

## SEXISM & INDIVIDUALISM

Sexism, like racism, is an irrational form of collectivism both in thought and in action. Like racism, sexism must be analyzed and fought by all advocates of justice and individualism.

Unlike racism, however, sexism is much more difficult to understand and identify and, for this reason, a calm rational analysis has long been needed. This article is an attempt to provide such an analysis, starting with consideration of the nature of sexism in this society and suggesting ways to combat it in one's own life and in society at large.

### Sexism & Racism

Racism is the practice of grouping people according to some common physical trait—such as the color of their skin or hair—and ascribing to such groupings moral, social, intellectual and/or political significance. Racism is the notion that a person's intelligence and character are not a product of his mind but rather of internal body chemistry or some mystical "racial" species identity. The consequences of such an attitude is that people are judged and dealt with not as individuals but as members of collective groups. These same racist principles are the foundation of sexism also.

**Sexism** is the practice of evaluating or relating to a person on the basis of their sex. In our culture sexual identity has primary importance in the development of social roles which many persons, both male and female, feel required to act out and expect of others.

Common sayings mirror such attitudes, like: "A woman's place is in the home." Or, "The husband should be the family breadwinner," or "A gentleman gives his seat to a lady.", or "The male should be the aggressive sex.", or "Woman should be responsible for the care of children."

The American culture is full of examples of sexism in practice, and, unlike racism, the vast majority of thinking persons both practice and implicitly accept sexism as proper.

One of the problems in analyzing sexism is that certain non-physical characteristics *can* be ascribed to people because of their sexual identity. For example, on average females are smaller and weaker than males and have a lower metabolic activation level, and thus do tend to be less aggressive than men. However, while some valid psychological generalizations can be made about men and women, upon examination these statistical differences do *not* support the sexist view.

### Sexual Identity and Personal Identity

First aspects of sexual identity are unrelated to moral, social or political questions. Whether or not a person can bear children, is stronger or weaker than another or is more or less aggressive has nothing to do with their proper ethical and legal rights.

Second, the variation between different men and between different women in every conceivable characteristic, including physical strength and aggressiveness, is far greater than differences between sexes. Thus while it is true that women *on average* have lower upper body strength than men, a woman who participates vigorously in sports is apt to be far stronger than a man who does not participate at all.

Finally, all differences between the sexes—physical and psychological—are far less important to a person's character than how a person chooses to use their mind and how they act in society. Social factors, such as prescribed sex roles and differing social expectations for males and females, have far more to do with how a person develops, both mentally and physically than their innate sexual identity.

### The Origin of Sexism

The origin of sexist attitudes is both cultural and psychological.

Culturally, sexism has been a traditional way of patterning societal-tribal-family roles to maximize and regulate division of labor. For the great bulk of human history, artificial sexual distinctions have been regarded as a good method of organizing hunting-earning, cooking-housekeeping roles with a minimum of competition (which was viewed as dangerous). However, by stressing sexual identity and ignoring individual differences such social roles inevitably forced many persons to try to fulfill roles for which they were ill-suited, physically and mentally, resulted in tremendous individual frustration and a great loss to society in general.

Another factor perpetuating sexual roles has been traditional child rearing practices which teach males to be active, questioning, exploratory and social, while teaching females to be docile, obedient, quiet and sedentary. Thus young girls are taught that it is unlady-like to make too much noise, fight, play in sports or challenge males. While young boys are taught "not to cry" (i.e., not to express their emotions), to be good at sports and to be competitive. The result is that both sexes are taught to emphasize certain aspects of their human nature, repress other aspects—with a loss in humanity to everyone.

Psychologically, sexism is a product of intellectual laziness; a desire for automatic knowledge about people without investigating their individual worth. Thus men bolster their self-esteem by proclaiming their "innate" superiority to women, while women learn that the path to social success is clever manipulation of men. These attitudes are in turn reinforced by social pressure to conform.

### Combatting Sexism

The first step in combatting sexism is to identify sexist attitudes in ourselves and reject them. Questions you can ask yourself are:

- Do I allow my non-sexual attitudes toward others to be influenced by their sex?
- Are my opinions of other people influenced by social sexual stereotypes? For example, do I think that a woman's place is in the home? That men should be the sole wage earner? That the woman should take care of the children?

The second area for combatting sexism is in the legal arena. A vast number of discriminatory laws still are on the books which discriminate between persons solely because of their sex. For example, in some states women have a limited right to own, inherit and manage property. Virtually nationwide, men are often compelled to pay alimony while women are legally exempt—regardless of income. The age for legally leaving home, marriage, starting work and having sexual intercourse are different in many states for male and females.

All such legal restrictions should be opposed wherever they exist and repealed as soon as possible.

### Cultural Change: Libertarian or Authoritarian

Finally, sexism must be combatted culturally since it is on the level of acculturation that sexual roles and stereotypes are created and maintained.

Here we face two alternate paths, one authoritarian, the other libertarian.

The authoritarian position is to end sexism through the use of governmental power. Advocates of this position, including such groups as the National Organization of Women, demand "free day care centers", laws mandating "equal pay for equal work", prohibitions on hiring and promotion because of sex, and so on.

The libertarian position is to end sexism through voluntary, non-governmental means: education, persuasion, economic boycott, social ostracism, and so on.

Libertarians argue as follows: Despite the irrationality of sexism, individuals rights are *not* violated by private (as opposed to legal and governmental) sexual discrimination. While a person is morally wrong and irrational to judge and deal with people or not deal with people because of their sex (outside of sexual relationships), a person's right to engage in such discrimination can only be taken away by abrogating the right to all freedom of association. Telling people that they may not irrationally discriminate because of sex sets the legal precedent for prohibiting rational discrimination because of sex.

We have already seen this occur in case after case with the civil rights laws. Laws intended to combat irrational racial bias have resulted in quotas, reverse discrimination, harassment of private associations, and endless legal battles. Discrimination often occurs in subtle and non-proveable ways, so there is really no way to prohibit arbitrary discrimination without prohibiting intelligent discrimination as well. Government quotas and "affirmative action programs" are the only real alternative to voluntary association, and such quotas and programs merely substitute one form of discrimination for another.

Further using tax funds to pay for day care centers or finance abortions means violating the right of everyone to their own income for the benefit of the social minority who desire such services. Such "special interest" legislation increases taxes upon already overburdened taxpayers, violates every principle of justice and extends the legalized theft of taxation.

Thus libertarians regard the use of governmental force in an attempt to end sexism as fundamentally immoral and *therefore* innately impractical.

Ultimately the evil of sexism is that it dehumanizes both men and women. But political force has the exact same effect. Therefore to substitute legislation for education and coercion for reason is but to replace one evil with another evil.

Any attempt to enforce "equal pay for equal work" or set up day care centers at everyone's expense would merely increase—not decrease—estrangement of men from women and hostility between the sexes. And such laws would greatly increase the power and invasiveness of government without preventing sexual discrimination in more subtle forms.

Peaceful society and rational attitudes between the sexes ultimately depend upon political freedom

and respect for individual rights. As a consequence, the only effective means of combatting sexism without fostering even worse evils is through voluntary, libertarian methods which uphold the rights of all people to their own life, liberty and property—even if they are bigoted and stupid.

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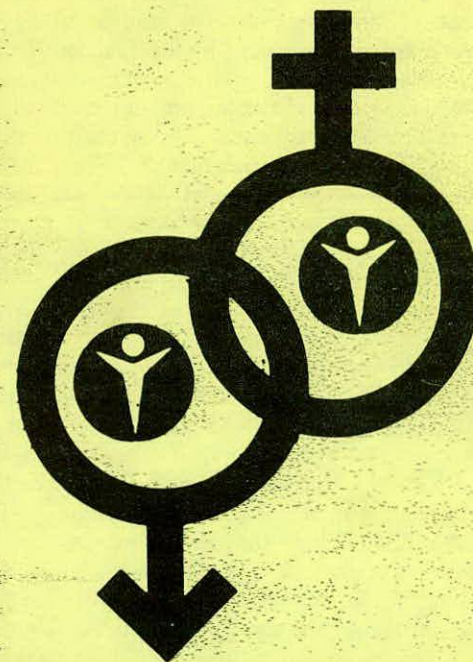
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