

That's Not Feminism: 3 Ways Women Advocate For Their Own Oppression

Another women's march has come and gone, and once again I wasn't in attendance. Not because I am anti-woman (I would actually argue that I am more pro-woman than even the most die hard feminists), and not because I don't think women should have equal opportunities and treatment as men. Of course I do. At this point, who doesn't, really? (Donald Humpty Dump and his cronies don't count). I love seeing all the ways we demand our rights and equality (like intersectionality), and saddened by the issues that don't make it to mainstream media (like rights in childbirth).

At the same time, women aren't men, and often times feminism seems to me more about women wanting to become like men than more like... women.

The patriarchy runs so deep that we can easily find ourselves knocking on the doors of it and desperately asking to join the ranks and systems of a man created world. Personally, I would much rather tune into the power of what makes us female, and work to take down the current model, recreating a new one that wholly supports what it fundamentally means to be a woman. In all of our intuition, vitality, and nurturing spirits.

Don't mistake this to mean that I believe women and men should be pigeonholed in set gender roles and stereotypes. With that said, and I will say it again, women and men *are* different, and *that is ok*. Not only is it ok, but it is crucial for the health and continuation and cooperation of our species.

Something I often see in the feminist movement (and I am a feminist!) is women demanding for something that appears on the outside will liberate them, but in reality, it only furthers their oppression. Usually, the very nature of the thing they are asking for, the very concept of it is bred from patriarchal ideals and ways of thinking.

Women, if you are really wanting to take back your power as a woman, then understand the ways we unknowingly conspire with the patriarchy to keep us from knowing who we really are and what we are capable of...

1) Work/motherhood/childlessness

No, I am not here to say that mothers need to stay home, not work and resort to being housewives. *But* I will say that it's the patriarchy that made us all believe that "merely" raising children is an inferior path. Only a society that detests, ignores, and denies the importance of the mother/child relationship says that motherhood is nothing but a burden on women. It is only a burden in a society that puts all of it's worth into production and

growth of industry. It is only a burden in a male centered society that offers women who have had babies no support. It is only a burden in a society that has made it to where the choice to become a mother only further disadvantages a woman.

Your choice to not have a baby is most likely coming from being raised in a patriarchal society that has tragically low views on women and children and has destroyed the the more natural ways of life lived by our ancestors that is more conducive to that.

But don't be confused. It isn't motherhood itself that further disadvantages a woman. It is the society that she finds herself in and the fundamental way it operates. Patriarchy puts mothers at a disadvantage. Not motherhood.

There is a big influx of women choosing to not have children and parading it as a choice of empowerment and liberation. For some or many women this is perhaps the case. I am not suggesting all women should have babies and I absolutely believe in having a choice. *But a choice can only be made when the option to have a child without you having to sacrifice your life is present.* I can't help but wonder if this choice was made based on the current way society is set up, and the values women have taken on from a society who only grants validation to women who work hard according to its patriarchal definition of "hard work."

You see, we don't recognize the hard work of woman (yes, I meant woman, not women). The dark, underground work. The lead to gold. The blood. The death to rebirth. The places we have to go to bring life into the world (and many women don't even know that one because more patriarchy, i.e. medicalized birth).

We don't see the behind the scenes work of mothers and women. The work that often goes unnoticed, but without it, everything would collapse.

If a woman has to choose between her job or having a child, that isn't an empowered choice. If a woman has to jump out of bed at 3-6 weeks postpartum to go back to work or else she loses that job isn't something we should all high five for because #workingmom.

That mom just severed the symbiotic relationship that is required for mother and child to thrive (which ultimately means for humanity to thrive). She just had to stop breastfeeding and start feeding from a bottle. She just had to leave her baby all day which increases her risk for PPD. It also increases her and her baby's cortisol production (stress hormone). A woman's body isn't even fully healed in this amount of time, and some studies show it takes a woman a whole year to fully recover on every level after giving birth (I can attest to that one). What this is essentially saying is the work to be done out in the world is more important than the work of raising healthy (physically, emotionally, psychologically) humans. We are telling women that they are more valuable at work than they are at home with their newborns. A job that *no one* can replace for the mother and be as effective as. How is all this in any way, "pro woman?"

2) Birth Control Pills (and all hormonal contraceptives)

I've always been a feminist, right? So even when I was younger and very much 'asleep' I identified as a feminist, and I was one of these people who thought birth control was like a female entitlement like, 'How dare you not make this free and widely available.'

But as I began to research more about it, I learned it's—and not to be too inflammatory—but the ultimate tool for oppression of the modern woman.

Your biology is meant to guide you. It's meant to empower you, it's meant to, you know, create a sense of vitality if you can inhabit your body and be in a truce with it.

-Dr. Kelly Brogan MD

Your fertility is not a burden. It's your power. Our demand and outcry for hormonal contraception means the patriarchal system has very successfully made women believe that they can't be bothered by what makes them women (so be like a man, basically).

The wide use of synthetic hormonal contraceptions have stripped women of their unique rhythmic cycles and understanding of their own biology. It has meant that the majority of women know nothing about their monthly cycle, or how to track it, or how to read their body for their own personal advantage. This ancient and vast well of wisdom that was given to women has been taken from them by medical, patriarchal thought that says women can't know their bodies so well. That they need a pill to control their moods, hormones, and when they bleed.

Just like a lot of pharmaceuticals, the pill keeps you from looking within. It band-aids potential imbalances within the body. Don't even get me started on the long list of side effects and negative outcomes women experience on the pill. Did you know if a woman is taking birth control she is 30% more likely to be prescribed anti-depressants than a woman who is not on birth control? Do you know how many parents are grieving over their daughters who lost their lives to pulmonary embolism (a side effect of the pill)? Not to mention the day-to-day health repercussions like weight gain, migraines, heavy bleeding, low libido, mood swings, *et cetera, ad infinitum...*

Hormonal contraception is a total undermine of a woman's health and wellbeing. It is the

manipulation of her sex hormones, which are inextricably connected to the rest of her body. It is the tactical breakdown of a woman's autonomy and opportunity to know her true self. It is the rejection of her feminine essence and the power, intuition, and magic that women of the past gained from the total embrace and connection to their monthly cycle.

There is nothing more liberating and empowering than embracing who you truly are as a woman, without suppressing it. There is nothing more empowering than taking 100% control and responsibility for your body, fertility and cycles, and knowing how to work with and understand the ebbs/flows and energy shifts that occur throughout a woman's life. For me, there has been nothing more radically empowering than taking 101% responsibility and control of my reproductive health. My rights cannot be taken away. Nothing can be given to me that I don't already have.

There is nothing empowering or liberating about handing your health over to big medicine. There is nothing empowering about not seeking the wisdom of your body because you can just pop a pill to manage your cycles for you. It doesn't come without a cost. Women deserve to be given all the information before they are given the pill, but more often than not, this information is not disclosed, once again making it not a truly empowered choice. It's more like the default due to the lack of choices.

There's a reason there isn't a birth control like this for men. No really, it's because they tried but the side effects were too unbearable for them. I don't know if the patriarchal overtones could reek anymore strongly. Not to mention it absolves men of the responsibility to be vigilant about unwanted pregnancy.

3) Abortion

No "choice" is ever made outside of the potent and unseen forces of socialization that we are all subject to, whether we recognize this or not. I'm much less interested in the reasons and rationalizations for why individuals make the decisions that we do, in favour of looking at choices as political and systemic. I hope that everyone can recognize that while it is never necessary or appropriate to judge individual women for their "choices", it is in fact essential to make judgements about the cultural mores and expectations that underpin individual choices—this is, after all, the purpose of feminism as a political movement.

-Yolande Clark

Whoa, Nelly. Before I get bombarded with hate, let me tell you that I don't identify as pro-choice or pro-life (as we commonly define those terms), because this issue is not that black and white to me.

With that said, what I have come to realize in my investigation is that often times, a woman's decision to terminate a pregnancy is a symptom of living under a patriarchal regime, not a solution to it. Let me explain...

At this point, I don't have strong opinions about what constitutes as the beginning of life, nor do I have a religious dog in this fight, so that won't be the position I am coming from. I am more interested in what drives 1/3 of women to have an abortion at some point in their lifetime. One third. That's one third of women who don't "feel proud kinship in the earthy, elemental beauty of birth. To hold it in contempt is to reject our distinctive power, our bodies, ourselves," as put by Frederica Matthews-Green. (Seriously go read that article). So what's up? Honestly, I could dissect this topic forever, but I will try to keep it concise.

First I want you to ask yourself this question: *Do you believe that if we lived in a matriarchal/woman-centered and revered society, one that understood deeply and honored and prioritized the mother/child dyad, women would still be getting abortions at the number we see them getting them today?*

In my opinion, if a woman wants her baby, she should have the right to the means to be able to do that. For a woman to feel like she has no choice (which is the opposite of how we tout pro choice abortion) but to terminate her pregnancy because of societal expectations of who and who is not capable and deemed acceptable to give life, is in its essence patriarchal and abusive to women and their children. Because we don't have an understanding or reverence for the mother/baby relationship, we place all these outside conditions on who is suitable to have a baby. The underlying message is that the woman herself isn't enough. She must have a certain amount of money, be a certain age (we hate pregnant teens), be partnered (and preferably married according to many), *et cetera*, for society to give the nod of approval to her pregnancy. One poll revealed that most women get abortions because it was what someone else thought they should do (boyfriend, parents, *et cetera*).

In a patriarchal society, death and destruction is the solution to a perceived problem. In a society that was truly for women, the suggestion to end her pregnancy when she felt alone and unsupported wouldn't make the top of the list. Asking how we can help and support her and make it possible to have her baby (the preferred choice) would. Abortion is a false sense of control and autonomy when a woman feels she has no other option.

If an entire society is set up in a way that becoming a mother only further disadvantages you, is it fair to call having an abortion a true choice?

It's not really pro-choice if the option to keep the baby (and thrive) isn't on the table. If we are going to be a pro-choice society then we really need to give women the resources and support they need to keep the baby without it being some great sacrifice. Otherwise, where is the choice really? I don't think any woman ever really chooses to abort her baby. Abortion is what happens when a woman feels she has no other option.

-Suzanne Gross

Patriarchy is driven by profit and control. It's what ultimately deconstructed colonial and tribal lifestyles. Lifestyles that support the mother/baby relationship, which is to say, supports our humanity. Without that, it isn't a wonder why so often women feel driven by desperation to end a pregnancy. Having a child in this culture is grueling work. How can we blame us?

Feminists for Life maintains that abortion rather reflects traditional patriarchal values: seeking power through control and domination, condoning violence on the grounds of personal privacy, and using killing as a solution to conflict. These views represent a renaissance of the original American feminism. Like the early American suffragists, today's pro-life feminists envision a better world in which no woman would be driven by desperation to abortion.

It is unjust to ask a woman to choose between sacrificing her life plans or her own child in order to participate freely and equally in society. Instead, let us work together to systematically eliminate the root causes that drive women to abortion — primarily lack of practical resources and support — through holistic, woman-centered solutions.

-Marilyn Kopp, Washington Examiner

I haven't even touched on the corruption of the abortion industry and how it's simply another way we commodify women's bodies. Nor have I mentioned the physiological and

emotional consequences of interrupting a pregnancy that most women have to suffer in silence about because our society doesn't offer support for the biological after effects of abortion. Because, once again, patriarchy only values that which it can cash in on and assert control over. Nurturing and healing people doesn't exactly fall into that category.

I totally get that there are some situations (like rape) where a woman choosing to terminate isn't coming from being driven by societal expectations and lack of support. These are more rare, and I am speaking about the majority of women, but this is why I am not an absolutist in this discussion. With that said, I still believe this is a systemic issue that needs to be investigated and addressed.

Again, I could go on about all the misconceptions here, but I think I have made my point clear. Please contact me personally if you have any questions.

When a man steals to satisfy hunger, we may safely conclude that there is something wrong in society — so when a woman destroys the life of her unborn child, it is an evidence that either by education or circumstances she has been greatly wronged.

-Mattie Brinkerhoff