

# Implicit and Structural Witchery

You're back in Salem during the 1690s. After an exhaustive hunt for witches, the Lord High Witch Hunter files a bombshell report: Despite his best efforts, he's failed to find any witches in Salem. Don't imagine, though, that the fight against witchery is over. During his investigation, the Lord High Witch Hunter uncovered an enormous volume of "implicit witchery" and "structural witchery." For example, residents of Salem occasionally skip church, or lose interest during the sermon. That's implicit witchery, pure and simple. Even worse, some leading merchants happily trade with Catholics and pagans. That's structural witchery at the highest levels of society.

If you're part of this society, you'd better not laugh. That's implicit witchery, too. For anyone else, however, the Lord High Witch Hunter's report is absurd. The magistrate launches a massive witchhunt. He fails to detect actual witches. So he redefines "witchery" as "Lack of single-minded devotion to my faith." Why bother with this farce? To make a thinly-veiled threat: If you're not part of the solution to witchery, you're an implicit/structural witch. And will be burned like a witch.

Similarly, imagine that during the McCarthy era you fail to uncover any actual Communists. The Lord High McCarthyite could admit he was wrong, but where's the fun in that? Wouldn't it be better to declare that you've discovered a massive dose of "implicit Communism" and "structural Communism"? As long as your society fears you, anything could count. Perhaps support for progressive taxes is implicit Communism. Perhaps the overrepresentation of left-wing academics in state-funded universities is structural Communism. Yes, you can cry, "Bait-and-switch." But that sounds dangerously close to implicit Communism.

Or suppose you're in modern Iran. The Lord High Inquisitor hunts for atheists, but can't find any. So he declares war on implicit atheism and structural atheism, which abound even in the Islamic Republic. Shocking? Not really, because almost anything qualifies as implicit atheism or structural atheism. If this is such an obvious scam, how come hardly anyone in Iran says so? Fear. Minimizing the danger of implicit atheism is a prime example of implicit atheism.

In the modern West, hardly anyone worries about in-the-flesh witches, Communists, or atheists, much less implicit or structural versions of these creeds. But that's because the targets have changed, not because the age of moral panic is over. And while the list of targets is long, racists and sexists are plainly at the top. The most obvious result is that people spend ample time trying to find racist and sexist individuals. In practice, however, this is as frustrating as trying to find witches in Salem. People today are about as likely to declare themselves racists and sexists as people in 17th-century Massachusetts were to

declare themselves brides of Satan. Part of the reason, no doubt, is fear; avowed racists do get punched in the face, after all. The main reason, though, is that almost no one sympathizes with creeds that almost everyone hates.

So what are you supposed to do if you want to continue the good fight against social ills you've already practically driven to extinction? Move the goalposts all the way to Mars. These days, the world's best detectives would struggle to find outright racists and sexists. Yet implicit racism, structural racism, implicit sexism, and structural sexism will always be in plain sight, because the definition expands as the phenomenon contracts.