

Sex, Gender, and Sexuality

A Workers Solidarity Movement Position Paper

Workers Solidarity Movement

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Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Sex and Gender	3
3. Sex and Gender are Socially Constructed	3
4. Gender Roles are Complex and Coercive	4
5. Gender Inequality – Sexism and Transphobia	4
6. Sexuality	6

1. Introduction

1. This paper outlines the WSM's view on sex, gender, and sexuality, as they relate to their common link of patriarchy.

2. Sex and Gender

1. Depending on a child's assigned sex, they are expected to fit into a certain role in society, i.e. to be a certain way and be treated a certain way.
2. To better understand this phenomenon a separate concept is needed, 'gender', which is related but different to sex.
3. At a first approximation, sex refers to a person's anatomy while gender refers to all the other traits that are expected to go along with that. So sex refers to things like genitals, hormone proportions, chromosomes, gonads, while gender refers to personality and behaviour, less about reproductive anatomy and more about mind and expression.
4. Traditionally sex and gender are treated as the same thing, e.g. the female sex, the female gender. However, it is instructive to treat them as separate ideas.

3. Sex and Gender are Socially Constructed

1. These gender roles are considered to be a natural fact of life. It goes that boys and girls are a certain way because they're biologically different, most notably having different brains.
2. At the same time it's considered a 'normative' fact of life, men and women should be a certain way because that's right.
3. However, these expected roles aren't natural at all. Neither are they ethical requirements. These gender roles are human inventions. Gender is a 'social construct'.
4. What society expects from people of a certain gender varies according to time and place. Within the Chambri tribe in Papua New Guinea for example women are considered the dominant gender and function as the primary suppliers of food for their families, a reversal of what we see in western societies.
5. We note that sex is also socially constructed. It is ultimately inseparable from gender. The entire sex classification process is political, and the categorisation of sex into male/female categories which are unavoidably connected to gender roles means it is not at all like using some neutral way of categorising and understanding human reproductive anatomy. A person whose gender is different to their assigned sex is perfectly correct and has the greatest right to assert that their sex and gender are actually the same. This does not change the physical facts of their anatomy, it is a political act counter to patriarchal society.
6. We see this starkly in the case of intersexism, the oppression of intersex people, when intersex people's bodies are deemed to be 'wrong' because their reproductive anatomy

doesn't fit into a rigid two-category idealisation. The 'solution' is often that doctors perform surgery to make their bodies better fit that idealised sexual pair of male = XY chromosomes, penis, testes, high androgen, etc, and female = XX chromosomes, vagina, ovaries, high estrogen, etc.

7. Generally, parents accept the sex classification of their children at birth and rear them according to society's expected gender roles.
8. The way our parents, other relatives, friends, teachers, the media, partners, passersby on the street, and everyone we encounter everyday in society, shape us from birth, through childhood, adolescence, into adulthood, and beyond, is called 'socialisation'.
9. As intensely social organisms, humans are heavily influenced by the people around us.
10. When we appear to fit into our expected roles it is not because they are natural or biologically inevitable but because we have either been socialised to be that way (for instance 'males wear blue and don't express their feelings'), or we actually don't fit the role but are perceived to because of patriarchal ideology (for instance 'females are less intelligent').

4. Gender Roles are Complex and Coercive

1. Gender roles are astonishingly complicated and rigid. Based on the label male or female, a person is expected to look and talk a certain way, have certain character traits and inclinations, and have certain mental and physical abilities.
2. That complexity can't be over-emphasised. Our personalities, behaviour, and bodies, are mapped out by society according to our assigned sex down to the finest details. As just relatively few examples, certain tiny facial expressions are considered 'feminine' or 'masculine', as well as tones and volume of voice, colours, gestures, hobbies, opinions, body shape, and name.
3. Neither can that rigidity be over-emphasised. Although, despite the fact that the traits which make up these two roles are expected to be rigidly obeyed they are often shifting and contradictory.
4. If the person does not fit that role, there will be retribution. Someone who attempts to deviate from this will be considered a freak, even ethically bankrupt, and/or can face ostracisation, bullying, legal and economic discrimination, assault, murder, and jail depending on circumstances.

5. Gender Inequality – Sexism and Transphobia

1. Male and female gender roles are gravely unequal. Those assigned female at birth are put in a subservient position, while those assigned male are put in a relatively dominant one. This process is called sexism.

2. According to patriarchal ideology, females are innately inferior to males. Females are among other things thought to be less intelligent, creative, strong (mentally and physically), and funny.
3. Females are expected to be submissive to males, including fulfilling their sexual desires, doing their housework, and raising their children.
4. However, as mentioned there is an additional factor, as those who transgress gender roles face punishment.
5. Many people fundamentally don't relate to the sex and gender they were assigned at birth. This categorisation feels particularly wrong, out of place, and oppressive. Instead, some other gender is appropriate.
6. 'Trans' people are those who were assigned one gender at birth but are actually another gender. Some, for example, are assigned male but are girls / women. Some are a gender other than one of the standard pair – the 'binary' of woman (girl) or man (boy) – being a third gender, no gender, multiple genders, or frequently shifting between genders. They are called 'non-binary' or 'genderqueer'.
7. This is relatively complicated because human personalities, and hence genders, aren't so absurdly simplistic and uniform as to fit neatly into two categories.
8. Others, who feel relatively comfortable with the sex and gender they were assigned at birth, are called 'cis'.
9. A person does not necessarily enjoy the dominant social position of cis males because they were assigned male at birth. Trans people are oppressed for not being 'proper males or 'proper females'. Thus it is not clarifying or helpful to say that trans women (or genderqueer people assigned male) experience male privilege.
10. Trans men do not have the same experience of the world as cis men because of transphobia. Though some can avoid sexism the fact that they have to live in a transphobic society must be taken into account when assessing their relative advantages as males.
11. The oppression and marginalisation of trans people is called transphobia.
12. Patriarchy dictates that trans people can't truly exist, since there are only two genders, and they are fixed biological facts. Therefore, being trans is considered a mental illness, a form of delusion or sexual perversion, or at best an attempt to seek attention.
13. Patriarchy is in a sense oppressive for cis men in that the expected male gender role can be damaging to them, especially psychologically. This is sometimes called 'toxic masculinity'. However, this is not at all to say that cis men suffer equally under patriarchy, cis men overall are privileged in it.

6. Sexuality

1. A critical aspect of gender roles is sexuality.
2. 'Proper men' are expected to be sexually and romantically (order deliberate) attracted to women, i.e. 'heterosexual'. 'Proper women' are expected to be romantically and sexually attracted to men. Heterosexuality is one of the key expectations of patriarchy's coercive gender roles.
3. Therefore, gay and bisexual¹ men and lesbian and bisexual women are considered to be dysfunctional men and women, and are oppressed accordingly. Similar to trans people, homosexuality and bisexuality are considered mental illnesses, perversions, and so on. Bisexuality is considered impossible or deviant because people can and should only be attracted to one gender (monosexuality).
4. This is especially true if the men are 'effeminate' or 'camp', i.e. exhibit too many traits associated with women, and if the women are 'butch', i.e. exhibit too many traits associated with men.
5. Implicit in the expectation to be heterosexual men and women is the expectation to be sexual. Hence asexual people, who don't experience sexual attraction, are deemed dysfunctional.

¹ bisexual here includes pansexual, attraction regardless of gender

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*Workers Solidarity Movement position paper on Sex, Gender, and Sexuality as collectively agreed
by the July 2017 National Conference. Note this sits under the Patriarchy position paper and so
doesn't repeat that material.*

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