

A Gay Guy's Guide To Feminism – A Brief Introduction

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05/03/2013

With the start of Women's, [Womyn's](#), and [Womanist](#) Herstory Month this past Friday, I have been wondering what more I can do to challenge sexism — including my own. As I have noted in previous posts, I have an evolving awareness that my own disadvantaged social location as a brown queer man does not make me immune to sexism, nor any other system of oppression.

One important task of my anti-sexist advocacy is to become aware of the ways in which I am privileged as a man. I know this to be a particular challenge for queer men because of our awareness that we are disadvantaged *among* men. So, I was disappointed to find little beyond a few personal reflections from feminist-identified gay men to guide me and other queer men to understand and appropriately fight sexism. [The Guy's Guide to Feminism](#) seems like a good start, but I find it useful to engage gay men from their unique relationships with sexism, women, and male privilege.

Feminism For Gay Men 101

Though I am just at the beginning of a lifelong journey to understanding sexism and my own male privilege, here are a few lessons I would like to impart to my fellow gay men:

1. We are men. We hold [male privilege](#). [Period](#).
2. Yes, number 1 is true *despite* our [sexual orientation](#) and *despite* our [gender expression](#) (no matter how feminine, androgynous, or queer). Though [gay masculinity](#) is devalued relative to [hegemonic masculinity](#) (i.e., white heterosexual middle-class able-bodied young/middle-age masculinity), it is still [privileged](#) over *all* femininities.
3. Systems of oppression are [linked](#) including — particularly relevant to this discussion — sexism, [heterosexism](#), and [cissexism](#). As such, *our* liberation [is tied](#) to the liberation of [ciswomen](#) and trans* people.
4. While number 3 is true, we are not immune to [sexist attitudes](#) and behaviors. And, most importantly, being gay does **not** make us anti-sexist. Our marginalized status among men may make it easier to understand sexist oppression, but it does not preclude us from it. Just like heterosexual [cisgender](#) men who engage in [anti-sexist activism](#), we must be active in challenging the prejudice, discrimination, and violence against women, and to keep our male privilege in check (i.e., give it up or use it for good).

5. Though we generally are not sexually attracted to women, we are just as capable of [sexually harassing or assaulting](#) women. The root of [sexual violence](#) is [power](#), not sexual attraction. I must point out here that too many of us *have* [sexually harassed or assaulted](#) women and naively excused the behavior as innocent *because* we are gay. Sexual violence by any perpetrator is **wrong**. But, that of gay men has the [added element](#) of placing our women friends and allies in the difficult position of questioning whether to feel violated or upset.



6. Related to number 5, we must stop treating the women in our lives as objects or accessories. Yes, many heterosexual women are guilty of doing this to us — [the gay BFF, every girl's must have!](#) — which is also wrong. Friendships that exist *because* of her gender or your sexual orientation are forms of exoticification.
7. Attraction to male-bodied individuals, men, and masculinity must be stripped of the presumed aversion to female-bodied individuals, women, and femininity. We need not be repulsed by female bodies just because we are not sexually attracted to (cis)women. Even when joking, this is no less problematic than (cisgender) heterosexuals who proclaim to be repulsed by people of their same sex.
8. Certain aspects of gay men's culture that promote pride and empowerment among us come at the expense of women's empowerment. To call a fellow gay man "bitch," "cunt," and, more commonly in the drag scene, "fish," is to use a term that derogates women. Though they may be positive in intent and meaning, these are not instances of reclaiming pejorative terms used against *us*: self-identifying as queer is; "servin' up fish!" isn't. Just think how outraged we would be if women decided to adopt "faggot" as a term of endearment among themselves.
9. Our queer, bisexual, and lesbian sisters are oppressed by heterosexism *and* sexism. We, as LGBT and queer people, will not be fully liberated by addressing homophobia and heterosexism alone.
10. Related to number 9, we must recognize that LBQ women are often subject to *our* [sexist prejudice and behavior](#), ranging from [anti-lesbian jokes](#) to outright exclusion (often disguised as innocently bonding with other gay men or even the product of our exclusive attraction to men).
11. The way that we devalue femininity among ourselves is another arm of sexism. The "[no femmes](#)" sentiment, aptly called [femmephobia](#), is nothing more than the hatred of femininity, which is associated with women. Beyond eliminating this silly prejudice in our anti-sexist efforts, we do ourselves the favor of [freeing the constraints](#) on how we can behave and express our gender.

12. We owe it — yes, we owe it — to the ciswomen and trans* people who have fought against the injustices we face to fight against those they face. Even when kept at the periphery or outright excluded, transpeople have fought for equal rights and status for lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. Many lesbian and bisexual women served as caregivers to gay and bisexual men with HIV/AIDS during the 1980s and 1990s, while also fighting along side those who worked for better HIV/AIDS health care. Feminists of all walks of life have advocated for our protection from prejudice, discrimination, and violence, seeing it as important in (and linked to) activism against sexist discrimination and violence against women.



We owe it to our ciswomen and trans* friends and allies — *and* ourselves — to be better feminists.