

Sexism

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It is a pervasive, long-standing, and deeply disturbing fact that, by many ways of measuring well-being, women around the globe live lesser lives than men. In much of the world they are less well nourished, less healthy, and less well educated (UNIFEM 2000). Everywhere they are vulnerable to violence and abuse by men. It has been estimated that as a result of these facts, and because in many places girl babies are disproportionately aborted or killed, there are one hundred million missing women (Drèze and Sen 1989). Many more women in the world lack access to education and many more are illiterate. Jobs that are high paying are much less likely to be held by women. Tedious and menial work is much more likely to be done by women. Women in the workforce are paid less than their male counterparts, are more often harassed and intimidated in work, and are far more often responsible for childcare and housework "after work." Independently of their participation in the paying workforce, women suffer from domestic violence at much greater rates, bear primary responsibility for childrearing and housework, and

are much more likely to be sick and poor in their old age. In much of the world women do not have access to safe abortion, or sometimes even to contraception, further putting women's health and well-being at risk. Women everywhere bear almost the full burden of unplanned pregnancies. Women in many nations of the world lack full formal equality under the law. Where they have it, they are less likely to be able to access the judicial system, and so still lack substantive equality. And almost nowhere in the world do women hold high government offices at anywhere near the rates of men. In short, when we compare the life prospects of women and men, we find that a woman is far more likely to be poor, unhealthy, abused, and politically disenfranchised, even while she works longer hours and is largely responsible for the primary care of future generations.

Two general explanations could account for this remarkable disparity in life prospects: (1) women are by nature inferior to men, and so less worthy of concern or less able to benefit from equal concern, or (2) women are systematically disadvantaged by society. Under the first we include explanations based on psychology, biology, socio-biology, and so on that maintain that natural differences between men and women are sufficient to justify the comparatively sadder life prospects of women. As we will discuss below in "Objections," we suspect

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that many such claims depend on tenuous evidence (Fausto-Sterling 1985), and deny that any immediate normative implications follow from whatever differences might exist between men and women.

In what follows we proceed on the assumption that the more plausible course is to take some version of the second as true. To follow this line in investigating the ways in which women are systematically disadvantaged is to investigate sexism. We begin with a characterization of sexism. We then offer a brief history of its social recognition. We turn then to the levels at which sexism conditions human social life, and discuss some paradigm examples of sexism. We then set out the two principal types of feminist theories of sexism, and conclude with a brief discussion of three objections to struggle against sexism.

What is Sexism?

It is important to note at the outset that sexism is a highly complex notion. It is thus much easier to define conceptually, though this is no small task, than to concretely and unequivocally identify. Though there are certainly patent cases of sexism, on many definitions sexism is often only identifiable by its symptoms or consequences. We can quite readily explain that, if some distribution of opportunities systematically deprives women of what is offered to men, and there is no apparent overriding reason which justifies such a distribution, then we have a clear *prima facie* case of sexism. As a general claim this seems to us both undeniable and unassailable. The idea that sexism involves systematic inequality is, in short, a commonly recognized working definition. Yet those who deny that there is (much) sexism in the world, or in a particular case, often demand clear, ostensible evidence. Objective, operational criteria would be helpful here, and helpful for doing research or making policy as well. The task of finding such criteria is often quite difficult and comes from a wide array of theories covering the gamut of the social and psychological world. For sexism happens not only in explicitly institutionally structured settings, such as, for example, the denial of equal opportunity for jobs, but also in the daily and presumably much more spontaneous interactions between persons. As these latter interactions involve a wide variety of motives and causes, they may appear to be idiosyncratic and individualized rather than socially constructed. In

such cases the charge of sexism might then appear less apt because less than obvious. Thus, the conceptual work of clarifying the nature of sexism is a far easier task than the practical work of showing that some particular concrete instance involving the mistreatment of women is the result of sexism or an instance of sexism. It is for this reason that much feminist work focuses on conceptual clarification and the organization of women's experience.

In its widest sense the term "sexism" can be used to refer to anything that creates, constitutes, promotes, sustains, or exploits an unjustifiable distinction between the sexes (Frye 1983: 18). In this wide sense the term "sexism" (and its nominative "sexist") can be used to refer to any purported though mistaken difference between the sexes. This neutral descriptive use of the term, however, is deeply unsatisfactory. First, because the history of the term (brief as it is) shows it to have been intentionally modeled on "racism." As "racism" does not merely describe attempts to differentiate between races, but instead refers to pernicious distinctions between races, the term "sexism" is better understood as referring to pernicious distinctions between the sexes. Second, a neutral use of the term implicitly denies its conceptual role in binding together and illuminating the various faces of women's social difference, and the ways in which these differences are harmful. Again, just as racism is most accurately used to refer to various forms of oppression against non-Caucasians (at least in Western societies), in the more accurate and more specific sense with which we will be concerned here, "sexism" refers to a historically and globally pervasive form of oppression against women. It is this more specific and explicitly normative sense of sexism that is the subject of feminist inquiry.

One catalyst for the identification of sexism was women's participation in struggles against racism. In fact, the first wave of the women's movement began with the participation of a number of thoughtful women in the abolition movement of the nineteenth century (Stanton and Anthony 1981), and the "second wave" can likewise trace its resurgence to the women of the civil rights movement in the twentieth century (Evans 1979). When contemplating a name for "the problem that has no name," as Betty Friedan (1983: Ch. 1) put it, there is little doubt that for many feminists the parallels with racism made the term "sexism" appealing. In some ways it might seem that this was an unfortunate start, for the differences between racism and sexism

are sometimes obscured by the easy way in which they form lists of social wrongs. Perhaps the most important difference is that racism is based on dubious theories about the differences between the races, while sexual difference can hardly be denied. Racism seems often to be motivated by a hatred or fear of the other from which the conclusion comes that other "races" than one's own are inferior, a kind of racism that Kwame Anthony Appiah has called "intrinsic racism." Sexism, by contrast, is typically akin to what he calls "extrinsic racism," where the judgment that the other is inferior derives from the judgment that aspects or abilities of the other are inferior (Appiah 1990). Thus, many sexist men when so-charged can truly object that "I am not sexist; I love women," but this only means, at best, that they are not intrinsic sexists. However, there are many parallels between racism and sexism. For one thing, both are pervasive and have a high human cost. But, more importantly, the psychological mechanisms that make sexism and racism possible and desirable are similar: namely, our penchant for categorizing by social group, and making invidious distinctions between in-group and out-group members (Cudd 1998). Furthermore, the social mechanisms that maintain sexism and racism are similar. Both sexism and racism are maintained through systematic violence and economic disadvantage. Both are difficult to pinpoint, but can be statistically documented and are much more readily perceived by the victims than by the respective dominant social groups. Both sexism and racism can have devastating psychological effects on individuals. And both inspire enormously powerful backlash when they are publicly challenged. Considerable work remains to be done, however, on the relationship between the concepts of sexism and racism (Alcoff 1998).

If one holds, as we do, that sexism is pervasive, both historically and globally, then it will be no surprise that its ground will be both wide and deep. Institutions that are sexist will be both causes and effects of sexism. When regarded as a result of past sexism, such institutions will then carry on a tradition of, say, excluding women from available high-paying work. Managers and others who carry on this tradition may, of course, overtly maintain extrinsic sexism. They may sincerely, but falsely, believe women to be incapable of carrying on this work. This *intentional extrinsic sexism* should be distinguished from what might be called *individuated extrinsic sexism*, which maintains that while women

(as a group) are capable of carrying on this work, no individual woman is. In either case it will be extremely difficult to persuasively establish such trenchant attitudes as sexist. In the latter case though women in general are held to be able to do this work, the technique of holding that each one now applying cannot do the job will effectively, if unintentionally, maintain the sexist tradition. Within that tradition such judgments are considered to be matters of keeping high standards, not sexism. As this practice requires an increasingly high degree of dubious judgment the longer it continues, over time it becomes correspondingly less reasonable to attribute to managers and others the sincere belief that women (as a group) are equally capable. In the case of intentional extrinsic sexism the fact that there are currently no or few women in the field contributes to the view that women cannot or do not want to do the work. The tradition of excluding women is, in this case, *intentional*, but is labeled by those who practice it "realism," not "sexism."

One important effect of the practice of excluding women in these ways is, of course, that women are made more dependent on others, usually men. By reducing the opportunities women have available to them, women are less able to clearly establish, both to themselves and to others, their general ability to accomplish high-paying (or high-status) tasks. Where these patterns are left unchallenged there is thus little to counter the claim that women are, by nature, more dependent. Moreover, these effects of sexist hiring practices are reinforced in a number of ways. They are reinforced by patterns of language which mark and delimit appropriate activities and attitudes on the basis of sex, and relegate the activities and attitudes of women to a lower status (i.e. sexist language). And they are reinforced by systems of education and enculturation which support, if not create and coerce, discrete proclivities for girls and boys, and relegate the proclivities of girls to a lower status. These social aspects of sexism are further mirrored in psychological dispositions, desires, and self-concepts. Accepting the activities, attitudes, and proclivities which are typically associated with men as "normal" or "standard" for human beings (i.e. the man standard) would render the activities, attitudes, and proclivities which are typically associated with women, when different, abnormal or substandard. For instance, women will appear "highly emotional" or "hysterical" when they display more emotion and concern than men, or "brooding" and "moody"

when less. More pertinently, recognition of the man standard enables us to make as much sense as one can of the characterization of pregnancy as a form of illness or a temporary disability.

We stated earlier that sexism involves systematic inequality. Our discussion to this point has attempted to elucidate this notion. On our view sexism is a systematic, pervasive, but often subtle, force that maintains the oppression of women, and that is at work through institutional structures, in interpersonal interactions and the attitudes that are expressed in them, and in the cognitive, linguistic, and emotional processes of individual minds. In short, sexism structures our very experience of the world, and makes that world on the whole worse for women than for men.

Background: Language, Experience, and Recognition

Though sexism is a pervasive form of oppression, the term "sexism" is of surprisingly recent coinage, first appearing in print in 1968 (Shapiro 1985). Language and recognition are close allies when identifying social problems and investigating the possibility of social transformation. In naming this social phenomenon, and thus drawing attention to it, the second-wave feminists of the 1970s provided the conceptual space within which to recognize and reorganize long-standing moral, social, and political structures based on and affecting gender and biological sex. The resulting explorations into sexism have yielded considerable insights, and a number of difficulties.

Prior to the very recent coining of "sexism" there was simply no term to refer to the concept of women's oppression. Instead, authors identified various ways in which women seemed to be mistreated. Authors writing on this subject generally described fairly "local" forms of mistreatment. The primary focus of feminist arguments in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example, concerned the importance of education for women and an opposition to the absolute sovereignty of men within marriage (Astell 1694, 1700). These arguments, however, commonly held that any change in the position of women depended largely, if not solely, on a change in women. They also often agreed with the popular view that women had a naturally limited rational capacity (when

compared with men), and that domestic life was women's naturally proper sphere.

At the end of the eighteenth century Mary Wollstonecraft focused on a comparatively greater variety of social factors contributing to women's subordinate position. Taking the radical stance that women are not inferior by nature, she held that women are naturally deserving of equal rights, and could, if properly educated, participate in "the theatre of politics." Like her predecessors, she held that women in general had an underdeveloped rational capacity. The vices that misogynist satires commonly attributed to women were, in her view, quite generally deserved: "it is your own conduct, O ye foolish women! which throws an odium on your sex!" (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1988: 302). Unlike them, however, she argued that it was not nature, but a lack of education that had contributed to women's focus on relatively trivial matters. Importantly, however, Wollstonecraft did not think that education would be sufficient to rectify women's subordinate position. She recognized that what she called the "stream of popular opinion" had an even stronger effect on women's social standing than did any characteristics actually possessed by individual women (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1988: 102). For bolstered by the stream of popular opinion and a socially produced reprehensible female character, she agreed that women's behavior often did "justify the authority that chains such a weak being to her duty" (Wollstonecraft [1792] 1988: 319). However, as women were just as capable as men of acquiring "human virtues," she argued that they were a social resource that was being squandered.

Like Wollstonecraft, J. S. Mill argued in the mid-nineteenth century that the various forms of mistreatment women suffered were contrary to general utility (Mill 1869). According to Mill, the opportunities offered to women and men should be based on a perfect equality of opportunity. That is, there should be nothing that is offered to men that is denied to women because they are women. Women, like men, will differ in aptitude and interest, but, like men, they should be allowed to win their social positions through fair and appropriate competition. On this position, the aim is to secure gender-neutral standards for all. As women have not been provided with the resources (for example, education, employment opportunities, political access, and social standing) to meet these standards, what is needed is a social transformation, which will give them the levels of access usually accorded men.

In 1949 Simone de Beauvoir reiterated the argument that women were not inferior to men by nature. However, de Beauvoir was interested in explaining not only the subordinate position of women in society, but also forms of female subjectivity that contribute to the durability of women's subordination. She thus gave greater weight to organizing "the lived experience" of women than did any of her predecessors. In her view both men's and women's natures have been socially constructed. However, the social construction of women has created a "second sex" in which women do not even regard themselves as a locus of dignity, as a self (de Beauvoir 1952). Instead, they regard themselves as "other," and, like men, reserve the notion of selfhood for men. The creation of a second sex is, moreover, the result of a primarily unconscious "desire for self-justification." That is, even the choices a woman believes she makes authentically, i.e. for herself, are the result of her constructed nature, the construction of which is for another, i.e. men. Alternatively, as the notion of "being a man" involves superiority, specifically superiority over women, men have a stake in maintaining women's inferiority. Women's subordination is thus explained and reinforced by men's and women's ways of experiencing the world. Though instructive in delineating aspects of female subjectivity, her work faces serious interpretive difficulties that mirror the main lines of feminist inquiry. These difficulties turn on the question of whether her position can be reconciled with some concept of gender-neutral standards. On the one hand, unless we can make sense of a self which is deeper than a constructed self, any notion of gender-neutral standards will be suspect. In other words, without an Archimedean point of view, gender neutrality will mean "equality with men" (i.e. the man standard) and women's differences will be detrimental to their well-being. On the other hand, if there is no deeper self, and the constructed differences between men and women must none the less be taken as "brute differences," then we are left with the difficult and somewhat uncomfortable goal of establishing "separate but equal" standards. To a large measure, feminist work on sexism has engaged in exploring, developing, and critically evaluating these complex lines of thought.

It would be difficult to deny that a sincere recognition of sexism will transform one's self-conception and one's conception of the world. Plato's allegory of the cave is a story of such experiential

transformation, of coming to recognize something one would have not seen, and of coming to realize that what seems real is not real. For many women the recognition of sexism is just such a transformation. For like the cave-dwellers' first glimpse of the sun, the recognition of sexism is both revelatory and disorienting. Women sometimes describe their first recognition of sexism as a moment of realization, a "click" in which many previously disparate experiences, problems, reports, and issues become unified. What seemed previously to be simply one's own experiences, become a woman's experiences. What seemed previously to be personal problems, become women's problems. What were reports about others, or issues concerning others, become stories and issues about women like oneself. The recognition of sexism thus involves both a new way of conceptualizing experience and an identification with other women. It is also, unsurprisingly, a bewildering recognition (Bartky 1990). For once made it is difficult to determine which of one's reactions are, and which are not, the result of one's own idiosyncrasies. As the world of personal experience fades and the pervasiveness of sexism becomes more clear, few aspects of one's life remain in place. Fear, anger, and resentment at being insulted or threatened (however subtly) can no longer be regarded as simply personal reactions to personal affronts. They may, and often are, better apprehended as part of a system of oppression, in which individual perpetrators, perhaps even unknowingly, reaffirm the boundaries resulting from sexism.

The recognition of sexism for men is and has been both a slower and seemingly quite different process (Segal 1990). Few men report the recognition of sexism as a "click." It is more likely to take the form of a ploddingly arduous reconstruction of their own experience, which will require that they take responsibility for participation in sexist practices, and re-evaluate many of their beliefs and desires. Forms of male social interaction (e.g. jokes, chiding) come to be recognized as a mutual devaluing of women. Aspects and images of masculinity come to be recognized as compelling yet inconsistent with an aspiration for both inclusive social justice and uncoerced interpersonal cooperation. The recognition of sexism can thus also be transformative. As it is accompanied by an awareness that by forgoing forms of power and privilege the exercise of which determines one's relative social standing, the transformation carries considerable personal risk.

As it is accompanied by a realization of complicity the intentional nature of which is not always clear, it carries considerable moral risk. Different accounts of sexism will affect the degree of moral risk men face and the degree of personal risk which they ought to undertake.

Though the dynamics may be different, what is clear for both men and women is that the recognition of sexism, and its corresponding personal transformation, is a prerequisite for social transformation. Sexism, as noted above, works at a number of different levels whose interaction is, again, in need of further clarification.

Levels of Sexism

Sexism can be seen as a force responding to and molding human interactions. As a force, it can be seen, roughly, to operate at three levels: institutional sexism, which works on and through the level of social institutions; interpersonal sexism, which works on and through interactions among individuals who are not explicitly mediated by institutional structures; and unconscious sexism, which works at the personal level of the cognitive and affective processes of individuals. It is helpful to sort out these levels in order to explain why some charges of sexism are relatively uncontroversial, while others are difficult to see or evidence conclusively.

Institutional sexism

Institutional sexism refers to invidious sexual inequalities in the explicit rules and implicit norms governing and structuring social institutions. Religious institutions provide a useful example of how explicit rules and implicit norms structure institutions. In the Catholic Church, for instance, it is an explicit rule that all priests are men and all nuns are women. Only priests can run the church hierarchy, and priests outrank nuns in most decision-making situations. While it is clear how explicit rules can govern and structure institutions, this example can also help us to see that implicit norms also structure Catholic experience and create sexual inequality. While it is no longer widely accepted as an explicit rule that in heterosexual marriage the man is the head of the household and the woman is the helpmeet, it is implied by the

relative rank of priests and nuns in the church and by its sacred writings. This implicit norm positions men above women in marriage (as in all other social institutions in which both sexes are present), clearly and invidious sexual inequality. In addition to the more explicitly rule-governed institutions of government, religion, family, health care, and education, there are crucially important informally or implicitly structured institutions prime among them being language, and the sites of cultural and artistic production. To say that sexism is a systematic social injustice based on one's sex (Radcliff Richards 1980), or a discriminatory sex-role differentiation (Bartky 1990), is to speak of institutional sexism. Sexism, then, must be understood as a part of the social order, similar to the economic order of capitalism or the political order of liberalism.

Interpersonal sexism

Whereas institutional sexism involves the explicit rules and their implicit norms that sustain oppressive social institutions, interpersonal sexism involves interactions between persons that are not governed by explicit rules. Interpersonal sexism comprises actions and other expressions between persons that create, constitute, promote, sustain, and/or exploit invidious sexual inequalities.

The person who is acting in a sexist way or making a sexist expression need not intend sexism; there are intentional and unintentional forms of interpersonal sexism. Here are some examples from our experiences:

- As a child, the girl is not allowed the free play of her brothers; she is prevented by her parents and teachers from engaging in rough-and-tumble play, not included in activities involving building, transportation, etc., not encouraged to try or expected to succeed at sports, mathematics, or leadership activities, and required, unlike her brothers, to do domestic chores.
- In school the teachers require her to speak less and restrain her behavior more than boys. Teachers reward her with better grades for her passivity, but boys exclude her from their games and begin to take the superior attitudes of their fathers.
- In sports she sees males and manhood extolled, females and womanhood ridiculed. Coaches and team-mates insult male athletes by calling

them "woman" or "girl," and praise them with the term "man."

- When a man and a woman negotiate a car loan or a home loan, or buy an expensive machine, the salesperson speaks only to the man. Super-market ads are aimed, meanwhile, at women as housewives.
- In conversations between colleagues men are routinely deferred to while women's remarks are ignored. When a male colleague repeats what a female has said, he is complimented for his good idea.

Sexism is a key motif that unifies this otherwise seemingly disparate set of personal experiences. This list could, of course, be greatly expanded, and much feminist work has been devoted to increasing our stock of example experiences. This work is important because sexism is such an integral but unspoken part of the everyday world that both men and women have a difficult time recognizing it. For society's ground of legitimacy seems to require that injustice be recognized and socially opposed. Yet the injustice of sexism is built into the very fabric of everyone's everyday experiences from infancy on.

Unconscious sexism

"Unconscious sexism" refers to the psychological mechanisms and tacit beliefs, emotions, and attitudes that create, constitute, promote, sustain, and/or exploit invidious sexual inequalities. This category will be denied by many as vague, unprovable, or too easily invoked. But there are both conceptual and empirical arguments in favor of its existence. The conceptual argument is that the statistical evidence concerning the lesser lives that women live would be completely puzzling given the legal guarantees of equality for men and women in many countries were it not for the possibility of such unconscious sexism. Institutional and interpersonal sexism cannot alone account for all the data. That implies that there are unconscious attitudes and beliefs that allow persons in positions of power unconsciously to prefer men to women when social rewards are distributed, and yet not to see themselves or be seen as applying sexist standards.

The empirical argument is widely diffused, but accessible. It consists first of all in evidence for the existence of unconscious motivations, which is vast

in the psychological literature. Second, there is evidence that when the same work is attributed to a woman it is judged of less value than when attributed to a man (Valian 1998). Third, there is evidence that women find it more painful to think of themselves as oppressed, and men find it more painful to think of themselves as the privileged gender. Thus, there is motivation for neither women nor men to think of women as oppressed and men as dominant (Branscombe 1998). Fourth, there is a great deal of evidence from social cognitive psychology to suggest that persons make invidious distinctions among salient social categories, that we tend to amplify them well beyond the real differences between individuals in those categories, and that sex is one of those categories (Tajfel 1981). Now since it surely cannot be argued that men get the worse end of this deal, this fact constitutes evidence for the claim that such cognitive processes tend to create unconscious sexist attitudes and beliefs. There is, no doubt, a great deal more evidence that could be cited, but this much should be sufficient to make the point that unconscious sexism is a real, documented, psychological phenomenon.

Having demonstrated its reality, however, some discussion and examples will be helpful to see how unconscious sexism is manifested and how one might go about discovering it. The key to recognizing unconscious motivations, especially unsavory ones that persons are reluctant to acknowledge in themselves, is to look for decisions or actions that could not be justified by a reasonable assessment of the available evidence. What counts as "reasonable" and "available" are crucial issues here, of course. By "reasonable" we mean consistent with one's other explicitly held beliefs and widely shared, non-sexist, knowledge in the community. We insist on explicit beliefs here because, of course, if one has tacit sexist beliefs the action could be reasonable but sexist, and yet not counted as unconscious. By "available evidence" we are referring to reports that would be made by a member of the community who does not have sexist beliefs or attitudes, or whose sexist beliefs played no role in the reports, or to widely shared, non-sexist, knowledge in the community. Of course, there may be no non-sexist members of any community. The practices of sexism affect one's self-conception. Internal critique may not be enough to free oneself from identification with those practices. But we must begin to identify sexist practices somewhere. Granting that it is possible that we will not recognize all unconscious (or, indeed, all

conscious) sexism, we can still begin by finding the more obvious cases. Consider the following examples:

- A philosophy department is looking to hire a new faculty member. One-third of the applicants are women. One-third of the interview list is made up of women. In the interviews the women are judged as doing worse than the men. The comments afterwards are that they don't seem "as polished" or "professional" as the men. The fact is that the women do not meet the interviewers' expectations of what a philosopher or a faculty member is supposed to look like, a stereotype that includes being a man.
- A department is considering how to advise a female colleague and a male colleague concerning their chances for tenure. They have equal but modest publishing records, and roughly equal but modest teaching records. However, the female colleague has far more service. Both colleagues have been active participants in the departmental politics and have voiced strong opinions in departmental meetings. The male is judged to be an excellent colleague, while the female is judged to be uncollegial. They give the male colleague a very positive report for his tenure prospects, and the female is warned that she must publish more and improve her teaching to get tenure. In fact, the department has judged her to be worse because they feel uncomfortable with a strong, active woman, while the man is judged to have leadership qualities.
- A drug is being tested for its effectiveness in preventing heart disease. All the research subjects are men. When asked to account for this the research team leader responds that women's hormones would interfere with the study. While it is surely true that the drug could affect women differently from men as a result of female hormones, it is equally true that it could affect men differently from women as a result of male hormones. This symmetry is lost on the research team, who, like most of us, tend to think of women as the ones with the "interfering" or abnormal hormones.

Unconscious sexism often seems to be innocent, in the sense that the beliefs or feelings that make it up are never voiced, and often based on widely shared stereotypes. Whether or not it is innocent surely depends on the degree to which the individual has access to information that counters the unconscious

sexist beliefs and attitudes, a condition that depends on larger social factors. Although we do believe that "sexism" names not only a mistake but a *prima facie* wrong, there are cases where one can commit this wrong and yet not be culpable.

These levels of sexism are, of course, interrelated. Understood as institutional discrimination, sexism concerns the interactions between men and women only as symptoms of a more pervasive problem. Social institutions guide, and on some accounts cause, our interpersonal attitudes. Our self-conceptions and our conception of others are at least partially a product of the social structures through which we interact with one another. How they are interrelated is a central question within feminism, feminist philosophy, and feminist social science. Different ways of understanding the interrelations between these levels result in different, and sometimes quite divergent, accounts. Two types of account are prominent in the feminist literature. In the next section we discuss these two types.

Two Feminist Views of Sexism

Though feminists agree that sexism structures our very experience of the world, feminist theories of sexism vary considerably. None the less, they can be very roughly divided into two categories. First, what can be labeled "equality feminism" maintains that social institutions are the primary medium of sexism. Men and women do not differ markedly in their potential capacities, interests, and abilities. Given similar training, men and women would develop fairly similar talents, at least as similar as those between men or between women. Thus if we are to transform society it will require that we resist and undermine those institutions that enforce sex differences and disproportionately deprive women of opportunities to develop highly valued social skills. Equality feminists need not accept what we have above called "the man standard." Rather, most contemporary equality feminists employ measures of social value such as utility, respect for human rights, or hypothetical agreement in order to develop gender-neutral standards by which to judge the opportunities, activities, and proclivities of men and women.

Alternatively, "difference feminists" maintain that unconscious desires are the primary medium of sexism. Accordingly, social institutions are the result, rather than the cause, of sexism. Recently a

variety of feminists holding this view have attempted to both articulate the differences between men and women and re-evaluate equality feminism. Some, like Carol Gilligan (1982), Nel Noddings (1984), and Sara Ruddick (1989), have argued that women's "different voice" involves a greater emphasis on responsiveness, caring, and the maintenance of particular, concrete relationships. This voice is undervalued in society, they argue, because of the dominance of "responsibility" – a notion which involves a strict adherence to principle and which, they argue, typifies the male point of view. Others skeptical of gender neutrality are also skeptical of the idea that caring and relationship maintenance best characterize women's difference. They thus seek to identify a different difference. Catherine MacKinnon (1987: 39) writes: "women value care because men have valued us according to the care we give them, and we could probably use some." In her view, since women's subordinate position in society informs their experience of the world, and so requires concrete critical evaluation, it can also give them a unique, and privileged, position from which to criticize our social traditions. Somewhat similarly, Luce Irigaray argues that the critical reevaluation of women should neither reassert what has traditionally been taken to be women's nature, nor strive for equality with men. She maintains that the law has a duty to "offer justice to *two genders that differ* in their needs, their desires, their properties" (Irigaray 1993: 4).

Both views aim to transform institutional sexism, interpersonal sexism, and unconscious sexism. They differ, however, over just what form such a transformation would take. For equality feminists the notion that there is a significant difference between men and women, a difference that makes a difference, seems more likely to sustain the global disparity existing between men and women since this disparity has been built on the basis of sex differentiation. For difference feminists, on the other hand, the notion that there is no significant difference between men and women, seems likely to undermine women's emancipation. Since women have been defined and have defined themselves in relation to men, as subordinate to dominant, women's independence depends on discovering, or perhaps imaginatively inventing, a different identity. Importantly, both equality feminists and difference feminists have the same worry. For both, the idea that an attempted transformation of society will result in a mere modification of sexism rather than its elimination

is, given its evident though under-acknowledged depth and pervasiveness, a predominant, reasonable, and clearly practical concern.

Objections

Three kinds of objections have been raised to feminist struggles against sexism, which we shall call the objections from *essentialism*, *skepticism*, and *defeatism*. The objection from *essentialism* maintains that there are essential biological or psychological differences between men and women such that true equality or even equal evaluation of men and women will ultimately be impossible or will too greatly restrain our liberty. Such objections to feminist efforts to remedy the ravages of sexism have a long history, from Aristotle's view of woman as partial man through biological theories of inferiority propagated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to Freudian psychoanalytic theories of femininity. A recent and currently influential version of this objection appeals to evolutionary psychology to explain the differences between the status of men and women. According to evolutionary psychology, there are distinct male and female psychologies because of the different reproductive strategies that each sex pursues, and the resulting psychologies make males more competitive, independent, and aggressive, while females are more nurturing and concerned about interpersonal relations. In addition, at least one proponent of evolutionary psychology has claimed that male psychology makes it inevitable that men will "run to extremes – or, in other words, that men are disproportionately represented in the top and bottom of many measurements" (Guyot 2001: B15). Thus, the best lawyers, artists, politicians, businessmen, and so on must be men. So, Guyot argues, it would be inefficient and morally wrong to bring about parity in gender representation of these fields.

To this objection we have three responses. First, specifically regarding evolutionary psychology, it is a highly theorized but largely untested hypothesis at this point. Given its genealogy as another in a string of allegedly scientific proofs of women's inferiority, it is important to be skeptical until and unless it scores empirical successes. Second, and this response applies to any scientific theory about sexual difference, normative implications of difference

are never directly implied by any descriptive differences. That is, it is fallacious to infer from the fact of sexual difference that women should therefore not have equal chances for social success. Finally, the ideals of liberal individualism and equality require each individual to be treated as a unique person, deserving of praise or social rewards based on his or her actual individual merit, and not based on the average merits of her class, caste, race, or gender. So even if it were true that women on average are less well suited to be lawyers, or whatever, it does not follow that there should be no safeguards in place to ensure that women are not discriminated against because of their sex. In fact, if women are on average less well suited to various occupations, it raises the likelihood that employers will unfairly judge individual women by their sex rather than their individual merits.

The objection from *skepticism* maintains that sexism is admittedly a serious problem in some other countries, but, though it has been a problem in our society in the past, sexism has largely been overcome. Women are not prevented from gaining an education, entering the workforce, or asserting their equal right to vote, to own property, or to divorce. In some cases women are treated preferentially and sometimes even outperform men. Therefore, there is no reason to pursue any remedies to sexism – it is already gone. This sort of objection has been leveled by Christina Hoff Sommers (2000). However, this objection overlooks a wealth of statistical information that proves that women's well-being is still compromised in contemporary American society. The gender wage gap hovers around 75 percent (Institute for Women's Policy Research 1997b) – up considerably from the 59 percent of the late 1970s, but still hardly something to be satisfied with. According to the Joint Center for Poverty Research, although the overall rate of poverty in the United States in 1997 was 13.3 percent, the rate for women was 24 percent. Women suffer from domestic violence at roughly four times the rate of men (US Department of Justice 2000). In 2001, 73 women served in the US Congress (13.6 percent): thirteen in the Senate, and 60 in the House, both all-time highs. Of course, no woman has ever been US President, and only two women are now and have ever been Justices of the Supreme Court. Women in state legislatures compose only 22.4 percent even of those bodies (Center for American Women in Politics 2001). Women own businesses at approximately half the

rate of men, and of the top one hundred wealthiest people in *Forbes Magazine's* list for 2001, only ten were women. And this is only a partial list of the great inequalities suffered by women in contemporary US society. Finally, it is also important to point out to the skeptic that the fact that women are suffering from sexism in much of the world is itself harmful to all women. Women form a social group – a non-voluntary social group. They thereby share each other's fate to an extent. If women are harassed on the streets of Kabul, then American women who travel there will be harassed. If women are subjected to humiliating or violent treatment in East Asia, then American women who travel there will be as well. If women are not taken seriously in a country, then how can a woman diplomat from America hope to do her job there? The skeptic thus underestimates both the degree to which sexism still exists in Western society and the effects that sexism worldwide has on all women.

The *defeatist* argues that there is nothing that he or anyone personally can do to fight sexism. Defeatists often continue by arguing that since they are not themselves mistreating women, do not dislike women or hold them to be inferior, they should not therefore be required to do anything to combat sexism; nor do they think that anything constructive can be done to eliminate it. Defeatists overlook the existence of institutional and unconscious sexism. They fail to recognize that they can participate in sexism even without overt, conscious sexist attitudes. If they take seriously the problem of sexism, then they should examine their behaviors, choices, and preferences for what those express to the world. Perhaps they will find underneath a dislike of a certain co-worker, say, a prejudice against assertive women that they do not harbor against assertive men. This would be an example of unconscious sexism (made conscious). They should also examine how they respond to other people's overt interpersonal sexism. Do they laugh at wife jokes? Look the other way from sexual harassment in the office? Such behaviors support sexism, and thus injustice. Finally, the defeatist who acknowledges institutional sexism has the obligation not to support it: not to vote for it, not to buy from it, not to encourage it. The defeatist has no real defense, in other words, as long as he admits that there may be unconscious sexism, interpersonal sexism among others, or institutional sexism.

In conclusion, sexism is alive and well in contemporary Western society, and to an even greater degree in much of the rest of the world. Sexism is a serious form of oppression, and, as such, it is incumbent on decent people to oppose it, though the form that opposition should take remains a serious matter for theorists and activists alike.

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