

Undergraduate Library of Gender, Cultural, & Sexuality Studies

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

One of my proudest academic moments was having my research on trash and debris in outer space, published in the Journal of Animal and Environmental Law, at the University of Louisville School of Law. There was such a proud feeling in having someone tell me that my research and writing was interesting enough to share with the world. It was a feeling that exhilarated me and it's a feeling I have sought to share with other students ever since.

When I was tapped to teach gender studies at Indiana University Southeast in the fall of 2023, I quickly saw an opportunity to share the joy of publication with my undergraduate students. At the end of the semester, the students would submit a final essay and the best two essays in the fall semester would be combined with the best two from the spring semester in a brand-new, gender studies journal.

Of the many essays I read, the four submitted in this publication stood out equally, as much as their authors did too.

Ashley Wilder was a fall student that before class, I primarily knew from sorority life on campus. The Ashley I knew was usually quiet. However, I was pleasantly shocked to hear her true voice through her paper on how intersectionality pulls all our struggles together. I

remember using the words "Masters Level Work" in the feedback I provided her.

Jaxon Reas was another fall student who reached out to me before the semester began, to express excitement over the class, especially its focus on trans culture. And being the most engaged student of the bunch, Reas' excitement shined throughout the whole 15 weeks. Jaxon's essay on transgender rights is personal, raw, and powerful.

Taylor Jones was one of my spring students. As he has very expressive facial features and he sat on the front row, I never had to guess how absurd he thought the actions of the patriarchy were. And his essay reflects those thoughts exactly.

Brooklyn Schotter was another spring student that really impressed me from day one. She took extreme care in asking questions and submitting numerous drafts when crafting her essay. The result was a phenomenal paper about the dark side of the internet, filled with personal antidotes and written by a student who was an absolute joy to have in class.

And for our cover art, I was lucky enough to have one of our graphic design students, **William Leach**, design the bright and vibrant cover which matches the text that it shields. William's work is a testament to the many areas our students excel in.

The publication of these works is bittersweet as I have learned that due to academic policy changes, my in-person gender studies class will no longer be offered. That means that this journal goes from being a hopeful series, to a one-off edition. But perhaps that makes *this* edition even more special as it will be one of a kind!

At the end of the day, I am proud to share the works of four phenomenal students and I hope you find as much joy in reading their research as I have.

James Wilkerson

August 20, 2024

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EXPLORING FEMINISM THROUGH INTERSECTIONALITY

ASHLEY WILDER

Considering recent transformative social movements such as the Black Lives Matter movement, the #MeToo movement, environmental issues, and ongoing discussions surrounding issues such as women's reproductive rights, today's society stands at the crossroads of critical conversations on justice, human rights, and the structure of power. These movements highlight just how important it is that we have a solid understanding of social issues like racism, ableism, homophobia, and their relation to the patriarchy and other oppressive systems. In this note, we will explore intersectionality and the significance it has in relation to feminist issues and the deeply rooted structure of the patriarchy.

Intersectionality is an important concept that plays an essential role when analyzing the complexity of social issues. Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw is recognized for establishing the term "intersectionality" (*Vox*, 2019). It's an idea that helps us understand how belonging to a particular social group could subject an individual to various kinds of oppression. But because individuals can belong to multiple groups

at the same time, our diverse identities can influence how oppression affects us individually.

Intersectionality recognizes that individuals can experience interconnecting forms of prejudice and discrimination based on different aspects of their identity, such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, and class. Understanding intersectionality goes beyond assessing each of these groups in isolation, and it recognizes that individual experiences are formed by a combination of multiple social factors. In a nutshell, it acknowledges that our identities and societal positions are interrelated, which can greatly impact how we experience and navigate the world around us.

In terms of feminist issues, acknowledging intersectionality is crucial in addressing different experiences of women from various backgrounds. It is also important in developing a more comprehensive approach to breaking down the patriarchal structures that feed into social inequality. For example, a woman of color can encounter many unique issues and challenges that stem from a combination of sexism and racism, and these experiences can't be entirely understood by looking at each social factor on its own.

In *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*, Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw's makes an argument that intersectionality should be acknowledged in feminist and legal discussions. She raises awareness to the drawbacks of current legal frameworks that consider gender and racial issues as distinct, separate concepts. According to Crenshaw, the combination of sexism and racism frequently results in specific forms of prejudice and discrimination that women of color must endure (*Crenshaw, 1998*).

When discussing feminist ideas and movements, it's difficult to ignore the crucial role that the patriarchy plays in the oppression of women. The notion of patriarchy is essential for truly understanding the complex power dynamics that create gender-based oppression. A patriarchal social structure is one in which women are commonly marginalized while men control areas of authority, leadership, and decision-making. This system maintains and reinforces gender disparities, affecting many different aspects of life, from the workplace to homelife and personal connections (Gupta, et al., 2023).

In the context of feminism, breaking down the patriarchy is an essential goal. Intersectionality provides an essential component to this understanding by acknowledging that the impacts of the patriarchy are not identical for all women. Women encounter patriarchy in different ways according to their overlapping identities (Gupta, et al., 2023). Disabled women, for instance, may experience ableism on top of discrimination for their gender. Because of this, challenging the patriarchy involves recognition and elimination of the interrelated oppressive structures that have different effects on women according to their unique identities. By acknowledging the connections between dismantling the system of patriarchy and removing other kinds of oppression, intersectional feminism promotes a more thorough and successful strategy for obtaining gender equality (UN Women, 2023).

Rahel More's work on *Storying Ableism: Proposing a Feminist Intersectional Approach to Linking Theory and Digital Activism* is especially significant when considering how ableism interconnects with the patriarchy. The author highlights the importance of acknowledging disabilities as an important element of intersectionality within feminist discussion. In the context of patriarchal structures, women

who have disabilities commonly encounter increased obstacles, as their own experiences of discrimination are influenced not only by gender but also by ableism (*More, 2023*).

The patriarchal structure frequently excludes and disregards the perspectives and needs of disabled women, solidifying an exclusive and discriminatory perspective on womanhood. More's approach highlights the significance of incorporating disability perspectives through feminist theory and advocacy. By recognizing and addressing the intersections of disability and gender, feminism grows to be more inclusive, supporting the breaking down of the patriarchal structures that sustain inequality. This intersectional lens allows us to value the interrelated nature of many kinds of discrimination and promotes a broader feminist approach to social change (*More, 2023*).

In addition to race and disability, other kinds of discrimination can emphasize the significance of intersectionality in feminism. For example, consider socioeconomic status, in which women from various socioeconomic classes face different obstacles. Economic inequalities can worsen gender disparities, as women in lower-income brackets might face obstacles such as limited access to education and employment opportunities (*UN Women, 2020*).

The intersection of socioeconomic status and gender creates a situation where women can find themselves dealing not only with conventional gender roles but also with financial obstacles that restrict their opportunities for growth. An intersectional feminist approach acknowledges these complex issues, understanding that the experiences of women differ depending on the interaction of multiple factors, including socioeconomic status. Addressing injustices based on gender involves comprehending and tearing down the interrelated

structures of oppression that maintain inequalities, and making sure that feminist representation includes the diverse challenges faced by women from various walks of life and economic status (*UN Women, 2020*).

In addition to the difficulties tied to socioeconomic status, it's important to examine the #MeToo movement and how it ties together with intersectionality and the system of patriarchy. The #MeToo movement started as a way for people to come forward and speak up about sexual harassment and assault. But as we dive deeper into this movement, we see that woman of color face additional challenges because of both their gender and their race. The patriarchal system, which is primarily focused on particular groups having more authority, can make these challenges even more difficult, as women might worry about facing more discrimination because of prejudices and unjust treatment (*Boyd & McEwan, 2022*).

Intersectionality allows us to see that addressing the problems connected to sexual assault and harassment means understanding and dealing with various experiences that women have. It shows that the #MeToo movement, although an effective catalyst for change, needs to take into account the specific ways that different kinds of oppression overlap. By acknowledging these overlaps, the movement can advocate for changes that take into consideration the diverse needs and perspectives of all women, no matter their race, economic status, or other factors that may impact them. This way, the #MeToo movement becomes even more effective in challenging the conventional standards that allow gender-based violence to continue (*Boyd & McEwan, 2022*).

Analyzing discrimination from another perspective in the context of patriarchy shows the intricate relationship between oppressive structures. Transgender, non-binary people, and other members of the LGBTQ+ community face substantial challenges that are influenced by the patriarchy. Strict expectations concerning appropriate behavior for men and women have been established by conventional gender norms, which commonly exclude people who don't fit into the stereotype. People who identify as transgender or non-binary may face intolerance not only because of their gender identification but also because of cultural norms that are upheld by the patriarchy. This intersectionality draws attention to the ways in which the patriarchal system upholds a binary conception of gender, creating obstacles for those whose identities fall outside of these specific definitions (*LGBTQ Intersect, n.d.*).

In feminism, acknowledging and addressing the intersectionality between gender and sexual orientation is crucial for promoting an inclusive movement. An intersectional feminist approach recognizes that breaking down the patriarchy involves an understanding for how it marginalizes not only straight cisgender women, but also transgender and non-binary individuals. By accepting a broader comprehension of sexuality and gender within feminist discussion, we set the way for a movement that promotes the freedoms and experiences of all people, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity. This intersectional standpoint enhances feminist theory and activism, challenging the patriarchal structures that foster prejudice against LGBTQ+ people and promoting an expanded and equitable path toward gender equality (*Boyd & McEwan, 2022*).

In conclusion, the exploration of intersectionality within the realm of feminism has demonstrated the complicated tapestry of interconnected systems of discrimination that influence women's experiences. By recognizing the ways in which race, socioeconomic status, disability, and LGBTQ+ identities intersect with gender, we gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges encountered by women in various contexts. The patriarchal system, deeply rooted in social norms, reinforces and perpetuates these forms of discrimination, emphasizing the importance to adopt a multifaceted and intersectional feminist approach.

As we move forward, it is important to the feminist movement to embrace intersectionality as its foundational principle. The #MeToo movement and the challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ community serve as significant examples of the way intersectionality improves the effectiveness of feminist advocacy. Understanding the diverse experiences of women and addressing the interrelated structures of oppression are essential in creating a culture that is more equitable and inclusive. An intersectional feminist approach not only challenges conventional values maintained by the patriarchy but also assures that the cause remains current and responsive to the varied circumstances of women from different backgrounds (*Hankivsky, 2014*).

Ultimately, the call for action lies in building feminism that actively dismantles the patriarchal frameworks that support inequality. By accepting the variations created by intersectionality, we pave the way for a more equitable and welcoming future. By means of intersectional feminism, we aim not only to address immediate issues of women but also to create a foundation for sustained, intersectional activism

that challenges the fundamental causes of prejudice and oppression in every aspect of society.

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THE PATRIARCHY IS RUINING YOUR LIFE

TAYLOR JONES

Since its very conception, the patriarchy has been used as a tool by the male, powers that be to shape and maintain a male-centered and male dominated society and enforce the rules of that society through male-centered and male-dominated institutions. This essay, however, does not necessarily seek to examine the relationship between patriarchy and society, nor does it explore the history of patriarchy and its institutions. Rather, this essay seeks to explore how the society that patriarchy shapes and maintains plays a detrimental role in the lives of every individual that lives in a patriarchal society. While it is easy to dismiss patriarchy as a device that merely harms women, when taking an intersectional view on the issue, it becomes easy to see how patriarchy impacts everybody, regardless of gender. It does not matter what background or gender identity an individual has; the patriarchal view of a male-dominated society adversely impacts the lives of everyone who is forced to participate in it.

In this note, I will be discussing how patriarchy works to create a society that is harmful to everybody within it. I will also be discussing how the erosion of patriarchy would help to improve the lives of both men and women, as well as some actions that could be taken to combat

patriarchy. By examining these relationships between patriarchy and gender, I will argue the case that patriarchy is, in fact, ruining your life.

Patriarchy Ruins the Lives of Women

At its core, patriarchy is a social system that reinforces male privilege by shaping society in a male-centered, male-dominated way, and a necessary aspect of male domination is the oppression of females; men cannot dominate society if women are not subjugated (Hassel, 2011). In order to maintain the patriarchy, women are subjugated by men financially, politically, and socially (sometimes intentionally, other times not). According to a report by the U.S. Department of Labor, as of 2023, for every dollar a white non-Hispanic man made, white non-Hispanic women made 80 cents, black women made 67 cents, and Hispanic women made 57 cents (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023). Often the argument presented by those who argue that the gender pay gap is myth is that the women make less than men in the workplace because they aren't assertive enough to negotiate more pay or are less likely to take more hours at work. Unlike men, of course, who are assertive enough to argue for better pay and are hardworking enough to take on extra hours at work. However, according to the U.S. Department of Labor report, only about 30 percent of the gender pay gap can be explained by these "worker characteristics"; the other 70 percent are explained by other factors, such as discrimination. The largest factor that contributes to the pay gap is the fact that women

tend to work in industries that pay low-wages, and when we explore these so called “pink-collar jobs” (nursing, caregiving, teaching, etc.), we find patriarchal influence.

When examining why these pink-collar jobs pay so poorly compared to professions that men primarily inhabit, the discussion of patriarchy is unavoidable. Simply put, the labor of women is seen as less valuable than the labor of men. This can be seen even in pink-collar professions, where women make less money than their male counterparts even in industries where women dominate. For example, despite women making up 84 percent of all registered nurses in the United States., women only earn 85% of what their male counterparts make (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). When women attempt to enter male-dominated fields, they often face discrimination in the workplace and even sexual harassment, which serves as a patriarchal deterrent from entering fields perceived as masculine (Ross, 2019). Furthermore, when women *do* integrate into these male dominated fields, the average pay of the profession tends to decrease, a issue which cannot be explained away by worker differences, such as experience and training (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023). All of these factors combined, synthesize into one unquestionable conclusion; women’s labor is not as valued by society as men’s labor. Patriarchy influences society’s expectations of work, and views men’s work to be more laborious and more valuable because society is structured, centered, and dominated by men. Therefore, society will inevitably value men’s work more than a women’s under this patriarchal influence.

The life-ruining effects of this gender pay gap are fairly evident. If women get paid less, then goods become more difficult to afford. If goods are harder to afford for women, then it becomes necessary

for them to either live a life full of strife or to find another source of income.

In this way, patriarchy has a tendency to bind women to men, when they become reliant on men to live comfortably within the patriarchal society. When women become reliant on their husbands, this reinforces patriarchal views as men as the breadwinners of the family. There are several ways to combat this aspect of patriarchy. Certainly, one solution could be raising wages in female-dominated industries. The U.S. Department of Labor also recommends supporting women's integration into male dominated fields to "address occupational and industrial segregation" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023).

Women's Societal Position

The patriarchy shapes society in such a way that women are to be made socially and politically subservient to men. Women are still disproportionately represented in government. Women, make up roughly 50 percent of the population in the United States, yet only make up 28 percent of seats in congress, with 25 female members of the U.S. Senate and 126 female members of the U.S. House of Representatives. (Schaeffer, 2024) This lack of representation in government has profound consequences on, not only women's social position within the United States, but on their civil liberties as well. Recently, the Supreme Court elected to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the

Supreme Court decision that essentially granted individuals the right to have an abortion. The overturn of *Roe v. Wade* was a massive setback for women's reproductive rights in the United States and serves as a perfect example of how patriarchal societies use the law to control women and reinforce patriarchal ideology. 57 percent of people in the United States disapproved of the Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, with 52 percent of men disapproving and 62 percent of women disapproving of the decision (Nadeem, 2022). With the majority of individuals in the country disapproving of the decision, why did the Supreme Court elect rule in this way? Several justices stated that the decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* was to defend state's rights to legislate their own abortion laws, implying that a woman's right to choose what to do with their own body is something that should be controlled by the state (Goitein, 2022.) A much more telling reason came from Justice Brett Kavanaugh, who argues against "unenumerated rights that were not rooted in the nation's history and tradition."

Behind all the reasoning and arguments made the Supreme Court Justices, the fact of the matter is that these decisions to limit the rights, freedoms, and autonomy of women are all based within the patriarchal view that women should be subservient to men. And this subserviency is crucial in order for patriarchy to be reinforced. Men make up the vast majority of the legislature, and thus it is mostly men who decided what laws are created and what freedoms are granted to which people. Women are not properly represented in the government, and thus their interests are not properly represented in the legislature. In essence, it is the patriarchy that influences our legislature to create laws that continue to shape and maintain a patriarchal society, with laws

being made from a male-centered and male-dominated perspective. This can ruin a woman's life in any number of ways. Using *Roe v. Wade* as an example, when a woman's right to bodily autonomy is taken away, many women with unwanted pregnancies are now forced to either carry to term with a child they do not want, or travel to another state that allows abortion to have one. A woman being forced to have a child they do not want only serves to create a mother who resents the child they were forced to bear, ultimately ruining not just the mother's life, but the child's as well. This is only one example of how patriarchy is used in a societal context to ruin a woman's life. Lobbying for more female members of the government would allow for more equal female representation in government, which would likely lead to a less patriarchal outlook on the law. Over time, would help to erode the patriarchal laws that oppress women.

Women also face an overwhelming number of double binds. For example, it is typically socially acceptable for men to have multiple sexual partners, but when a woman participates in the same behavior, she is deemed a slut. Another example see society supporting men's interests in things that are typically considered masculine such as sports, while diminishing interests typically considered feminine. A difference in body acceptance is another double bind where overweight men are socially accepted, seen as having "dad bods", while overweight women are mocked and called unattractive. This example is especially life ruining as women being mocked for being overweight explains why women are more than twice as likely to develop an eating disorder compared to men. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024). All of these are great examples of how patriarchy can influence our daily lives to maintain a society that is hostile to women.

There are a staggering number of life-ruining social pressures put onto women that are shaped by patriarchy, and it is only by combating these social pressures that the patriarchy can be slowly eroded and that women can be allowed to live comfortable lives. All of this being said, it is not only women who face social and societal pressure due to patriarchy. Men, too, have their part to play within patriarchal society, and any failure to meet these social and societal expectations shaped by patriarchy can be life ruining for them as well.

A Man's Role

While it would be easy to dismiss patriarchy issue that only negatively affects for women, there are also pressures put onto men by patriarchy to continue to shape and maintain a patriarchal society. It is important to understand that men are not solely an enemy within patriarchy but are also a victims and unwitting and unwilling participants within it. Men, like women, have socially expected gender roles within patriarchal society. Just as the woman is expected to be the caretaker, the child bearer, and the quiet and submissive wife, the man is expected to be the breadwinner, the decisive decision maker, and the loud and dominant husband. These societal expectations for men to be dominant and emotionless have created a society which punishes and ostracizes men for daring to behave differently from these established gender roles. For example, men are socially expected to be unemotional and unmoved, lest they be seen by others as a pansy,

or “acting like a girl.” Men are expected to be aggressive, and violently protective of their family, and anyone who doesn’t fall in line with these expectations tend to not be seen as “real men.” Men’s stress and anxiety over performing their assigned gender roles in patriarchal society is a very real, very tangible phenomenon that has been studied extensively in the past.

For example, take the 2017 study done by Adil, Shahed, and Arshad, *The Burden of Being a Man in a Patriarchal Society*. Their research studied the phenomenon of “gender role strain”, which is a stress that is induced by the expectations of behaving in a way that expected of an individual’s gender (Adil et al., 2017). For men, these expectations include things like being the breadwinner for the family, or being the individual of a family who makes the final decision for choices that impact the family. Their results revealed that in the patriarchal society of Pakistan, there exists a very real and very substantial amount of gender role strain that men face. Patriarchy creates a society that reinforces unhealthy, unrealistic ideals for men to strive towards, which creates unnecessary strain on men when they cannot meet those expectations. The way patriarchy ruins men’s lives is, at least socially, not too different from how it ruins women’s lives. The social expectations that the patriarchy creates for men are unfair and unhealthy, with any man refusing to meet these expectations at risk of being ostracized and mocked for not meeting the standards of patriarchal manhood. The stress that gender roles put onto men actively harm their mental health and has been shown to cause severe stress and mental health problems that severely degrade quality of life (Griffith, 2011). By combating these gender roles placed on both men and women, we can help men recognize that they do not have to meet

these gender roles to be seen as a real man. Combating the patriarchy's ideal of masculinity would work wonders in eroding patriarchy.

The patriarchy is bad for everyone, and all efforts should be made to erode this archaic institution, relegating it into the dustbins of history where it belongs. The structures in place that are influenced by patriarchy's ideals of male-centeredness and male-domination exist to keep women subservient to men, and to control society in such a way that it remains male-dominated. The society that gets shaped and maintained by patriarchy harms women by oppressing them financially, politically, socially, and the laws that patriarchy influences are designed to keep women oppressed and tied to men. Even though the patriarchy exists to keep society male-dominated, the patriarchy fails to provide wellness to men. The gender roles that are established by the patriarchy, put unnecessary expectations of manhood onto men that directly leads to increased stress that are actively harmful to men's health. The patriarchy is a social system which adversely impacts the lives of everybody that lives within its influence and needs to be done away with.

Because patriarchy is ruining your life.

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THE DARK SIDE OF THE DIGITAL WORLD

BROOKLYN I. SCHOTTER

Being online is a prominent part of today's society. With the power of the online world, we are able to connect with others all over the globe with little effort. This opens up many opportunities for controlling the way you are presented in the online space and the ability to be whoever you choose to be. Although some use these opportunities as an outlet for creative expression, others have abused the use of this every day tool. Many forms of harassment can be committed online. According to a Pew Research Center article by Emily A. Vogels, "41% of U.S. adults have personally experienced online harassment, and 25% have experienced more severe harassment." (Vogels, 2021). Online harassment is a serious issue that has many negative impacts on those targeted. As consent is often something ignored through the form of digital media, this problem needs to be taken seriously. Consent needs to be taught and people need to be held accountable for their actions.

I entered the world of social media at a young age. In the fifth grade, I was preparing to move schools and leave my friends behind. I was told that the best way to connect with my fellow classmates was to join Instagram, as everybody used it. Without consulting my parents, I downloaded the app and began connecting with other users. While sitting in morning school care before the school day began, I received a direct message from a user I didn't recognize. I opened the message and was met with an image of a shirtless man, asking how my day was. I stated my age and the level of discomfort that the photo gave me, but this didn't matter to him. Following my message, he sent a photo of him in white underwear, groping himself. I pleaded with him to stop, now feeling anxious and sick to my stomach. He questioned me, "What's wrong? You've never seen between a man's legs before?"; I blocked him before any more photos were sent. I was only 12 years old when first exposed to online harassment and the ignorance of consent.

According to research conducted in the UK, around 75.8% of girls between the ages of 12 and 18 stated that they had received unwanted dick pics (Barker-Clarke, 2023). In her essay, *Girls Navigating the Context of Unwanted Dick Pics: 'Some Things Just Can't Be Unseen'*, Barker-Clarke states that the frequency of this harassment had caused the girls to "...rationalize image-based sexual harassment as naturalized masculine actions" (2023). This issue is happening so frequently that it is seen as a normal behavior. Blocking the photo sender and reporting the account is what is typically recommended to those who encounter an unsolicited photo. The platform's response is typically to remove the photo and issue a warning to the account or temporarily ban it. Blocking someone on social media however, doesn't put an end

to an issue. If an account is blocked or restricted, a new account can still be made under a different identity. There is no limit to how many accounts you can make. These fake accounts can act as safety blankets for the harasser's identity.

With social media, there is also the ability to comment on shared photos. People comment on all sorts of content, however women and minorities are typically the target for harassment. According to Audrey Nelson's article in *Psychology Today*, "While there are a few cases of men harassing other men, women harassing other women, and women harassing men, the overwhelming majority of the EEOC (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's) cases filed, involve men harassing women" (Nelson, 2021). Nasty comments are left on social media posts, where they can be reported and removed. Due to a more recent update, the creator of the content also has the ability to turn off the commenting option on their photos. This addition to social media platforms demonstrates that there is an issue with harassment on posts. Although this update restricts options for harassment, it doesn't solve the problem long term. It recognizes that there is an issue, and it puts a Band-Aid over it.

Much like harassment that occurs outside of the digital world, the blame is often flipped onto the target of the digital harassment. When a woman receives unwanted comments on social media, the woman is often questioned before the harasser is even considered to be the problem. "What were you wearing?" and "Why did you post it if

you didn't want that kind of attention?", are the types of questions that these women face after experiencing unwelcome comments. The patriarchal system puts the women at blame for the comments instead of those leaving the disgusting remarks.

In Greta Gerwig's 2023 movie hit, *Barbie*, she states, "You have to answer for men's bad behavior, which is insane, but if you point that out, you're accused of complaining. You're supposed to stay pretty for men, but not so pretty that you tempt them too much..." (Gerwig, 2023). Greta uses her creative platform in order to push this issue into the light and call out the flawed system. This segment of the movie is empowering to women and shows that this is an issue experienced at an unacceptable level. This speech brings together those who have been affected by this system and calls for action on the issue by pointing it out so directly.

Harassment online doesn't only occur on social media, and it isn't always from a stranger. Online harassment can also occur through texting and by someone you know personally. At the age of 14, I encountered harassment through text messages from someone I considered a best friend. It started off as sly put downs here and there and progressed through a series of months. They would make harmful remarks such as, "the world would be a better place without you in it" and tell me if I told anyone the things they said to me, they would inflict harm upon themselves. In my experience, intimidation and threatening messages were used as a form of control.

Although this form of harassment isn't verbal, it still holds the power to do just as much damage. My experience had severe impacts on my mental and physical health. I began to struggle with disordered eating and became physically weak. From a mental aspect, my anxiety worsened, and I began to experience panic attacks. These factors also negatively impacted my education. As I had to sit in class with my tormenter whom I received constant threats from, I lost my ability to focus when in the same room. The effects from severe online harassment can have long term or even lifelong effects on those targeted. The online harassment I had experienced even led to harassment in person, which only made my health decline more. Once the school had found out, the only consequence for the harasser was a recommended trip to the Wellstone mental facility.

Another form of harassment committed by someone known personally to the target is the sharing of private images. The exchanging of nude photos through sexting has increasingly become a popular way to be intimate online. Although these photos are often shared with trust, trust isn't always reliable. Harassment is often connected to a sense of power and control. By sharing private images with someone, these images can be used against someone in order to give the harasser a sense of control. This is what leads to the dangers of sharing photos online.

The article published on *Seventeen* by Hanna Orenstein called, "14 Girls Share Their Sexting Horror Stories" briefly distributes stories

shared by women covering the dangers of sharing intimate photos online, whether themselves or others they know. These short story segments represent the motives of the harassers and how they use harassment in order to get what they want out of their target. Some of these shared segments represented those pressured into sharing private photos through threats while others listed how their protective systems have failed them.

A standout segment of this article stated:

“Someone at my school made a Google Docs page with nudes from 200+ girls. We were in ninth grade at the time, but the photos were from sixth and seventh. The school did nothing except to tell us not to send nudes.” — Emilie, 17” (Orenstein, 2017).

Not only were the girls minors, but their situation was dismissed and not taken seriously by a system that is supposed to protect them. The blame had been pinned on those who sent the photos at a young and naive age. Their situation should have been handled on a consequential level. Instead, the dismissive system of online harassment has failed these young girls just as it has for many others.

Much like demonstrated in the article, once these photos are sent out, the outcome is out of the sender’s hands. What the receiver of the photos chooses to do with the photo can lead to the photo getting sent around to other people or leaked on the internet. The saying, “the internet is forever” implies that once an image is uploaded, a copy of it will always exist somewhere. Photos may be uploaded or shared without consent, forever exposing the person in the photo at a private

level. When this privacy is violated through harassment, things get dangerous.

When photos are leaked and consent has been abused, the mental health of those targeted is at risk. Even though the harassment is online, it has serious impacts on real life people. Teen suicide is often linked to depression and forms of harassment and bullying, things that can easily come from online. According to the article "Sexting, Mental Health, and Victimization Among Adolescents: A Literature Review", in *National Library of Medicine*, findings suggested a significant association between sexting behaviors and suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, depressive symptoms, and feelings of sadness. Teenage boys and girls who engaged in sexting behaviors showed a higher risk of reporting suicidal thoughts even after controlling for cyber victimization and depression (Gassó, Klettke, Agustina, & Montiel, 2019). The increasing rate in teen suicide is incredibly concerning and it is an issue that needs to be focused on. The fate of future generations is dependent on the attempts made to prevent online harassment.

In order to combat the brutality of online harassment, the issue needs to be addressed. By focusing on the root of the problem, there would be a drop in the rate of teen depression and suicide. Listening to those who have been targets of online harassment and focusing on where the system has failed them would be a step in the right direction of solving this issue. Sharing and learning from these experiences would help to

better shape online safety and the importance of consent, for all ages. Their stories pave a path for change and a reformed system.

Social media platforms need to put more effort into protecting their users. Reporting or blocking an account no longer helps to prevent harassment. Those with the intent to harass have found ways around the simple block and report solution. It is a short term fix to an issue that affects many users of the platform. Harassment through the internet needs to have more appropriate consequences. Taking away the access of social media or putting the harasser through a mandatory ethics course could limit the amount of online harassment being committed on a daily basis.

If the importance of consent was taught at a young age, the lines of consent would be defined from the start. In the article "Consent at Every Age" by Grace Tatter, she states,

“...at its core, it’s an idea that many learn as early as preschool — the notion that we should respect one another’s boundaries, in order to be safe, preserve dignity, and build healthy relationships.” (Tatter, 2018).

Consent isn’t something that is only taught to teens and adults. It can be taught at any age and it will benefit the individual for life, forever impacting the way they interact with others. By teaching this concept to the youth, they will be better educated on how to safely interact with other internet users and what comments are appropriate to make. In the long run, this will prevent internet users from thinking that harassing others on the internet is okay.

In order to combat harassment in the digital world, the voices of those who have been harmed by the lack of protection in the system of the online realm need to be uplifted, social media platforms need to take the issue earnestly, and consent needs to be taught early on. Bringing attention to the issue increases the probability of change and improvement. By acknowledging the flaws in the system and working towards making alterations in the way online harassment is handled, many will be spared the negative impacts.

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WHY THE FIGHT AGAINST TRANSGENDER RIGHTS MATTERS TO YOU: THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF OPPRESSION

JAXON REAS

My name is Jaxon Reas, and I am a 19-year-old transgender man.

I came out to my parents about two years ago, but I have known I was different since I was little. I came out to my friends sophomore year of high school. I was called every homophobic slur in the book since before I even knew the term “transgender.” I have been on hormone replacement therapy for around eight months.

I am giving you my story because my rights are currently the main topic of today’s political atmosphere. People triple my age are sitting in government buildings, deciding my and every other trans person’s fate because they find us to be a threat of some kind.

A threat to their children.

Their schools.

Their sports.

Their masculinity.

I am just a kid getting a college degree. I threaten no one. But they don't care about my or anyone else's story. We are not the first community *by far* to have our rights to live questioned for an identity that is out of our control. We will surely not be the last. The patriarchy has a funny tendency to cycle through minorities once it's gotten bored with the last. This is exactly why the fight against *my* rights, transgender rights, should matter to you. Your community might be next. The patriarchy only *truly* benefits a single kind of person: a cisgendered, heterosexual, middle-to-upper class, able-bodied, neurotypical, Christian, white man. If you do not fit each part of that criteria, eventually it will be your turn on the chopping block. So, unless we fight the system as a whole, the patriarchy lives on to oppress another group of people.

My fight is your fight, and yours is mine.

The major idea that will frequently be discussed throughout this paper is intersectionality. I may be a transman, but that is not the only identity that I carry with me, as is the same for every human being. Our identities are an amalgamation of labels that mix in a complex

manner that often leads to people falling into multiple categories of oppressed minorities. A queer black woman will always be that—queer *and* black *and* a woman. She is of three oppressed identities simultaneously, being put down by the same oppressive political structure of the patriarchy.

Audre Lorde puts it best:

“From my membership in all of these groups I have learned that oppression and the intolerance of difference come in all shapes and sexes and colors and sexualities; and that among those of us who share the goals of liberation and a workable future for our children, there can be no hierarchies of oppression” (Lorde, 1983).

Since homophobia and racism stem from the same source, any issue within the LGBTQ+ community becomes an issue in the black community, and vice versa. No oppression of one identity trumps another because in the long run, we’re all being oppressed by the same system. Lorde claims that no single part of her identity can prosper while the other part suffers under the hands of oppression (Lorde, 1983). Discrimination and injustice need to be attacked from its central source, not scattered about on different battlefields.

De Vries discusses the intricacies of intersectionality that trans people are forced to master in their work, “Intersectional identities and conceptions of the self: The experience of transgender people” (de Vries, 2012). They interviewed 30+ transgender people of a variety of ethnic/cultural backgrounds, ages, genders, sexualities, education,

medicalisation, and class status. From what was gathered from the participants, trans people after transitioning are not only changing what people expect from them in gender norms; they are expected to behave like their new gender within the norms of their race, class, etc. (de Vries, 2012). A young, white man holds certain expectations, both within his own culture and to the rest of society, just as a black woman is expected to behave a certain way around people of *her* culture. Changing the perception of one's gender is just one part of the whole transition process.

In just the terms of gender and race, de Vries says:

“Even for transpeople who maintain the ‘same’ racial identity upon transitioning, the racial/ethnic meanings others attach to their gender are significant and often vary from dominant, white cultural expectations” (de Vries, 2012).

Kimberlé Crenshaw, in her TedTalk titled, “The urgency of intersectionality,” uses the analogy of a crossroads to simplify intersectionality. Specifically for a black woman in the workforce, the black woman stands in the middle of an intersection of roads, where one road was structured by race and the other by gender. The traffic, in her words, “would be the hiring policies and the other practices that ran through those roads” (Crenshaw, 2016). A black woman is faced with both the discrimination because of her skin colour and of her gender. This further goes to show just how interlocked our social identities are.

Intersectionality always has and always will be a part of human society. I, as a transman, have the black trans women of the 70s to thank for my ability to legally medically transition today. Transgender people and people of color go way back in history together. The intertwining history of the LGBTQ+ community and black trans women is not often discussed, but it has been upon the backs of these black trans women that LGBTQ+ people today have been carried to liberation. As much as I wish this was common knowledge, there are still people in America who have never heard of the Stonewall riots, the main turning point for the gay rights movement. Though the unrest began far before the events of Stonewall, these particular riots began on June 28th, 1969, after police raided a bar with the intention of arresting “ ‘transsexuals and cross-dressers’ ” (Boyson, 2020). The LGBTQ+ community were frequent targets of police brutality, especially those who were people of colour, and on this morning, they fought back. The Stonewall riots were led by a woman named Marsha B. Johnson, a black trans woman and a name hardly ever seen in the retellings of these events (Boyson, 2020). Once again, intersecting oppression has let another person slip through the cracks of history. Even the community where all are meant to be welcome, whether intentionally or not, failed to give coverage to the diverse range of ethnicities within the community.

Today, while we as a society have taken leaps and bounds to create a more equal home, we are still far from perfection. A country and system that was built upon sexism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia is still finding itself housing biases against those who are different. This can be seen in the media. The website "Are you Press Worthy" calculates the amount of news coverage and stories a person would

have if they were to go missing in the U.S. based on four different criteria: age, gender identity, state, and ethnicity. The first thing to catch my attention was the choices available for gender identity; transgender was not even an option. There was male, female, non-binary, and “prefer not to say”. That should let you know how many news stories there would be about me. After entering my own data (with the caveat of picking “non-binary” since it would be the closest option), I received a whopping 17 articles. Only eight news outlets would tell my story. Only 2.25% of Americans would hear my name. To put it into perspective, the average young, white woman’s missing person story gets roughly 50 stories, with the highest number reaching 128. Fiddling with the inputted data gets even more striking results; changing just the ethnicity from white to black/African American nearly halves the number with a mere eight stories (with 1.02% of Americans hearing it). God forbid I were a 45-year-old Latina/Hispanic woman as I’d only receive less than 5 news stories. The point I am making is that the intersectionality of oppression is a real threat to real lives.

The title of “transgender” by itself puts a target on our backs, especially now when lies are being spread about our apparent “threat” to society. According to research from 2017 and 2018, trans people are “over four times more likely than cisgender people to experience violent victimization, including rape, sexual assault, and aggravated or simple assault” (Dowd, 2021). This is data from *before* every political conversation became geared toward the topic of transgender rights. More current data shows even more concerning results; the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) monitors and collects data of cases involving the murders of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. They track each year, starting and ending on November

20, Transgender Day of Remembrance. From November 20, 2022, to November 20, 2023, there were a total of 33 transgender and gender non-conforming people killed (HRC.org, 2023). The data also shows that a majority of these deaths are people of color, more specifically black trans women. The HRC has been tracking these kinds of cases since 2013, and according to this article, the murders of black transgender women make up 61.8% of fatal violence against trans and gender non-conforming individuals. 85% of these cases were people of color with 69% of them being of black trans people. This past year has seen a significant increase in the disproportionate violence against trans women of color: “In the last 12 months, trans women of color accounted for two-thirds of all victims (66.7; n=22), with black trans women accounting for more than half (51.5%; n=17) of all known victims in this period” (HRC.org, 2023). The HRC has many other statistics, each scarier than the last.

Collecting this kind of data can be incredibly challenging for a variety of reasons; cases often go unreported and others will not identify the victim as transgender or gender non-conforming (HRC.org, 2023). This can also tie back to the site I mentioned earlier, areyoupressworthy.com. There is a bias in the media and the law against trans people that keeps our names and stories from being shared, especially if you hold more than one minority identity. This bias does not only affect the trans community, but every minority group. Transgender people are everywhere; they are black, Hispanic, and indigenous. It is not just the white trans people dying. Quite the opposite actually with white trans people only making up for a little over 13% of victims of fatal violence since 2013 (HRC.org, 2023). As I said earlier, most of the victims are people of color. So, it is *every* community that

suffers. The black community, the Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx community, the Asian-Americans; everyone suffers the costs of the patriarchy. The death of a black trans woman impacts three separate groups simultaneously. This is *all* of our fight because it affects all of us.

Even the data of non-fatal crimes should be enough to convince you of the desperation of the situation. The FBI reported nearly 500 gender identity-related hate crimes in the year 2022 alone, with around 20% of all hate crimes that year being generally anti-LGBTQ+ (HRC.org, 2023). Once again, this number still is not perfect because “FBI data reporting does not capture all hate crimes, as not all jurisdictions track anti-trans hate crimes, nor do all jurisdictions report hate crimes to FBI databases” (HRC.org, 2023). We continue to see the erasure of the stories of trans suffering because of institutionalized transphobia, racism, and sexism as well as all the other institutionalized systems of oppression. Extreme acts of homophobia and transphobia were also documented. During the time period of early 2022 and April 2023, there were over 150 attacks on drag events, “more than 350 anti-LGBTQ+ incidents,” and then in June of this year, there were 145 incidents of extreme anti-LGBTQ+ acts (HRC.org, 2023).

Our nation’s current, narrow focus on the trans community is terrifying to say the least. This quote from the HRC report sums up the situation well:

“This report comes amidst a shocking wave of anti-transgender legislation. In 2023, for the first time in their 40+ year history, the Human Rights Campaign declared a National State of Emergency

for LGBTQ+ Americans, in response to the over 550 anti-LGBTQ+ bills introduced into state houses across the country, more than 80 of which were passed into law” (HRC.org, 2023).

Many of these laws target trans people in particular, along with a slew of hate speech that is propagated by the right-wing political scene. These laws have tried to: “limit access to school sports, school restrooms, and locker rooms; ban access to safe, effective, age-appropriate gender-affirming medical care; and remove inclusive books and references to LGBTQ+ identities and experiences from school curricula (a la “don’t Say LGBTQ”)” (HRC.org, 2023). The target is being heavily placed on transgender and gender nonconforming youth, a group that is already prone to tragedies such as suicide and violent hate crimes. According to research by Austin and their team, transgender youth pose the highest rates of suicidality when compared to trans adults (Austin et al., 2020). Yet, bills are continually being passed that directly target this specific group.

My name is Jaxon Reas.

And I am watching the brutal wave of attacks against my community just as many others in different minorities have before me. I am standing in their shoes, waiting to see what the patriarchy does with

my rights and my future. I remember the terror in the women and other AFAB (assigned female at birth) people when *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, never expecting it would be my turn to witness my rights on the chopping block.

I was ignorant.

It all comes from the same source; a source of hate and discrimination, greed and power. I wish I had known then what I know now about intersectionality because maybe then I would have been better prepared and equipped to handle the emergency we find ourselves in. It is not simply an attack on transgender people because an attack on transgender people means it is also an attack on gays, lesbians, the black community, the disabled community, and everyone who does not fit into that long list of norms favored by the system. Fighting as separate groups will get us nowhere. Our communities are so intertwined, and we can find strength in those numbers.

So, please, listen when I tell you that the trans fight is *your* fight as well.

Join the fight.

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Ashley Wilder is a senior at Indiana University Southeast, pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. During her time at IUS, she has held several leadership positions within her sorority and has been an active member of the IUS Psi Chi Psychology Club. Academically, Ashley has been deeply engaged in exploring the intricate connections between psychology and social justice, showing a particular interest in understanding the intersectionality of individuals from diverse backgrounds. As she prepares to graduate, Ashley is determined to further her education and pursue a career that allows her to focus on her interests in both psychology and social justice.

Taylor Jones

Taylor Jones is a Junior at Indiana University Southeast majoring in psychology with a minor in philosophy. He has aspirations to go into social work, with a particular interest in research. His interest in social work comes from a place of wanting to help those in need directly, rather than being an outside observer.

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Brooklyn Schotter is a senior at IUS who is majoring in biology and minoring in plant science. After college, she is considering entering research in the medical field or focusing on conservation.

Jaxon A. Reas

Jaxon A. Reas is a junior at Indiana University Southeast. Reas is majoring in Psychology with a minor in Gender Studies and plans to attend IU Southeast's Master's program in mental health counseling. As a 19-year-old transgender man who has been an active part of the LGBTQ+ community for several years, Reas believes their insight can provide people a better understanding of the issues this community faces.