

SPECTRUM

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The Wimmin's Room

Reverse discrimination - does it exist?

by Valerie Kilfoil

More and more we are hearing the phrase "reverse discrimination." Some men and women perceive gains by the women's movement as resulting in discrimination against men.

Both women and men say, "well I just want the best PERSON to be hired for the job." The stock male question regarding affirmative action is: "Would you want to be hired for a job just because you are a woman?" My flippant response is "Well, why not? Men have been getting jobs that way for the last few centuries."

The main problem surrounding affirmative action and the notion of "reverse discrimination" is that there is an illusion that women have achieved equality. We are in the work force, and apart from occasional men's club, there are very few organizations that blatantly state: "No Women Allowed." Because of that development, any type of affirmative action program or equality legislation is seen to benefit women and minorities. White men now feel they are being discriminated against because laws state that in certain circumstances women and minorities must be hired. However, these same men never question that during the past five decades that only men were hired. The government and most public institutions openly barred women and minorities. In fact after World War II ended, the government of Canada enacted legislation that specifically stated that men were to be given the jobs before women.

Jumping back to the present, the latest case of "perceived" reverse discrimination in the news was the firefighters in Toronto. The fuss in Toronto was over the fire department wanting to hold 25 jobs for women and minorities. Out of about 100 applicants who had passed all the requirements, the department simply wanted to bump the women and minorities ahead of approximately 28 white men who had finished ahead of them. The white men saw this as discrimination against them - even though everyone had passed the same tests.

In my Feminist Theory in Education class, both women and men in the class (yes, real men do take women's studies) were arguing that they wanted the "best person for the job" We feminists in the class argued that there had to be more involved if the "best person" for the job was always a white man. Close to 100 percent of people employed by the Toronto fire department are white men. Mere coincidence? I don't think so.

Another example is the ongoing human rights inquiry at Fredericton High School. Six female teachers who applied for a vice-principal's position were passed over in favour of a male candidate who did

not hold the proper qualifications. The women filed a complaint of sexual discrimination. A year later the position was re-opened. It went to one of the women and the man cried "reverse discrimination." In New Brunswick, roughly 75 percent of teachers are female, yet only about 10 to 15 percent of administrative positions are held by women. In fact, the New Brunswick Teachers Association voted down an affirmative action program last year because they "wanted to be fair" and make sure "the best person was hired for the job."

These situations are not isolated incidents. Looking at the situation across the board, we must stretch our credibility to accept that the best person for the job in almost every situation is a white male. What is going on? I suggest the problem lies in two related areas: society's classical liberal ideology, and male standards being held as the norm.

The dominant ideology in North American society is Classical liberal. The liberal ideology is not the same as we think of as liberal today. It is closer to present day conservatism. Classical liberalism developed during the Enlightenment. Men at this time believed that all men were equal and should be treated as such. Early feminists debated that these same rights and opportunities should be extended to all women. However, classical liberalism failed to recognize that inequality for both men and women was already imbedded in society through the social structures of race, class and gender.

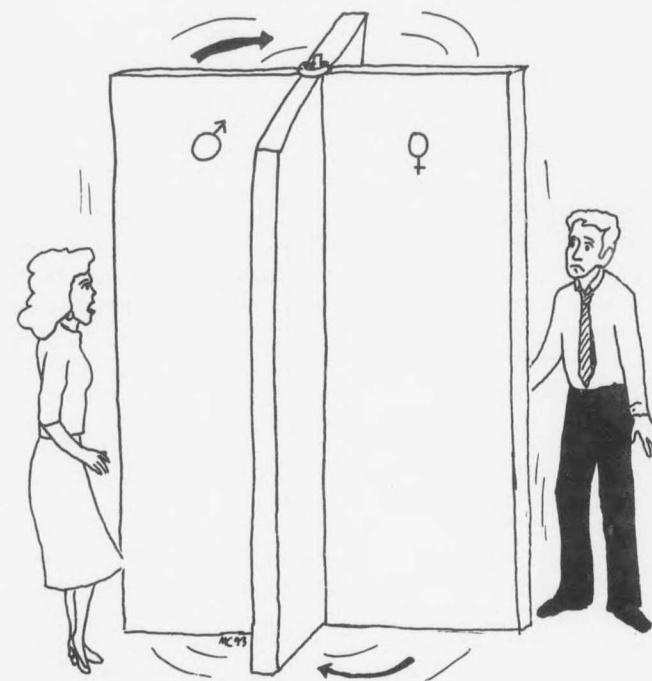
Liberal thinkers regard people abstractly, with no determined age, race, sex or economic. They treat unequal as equals and focus on the individual. Feminists today

argue that this view is unrealistic. In fact, women have not achieved equality with men. The Liberal ideology has enabled the power groups in society to use the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to undermine the protection women have won in trying to achieve equality. Women have lost hard fought for gains because they are held up to male standards and are treated as if they have already achieved equality. But when women's reality as an oppressed group has been taken into consideration, women have won Charter cases.

The problem with Liberal ideology and liberal equality legislation is that it assumes all people are equal - and have equal means or access to opportunity. The law states that if both men and women do not have equal access or means, then that is discrimination. But this line of reasoning denies women's reality as an oppressed group. "Equality" has also been used against women in the United States to argue that women should not have maternity leave or benefits. Because men cannot get pregnant, they cannot have these benefits, and that is discrimination. It has been used in Canada to attack women's right to women-only policies like the Wen-Do Self Defense Corporation and the Nova Scotia newspaper, Pandora. It also appears to be behind the argument being used by the UNB Student Union in their attempt to create a non-discriminatory funding policy. They ignore the fact that equal treatment not only fails to recognize inequalities, but sustains structures that perpetuate discrimination.

From a feminist perspective, men and women are not equal, despite the gains the women's movement has made. For example statistics

LIBERAL THINKERS! They regard people abstractly and they treat unequals as equals, but feminists argue that this view is unrealistic.



The Revolving Door
of
Discrimination

show that:

- Women's wages have only improved nine cents in closing the gap between men and women in 25 years. Women earn approximately 65 cents on the male dollar.
- Despite the number of women working outside the home, women still do the vast majority of work inside the home.

- Sixty-eight percent of people on welfare are women and children.
- One of four women will be sexually assaulted in her lifetime.
- Ninety percent of victims of violence are women and children.

Equality legislation is designed to correct these problems but will

Continued on page 11

Metanoia

Religion and the perils of individualism

COMMUNAL SUPPORT/ When there is none we run the risk of succumbing to deception.

by John Valk

In our society we value the freedom of religion. We also strongly believe that religious convictions are highly personal. Everyone is free to choose their religious values, beliefs and commitments. The state may not impose any religious value or belief system on its citizens. What does this mean for our modern society?

Reginald Bibby has discovered that 83% of Canadians believe in God and 76% believe Jesus is divine. Furthermore, 89% of Canadians identify themselves with a church; either Catholic, Anglican, United, etc. Commitment to that church, however, drops off dramatically (42%), as does regular church attendance (25%). Among

younger people (ages 18-35) church attendance stands at only 14%.

Bibby, and numerous others, offer explanations for dismal church attendance. And, many of these explanations cause many clergy many sleepless nights. However, does the source of the problem of decreasing church involvement lie solely with the churches themselves? I think not.

The church is communalistic by its nature, not individualistic. It is a body of people, united in a common cause. When it is such, not only can it best meet the needs of its own people, but more than any other institution it can meet the needs of others as well, even though it is far from perfect. But is it likely to do so when the dominant characteristic of our society is not a

communalism but a rampant individualism?

From whence comes this individualism? One would not be entirely wrong by pointing to the increasing secularization in our society. Is secularism becoming the dominant belief system, which is having the greatest impact on church involvement?

Under the influence of secularism we often come to understand the religious freedoms we so highly praise in a particular manner. Freedom of religion, for example, is often understood as freedom from religion, it insists on the freedom of all students from exploring it. To what extent is public education responsible for a great disinterest in ecclesiastical commitment?

Furthermore, we affirm that reli-

gious convictions are highly personal. Indeed, religious convictions need to be personal if they are to be meaningful. To insist that they remain private, however, is something entirely different. That is the view of secularism, not Christianity, Judaism or Islam. To what extent has the dominance of secularism forced the removal of (traditional) religion from the public forum? The educational system has removed it. Student Unions feel that business and other clubs merit funding, but not religious groups.

We strongly believe the state ought not to impose any religious belief, value or commitment on any citizen. But, in our (supposed) plural society, why does secularism

Continued on page 12