

These people, sometimes called TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists) or “gender critical feminists,” believe that women’s oppression is rooted in biology. They believe people assigned male at birth cannot experience women’s oppression because they have not lived their entire lives as women. Worse, some of these feminists argue that trans women are simply men in disguise, seeking to access women’s spaces for nefarious and violent reasons.

Their argument is rooted in essentialist and biologically determinist ideas about what constitutes a woman. It also ignores the fact that trans women suffer both everyday sexism *and* transphobia. In fact, trans people are some of the most oppressed and violently targeted people in our society.

Socialists

Socialists believe that gender is fluid and shaped by the societies we live in. Transphobia is bound up in the oppressive ideas capitalism uses to control our bodies, reproduction, and families in order to keep the system running.

Something that also distinguishes a Marxist approach to oppression is the idea that it has not always existed. If oppression is created to serve and maintain a particular class arrangement, this means an end to class society creates the possibility for an end to oppression too. By the same token, any serious fight against capitalism must center the experiences and voices of those the system most brutalizes. That means the fight for socialism and the fight for trans liberation depend upon one another.

We can have a society without oppression—but that means overturning the whole system and fighting for human liberation.

Monthly national discussion / ALL WELCOME

From Stonewall to Reclaiming Pride:
The fight for queer liberation today

Sun Jul 11 / 11am / 2pm / Zoom: 9132004856

Marx21 is a socialist organization with members across the country. Visit our website marx21us.org/category/lgbtq to read more socialist analysis of queer politics. Follow us [@marx21us](https://twitter.com/marx21us) to learn more and get involved.



Socialists believe that the struggle for liberation from oppression and the task of transforming the capitalist system are part of the same fight. One cannot occur without the other.

Today there is a growing understanding of trans oppression, led by trans people themselves. This is reflected in the visibility of trans people in movies, music, and wider society.

But the flipside of greater trans visibility has also been the development of a disturbing backlash. Over the last few years, a significant assault has been mounted on trans people’s rights and aspirations — taking the form of transphobic public restroom bills, attacks on trans athletes, and bans on gender-affirming healthcare especially for children.

Earlier this month *The Guardian* reported that 2021 is already set to be the decade’s deadliest year for trans and gender non-conforming people in the US. At least 28 trans people have been killed so far this year. Most were Black or Latinx women.

Studies suggest that 25-43% of trans people have attempted suicide. Social attitudes are more hostile toward trans people in particular than toward the wider LGBT+ community in general.

Capitalism

Laura Miles, author of *Transgender Resistance: Socialism and the fight for trans liberation* locates the origins of trans oppression in class society and capitalism. Laura writes that trans people “stimulate a fundamental angst” over “the common sense about gender and sex.”

But people's ideas about gender are not "immaculately conceived from thin air." They flow from material conditions — how production is organized, and the social relations between the rulers and ruled in a class society such as capitalism.

This is at the heart of debates around how socialists should respond to the fight for trans rights.

Essentialism

Laura argues against what she calls an "essentialist idea about gender and sexuality. They don't reflect truths at all, but rather ideological claims that serve the interests of the dominant class," she writes.

An essentialist view sees sex as biologically determined in a binary way and that gender follows suit. This comes out in a transphobic argument that biological sex means trans women aren't really women.

Laura writes that people sometimes look to science to "hunt down 'fundamental' genetic or brain structure differences between males and females.

There is a greater scientific understanding today that biological, sexual, and reproductive characteristics are much more varied than a simple male-female binary.

A small minority of people born intersex — meaning they have sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the binary boxes of "female" or "male." But the medical community largely has not accepted these variations and tends to advocate non-consensual and permanent surgical or hormonal treatment on young infants.

While intersex relates to a physical condition, being transgender relates to a lack of a 'fit' between a person's birth-assigned gender and their sense of gender identity.

Laura argues evidence that gender is hardwired into the brain is weak. The way children are nurtured and raised "is flexible and depends on the social order into which they are born."

History

Archaeological and anthropological studies show that women's oppression did not exist in pre-class hunter gatherer or foraging societies. "In such

societies," says Laura "male and female roles might differ due to differentiated biological abilities. But this would not necessarily mean significant differences in social status or power between the genders."

The evidence shows great variety and fluidity to gender roles in different times and cultures. "Being a particular sex could lead to a variety of gender roles and choices of gender as ascribed by particular societies," she writes.

This changed with the rise of class society. Laura explains, "Men increasingly came to control the forces of production as agriculture was developed and more children were needed to work the land. Women's reproductive and infant nurturing roles largely precluded the possibility of continuous heavy labour in the fields," she writes.

Men were able to accumulate greater wealth as they controlled and traded the surpluses made possible by agricultural society and women were increasingly restricted to privatized family units.

With the subjugation of women came far more rigid gender roles. The institution of the family began to regulate sexuality.

Family

Capitalism, based on mass production outside the family unit, pushed women and children into the factories and threatened to break apart the working class family.

But capitalists still needed the family to reproduce the next generation of workers. So in the late 19th century rules were brought in to enforce the idea of a "nuclear family."

During this period, abortion was banned and the term "homosexuality" was first used. Same sex relations were seen to threaten the family and the idea of sex for procreation not pleasure.

The family has undergone many changes under capitalism. But it remains resilient and is used to this day to police both sexuality and gender.

Transphobia

Over 110 anti-trans bills across 37 states have been proposed by Republicans this year. But transphobia is not only a conservative moral panic. A minority of feminists, particularly out of Britain, argue that trans women are not really women, and call to exclude trans women from women-only spaces.