



# SEXLESS

How  
Feminism  
Is Failing  
Women

By Anne Hayes

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**True** sexual harassment is a serious problem,

and women both inside and outside of the feminist movement have made important strides in dealing with this issue. Unfortunately, however, feminists have taken the issue to an illogical extreme, in which men are required to ignore the fact that women are women at the same time that they are supposed to be hyper-conscious of women. For example, men are discouraged from noticing a woman's shapely calf above a spike-heeled shoe, yet must be sufficiently aware of female sensibilities to realize that a female co-worker might be offended at seeing a copy of the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue in their cubicles.

Excerpt, *Chapter Seventeen: Men and Women at Work*  
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**Men must be aware** of the female psyche, but not the female body. This is almost diametrically opposed to how men actually behave.

However, this is not to say that men should not be made to curb their baser instincts while at work. They should. But there is a problem. The problem is that at the same time they began to make a big deal about boorish, sexist, and sexually offensive office behavior, feminists were actively discouraging the idea that women should be shown any respect at all. Gentlemanly courtesies demonstrating respect, gestures such as opening doors, holding out chairs, and paying bills for women (and expecting no sexual favors in return), addressing women as Miss or Ma'am, standing up when women entered a room, refraining

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from using foul language in the company of women, and so on, became unacceptable “discrimination” to feminists.

They encouraged women to behave and speak more like men, and to disdain behaving like ladies.

Niceties shown by men toward women were seen as condescending and sexist, and feminists were ill-mannered toward men who observed these courtesies. One can only imagine the difficulty men (especially older men) encountered as the “revolution” was taking place, trying to gauge what a woman’s reaction would be to the simple act of opening a door: will she smile and say “Thank you,” or will she give a dirty look and ungratefully snap, “I can open a door by myself”? And if he did not open the door, a lady would be affronted by his atrocious

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manners and a feminist would disdainfully ignore him or give him an “I dare you” stare. It was a gamble every time. Most sensible men probably made a hasty detour every time they saw a woman approach a door just to avoid the dilemma.

Feminists may be giving themselves a pat on the back for their tireless efforts to

eliminate these old-fashioned, “sexist,” but perfectly decent manners, but they have now found out that manners are a necessity.

Manners dictate what is appropriate to say and to do in a given setting; manners help people to get along civilly. When manners dictate behavior, people have a way of relating to one another even when communication fails. Manners not only facilitate

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relationships between friends, acquaintances, and colleagues, but also enable mortal enemies and strangers to manage the task of getting along. And manners are especially important, if not vital, to make the workplace a comfortable environment for both men and women without unseemly sexual tension. Merely working in close proximity generally provides tension enough. But while manners are essential, it is unreasonable for feminism to insist upon its convoluted standard of workplace etiquette in the midst of a culture in which

the idea of **imposing standards of decency** between men and women has basically been exterminated.

Beginning in the 1980's, and proceeding right on up through today, in movies, on television, in books, on the radio, and everywhere else, crude language, sexually explicit banter, sexually

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loose behavior, and suggestive innuendo have become everyday conversation and everyday spectacles.

**Our culture is inundated** by the airing of language and subject matter that 40 years ago never saw the light of day, but which today is everyday conversation.

While feminists, including NOW, have been admirably staunch in their condemnation of sexually demeaning lyrics and speech, they have not fully appreciated the connection between the coarsening of acceptable manners—including what should and should not be expressed out loud—and the problems encountered by men and women in the workplace. Despite the fact that society has virtually no standards left as to what is or is not acceptable to air

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in public both in manner or language (other than the politically correct taboos against racist or homophobic or sexist terms or sentiments), men are nevertheless expected to have some innate sense of exactly where the line is on acceptable workplace language and conduct. Men and women are expected to miraculously shed all of the unseemly influences that the entire outside world is forcefully thrusting upon them, and behave like well-bred Victorian gentlemen and ladies the moment their rear ends hit their ergonomically-engineered swivel chairs.

This criticism of irrationality, however, **is not meant to excuse workplace harassment** or misbehavior. Quite the opposite.

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But there must be some degree of proportion. When society is treated to gratuitous utterances of the “F” word as everyday parlance, and sexually explicit speech and conduct are regularly broadcast across the airwaves in prime-time or bluntly discussed in women’s magazines,

**it strains credibility** to assert that women do not have enough fortitude to withstand—or at least appropriately handle—the occasional lapse in judgment

from a male co-worker without calling down the wrath of litigation. If women are to command respect in any sphere, it cannot be based upon codes of manner that are so utterly whimsical, in which men must treat the same woman with varying degrees of dignity depending only upon the time and place.

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The level of respect to which men and women are entitled in the office should approximate the degree of respect women and men *should be* demanding and bestowing in every environment, whether that is on the street, at work, in a bar, seen on television, heard on the radio, or anywhere else. Feminists cannot place the responsibility solely upon men to behave like gentlemen in the office if feminists are not going to insist upon it anywhere else, and

women should not be able to **turn every instance of tactlessness or misjudgment** into a legally actionable offense.

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While manners have always been subject to variation depending upon context—that is, people relax their manners in more casual settings—

never has there been such a wide disconnect **between what is acceptable among the general public and what is allowable in the workplace.**

When grown men and women have only vague clues about what they should or should not say and do at work, when employers happily spend thousands of dollars on lawyers and consultants just to instruct employees not only how to behave like decent human beings, but to introduce them to the novel idea that they need to behave like decent human beings, when thousands of man- (or

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woman-) hours of unproductive employee time are spent on this effort in order to protect companies from liability, it should strike

any sane person that **something is bizarrely wrong.**

Thus, while feminists are justifiably concerned about improper conduct in the workplace, they have basically missed the target.

Men and women have **lost all general and common understanding of good manners.**

They have been released by our culture from the need to respect the privacy and sensitivity of other people both physically and psychologically. Among the general populace, there is no longer any social pressure upon people to consider the feelings and sensibilities of others in governing their own language and

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conduct, and there is no longer any sense of reserve between men and women. Under this regime, where society has been allowed to jettison a common language of etiquette, workplace rules have simply become a repressive device, rather than a true shaping of attitudes and behavior. When women do not generally behave as though they have some personal dignity with respect to their language, their dress, and their conduct; when women do not universally insist upon some measure of decency in every context, it really does not matter what happens in the office.

No amount of liability **will earn women respect** if that respect relies upon a set of stilted, artificial rules grafted onto the business world that have no bearing on behavior anywhere else.

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