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Comment on Catherine Hakim/1

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by Eric Anderson

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Hakim [2016] begins her treatise on the contemporary *cause* of patriarchy with an homage to the very notion of patriarchy, suggesting it to be a useful concept to feminist theory, before (rightfully) dismissing decades of feminist work into it. However, in proposing her theory of sexual deficit as the cause of patriarchy, she enters the same tautological trap that other feminists of gender scholarship commit: believing that she can, without evidence of causation, attribute men as the sole harbingers of a wilful and contemptuous plot to subordinate all women, including gay men, single men, straight men who stay at home to raise their children, and straight men who self-segregate away from sex with women.

I understand her desire to explain patriarchy this way. It is, after all, tempting to examine constituent parts of patriarchy and to imagine a cause and effect relationship. It is, in fact, a recurrent theme in sociology and women's studies. Take for example, Connell's [1985] notion of "hegemonic" masculinity, which has never proven that hypermasculinity is the root of the "patriarchal dividend." Perhaps a more sophisticated approach comes from Walby who, in 1990, discussed patriarchy as existing through six modalities: paid work, housework, culture, heterosexuality, physical violence, and the more ambiguous definition of "the state."

But in the intervening years since Connell published her work, masculinity in Western societies has dramatically softened [Anderson 2009] and many theories of masculinities no longer argue that they are capable of explaining gender inequality [Anderson and McCormack 2016]. Similarly, since Walby published her work, each

of the six institutions have changed – dramatically. As Hakim’s own [2004] work shows, women have gained in the wage gap so much that many now equal men’s pay – leaving only a gap for women who take breaks from their careers for childrearing. Housework is at least less of a sex role issue today, as fewer people are married, more men stay at home, and much household labour is outsourced. Heterosexuality is no longer a compulsory institution, and those who enter into heterosexual marriages are doing so later, and having fewer children. Violence against women is down, along with all other forms of violent crime [Pinker 2011]. Despite these changes, however, patriarchy still exists. Clearly, a piecemeal approach to its understanding has not yet been empirically validated.

Hakim [2016] bravely, and perhaps foolishly, attempts the latest rendition of a simple single cause explanation for the complexity of patriarchy. This time using one thread – not of culture – but of biology. But in attempt to do so, she falls upon the same sword as those before her. First, she fails to define patriarchy, and thus there is no objective way to measure whether the sexual deficit influences it. To her credit, a definition of the concept is impossible: It seems that patriarchy is much like pornography and obscenity, in that you know it when you see it. Even so, her understanding of patriarchy seems to be within the realm of matters pertaining to sexual assault, and her dislike for men’s masturbation to pornography. A very limited notion, indeed.

This is the second flaw in Hakim’s argument: she describes men, universally, as *actively* pursuing the subordination of women and ignores the role of women. Doing so not only subjugates men with the same oppression that she seeks to lift for women, but it denies women’s role in the reproduction of patriarchy. Whatever patriarchy is, women are not simply passive victims; they are part of the causal equation. The majority of women voted in large majority for a pussy-grabbing Donald Trump, after all. If there has ever been an active vote for the continuation of patriarchy in contemporary times, it is this. There is thus a cultural hegemony involved about female inadequacy that is not recognized by Hakim’s theory.

Hakim is also singularly focused on the subordination of women and not their intersection with culture. If the locus of patriarchy is men’s sexual frustration, how does this explain the various treatment of women according to religious or cultural beliefs? It also ignores other aspects of oppression. Just as I have argued against patriarchy being explained by theories of masculinities *only*, it would be highly surprising, for me, if patriarchy had no relation to other systems of oppression such as homophobia, racism and classism.

I am also concerned by Hakim’s argument regarding what appears to be a static approach to the sexual deficit. If men are hornier than women, and get angry when they are not sexually satisfied, it should follow that men will be less aggressive and

sexist in contexts where they find sexual satisfaction. This should mean that women should actively look to serve and please their man, like the Bible says, in order to promote women's equality. This should mean that the increasing acceptance of masturbation has led to better experiences for women; that men who consume pornography will be more egalitarian than those who don't; and that men who pay for prostitutes will treat women better than those who don't. It is implicit in Hakim's argument that masturbation, porn consumption and paying for sex are bad things, but the logic of her theory is that they could have positive effects. She should thus be heralding sex work, non-monogamy and pornography as the key to unseating patriarchal privilege.

Finally, and perhaps most egregious, Hakim shows no concern or regard for men. She tells us that men are biologically destined to desire more sex than women, but stigmatizes every method they have to achieve that sex (pornography, sex work or "prostitution", and playing the sexual marketplace). Thus, she sets up a system where men's desires are all toxic, and women's virtuous. She fails to discuss how either biology or patriarchy creates a scenario in which most all of the homeless are men; in which suicide is mostly a male problem; in which most all incarcerated citizens are males; in which men suffer disproportionately from working hazardous jobs (from sports teams to the military); or in which males are more likely to be victimized by physical violence and murder. And she doesn't explain why enjoying sex, consuming porn or paying for sexual intimacy are necessarily bad things.

Where I credit Hakim, however, is that she attempts to add to the debate about patriarchy by evoking something feminists have feared to mention is real: biological influence. Her essay nicely castigates feminists as ignorant when they deny biology as having any relevance. In other words, she recognizes basic social facts that biology is, although perhaps not deterministic, is still important.

I credit her with on five other counts, too: 1) she will be castigated by most feminist for making such an obvious proclamation, and we should value voices of dissent in the academy; 2) she highlights that sociologists are all-too-often smitten by their own knowledge that they become under-educated and unable to comment on biological matters. This means that sociologists might also be wrong about men not having innate abilities over women in sport, and that radical feminists might be wrong in stating that trans women are not really women; and that the "everything is socially constructed" crowd are wrong with their ludicrous proposition that homosexuality is socially constructed.

More personally, 3) in highlighting that men have higher sex drives on average than women, she supports my work [Anderson 2012] where I show that this sexual desire discordance makes monogamy a deeply flawed social institution. Hakim doesn't mention the problem of monogamy in this essay. To admit that men's higher

sex drives spells trouble for monogamy in a heterosexual relationship would be to look at men in a less-than harsh light. 4) As a gay man, I am relieved that me and my fellow gay male friends, and asexual male friends, are removed from the patriarchal stew (my bisexual men are given half of a pardon). Although she mentions nothing about us in her heterosexist writing, it's salient that we gay and asexual men have no part in this buying sex from women with cash and capital business; we do not generally rape or sexually harass women. Heck, we don't even want sex with women. Thus, as per Hakim's model, we certainly cannot contribute to patriarchy.

Finally, 5) although Hakim fails to mention that her prose will please men's rights activists, she nonetheless supports some of what they have been arguing, showing that they are not all misogynists. One of their arguments is that men are more willing to take risks than women. Risks that not only land adolescent males in the Emergency Room more than females for sporting accidents, but risk of putting oneself forward for a promotion; standing up politically, and generally pursuing matters that lead men to have more cultural capital than women. If Hakim is correct, that men are biologically determined to be hornier, can they not also be biologically determined to take these risks? With this essay she opens the biological gene in a bottle that feminists have tried to keep corked for too long.

In conclusion, Hakim deserves credit for acknowledging that biology is at play in gender, and that sociologists are ill-equipped to understand it. But she offers no proof that it is the sexual deficit which leads to patriarchy. Equally, she has thrown the baby out with the bath water. Her theory fails to account for a social influence of patriarchy: Things like paid and unpaid work, the gendering of jobs, and influence of the media. There is no accountability for women's role in their own self-inflicting habit of voting for male leaders, either. There is also no implication that those who sexually self-segregate away from women (like priests and soldiers), or gay and asexual men, can also contribute to patriarchy. There is no accounting for other biological possibilities that might exist between males and females, like risk taking.

In this capacity Hakim's interesting theory remains just another contention among many possible parts of patriarchy that *might* explain some aspect of patriarchy, some of the time, for certain sexualities in certain life-stages. But ultimately, like other sociologists who have tried to lay claim to its roots, she commits the most basic social science mistake, attributing causation to what is only evidenced as correlation. Her work thus comes across as proselytising, rather than legitimate social science.

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Abstract: In this review of Hakim's essay, I highlight that in proposing sexual deficit as the root of patriarchy, she foolishly enters the same tautological trap that other feminists of gender scholarship commit: believing that she can, without evidence of causation, attribute men as the sole harbingers of a wilful and contemptuous plot to subordinate all women. I detail the numerous, heterosexist and sex-negative faults with her thinking, highlighting that she offers no proof that it is the sexual deficit which leads to patriarchy, and point out areas that she conveniently ignores, like women's own self-oppressive behaviours (i.e. voting for Trump) and monogamism. However, despite her un-scientific proselytising, Hakim does deserve credit for acknowledging that biology is also at play with gender – something that will find her pilloried by many gender scholars – and that sociologists are ill-equipped to understand this.

Keywords: Patriarchy; Gender; Equality; Masculinity; Feminism.

Professor **Eric Anderson** has published over 60 articles and 17 books related to the study of men and their changing masculinities and sexualities. His work shows millennials kissing, cuddling, maintaining bromances and engaging in semi-sexual behaviors with other males. He is an expert on both monogamy and cheating, as well as sport. His research is recognized by the British Academy of Social Sciences; and he is also a Full-Fellow of the International Academy of Sex Research.