G.I.Z.
THE GENDER ISSUES ZINE

Gee! It sure is lame to live in a society full of patriarchy and gender biases!

Yes dear, but with an open forum to discuss gender issues, we could be well on our way to gender egalitarianism.

ISSUE #1
Welcome to the first issue of the Gender Issues Zine!
This zine’s focus covers everything related to sex and gender - including sexuality, gender identity, civil liberties, power dynamics, egalitarianism, feminism, sexual orientation, etc. G.I.Z.’s goal is to provide an open forum where everyone can be heard, so people from all perspectives have the opportunity to get their ink on our pages.

We encourage you to submit your stuff for future issues. Submissions can take the form of essays, short stories, poetry, cartoons, or art work. Each author’s focus may be political, personal, or any combination thereof. Submissions will be included on the basis of relevance, quality, and space available. Lively debate is encouraged, but personal hostility is not. Our writers should feel free to criticize others’ ideas and writing, but not to engage in personal disrespect or name-calling against individuals in the Mid-MO community. Regular submissions will not be responded to until at least the following issue. We’ve set a tentative deadline of Nov. 10th for submissions to the second issue, which we aim to have out shortly thereafter.

Text submissions should either be submitted on a disk or e-mailed to us - GIZ_ZINE@planet-save.com - so that we can proofread and format them, or typed neatly handwritten and proofread in 5 ½ by 8 ½ format (two columns, landscape on computer). Art or cartoon submissions should be in black and white, or copy nicely to black and white, and fit in our 5 ½ by 8 ½ format.

We also accept letters to the editors, all of which will generally be included, and which we can transcribe for the authors. These short submissions may be responded to by the editors. They should be limited to 300 words and submitted by our regular deadline.

We intend to always offer the G.I.Z. free of charge, but we do have some expenses in publishing. If you can afford to, please donate so that we can continue putting it out.

Mail everything to: The Gender Issues Zine c/o Abe Haim, 615 Morningside Dr., Columbia, MO 65201, or you drop it off at the Peace Nook (downtown Columbia) for Abe or Laura to pick up. For more information, please contact one of our editors: Laura at 443-0629 or Abe at 256-8633.

Laura’s Intro-Editorial

Howdy folks, just a few words from your friendly neighborhood Columbia G.I.Z. editor. First of all, I want to say thank you very much to the contributors, and thank-you for your interest in the first edition. I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I did editing. I wanted this zine to express my egalitarian views of gender- that of course all genders (male, female, and transgender) are valuable and equal, and our society needs to recognize them as such. However, in this issue there is quite a lack of female and transgender contributions, something I encourage our readers to change. We have all had gender based experiences, for our society loves to emphasize the differences between genders. I would love to hear your stories, so send them in!

If you like the Gender Issues Zine, check out “A Voice for Wimmin,” a great Columbia MO zine featuring lots of wimmin’s perspectives, thoughts, and artwork. They are currently working on their second issue, so look for it soon.

Happy Reading, and remember: Solidarity forever, for gender roles won’t smash themselves.

Abe’s Intro-Editorial

“In the beginning, there was the word…” It’s fitting that this first issue seems to have an overall theme of words and language. A philosopher refutes the politically correct notion that the English language itself was traditionally biased against women, a local librarian tells us of his life in the world of children’s literature, and a composite article debunks and critiques the urban legend that the phrase “rule of thumb” has an etymology of state-sanctioned wife-beating. An article by yours truly takes a critical look at the word “feminism,” and contrasts both its etymology and real-world manifestations with the claim that “it’s all about equality.”

This article, “Why I’m not a feminist,” is what ultimately brought the Gender Issues Zine into existence. It was written about seven months ago in response to an article in another zine, A Voice for Wimmin. That publication’s founder, Heather Tucker, informed me that despite the zine’s name, submissions from both sexes and all points of view would be included. Indeed the first issue, which came out last winter, included a piece by Nick Taylor entitled “Male Feminism,” that featured a wonderful summation of “radical”
feminist dogma a la Marilyn French and Andrea Dworkin. I soon whipped out a rebuttal to the article’s main point, that there was no good reason why any reasonable person wouldn’t adopt the label “feminist,” and submitted it for publication. Heather thanked me for my submission and told it would add a lot to her zine. Though she may not have agreed with everything in it, she at least recognized that the piece was thoughtful and well written, and that everyone benefits from open dialogue. Unfortunately, other people involved in putting out the V.F.W. were not so enlightened, and inside sources have told me that it was the major controversy my piece caused that prevented the second issue from ever being published. (I know first hand, from attending a meeting this past spring, that there was never a shortage of material or funds for that issue.) Heather has since left Columbia, and we at G.I.Z. wish her well in her new life.

My aim with the G.I.Z. is to create a forum where women and men of all beliefs can freely discuss a set of issues that affects us all. And unlike some other topics, everyone is an expert of sorts on gender issues – possessing a wealth of empirical data simply from their observations in everyday life. All of their perspectives deserve to be heard, even those that some may not deem politically correct. It’s time to step outside the feminist box which insists we see everything related to gender issues as women always being oppressed and men always being privileged. We need to be able to see the more complex reality of present day America, which includes such things as women living seven years longer than men, men being overwhelmingly more likely to commit suicide, and almost every institution of higher learning having more female than male students.

My article is being published as it was first submitted many moons ago. My views have changed a little since I wrote this piece, largely to a more thorough critique of feminism, which I’ll share in greater depth in the coming issues. So there are a few things I would have changed, but I felt that the article – as I submitted it – deserved that right to be published which it had been denied for so long.

I’ve heard rumors that Nick, who’s reportedly taken over as chief editor, is planning on publishing a second issue of the V.F.W. It’s unclear whether Mr. Taylor will honor Heather’s wishes and her original vision by including my submission (if and when the second issue finally comes out), or if he’ll bow to the temptation of censorship. In either event though, it’s clear that a fair and timely venue is very much needed at the local level to provide an open forum for such issues to be freely discussed.

**Athletic Liberation!**

By Laura K.

“What the fuck is so funny about that!?” I shouted angrily at the opposing team. Saturday was a clear, sunny day, but after playing half a soccer match in an all-male tournament, my mood certainly did not match the beautiful day. You see, every time I stole the ball or faked out an opponent, the other team would laugh, hoot and howl, mocking their teammate for being shown up “by a girl.” One man even cried out, “I love this girl, I love this girl, I want to marry her!” The other team, winning by then, could not handle playing seriously with a womyn. My question elicited even more laughter, causing me to see red. I blindly ran after the ball, charging into the opponents like an elephant stampeding through a savannah. After thoroughly exhausting myself and making no major gains for my team, the referee blew his whistle and it was over.

Afterwards, as I sat unlacing my cleats and gulping down water, I felt anger all over, followed by the numbness of corralling my emotions. It was so unfair that those men could not just see me as an equal adversary, treating me with the respect with which I treat all my teammates and opponents alike. They had to remember our differences and focus on them, instead of realizing that our mutual love of soccer was more relevant than gender.

Looking back, I still don’t know the best way to handle the situation. I wanted to fight, punch, kick the other team, but I know that is not the best way to solve anything. To approach and confront an entire team of men about their sexist playing style still seems too intimidating. Taking it one man at a time could work, but in the middle of a match I am not going to flag down a specific player and discuss patriarchy with him; I want to play with intensity and concentration. I think the best thing to do is just continue, to make it common for a womyn to play equally with a man. To that end, I play soccer as often as possible, because I aim to be just as good, if not better, than every man I play with. I do this not so that I can ridicule or harass them, but so that I can prove what I believe is true: smashing perceptions of gender and gender roles can be tough, but damn is it fun!
WHY I'M NOT A FEMINIST

Creating real gender egalitarianism

By Abe Haim

In Nick Taylor's article "Male Feminism," he rhetorically asks "why isn't everybody a feminist?" I have a number of reasons for not classifying myself under that "ism." I believe in equality, so I consider myself an egalitarianist. When it comes to gender issues, I call my philosophy "gender-egalitarianism." "But what's the point," you might ask, "of quibbling over semantics? Feminism is all about equality, so if you really believe in equality then why aren't you a feminist?"

My first critique of feminism is of the word itself, and its implications. I'm a firm believer in social linguistics - That is looking at our choice in words and seeing what is embodied in our language.

Feminists have a long tradition of doing just this. For example, they examined the word "woman" and its etymology, and found that it came from a combination of "womb" and "man." Thus there was a bias embodied in our very language that viewed women as mere reproductive units. Now many feminists use words like "wumon" in its place.

But I have yet to see a feminist take a critical look at the word "feminism" itself. She may well be surprised by what we find...

"Feminism" consists of two essential word parts. The first part, "femin," is a shortening of feminine, which of course means female. The second part, "ism," which is almost exclusively used as a suffix, means an ideology or belief system. The meaning of a given "ism" is determined by what precedes it in the word. For example, "capitalism" is an ideology based on money, or capital, while a "racist" follows an ideology based on race.

So what does it mean when you put "feminine" together with "ism"? In short, it's a form of sexism. Feminists often use the word "sexism," which is generally used to describe an ideology of male superiority over women. But the word really means any ideology based on sex. It can be made more specific. To describe a male based sexism, we could use the term "masculism," while a female based sexism would be called "feminism." So certainly "feminism" is a very poor choice of word to describe a desire for equality of the sexes.

While few people have analyzed the word quite as scientifically as I just did, many are still very disturbed by the idea of an ideology, or ism, based on one of the sexes. They simply don't want to be a part of anything like that. Many of these same people, on the other hand, would be quite pleased with "egalitarianism," and gladly identify with a movement that is obviously based on equality. Over the last two decades, I believe, the continued use of the word "feminism" has hurt the movement much more than any help it may have given in familiarity and continuity.

"Well, ok" you're probably saying now, "sure, maybe 'feminism' isn't the best word, but what's really wrong with the feminist movement? It's certainly not sexist, even if that's what its etymology might imply." If (hypothetically speaking) feminism was sexist, we'd expect it to at best be an ideology based entirely on the female sex, that only discusses males as victimizers, and at worst to be irrationally anti-male. And in practice, feminism has generally been the former, and all too often the latter.

Feminism began as a women's liberation movement, so it's female-centric ideology is certainly understandable. But for there to be a vital movement of men and women that will transform society and bring equality, we need a broader vision. Men are gonna be part of any new society we create, so its vision cannot be centered around just half of the population. This has been one of feminism's most damaging weaknesses -- its inability to come up with a positive male vision.

Feminism has also been guilty of stereotyping men and failing to appreciate the true diversity of the male population. It's basically assumed that if you're a heterosexual male then you must be privileged, so therefore you owe a certain debt to women. For men who actually grew up feeling accepted and privileged in their society (to later become enlightened), this makes sense to them and they gladly hop on the feminist bandwagon. But for many of us that wasn't the case at all.

One case of this is what I call secondary sexual orientation. For example, a large minority of heterosexual males (including myself) are what's been described as "male-lesbians." We're only attracted to women, and we're not at all transsexual or transvestite.
But romantically, we emotionally identify a lot more with what’s traditionally been considered feminine. We’ve long been persecuted and discriminated against, but unlike other groups, such as gays, we generally don’t have a recognized identity or support network. One might think that, given our natural inclination to egalitarian relationships and our common oppressor of sexism, that we’d be celebrated by feminists. But I have yet to hear a feminist make mention of us. We just get lumped in with the rest of “those damn hetero-males.”

Irrational anti-male sentiment, though generally far more subtle than your stereotypical rabid man-hating rant, a la SCUM Manifesto, is still quite prevalent in the feminist movement and the larger ‘progressive’ culture. While it’s understandable that many women would have anti-male sentiments, due to the horrible things many men have done, it’s not ok to put-down men as a whole. Only those men who have actually done the horrible things. Derogatory statements about men, and/or male sexuality as a whole, are common place in feminist lectures and presentations, the lyrics of feminist music, and comments by individuals in social settings. Though these statements are often theoretically made in jest, they are none the less damaging and counterproductive. They can be especially traumatic for sensitive young men. And ironically, it’s the very men who have the most respect for women, and the strongest belief in equality, who are likely to hear feminist lectures and music. So as a thank you for our solidarity, we are unjustly insulted.

I’ve also found that irrational anti-male sentiment is often fueled more by personal romantic angst than real political grievances. Lesbians, in my experience, are far less likely to be irrationally anti-male. This is not to deny the validity of actual damage cause by some sexist men in relationships. The angst I’m referring to is the universal kind that everyone has felt, from rejection and neglect. If hetero males were to channel this sort of rage into a political agenda, it would give “misogyny” a whole new meaning. I’ve been present on all too many occasions when a group of women who had recently been dumped was sitting around talking about how “men suck!” My reaction has always been that “it’s not men that ‘suck,’ but rather your choice in men.”

Which brings me to my last critique – empowerment vs. victimhood. While feminism is supposed to be about empowering women, it so often disempowers them by reinforcing their victim role. At one feminist lecture I attended, the speaker had the brilliant idea that women could go on strike – that is refuse do certain things for their boyfriends, husbands, bosses, etc. until they got the respect they deserved. It’s just this sort of thinking that’s needed to get beyond victimhood and take real responsibility. For example, feminists are always griping about guys who are sexist macho jerks, but last time I checked, these guys weren’t having any trouble finding dates. And just in my experience, I have certainly witnessed over a dozen “feminists” go out with such men. It doesn’t take a Ph.D. in behavioral science to know that it’s not too difficult to modify a group’s behavior if you control the supply of what they want. So feminists can complain into the next century about how men aren’t respecting them, but women could change all that over night if they simply decided to never date such men.

All this said, I’m not really “anti-feminist” per se, I’m just very aware of feminism’s faults and shortcomings. The women’s empowerment movement, often under the name “feminist,” has done a lot of great things for women in recent decades. It has made women as a whole much more aware and proud of their bodies, intellect, creativity, spirituality, and sexuality.

But the same still needs to be done for men. To achieve real gender egalitarianism, new male identities need to be explored and studied. Many feminists scoff at the idea of having men’s studies departments at universities, yet this sort of thing is exactly what we need. The full range of male identities deserves serious scholarly study. And not just under the umbrella of women’s studies. Likewise, male identity needs to be freely explored in our social and activist communities, outside the confines of the movement that’s been known as feminism.

So my recommendation is that we abandon the word “feminism,” because it’s a poor word choice with embodied biases and counterproductive implications. A term like “gender-egalitarianism” is a far more accurate description of what we need in society and how it can be attained. What has been known to this point as the “feminist movement” should be replaced with women’s empowerment and men’s empowerment movements – working in solidarity as part of a larger movement for equality.
The Expectations Placed on Men by Society

By Dominick Dufner

Women often comment on the pressures they feel placed on them by society, and rightfully so. However, it is important to realize men also face pressures. So I sat down one night and thought about all the things that were bothering me about my sex. All the pressures and expectations I felt were placed upon me by others and society. I sat down and wrote what I felt was expected of me as a heterosexual male. The list that follows is a summation and revision of those expectations.

As a man, I must act as macho as possible at all times. I must never act in any way that can be perceived as too feminine by other men or by many women. I can never imply in any way, vocal or otherwise, that I find another man to be attractive or good-looking. I am expected by society, as a heterosexual male, to have an extreme dislike for homosexual men, though I am expected to like lesbians, but only if they are hot and are sexual with other women only for the gratification of men.

As a man, I am always expected to make the first move in any kind of serious relationship with someone of the opposite sex. This includes always asking the girl out, never vice versa, and even being the first to initiate a conversation with someone I'm interested in. I am expected to have a never-ending libido and to only be interested in sex. Also, I am, as a man, expected to view the act of courting as an almost predatory action, forcing my presence upon a girl, until, eventually, she gives in to me. I am expected to only be attracted to bimbo type girls that are shallow and superficial, again, only for the sex that they offer. I need to have sex at as early an age as I can, as it is the key act in becoming a man. I must always be concerned only with my sexual gratification, and never concerned with that of my partner. I should have sex as often as I possibly can to show that I'm a real man. I am expected to have sex with as many girls as I can as a show of my manhood. Later in life, I am expected to settle down and marry a girl, have kids, and keep my extra marital affairs under wraps.

As a man, I am expected to like manly things, such as cars and sports. I should drink alcohol, often excessively. I must constantly be putting on a show to portray just how manly I am, so that I can dispel any doubt as to my sexual orientation. This can mean showing off and doing just plain stupid shit. I should belittle anyone that does not fit into the manly stereotype, for fear that they might make my entire sex look bad. If someone offends me, I should get loud and violent about it.

As a man, I should expect to be the target of hatred from some feminists and others that blame members of my sex for everything they see wrong in the world. These individuals, in their unrelenting sexism, see all men as bad, thus helping to reinforce the social responsibilities outlined herein.

As a man, I must never act too caring or emotional about anything or anyone. I am expected to be a hard ass about everything, acting like things don't bother me and like I never need to confide in another human being. I must internalize all my feelings, eventually destroying any possibility of feeling much at all.

As a man, I should expect to live an average of six years less than a woman, have higher stress, and have less close relationships with family and friends. [1]

As a man, I am expected to be upwardly mobile. I should get a good job that pays well and try my best through out my life to accumulate as much wealth as I can. As a man, I am still expected to be the main income provider of my household.

As a man, I should help reinforce the status quo. I am expected to fear change of any kind. I should eat meat. I should be patriotic to the point of nationalism. I should drive vehicles that waste gas while driving aggressively and irresponsibly.
My vehicle should also be extremely showy and sleek, as another means to attract women to me.

- As a man, I should be concerned about my body image. I must get rid of any unsightly body hair on my legs, arms, chest, genitals, etcetera, so that I look like a male supermodel. I should be self-conscious if I have a small penis and if my hair begins to fall out. I should work out and be buff until I get married at which point I can let myself go. However, I should get irate if my wife does the same.


Trouble in River City
By Brian Katcher
bjkatcher@hotmail.com

I'm a male librarian. A male elementary school librarian. I didn't intend for it to happen. I mean, there I was, a fourth grade teacher, minding my own business, and bang! there I am running the damn media center. Someone must have slipped me a Mickey or something.

So far as I know, I'm unique. Sure, I'll occasionally see guys working at public libraries, or college libraries, but elementary libraries? Never. You'll hear rumors of us occasionally, but like female Three Stooges fans, we live furtive, shameful existences.

I guess I had it coming. I was an elementary teacher for six years, I even taught kindergarten. Foolishly, I thought I'd be safe in a female dominated profession. Schools sought me out. I was a man and I could teach! It was time to show those women they could be discriminated against in elementary education, as well as every other field. Ah, those were the days.

Now, I never talk about work. When people ask, I tell them I'm an ivory poacher or a telemarketer.

I guess I shouldn't complain. The money's good, and checking out books is a hell of a lot simpler than teaching a real class. But when I go to my ten-year reunion this fall, I just know I'm going to stick with my 'just got out of prison' story.

What is so blasted unmanly about being a librarian, anyway? The books? The children? The filing? Who decided that all school librarians should be women? I swear I'm gonna mess up the next SOB who calls me Marian.

Maybe I should be proud. Start hanging around bookstores on my days off. Wear T-shirts with the Dewey decimal system on them. Get 'OVER DUE' tattooed on my knuckles. Embrace the lifestyle.

It'd never work. Society isn't ready. But until that day when all men who work in school libraries can raise their date stamps unashamedly, I'll be here waiting.

Maybe I can convince my wife to become a plumber, so we can at least live out our porno movie fantasies.
Against the Theory of "Sexist Language"
By Kelley L. Ross, Ph.D.

It is common today in public discussion, whether the context is academic, political, or even legal, to take it for granted that using the word "man," in isolation or as a suffix, to refer to all of humanity, or using the pronoun "he" where any person, male or female, may be referred to, is to engage in "sexist language," i.e. language that embodies, affirms, or reinforces discrimination against women or the patriarchal subordination of women to men. Thus the American Philosophical Association offers "Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language," which it says is, "A pamphlet outlining ways to modify language in order to eliminate gender-specific references" -- as though that is an unproblematic, rather than an Orwellian, goal. Not everyone agrees with this view, and "he" and "man" often seem to creep inappropriately into the speech of even those who consider themselves above such transgressions; but the ideology that there is "sexist language" in ordinary words and in the ordinary use of English gender rarely comes under sustained criticism, even in the intellectual arenas where all things are supposed to be open to free inquiry. Instead, the inquiry is usually strongly inhibited by quick charges of "sexism" and by the other intimidating tactics of political correctness.

Such defensiveness accompanies the widely held conviction that the theory of "sexist language" and the program to institute "gender neutral" language are absolutely fundamental to the social and political project of feminism. The theory of "sexist language," however, is no credit to feminism, for it is deeply flawed both in its understanding of the nature of language and in its understanding of how languages change over time. Since the ideology that there is "sexist language" seeks, indeed, to change linguistic usage as part of the attempt to change society and forms of thought, the latter is particularly significant.

First of all, the theory of "sexist language" seems to say that words cannot have more than one meaning: if "man" and "he" in some usage mean males, then they cannot mean both males and females in other usage (i.e. nouns and pronouns can have both masculine and common gender). This view is absurd enough that there is usually a more subtle take on it: that the use of "man" or "he" to refer to males and to both males and females means that maleness is more fundamental than femaleness, "subordinating" femaleness to maleness, just as in the Book of Genesis the first woman, Eve, is created from Adam's rib for the purpose of being his companion. Now, the implication of the Biblical story may well be precisely that Adam is more fundamental than Eve, but the Bible did not create the language, Hebrew, in which it is written. If we are going to talk about the linguistic structure of Hebrew as distinct from the social ideology of the Bible, it is one thing to argue that the system of grammatical gender allowed the interpretation of gender embodied in the story of Adam and Eve and something very much different to argue that such an interpretive meaning necessarily underlies the original grammar of Hebrew -- or Akkadian, Arabic, Greek, French, Spanish, English, Swahili, etc. -- or that such a system of grammatical gender requires such an interpretation.

What a language with its gender system means is what people use it to mean. It is an evil principle to think that we can tell other people what they mean by what they say, because of some theory we have that makes it mean something in particular to us, even when they obviously mean something else. Nevertheless, there is now a common principle, in feminism and elsewhere (especially flourishing in literary criticism), that meaning is only in the response of the interpreter, not in the mind of the speaker, even if the speaker is to be sued or charged with a crime for the interpreter having the response that they do. There is also on top of this the Marxist theory of "false consciousness," which holds that "true" meaning follows from the underlying economic structure, today usually just called the "power" relationships. Most people are unaware of the power relationships which produce the concepts and language that they use, and so what people think they mean by their own statements and language is an illusion.

The implications of these principles are dehumanizing and totalitarian: what individual people think and want is irrelevant and to be disregarded, even by laws and political authorities forcing them to behave, and speak, in certain ways. But they are principles that make it possible to dismiss the common sense view that few people speaking English who said "man" in statements like "man is a rational animal"
were referring exclusively to males, even though this usage was clear to all, from the context, for centuries before feminism decided that people didn't "really" mean that. But even if some speakers really did mean that, it is actually irrelevant to the freedom of individuals to mean whatever they intend to mean through language in the conventionally available forms that they choose. What was meant by the gender system in the languages that ultimately gave rise to Hebrew is lost in whatever it was that the speakers of those languages were saying to each other; but what we can say about the functioning of gender systems and about language in general is very different from the claims that the theory of "sexist language" makes.

Historically, if a language possesses a gender system and distinguishes between "he" and "she," then one or the other will also tend to be the common gender for when both genders are involved. In English, and most other languages with gender, that falls to "he," and the feminist argument is that this reflects patriarchal dominance and so sexism -- a hierarchy in which the masculine is more fundamental. That may even be true in many cultural contexts; but interpretation is separate from the grammatical structure, and the structure allows for interpretation that cuts both ways. Logically, English "he" stands to "she" as "number" stands to "prime." Number, in a sense, is more "fundamental" than primeness, just because it is more general; but prime numbers are certainly no less numbers than any other numbers. Prime numbers are simply marked with a certain property that other numbers do not have. Calling prime numbers "prime" represents the traditional sense that the distinguishing property of prime numbers -- that they cannot be evenly divided by any numbers besides one and themselves -- is particularly striking and salient.

If "she" is logically subsumed under a more general "he," it may then be because the female was regarded as more "marked" than the male. Feminists sometimes notice this, to their irritation, especially in the structures of the words "female" and "woman" as compared to "male" and "man": each simply adds a syllable. Similarly, Afro-Asiatic (or Hamito-Semitic) languages from Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew to Modern Arabic have added the syllable -at as the mark of feminine nouns (where the t is usually silent and the a often later pronounced as e or i). More subtly, French may represent the same thing through the quality of the vowel in the definite articles: The feminine singular article, la, contains a full and pure vowel, /a/, while the masculine article, le, actually contains a reduced vowel, the indistinct and indefinite "schwa" sound. The full feminine vowel can easily be interpreted as more "marked" than the reduced masculine schwa.

Such superadded distinctness, properties, or syllables, of course, could represent something either positive or negative -- femaleness could be either more valuable or less valuable than humanity in general. Or the property could be just salient and distinguishing, without being relatively more or less valuable. Feminists argue in effect that the feminine as the more "marked" gender is the less human gender. This is ridiculous, like arguing that prime numbers are less "numerical" than other numbers. It actually means that the gender system of English is just as amenable to a feminist interpretation that it reflects a primaeval matriarchy as it is to the interpretation of Old Testament patriarchy, with the feminine, like prime numbers, as the more significant, rather than the more common, gender. Since the gender systems of Indo-European and Afro-Asiatic languages certainly go back to the prehistoric periods where speculation about matriarchies proliferates, it is surprising that such an alternative interpretation has not been advanced by such theorists.

The actual positive markedness of the feminine gender could be argued on the basis of the gender systems of Greek and Latin, which display a general characteristic of complete Indo-European gender systems: the most common regular nouns display endings that are mostly identical for the masculine and neuter genders (o- themes in Greek, like ho oiko, "the house," masculine, and tò biblion, "the book," neuter) but quite different for the feminine (e- themes in Greek, like hē epistolē, "the letter"). We might interpret this to mean that things with masculine gender are the most like inanimate objects, while things with feminine gender are unmistakably different from inanimate objects. This could mean that the feminine is more markedly human than the masculine. The similarity between the endings of masculine and neuter nouns still occurs in German. On the other hand, other noun endings in Greek and Latin (consonant stems, etc.) do group masculine and feminine together, contrasting them with the neuter, so there is
also obviously a sense that both masculine and feminine actually are animate or human.

A gender system that distinguishes femaleness as having a salient property, whether positive, negative, or neither, might still be regarded as a kind of sexism, whichever way the property goes; but it is a rather different matter from the usual feminist complaint about the patriarchal conception that we find all the way from Genesis to Aristotle to Freud: that the male is more "marked" and valuable because of the presence of a phallus, while the female is less "marked" and valuable, indeed envious, because of the absence of a phallus. It looks to be essential to the feminist theory of "sexist language" that a gender system where the masculine gender doubles as the common gender causes or reinforces "phallocentrism" and a patriarchal society. The feminine as merely the more "marked" gender, however, makes that unlikely.

But all this as a theory can actually be tested: We would expect that if linguistic gender were a correlate of social form, an engine for the enforcement of patriarchy or a reflection of the existence of patriarchy, then we would find it present in sexist or patriarchal societies and absent in non-sexist or non-patriarchal societies. In fact, the presence of gender in language bears no relation whatsoever to the nature of the corresponding societies. The best historically conspicuous example is Persian.

Old Persian, like Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, had the original Indo-European genders of masculine, feminine, and neuter. By Middle Persian all gender had disappeared. This was not the result of Persian feminist criticism, nor was it the result of the evolution of an equal opportunity society for women. It just happened -- as most kinds of linguistic change do. Modern Persian is a language completely without gender. There are not even different words for "he" and "she," just the unisex un. (There are not even different titles for married and unmarried women: Persian khānum can be translated as "Ms.") Nevertheless, after some progress under Western influence, the Revolutionary Iran of the Ayatollah Khomeini retreated from the modern world into a vigorous reestablishment of mediaevalism, putting everyone, especially women, back into their traditional places. So the advice could be: If someone wants "non-sexist language,"

move to Iran. But that probably would not be quite what they have in mind.

Why didn't the "gender free" Persian language create a feminist utopia? This goes to show us that gender in language is completely irrelevant to the sexual openness of society. And one of the greatest ironies for us is that a feminist attempt to produce a gender free "non-sexist language" in English could only be contemplated in the first place because grammatical gender has already all but disappeared from English. Feminist complaints must focus on the meaning of words like "man," even though words can mean anything by convention, because the pronouns "he," "she," and "it" are all that remain grammatically of the three Indo-European genders. Getting gender to disappear in German or French or Spanish (etc.), on the other hand, would be a hopeless project without completely altering the structure of the languages [note]. Occasionally feminists say that they are personally offended by people referring to ships or aircraft as "she," and manuals of "non-sexist" language usually require that inanimate objects be "it" without exception. Good luck in French. Since every noun is either masculine or feminine, not only would this feature have to be abolished, but an entirely new gender, the neuter, presumably with new pronouns, would have to be created. Then there would have to be decisions about words like livre, which is differentiated into two words by gender alone: le livre is "book," from Latin liber, while la livre is "pound," from Latin libra. French doesn't even have English's happy refuge from inclusive "he" in "they," since you still have to decide in the third person plural between ils and elles. Only on ("one") allows for a gender free (or common gender) pronoun, just as "one" does in English.

It is now hard for people to quote Aristotle's famous dictum, "Man is a rational animal," without gratuitously adding that this is a "sexist" remark because, presumably, Aristotle didn't say "human beings" (e.g. p.109 of the otherwise good Against Relativism, by James E. Harris [Open Court, 1992]). This goes to show the silliness of this whole kind of exercise and the willful know-nothing-ism of many writers when it comes to linguistic history. Even if we think that English "man" is "sexist," Aristotle was, of course, not speaking English. And in contrast with English, Greek and Latin both "mark" the male as well as
the female in their vocabulary: anēr in Greek and vir in Latin both mean "man=male"; gynē in Greek and femina in Latin both mean "woman"; and ānthrōpos in Greek and homo in Latin both mean "man=person." Aristotle said "ānthrōpos," not "anēr; and Classics scholars are usually happy to point out the inclusiveness of the former term. However, ānthrōpos and homo are both in the masculine gender. Since Greek and Latin are languages where every noun has gender, like French, Hebrew, etc., there is actually no grammatically "gender neutral" expression possible, as there is in English. So was Aristotle sexist after all? If so, then we are still using a sexist expression in "human beings" because "human" is from homo, which had masculine gender to start with.

I often notice this kind of tangle over languages with much more complete gender systems than English since the politically correct term for people of Hispanic derivation or identity these days is "Latino," which is of the masculine grammatical gender but of course embraces both men and women. The feminine term "Latina" is never used unless only women are referred to. That sounds like it should make for a cause célèbre in the non-sexist language world, but of course no feminist would want to be labeled ethnocentric or culturally imperialist by applying their critique of English to Spanish. And then, unlike French, where gender specific word endings have been lost, Spanish still has a lot of nouns whose gender can be predicted from this of a alternation of endings. A non-sexist Spanish presumably would have to pick some other vowel, or none, to replace these fossil Latin endings. And while some activists seem to have lately begun using the expression "Latino/Latina" more carefully, they are unlikely to be amenable to "reforming" the morphology of Spanish so that it would be as gender free as, of all things, English.

To reform a natural language like that, we would have to set up some political authority to decide what changes to make and then spend many decades coercing people into following the preferred forms: all to produce something that often happens spontaneously anyway, has progressed almost completely to the loss of gender in English already, and never in the past with the slightest effect on the structure of society. So why bother with all the grief and recriminations of trying to impose a feminist New Speak? But perhaps that is the point. All the
grief gives ideologues something else with which to browbeat people and a completely phony issue through which to claim political authority over how people speak, in all innocence and good will, in natural languages. It can even translate into the introduction of virtual political commissars, often with punitive powers, into schools, workplaces, churches, etc. to monitor incorrect speech. And that is the kind of power that ideologues like.

But the conceptual error underlying this kind of thing didn't originate with feminism; it is the heritage of once popular but now discreditable theories about the nature of language -- that how we talk determines how we think (to paraphrase something the semanticist S.I. Hayakawa actually said -- a kind of linguistic behaviorism) and that the structure of language creates the structure of the world (promoted by the philosopher Wittgenstein and his recent followers). If we talk with grammatical gender, so this goes, then this determines not only that we think in exactly the same way but that the grammatical structure is projected into the world.

In fact, as the counterexamples indicate, such linguistic structures as gender determine little about thought and nothing about the world. Grammar is usually just grammar, nothing else. It is used to express meaning -- it does not determine meaning. But the most significant assumption and the greatest hybris in the theory of "sexist language" is just that language and linguistic change are controllable, and so can be controlled by us, if we wish to. But language is not anything that can be planned or controlled. Languages grow and change spontaneously. The kind of theory that properly can describe the development of language is one that credits events with the capacity for developing spontaneous natural order. Theorists of such order range from the great naturalist Charles Darwin, to the great economist F.A. Hayek, and to the great philosopher Karl Popper.

Those who traditionally have wanted to control linguistic usage for one reason or another, and who believe that it can be controlled, are always ultimately frustrated. Literary or sacred languages can preserve ancient or elevated usages -- as with ancient Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic, Sanskrit, Chinese, etc. -- but real spoken language goes off on its own merry way, exuberantly evolving new meanings, words, usages, and even new languages, always to the chagrin of the priests,
scholars, and traditionalists. Nobody ever plans that. As feminism has wanted to control, mainly to abolish, the use of gender, it thus puts itself into the pinched shoes of the traditional grammatical martinet -- leaving us with the image of a fussy schoolmarm swatting knuckles with a ruler rather than of the heroic revolutionary woman leading the way to a better future.

In the end, gender, in any language, is just an expression of the affinity of our understanding for logical divisions and hierarchies; and since logical divisions and hierarchies are essential to thought, the principle of eradicating gender (or "hierarchy") is absurd. Even if the feminine gender is usually more "marked" than the masculine, this can really mean anything, depending, indeed, on what we intend to mean. Instead of gender systems compelling patriarchy or, obviously, matriarchy, the whole idea of sexual equality was conceived in languages (English, French, German) with strong or remnant gender structures, while other languages with gender structures (Sanskrit, Arabic, Swahili) or without (Persian, Chinese, Malay) produced nothing of the sort. Serious intellectual dispute on any issue always must focus on what the speaker means by what is said, not on theories about how it is said compels certain unintended meanings, especially when such theories are clearly mere features of certain political and ideological systems of interpretation.

Note: I have heard claims recently (Spring 1998) that both Spanish and Hebrew actually do have a neuter gender. My informants, relating what they had heard from others (e.g. teachers, a rabbi), were unable to say how. Such claims may reflect efforts to bend the facts so as to render languages like Spanish and Hebrew politically correct. The response, of course, should be, "What is the pronoun?" Since gender is part of the grammatical system of a language, it is reflected in the pronouns. Until Spanish and Hebrew have a neuter pronoun (and, for Spanish, a neuter article -- other than "el" and "la"), they do not have a neuter gender. The meaning of words is irrelevant. Their grammatical gender is revealed by their inflection, the inflection of modifying words, or by the pronouns or articles used with them.

Rules of Thumb

By Abe Haim (with extensive quotations)

At one point or another, we’ve probably all heard the story which alludes that the phrase “rule of thumb” originated in a law that allowed men to beat their wives – provided that the rod was no larger than their thumb. It’s likely a majority of you reading this now still think it’s true (or at least you did before reading this). Even I believed it at one point, first hearing the tale around ’98 as I recall. But as this article will show, that etymology is completely, 100% false. This has been proven for quite some time now, but the urban-legend continues to circulate – particularly in feminist circles.

So what affect does this urban legend have? For one, it has started to deprive the English language of one of its best classic folk expressions. More importantly though, its implications give a very distorted view of history. I remember when I first heard the story and I was like “Wow, wife-beating was such a common and celebrated part of our culture as to be the name-sake for such a popular phrase!” It conjured up an image in my mind of a group of men hanging out and talking about how much they loved to beat their wives. They joke around and compare notes, talking about what worked best for the floggings. One of them remarks that the stick should be big enough to let her know who’s boss, but small enough that she wouldn’t be too injured to give him lots of sex and good strong sons. “It shouldn’t be any bigger than your thumb” he adds, “I call this the ‘rule of thumb.’” And so the phrase caught on, to be used by similar such groups of men for many years in everyday conversation, eventually being used as a rule for other situations...

The only problem is, that this never happened. Christina Hoff Sommers thoroughly refuted the “rule of thumb” legend in her 1994 book Who Stole Feminism. Since then, other scholars and commentators have followed suit. As Cecil Adams of “The Straight Dope” (see: http://www.straightdope.com/columns/q000512.html) reports, “Wife beating has never been legal in the U.S. The Massachusetts Bay Colony prohibited it in 1655, religious groups campaigned against it, and vigilantes occasionally horsewhipped men accused of it. Most states had explicitly outlawed it by 1870.”

As for English Common Law permitting it, as feminists allege, this may have happened many centuries ago but had already changed long before any movement known as feminism came about. Mr. Adams, quoting William Blackstone, who codified E.C.L. in his 1765 Commentaries on the Laws of England, reports:

“…The husband also, by the old law, might give his wife moderate correction … in the same moderation that a man is allowed to correct his apprentices or children. … But with us, in the politer reign of Charles the Second [1660-’85], this power of correction began to be doubted; and a wife may now have security of the peace against her husband.’ In other words, once upon a time in olde England, a man could beat his wife. But don’t try it now.”

In the same century as blackstone, a British Judge was apparently still swayed by the old traditions. Micheal Quinion of “World Wide Words” (See: http://www.worldwidewords.org/qa/qa-rull.htm), citing the work of his colleague Sharon Fenick, reports:

“Ms Fenick traced the idea back to a pronouncement that was supposed to have been made in 1782 by a British judge, Sir Francis Buller; this led to a fiercely satirical cartoon by James Gillray that was published on 27 November that year, in which Buller was caricatured as Judge Thumb.”

So we see that even in 1782, well before the 19th century feminist movement, a judge who condoned violence against women was mocked and ridiculed!

That “old law” has been cited by a couple judges more recently, as feminists point to, but in each case they reaffirmed Blackstone’s rejection of it. As Cecil Adams puts it:
The old permissive approach wasn’t entirely forgotten, however. It was cited in two court rulings, one in Mississippi in 1824, the other in North Carolina in 1874. Both judges referred to an "ancient law" by which a man was allowed to beat his wife with a stick provided it was no wider than his thumb. Where the judges came up with the thumb angle I don’t know; as I say, it is not found in Blackstone. At any rate, both judges rejected the principle—each found the husband guilty in the wife-beating case he was adjudicating. And neither referred to the old law as the rule of thumb.”

Getting back to the actual origin of the phrase itself, Micheal Quinion again proves helpful, “The expression rule of thumb has been recorded since 1692 and probably wasn’t new then. It meant then what it means now—some method or procedure that comes from practice or experience, without any formal basis.”

He also informs us that the “rule” of thumb has its roots in our traditional system of measurement, which, unlike the more modern and technical metric system, is based on everyday things like body parts. Moreover, the “rule of thumb” was no more a governmental law than the “slide-rule:”

“It’s most likely that the saying comes from the length of the first joint of the thumb, which is about an inch (I remember once seeing a carpenter actually make a rough measurement this way). So the phrase rule of thumb uses the word rule in the sense of ruler, not regulation, and directly refers to this method of measurement.”

This argument is particularly compelling when you consider that in almost every European language the words for “thumb” and “inch” are either very similar or identical. Here are some examples: Norwegian: “tommelfinger,” “tomme,” Dutch: “duim,” “duim,” Italian: “il pollice,” “il pollice,” French: “le pouce,” “le pouce,” and Spanish: “el pulgar,” “la pulgada.” So while people may have used thumbs to measure the sticks they used to beat their wives, they also used them to measure everything else. That measurements based on thumbs were at one point used for nefarious purposes is no more an indictment against thumbs (or rules of thumb) than all the people killed with nine millimeter pistols is an indictment against the metric system.

Ms. Sommers was able to track down the exact moment that the foundation for the “rule of thumb” myth was layed. It came from a press release by Del Martin, coordinator of the NOW Task Force on Battered Women. Adams quotes the original statement:

“‘Our law, based upon the old English common-law doctrines, explicitly permitted wife-beating for correctional purposes. However, certain restrictions did exist... For instance, the common-law doctrine had been modified to allow the husband ‘the right to whip his wife, provided that he used a switch no bigger than his thumb’ -- a rule of thumb, so to speak.’”

Though Ms. Martin clearly misinterpreted American legal history, it’s crucial to note that this feminist herself never claimed that the phrase “rule of thumb” originated in wife-beating -- she was merely making a play on words. It was only through others’ misinterpretation of her statement that the false etymology came about. It is certainly quite possible that somebody, at some (prior) point in time, may have used the phrase “rule of thumb” in reference to wife-beating, but nobody that I’m aware of has been able to find any pre-’76 use of the phrase in that context. As Michelson notes:

“[I]t was only in 1976, so far as I can discover, that the traditional phrase rule of thumb became directly associated with this spurious legal maxim, through a bit of wordplay in a report that was misunderstood by readers.”

So, as we’ve seen, domestic violence has long been both outlawed and frowned upon by our society. In the past, it may have all too often not been taken seriously enough. It may have been considered a private matter that others would gossip about but not intervene. And that was certainly a bad thing, but it’s very different from the “rule of thumb” myth and its implications.

Now that I’ve reclaimed this great phrase, I’d like to put it to good use by advising my readers that it would be a good rule of thumb to take any shocking revelations you might hear from feminists with a grain of salt and check the facts yourself!
It's too expensive to be a family MAN!

I am a WOMYN. But what does it matter in today's patriarchal society? All I can be is a good wife, and a good mother. What options do I really have? My husband won't even listen to my opinions. So I smile and hope... The camera flashes for a fee. I hope I look pretty...

NEXT:
raise the stakes...