
Introduction

The essays in this section confront the numerous and varied ways patriarchy and gender norms marginalize women, girls, trans folk, and all things feminine. While patriarchy ultimately harms everyone, cisgender men and boys are rarely forced to reckon with the ways their lives, experiences, and concerns are valued at the expense of others. Our formal education does not teach us what is at stake for folk who are gender fluid, gender nonconforming, gender neutral, or same-gender loving. As crunk feminist Eesha Pandit has noted, “Sex and gender are different and there are more genders than two,” but in a patriarchal culture that privileges masculinity and maleness, binary categorization reinforces the hegemonic harms linked to the social construction of gender and the hegemonic harassment that insists masculinity be given social capital.

Just as gender is not synonymous with sex, it is not preoccupied with femininity. We approach gender as a contrived system designed to dictate how women and men (including trans and intersex folk) negotiate their roles and performances, in public and private. Many of us found feminism after recognizing and/or resisting the blatantly sexist and misogynist cultural expectations of how we were supposed to think, act, dress, and behave. The strict confines of gender scripts failed to represent the hybrid, fluid, androgynous spectrum of gender expression we experienced and witnessed in our lives. Gender was invented to restrict the performance of women and men to conservative and traditional behaviors, punishing nuances such as female masculinity or androgynous femme.

These limitations of gender are particularly problematic in Black communities because of the residue of Moynihan’s matriarchy
thesis, the nuanced negotiation of gender in Black households, and the vulnerability of Black masculinity due to limited resources and opportunities linked to racism. Even though our social circumstances, allegiances to Black men, and devotion to Black churches have often complicated our relationship to raced gender performance, Black women can rarely afford to hold conservative or traditional attitudes about gender, which were designed with White women in mind. Because Black women are framed by images of independence, strength, and resilience, their gender performance, unlike White women's, has often been read as an assault on Black manhood and evidence that Black women are inherently more masculine and, therefore, don't deserve or require the same protection and provision as White women. Thus, Black feminism recognizes and calls out the racist agenda of gender categorization, particularly the ways it polices the bodies and actions of Black women.

Our work seeks to further complicate the already problematic relationship Black women have to the patriarchy, a relationship that is both abusive and one-sided. While we understand the myriad ways Black men are targeted for their own negotiation of gender, we refuse to prioritize the needs of men over women or to overlook the investments all men have in patriarchy because of their inherent privileges. We understand gender to be a social construction created to limit our options and access.

As crunk feminists we embrace the possibilities of gender performance, insisting that Black women and women of color be given the room and agency to make sense of who we are, outside of stereotypes. As women of color, we are intimately aware of the politics of identity, the role of racism in the ways our gender is read and understood, and the interconnection of our race, gender, sex, ability, sexuality, and class. Our allegiance to Black men—we are allied—is not an investment in patriarchy, because our feminism pushes us to challenge the status quo and demand equal standards.

We envision an understanding of gender that is inclusive and nonhierarchical; we imagine relationships that are reciprocal and nonviolent. We are also invested in the lives and experiences of our community and siblings, including all sexes and genders, and we are deeply invested in and committed to shifting our language practices and social justice commitments to be more gender inclusive.

Black women and girls are not generally offered the luxury of femininity. Women of color are faced with more than sexism in our homes, jobs, and communities. We face criticism when we express our independence from and solidarity with men, and receive backlash when we express our disappointment and frustration with their flagrant disregard for our lives and well-being. Many of us grew up witnessing our foremothers and other women in our lives demonstrate strength and independence out of necessity, never given the luxury or opportunity to be "kept women." Places we were told to revere like churches and schools, as well as intimate spaces like our homes and bedrooms, were privately, if not publicly, sexist. We were encouraged (by women and men alike) to accept these unfair and unjust practices as normal.

The absence of men was never an absence of possibility. We were raised to be feminists (what our mamas called "having our own," outside of a man), to get educated, to be capable of achieving our goals, to understand the function and functionality of female friendships, especially in households that were largely matriarchal. Still, the absence of men was never an absence of male reverence. Patriarchal influences permeated our lives and we, like Black feminists before us, had to learn and understand that our allegiance is to ourselves and that we cannot afford to be invested in patriarchal norms.

Feminism, which ultimately seeks equal rights and recognition for women and girls, and crunk feminism, which unapologetically and actively resists patriarchy by practicing, being, and performing "crunkness," inform the impetus of this section. As crunk feminists, we are not invested in being polite, respectable, or politically digestible—because our very lives are on the line.

Women and girls are perpetually reminded that their lives are not valued, that their testimonies (against men) will not be believed, and that their well-being is unimportant when masculinity (including ego) and patriarchy are at stake. This was reinforced, for example, when the Black women assaulted by former police officer Daniel Holtzclaw said they felt that reporting him would be futile, and when the more than fifty women who have come forward as rape victims of Bill Cosby are framed as "accusers," not victims. It is also reiterated

1. The controversial Moynihan Report, written in 1965, concluded that the high rate of Black families headed by single mothers would greatly hinder the progress of Black communities toward economic and political equality.
through the documented double standard of the wage gap and the fact that Black women and trans women of color are disproportionately affected by violence that ends in death.

Patriarchy is invested in the normalization of masculinity in all of its manifestations (including rape culture and violence) and the silence and invisibility of women, especially women of color. The patriarchy tells us that women should stay in their place and not challenge authority. The patriarchy wants us to be misguided and misinformed. The patriarchy wants us to be defeated and disenchanted. Our essays on gender demonstrate resistance and refusal to comply with traditional, irrational, and patriarchal bullshit. Fuck the patriarchy!


Dear Patriarchy

Crunkista

Dear Patriarchy,

This isn’t working. We both know that it hasn’t been working for a very long time.

It’s not you ... No, actually, it is you. This is an unhealthy, dysfunctional, abusive relationship—because of you. You are stifling, controlling, oppressive, and you have never had my best interests at heart. You have tricked me into believing that things are the way they are because they have to be, that they have always been that way, that there are no alternatives, and that they will never change.

Anytime I question you or your ways, you find another way to silence me and coerce me back into submission. I can’t do this anymore. I’ve changed and in spite of your shackles, I’ve grown. I have realized that this whole restrictive system is your own fabrication and that the only one gaining anything from it is you. You selfish dick.

I will not continue to live like this. I will not continue to settle. I know now that there is a better way.

Before you hear about it from one of your boys, you should know that I have met someone. Her name is Feminism. She is the best thing that has ever happened to me. She validates and respects my opinions. She always has my best interests at heart. She thinks I am beautiful and loves me just the way I am. She has helped me find my voice and makes me happier than I have ever been. We have made each other stronger. Best of all, we encourage and challenge each other to grow. And the sex ... Well, the sex is so much hotter.

I’m leaving you. You’re an asshole. We can never be friends. Don’t call me. Ever.

Never again,

Crunkista