

SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF MEN: BEYOND RIDICULOUS TO SURREAL!

by Francis Baumli, Ph.D.

On March 26, 2019, Don Marsh, host of St. Louis on the Air of my local NPR radio station (KWMU), surprised his listeners when he resigned under duress. I was sure there would be a city-wide outcry and a plethora of letters to St. Louis County's Webster-Kirkwood Times. But the outcry was limited to Facebook posts, there was only one brief letter in the Webster-Kirkwood Times, and no letters in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. I waited, hoping that more letters would eventually come in. I myself then published a short letter in the Webster-Kirkwood Times. But after this there was nothing.

To inform readers who do not already know about this gruesome matter: That Tuesday morning, about an hour before his show, when guest Karen Foss (long an anchor for KSDK TV Channel

5) who had retired in 2006 showed up, Mister Marsh told her, “You look good!”

Someone (actually several people) on KWMU’s staff took umbrage to this compliment, deeming it dangerously sexist, and by the next day two powers-that-be of the station had a meeting with Don Marsh. In this meeting Don defended himself, saying that when he saw Karen Fass (who was an old friend) he merely told her “she looked great.” During this meeting he said to one of his interrogators, “Are you basically saying what I did was wrong?” To which, “the manager made a gesture with his hand like, ‘It’s right on the edge,’ and I said, ‘That’s it. I’m done.’” He walked out 45 minutes before his Wednesday show was to begin.

I would later discuss this part of the interaction with Tim Eby, General Manager of the station, who insisted that Don Marsh’s understanding and mine were wrong because the two men who had called Marsh into a meeting were not managers. I took his word on this, but later, reading the news accounts more carefully, I noted that the two men who called Don Marsh on the carpet were Alex Heuer, Executive Producer of the show that Don Marsh hosts, and Robert Peterson, Director of Radio Programming and Operations who is Heuer’s boss. Frankly it seems to me thoroughly disingenuous to assert that these two men—an “Executive Producer” and a

“Director”—are not “Managers.” They still were men with authority over Don Marsh and they could presume and use authority over Don Marsh.

Don Marsh felt insulted by the authority these two men wielded, which essentially was to accuse him of inappropriate behavior (“on the edge” of being wrongfully sexist), and this is why he quit. I applaud his decision. Even Karen Foss defended him. She promptly did a Facebook post which stated that Marsh’s compliment was a “common way for those of us who are aged to greet each other.” (She was 75 then and Marsh 80.) She added, “I am appalled. As a woman who has long argued for the equitable treatment of women, I am highly alert to sexism and discrimination and I sensed absolutely none of that in his greeting.”

Soon something else happened, and I had predicted it would. A few other grievances against Don Marsh were dusted off and brought forth to bolster this accusation. For example, on one occasion—a full three years before!!—when a male guest and a female producer hugged, he jokingly said, “Hey, guys, get a room!” (Was this sexist? If so, toward whom? The man or the woman? The fact that everyone who judged that comment sexist assumed it was sexist toward the woman, and didn’t even consider how the man might feel, indicates clearly that these judgmental people are reflexively sexist toward

men.) Was that comment lewd? No. It was mild sexual banter obviously said with innocent good will. Innocent—precisely because it was openly public. But the female producer was not inclined toward passing up an opportunity for later saying she was offended by the comment. When Marsh heard about this he found her attitude ridiculous. But he also showed that he is a courteous person who wants to do right. The result was that when he learned first-hand that the female producer objected to the remark because she felt she had been “disrespected,” he said, “Well, in that case, I’m sorry.” It deserves being emphasized (again) that this particular incident had happened about three years before Don Marsh’s supposedly sexist comment made to Karen Foss. (A perfect instance of dusting out the coal bin for the sake of conveniently blackening a person’s reputation. This time with something that had not seemed to even warrant comment until three years after it happened when it could finally be used for ammunition.)

Another complaint which got trotted forth to bolster the objection to what Don Marsh had said to Karen Foss (the day before he quit) was that, when that Tuesday interview with Foss was over, because it had run longer than expected and had delayed the entrance of the next two guests, Mr. Marsh told the two waiting guests that, “a pretty woman always takes precedence.” He was referring to 75-year-

old Foss. Was he being sexist? I don't see how. I suspect he was using it as a chivalrous opportunity for giving a compliment to Karen Foss. (And what 75-year-old woman—or man—doesn't need, and deserve, every compliment about their looks they can get?)

However, not just one but several people right there at the station took issue with how Don Marsh had been complimentary toward Karen Foss. Right after the show one member of the talk show staff entered Don Marsh's office and talked with him about his first compliment to Foss which was, "You look good!" Marsh dismissed the objection as ridiculous; the person who made that objection now chooses to remain anonymous. But that very evening one of the talk show producers, Evie Hemphill, sent Don Marsh an email reprimanding him for his second comment, "a pretty woman always takes precedence," adding that, "Outside of settings akin to a beauty pageant, I just don't see a place for it." Here is a perfect example of the "lazy liberal" who takes issue with someone about micro-issues because they require little effort, but doesn't bother to notice, much less get upset about, the bigger issues. I.e., the comment, "a pretty woman always takes precedence," is a bad thing to say, but if it gets said at a beauty pageant it is somehow okay? A conscientious liberal, willing to put forth a little effort on the big issues, would note that any kind of beauty pageant is so sexist (not to mention demeaning to

other women who could never hope to compete in a beauty pageant, and also demeaning toward men who in our culture do not possess a beauty that anyone would consider worthy of being judged in a contest) that they should not even exist. But of course Evie Hemphill would never want to tussle with an issue that big. It would take too much time, physical effort, and emotional courage!

A third situation was brought forth (which somehow no one had bothered to address until they now needed even more ammunition). This situation happened a few weeks before when County Executive Steve Stenger arrived at the studio with a female assistant named Ellen Lampe and Don jokingly said to Steve, “Can I take her home with me?” Don Marsh later explained that he was complimenting the woman’s efficiency as an assistant. (This is something I could well understand. I am always needing one more secretary who is competent and versatile.) But out of fairness here, it should be pointed out that Tim Eby, Station Manager, went on record stating that he did not consider Don Marsh’s compliment to Karen Foss sexist. However, he did hear Don Marsh say, regarding Steve Stenger’s assistant, “Can I take her home with me?” and Mister Eby had the distinct impression that, however jocular the comment was meant to be, the tone did not at all imply a compliment regarding the woman’s efficiency; rather, it definitely had sexual innuendo. Still,

the remark was not addressed to the woman, and might be the sort of thing which many men—thorough gentlemen—might say to one another in mild banter. And the woman did not even hear Don Marsh say it. In fact, not until after Don Marsh resigned, and this statement which he had made a few weeks earlier got published, did the woman find out about it. Thereupon she could not pass up a convenient opportunity for leveling a public protest against Don Marsh by stating that she applauds KWMU for “standing up for women’s dignity.” (So who was sexually harassing Ellen Lampe more? Don Marsh, or those who made public—and thereby amplified—the dimensions of what Don Marsh had said?)

When a situation like this happens, I am always curious about something—namely, what does this woman look like? I was told by a male member of the station personnel that this woman (Ellen Lampe is her name) is young, very gorgeous, with long blonde hair. He, in an appropriate and gentlemanly manner, stated that she is the kind of young woman who understandably would elicit such attention. He also emphasized that he did not approve of the comment Don Marsh had made: “Can I take her home with me?”

Was it salacious interest which caused me to want to see what she looked like? No. Idle curiosity? No. I had another reason, which will become obvious shortly.

So I looked her up. Young with long blond hair? Yes. Attractive? Not to me. She looked pleasant enough. Ordinary looking in the way most young women look. However, I thought her attempts (via make-up and packaging), made her look rather unattractive. She definitely is one of those women who helps manufacture a scarcely laudatory national statistic: The average working woman spends a full hour each morning putting on her make-up and primping before she goes to work! This kind of packaging provides a woman like Ellen Lampe the false appearance of being highly attractive. (Or, to put it bluntly, it makes her look like a self-made sex object instead of a person. And when a woman spends an hour dolling herself up to look like a sex object, doesn't that disqualify her for applauding KWMU for "standing up for women's dignity"? What is dignified about primping in front of a mirror every morning?!)

But people often blindly make judgements about such self-made sex-objects, whose appearance has been manufactured by their careful grooming. (At a younger age I myself too often made such blind and stupid judgements. But before long I learned that after I knew such a woman a few weeks, and saw her late of an evening when she was disheveled and tired, or early in the morning when she was trying to come awake, the illusion usually fast faded as reality made itself known.) But as for how Ellen Lampe looks, I don't really care.

My attitude is that it is none of my business to do anything more than notice (assuming I do notice), then shrug my shoulders, and proceed without judgement or comment. I can honestly say that I rarely think about whether anyone, woman or man, is either attractive or unattractive. (And I am not so conceited as to claim that I always judge people by their minds. Usually I am kind enough to not judge anyone on this basis because, to put it bluntly, they almost never measure up to any mental standards I respect.)

I am curious about one thing though. I referred to the member of KWMU's station personnel who described Ellen Lampe as young and gorgeous. He said this to me privately, and with decorum, so I am sure that no one could have considered this statement to be sexual harassment. But I am here making it public. I also here make public my observation that, except for her hair, I do not find Ellen Lampe attractive. So which statement would she find more sexist? Don Marsh saying, probably on the basis of her looks, "Can I take her home with me?" or my own present statement: "I do not find Ellen Lampe attractive, but that doesn't matter to me, and I would never have commented on this part of her except for the sake of this article's context. I just hope she is a nice person, which is what I hope for with anyone." If Ellen Lampe finds my reluctance about complimenting her on her looks at all offensive, or wounding to her pride, then she

herself is tainted by sexist vanity. And that, most assuredly, would be an assault to women's dignity.

Further discussion of the sexual aura people project, and what this aura elicits, is appropriate here. I think it is important to oppose sexism—which is oppressive, objectifying, and either callous or malicious. It is just as important to understand that sometimes mild sexual banter has not one bit of sexism in it. Quite the contrary it is friendly, socially relaxing, amiably shared, and is a way of allowing the sexual feelings that pervade social relating to coexist with the demands of work. When the actor Morgan Freeman was accused of using sexist language toward female co-workers, he fought back in an admirable way and prevailed. He pointed out that when he arrives on the job he might say to a female co-worker, “My, but don't you look hot today!” and she might respond, “Me? What about you, and all those women sniffing after you when you were walking down the street?” He added, “We share a laugh, we feel relaxed, then we get to work.”

Sexual feelings are constantly with us as we go through the day; jovial and civil sexual banter acknowledges, then dismisses, such feelings. Mild sexual banter not only isn't sexist or oppressive, it is being socially friendly about the sexual feelings that are a constant in our lives. Such sexual banter also addresses another constant in our

lives: the need to get social approval to help keep at bay the insecure perceptions we all have about our own bodies. It happened just today that I was in a slow-moving check-out line at Penny's, began conversing with a woman, and was struck to find out that she is 83 years old when, to me, she looked younger than I do at 71. I told her she sure didn't look her age and said she must be doing something right with her life. She smiled with obvious pleasure. And not long ago a young fellow (in his mid-20s) said to me, "I hope I look half as good as you do when I get to be your age." That sure made me feel good.

But obviously, on these matters, KWMU and its personnel had stern reservations about Don Marsh. They solicited the services of a professional writer to set forth a thorough and unbiased report. This writer, Nancy Fowler, a retired editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and possessing many other journalistic credentials, set forth an essay which I had already read twice, never realizing it was by an editor and reporter; I thought it was just one more smattering of poorly written, poorly cogitated Internet spillage that was neither thorough nor focused. Also, after reading the article and checking into the credentials of the author, it became obvious that nothing about this story or its author could at all warrant claiming a lack of bias since Nancy Fowler, in December 2018 had received an "Employee Service Award" from the University of Missouri Saint Louis for her work at

KWMU!!! KWMU is the official NPR radio station of the University of Missouri Saint Louis, Nancy Fowler is associated with the newsroom (although I could not discern what the specifics of her job description entailed), and yet the people who requested that she write this story about Don Marsh went to considerable (and hypocritical!) lengths to emphasize (in print and also to me in person) that the nature of the internal organization of Saint Louis Public Radio (KWMU), its newsroom and its show “St. Louis on the Air” are safely separate from each other because they “are in different departments and are not managed by the same leaders.” (Also, for what it’s worth, they are in separate—albeit virtually adjacent—rooms!) The implication: Because of this boundary—tenuous and thin though it be—Nancy Fowler supposedly could write an unbiased story about what happened regarding Don Marsh.

But different departments and different management do not make for an unbiased perspective. Quite the contrary, what Nancy Fowler wrote was the same old story (yes; it was already getting old) spinning the same yarns about what Don Marsh did wrong and not once bothering to describe the secrecy surrounding Don Marsh’s so-called transgressions. The only thing original about Fowler’s story was that she gussied it up with a pretense of credentialed scholarship by referencing Caitlyn Collins who is an assistant (sic) professor of

sociology and of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Washington University. Collins' credentials actually reveal only one thing: that she has no solid credentials. And as for Nancy Fowler's credentials? In her Twitter account Nancy Fowler describes herself by stating, "I'm an arts/culture reporter for Saint Louis Public Radio who focuses on race, gender, sexual orientation, equality and other stuff" (It sounds as if Fowler and Collins are nothing less than bedfellows! Their self-descriptions are quite similar, and they both are skewered in the direction of the same ideology ... and stuff.) Predictably, the rhetoric of the pseudo-authority whom Fowler cited (Caitlyn Collins) was feeble, biased, and formulistic. As for Caitlyn Collins' observations, I will judge them not by how lengthy is her job description, but by how sensical are her assertions. For example she smugly claims, "If it offends someone, then it's a problem."

Really? But what if that "someone" has a chip on their shoulder, or is a liar bent on vengeance toward all men in general, or is mentally ill? (Or—perish the thought!—what if that someone is me, and my problem is the one I have with Assistant Professor Collins herself?) This claim by Collins is so glib, generalized, and unsupported as to be ridiculously sophomoric. But she tries to sound professorial with, "Something that seems small, or like an aside, when it happens regularly, becomes insidious in a workplace in the

way that suggests that women can be the subject of critique over their physical appearance.”

Indeed that is true. But what Don Marsh said was not an “aside” nor did it “happen regularly.” He was being jocular at all times, and in all these instances he was not indulging in a critique; he was being complimentary. If Collins wants to make the point that compliments can become insidiously oppressive, then I would be very interested in seeing the methodology used for supporting this point, i.e., the scholarship (both research, and credible analysis) behind it.

Meanwhile, there is zero authoritative credibility in Collins’ claims about how women can feel oppressed by comments about their physical appearance in the workplace precisely because this “Assistant Professor” Caitlin Collins has prejudiced herself, and her pontifications, by mentioning women only and completely ignoring men. But men too are the subject of such critical comments. To wit: at a place where I worked in the early 1980s, I saw a man come in to give a report to all the professional personnel there, and the woman in charge, while introducing him, began with, “It seems we get to see you about every three or four years. Just enough time for you to put on another ten pounds.” The man, obviously embarrassed, pretended to laugh it off but it was transparent to all (including the smirking woman who made the comment) that it had stung. And at this same

corporation, where I occupied what was probably the most enjoyable and satisfying job of my life, my sense of enjoyment was utterly destroyed by two women. They both were sexually attracted to me, felt it was their duty to be “open and honest” by telling me so, and once they told me so their volley of daily “micro-aggressions” (as academicians so eloquently put it) burgeoned into a daily barrage of macro-aggressions (if I may bitterly put it) and the atmosphere became intolerable. Micro-aggressions (like commenting on how I was dressed—even commenting at length on the shape of my feet the one time I wore “dress” sandals without socks) soon turned into macro-aggressions that were physically aggressive, such as sneaking up behind me when I was in the middle of work to startle me, or the two of them locking arms while holding me against a wall as they (pretending to be ever-so friendly) spent as long as 15 minutes singing to me, and ... well, the result was that I quit the job. What was my alternative? Violently shove those two women away from me when they were pinning me against the wall? Violence isn't my style.

But since I was a man I had no more support back then (in the early 1980s) than a man might get today from a Professor Collins afflicted with society's ubiquitous gender bias against men. No team of tepid liberals was there to come to my rescue. The two people above me in that corporation, when I tried to present my grievances, had no

sympathy. The CEO told me to lighten up, and the Clinical Manager (my direct supervisor and an ex-priest with way too many hang-ups) heard me sternly and silently, then dismissed me without comment except to say that he was “uncomfortable” with my view. I asked him to elaborate and he refused with a redundant, “I’m not comfortable with that.” Obviously I was not going to get any help from those in charge of the agency. My choices were to either not be in touch with my feelings, or make someone else’s comfort more important than my personal pain. So, truly grieving my loss of this job, I terminated my employment there.

But the harassment I had to endure happened over a third of a century ago. One would like to hope that now, this many years later, Don Marsh could expect better treatment. But whereas my complaints were ignored and I was anonymous, Don Marsh’s plight was reported in all the local news outlets and as a result he was pilloried. So to repeat my original point about the Don Marsh inquisition: Professor Collins, with her paltry and dubious credentials, sabotaged any claim to veracity by being glib, vacuous, and entirely lacking in methodological or scholarly underpinnings. And in the end she showed herself to be utterly biased given that, in the course of brandishing her supposed expertise, she made sure to opine about women only while ignoring the fact that men too can have problems

with the very kind of sexism she vapidly believes only women have to endure. I suppose this kind of attitude is what the people at KWMU could only expect when their reporter, Nancy Fowler, grubbing for a credentialed authority, plucked a junior professor from the academic gene pool who could be predicted to spout the lint-brained, pedantic rhetoric that was desired. Obviously this supposedly neutral reporter was all too eager to accept a toxic dose of intellectually impoverished pontificating, i.e., empty verbiage, from a junior professor in lieu of cogent, insightful, and unbiased analysis.

The station manager of KWMU, at the beginning of this fracas, said, “station leaders may have more to say at a later date.” I hoped something concrete would result from this vague prediction. Something like a public retraction, apology, and a resolve to do better next time. But it didn’t, and at this point I believe I can safely opine that it never will. I remain truly stunned by the amount of secrecy and silence that have been allowed to contaminate the truth about what actually happened amidst the Don Marsh fracas. Those of us following the story were never given more than sketchy information, and even Don Marsh obviously wanted to just walk away from the gore and stop talking about it.

What we do know is that after Don’s show with Karen Foss, there was only “one member of the talk show staff” who objected to

Marsh telling Foss, “You look good.” There then was a conversation about this in Marsh’s office. And another member of the staff took exception to the statement he made after that same show when he joked that “a pretty woman always takes precedence.” We do not know who the member of the talk show staff was who initially took offense at Don Marsh telling Karen Foss she looked good; we do know that the person who objected to the statement Don made to the pair of incoming guests that “a petty woman always takes precedence” was Evie Hemphill, one of the talk show producers, who that night rebuked him by email. So ... he had two accusers that day; we do not know who the first one was, we do know who the second one was, we also know that a third accuser, Alex Heuer, the talk show’s Executive Producer, asked Don Marsh to meet with him and with Heuer’s boss, Robert Peterson, Director of Radio Programming and Operations, the next morning in order to discuss not only the “inappropriate” greeting but also another “conversation” Don had had which has never been specified or elaborated on. Heuer’s language was specific: “I’d like for you, Robert and me to sit down for a brief meeting tomorrow after the show. If your plans after the show interfere, let’s please talk when you arrive.” Despite the secrecy as to what that meeting was actually about, Heuer vows that he “stands by the email.” [I.e., Evie Hemphill’s email.] Tim Eby, station manager, says that

unlike the others he himself was not concerned with what Don Marsh said to Karen Foss, considering it an appropriate exchange between friends. Moreover, he claims Marsh's greeting to Foss was not the "core point" of the meeting, admitting however that it "may" have been "brought up." But he then declined to comment, much less elaborate, on what this core point of the meeting actually was except to vaguely note that it was a "personnel issue." All this has caused people to wonder if there was something else Don Marsh was being reprimanded for, but to this question the "management team" has only responded, "While we understand that our listeners and members would like to hear the full story from us, there are things we can't share, including the details of that meeting, as it would be improper to discuss personnel matters in general."

Who was this management team? Eby, Heuer, and Peterson? Maybe a few others too? And why did we again hear that it was a "personnel issue"? This surfeit of camouflage begins to sound like an exercise in obfuscation, dissimulation, along with a hidden agenda of emotional corruscation. The image comes to mind of Henry Kissinger, Al Gore, and George W. Bush all sitting around the same conference table doing what they were best at: evading questions.

While much was not being stated, and little was being clarified, any person can see the garishly gruesome and simple contradiction in

this sordid scenario. Don Marsh stated this contradiction bluntly: “They’re saying this was not about my greeting to Karen Foss, and yet they called a meeting because of the apparent inappropriateness of the greeting to Karen Foss.”

Well; yes. That’s it exactly. Alex Heuer asked Don to meet with him and Robert Peterson the day after several people got upset because Don Marsh told Karen Foss, “You look good,” and now we are supposed to believe the meeting was actually called because of some kind of abstract, clandestine, unmentionable “personnel issue”? Meanwhile, Don Marsh gets his name in the news, his reputation smeared, and yet we are not even told the name of that member of the talk show staff who was the first to object to Marsh’s compliment because somebody wants “to protect his privacy” even though no one cares one bit about Don Marsh’s right to privacy. And after the meeting with Heuer, Peterson, and Marsh, Peterson declined to be interviewed. So ... the inquisitors got to hide behind their cloaks of secrecy, Don Marsh was treated as an infidel to be pilloried in public, and all the while his bullies back at the station wallowed in smug glee at how their pompous edicts about male sexism had heaped infamy upon a likable, affable, jocular but courteous gentleman.¹

¹ So that I may set my readers’ minds at ease, allow me to point out that I did not litter my account of the facts around the Don Marsh case with a plethora of footnotes because it suffices to summarily state that my

I did not keep my own response to this fracas a secret. I published my opinion in the Webster-Kirkwood times, noting that I not only was registering an opinion, I also could vote with my money. Previously I had been a \$250-per-year supporter of KWMU. I cut back to \$100 per year the following year, and aware that since fair's fair, I henceforth would listen only to the news reports. Subsequently, feeling that this partial retraction of monetary support was scarcely a sufficient protest, I decided to walk away from KWMU entirely. I now listen to other stations here in the U.S. and to the British news reports.

As for Don Marsh: An 80-year-old man was being reprimanded, socially criticized, and harassed to the point that he walked away from his job. He was being friendly; his cowardly accusers called him sexist. He was being generously sociable; his pompous accusers labeled him crude and inappropriate. As happens too often, women (and their chivalrous male lackeys), sternly accuse a man, he is immediately presumed guilty, and he is promptly sentenced with a humiliating social reprimand. One more victim of our society's organized sexism toward men.

information came from the many "news feeds" on The Internet and from personal conversations with people I know at KWMU. Also, since Karen Fowler's "report" requisitioned by KWMU's powers-that-supposedly-be is purported to be comprehensive, I have relied on it for many facts. Surely Karen Fowler, as a seasoned reporter, can be counted on to get her facts straight even if she can not be counted on to give an independent and unbiased perspective.

Note the phrase I used above: “cowardly accusers.” My categories for judging human behavior are not simplistic. I believe there are times when people are rightfully sensitive to sexism: microsexisms and macrosexisms. But I also believe there are times when people are artificially sensitive precisely because they (like too many of their species) are cowardly. Such people latch on to artificially erected issues because they are simple and do not require the kind of courage that confrontations in the really difficult situations require. So these timid people launch accusations that are easy. Such people are not being overly sensitive; rather, they are being connivingly sensitive. Calculated, easily brandished sensitivity is ever so comfortable because if a “tempest in a teapot” is where people exercise their values, then they can call themselves conscientious liberals without ever having to get involved in the big bad world where the truly difficult issues are harsh and real. In other words, this kind of liberal does not have to do anything that requires backbone and effort.² In this case, Don Marsh somehow broke the

² Just to make sure that readers in general, KWMU sympathizers in particular, and liberals in collusion with one another do not label me as a curmudgeonly conservative who is a hater of liberals, I here staunchly go on record with the assertion that I am very much a liberal. My friends, my intellectual colleagues, and readers of my writings know me as a liberal. In fact, many of these people note that my politics and personal views should be described as hyper-liberal or radical. I believe this judgement is correct, which perhaps is a part of what gives me worthy credentials for taking to task any liberals who do not live up to the creed and to the stance their political ideology should warrant.

artificial rules their controlling cowardice cravenly depends upon. They lack the courage, and the insight, to inject into their lives an awareness that if there occurs a momentary lapse into language that seems slightly less than propriety, but if this lapse is accompanied by good will and good intentions, then what is almost always warranted is a shrug of the shoulders instead of shallow indignation and timidly pompous condemnations. (“Virtue signaling” is what this is called in popular culture.)

So what role are men to play in this tortuous path we are trying to traverse, which involves not being sexist toward women while trying to avoid society’s sexism toward men? Perhaps the travails of this journey can best be illustrated with an example:

I had gone to a buffet with a friend, and upon returning from this feast I felt full, bloated, and aware that in the last hour I had probably added about three pounds to my trim waistline. As I came into my home there were several relatives there visiting, and one female, whose demeanor toward men is often critical and misandrosistic, said, “Hey Francis! You’re puttin’ on weight! You’re gettin’ a gut!” To which she laughed loudly.

I scarcely bestowed upon her a look of forgiveness. Instead I spoke her name firmly and then added, “Have I ever in my life said anything critical about your body?”

Without a moment's hesitation she jeered, "No, but you never give me any compliments!"

There you have it. A woman can excoriate a man with malicious sexism, and if he protests, he can be accused of never giving her any compliments. But then if he does give a compliment to a woman, he can be publicly accused of sexism. In other words, neglect to give a woman a compliment and you are criticized. Give her the compliments she seems to crave and you can be publicly vilified. We men can't win. It's damned if you do, damned if you don't, and double damned either way if someone takes offense, the offense goes public, and you choose to fight back.

Meanwhile, Don Marsh, in our society's hypocritical game of pretending that sexism is a single-gender problem, has been vilified as a sexist pig. Although initially he was a condemned man, we can hope that soon he will be exonerated. Of course this will not come about through forgiveness. It will result from the anonymity of oblivion as the memory of Don Marsh fades away—one more forgotten victim in the pogrom of sexism toward men.

***written in one day on July 5,
2019 (slightly revised August 8,
2019 and subsequently revised
July to August 2021)***

posted on August 10, 2025