AN INTRODUCTION TO FEMINISM, GENDER, & SEXUALITY

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Content warning!
This workshop contains sensitive and challenging material. Please take a break if you need to.
THIS GUY IS WANT TO BE PRESIDENT

in Donald Trump’s own words:

On Hillary Clinton:
"SHE GOT SCHLONGED" in the 2008 election

On what the media says about him:
“It doesn’t really matter... As long as you’ve got a YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL PIECE OF ASS.”

On women:
“dogs” “fat pigs” "disgusting animals"

On military sexual assault:
“What did these geniuses expect when they put men & women together?”

On motherhood:
Called a breastfeeding employee "DISGUSTING."

SOURCES: WEAREULTRAVIOLET.ORG/TRUMP
Objectives

- Define and use specialist terminology within gender theory.
- Grasp the difference between structural/systematic and accidental/individual features of the social world.
- Understand the importance of intersectionality.
- Recognise and understand the origins of gender myths.
- Examine objectification, violence, and globalization in the context of gender studies.
Across the world, 35% of women experience domestic or sexual violence at some point in their lives (WHO, 2014).

Across all world regions, women spend twice as long as men on unpaid domestic work (UN, 2010).

The UK gender pay gap is around 20% (Equal Pay Portal, 2013).

Globally, 17% of parliamentary seats are held by women (UN, 2010).

Two-thirds of the world’s illiterate people are women (UNDP).
Preliminary claims

“No society treats its women as well as its men” (Wamala and Kawachi).

I will argue for, and draw upon, two facts:

- women are primary caregivers in a world in which caregiving is not seen as valuable, but is viewed as dirty, unskilled, and undesirable;
- women are objectified, embodied, and hyper-sexualised in a world in which sex is seen as bad and dirty.

We are taught that women are these things by nature.
Terminology

Feminism
Privilege
Oppression
Gender
Sex
Sexuality
Intersectionality
Social construction
Oppression and Privilege
Oppression
Oppression

[Oppression is] the experience of being caged in.... Consider a birdcage. If you look very closely at just one wire, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire ... it is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere; and then you will see it in a moment. (Frye, 1983,5-6)
Oppression

“One of the most characteristic and ubiquitous features of the world as experienced by oppressed people is the **double bind**—situations in which options are reduced to a **very few** and all of them expose one to **penalty, censure or deprivation**. For example, it is often a requirement upon oppressed people that we smile and be cheerful. If we comply, we signal our docility and our acquiescence in our situation. We need not, then, be taken note of. We acquiesce in being made invisible, in our occupying no space. We participate in our own erasure. On the other hand, anything but the sunniest countenance exposes us to being perceived as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous. This means, at the least, that we may be found “difficult” or unpleasant to work with, which is enough to cost one one’s livelihood; at worst, being seen as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous has been known to result in rape, arrest, beating and murder. One can only choose to risk one’s preferred form and rate of annihilation” (*ibid.*).
Definitions: privilege
Definitions: privilege

“…uneared assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was ‘meant’ to remain oblivious… like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks.”

-- Peggy McIntosh
There is an important distinction between structural social realities, and accidental ones.

This is why “reverse-sexism” and “reverse-racism” are not meaningful concepts.
What about the science?

Biological determinism and social construction
Biological determinism

In 1889, Thomas claimed that sex-variant metabolic states brought about differences in social, psychological, and behavioural traits. That is: women conserve energy, which renders them stable, inert, passive, and uninterested in political life. Men, on the other hand, expend their excess energy, and are therefore fit for violence, war, sport, and politics.

In the 1970s, it was claimed that women should not be employed as aeroplane pilots lest their menses interfere with their ability to reliably carry out their jobs.
Biological determinism
In 1992, *Time* magazine published an article which posited a sex-based difference in cognitive ability based on the thickness of the **corpus callosum**, which bridges the hemispheres of the brain. It was claimed that the bridge is wider in women than in men, allowing for more connections between areas of the brain, which ostensibly accounted for women's “intuition” and ability to multi-task, whilst impairing our ability to perform focussed visual-spatial tasks, like parking a vehicle or complex mathematics.
Biological determinism

Fausto-Sterling (2000):

(a) the corpus callosum exhibits considerable natural variation;
(b) purported sex-differences not observed in infants, therefore differential treatment is a better hypothesis;
(c) visual-spatial skills and multi-tasking skills are hugely improved with practice.

In fact, a meta analysis of 49 studies on the corpus callosum since 1980 found no difference between the sexes.

The mainstream media ignored this study.
Scientists find secret ingredient for making (and losing) lots of money - testosterone

- Study links male hormone with earning power
- But too much can lead to irrational risk-taking

In the film Wall Street, which symphorised the excess of the 1980s, the most successful traders were odious alpha males with aggression seeping from every pore.
But stereotypes often have a kernel of truth, and researchers from Cambridge University have concluded what everyone outside the City has always suspected.

High Testosterone Means High Profits
By Adam Smith London  Monday, Apr. 14, 2008

You can almost hear Gordon Gekko cheer. Financial traders are widely seen as filthy rich, brash, and, well, ballsy. Now it turns out that there’s cash in those cojones. According to new research from the University of Cambridge, a male trader’s daily testosterone level is higher on days when he makes more than he would in an average day. What’s more, the higher a trader’s morning testosterone level, the more money he’ll likely have netted before the close of business that day. Testosterone, in other words, can be good for business.
Biological determinism

“Conclusive” study (2008)
sample of 17
testosterone
hormones in saliva
University of Cambridge
Widespread media coverage

Inconclusive study (2009)
sample of 200
testosterone and oestrogen
hormones in blood
two universities in Sweden
Resounding silence
Biological determinism

A major scientific idea which feminists aim to complicate is that of **biological determinism**. This is the idea that the most important causes of certain human phenomena are genetically determined within individuals, rather than culturally determined across societies.

This is fine as a source of explanations for particular facts, but most human behaviour and relationships are so heavily determined by society and culture that weighing in favour of biological/genetic explanations is not justifiable or helpful, and is often false.

Q: Innocent over-simplification, or pernicious normalisation and apologism?
Getting our facts straight …

What does it mean to be female/male?
What does it mean to be a woman/man?
What are the connections between them?
“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature … which is described as feminine” (SdB, SS).
“One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body. ... Those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished. ... The various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. ... The tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of its own production. The authors of gender become entranced by their own fictions whereby the construction compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness” (Butler, p. 99).
Making gender
Making sex?

Whilst biology is often considered to influence cultural norms, the inverse effect is often ignored.

Social forces can and do influence sexed bodies.

In many societies, women are fed less or fed less well, accentuating the difference in physical size and strength; women are discouraged from playing vigorous sports and building muscles; women are encouraged and rewarded for removing body hair and undergoing surgery; covering up skin means that women are at higher risk of having weak bones, but may have fairer complexions.
Making heterosexuality?

Institutional, cultural, economic, and legal systems encourage, reward, and advertise heterosexuality, promoting the assumption that it is the norm, and thereby reinforcing its power.
The Genderbread Person v3.3

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don’t. Like Inception. Gender isn’t binary. It’s not either/or. In many cases it’s both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for gender understanding. It’s okay if you’re hungry for more. In fact, that’s the idea.

Gender Identity

- Woman-ness
- Man-ness

How you, in your head, define your gender; based on how much you align (or don’t align) with what you understand to be the options for gender.

Gender Expression

- Feminine
- Masculine

The ways you present gender; through your actions, dress, and demeanor; and how those presentations are interpreted based on gender norms.

Biological Sex

- Female-ness
- Male-ness

The physical sex characteristics you’re born with and develop, including genitalia, body shape, voice pitch, body hair; hormones, chromosomes, etc.

Sexually Attracted to

- Nobody
- Women/Females/Femininity
- Men/Males/Masculinity

Romantically Attracted to

- Nobody
- Women/Females/Femininity
- Men/Males/Masculinity

In each grouping, circle all that apply to you and plot a point, depicting the aspects of gender toward which you experience attraction.

For a bigger bite, read more at http://bit.ly/genderbread
A brief history of patriarchy …

At first sight, it seems as though the obvious explanation comes from biology, specifically: evolutionary biology.

After all, men, (a) on average seem to exhibit heavier musculature, and (b) only women have the bodily machinery for child-bearing.

In reality, ethnographies show that the division of labour, and attitudes towards child-bearing differ from culture to culture; that is, it is not the case that men always perform heavy labour, and it is not the case that women are devalued on the basis of their reproductive potential. Yet in all cases, there is a well-defined dichotomy of gender norms, and those norms systematically privilege men.

So we need to look elsewhere …
Patriarchy seems to have emerged from primitive kinships systems in pre-state societies. Kinship systems were premised on the exchange of women as the most valuable of gifts.

With women as gifts, and men as gift-exchange partners, the subject-object relationship was established. So too was the compulsion to control female sexuality and autonomy, and enforce heterosexuality and marriage.
The politics and psychology of oppression

Why does oppression persist?
(a) Social barriers, including direct and structural violence;

(b) the dispersal of women throughout society precludes solidarity: women “live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing, to certain men — fathers or husbands — more firmly than they are to other women” (SS, p.5). Women are themselves differently situated;

(c) the internalisation of oppression, resulting in self-hatred, self-rejection, and low self-esteem: the belief in inferiority, and the avoidance of shame.
If you want to make it through, JUST BE YOURSELF!
Intersectionality

Race  Sex/gender  Nationality  Class

Disability  Sexuality  Cis/trans  Age

Ethnicity  Religion  Caste
Intersectionality: Kimberlé W. Crenshaw (1991)
Starting to think intersectionally ...

If you don’t have to think about it, it’s a privilege.

locating yourself
admitting privilege
not being defensive
granting credibility
Suffrage (1851)

"Ain't I a Woman?

a midwest newspaper of women's liberation
Vol. 1 No. 2 July 10, 1970
published by the publications collective, iowa city w.f.
Forced sterilization (1904-1963)
Women in the domestic sphere (1963)
Domestic violence (1985)
Slutwalks (2011)
Lean in (2013)
Burkinigate (2016)
Objectification and sexualisation
Content warning!
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ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS
Objectification

When a person is viewed and-or treated as an object, rather than a subject. Objectification dehumanises the person in question and ignores or subjugates her agency. Sexual objectification is considered to be a major component of the way in which a patriarchal society oppresses women. Amongst other things, it involves treating women as property, ignoring women's subjectivity, silencing, and viewing them as instrumental to the desires of men.
Objectification

**Instrumentality.** The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.

**Denial of autonomy.** The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.

**Inertness.** The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.

**Fungibility.** The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type and/or (b) with objects of other types.

**Violability.** The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.

**Ownership.** The objectifier treats the object as something that is owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.

**Denial of subjectivity.** The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.
Pornography is one of the most extreme and obvious everyday examples of the sexual objectification of women. The consumption of pornographic material by men contributes heavily to the creation and maintenance of the view of women as sex objects.

Pornography can be defined as ‘the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women though pictures or words that also includes women dehumanised as sexual objects, things, or commodities; enjoying pain or humiliation or rape; being tied up, cut up, mutilated, bruised, or physically hurt; in postures of sexual submission or servility or display; reduced to body parts, penetrated by objects or animals, or presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, torture; shown as filthy or inferior; bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual’ (MacKinnon 1987, 176).
Violence against women

Approximately 85,000 women are raped on average in England and Wales every year.

Over 400,000 women are sexually assaulted each year.

1 in 5 women (aged 16 – 59) has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 16.

According to a 2005 Amnesty survey, more than a quarter of those asked (26%) said they thought a woman was partially or totally responsible for being raped if she was wearing sexy/revealing clothing. More than one in five (22%) held the same view for women who have had many sexual partners.

N.B. Less than 2% of reported rapes are proven to be false. It is more common for a person to fake their own death than lie about rape.
Back in 2006, a rapist in Manitoba, Canada, was given no jail time because, according to the judge, the 26-year-old woman, who was forced into intercourse in the woods along a highway, met the rapist under "inviting circumstances." He noted that she and her friend were wearing, "tube tops with no bra, high heels and plenty of makeup."

"They made their intentions publicly known that they wanted to party ... This is a different case than one where there is no perceived invitation," the judge, Robert Dewar, said. "This is a case of misunderstood signals and inconsiderate behavior."

"If I’m walking around in my underwear and I’m drunk? Who else’s fault can it be? [...] You know, if you don’t want to entice a rapist, don’t wear high heels so you can’t run from him. If you’re wearing something that says, 'Come and fuck me,' you’d better be good on your feet." Chrissie Hynde, 2015.

After 118 women were killed in acts of domestic violence in Italy that year, along with a wave of sexual violence throughout the country: "They provoke the worst instincts, which end in violence or sexual abuse [...] They should search their consciences and ask: Did we bring this on ourselves?" Piero Corsi, a Catholic priest in Italy in 2012.

Source: https://mic.com/articles/141781/here-are-9-times-clothing-was-blamed-for-sexual-assault-rather-than-the-obvious#.LOx4eqEoQ
Policing bodies

Across cultures, women’s bodies are subject to expensive, uncomfortable, time-consuming, and often dangerous modifications, such as:

FGM and female cosmetic genital surgery
Hymen reconstruction
Various forms of cosmetic surgery
Starvation and-or malnourishment
Hair removal
Skin whitening/tanning
Assorted cosmetic treatments

Historically:
Foot-binding
Corsets
Feminism in the real world
Gender in a globalised world
Feminization of labour

Trade expansion: living-wage Global North jobs relocated to Global South. New industrial working class of poor women in export processing zones (EPZs), generally in Asia.

Racism and sexism: Asian governments entice foreign corporate investors with the prospect of docile, industrious, desperate women, satisfied with tedious, unrewarding work. The same is true in new sectors of the immigrant populations of the Global North.

Full-time work seen as supplementary; women assumed to be supplementing salaries of breadwinner partners. Fewminised work is low security, poorly-paid, with zero-hour contracts. Sexual harrassment is rife due to desperate poverty and lack of unionisation.
Economic restructuring

Structural adjustment to service debt includes lowering wages, increasing the price of daily necessities, and decimating public services. Women bear the brunt of these changes, since they have primary care-taking responsibilities. Daughters are very often withdrawn from education in order to help their mothers make up the shortfall, trapping a new generation of girls into a cycle of poverty.

“A 2013 GFI report found that even after you account for all types of financial flows (both legitimate and illegitimate)—including investment, remittances, debt forgiveness, and natural resource exports—Africa is a net creditor to the world” Global Financial Integrity.
The rise and rise of pornography has accelerated and globalised the sexualisation of women. Sex trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation is now the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world (98% of those trafficked are women and girls). For some countries in Asia and the Caribbean, local economies are critically dependent on sex work as their primary source of income. The disintegration of rural communities and migration to cities, coupled with poverty, have exacerbated the desperation that forces women into sex work and its associated vulnerabilities.
Environmental degradation
Globalising oppression: domestic work and the global care chain

A wealthy global north woman who has a well paid job does no domestic work, but … … pays a Global South migrant domestic worker a low salary …. … who pays another Global South non-migrant worker a tiny salary … … who brings the tiny salary home to share with a daughter/mother who does unpaid domestic work.

(How to break the cycle? Instead of talking about women as the world’s untapped economic resource, how about men as the world’s untapped care resource?)
The global market in female bodies

Globalisation, coupled with the cross-cultural objectification of the female body, has resulted in commodification of female bodies across a growing global market.

What kind of future should we expect?

Global South bodies are purchased by Global North consumers for:

- Surrogacy
- Sex work
- Domestic work
- Carework
Feminism for a struggling world

**Spice-girls feminism:**
You can have it all!

**Intersectional feminism:**
The radical notion that you *can’t* have it all!

Our struggle is *not* individual, it is both local and global. **Making gains at the expense of other women** or at the expense of poor or racialised communities is *not* feminism.

Being an ally, extending solidarity, offering your privilege as a resource for others’ self-determined needs *is* feminism.

Real feminism is a moral commitment to a fight for justice. It begins with the most oppressed, and **no-one is left behind**.