

Sexist Pigs – Sexist Sows

By Stephanie MacKendrick

Sexist pig: n. *A filthy, porcine creature who habitually uses innuendo, graphically inappropriate metaphors and suggestive comments to intimidate and otherwise discomfit those of the opposite sex. A real boar.*

It's one of those expressions most often hurled in disgust, usually in the wake of some leering, totally inappropriate comment, proposition or attempted grope. Sexist pig!

It's what you call someone who sexualizes every encounter and uses sexually-charged tactics to make a person of the opposite sex feel uncomfortable and at a disadvantage. It especially applies to those who unleash their lascivious antics at the workplace. We're not talking about someone who tells you that you look nice, or that they admire what you're wearing. We're talking vivid descriptions of body parts and recommendation about what one should or would like to do with them, speculating about one's intimate life or singling out and embarrassing with innuendo because someone is the only one of the opposite gender in the room. It's about sexually explicit jokes that are meant to make you uncomfortable (as opposed to sharing jokes with someone you know well enough that they won't be offended and in an appropriate setting).

The sexist pig is a loathsome creature and has been a major impediment in the struggle for women to have an equal place in society, and particularly in the workplace. The career-plaguing SP is the one who comments on how your pants fit when you're trying to make a presentation, who calls you honey and singles you out when you're in a roomful of the opposite gender and suggests that you must be a tiger in bed when you show any signs of asserting yourself. (And then gets offended when you suggest that the remarks are inappropriate.)

We've made a huge amount of progress in sensitizing society to the harm inflicted by sexists and their piggy behaviour. In the early days, much of the anti-pig effort was strictly educational, making sure that everyone understood what was okay and what wasn't. Much of the problem was not malice, but habit, ignorance or insensitivity. My own observation is that the sexist pig of yore is whiffing his last oink, in that overt offensive behaviour has diminished spectacularly in a generation. There aren't too many places that you can go in business today where they'll openly make sport of you just because you're the odd one out and now there is legislation to guard against such sexual harassment.

So, why even discuss it?

Sadly, it's because the porcine peril is back, though this time it appears that it's the Sexist Sow who has made her debut. I've been seeing with increasing frequency women doing precisely the same sexist things that they so vehemently objected to men doing for all these years. I find this quite distressing because, if it's not okay for men to make women feel like they are a chunk of meat ready to be served on someone's platter, surely it's not okay for women to do the same to men?

It's an old and sad fact that all too often, the oppressed become the oppressors. It's at the root of so many personal, political and religious conflicts. And now, it seems that if

we're not careful, women will indulge in this loathsome practice and belly up to the sexist trough with the other porkers.

It makes me wonder how as a group we can turn around and do the same thing to men that we have so bitterly complained about when we were on the receiving end.

To me, there can be no real progress if all that happens is just a shift in who the perpetrators are. You can't leer at the cute young waiter and remark on the attractive rotundity of his gluteous maximus in the same breath as complaining about the way men drool and make lewd comments about the bodacious Raptors Dance Pack. And the whole cougar thing. Somehow it's gone from older women can still be attractive to younger men (good) to middle-aged women predators looking for fresh meat (bad).

And I guess that's what it comes down to. A particular practice is either okay or it's not. And if it's okay for one group, it should be okay for the other. Thus, if it's human nature that boys will be boys, then I suppose it's okay that girls will be girls. But we, like they, cannot have it both ways.