

## Real Men

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"Ah, for the good old days, when men were men and women were women." Men who express such sentiments long for the world where homosexuals were ensconced in their closets and women were sexy, demure, and subservient. That is a world well lost -- though not as lost as I would like. More than a few men still practice misogyny and homophobia. The defects of such attitudes are obvious. My concern here is not to document these defects but to ask how real men, men who reject stereotypical male-female roles -- men who are sensitive to the insights of feminism -- should relate with women. In particular, how should men and women relate in intimate, sexually oriented, i.e., "romantic," relationships.

### The problem of relationships

Intimate (close personal) relationships are relationships in which each person relates to the other as a unique individual whose interests she wishes to promote. Such relationships are exemplified by care, trust, sensitivity, and mutual support. In the best of circumstances, intimacy is difficult to establish and arduous to maintain. Even when we have the noblest of intentions, we often despoil our closest relationships. We know that from experience. The task of the philosopher is to explain why this is so, hoping thereby that we can learn how to overcome these difficulties.

Relationships falter for any number of reasons. For instance, intimate relationships can be neither established nor maintained unless

the partners know and trust one another. Unless they know each other, they cannot promote each other's needs. Unless they trust each other, their fear of being hurt will circumscribe communication. Moreover, their interests -- although they need not be identical -- must be sufficiently overlapping so neither continuous conflict nor absolute acquiescence is inevitable.

Even when two people know, love and trust one another and have reasonably similar interests, external conditions can undermine intimacy. Job pressures, family illness or difficulties with children make regular and sustained conversations between partners difficult. Without intimate communication to nourish them, they will grow apart. Small troubles evolve into big problems. Big problems become insurmountable hurdles. Relationships are dashed on the rocks of miscommunication and misunderstanding.

Other relationships suffer because the partners are so desirous of intimacy that they squelch their own interests. For instance, Joan may strive to make Betty happy, even if she (Joan) is thereby unhappy. In and of itself there is nothing wrong with Joan's behavior. Altruism of some form must infuse every successful relationship. But it is far too easy for well-intentioned altruism to run amuck, particularly between partners who are not honest with one another. Each may accommodate to the other so often that she becomes angry. Each may accommodate so often that she does not know what she really wants.

These are substantial hurdles for anyone wishing to establish or preserve an intimate relationship. But these are especially problematic for a man and a woman -- and perhaps even more so for a man and a woman engaged in a romantic relationship. We are products of a pervasively sexist culture. The sexism in which we were all acculturated is especially difficult to escape. It permeates our society. It pervades our attitudes. It haunts and -- if allowed to run wild -- devours our heterosexual relationships.

If the sexist culture had merely erected legal obstacles to equality, the battle against sexism would be relatively easy. Legal obstacles, being visible, can be attacked. The women's movement has made considerable effort to remove the most onerous legal barriers to equality. They have had considerable success.<sup>1</sup>

The primary engines of sexism, however, are veiled sub-conscious forces. The dominant culture promulgates sexist stereotypes which pervade television, movies, books and music. These embody well-defined gender roles which infuse the relationships children see at home, at school, and when visiting their friends. They establish expectations to which all of us are subject, images to which all of us respond -- to some degree or another. They shape our desires, interests and perspectives, thereby making informed, unbiased choice difficult, if not impossible.

For instance, as men we are encouraged to be determined, strong

and perhaps even aggressive. We are taught to be interested in math and science, to crave success, to be competitive. We are discouraged from developing interests or personality traits which are deemed "feminine," e.g., an interest in children or a tendency to cry. Conversely, women are taught to fear math, to enjoy literature and art. They are encouraged to be giving, supportive, soft, maternal, and, if need be, subservient.

Of course not every man and woman were shaped in precisely these ways or to this extent. But even children reared in relatively liberated non-sexist homes are shaped, at least in part, by these dominant cultural stereotypes. The effects of such shaping cannot be obliterated. Those of us reared in a pervasively sexist culture will never be entirely free from those early influences. Even those of us sensitive to the insights of feminism will still hear sexist voices from the past. They inevitably modulate our interpersonal interactions, even as we seek to free ourselves from their influence.

Consider. Trust is important in intimate relationships. Trust involves, among other things, trusting that your partner will not intentionally harm you or your interests. Such trust requires vulnerability: I cannot trust you unless I am willing to be vulnerable with you -- unless I am willing to put myself in a position where you can harm my interests.

The influences of our sexist culture make trust difficult for most men. We can "trust" our bankers and we can "trust" our colleagues: we are good at institutionalized, impersonal trust. However, our fear of being really vulnerable, of personally trusting another, has often made close relationships difficult. The cardinal sin for men is to be weak, vulnerable. We are supposed to be made of iron, spartans all. We were told we must know what to do, or, short of that, to act as if we did, since must be "kings in our castles." We may occasionally be weak with our spouses; that is acceptable. But such weakness must be contained; most assuredly it must not be public. In short, men dominated by these standard images of masculinity cannot establish as close a relationship as can those who are willing to be vulnerable.

Even those of us who are relatively free of these images, those of us who are willing to be emotional, to cry, to be vulnerable, are not free of our sexist upbringing. We often find -- at the most inopportune times -- that our father's urgings "to be strong" dominate the more informed voices that tell us to be vulnerable, to be a human being. Sexism harms men as well as women. It makes genuine, intimate, and fulfilling heterosexual relationships exceedingly difficult -- as if they were not difficult enough on their own.

Or suppose you and I have a long-term relationship. At some point in our lives, I become dissatisfied with my job; I want to seek employment elsewhere. You, on the other hand, are pleased with your

employer and are convinced you will have difficulty finding similarly rewarding employment in the towns to which I wish to move.

Obviously there are any number of considerations we might think relevant. If we are especially concerned about financial security, perhaps we will consider the options which have the highest combined salary. Or we might concern ourselves with issues of "fairness" -- you have had a job you liked for ten years, now it is my turn to have a job I like. Perhaps we might look at other amenities of the respective communities: the type of neighborhood in which we can raise our children, the climate, the nature of the public schools or the proximity to ailing parents.

Regardless of what considerations we bring to bear, our final decision will be shaped by our desires, interests, and attitudes, and these were formed by the sexist culture in which we grew up and currently live -- a culture not of our choosing. Consciously or unconsciously I may expect you to be willing, if not eager, to move. I may be uncomfortable baldly asserting that my male interests are superior. I may be uncomfortable even entertaining such thoughts -- after all, I am supposedly liberated. So perhaps I find, instead, some way to rationalize my choice. You, on the other hand, may want to remain with your current employer, but the visions of a dutiful spouse standing by her man may lead you to suppress your interests and to acquiesce. Perhaps neither of us will succumb to these urges, but they are likely operative, even if in attenuated form. And, although they do not dictate the outcome of our deliberations, they will likely effect it.

These urges -- what I like to think of as an internal gender police -- will likewise influence our decisions about child care. Suppose we decide (perhaps on good medical grounds) to breast feed our infant. You will inevitably be required to take additional responsibility for child care, at least for the first six months. It may then be all too easy for us to use this as an excuse for letting you continue to be the primary care giver once the child has been weaned -- after all, our upbringing has likely "convinced" us, albeit subconsciously, that this is the way it should be since, after all, you are better with children.

### Escaping the sexist culture

If both of us wish to minimize detrimental effects of social conditioning, we must be especially attuned to the influence our upbringing exerts over us. Then we must contain those influences. That is easier said than done. For, *ex hypothesi* the sexist culture shaped not only our first order desires, for example, the desire to be a successful professional or to play football, but also our second order desires and abilities: our values and our ability to reason. These

second order desires govern how we evaluate and subsequently modify our first order desires. They thereby influence the contour of the people we become.

If we wish to free ourselves from these culturally induced desires, we must first identify them. That is difficult since they are amorphous, indefinite. To the extent that we can identify them, we can do so only after careful and sustained self-examination. Consequently, we cannot easily excise them nor restrain their undesirable effects.

The difficulty of identifying and controlling these impulses has led some women to separate themselves from the sexist culture.<sup>2</sup> Separatists think that only by starting a new culture -- constituted by new ideas, new beliefs, and new ways of relating -- can they escape the mental bonds with which the sexist culture has shackled us. It is easy to see why separatists might come to this conclusion.

I am inclined to believe, however, that we cannot escape the power of the culture by separating ourselves from it. The same forces which control those of us who remain, will operate on those who leave. Since the culture perpetuates itself by shaping desires, values and attitudes, removing ourselves from the culture after these have been formed will not free us from their sway. Being physically removed from the dominant culture may even make it more difficult to identify and control these forces. Consider, for instance, an individual reared in a pervasively racist culture. Merely moving to an area of the country devoid of overt racists will not purge her of racist sentiments, although it may remove her from circumstances which elicit them. The best way to eradicate racism and sexism is to transform the dominant culture which formed and sustains them.

Perhaps, though, the separatists are correct. Perhaps we can change the dominant culture only by disengaging from it. But I would like to think them mistaken. Some of us men deeply want intimate relationships with women and would suffer a substantial loss were such relationships impossible. Some of us think women have a perspective and emotional maturity from which we can learn a great deal. Some of us sexually prefer women. It is not that we think homosexuality or bisexuality wrong, immoral, or inferior. Rather we are sexually attracted to women and think it would be more effort than it is worth to try to change our orientation. Needless to say, I cannot discuss separatism in any detail here. Consequently, I will assume for the remainder of the paper that separatism is not the only way to cope with the influences of our sexist culture. I will further assume that non-sexist male-female romantic relationships are possible, albeit difficult.

We return to the original question: how do we establish intimate heterosexual relationships within a sexist culture without succumbing to that culture's detrimental influences? We cannot immediately destroy the culture's power, nor can we eradicate its influence. We can,

however, contain that influence, control its most detrimental effects.<sup>3</sup> However deciding that we should rid ourselves of our sexist baggage is just the first step. We must also find a strategy for doing so. There is no algorithm for freeing ourselves from sexist stereotypes, no potion we can take to make us immune to this devastating mental virus. Yet we must find ways to control its symptoms if we wish to establish genuinely intimate relationships.

### Equity

Women who choose to remain in the dominant culture, yet wish free themselves of its sexist influence, may resort to the powerful moral tools of rights, obligations, and equality. It is easy to see why. For millennia women were systematically deprived of rights and legal standing. They could not vote, hold personal property, earn a fair wage, hold public office or serve on a jury. The women's movement has fought to gain legal recognition for women by asserting that women had rights to social and political goods. That is exactly what women's advocates should have done. Rights are the appropriate medium of exchange within the impersonal political arena.

Given the power of rights to battle injustice and mistreatment within the political arena, women are naturally inclined to appeal to rights and equity to battle mistreatment in personal relationships. All too often women do the bulk of the work around the house, care for the children, etc. Even when some male partners do an equal portion of the work, that is sufficiently unusual to be worthy of comment. Such men are said to be "helping" their mates -- which assumes, of course, that house work and child care are women's responsibility, work in which these great-hearted men shares. Despite some positive changes in the treatment of women, this still captures standard practice within most households in the United States.

If I were a woman, I would be ticked off. Men should carry their share of housework. Something is fundamentally wrong if they don't. The question is: how should men understand and describe our responsibilities? Do we have an obligation to do an equal portion of the work? Do our partners have rights which we violate if we don't? It is tempting to say that we each have a right not to have to carry more than our "fair share" of the load. However, that, I think, is a grave mistake. Although talk of rights and equity is appropriate within the political domain, it is an anathema to personal relationships.

Traditional wisdom says otherwise; it holds that successful personal relationships must be equitable. However, a growing minority of psychologists disagree. In a series of studies Margaret Clark found that although people expect equity in impersonal (exchange or trade) rela-

tionships, they do not expect it in personal (what she calls "communal") relationships.<sup>4</sup> Within exchange relationships, she claims, we are expected to benefit those who have benefitted us. Such relationships continue only as long as each reciprocally benefits the other. For instance, an employer and employee exchange money for labor. As long as each receives what she or he considers fair, the relationship will likely continue.

Within close personal relationships, however, people are expected to respond to each other's needs – not to reciprocate benefits. More strongly, they are expected to not reciprocate benefits. For instance, if I try to return a benefit from someone with whom I have a communal relationship, I may thereby destroy the relationship -- even though I would be acting exactly as expected had I been in an exchange relationship.

Moreover, we must remember that the studies which suggest that equity is important for interpersonal relationships are correlative: people claim to be satisfied in relationships they deem equitable; dissatisfied in those that aren't. That may well be true. However, that does not show that people are satisfied because the relationship is equitable. It may well be that they deem it equitable because they are satisfied. Perhaps many people in close relationships never consciously consider if theirs is equitable, although, if asked, they surmise that it must be since they are satisfied. Conversely, if one partner is dissatisfied, she will likely seek the cause of the dissatisfaction. In the current ideological environment, being exploited seems a plausible candidate.

Even if this does not account for all of the correlation -- even if we grant that perceived inequity will lead to relationship dissatisfaction – there are two divergent explanations of why this is so. According to the first, an individual enters personal relationships in order to obtain specified benefits from the other but is also willing to give in return: that is, she wants an equitable exchange. When or if the exchange is no longer equitable -- when the relationship ceases to be a good bargain -- she is dissatisfied.

According to the second interpretation -- which I endorse -- people enter close personal relationships not in search of a good bargain but a good friend. Both partners expect to promote their intimate's interests, to respond to her needs. Nonetheless, given each person's belief that intimates respond to the needs of people for whom they care, it is not surprising if each expects something approximating equity.

Let me explain. We are in a relationship. You have settled views about how intimates should treat each other, namely, that neither person will take advantage of her intimate; moreover, you expect each will spontaneously satisfy one other's needs. Finally, you plausibly assume that any two people will have roughly equivalent needs and roughly equivalent abilities to satisfy another's needs.

Given these beliefs, you would reasonably expect that you and your partner will benefit and give roughly the same. Now suppose the relationship is notably inequitable, that is, that you have contributed much and received little. You will understandably infer that I do not really love you. Equity is the likely result of a close relationship. It is not the relationship's goal.

Still others have argued not that successful relationships are equitable, but that they should be. On this view, inequitable relationships are not merely unsatisfying (though usually they are); rather, they are unjust. People who take advantage of their intimates have acted unjustly or immorally, they have wronged or violated the rights of their intimates.<sup>5</sup> At one level this claim seems eminently reasonable, even indisputable. If Jeff lets Patty carry a full time job, do all of the housework, completely care for the children, while he spends his evenings watching television and his weekends golfing, then Jeff has wronged Patty. What more can be said? As it turns out, a great deal.

Doubtless one partner's behavior in a "personal" relationship may be so exploitative that we can only conclude that she has acted unjustly. On this point most people will agree. That does not show, however, that close relationships are best evaluated by standards of justice or by an appeal to rights. Rather, we should conclude that such relationships are properly evaluated by criteria of justice precisely because they are no longer close or personal. If one person regularly ignores the interests of the other, the relationship is not, properly speaking, intimate. It may have trappings of close relationships: the people may spend time together or even live together. They may have fond things to say about each other. However, these trappings in an abusive relationship are not the hallmarks of intimacy but of mere familiarity.

Let's look at the flip side of the issue. Even if rights managed to protect us from gross abuse from our intimates, they would still fail to provide what we want and expect from intimates. Rights are both too stringent and too lenient. Rights are too stringent because our friends have a license to treat us in ways we would not tolerate from strangers. Close friends may borrow from us without asking; in fact, we expect them to do so. A close friend, for instance, may enter my office in the evening to borrow a book; I would feel free to do likewise. Or, a friend may plausibly expect me to help her cope with personal trauma, even though the cost to me might be substantial; I would expect her to do the same. Or a depressed friend might become angry at me in ways I would not tolerate from a stranger. I assume I could do likewise. That is just what we expect from our good friends.<sup>6</sup> In these cases talk of rights is simply out of place. It does not capture the nature of the relationship. A friend who borrows a book without asking has not violated my property rights; nor have I waived my rights. A friend who

interrupts me to talk about her problems has not invaded my privacy; she has done what I would have expected.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, we have higher expectations of our intimates than of strangers. We expect our intimates to care. That rights cannot provide. If I have a right, it is merely a claim that others accord me some minimal level of decent treatment. I do not have a right that others care for me or trust me or love me.

Additionally we also expect our intimates to have "better" motives than strangers. We expect strangers to respect our rights and to fulfill their obligations to us. We expect them, for example, not to steal our property (or to steal anyone else's, for that matter) or hit us over the head or kill us. But we will not settle for abstract respect from our friends; we want personal affirmation and affection.

Imagine how repugnant it would be to have a spouse or friend who merely respected us. Consider, "Don't worry, honey, I will fulfill my conjugal duties to you even though I do not want to." Or, "Sure we will talk this evening; I realize I am obliged to do so." Such behavior makes a mockery of the relationship. We do not want our friends motivated by a sense of justice, but by the desire to be with us, to talk with us, to care for us and to promote our interests.<sup>8</sup>

Of course sometimes the fact that you love someone and desire to satisfy their interests may lead you to do something you do not, for other reasons, particularly want to do at that moment. Patty may not want to listen to Jeff's problems right now. But she may do so because she loves him. That is rather different, however, from listening to him because she is obliged to do so. Of course intimates may occasionally be motivated by a sense of duty; perhaps that is unavoidable. But duty should not become relationship's staple. If it does, our relationship is transformed from a close relationship into an exchange relationship. And an exchange relationship, no matter how good, can never satisfy our longing for love and personal affirmation which an intimate relationship provides.

Nonetheless, someone might say, considerations of justice must be operative in the background of personal relationships, even if they are not invoked or explicitly considered. That is true, in one sense, namely, that people might appeal to considerations of justice when the relationship is seriously inequitable. But that does not show that those considerations are operative in well-functioning relationships; still less does it show that they should be.

In fact, I think that appealing to or even conceiving of our personal relationships in terms of rights is to misconstrue them and will likely subvert them. If we begin to construe our personal relationships in terms of justice or rights we will see our partner's interests as limitations on us (as we would in impersonal relationships) rather than as interests we wish to promote (as we should in personal relationships).

Rights talk is intended to govern interactions between strangers, between people who do not care for each other and who may even be in overt conflict. Thus, Patty's right to property limits Jeff's ability to use that property, even if he wants or needs it. Jeff's right to life limits Patty's options; Patty cannot swing her new bat in an area occupied by Jeff's head. Rights tell us what we cannot do to each other. They thereby emphasize -- or create -- distance between us. Consequently, if in our personal relationships we begin to think in terms of rights, we begin to think about the other as putting limitations on us. We begin to ask: "What must I do for my intimate?" rather than "What can I do for them?" Thoughts of justice or rights constrain personal relationships.

None of this should be taken to suggest that people in personal relationships never, in fact, think in terms of rights, justice, or equality. Certainly we do. Given Western civilizations's preoccupation with rights it would be surprising were it otherwise. What I am suggesting is that we would be better off if we didn't; if, instead, intimates conceptualized and dealt with their differences as two people who care about one another rather than as two people who must treat each other justly.

Consider a situation where we have an apparent clash of interests. We are trying to decide, for example, which car to purchase, where to take our vacation, or where to live. If we judge our relationship by standards of justice or rights, each of us will likely become preoccupied with our rights and our responsibilities. If there is no obvious solution to our "conflict," we will likely compromise. Compromises over important issues, however, rarely satisfy either person. Each of us will feel we sacrificed to the relationship.

Suppose, instead, that we focus on our mutual care, on the fact that I take an interest in you and you in me. I want to promote your interests as well as my own; you want to promote mine as well as yours. If we can conceive of our differences in these ways, there is no straightforward way to identify a conflict of interest between us.

Of course this does not eradicate our differences. The shift in perspective does not make disagreements vanish the way some dime store novels might suggest. It does, however, change the way we see those differences, the parameters within which we make a decision. Thus, I may recognize that my interest in you is more important than my interest in buying a new Prelude. Or you may decide that your interest in me is greater than your interest in visiting Orlando.

Even if this maneuver does not result in a quick solution, it will encourage us to consider alternative solutions which might satisfy us both, rather than settling for a compromise which satisfies neither. If we are intimates we will benefit from the resulting decision. We will each understand that our interests in ourselves and one another will be

advanced. So considerations of justice, though they may in some sense lie in the background of personal relationships, are best ignored by parties within them.

Finally, if we emphasize love and care rather than rights and equity, we will be better able to cope with some of the effects of our sexist culture. At least that is what I argue in the next section.

### Constraining the sexist influences

How, then, can we establish intimate relationships which limit sexist influences without relying on equality or rights? If we are sensitive to the insights of feminism we likely need not worry about controlling overt sexist sentiments -- presumably we do not openly advocate keeping women "barefoot and pregnant." (One who openly advocates that view will have no interest in limiting the effects of sexism.) For us the principal obstacles to non-sexist relationships arises from sub-conscious attitudes and from institutionalized practices which sustains them. Long established practices make it all too easy for us to fall into sexist patterns of relating. Liberated partners must be cognizant of these patterns and must take steps to insure they do not mindlessly fall into them.

Consider, for example, a common occurrence: a couple meets early in college and marries (or establishes a long-term relationship). The woman quits school and finds a job to support her man, all the while assuming she will return to school herself after he finds permanent employment.

He graduates and finds a job; she returns to college to finish her degree -- unless, of course, they have had a child in the meantime, which will further delay her return to school. When she finishes, he has a two or more year "jump" on her in the job market. Thus, he likely makes more money than she does. If an opportunity later arises to relocate for a better position, they will likely move to advance his career, since he is already better established economically. Having moved, she now seeks new employment, putting her still further behind him in the competition for jobs. Their future is writ: he has become the bread winner; she has become the little woman dependent on him.

Sensitive couples must be alert to these possibilities and must work to constrain them. However, talk of rights will not serve them well in this situation. It would be difficult to say where, in the above cited scenario, that the woman's rights were violated; each decision seems reasonable. If, however, the partners emphasize their mutual care, they should act to insure they do not get locked into this pattern, no matter how "reasonable" it seems. They must insure that her opportunities are not limited. For instance, both might go to school part-

time. Or perhaps he could guarantee that she will finish school and find suitable employment before he furthers his career. A man should act in these ways because he cares for his partner. That is how she should expect him to act -- not because she has a right that he do so, but because she knows he cares. People who care for one another do not act in ways which close off options for the other. In short, in situations where both parties recognize the tendency for sexist institutions to direct them down preestablished gender paths, they must find ways to route themselves in more productive directions.

What happens, though, if one of the parties thinks the other is subject to sexist stereotypes in ways she does not recognize? Consider this most troubling form of the case. A woman, reared in a very traditional home, maintains the conviction that her husband should "rule the home." What should she -- and her spouse -- do? Should they merely let her maintain this conviction unchallenged? I think not. The woman should try to alter these beliefs, even if she is comfortable with them and even if she thinks it would be difficult to change them. For, if she blindly accedes to her husband's judgements, she is effectively abandoning her autonomy. This is a remnant of the sexist culture she should not tolerate.

A caring spouse should likewise urge her to change, even if she does not want to. Moreover, he should act in ways which will help her change. Doing so inevitably involves elements of paternalism -- and paternalism within intimate relationships is always risky. On a right's view, paternalism is not merely risky; it is absolutely prohibited. Yet I think to exclude paternalism in such cases, especially since the goal is to free the woman from undue sexist influences, is to damage her and the relationship. If she always accedes to his interests and preferences, then they are not on sufficiently level footing to have a genuine relationship. Thus, the man should not permit his partner to be dependent on his judgement. That, I think, is not only unobjectionable, it is the only loving option.

This should not be taken as an across-the-board endorsement of paternalism. For as I noted, unconstrained paternalism of men toward their female partners is a sexist rut we must avoid. The only circumstances where it is permissible are in dramatic situations like those just described. In other, seemingly parallel, circumstances, paternalism is clearly out of order. For instance, I think relatively liberated people may legitimately leave remnants of our sexist upbringing in place. After all, we cannot plausibly eliminate all of them in one generation. Moreover, other effects might be alterable, but only by making efforts which "cost" more than they are worth.

Consider Ralph, a twenty year old man who is preparing for a career in mathematics. His father was a mathematician who imbued him with a love for math. Perhaps it is a shame the father shoved Ralph in

this direction. Perhaps, with different parents, Ralph would have considered being a nurse, an accountant, an elementary school teacher or a lawyer. But the fact is, he loves math. For him to try to alter his desires because he recognizes that, had other parents reared him he might have chosen differently, would be ludicrous. Of course if the parents had wanted him to become a criminal he should try to change (although I suspect he would have trouble doing so). But as long as it is a worthwhile and personally satisfying line of work, there is nothing wrong should he pursue math as a career. Likewise, there would be nothing wrong if Ralph decided he wanted to be a nurse. Its up to Ralph.

The problem becomes stickier, though, if we imagine a similar situation which many women face. Imagine a twenty year old woman completing her training to be an elementary school teacher. Although there is absolutely nothing wrong with her chosen career – it is a noble profession indeed -- she likely developed her interest in teaching young children because of the gender roles into which she was inculcated. Perhaps she would have selected the same career had she been reared in a non-sexist culture; perhaps not. We will never know. Although she might have had different interests and desires, she is now the person whose first order interests were shaped by her sexist upbringing. Under such circumstances she may decide that it would be counter-productive to try to develop different career interests. She might determine that she could not alter those interests. Or perhaps she might reason that she could alter her interests only by changing "who she is." She could diminish her desire to teach elementary school only by diminishing her interests in young children. That she does not want to do.

The woman does nothing wrong if she continues her preparation for teaching elementary school. Even though she (and Ralph) realize they might have pursued different careers had their upbringing been different, each decides that the cost of trying to alter their interests is either impossible, unnecessary or imprudent.

If we are partners with a woman facing such a dilemma, it would be foolish and paternalistic to try to change her desires, even though these desires were largely formed by her sexist upbringing. (Of course if she wishes to change them, then her partner should support her in whatever way possible.) For, although the culture shaped her first order desire to be a teacher, her second order judgement is that her first order desire need not be changed. If, under the circumstances, her male partner were to force her to change her career plans, it would be unacceptably paternalistic.<sup>9</sup> Notice, though, this case is relevantly different from the previous case in which I endorsed paternalism. There what was at issue was not some first order desire, but rather, an

all pervasive second order desire, which, if allowed to persist, would diminish if not eliminate her ability to make informed decisions.

### Experiments in relating

Abandoning talk of rights, equity, and egalitarianism may be especially frightening for men and women who want to relate in non-sexist ways. We all know how people encased in rights are supposed to relate -- our entire culture is based on such ways of relating. We have brilliant models of people claiming their rights, demanding that they be treated justly or equitably. But, if we abandon both sexist role models and refuse to build a relationship on rights, then we must find new ways of relating. What are those new ways? We may be tempted to assume there is a preferred way of relating, a way we only need find. There is, however, nothing to find. There is no predetermined ways of relating waiting to be discovered. There are no models we can emulate. We must create successful ways of relating through experiments in relating. We must try various arrangements, styles and patterns, and we must critically evaluate our efforts. We must revise our efforts in light of that evaluation. There is no other way of having successful heterosexual intimate relationships. There is no well-trodden path for us to follow.

### Conclusion

Having a close relationship with a woman is difficult for those who seek to escape the constraints of sexist stereotypes. If such relationships are possible, it is only through the concerted efforts of both partners to identify and excise the sexist remnants. But the attempts to free ourselves from sexist bonds is a path rutted and full of brambles, ready to trip or ensnare us. For although we must regularly scrutinize our heterosexual relationships to ensure they are (relatively) free of sexist influence, we should not constantly scrutinize them. Constant analysis of ourselves and our relationships will make our actions stiff, ingenuine. Love involves spontaneously responding to the needs of our intimates. That we cannot do if we are constantly assessing our actions, motives and relationships. We may expend so much energy insuring that we have a non-sexist relationship that we do not have a relationship at all: we do not talk about things which are important; we cannot enjoy each other's company.

Self-reflection certainly plays an important role for humans; it is crucial for healthy personal relationships. It allows us to critically evaluate and subsequently modify our actions so they are more mean-

ingful and productive. But its value can be fully achieved only if we are already active, if we already have a life worth evaluating. To put a twist on the well-known Socratic slogan: "the un-lived life is not worth examining." Meaningful self-reflection is important. But it can all too easily become the purpose of the relationship, especially when people are only a holy crusade to excise the demons of sexism.

### Notes

1. I am well-aware, however, that women have not made the legal and economic strides some politicians would have us believe. See Susan Faludi's *Backlash*, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1991).

2. For a philosophically sophisticated defense of separatism, and an account of a separatist ethic, see Sarah Lucia Hoagland's *Lesbian Ethics* (Institute of Lesbian Studies: Palo Alto, CA, 1988).

3. Perhaps eventually we can destroy all remnants of sexism. But doing so will take generations. For those of us who wish to have heterosexual relationships now, what can or will happen in a century is of little help. We must deal with the fact that we live in a sexist culture and that each of us at least partly embodies that culture.

4. "Perceptions of exploitation in communal and exchange relationships." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 2, 403-18 (1985); "Record-keeping in two types of relationships;" *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 47, 549-57 (1984); "Interpersonal attraction in exchange and communal relationships." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37, 12-24 (1979).

5. Marilyn Friedman, "Justice Among Friends," American Philosophical Association, Eastern division (1986)

6. Perhaps the reader is not comfortable with the particular illustrations provided. Perhaps, you do not want anyone taking your books without permission. Or perhaps you do not want anyone to get angry with you -- even if they are friends. These examples, though, are just that: examples. My point is merely that there are some things which intimates can do without explicit permission -- actions which, if performed by a stranger, would constitute a violation of your rights.

7. If I discovered that a good friend did not call when she desperately needed my help because she did not want to violate my privacy ... I would be upset. Among other things, I would doubt whether our friendship was as important to her as it was to me.

8. In this section I draw heavily from John Hardwig's, "Should Women Think in Terms of Rights," *Ethics* (1984).

9. This may be one more casualty of our sexist culture. In a completely non-sexist culture, intimates might well be justified in acting paternalistically toward their partners -- at least in some cases. After all, we assume our

intimates really do wish to promote our best interest; likely, too, they know what those interests are. But, given the tendency of males to dominate, paternalism should be avoided in all by the most extreme cases.