

THE SECOND SEXISM

Discrimination
Against Men
and Boys

DAVID BENATAR

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

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To my brothers

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Preface

Sexism negatively affects not only women and girls, but also men and boys. While the former manifestation of sexism is widely acknowledged, few people recognize or take seriously the fact that males are the primary victims of many and quite serious forms of sex discrimination. The central purpose of this book is to draw attention to this “second sexism” and to respond to those who would deny that it exists.

It is worth pre-empting the joke that a book about discrimination against males must be a very short book. Although this *is* a relatively short book, this is not because the scope or seriousness of the problem it discusses is limited. Instead it is (partly) because a longer book is not required to show that there is an extensive and dangerous second sexism.

That said, the book develops, at much greater length, the arguments I advanced in an earlier paper on this topic. The editors of *Social Theory and Practice*, to which I had submitted that paper, invited four responses. These were published alongside my original article as well as my rejoinder in the April 2003 (vol. 29, no. 2) issue of the journal. I am grateful to the editors of the journal for permission to draw on those earlier papers of mine in writing this book. I also acknowledge the use of material used in Chapter 6 that is drawn but significantly adapted from two other previous works of mine: “Diversity limited,” in Laurence Thomas (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Social Philosophy*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2008, pp. 212–225; and “Justice, diversity and racial preference: a critique of affirmative action,” *South African Law Journal*, 125(2), 2008, pp. 274–306.

The first draft of this book was written while I was a Laurence S. Rockefeller Visiting Fellow at Princeton’s University Center for Human Values for the (northern hemisphere) 2009/2010 academic year. I want to thank the director, faculty and staff of the Center, both for awarding me this fellowship and for making my visit such an agreeable one. I could not have asked for a more stimulating environment in which to conduct my research

and do my writing. The Princeton University libraries were also an invaluable resource and I appreciate the assistance provided by the library staff.

My thanks also go to the University of Cape Town for the period of sabbatical leave that enabled me to take up the fellowship and write the book.

Leo Boonzaier, Meghan Finn and Andrew Fisher provided very able research assistance. Jessica du Toit compiled the list of bibliographic references from my endnotes, and detected some typographical errors in the process. I am grateful to have had such excellent assistants.

I presented an overview of the book as the Morris Colloquium Speaker at the University of Colorado at Boulder. At a Laurence S. Rockefeller Fellows Seminar at the University Center for Human Values in Princeton, I presented parts of Chapter 5. In the Admiral Anderson Speaker Series at the United States Naval Academy, I presented the material on women and combat. I am grateful to those who attended these events for their comments.

Kingsley Browne kindly commented on my response (in Chapter 4) to his *Co-Ed Combat*. He and I still disagree on the question of women in combat, but his critical comments were most welcome. Nannerl Keohane provided helpful written comments on parts of Chapter 5.

I am especially grateful to Don Hubin and Iddo Landau, the two reviewers for Wiley-Blackwell, for their extensive and extremely helpful comments.

Finally, my thanks go to members of my family. The book is dedicated to my brothers.

DB
Cape Town
20 June 2011

Introduction

Many men are far more oppressed than many women, and any feminist who was determined to support women in all situations would certainly encounter some where her support of women against men would increase the level of injustice in the world. ... No feminist whose concern for women stems from concern for justice in general can ever legitimately allow her only interest to be the advantage of women.

Janet Radcliffe Richards, *The Sceptical Feminist*,
London: Penguin Books, 1994, p. 31.

What Is the Second Sexism?

In those societies in which sex discrimination has been recognized to be wrong, the response to this form of discrimination has targeted those attitudes and practices that (primarily) disadvantage women and girls. At the most, there has been only scant attention to those manifestations of sex discrimination whose primary victims are men and boys.¹ What little recognition there has been of discrimination against males² 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.³ The second sexism is the neglected sexism, the sexism that is not taken seriously even by most of those who oppose (or at least claim that they oppose) sex discrimination. This is regrettable not only because of its implications for ongoing discrimination against males but also, as I shall argue later, because discrimination against *females* cannot fully be addressed without attending to all forms of sexism.

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Disadvantage

So unrecognized is the second sexism that the mere mention of it will appear laughable to some. Such people cannot even think of any ways in which males are disadvantaged, and yet some of them are surprised, when provided with examples, that they never thought of these before. Male disadvantages include the absence of immunity, typically enjoyed by females, from conscription into military service. Men, unlike women, are not only conscripted but also sent into combat, where they risk injury, both physical and psychological, and death. Men are also disproportionately the victims of violence in most (but not all) non-combat contexts. For example, most victims of violent crime are male, and men are often (but again not always) specially targeted for mass killing. Males are more likely than females to be subject to corporal punishment. Indeed, sometimes such punishment of females is prohibited, while it is permitted, if not encouraged, for males. Although males are less often victims of sexual assault than are females, the sexual assault of males is typically taken less seriously and is thus even more significantly under-reported. Fathers are less likely than mothers to win custody of their children in the event of divorce. These and other examples will be presented in some, but by no means exhaustive detail, in Chapter 2.

However, demonstrating the existence of male disadvantage is, by itself, insufficient to show that males are the victims of sexism. Not all disadvantages somebody suffers on the basis of his or her sex amount to sexism. By way of illustration, consider the following. The disease called hereditary haemochromatosis is a genetic condition in which the body gradually absorbs too much iron, storing it in major organs. If the condition is not detected in time, serious organ damage and failure can result, often resulting in death. The treatment, if the condition is detected sufficiently early, is regular blood-letting.⁴ Although both males and females can have this genetic condition, males are more likely to suffer from the resultant disease. This is because females, during their reproductive years, regularly lose blood, and thus iron, during menstruation.⁵ It thus transpires that menstruation is an advantage for those females with haemochromatosis. But menstruation can also be a disadvantage. Because younger women do lose blood and iron, they are more prone than are men to iron deficiency anemia. Menstruation is thus an advantage for women with haemochromatosis, but a disadvantage for women who are susceptible to iron deficiency anemia. Similarly, the absence of menstruation is a health disadvantage for men with haemochromatosis, but an advantage for men who might otherwise be susceptible to iron deficiency.

The presence or absence of these disadvantages does not demonstrate that males with symptomatic haemochromatosis and females with iron deficiency anemia are the victims of *sexism*.

Discrimination

To understand the relationship between disadvantage (on the basis of sex) and sexism, there are a number of concepts we need to understand and distinguish. First, we need to distinguish disadvantage from discrimination. The man with haemochromatosis is disadvantaged by not menstruating, but he is not discriminated against. For there to be discrimination the disadvantage must be at least partly the product of agency, or, on some views, of social structures or practices. Thus an individual, an institution or a state might discriminate against people of one sex. Or it might be the case that particular social structures or practices have the effect of favoring one sex over the other. The disadvantage suffered by the man with haemochromatosis is not in itself the product of any of these. For example, nobody forbade or discouraged him from menstruating or removed the uterus he never had, or prevented him from acquiring one.⁶

We cannot conclude, however, that whenever some disadvantage is experienced as a result of discrimination on the basis of sex that the person suffering the disadvantage is the victim of sexism. This is because discrimination is sometimes entirely appropriate, if not desirable. The word “discrimination” is so often used in its pejorative sense that it is sometimes forgotten that it also has an entirely non-pejorative sense. To discriminate is to recognize a difference or to differentiate. Some discrimination in this sense is both necessary and desirable. Teachers, for example, must discriminate – discern the difference – between good- and bad-quality work submitted by their students. If teachers awarded first-class passes for all work, or failed all work, irrespective of its quality, they would not be acting in an appropriately discriminating way.

Wrongful discrimination

This brings us to a second distinction, namely between discrimination and unfair or wrongful discrimination. Whereas discrimination *per se* can be morally acceptable, wrongful discrimination is, by definition, morally problematic.

There are obviously many possible grounds on which one might wrongly discriminate. These include sex, race, religion, ethnic group, national origin and sexual orientation. Of interest in this book is wrongful discrimination on the basis of a person's sex.⁷

However, sex is not *always* an inappropriate basis on which to discriminate between people. Thus once one has established that a disadvantage is the product of discrimination on the basis of somebody's sex, one then needs to establish whether or not that discrimination is fair, just or justifiable. That is to say, one must determine whether or not a person's sex provides an

appropriate basis for the differential treatment. For example, one might say that middle-aged males are discriminated against if their medical insurance does not cover them, but does cover females of similar age, for routine mammography. However, one might argue that the discrimination is not unfair on account of a relevant difference between men and women. Women, given the nature of their breasts, are more likely to get breast cancer, and thus the cost of routine scanning may be warranted for them but not for men. (We can imagine exceptions, of course. If some subset of males were known to have an elevated risk of breast cancer, we might think it unfair if they, unlike other men, were not covered.)

As we might expect, there is disagreement about the correct account of when discrimination is wrong. My preferred answer is that discrimination is wrong when people are treated differently without there being a relevant difference between the people that justifies the differential treatment. (When I speak of the differential treatment being *justified*, I do not mean that some or other reason is *offered* for the differential treatment, but rather that there is good objective reason for the differential treatment.) If, for example, a teacher were to fail work that deserves to pass and does so on account of its having been written by a student of a particular sex, race, religion, ethnic group or sexual orientation, then that teacher has also acted unfairly and wrongly. Such features of the author of a piece of written work are irrelevant to assessing the quality of that work.

Although this is my preferred account of what makes discrimination wrong, it is not necessary to accept this particular account in order to reach the conclusions for which I shall argue later in this book. It is possible for people with different accounts of what makes discrimination wrong to agree that specific instances of discrimination are wrongful. Thus my arguments in subsequent chapters will not presuppose a specific account of when discrimination is wrongful. In this way I hope to bypass at least some disagreement about what makes some discrimination wrong.

To give a specific example, we do not need to have an account of what makes discrimination wrong in order to know that excluding women from university (because they are women) amounts to wrongful discrimination. Similarly, we do not need to have such an account in order to know that laws permitting the corporal punishment of boys but not of girls amounts to wrongful discrimination. This is not to say that each of these discriminatory practices has not had its defenders. Instead it is to say that the best way to determine whether a given form of discrimination is wrong is to examine that specific treatment and all the considerations relevant to it. That is what I shall do in Chapter 4.

For this same reason it is not necessary, for those who do accept my preferred account, to give a more detailed account of *when* precisely a person's

sex is irrelevant. This question too can be bypassed. Moreover, it is not clear, in any event, that any more precise account could be given. There are so many different ways of treating people and so many different conditions under which they may be treated. To expect that a precise account can be given to cover all these cases is to expect more than can be provided.⁸ Consider, for example, the breast cancer screening example above. Determining whether that is a case of justifiable discrimination depends on the relative risks of breast cancer faced by men and women, on the costs of competing screening policies and on the rationing principles one uses to distribute scarce resources. This is just one of very many contexts in which we need to determine whether discrimination is fair.

Sexism

I shall refer to wrongful discrimination on the basis of sex as “sex discrimination,” “sexist discrimination” or “sexism.”⁹ This seems like an entirely reasonable understanding of what sexism is. However, it is not uncontroversial and thus more needs to be said about this definition, its competitors and what is at stake between them.

The first thing to note is that there is no single, standard usage of the term “sexism.” It is used in many different ways, even by those who are united in opposing it. For example, Janet Radcliffe Richards defines it, albeit in passing, as counting “sex as relevant in contexts in which it is not.”¹⁰ Mary Anne Warren says that sexism “is usually defined as wrongful discrimination on the basis of sex”¹¹ and that discrimination “based on sex may be wrong either because it is based on false and invidious beliefs about persons of one sex or the other, or because it unjustly harms those discriminated against.”¹²

Others think that a definition of this kind is inadequate and that sexism involves at least one further element, which is variably described as the *subordination* of one sex to the other, the *domination* of one sex by another or the *oppression* of one sex.¹³ Those who think that some such additional element is required for sexism to exist typically think that sexism must be a *systemic* phenomenon, because subordination, domination or oppression could not exist without systemic discrimination. They also think that such additional conditions for sexism preclude the possibility that males could be the victims of sexism. This is because they deny that males suffer from subordination or being dominated or oppressed. In addition they might deny that discrimination against males, even if it exists, is systemic in some other way.

There are innumerable versions and combinations of these views and I obviously cannot consider them all. However, I shall consider a few examples.

Richard Wasserstrom says that “racism and sexism should not be thought of as phenomena that consist simply in taking a person’s race into account ... in an arbitrary way.”¹⁴ It must also be the case that this occur

in the context of a specific set of institutional arrangements and a specific ideology which together create and maintain a specific *system* of institutions, role assignments, beliefs and attitudes. That system is one, and has been one, in which political, economic, and social power and advantage is concentrated in the hands of those who are white and male.¹⁵

According to this understanding of sexism, it must be systemic and the system must favor those who enjoy overall power.¹⁶ Marilyn Frye is another who thinks that sexism must be systemic and to the overall advantage of some. She says that “the locus of sexism is primarily in the system or framework, not in the particular act”¹⁷ and that the “term ‘sexist’ characterizes cultural and economic structures which create and enforce the elaborate and rigid patterns of sex-marking and sex-announcing which divide the species, along lines of sex, into dominators and subordinates.”¹⁸

These definitions of sexism are, in one sense, broader than mine, but in another sense they are narrower. It will be recalled that I have defined “sexism” as wrongful discrimination on the basis of a person’s sex. The definitions of Professors Frye and Wasserstrom are broader in the sense that they focus not on an individual act, but a system into which the act does (or does not) feed. However, their definitions are narrower than mine in another sense. If we follow their lead, fewer actions will count as sexist. This is because it is only a subset of actions that wrongly discriminate against people on the basis of their sex that creates or contributes to hegemonies.

What can be said in favor of the definitions that compete with mine? Professor Frye asks us to consider the following case:

If a company is hiring a supervisor who will supervise a group of male workers who have always worked for male supervisors, it can scarcely be denied that the sex of a candidate for the job is relevant to the candidate’s prospects of moving smoothly and successfully into an effective working relationship with the supervisees.¹⁹

This case is intended to show that unfair discrimination cannot consist merely in treating people differently on the basis of an arbitrary or irrelevant attribute such as their sex. This is because, it is said, sex is not irrelevant in this case to the ability to perform the job. What Professor Frye finds problematic about the case is that if a woman is not hired, this will feed into a broader system in which females are disempowered.

I agree that systems can be sexist and I agree that systematic exclusion of women from particular positions is sexist. However, I deny that unfair discrimination *must* reach the systemic level in order to constitute sexism. I shall say more about this later, but now I shall indicate why the “irrelevant characteristic” view is able to account for Professor Frye’s case. First, we should note that the relevance of the applicant’s sex in her case is dependent on the attitudes of those workers who will be supervised. If they had different attitudes to women or to female supervisors then a female supervisor would be able to function as effectively as a male one. Thus we need to ask whether the differential attitude that the workers have toward male and female supervisors was based on an irrelevant characteristic. The answer to that question is affirmative and thus we could conclude, following the view that Professor Frye rejects, that the workers have sexist attitudes.

There is now a secondary question whether the people hiring the supervisor should take those sexist attitudes as a given or whether they should override them. While I doubt that a categorical answer can be given to this question, I strongly suspect that much more often than not, they should not pander to the sexist views. For example, historical experience suggests that pandering to such views only reinforces them (which is problematic, independent of systemic concerns). By contrast, resisting prejudice by opening positions to people irrespective of their sex (or race), although it can have teething problems, helps to break down prejudicial attitudes. In all cases where those hiring should hire the woman despite the workers’ attitudes, pandering to sexism could be said to be derivatively sexist.

Professor Wasserstrom provides a different case. He says that what was primarily wrong with human slavery was “not that the particular individuals who were assigned the place of slaves were assigned there arbitrarily because the assignment was made in virtue of an irrelevant characteristic, i.e., their race.”²⁰ Instead, he says, the primary problem is with the practice itself – “the fact of some individuals being able to own other individuals and all that goes with that practice.”²¹

Does the case of human slavery really show that the “irrelevant characteristic” account of racism or sexism fails? I do not think so. There are at least two possible alternative reasons. According to the first, it is precisely because what is primarily wrong about slavery is that people are treated as chattel that the wrong is not primarily one of discrimination. Given this, it should be unsurprising that racism fails to provide an exhaustive account of what is wrong with slavery. Of course, where race is the criterion for who may be enslaved, then racist discrimination is a further wrongful feature of slavery, but there is no reason to think that the underlying wrong of slavery must be explained in terms of racism and thus in terms of the “irrelevant characteristic” account of racism. What this nicely illustrates is that some actions may

be wrong for more than one reason and that discrimination may sometimes be a compounding wrong rather than the primary wrong.

Alternatively, perhaps we *can* fully explain the wrong of slavery via the “irrelevant characteristic” account. There is no moral problem with humans owning machines and treating the machines as chattel. There *is* a problem with humans owning other humans and treating them as chattel. What explains this difference? It is the fact that there are relevant differences between machines and humans. It is these differences that make it wrong to own humans but not machines. When people have thought that some humans may be owned on account of their “race,” they have mistakenly taken a person’s “race” to be a relevant difference from those humans who may not be owned. They have mistakenly treated being black as being like a machine or some other object that may be owned. According to this explanation, it is wrongful discrimination that explains why the wrong of slavery is inflicted on particular people. A given person is enslaved only because of his race. Had he been a member of another race he would not have been enslaved.

Now, even if one rejects these responses to Professors Frye and Wasserstrom and maintains that sexism is not merely a matter of treating people differently on the basis of an irrelevant characteristic, one need not embrace their definitions of sexism. One could retain the view that sexism is unfair or wrongful discrimination on the basis of a person’s sex, but deny that this consists of treating people differently on the basis of their sex when their sex is indeed irrelevant. One could prefer an alternative account of wrongful discrimination, while still identifying sexism as wrongful discrimination. Rejecting the “irrelevant characteristic” account of wrongful discrimination does not entail the view that sexism must satisfy a systemic criterion or must involve domination, subordination or oppression.

So far I have argued that we do not *need* to abandon the understanding of sexism as wrongful discrimination on the basis of a person’s sex. Now I wish to say why we *should not* abandon it in favor of the alternatives I have outlined. Accepting the requirement that discrimination be systemic and involve subordination, domination or oppression would do violence to ordinary language.

In our ordinary usage, we speak of prejudicial and discriminatory “isms” in the absence of overall and systemic disempowerment. If a teacher were to assess a student’s work more harshly merely because that student was white or male, we would ordinarily label that action racist or sexist (in addition to being wrong on other grounds). People *do* use the words “racism” and “sexism” in such contexts. Nor is this usage restricted to non-philosophers. Peter Singer, for example, understands speciesism and racism in terms of treating beings differently on the basis of arbitrary or irrelevant differences.²²

Perhaps my opponents think that although we do use words like “sexism” and “racism” in these ways we should not do so. Perhaps they are recommending that we alter our usage and use the word “sexism” in a more restricted way. These definitional issues are difficult. We cannot categorically say that ordinary usage must prevail. Such usage is sometimes both confused and confusing. However, it is not clear that this is true in the case at hand. Moreover, there is a danger in stipulative definitions that depart too significantly from ordinary usage. They themselves can be confusing or misleading. If, to choose an extreme example, one defines Monday as the day *after* Tuesday, one will not be contributing positively to clearer thinking and communication.

It is possible to stipulate that males cannot be the victims of sexism or, less blatantly, that group members cannot be victims of sexism or racism unless those groups are disempowered or subordinated. However, it is hard to see why such stipulations should be made. Indeed, doing so seems to have implications that would be unpalatable even to many of those who make them. A racial epithet directed against a rich and powerful member of the Kenyan government would widely and rightly be recognized as racist, even though the epithet would not lead to an overall disempowerment or subordination of blacks in Kenya. Nor does the target group need to be a majority. Jews in the United States, for example, today enjoy a degree of equality and influence unprecedented in Jewish history. They are not (contrary to the view of some antisemites) controlling the country, but they are hardly disempowered or subordinated. Isolated anti-Jewish epithets in the United States do not plausibly effect an overall disempowering or subordination of Jews in that country, but they would nonetheless appropriately be recognized as instances of antisemitism.

In response to these examples, perhaps it will be suggested that they are instances of racism and antisemitism because there is a *history* of discrimination against blacks and Jews. According to this view, it does not matter whether, in a given place, that pattern of discrimination continues. It is sufficient that it did previously continue for a long time. Notice, however, that this pedigree criterion of racism and antisemitism is even more controversial than the other features of the alternative definitions I reject.

There is a further problem with stipulating that only disempowered, subordinate or oppressed groups can be the victims of sexism (or racism). It may well be the case that *females* are no longer systematically disempowered, subordinated or oppressed in developed countries. Many feminists will be outraged at this suggestion. I shall delay, until the concluding chapter, my defense of this suggestion. For now, it is sufficient to make two observations.

First, power is spectral rather than binary. One has more or less of it, rather than either having it or not having it. Accordingly, even if men still

have overall power in the developed world, the erosion of male power has taken place gradually. On this trajectory, there comes a point at which men no longer hold most power and at which women, while still the victims of discrimination, are no longer subordinated or dominated. Those who assert that the term “sexism” only applies where one group is dominant or another subordinate must concede that discrimination against females would not constitute sexism once that point is reached. I find that implausible. If my critics recognized that that point had already been reached in some places, they would likely find it implausible too.

Second, some feminists have recognized that to say, for example, that women in the developed world are still oppressed, they must depart from the traditional understanding of “oppression” and employ a new understanding of this term.²³ In this way the definitional questions recur. We are asked to reinterpret “sexism” in such a way that oppression is a criterion for it, but then we are asked to reinterpret “oppression” in such a way that the word “sexism” can still be applied to contexts in which it still seems to have application. With all this reinterpretation that is required, one wonders why it would not be more economical – and truer to ordinary usage – just to stick with the common understanding of “sexism.”

I have now presented and rejected some representative alternatives to my understanding of sexism. It is worth noting, however, that less rests on this disagreement than might first appear. Let us assume, merely for the sake of argument, that sexism should not be understood in the way I have suggested it should be understood. And let us assume further that for this reason men cannot be the victims of sexism. If that were the case then there could be no *second sexism*. However, nothing would follow from this about a *second sex discrimination*. Men and boys could still be the victims of wrongful sex discrimination.²⁴ Even if that were not appropriately called sexism it would still be worthy of moral concern and opposition. Wrongful discrimination is wrongful and could be quite seriously so. Thus the really important conclusion for which I need to argue is that males are the victims of wrongful discrimination (or even merely wrongful treatment) on the basis of their sex. I happen to think that such discrimination merits the name “sexism” but even if I were incorrect about that, my critics could not justify, on that basis, any complacency about the wrongful discrimination of which males are the victims.²⁵ It would still be a problem that should be recognized and confronted. It is much more important that wrongful discrimination against men and boys be identified and opposed than that we *call* it “sexism.” The fact that labeling wrongful discrimination as “sexism” is not essential to its being wrong and worthy of opposition might explain why some feminists have either barely mentioned the word “sexism” or failed to give a full account of what it is.²⁶

Having defended my understanding of sexism against alternative views (and having placed that disagreement in perspective), I now return to say

more about my view. According to this view, sexism is by definition *wrongful* discrimination. This, I think, is in keeping with our ordinary understanding of the term “sexism.” We do not, in normal parlance, think that sexism could be morally justifiable, at least in ordinary circumstances.²⁷

Sexism is sometimes explicit, as it is when people of one sex are legally prohibited from performing certain jobs. However, as feminists have rightly noted, it can often be implicit, subtle and unintentional.²⁸ For example, there may be some policy or practice that appears neutral but in fact unjustifiably has a “disparate impact” on either women or men. Thus, a height requirement for a particular job may lead to many fewer women being employed. If there is not a good reason for that particular height requirement, then women are the victims of an indirect and often unintentional sexism. Or consider those powerful social forces that shape the expectations or preferences of men and women in ways that significantly disproportionate numbers of men and women aspire to particular positions.²⁹ If, for example, girls are led to think that a “woman’s place is in the home,” girls might not seek work or careers outside the home. Here subtle discrimination is operative. Given the nature of subtle discrimination, it is not always easy to tell *to what extent* it is operative – a matter that will be discussed in more detail later.

The second sexism is that sexism of which males are the primary victims. As a species of sexism, it is a form of *wrongful* discrimination. Thus, to show that there is a second sexism, I shall have to demonstrate not only that males are disadvantaged and that at least some of this disadvantage is the result of discrimination, but also that this discrimination is wrong. I shall do this in stages. In Chapter 2, I shall present examples of male disadvantage. Some, but not all, of these disadvantages are manifestly also instances of discrimination, and often *de jure* discrimination. However, I shall delay until Chapter 4 the arguments that at least some of the discrimination is *wrongful*. In Chapter 5 I shall, among other things, ward off objections that this discrimination does not amount to wrongful sex discrimination or sexism.

It would be tedious if, on every occasion that I refer to discrimination, I were to spell out whether I meant discrimination in the pejorative or non-pejorative sense and whether I was referring to sex discrimination or discrimination on some other basis. Very often the correct sense is implicit and does not require explicit statement. Thus, while I shall often speak of unfair or wrongful discrimination, I shall often shorten this simply to “discrimination” where an adjective is unnecessary, either because it is clear from the context that I am speaking about wrongful discrimination or because I am referring to both discrimination and wrongful discrimination. Similarly, I shall not usually qualify “discrimination” with the words “sex” or “sexist” because it will usually be obvious that I am speaking about such discrimination.

The First Sexism

This book is about the second sexism. Accordingly it is not about that sexism of which females are primary victims. This is *not* because I deny the existence of such sexism. It clearly exists and has existed for a very long time.

Girls and women, in some times and places, have been killed because they are female. Female infanticide is common in some of those countries with a strong preference for sons. And widows have sometimes been pressured, if not forced, to end their lives through such rituals as *sati* in India. Girls and women have also died through neglect. Where food is in short supply, cultures favoring sons have prioritized the feeding of boys, often allowing girls to die of malnutrition. In the developing world, women continue to die in significant numbers during childbirth. This is attributable to the absence of basic obstetric services. To some extent this is a product of their impoverished environment. However, sometimes limited services are available at some distance and insufficient priority is put on granting women access to those services. At least in such cases, the peri-partum deaths are the result of discrimination.

Millions of girls and women have had their genitals excised. Girls have regularly been deprived of education, even when boys have been provided with education. Even in many places where girls received primary and secondary education, young women were often barred from institutions of higher education. Millions of women and girls have been raped or sexually enslaved. Women have often been prohibited from owning or inheriting property and from voting and holding public office. Women are often required to cover up their bodies in ways that men are not. In the most extreme cases, a full burqa is required. Among the many restrictions imposed on women in such countries as Saudi Arabia is a prohibition on driving a car or riding a bicycle or motorcycle.

Some of these forms of discrimination are more serious than others, but none are trivial or justifiable. Their impact on the lives of women and girls should not be underestimated. However, all these forms of discrimination, as well as many others, have been widely discussed. Discrimination against females has been the subject of almost all discussion about sexism. I do not plan to add to it here. Instead I shall focus on the neglected side of sexism. My topic is the *second* sexism rather than the first sexism. This selectivity is not unfair. Because my aim is to show that there *is* a second sexism, rather than to show that there is not a first sexism, I need only cite cases of the second sexism to establish my conclusion. It is only if I were also arguing that females were not the victims of sexism that my failure to consider instances of unfair discrimination against them would be relevant.

Although I have distinguished between the first and second sexism, this distinction does not imply that they are unrelated. In the course of this book I shall point to various connections between them, while retaining my focus on the second sexism. It is worth mentioning now, however, that there are some instances of discrimination that arguably are simultaneously instances of both the first and second sexism.

Consider, for example, the United States Supreme Court case of *Frontiero v. Richardson*.³⁰ Sharon Frontiero, a lieutenant in the United States Air Force, had sought benefits for her husband that wives of military personnel automatically received under Federal law. By contrast, husbands of female members of the military were entitled to these benefits only if they were dependent on their wives for over half of their support. Lt. Frontiero's request was turned down because she failed to demonstrate her husband's dependency. A lower court ruled that the discrepant treatment did not amount to unconstitutional sex discrimination. Lt. Frontiero and her husband, Joseph Frontiero, appealed. The Supreme Court reversed the lower court's judgment.

Although the court ruled that female service members were discriminated against by the policy of differential treatment, it is far from clear that this is exclusively a case of the first sexism. One could as easily say that husbands of female service members are discriminated against because they are denied the benefits that wives of male service members automatically enjoy. Alternatively, one could say, as I think we should, that both female service members and their male spouses are discriminated against, in which case the discriminatory policy is an example of both the first and the second sexism. It is noteworthy, however, that the court noticed only the first sexism. This supports my claim that even though a second sexism exists and is often intertwined with the first sexism, the second sexism typically remains invisible.³¹ The aim of this book is to make it visible.

Two Kinds of Denialist

Arguments showing that there is a second sexism raise objections from two main directions.³² Most plentiful, at least within the academy, are objections from some (but not all) feminists. From the other side come objections from some conservatives. In each case, the objectors deny either there is such a thing as the second sexism or that it is as extensive as I shall argue it is.

Consider, first, those second sexism denialists from among the ranks of feminists. Feminists, of course, are not a monolithic group. There are numerous ways of categorizing varieties of feminist, but for my purposes only one distinction is crucial. It is the distinction between those feminists

who are motivated by and interested in equality of the sexes and those feminists whose primary concern is the advancement of women and girls. Some feminists – those of the second kind – are likely to claim that this is a distinction without a difference. They will argue that equality of the sexes is promoted by advancing the interests of females, and vice versa. They are (only) partly right. Promoting equality of the sexes does often coincide with the promotion of women's interests. It does so when women are unfairly discriminated against. However, because men, as I shall argue, are sometimes the victims of unfair discrimination, the promotion of gender equality will sometimes require the advancement of men's rather than women's interests.

We might refer to those feminists who are fundamentally concerned with equality of the sexes as *egalitarian feminists*,³³ and those feminists who are basically concerned only with the promotion of women's and girls' interests as *partisan feminists*.³⁴ The latter are the feminist equivalent of those men's rights advocates who are interested only in advancing the interests and protecting the rights of males. Feminists are rightly critical of that view, but partisan feminists do not notice that the blinkered pursuit of one sex's interests that is characteristic of such (but not other) men's rights advocates is similarly true of their own position. This criticism does not extend to the egalitarian feminists.³⁵ Nothing that I say should be hostile to egalitarian feminism. Indeed, I endorse that form of feminism. Advocates of this view will recognize that opposing the second sexism is one part of the overall project of opposing sexism and promoting gender equality. What I shall say will be antagonistic only to partisan feminism.

In drawing the distinction between egalitarian and partisan feminists, I have not claimed that egalitarian feminists *must* recognize that there is a second sexism. Obviously, a commitment to equality of the sexes does not entail the belief that men are the victims of some unfair discrimination. The aim of this book is to argue that males are indeed the victims of sexism. The only point I am making now is that there is nothing in that claim that is inconsistent with egalitarian feminism.

In distinguishing egalitarian feminism from partisan feminism I have not proved that there are any partisan feminists. The distinction also does not prove that there are any egalitarian feminists, but it is the category of partisan feminists that some feminists might claim is empty. I intend to show at various points in the course of this book that there are indeed feminists of this kind. There are some, but not many, feminists who explicitly espouse what I have called partisan feminism.³⁶ Much more commonly, however, many of those who profess egalitarian feminism in fact slip into a partisan form of feminism. They interpret the evidence as proving that females are the victims of discrimination even when they are not – and even when it is instead males who are the victims of discrimination. They also engage in

rationalizations to reach the conclusion in any given instance that it is female interests that ought to prevail.

I do not intend to identify particular feminists as egalitarian. One reason for this is that it is difficult at this stage to determine who the real egalitarian feminists are. Almost all feminists writing about sex discrimination have been concerned with discrimination against females. It is difficult to know whether any given feminist has ignored discrimination against males simply because she or he has not been aware of the problem. It remains to be seen what will happen once they are made aware of it. Once it is drawn to their attention, their (broad) options seem to be these:

- (1) They could accept that there is some wrongful discrimination against males (and join me in opposing it).
- (2) They could provide good arguments why, contrary to what I say, males are not the victims of any wrongful discrimination.
- (3) They could reject the conclusion that males are the victims of wrongful discrimination but fail to provide good reasons for this conclusion and instead engage in the familiar rationalizations that I shall discuss later.
- (4) They could declare that they are not interested in discrimination against men and boys even if it does exist.

The first two options are compatible with egalitarian feminism, while the second two either suggest (option 3) or explicitly declare (option 4) partisan feminism. Partly for this reason, those in the third category are likely to claim that they are actually in the second. I do not wish to prejudge how particular people will respond. Because many feminists who profess to be egalitarian slip into a partisan form of feminism when confronted with arguments that there is a second sexism, one often cannot easily tell (in advance) which of those who profess to be interested in equality of the sexes really are.

Nor do I *need* to identify particular egalitarian feminists (or discuss their work *qua* egalitarian feminists) in order to make my case. Egalitarian feminism is a possible view and one that many people profess. The question of who actually occupies this intellectual (and political) space is not relevant to determining whether there is a second sexism. Nor is it relevant to showing that recognition of and opposition to the second sexism is compatible with the view that I have called “egalitarian feminism.”

As is the case with feminists, conservatives are not all of one stripe. Some of those who go by the name “conservative” may have no objection to the views I shall defend. This is because somebody might be conservative in one realm but not in another. Economic conservatism, for example, does not entail religious conservatism. The conservatives who will object to my arguments will most likely be those who endorse (the enforcement of) gender

roles and the consequent differential treatment of the sexes, which I oppose. They will argue that many of the disadvantages that males suffer are not instances of sexism, because males ought to bear those burdens or at least that it is not unfair for males to bear them. These conservatives – whom we might call *gender-role conservatives* – think the same thing about various burdens borne by women, which should make them unreliable allies for partisan feminists who also deny that there is a second sexism. Indeed, gender-role conservatives may find *some* of what I shall argue – especially against partisan feminists – to be quite congenial. They might, for example, agree that there are the double standards that I shall demonstrate exist in the views of partisan feminists.

It should be clear, though, that *my* view is not conservative about gender roles. While there may well be average differences in some psychological traits between the sexes³⁷ I do not think that these justify all the differential treatment of the sexes that gender-role conservatives endorse. Because I think that the second sexism ought to be opposed along with the more widely recognized sexism, I am advocating change – doing things differently from the way they have been done historically. Moreover, the change I am recommending is quite radical. That is by no means conservative.

In defending the view that there is a second sexism, I shall respond to criticisms both from partisan feminists and from gender-role conservatives. However, my arguments will be directed more commonly against the former. This is not because I am more opposed to their position, but rather because it is the more common one in the academy.³⁸

It cannot be emphasized enough, though, that I am not criticizing *all* feminists. I have found that this fact is often forgotten (or, on a less charitable reading, ignored) even when one states it clearly. Unfortunately, partisanship and other ideological excesses of feminism are rampant and I shall devote lots of attention to demonstrating the problems with such views. In doing so, however, I should not be construed as rejecting feminism in its purer egalitarian form.

Forestalling Some Fallacies

Given the prevailing orthodoxy in the academy and the sensitivity of the issues I shall be discussing, the views I defend in this book will be deemed threatening by many.³⁹ I am thus under no illusions. My position, no matter how clearly stated, is likely to be misunderstood. Where it is not merely dismissed (sometimes vituperatively, as inconsistent with received opinion), it is likely to be subject to numerous (sometimes overly confident) mistaken objections. Indeed, overly confident objections are very common among those defending orthodoxies.⁴⁰ One reason for this is that the responses to