

# ***WHY ARE THERE NO WOMEN IN REGULAR FREEMASONRY?***

By Jaime Paul Lamb

Recently, we have seen a resurgence of the discussion regarding opening the Craft to women. There have also been advances made to this end in the UK, where transgender women (i.e. men now living as women), if made a Mason while a man, may continue to participate, post-operatively; and men (i.e. women now living as men) are welcome to petition for membership in the Lodge, just as those who were born male [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/aug/01/freemasons-to-admit-women-but-only-if-they-first-joined-as-men]. The topic has been dissected at the Lodge level, in message boards, on social media platforms, as well as mainstream media publications... but one of the most salient arguments in this debate remains mostly under-employed in Masonic discourse. We'll get to that shortly, but first a look at the most typical...

The reasons for Freemasonry's exclusion of women have a wide range of tenability. One of the most commonly heard about the Lodge is that men need a place where they can be men. This argument is obviously not very well developed, as a man is a man regardless of setting and location (unless, of course, he undergoes gender-reassignment surgery). The general tenor of this statement is that a man needs to be out of the earshot and eyesight of women in order to truly be a man, which is of course preposterous and almost does more to prove the inverse of the argument. One might imagine a dark, smoky room wherein naughty boys, in the absence of the much-dreaded female authority, can drink and curse to their heart's content, likely while playing poker or billiards. While this may seem nice, it's certainly not within the purview of Freemasonry.

Another more persuasive argument involves a clause in both the Ancient Landmarks ["that a Mason be a man [...]"] and in the Master Mason Obligation ["I will not aid, nor be present at [...]"], etc.]. Relying on the Landmarks to buttress the argument against women joining Regular Masonry is to employ a sort of circular logic, in that it ends where it begins without arguing the root premise. The Master Mason Obligation is another matter, however. This is an irreversible oath, a pact that one has taken with God, the Lodge and themselves. The only way around this binding clause is if the Grand Lodge of the jurisdiction were to remove it from the Obligation. Theoretically, if this clause were removed, and after there were enough Brethren raised in its absence to operate a Lodge of Master Masons, they could initiate, pass and raise a woman. But there is a reason why this is inadvisable...

The most sound case against allowing women to take part in the Regular Blue Lodge experience is that its ritual is specifically masculine in nature and would likely resonate comparatively very little with women, who already have obvious biologically and socially transformative cues which happen intermittently throughout their lives. Men have segregated into "secret", initiatory societies since time immemorial – any entry-level anthropological work on the subject should put any doubt of this tendency's historical basis to rest. Single-gender socialization is a common and healthy mechanism of the human experience even to this day. Men and women are biologically, physiologically, emotionally and psychologically different. So different, in some regards, that there is little reason to suspect that "a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols" designed by and for men, in order to *initiate* ["to cause something, especially an important event or process, to begin" Encarta Dictionary, retrieved online] them into a process in which they are transported from one psychosocial phase of existence to another, would have any efficacy in promoting a truly transformational effect on women.

As it stands, however, there are plenty of irregular and clandestine Lodges that accept the petitions of women. There are even Lodges that are exclusively female – Masonic sororities, as it were [The Order of Women Freemasons - <https://www.owf.org.uk/>]. Not to mention the several organizations, appended to the Regular Masonry: the Order of the Eastern Star, the Order of the Amaranth, the White Shrine of Jerusalem, the Ladies Oriental Shrine of North America, Daughters of the Nile, the Daughters of Mokanna, and the Social Order of

Beauceant. But the truth appears to be that women are generally not as interested in what the Fraternity offers or else they would likely join Co-Masonry [*Les Droit Humain*, an irregular, co-ed Freemasonry - <http://www.comasonic.org/>] in roughly similar numbers. Women seem to have their sororal and psychologically transformational needs met through other naturally-occurring outlets, more suited to the feminine temperament – and, reciprocally, these feminine-oriented systems would likely contribute very little meaning to the unfolding narrative of a man's life.

It has been the purpose of this article to attempt to challenge the standing beliefs and opinions on what has been a controversial subject, particularly as of late. If one, as a Mason, is of the opinion that Freemasonry should remain exclusively male, or whether it should initiate women, then it is important that one develop a reasonable support of your claim – a rational argument that is free from logical fallacies and can withstand critique. We, as Masons, should feel more comfortable than most with the idea of challenging our philosophical standards and perspectives to see if they hold up to scrutiny – and it is always preferable for one to scrutinize one's own opinions, lest another come and dash our beliefs upon the rocks of their superior reasoning powers.