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WENDY KAMINER: PANEL THREE - EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVES ON ALL-FEMALE EDUCATION

WENDY KAMINER

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Wendy Kaminer *

WENDY KAMINER: At the risk of seeming stereotypically feminine, I would like to use much of my time to personalize the discussion of single-sex education. I will leave consideration of empirical evidence regarding the presumed benefits of separatism to Joan Bertin and Cynthia Epstein, who are better informed about the data than I am.

My own skepticism about single-sex education is born partly out of mistrust of sexual stereotypes that are almost always invoked in favor of it;¹ historically the same ideals of femininity used to justify sexual separatism presumed to benefit women have been used to justify sex discrimination.² Notions about female styles of learning,³ a natural female preference for cooperation over competitiveness,⁴ and the tendency of girls and women to be intimidated by the presence of males⁵ abound.⁶ And,

* Wendy Kaminer is a Public Policy Fellow at Radcliffe College and a Contributing Editor at the *Atlantic Monthly*. She is also a regular commentator on NPR's *Morning Edition*. A lawyer and social critic, she received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1993. Her latest book is *True Love Waits*, a collection of essays. She is currently working on a book about irrationalism, focusing on popular spirituality and religion. Kaminer's other books include *It's All the Rage: Crime and Culture; I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement & Other Self-Help Fashion*; and *A Fearful Freedom: Women's Flight From Equality*. Her articles and reviews have appeared in publications including *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *The New Republic*. Before embarking on her writing career, she practiced law as a staff attorney in the New York Legal Aid Society and the New York City Mayor's Office.

¹ See *infra* text accompanying notes 5 & 7.

² See *infra* text accompanying notes 6 & 9.

³ See generally Kristin B. Hopkins, Ann V. McGullicuddy-De Lisi and Richard De Lisi, *Student Gender and Teaching Method as Sources of Variability in Children's Computational Arithmetic Performance*, J. GENETIC PSYCHOL. 333, Sept. 1, 1997 (discussing mathematic performance and the fact that boys and girls have different learning styles; girls learn through rules and algorithms while boys learn through a more autonomous approach).

⁴ See generally Kristin S. Caplice, *The Case for Public Single Sex Education*, 18 HARV. J.L. & PUB. POL'Y 227, 243-44 (1994) (discussing the advantages of public single-sex education for both boys and girls and that in single-sex schools girls tend to have higher academic aspirations and feel less pressure without boys in the classroom).

⁵ See generally Lynnell Hancock & Claudia Kalb, *A Room of Their Own*, NEWSWEEK, June 24, 1996, at 76 (stating that girls feel more comfortable studying physics without boys).

advocates of single-sex education, right and left, tend to rely on traditional notions of a female collective,⁷ while opponents hold up the banner of individualism.⁸

Still, politics often trumps ideology in the struggle for and against sexual equality. It is always amusing to see people change sides with no self-consciousness.⁹ Conservatives who regularly attack feminism as an exercise in victimology and female protectionism¹⁰ suddenly start advancing arguments about women's natural weaknesses when the integration of VMI or the Citadel is at issue.¹¹ Feminists who complain about the male ethic that pervades law school classrooms and male learning styles that are inimical to women¹² suddenly start talking about the capacity of women to compete with men as equals in presumptively

⁶ See generally Valerie E. Lee et al., *Sexism in Single-Sex and Coeducational Independent Secondary School Classrooms*, 67 SOC. EDUC. 92, 103-04 (1994) (stating that gender discrimination against females is common in coeducational schools).

⁷ See generally Kingsley R. Browne, *Sex and Temperament in Modern Society: A Darwinian View of Glass Ceiling and the Gender Gap*, 37 ARIZ. L. REV. 971, 1025 (1995) (discussing differences in competition between the sexes, for example, girls tend to take turns and are less competitive than boys).

⁸ See Daniel L. Schwartz, *Discrimination on Campus: A Critical Examination of Single-Sex College Social Organization*, 75 CAL. L. REV. 2117, 2120 (1987) (arguing that single-sex organizations harm individualism because they lead to the conclusion that "societal roles should also be classified by gender"). See generally *Letters to the Editor: Wrong Lessons at Girls' Schools*, WALL ST. J., Sept. 3, 1997, at A21 (stating that "segregation is not the way to achieve equality" and that stereotypes should not be used to justify single-sex education).

⁹ See *infra* notes 12-15 and accompanying text.

¹⁰ See Robert Hughes, *CULTURE OF COMPLAINT: THE FRAYING OF AMERICA* 9 (1993) (stating that "conservatives have been delighted to cast their arguments in same terms of victimology [arguing that] what produces victims is feminism itself.>").

¹¹ William A. DeVan, *Toward a New Standard in Gender Discrimination: The Case of Virginia Military Institute*, 33 WM. & MARY L. REV. 489, 522 (Winter 1992) (indicating that "claims that men and women are dissimilarly situated because women cannot perform as well as men at a military school are fatuous.>").

¹² Nancy L. Farrer, *Of Ivory Columns and Glass Ceilings: The Impact of the Supreme Court of the United States on the Practice of Women Attorneys in Law Firms*, 28 ST. MARY'S L.J. 529, 532 & 540 (1997) (discussing how women have historically struggled to gain admission to law schools and state bars, and how they are seriously underrepresented in the ranks of law firm partners).

masculine environments¹³ - when they are bent on integrating the military academies.¹⁴

I have always favored an individualist, integrationist approach to sexual equality, and so I oppose establishing the Young Women's Leadership School, for some of the same reasons that I oppose publicly funded male only military academies. I realize that an all girls high school can be rationalized as a form of affirmative action¹⁵ while the military academy looks more like intentional discrimination.¹⁶ But as a matter of policy and politics, that is a very difficult distinction to uphold,¹⁷ and as a matter of fact, I doubt that all girls schools will deliver on their promises.

My doubts about all female schools are born from experience, perhaps even more than history. I graduated from Smith College in 1971. Looking back, I can safely say it was one of the most sexist environments in which I have ever been stuck - more sexist than the law school I attended, more sexist than the Brooklyn criminal courts in 1978, in which I briefly practiced.

Of course I do not pretend to speak for all graduates of women's colleges. Many do not share my opinion. I realize as well that women's

¹³ See DeVan, *supra* note 11, at 523 (stating that women have generally performed very well at the service academies and other military colleges).

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ See, e.g., Jolee Land, *Not Dead Yet: The Future of Single-Sex Education After United States v. Virginia*, 27 STETSON L. REV. 297, 303 (1997) (discussing how the state of Mississippi attempted to defend the single-sex admissions policy at MUW, an all-female nursing school, by claiming that the policy was a form of gender affirmative action because it was intended to compensate for past discrimination against women).

¹⁶ See generally Laurie A. Keco, *The Citadel: Last Male Bastion or New Training Ground?*, 46 CASE W. RES. L. REV. 479 (1996) (recounting how the Department of Justice brought suit against Virginia, claiming that VMI's admissions policy violated the Equal Protection Clause); Karen Lazarus Kupetz, *Equal Benefits, Equal Burdens: "Skeptical Scrutiny" for Gender Classifications after United States v. Virginia*, 30 LOY. L.A. REV. 1333, 1347 (1997) (noting that VMI readily admitted its intentional discrimination against women and rationalized this as serving a legitimate state interest, that is, diversity in education).

¹⁷ See Christopher H. Pyle, *Women's Colleges: Is Segregation By Sex Still Justifiable After United States v. Virginia?*, 77 B.U. L. REV. 209, 235 & n.101 (1997) (stating that affirmative action is one reason women's colleges still claim to exist, but it remains to be seen how this argument will fare under skeptical scrutiny).

colleges have changed over the past 25 years.¹⁸ Still, some of the same arguments advanced by advocates of single-sex education today¹⁹ were advanced 25 and 30 years ago,²⁰ and many people point to the seven sister schools²¹ as exemplars of the single-sex educational experience.²² So, it seems worth offering a contrary perspective.

The sexism of exclusively female schools is insidious.²³ It is true that they encourage academic achievement in women and girls,²⁴ but they discourage academic competition with men.²⁵ They encourage

¹⁸ See generally Deborah L. Rhode, *Association and Assimilation*, 81 NW. U. L. REV. 106, 133-34 (1986) (stating how women's colleges have changed their curriculum since the 1970's to include courses that center on women in art, literature, politics, or history). In addition to changing their curriculum, single-sex schools were transforming into coeducational institutions so that by the mid-1980's only 2.3 percent of all college women were enrolled in women's colleges. *Id.* at 136.

¹⁹ See generally Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, *The Myths and Justifications of Sex Segregation in Higher Education: VMI and the Citadel*, 4 DUKE J. GENDER L. & POL'Y 101 (1997) (discussing some of the justifications currently advanced by advocates of single-sex education).

²⁰ See generally JoEllen Lind, *Symbols, Leaders, Practitioners: The First Women Professionals*, 28 VAL. U.L. REV. 1327, 1329 (discussing the general history and the development of women's colleges). See generally Land, *supra* note 15 (discussing the advantages of single-sex education such as higher self-regard and self-confidence, greater verbal assertiveness, higher career aspirations, and expanded leadership opportunities). See also Pyle, *supra* note 19, at 222-23 (referring to the age old stereotype that men perform better in single-sex military academies because they are not held back by the "weaker sex" or distracted by the opposite sex).

²¹ See Pyle, *supra* note 17, at 234 n.92 (listing the Seven Sister schools as Mount Holyoke College, Vassar, Smith, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Radcliffe, and Barnard).

²² See Karla Cooper-Boggs, Note, *The Link Between Private and Public Single-Sex Colleges: Will Wellesley Stand or Fall With The Citadel?*, 29 IND. L. REV. 131, 142 n.96 (1995) (describing the Seven Sister Schools as the seven most prestigious women's colleges in the United States).

²³ See *infra* notes 24-29 and accompanying text.

²⁴ See Valerie K. Vojdik, *Girls' Schools After VMI: Do They Make the Grade?*, 4 DUKE J. GENDER L. & POL'Y 69, 83 (1997) (discussing the educational benefits of all-girl schools).

²⁵ See Pyle, *supra* note 17, at 231-32 (recounting that the first President of Smith College said that the school would not produce competitors with men nor would the school diminish womanhood).

heterosexual women to separate their sexual and intellectual lives.²⁶ They create environments where men and women interact primarily romantically and not collegially.²⁷ Men are dates, not classmates.²⁸ They confirm the fearful notion that intelligence and assertiveness are unfeminine.²⁹

In my senior year at Smith, the college conducted a survey on student attitudes toward coeducation. It was about the same time that women's colleges were considering going coed,³⁰ as Vassar soon did.³¹ A majority of students were opposed to integrating Smith.³²

One of the primary reasons offered for their opposition was a preference not to compete with men intellectually.³³ Even graduates of coed high schools did not talk then about suffering discrimination in coed classrooms; whatever inhibitions they suffered were at least partly self-imposed. They accepted the social mandates not to argue with men or

²⁶ See Caplice, *supra* note 4, at 256-57 (noting that girls' preoccupation with sexual attractiveness will conflict with academic accomplishment in a coeducational setting, and that this preoccupation is absent in a single-sex educational setting).

²⁷ See Jacques Steinberg, *Just Girls and That's Fine With Them: At a New School No Boys, Less Fussing, and a Freer Spirit*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 1, 1997, at A21 (noting that students at the Young Women's Leadership School persuaded school officials to allow boys on campus for one night only in order to attend a Valentine's Day social).

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ Cf. Caplice, *supra* note 4, at 265 (advancing the notion that an all girl educational setting seeks to "eliminate the conflict between assertiveness and sex role stereotypes for women."). See also Rhode, *supra* note 18, at 130 (noting the old stereotype that women should not be "bookish" or intelligent).

³⁰ See Caroline V. Clarke, *A New Face in the Ivory Tower*, BLACK ENTERPRISES, Oct. 1, 1995, available in 1995 WL 9980997 (noting that in the early 1970's, Ivy League Colleges began to admit women and the Seven Sister Schools followed suit by beginning to admit men).

³¹ See Ann Meeks, *Vassar Road*, COM. APPEAL, July 29, 1995, available in 1995 WL 9356571 (noting that Vassar became coeducational in 1969).

³² See generally Pyle, *supra* note 17 (discussing the contentious issue regarding whether or not female colleges still have sufficient grounds to exclude men and stating that Smith has been avoiding this issue for years).

³³ See Rhode, *supra* note 18, at 131 (stating that administrators denied that the college would produce competitors with men), see also Pyle, *supra* note 17, at 231-32.

outshine them academically;³⁴ they were quiet in class, not because men were silencing them but because they did not want to compromise their femininity.³⁵ Many students said they liked being at a women's school because they did not have to dress up to go to class or worry about their appearance at all during the week.³⁶ In other words, they were smart on weekdays and pretty on weekends.

I have always thought that student opposition to coeducation at Smith provided a particularly powerful argument in favor of it. Women's colleges seemed to be pandering to women's fears about masculinizing themselves.³⁷ Smith was accepting the limits of femininity rather than challenging them.

Social mores were extremely sexist.³⁸ The sexism I ran into in the criminal courts in the late 70's was nothing compared to the sexism of a mixer. Single-sex schools provide little, if any, opportunities for collegial relationships between the sexes, and collegiality is the key to social equality.³⁹ I suspect that laws against sexual harassment are not nearly as effective in ending it as are the daily experiences of men interacting with competent, intelligent female colleagues. There is virtually none of that interaction in an exclusively female school.

So, there is a tendency, I think, to romanticize single-sex schools. We forget, for example, what class bound institutions the seven sisters

³⁴ Sharon K. Mollman, *The Gender Gap: Separating the Sexes in Public Education*, 68 IND. L.J. 149, 171-72 (1992) (arguing that "some studies have shown that girls will deliberately hold back from achievement out of fear that boys will not find them attractive if they are too successful.").

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Id.* at 171 & n.161 (advancing that an all-girls school will free girls from being preoccupied with their appearances).

³⁷ *Id.* at 171-72.

³⁸ See Rhode, *supra* note 18, at 107-11 (noting that although neither society in general nor the feminist community in particular are in agreement concerning the role that gender differences should play, the fact remains that single-sex organizations that have existed "fostered both separatist and feminist sentiments.").

³⁹ See Mollman, *supra* note 34, at 175-76 (emphasizing that a "plan to eliminate the inequities" in co-ed schools must incorporate a program for compensatory all-girls programs to offset the established all-boys programs).

were.⁴⁰ I never felt subject to any anti-female bias in the coed public high school I attended. But, as a middle class New York Jew, I felt considerable class bias at Smith. That has probably not survived the past 25 years because the student body has changed considerably.⁴¹

The biases I encountered at Smith are not at issue, of course, in the Young Women's Leadership School. In fact, opponents of the school, like me, are the ones accused of class bias; our opposition is framed as an effort to deny lower income Latina teenagers the same opportunities enjoyed by their upper class counterparts.⁴² Advocates for the Young Women's Leadership School say that the daughters of the wealthy attend all female private schools, so why not establish public single-sex schools to provide equal opportunities to the daughters of less affluent families?⁴³

But why should we assume that rich parents are doing their daughters a favor by sending them to all girls schools? The fact that some rich people favor single-sex education is not evidence of its superiority. I do not consider the upper class a model of social progressivism, especially when it comes to sexual equality. Rich people also have coming out parties for their daughters,⁴⁴ which never seemed like progressive, feminist events to me. All female schools were a creation of the genteel classes.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ See Rhode, *supra* note 18, at 139 (recognizing a connection between single-sex schools and higher socioeconomic status).

⁴¹ *Id.* at 136 (citing that since the turn of the century, coeducational and single-sex schools have been changing).

⁴² See generally Mary B.W. Tabor, *Planners of a New Public School for Girls Look to Two Other Cities*, N.Y. TIMES, July 22, 1996, at B3 (mentioning single-sex schools like the Philadelphia High School for Girls, where, although some students come from affluent families, "half of the students are from poor families and qualify for free or discount lunches.").

⁴³ *Id.* (noting that the success of Girls High in Philadelphia and Western High School in Baltimore, both of which provide lower income girls with educational programs usually reserved for their more affluent counterparts, make them models for the new public school for girls in New York City).

⁴⁴ See Kathryn Balint, *Down Year For "Debs" in La Jolla*, SAN DIEGO UNION-TRIBUNE, Jan. 22, 1992, at A1 (noting that only high society can afford to participate in the debutante coming out process).

⁴⁵ See Lind, *supra* note 20, at 1331 (indicating that initially education was made available to women from middle- and upper-class families).

As they developed, female secondary schools and colleges did subvert some notions of femininity and advance the entry of women into public life⁴⁶ - and coeducational schools. But they also retained some clearly feminine attributes and ideals.⁴⁷ Sexual homogeneity does not in and of itself ensure a nurturing, egalitarian environment.⁴⁸ And co-education is not inherently inegalitarian.⁴⁹ One recent study of female secondary schools found sexism in their chemistry classes, in which "undue attention was paid to neatness and cleanliness as well as to drawing parallels between domesticity and chemistry activities."⁵⁰

So I caution against trying to solve the problem of sexism in coed schools by attacking the schools instead of the sexism. It comes in all sorts of disguises.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 1334 (stating that as a result of the female education movement, many women began to apply their education to the political and social spheres).

⁴⁷ See Lind, *supra* note 20, at 1331 (stating that all-female schools generally tended to "appropriate[] rather than challenge[] the woman's sphere ideology that permeated American culture by purporting to produce better homemakers.").

⁴⁸ See Caplice, *supra* note 4, at 241 & n.43 (quoting Hoffman that "[t]here is no convincing evidence one way or another of the relative academic achievement of women at single-sex schools, as compared with women at coeducational institutions.").

⁴⁹ *But see* Mollman, *supra* note 34, at 170 (stating that "[s]tudents in co-ed classrooms are treated differently on the basis of gender.").

⁵⁰ Valerie Lee, *Sexism in Single Sex & Coeducational Independent Secondary School Classrooms*, 67 SOC. OF EDUC. 92, 104 (1994).