

Question # 1

There are numerous points of contention exist around the topic of gender characteristics and sexual orientation, and their relation to biology. Many believe biology and nature are of the utmost importance, with the genes one is born with determining exactly what a person will do. Others believe the human mind is a blank slate, just waiting for parents and society to pour in all of its culture, prejudices, and morals. Many lie in between these two extremes, believing nurture cultivates what nature innately inscribes. These viewpoints all shape the political and social landscape about what it means to be human, and what is right to do as a human. For each of these viewpoints, even more contention exists, between the definition of morals, and how the human condition should relate to them. Does being natural imply being right? Are actions that result from free choice considered wrong? If society controls one's innate thoughts, not nature, can people be blamed for their actions? I believe I have an answer that may satisfy these questions; however, my answer is one of many. For my own personal answer, I will attempt to reason and explain my viewpoint, as well as explain the tenants of other viewpoints. I will in turn refute the ideas of other viewpoints, and contrast them with my own. I hope that by doing so, we can all come to a better understanding of gender characteristics and sexual orientation, and what their place in society is.

The theories I primarily support are the theories of Liberal Feminism and Liberal Gays, henceforth referred to as the 'Liberal Activism' theories. Liberal Activism holds a combination of nature and nurture as the basis of one's self. Nature provides a unique starting place in society, one is born with certain traits, and some are more advantageous than others. However, all but the most deleterious of traits are able to be compensated for by one's drive to succeed, willingness to try hard, and above all, rational thought (Jaggar 173-174) .Thus, on the topic of gender characteristics and sexual orientation,

the question of acceptance is a simple one. If gender characteristics and sexual orientation are traits that do not affect one's ability to succeed, to work, or especially to think, then those traits are non-issues, and should not be used to discriminate by. Now, liberal thought in general has been used in the past against oppressed groups, by categorizing what are now known as arbitrary characteristics as disadvantaged characteristics. Many women were once told they could not act the same as men because their 'womanly brains' could not handle heavy thinking, their bodies could not handle heavy exercise, and other excuses. However, those practices are generally behind modern society in part due to people practicing the core tenants of Liberal Activism; the idea of which there are very few traits that cannot be overcome through rational thought; and that being a woman does not affect your ability to think (Steinem 50-51). Neither does sexual orientation, although the arguments against non-normative orientation are generally not based in liberal arguments. The theory of Liberal Activism, to me, is a perfect combination of how the natural and societal influences in our lives affect our actions. We are born with certain variation; it is an undeniable fact of our biology; however, our biology also affords us the ability to be influenced by society, and also rational thought (Cruikshank 52). It is naïve to think society decides everything about a person, for then, how could society initially form? It is likewise foolish to believe that biology determines everything about us, and to think what we learn from our surroundings does not affect us. Thus, liberal based thought, I believe, is the best reconciliation of nature vs nurture, and is the theory I think gives the most answers.

One of the first theories to arise against the ideals of Liberal Activism was that of Socialist Feminism. Socialist Feminism is similar to Liberal Activism in many ways, particularly in the view of the value of male and female sex differences being largely irrelevant to one's ability to perform most tasks. As Socialist Feminism deals primarily with women's issues, and not LGBTQ+ issues, I will address views from the LGBTQ+ community later on. The primary point of contention between Liberal Activism and Socialist Feminism is thus not one of societal gender division, but rather of economic system, as their

names suggest. Socialist Feminism holds that the primary issue facing women is the stratification of society into the hierarchy of capitalism. Capitalism, as explained by liberal feminists, is inherently exploitive. As long as Capitalism exists, it will be profitable and acceptable to discriminate between groups of arbitrary difference, in order to leverage these differences for profit margins (Radical Women Manifesto 8). Ideally, a single-level system where everyone is evenly valued, through socialism, would be able to end discrimination, as there would be no real points of difference for people to discriminate by. This ideology stems from the primary difference between liberalism and socialism, the definition of human nature. Liberalism highlights rational thought as the pinnacle of humanity, while socialism values its industry. Liberalism strives to create equal opportunity, with everyone then judged by their merits, while socialism strives for equal results, with everyone getting what they need, and nothing more (Davis 224-225). Socialist Feminism is thus simply an extension of socialist thought, in an attempt to make socialism more consistent. Equal results for all men, and all women, because we are all human.

I personally disagree with the approach of Socialist Feminism in two primary ways. First, for feasibility reasons, and second, the ideological approach. For the issue of feasibility, I believe history has demonstrated the general ineffectiveness of a non-hierarchical society. Russia and China attempted such an endeavor, but eventually were forced to revert to at least a partial capitalism hybrid system. This is primary due to the fact that to work, socialism needs to be universal. As long as other countries exist, and exist outside of a socialist system, the general necessity of trade and relations will continue to diffuse capitalist thought. In addition, the disparity of wealth in other countries still creates a hierarchy. There are people in other nations with more luxuries and wealth than in a socialist country, and thus without world participation, a socialism country is not truly non-hierarchical. Furthermore, just from a political standpoint, capitalism is deeply entrenched into the values of society, and practically impossible without full blown revolution. It is for these reasons I believe Socialist Feminism can never come to fruition, as the concept is too tied to socialism to be adopted by the highly capitalist general public. As to

the ideological approach, I personally disagree with the core tenant of socialism: unconditional equality. I am very much a believer in the virtue of rational thought, and of societal stratification based off of merit. Primarily, I believe that the degree to which a person can contribute to society, through their knowledge and reasoning capacity, in order to advance society as a whole, should be the basis for their compensation. A society without motivation to do better, or to invent and research and take risks and succeed, is a society that stagnates. If everyone is unconditionally cared for, and especially if the bare essentials is the cap for compensation by society, there is no reason to try hard or be unique or think outside of the box in pursuit of a better future. Necessity is the mother of invention, as the phrase goes, and without necessity, there is no invention. So to me, supporting Socialist Feminism is supporting the stopping of progress, not progress itself.

The next theories I present will come in the pairing of Radical Feminism and Radical Gays, collectively Radicalism. I believe these two groups are very similar to each other in tactics and message, and their primary difference is that of the target group. Radicalism is primary denoted by the movement's aversion to political institutions and the concept of the 'The personal is political' slogan, position generally referred to as non-alignment, due to not conforming to older modes of thinking. (Bunch 46-47) Radicals believe in systemic institutionalized discrimination towards oppressed groups, Women and Gays. The only solution to such ingrained discriminatory culture is the dismantlement of said institutions, as well as consciousness raising efforts to bring the issues into the public light. The concept of 'Patriarchy' in particular is a large tenant of the movement's ideology, where it is said that most discrimination occurs due to not having attributes pertaining to 'manhood' (Johnson 61-62). In the case of women, the connection is obvious, however even in Gay culture, patriarchy is perceived as a powerful problem. The reasoning follows that Gay men are not 'real' men, due to a perceived lack of masculinity, and increased feminine traits. Lesbians are damaged through the dual avenues of being women, as well as not following traditional sexual roles as prescribed by the male dominated society.

These specific gender roles and sexual orientations approved by the Patriarchy are seen as obstacles to a better, freer, more sexually open society (Freedman & D'Emilio 252-253). Radicalism ideology maintains that society prescribes gender on children, not nature. Therefore, to a proponent of radicalism, the ideal society would be one of androgyny, with no distinct gender differences, and no hierarchical systems. Additionally, followers of Radicalism are strong proponents of the Human mind being a blank slate, with only society determining the restrictions placed on one's self. Thus, individuality is highly emphasized in order to distance one's self from the confines of society, creating a dynamic where humans are not categorized as men, women, homosexual, or heterosexual, they are simply themselves (Wittman).

I necessarily disagree with Radicalism on two points. First, the centrality of the Patriarchy concept, and second, the assumption of human androgyny as a base state. In regards to the first of my qualms, it seems naïve to me to distill all of the various problems of the world into one monolithic concept: the Patriarchy. Reducing the complex intricacies of cause and effect, of politics, and even economic systems down to the concept of too much machoism seems overly simplistic. Additionally, those alleging oppression from the patriarchy are often in socioeconomic and political environments which allow such expression of personal thoughts in the first place. I would state that there are many problems in the world where applying the notion of patriarchy as a cause would be absurd when there are much more obvious causes available. This tends to be my issue with Radicalism. Radicalism has decided to face an essentially unverifiable construct as its enemy, leading to rampant attribution of any statement against the movement as discriminatory. There is no way to prove implicit bias in a person, but Radicalism tends to think it can. Ironically, similar to the McCarthy Era accusations of Communist sympathies or accusations of homosexuality, Radicalism can label anyone who disagrees with it as a sexist, homophobe, or various other names. That is why I believe a social movement should always try to be a constructive movement, one of inclusion and learning. 'Othering' the opposition reuses many of the tactics of oppressive groups, just now with a new label. My second issue with the ideology is that of

its stance on the biological grounds of human sexuality. The Radicalism claim is generally that humans are by nature sexually free, with a wide spectrum forming a basis of choice in regards to sexual orientation. While I get the allure of such a thought, I tend to disagree, as there is no good biological basis for such a claim. There are no studies proving or even indicating such a claim, and as the burden of proof in science is on the one making the claim there is no value in a claim that cannot be tested. I personally believe, that yes, there is natural variation in an individual's degree of sexuality due to the pressures of society, however, there is a biologically fixed starting point. Someone who is homosexual would not think of heterosexual relations, if they could, and the opposite is also often true. Even sexually liberated cultures, such as the Floridian tribes of North America, defined genders due to strong distinctions between the groups. (Katz 285) A perfectly fluid spectrum would not form those specific gender groups in the first place. Believing anyone can be any sexuality if only society was not in the way disregards the legitimacy of those who do fall into normative sexual and gender orientations, as well as those in non-normative orientations who wish to embrace their non-normativity. Thus, I believe Radicalism takes its idealism too far. At the very least, Humans are separated into two biological sexes, each sex triggering complex chemical reactions that determine many of one's traits. We are not all perfectly equal, but we are generally practically equivalent, and that is the extent to which society should see it.

The next, more uncommon ideology is that of Separatism. Separatism is a concept highly related to lesbianism, but with roots dating back to black separatism. In essence, Separatism is the concept of women removing themselves from common society in pursuit of their own, women only society. The argument being that women for too long have been oppressed under Patriarchy, and have no control over their own lives. Thus, women must take control of their own lives by voluntarily removing themselves from male-dominated society, and endeavor to create a society of women support, as the culture of men is too toxic an environment to exist in (Levy 30-31).

My primary concerns are that of the extreme unfeasibility and unsustainability of such a society, as well as the general undesirability of such a segregated society. Firstly, the entire endeavor is doomed to fail through simple biology. Without men to reproduce with, the movement will be over within a generation. Biological reproduction is an inconvenient fact that makes male involvement a necessity for any long term goals. The few women-only groups to have existed quickly died out once the political message dissipated; relying on disgruntled women immigrants is not a path to sustainability. I feel Liberal Activism, with the goal of embracing our differences and attempting to get along, is a much more constructive train of thought than running away from the problems in society. Even less extreme versions of the ideology, such as separate woman's spaces and support groups, still strike me as too isolationist, and forgo getting along for pushing out the world.

Finally, we come to the ideology of Queerism. Queerism takes a different approach from that of feminism or typical LGBTQ+ Movements, primarily through its connection to postmodernism. Queerism maintains that human experience is exclusively a product of the systems of society we exist in. Thus, nothing can be truly objective due to the biases humans pick up from society. Following from this premise, Queerism maintains that there exists no true stable identities, that people are only defined by their positions within the systems they inhabit. As those positions are ever changing, so too are the identities of those inhabiting the system (Eaklor 293). However, the primary focus of Queerism tends to be the opposition to society's dominant sex/gender system: heteronormity. The movement defines people to be queer if they are against the system of heteronormity (Duggan 165). Thus, Queerism is first a position, and only second an identity. The Queerism movement typically has employed controversial tactics, such as public 'outing' of individuals as homosexuals in an attempt to draw attention to hypocritical behavior, although often uninvolved parties become outed as well. Additionally, the movement tends to participate in Radical Direct Action in order to increase publicity, with actions such as sit-ins and lie-ins, protests, and other forms of spontaneous organization.

I disagree with the theory of Queerism for much the same reasons I disagree with Radicalism; that being the weak scientific basis for many of Queerism's claims, and the general existentialism Queerism employs. However, I primarily disagree with the methods Queerism uses to push its message. Queerist activism tends to be very disruptive to typical citizens. I personally believe that in order for a social justice movement to succeed, it must first win the public's approval. Gaining rights, unfortunately, does not always happen if you demand it. You must convince people to give you rights, you cannot just take them. I have long maintained that the best way to have someone do something is to make them want to do something; forcing someone's hand through pressure or coercion leads to resentment, bias, and hatred. Convincing someone change was their idea leads to a more constructive future. Thus, I believe Queerism takes the wrong approach by alienating the very people who may otherwise be sympathetic: the common citizen. There is no faster way to make someone dislike your cause than to inconvenience them. Queerism through its actions strongly polarizes communities, and a polarized community is not one that works towards greater rights.

It is through these arguments I have presented I hope to paint Liberal Activism as the best path forward in the fight for social justice. Liberal Activism is the most realistic of all the theories. It realizes people will change slowly, but generally can listen to reason. It realizes that, yes, biology exists, and does play a factor in our lives, but we don't have to be controlled by it. It realizes that inclusion, not exclusion is the best way into people's hearts, and that raising awareness, but not through infamy, is the best way to spread a message. I believe in Liberal Activism because it works. It has gotten us from the persecution of sodomy to the legalization of gay marriage, and from dark religious times to new ages of enlightenment. Idealism has its place, to look towards the future, but pragmatism is what gets us there. Let learning and knowledge work; all it needs is time. Other movements have risen and fallen, but Liberal Activism has stayed. It is time we realize that change is coming, and largely has come, due to Liberal Activism.