Article

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A Look into Western Society and the Cornell 7 Case

Recently, the Cornell 7 case has sparked alot of debate on social media. While some are looking at the culture that led to this, many of the discussions focus on whose 'fault' it was, the girl or the boys? Everyone is dissecting the situation; did she consent to it and enable the situation? Or did the boys go to disgusting lengths to take advantage of a girl who was drunk and drugged? Is the woman a victim? Or did she put herself in the situation, and bring forward a legal case even though she consented to things at first?

Meygn Kelly, an America attorney and political commentator, was criticized for her opinion that focused on the girl. She said: *"No one will even consider the possibility that this woman made a decision to get it on with four men total, not seven, and enjoyed it because — I'm just going to be honest, she's not the most attractive gal."*

Adding that the woman was "extremely beefy in her arms and her legs," and suggested she may have been "thrilled to be so admired" because she "clearly didn't grow up the incredibly beautiful one."

Kelly also questioned why the woman was treated as a victim, saying: "Why do we have to go right to she's a victim?" She argued that the woman had not initially characterized the encounter that way.

Florence Pugh directed her remarks explicitly at men, saying she felt "uneasy and sick and anxious" and calling on men to be as horrified as women and to lead conversations against complicity.

Mariska Hargitay focused on male bystanders and enablers, arguing that men who learn friends are committing gang rape should call the police, and that men who drug and gang rape someone should face serious consequences.

Susan Matthews, American journalist and Slate's executive editor, framed the issue around "the boys"—both those allegedly in the room and those who saw degrading messages about a woman and did nothing. She argued the case exposes a culture in which women are treated as available bodies while men face few consequences.

These are examples of the discussions surrounding this case, that have focused on which gender is to blame – men or women. Another example is found in the comments in response to an Aljazeera post, which highlighted the concerns about fraternity culture. There was a slew of comments; with one person highlighting the good that these fraternities could do for the students on campus, arguing that 'they want men to have no space or community'. This comment was not well received, with others focusing on the fact that fraternity culture is known to encouraging the exploitation of female peers and male entitlement by allowing boys to have the 'freedom' to 'make mistakes' as it encourages partying, drinking and drugs.

While Cornell has cancelled fraternity events for the rest of year, this issue goes far beyond a few university fraternities. It's a result of the culture that has deeply affected society– a culture that normalises interactions between men and women based on sexual connotations, the lack of accountability surrounding such issues, and the very real allowance for men to have the power to exploit women.

According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), nearly 1 in 3 women (about 840 million women globally) have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. In the United States, roughly 1 in 3 women (30.4%) experience verbal sexual harassment in the workplace, and 1 in 4 to 1 in 3 experience it in public spaces. In the United Kingdom, surveys indicate that over 52% of women experience some form of sexual harassment or unwanted advances during their working life (Source). Many believe that these numbers are much lower than the actual reality, as evidence suggests many incidents go unreported.

The issue is also far greater than the few legal cases, stories or statistics that we hear of. It is deeply imbedded into society. If you look at popular culture; the movies and tv series that come from Hollywood and the US entertainment industry, we see they actively encourage the ideas related to male/female interaction, that are being highlighted by the Cornell 7 case. They not only reflect the culture and normality of sexual advances, harassment and exploitation of women in different situations, but they also propagate and further normalise them. Through pop culture, and various forms of media, girls are told:

- If he's rude to you, it means he likes you and is too scared to admit it.
- If he flirts with you, it's a compliment.
- If you are nervous about male attentions, it's because you haven't put yourself 'out there'.
- If you choose to keep yourself away from the partying, drinking and drugs, you are the odd one out and think you are better than your peers.
- If you want to be confident, and succeed in the world, you need to put yourself out there and 'relax' around men.

Men are told;

- That it's ok to 'have fun'.
- That a girl who complains or doesn't respond to their advances is just difficult.
- If a girl reports you, you haven't done anything wrong.
- If you try to respect women, and not take advantage of them, then there is something 'wrong with you'. Maybe even going as far as to argue that such men could be 'gay'.

The list is endless but the basic ideas encapsulate the plot line of most movies that showcase school or college life for young adults. The 'icons' that girls and boys are told to aspire also encourage these ideas. Dolly Parton said (in interviews reported by the *Daily Mail* and *Mirror)*, that flirting was fun and her husband Carl Dean was not jealous because it never became sexual: "I'm just flirting and having fun." While she mentioned the need for women to 'respect themselves' and have boundaries, her comments were dangerous as they support the normalisation of a certain relaxed sexual culture between men and women. She openly said that she didn't sleep with men to get to the top, she slept with men because she wanted to. Which is a clear recognition of the culture of sleeping your way to the top!

She is one example of many, and all of this highlights the thoughts that exist that surround the relationship and interactions between men and women in society today. This very relaxed attitude towards such interactions is supported by women and men in society. And it has normalised the behaviour that leads to female harassment, exploitation and abuse in the workplace, and society at large. When the common, or more prominent, thoughts in society are that it's fine for men to act in a certain way towards women, how does either sex know when to draw the line?

At this point feminists will argue that women shouldn't be expected to hide themselves or act differently because men can't control themselves. Others will argue that it's not 'all men'. But once again, both of these points oversimplify a very real pandemic that exists in society – that is the lack of respect that exists for women today (and the problems that ensue from it).

Now, the 'solution' that we have for this, through the ideas of secular Capitalism, is the need for representation. If we want to empower women and change the way that they are treated, they need more political, social and legal representation. This idea that representation can lead to respect, is at the very basis of democracy – groups of people are told that in order to get your rights, you need to be recognised within law as having rights.

So, women came out and fought to be recognised within democratic law as having the right to do – well anything. Because in the West, until this century married women were legally, seen (in one way or another) as being an extension of their husband not their own person.

This meant that, in general, a married woman could not independently own personal property, keep her wages, sign contracts, or sue and be sued in her own name. Her wages and movable property legally became her husband's; he could manage or dispose of them without her consent.

While it was married women who lacked 'independent personhood', unmarried women and widows also did not have the same rights as men either. They could often own property and make contracts, yet they were still excluded from voting, jury service, many professions, higher education, and equal control over family and economic life.

So, both married and unmarried women had to fight to be recognized in democratic law as full legal and political persons.

But this recognition has not guaranteed her respect, and this is where the issue lies. Within the Capitalist system, women may be recognised as by law as having their own rights, but that doesn't automatically guarantee respect. You see this with any minority group and it stems from the way that the Capitalist system views' 'power'. If you want something, even respect, you need the power to ensure that it's given to you. And this is why we constantly see feminists asserting that the way to get any respect is to fight the patriarchy. Because men currently have the power to shape social interactions, and that has put women at a disadvantage. As an example, women will argue that have to accept a certain level of sexual exploitation in the workplace because that's the only way that men will allow them to succeed in their career, as men have the power in this situation.

The normalization of the lack of respect towards women can be seen in the SNL's (Saturday Night Live) recent comedic monologue, where Shane Gillis called women in the gym who wear shorts 'whores'. The key issue here is not his view on women's dress in the gym, but the fact that he said this, even in jest on live TV! This shows the level of disrespect for women that exists in society. Not only did he not have an issue with referring to women this way, he also knew he had an audience for a joke like this.

This shouldn't come as a surprise when we consider that powerful men – even ones as powerful as the President of the USA - have been similarly disrespectful to women. Since returning to the presidency in January 2025, Trump has been called out for the way he speaks to women. One of the most visible examples involve female journalists, though there are also disputes involving women in his administration. In 2025 when Catherine Lucey, a Bloomberg reporter**,** tried to ask a follow-up question aboard Air Force One, Trump interrupted: "Quiet, quiet, piggy. Then in 2026, Trump told Kaitlan Collins, a CNN reporter "You are the worst reporter… I don't think I've ever seen you smile," shifting attention from her question to her facial expression. These are just two examples from his time in office.

We can find many before that too. When discussing Clary Fiorina, his Republican primary rival, Trump told *Rolling Stone*: "Look at that face. Would anyone vote for that? And after Meygan Kelly questioned him in a debate, Trump said of her: "You could see there was blood coming out of her eyes… blood coming out of her wherever." The remark was widely read as implying menstruation.

This disrespect can be passed off by many as seemingly harmless jokes, or a man simply being open and frank (as argued by Karoline Leavitt in the case of Donald Trump) Or it can be seen as it actually is – clear disrespect, open harassment and vicious attacks on women.

On social media we can see that people have taken this open disrespect and tied it to men; arguing that they are at fault. But all this does is create a clear division and conflict between men and women – a conflict that we see shaping out in real time, as men and women 'take sides', arguing the minute details of law and norms to show how it favours one over the other.

And suddenly every issue that plagues society from arguments about Muslim women's right to wear the hijab, to the accountability within sexual assault cases is being looked at through a gendered lens. Why do we, as Muslims need to cover, when men should learn

to look away? Why do women need to watch what they wear, when men should learn to control their instincts?

But focusing and blaming men is not solving the problem as the problem is much deeper and systematic. Feminists will support this saying that the patriarchy has given men, a historically dominant group, a disproportionate power to shape laws and institutions, and this has allowed them to shape the political and legal system in a way that enables them to harass and exploit women.

But we want to go beyond men's ability to dominate women through the existing system, and the assumption that changing some ideas and laws to favour women will help solve the problem. Because in order to bring about complete fundamental change to the thoughts and actions of a people within a society, we need to target the foundation upon which the system itself is based. The patriarchy, male entitlement, corruption, lack of legal representation, a need to fight for recognition... all of it stems from this Capitalist secular ideology, and its view of how humans and the systems that govern their life function. Anything that uses ideas that stem from this ideology (even if the intention is to change a situation for the better) will be limited, and flawed as the source of the ideology is flawed. The human mind, whether male or female, cannot produce an ideology that gives justice to both sexes.

Why do we see so many examples being shared about Islamic rule, where women were respected, recognised and given legal rights and protections? These stories are shared on social media and dissected as we try to see a way to achieve that again today. But they weren't a result of secular Capitalism, or feminism. Capitalism has actually given us oppression and subjugation – and feminism didn't arise until centuries after Islam guaranteed the rights and respect of women as a reaction to the western women's problems. So, why do we continue to use Capitalist and feminist ideas to try to improve our situation?

Neither of these will grant respect for women, nor will it protect them within society. The system, and its solutions, are flawed at the very foundation. This is why there is no accountability or justice for either gender. The current reality won't be solved by focusing on gender, and the power of representation in this system.

It needs us to change the view of men and women in society at the very foundation. And this can only be done if we refer to Islam. It was the implementation of Islam on this earth, which made the historical examples of female respect and success possible. And this was possible, because Islam views both men and women as creations of Allah swt. Both genders are equal before Him – and are accountable to Him (swt) for each and every one of their actions.

This understanding is the basis upon which respect for women is built within society. And this basis lays the foundation upon which our interactions are built – we are encouraged to work together for the betterment of society, with our goal being to please Allah, and our actions being guided by Him. When this guidance is ignored, and the harmony within society is disrupted, the individuals involved are held accountable – using the laws that Allah has given us. We appreciate the examples from history, but we must understand how it was only possible through the implementation of the system that Allah has given us! Allah (swt) said, ﴿وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ ۚ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ﴾ **"The believers, men and women, are Auliya' (helpers, supporters, friends, protectors) of one another; they enjoin Al-Ma'ruf (good) and forbid Al-Munkar (evil); they perform As-Salat and give As-Zakat, and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah will have His Mercy on them. Surely, Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise."** [Surah At-Tawbah 9:71] ﴿وَمَا تَوْفِيقِي إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ ۚ عَلَيْهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ وَإِلَيْهِ أُنِيبُ﴾ **"...And my success is not but through Allah. Upon Him I have relied, and to Him I return."** [Surah Hud 11:88].

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