



said the pot to the kettle

feminist theory for anarchist men

“feminism practices what
anarchism preaches.

-lynn farrow

THE HISTORY OF PATRIARCHY! First Page!

Once, a long time ago, in a past that I'm making up, men & women, boys & girls weren't judged by what happened where their legs met...



we're stick people anyway.

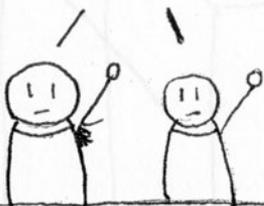
for a brief period of time, people experimented with a hierarchy based on what happened where their arm & torso met...



— behold the power of my hairy armpits!

but patriarchy never really caught on.

this is dumb.



but one day some guy named Pat had the not-so-bright idea of a hierarchy based on what was between people's legs.

I rule.



he called it patriarchy.

hey Pat, you just named this after yourself, didn't you?

Umm... no?



at first, patriarchy seemed just as dumb as patriarchy, but then half the people realized they could be better than the other half.



I have a penis..

and soon patriarchy ravaged the countryside...

Since only men got to write books and teach higher education, people thought it was a good thing.

ah! run! it's the forces of domination culture!



Feelings make me weak.

I'm too ruled by emotion to understand complex thought.



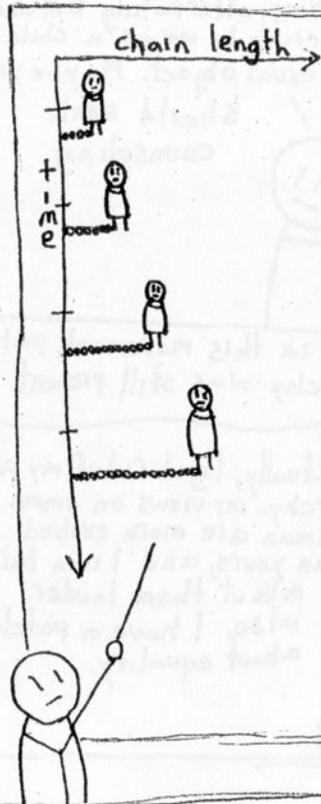
fortunately, a group of women realized that, contrary to popular vernacular, they didn't need any balls to be brave, and started a movement called feminism.

Almost 200 years have passed, and although much good has been done, patriarchy remains.



gives us liberty or we'll give you death, jerk-o's.

unfortunately, most men didn't want to give any power back to women.



I'm not a doormat.

feminazi.



Some women wanted radical change. They wanted equality.

still not a doormat...

feminazi.



So the mass media spun "equality" to mean "anti-man."

and these women are going to leave their husbands and become lesbians and practice witchcraft...

well, they finally got something right!



when in fact, most radical feminists don't hate men... they just hate almost everything men do.

Around the same time period, another movement was evolving. Anarchism, which claimed to be against all hierarchy.

You act like your opinion is more valid than mine. Also, you keep alternating between referring to me as a child and as a sexual object. Maybe you should seek counseling.

it's also about

spray paint.



but in this movement, patriarchy was still present.

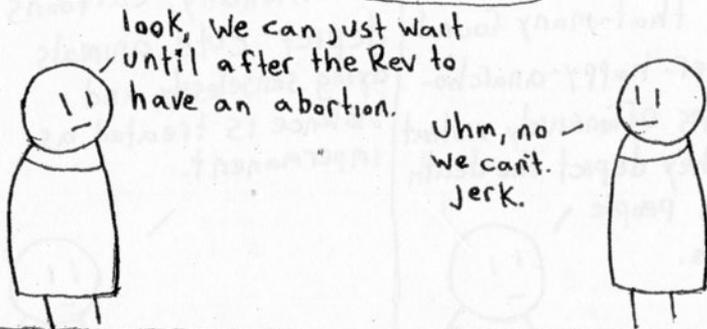
So the anarchist movement is full of hypocrisy, and not just that good crismeth Inc. "doing the best we can" kind.

Actually, I got rid of my patriarchy. my views on emma goldman are more evolved than yours, and I can talk about them louder. also, I have a patch about equality.

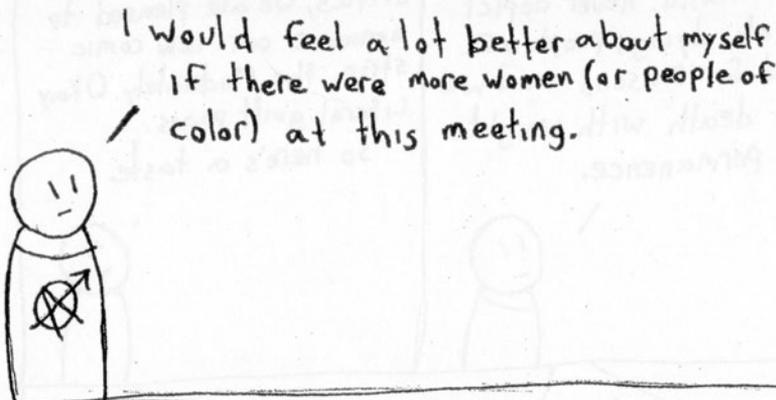
I thought that dishes just washed themselves.



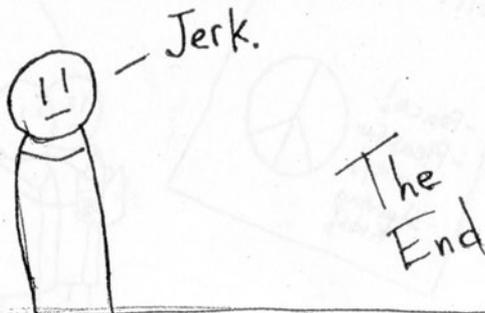
activists often think of women's rights issues as purely reformist. . .



and then wonder why a lot of women burn out after being treated like crap by anarchist men.



So anyway, think about these things.



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introduction

This is a daunting subject. I postponed collecting this zine together for some time, but after speaking to several anarchy-feminist friends of mine I decided that it could be a positive thing. Feminist issues affect men as well as women; patriarchy keeps us all trapped within an oppressive, dominating system. Certainly, however, it is important for men to not steal the spotlight in feminist struggles.

the author and the audience

This zine has one primary author, a twenty-something white male who is mostly attracted to women. I come from a middle-class family. I'm not first and foremost among the oppressed in this world. Yet I will be honest about my selfish motives: I would be happier living in a world without oppression, without gender norms, without class divisions or racial prejudice. I'm an anarchist for myself. I desire feminist culture for myself because I was never the most masculine of boys and as a result I wasn't treated well by my peers growing up. I feel it is important to act in solidarity with, rather than as charity for, women. I realize that women's struggle for liberation is the same struggle I fight for liberation.

Other people of all genders, sexes and sexual orientations have helped tremendously in the creation of this, whether by writing anecdotes, talking about the issues or editing. Anecdotes and quotes from other people are separated from the main text.

This zine is focused primarily on men who sleep with women. Parts apply to anyone who was raised as a man. Parts are about consent in relationships regardless of sex and gender. The entirety comes from a critique that recognizes coercive authority and capitalism as institutions that need to be done away with.

the purpose

I set out with two goals in mind:

- To help men deconstruct patriarchy within themselves for the sake of women’s liberation.
- To help men deconstruct patriarchy within themselves for the sake of their own liberation.

not the purpose

Anarchist feminism for men has nothing to do with liberal guilt. I am not trying to make you feel bad for the way you were raised. This is something you cannot change. If you feel guilty about things you can change, however, change should be considered.

a note on dogma

Little could be more dangerous to an anarchist movement than dogma. All rules are merely guidelines, and all guidelines are merely suggestions.

Dogma can be twisted to suit one’s own ends, much in the way that corporate lawyers cleverly interpret laws to suit their company’s need. I have personally witnessed a sexual assaulter wriggle out of condemnation by carefully wording his statements to fit the dogmatic rhetoric of his anarchist community.

Creating a dogma also allows people to address symptoms instead of diseases. It’s easy to critique someone for saying the wrong word and to try and force them to conform to a certain standard. It’s much harder to address the actual thoughts behind the language that a culture uses.

Dogma creates a hierarchy of knowledge in which those who know subtle rules of language are granted more power. Sometimes men even exert this power over women, claiming to be “better” feminists than someone who doesn’t comply with some illusionary set of rules.

As you read, keep in mind that every situation should be considered within its unique context.

the F word and me

I would be hesitant to label myself a feminist, but not because of any social stigma attached to the word. I would say that I aspire to feminism. I aspire to rid myself of acculturated patriarchy because I see how much it hurts me as well as those around me. In this respect I see how anarchism and feminism are intrinsically linked. They are two different words for, and approaches to, the end of oppression.

patriarchy

Patriarchy is a system based on the domination of women by men. It is more subtle and complex than outright sexism, although sexism is a symptom of patriarchy. You see patriarchy in how men feel more entitled to speak and be heard than women, in the disproportionate workloads between the sexes and the inequality of wages. Patriarchy is at work every time a man feels safe coercing a woman into sex and in how “women & children” are lumped together as resources to be protected. It is seen in how under-represented women are in our political system and in how they are viewed as too prone to emotion to lead. In innumerable ways throughout every aspect of life, women are still treated as inferior.

Anarcha-feminism holds that patriarchy is a system of hierarchy, and that hierarchical thinking reinforces itself. The only way to root out patriarchal thinking is to root out hierarchy, and the only way to root out hierarchy is to overturn the system; the current one was built for coercion from the ground up.

as anarchist men

As anarchists, we reject the master/servant dichotomy. Since patriarchy is a form of domination, we refuse it. Cliché it may be, but none are free while others are in chains. Men feel the lash of patriarchal culture as well, although not as harshly as do our sisters.

Are you afraid to wear skirts, no matter how comfortable they look? Are you afraid to talk about your emotions, particularly with other men? Have you never told your dad, with tears in your eyes, how much you love him? Maybe you're afraid to shave your legs, even if you're curious. Maybe sometimes you want to admit that you don't know something, instead of trying to make up an answer. Maybe you're even afraid to grow your beard because it isn't in style. Is your penis long enough? I sure hope you're able to have sex for hours, be horny 7 days a week and up for it anytime, anyplace.

It's all bullshit.

“Anarchist men have been little better than males everywhere in their subjugation of women. Thus the absolute necessity of a feminist anarchist revolution. Otherwise the very principles on which anarchism is based become utter hypocrisy.”

– Peggy Kornegger²

As it stands, it's quite understandable when women hate men. When I told my mother I was planning on doing this zine, her response was to tell me “the problem is that all men are jerks.” And I couldn't tell her she was wrong.

We need to learn what makes men reinforce patriarchy. We need to leave all the privileges and curses of inequity behind us.

binary gender

Binary gender is the (false) assumption that there are only the two genders that match the two primary sexes. Popular culture is based on this premise. Sure, culture says, some people like cross-dressers and butch lesbians are the opposite gender than their physical sex, but they are still boy or girl, man or woman, dude or chick.

Now, as good anarchists we know that rather than think outside the box, we need to smash the box to pieces. We don't want to pick between two different cages, even if one has more room than the other. Everyone is a mixture of different gender concepts, anyway, and nobody should be constrained to acting within one cage or another.

That said, some people find that when they act naturally, they act within the confines of one of the two traditional genders. The point is to get rid of the barriers, not force people to go outside of them.

Binary gender is a powerful column that helps to hold patriarchy up; without two simple categories to lump people into, it would be ridiculously hard to for one to dominate the other.

smashing things

Unfortunately, smashing binary gender is mostly a metaphorical smashing. However, it's totally okay to smash up Niketown while you're working on smashing patriarchy, and don't let anyone tell you that you're being macho when you are acting out legitimate rage. (When you're just posturing, on the other hand, you are just being macho).

Also, if you set your mind to it, I'm certain you can come up with targets worth smashing for their role in encouraging sexism and patriarchy.

In January 2003 the black bloc in SF attacked Victoria's Secret.³

In 1982 the Wimmin's Fire Brigade of British Columbia, Canada, burned down a chain of porn stores that refused to stop carrying rape porn.⁴

Anarcha-Feminists in Sweden attack Hennes & Mauritz, a fashion company that promotes itself with sexist ads.⁵

Women demanding suffrage in Britain from 1905-1914 firebombed the prime minister's country house as well as rioting regularly.⁶

the role of men in women's struggle

We cannot co-opt the struggle for women's liberation away from women, but instead ought to do what we can to support them.

Primarily, we need to deconstruct the patriarchal attitudes within ourselves and help each other through the process. It would be beautiful if our male-to-male friendships were strong enough to discuss the complex issues involved; a lot of women are pretty sick of having to hold our hands.

gender identification

Your sex is what biological body you have, your gender is what your mindset and emotions tell you that you are. There are two primary sexes, male and female, with other sexes resulting either from birth, surgery and/or hormones. The two culturally accepted genders line up with the two primary sexes.

I feel that the purpose of anarchism is to eschew rigid guidelines and rules, instead forging our own path and creating our own understanding of the world around us. Because of this, destroying binary gender is a pretty obvious necessity.

gender queer

Gender Queer is a concept a lot of people embrace who don't quite consider themselves trans-gendered but realize that they do not fit the "male" or "female" stereotypes. They often identify with some third, fourth or hundred-and-fourth alternate gender.

trannies

A trans-gendered person is someone who identifies most with the opposite gender of their sex. A transsexual is someone who is planning, in the process of, or has completed a physical transformation from one sex to the other (often with the help of hormones and surgery).

Trannies are some of the least confused people around: they know more clearly what their gender is and what their sex ought to be than most people who have never questioned these things.

Remember, if you wouldn't ask a stranger about their genitals and sexual interactions, you probably shouldn't ask a transsexual you don't know well either. There are plenty of resources available online and in bookstores that you can research on your own time to satiate your curiosity.

"normal" genders

Some would be tempted to say - and others have actually said - that by choosing to identify with one of two primary genders, male or female, a person is betraying the gender liberation movement. There are at least two problems with that assertion:

First, there are often people who find it safer to be viewed as a woman or a man... A transsexual woman, for instance, is sometimes quite literally in danger if she is found out to be transsexual. She may therefore decide to try to pass as a traditional woman, whether it is through wearing makeup or stockings or ugly dress-suits or whatever.

Second, it creates artificial boundaries and rules. It restricts a person's freedom if you tell them that they can't grow a beard because it is gender-normative, or that they can't shave their legs for the same reason. Some people will choose to do these things, trying to reach an aesthetic that they desire.

safe spaces

There has been an increased interest in anarchist circles recently to try to create “Safe Space”, or “Safer Space”. The idea is that certain areas should be free from oppressive behavior or people. Often people who have been identified as sexual assaulters aren’t allowed in these sorts of spaces. Often oppressive language is banned.

women-only spaces

So, wouldn’t a community committed to destroying binary gender reject the concept of sexual segregation?

In an ideal world it might. In the meantime, a lot of women choose to only associate with women, either in certain spaces or in general. This is the “free association” that is a basic tenant of anarchism. Even if we don’t always understand it completely, we can accept it.

But why do women’s only actions and spaces form? Because sometimes women get fed up with constantly being treated patriarchally and want to be able to accomplish things without constantly battling the sexism of their male comrades

Hell, I don’t like being around sexist guys either. Bickering and fighting for conversational dominance; competing for the alpha-male position is crap. You can’t blame people for wanting out. The quickest way to deal with this is to liberate yourself from the patriarchal mindset and help the men around you do the same. Be worth being around.

“It would be great if everyone used language that demonstrates respect when referring to a generalized group, but words are just that if they are insincere. Reformed language is not the first step in changing people’s views and consciousness, it’s probably the last.”

- Caitlin Stern⁷

language

As the Tao te Ching puts it, “Even the finest teaching is not the Tao itself. Even the finest name is insufficient to define it.”⁸ That is to say, what matters are intentions and not words; words can never be more than a translation of important concepts.

But in our society, words have a lot of influence. It should come as no surprise that some people decide to write “wimmin”, “womyn” and other such words. In this case, these people are attempting to remove the concept that “women” are merely some derivative form of “men” ala Adam and Eve (you know, how Adam gave up one of his ribs to be made into Eve cause he was tired of jerking off). The same is true with herstory for history. Language is defined by those who use it, not academic texts. As anarchists, we should realize that we cannot allow any centralized authority to govern our language or thought.

Sometimes feminists also choose to exclude words from their vocabulary. You probably don’t use racial slurs against races other than your own, for example, and the same is true of sex and gender. The word “bitch” is usually thrown at any woman who expresses herself strongly (as men are expected to do) and also at any man who allows himself to be penetrated in sex. To use the same word to describe women in general isn’t such a good idea; nor is it smart to use it in the context of demeaning “masculine” women and “feminine” men. Chick, ho, pussy, cunt, fag, dyke, slut, whore. There are plenty of words people demean each other with.

Now, we don’t need to somehow eradicate these words from our heads. This isn’t about censorship; it’s about understanding. Refusing to use a word in the context of talking about the word itself is ludicrous and only empowers the word further. If we can’t talk about similar implications of the words “nigger”, “fag” and “cunt” by name then we’ll have a hard time communicating.

Those three words, in particular, have been reclaimed to varying degrees
10 by the people they are considered slurs for. It would be imprudent to make

the assumption that just because your gay friend calls himself a fag you can safely call all gay men fags, however. It seems like this should go without saying, but it seems to happen quite often in punk/radical scenes.

The word “girl”, used when referring to an adult woman, is problematic to many because it implies a limited age. If your male/female terminology is guy/girl for example, then you are describing an adult male and a female child.

One problem that can arise is if we correct our thought and speech too simplistically is that we can put ourselves into a position where we refer to all females over the age of 13 or so as women. For a while, I used “kids” to describe my friends, but only when they were all men, because I sub-consciously wouldn’t refer to a woman as a kid. I know some females who don’t want to be referred to as women, because they imagine women as old ladies with purses and pump shoes. Just pay attention to your terminology. If you refer to a male as a boy, then referring to a female as a girl isn’t always a problem.

In written language, often people will refer to “men” as a word inclusive of all sexes, or “mankind”. Imagine if every single instance of that, throughout time, were “women” or “womankind” and wonder if you wouldn’t feel excluded.

pronouns

Sometimes people write about “he” as a general pronoun to cover all people. This is most likely the fault of English language; there are very few graceful ways to solve the problem of pronouns. Some people prefer to use “one”, others prefer “s/he”, and still others use “they” to imply a singular person of unspecified gender.

There are gender neutral pronouns around: “ze” and “co” most conspicuously in anarchist circles. It is uncertain as to whether or not they will catch on. “It” is not gender neutral, but instead gender neuter. To refer to a person as an “it” would be to deny that they have any sort of gender, rather than a neutral one.

I personally prefer the method used by some modern anarchist writers; changing between “he” and “she” frequently, they remove both of any definite gender content.

jokes

Jokes are a blurry, blurry issue. They are also one of the most divisive issues conceivable. Are dead baby jokes funny? Are racist/rape jokes funny? Does it depend on who is telling them? Why do people tell these jokes? Are they ever okay, even if it’s only you and your close friend?

Sometimes we use jokes as a way to make light of things that scare us. Often the very people telling or laughing at rape jokes, for instance, are survivors of sexual assault. But different people respond to their experiences of sexual assault in different ways, and most people are triggered by

others making light of it. Any space in which you tell an offensive joke is not a safe space for anyone who isn't likely to understand your intentions completely.

Homophobic, racist, sexist and rape jokes explicitly reinforce oppression. But without knowing the complex background that makes each of us up, you can't know why a person says these jokes. And for the same reason, you can't assume that it is safe to say an offensive joke.

If you're really into some type of joke that is about violence, just change it to be about cops. Everyone hates cops.

And yes, there is 3rd level humor, where you are laughing at the idea that someone could be so fucked up as to say something, but for the most part ironic hipsters have blurred this into oblivion.

body image

women

Turn on the TV (I'm sure you know somebody with a TV) and I bet you can find, at any given time, a sitcom with a fat husband and a thin wife. In fact, according to television, Roseanne and mother-in-laws are the only fat women on the planet.

Obviously, most real women aren't 5'10" with large breasts, a narrow waist and moderate hips. It should follow then, that if we are going to get along well in life, we are going to have to realize that beauty is something that exists wherever it is found.

To free ourselves from one particular unattainable ideal, we can start by throwing away any porn that isn't of a radically feminist bent. We don't need to be bombarded by images of only one type of woman, to say nothing of how strongly almost all porn reinforces sexist (and hetero-sexist) stereotypes of sex. Controlling the mediated experiences (TV, movies, magazines, etc.) in our life allows us to control what we reinforce within ourselves. I'm not saying that if you watch TV or Hollywood movies you're a bad feminist ally, only that we need to be aware of the effects of watching certain modes of behavior and certain body types over and over again.

Most people find that the longer they've been directly experiencing relationships, the more that their horizons broaden to include more body types as beautiful.

I once read an anarchist publication in which a reader asked the question "I've been studying feminism for a long time, yet I still find myself attracted to stereotypically beautiful women. What am I to do?"

The publication's response was, in effect, to explain all the things wrong with liking stereotypically beautiful women, and to refer him to other books

I find that very problematic. Reading and theory are not the be-all-and-end-all of it. Reading won't solve the problems of internalized beauty standards, but association might. If we get to know people for their own sake, rather than for some sexual desire, genuine friendships can form. The longer you associate with a diverse range of people, the more you will find things attractive about all different kinds of people. And eventually, you still might end up attracted to people whom society finds attractive as well. Worse things have happened.

Other media stereotypes about female beauty are quite a relief to get off your mind. Hairy legs, armpits, arms, pubic thatches, etc. can be quite erotic once you start getting to know women who don't shave. All the natural body scents are amazing. The subtle (or not so subtle) curve of a belly is attractive. And yes, women often look much better without makeup.

It's not our place, however, to judge anybody for making decisions about their body. I know I would be a hypocrite to judge women for wearing makeup.

men

Men also suffer in this society from patriarchal views of the body. We are supposed to have big dicks, we are supposed to refer to them as our guns. We are to be stronger than women are by some standards, smarter by other standards.

If we have incomplete facial hair we need to be mocked, so that we are pressured into shaving "those ugly pubes" off of our faces. Sexually, we are to be inexhaustible. We are to be able to go for hours. If we are conscientious of women, then we are supposed to always last long enough to make them come, or we have failed at sex (hrmm... good thing there are other ways to make our partners come). We think about sex every 3 minutes apparently too.

Having a hairy butt or chest is gross, but shaving it is womanly (whatever the hell that means).

Ask a short guy if he has any problems with social conceptions of maleness. Ask a fat guy the same thing.

Unfortunately, knowing that it's all a load of crap doesn't save us from feeling awkward about our bodies or habits. It probably won't stop until we do away with forced gender norms, even if it is just among our group of friends.

sexual assault

Once again, women without a doubt have it worse than men. To claim otherwise would be to deny reality. But some of the myths in patriarchal culture make it hard for men to come to terms with sexual assault.

Men can be sexually assaulted, and women can be sexual assaulters. It is a sexist myth that men are always the perpetrators and women are always the victims.

Often I have heard both men and women make the assertion that a man cannot be raped by a woman. It has to do with a concept about consent that is often used against the female survivors of sexual assault: the biological functioning of a body will often force a body to get aroused, male or female.

A hard dick or wet cunt do not consent make.

On more than one occasion I have been sexually assaulted by women. Once was by a woman I was in a relationship with, and once was by a stranger. Neither thought they were doing anything particularly wrong. I don't think, even now, they realize. An interesting part of being raised as a man is that I didn't think either had done anything wrong myself for a long time. I did, however, become distrustful and unhappy. In one instance I thought I had cheated on my girlfriend. I sometimes have a hard time trusting women I'm close to because of this history.

It was actually through feminist thought that I started to realize that what had happened was date rape. It has only been with the help of a few understanding lovers in the years since that I have been able to regain any sort of real trust.⁹

It's incredibly hard for anyone to come forward about rape. Our culture is in denial about the pervasive nature of sexual assault. The feminist movement has been working hard for decades (centuries? millennia?) to make women feel safer about coming forward as survivors of sexual assault and rape, and there is still so much work to be done. But at least by now large segments of society are starting to recognize that date rape and sexual coercion exist (the legal system on the other hand, hasn't caught on and probably never will. Thus the whole "overthrow the government" thing..).

Men almost never come forward about instances of assault and rape by women. Most of the time men cannot even fathom that it could have been assault or rape, and they place blame on themselves for not stopping the situation. (the same is true for most women survivors of sexual assault.) If men do come forward, they are disbelieved; the rape is dismissed as a complete fluke or they are told that they are exaggerating the circumstances. (gee, same thing happens to women.)

Men rarely come forward about instances of assault and rape by other men. It is, in our culture, incredibly demeaning to be penetrated by another man, and it is probably viewed as the ultimate form of rape. This seems to come from our culture's tendency to consider it "submissive" and "unmanly", and therefore inferior, to be penetrated during sex. Which of course, carries into our society's view of women. But for men who are raped by men, it makes it incredibly hard, and embarrassing, to come forward. The sad truth is that people violate people, regardless of sex, gender, or sexual orientation. Sometimes it is malicious, sometimes it is coercive, and sometimes it is accidental. It's a little matter of...

consent

It should go without saying that sexually violating someone maliciously is wrong. Also it should be obvious to anyone with an understanding of patriarchal society that coercing someone into sex is wrong. How then, to avoid accidentally violating boundaries? Often, a person will not really feel empowered to stop a partner from taking things further. They could be afraid of embarrassment, of rejection, or of their "no" not being respected without question. Sometimes, people make "compromises" in which they decide to go further than they want in order to avoid being pressured into doing certain things.

So I guess we'll just have to ask, wont we? Consent must be explicitly clear between two people in order to avoid accidentally doing something that the other person doesn't want. What if the boy you're with was orally assaulted in the past and is triggered by you going down on him? What if the woman you're with is bleeding and isn't okay with being fingered today when it was okay yesterday? And if you feel like it's too awkward to ask, wouldn't it be even more awkward to do?

Most reasoning against explicit verbal consent is reminiscent of reasoning against condoms. "It kills the mood." "It isn't sexy." Etc. If you've reached an understanding with your partner previously, then fine. But if you're in the exploratory stages, physical protection and explicit verbal consent make a hell of a lot of sense. Concern for the welfare of your partner is a whole lot more intimate than assumptions.

triggers

One thing that often happens during psychologically damaging experiences is that a survivor develops triggers. Later, something can remind

them, consciously or not, and they relive at least part of the negative feelings from before. A trigger could be certain sexual acts, or it could be certain situations, odors or sights. It's important to try to understand your partner, without prying rudely into their past, to avoid triggering them.

boundaries

People have them. It can be hard to know where your own boundaries are until you've thought about them a lot.

Once you realize what your boundaries are, it is easier to realize that you shouldn't make assumptions about other people's boundaries. The Satanists have an attitude that could be summed up as "don't do unto others as you would have them do unto you, because how the hell would you know if what they want is the same thing that you want?"¹⁰

Just because you wish you were cuddling with someone doesn't mean they want you to. It isn't safe to assume that a person wants you to stand close to them. Strangers might not want you to hug them. C'mon, who hasn't been annoyed by hippies that do this? Think about your boundaries and respect other people's.

It is probably a good idea to have a conversation with a partner about these things. Find somewhere where you won't be interrupted, in a non-sexual circumstance (like, not lying in bed post or pre-coital). Talk about triggers, boundaries, consent, STDs, abortion, all of the things that complicate sex. It feels good to have that sort of thing out of the way.

repercussions of assault

Sexual assault is going to occur, even within our radical scenes. The question of what to do about it is one that comes up frequently and causes divisions within radical communities almost every time. The subject is too large and scary to cover adequately in these pages. The important thing to remember is to not condemn a survivor of sexual assault for actions they may choose to take or not take. Calling the cops, for example, isn't a very anarchist thing to do. But neither is raping someone, so we need to let the survivor make up their own mind about it. If they want street justice to be done to the assaulter, that is their choice also. Just be supportive, and don't make assumptions.

power dynamics

Most anarchists are against ageism — the concept that you can judge and critique a person based upon the number of times they've gone around the sun. And rightly so; youth are equally entitled to their opinions and freedom. But there are power dynamics in relationships. These, not numbers, are what are important.

In many anarchist punk scenes, for example, you will find only younger women, despite diversity in the ages of men. Why? Because young women often enter a scene (often only invited in the first place by a boyfriend), end up being identified primarily as sexual objects, eventually get frustrated with the boy's club, and leave.

A more experienced person in any given scene has more social power (I believe "cred" is the word) than someone who is new, regardless of age. Also, as people age they are likely to gain more self-esteem and be more certain of themselves in general. Unless it is thought about, power dynamics between two lovers can easily go unnoticed, wreaking havoc on both people. This isn't to say that older men shouldn't ever date younger women, but many find they get greater fulfillment out of dating their peers (and not just peers by age).

It could be the handsome, experienced organizer who ends up dating a large portion of the newly involved (and usually younger) women who enter a political scene. It could be the singer of the popular crust band. It could be the charming wanderer who floats into town with a myriad of stories of adventure.

The person with the upper hand might not be aware of the discrepancy. Although some who are predatory, many more people are honestly and simply attracted to these new people.

It's a downward spiral, however. If every new woman in a scene ends up in these skewed relationships and leaves as a result, the men in the scene will seemingly have little choice but continue to date the younger (those being the only women around).

Couples with a lopsided power dynamic can still date, certainly, but it is important that the power dynamic be considered. What is it that this less experienced person has to offer you? Are you attracted to them because of their adoration of you? From a purely sexual point of view? Do you honestly respect their opinions or do you find them a bit naive? Is there an equal exchange in the relationship, sexually, intellectually, emotionally?

relationship gender roles

initiation

As a consequence of being considered primarily by their beauty, women are often forced into the reactive position, saying yes or no to a proactive man.

You can make the first move and still be a good feminist ally. But if you're always making the first move, then something is probably awry. It is also important to be as aware as possible of people's desires (and lack of desires).

Ever been kissin' someone and felt like their heart just wasn't in it? Then maybe you need to think about it, or talk about it, or not kiss them.

When I first really started thinking about these dynamics, my first reaction was to force myself into the reactive position, and never make any moves on anyone. I ended up being approached by people whom I never would have approached, and when they tried to kiss me I didn't stop them.

Since I hadn't stopped them once, I felt a strange obligation to keep kissing them. Only I didn't really want to. This is what it's like to be only in the reactive position when you are unclear about your boundaries and who you are attracted to.

It didn't solve any of my problems to force myself into the reactive role like that; it only put me in an uncomfortable position.¹¹

in the relationship

If your relationship falls into traditional gender roles, ask yourself why it does. Sometimes, relationships fall into traditional gender roles for a good reason, but more often they do it simply because it is what we are used to.

Some stereotypes in anarchist relationships:

The man is a busy, hard-working organizer who is constantly stressing himself out. The woman supports him; maybe massaging him every night, or telling him that what he's doing is good and necessary. Even if the woman is a hard-working organizer in her own right, often it ends up that she has to be the comforting partner in a relationship.

In anarchist culture, where nonconsumption is a virtue, many decide to go jobless. Without an income to provide housing, many squat. Many couch-surf. And many shack up with a lover. All too often, when squat-

ter boys shack up they fall into the habit of having all of their living expenses paid for by their partners. Instead of liberating themselves from the capitalist economy, they just live off someone else, turning women into the providers. Frequently, the girlfriend goes to school and has a job, sharing her paid-for bed and her paid-for food with her “squatter” boyfriend. The comparisons to cultures that we look down on are frightening. There are responsible ways to shack up: make certain to provide for yourself and your partner in other ways.

Men are encouraged by culture to be hypocrites about cheating. In monogamous relationships, often the man is allowed to flirt, or at least hang out with, other women, but is insecure about his partner hanging out and flirting with other men. Even in non-monogamous relationships this double standard often emerges.

Movies influence my thoughts. Both old movies and new movies have ideas about people cheating on one another; in old movies it is apparent that men are supposed to have their mistresses and that woman are objects to be used for pleasure. I, for one, have always thought to myself, “well I’m not like that and I don’t need sex,” but I never trusted that other people were any different than the people on the screen. In newer movies they make it a point that all anyone really wants is sex, and that they’ll get it wherever they can. If you leave your loved one alone for too long they will go out and find someone else, since sex is their only need. They reinforce the concept that a woman cannot go for very long without sex; a woman away from her partner grabs the closest person to them.

Women in movies do not tend to have male friends unless they are secretly sleeping with them. I end up feeling that any male friend is a threat to my relationship. I may know the source of the problem, but it is still hard to get past something that has been told to me over and over since I was a small child.

Hollywood is the devil and if you’re not careful it can ruin even the best of relationships.¹²

sexual & reproductive health

stds

Most common STDs are less likely to cause symptoms or health complications in men than in women. Getting tested regularly, not just when you get symptoms, and not just for HIV, is important. HPV (the virus that can cause genital warts) is particularly dangerous because it is expensive to test for, causes no real problems for men and can cause cervical cancer in women. It can also pass through condoms. Scary? Yup.

Getting tested for HPV can be incredibly difficult though, particularly for those of us in the “broke” class. Doctors will usually just tell you that it is a non-issue. Just do what you can.

abortion

Respect and defend a woman’s right to choose. As men, we aren’t in the best position to understand the complexities of pregnancy and abortion, so we should more or less just stick with our women comrades on this one.

It’s probably a good idea to talk about abortion with a potential lover before you have vaginal intercourse for the first time. My worst nightmare is to impregnate a woman only to find out she wasn’t willing to abort (some pro-choice advocates still would not personally choose to have an abortion). I don’t want to have an unplanned child. Talk this over beforehand, because...

When it comes down to it, it really is a woman’s right to choose what to do with her body. You may want to abort it, but if she doesn’t, you can’t force her to. You may want to keep it, but if she doesn’t want to she doesn’t have to. If a partner of yours is pregnant and chooses to abort, it should go without saying that you should be as supportive and respectful as possible, in any way possible.

patriarchy in organizing

I once had the pleasure of sitting in on a meeting to organize an all-women’s action in relation to a project I was working on. It went quickly, accomplished a lot, consensus was reached, nobody talked over or interrupted anybody, and almost everybody present was heard from.

When I compare this to mixed sex meetings I have been to (oh, I could mourn for the hundreds of hours gone from my life...) I can’t help but feel that women have the advantage over men when it comes to organizing anarchistically. Men are taught to make their every opinion heard and understood, to re-iterate points, and generally try and control everything happening around them. In the context of consensus meetings, this is deadly.

What is to be done? Well, for starters, make certain that you have thought
20 about what you are going to say before you say it. Also, I’ve found that if

you just shut up, usually someone will make your point for you. If nobody does, go ahead and speak up about it, but realize that everyone else in the meeting has their own well-thought-out opinions as well. And you might not have to reiterate your point for people to get it.

As in punk scenes, women can be fairly transient in anarchist organizing circles. And why shouldn't they be? A structureless, "leaderless" organization will often have a de-facto leader, usually a man, who gets his way by force of will and experience.

Worse, many women are only treated with respect and listened to when they are perceived as sexually available. This is particularly true in the male-dominated fields of technology; computer and video collectives are both notorious in this way. Men often do this without even realizing it.

So think about the gender dynamics of situations.

Often women do the grunt organizing: flying, phone calls, office work, cleaning, cooking. It's not because they are asked to or because men feel like the women should be doing it. It's because men don't step up to these roles that we usually just plain take for granted. We want to focus on the big, sexy actions. We want to be the media spokes, or work out the black bloc tactical decisions, or whatever. Not that these aren't important roles to fill, but they aren't the only jobs that need to get done.

Step up to do grunt work for your organizations. Make copies, clean the office, and cook dinner. At least wash the damn dishes after everybody eats. Don't insist on replacing a woman occupied with any of these tasks, but offer. It can be insulting to act as though stereotypically "female" tasks automatically victimize a woman.

Anarchists have a habit of rejecting all work that utilizes the system as reformist and liberal. However, certain gendered issues are imperative to us in order to keep our women comrades and ourselves safe while we work for total liberation. Obviously, prison abolition work is very important to us. Likewise, working for trans-acceptance, queer liberation and abortion rights, or at least supporting those who do, is important.

Certainly, we need to take an anarchist approach to these issues. Fighting the "glass ceiling" that keeps women from having the power to fuck everyone over like men do isn't part of an anarcha-feminist critique.

violence

When I was little, boys climbed trees and girls didn't. To therefore claim that climbing trees is masculine, or macho, seems like a weak argument... more likely, girls had it reinforced that treeclimbing was something boys, and not girls, did. I hate when we, as a radical culture, reinforce these stereotypes. Physical training is called macho. Sparring is called macho. Learning acrobatics is even, somehow, called macho.

If you are better at fighting than someone and you domineer him or her because of it, sure, that's macho. But preparing yourself, with your friends, for physical conflict has more to do with responsible anarchism than any gender determination.

However, because of upbringing, many women don't find it easy to become involved in sparring or physical competitions. In my experiences, many (not all) women need to be encouraged to join in. This also applies to men, like me, who grew up avoiding physical contests and need an environment that is welcoming to beginners as well as experts in order to become involved. Also, remember that as anarchists we are not battling for supremacy, but rather working together to hone our abilities.

There is a fairly prevalent strain of (mostly liberal) feminism that encourages, essentially, the equation Violence = Patriarchy. This, however, is based deeply in our culture's prejudices regarding gender and sex. It is based in this theoretical world in which men are violent and women are passive. When women are violent or aggressive, they are being masculine, it is assumed. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Although there are huge aspects of our primary culture that are both violent and patriarchal (imperialist war and domestic abuse to name just two), violence itself is intrinsically a part of the human experience. It is not, by its very nature, gendered.

In nearly every revolution, women take up arms as readily as men, lead as well as men, die as well as men. And usually they are told that they will be treated as equals after the revolution. In most cases, this is a lie. (State communists were a notable exception, but then again, they didn't create the most libertarian of societies. Being equally oppressed is still pretty crappy.)

As long as there have been feminists, there have been militant feminists who believed that if they would not be granted equality, they would take it by force. Anarchists understand this point of view. If we are not granted liberty, then indeed we shall take it.

Self-defense is a right, not a symptom of patriarchy.

emotions

If girls are taught not to be violent, boys are taught not to be emotional. Except in very few circumstances, like when alone with a female lover, men are to be stoic and unflinching. And although there is a place for stoicism in active militant struggle, very few anarchists spend most of their time engaged in physical confrontation with the state.

We have a lot of work to do to get in touch with our emotions.

It really is just nicer to know how you feel, and how other people feel about you. I want to be able to be as emotionally connected with my male friends, regardless of physical attraction, as I am with my female friends,

how to not be a complete fucking douche bag¹³

Don't allow your new-found "feminism" to be some way to meet women. Just don't.

Don't brag about your anti-patriarchy work. You can bring it up in context, of course, but don't brag. Do not think that because you are "working on your shit" that you are exempt from responsibility for any actions that you take. The most important thing is not what you say, or even what you think, it's what you do. If you still coerce women, or push through people's boundaries, then you're still acting sexist, no matter how loudly you yell to beat up sexist, cat-calling jocks.

footnotes

- 1 - Farrow, Lynne. "Feminism as Anarchism" Quiet Rumours. Dark Star Press. Oakland: AK Press, 2002
- 2 - Kornegger, Peggy. "Anarchism: the Feminist Connection" Quiet Rumours. Dark Star Press. Oakland: AK Press, 2002
- 3 - see <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2003/01/19/15620241.php>
- 4 - see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Squamish_Five
- 5 - see <http://www.spunk.org/texts/anarcfem/sp001834.html>
- 6 - see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage
- 7 - Stern, Caitlin. Quote is from personal correspondence.
- 8 - see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tao>
- 9 - Anonymous
- 10 - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Satanism#Satanic_philosophy
- 11 - Anonymous
- 12 - Anonymous
- 13 - douche bag is a term decided upon after long deliberation. Unlike most insults, it does not slander anything normal, like "suck". Douch bags are mostly useless things that promote the concept that women are unclean.

see also

www.anarcha.org/sallydarity

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<http://magpie.manifestor.org>

