

The Second Sexism by David Benatar

In societies in which sex discrimination has been recognized to be wrong, the assault on this form of discrimination has targeted those attitudes and practices that (directly) disadvantage women and girls. At the most, there has been only scant attention to those manifestations of sex discrimination of which the primary victims are men and boys. What little recognition there has been of discrimination against males has very rarely resulted in amelioration. For these reasons, we might refer to discrimination against males as the "second sexism," to adapt Simone de Beauvoir's famous phrase. The second sexism is the neglected sexism, the sexism that is not taken seriously even by most of those who oppose sex discrimination. This is regrettable not only because of its implications for ongoing unfair male disadvantage, but also, as I shall argue later, because discrimination against *women* cannot fully be addressed without attending to all forms of sexism.

So unrecognized is the second sexism that the mere mention of it will appear laughable to some. For this reason, some examples of male disadvantage need to be provided. Although I think that all the examples I shall provide happen to be, to a considerable extent, either instances or consequences of sex discrimination, there is a conceptual and moral distinction to be drawn between disadvantage and discrimination. I shall follow the convention of understanding discrimination as the *unfair* disadvantaging of somebody on the basis of some morally irrelevant feature such as a person's sex.

Discrimination need not be intentional. It is the *effect* rather than the intent of a law, policy, convention, or expectation that is relevant to determining whether somebody is unfairly disadvantaged. Discrimination also need not be direct, as it is when one sex is explicitly prohibited from occupying some position. There are powerful social forces that shape the expectations or preferences of men and women so that significantly disproportionate numbers of men and women aspire to particular positions. Here indirect or subtle discrimination is operative. I shall not defend the claims that discrimination can be indirect and need not be intentional.

These are accepted by many. Given that many other claims I shall make will be widely disputed, I shall focus on defending those more contentious claims.

Given the distinction between discrimination and disadvantage, outlining the examples of male disadvantage below is, at least for some of the examples, only the first step in the argument. I shall later consider and reject the view that these examples are not instances of discrimination.

Male Disadvantage

Perhaps the most obvious example of male disadvantage is the long history of social and legal pressures on men, but not on women, to enter the military and to fight in war, thereby risking their lives and bodily and psychological health. Where the pressure to join the military has taken the form of conscription, the costs of avoidance have been either self-imposed exile, imprisonment, or, in the most extreme circumstances, execution. At other times and places, where the pressures have been social rather than legal, the costs of not enlisting have been either shame or ostracism, inflicted not infrequently by women. Even in those few societies where women have been conscripted, they have almost invariably been spared the worst of military life—combat.

Some have noted, quite correctly, that the definition of “combat” often changes, with the result that although women are often formally kept from combat conditions, they are sometimes effectively engaged in risky combat activity.¹ Nevertheless, it remains true that in those relatively few situations in which women are permitted to take combat roles, it is a result of their choice rather than coercion and that even then women are kept insofar as possible from the worst combat situations. Others have noted that the exclusion of women from combat roles has not resulted in universal protection for women in times of war. Where wars are fought on home territory, women are regularly amongst the casualties of the combat. It remains true, however, that such scenarios are viewed by societies as being a deviation from the “ideal” conflict in which (male) combatants fight at a distance from the women and children whom they are supposed to be protecting. A society attempts to protect its own women but not its men from the life-threatening risks of war.

If we shift our attention from combat itself to military training, we find that women are generally not treated in the same demeaning ways

¹Judith Wagner DeCew, “Women, Equality, and the Military,” in Dana E. Bushnell (ed.), *Nagging Questions: Feminist Ethics in Everyday Life* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), pp. 123-44, at p. 131.

reserved for males. Why, for instance, should female recruits not be subject to the same de-individualizing crewcuts as male recruits? There is nothing outside of traditional gender roles that suggests such allowances. If it is too degrading for a woman, it must be judged also to be too degrading for a man. That the same judgment is not made is testimony to a double standard. Permitting women longer hair as an expression of their "femininity" assumes a particular relationship between hair length and both "femininity" and "masculinity." These special privileges simply reinforce traditional gender roles.

Men are much more likely to be the targets of aggression and violence.² Both men and women have been shown, in a majority of experimental studies, to behave more aggressively against men than toward women.³ Outside the laboratory, men are also more often the victims of violence. Consider some examples. Data from the U.S.A. show that nearly double the number of men than women are the victims of aggravated assault and more than three times more men than women are murdered.⁴ In the Kosovo conflict of 1998-99, according to one study, 90% of the war-related deaths were of men, and men constituted 96% of people reported missing.⁵ In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission found that the overwhelming majority of victims of gross violations of human rights—killing, torture, abduction, and severe ill-treatment—during the Apartheid years (at the hands of both the government and its opponents) were males.⁶ Testimony received by the Commission suggests that the number of men who died was six times that of women. Nonfatal gross violations of rights were inflicted on more than twice the number of men than women.⁷ Nor can the Commission be accused of having ignored women and their testimony. The majority of the Commission's deponents (55.3%) were female,⁸ and so sensitive was the

²Saying that men are more *likely* to be the victims of aggression and violence is not to say that they are *always* over-represented among such victims. Nazi genocide of Jews and others, for example, targeted men and women equally.

³Ann Frodi, Jacqueline Macaulay, and Pauline Ropert Thome, "Are Women Always Less Aggressive than Men? A Review of the Experimental Literature," *Psychological Bulletin* 84 (1977): 634-60, p. 642; Alice H. Eagly and Valerie J. Steffen, "Gender and Aggressive Behavior: A Meta-Analytic Review of the Social Psychological Literature," *Psychological Bulletin* 100 (1986): 309-30, pp. 321-22.

⁴Diane Craven, "Sex Differences in Violent Victimization, 1994," Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, September 1997.

⁵Paul. B. Spiegel and Peter Salama, "War and Mortality in Kosovo, 1988-89: An Epidemiological Testimony," *The Lancet* 355 (24 June 2000): 2204-9, pp. 2205-6.

⁶*Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, 1998, vol. 1, p. 171; vol. 4, pp. 259-66.

⁷*Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 171.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 169.

Commission to the relatively small proportion of women amongst the victims of the most severe violations that it held a special hearing on women.⁹

The lives of men are more readily sacrificed in nonmilitary and non-conflict contexts too. Where some lives must be endangered or lost, as a result of a disaster, men are the first to be sacrificed or put at risk. There is a long, but still thriving tradition (at least in western societies) of "women and children first," whereby the preservation of adult female lives is given priority over the preservation of adult male lives.¹⁰

Although corporal punishment has been inflicted on both males and females, it has been imposed, especially in recent times, on males much more readily than on females.¹¹ Both mothers and fathers are more likely to hit sons than daughters.¹² Where corporal punishment is permitted in schools, boys are hit much more often than girls are hit.¹³ Obvious sex-role stereotypes explain at least some of the difference.¹⁴ These stereotypes also explain why, in some jurisdictions, physical punishment imposed by schools and courts has been restricted by law to male offenders.¹⁵

⁹Ibid, vol. 4, chap. 10.

¹⁰Two famous examples are those of the ships *Birkenhead* and *Titanic*. When they were wrecked, in 1852 and 1912 respectively, women, and children were given priority in access to the lifeboats, while adult men were expected to stay on board knowing full well that they would die. See David Bevan, *Drums of the Birkenhead* (Cape Town: Purnell & Sons, 1972); Mark Giroud, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (London: Yale University Press, 1981). I am grateful to Ulrik Strandvik for drawing these sources to my attention. Sex and age are not the only relevant variables. Class is another. For statistics on the percentages of surviving men, women and children in each of the three classes on the *Titanic*, see Ian Jack, "Leonardo's Grave," in *Granta* 67 (1999): 7-37, p. 32.

¹¹For arguments against sex-discrimination in the infliction of corporal punishment, see David Benatar, "The Child, The Rod and the Law," *Acta Juridica* (1996): 197-214; and "Corporal Punishment," *Social Theory and Practice* 24 (1998): 237-60.

¹²Håkan Stattin, Harald Janson, Ingrid Klackenberglarsson, and David Magnusson, "Corporal Punishment in Everyday Life: An Intergenerational Perspective," in Joan McCord (ed.), *Coercion and Punishment in Long-Term Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 315-47, at pp. 321-23; Murray A. Straus, *Beating the Devil out of Them: Corporal Punishment in American Families* (New York: Lexington Books, 1994), pp. 29-30.

¹³Steven R. Shaw and Jeffrey P. Braden, "Race and Gender Bias in the Administration of Corporal Punishment," *School Psychology Review* 19 (1990): 378-83; Irwin A. Hyman, *Reading, Writing and the Hickory Stick* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1990), p. 65; John R. Slate, Emilio Perez, Phillip B. Waldrop, and Joseph E. Justen III, "Corporal Punishment: Used in Discriminatory Manner?" *The Clearing House*, vol. 64, July/August 1991, pp. 362-64.

¹⁴Straus, *Beating the Devil out of Them*, p. 30.

¹⁵Here are a few examples of jurisdictions where corporal punishment either was or is

Sexual assault on men is also often taken less seriously than such assault on women. For instance, the extent of sexual abuse of males is routinely underestimated.¹⁶ Sexual assaults upon boys are less likely to be reported than are those upon girls.¹⁷ Moreover, while rape by a male of a female is a crime everywhere, there are only a few jurisdictions in which forcing a male to have sex is regarded as rape. In these latter jurisdictions it is only recently that the definition of rape has been broadened to include the possibility of rape of a male. Before that, nonconsensual sex with a man carried less severe penalties than nonconsensual sex with a woman.¹⁸

In a divorce, men are less likely to gain custody of their children than are women. Mothers gain custody of children in 90% of cases.¹⁹ Some have suggested that this is because very few men want child custody. The evidence does indeed suggest that a smaller percentage of fathers than mothers want custody and that even fewer fathers actually request custody. However, even taking this into account, fathers fare worse than mothers with regard to child custody. In one study, for instance, 90% of cases where there was an uncontested request for maternal physical custody of the children, the mother was awarded this custody. However,

legally restricted to males. South Africa: J. Sloth-Nielsen, "Legal Violence: Corporal and Capital Punishment," in Brian McKendrick and Wilma Hoffmann, *People and Violence in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 77. United Kingdom: Section 56 (1) of the (U.K.) Petty Sessions and Summary Jurisdiction Act: 1927 (as amended by s. 8 of the Summary Jurisdiction Act 1960), quoted in *Tyrer v. United Kingdom*, *European Human Rights Reports*, 1978, p. 4. Singapore: Regulation No. 88 under the Schools Regulation Act 1957. Quoted at www.corpun.com/sgscr1.htm (accessed 18 February 2002).

¹⁶One of the few works to examine the problem of sexual assault on men is Gillian C. Mezey and Michael B. King's collection, *Male Victims of Sexual Assault*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). A number of authors in this collection demonstrate that the problem is significantly greater than is commonly assumed. Some of them postulate explanations of why sexual assault of males is less well recognized. Some of them also provide evidence that the number of female perpetrators of such assault is considerably greater than most people assume. See also William C. Holmes and Gail B. Slap, "Sexual Abuse of Boys: Definition, Prevalence, Correlates, Sequelae, and Management," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 280, no. 21 (2 December 1998): 1855-62.

¹⁷Bill Watkins and Arnon Bentovim, "Male Children and Adolescents as Victims: A Review of Current Knowledge," in Mezey and King (eds.), *Male Victims of Sexual Assault*, pp. 35-78, at pp. 40-42.

¹⁸Zsuzsanna Adler, "Male Victims of Sexual Assault—Legal Issues," in Mezey and King (eds.), *Male Victims of Sexual Assault*, pp. 125-40; South African Law Commission, *Sexual Offences*, Discussion Paper 85, 12 August 1999.

¹⁹Ross D. Parke, *Fathers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 79; Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., and Andrew J. Cherlin, *Divided Families: What Happens to Children When Parents Part?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 31.

in only 75% of cases in which there was an uncontested request for paternal physical custody was the father awarded such custody.²⁰ In cases of conflicting requests for physical custody, mothers' requests were granted twice as often as fathers' requests.²¹ Similarly, when children were residing with the father at the time of the separation the father was more likely to gain custody than when the children were living with the mother at the time of separation, but his chances were not as high as a mother with whom children were living at the time of separation.²² This study was undertaken in California, which is noted for its progressive legislation and attitudes about both men and women and is thus a state in which men are less likely to be disadvantaged.

Fathers are not the only males to suffer disadvantage from post-divorce and other custodial arrangements. In one important study, divorced mothers showed their sons less affection than their daughters, "treated their sons more harshly and gave them more threatening commands—though they did not systematically enforce them ..."²³ "Even after two years ... boys in ... divorced families were ... more aggressive, more impulsive and more disobedient with their mothers than either girls in divorced families or children in intact families."²⁴ In another study, "a significant proportion of boys who developed serious coping problems in adolescence, had lived in families in which their father was absent temporarily, either because of family discord or work."²⁵ The same was not true of girls who grew up with an absent father. In short, boys tend to suffer more than girls as a result of divorce and of living with a single parent. This may be because children fare better when placed with the parent of their own sex, at least where that parent is amenable to having custody.²⁶

Homosexual men suffer more discrimination than do lesbians. For instance, male homosexual sex has been and continues to be criminalized or otherwise negatively targeted in more jurisdictions than is lesbian sex.²⁷ Male homosexuals have a harder time adopting children than do

²⁰ Eleanor E. Maccoby and Robert H. Mnookin, *Dividing the Child: Social and Legal Dilemmas of Custody* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 103.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid, p. 105.

²³Cited by Ross D. Parke, *Fathers*, pp. 81-82.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Emmy E. Werner and Ruth S. Smith, *Vulnerable but Invincible: A Longitudinal Study of Resilient Children and Youth* (New York: Adams Bannister Cox, 1982), p. 80.

²⁶Ibid, pp. 94-95.

²⁷In 1997-98 there were at least 39 states in which "only male homosexuality [was] targeted in law or practice." Dan Smith, *The State of the World Atlas* (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 76-77.

lesbians,²⁸ even in those places where same sex couples are permitted to adopt. Male homosexuals are much more frequently the victims of "gay-bashing" assaults than are lesbians.²⁹

In addition to the above examples, for which the evidence is clear, there are also others for which there is only equivocal evidence. For instance, capital punishment is inflicted on men hundreds of times more often than it is inflicted on women. While it is true that men commit more capital crimes than women do, it is not clear that this fully explains the vast disparity in the number of men and women executed. The sex of the criminal may itself influence whether a criminal is executed.³⁰ Consider also the broader criminal justice system. There is at least some evidence that, controlling for the number and nature of offenses, men are convicted more often and punished more harshly than are women (or, at least, than those women who conform to gender stereotypes).³¹ Given that there is conflicting evidence about these latter examples, we cannot be sure that they really are examples of unfair male disadvantage. Nevertheless, they are worth mentioning at least as topics suitable for further investigation.

Underlying Attitudes

These are not negligible forms of disadvantage. In seeking to explain how they arise, one can point to at least three related prejudicial attitudes

²⁶Kath O'Donnell, "Lesbian and Gay Families," in Gill Jagger and Caroline Wright (eds.), *Changing Family Values* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 77-97, at p. 90.

²⁹D.J. West, "Homophobia: Covert and Overt," in Mezey and King (eds.), *Male Victims of Sexual Assault*, pp. 17-34, at p. 29.

³⁰G. Scott, *The History of Capital Punishment* (London: Torchstream Books, 1950); David C. Baldus, George Woodworth, and Charles A. Pulaski Jr., *Equal Justice and the Death Penalty: A Legal and Empirical Analysis* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990), p. 159.

³¹Carol Hedderman and Mike Hough, "Does the Criminal Justice System Treat Men and Women Differently?" *Research Findings*, No. 10, Home Office Research and Statistics Department, May 1994; Christy A. Visher, "Gender, Police Arrest Decisions, and Notions of Chivalry," *Criminology* 21 (1983): 5-28; Patricia Godeke Tjaden and Claus D. Tjaden, "Differential Treatment of the Female Felon: Myth or Reality?" in M.Q. Warren (ed.), *Comparing Female and Male Offenders* (London: Sage Publications, 1981), pp. 73-88. There is conflicting evidence, however, because others have found that sex plays no part. See, for example, Imogene L. Moyer, "Demeanor, Sex, and Race in Police Processing," *Journal of Criminal Justice* 9 (1981): 235-46; and Debra A. Curran, "Judicial Discretion and Defendant's Sex," *Criminology* 21 (1983): 41-58. There is reason to think that authors' agendas often affect the interpretation of data on this topic (as on others). A. Bottomsley and K. Pease point to this problem in their *Crime and Punishment: Interpreting the Data* (Philadelphia, Open University Press, 1986), p. 154.

about males. First, male life is often, but not always, valued less than female life. I do not mean by this that every society unequivocally values male lives less than female lives. This cannot be true, because there are some societies in which female infants are killed precisely because they are female. However, even in such societies, the lives of adult males seem to be valued less than those of adult females. The situation is less ambiguous in liberal democracies. It is not my claim that every single person in these societies values male life less, but that these societies generally do. Although, of course, there are countless examples in liberal democracies of fatal violence against women, this tends to be viewed as worse than the killing of men.³² If violence or tragedy takes the lives of “women and children,” that is thought to be worthy of special mention. We are told that X number of people died, including Y number of women and children. That betrays a special concern, the depravity of which would be more widely denounced if newsreaders, politicians, poets, and others commonly saw fit to note the number of “men and children” who had lost their lives in a tragedy.

Sometimes the special concern for female lives is less overt and more sophisticated. Consider, for example, an argument of Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze, who have drawn attention to the number of female lives that have been lost as a result of advantages accorded men. They have spoken about the world’s 100 million “missing women.”³³ To reach this figure they first observe that everywhere in the world there are around 105 boys born for every 100 girls. However, more males die at every age. For this reason, in Europe, North America, and other places where females enjoy basic nutrition and health care, the proportion of males and females inverts—around 105 females for every 100 males. Thus, the overall female-male ratio in these societies is 1.05. Amartya Sen and Jean Drèze observe, however, that in many countries the ratio falls to 0.94 or even lower. On this basis, they calculate the number of “missing women”—the number of women who have died because they have received less food or less care than their male counterparts. This is indeed an alarming and unacceptable inequity.

It is interesting, however, that no mention is made of “missing men.”

³²For instance, arguing in favor of a combat exemption-exclusion for women, one representative in the U.S. House of Representatives said, “We do not want our women killed” (quoted by Judith Wagner DeCew, “The Combat Exclusion and the Role of Women in the Military,” *Hypatia* 10 [1995]: 56-73, p. 62).

³³Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Public Action* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 50-59; Amartya Sen, “More Than 100 Million Women Are Missing,” *New York Review of Books*, 20 December 1990, pp. 61-66. The idea has been used by, amongst others, Martha Nussbaum and Jonathan Glover in their *Women, Culture and Development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 3, 33.

The implication is that there are only women who are missing. There are, however, millions of missing men, as should be most obvious from the greater number of men than women who die violently. However, there are other less obvious ways in which men become "missing." To highlight these, consider how the figure of 100 million missing women is reached. Amartya Sen says that if we took an equal number of males and females as the baseline, then "the low ratio of 0.94 women to men in South Asia, West Asia and China would indicate a 6 percent deficit in women."³⁴ However, he thinks it is inappropriate to set the baseline as an equal number of males and females. He says that "since, in countries where men and women receive similar care the ratio is about 1.05, the real shortfall is about 11 percent."³⁵ This, he says, amounts to 100 million missing women.

Now, I think it is extremely enlightening that the baseline is set as a female to male ratio of 1.05. Why start from that point rather than from the ratio that obtains at birth? The assumption is that the female-male ratio of 1.05 is the one that obtains in societies in which men and women are treated equally in the ways relevant to mortality—and these are taken to be basic nutrition and health care. But clearly males are not faring as well as females in those societies, so why not think that there are relevant inequalities, disadvantageous to males, operative in *those* societies? One answer might be biology—males seem to be not as resilient as females. I cannot see, however, why that would warrant setting the baseline at the female-male ratio of 1.05. Some distributive theories—those that claim that natural inequalities are undeserved—recommend distributing social resources in a way that compensates for natural inequalities. If males are biologically prone to die earlier, perhaps the ideal distribution is the one whereby the mortality imbalance is equalized (by funding research and medical practice that lowers the male mortality level to the female level).³⁵ This certainly seems to be what feminists would advo-

³⁴Sen, "More Than 100 Million Women Are Missing," p. 61.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Consider some research funding disparities that favor women. In 1993, for instance, the National Cancer Institute (in the U.S.A.) "budgeted \$273 million for research on cancers specific to women, including breast, cervical, ovarian, and uterine cancers, and \$41 million for research on cancers specific to men, including prostate and testicular cancers." Moreover, its research expenditure on breast cancer, which kills 46,000 women a year in the U.S., exceeds the amount spent on research into lung cancer, a disease that kills 93,000 men and 56,000 women annually. See Ace Allen, "Women's Health," *New England Journal of Medicine* vol. 329, 9 December 1993, p. 1816. This is not to suggest that there are no research biases that favor males. See, for example, Marcia Angel, "Caring for Women's Health—What is the Problem?" *New England Journal of Medicine* 329 (22 July 1993): 271-72. However, the sorts of figures I have cited here show that there

cate if biology disadvantaged women in the way it does men. If, for instance, 105 girls were born for every 100 boys, but various factors, including parturition, caused more females to die, there would be strong arguments for diverting resources to preventing those deaths. At the very least, the baseline for determining “missing people” would certainly not be thought to be set after the parturition deaths were excluded.

If we accept the male-female sex ratio at birth—105 males for every 100 females—as a baseline, then at birth there is a female-male ratio of 0.95. From that baseline there are millions of missing men, at least in those societies in which the female-male ratio inverts to 1.05, who go unseen in the Sen-Drèze analysis. This analysis fails to take account of the connection between its baseline ratio and how our health resources are currently distributed. That the Sen-Drèze analysis highlights the missing women of the world, but notes nothing about the missing men, is extremely revealing. It is a sophisticated form of the view that lost female lives are more noteworthy than lost male lives.

It might be suggested that the stronger concern to avoid female deaths rather than male deaths is best explained not by a greater valuing of women’s lives but by social and economic considerations. Since the reproduction of a population requires more women than it does men, a society can less afford to lose large numbers of women (in combat, for example). This explanation, however, is not at odds with the claim that female lives are valued more. In fact, it is a possible explanation of *why* female lives are valued more. Note, however, that this explanation does not excuse the differential treatment. If it did, then excluding women from work outside the home, where they might be tempted to delay or abandon procreative activities, could also be excused.

The second prejudicial attitude underlying the examples I have given of male disadvantage is the greater social acceptance of nonfatal violence against males. This is not to deny the obvious truth that women are frequently the victims of such violence. Nor is it to deny that there are *some* ways in which violence against women is accepted. I suggest only that violence against men is much more socially accepted.

At least one author has taken issue with the claim that violence against men is regarded as more acceptable. He has said that those who think it is so regarded “never offer a criterion for determining when a social practice is acceptable.”³⁷ He says that “sometimes they slide from

are some ways in which current practices might favor women and thereby explain the life-expectancy differentials of males and females.

³⁷Kenneth Clatterbaugh, “Are Men Oppressed?” in Larry May, Robert Strikwerda, and Patrick D. Hopkins (eds.), *Rethinking Masculinity: Philosophical Explorations in the Light of Feminism*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), pp. 289-305,

the fact that violence with men as victims is very widespread to the conclusion that it is acceptable."³⁸ He notes, quite correctly, that a practice can be widespread without its being deemed acceptable. He also thinks that the "penalties for violent acts, social instructions against violent acts, and moral codes prohibiting violent acts" constitute evidence that violence against men is not acceptable.³⁹

It is doubtful that a single criterion of the greater acceptability of violence can be provided. However, there can be various kinds of evidence for such a claim. For instance, although violent acts against men do usually carry penalties (as do violent acts against women), the law does reveal bias. When the law prohibits physical punishment of women but permits such punishment of men, it indicates a level of greater societal acceptance of violence against men. Similarly, when the law does not punish male homosexual rape with the same severity as it punishes heterosexual rape of women, it sends a similar message. But the law is not the only evidence of societal bias. There are penalties for wife-batterers and for rape, yet this (appropriately) has not stopped feminists from showing how both legal and extra-legal factors can indicate societal tolerance of such activities.⁴⁰ If, for instance, police do not take charges of wife-battery or rape seriously or if there are social impediments to the reporting of such crimes, this can sometimes constitute evidence of a societal complacency and therefore some implicit acceptance of such violence. If that can be true when women are the victims, why can it not be true when men are? There *are* differences in the way people view violence against men and women. For example, a man who strikes a woman is subject to much more disapproval than a man who strikes another man (even if the female victim is bigger and the male victim smaller than he is, which suggests that it is sex not size that counts).

The third prejudicial attitude is the belief that the instances of male disadvantage to which I have pointed are fully explicable by men's being naturally more aggressive, more violent, less caring, and less nurturing than women are. Some—perhaps most—people will take this to be not so much a prejudice as a truism. I shall assess this view shortly and will show that even if there are such natural behavioral differences between the sexes, the magnitude and significance of these differences is exaggerated. At the very least, those exaggerations constitute prejudices.

at p. 301.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Susan Estrich, *Real Rape* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

Responding to Objections

Some will recognize the value of attending to these prejudices and the forms of disadvantage to which they give rise. Among these people will be those feminists who acknowledge that opposition to instances of the second sexism, far from being incompatible with feminism, is an expression of feminism's best impulses. This, for reasons I shall make clear, is the view that I think all those opposed to sex discrimination ought to adopt. Regrettably, however, there will be others who will oppose combating what I have called the second sexism. These will include conservatives who endorse traditional gender roles, but also those feminists who will regard attention to the second sexism as threatening. I shall now consider and respond to four possible objections to concern about the second sexism.

1. The no-discrimination argument

What I call the no-discrimination argument suggests that the examples I have provided are not instances of discrimination (against men). The argument denies that there is a second sexism, by suggesting that it is not discrimination that accounts for these phenomena, but rather other factors. On this view, there may indeed be examples of male disadvantage, but these are not instances of *unfair* disadvantage.

I cannot offer a detailed application of this argument to all of the examples of male disadvantage. Therefore, although my discussion will have relevance to a number of them, I shall focus on the unequal pressures on men and women with regard to entering the military and engaging in combat. Many feminists do not question such inequalities. If pressed to explain their silence, some (but not others) might argue that these inequalities are an inevitable consequence of males' greater natural (rather than socially-produced) aggression. We might call this "the biological explanation." Insofar as they do not offer a similar explanation of the disproportionate number of men in the legislature, in specific professions, and in senior academic or management positions, and instead decry these inequalities, they selectively invoke the biological explanation to the advantage of females. Such selectivity is itself a kind of sexism. A similar charge could be laid against those feminists who would attribute both inequalities that disadvantage men and those that disadvantage women to natural differences between the sexes, but who call for an end only to those that adversely affect women.⁴¹

⁴¹Because she does not mention male disadvantage, it is hard to tell whether Shulamith Firestone would take there to be any such disadvantage, and, if she does, whether

The biological explanation does have a more consistent application in the hands of evolutionary psychologists and their followers. They argue that natural, evolutionarily explained differences between the sexes account, at least to a considerable extent, for social inequalities between men and women.⁴² They are careful to grant that environment also plays a role in psychological differences between the sexes and to acknowledge that no normative implications follow (directly) from the biological explanation. Notwithstanding such disclaimers, however, they regularly use the biological explanation to support conservative views that little if anything can or should be done to address sex inequalities, irrespective of which sex is disadvantaged. I shall now consider the common assumption that males are naturally more aggressive and then consider what implications this assumption, even if true, would really have for the sex inequalities I am considering.

The first point to note is that although males *do* account for more aggression and violence than females, the difference is not as great as it is usually thought to be. This is borne out by some laboratory studies.⁴³ In real life, we find that there are at least some circumstances, most notably within the family, in which women behave as aggressively and violently as men and sometimes even more so than men. A number of studies have shown that wives use violence against their husbands at least as much as husbands use violence against their wives.⁴⁴ Given the counter-intuitive

she would attribute it to biology. See *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1970). She is clearly an example of a feminist who attributes female disadvantage to biological difference between the sexes. She speaks of the "freeing of women from the tyranny of their biology" (p. 270), specifically those features associated with child-bearing and child-rearing. Although she does also speak of the "total integration of women ... into the larger society" (p. 271) and this might be thought to include all aspects of the military, she does not seem sufficiently concerned with the elimination of female advantage to explicitly endorse such an implication.

⁴²Steven Goldberg, *The Inevitability of Patriarchy* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1974); Kingsley Browne, *Divided Labours: An Evolutionary View of Women at Work* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998); Kingsley Browne, "Women at War: An Evolutionary Perspective," *Buffalo Law Review* 49 (2001): 51-247.

⁴³D.J. Albert, M.L. Walsh, and R.H. Jonik, "Aggression in Humans: What is its Biological Foundation?" *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 17 (1993): 405-25, p. 417; Ann Frodi et al. say that "[c]ommonly held hypotheses that men are almost always more physically aggressive than women and that women display more indirect or displaced aggression were not supported" ("Are Women Always Less Aggressive than Men?" p. 634).

⁴⁴See, for example, Murray Straus, "Victims and Aggressors in Marital Violence," *American Behavioral Scientist* 23 (1980): 681-704; Murray A. Straus and Richard J. Gelles, "Societal Change and Change in Family Violence from 1975 to 1985 as Revealed by Two National Surveys," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 48 (1986): 465-479. The latter paper notes that a number of other studies have confirmed their findings about the

and controversial nature of these findings, at least one well-known author (who shared the prevailing prejudices prior to his quantitative research) examined the data in multiple ways in order to determine whether these could be reconciled with common views. On almost every score, women were as violent as men. It was found that half the violence is mutual, and in the remaining half there were an equal number of female and male aggressors.⁴⁵ When a distinction was drawn between "normal violence" (pushing, shoving, slapping, and throwing things) and "severe violence" (kicking, biting, punching, hitting with an object, "beating-up," and attacking the spouse with a knife or gun), the rate of mutual violence dropped to a third, the rate of violence by only the husband remained the same, but the rate of violence by only the wife *increased*.⁴⁶ Wives have been shown to initiate violence as often as husbands do.⁴⁷ At least some studies have suggested that there is a *higher* rate of wives assaulting husbands than husbands assaulting wives⁴⁸ and most studies of dating violence show higher rates of female-inflicted violence.⁴⁹

Most authors agree that the *effects* of spousal violence are not equivalent for husbands and wives. Husbands, probably because they are generally bigger and stronger, cause more damage than wives.⁵⁰ This is an important observation, of course, but in determining whether women are less violent than men are, it would be a mistake to point to the lesser effectiveness of their violence.

Recognizing that the sex differences in aggression and violence are

parity of male and female marital violence (p. 470).

⁴⁵Straus, "Victims and Aggressors in Marital Violence," p. 683.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 684.

⁴⁷Jan E. Stets and Murray A. Straus, "The Marriage License as a Hitting License: A Comparison of Assaults in Dating, Cohabiting, and Married Couples," *Journal of Family Violence* 4 (1989): 161-80, p. 163. Jean Malone, Andrea Tyree, and K. Daniel O'Leary found that women are more likely to throw an object, slap, kick, bite, hit with a fist, and hit with an object. See "Generalization and Containment: Different Effects of Past Aggression for Wives and Husbands," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51 (1989): 687-97, p. 690.

⁴⁸K. Daniel O'Leary, Julian Barling, Ileana Arias, Alan Rosenbaum, Jean Malone, and Andrea Tyree, "Prevalence and Stability of Physical Aggression Between Spouses: A Longitudinal Analysis," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 57 (1989): 263-68, pp. 264-66.

⁴⁹David B. Sugarman and Gerald T. Hotaling, "Dating Violence: A Review of Contextual and Risk Factors," in Barrie Levy (ed.), *Dating Violence: Young Women in Danger* (Seattle: Seal Press, 1991), pp. 100-118, at p. 104.

⁵⁰Murray Straus, "Victims and Aggressors in Marital Violence," p. 681; Straus and Gelles, "Societal Change and Change in Family Violence from 1975 to 1985," p. 468; O'Leary et al., "Prevalence and Stability of Physical Aggression Between Spouses," p. 267.

less marked than commonly thought is important for the following reason. Any attempt to explain a phenomenon must be preceded by an accurate understanding of the phenomenon that is to be explained. To the extent that the sex differences in aggression are exaggerated, the posited explanations will be misdirected.

Because there are different possible explanations of the *actual* (that is, unexaggerated) sex differences in aggression, we need to consider next the evidence for the *biological* explanation of these differences. There are considerably divergent readings of the body of evidence on whether males are naturally more aggressive than females. The evolutionary psychologists understand the evidence clearly to support the biological explanation, while many feminists and others take the opposite view. Authoritatively assessing which of these interpretations is correct is too large a task to undertake here. Fortunately, for reasons I shall explain later, it is not necessary to do so. Nevertheless, for those who think that the evidence for the biological explanation is stronger than it really is, I shall first show that at the very least there is considerable room for doubt.

Consider first the alleged connections between aggression and circulating androgens, particularly testosterone. The administering of antiandrogens (and the resultant reduction of circulating testosterone levels) has been successful in curbing compulsive paraphilic sexual thoughts and impulsive and violent sexual behaviors. However, the drugs were not very effective in reducing nonsexual violence.⁵¹ Increasing testosterone levels in women or hypogonadal men to normal or supranormal levels has not been shown to increase aggression consistently. Lowering testosterone levels in men, by castration or antiandrogens, does not consistently decrease aggression.⁵²

Some of those reviewing the literature have concluded that the evidence does not support a link between circulating testosterone and human aggression.⁵³ Some authors claim that the inability to establish this

⁵¹Robert T. Rubin, "The Neuroendocrinology and Neurochemistry of Antisocial Behavior," in Sarnoff A. Mednick, Terrie A. Moffit, and Susan A. Stack (eds.), *The Causes of Crime: New Biological Approaches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 239-62, at p. 248.

⁵²Albert et al., "Aggression in Humans," p. 407-10.

⁵³Robert T. Rubin says "there remains a definite controversy concerning the role of androgenic hormones in human aggressive and violent behaviors ("The Neuroendocrinology and Neurochemistry of Antisocial Behavior," p. 248) and "the data on the neuroendocrine correlates of aggression and violence, with particular reference to the most thoroughly studied relation, that of testosterone in men, are sparse and conflicting" (ibid., p. 250). D.J. Albert et al. say that "[a]ttempts to demonstrate a correlation between testosterone and aggression in humans have been in progress for almost 30 years ("Aggres-

link stands in striking contrast to the ease with which relations have been shown between testosterone and other phenomena, including sexual activity.⁵⁴ In those few studies that do suggest connections between circulating testosterone and human aggression, the links are correlational and there is some reason to think that it is the aggressive and dominant behaviors that cause testosterone levels to rise, rather than vice versa.⁵⁵

Now it might be argued that the evidence for androgenic causes of aggression is strongest not in the case of circulating androgens but in the case of prenatal androgen exposure.⁵⁶ The suggestion is that exposure to androgens in utero causes the fetal brain to be organized in a way that causes increased aggression in the person that develops. On this view, since males are typically exposed to higher prenatal levels of androgens, they become naturally more aggressive.

There are clearly moral constraints on experimentally altering the androgen levels to which fetuses and infants are exposed. As a result, one of the few ways of testing the above hypothesis is by examining girls with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), a condition causing them to be exposed to unusually high levels of androgens in utero and until diagnosis soon after birth. Some studies have indeed found CAH girls to be more aggressive than control females,⁵⁷ but some found "the difference was not significant."⁵⁸ Other studies found no difference in aggression levels between CAH females and control females,⁵⁹ even

sion in Humans," p. 406). Yet, a clear relation remains to be established." Leslie Brody says "there is very little basis to the widely accepted idea that there is a causal relationship between testosterone levels and human aggression" (*Gender, Emotion and the Family* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999], p. 107).

⁵⁴Albert et al., "Aggression in Humans," p. 417.

⁵⁵Leslie Brody, *Gender, Emotion and the Family*, p. 111; Ruth Bleier, *Science and Gender: A Critique of Biology and Its Theories on Women* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984), p. 97.

⁵⁶The elevated prenatal androgen levels in boys do not drop immediately at birth, but taper off in the months after birth. Thus the androgens generated in utero may continue to influence development postnatally for a few months.

⁵⁷Sheri A. Berenbaum and Susan M. Resnick, "Early Androgen Effects on Aggression in Children and Adults with Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia," *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 22 (1997): 505-15.

⁵⁸Anke A. Ehrhardt and Susan W. Baker, "Fetal Androgens, Human Central Nervous System Differentiation, and Behavior Sex Differences," in Richard C Friedman, Ralph M. Richart, and Raymond L. Vande Wiele (eds.), *Sex Differences in Behavior* (Huntington, N.Y.: Robert E Krieger Publishing Co., 1978), p. 41.

⁵⁹John Money and Anke A. Ehrhardt, *Man and Woman, Boy and Girl* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), p. 99; John Money and Mark Schwartz, "Fetal Androgens in Early Treated Adrenogenital Syndrome of 46XX Hemaphroditism: Influence on Assertive and Aggressive Types of Behavior," *Aggressive Behavior* 2 (1976): 19-30, esp. pp. 22-23; Melissa Hines and Francine R. Kaufman, "Androgen and the De-

though affected females were, in other ways, found to be behaviorally similar to boys and unlike control females. The latter studies suggest that even if prenatal androgen exposure has other behavioral effects, an influence on aggression is not demonstrated.

There is, in any event, a significant problem that plagues the CAH studies. Given that the external genitalia of CAH girls tend to become virilized to some degree and parents know of their daughters' condition, one cannot discount social factors as a cause or partial cause of those behavioral differences that are found.⁶⁰ One author⁶¹ has suggested that this objection can be rejected because normal children exposed prenatally to higher levels of testosterone have greater brain lateralization.⁶² However, unless cerebral lateralization can be shown to affect aggression, we cannot extrapolate from studies about the relationship between testosterone and lateralization to a relationship between testosterone and aggression.

None of this is to deny a biological basis for human aggression. It is possible, for example, that human aggression is rooted in some biological phenomenon other than androgens. There is some evidence that human aggression has many features in common with what is called "defensive aggression" (as distinct from "hormone-dependent aggression") in nonprimate mammals and that this kind of aggression is rooted in the limbic system of the brain.⁶³ One of the distinctive features of defensive aggression in nonprimate mammals, however, is that it is quantitatively similar in males and females.⁶⁴

It is also possible that there is a connection between androgens and aggression even though none has yet been demonstrated. One possible explanation for this is that the posited connection is a complex one. One obvious feature of this complexity is the interaction with environmental factors. Even those who argue that there are (proven) hormone-related

velopment of Human Sex-typical Behavior: Rough-and-Tumble Play and Sex of Preferred Playmates in Children with Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH)," *Child Development* 65 (1994): 1042-53.

⁶⁰This problem is exacerbated in other studies on which the hypothesis about the prenatal influence of androgens can be tested—those on genetic (that is, XY) boys with Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS). These children *look* like normal females.

⁶¹Kingsley R. Browne, "Sex and Temperament in Modern Society: A Darwinian View of the Glass Ceiling and the Gender Gap," *Arizona Law Review* 37 (1995): 971-1106, pp. 1046-47.

⁶²Gina M. Grimshaw, M. Philip Bryden, and Jo-Anne K. Finegan, "Relations Between Prenatal Testosterone and Cerebral Lateralization in Children," *Neuropsychology* 9 (1995): 68-79.

⁶³Albert et al., "Aggression in Humans," pp. 405-25.

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, p. 414.

differences in aggression between the sexes agree that the environment, including the social environment, plays a significant role. Evolutionary psychologists often ignore the importance of this in drawing normative conclusions. Even if human aggression were shown to be influenced by androgens, current inequalities (in conscription and combat, for example) would still be cause for concern. One reason for this is that at least some of the inequality would be attributable to social factors rather than to natural hormonal differences between the sexes. Any natural differences in aggression that might exist could give rise to, but would also be greatly exaggerated by, sex-role expectations and conventions. This is one reason why conservatism is not a fitting response to current inequalities even if one thinks that natural differences account for some of the inequality. Another reason is that even if men are naturally more aggressive than women, it does not follow that women are not aggressive enough for military purposes or that they cannot be subject to environmental influences that would make them so.

Some feminists make much of how war is carried out by men, implying and sometimes even explicitly claiming that women are above this kind of behavior.⁶⁵ But there are obvious social and gender role explanations that can account for why men become soldiers. Where women have had the opportunity to kill, torture, and perpetrate other cruel acts, they have proved very capable of doing so.⁶⁶ There is a disingenuity in the arguments of those feminists who will discount the opportunity differentials between men and women for the violence of war, but who rush to explain the greater incidence of (non-sexual) child abuse by women as being a function of sexism. It is women, they correctly note, who have most contact with children and therefore have the greatest opportunity to abuse children. Moreover, we are told that female abusers of children “would probably not have become child abusers had the culture offered them viable alternatives to marriage and motherhood.”⁶⁷ If this line of argument (contrary to my own view) is acceptable, why can a similar explanation for participation in war not be given for young men “whose culture does not offer them viable alternatives” to machismo and the military?

⁶⁵Jean Bethke Elshtain attributes this sort of view to Virginia Woolf (in *Three Guineas*) and Jane Addams (in *The Long Road to Woman's Memory, Peace and Bread in Time of War and Newer Ideals of Peace*). See Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), p. 235.

⁶⁶See, for example, Elshtain, *Women and War*, pp. 167-169, 181, 196. See also “Women as Perpetrators,” in *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, vol. 4, pp. 313-14.

⁶⁷Wini Breines and Linda Gordon, “The New Scholarship on Family Violence,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 8 (1983): 490-531, p. 495.

Some feminists not only refuse to excuse men the violence of war (in the way they excuse women's violence) but, unlike other feminists, they also resist the very changes which would make it a less male affair—namely, parity in enlistment of the sexes. They oppose conscription of women.⁶⁸ Feminist defenders of women's absence from combat assume that women are different and unsuited to war. They maintain that so long as there is (or must be) war, it is men who must wage it. There are a number of problems with this view. First, by seeking to preserve the status quo, they suppress the most effective test of whether men really are better suited to war. Notice how the real test of female competence to perform other tasks has been most unequivocally demonstrated by women actually performing those tasks. Whereas when there were almost no female lawyers people could have appealed to that fact to support claims of female unsuitability to the legal profession, that same line of argument is simply not available when there are vast numbers of successful female lawyers. Second, those who argue that women are ill-suited to war assume that men (unlike women) want to participate in war. Alternatively, male preferences on this score are a matter of indifference to them. The overwhelming majority of men do not wish to be part of the military. Were it otherwise, conscription would never be necessary. Why should these men be forced into the military, while women are not? It simply will not do, as I have explained, to justify this by saying that men are naturally more aggressive than women and thus more suitable to military activity.

Nor will it do, as some have tried, to justify the female exemption-exclusion⁶⁹ from combat in other ways. I do not have space here to consider and respond to all the arguments for female exclusion from combat, but I shall examine two by way of illustration.⁷⁰ Some have claimed that because women have less strength, stamina, and muscle than men, they are less suited than men to the physical demands of ground combat. There are numerous problems with this argument. For instance, much

⁶⁸Many feminists ignore the question of drafting females. However, feminists were challenged to comment on the matter when the United States Supreme Court considered a sex-discrimination challenge to the males-only draft. The National Organization for Women expressed support for drafting females. Other feminist groups, however, opposed drafting females. See DeCew, "The Combat Exclusion and the Role of Women in the Military," p. 72.

⁶⁹Sometimes it is referred to simply as a combat *exclusion*. However, that way of referring to the matter, suggests that it only disadvantages women. I prefer exemption-exclusion because that also incorporates reference to a way in which (most) women are advantaged by not being sent into combat.

⁷⁰For a good outline of and response to a number of different arguments see DeCew, "Women, Equality, and the Military," pp. 123-44.

combat activity, at least in our time, does not require strength. But even if it did, that would not be a reason for excluding all women. Some women are stronger than some men are. If strength were really what counted, that and not sex would be the appropriate criterion.

Others have defended the combat exemption-exclusion as a way of protecting women from the greater risk of being raped which they would bear if captured by the enemy. It might be noted in response to this that it is far from clear that sexual abuse is not experienced by many male prisoners of war. Second, males may well stand a greater chance of being tortured in nonsexual ways than women. Why should there be such rigid (often paternalistic) exclusions of women from combat allegedly to protect them from rape, while men are not only not protected, but often forced into combat situations where they can face harms (including maiming and torture) that are arguably as traumatizing as rape? Finally, the argument that women should be exempted from combat because they need to be protected from rape (or because they are less aggressive or less strong) is one that feminists can advance only at their peril. If some such reason for exempting women were (thought to be) true, it could equally support the exclusion of women from functions they do wish to fulfill. Indeed, such reasons have been used regularly by the conservative defenders of traditional gender roles, including those who have sought to exclude from combat those women who do want such roles.

2. The distraction argument

Not all those opposed to highlighting the second sexism will deny that men are sometimes the victims of sex discrimination. However, those who are willing to grant this may argue that attention to the second sexism will distract us from the much greater discrimination against women. On this view, until there is parity between the extent of disadvantage suffered by men and women, we must devote our attention and energies to opposing the greater discrimination—that experienced by females.

This argument presupposes that the position of women is worse than that of men. I do not deny this, if it is a global claim that is being made. In most places, women are generally worse off than men. This is because the traditional gender roles for women are much more restrictive than those for men, and most of the world's human population continues to live in societies that are characterized by traditional gender roles. But what about contemporary liberal democracies, from whose ranks most feminists are drawn and to which substantial (but not exclusive) feminist attention is devoted? In the light of the substantial inroads against sexism made in such societies, as well as the examples of the second sexism

that I have outlined, are women worse off than men in such countries? Many people will confidently offer an affirmative answer. I cannot say that their answer is wrong. Nevertheless, the answer cannot be offered with confidence in a society that has viewed so lightly the serious forms of discrimination against men. The extent of discrimination against men is probably seriously underestimated and this makes fair comparison unlikely. Fortunately, I think that the question of which sex suffers the greater discrimination is simply irrelevant to the question of whether attention should be given to the second sexism. This brings me to my first response to the distraction argument.

Sex discrimination is wrong, irrespective of the victim's sex. It is not only the most severe manifestations of injustice that merit our attention. If it were wrong to focus on lesser forms of discrimination when greater forms were still being practiced, then we would have to attend to racial discrimination rather than sex discrimination, at least in those places in which racial discrimination is worse than sex discrimination.⁷¹ Moreover, where one opposed sex discrimination, one would have to ignore some forms of sex discrimination if one accepted the view that only the most serious injustices deserve our attention. Not all forms of sexism are equally severe. Using the word "man" to refer to people of both sexes, for example, is not as damaging as clitoridectomy or even as unfair as unequal pay. Feminists who think that we should devote our energies only to eliminating the worst forms of sex discrimination would be committed to a very restricted agenda. But if both major and minor forms of discrimination against women deserve attention, why should major forms of discrimination against men not be equally deserving of concern? How can it be acceptable to want an end to sexist speech while males die because of their sex? If one is opposed to injustice, then it is injustice that counts, not the sex of the victim. Even if it is the case that in general women are the greater victims of sex discrimination, it is still the case that some men suffer more from sex discrimination than some women. A young man on the *Titanic* who is denied a place in a lifeboat because of his sex is worse off than the young woman whose life is saved because of her sex. A young man, conscripted and killed in battle, is worse off than his sister who is not. It does not matter here that *had* he survived, the man would have had greater access to higher education or could have earned more. If he is made to lose his life because of his sex and she has her life spared because of her sex, then this man is the

⁷¹Lest it be suggested otherwise, there are at least some places where racial discrimination is worse than sex discrimination. Apartheid South Africa was one particularly obvious example.

greater victim of sex discrimination than this woman. Countering sex discrimination against men will remove some relative advantages that women enjoy, but that is fair in the same way that it is fair that countering sex discrimination against women removes relative advantages that men enjoy.

There is a second important response to the distraction argument. Far from distracting one from those discriminatory practices that disadvantage females, confronting the second sexism can help undo discrimination against women. This is because ending discrimination against one sex is inseparable from ending discrimination against the other sex. One reason for this is that the same sets of stereotypes underlie both kinds of discrimination. For example, the very attitudes that prevent women from being conscripted and from being sent into combat, thereby discriminating against those males and protecting those women who have no wish to be part of the military, also favor those males but disadvantage those females who desire a military career and who do not want to be excluded from combat. Similarly, the stereotypes of men as aggressive and violent and of women as caring and gentle lead to only males' being sent into battle but also entail assumptions that it is women who must bear primary responsibility for child-caring. Or consider the small proportion of women amongst the victims of gross human rights violations in South Africa. This is attributable to gender roles that discouraged women from engaging in political activity, especially dangerous political activity in which men were encouraged or expected to participate.⁷² Although these gender roles had beneficial effects for women in protecting them from the violence of adversaries, these same gender roles disadvantaged women in other regards. The "women and children first" mentality is another, related, example. It disadvantages men in life-and-death situations but has obvious disadvantages for women in other circumstances. Women are protected, to be sure, but in the same way and for relics of the same reasons that children are—they are assumed to be weak and to be unable to look after themselves. Similarly, the battered woman syndrome defense, under which the criminal law (at least in the United States) allows evidence of abuse of women, but not of men, to constitute an excuse from criminal responsibility, has the effect of reaffirming prejudices about women as lacking the capacity for rational self-control.⁷³

⁷²*Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, vol. 4, pp. 289-90.

⁷³See Anne M. Coughlin, "Excusing Women," *California Law Review* 82 (1994): 1-93.

3. *The inversion argument*

By the "inversion argument," I mean the argument that what I have suggested are instances of discrimination against men are instead forms of discrimination against women. On this view, what I have called the second sexism is instead just another form of discrimination against women. Rarely is such an argument explicitly presented. That is to say, those employing this sort of argument do not argue that matters ought to be inverted. Rather they simply invert them. They do not argue that what might be thought to constitute discrimination against men is rather discrimination against women. Instead, they simply present the data as instances of anti-female bias. To this extent, my presentation of the inversion as an argument is a construction of an argument out of a practice. The absence of an explicit argument for inversion is understandable. Were an argument for inversion explicitly presented, its weakness would be much more apparent.

Consider, for example, those authors who present attempts at excluding women from the military as forms of discrimination against women. They say, for instance, that the military, faced with an increase in the number of women soldiers, "seems to have an exaggerated need to pursue more and more refined measures of sexual difference in order to *keep women in their place*,"⁷⁴ noting that Western armed forces "search for a difference which can justify women's continued exclusion from the military's ideological core—combat. If they can find this difference, they can also exclude women from the senior command promotions that are open only to officers who have seen combat."⁷⁵ As I have argued, excluding women from combat does indeed disadvantage some women. That it is a minority of women whom this exclusion disadvantages—those who seek combat opportunities and the career benefits that come with this in the military—does not alter the fact that *these* women are indeed the victims of sex discrimination. But to present the exclusion exclusively in terms of the negative effects it has on women is to ignore the much greater disadvantage suffered by vast numbers of men who are forced into combat against their wills. It is well and good to note, as I have done, how an instance of sex discrimination can cut both ways. It is quite another to present everything as disadvantaging only women.

Even those with a more balanced approach tend to make much more of the negative impact on women of those discriminatory practices

⁷⁴Cynthia Enloe, "Some of the Best Soldiers Wear Lipstick," in Alison M. Jaggar (ed.), *Living With Contradictions: Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 599-608, at p. 603 (my emphasis).

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

whose primary victims are men. Thus, one author who notes that war is “often awful and meaningless,”⁷⁶ observes that there are advantages that combatants enjoy. She cites a prisoner of war graffito “freedom—a feeling the protected will never know” and “the feelings of unity, sacrifice and even ecstasy experienced by the combatant.”⁷⁷ Moreover, she notes that women “who remain civilians will not receive the post-war benefits of veterans, and those [women] who don uniforms will be a protected, exempt-from-combat subset of the military. Their accomplishments will likely be forgotten.”⁷⁸ Although true, the significance of these advantages is overdone—even to the point of depravity. Certainly, those who never experience its loss may not have the same acute appreciation of freedom, but that acute appreciation is, at most, a positive side effect of an immensely traumatic and damaging experience. Imagine how we would greet the observation that although paraplegia is “often awful and meaningless” it is only those who have lost the use of some limbs who can truly appreciate the value of having those limbs functional. Next, although veterans do have benefits denied to others, this is a form of compensation for sacrifice made. It is hardly unfair that compensation is not given to those to whom no compensation is due. People should be free, of course, to decide whether they want to accept the sacrifices of joining the military and the compensation that goes with it, but the absence of that choice is the disadvantage rather than the mere absence of the compensation. Finally, while the tasks of noncombatants are indeed less likely to be remembered, this observation grossly underplays the extent to which the tasks and sacrifices of most *combatants* are unremembered. Many of these who die in battle lie in unmarked graves or are memorialized in monuments to the “Unknown Soldier.” In exceptional cases, as with the Vietnam War Memorial, a deceased combatant’s memorial consists of an engraving of his name, along with thousands of others—hardly a remembrance proportionate to the sacrifice.

Consider another example of the inversion argument. Males, I noted earlier in my discussion of the Sen-Drèze argument, tend to die earlier than females. Although life expectancy has increased in developed countries over the last century, men have consistently lagged behind women. This suggests that the earlier death of males is (or, at least, was) not attributable to a biologically determined life-expectancy ceiling. As social conditions improved, men lived to be older, but never (on average) as old as women. If it were the case that men tended to live longer

⁷⁶Judith Hicks Stiehm, “The Protected, the Protector, the Defender,” in Jaggar (ed.), *Living With Contradictions*, pp. 582-92, at p. 585.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid, p. 583.

than women, we would be told that this inequality would need to be addressed by devoting more attention and resources to women's health. By means of the inversion argument, the call for more attention and resources to women's health is exactly what some people offer even though it is in fact men who die earlier. Such claims do not result from a belief that more is spent on the health care of men than women. A Canadian study on sex differences in the use of health care services showed that the "crude annual per capita use of health care resources (in Canadian dollars) was greater for female subjects (\$1,164) than for male subjects (\$918)" but that expenditures "for health care are similar for male and female subjects after differences in reproductive biology and higher age-specific mortality rates among men have been accounted for."⁷⁹ Accepting that there is indeed an *equal* distribution of health-care dollars between men and women, one practitioner of the inversion argument suggested that such expenditure was not *equitable*.⁸⁰ This, we are told, is because the greater longevity (of females) is "associated with a greater lifetime risk of functional disability and chronic illness, including cancer, cardiovascular disease, and dementia, and a greater need for long-term care."⁸¹ I shall assume that that is indeed so. Living longer does carry some costs, but on condition that those costs are not so great as to render the increased longevity a harm rather than a benefit, the infirmities that often accompany advanced age cannot be seen in isolation from the benefit of the longer life-span. An equitable distribution of health-care resources is not one that both favors a longer life-span for one sex and increases the quality of the additional years of that extra increment of life. Such a distribution would constitute a double favoring of one sex. A genuinely equitable distribution would be one that aimed at parity of life expectancy and the best quality of life for both sexes within that span of life. The proponents of the inversion argument, by contrast, are unsatisfied with any *perceived* trends that lessen the gap between men and the healthier sex. Thus we are told, disapprovingly, that at "a time when there have been improvements in the health status of men, the health status of women does not appear to be improving."⁸²

Another example of inversion is the common argument that the educational system disadvantages girls.⁸³ It is widely thought that girls fare

⁷⁹Cameron A. Mustard, Patricia Kaufert, Anita Kozyrskyj, and Teresa Mayer, "Sex Differences in the Use of Health Care Services," *New England Journal of Medicine* 338, no. 23 (4 June 1998): 1678-83, p. 1678.

⁸⁰Jennifer Haas, "The Cost of Being a Woman," in *ibid.*, pp. 1694-95.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, p. 1694.

⁸²*Ibid.*, p. 1695.

⁸³See Christina Hoff Sommers' accounts of and rejection of this argument: "The

worse than boys in school and university. This is just the message proclaimed by a report from the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women. Sponsored by the American Association of University Women, the report, entitled "How Schools Shortchange Girls," has been widely cited. Indeed, there are some ways in which girls fare less well than boys in the educational system. For instance, boys tend to do better in mathematics and science tests and more doctoral degrees are awarded to men than to women. However, there are other ways in which boys are clearly at a disadvantage. In the U.S.A., girls outscore boys on reading and writing by a much greater margin than boys outscore girls in science and mathematics tests. And although boys do better on science and mathematics tests, girls get better class marks for these subjects. Some have suggested that this differential is to be explained by gender bias in the standardized tests. Christina Hoff Sommers suggests, however, that it could be better explained by a grading bias in schools against boys. Since Taiwanese and Korean girls score much higher than American boys on the same tests, it would seem that the gender-biased explanation of the standardized tests is not entirely satisfactory. Boys are educationally disadvantaged in other ways too. More boys miss classes, fail to do homework, have disciplinary problems, and drop out of school. The higher dropout rate for boys may partially explain the better average performance by boys on standardized tests. The academically weakest boys tend not to write. Boys are also "more likely to be robbed, threatened, and attacked in and out of school."⁸⁴ Females now constitute a majority of college graduates and M.A.s in the U.S.A. Only in doctoral degrees are men still in the majority, but now by a much smaller margin than before. Females are worse off in some ways, but these disadvantages are diminishing. The inverters, ignoring the serious ways in which males are disadvantaged, present the educational institutions as disadvantaging only girls and women.

Sometimes the inversion argument or technique applies to a phenomenon that both discriminates against men and against women, but it presents the situation as discriminating only against women. We might call this a *hemi-inversion* argument. It inverts only that aspect that discriminates against men, thus presenting the phenomenon as disadvantaging only women. One example of this is the pair of authors who presented the exclusion of women in the sports media from male locker rooms after matches as an instance of *blatant* discrimination against

Wellesley Report: A Gender at Risk," in her *Who Stole Feminism?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), pp. 157-87; "The War Against Boys," *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 2000, pp. 59-74. The details in this paragraph are drawn from these sources.

⁸⁴Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?* p. 161.

those women. As they correctly observe, such sportswriters who “cannot get immediate access to athletes after a game ... may miss deadlines and will likely be ‘scooped’ by the competition.”⁸⁵ They entirely ignore the other side of the issue, however, and quote with disapproval the coach who stated “I will not allow women to walk in on 50 naked men.” Had it been a male sports writer seeking access to a locker room of 50 naked female athletes, we can be sure that a different tone would have been evident in feminist commentary on the matter. There are alternative solutions to such equity issues—such as denying all journalists, both male and female, from entering locker rooms. These authors ignore such options just as they ignore the invasion of privacy that would be experienced by the male athletes, who would surely be discriminated against if their female counterparts would not also be subject to such invasions. Instead, the authors view the matter entirely from the perspective of the female sports writers. I am fully aware that for other unfortunate reasons male sports draw more attention, and that female writers thus lose more in not having access to male locker rooms than male writers do in not having access to female locker rooms. However, if this is used to justify female access to male locker rooms but not male access to female locker rooms, then the intensity of the writer’s interest rather than the athlete’s privacy is taken to be the determining factor. And if that is so, then male journalists should be allowed to corner female politicians, actors, and other public personalities in female-only toilets and locker rooms if that is how they can scoop an important story. If this would not be acceptable, then neither is the intrusion by female sports writers on the privacy of male athletes, irrespective of the writers’ interests in getting a story.

The inversion argument is a crass form of partiality. It presents *all* sex inequality as disadvantaging primarily or only women. This is unfair to those males who are the primary victims of some forms of sex discrimination. It also strategically compromises the case against those forms of discrimination that do in fact disadvantage women more than men. Unfairly presenting the relative disadvantages of different practices leads to one’s legitimate claims being taken less seriously.⁸⁶

4. *The costs-of-dominance argument*

A fourth kind of argument suggests that although there may indeed be costs to being a man, these are the costs of dominance—the costs that

⁸⁵Nijole V. Benokraitis and Joe R. Feagin, *Modern Sexism: Blatant, Subtle and Covert Discrimination*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1995), p. 40.

⁸⁶Paralleling the little boy who cried “wolf,” this is a case of what we might call the little girl who cried “wolf-whistle.”

come with being the privileged sex.⁸⁷ Unlike the inversion argument, the costs-of-dominance argument does not suggest that the costs of being a man are *themselves* actually advantages. Instead, this argument recognizes that they are indeed costs, but suggests that they should be seen merely as the by-products of a dominant position and thus not evidence of discrimination against males. In the words of one author, it “is a twist of logic to try to argue ... that because there are costs in having power, one does not have power.”⁸⁸

Clearly there are some situations in which the costs-of-dominance argument would be sound. Where a cost really is inseparable from one’s position of power or (overall) advantage, then it is true that the cost is not a cause for complaint *on behalf of* the power-holder.⁸⁹ However, it does not follow from this that all the costs experienced by males really are connected to their having power or privilege. For example, although the exemption-exclusion of women from the military is the result of females’ perceived military incapacity, it is hardly obvious that male power would be impossible without this exemption-exclusion. For example, the rich have succeeded in preserving (even enhancing) their privilege while the poor, for various reasons, have endured a disproportionately heavy military burden. Thus, it need not be the case that those with the power in a society must be those who bear arms. Bearing arms is dirty work and there is no shortage of examples of underdogs being forced or enticed to do the dirty work. Similarly, it is far from clear that the higher rates of capital and corporal punishment of males is an inevitable by-product of male power.

It is sometimes alleged that the higher rates of male suicide, the tendency of males to die younger than women, the greater chance that men have of being killed, becoming alcoholic, and so forth, are side-effects of the stresses that come with privilege.⁹⁰ It might be argued in response that alleged privileges that have these consequences are not real privileges for those who succumb. Although some men may benefit, many

⁸⁷This view is taken by Kenneth Clatterbaugh, “Are Men Oppressed?”

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

⁸⁹An anonymous reviewer has kindly pointed out that this sort of argument might be applied against a view, mentioned earlier, that more health-care resources should be directed to women in order to improve the quality of the extra years of life they have over men. Since the disadvantage (a lower quality of life in the extra years) is a cost of the advantage (the extra years of life) there is no ground for complaint according to this argument.

⁹⁰Some advocates of this view think that the burden of proof lies with those who would deny such connections. (See Clatterbaugh, “Are Men Oppressed?” p. 300.) My own view is that when it comes to unequal and discriminatory treatment, the burden of proof lies with those who seek to defend or condone such treatment.

others experience only the costs. However, even if it were true that these were costs of genuine privilege, it would not follow that these costs were *inevitable* results. Those with power can divert resources in order to combat such side-effects of their power, thereby further improving their position.

Moreover, it is curious that as male power has surely (and appropriately) diminished in western democracies, the costs of being male have (inappropriately) increased, not decreased. For example, whereas a century or more ago men were almost guaranteed, following divorce, to gain custody of their children, today they are at a distinct disadvantage. As custody practices were better for men when they really did enjoy more power than they do now, it is clear that the current custody biases are not inevitable by-products of male power.

Thus, although it is true that the powerful cannot complain about having to bear the costs of that power, it does not follow that all disadvantages they suffer are such costs. Even if it is true that men in our society enjoy overall advantage—and I am not convinced that this is true any longer—it can still be true that they suffer genuine discrimination that is not an inevitable consequence of their privilege.

Now some will ask why those who hold most positions of power in a society could be the victims of pervasive discrimination. Why would those with power allow themselves to be treated in this way? Although there are a number of possible answers, the most important one is that insofar as discrimination is indirect and nonintentional, those who hold positions of power may not recognize it for what it is. They might take their disadvantage to be inevitable, perhaps because they share the very prejudices that contribute to their own disadvantage. A captain and officers clearly hold the powerful positions on a ship. Yet when it sinks and they adhere to and enforce a policy of saving “women and children,” the social conventions lead them to use their power in a way that advantages women and disadvantages men (including themselves).

Taking the Second Sexism Seriously

The fitting response to the second sexism is to oppose it in the same way that we oppose those sexist attitudes and practices of which women are the primary victims. To date, however, there has been an asymmetrical assault on sexism. Practices that disadvantage women have steadily been uprooted, while very few disadvantages of men have been confronted. Male disadvantage is thought hardly worthy of mention. When it is mentioned it is often excused even by those who purport to oppose sex

discrimination. In academic research into gender issues, the trend is to examine ways in which women are disadvantaged. Relatively little research examines the other side of the sexist coin. Because of this, we have every reason to think that the full extent of male disadvantage has not been revealed. If it has taken all the research it has to show the many facets of discrimination against women and girls, it surely will take as much to show the many ways in which men and boys suffer disadvantage.

Recognition of the second sexism sheds some light on the claim that all societies are structured to the exclusive benefit of men and are thus “patriarchal.” So powerful is patriarchy, we are told, that women themselves internalize its values and serve its ends. Consider, for instance, female genital excision, which is widespread in some parts of the world. This ritual is almost always performed by women and many women are amongst the most vigorous defenders of the practice. Nevertheless, it is argued, entirely appropriately, that given how damaging the procedure is to the girls on whom it is performed, it cannot reasonably be claimed to serve the interests of women (except, perhaps, those few female performers of the ritual, as they may have a vested interest in it).⁹¹ What is curious, though, is that similar reasoning is not applied to the conscription of only males. Here some feminists are at pains to emphasize that it is men who make wars and men who conscript other men to fight them. This is true, but no less so than the claim that it is females who perform genital excision on little girls. Why is it not the case that the whole system of male-only conscription and combat serves women’s interests? Why are the female agents of genital excision serving the interests of men, while the male—and now also female—agents of government, the bureaucracy and the military who send *men* to war, are serving *men’s* interests? Why are women not complicit in and partly culpable for the perpetuation of gender role stereotypes that lead to male disadvantage? Once one recognizes the second sexism, claims about universal patriarchy become either absurd or unfalsifiable. The evidence suggests that not *everything* counts against women and in favor of men. Society often favors men, but it also sometimes (perhaps even often) favors women. To the extent that claims about the existence of patriarchy deny this and explain away any conceivable example of male disadvantage, they are unfalsifiable and accordingly unscientific.

Understanding the second sexism also has consequences for the debate about affirmative action for women (qua women, rather than qua some other class of beings). For instance, one objection to strong af-

⁹¹Those who seek to claim that girls are benefited by the procedure, because without it they would be ostracized, fail to notice that that ostracism is just the sort of pressure that reinforces the societal norms.

firmative action policies is that rather than redressing past disadvantage by making restitution to an identifiably disadvantaged person, such policies make restitution to a person who belongs to a class that has been disadvantaged. This, it is said, sometimes leads to somebody who has not been disadvantaged receiving the benefit of affirmative action. In response to this argument, defenders of affirmative action sometimes argue that given how society works, *all* women have been disadvantaged and thus an affirmative action policy favoring women cannot in practice favor somebody who has not been disadvantaged. What the second sexism shows is that this response will not work. It will sometimes—even often—be the case that a man has been more disadvantaged than a woman. This woman may not have had her career interrupted by child-bearing and rearing, but this man may have had his career interrupted by a period of military service. This woman may have had every educational advantage during childhood schooling, while this man may have been one of the many who suffered educational disadvantage.

Moreover, asymmetrical attention has been given to how sexist attitudes lead to lopsiding in social institutions. Feminists regularly tell us that anything less than proportionate representation of the sexes in government, the professions, and other socially desirable positions is an indication of discrimination (whether subtle or otherwise). Although there are relatively few female engineers, for example, despite formal equality of opportunity, *we are told that this is due to subtle sexist influences that discourage young girls from aspiring to be engineers.* Yet, this sort of reasoning is not used to explain why the vast majority of prisoners or soldiers are male. It is not said that sexist stereotypes dispose (or force) young males to enlist or to behave in ways that make them more susceptible to imprisonment. The proportion of male prisoners and soldiers, for example, is simply taken as natural in a way that the proportion of male engineers or legislators is not.

If the under-representation of women in the academy, for example, must be redressed by affirmative action policies that ensure proportionality, why should similar policies not be used for the purposes of conscription and combat? Affirmative action conscription policies that aimed at enlisting equal numbers of males and females and insisted on sending equal numbers of men and women into battle would not only enforce the desired proportionality, it would also have an immense impact on the prejudicial views about gender roles. Similarly, notice that although women are now heavily represented in what were traditionally male jobs, men have not made comparable inroads into professions such as nursing, which (for about a century and a half) have traditionally been the preserve of women. Part of this is explicable by the lower status of

traditionally female jobs, which makes them less attractive to men. But that, it seems to me, is just part of the sexist worldview that feminists are seeking to undo. If the aims of affirmative action include proportional representation of the sexes in each kind of work, and the overcoming of gender-linked jobs, then affirmative action has as much of a role to play in equalizing the nursing profession as it does in equalizing the sexes within the ranks of doctors. In fact, there is reason—including the actual success rates—to think that sexist stereotypes make it easier for women to enter traditionally male professions than for men to enter traditionally female professions.⁹² Accordingly, affirmative action policies, if justified, may be more needed in nursing than in medicine. I want to emphasize that I am *not* recommending affirmative action in the military, the nursing profession, and other such areas. My claim is only that the very arguments used to defend affirmative action in other contexts would apply equally here. To apply them selectively is disingenuous.

Conclusion

When one considers how much has been written about discrimination against women, it is clear that no one paper can address all aspects of the second sexism. It has not been possible for me to search for and probe all instances of the second sexism, and it has not been possible to consider and respond to all objections to the claim that there is a second sexism. Such constraints on a single paper are innocuous in themselves. Unfortunately, however, the paucity of papers giving attention to discrimination against men leads to those few that there are being taken less seriously. The absence of an extensive academic literature about discrimination against men both results from and further entrenches the neglect of such discrimination. That is to say, it is at least partly because such

⁹²Many feminists seem oblivious to the evidence that women have penetrated traditionally male professions more successfully than men have broken into traditionally female professions. Kenneth Clatterbaugh (“Are Men Oppressed?”), for example, in arguing against the claim that men are oppressed, suggests that the restrictions of a gender role do not constitute oppression unless the restrictions are imposed because of a perceived lack of abilities (which he thinks is not true in the case of restrictions on males). He says that whereas young women are told they *cannot* be doctors, young men are being told that although they *could* be nurses it would be unworthy of them. But the evidence of men’s and women’s actual success in entering into professions traditionally reserved for the opposite sex suggests that today in Western societies, women *can* become doctors. Only the paranoid could think otherwise. Even if it is still true that men are not being told that they *cannot* become nurses, and even if they are not thereby being oppressed, it is still true that some individual men are *unfairly disadvantaged* (in ways that women are not) by societal pressures that militate against their becoming nurses.

discrimination is not taken seriously that so little research time and money is devoted to it. But because it is not the vogue to examine such discrimination, much less is known about it and this perpetuates the impression that is not worthy of detailed consideration. The lopsided information we have about sexism creates a climate in which the research bias is preserved and reinforced. This is dangerous. We have every reason to think that academic neglect of a problem is not an indication of its absence. For example, it was not long ago that sexual abuse of children was thought to be an extremely rare phenomenon. That issue has since become a popular academic and social cause, with the result that we now know much more about it and it is now widely recognized to be more common than was previously thought.

But do (most) men feel as though they are victims of sexism? It has been noted that "women bent on escape from the female sphere do not usually run into hordes of oppressed men swarming in the opposite direction, trying to change places with their wives and secretaries" and that this is evidence for "where the real advantage lies."⁹³ Notice that one *could* embrace the conclusion that *overall* advantage lies with men, while still acknowledging that men do experience some significant sexist discrimination. In this paper I have sought only to highlight this discrimination and to argue that it should be opposed. I have not sought to claim that men are worse off than women. Nevertheless, the observation that men (generally⁹⁴) do not want to change places with women should not be invested with too much significance. If people's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their socially mandated roles were determinative (or even suggestive) of whether such roles were advantageous to their bearers, then a few conclusions that are unfortunate for feminists would follow. First, many women forced into traditional female roles could not be viewed as being the victims of sexism, so long as those roles were internalized by those women and found by them to be satisfying. Just such an attitude characterized most women until the dawn of the women's movement, and it is an attitude that is still widespread among women in more traditional societies, if not with respect to every feature of their position then at least to many of its features. Second, the women most dissatisfied with their condition are to be found in disproportionately large numbers amongst women who are subject to the least sexist discrimination and restrictions. For instance, female feminist professors in

⁹³Janet Radcliffe Richards, "Separate Spheres," in Peter Singer (ed.), *Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 185-214, at p. 198.

⁹⁴I say "generally" because there are some men who have wanted to change places with women, and not because of a so-called "gender-identity disorder." Men dressing in women's clothing in order to secure places on life-boats is one example.

Western societies are arguably the most liberated women in the world—the women least restricted or disadvantaged by sexism. Yet they are also more concerned about the disadvantages they do face than are many less fortunate women. If the level of one's satisfaction with one's role is what determines the severity of the discrimination to which one is subjected, then the sexism experienced by contemporary Western feminists really is worse than that endured by those women in more traditional societies, past or present, who are satisfied with their position. Whether one takes that to be absurd will depend, at least in part, on what view one takes about such matters as adaptive preferences and false consciousness. It would be unwise to attempt to settle these issues here. All I wish to observe is that if men's apparent contentment with their position is taken to be evidence that they are not the victims of discrimination, then from that follow some conclusions that should be unsettling to most feminists. If, by contrast, it is thought that somebody might be the victim of discrimination without realizing it, then the way is opened to recognizing that even if most men are content with their position they might nonetheless be victims of a second sexism.⁹⁵

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