Cry Like A Fag, Scream Like A Woman

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Cis men's emotions — what they are, how they feel them, how they deal with them, what patriarchy expects from them — have been treated as a concern of feminist theory for the totality of its history. Unsurprising, as patriarchy is a system that makes successfully understanding and navigating the emotional landscapes of men a matter of vital importance and personal safety to all maGes (marginalized genders). While I do not deny that it is worthwhile to explore the differing impacts that patriarchy has on people of all genders, including cis men, I believe the character of this particular interest is very frequently not as feminist as it purports to be. The most common expression of this concern (and thus the one I intend to critique here) presents cis men's emotions, particularly the idea that they are "stifled" or "suppressed" by patriarchy, as a central rather than peripheral concern to feminist thought and organizing. As liberal feminism has gained (at least rhetorical) momentum and popularity, so too has the desire to recast as feminist the patriarchal expectation that maGes center the concerns and emotional lives of cis men.

This special concern is the values of patriarchy reconstituting themselves within feminist discourse. It positions cis men as experiencing sadness, anger, loneliness, loss, alienation, etc. in ways that are deeper and more profound than maGes do, and thus require heightened concern, time, energy, resources, care, etc. than the gender marginalized. It stems from a belief that the emotional landscapes of cis men are more nuanced than maGes, have more depth, are more valuable and constitute a crisis when disrupted or dysregulated. Indeed, under patriarchy, cis men are entitled to make their emotional dysregulation a crisis for everyone else. It reorients concern away from those marginalized by patriarchy and towards its primary and most empowered perpetrators. It also, to my assessment, stems from a misunderstanding of the problem itself.

It is reductive to say that cis men are not allowed to experience or express their emotions under patriarchy, as is commonly claimed. Cis men are not only allowed but *encouraged* to express any and all emotions under patriarchy. What they are actually discouraged from doing is expressing emotions in ways that do not serve to differentiate them from women and other marginalized genders. Cis men can be angry, just not in the way women are angry. They can be sad and even cry, but just not in the way queers do. They are encouraged to have and express emotions by patriarchy, but only in ways that refer to that system of power.

In practice this looks less like the total and constant emotional suppression for cis men many liberal feminists articulate and more like the stratification of emotional and reproductive labor: the product of a society in which emotional and caring labor is heavily gendered and cis men de-

pend on their ability to constantly differentiate themselves from women and other marginalized genders to access patriarchal power, and thus the wealth extracted by that system. In the arenas where they struggle and posture for power with other cis men they are indeed frequently emotionally stifled and struggle to express the fullness of their authenticity with each other, but this itself is because such authenticity would place them in closer proximity to queerness in the eyes of other cis men and thus disadvantage them in that power struggle. Among youth and gender marginalized people, however, cis men can generally unleash any emotional storm they want, are even encouraged to do so by patriarchal gender scripts, with the expectation of receiving unconditional support and bottomless empathy in return. All this with little to (frequently) no acknowledgment that the maGes providing them with emotional and reproductive support have complex emotions, needs, and inner lives of their own.

We are meant to be concerned with cis men's so-called "loneliness epidemic" and "lack of positive role models" because patriarchy needs us to affirm cis men's differentiation from the gender marginalized. They demand solutions to their loneliness that affirms their patriarchal power: "women should (be nicer to me, talk to me more, agree to have more sex with me, submit to being my state-assigned wife, etc.)" and when they decry a supposed lack of positive role models they invariably mean a lack of positive role models who are cis heterosexual men embodying hegemonic masculinity. What is at issue here is not that cis men are simply ignorant and lack emotional awareness or ability to feel and express their authentic selves, it's that they want to be able to do so and not risk their ability to access patriarchal power. They believe that the solution must be their emotions taking up more space rather than in interrogating the methods for expressing them they find acceptable, which they avoid, and why. They want to be able to be an empowered patriarch in manly tears and they are terrified of looking like a fairy instead.

The impulse to assure cis men that their emotions don't actually put them in nearer proximity to womanhood or queerness ("Don't worry, crying doesn't make you look like a woman!") or that they experience emotional difficulties more profoundly than how maGes experience them is patriarchal at its core, not feminist. The problem of cis men's loneliness is not special and unique from the problem of loneliness in general. The only thing about cis men's emotional dysregulation that makes it notably distinct from how maGes experience emotional dysregulation is that we live in a society meant to cater to and alleviate cis men's alienation, whereas the alienation of the gender marginalized is understood as the system working as intended. A cis man being lonely is seen as a social problem, a woman or queer person being lonely is seen as shameful personal failure. Continuing to cater to cis men's desire to differentiate themselves from maGes while having their (only self-serving) emotional liberation too will never get to the core of the issue that is cis men's fear of losing their power.

That cis men struggle with figuring out how to authentically express their emotions while being able to continue to differentiate themselves from women and other marginalized genders is not a feminist concern. It is patriarchy working to reconstitute itself in a new form and the result is the same: the centering of the emotional lives of cis men over the material needs of the gender marginalized. The pressing feminist issue regarding cis men's emotions is their *overrepresentation* in our lives, not their absence. Cis men's emotions frequently dominate the spaces they are in and via the technology of patriarchy are reframed as mere expressions of Logic and Reason we must submit to. MaGes must constantly cater to cis men's feelings and navigate them with extreme care just to be safe, and even the most extravagant rituals of caretaking and subservience cannot always offer protection when their entitled rage has been triggered. Every negative emotion cis

men experience is seen as the failure of a woman or otherwise gender marginalized person to properly caretake for them. Their insecurities and jealousies are treated as acceptable causes for the assault, abuse, and murder of the gender marginalized. Their anxieties and entitlements and the system that empowers them lose us access to resources, housing, communities, healthcare, and more. Cis men don't need to learn to express their emotions more, they need to *reduce* their sense of entitlement to the caretaking of marginalized genders as well as their fear of being perceived as similar to us. They must also expand their sense of maGes as people who have equally rich and complex emotional lives, and thus are people in need of reciprocal support and solidarity.

Cis men truly interested in being liberated in their emotions in ways that don't refer to patriarchal power see their loneliness as a struggle they share *in common* with women and queer people — a point of solidarity — rather than trying to differentiate themselves from maGes by articulating their feelings as more special or profound. They stop looking to other cis men for role models altogether. The serious ones find the courage to cry like a real fag! They're screaming like women, learning about their masculinity from trans people, and being devalued by other cis men as a result! It is simply impossible to reject patriarchal hegemony while still being fully accepted by it, and it is far past time that we stop pretending otherwise to coddle the endless sensitivities of cis men. The price (and gift) of authenticity is closer proximity to queerness. Cis men can take the risks inherent in rejecting the system that gives them their power, or continue to conform to its hegemony, but they cannot do both. If their store-bought masculinity chafes, let them remove it themselves. We need not take the time, energy, and resources to attempt to refit such fragile garments and there is no shortage of other options for them should they really care to look.

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