

A Woman Can Be Any Gender He Wants To Be

Lee Cicutta

If you are looking for a sign that you are *really* trans, this is it. The only requirement for being trans is to decide that you are, and you don't need to know with total lifelong certainty to play with possibilities. You can be non-binary this week, cis the next, and trans the following day. Try all the pronouns, change your name every hour, change nothing at all, it's your journey. You are trans enough if you want to be trans. Welcome to the coalition, now please go make cis people uncomfortable and destroy private property.

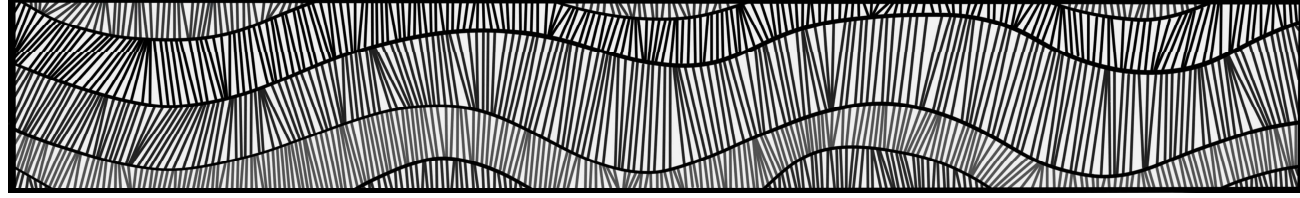


## Introduction

*A Woman Can Be Any Gender He Wants to Be* is a theoretical and personal exploration of patriarchy, masculinity, and gender liberation. Hello. Today I am Lee Cicuta (she/her), a transmasculine butch woman and anarcho-feminist. I am white, disabled by chronic pain and illness, and neurodivergent. Much of my written work has focused on theorizing about domestic violence (intimate authoritarianism) and insurgent survivorship. I have only published one essay (included in this zine) about gender specifically, and it is that oversight that I seek to rectify with this collection!

My gender is illegible to most. That comes with inevitable feelings of alienation but along with it I have always found such profound joy at transgressing gender, at being visible and unignorable in that transgression, of inhabiting a gendered space that

and living out (as much as is possible) a world after patriarchy. It is true that one can only engage in the act of imagining such a world if one has experienced what it is like to be affected by patriarchy, and yet that reality does not stop us from calling it a dream of liberation.





undermines that patriarchal status quo. I do not claim them as completely unaffected by patriarchy, but rather shaped in active conflict *with* patriarchy, not simply accidental and passive symptoms of it. This, to me, implies that subversive gender can and does exist, even under patriarchal rule. The project becomes, then, expanding the agency and collective power of transgressively gendered people, encouraging more people to play with gender transgression, and utterly rejecting patriarchy's private property claim over defining and assigning gender.



It is likely that butchness as I understand it would never have come to be in a world without patriarchy, but it does not follow that butchness, or any gender, could not exist without it. My gender is not a symptom to be corrected, nor a mere response to an overpowering system. My gender is one formed in political conflict. It is not only the shape of my resistance, but an act of prefiguration: of imagining



puts tension on cis people's normally comfortable assumptions and beliefs about gender. I take testosterone and am seeking out top surgery to affirm my sense of my womanhood. I wear dramatic drag and play with femininity in ways that ultimately affirm my sense of my masculinity. I am a woman, I am nonbinary, and my butchness encapsulates it all and connects me to a long and rich history of gender subversion as well as class struggle. Gender fuckery is a method of political agitation, and it is also a site of play and exploration (and often it is both!)



In this collection of essays I theorize about patriarchy, masculinity, and gender liberation. As a butch I have been told my entire life that masculinity is something that belongs to cis men, can only be performed correctly by cis men, and is a deviance to be punished and suppressed in anyone else. I have been told that I could not be both masculine and a woman, and my gender has been shaped in defiance to that. This collection is an expression of that defiance, an





attempt to carve out more space for subversive masculinities, and an agitation against a theoretical flaw that runs uninterrogated throughout much of feminist theory. I'm taking back masculinity from cis men. It was never truly theirs to begin with.



The first essay in this collection is a piece I wrote in 2021 titled *Butch Anarchy*. In this short essay I connect butchness to the politics and values of anarchism and deny patriarchy's private property claim over masculinity. This personal piece remains very close to my heart and introduces some of the ideas I expand upon in the following three essays.



In *Masculinity: Contested Territory*, I explore the inadequate but popular conceptualization in feminist theory of masculinity as being inherently patriarchal or otherwise interchangeable with patriarchy. I argue that the existence of subversive masculinities that are suppressed under the patriarchal system



imagine something similar, that there will likely never be an endpoint at which we have fully "undone" gender to such a degree that coercive gendering systems can never reemerge. Instead, we will do away with the process of coercive gendering (ex: assigning gender at birth, assuming gender, or associating masculinity, femininity, androgyny with specific genders, gender roles, or presentations, etc.), incorporate social practices of actively transgressing gender, constantly interrogate systems of gendering (not just at birth but throughout social life) as they form, and, through this, honor the true multiplicity of human experience.



I love my gender. I love butchness. I love womanhood. I love being trans and nonbinary. I recognize all of these identities as historically, socially, culturally, and materially contingent, and as such I situate them as identities that connect to a rich history of transgressively gendered people creating identity and making meaning that challenges and





which they find sacred. I don't want to simply tear down their empire, I want to reveal it for the farce it has always been. They've never had totality! Nothing was ever theirs! Masculinity, femininity, androgyny, and gender, mean whatever we want them to mean, whenever we want them to mean it. Liberated from the coercive gendering system we make gender a site of play, creativity, expression, and transcendence.



What I hope for the future is not a world where gender has been abolished, but a world in which *cisness* has been abolished. The right-wing's worst fears are correct: I think everyone should be trans! To clarify: as an anarchist, I understand revolution not as

a singular event but a never-ending project. We do not "reach" anarchism, we strive *towards* anarchism. Incorporating anti-power values into our social systems demands constant maintenance, establishing shared values and practices oriented towards spotting, analyzing, and undermining nodes of centralized power as they crop up. For gender I

indicates a political conflict more complex than such a simplistic reduction allows.



*Cry Like a Fag, Scream Like a Woman* is an essay about another common idea in much of feminist theory: that cis men are not allowed to express their emotions under patriarchy. In this piece I argue that the prevalence of this idea is the values of patriarchy attempting to reconstitute themselves and ultimately misdiagnoses the problem: that cis men have anxiety not about their emotions in general, but how they can express them in ways that differentiate them from the gender marginalized and allow them to keep their standing among other cis men.

Finally, in *Gender Liberation*, I articulate a strategy of resistance to patriarchy that centers the power of gender transgression and seeks to liberate the concept of gender itself from the enclosure of patriarchy. I argue that patriarchy has never been the only voice about gender and declare my trans

political project not to be the abolition of gender, but the abolition of cisness.

#### Language and Terms

**Transgender:** Mainstream understandings of transness tend to connect the word trans to

“transition.” However, early trans theorists tended to see transgender as a much wider umbrella that included all forms of gender nonconformity.

Transgender, in their theorizing, meant transgression, not transition. In a 1996 interview

Leslie Feinberg explained, “For me transgender means ‘transgressively gendered’, that is, any kind of transgression against the mores and codes that

would make up ‘gender’ in the culture.” In 1994 Susan Striker defined it as “all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between, or

otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries.” In my theorizing this is the framework I use to understand transness and its location in our

narrative intended to suppress resistance before it can even begin. This is apparent in patriarchy’s attempts to suppress and erase trans people from social life. Trans people are key to its downfall, we are on the frontlines of the conflict. We are the insurgents, not passive victims (as if such a thing ever existed).

Core to my approach to gender liberation, however and *importantly* (I’m absolutely serious about this), is spite and defiance! Patriarchy makes cis men feel easy and comfortable over their private property relation to claiming masculinity and manhood, defining femininity and womanhood, and utterly erasing all other possibilities. I understand and respect the impulse to totally demolish all that they claim as theirs. However, for myself I can say that I have a much stronger impulse towards theft and sacrilege. I’m not interested in validating their original property claim even as I burn that property down. I want to put my dyke hands all over that



Every transgressive gender is a point of pressure and tension on the cissexual system. Living proof of the lie. Which is exactly why that system wants so badly to kill us. In my view, gender liberation has the potential to center the subversive possibilities of transness: bringing specific focus to the ways that trans people have always been and continue to be active combatants against the imposition of patriarchal gendering systems. Rather than framing us as unfortunate recipients of patriarchal gender we have little choice but to react to, it situates us as agents in a struggle against the patriarchal project to impose unity and essentialism over an endless, ever shifting multiplicity of experiences. Patriarchy does not sit at an equilibrium — calmly and authoritatively administering orders — it is, like all forms of hierarchical power, locked forever in a stance of precarious counterinsurgency. Counterinsurgents depend on the illusion of total control and power to maintain their authority: a unified, totalizing



social world: with a focus on it as an act of transgression, rather than inherently tied to the idea of transition.

**MaGes:** this term stands for marginalized genders, and is intended to encompass all gender identities that are marginalized by patriarchy. I far prefer this term to the cursed (and woefully inaccurate) popular alternatives such as “women and femmes,” “women and nonbinary people,” “non-men,” etc.

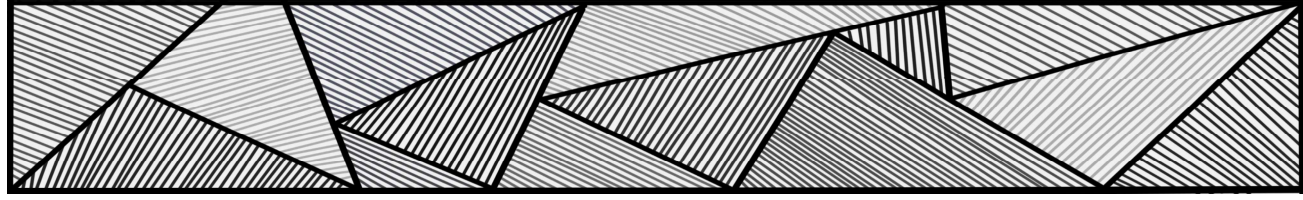
**GNC:** Gender-nonconforming. In my work I understand all trans people to be under the broader gnc umbrella, so while I frequently will speak about trans *and* gnc people, when I use a phrase like “gnc women” I am doing so to refer to *all* gender-nonconforming women, trans and intersex, NOT just masculine cis women.

## Butch Anarchy

Butchness is not only the appropriation of traditional masculinity, but the *subversion* of it. The sacred weapon in the arsenal of patriarchy, the one they did and continue to do everything to keep us from taking, is not something we even bother to steal under the cover of nightfall. Instead, we swagger right through the front door, wryly appraise the shelf on which it sits, and take what of it suits us best. We wear it openly in the streets, keenly aware of the retribution such a theft will at any moment bring down upon us.

We take it so blatantly, so assuredly, not because we believe that masculinity belongs to patriarchy, but because we know that it does not. We know that gender expression and play and variety has existed throughout and beyond all of recorded time. We know who the original thieves are, who took masculinity and locked it away for only the privileged few to use and to weaponize. We know that this

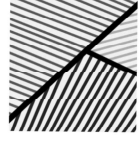
I understand our enemy to be not gender itself, but the patriarchal system of *gendering*: coercive gender assignment, bioessentialism, and gender roles. Capitalist colonial white supremacist cisheteropatriarchy has enclosed gender and gender expression, rendered it into private property to alternatively bestow on and entrap people in the service of hierarchical power. It is undeniably a system of coercive control and resource extraction. Yet it has its limits, and those limits do not encompass the totality of gender as it exists in our world. Transgender — transgressively gendered: the act of transgressing the patriarchal system of gendering — is not simply a passive result of this system but an active challenge to it. A challenge patriarchy has acknowledged as a threat for the totality of its existence. Trans people live genders that defy patriarchy's system of social organization and undermine the very foundations its logic stands upon.







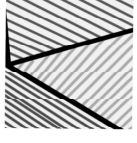
that we are incapable of creating genders that subvert the intent of that origin. Supposing gender *is* something that is only ever done *to* us, done to us irrevocably and unidirectionally, from the seats of patriarchal power. I still see no compelling reason not to co-opt that creation. We are, after all, not simply taking the master's tools and using them as intended. We're smashing the handles, fucking up the edges, melting down the metal, taking what pleases us and dancing around the burning remains of the parts we reject. We make a mockery of their projects! We defile their alters! We declare our scarred bodies and wild genders divine! Perhaps gender truly was initially inflicted upon us. But we are not passive recipients of its decrees, and we have had hundreds of years to play with, distort, and reinvent it. We have been present. We are political agents. We are undoubtedly shaped by existing frameworks of meaning but with our lives and our bodies we also shape it into a meaning of our own.



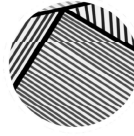
shares an origin story with all of private property. We know that the answer is not to concede the loss, but to liberate that which was stolen. That is what we butches do with masculinity.



Patriarchy, capitalism, centralized power, they are the original thieves, whose heists were such a phenomenal success that they went so far as to make many of us believe that we were *made* to be so impoverished, and, beyond that, that there is nothing in our power to change that. It is what we butches were taught from young ages, when our authenticity, our masculinity, first began to show its face. *That's not for you. Girls can't do that. Why do you want to be like a man? You are a woman, so you must be feminine.* Our truth, our birthright, stolen from us before we even understood what it meant to us, before we knew how precious it was. And then we were taught that the theft was not only normal... but that it never even really happened. Some of us developed our iron grips at a young age and never



fully let go, some of us nodded along with pain in our hearts and tried to adapt for a while, some of us had masculinity printed so clearly on our faces or voices that no amount of policing could deny its truth. All of us, though, have scars from the attempted taking... and even more scars from the punishment that followed our refusal, then or later, to deny that we had a right to keep it.



Butchness, as we discover (sometimes with pain, sometimes with joy), is naturally subversive. There are butches who cling to other identities of power and privilege so tightly that they deny this subversive power, but it is there, and we all know it. We cannot walk into a room and not know it. While there are those who flinch away from the raw and vulnerable power such subversion lends us, there are many more who recognize that this is a necessary, and beautiful, aspect of being butch. We embrace it. It is the fuel to our fire. It is our righteous cause. It is butch anarchism. The subversion and overthrow of the

crafting, developing, and disseminating anything as nuanced, culturally influenced, and endlessly diverse as gender. Let us not grant our enemies a level of competence and power they do not actually possess! There are and have always been endless trans experiences of gender that do not neatly (or at all) align with patriarchy's messages about the gender binary and gender roles. Countless are the ways that the general culture has been influenced by queer and trans subcultures; influence is not unidirectional — something that has been passively received by trans people from patriarchal society — it is a dynamic, ever shifting, *political conflict*. Patriarchy dominates so much of the gender narrative because it is an empowered hierarchical system capable of controlling access to resources and suppressing dissent, not because it actually is, or ever has been, the only voice.



Even *were* it true that patriarchy is the sole origin of our concepts of gender, it does not necessarily follow

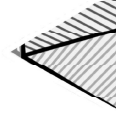


## Gender Liberation

Much has been written in feminist and transgender theory of the necessity of gender abolition. This theoretical tradition sites patriarchy as the original source of the concept of gender, and asserts that the abolition of patriarchy will necessitate the abolition of gender altogether. While I believe there is much of value offered by gender abolitionist theory, I myself am not particularly interested in ceding the territory of gender to patriarchy in its entirety. My project, gender liberation, is a complete denial of patriarchy's private property claim over determining and defining gender and gender presentation.

This is not to assert that our understandings of our genders are completely separate from patriarchy. No part of our identity can be fully separated from the social systems in which it developed. What I resist is giving any authoritarian system total credit for

entire order that would ever dare to limit who can and cannot be masculine. Who can and cannot be authentic. Who can and cannot eat. Who can and cannot be free. Who can and cannot live.

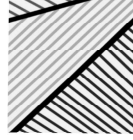


Butch anarchy is simply the refusal to accept the private ownership of anything, including identity and personal expression. It is a keen eye to the past, where we know there is a rich and endless history of those like us who struggled against the sovereignty of the powerful, and a focused eye on the future, where we see strong possibilities for a better and liberated world. It is a somber recognition of the ways that patriarchy has privatized and weaponized masculinity, and a joyful knowledge that this is not the inherent nature of masculinity, only a sick and vapid distortion. It is a dedication to discovering personal authenticity, no matter how difficult the road. It is a commitment to taking masculinity and putting it to the work we know it's well-suited for, even if such a

purpose has long been denied it: care, compassion, vulnerability, protection, mutual aid, liberation.

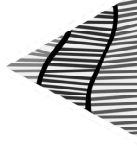


This is, I believe, the logical conclusion of butchness itself. Regardless of the unfortunate numbers of butches who choose not to travel to such a conclusion. If our enemy is the force that stole masculinity from us, who made us fight so hard to keep it or retrieve it, who beat us when it saw us wearing it, then our enemy is every institution that takes for itself the right to determine and restrict the conditions of our lives. Our enemy is every structure that works to rip away anyone's autonomy and personal agency in order to feed its own power. Our enemy is the State. Our enemy is capital. Our enemy is centralized power.



Recognition of such an enemy, then, makes us anarchists. Butch anarchists. And this is a beautiful thing to be. Here, we can fully resist the call to attempt to assimilate our identities into the rhythm of

that gives them their power, or continue to conform to its hegemony, but they cannot do both. If their store-bought masculinity chafes, let them remove it themselves. We need not take the time, energy, and resources to attempt to refit such fragile garments and there is no shortage of other options for them should they really care to look.







emotional lives, and thus are people in need of reciprocal support and solidarity.



Cis men truly interested in being liberated in their emotions in ways that don't refer to patriarchal power see their loneliness as a struggle they share *in*



*common* with women and queer people - a point of solidarity - rather than trying to differentiate themselves from maGes by articulating their feelings



as more special or profound. They stop looking to other cis men for role models altogether. The serious



ones find the courage to cry like a real fag! They're screaming like women, learning about their masculinity from trans people, and being devalued



by other cis men as a result! It is simply impossible to reject patriarchal hegemony while still being fully



accepted by it, and it is far past time that we stop pretending otherwise to coddle the endless sensitivities of cis men. The price (and gift) of authenticity is closer proximity to queerness. Cis men can take the risks inherent in rejecting the system



traditional, patriarchal, masculinity. We know that doing so would afford us no real safety, and, further,



we know that even attempting to do so would be a capitulation to the very system that brutalizes us and so many others in the name of control and “normality.” Here, we can look with clear eyes at who



our real comrades are in the struggle, and what work needs our butch hands put to it. Here, we can see stretching before us endless possibilities for



liberation, paths that are incredibly treacherous, but nevertheless do not demand any more surrender



from us: only integrity, which — luckily — we have in spades.



## Masculinity: Contested Territory



So frequent is the assertion in feminist discourse that masculinity is inseparable from patriarchy that many feminists use “masculinity” and “patriarchy” interchangeably in their theorizing, treating them as one in the same. When gender-nonconforming women (including trans and intersex women) and trans masculine people find ourselves in the position to offer a direct critique point out that this reduction erases our experiences as well as our unique relationships with counter-hegemonic masculinities, one of few things tend to happen in response: (1) our identities are added as a footnote to an otherwise unchanged theory (“masculinity is inherently patriarchal” \*except for those queer and trans people we’ll otherwise ignore”); (2) we are told that we can only ever attain a false masculinity (“masculinity is inherently patriarchal, so those who do not benefit from patriarchy are not really

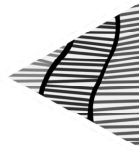


and Reason we must submit to. MaGes must constantly cater to cis men's feelings and navigate them with extreme care just to be safe, and even the most extravagant rituals of caretaking and subservience cannot always offer protection when their entitled rage has been triggered. Every negative emotion cis men experience is seen as the failure of a woman or otherwise gender marginalized person to properly caretake for them. Their insecurities and jealousies are treated as acceptable causes for the assault, abuse, and murder of the gender marginalized. Their anxieties and entitlements and the system that empowers them lose us access to resources, housing, communities, healthcare, and more. Cis men don't need to learn to express their emotions more, they need to *reduce* their sense of entitlement to the caretaking of marginalized genders as well as their fear of being perceived as similar to us. They must also expand their sense of maGes as people who have equally rich and complex

man being lonely is seen as a social problem, a woman or queer person being lonely is seen as shameful personal failure. Continuing to cater to cis men's desire to differentiate themselves from maGes while having their (only self-serving) emotional liberation too will never get to the core of the issue that is cis men's fear of losing their power.



That cis men struggle with figuring out how to authentically express their emotions while being able to continue to differentiate themselves from women and other marginalized genders is not a feminist concern. It is patriarchy working to reconstitute itself in a new form and the result is the same: the centering of the emotional lives of cis men over the material needs of the gender marginalized. The pressing feminist issue regarding cis men's emotions is their *overrepresentation* in our lives, not their absence. Cis men's emotions frequently dominate the spaces they are in and via the technology of patriarchy are reframed as mere expressions of Logic



masculine”) or, most ridiculous of all; (3) we are all lumped in with cis men (“masculinity is inherently patriarchal so if you are masculine that means you benefit from patriarchy.”)



All of these potential answers are deeply flawed in ways I would love to believe is obvious but, with the world as it is, I will refute them here before we continue. The first, the unchanged theory with a hasty addendum for inclusivity points, is the first to show us our general problem. If you make a sweeping claim about masculinity as a whole, assert that claim as inherently true in all cases, and then acknowledge that there are also entire social groups who are made *more vulnerable* to patriarchal violence because of their masculinity/perceived masculinity, it has come time to acknowledge that something about your theory is flawed and that there is something more complex happening than masculinity=patriarchal.





The second stance is frequently brought up in an attempt to resolve the tension of the first. To save the theory it is easiest to simply deny the reality of masculinities external to patriarchy. We're not *really* masculine or we're doing something that's aesthetically masculine but not *truly* masculine. We're playing pretend at something that cis men just inherently own. This is a point that transphobes and misogynists happily agree with! Because to argue this requires asserting that masculinity is derived from some inherent essence completely separate from how one presents themselves, what they wear, their mannerisms, how they understand themselves, their historical, cultural, subcultural, or counter-cultural context, etc. Additionally, this argument renders most colloquial uses of the term unintelligible! Patriarchy as a term is used to refer to a system of power, and while plenty of theorists do use patriarchy and masculinity interchangeably, there are many more people who also use masculinity to



interrogating the methods for expressing them they find acceptable, which they avoid, and why. They want to be able to be an empowered patriarch in manly tears and they are terrified of looking like a fairy instead.



The impulse to assure cis men that their emotions don't actually put them in nearer proximity to womanhood or queerness ("Don't worry, crying doesn't make you look like a woman!") or that they experience emotional difficulties more profoundly than how maGes experience them is patriarchal at its core, not feminist. The problem of cis men's loneliness is not special and unique from the problem of loneliness in general. The only thing about cis men's emotional dysregulation that makes it notably distinct from how maGes experience emotional dysregulation is that we live in a society meant to cater to and alleviate cis men's alienation, whereas the alienation of the gender marginalized is understood as the system working as intended. A cis

support have complex emotions, needs, and inner lives of their own.



We are meant to be concerned with cis men's so-called "loneliness epidemic" and "lack of positive role models" because patriarchy needs us to affirm cis men's differentiation from the gender marginalized.



They demand solutions to their loneliness that affirms their patriarchal power: "women should (be



nicer to me, talk to me more, agree to have more sex with me, submit to being my state-assigned wife, etc.)" and when they decry a supposed lack of



positive role models they invariably mean a lack of positive role models who are cis heterosexual men embodying hegemonic masculinity. What is at issue



here is not that cis men are simply ignorant and lack emotional awareness or ability to feel and express



their authentic selves, it's that they want to be able to do so and not risk their ability to access patriarchal power. They believe that the solution must be their emotions taking up more space rather than in



describe the vibe of a button-up shirt or a hairstyle, and very few people really believe that wearing a button-up shirt or cutting one's hair magically imbues one with all the powers and privileges of patriarchy...



But some do. Unfortunately. The last position, when all else fails, is to simply group all masculine or



perceived as masculine people in with cis men as the benefactors of patriarchy. Some gnc women are



accused of trying to acquire patriarchal privilege and betray other women when they actively seek to be masculine or are perceived as masculine; other gnc



women are accused of having inherent and inescapable patriarchal privilege that makes them



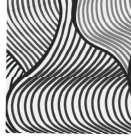
dangerous to other women due to their past masculinity/perceived masculinity; trans men's complex relationships with a manhood that is



suppressed by patriarchy are erased and denied; and nonbinary people have their identities utterly invalidated. It is even further complicated by the reality that which maGes are perceived as masculine

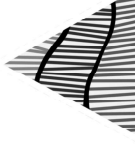


is highly influenced by other structural vulnerabilities, especially by race. Black women are frequently perceived as more “aggressive” and “masculine” than white women are regardless of their identity or gender presentation because misogyny and transmisogynoir function in part by degendering Black women as means of dehumanizing them. That the presence of masculinity or perceived masculinity can be and is used as a reason to dehumanize and disempower everyone but cis men reveals this particular theory for what it is: one that has so little interest in the material conditions of patriarchy that we need not waste any more time in considering it here.



“Masculinity and patriarchy are one in the same” is one of the ideological pillars of patriarchy. In doing so it frames masculinity as something that can only be affirmed via a dominance relation and renders all forms of counter-hegemonic masculinity invisible. Ceding that territory to patriarchy only serves to

society in which emotional and caring labor is heavily gendered and cis men depend on their ability to constantly differentiate themselves from women and other marginalized genders to access patriarchal power, and thus the wealth extracted by that system. In the arenas where they struggle and posture for power with other cis men they are indeed frequently emotionally stifled and struggle to express the fullness of their authenticity with each other, but this itself is because such authenticity would place them in closer proximity to queerness in the eyes of other cis men and thus disadvantage them in that power struggle. Among youth and gender marginalized people, however, cis men can generally unleash any emotional storm they want, are even encouraged to do so by patriarchal gender scripts, with the expectation of receiving unconditional support and bottomless empathy in return. All this with little to (frequently) no acknowledgment that the maGes providing them with emotional and reproductive





also, to my assessment, stems from a misunderstanding of the problem itself.

It is reductive to say that cis men are not allowed to experience or express their emotions under patriarchy, as is commonly claimed. Cis men are not only allowed but *encouraged* to express any and all emotions under patriarchy. What they are actually discouraged from doing is expressing emotions in ways that do not serve to differentiate them from women and other marginalized genders. Cis men can be angry, just not in the way women are angry. They can be sad and even cry, but just not in the way queers do. They are encouraged to have and express emotions by patriarchy, but only in ways that refer to that system of power.

In practice this looks less like the total and constant emotional suppression for cis men many liberal feminists articulate and more like the stratification of emotional and reproductive labor: the product of a



erase the women, trans mascs, trans men, nonbinary people, etc. who explore and live out subversive forms of masculinity. We would be far better served by understanding masculinity as something that patriarchy attempts to *capture*, rather than something it inherently owns, therefore shifting our understanding of masculinity away from seeing it as a component of the enemy and towards understanding it as *continuously contested territory*.

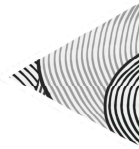
Patriarchy attempts to enclose masculinity, rigidly define it, tie it to domination and control, and punishes all unsanctioned expressions of it. This capture is not inherent nor is it complete. Trans and gnc people have been undermining that project since it began! Many of the positions explored above take for granted that masculinity is a real and consistently definable phenomena, invented, made material, and defined by patriarchy alone. They assume that patriarchy's word on masculinity has been the only real word, cis men's understanding of it the only real



understanding of it, its deployment in rigid gender roles its only possible manifestation. Cis men have been at the wheels of centralized power and thus have had more means to make their own voices drown out the rest of us, but subversive masculinities have always been here, have always been a threat to the patriarchal narrative.



Many also assume that when queer and trans people refer to masculinity we are always referring to a masculinity that at least gains its meaning from patriarchy. It is time to inform you that your imagination up until this point has been disastrously stifled. Certainly, popular conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinity are inherently patriarchal and gain their meaning from that system. However, it is too far to assume that trans people are always referring to the same framework of masculinity that cis men do. We create our own meaning even as we expand masculinity to the point of meaninglessness.



I take testosterone and am seeking top surgery to

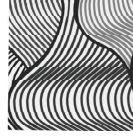
organizing. As liberal feminism has gained (at least rhetorical) momentum and popularity, so too has the desire to recast as feminist the patriarchal expectation that maGes center the concerns and emotional lives of cis men.



This special concern is the values of patriarchy reconstituting themselves within feminist discourse. It positions cis men as experiencing sadness, anger, loneliness, loss, alienation, etc. in ways that are deeper and more profound than maGes do, and thus require heightened concern, time, energy, resources, care, etc. than the gender marginalized. It stems from a belief that the emotional landscapes of cis men are more nuanced than maGes, have more depth, are more valuable and constitute a crisis when disrupted or dysregulated. Indeed, under patriarchy, cis men are entitled to make their emotional dysregulation a crisis for everyone else. It reorients concern away from those marginalized by patriarchy and towards its primary and most empowered perpetrators. It

## *Cry Like A Fag, Scream Like A Woman*

Cis men's emotions-what they are, how they feel them, how they deal with them, what patriarchy expects from them - have been treated as a concern of feminist theory for the totality of its history. Unsurprising, as patriarchy is a system that makes successfully understanding and navigating the emotional landscapes of men a matter of vital importance and personal safety to all maGes. While I do not deny that it is worthwhile to explore the differing impacts that patriarchy has on people of all genders, including cis men, I believe the character of this particular interest is very frequently not as feminist as it purports to be. The most common expression of this concern (and thus the one I intend to critique here) presents cis men's emotions, particularly the idea that they are "stifled" or "suppressed" by patriarchy, as a central rather than peripheral concern to feminist thought and



affirm my womanhood. Glitter, dramatic eyeliner, platform boots, and extremely slutty deep-V shirts validate my sense of my masculinity as much as work boots and button-ups do. Some of us are simply not referring to patriarchal masculinity when we are doing masculinity and what we're doing is not new. Not only is masculinity not inherently patriarchal: masculinity is not inherently anything at all! Masculinity, femininity, and all gendered terms are vibes-based only and vibes are always changing with people and context! They are not real! Their utility is in play and self-exploration and any insistence of inherent reality beyond that will itself necessarily refer to patriarchy.

The inclination to talk about "masculinity" as a replacement for naming patriarchy is an inclination, consciously or not, to move focus to a rather nebulous category of gender presentation rather than have to talk about the social location cis men *specifically* inhabit. "Masculine people" is not a





coherent or empowered social group under patriarchy; cis men, however, are. Refraining from naming cis men specifically, trying to reframe them as equal victims of patriarchy, and denying the power granted to all of them via patriarchal systems (even when tempered or changed by other intersecting identities) is a patriarchal impulse. It is no surprise that self-proclaimed feminist cis men seem to value “the ways patriarchy hurts men” over much else of feminist theory. It’s a move to innocence and shifts the attention from the actual power relation between cis men and maGes and towards arbitrary and subjective interpretations of masculinity and gender presentation.



Masculinity is not a material reality, and its meaning is located in context. Many do use it to describe hegemonic masculinity, but many also use it to describe an attitude, a trans identity, a kind of smell, a haircut style, a color scheme, a way of being, etc. I might describe a shirt as feeling “masculine” to me



and for another person that same shirt would feel feminine, and we would both be right. It is a nebulous, vibes-based, and continuously contested category. Patriarchy, however, is a material reality, and refers to a hierarchical power structure that organizes much of our social world in order to empower cis men over the gender marginalized.



Challenging patriarchy demands undermining this power relation and to do this we must be able to accurately articulate the nature of the problem.



Understanding masculinity not as something patriarchy inherently owns but something it seeks to capture and privatize can allow us to keep our focus on the material power relation *and* locate masculine



maGes not as unfortunate (and confusingly incongruent) footnotes to patriarchy but as frontline insurgents in the political conflict to liberate masculinity and all forms of gender expression.

