Feminism is a Necessity for Societal Progress
Raven Maloney
I would define feminism as a movement to combat, dismantle, or reform a society built around dominance of men. Feminism is not against men specifically. Rather, it is against a system of oppression that uplifts stereotypes, gender roles, and general discrimination as the uncontested norm of society. This system of oppression is called patriarchy, and it affects all members of a society that it dominates. The idea that leadership positions are for men while women are homemakers, that men should not show emotion while women are emotional, that men are aggressive while women are innocent, that men wear suits while women wear dresses, and so on are all aspects of patriarchy that feminism attempts to combat. Patriarchy as a system, therefore, affects all members of society negatively.

I consider myself a feminist. For nearly half my life patriarchal views have been the source of depression and trauma. Views about how men are supposed to control emotions, appear masculine, and like only masculine things resulted in years of depression and emotional suppression. The media's immense lack of transgender representation and the taboo nature of the concept resulted in me not even knowing trans people existed until I was fifteen. Even then, the idea that men should always be men and women should always be women was immediately ingrained as an indisputable fact of life. Despite the norm of my life, the knowledge that something was missing never faded and I eventually found spaces online where I learned other views.

However, even after having my perception of gender changed, the years of emotional suppression were so complete that it would not be for another few years before I realized that I was trans as well. I have struggled with chronic depression since I was fourteen. Despite going through multiple therapists, doctors, medications, and diagnoses, the source of this depression was never truly found. This is because the answer to that depression was a concept that has been ingrained in society as taboo by patriarchal gender norms. Being diagnosed as trans by a medical professional was near unheard of and I did not understand the term enough to discover the truth for myself. I blame patriarchal views for the years of depression and trauma I endured as a result of demonizing any individual that differs from the norm it upholds.

Even after beginning to transition, these views have still been a constant factor in my life. Staring is the most obvious effect. Many people, both supportive and not, are not used to the existence of trans people. As a result, I have found myself drawing stares nearly everywhere I go. As our society is built on an ideal of a definitive man and woman, every action as a trans person is scrutinized to maintain the carefully curated boxes used to sort different identities. From bathrooms to sports, everything is policed based on the concept of gender.

A common justification for this, about trans women, is to protect women from sexual predators. This stems entirely from the patriarchal belief that men are inherently sexually aggressive and women need protecting. Trans people do not transition for sexual reasons; it is rooted in the disconnect from mental image and physical body causing distress. Furthermore, transition is not necessarily optional. Of course, it is possible to ignore the need; however, the alternative is almost always a life of chronic depression, which is why trans people are disproportionately

more likely to commit suicide or engage in self-harm. Patriarchal views have demonized the only way to avoid this.

Aside from my personal experience as a trans woman, patriarchal norms also affect trans men. Trans women are demonized as predatory men because wanting to be feminine is hard for many to grasp, while trans men are treated as confused or misled. This behavior was evident in the documentary *Hugh Hefner Is My Enemy*, when the psychiatrist spoke to the women as if they were children, claiming they were misled and disregarding what they said as an overreaction. Similarly, the interviewer introduced the women by saying, "Let's see what the women are so upset about." The idea that women are overemotional or not in control of their emotions is a common theme in patriarchal society used for manipulation. It discounts women and those born female when they discuss real issues.

It is also the case that trans men are frequently pushed aside in discussion in favor of trans women. In addition to views that people born female is not taken seriously, it also seems that the idea of becoming a man is more acceptable than becoming a woman.

Taking all this discussion on my personal experiences in a patriarchal society, I consider myself a feminist because a world built on the idea that one group is somehow superior to all others is absurd. The idea that showing emotion is weakness or that being yourself is evil is not a world I want to live in. The idea that all groups, including the so-called superior one, must behave in arbitrary and overly specific ways is morally wrong. I believe it is impossible for us as a society to truly progress with beliefs that drive a wedge between individuals for differences that a child would not think twice about if they were not told to do so. Patriarchal beliefs actively harm progress and are inherently a tool of oppression.

I agree with bell hooks that feminism is not anti-male because patriarchy also harms men. Patriarchal society dictates how men are expected to behave, leaving little room for deviation. In her article *The Influence of Media on Views of Gender*, Julia Woods calls attention to stereotypes: "Children's television typically shows males as 'aggressive, dominant, and engaged in exciting activities from which they receive rewards...'" and "the majority of men on prime-time television are independent, aggressive, and in charge." Gentleness in men, briefly evident in the 1970s, has receded as male characters are redrawn to be more tough and distanced from others.

Men are expected to be independent, completely in control of their emotions, and successful. These ideals have resulted in a society where men struggle to ask for help, to the detriment of their health. It has caused emotional suppression and depression in men; "nearly 1 in 10 men experience depression or anxiety but less than half will receive treatment and more than 4 times as many men as women die by suicide every year" (ADAA). Pressure on men to always be successful has demonized seeking the job they want in favor of the job that pays the most. In relationships, men often struggle to communicate emotional needs as another side effect of the belief that men cannot seek help or express emotion.

Aggression by men is often expected, promoting unhealthy coping mechanisms like yelling, breaking things, or fighting. Smaller side effects of concepts that are thought to give men

privilege can also have negative effects. In dating, men are expected to take initiative, provide transportation, and pay for the date, forcing them into a provider role regardless of desire.

In summary, feminism is a movement meant to combat patriarchal society with the goal to either dismantle it or change it into something better. Patriarchal society is the overarching concept that gender dictates society. It is the idea that men are superior, that there are only two genders, and that both have designated roles. I consider myself a feminist because a world built on oppression is not a world, I want to live in. I agree with bell hooks that feminism is for men as well because men are also harmed by the patriarchy. It harms men by forcing them into roles regardless of whether they want them, and societal stereotypes have resulted in a depression epidemic. Feminism is a movement necessary for society to continue to progress.

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