



Feminism and the Basic Income

Why we should all be feminists...and why all feminists should support the basic income.

If all you knew about feminism was what the extreme right-wing says about it, you probably think feminists are the devil-incarnate. Feminists have been wrongly (and in many cases, maliciously) described as angry, man-hating women, who are control-freaks and would like to see men subjugated by and subordinated to women. To their minds, feminists (or FemiNazis, as they sometimes refer to feminists) would like to enslave the world.

But that's of course nonsense. Feminism is about as hate-worthy a thing as anti-racism (which is why it's not surprising that the same cohort of people who hate feminists also seem to hate anti-racism campaigners such as the Black Lives Matter movement).

Sure, some feminists are angry. Guess why? Humans do get angry sometimes. It's as Human as breathing. Often, the state of mind behind using the phrase "she's an angry person" as a criticism is one which denies to women attributes which, in men, would be viewed as normal. But also, women, as a group, have many really good reasons to be pretty angry. Take a look at everyday stories relayed by women on the difficulties of doing basic things in public, at work, in mass transit systems, etc. documented by the everydaysexism.com project, and see if you wouldn't be really angry yourself.

Recently, our society's collective attention has been turned to sexual harassment. Reports of everything from sexual assault to sexual improprieties seem to have become a constant feature of the news cycle. Across the pond, Roger Ailes, Bill O'Reilly, Harvey Weinstein, Donald Trump, John Conyers, and Al Franken have been the most high profile cases. At home, parliament was recently beguiled by reports of the existence of a secret list of 36 "sex pest" Tory MPs.

Like it or not, our society needs to face up to the problem of toxic masculinity. Its most recent iteration is the extremely stupid "bro culture." But toxic masculinity has been part and parcel of this civilization, for a long, long time.

Toxic masculinity explains the following: Sexual assault and rape; sexual harassment; unwanted touching; verbal abuse aimed at a woman for her appearance; assumptions about what she may or may not like, including (but not limited to) the assumption that her politeness is conclusive evidence she wants to go to bed with you; assumptions about her intelligence and knowledge (which often plays out in the form of treating genuine intellectual disagreements, not as that, but as a sign that she is too unintelligent to see your point); etc. These are all products of a system which places women lower on the pecking-order of humanity than men, and in which women are simply there to be acted upon (liked, married, complimented, corrected, satisfied, sexualized, etc.) by men.

Some cases of these might seem exceedingly normal. But that is not because they should be. They seem normal because toxic masculinity is viewed as normal.

One result of toxic masculinity is, to my mind, the implicit view that the work women do is less valuable than the work men do. This can clearly be illustrated in pay. I assume, of course, that in a capitalist system like ours pay is meant to illustrate the value which one's work is taken to add. What you are paid depends on how valuable what you do is taken to be. I do not, however, believe that there is any relation between the value placed on one's work by the market, and the actual (inherent) value of the same work.

This endemic devaluing of the work women do (for no reason related to the work itself, but to the fact that they are women), I think, explains the fact that there is a pretty striking [pay gap](#) in the UK (and around the world), between men and women doing the same job, even after other factors have been controlled for. But beyond this, female dominated professions tend to pay [less than male dominated professions](#). Information technology managers (male-dominated) earn more than human resource managers (female-dominated). Janitors (male-dominated) earn more than domestic helps (female-dominated). And you can go on. The New York Times put it hauntingly: "Work done by women simply isn't valued as highly." This last fact is obviously linked to the fact that these areas are female-dominated since studies show that when women enter male-dominated fields in large enough numbers [pay in those areas tend to fall](#) even after one has controlled for other factors.

Feminists, regardless of the differences in how they choose to go about it, simply want to undermine both the systemic sources of these injustices as well as their day-to-day effects on the lives of women. That is what feminism is. Every sensible person should be a feminist, because I assume every sensible person wants justice to prevail. I am a feminist. We should all be feminists.

So, why must every feminist support the basic income?

It might seem that we, as a society, couldn't possibly go lower in our disregard for the work women do, right? Wrong! While pay for women in the earlier cases are lower than men's, some of the work done by women are quite simply unpaid. To be more correct, they are simply not even viewed as work. While women have now entered the work-place in truly historic numbers, they still make up the overwhelming majority of stay-at-home parents. In the US, for example, [only 16%](#) of stay-at-home parents are dads. In the [UK](#) it is just 12%. Could the fact that we don't, as a society, value the work women do explain why we don't see staying home to care for kids as work, or as pay-worthy work?

I am well aware of the arguments about how parenting is a work of love, which, if paid, would devalue the love with which it is done. Am sorry to say, that is a load of rubbish. Cristiano Ronald loves the game of football, am sure. He would continue to do it even if he wasn't paid to do it. But he gets paid millions of pounds each year to do it. And we can see the parallels. The same arguments applied to stay-at-home parenting were once also applied to football. When big money started taking an interest in football, people complained that it was eroding its value. What was important, complainers typically said, was the passion, the love, and the commitment to the beautiful game. Today, most people are at peace with the fat salaries players take home.

Who says you can't pay someone for doing something they do with love?

Paying moms (and now dads) for stay-at-home parenting is the next front where society needs to change its approach. Football provides something valuable: entertainment. Stay-at-home parenting provides something much more valuable than entertainment: good citizens, good humans. And, yes you don't have to stay at home in order to produce good children; and staying at home to care for your kids doesn't guarantee that they will turn out great. But studies consistently show that stay-at-home parenting produces much better results than Child Care . From functional, well-adjusted adults to productive members of society, stay-at-moms are arguably the only thing standing between us and complete chaos or society-wide maladjustment and malfeasance.

Philippe Van Parijs, who is perhaps the best-known proponent of the basic income in the philosophical community in the West, has argued in his [new book](#) *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and A Sane Economy* that justice requires that stay-at-home parenting be remunerated. He contends that while giving a basic income may not necessarily solve the problem outright (because the basic income is not given only to stay-at-home parents); and while money may not solve the problem in its entirety, since its source (patriarchy) goes much deeper than statistics can explain, the basic income sure can make the situation less unjust than it currently is.

I agree with him.

Every one of us who thinks that every small step toward equality between males and females is a laudable achievement (feminists) should celebrate the basic income as a small step toward that, while we proactively think of better solutions.

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