

Gynocentrism

Gynocentrism is a dominant or exclusive focus on women in theory or practice; or to the advocacy of this.^[1] Anything can be considered gynocentric when it is concerned exclusively with a female (or feminist) point of view.^[2]

Contents

History

Etymology

Criticism

In contemporary society

See also

References

External links

History

The term gynocentrism has been in use since at least 1897 when it appeared in The Open Court stating that Continental Europeans view Americans "as suffering rather from gynocentrism than anthropocentrism."^[3] In 1914, author George A. Birmingham stated that "American social life seems to me gynocentric. It is arranged with a view to the convenience and delight of women. Men come in where and how they can."^[4]

Beginning with second-wave feminism in the 1970s, the term gynocentrism has been used to describe difference feminism, which displayed a shift towards understanding and accepting gender differences, in contrast to equality feminism.^[5]

According to University of Massachusetts philosopher Christa Hodapp, in modern men's movements gynocentrism is described as a continuation of the courtly love conventions of medieval times, wherein women were valued as a quasi-aristocratic class, and males were seen as a lower serving class. This antifeminist viewpoint describes feminism as the perpetuation of oppressive medieval conventions such as devotional chivalry and romanticized relationships, rather than as a movement towards liberation.^[6]

Religious studies professors Paul Nathanson and Katherine K. Young claim that feminist calls for equality or equity are a subterfuge for gynocentrism.^[7]

Etymology

The term *gynocentrism* is derived from ancient Greek, γυνή and κέντρον. Γυνή can be translated as *woman* or *female*,^{[8][9]} but also as *wife*.^{[8][9]} In ancient Greek compounds with γυνή, the stem γυναικ- is normally used.^[9] This stem can be spotted in the genitive case γυναικός,^[8] and in the older form of the nominative case γύναιξ.^[8] In ancient Greek, no compounds are known to exist with γυνή that start with γυνο- or γυνω-.^[9]

The ancient Greek word κέντρον can be translated as *sharp point*,^[9] *sting (of bees and wasps)*,^[9] *point of a spear*^[9] and *stationary point of a pair of compasses*,^[9] with the meaning *centre of a circle* related to the latter.^[9] The meaning *centre/middle point (of a circle)* is preserved in the Latin word *centrum*,^{[10][11]} a loanword from ancient Greek.^{[10][11]} The English word *centre* is derived from the Latin *centrum*.^[12] The word κέντρον is derived from the verb κεντεῖν,^{[9][11]} meaning *to sting (of bees)*,^[9] *to prick*,^[9] *to goad*,^[9] and *to spur*.^[9] When trying to explain etymologically the term *gynocentrism*, it is important to consider the ancient Greek κέντρον, with the signification *middle point/centre*, and not the more obvious ancient Greek word κεντρισμός (mirroring *-centrism*).

Criticism

Nathanson and Young state that ideologically, the overriding focus of gynocentrism is to prioritize females hierarchically, and as a result may be interpreted as misandry (hatred of and prejudice towards men). Feminist calls for equality or even equity are often, according to them, a subterfuge for gynocentrism.^[7]

They define gynocentrism as a worldview based on the implicit or explicit belief that the world revolves around women, a cultural theme that they claim has become 'de rigueur' behind the scenes in law courts and government bureaucracies, resulting in systemic discrimination against men.^[13] They further state that gynocentrism is a form of essentialism – as distinct from scholarship or political activity on behalf of women- to the extent that it focuses on the innate *virtues* of women and the innate *vices* of men.^[14]

Some authors make discriminations between *individual* gynocentric acts and events, such as Mother's Day, and the more general concept of a *gynocentric culture* which refers to a larger collection of culture traits that have major significance in the way people's lives were lived.^[15]

Some post-modern feminists such as Nancy Fraser question the assumption of a stable concept of 'woman' which underlies all gynocentrism.^[16] Nathanson and Young make a comparable claim that gynocentrism is a form of essentialism as distinct from scholarship or political activity on behalf of women, to the extent that it focuses on the innate virtues of women. Nathanson and Young add that "This worldview is explicitly misandric too, because it not only ignores the needs and problems of men, but also attacks men."^[14]

Christina Hoff Sommers has argued that gynocentrism is anti-intellectual and holds an antagonistic view of traditional scientific and creative disciplines, dismissing many important discoveries and artistic works as masculine. Sommers also writes that the presumption of objectivity ascribed to many gynocentrist theories has stifled feminist discourse and interpretation.^[17]

Feminist writer Lynda Burns emphasises that gynocentrism calls for a celebration of women's positive differences—of women's history, myths, arts and music—as opposed to an assimilationist model privileging similarity to men.^[18] However observed in practice, the preeminence of women associated with gynocentric narratives is often seen as absolute: interpersonally, culturally, historically, politically, or in broader social contexts such as popular entertainment. As such, it can shade into what Rosalind Coward called "womanism...a sort of popularized version of feminism which acclaims everything women do and disparages men".^[19]

The Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW) community describes themselves as a backlash against the misandry of gynocentrism.^[20]

In contemporary society

In a 2019 study of Trinidad society published in the *Justice Policy Journal*, researchers concluded that "gynocentrism pervades all aspects of the criminal justice system as well as society."^[21]

See also

- [Androcentrism](#)
- [Gynocriticism](#)
- [Red Tent Meetings](#)

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