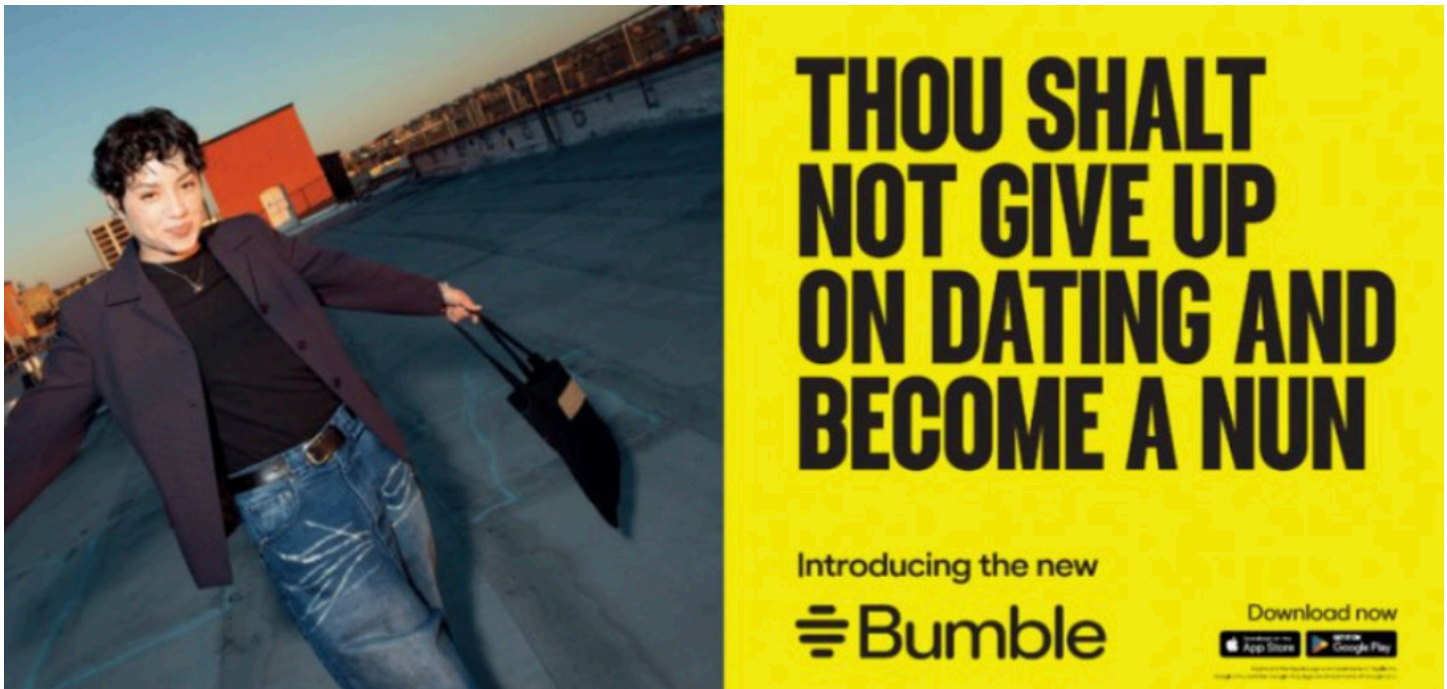
appear to be a tool for sexual liberation, but they reinforce gendered power imbalances, highlighting that sexual freedom does not equal women’s liberation. Dating apps like Bumble and Tinder are now extremely popular amongst young adults, according to the Pew Research Center: about 53 percent of Americans from the ages of 18 to 29-years-old report using dating apps, turning them into a key site for young people to meet new people. These apps are having a crucial impact on casual sex. An act which happens primarily amongst college-aged adults that was previously dominated by the culture of one-night stands at parties, has now been replaced by weekends or lonely nights of swiping left and right on Tinder. Tinder is overwhelmingly considered a digital “sexual marketplace” (Goluboff 2015:102) and the primary app for casual sex and hookups (LeFebvre 2018). Now, instead of having to talk to people in person, you can swipe endlessly until

you find someone you deem attractive enough to begin a conversation with. The app also has additional paid features like Super Like, Tinder boost, and Tinder passport, all to stand out more to your potential matches. Gender-neutral Tinder has been the standard and most recognized dating app for hookups, but the new emergence of Bumble, a reimagined dating app, claims to give women more power by requiring them to message men first.

Yet, there is a staunch gender difference in how these apps are used. Women on these dating sites frequently state that they use them to form romantic relationships and for validation, while men use them primarily for hookups (Lefebvre 2018; Ranzini and Lutz 2017; Sumter, Vandebosch, and Ligtenberg 2017). Men also make up the majority of the users of these apps because society largely sees sex not as something that women actively participate in, but rather as something that is done to them. However, opting out of sex is not an option either, because then we are seen as puritanical prudes. A big testament to this is that even though the two dating apps are both very popular, they both seem to be running

into a similar problem: not enough women using them.

Tinder seems unbothered, but Bumble seemed to take issue with this gender gap, having poured money into a campaign to try to get more women to use their app. Tried and failed: their ways of marketing to women were through attempts at shaming women into consumerism and accepting our new sexual culture. Bumble's controversial new anti-celibacy campaign triggered backlash—the campaign contained a commercial in which a woman became a nun in an attempt to swear off dating. The advert ends with her drooling over a shirtless man and downloading Bumble anyway. In addition, the campaign included billboards that stated “You know celibacy is not the answer” and “Thou shalt not become a nun.” Surely there are better ways to get women to join your app than shaming women's choice of celibacy. Adding fuel to the fire, Bumble named itself a “feminist” dating app. The app has since apologized and taken down the billboard. In the apology, the app acknowledged its mistake and said that the company plans to donate money to the National Domestic Violence Hotline. The clear gendered



language of the campaign and their response to criticism shows how these apps display women as commodities to be sold and bought, with no regard to female choice or dignity.

“These specific words emerging from male Tinder users are an insight into how young women are perceived by scrolling men on the app—both of these terms denigrate women in a familiar way: they invoke the inevitable Madonna-whore complex.”

Unlike Bumble, Tinder, the most popular dating app amongst heterosexuals, has never used a faux-feminist approach in its marketing—actually, quite the opposite. The app has generated a new lexicon via the creation of new phrases such as “tinderslut” and “tinderella”: a tinderslut being a woman who uses the app for its intended purpose, a casual hookup, while a tinderella is defined as a man’s dream girl. These specific words emerging from male Tinder users are an insight into how young women are perceived by scrolling men on the app—both of these terms denigrate women in a familiar way: they invoke the inevitable Madonna-whore complex.

The Madonna-whore complex is a psychological phenomenon that places women into two categories: the Madonna, pure and virtuous, or the Whore, promiscuous and manipulative. The term was first coined by controversial psychologist Sigmund Freud. Unfortunately, it is something that has become cemented into our religions, media, and culture. The complex, for example, is deeply intertwined with Christian theology, the Virgin Mary being seen as the end-all-be-all of purity. The Bible’s various passages shame women who are sexually active as sinners who cause men to stray away from righteousness. Similar patterns follow in other Abrahamic religions. In our media,

specifically in slasher or horror films, we see a pattern of the promiscuous woman dying first while the good girl, the Sandra De, lives on to become one of the final girls. The Madonna-whore complex is so permeated into society that most people are not even aware that they subconsciously hold those feelings. Forcing women into limiting roles further proves that liberation cannot be achieved through the basis of harmful stereotypes.

Another heavily ignored factor of women’s subjugation in normalized casual sex is how these apps put women in dangerous situations, especially those that may result in sexual assault, rape, or even murder. There have been a multitude of cases where surveyed women have reported being sexually assaulted by someone they met through an online dating platform. In 2019, for example, a ProPublica [report](#) found that over 1/3 of the ~1,200 women surveyed by the Columbia Journalism Institute reported being sexually assaulted by someone they had met through an online dating platform. It is more likely for women to be assaulted on a date or meet-up from a dating app than from using a ride-share app or taking a taxi. Dating apps have no background checks, so all people, regardless of violent or criminal history, have access to these apps. The dating app industry standard is to only ask for a phone number or email verification. On Tinder, if a user would like a blue checkmark, a verification that signifies to other users that they are real, the only necessary step is to pay to upload a government issued ID. This creates a reality in which users who want to pay out of pocket for verification are the only ones having their identity verified. Furthermore, the lack of any background checks also makes it easier for minors to use these apps. Slapping an over 18 label does not stop minors from faking their age to use these websites and applications.

Another issue with dating apps is that on the internet, people are seemingly more empowered to send women abusive and unnecessarily cruel messages, no doubt due to their virtual anonymity and the likely chance that they will never have to

face the consequences of this verbal abuse. While there are always outliers in public, face-to-face settings, most people deliver and accept rejection kindly. Just a simple “no, thanks, not my type,” usually suffices. Men also will, hopefully in most cases, not flash their penis at you as they do with photos in direct messages.

Sexual harassment is all too common on these types of platforms. Some men use dating apps as a way to troll or cyberbully women they have deemed unattractive. Men report more frequent engagement in internet trolling behaviors and higher rates of trolling enjoyment than women (Buckels et al., 2014). While in-person dating does not exempt one from engaging in negative dating habits and behaviors, being able to hide behind a screen enables people to act out and say things they would never have the courage to in person—creating a sort of pseudo-bravery allowing men to be as cruel as possible. Even when women share nasty messages they have received online, they do not usually share the name or the user of the person who has harassed them or sent explicit threats out of respect or fear of retribution. A lot of these men will rally their followers to harass the victim if they are exposed. Some women have seen other women share these crude messages and watched them be hounded by people saying that it’s not true or it must be them sending messages on another account for attention. Shame becomes obsolete in these situations. Not only does the

“sexual marketplace” and prevalence of the Madonna-Whore complex harm women on an ideological level, the lack of safety protocols and verification on dating apps places real women in actual harm.

Online dating has promised to bring us closer to people with similar interests or people we might connect with on the other side of the pond. This promise has fallen flat and left us with marketing campaigns and even more social media begging to be downloaded. All around, these apps cause more harm than good to women and children. Modern society normalizing casual sex has led to a whirlwind of modern problems: women are harassed and preyed upon by unknown men hiding behind a screen and insulted for rejecting dates, engaging in casual sex, or even merely having friendly interactions with their counterparts on these dating apps. These apps have always fallen short on their promises of liberation and choice. The burden of staying safe, and avoiding assault or pregnancy, is always placed on the women. Dating apps also create impunity for predators, where they could easily place blame on young girls for lying about their ages when they groom, sexually assault and statutorily rape them. Although the use of dating apps has been relatively ignored in political feminist circles, it is worth discoursing to find ways to reduce the harm they cause to women and young girls.

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Business as Usual: The History and Harms of BDSM in the Lesbian Community

By Winnie Lark

When I lie in my lover's arms, feeling entirely transported, taken, by her, what shall I call that? ...I will not call it by the vile terms master and slave, those relics of the ownership of human flesh that are with us still. I will not call it dominance and submission—that model of human relations threatens to destroy us all. ...I would rather develop a new model for transcendence, a new language that expresses how we affirm one another, are loving, are passionate, are connected to all living things, are women in struggle. (Jesse Meredith, "A Response to Samois," in *Against Sadomasochism*, p. 97.)

While the term "BDSM" (bondage and discipline, domination and submission, sadism and masochism) didn't emerge until the 1990s, the fetishization of power imbalances is nothing new. Radical feminists of the 70s critiqued works like *The Story of O* (1954) which romanticized extreme sexual abuse, just as contemporary feminists challenged the BDSM romance novel *50 Shades of Grey* (2011). The lesbian S/M group Samois, named after *The Story of O's* setting, exemplifies how many lesbians have historically pushed back against feminist critiques of sadomasochism and diverted women's attention away from feminist projects. Proponents frame BDSM as a way to embrace hidden desires, echoing Freud's view of sadomasochism as subconscious repression. Radical feminists, however, recognize that such practices reinforce systemic oppression. As Melissa Farley noted in "Ten Lies About Sadomasochism", "**Sadomasochism is business as usual; power relations as usual; race, gender, and class as usual.**" (*Sinister Wisdom*, no. 50, 1993, p. 36.)

A major misunderstanding of anti-BDSM arguments lies in assuming the dynamics of BDSM fundamentally change when it occurs between women. Lesbian relationships lack inherent sex hierarchy, yet many intentionally introduce imbalances that aren't naturally present under the guise of eroticism. In 1999, Sheila Jeffreys critiqued this practice: "Pat Califia (Samois member) argues that gender, the difference between the sexes, must be retained because it provides the excitement of sex. It is indeed the dynamic of sadomasochism. But for the feminist project, gender is something which cannot be retained; our freedom depends upon the elimination of 'gender.'" ("The Eroticism of (In)Equality," *Lesbian Ethics*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1999, p. 6.)

Queer theory's assertion that lesbians exist outside heterosexual socialization dangerously ignores how all women internalize misogyny. For years there has been pushback against the idea that women form a coherent class, and lesbian exceptionalism is part of the liberal effort to convince us that we have no shared goals or commonalities. As Melissa Farley states, "Sadistic and masochistic attitudes and behaviors among lesbians, in fact, are a good example of how we internalize abusive ideas just like everyone else does. We're seduced by male domination—because we see that that is where power lies." ("Ten Lies About Sadomasochism," p. 35.) Desires shaped by patriarchy cannot liberate; they only replicate oppression.

BDSM's inherent racist characteristics further exposes its incompatibility with radical feminism. Gay newspapers in the 1990s rightly refused to run ads for the KKK. Why, then, did

they feel comfortable publishing personal ads for readers seeking Black, Latino, and Asian sexual slaves? (Farley, *Sinister Wisdom*, no. 50, 1993, p.30). In “The Leather Menace: Comments on Politics and S/M”, Gayle Rubin recounts one clash between gay men and police over this issue: “In 1976, Los Angeles police used an obscure nineteenth-century anti-slavery statute to raid a slave auction held in a gay bathhouse. ...The slaves were, of course, volunteers, and proceeds from the auction were to benefit gay charities. The event was about as sinister as a Lions Club rummage sale.” (*Coming to Power*, edited by Samois, 1981, p. 199.)

This racism displayed in gay BDSM spaces—a regrettable and significant part of gay history—is not confined to men. Lesbians involved in S/M openly wrote articles, gave speeches, and produced porn centered around “master/slave” relationships. In “Racism and Sadomasochism: A Conversation with Two Black Lesbians”, Karen Sims and Rose Mason discuss this phenomenon and the privilege inherent in choosing to “play” with loss of control:

Mason: “For them to make sadomasochism...a community issue, a feminist issue, a political issue...angers me; it has no place. I think it is racist for them to even call themselves an oppressed minority. I am very insulted that they would align themselves with me as a Third World woman in terms of being oppressed. They don’t know oppression.”

Sims: “I have a question to the people that are into sadomasochism and talking about dealing with their own struggles. How do they align themselves with the day-to-day struggles of Third World people? The whole language, the whole dressing up, bondage, master/slave, dog collars.” (*Against Sadomasochism*, Darlene R. Pagano, 1982, p. 102.)

“In researching the history of lesbian BDSM, it becomes clear that sadomasochism is just one head of a larger beast, the Hydra of sexual liberalism that has been eating away at any real feminist progress for decades.”

Sims raises a profound point. If radical feminists accept that the personal is political, how can we justify decrying imperialism while eroticizing slavery’s iconography? Our politics should not end at the bedroom door. How can we tell women they have nothing left to lose but their chains—unless we find those chains sexy?

As Mason noted, sadomasochists often claim they are oppressed by society, arguing they must hide their “lifestyles” for fear of being labeled abusers or misogynists. Gayle Rubin said, “The experience of being a feminist sadomasochist in 1980 is similar to that of being a communist homosexual in 1950.” (*Coming to Power*, “The Leather Menace: Comments on Politics and S/M”, p. 212.)

In “Why I’m Against S/M Liberation”, Ti-Grace Atkinson critiques this line of thinking, as we know that the fetishization of power imbalances is pervasive in our society: “Your enemy, then, from which you wish ‘liberation,’ is one of attitude. ...Your ‘enemy’ is not the Establishment per se. In fact, you claim as your life force the distillation of the essence of that Establishment. **Your enemy is the resistance of the Establishment to recognize you as its own.**” (*Against Sadomasochism*, p. 91.)

Samois’ activism heavily relied on this notion of sadomasochist oppression, especially as they faced criticism from other feminists. However, as opposed to the feminist goal of protecting the vulnerable, their rhetoric was used to shield predators. In *Coming to Power*, Rubin provides

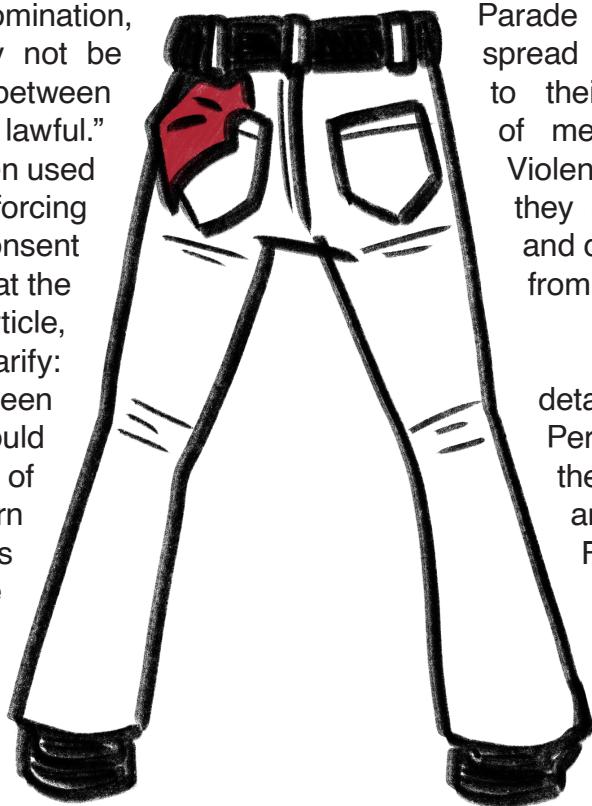
an example of what she views as unjust legal consequences for a sadist: “In a recent case in Massachusetts, Kenneth Appleby was sentenced to ten years in prison for hitting his lover lightly with a riding crop in the context of a consensual S/M relationship. The Appleby case has some murky elements, but it sets a frightening precedent.” (“The Leather Menace: Comments on Politics and S/M”, p. 99–200.) Further investigation into these “murky elements” reveals that Appleby’s “lover,” who maintained that they were *not* in a sadomasochistic relationship, fled to a monastery in his underwear after being struck with the riding crop for serving melted ice cream. Rubin’s immediate unease when sadists are questioned is unjustified and dangerous—Appleby was later convicted of kidnapping, rape, and murder. Far from being oppressed, sadists are often protected by society, which enables abusers to use BDSM as a cover for their actions as Appleby did.

This dynamic is evident in the 2024 [Vulture article](#) detailing allegations of abuse by Neil Gaiman against multiple women. He responded to the accusations, stating that: “sexual degradation, bondage, domination, sadism, and masochism may not be to everyone’s taste, but between consenting adults, BDSM is lawful.” This “rough sex defense” is often used to shield male perpetrators, forcing women to prove they did not consent to abuse rather than proving that the abuse occurred. In the same article, the author felt compelled to clarify: “Had Gaiman and Pavlovich been engaging in BDSM, this could conceivably have been part of a rape scene.” The modern acceptance of BDSM has brought us to a place where women must prove that they did not facilitate their own rapes, and lesbian feminists should bear this in mind when women claim that

BDSM has any place in feminist movements.

These liberal inanities about sex not only negatively influence personal expressions of sexuality and bolster dangerous individualism, but also serve as an opportunity for bad actors to infiltrate and disrupt feminist movements. One example from Melissa Farley illustrates this: “In 1988, I posted a notice for a workshop called ‘The effects of sadistic/violent sexual practices on non-participants: a support group; closed to sadomasochist participants and advocates.’ As a small group of us sat on the ground and talked, six or seven women with whips came and stood, arms folded, behind us. They said nothing; the intent to intimidate was clear.” (“Ten Lies About Sadomasochism”, p. 31.)

Researching the history of Samois reveals a pattern of undermining feminist/lesbian projects. *Coming to Power*, a founding work of the lesbian BDSM movement intended to persuade lesbians to accept S/M, documents how Samois historically disrupted feminist efforts. From their controversial “float” in the 1978 Gay Freedom Day Parade featuring a woman chained spread eagle to the hood of a Jeep, to their documented harassment of members of Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media, they repeatedly diverted attention and drained time and energy away from important feminist missions.



Take for example a situation detailed by Pat Califia in “A Personal View of the History of the Lesbian S/M Community and Movement in San Francisco”: Samois published a pamphlet titled “What Color is Your Handkerchief?” which advised lesbians on signalling kinks to one another. When a feminist bookstore refused to carry

it, Samois bombarded them with phone calls and delivered a petition accusing them of censorship. The ensuing conflict, culminating in a march of 25 women to the bookstore, wasted valuable time and energy that could have been directed toward meaningful feminist causes. (*Coming to Power*, p. 267–269.)

Perhaps the most shocking example of Samois infiltrating feminist projects to advance contradictory agendas is their support for pedophilia. In a speech at The Scholar and the Feminist: Towards a Politics of Sexuality conference, Samois member Gayle Rubin defended NAMBLA, a group of gay pedophiles advocating for the repeal of age-of-consent laws. After widespread drama ensued, Califia attempted to clarify in *Coming to Power*: “Samois has passed a resolution supporting young peoples’ right to complete autonomy, including sexual freedom and the right to have sexual partners of any age that they wish.” (“A Personal View of the History of the Lesbian S/M Community and Movement in San Francisco”, p. 280.)

Why were so-called feminist organizations like Samois devoting time and energy to such heinous causes? Audre Lorde pondered: “... Is this whole question of S/M sex in the lesbian community perhaps being used to draw attention and energies away from other more pressing and immediate life-threatening issues facing us as women in this racist, conservative, and repressive period?” (“Interview with Audre Lorde” in *Against Sadomasochism*, p. 70.) When feminists and queer activists claim that our political agendas align with those of sadomasochists, we must critically examine whether this is true. Does sadomasochism lead us toward female liberation, or does it divert us from it? We must identify and eliminate antagonistic contradictions within our movement to avoid repeating past mistakes.

As radical feminists, we understand that our ways of forming relationships have been influenced by those in power who do not



prioritize our well-being. Karen Rian says in “Sadomasochism and the Social Construction Of Desire”, “I believe that an approximate feminist goal is not the expression—or even equalization—of power, but rather the elimination of power dynamics in sexual, and other, relationships.” (*Against Sadomasochism*, p. 49.) Even if we attempt to subvert the narrative by placing women in the “sadist” role, we are still operating within the confines of the patriarchal system. What might we discover if we step outside that system entirely?

Radical feminism encourages us to envision new possibilities for our futures: What do we want our sexual interactions to look like? How can we facilitate relationships that align with our values? Rian suggests: “To borrow a formula from Karl Marx: if we want to get rid of dominance and submission in personal relationships, we have to get rid of the conditions that require and engender dominance and submission.” (*Against Sadomasochism*, p. 47.)

In researching the history of lesbian BDSM, it becomes clear that sadomasochism is just one head of a larger beast, the Hydra of sexual liberalism that has been eating away at any real feminist progress for decades. Despite BDSM being marketed to us as a personal choice, we know the personal is political. As women, we understand that there is no true pleasure in “business as usual,” and as lesbians, we have a unique opportunity to do away with gendered hierarchies in our relationships. New ways of loving are possible if we work towards them.

A Hand Free of Henna

By Saaleha (@A7Tima)

The henna on Mariya's fingertips had begun cracking when she started mopping the courtyard garden tiles. Many other servants were employed under the Raheem family's seven brothers and could manage the courtyard, but Mariya's mistress—the fourth brother's wife named Ayat Begum—is the one whose domain is this garden, so the duty fell to Mariya.

The eldest of the seven brothers has a new bride, Tahira Begum, who arrived at the estate a month ago. Mariya hadn't properly met Tahira yet but had been watching her and taking on tasks closer to the bride's rooms. Ayat Begum forbade it; no one wants their servants to wander to another mistress, but Mariya takes great joy in petty disobedience. It helps that Tahira is a marvel of a woman, unlike any Mariya has ever seen. She is the most educated of the wives, is from the capital, and is a great beauty. Mariya has dreams of fusing into the bride's skin and living as her.

When Mariya finishes her chore, she looks at her sun-browned hands. The henna has eroded further. She sighs wistfully, but she appreciates her mistress for letting her have it on at all. Weddings, especially one of the Raheem family with their ownership of several petrol pumps, were lucrative even for the servants. Mariya was given a nicer dress than usual for it, had her hands painted with henna, and guests were more generous with their tips. She thanked Christ for that; her baby sister wasn't getting any better and her old mother cried every time the baby whined and whimpered and choked on spittle.

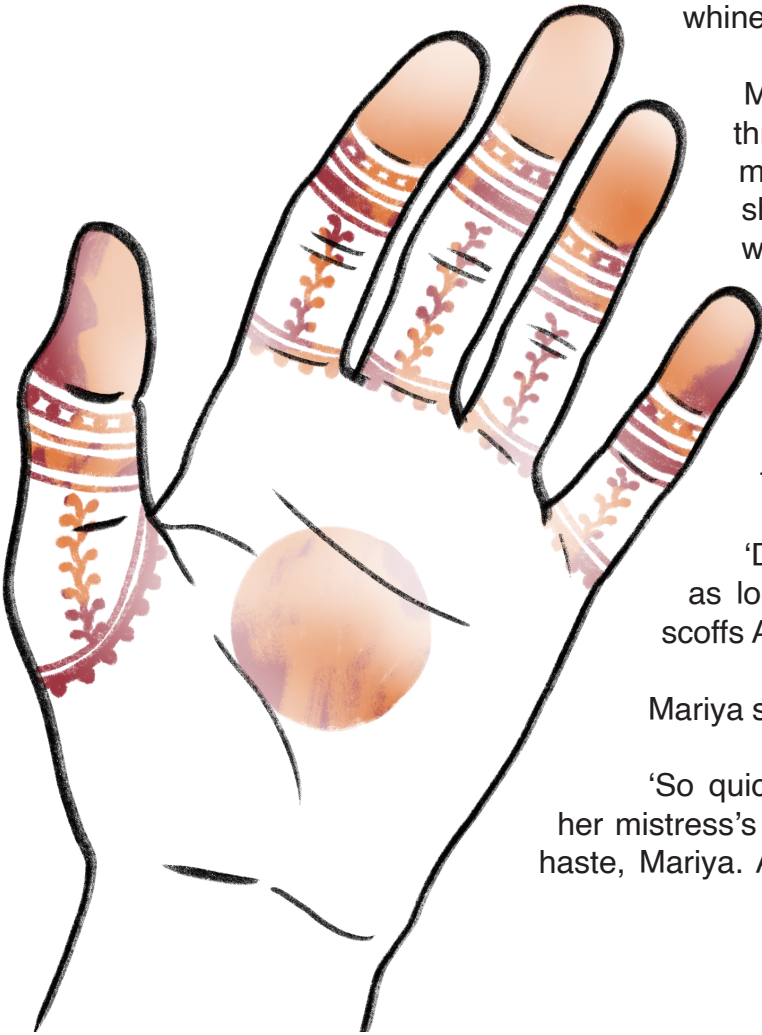
Mariya gathers her cleaning equipment and walks through the halls of the estate. She has to tell her mistress that she is done cleaning the courtyard. When she enters Ayat Begum's rooms, she finds her mistress with the wife of the fifth brother. Both women's children were off to the side on their tablets or otherwise bothering their nannies.

'She didn't bleed on the sheet. She got all bashful when I asked her about it,' said the wife of the fifth brother.

'Does that surprise you? She's from Islamabad. They're as loose with their legs as they are with their tongues,' scoffs Ayat Begum before busying herself with a sip of tea.

Mariya speaks politely. 'I've finished in the courtyard, Begum.'

'So quick?' Ayat Begum says with suspicion. Mariya hates her mistress's accusatory tone. 'I do not enjoy you doing things in haste, Mariya. Allah and His messenger warned us against haste,'



she continues to say in her nasal voice.

Mariya smiles as warmly as she can manage. 'I am sure, Begum. A man could see his reflection on the tiles.' Mariya does not make the mistake of reminding Ayat Begum that she is a Christian. She wants to take the cup of tea her mistress was drinking and bash it on her head. Ayat Begum only hummed and asked if Mariya had at all spoken with Ms. Modern, which is what she calls Tahira. Mariya lies and says she has not and her mistress dismisses her.

Mariya makes her way to the female servant quarters and thinks of Tahira. She almost pities the new bride. From what she knows, Tahira is a university-educated, liberal, modern woman, which makes the wives—who read nothing other than Khawateen Digest, if even that—look ignorant and base. That makes Tahira the object of their ridicule. More than that, Mariya pities her because Tahira has big shoes to fill, considering her predecessor failed when she died, birthing a baby born as blood instead of body. Mariya thinks Tahira will surprise everyone by bringing a child for her solemn husband and more.

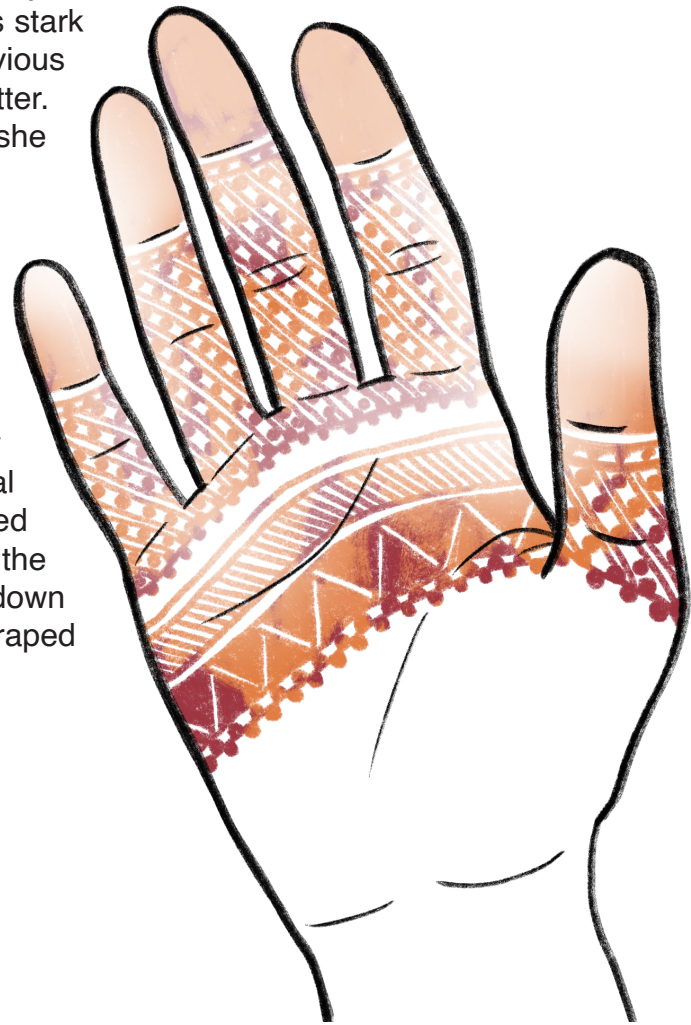
Mariya wakes up before even the mosques sound the morning call to prayer. She steps over the sleeping bodies of the other female servants and ventures onto the highest rooftop of the estate. The smog is not so bad today, so when she peers over the railing, she takes in the sight she has seen a million times but could never fully stomach. Beyond the gates of this colony, Mariya has borne witness to the dim shacks of the slums, the bare-footed children begging by the busy road, the poor women who walk freely without a chaperone fetching things for their employers, and the trash that littered the cracked streets. Inside the colony, where she works, she witnesses something else: grand estates where power never malfunctions, well-clothed children chasing each other on the clean asphalt, wealthy women who donned embroidered veils to indicate their respectability, and flowers that bloomed in well-kept beds. Mariya knows this stark contrast is a stifling thing for girls like her; she is not oblivious to her own oppression and that makes her all the more bitter. Her anger overtakes her at times and becomes so savage she thinks she could strangle someone.

'What are you gritting your teeth at?' a playful voice asks behind her. Mariya knows who it is since she has been watching the owner of this voice around the estate for a month now.

'Um. Peace be to you, Begum,' Mariya says clumsily as she turns to Tahira Begum. She feels lower than usual right now; her hair is still mussed and she hadn't brushed her teeth when she decided to come up to the roof. Tahira, the splendid bride of dark hair and fair skin, eyes her up and down and seems to be hiding something under her loosely draped veil.

'And to you. What's your name?'

'Mariya.'



‘Mariya. I have seen you sneaking around in between your chores and spying on me when I’m in the courtyard or the common rooms. What’s that about?’ the bride asks like she already knows the answer. Mariya hates that she finds Tahira’s girlish smile so endearing.

Mariya found her self-assurance grating, as did the fact that the bride seemed to be holding something obscured by her veil.

‘Well, I simply... found you interesting. You read those big books and I’ve heard you speak some odd language to yourself. That is all, Begum,’ Mariya replies in false humility.

Tahira smiles at the young maid, head high and spine erect. She seems to like attention, likes that even a lowly Christian maid like Mariya has been intrigued by her. ‘Is that right? I have been practicing Russian so that I might read my favourite novels in their original prose. You’re in year ten, I assume. I’m sure you’ve heard of Dostoevsky, yes?’ She rattles off happily.

‘I have never been to school and cannot read,’ Mariya says simply.

Seeing Tahira’s smile fall and her mien chasten in a second elates Mariya; she feels some of the power of the interaction shift to her.

‘...I see. Forgive me, child,’ Tahira says seriously. Mariya thinks it funny that Tahira calls her a child. Tahira is likely not even a decade older than her.

‘It’s alright, Begum.’ Mariya says graciously. ‘Most-’

‘Though it seems you are in a position to be asking for forgiveness as well. From your mistress, I mean,’ Tahira interrupts, the previous self-assuredness seeping back into her tone. She reveals that the item she has been holding under her veil was an all-too-familiar shoe box.

A shoe box that Mariya would stash some fifty or hundred rupees in when her mistress wasn’t looking. *This bitch.*

Mariya swallows dryly. The morning calls to prayers have begun but she can hardly hear them. ‘Begum, you must understand. My baby sister-’

‘I really don’t care,’ Tahira says, covering the box again and holding it under her arm. ‘You could steal all Ayat’s gold and I wouldn’t care. That witch would deserve it, Allah knows. She tells all the servants to keep away from me, doesn’t she? Because I’m too modern?’

Mariya is about to respond but Tahira continues, ‘I will keep your secret and give you this back,’ she says coolly and shakes the shoebox. ‘But only if you do me a favour.’

‘Anything, Begum.’

‘I want you to convince my husband to let me go to your village to teach.’

Mariya frowns. ‘For what?’

‘To teach, as I just said. I have a university degree and I don’t want to see it all for naught simply because I am married. My husband doesn’t think it proper for a woman of my standing to go to, ah, shall we say undignified places? But he has a soft spot for the servants. I think he’ll listen if you ask,’ Tahira says.

She is so eager to help pitiful people such as mine in the village but blackmails me here, Mariya thinks bitterly. But if Mariya can find favour in such a strong lady, that would bode well for her and her sick sister.

All Mariya says is, ‘I will ask. But I worry my mistress will be unhappy if she knows I am advocating for you.’

‘Damn your mistress. She may be older than I and perhaps even wiser, but I am the wife of the eldest brother and I precede her thus,’ she says firmly.

‘I... alright.’ A brief silence commences in which only the echoes of the calls to prayer can be heard. ‘May I have that back now?’ Mariya asks, gesturing to the shoe box.

‘Not until my husband is convinced.’

A part of Mariya wants to push her off the railing and see her crack her porcelain head open. Instead, she lowers her head and says, ‘I will do that today.’ Tahira walks off with a smile and the shoebox full of stolen rupees.

The sorry excuse of a class is dismissed. The students, little children tanned by their work in brick kilns, speaking sharp and loud Punjabi that scandalises the high ladies of Tahira’s ilk, bound out the humid hut they call a classroom. Mariya knows that simply being in Tahira’s presence elated the kids and their young village mothers. She knows because these are her people. She knows because she shamefully feels the same. She accepts this bitterly. The gestures she once thought of as testaments to her employer’s goodwill and God-fearing hearts—the dresses when the bride came, the henna, the extra tips—were to sweeten a bitter deal. Mariya’s hands are to be worked until the abrasions erode the swirls of henna, but she likes feeling useful nonetheless. Her bitterness amounts to nothing.

Tahira’s tired voice pulls Mariya from her thoughts. ‘Come quickly, child.’

Mariya carries Tahira’s bag and follows her into the sleek vehicle, where the driver waits. Mariya eyes Tahira; since the announcement, the bride has taken to gingerly touching her abdomen and staring out the dimmed windows of the car. Her posture is nothing like how Mariya first

“The gestures she once thought of as testaments to her employer’s goodwill and God-fearing hearts—the dresses when the bride came, the henna, the extra tips—were to sweeten a bitter deal.”

witnessed it; now, she sits stiffly and unsure, like a sorry imitation of the woman who blackmailed her that day on the rooftop.

Mariya feels a heavy ache in her chest and a light buzz in her head. She suddenly wants to leap out of the moving car and run from Tahira. The knowledge that a woman such as Tahira, who speaks European languages, threatens those around her to get what she wants, and is the most educated of the wives, is still just a wife, sours her mouth. Mariya accepted that her own bitterness would lead to nothing, but a woman like Tahira? She ought to have been teaching lecture halls, swollen belly and all. Perhaps even free girls like Mariya.

‘Begum?’ Mariya calls. Tahira only stares out the window. Mariya tries again, wetting her dry lips. ‘Begum.’ When Tahira looks at her with her hands over her abdomen, Mariya asks if she will continue teaching the villagers. Tahira smiles then, eyes on the hands that are splayed over her belly.

‘If my husband sees fit. I do not want to jeopardize this child of his. He only wants the best for the baby, you understand. And me. Always me. I am his wife.’

Mariya stares at her own hands then, rough and free of henna.

The Lies of Motherhood

By Jahanvi Rao

Compulsory motherhood is a rubber band. It snaps us back to square one in our fight for liberation regardless of any progress we make. Despite debates about women's relationship to motherhood stretching across centuries, feminists still struggle to think of a life without this role for women. So far, the ground we've gained through feminist organising has given women agency over when they decide to have children (although even this right has been revoked and come into debate over the past few years), not if. The unspoken thought and widely held perception is that abortion and birth control are just tools to delay the inevitable. Some post-structural feminists, such as Julia Kristeva in her piece [Motherhood Today](#), have come full circle, where they have regressed to positing maternity as sacred by saying "motherhood is imbued with what has survived of religious feeling." It's natural to ask, why do we struggle to disconnect women from the role and functions of motherhood? And most importantly, why should we? It is necessary to unravel childhood socialization, insidious misogyny in socialist groups and scientific communities, as well as the obfuscation of the physical dangers of maternity to serve patriarchal agendas.

It is not covert knowledge that the upbringing of girls is heavily geared towards preparing them for motherhood. Toys for girls such as baby dolls and cleaning games as well as jobs like babysitting are just a few of the various forms of attrition that wear girls down to internalize servitude and sacrifice. Girls are also taught to be tolerant of unfair behavior from others; mainly, girls are taught to suppress all instinct for self-preservation because their bodies don't actually belong to them but to larger society. The singular message brow beaten into girls, whether subliminally or overtly, is that they do not have ownership of their own

bodies. Their body is a means to their community's end, first as an incubator for a baby, before fully sacrificing their identity and wellbeing to care for and put the baby's needs before their own. The word 'baby' can also be used interchangeably with male partner.



With a lifetime of this conditioning, it isn't surprising that women are afraid to assert their needs and identities. It is surprising how often collectivism—which is the basis of most leftist ideology—is weaponized against women who attempt to assert their individual needs. Women are chided for bringing up their desire for freedom, branded by the labels of 'individualistic' and 'selfish'. These criticisms employed by the leftists in the Global North are very frequently used in the Global South to suppress women: women are commonly asked to sacrifice every part of themselves—physically, mentally and

emotionally—for their communities. This dilemma, of being made to choose between oneself or one’s community, is very prominently played out in the struggle against racism, where Black and other racialized women are made to choose between the struggle or their own personhood. The burden of promulgation of society to combat genocides of their races (i.e., the compulsory sterilizations of predominantly Black women from the 1930s to 1960s) is placed upon nationally oppressed women, where they are forced into motherhood at the expense of permanent life-altering physical changes to their bodies.

During this time, resistance to motherhood was portrayed as a position exclusively taken by white women, even though [the CDC’s abortion data](#) reveals that abortions are overwhelmingly chosen by Black women and racialized women. Although systemic poverty and the lack of societal support is a partial cause behind the higher rates of abortion by marginalized women, it is also degrading and ignorant to assume that all women, given unlimited money and time, would even want to be mothers at the end of the day. This is a retrograde myth that is still propagated to convey that women who don’t choose motherhood are just denying or suppressing natural urges. Even more alarmingly, in *Feminist Perspectives on Motherhood and Reproduction*, Gerda Neyer and Laura Bernadi reveal that “Post-structural feminists no longer rebuff motherhood in order to overcome power structures, but they seek for means to overcome power structures in order to allow motherhood [because] the emotional, intellectual and often spiritual rewards of motherhood are stressed and the desire for caring and mothering is seen as a strength which women should try to re-legitimize in their life rather than deny it” (de Marneffe, 2004).

When society promotes motherhood, the reality of being a mother is never talked about. The taxing physical, mental and emotional burdens are heavily suppressed; instead, we are sold a picture of an ebullient woman with obedient babies.

“The so-called sanctity of motherhood not only limits women’s freedom, it also absolves women of abusive behavior towards their children—forced motherhood deprives children of loving and safe environments.”

Abstract and maudlin terms like joy, love, and connection are used excessively and repeatedly on popular media concerning motherhood. This language is nauseatingly positive and almost Orwellian in its attempt to avoid acknowledging the common negative experiences of motherhood. By concealing these negative experiences through the baseless sentiment that every woman feels a magical and scientifically inscrutable connection to her newborn, women are being scammed into motherhood. This is further explained by Sunna Simonardottir in [Constructing the Attached Mother in the “World’s Most Feminist Country”](#), expanding on how the relationship between mother and child is made to seem biologically determined and not socially constructed and historically specific.

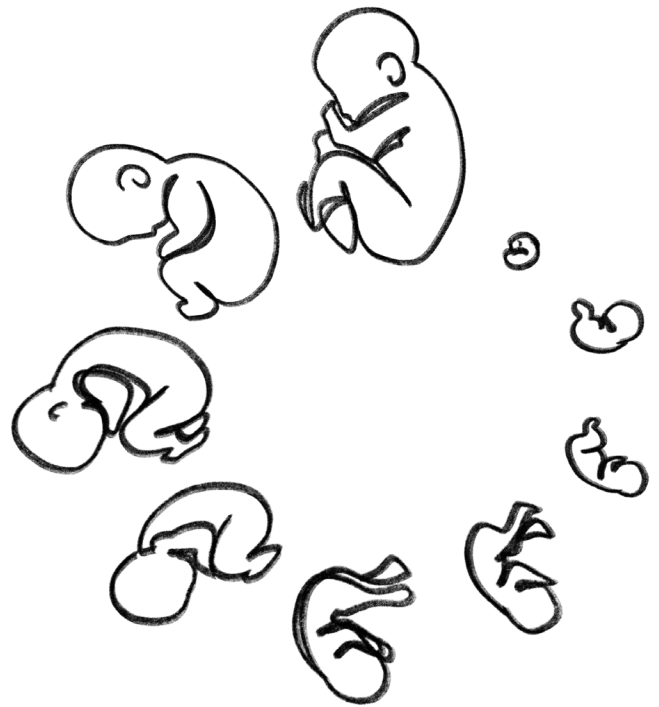
Attachment theory is used to justify forcing women into the role of primary caregivers. Attachment theory is defined in [The Importance of Attachment in an Infant and Influencing factors](#), an article published in the National Library of Medicine (the largest global medical library operated by the US federal government), as “a pattern of interaction and communication established and developed between mother and baby. For the growth of mentally and physically healthy individuals, the mother is expected to create a suitable attachment starting before the birth and to maintain it afterwards.” The lack of gender neutral terms and the blatant imposition of gender roles where the woman is expected to constantly be looking after her baby is appalling.

The misogynistic foundation of attachment theory is clear: the framing of the human-dependency of newborns as a problem only women can solve operates as a way to keep women confined to the labor sphere of motherhood and limit their participation in public life. Thus, with the popularity of attachment theory, the thought of not rearing a child after giving birth is still very taboo, leading to extreme crucifixion of the biological mother on perceived or real abandonment, despite numerous studies showcasing the benefits of non-parental care. This is shown in [There is a Better Way to Parent than a Nuclear Family](#), where Vicki Dodson advocates for nonparental care, explaining that “if child rearing became more of a communal obligation, all children, whether subject to disadvantaged socioeconomic background or bad parenting, would benefit. Having numerous caregivers would expose bad parenting earlier and help mitigate it.” The so-called sanctity of motherhood not only limits women’s freedom, it also absolves women of abusive behavior towards their children—forced motherhood deprives children of loving and safe environments.

What feminists have achieved so far is a compromise at the cost of total agency. Women are allowed to have a career or participate in a public life—as long as they give birth to children. What motherhood really is, is a bargain—we are allowed to exist in exchange for total sacrifice of our identities and bodies.

While we explore alternatives to our current reproductive relations that exploit female labor in pregnancy and child-rearing, it is essential to separate birthing with care-giving. Governments that demand population booms should provide institutions and spaces that completely take over the responsibility of caregiving. Products and messaging that promote mothering to girls should be restricted and girls should receive special education that empowers them with total awareness of their rights and ownership over their body. The goal isn’t just to resist motherhood as a form of protest, the goal is for women to be able to define themselves outside of traditional gender

roles and reject the delegation of motherhood. Rejection is about destroying compulsory motherhood and gaining full ownership over our bodies. There is no true liberation without destroying society’s entitlement over women, our bodies and our labor.



Depp v. Heard

By an Anonymous Artist

DEPP v. HEARD

JOHN DEPP PLAINTIFF SUES
AMBER HEARD DEFENDANT
ON CLAIMS OF DEFAMATION.



Stop Being a Virgin - Literally: Why Women Should Stop Subscribing to the Idea of Virginity

By A. Tatiana

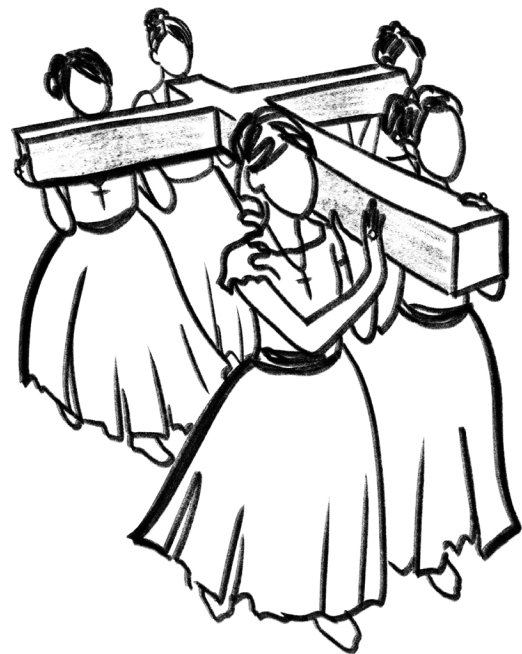
A few years ago, I stopped calling myself a virgin. Whenever people ask me why, I'm always honest with them: I don't see a point. I remember when I was young and consistently going to Sunday School, where the pastor lectured me on how important it was for me as a girl to remain a virgin, to remain "pure" until the inevitable day of marriage. As I started drifting away from the Baptist church in my teen years, I started thinking to myself: Why does virginity matter? Why must I be a virgin? Why must all women and girls share their sexual activity (or lack thereof) with the world? This is why I stopped subscribing to the concept of virginity.

Virginity is a useless, misogynistic concept made as a tool to control women. Contrary to public belief, there are no physical and mental indicators of virginity; you can never tell if a woman has had sex or not unless she tells you. Yet, society places most, if not all, of a woman's worth on something so miniscule. If an unmarried woman is not a virgin, she is a whore, impure and no longer capable of any respect. Shame on her—she's not one of the good ones who saves herself for Prince Charming! A woman who is not a virgin is considered immoral. If she's willing to— heaven forbid—sleep with someone outside of wedlock, she must also be willing to lie, cheat and steal. Society implies that only bad women show anything even resembling sexuality, while good women keep their legs closed and skin hidden.

In *The Purity Myth: How America's Obsession with Virginity Is Hurting Young Women*, Jessica Valenti discusses how girls are taught that their sexuality reflects their morality. "When young women are taught about morality, there's not often talk of compassion, kindness, courage, or integrity. There is, however, a lot of talk about

hymens," (Valenti, 2009). Please ask yourselves: Why are you considered a good or bad person based on when you first slept with someone? Why does your sexuality override all the good or bad deeds you've done in your life?

Of course, I can't write an essay about virginity without discussing religion's role in tying sexuality with morality. I grew up in a religious environment, and my extended family is still Baptist. I have personally experienced how the church played a role in controlling the lives of me and my female family members through purity culture. The obsession society has with virginity is tied to religion and the purity culture it enforces. From Christianity to Islam, the construct of virginity convinces women that they are inherently impure unless they cover up and only open their legs for their God-fearing future husband. The pastor at Sunday School didn't teach me how to be a good person with my actions or words; he lectured me to be a good person by keeping my legs closed.



Women must reject the concept of virginity because the obsession society has with our sexuality bleeds into our daily lives and makes them hell. For example, the rapper T.I. said in an interview that he consistently goes to the gynecologist with his daughter to ensure her hymen is intact to see if she's had sex. Not only is this absurd, rooted in medical lies about the female body and just overall abusive parenting, it's unfortunately very common. I know many girls who get ushered to the gynecologist not for their health but as a form of surveillance. Virginity is a form of surveillance against women.

I believe this surveillance is attributed to the constant talk of laws banning female contraceptives and morning-after pills. To those who've ever asked themselves why the government doesn't pass laws banning vasectomies and condoms, it's because male sexuality isn't surveyed or scrutinized as a moral compass. Men aren't immediately written off as terrible people for having sex before marriage; men aren't being rushed to the doctors to check the integrity of their penis. Men are allowed to be seen as more than those with whom they've had sex with; men are allowed to sleep with as many women as they want, whenever they want. Valenti writes, "When women's sexuality is imagined to be passive or 'dirty,' it also means that men's sexuality is automatically positioned as aggressive and right—no matter what form it takes," (Valenti, 2009). Male sexuality is considered second nature, correct, and pure. The concept of virginity doesn't apply to men because society doesn't think men need virginity.

As long as purity culture and misogynists exist, I don't believe there will be a way to fully erase the concept of virginity. I say women must reject virginity, but I believe everyone should. No person should care about the sexuality of women. Virginity is something everyone should no longer entertain, but the change begins with us. We, as women, need to break free from this prison we've been placed in the moment the doctors say "it's a

girl". Only we can begin to reclaim our autonomy and power from the society that strips us of it. Stop being a virgin—enough of this silly prescriptive idea that you are only worth something if you close your legs.

Reference: Valenti, Jessica. (2009). *The purity myth: how America's obsession with virginity is hurting young women*. Berkeley, Calif. Seal Press.

"A few years ago, I stopped calling myself a virgin. Whenever people ask me why, I'm always honest with them: I don't see a point."

An Argument Against the Female Nude: Abridged

By @FemFederation

This is an excerpt from a longer essay that will be featured on my [Substack](#). This section discusses Venus/Aphrodite as the prototypical origin of the conventionalized female nude in Western Art. Artistic nudity is often positioned in opposition to pornography to determine what type of nudity is culturally appropriate—especially Classical nude sculpture. I argue that from its inception, however, artistic female nudity has been a product of patriarchal society and has historically functioned as erotica for an elite male ruling class. I encourage using the methodology I have employed in this essay (visual analysis, historical context, and feminist theory) to assess works of art and images of women in your own life.

When walking into any art museum in the Western world, there is a not insignificant chance for one to encounter artistic depictions of nudity. There is an even higher chance that the majority of these depictions are of nude female bodies, specifically.

Aphrodite, better known as Venus, is the prototype that underscores not only the artistic tradition of the nude, but representations of women in Western visual culture as a whole. Venus imagery is present in everything from adverts to television to pornography, and even informs the contrapposto position (one leg bent, knees together, and hips cocked) that so many women assume when in front of a camera. (I am here referencing John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*: watch Ep. 2 on [YouTube](#); or read it [online](#).)

Venus appears again and again in Western Art: she stars in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*; she is turned on her side and made reclining by Titian

in *Venus of Urbino*; & Picasso's *Demoiselles D'Avignon* borrows from Classical depictions of Venus washing her hair; and she appears repeatedly in Zoffany's *The Tribuna of the Uffizi* (c. 1772–1778), pictured below. Venus is the mother of all female nudity in Western Art: to understand her is to understand the nude tradition—and because the female nude is not merely a recurring subject, but the *fundamental subject* (Berger), to understand Western Art itself.

The first work of Western Art to depict a fully nude female was Praxiteles' Aphrodite of Knidos (c. 360–330 BCE). It was widely lauded as one of the sculptural masterpieces of the classical world and spawned numerous extant copies, made in both the Classical era and the later Renaissance. It is the nude from which all nudes are descended.



Johann Zoffany, *Tribuna of the Uffizi*, c. 1772–1778

The Knidian Aphrodite was *also* one of the first and most significant examples of erotic art in the ancient world, becoming an erotic tourist attraction in antiquity. Pliny the Elder described the

statue as “not only the finest work by Praxiteles but in the whole world,” and wrote that many visitors were so overwhelmed by the statue’s eroticism that they had to be stopped from masturbating in its presence (Bellis). This tourism is further recounted by feminist art historian Catharine McCormack in her book *Women in the Picture* (p. 35):

Once they were alone in the sanctuary with the marble figure, one friend tried to kiss it on the lips, while the other, who was homosexual, went for her buttocks, claiming that they were as arousing as those of any young boy. The friends also noticed a stain on the statue’s thigh... [of which the priestess custodian explained] that a sailor had ejaculated on the statue when trying to have sex with it.

If you find this surprising, you’re not alone. Many art institutions, especially in the US, have discouraged (or outright denied) erotic readings of nude art: firstly via the doctrine that female nudity in art is an ‘appreciation of the female form;’ and secondly, in an attempt to assuage anxieties about the nature of this ‘appreciation,’ via the commonly repeated adage: *it’s not sexual, it’s art*.

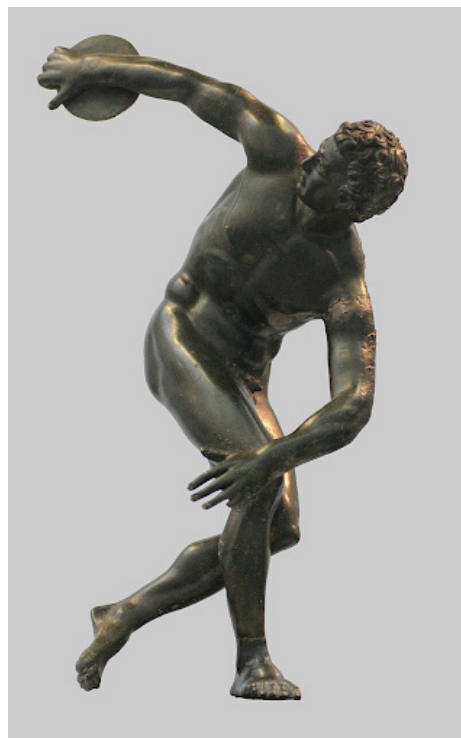
This dichotomy suggests that for something to be a ‘great work of art’ it cannot be sexual in nature, and that sexualized depictions of nudity are not and cannot be ‘great works of art.’ Moreover, fine art is often positioned in opposition to pornography to exemplify what sort of nudity is culturally appropriate. However, as the above passage shows, female nudity in art has been sexualized since its inception. It is *crucial* for us as feminists to reject this dichotomy and recognize the eroticized misogyny embedded in artistic depictions of women in Western Art.

This essay intends to expose the very important truth that the Knidian Aphrodite and its many descendants are both sexual *and* art. To understand what the Knidian Aphrodite meant

to contemporary Classical audiences and what makes her so erotic, we must look to the origin of both male and female nudity in Western Art: Classical Greece (the 5th and 4th centuries BCE).

Ancient Greece had a thriving artistic tradition of “heroic male nudity,” referring to the armor-like physiques bestowed upon representations of Classical heroes (Herring). The musculature of male nudes artistically represents the heroic virtue, or *kalokagathia*, meaning “beauty and goodness, conceived of as an inseparable pair” (Kousser p. 149), of the subject.

The Discobolus, sculpted by Myron of Eleutherae in the fifth century BCE, is regarded as one of the most influential pieces of Classical art ever made and is particularly lauded as a visual representation of *kalokagathia*. Interestingly, the Discobolus’ abdominal musculature is anatomically incorrect (Beard, *Shock of the Nude*, 25:35). Despite the perceived accuracy of Classical sculpture, artists sculpted the body to display the subject’s *character*, not their appearance.



Myron of Eleutherae, *Discobolus*, c. 460-450 BCE

Female nudity first appeared in Classical art as sexualized depictions of courtesans (*hetaira*) or prostitutes (*porne*) painted on pottery (Beck p. 1847; *Women in Antiquity* p. 42). Ancient Athens had a thriving yet ambivalent culture of prostitution: brothels were state sponsored but prostitutes of all ranks were “not considered morally or lawfully worthy of sacred Athenian citizenship, marriage, or public ceremony” (Beck p. 1847). Having sex with prostitutes allowed for Greek males to exercise their sexual superiority as virtuous democratic citizens and express their authority via penetration without impinging on the virtuosity of Athenian women (Beck p. 1848). Artistically, prostitutes were depicted in unflattering ways that, by inverting *kalokagathia*, visually represented their poor moral character.

In Ancient Greece, virtuous females were always depicted fully clothed, as chastity was the most important virtue for Athenian women (BBC). Respectable women were expected to wear a veil on the rare occasion they left their house at all (Beard “Women in Power” 18:45). The Grecian understanding of artistic male nudity as heroic & virtuous and of female nudity as immoral and erotic served to sexualize and degrade the female body & sex-class whilst venerating the male body & sex-class.

However, the first significant fully nude female sculpture was not of a prostitute—but of a goddess.

Praxiteles’ Aphrodite of Knidos is fully nude and sculpted in *contrapposto* position. Her genitals are modestly covered by her hand and the line of her bent arm leads the eye up to her abdomen and breasts. Her other hand clutches drapery that leads down to a bathing urn, both supporting the otherwise free-standing sculpture and telling the viewer that the goddess was undressing for a bath.

The inclusion of both a bathing urn and drapery is significant for multiple reasons: firstly, it humanizes Aphrodite by showing her engaged in a mundane activity. Secondly, it connects Aphrodite



From “Praxiteles, Aphrodite of Knidos, c. 360-330 BCE”

to her mythological origin of sea-birth—on the island of Knidos, Aphrodite was particularly invoked as a water goddess and given the epithet *Euploia* (fair sailing) (Kousser p. 150). Thirdly, it provided a moral context for the goddess’ nudity. As nudity typically denoted prostitutes, the bath setting made the goddess’ nudity socially acceptable.

However, by humanizing the goddess, Praxiteles allows societal views about nudity, patriarchy, and sexuality to color the interpretations of his sculpture. The inclusion of a bathing urn here becomes important for a fourth reason: Aphrodite clutching her robes transforms the nudity of this work from allegorical to literal: this formal component suggests that she has just disrobed.

In other words, it suggests movement. **It makes it real.**

Unlike Classical examples of other goddesses, Aphrodite is looking to the side. She is unable to meet the viewer's gaze and assert herself as an equal. Interestingly, this reminds me of a formal convention deployed in paintings of prostitutes in which the male's head and eyeline are higher than that of the females' as a visual representation of female inferiority (Beck 1848). Some scholars believe that Praxiteles modeled the Knidian Aphrodite after a courtesan he patronized, named Phryne (Louvre). If this was the case, Aphrodite's averted gaze and full nudity may be references to the artistic conventions typically used to denote a prostitute. This contradicts the interpretation of her nudity, pose, and bathing as mythological aspects with cult value.

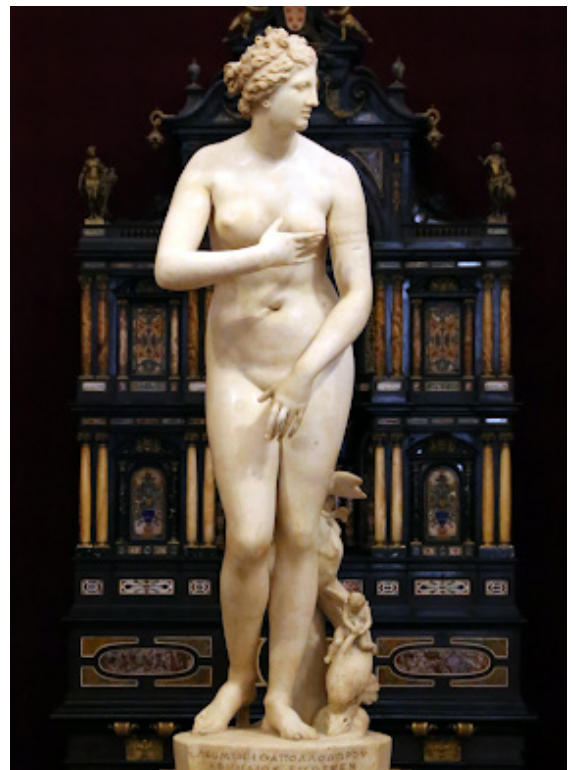
The Knidian Aphrodite is a chimera of elements which contextualize her nudity as virtuous and as containing cult value, but also align her with the erotic conventions typically present in artistic female nudity. She is both ashamed of and calls attention to her nudity with the placement of her hand over her sex, adding both mythological context (as Aphrodite was the goddess of sexual love and fertility) and an undeniable erotic charge. The bath setting provides just enough contextualization to preserve her virtue while also depicting a nude female body for the erotic pleasure of the male viewer. Her mythological elements provide a moral pretense not for her to be nude, but for male citizens to *look*.

The female nude is a reflection of male sexual superiority—*that* is its eroticism. It reinforces the ability of the male viewer to violate and sexualize female bodies by just looking at them.

While the original Knidian Aphrodite was lost to time, it spawned numerous copies in antiquity, including the Roman Medici Venus. This Venus deviates from the Knidian original by adapting the grasping of robes into a covering of the breasts:

the iconic *venus pudica pose*. In this composition, the shameful modesty of the female subject trying to cover herself is contrasted with the voyeuristic gaze of the artist, patron, and viewer. This shame is never placed upon the male voyeur; female nudity is freely presented to be ravenously dissected by his gaze. After all, *pudica* comes from the Latin term *pudendus*, meaning both **shame** and **vulva**.

Similar to the Knidian original, the Medici Venus was famous for its eroticism. It was a popular stop on the Grand Tour, a pilgrimage to Paris, Venice, Florence, and Rome by upper-class European young men in the 17th to 19th centuries (Sorabella). This voyage served as the ultimate refinement of taste through the appreciation of art and culture—however, pilgrimages to see the Medici Venus and other 'great works of art' in the Tribuna of the Uffizi were "as much about admiring Italian masterpieces as they were an exercise in culturally sanctioned leering over images of the female nude body" (McCormack p. 36). (This is rather neatly satirized in the Zoffany painting that began this essay.)



Unknown Roman Artist, Medici Venus, c. 1st century BCE

The mythological basis of nude art provided a moral context for men to voyeuristically enjoy female nudity whilst also reaffirming their social superiority: firstly over females as a sex-class, reinforcing their role as passive sexual objects; and secondly over lower-class men via familiarity with the mythological iconography used as moral context.

As *the* artistic subject, the nude is inseparable from the creation of great works of art and the canonization of the 'genius' male artists who created them. Nude compositions allow for artists to demonstrate their artistic & anatomical mastery and their familiarity with mythological iconography, compositions, & techniques used in famous nude precedents. In "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971) feminist art historian Linda Nochlin explains how mastery over anatomy, gained through life drawing, is one of the markers of a 'great artist.' Until the 20th century, however, female artists were barred from entering life drawing classes, creating an institutional barrier to their mastering of anatomy and the creation of 'great works of art.'

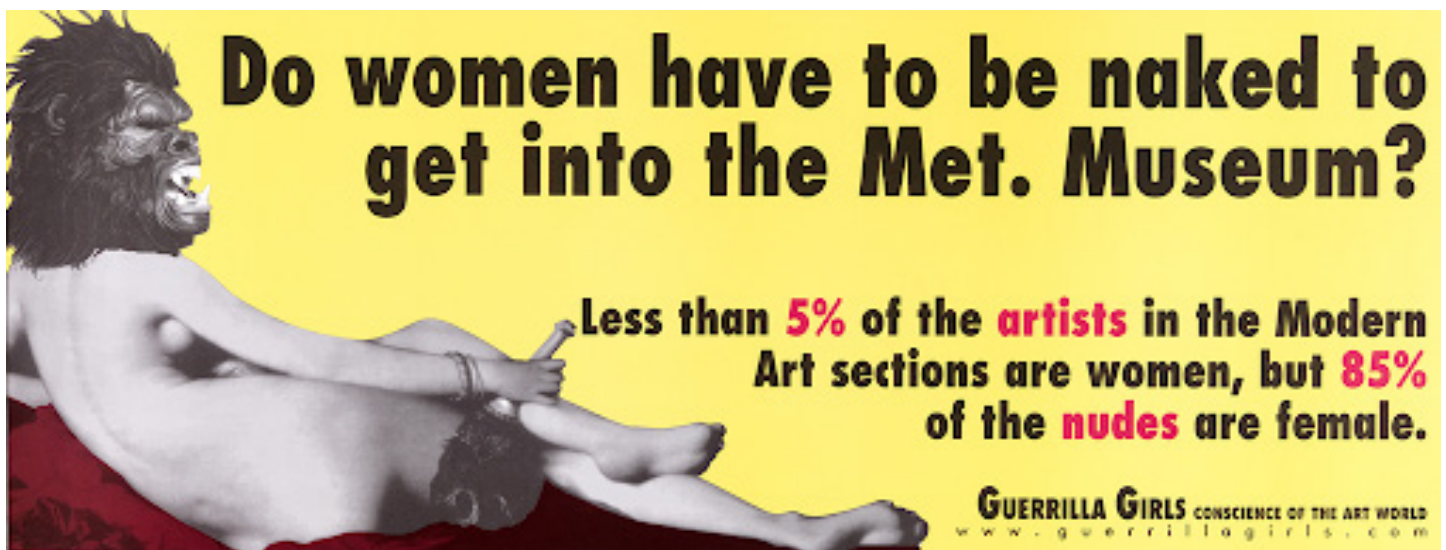
The ubiquitous subject in Western art has therefore been almost entirely conventionalized, commissioned, and created by male artists and

patrons. Nude art therefore contains a layered 'male gaze' (Mulvey): the female model is posed and directed by the male artist; represented via the art object in ways that will best please the male patron; who can then use the object for his own, usually erotic, means.

This inequality was famously highlighted by the Guerrilla Girls, first in 1989 (pictured below), then again in 2005 and 2012. The 2012 reissue has updated the number of women artists to be less than 4% and female nudes as 76% (Met Museum).

Interestingly, this implies that the museum did not acquire more work by female artists, but instead acquired more male nudes. As previously shown, however, male nudes have historically functioned as a heroic power fantasy (or in the modern era, as gay erotica), whereas female nudes have functioned as sexual objects that encode misogynistic views of women.

This is present in the very origin of Venus, the nude's prototype. In Classical mythology, Aphrodite/Venus functioned as a male-created representation of ideal sexuality. She was born not from a womb, but from the severed genitals of Uranus that were thrown into the ocean:



Guerrilla Girls, *Do Women Have To Be Naked To Get Into The Met Museum?*, c. 1989

“where they frothed and transformed into a beautiful woman who was a goddess of love, beauty, and fertility.... The enduring Western symbol of feminine beauty and sexuality [came from] the sex organ of a man. Venus [Aphrodite] is the butchered testicle of her father’s body” (McCormack p 42–43).

Female nudity in Western art must be *fundamentally* understood **not** as an accurate representation of female nakedness and an appreciation of female sexuality, but as a culturally constructed artistic tradition that depicts women as erotic objects. Male artistic creation is a part of the economic and legal system of patriarchy, a system of sex-based oppression that is upheld with cultural beliefs, moral values, and artistic expression. The reality represented in painted, drawn, and sculpted images is just that—a fabricated reality formed from the vantage point, either conscious or subconscious, of its creator.

Rejecting the pornography-art binary exposes the historical weight of patriarchy and the active efforts of institutions to obfuscate the misogyny embedded in ‘great works of art.’ We, as feminists, must be able to recognize the misogyny encoded in visual depictions of women *especially* when considering the ubiquity of images in our culture.

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Unmasking Desire: Feminism, Pornography, and the Dominant Sexual Model

By Anusha (@pixiedustpilled)

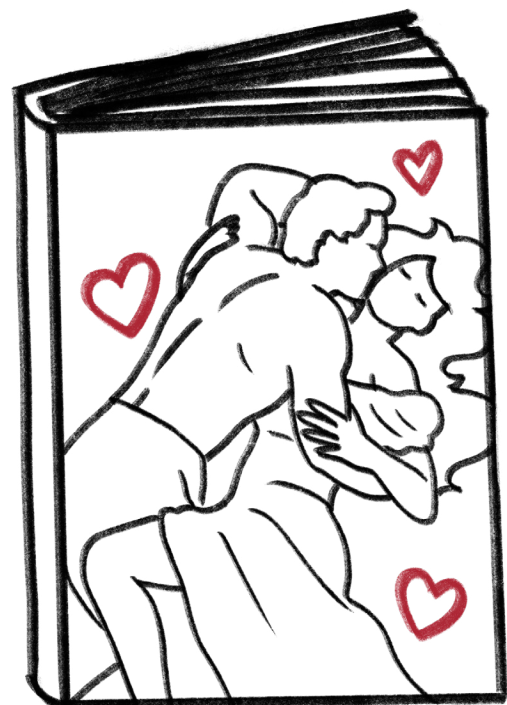
The things we find sexy are not innate, both in terms of behaviour and aesthetics. They are shaped by culture, trends, our upbringing, and now mostly by pornography due to its permeating influence. I have to recognize that even in my own sexuality, certain things I find attractive and practice are a product of these influences. Most women relate to this, which is why the liberal feminist urge to paint these desires as harmless, and as our very own, is tempting. But it is better to be a flawed feminist with correct analyses, than one who furthers rhetoric that harms other women just because it makes one feel better about their own choices or desires—and pornographic fantasies are ultimately harmful to women as a collective.

These fantasies promote the idea of a plastic, mechanical intimacy that women are now readily accepting, instead of one that is rooted in emotional connection or mutuality. Some women are coerced into embracing this idea of degrading intimacy by their pressuring partners, and others become willing to endure, even find attraction in, sexualized violent acts like hitting, mutilation and strangulation.

I've grown up in a mostly conservative Muslim society in the Gulf, where sex education, and sex in general, has been extremely taboo. When I think of how damaging it is for those raised in such conservative cultures to have pornography be their first introduction to human sexuality, I remember an offhand remark by a male friend in high school. He seemed to think that sex was inherently painful to women and something they just endured for the men they love. This was a belief instilled in him by the degradation

and violence he had seen enacted on women in pornographic media, and he still intended on recreating this with the girl he'd eventually have sex with.

For many women and girls in such cultures, including my teenage self, it feels rebellious, even feminist, to embrace these pornographic ideas. When you are taught to repress your sexuality and are subjected to extreme restrictions—ones that your male peers can break without consequence, while for you doing the same could mean the end of your freedom or life—the mere acknowledgment of your sexual desires feels liberating. But it inherently is not, because your sexual desires don't exist in a vacuum. The pornographic, misogynistic version of sexuality pushed by the West is no better than the sexual repression we are taught to practice.



Even women who don't consume pornography are only introduced to an idea of female sexuality that is rooted in servitude, such as appearing "pretty" for men and tolerating discomfort or pain during sex, as it is only "natural". When liberal feminists uncritically root for sex positivity without dissecting and discarding the male supremacy present in our ideas of female sexuality, they only reinforce this issue and worse—give it the glittery mask of "female empowerment" which makes us reluctant to criticize it.

When we are encouraged to explore our sexualities, we must ask—are we really exploring our sexualities? How much of our sexuality is even ours? Increasing numbers of women are consuming porn, and even if they don't personally watch it, they are exposed to its tropes and imagery from how much it has seeped into pop culture. In her book, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, Gail Dines described the extent to which pornography had influenced culture and women's choices: "What is different about today is not only the hypersexualization of mass-produced images but also the degree to which such images have overwhelmed and crowded out any alternative images of being female. Today's tidal wave of soft-core porn images has normalized the porn star look in everyday culture to such a degree that anything less looks dowdy, prim, and downright boring." She wrote this in 2010, and since then this trend has worsened significantly, with girls and women being blasted with pornographic impositions in their daily life. We are bombarded with softcore porn on our social media feeds, by our favourite artists, and in nearly all forms of media. Horrifyingly, the current mainstream beauty ideal is that of adultified girls and infantilized women.

Through its uncritical acceptance of BDSM, violent kinks and the dominance-submission sexual model, 'sex-positive' feminism has further acted as a vehicle through which pornographic

tropes have been driven into women's subconsciousness. This messaging has invaded films, music, visual art and even literary fiction.

Recently, I've developed an interest in gothic stories about women, our bodies, fears, and struggles. An interesting pattern I've noticed is that a lot of modern, gothic-feminist fiction has sexual overtones. Of course, this can be a good thing. I found the writing in many of these works exquisite, and after all, isn't it a step in the right direction for women to write about our sexual desires? To discard the shame we are taught to associate with such desires in a patriarchal world?

That used to be my knee-jerk reaction to raised eyebrows at this kind of writing; however, it's not so black-and-white when misogyny continuously mutates with culture and subcultures. This struck me particularly hard when I attempted to read *Her Bodies and Other Parties*, a genre-bending short story collection that used horror to explore women's oppression. This was highly recommended to me by a friend, and although I found the symbolism in the book clever and the descriptions beautiful, the erotic elements it was laden with left a bitter taste in my mouth. Having read all the praise this book received for being feminist and queer, I came in expecting a reimagined kind of sexuality that centered women and female pleasure. What I found was the opposite: the eroticism was heavily male-centred with female pleasure being depicted as secondary, painful, and even sacrificial. If that wasn't bad enough, the depiction of same-sex relationships and sexual encounters was even worse, tainted by male voyeurism. They even had much shorter descriptions and were filtered through a fetishistic lens. I stopped reading it after two chapters. Despite the feminist elements of the book, such as its focus on female experiences and our relationships with our bodies, its sexual overtones felt merely like an assemblage of male fantasies with droplets of female humanity sprinkled in.

I kept thinking, how do self-proclaimed feminist erotica writers and misogynist male pornographers have the same conception of female pleasure?

The pattern I'm describing isn't exclusive to the book I read, or even to a particular genre. The majority of female-authored erotica, from teenaged girls writing "smut" on Wattpad to the erotica books written by middle-aged women, are riddled with tropes of female submission and male dominance. They generally sexualize violent misogyny, rape, and female degradation.

Even in certain queer subcultures, including lesbian and bisexual writers of erotica, the heterosexual dynamics of dominance and submission reinforce a hierarchy between "tops" and "bottoms" that feels indistinguishable from traditional gender roles and inadvertently, heterosexual porn. Traversing any erotica or fanfiction site forces one to encounter this dynamic, regardless of the sex or sexual orientation of the author. Mirroring real-world heteropatriarchy, there are subcultural trends like the fetishization of ejaculating strap-ons, mimicking heterosexuality to the point where the central erotic appeal is penetration, often with an exaggerated focus on power and dominance rather than mutual pleasure.

In these instances, queerness doesn't become an alternative to patriarchal sexuality but rather an extension of it. It replicates the heterosexual model of female submission and male dominance through that of the penetrator and penetrated. Naturally, this manifests in the degradation of the penetrated partner, who is seen as an object to be conquered and used.

Although originally born from misogyny, this dynamic can be recreated in pretty much any relationship. Many people bring up femdoms (also known as dominatrixes or female dominants) to deny the patriarchal roots of the dominance-submission dynamic, but this flimsy argument crumbles upon closer inspection. The submission

of men to dominant women in these BDSM scenes is performed through their humiliating feminization. The very misogyny that is being denied is used as a crutch in their sexual domination. They are called the b-slur, "sissies", and other variations of misogynistic, as well as homophobic terms. It's simply another way to relegate them to the role of the submissive, the penetrated.

"A feminist sexuality must encourage women to prioritize their pleasure, emotional connection with their partners, and to learn about their bodies. It must be rooted in equality, instead of relying on real or acted out power dynamics."

Being as old as the patriarchy, this sexual dynamic has accumulated various different explanations and justifications, even from people with the supposedly contrasting ideologies. Traditional misogynists will tell you that women, and by extension those who take on the role of the penetrated, are inferior and naturally submissive. They will claim that it is an innate feature and the product of our biological wiring. Liberal feminists will claim that fantasies are just that—fantasies—and that all sexual practices are perfectly ethical so long as they are consensual. They will even encourage these fantasies, sanitizing them with empowering language: "Shouldn't all women explore their sexualities? What's the harm in that?"

Women who perceive the veiled layers of misogyny and degradation in these fantasies will be labelled prudes, both by liberal feminists and misogynists. Due to the ideological overlap such as the belief in the liberal ideas of "choice" and "agency" existing in a void outside of larger social structures, queer theorists will agree with the liberal feminists, overlooking the gender

essentialism and misogyny that this sexual model is rooted in.

Lenin's critique of bourgeois sexuality is particularly relevant here. In an [interview](#) with Clara Zetkin on the Woman Question, he stated, "I mistrust sex theories expounded in articles, treatises, pamphlets, etc.—in short, the theories dealt with in that specific literature which sprouts so luxuriantly on the dung heap of bourgeois society. [...] No matter how rebellious and revolutionary it may be made to appear, it is in the final analysis thoroughly bourgeois." This analysis can be applied to modern sex-positivity which disguises itself as liberatory while still functioning firmly within the very patriarchal-capitalist structures that commodify women's bodies. The very origin of the dominance-submission sexual model is rooted in the reduction of women to objects, which arose from female slavery under the very first class societies.

The normalization of violent sexuality under the guise of feminism will never liberate women, only rebranding our subjugation as empowerment. True sexual liberation will free women from harmful narratives, not repackage them as progressive. This kind of sexual liberation will fully materialize in a socialist society, where constructs of gender start to collapse, women are not othered, and class society, the originator of our oppression, is withering in the transition towards communism. The dismantling of class and gender are interconnected processes—as class society crumbles, it brings down the pillars of rigid gender roles and binaries that are holding its foundations. An example of this is the degendering of society that started to emerge in China under the Mao era, where women gained freedom from gender roles as gendered beauty standards and patriarchal authority were militantly challenged. This is recounted through nuanced anecdotes in *Some of Us*, a collection of memoirs by Chinese women, which were compiled and edited by Xueping Zhong, Zheng Wang and Bai Di.

In our current world, we can only envision what a liberated society will look like. A truly feminist sexuality, or sex-positivity, must be starkly different from the tropes created by traditional patriarchy and pornographers. As Andrea Dworkin describes in *Intercourse*, "The real core of the feminist vision, its revolutionary kernel if you will, has to do with the abolition of all sex roles—that is, an absolute transformation of human sexuality and the institutions derived from it."

A feminist sexuality must encourage women to prioritize their pleasure, emotional connection with their partners, and to learn about their bodies. It must be rooted in equality, instead of relying on real or acted out power dynamics. This begins with interrogating our own desires, criticizing the sexual double standards in the media we consume, and if possible, creating and consuming alternative media with feminist messaging, such as feminist fiction and erotica. Breaking free from this damaging model of sexuality is not easy, it requires much more discipline and introspection than the feel-good, hedonistic line of thinking that is promoted by liberal strands of feminism. But then again, breaking one's chains takes much more effort than simply finding comfort in them.

Interview with an Azeri Radical Feminist

By [@Practice4b](#)

Excerpts from a transcribed interview in which a radical feminist interviews a 17-year-old radical feminist from Azerbaijan. Link to the full transcript can be found on [Practice 4B Movement's Substack](#)

Hi everyone, today I will be speaking to Zainab. She is a girl who lives in Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan is a country in Western Asia, located north of Iran and south of Russia.

Hi, I'm Zainab.

I am 17. I've lived here my whole life. I go to school and I also work as a private English tutor for kids and adults on the side.

How would you describe Azerbaijan to women abroad? From the outside, it looks perfect. It's a country that produces and sells oil. Yet, from the inside, everything is not so simple.

Russians have been colonizing the country, so a lot of people don't know their own language, a lot of bureaucracy problems. People say it's safe for women, as you can walk around at night and all that jazz, but the reality is that news outlets try to hide and conceal rape instances and femicides as much as they can, so we don't know much about what happens behind the curtains. I only know about the rape and femicide instances and their frequency because my dad works in the police.

Here, if you get raped, you have to marry him. People uphold traditional values, which is nothing but plain sexism.

It seems that rape is not always prosecuted as a crime in certain contexts. From what I understand, marital rape is also not considered a crime in Azerbaijan. Could you elaborate on the circumstances where rape laws are or are not enforced?

They are only enforced if there is footage that proves it or an eyewitness, and no, marital rape is not a crime, sadly.

Most rape cases favor the males, of course, if they ever make it to court, that is. Most women just feel too ashamed that they are not virgins or marriable anymore, and they don't take it to court in hopes of not being shamed by the public.

Earlier, you said women don't trust each other. Why do you think there is a lack of sisterhood among women in Azerbaijan?

Because of the way we're brought up, I'd say. We are taught to worship men, and our mothers genuinely teach us not to trust anyone and that other women have evil eye, and if a woman compliments you, it means she's trying to send evil eye your way. That's actually one of the things I'm researching right now.

"Decenter men. Educate yourself. Throw the man inside you out. Join radical feminism and remember what it feels like to be human again."

What power, if any, do women have in Azerbaijan? I read that women are restricted from entering into certain careers, is that true?

That's so true, I forgot to mention that. Women are refrained from becoming lawyers, politicians, working in the police, law enforcement fields, basically any position of power. Women don't have much power, we can vote, but that's pretty much it.

What does the future hold for girls? Are they primarily encouraged to become wives, and if they do work, are they pushed into jobs with limited opportunities for career growth or substantial pay?

Even though girls show better performance than men at school and universities, women still get lower pay. Here it is instilled to our brains at birth that we are meant to be wives and give birth to a child.

Even the families who educate their daughters think of their education as a trait that would make a male want to marry her. My mom personally says I have to marry someone and that I owe her a grandchild, and every girl here knows what's expected of her. Women are pushed into jobs with limited opportunities, and for the married women, their husbands usually don't let them work, they have to claw their way into getting privileges such as a right to work or dress how they want.

How would you describe relationships between men and women in Azerbaijan? In 2023, 9,389 complaints related to domestic violence were filed, but only 1,386 led to prosecutions, 88 women and 1,298 men. It seems men may falsely accuse women to deflect blame.

That is 100% correct, and let me tell you, 9,389 is not even a correct number. In actuality, it happens significantly a lot more than that. DV is very much normal here. If a man hits a woman,

then it's a family matter, so people don't really try to speak up.

The prosecutions usually favor the women. Even though our justice system is in shambles, women at least have that. It's also worth mentioning that women who take it to court end up being killed by their husbands a lot of the times.

For example, there was a woman who was cut to pieces by her father-in-law, and the first thing people asked was, I wonder what she did? And the deflecting the blame thing happens a lot. My family is in the law enforcement system, so I see it happening firsthand. They usually inflict wounds on themselves and say, she hit me first, or come up with another lame excuse, which the judge, of course, favors.

Are there any feminist movements in Azerbaijan, whether they are underground or mainstream?

No mainstream feminist movements exist because they get shunned and shamed. I got hit by a man when I mentioned I was a feminist. Imagine what a group of us would do to them, and the underground ones are liberal feminists.

Women do not have support except for this one government organization called Organization for Family Problems, Children and Women's Problems, who doesn't do anything. There aren't many feminists out here.

I'm so sorry a man hit you. That's horrible. Did he face any repercussions?

Thanks. No, because the same thing happened when my parents learned that I'm a feminist and I can't do much without my parents' support as a minor.

I'm really sorry to hear that. You deserve so much better. Have you thought about leaving Azerbaijan?

Yes, I'm leaving this place and going to France as soon as high school ends. I plan to study law in hopes of maybe being a politician or a lawmaker so that I can bring change and represent us feminists out there. France has a lot of radfems, so I think I'll fit right in.

I'm so happy to hear that you plan on leaving. I'm curious how women interact with one another. As a feminist, do you find it difficult to support women in a country where there is essentially no sisterhood?

Yes. Unfortunately, I have tried times before to educate women and wake them up, but it is very isolating since I don't have any friends as a result of my feminism. I still try to teach my young students who are girls and favor their voices because it isn't too late for them to learn.

Thank you for being a positive influence on girls. Thank you for trying to wake women up to the reality that chasing beauty is just female subordination. Can you tell me about the beauty standards in Azerbaijan? I'm guessing women there do some of the typical beauty rituals like body hair removal or wearing high heels.

Of course, it is my duty to do so as a radfem. Women here are quite literally looked at as pigs if they don't get hair removal, if they're slightly chubby. My mom forced me to get hair removal at age 12 and I didn't want it even back then.

I have never understood it. Also, the nails, I remember not wanting to get them and my mom said that she thinks that I'm a man and that she won't speak to me unless I get them. Again, happens to a lot of girls.

Tell me about your relationship with radical feminism. What does it mean to you? What made you realize radical feminism was right?

Ever since I was a little girl, I hated femininity and refused to act the way people expected a little girl to. It was all very superficial to me, the bimbos and the girls who liked the boys and stuff. I never had many friends because of that. In my early teens, I refused to shave.

It was never something that made sense in my head. I refused to do any makeup without knowing the reason behind it. My family and everyone around me tried so hard to make me have an eating disorder because I was fat, but I never really cared.

When I was 13, I discovered liberal feminism and I hated it. I couldn't comprehend just how so-called sex work could be empowering. And when I was 16, I discovered radical feminism.

Everything suddenly clicked in my head, why the world is the way it is. Every problem we have right now can be traced back to misogyny. I made radfem friends online who reassured me that I'm not crazy nor unhygienic for refusing shaving, makeup, et cetera, and I found so much comfort.

I never really felt like I belonged here. I never had friends, even as a child, but through the online radfem space, I got to know very cool people who actually do get me.



How would you characterize the main differences between liberal and radical feminism?

Liberal feminism masks gender roles as empowering for women, encourages women to sell themselves and objectify themselves, and I frankly don't understand why we call it feminism because all it does is cater to men. Radical feminism is liberating women from the patriarchy, anti-objectification, and anti-selling yourself to men.

Radical feminist Andrea Dworkin once said, "Many women, I think, resist feminism because it is an agony to be fully conscious of the brutal misogyny which permeates culture, society, and all personal relationships." I hear a lot of radical feminists online lament that it is torture to be so aware of misogyny because it permeates every corner of the earth. Do you think you're overall happier or better off now that you are aware of radical feminism, or do you feel like life is just a bitter agony?

It is unfortunately in every corner, but I would never say that my life is a bitter agony. I believe the art men make isn't real, right? Whatever you want to call it. I think only women are capable of creating art so I can survive without man-made stuff. When it comes to relationships, I haven't seen one woman whose life got easier when in a relationship with a man, and I prefer to date women anyway. I would say that I'm happier because I was never brainwashed, just unaware.

I agree with what you said. I personally feel so much happier knowing the truth. It's such a relief to know I can stop worrying about stupid pressures like marriage and children. My life is dramatically improved by not shaving my entire body every two weeks.

Same here. It feels so freeing, you know? I feel like a bird who got her wings back.

How can women abroad help women in Azerbaijan?

I'd say come here and try to organize seminars about radical feminism, maybe. Seminars should be in English because due to colonialism, my people will listen to anyone but someone from their own country.

I can't imagine any other way of helping the women here. I'll try to create an Azerbaijani RadFem page when I'm done with my exams in hopes of gaining an Azerbaijani audience. It is definitely doable to reach an Azerbaijani audience.

That is something any radical feminist creator can do from home. I like that idea. And I think it will be better if I translate some excerpts from books and try to make people digest the idea. Radical feminism is just so new to this place, I wouldn't want to scare women off.

If you had the chance to address every woman on earth at once, what would your message be?

Decenter men. Educate yourself. Throw the man inside you out. Join radical feminism and remember what it feels like to be human again.

This sounds so dramatic, but I know for sure no woman feels like a natural human being with makeup on and all body hair except for scalp hair and eyebrows shaved. That's why I said it.

Amazing message. I don't think you sound dramatic at all. I felt the same way when I followed beauty standards. Once I stopped, I felt human again. Thank you so much for your time and thoughtful responses. You are a remarkable girl. I'm wishing you all the success in the world.

Thank you so much for advocating for women and girls. Thank you so much. I'm very happy to be in this community.

