



Gender Tribalism

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Feminism has become a form of gender tribalism, a collectivism that denigrates individual agency and accomplishment in favor of the group or sisterhood. Positing women as the victims of oppressive forces beyond their control, feminism is today the leading voice in declaring women to be helpless and incapable of accomplishment without significant government aid. A mentality of entitlement and dependency has come to replace the more liberating idea of individual accomplishment; a “neo-hausfrau” movement. Feminism has degraded men and women alike. The rhetoric of liberation obscures a movement that replaces individual responsibility and achievement with a tribal mindset subservient to the group.

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Editor's Introduction: This text first appeared in the collection of essays *The Return of the Primitive: The Anti-Industrial Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1999, pp. 205-218). Peter Schwartz is a Distinguished Fellow of the Ayn Rand Institute in Irvine, California. Mr. Schwartz's insights are remarkable for their prescience with respect to the fundamental meaning of feminism as it has played out in the last forty years. The editorial board of *New Male Studies* is grateful to Mr. Richard E. Ralston, Publishing Manager for the Ayn Rand Institute for permission to reprint Mr. Schwartz's text.

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All forms of collectivism rest on a certain metaphysics. The collectivist tenets—in economics, that production is primarily a social effort; in politics, that the group, not the individual, has rights; in ethics, that the individual must sacrifice his interests to the needs of society; in epistemology, that the judgment of an individual mind is subordinate to the collective consensus—all stem from a deeper premise: that the individual is impotent to cope with reality. The individual, on this premise, cannot sustain his life on his own, and must depend upon the group for survival.

This viewpoint, as applied to women, is what feminism essentially promulgates.

Of all the supposedly demeaning views of women for which feminists condemn our “patriarchal” society, none is remotely as denigrating as that held by feminism itself. It is, today, uniquely feminists who depict women as congenitally helpless, endlessly “victimized” creatures.

It is feminists who declare that, without government aid, women are compelled to accept only 75 percent of what men are paid—that their advancement at work is blocked by a “glass ceiling,” which only the weight of government can shatter—that women cannot be expected to hold full-time jobs unless government provides day-care services for their children—that women cannot get hired for the better jobs or admitted into the better schools, except through “affirmative-action” preferences—that women cannot attain self-esteem as long as Playboy-type material (which, a court rules, has “a negative impact on the individual's sense of self-worth and acceptance”) is legally permitted to be sold.¹

The message of such feminist stands is that the individual woman cannot succeed in life by her own efforts and on her own merit. She is at the mercy of forces she cannot control, unable to obtain work, education or self-respect without the succor of a (governmental) nursemaid.

This is not merely a journalistic description of what feminists see as an unfortunate condition of women at present. This is, rather, a part of their basic philosophy—a philosophy that holds metaphysical powerlessness to be woman's normal state.

And it is a state that feminists actively foster. They want women to believe that the way to attain one's goals is to rely, not on individual merit, but on the power of the group. According to feminism, acquiring the specific abilities necessary for success in some area should be of little concern to women. In fact, they should dismiss the very need for such abilities. What they should count on,

instead, is the fact of their gender.

For example, the average woman scores lower on the Medical College Admissions Test (because of deficiencies in her knowledge of science) than the average man. Should women who want to be doctors come to the logical conclusion that they need to study harder? Should women be advised to master science, so that they can be accepted on the same basis as men, irrespective of gender? No, say the feminists; the only conclusion to be drawn is that not enough women are being admitted—so the qualifications must be changed.²

If a woman wants to be, say, a firefighter, the feminists do not encourage her to make sure she measures up to the demanding physical standards. What matters most, she is told, is that there be a representative contingent of her gender at the firehouse. And if she does not meet the standards? She should not have to, feminists retort; women are rightly due their quota of such jobs.

With all their prattle about female “empowerment,” feminists disavow the only legitimate meaning of that term: i.e., the individual woman’s self-created power to make herself into a value, the power to make an employer want to promote her or a school want to enroll her—as a mutually beneficial exchange, based on her objective ability, not as a sacrificial accommodation to her gender. But that would be too independent an approach for the feminists to sanction.

Their implicit message to women is: “You cannot succeed on your own—but you don’t have to; your collective will get you what you want.”

Ironically, when the contemporary feminist movement began, in the 1960s, people believed that its message was the exact opposite. They believed that women were being urged to abandon the traditional “hausfrau” mentality—i.e., the assumption (held by females no less than by males) that women were incapable of dealing with existence outside the confines of the kitchen and the bedroom. People believed that women were being urged to seek their own careers, to reject unchosen duties to others, to assert a moral right to the pursuit of their own happiness, to embrace the real world by becoming airline pilots, neurosurgeons, music composers and CEOs.

But the collectivism at the heart of the movement quickly surfaced, revealing feminism’s true nature. It became clear that women were expected to obtain all these new positions, not by earning them qua individuals, but by demanding them qua females. It became clear that the hausfrau image, far from being rejected, was being endorsed by feminism—in an updated, uglier form.

Whereas the old hausfrau mentality said that women could not perform the more demanding jobs as competently as men, this same mentality now says that women should not be required to. Now, the fact of gender supposedly entitles women to their “fair share” of corporate vice presidencies, irrespective of ability. Now, under this “neo-hausfrauism,” women don’t have to earn any reward—they just have to call upon Momma State to grab it for them. Now, as before, the conclusion for women is: gender determines all.

It is only the perverse influence of modern collectivism that permits such moral debilitation to be termed “liberation.”

In pushing this philosophy, feminism attracts the very worst among women. It draws all those who want to be absolved of responsibility for their lives. Every housewife who feels guilty for having forever given up her pursuit of a career—every mindless scrub nurse who regrets having abandoned her ambition for something more—every bitter woman in a dead-end job or a dead-end life—are all reassured that their plight is not their fault. The individual woman cannot succeed—feminist doctrine proclaims; so she is not to be reproached for her failures.

One type of woman, however, is to be reproached: the woman of true independence. The woman who wants to judge and be judged according to individual merit—who scorns the crutch of “affirmative action,” who succeeds on her own and who is proud of it—is chastised as a traitor to her tribe. She would never have achieved anything—feminists resentfully insist—had it not been for the collective efforts of all women.

Feminism rests upon dependency. It tenaciously recruits—and molds—dependent, self-abnegating women. It inculcates in them a belief in their metaphysical helplessness—and then waits for them to become docile members of the flock.

Feminism wants to enshrine the very mentality from which it claims to “liberate” women. It seeks to re-channel the hausfrau mentality—the desire to be provided for—by simply switching the object of dependence from husbands to the “Sisterhood.”

The leaders of feminism advocate the creed of the social worker. The social worker exists, not to help people escape from trouble, but to persuade them that life inherently is trouble—from which escape is impossible without the help of the social worker. Feminists want to instill a similar state of mind, by convincing the individual woman that she is doomed to frustration and failure—unless she hitches her wagon to the collective caravan of womanhood.

At the root of this malign conception of women lies a premise about free will. Feminists implicitly believe that women have no genuine volition and that their choices in life are not freely made.

Thus, according to feminism, a woman is never to feel guilty, no matter how low she may have sunk. Has she thrown her life away in a loveless marriage, in drug addiction, in prostitution, in violent crime? She could not help it, feminists tell her. Her choices are not the cause of her misery. Society did not allow her to do anything else. It is society, not she, that needs changing. And the only true “choice” a woman can make, therefore, is a collective one: to stand in solidarity with her female comrades.

The heroines of the feminist movement are not the women who achieve productive lives by their own efforts, but those who announce how empty and impossible their lives would have been without the maternalistic aid of a feminist-sensitive state. The woman who has no real self to assert—who pleads to be taken care of by her “sisters”—who preaches loyalty to quotas and subservience to the collective—who declares that the source of her unhappiness is not her own irrational choices in life but a tyrannical culture—it is she who is held up as a model to be emulated.

Because feminism regards volition as a myth, women are consistently portrayed as victims.

Since they are not held responsible for any failure to attain some end, every frustrated whim of theirs is taken as a sign of victimization. It is taken as evidence that women are being denied their rightful share of the goods. “Feminist consciousness”—says one author—“is consciousness of *victimization*.”³ (Emphasis in original.)

The actual “victimizer” is, of course, reality itself. If a woman wants to be hired for a certain position or to gain entry into a certain school, not because she qualifies for it, but because she belongs to a class whose desires are not being fulfilled—then it is reality that is the barrier. For it is reality that demands objective qualifications. It is reality that presents us with the unbending law of causality, the law which states that a job can be done only by those who can do it. It is objectivity—the need to adhere to the requirements of reality—that is feminism’s real enemy.

But feminists dismiss the very concept of an objective reality, because the volitionless woman cannot survive in such a world. She cannot accommodate herself to a universe that makes such rigid demands upon her. She wants the “flexibility” of the non-objective. She feels ineffectual in an objective reality—so feminism repudiates it for her.

“Feminist analysis”—says a professor at the University of New Mexico Law School—“begins and ends with the principle that objective reality is a myth.”⁴

Thus feminists denounce the “exclusionary” means by which society evaluates doctors, lawyers, soldiers. Why, they ask, should women be judged by objective standards? And if one answers: because reality and reason mandate it—their reply is: Why should women be bound by reality and reason? Why can’t a woman be allowed to construct a more malleable world, a world she feels is more hospitable to her wishes? Why shouldn’t she be judged, for example, by her compassion for the ill, rather than her ability to perform surgery—or by her aptitude for telling stories rather than for logically analyzing legal principles—or by her capacity to bond with her fellow soldiers rather than to run an obstacle course in full military gear?

As the president of City College of New York, complaining about a lack of “diversity” in universities, writes: “Institutions of higher learning in the United States are products of Western society in which masculine values like an orientation toward achievement and objectivity are valued over cooperation, connectedness and subjectivity.”⁵

Why, feminists wonder, should even immutable facts stand in the way of women’s egalitarian desires? For instance, why should women pay more for annuities just because they have longer life expectancies? Why should they pay different medical insurance premiums just because they incur pregnancy-related costs?⁶ Why should females not be members of the Dallas Cowboys and the Vienna Boys Choir? As one feminist organization claims: “There is no such thing as fair and unfair discrimination.”⁷

In this war between women and objectivity—between whims and reality—it is considered “discriminatory” to give priority to the latter combatant.

But since reality per se is not very responsive to political protests, feminists direct their griev-

ances against the party they blame for “inventing” such an unyielding universe: men.

It is men who push the idea of objectivity—feminism argues—as a means of keeping women subjugated. It is men who arbitrarily refuse to indulge a woman’s whims, as they insist that she be judged by merit, not gender. It is men who are to blame for every female who becomes a stewardess rather than a pilot, a cheerleader rather than a quarterback, a secretary rather than a vice president.

Feminists observe that males have somehow managed to succeed in reality. They have somehow been able to acquire the jobs, the wealth, the fame, the happiness. The way for women to do likewise—feminists maintain—is, not to master reality, but to harness its surrogate: the male. How? By acting like the children feminism believes they metaphysically are, and petulantly demanding that their desires be accommodated—by men. By insisting that they be given their “allowances,” in the form of prescribed quotas of jobs, promotions, college admissions, etc.—to be produced and financed by men. (At least, the old hausfrau method of directly latching onto a husband for financial security was a more honest form of dependence.)

This evaluation of women as non-volitional ciphers, and of men as their vile oppressors, is implicit throughout the feminist philosophy. But there is one area in which this view is made virtually explicit: sex.

Sex between a man and a woman is not what it seems, according to feminists—i.e., it is not really voluntary. Law professor Susan Estrich, for instance, writes: “Many feminists would argue that so long as women are powerless relative to men, viewing a ‘yes’ as a sign of true consent is misguided.”⁸

Other feminists contend that a woman cannot be held accountable for her decision to engage in sex. “There could be many reasons why a woman might not resist a man’s advances so that unwanted intercourse could occur without force. The woman ... may be confused. Her socialization may make it difficult for her to resist.”⁹

In other words, women—adult women—are incapable of saying no when they do not want to have sex. They are the passive, deterministic products of their “socialization.” Consequently, feminists say, women cannot be held responsible for having sex, any more than children can.

This idea of women as volitionless doormats obliterates the distinction between the voluntary and the forced. Do women have a rational faculty, by which they choose whether or not to engage in sex?

Not according to feminists, who declare that “verbal coercion” constitutes rape. And what is “verbal coercion”? It is “a woman’s consenting to unwanted sexual activity because of a man’s verbal arguments *not including verbal threats of force*.”¹⁰ (Emphasis added.) So whenever the man utters anything indicating a desire for sex, any subsequent sexual activity, no matter how willing the woman is, may well make him criminally liable.

This is why, in incidents in which men are denounced (sometimes correctly) for “sexual mis-

conduct”—such as the one at the Navy’s 1991 Tailhook convention—no differentiation is made between actions in which the women willingly engage and actions in which they are forced to participate. To the feminist, it is all “coercive.”

On this view, it is not the objective facts that are legally decisive, but the woman’s subjective emotions. Says law professor Catherine MacKinnon: “I call it rape whenever a woman has sex and *feels violated*.”¹¹ (Emphasis added.)

Facts are simply brushed aside by feminists. Since women are seen as incapable of exercising volition, the crucial distinction with respect to sex is, not between the woman’s giving and withholding consent, but between her feeling and not feeling “violated” —a feeling on the basis of which men are to be indicted, tried and sentenced.

A study of college students (“Project on Campus Sexual Assault”), sponsored by Ms. magazine in 1985, is widely hailed as an authoritative, scientific survey of the prevalence of rape in American society. It found that over 25 percent of college-age women had been victims of rape or attempted rape. This reinforced the portrait of a patriarchal culture in which women are under constant attack by, and need constant protection from, their natural enemy, the male.

Yet it was only the survey’s distorted definition of rape—based on the view of women as “socialized” puppets, unable to make their own decisions—that led to such a conclusion. For example, according to the questionnaire, if a woman accepts a drink from a man and they then willingly have sex, it may be considered rape, because the man has “impair[ed] the other person’s judgment or control by administering any drug or intoxicant.”¹²

In fact, of those classified by the survey as having been raped, 73 percent indicated that they themselves did not believe that the sexual activity in question constituted rape. And over 40 percent of the “victims” had sex again with their “attackers.”¹³

This neo-hausfrau movement believes that women must be treated like children. They cannot be trusted to give “informed consent,” they cannot be relied upon to know whether they have been raped and they need continuous parental supervision to make sure their needs are being met.

When a march on Washington was organized by the National Organization for Women to publicize “violence against women,” the objects of the protest were, not just rape or battery, but reductions in welfare spending and cutbacks in affirmative action programs. As reported in the *New York Times*, the feminists “equated what they called ‘political violence’ with physical attacks.”¹⁴ A parent who beats an infant and a parent who withholds meals from an infant are both guilty of physical abuse. Similarly—feminist thinking goes—adult women are “victimized” by a denial of welfare benefits as much as by a real assault.

Just as the essence of rape, according to feminists, is not the act of physically forcing a woman to have sex, so the nature of its evil is not the coercion—but the collective “discrimination” by one class against another.

This primitive, tribalist view is most openly advocated by MacKinnon, who writes: “Sexual violation is both a practice and an index of inequality between the sexes, both a symbol and an act of women’s subordinate social status to men.”¹⁵ Unable to perceive a woman as an individual even with respect to her being the target of an actual rape, MacKinnon sees the crime as being committed against the tribe. It is not that a particular woman has been attacked by a particular man—or even that physical force has been used—but that one collective has been judged “inferior” to another.

Rape should be prosecuted as a “sex equality case,” MacKinnon says. In a rape trial, the central questions about the accused would include: “How does this man treat women sexually? Is he a sex bigot?” If the courts were to adopt this approach, she concludes, “At least rape would be called in law what it is in life: sex discrimination.”¹⁶

But if the essence of rape is “discrimination”—what is the difference between sex and rape? The act of sex is undeniably “discriminatory” —it discriminates by gender. Doesn’t that make it inherently evil?

Whether the claim is that “yes” equals “no,” or that rape equals “inequality”—sex is transformed by feminists into the archetypal act of aggression by men against women. Sex per se becomes rape. And all men become guilty of it.

Rape, says one “acquaintance-rape educator,” “is not some form of psychopathology that afflicts a very small number of men. In fact rape is not that different from what we see as socially acceptable or socially laudable male behavior.”¹⁷ Rape, says a noted feminist author, is “a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men keep all women in a state of fear*.”¹⁸ (Emphasis in original.)

What is the source of this enormous hostility toward men, and particularly toward sex between men and women? The act of sex, Ayn Rand writes, is an act of metaphysical assertion: “To a rational man, sex is an expression of self-esteem—a *celebration of himself and of existence*.... [I]t is his response to his own highest values in the person of another.”¹⁹ (Emphasis in original.) Sex is an affirmation of an individual’s self-worth, of his or her capability to live successfully in reality and to experience the joy of such success.

What assessment of sex, then, follows from an opposite metaphysics? If sex is good because it celebrates the individual’s capacity to master reality and achieve values—how must feminists, who believe that a woman fundamentally lacks that capacity, perceive sex?

To them, sex is a union, not between two partners sharing their highest values, but between two antagonistic forces: a brutal despot—who wantonly denies woman her due by insisting that she earn her place in the world: and a feckless, perpetual victim—who desperately clings to others for her basic identity and for her very survival. On this view, sex for the woman is not a joyous affirmation of her sense of self-value, but an intolerable reinforcement of her sense of helplessness—and of her resentment toward the man for not being helpless.

Sex, according to feminists, is sheer oppression. The woman is being dominated. She is being “taken” by her enemy. Sex is the quintessential “victimization” of woman—the woman who lacks

the capacity even to assert her own will in the face of male “verbal coercion.”

Feminist theorist Andrea Dworkin, who depicts sex as “wartime invasion and occupation,” presents this view unabashedly: “Physically, the woman in intercourse is a space inhabited, a literal territory occupied literally: occupied even if there has been no resistance, no force; even if the occupied person said yes please, yes hurry, yes more.” The fact that women may judge sex to be good makes the act all the worse, she says. These “occupied women [are] more base in their collaboration than other collaborators have ever been: experiencing pleasure in their own inferiority, calling intercourse freedom.”²⁰

Dworkin’s is not some “lunatic fringe” viewpoint. Her odious characterization of sex follows logically from the feminist metaphysics. If the individual woman is a powerless, volitionless nonentity, then sex is a combination of callous invasion and abject collaboration. Dworkin is merely being more consistent, and is taking feminist ideas more seriously, than many of her feminist cohorts.

The doctrine of feminism pervades today’s culture. To question and oppose its “politically correct” tenets, especially within academia, requires an independent mind. That is, it requires precisely the faculty whose existence feminism will not acknowledge—and whose force it cannot withstand.

Feminism needs to be repudiated by everyone—man or woman—who recognizes the crucial need to think, and to act, by oneself. If you understand that a human being’s basic identity is self-created, and is not the product of gender—if you grasp the fact of your capacity to achieve your own goals by your own effort—if you indignantly reject the demand that anyone live by the guidance and the power of the collective—then do not permit the ideas of feminism to go unchallenged. Expose, and condemn, the self-effacing dependency that this “liberation” movement cultivates. Above all, let people see that the ideological battle over feminism is not between the female and the male—but between tribalism and independence.

Footnotes

¹“Canada Court Says Pornography Harms Women,” *New York Times*, February 2, 1992, p. B7

²On the Medical College Admission Test—the only standardized test available to medical schools—women attain a mean score 88 percent that of men on the physical sciences section of the test; and 90 percent on the biological sciences. Yet in recent years, according to the Association of Medical Colleges, equal proportions of male and female applicants have been accepted to medical schools. (“Women seem to communicate better in the interview,” says the associate dean of admissions at Harvard Medical School.) See Martin L. Gross, *The End of Sanity* (Avon Books, 1997) pp. 72-75.

³Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (Routledge, 1990), p. 15.

⁴Ann Scales of the University of New Mexico Law School, quoted by David Brock in *The Real Anita Hill* (Free Press, 1993) p. 384.

⁵ Yolanda Moses, quoted in a *New York Post* editorial, “CUNY Does It Again,” May 26, 1993, p. 18.

⁶ The Supreme Court has endorsed this view, ruling in 1983 that sex-segregated actuarial tables violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964 because “under the statute, even a true generalization about a class cannot justify class-based treatment.”

⁷ An official of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs, quoted in *The Intellectual Activist*, July 29, 1983, p. 3.

⁸ Quoted by Katie Roiphe in “Date Rape’s Other Victim,” *New York Times Magazine*, June 13, 1993, p. 30.

⁹ Charlene L. Muehlenhard and Jennifer L. Schrag, quoted by Norman Podhoretz in “Rape in Feminist Eyes,” *Commentary*, October 1991, p. 33.

¹⁰ Roiphe, op. cit.

¹¹ Quoted by Carol Iannone, “Sex and the Feminists,” *Commentary*, September 1993, p. 31.

¹² Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?* (Simon & Schuster, 1994), pp. 212—213.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 213—214.

¹⁴ “Thousands in Capital Protest Attacks on Women,” *New York Times*, April 10, 1995, p. A1.

¹⁵ “The Palm Beach Hanging,” *New York Times*, December 15, 1991, Section 4, p. 15.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Py Bateman, quoted by Podhoretz, op. cit., p. 30.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* (from Susan Brownmiller’s book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Bantam, 1976).

¹⁹ Ayn Rand, “Of Living Death,” *The Voice of Reason* (New American Library, 1998), p. 54.

²⁰ Quoted by Podhoretz, op. cit., p. 31 (from Andrea Dworkin’s book *Intercourse*, Free Press, 1988).



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