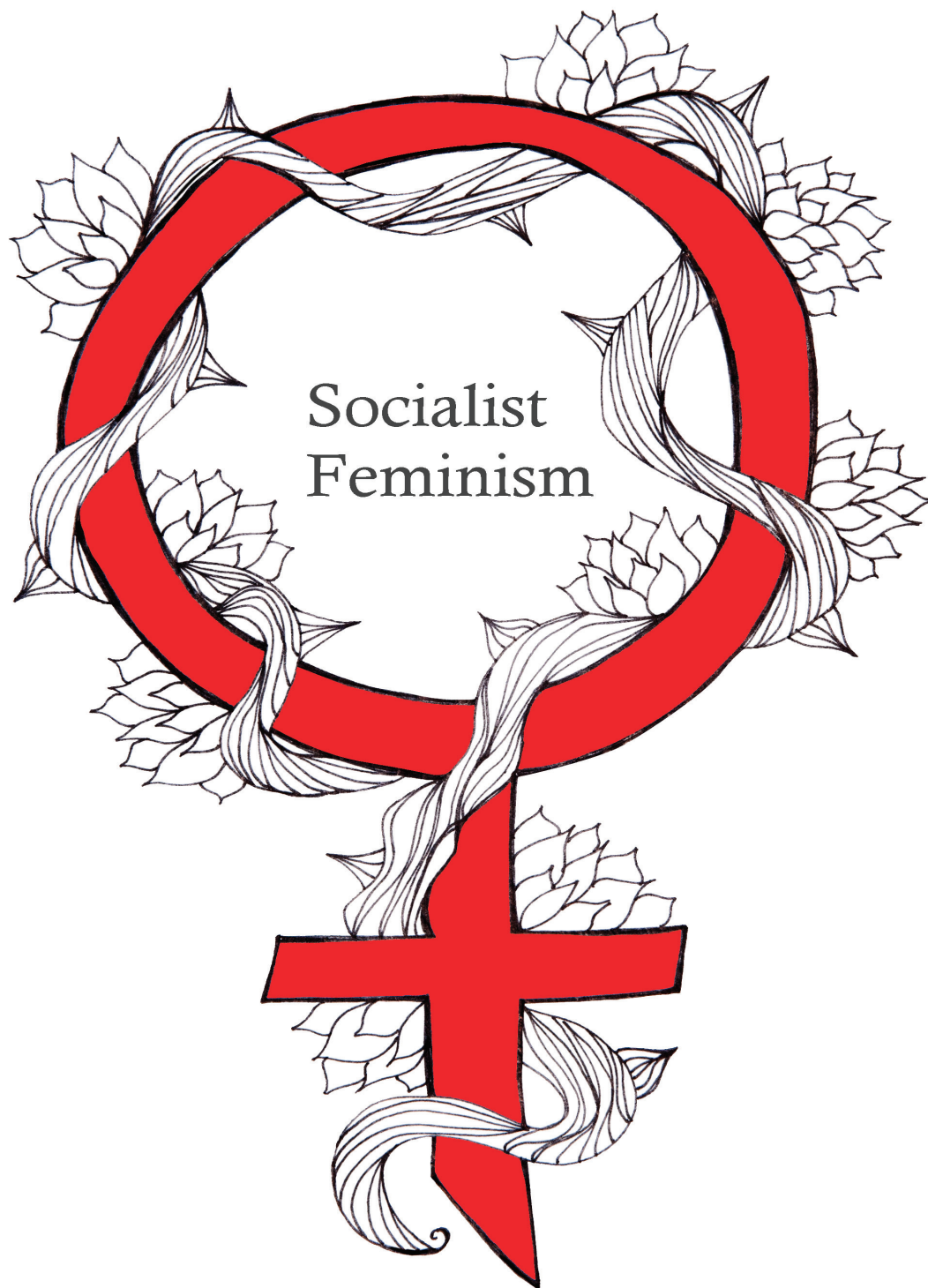


# the Socialist

Magazine of the Socialist Party USA - 2013 Issue 1



## Editorial

### Socialist Feminism: Where It Stands Today

Where does the socialist feminist movement stand today? This is the question the Editorial Board pondered as we approached the planning for this issue. What does it look like? Where is the movement headed? What are the issues we still face? How far have we come in our praxis?

These are difficult questions to answer, particularly within the confines of just one issue. Like all the other issues we fight against, gender inequality and gender oppression are rooted in the patriarchal system of capitalism. It is reinforced by culture, by religion and by law. As individuals, we give it life through our everyday actions. "Who takes care of the food?" is a question Maggie Phair poses to us in her piece "My Feminist History." It is not enough to say we are socialist feminists; we must also act like it.

Yet, overcoming deeply ingrained gender roles and cultural mores is a tremendous challenge, not just for men but also for women. Does enacting socialist feminism entail abandoning the constructs of femininity and masculinity? Should socialist feminist women take their cue from Mao's Revolution and cut their hair and behave more aggressively to eliminate gender distinctions?

In many ways, this has been the tack of women who believe they are exemplars of feminism because they've "made it" in the corporate world. Consider the female corporate executive who has risen to the top by "becoming one of the boys." She wears power suits, she spews corporate lingo and she doesn't bat an eyelash when workers are summarily terminated. For socialist feminists, she is sorely misguided; but for many -- particularly liberal feminists -- she is a role model.

Socialism offers us a radically different model; one that is inherently feminist in its fight for equality. Socialist feminism recognizes that there is no hierarchy of oppression; gender equality is one among many forms, sharing company with race, class, sexual orientation, religion and education. Socialist feminism is, as Tina Phillips so eloquently puts it, "the great equalizer."

Socialist feminism frees us from gender constraints. Veronica Nowakowski explores feminine and masculine characteristics, and demonstrates how they can and should be embraced by everyone, regardless of gender identification. Jim Marra confronts the notion that men cannot be "as feminist" as women in his masterful theoretical analysis, "Socialist Men and Socialist Feminism." These two pieces are complementary and should be read in tandem.

In homage to the January anniversary of Rosa Luxemburg's assassination, we remember her significance as a socialist feminist. Luxemburg was a staunch believer that everyday

working people could win the battle against capitalism and create a justice and equal society. Her revolutionary ideals extended to her role in the women's suffrage movement of the time, which she criticized for its bourgeois dimension. In contrast, Luxemburg's position was for the proletarian woman and her political demands rooted in the fight to level the chasm between the exploiters and the exploited. Often described as "fiery" in action and uncompromising in principle, Luxemburg is a true exemplar of what she called the "unity of theory and action."

In celebration of the 40th anniversary of *Roe v Wade*, we discuss the growing threat to abortion rights with the Emma Goldman Clinic. A recent Gallup poll revealed that public support for abortion rights is eking out the opposition: 28 percent of those polled believe abortion should be legal under all circumstances, 52 percent believe abortion should be legal under certain circumstances, and only 18 percent believe it should be illegal in all circumstances. Yet, we must analyze these statistics with trepidation. The public's positive outlook on reproductive freedom is hardly reflected in U.S. legislation. Quite the opposite, in fact.

The Guttmacher Institute revealed a growing hostility towards abortion rights and an increasing diversity of approaches to restrict reproductive freedom. This has manifested as mandatory, medically inaccurate pre-abortion counseling and/or parental consent for minors. Other states have restricted medical coverage, whether by private or public insurance, making it financially onerous for women who cannot afford to pay for the procedure.

Abortion clinics have been targeted by legislation, too. Expensive requirements, which have no basis in public safety, have been imposed upon abortion facilities, while at the same time public funding has dramatically decreased. By the end of 2011, a total of 1,100 provisions regarding reproductive rights had been introduced and 135 adopted. This should serve as a warning of the tactics to come.

The socialist feminist movement hasn't had many "wins" lately, and the landscape appears increasingly treacherous. Stephanie Cholensky reminds us that rape is still pandemic, and that patriarchal systems of oppression place the blame on the victims of rape rather than the rapists.

This issue attempts to give a look at where the socialist feminist movement stands today. If there is one unifying theme, it is this: We must continue fighting, and we must continue fighting together. As we approach International Women's Day on March 8th, we are reminded that there is still much work to be done. As feminist socialists and members of the SPUSA, we have an opportunity to be incredibly creative about the ways in which we advance the socialist feminist movement. We must seize this moment.

# Thank you, Kristin Schall.

The Editor and Editorial Board of *The Socialist* magazine and The Socialist Webzine wish to express their heartfelt appreciation and best wishes to our outgoing Editor, Kristin Schall, for her outstanding work and strong leadership during her tenure.

Kristin's efforts contributed significantly to the success of the SPUSA's public outreach, as well as the many quality and content improvements that were realized under her direction. In addition to her ongoing advocacy for socialist feminist content, Kristin presided over the important 2012 "Occupy" issue and enhanced the public face of the party by including short biographies of party members who authored content. Kristin worked to expand the number of new contributors to the magazine and input from locals. She completed a much-needed update of the National Directory, streamlined the magazine's editorial and the webzine posting process, and worked with the Home Office to improve the stability and "look and feel" of the Webzine.

Kristin offered a steady and caring presence that continued to strengthen the comradely climate of Board operations and worked effectively to resolve controversies that are an inevitable part of any political outreach.

The Editor and the Board wishes to express its best wishes to Kristin and her family as she moves on to serve the party in other capacities. Although her strong presence will be missed, Kristin will not be far from our thoughts, and we know that she will, as always, remain a champion of *The Socialist* and the Socialist Webzine.

In unity,

The Editor and Editorial Board, *The Socialist*

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## My Feminist History

by Maggie Phair

I joined the Socialist Party when I was 21. I was glad to realize that my opinions and statements were listened to, though I was not a feminist. Here I met Fran Troy, a socialist feminist who argued for feminism. I thought Fran had her head on backwards, but I did note that women members had to make and serve the coffee.

Many years later, I began to attend National Committee meetings as a California representative. The NC women members were largely feminist, but still responsible for food. At a meeting in Texas, the NC decided to formally require that all state delegations to conventions be 50 percent female; that the elected NC be 50 percent female; and that Co-Chairs should include at least one woman. Many male delegates protested this. I became a feminist. Ruth Edelstein of upstate New York became my mentor.

At one convention, the women tried to get the then editor of our magazine to help with the food. After great pressure, he agreed to peel one carrot. At that time, the SP was officially feminist, but women were still responsible for the food.

Eventually, I attended a class on feminism sponsored by the local NOW (National Organization for Women). Here I heard for the first time that my brother Bob was wrong. He was five years older and resolved every dispute by declaring "At least I'm a boy, so I am better than you." That this was untrue was a real revelation to me, because no one in my family disagreed with this.

Now that I am 83-years-old, I no longer attend SP meetings, but the question remains, who is responsible for the food?

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*The Socialist* welcomes fresh material that highlights the struggles of the working class. This includes news, first person testimonials, all forms of the arts and letters from readers. Please limit letters to 500 words and articles to 1,250.

Submit as .doc or .rtf file.

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# Feminism as Freedom from Gender Roles

by Veronica Nowakowski



As a transgender individual – I was born male and identify more as female – I may take a different view on feminism than some others. There are several waves of feminism, each defining it as something different. I define it based on its roots: as a fight to free women from the constraints of a male hierarchy.

However, as Hegel pointed out with his master and slave dialectic, and later Marx with his capitalist and worker dialectic, these power relationships enslave not only those who are at the bottom, but they also enslave those at the top who are benefiting from it. Therefore, as feminism starts to hit pitfalls with society again, the way to move forward is to remove the social expectations of both men and women alike.

One of these earlier waves of feminism glorifies masculinity and insists that women have the right to be masculine too. Followers of this wave are often every bit as chauvinistic as the male brethren they call chauvinist pigs, except

that they act as if females are superior. Furthermore, they expect men to fully act masculine, shame women for acting feminine, and, thus, create a paradox. If men are supposed to act in a certain way and fulfill certain roles in a relationship, how can a woman be free to do the same if they're in a relationship with a man -- fraternal, romantic, familial, or otherwise? A man who doesn't fulfill his role of masculinity is shameful; and so he must outpace masculine women. In this dynamic, women always remain one step behind. Even worse, what if a woman isn't masculine on the inside? She is bound to these new gender roles and expectations to act masculine -- even hyper-masculine -- because femininity is seen as a weakness.

Feminism today must be, essentially, anti-sexist. We have to abolish gender roles and see men and women as fundamentally the same; equal, even if not equivalent. We know we're probably not going to see pregnant men in the future and that there are genetic differences between the two sexes, and of course we can't

ignore our intersex brethren whose genetic coding transgresses the standard male-female duality.

Much of the differentiation between men and women is societal. Society says that men have to act macho to impress their mates and that a woman cannot overshadow their mate. That same society says that men have to be the breadwinners and women the caretakers. In order to free ourselves from these gender roles and expectations, we have to free men to be secure in staying home to tend the home or to show their emotional side. By freeing men to be more feminine, it frees up women to be more masculine.

In the same thought, it's important to note that there is nothing implicitly wrong with femininity, whether expressed by a man or a woman. In their extremes, femininity may be too passive and masculinity too aggressive. Balance between the two – assertiveness -- is the ideal; and I would even second that on spiritual grounds. However, you cannot force someone to be something that they are not and get positive results. Those who are more feminine by nature must be free to act feminine, and those who are more masculine must be free to act masculine – as long as it is kept in check. For example, someone who is feminine and is being abused must be encouraged to stand up to the abuser, and someone who is masculine and is abusing must stop, in spite of "nature." But these are extremes.

Our current society is one of extreme masculinity. Women who adopt masculine traits or dress are applauded, while men who adopt feminine traits or dress are shamed. In many ways, this is the story of the transgender individual. Beyond that, modern capitalism is a very masculine system encapsulating masculine values. You take what you can pry away or fool others out of, and there is no shame in that. It's this mindset that leads to wars of imperial conquest in order to take more from those who are weaker.

Communalism would be the feminine counterpart, where everyone is given the same no matter what – everyone is taken care of, regardless of their contribution. Both approaches have led to failure; poverty and unemployment are rampant in the United States, and there was massive famine in China when Mao's vision of communal farm life took hold.

Socialism is a system of balance, where one's contribution dictates the outcome, but those who are truly unable to fend for themselves are taken care of by society. In this way, perhaps it is like me -- slightly favoring the feminine. In socialism, one is assertive: neither allowing their rights to be trampled nor allowing oneself to trample the rights of others. Because of this, socialism and feminism are innately interwo-

ven. The advancement of either true socialism or true feminism will bring out the other; as a rising consciousness one will raise the consciousness of the other.

As socialists, it is our duty to also work to abolish gender roles in all forms. This ensures the freedom and promotes the happiness and wellbeing of each member of society. At the same time, it promotes a mindset of balance where people do not feel compelled to live out gender roles in their economic lives, where there are exploiters and the exploited. Though individuals may favor the characteristics of one or the other based on their gender identities, there will be nothing compelling them but their inner selves. Feminism and socialism may not be one and the same, but their fates are bound just the same.

## GUERRILLA WHINING

This poem is pounding on the door of your perceptions, groveling at the knees of your conscience.

I offer you the precarious kiss of reality:  
the work of the homeless—to survive one more night,  
the limiting nature of nuclear incident,  
the criminality of our prejudices,  
the arrogance of our wealth.

The monsters of commerce call to us and we respond,  
choking on \$12.95 wine and caraway crackers.  
The whites of the world's eyes  
are blushing with exhaustion.  
Good people have calloused lips from sucking the blame  
out of the tall, frosted glasses  
held by congressmen and princes.

We want to be dauntless in an era that begs us to forget,  
to ignore Iraq, Abu Grahib, New Orleans.  
The fragile white palm of a politician's hand,  
forever urging the bloody adventures onward,  
waving as the world's warring stride off to meet,  
is the palm no one touches. We only imagine it and still it  
pushes, directs, encourages and waves "goodbye."

Larry Levis says, "terror is a complete state of understanding."  
I get that. I agree with that.

Politics is a meaningless famine; it gives us  
the necessary vocabulary to discuss our new myths.  
It is compensatory collateral that makes of us  
sheep children, floating in nameless liquid,  
in clear glass jars on the shelves of fucking hell.

*from the book "Learning By Rote" by Martina Reisz Newberry,  
Deerbrook Editions*

# Socialist Men and Socialist Feminism

by J. Richard Marra

One thread winding through feminist literature traces a controversy surrounding versions of the question, "How can a man be a feminist?" This version offers a fallacy of accent that reveals some central claims concerning the likelihood and feasibility of male appreciation of feminist ideology and solidarity with feminist politics.

The query admits four familiar interpretations. One suggests that men can be feminists and asks how that might occur. It suggests that non-feminist men can become "authentic" feminists, although they must first overcome constraints of nature, nurture and enculturation. A second version, admits men as feminist cohorts, however wanting. Under this interpretation, men might become feminist "sympathizers", but not authentic and unmitigated feminists. A third parsing presupposes that no male can be a feminist, rendering the question self-contradictory. This is the "un-feminist" man, ideologically and physiologically isolated from the political concerns of women. It presupposes necessary restrictions upon men's understanding of the feminist conceptual framework and recognizes no personal or social motivation for male participation in the feminist political program. Inhibiting conditions include intrinsic sexual differences and political patriarchic advantages. A final rendering admonishes men against being feminists at all. It claims that any alliance with feminists will compromise men's rights. It would limit social discourse concerning male grievances against female oppression of men and attenuate male social superiority. Rush Limbaugh warns men of a socio-physiological hazard involving an inverse relationship between penis size and the extent to which men attempt establishing rapport with female feminists.<sup>1</sup>

Some may recognize among these interpretations Michael Kimmel's tripartite taxonomy of masculine perspectives into antifeminist, masculinist, or pro-feminist categories.<sup>2</sup> However, this inquiry focuses upon a narrower version of the question, "How can socialist men be socialist feminists." One might allege fraudulence regarding the introduction of ideological synergies. However, a change in focus does not entail duplicity. The reformulation will reveal difficulties with the original and demonstrate how the semantics

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1 David Edwards, "Limbaugh: Penises now '10 Percent Smaller' and shrinking because of 'feminazis'," *The RawStory*, September 20, 2012, <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2012/09/20/limbaugh-penises-now-10-percent-smaller-and-shrinking-because-of-feminazis>. Of course, "Limbaugh's Law" fails on physiological causal grounds and its dependence on discredited Neo-Lamarckism and Mythopoetics.

2 Michael S. Kimmel, "The Poetics of Manhood" (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995).

of the capitalist ideology constrain the range of potential interpretations. The reformulation provides an opportunity to examine how the socialist attitude can resolve significant putative impediments to male participation in the feminist project.

Consider the ideologically imprecise term "Feminism." It carries the weight many feminist doctrines whose details affect the semantics of the debate. We eliminate vagueness by limiting the range of potential interpretations to socialist feminism. Although the doctrine itself admits many contending interpretations, the reformulation does at least constrain ideological ambiguity. It also limits the sociological problem space. For example, the question of whether socialist men can support nondiscrimination in women's career advancement in the CIA is absurd. This is because the socialism in itself is morally inconsistent with service to the imperial designs of capitalism. Hence, any feminism that advocates gender equality in workplace advancement within an enabling bureaucracy of oppression misses the ideological Archimedean point and would be morally discordant. The original question remains unproductive, unless it includes further moral specification.

The existential "be" raises logical and empirical concerns. Logically, we need to avoid drawing the conclusion "Men cannot not be feminists" from any definition of manhood that prohibits inherent features of the feminist man. Furthermore, any claim that a specific man is un-feminist or not requires empirical corroboration. Ostensible evidence that Howard Zinn was not a feminist would likely be striking, controversial and counterintuitive. It might require proof that Zinn was ideologically delusional or merely misinformed. It might allege Zinn's miming of pro-feminist talk and political behavior, or accusing him of existential "Bad Faith." Occam's Razor easily cuts this stubble from the face of these propositions. "Be" can also evoke its cognate "become." This casts men's feminist political existence as a process, in contrast to a state. However, this diachronic reorientation does nothing to clarify the question, or resolve empirical and logical problems.

The nagging fact remains that some men appear to genuinely self-identify with the ideology and politics of feminism, and feminists and others, including women, recognize such. Some feminist organizations acknowledge and celebrate male cohorts, and invite other men to participate in the struggle for women's rights.<sup>3</sup> Men have actively

3 The Radical Women organization is affiliated with The Freedom Socialist Party which advocates for "revolutionary feminist men and women [collaborating] on building a better world..." See <http://www.radicalwomen.org/whySocialism.shtml>.

advocated for women's rights within each feminist "wave." Mid-nineteenth-century men and women recognized synergies between women's rights and Abolitionist politics. During the early 20th century, George R. Lunn, the socialist Mayor of Schenectady, New York was an outspoken suffragist<sup>4</sup> and the Socialist Party's Eugene V. Debs worked ceaselessly for women's equal pay in the workplace and the decriminalization of prostitution.<sup>5</sup> More recently, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Howard Zinn were strong champions of women's reproductive rights and other revolutionary feminist concerns.

It is insidious to claim that men cannot be feminists because their physiological gender and their patriarchic social status prohibit their understanding of women's issues. Of course, direct experience of oppression, and how the oppressed conceptualize their political situation can enrich the political consciousness of the non-oppressed. Anyone concerned with gaining experience regarding poverty, for example, might choose to live in destitute circumstances, in order to better understand the oppressive conditions of want.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, such situations remain temporally limited. No actual social remedies are required to

by virtue of physiological uniqueness or attendant institutional oppression. The neo-conservative impulses of Sarah Palin and Anne Coulter, and the advocacy for economic austerity and the restriction of female access to reproductive healthcare by such conservative PACs the "Voices of Conservative Women"<sup>7</sup> inveigh against this claim. One might argue that ideological bias concerning how feminism is conceived artificially constrains which women are admitted into putative feminist political programs. That is true. However, attempts to cast neo-conservatism as sympathetically "feminist" are as muddled as characterizing drone-pilots in Nevada, who kill children at a protected distance and with impunity, as "heroes."<sup>8</sup>

Our analysis indicates that the original query remains ambiguous and admits the extrapolation of unacceptable political implications. It does not provide a basis for sufficient empirical corroboration or explanatory force, and is historically counterfactual. Rather than pursuing an unprofitable question, let us turn to our socialistic reformulation, which is intended to reveal how an inter-gender socialist orientation might at least partially remedy these concerns.

### **"Socialist feminists reject the assertion that men cannot be feminists of any ilk."**

assuage temporary personal vicissitudes. However, those trapped by oppression must endure without any certainty of relief. Some feminists conclude that men can never authentically appreciate female oppression, in any sense or to any degree, because of men are not so confined. This conclusion remains invalid unless additional premises are provided that offer reasons why experiential limitations deny political alliance. Even if reasons are provided, questions linger concerning whether such reasons are sound. We should also expose a potential "reduction to absurdity." If the absence of a "complete" (or even "minimally sufficient") experiential identification with an oppressed group denies membership into such political communities, then there is little hope that alliances can form among disparate individuals or groups, or that sufficiently liberating political momentum can arise.

The doctrine of man-less feminism does not imply that women are by default feminists solely

Let us further constrain ambiguity by specifying a working doctrine of socialist feminism. We will settle upon the Socialist Party - USA's statement concerning "Socialist Feminism and Women's Liberation."

"Socialist feminism confronts the common root of sexism, racism and classism: the determination of a life of oppression or privilege based on accidents of birth or circumstances. Socialist feminism is an inclusive way of creating social change. We value synthesis and cooperation rather than conflict and competition. We work against the exploitation and oppression of women....Women's independent organizations and caucuses are essential to full liberation, both before and after the transformation to socialism. Women will define their own liberation."<sup>9</sup>

"Socialist" feminism is democratic, and therefore "inclusive," "synthetic" and "cooperative." Socialist feminists reject the assertion that men cannot be feminists of any ilk. Physiology and any of its experiential consequences do not determine potential membership into the feminist ingroup.

4 Michael Cooney, "George R. Lunn and The Socialists of Schenectady," Upstate Earth, January 14, 2012, <http://upstateearth.blogspot.com/2012/01/george-r-lunn-and-socialists-of.html>.

5 "Women's Rights: Debs and Women's Rights - A Lifetime Commitment," <http://debsfoundation.org/womensrights.html>.

6 During 1981, Former Chicago Mayor Jane Byrne moved into the Cabrini-Green housing project in order to dramatize gang violence plaguing the community. The posting of armed guards outside her apartment diminished the authenticity of the Mayor's experience.

7 <http://voicesofconservativewomen.org>.

8 See "Drone Pilot To Receive First Air Force Medal of Honor Since Vietnam," December 4, 2012, <http://www.duffelblog.com/2012/12/drone-pilot-to-receive-first-air-force-medal-of-honor-since-vietnam>.

9 <http://socialistparty-usa.net/principles.html>.

bell hooks provides the compatible ideological attitude.

"Feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women have equal rights with men; It is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels- sex, race, class, to name a few – and a commitment to reorganizing U.S. society so that the *self- development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion and material desires.*"<sup>10</sup> [My italics]

Patriarchy and capitalism represent ideological sources of the oppression of both genders. Hook's socialistic attitude inherits the Marxian critique of social domination. It provides a reorientation that frees the debate from the semantics of the patriarchic gender binary. Claims that men might be "feminist sympathizers" suffer from the same semantic disease. It remains unclear how a socialist man might "sympathize" with the female political struggle but not "be" a socialist feminist, given Hook's overarching Marxian non-binaristic critique. Capitalism "existentially" and mutually oppresses men and women by virtue of the same social structures. The "gender binary" represents a social division that empowers and justifies the political interests of the bourgeoisie. Capitalism exploits this doctrine, which is compatible with its complicit neo-conservative patriarchic Christian theology, to structure, promulgate and maintain oppressive regimes. The Marxian critique reveals antifeminist, masculist and "semi-feminist" responses to our original query as misconceptions raised upon the stilts of the gender binary.

Let us conclude our analysis by inquiring after what evidence might count as corroboration for the claim that some man is a feminist. Consider the following of three propositions that might provide a basis for empirical corroboration. The three conditions require that prospective socialist feminists can 1) display linguistic competency with feminism's underlying conceptual-semantic network, 2) employ that network to correctly recognize and understand oppressive social situations and 3) display interpersonal, social and political behavior that is compatible with that understanding. Cognitive and social psychologists possess the empirical tools to construct behavioral tests to verify linguistic and analytical competency. Such tests would include experimental and statistical measures to account for error and to minimize the statistical impact of data introduced through deception, delusion or conceptual misunderstanding. We have already noted that women feminists are accomplished in identifying men who are politically amenable.

In addition, inclusive, synthetic and cooperative socialist feminism provides practical measures for correcting residual binarism, and male and

female misconceptions of socialist feminist semantics, analysis and practice. The free and honest inter-gender discourse is required and encouraged, as is the maintenance of an empathetic and nurturing socialist political environment. Sharing unbiased information and insightful feminist theories supports the development of increasingly coherent non-binaristic conceptual frameworks, which augur effective socialist analysis and political action.

One might argue, incorrectly, that the terms "socialist" and "feminist" are redundant. On the contrary, our analysis in part places feminism as a subdomain of the socialist political program. Socialism provides a guiding and corrective critique that characterizes a synthetic and collective "feminism" that is politically radical, and sociologically and historically comprehensive. Correspondingly, socialist men understand that "women...define their own liberation." They appreciate that the unique experiences of women provide that critical prism through which the light of the searing flame of oppression is decomposed into a spectrum of the debilitating social structures of capitalism and patriarchy. We should not interpret these complementary perspectives as a mistaken reintroduction of binarism. Rather, socialist feminists reject those merely casual binaristic truisms concerning physiological and experiential gender differences central to the bourgeois social mentality.

The principles of the Socialist Party - USA, resonate with the struggles of those oppressed by capitalist social structures. The collectivist, anti-capitalist and non-binarist character of party's multi-tendency principles, organization<sup>11</sup> and political activities provide a diverse and nurturing political environment that invites socialist men to effectively participate in feminist politics. Pursuing their goal of developing "feminist practice within the party," socialist feminists within the SPUSA, both men and women, continue to reap practical benefits within the struggle "to establish a radical democracy that places people's lives under their own control - a non-racist, classless, feminist socialist society."

10 "bell hooks," Speakers Access, <http://www.speakersaccess.com/bell-hooks>.

11 The SPUSA declares itself a "multi-tendency" party because it encourages a common democratic socialist political program that appreciates different underlying socialistic orientations. Under this rubric, socialist feminism encourages political discourse, between men and women, and the accommodation of divergent viewpoints.



# INTERVIEW: Stefanie Ehmsen

Co-Executive Director of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, New York Office

[www.rosalux-nyc.org](http://www.rosalux-nyc.org)

***It has been said that Rosa did not identify with the feminist movement of her time, and yet she remains one of the most pivotal figures for socialist feminists in the U.S. and worldwide. What is the significance of Rosa and the socialist feminist movement today?***

Rosa Luxemburg certainly had an interesting relationship with the feminist movement during her lifetime. On the one hand, she rejected the idea that she somehow belonged to the movement simply because of her sex and did not identify herself as a feminist. On the other hand, being a strong and independent thinking and acting woman – personally and politically – in a male-dominated world made her serve as role model for many (feminist) women and still does. And while she was critical of the “bourgeois” women’s movement that did not want to talk about issues of class, she on several occasions wrote supportive pieces for socialist feminist groups. One of her closest friends and advisors was Clara Zetkin, a founder of the proletarian women’s movement. Ultimately, Luxemburg believed that bringing about Socialism was the most important task in securing equality for the oppressed – be they women, Jews, or the disabled – but this did not delegitimize good work on behalf of any one oppressed group.

Rosa Luxemburg has a great deal to teach today’s socialist feminists in how she understood relationships between different oppressed groups. She understood how “feminist” issues related both to questions of immigration and racism, as well as to the broader struggle of the labor movement as a whole. In her work she often sought to shine light on the connections between the most oppressed that were created by their shared exclusion from the political realm. These connections are as real today as they were at that time, and the work of understanding and articulating them remains paramount for the critical socialist feminist.

***Can you expand on the assertion that she criticized Marxism as dogma?***

Rosa Luxemburg criticized all dogma. She was a polemicist by nature, and she believed fully in the importance of criticizing all systems of thought toward the betterment of the labor movement. Returning to Marx himself, Rosa principally criticized the tendency of some to apply one static formula to all political questions, as opposed to engaging

critically with Marx’s works to find new solutions to the challenges of the time.

Now, when we speak about her criticism of Marxism as dogma, it’s important to identify just which Marxism she was talking about. She certainly criticized Bernstein and Kautsky, but if anything it was for their lack of dogma, if you wish, i.e. their abandonment of the maxims established by Marx. Later, despite considering herself a great supporter of the Russian Revolution, she was also critical of the Bolsheviks – “Freedom is always the freedom of those who think differently,” she famously wrote.

***Your site mentions that she “never shunned tenderness and sensibility” throughout all her actions. Was this a conscious decision on her part? A precursor to what we today call “feminist process”?***

More than a conscious decision (or a consciously political act), I think that Rosa Luxemburg’s well-known “tenderness and sensibility” – well-known to many from Margarethe von Trotta’s feminist movie on her life – was a part of her personality. It certainly had to do with her resolve to always be honest to the person she was. She was a woman of tremendous principle, and she drew much of her strength from her adherence to these principles. I think of her tenderness as the flip side of this rigor; quite simply, she had a tender spirit and was determined never to stifle it, and always to nourish it through her personal relationships and her love of nature. And yes, I personally would view this trait as something of a precursor to “feminist process” and its dialectical approach of seeing the personal as political, though I wouldn’t be surprised to see Rosa disagree with me if she were alive today!

***What message would you like to send to socialist feminists in celebration of International Women’s Day?***

I think the main message is that we still need to fight for full equality. Women are more than half of the world’s population, but they own less than ten per cent of the wealth. They bear most of the duties, but receive few of the rewards. Many times, they do not even have full control over their bodies. So I would say to all the activists of the global women’s movement: Continue your hard work! And keep in mind that only if you think and act internationally, we can fight together for a better, a democratic and socialist future.

# Queer Feminism: United by Difference

by Tina Phillips

Lesbians and other queer people have played a central and integral role within the feminist movement. This has not always been recognized, nor have queer folks' contributions been appreciated. Queer people have been invisible to many. However, as socialist feminists we believe in the intersection of identities and of oppression. There are multiple layers of oppression that intersect along identity lines. Long have we seen the impact that capitalism has on minorities. Yet, queer folks are undervalued even among some socialist feminists. Some believe that class is the only factor socialists should organize around. Many disregard identity as a factor; but it remains an important part of who we are and a central focus of the onslaught against all people.

In the past, lesbians were unwelcome in the feminist movement. They were told that their sexual orientation had nothing to do with the goals of feminism, and that being open about their queer identity would harm the movement and be a "distraction." Some lesbians continued to openly organize within the movement but were often treated as pariahs; attempts were made to silence them. While lesbians are included in the modern day mainstream feminist movement, their needs are often ignored.

Within socialist feminist circles, queer issues are considered backburner issues to more pressing issues. However, queer women have been central to many movements and organizations, even though their queerness is not usually a focus.

The good thing about socialist feminism is it focuses on inclusion. Socialist feminists recognize the fluidity of gender, sexuality, and the complexity of human beings. We also see that there is worth and value in feelings and personal experiences as well as rationale and logic. We value that the personal is political; and we see the connections between the everyday struggle of queer people and that of other marginalized groups. Many socialist feminists recognize that identity matters.

Capitalism uses any perceived difference in identity and labels it as a weakness. Capitalism uses difference to exploit and oppress the "other." The recognition of these exploitations unites us all in a common struggle for social and economic justice. Furthermore, as much as patriarchy impacts both women and men, queer people are further impacted and threatened by its constricting, limiting, and controlling ways. I believe the destiny of all people is bound up in the liberation of queer people.

While some feel feminism or queer culture has little to do with socialism, others have a critical and radical critique that combines feminism, queer theory, and a socialist perspective. Third-



wave feminism includes queered feminism. Third-wave feminism includes the rejection of gender essentialism and the gender binary, makes queer theory central in its analysis, and is sex-positive. Although there are some biological aspects of gender, much of it is socially constructed -- which means it can be deconstructed. It is the aim of many socialist feminists to deconstruct gender and highlight and expand the ability of all human beings to experience all life has to offer (feminine, masculine, and everywhere in-between).

As socialist feminists, we need to examine and dissect gender, patriarchy, sexism, strict gender roles, misogyny, and male chauvinism, among other barriers, to achieve full liberation for all people. We believe the capitalist and patriarchal systems benefit from and perpetuate the social constructions of gender, which bind us and control us. In addition, we believe that socialist feminism can be practiced in our everyday lives through engaging in feminist process and consciously creating socialist feminism as well as within the workplace and our organizations. This can look different ways to different people, and there are also various different kinds of feminists too. So it is very complex. However, I encourage people to look up these terms, ideas, and concepts through books and online as well as asking feminist people what they mean to them. Individuals must take initiative to learn about feminist concepts themselves as they recognize the importance of doing so.

Most importantly, as socialist feminists we believe systemic, institutional, and structural changes must be made through reforms and revolutionary means so that a socialist feminist so-

ciety can be realized. This is what divides us from the mainstream "liberal" feminist movement. The liberal feminist movement believes that reforms are the tools we need to employ to help women compete in a capitalist society, and does not encourage revolutionary means or ideas to transcend gender constructs, redefine gender, or create a truly egalitarian, non-hierarchical society.

Another aspect I believe is important to a queer critique of feminism is that feminism cannot be realized without the participation of all people of all genders and all sexes. For many, feminism is something for, of, and by women. This excludes transwomen, transmen, men, gender queer individuals. In the first wave of feminism, lesbians were excluded, and in the current wave of feminism, many are excluding transwomen, transmen, and queer people who do not fit the gender binary. Many feminists also exclude anyone who self-identifies as a man. I see this as a barrier to progress.

I believe minorities need allies and allies need minorities. This is how unity is achieved -- and how solidarity is formed. Partnership and collaboration is necessary for us to build the society we need and will thrive in together. When patriarchal structures, socially constructed and strict gender roles, and the power dynamic integrated into these structures, are dismantled and abolished, it will directly benefit everyone. Whereas some believe men benefit from a patriarchal capitalist society, socialist feminists know that men suffer much more than they gain from capitalism and patriarchy.

Socialist feminist queers advocate for a non-hierarchical egalitarian society that is free from homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, internalized forms of the later, heterosexism, and heteronormativity. We call on all people to be united in class struggle to realize a classless socialist feminist society.

Marriage equality is a modern day example of the clash between class and sexuality. Within the queer community a lot of energy, money, and activism has been directed at winning marriage equality. Although I see marriage equality as an important civil and human right, there are more fundamentally important and immediate issues the LGBT community must focus upon. These include: homophobia, bullying, hate crimes, murders and rapes, homelessness, sexually transmitted infections, alcoholism and substance abuse, sexual exploitation, discrimination in housing and employment, and heteropatriarchy. Not to mention mental illness, which disproportionately impacts the LGBT community due to the factors above. These are pressing concerns that are all too often ignored and under-funded by government, non-profits, and even grassroots organizations and individual activists.

Additionally, there is an argument that marriage equality further privileges Euro-American

men. Those who argue this think that marriage rights for lesbians and other queer people would not make much of a difference to the quality of our lives, given the opposition and adversity we face in society at large. To me, all people deserve the protections and benefits of marriage, regardless if they are in a relationship, are single, or have a different family arrangement (such as three people). Personally, I see marriage equality as a steppingstone to greater rights for everyone, although I acknowledge not everyone even within the queer community agrees on this. To me this is not an either/or issue. We need to organize and fight for a better quality of life for all queer people on every front and take every opportunity to do so.

We must remember that, for many people, marriage is about deep emotions, love, and other intangible complexities that cannot be simply brushed aside. As socialists, we recognize that human needs are critical, and, thus, I believe there is room at the table for all human needs to be addressed. The U.S. Supreme Court may very well decide this issue soon. In the meantime and after marriage equality is won, we have to recommit ourselves to fighting for justice for queer people of every stripe who may be facing life and death struggles along class lines. This will require class analysis and socialist organizing.

Socialist feminism is a great equalizer. We clearly see the intersection of all types of oppression and the disproportionate impact on queer people of color, the disabled, mothers and fathers, fat queer folks, youth, seniors and other marginalized peoples. Any form of "difference" adds to the chance of further strife and marginalization. However, we should also remember that our lives and differences are worth celebrating. We are all worthy of living amazing lives, and we can all realize our own potential for happiness. Part of that realization takes work. We must unify our approach to ending oppression on every level, both by organizing inside self-identified groups and by working together as human beings.

Moving forward, having our own identity groups (such as the Women's Commission or Queer Commission) is not enough; we need entire organizations, such as the SPUSA and all segments of our society (not just feminists or queer people) to find common reasons to band together, for our destiny is inextricably tied together. We need each other if we are going to overcome capitalism and heteropatriarchy, which impacts us all. There is hope for a different world, filled with acceptance and appreciation of differences. But this will only happen if we recognize our common vision that links us all together now. It will only happen if we start working together to actualize that vision and take action, and not despite our diverse individual identities — but because of them. We are united by difference.

# The Roots of Rape in New Delhi and Globally

by Stephanie Cholensky



This December, a young medical student suffered fatal internal injuries after a brutal gang rape in New Delhi. Outrage over the attack has sparked massive protests across the country and has launched women's rights to the forefront of public attention.

These protests are of historical importance to India, not only because of their scope and size, but because so many women and men who never aggressively questioned the sexual status quo are now in the streets demanding answers to important questions about patriarchy in our society. For women in India and all over the world, the latest attacks are just an extreme example of what we have to live with every day. Sexual harassment, groping and unwelcome sexual advances are a common occurrence for women in public.

A young lawyer from Agra described to reporters how every day she faces a gauntlet of harassment on her way to and from work, and that bystanders rarely intervene. "For most men, any woman who is out of the four walls of her house is fair game" she says. "It's all a power trip" says another woman who carried pins on the bus in

order to discourage men from harassing her.

In a country where a rape occurs every 20 minutes, yet the majority of rapes go unreported, this attention is long overdue. An undercover investigation by the Indian Weekly Tehlka gave insight into why so many women fear the justice system that is supposed to protect them. Hidden cameras caught dozens of police officials stating that in their opinion almost all rape cases they have seen are either fake or the fault of the victim. These officials claim everything from dressing in a certain way, being in public alone, dancing, or being seen out with friends at night as a clear indication of consent by the victim.

**"No rape in Delhi can happen without the girl's provocation."**

*- Sunil Kumar, New Delhi police inspector*

Unfortunately, they are not alone in blaming the victims of sexual assault. Women who seek refuge in hospitals or turn to family members often are treated callously and with little sympathy because of the stigma and shame attached to rape victims.

Protesters are calling for important changes such as the dismissal of law enforcement and health care providers that act in such a way toward victims, increasing the amount of women on the police force, strengthening sexual harassment laws and enforcement, boosting the conviction rate for the rapists that are brought to trial well beyond the current 35%, and creating support services for rape survivors, but this only a start.

The real change must be within the mindset of society. This is a global problem, just one of the many symptoms of the disease of patriarchy and systemic oppression of women for centuries. We must demand complete equality for all women, and for all people from all systems of oppression.

These systems of control are not natural; they have to be taught. Therefore, we are always one generation from achieving a better world. If we stand together, we can change the world as it is now, and ensure these poisonous ideas are not inherited by the next generation. Hopefully, these protests will lead to meaningful and long lasting change in oppressive patriarchal cultures in India and beyond. Hopefully, this young woman's death will not have been in vain.

# INTERVIEW: Francine Thompson

Director of Health Services, Emma Goldman Clinic  
www.emmagoldman.com

***We just celebrated the 40th anniversary of Roe v Wade, and yet more states have imposed restrictions on reproductive rights (43 state laws were passed in 2012 and 92 in 2011, according to the Guttmacher Institute). What is the cause of these increasing restrictions?***

I don't think there is a single or simple answer to that question. Within hours of Roe becoming law, the anti-choice movement was preparing opposition. And for 40 years, they have chipped away at the structure of Roe v Wade. Some political success has emboldened them. Unfortunately, in the chaos of today's world, many people are motivated by "the fear of." Fear-based messages regarding health, morality and finances impact political decision making. The anti-choice faction has done well with single-issue organizing. The pro-choice faction includes a spectrum of issues along a choice continuum. We recognize the many intersections and complexities of women's health.

***What do these restrictions say about the feminist movement today?***

I am not sure that I think it sends a message about feminists per se. In a recent poll, 70% of Americans did not want Roe to be overturned. That feels much different than the rhetoric that was associated with the presidential election where women's issues were used as currency for political gain (or losses in some cases).

1 in 3 women will have an abortion in their lifetime, yet abortion is the most politically divisive social issue in America today. I think that we need to find ways to engage more fully (and without stigma) the 1 in 3 women who have had an abortion.

***Can you explain in more depth the "feminist approach" to healthcare at EGC and how it differs from other clinics?***

Many of the feminist health care approaches that are embedded in EGC's delivery of services have now become a part of mainstream medicine. Informed consent, participatory health care and client-centered care were all approaches introduced by the women's movement and the feminist health care centers of the 1970s.

One thing that continues to differentiate EGC from other providers is that who we provide health care

to is as important as how we provide health care. We continue to attempt to increase access for marginalized populations: LGBT, people of color, people living in poverty and those that are traditionally underserved. Our feminist philosophy is also institutionalized, in that with our employment policies, we strive to be women and family friendly.

***Please describe the significance of Emma Goldman to the feminist movement in general and reproductive freedom in particular.***

Emma is significant and an asset because it is a locally-based, locally-responsive clinic, and Emma's presence in the community increases the strength of diversity in the health care ecosystem.

There are currently only 13 remaining Feminist Health Care Clinics in the US, that are not for profit and provide abortion care.

I think that these statements, taken from the Feminist Abortion Network's page (FAN) of which we are a member, sums it up:

*We are feminist.* We believe that individuals are capable of making informed decisions about their health care, and they deserve to do so in an atmosphere of dignity and respect and as active participants in their care.

*We are independent.* Our health care practices are not directed by corporate mandates, but by the needs of our communities. Our independence allows us to be accessible and responsive to our communities and enables us to take action on emerging and immediate community needs.

*We are nonprofit.* We provide support and services to vulnerable and historically marginalized communities. We are not responsible to stock holders, but to our community, our Board of Directors, and our stakeholders.

*We are abortion providers.* We are proud partners of the broader reproductive justice movement that advocates for a woman's right to determine whether and when to have children, to become a parent, to parent with dignity, to have a healthy safe pregnancy, and to have healthy safe families and relationships.

**Are the communities in Iowa City supportive of EGC? Please describe any opposition it encounters.**

Iowa City is generally a very supportive community. We do experience regular protests -- at least 1 day per week. There is also an undercurrent of indirect but significant opposition from anti-choice organizations and crisis pregnancy centers, through misleading information and fear based advertising of their services. A more current tactic of the opposition is the use of nuisance complaints and reports to administrative organizations.

**What are some of the greatest challenges the EGC faces today?**

The greatest threats and challenges for the clinic and for reproductive health care come in the form of legislative threats. Increasing restrictions for the women seeking services impact access tremendously.

Many of the increasing regulations for clinics are cumbersome and nearly impossible to comply with. They put an increased stress on small non-profit finances and staff resources.

**What message would you like to send to socialist feminists in celebration of International Women's Day?**

I would like us to remember that integrative – multiple oppressions exist at the same time. In order to influence policy and affect change it will require working across social justice issues, bringing diverse issues and people together to obtain the necessary social supports to live healthy lives in healthy families, and in safe and sustainable communities.

In celebration of International Women's Day, it is good to be reminded that our individual grassroots efforts can be replicated globally.

As Audre Lord wrote, "there can be no hierarchies of oppression".

We are all in this together.

## What's Your Favorite Book on Socialist Feminism?

### **Feminism and Class Power**

**by bell hooks**

"Her language and approach make me feel like she's speaking to me as opposed to at me. I actually feel engaged with the words, with the simplicity of the message. When I read, I sincerely felt like I could take that chapter, walk around the block, and hand it to anyone I saw, and they would enjoy the words, and possibly take the message home with them to tell others."

-- *Mimi Soltysik, Chair, Socialist Party of California*

### **The Woman Question**

"Required reading for historical context."

-- *Michelle Borok, Los Angeles Local (via Mongolia)*

### **Patriarchy and Accumulation On A World Scale**

**by Maria Mies**

"This book helped me through Marxist contradictions that the division of labor along gender lines would be solved with modern capitalism. Mies shows the role that first and third world women play under a global capitalist patriarchy; that socialism will not end patriarchy by engaging women in the modern workplace ... in the endless destruction of the ecosystem with their brothers; that the true labor of women is still largely unpaid, invisible and considered a natural part of her existence, yet, it is this exploitation that subsidizes all other work."

-- *Bennett Foster, Chair, Memphis Local*

### **Women And American Socialism 1870-1920**

**by Mari Jo Buhle**

-- *Art Kazar, Chicago Local*



**International  
Women's Day  
March 8th**

# DID YOU KNOW ... ?

## HOUSEHOLD WORK

### Percentage of men and women who do housework on an average day:

Men: 16 percent

Women: 48 percent

### On days they did housework ...

Women spend an average of 2.6 hours

Men spend an average of 2.1 hours

### Who does food preparation and cleanup?

Men: 40 percent

Women: 66 percent

### Average time spent working at a paid job:

Men: 8.3 hours per day

Women: 7.8 hours per day

### Average time spent caring for children under the age of 6:

Employed man: 26 minutes per day

Employed woman: 1.1 hours per day

Source: Labor Department's 2011 American Time Use Survey

## THE WAGE GAP

The number of women in the workforce: 59.4%

### Women who work full-time still only earn 77 percent of what men earn:

- White women earned 78.1 percent compared to white men
- African-American women earned 89.8 compared to African-American men
- Latina women earned 79.7 percent compared to Latino men
- Asian women earned 79.1 percent compared to Asian men

Over a 40-year working career, the average woman loses \$431,000 as the result of the wage gap -- \$300,000 for women who do not finish high school, and \$723,000 for women with bachelor's degrees.

### In 63.9 percent of families, women are either the sole breadwinner or the co-breadwinner.

Source: Center for American Progress

## REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

From 2010-2012, there were 1,100 proposals to restrict reproductive rights; 135 were adopted.

### 20 states have laws that could be used to restrict the legal status of abortion:

- 4 states have laws that automatically ban abortion if

Roe were to be overturned.

- 13 states retain their unenforced, pre-Roe abortion bans.

- 7 states have laws that express their intent to restrict the right to legal abortion to the maximum extent permitted by the U.S. Supreme Court in the absence of Roe.

Unintended pregnancy rates are highest among poor and low-income women, women aged 18-24, cohabiting women and minority women.

By age 45, more than half of all American women will have experienced an unintended pregnancy, and three in 10 will have had an abortion.

Nearly half of all abortions worldwide are unsafe, and nearly all unsafe abortions (98%) occur in developing countries. In the developing world, 56% of all abortions are unsafe, compared with just 6% in the developed world.

Source: Guttmacher Institute

## RAPE

Number of women raped every year: 1.3 million

Number of men raped every year: 93,000

Percentage of unreported rapes: 54 percent

Percentage of rapes that result in incarceration: 0.35 percent

Number of rapes reported in the military (2011): 16,500

Pentagon's estimation of unreported assaults in the military: 80-90 percent

Increased chance of a LGBTQ person getting raped in prison: 15 percent higher

Source: Soraya Chamaly, Huffington Post - [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/50-facts-rape\\_b\\_2019338.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/50-facts-rape_b_2019338.html)

## SUICIDE

The lifetime prevalence of suicide attempts in gay and bisexual male adolescents and adults was **four times** that of comparable heterosexual males.

Lifetime suicide attempt rates among lesbian and bisexual females were almost **twice** those of heterosexual females.

**41 percent** of transgender adults have attempted suicide.

Source: Chris Johnson, Washington Blade - <http://www.washingtonblade.com/2012/09/10/lgbt-inclusive-national-suicide-strategy-unveiled/>

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