



Fall 2019

FYS 101 Women Writing the World

Fall 2019

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Recommended Citation

Robinson, Raven, "Born To Be Sexist: Analysis of Everyday Sexism" (2019). *Fall 2019*. 22.
https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/fys_ww_f2019/22

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Raven Robinson

Born To Be Sexist:

Analysis of *Everyday Sexism*

In her novel, *Everyday Sexism*, Laura Bates raises awareness of the severe injustices women face on a regular basis. Although these injustices are often initiated by men, Bates acknowledges that male individuals are not to blame. In fact, Bates does not demonize men, but rather seeks to create an understanding that no person is born cruel and unreasonable. The implication that men are not born sexist is the key takeaway.

Young women are immediately exposed to the varying aspects of sexism at a very early age. According to Bates, young girls are often subjected to the notion that “they are somehow by definition inferior to their male peers”(87). In turn, it is reasonable to assume that young boys are presented with the idea that they are superior to their female peers. A mother tweeted about her 11-year-old daughter winning a cross country race. One of the teachers shouted to the boys “come on, don’t be beaten by a girl” as her daughter was passing by (88). Statements like these make it seem as though everything is a competition between males and females and that in these competitions, men are always expected to win. Ideologies as the aforementioned suggest that in any situation, males are always stronger, better, or more capable. When a young boy is taught that a female is often capable of less, especially by a teacher or someone in a position of authority, this mindset translates into their thoughts and behavior later on in life.

Often, the negative translations exist in areas of higher education. Bates explains that “for young women, college is a gauntlet”(126). Based on the shared experiences of women attending universities, a student culture has been created, “literally suffused with misogyny and

harassment”(126). Though, when discussing misogynistic men, it’s important to consider who or what made them that way. In situations where an engineering professor greets the class with ““Good morning, gentlemen’ while looking straight at the sole female student”(127) the answer becomes pretty clear. The issue we come across is learned behavior. For example, when a young woman and her boyfriend are accepted into the same law school they should be equally celebrated. Instead, the female is asked questions like “who did you sleep with for that”(126). and the male is not. Both of these examples encourage mindsets suggesting that women are invisible, and have no purpose other than to please a man and sometimes be rewarded for it. The young men in that classroom, and the young man dating the girl being harassed over an acceptance into law school, inevitably hold very different outlooks on women due to those personal experiences. Bates acknowledges that “college is a place where young people’s attitudes and ideas about the world around them are cemented”(137). Therefore, misogyny that exists in higher education institutions is “bound to carry over as students graduate”(137) and as they continue to progress in the real world. Even a perfectly well-mannered young man can be exposed to unreasonable outlooks. When these outlooks are repeatedly showcased throughout a person’s life, it can become nearly impossible to resist submitting to these ideas.

When men submit to encouraging negative outlooks on women, the line between a small incident and a serious infraction becomes very thin. Bates points out that, of all the stories she has heard about sexism in the workplace, “not a single one of them could have possibly been a simple case of ‘misunderstanding’”(226). Although this may be true, it is possible that, by the time a man makes it to the start of his career, his judgement is already extremely clouded by previous experiences. In situations where a male employee responds to the disagreements of his

female colleagues by saying “‘they must be on their period’ because they were ‘all hormonal’”(230), natural female occurrences become subjective anomalies. This provides a clear example of a childish misconception that has been translated into a professional environment as a gross form of abuse. If these petty jokes and misconceptions had been eliminated in middle school and high school, they might not exist in an area where males and females are expected to coexist and make a living. More importantly, adult men may see comments such as these less as jokes and more as unreasonable remarks that foster a potentially harmful environment for their female counterparts.

The lack of respect for women in the workforce is often worsened by the prospect or the event of pregnancy. Bates acknowledges that in most cases where women decided to have children, “their competency and dedication were brought into question”(237). In environments where male colleagues already doubt female capabilities, a working mother is a foreign concept. After having a baby, “women are automatically thought to be no longer ‘up to the job’”(237). This is a result of boys being raised to believe “it’s only men who derive fulfillment from academic and professional endeavor”(278) instead of being taught that women value these things as well. Men are often surrounded by the traditional outlook on domestic roles, which includes a stay-at-home mom or a male breadwinner. In the grand scheme of things, men feel that women don’t belong in the workplace long before they even get there.

A feminist is surely motivated by the fact that women are regularly mistreated. Whether it be in high school, in college, in the workplace or even well into motherhood, women and men are not seen as equal. However, this mistreatment does not put men at fault. It is a treatment that has been built on for generations. It’s a culture that has been allowed to develop over time, not

just by men, but by all of humanity. With *Everyday Sexism*, Bates introduces a form of feminism that stands for everyone, because, in consummation, men are never born sexist.