

(Retro)sexism in the church

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I learned a new word recently and then encountered it three times that day. "Retrosexism" hasn't made it into the Oxford English Dictionary yet, but a Google search turns up several thousand hits, and *Newsweek* [noted](#) last month that "the term 'retrosexual' has all but replaced 'metrosexual' in the lifestyle sections of national magazines."

If a metrosexual male is all about fashionable clothes, designer hygiene products, willingness to show emotions, and general open-minded eschewing of traditional masculinity, a retrosexual is the opposite. Retrosexuals reclaim the old notion of men who care little about their appearance and harken back to a more classic understanding of masculinity, no hair product allowed.

"Retrosexism" is the sexism that can accompany these retrosexual attitudes. Often this includes an ironic twist: the retrosexual understands that an idea is offensive but persists anyway, assuming a free pass since he *knows* it's sexist. Anita Sarkeesian calls this the "I know that you know that I know" approach to unacceptable sexist behavior:

Retrosexism often glorifies sexism of the past with the double logic that, since folks know the attitude is sexist, it's somehow okay to look the other way. Think of jokes that end with punch lines about what an old-fashioned grandfather might say about gender relations. Or consider an otherwise forward-thinking college guy winkingly telling a female friend to do his laundry.

Call it "retrosexism" or just plain "sexism." The

objectification and undervaluing of women continues to get a pass in our culture. This is wrong; it's sin. But I'm betting that it will become more common in our churches in the near future. As women finally make significant inroads into equitable leadership and encounter fewer sexist attitudes in the church, there will be a backlash. Congregational presidents will joke about a pastor not truly deserving maternity leave. Masculine homiletics will attempt to crowd out the feminist voice.

Also,

since retro culture tends to look backward with rose-colored glasses, perhaps the church will increase—if this is possible—its glorification of the past.

This might include snippets such as "Back in the day before woman pastors" or "I remember when we didn't need female representation on the church council."

Maybe

I'm wrong about this. I hope so—not everything retro is worth bringing back.