

Men Cannot Be Feminists

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I am neither smart enough to raise radical theories on the following issues, nor in a position to offer new perspectives. I will not be able to convince someone who is not interested in feminism, and someone knowledgeable on the topic will most likely find the topic of this text frankly redundant. I shall nevertheless explain my view on the matter for if the reader is a cis-gender male who, enthusiastic on the feminist movement, claims the name of feminist for himself.

Should one analyze my thoughts on sex and gender, they would find numerous elements of feminism, yet I do not call myself a feminist. Men cannot be feminists.

Some immature people might equate feminism to female chauvinism. But whatever they may say, feminism is a movement that seeks to break down the oppressive structure between sexes and genders and create an egalitarian society. More specifically, the goal of feminism is to end sexism and patriarchy. It is “feminism” precisely because it opposes the male-led system. Patriarchy is a hierarchical structure that justifies men’s social authority and governance. In other words, it is a system that subjugates all who are not men, especially women. Women are placed at the bottom of said structure simply because they are women. In the same way, men are placed above all other sexes and genders simply because they are men. In this way, men and women are placed in opposition to each other, privilege given for one and oppression to the other. Patriarchy is established only when there is a male who will rule over the other sexes. Because of this, the very existence of a man, who is raised in a sexist environment, internalizes this injustice, and enjoys the benefits of a patriarchal system that causes the suffering of the rest, becomes oppressive for women and all other sexes and genders.¹⁾

Some men may not feel that they enjoy such privilege. Some may even be at a disadvantage compared to women. It is even true that not all women are placed beneath all men. However, this does not prove the absence of gendered inequality, but the existence of something called “intersectionality”.

¹ For those who take this as an attack on their gender identity or feel guilty and helpless about their masculinity, the following should be emphasized: This problem is not about the “bad guys” or the “good guys”. This is not an issue of individuals, but a structural problem that encompasses all of us, where a complex system puts one gender on top of the other. This is not to say that all men are necessarily “evil”, but rather that they are placed on top of an oppressive, sexist structure regardless of their will. For an anarchist, it should not be difficult to understand that such structural problems can exist.

Society is made up of complex interactions. There are numerous ways that a person can form relationships with others, and there are just as many oppressive relationships that arise from these. Between a bisexual, cis-gender, disabled, working man with a right to vote, and a heterosexual, transgender, able-bodied, immigrant, bourgeois woman, who would be in an objectively better social position? The overlapping of these numerous socio-political factors that benefit or harm individuals is Intersectionality. Those who oppress others in one way can be the oppressed themselves in many other ways. Indeed, sexism and patriarchy are not only harmful to women. Men can also be victims of this system. Men who do not meet the criteria of masculinity are, at the end of the day, socially ostracized. However, although a man who satisfies the masculinity demanded by society can become a ruler, a “perfect” woman who satisfies the social criteria of femininity would ultimately be nothing more than a woman dominated by a man. In the eyes of a patriarchal society, the “best woman” is nothing more than an easily controllable object. Even if man and woman are harmed by the same gun, one gets a dislocated shoulder due to recoil, while the other has their flesh pierced by the fired bullet.

The fact that those who enjoy the privileges of patriarchy are unaware of this reality shows that the oppressive system is working as intended. The privileged tend to think that the inequality is natural since it is not harmful to them. As men, we may know the pressures and injustices of being a man, but we cannot understand the struggle of being a woman. To be in a society where inevitable menstruation has to be a legally guaranteed right. To always be left behind in family matters for simply being a woman. That one’s failure is considered natural and even successful results are to be considered an extraordinary exception. To bear with the overwhelmingly high probability of being a victim of sexual violence and to be stigmatized for being a victim. To endure the mental and physical stress of raising children, considered the final duty of womanhood and not a conscious choice. To live in a society that symbolically mutilates and commodifies the female body.

To not have to live through any of this is to live as a privileged man in a sexist, patriarchal society. Even if they refuse these special treatments, the structures of the sexist society would still bring women under the soles of these men. If patriarchy was worried about people’s consent, it wouldn’t have been oppressive in the first place.

Privilege is established only by separating those who receive it from those who do not. Therefore, being a man in and of itself is to be an oppressor. I can empathize with women’s pain and stand in solidarity with them, but precisely because I am a man, I can never experience it and truly understand it.

This is why I do not call myself a feminist. Society recognizes me as a man, so I am given more opportunities accordingly. I can get people to listen to me even without the platform of feminism. I do not want to intrude in the few safe spaces free of male oppression that feminism has created. It is the voice of feminists that the world needs to hear, not the voice of another man like myself. My role as a man in the feminist movement is to listen to their voices, to actively stop the oppression of myself and the men around me, and to challenge patriarchy as a man.

Gender equality will benefit all of us, but it is up to those who are not men — not men themselves — to fight gender discrimination and patriarchy. As men, we shall merely act as their allies, giving way to them and stand in solidarity when they need help, not as feminists who take the lead in this struggle.

While we recognize the privileges we enjoy, empathize with the suffering of all other sexes, and stand in solidarity with the struggles of feminists, we have no intention of replacing their voices and initiatives. To not call oneself a feminist is to understand this reality:

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