

# Is Male Protectiveness Sexist?

## On Gender Distinctions

A February 2001 article published in *The American Psychologist* critiqued the traditionalist view of the man as head of the household and family protector.

Joseph and Linda Ames Nicolosi submitted the following Commentary to the journal.

In your lead article of the last issue of the *American Psychologist*,<sup>(1)</sup> the authors criticize the "benevolent sexism" and "chivalrous ideology" in a marriage where the husband serves as the protector and provider.

Given that the authors' radical feminist view is at odds with the traditional view of our society, it is surprising indeed that there is so little resistance to it. We see little objection—in this journal or others—to the relentless deconstruction of the traditional family, and to the related assumption that children do just as well, *if not better*, in nontraditional families.

Perhaps this view is so prevalent in intellectual circles because we Americans love democracy so much—along with its cherished individualism and equality—that we easily tend to slip down the slippery slope into radical egalitarianism. Radical egalitarianism, some philosophers have noted, leads to a denial of the foundational social distinctions of gender, generation, and hierarchy.<sup>(2)</sup>

But when gender distinctions are denied, and the subtle, hierarchical distinctions of traditional marriage are deemed merely laughable, there is reason for concern for the continuation of the foundational institution of marriage, upon which democracy itself depends.

As Stanley Kurtz of the Hudson Institute has noted,<sup>(3)</sup> the success of marriage actually seems to depend on gender distinctions—particularly, the innate complementarity of the sexes, although "even to mention it [complementarity] these days is to invite ridicule." Male-female physical and emotional complementarity is, Kurtz astutely observes, biologically-based and thus "not about to disappear." Women help to domesticate the man's typically more aggressive, sexual and risk-taking nature.

Innate gender differences may help to explain why gay male relationships, for example, in contrast to heterosexual marriage, characteristically turn out to be "open," while lesbian relationships are more often socially exclusive and tend to be possessive. Neither of the latter two types of relationships possesses the strength inherent in gender complementarity.

Does a man's protectiveness toward his family translate into anything like "sexism," or worse, a form of despotism? Perhaps quite the opposite; in fact, one very important factor that works in favor of marriage, as Kurtz notes, is a man's sense that his home is his "castle" and he its

"king." Even so, the reality, he observes, is that "a rough sort of equality" exists in the way a husband-wife relationship actually plays out. But still, "what the Promise Keepers has the audacity to say out loud about a man's authority within the marriage bond remains, in subtler form, the formula of heterosexual marital success."

Nevertheless, the authors of the *American Psychologist* article would obliterate gender distinctions and even subtle forms of hierarchy, while the distinction between the generations is now also slowly deteriorating. And so we also see arguments now being made in favor of "inter-generational intimacy"—a euphemism for man-boy sex—which are published on a regular basis in the *Journal of Homosexuality*. That journal deconstructs generational distinctions by arguing that children are an oppressed minority who possess a natural right to their sexual autonomy.

The next frontier for deconstructionists is the obliteration of the distinction between human and animal—a project of the animal-rights movement.

Where, we are asking, is the intellectual resistance to these movements? Other than within journals of religion and public policy like *First Things* and *Commentary*, its intellectual opponents have largely fallen silent.

Some of this silence can be attributed to the powerful "censoring role" of the media which prefers to promote its favorite causes; some, we believe, to the fact that a small group of deeply committed ideologues (particularly, radical feminists and gay activists) can impose social and career costs on their ideological adversaries.

"But one also senses," says Kurtz (and we agree), "that the silencing of the majority would never have been possible were the majority itself more certain of its ground."

### Endnotes

(1) "An Ambivalent Alliance: Hostile and Benevolent Sexism as Complementary Justifications for Gender Inequality," *The American Psychologist*, February 2001, p. 3.

(2) Weaver, Richard, *Ideas Have Consequences*. Chicago, Ill.: U. of Chicago Press, 1948.

(3) Kurtz, Stanley, "What is Wrong with Gay Marriage," *Commentary*, September 2000, pp. 35-41. ■