

# THE INSTITUTE OF FEMINIST THOUGHT

## Dr Jane Clare Jones – Evidence for Women’s Equality Party

### 1. Introduction: Feminism as material class politics not identity politics

*Materialist class analysis* -> Women are a sex class. Patriarchy is a *historical* system which arose in order to appropriate women’s sexual, reproductive and socially reproductive labour. That is, male dominance arises in order to exercise control over, and extract labour, from women. The structure by which the system is maintained is the socialisation of women into service-based sex roles, the notion that certain roles are proper to each sex, and the system of hierarchical cultural values that prioritises the characteristics allocated to males and devalues those allocated to women. This system is called *gender*.

Female people positioned within a system of hierarchical male power that treats them as an extractive resource, thus have a set of shared material class interests.

- Sexual and reproductive autonomy
- Protection from male violence that arises through efforts to control women as a reproductive and sexual resource
- Opposition to all forms of commodification that economically coerce women’s bodily autonomy (of course not to be exercised by criminalising women).
- Demand for just accounting and valuing of women’s reproductive, socially reproductive and devalued economic labour, especially regarding how this disproportionately affects working class and racialised women.
- Fundamental demand for transformation of patriarchal-capitalist system grounded on extractive relation to women, the earth, and all exploited peoples.

### 2. Women’s Political Representation

i) Representational Equality -> The symbolic importance of women’s representation, women as a role model for other women, ‘representational justice or equality’ as an important value in and of itself.

This brings us immediately to the much-contested ontological question -> ‘What is a woman.’

My claim will be, based on a materialist politics, that women are a sex class. This matters because:

- It impacts how we understand women’s political interests
- We consider women being redefined as a gender class to be politically regressive. Gender is the mechanism of women’s oppression, women should not be politically defined by the mechanism of their oppression. Women are people with a female body and any personality, not people with any body and a female personality. This reifies the idea of gender, and reinscribes oppressive restrictions on women.

‘Inclusion and Diversity’ -> It is vital that we recognise identity and difference. It is notable that at this period while most other social groups are becoming incredibly identity based, the existence of female people as a class is being undermined. On the one hand then, we have a possible over-accentuation of difference, while with respect to the relation of trans women and women we have a complete denial of difference on a political level. This is harmful regarding the definition of women in law, and the implications of the erasure of the recognition of sex on women’s sex-based interests, it is also harmful because it ends up suppressing important and salient differences between trans women and women’s political interests. We should be aiming at solidarity, recognition of similarity and alignment *across* difference.

ii) Representing Women’s Political Interests -> Difficult, as women do not always identify with, and represent, the political interests of women as a class. Women have generally weak class consciousness, as distributed between men. However, hope this is less of an issue in party formed explicitly around the representation and equality of women.

Do women and trans women have the same interests?

- In cases where trans women respect difference we can be strong and meaningful allies.
- In cases where the principle political objective is erasing that difference, our interests are in direct conflict, e.g. Munroe Bergdoff -> Don’t centre reproductive issues and bodies as ‘exclusionary’. Objective to gain access to women’s space leads to diminishing importance of male violence and women’s need to be away from male gaze. Lack of being socialised as female means trans women often don’t seem to empathise with harm to women of being sexualised from early teens, and why space away from males matters to us.

Conclusion -> It is not appropriate for trans women to represent women. Aim should be solidarity.