

**What's Gender Got to Do with It:  
Facilitating Conflict Between Men and Women  
Process Work Institute  
May 2005**

**Plan for evening:**

- Talk about concept of gender
- Discuss psychological theories about gender differences
- Question and discuss how gender effects communication and conflict
- Discuss internalized oppression and how sexism effects both men and women
- Concluding ideas

**1.What is gender? Can't talk about conflict between men and women without first looking at concept of gender.**

If we discuss conflict and communication problems between men and women we are accepting the idea that

- a) there is such a thing as 2 genders
- b) there are essential typical differences

Let's look at each of these assumptions

**a) Deconstructing gender**

For most people, talking about gender and gender differences is like a fish talking about water. The 2 sex gender system is so accepted and all pervasive that most of us don't even think to question it. We assume that gender and biology are one and the same.

It is such a routine and the assumptions are so taken for granted—for some, questioning gender is almost like questioning if the sun will come up or the earth is round.

But some theorists have posed that gender itself is a social construction. The deconstruction of gender comes out of post-modernism and queer theory.

(Judith Lorber, Judith Butler, Kate Bornstein, Lesli Feinberg, John Stoltenberg)

Let's allow our minds to ponder the possibility that "gender" is, according to Judith Butler, a "**complex cultural construction.**"

Concept of gender is extremely important to reinforce consensus reality and the status quo in society. Gender is so important that it is one of the defining factors of who a person is-- the most essential difference between people is whether they are male or female, which is a biological designation decided by whether you have a penis or a vagina. If an infant is born with ambiguous genitalia (so-called hermaphrodite), the doctor decides and the body is changed surgically, sometimes with or without the parent's consent or permission. This procedure is much more common than one might think. (I worked with a client who had dreams and body memories that she was surgically altered at birth— she had a personal myth around androgyny.) Once the baby's genitals are decided, gender is assigned and the parents and the world treat the child and refer to the child accordingly. All of the processes and routines we engage in to reinforce whether someone is a girl or a boy—from which toys to buy to what color the baby blanket should be-- contribute to the social construction of gender.

Instead of questioning this, most of us equate gender with "biological gender" meaning genitals and reproductive organs. We call it our "sex" and we refer to each other as "the opposite sex."

**How does this effect how we think we must behave? And what does this do to our relationships?**

Gender, as we know it, is not just a mutual recognition and appreciation of differences. Gender is a hierarchical system which values certain traits and behaviours while devaluing and marginalizing others. Some theorists suggest that this system keeps male dominance and privilege in place.

**Kate Bornstein**-- transsexual lesbian performance artist wrote book called *Gender Outlaw*. She says 2 genders are like a caste system. It is kept in place by economic necessity. It supports male privilege and sexism. Without the concept of male and female there could be no male privilege. We could have no sexism.

She would ask us to ponder:

- What is a man? What does a man feel like? What is a woman? What does a woman feel like?
- How do you have to behave in this culture in order to be perceived as a man/ a woman? What are the behavior cues?
- How do you have to look in order to be perceived as a man/ a woman? What are the physical/visual cues?
- Have you ever "passed" as a different gender? What was this like for you?
- Can you imagine a world without gender? without only two genders? Can you imagine a world where gender is a continuum?
- If you could choose your gender, what would you choose?

In most modern societies, the gender "male" has a higher social status than the gender "female." In USA in 2000 more than a 1000 Michigan elementary students were asked to describe what it would be like if they were born the opposite sex, more than 40 percent of girls saw positive advantages to being a boy. 95 percent of boys saw no advantages to being a girl.

### **Why is this?**

The traits which are male, such as competition, aggression, outgoingness, toughness are considered superior in our culture and rewarded. Traits which are considered female such as emotionality and sensitivity are devalued if not derided. Additionally, if a biological man has so called female traits he is derided (called gay). Unless he is with his children and considered a nurturing father. If a biological woman has male traits she is derided (called lesbian or butch or animus possessed.) Unless it is in a business setting. Then she is appreciated. This is where sexism and homophobia collide.

Most heterosexuals, if they don't act in accordance with their gender, think they are strange, rather than question the gender assumption or the concept of gender itself. In fact we have needed a new term—metrosexual—to describe heterosexual men who have "gay qualities" such as good taste and sensitivity. Why do we need a new term?

Later we will look at how these cultural biases becomes internalized, thus creating “internalized oppression” in both men and women.

The constraints of gender in terms of the limitations on personal freedom constrain both men and women equally. But the gender system benefits men socially and economically.

Especially in wealthier and white groups, men still have huge economic advantages. The more economic resources a group has, the more they are monopolized by men. In poorer and social disadvantaged groups there is more economic equality between the genders

(To those who question that there is still inequality:

Yes, there are more girls in college now than boys... but not in the ivy league schools. Yes, more boys are dropping out of school, but not middle/upper class white boys. )

**It is interesting to note:**

- Native American and Hindu culture have special spiritual status for those with fluid or ambiguous gender identities. “Berdaches” Kodiak Islanders, in early 19<sup>th</sup> century –assigned female gender to child with penis. These “women brought huge good luck to their husbands and larger dowries to the parents. Hijras,” lower caste Hindus. Come to weddings for good luck
- Western culture does not give an elevated status to cross dressers, transsexuals. Rather psychiatry talks about “gender identity disorder” or gender dysphoria.
- If you don't have the behavior that is supposed to go along with your gender, this becomes an aspect of your personal psychology-- something to work on: “I am not very feminine”
- Or if your “*assigned gender*” doesn’t correspond with your “*felt gender*” you are *transgendered* and may choose to have an operation (genital reassignment surgery) which alters your genitals to correspond with your experience. (transsexual)
- Interesting to ponder—if culture weren’t so rigid about gender would it be necessary to go to all that expense and trouble to change your sex organs. Why not live as whichever gender you want?

Same gender relationships are often ahead of heterosexuals and can be teachers for straights in their exploration and diversity of gender experiences:

- Freedom of both men and women to be everything
- Fantasy and imagination do not remain within the bounds of our gender identities
- Limiting to only feel yourself as your gender with your organs, freedom of fantasy, sex toys, what allows some this exploration and others don't have the freedom?
- Concept of "gender fuck" from Susie Bright
- "Gender is a sex toy." Slogan from the sm movement. This means gender is a dreaming process and not just a biological one.

People attempting to move beyond constraints of biology, gender identity and life style. Nature has imposed gender on us but do we have to be limited by it? Let it be fluid.

### **Examples:**

Psychology can collude with these assumptions. In the beginning of my practice, before I was fluid around these ideas. I worked with a woman who felt she wasn't a "real" woman. She wanted to be more nurturing. I thought this was an edge, that she needed to be more "feminine, soft" I fell into cultural trap and tried to help her walk, act like her idea of a "woman." Lots of negative feedback. She felt stupid, couldn't do it, was bored. Then I noticed her signals: plain dress, angular body, short hair. Helped her amplify these "manly" qualities. I helped her be a man. As a man she could be a nurturer. She has since shaved her head and decided to live as a man who loves women. Very nurturing and loving to her partner.

### **In pw we consider gender as a fluid process**

In one moment you may identify as nurturer in next as hunter, warrior. Be free to be both and all. Also sexually.

## **2. Theories of gender difference**

Let's look at how this gendered system effects our psychologies, according to some other theorists.

The main psychological theories developed in the last century keep this 2 gendered system in place.

### **Psychodynamic assumption about gender**

Most mainstream theories of gender difference come from one psychodynamic assumption-- Women are primary caregivers, therefore girls can develop in identity with caregivers and can have fluid boundaries, are interested in relating. Boys must develop in opposition to caregiver, they must separate from their mothers, therefore develop rigid boundaries in order to develop a male identity --they must over-identify with the penis.

**Freud:** (Freud basically thought that "Anatomy is destiny")

Most of western psychology comes from Freud-think about that

Listen to what he says in 1933:

"The discovery that she is castrated is a turning point in the girl's growth. The girl's penis envy persists as a feeling of inferiority and a predisposition to jealousy; her perpetual desire for a penis is, in the mature woman converted to the desire for a child. Particularly for a son, who brings the longed for penis with him."

So she is only complete through connection ( with a man and male child )

He says that the girl's envy dooms her to feelings of inferiority but also to actual inferiority in terms of a woman's sense of justice, intellectual curiosity, capacity to implement her ideas.

Freud asserts that women someday have the hope of obtaining a penis despite everything "... I cannot escape the notion that for women, what is ethically normal is different than for men... We must not allow ourselves to be deflected from such conclusions by the denials of the feminists, who are anxious to force us to regard the two sexes equal in position and worth."

For boys, the Oedipal crisis is central—this is the time when the boy has to surrender his attachment to his mother and develop a “superego” and a sense of autonomy that will propel him through life.

**Jung:** (Jung, too, was sexist in his thinking.)

Jung made the claim in 1948: " In men, Eros, the function of relationship, is usually less developed than Logos. In women on the other hand, Eros is an expression of their true nature, while their logos is often only a regrettable accident."

Jung insulted both “anima type” and “animus possessed” women.

**Jung insulted women. Soon we will look at how current gender theories insult men, claiming they cannot relate properly.**

Social psychologists such as Alfred Adler and Karen Horney recognized the cultural factors effecting girls’ sense of inferiority and low self esteem.

**Alfred Adler:**

Adler made the radical suggestion that psychological differences between the sexes are entirely the result of cultural attitudes. He also pointed out that a culture's attitude towards men and women profoundly affect an individual's development from birth. He condemned society's conception of women as inferior and said this view was meant to perpetuate male domination and privilege.

"A girl comes into the world with a prejudice sounding in her ears which is designed only to rob her of her belief in her own value, to shatter her self confidence, and destroy her hope of ever doing anything worthwhile... The obvious advantages of being a man in our society have caused severe disturbances in the psychic development of women." Psychoanalysis and Women. 1973

**Karen Horney**

Although she agrees with "penis envy" she says that the little girl sees herself as disadvantaged in not having a penis based on the realistic assessment that she has fewer possibilities for success and gratification

### **Carol Gilligan and John Gray—hugely influential gender difference theorists**

These theories have been interesting for me to study, and quite disturbing because of my own experience of having never been a "normal" woman, who fits the categories they describe.

### **Gilligan : Essentialism or "different voiced" feminism—1982. In a Different Voice.. p.20**

She proposed a new theory of human development that was different than Freud's. She said there are essential differences in the qualities of men and women. Women have an innate "relational self" that men lack. Women are talented care-givers and men are inferior at relating. (Women are different and somehow better)

Men and women's moral development take different paths based on what happened in early childhood. Boys have to separate from their mother's. Girls get to develop in connection with mothers.

Gilligan claims that women's morals are based on '**care reasoning**' while men's are based on "**justice reasoning.**"

Heintz experiment—is it okay to break into the pharmacy to steal medicine for your dying wife: Yes. Justice places the right to life above the right to property. Women scored lower than men. Harvard's Lawrence Kohlberg used this to prove that women's moral development was less mature than men's. Gilligan said no—wrong scale. Women's reasoning is not based on abstract notion of justice but on beliefs about human care and connection

According to Gilligan, the indisputable fact of our gender determines how we interact, behave, communicate. She was hugely influential in the 1990s. Even if we don't know Gilligan's theories, every time we

say ... “that’s a guy thing” or “she would never understand cause she’s a girl” we are influenced by her theories. It happens when we excuse men’s insensitivity or women’s emotionality as due to their gender...

Carol Gilligan’s intent was to value the female role, and even make her superior to men. But she inadvertently supported the sexist stereotype. The idea of a “relational self” is new wine in an old bottle, reinforcing gender stereotypes. Now women must be held to a higher, more caring standard. It backlashed and was used as an excuse for women not to become successful in the man’s world. Proves they are unsuitable to be aggressive CEOs, etc.

### **John Gray. Men are from Mars, Women from Venus—**

Wildly popular, one-size-fits-all approach,. As of 2002, 15 million books sold, outstripped only by the Bible. He is the only author ever to have sold out Carnegie Hall

- Men are naturally programmed to go into their caves and not communicate
- Women must honor this behavior and not try to talk to them when they are in the cave
- Women must not try to help a man, it will make him feel weak and incompetent
- Never criticize man, only talk when you are loving and centered
- Men should learn to admire and appreciate all the work women do at home and send flowers (not help with housework)
- Men should listen more and respect women’s feelings

In Gray’s universe, it is the woman’s job to tend the relationship. Men are goal oriented, see everything in terms of competition, fixing and win/lose. They are not wired to be relational.

His book became wildly popular with men and women as women were moving out of the home and out of the typical homemaker role. Why is this? It would be way too difficult for women to fight it out and expect men to be “relational” on their “second shift” at home. He offered a rationalization for men’s bad behavior. They are not wired to do any better. They are incapable.

This rationalizes and reinforces the power relationship-- men are better at work. Women are better at home. I can't tell you how many men in my practice today, say that they are bad at expressing feelings, are numb, don't know how to feel. I believe this is a painful result of socialization, not an innate inadequacy.

### **Evolutionary psychology:**

Draws on Darwinian theory, evolutionary biology

Human's basic drive is to pass genes on to next generation. Men and women's brains developed in accordance with how they coped with their reproductive selves. Women needed time to nourish and protect a fetus and baby. Need to choose men who are good providers—meaning good strong hunters. Men's biological success would be result of inseminating as many women as possible. They should select young fertile females. Stereotypical behavior is genetically encoded.

This explains that:

- women are basically monogamous and coy
- men are (young) skirt chasers
- men more ambitious
- women want successful (older ) men/good providers

This has been debunked. Early societies were based on foraging, not hunting and were much more egalitarian. Women wanted and needed more males involved for protection... likely to copulate with many males.

And there are all sorts of studies of female primate behavior that debunks the theory of female coyness and monogamy.

Additionally: Now that women earn more, they no longer look for an older husband/breadwinner. Now that women earn more, men are more interested in equality and older women. Why does the media hold on to old ideas?

### **What is useful about these gender difference theories?**

- They explain some prototypes and tendencies

- They make our lives easier because we expect less of the other gender
- They support us to be more tolerant and make less demands
- They reinforce the status quo

### **What is the problem with these gender difference theories?**

- When we fall back on the theories, we are not relating to a person.... putting them in a box.
- They can be patronizing. Why shouldn't we expect men to be capable of being emotional and women to be rational. It is like excusing someone because of their race or class or upbringing. If a man assumes a woman is incapable of rational thought, and only wants to talk endlessly about feelings, he will never expect her to understand him and will tune her out.
- We marginalize our expectations and demands and become depressed. This effects other aspects of our lives/relationships like our libidos. What happens to women's anger? They may get depressed instead, and lose interest in sex.
- Based on biological drives but we are not just animals—we also have psychologies
- Limits personal freedom to be everything
- We pathologize ourselves when we don't fit in
- It perpetuates insults about the other gender

Women's most common insults about men:

babies, emotionally limited, not in contact with feelings, spoiled, pampered, brains are between their legs, don't know how to please a woman, they don't listen

Men's most common insults about women:

controlling, dominating, irrational, hysterical, unreasonable they fight dirty, are manipulative. guilt trippers, demanding, castrating bitch, cunt, cocktease,

**Let's talk about how theories of gender difference reinforce stereotypes and communication difficulties**

### **3. Gender, Communication and Conflict**

Deborah Tannen. *You Just Don't Understand*  
Georgetown University linguist  
1990 Bestseller

Talks about communication styles based on inherent differences. Women use conversational style to express involvement, caring, connection. Men use speech to indicate independence and position in hierarchy.

These are examples of women's tendency towards caring and connecting:  
Not interrupting, qualifying statements, asking questions, apologizing.

These are examples of typical male communication  
--interrupting, dominating airspace, making sure views get heard  
--problem solving, fixing  
--refusal to apologize  
--controlling the communication style; I can walk out and retreat into cave when woman's anger or pain is too much

**I propose that some of these variations in communication is based more on power differences and entitlement than on gender. And in our society men have more social power, therefore have developed certain communication styles that go along with leadership.**

**Too often we mistake power behavior for gender behavior**

Psychologist Sara Snodgrass of Florida Atlantic University. Created mixed sex pairs to do certain jobs and assigned one as leader and other as subordinate. In her experiment, the communication style was determined by who was leader and who was subordinate. Example: Do you think Hillary Clinton's male clerks interrupt them constantly. I doubt it.

**This brings me to the following conclusion:  
People's behavior is determined by much more than gender.  
Behavior determined by race, religion, class, nationality, talents, interests, personal history, personal myth and dreaming, astrology, health, hormones, etc. Gender is just one factor.**

For example:

I am a biological woman with the ability to bear children but I have an aquarian moon. Astrologically not suited to be a traditional nurturer.

Hormonally I have a lot of testosterone.

And as Jew I have been trained to interrupt

**Does this mean I am not a woman?**

**Huge source of conflict in relationship is an imbalance of power.**

Power in relationship can come from many places. For example:

Class is a huge and unexplored issue in relationship. People fight about money but rarely discuss class.

Btw. Do you know there is less divorce in couples where both partners earn more or less equally. This is counter-intuitive because you think people stay together because of financial dependency

**Examples of how other power issues effect relationship**

**Social rank and power :**

- Class: Middle class woman wants to save for their future. Working class man wants to go on holidays when there is extra money. Saving for future is middle class idea. The fact that he does not want to save money for their future does not mean he doesn't love her and is not committed. Fact that she won't go on spontaneous holidays doesn't mean she doesn't love him. 2 types of power at play: spiritual power in being spontaneous, social power in saving.
- Religion and education: A middle class Jewish male physicist comes in with his upper class anglo-saxon wife. Neither are very emotionally expressive. However when she finally cries instead of criticizing, he interrupts and says , "Point of information," "You need to think about..." After the sessions he faxes me lists and points. He uses intellectual power to avoid emotion.

Point of this is that the discussion around gender is too specific. You can't really look at any one construct, such as gender. You have to look at whole person. **Gender can be really triggering.** We see an intellectual guy and all we see is his power. We don't see that he is afraid of emotion.

## **Psychological rank and power**

Regardless of our gender, religion, age, race, some of us have better self-esteem, love ourselves, have been nurtured and taught to stand up for ourselves, and others of us have not. Our psychological powers and our ability to be fluid and bring out all parts of ourselves hugely effects our relationship

### **Example 1:**

A male client is hugely successful in business and has achieved tremendous wealth. In a new relationship, he has what he calls a “mental breakdown.” Anxiety, depression and extreme insecurity. He is totally in love with his new girlfriend who he thinks is psychologically superior. She has good self-esteem and can talk easily about feelings. He is unable to ask his girlfriend for the simplest favors and is totally adapting to her timetable and activities. Gives up some of his favorite activities because she wants to spend time with him. He wants to marry her but is afraid to discuss a prenuptial agreement. Even though he was “taken to the cleaners” in his first marriage, he expects perfection from himself and he thinks he shouldn’t need or want this piece of paper. He can’t even discuss it with her because he is afraid of her reaction. Therefore he continues to feel confused and emotionally disconnected. He can’t agree to marry her because he can’t stand up for his needs. He is very self critical. This is a man who has never put his own feelings first. He has operated out of the mandate to be perfect. The pre-nup would be a symbolic act of putting himself first.

### **Example 2:**

**Male electronics technician earns \$8 per hour.** Female partner earns \$120,000 per year in a business related field. She doesn’t want to marry him because in case he needs nursing home care later in life, she doesn’t want to pay. He says “I feel numb. I don’t know what I feel.” He feels he has no right to object, even though if situation were reversed he’d feel differently.

**In examples 1 & 2 , the woman is much more fluid at expressing her needs and standing up for what she wants.**

**In these examples, oppression is internalized in the man. He feels he has to be strong and perfect. He has no rights to his needs and hurt feelings.**

**Example 3:**

Female client is clinically depressed. She expects herself to be a good mother and take care of her son, who has both behavioral and learning problems and requires a huge amount of structure. Her ex-husband is happy go lucky and lords it over her that she is depressed. She has to prove she is a good mother and therefore pushes herself, doesn't take care of herself and drives herself deeper into depression. When she finally breaks down, it proves he is right.

**In example 3 the man has the psychological and spiritual power. It would be more helpful if he could use his psychological rank to support her and be more understanding.**

**In this example, the woman suffers from internalized oppression—she has to be a perfect mom**

**Relationship troubles between men and women occur due to many factors:**

- Lack of awareness of dynamics of power and privilege, including both social and psychological powers
- Each gender forces itself to behave according to the gender stereotype. This is internalized oppression.

**THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF WHAT GENDER HAS TO DO WITH IT: The gender roles get internalized and become oppressive and contribute to conflict between men and women.**

**ANOTHER WAY TO SAY THIS: SEXISM HURTS BOTH MEN AND WOMEN**

***Process worker's job: To understand and bring to light the dynamics of power and privilege and the feelings of oppression on both sides.***

**Let's talk about internalized oppression: *Internalized oppression means that the oppressor is also inside us.***

**Less powerful social groups are marginalized on the outside by society and internalize the oppressor.**

For example: A common oppressive stereotype about women is that they are too sensitive. Many women criticize their own sensitivity, feeling it is weak. Especially in the 80s and 90s women felt they had to mirror the “strength” of men to be successful in the workplace and marginalize their sensitivity. This self-criticism about sensitivity is a form of internalized oppression.

Another form of internalized oppression is that women feel they should not be strong—or dominating. Call themselves bitches if they express anger.

**Internalized oppression also happens in people with social power.**

For example: A common oppressive stereotype about men is that they are strong. Many men criticize their own sensitivity because they perceive it as a weakness. In addition, they are afraid to be perceived as sensitive because it might indicate they are gay. This is where sexism and homophobia collide.

***Knowing your inner marginalizer***

Knowing your inner marginalizer is a crucial tool in relationship. For example, if you marginalize your anger or sensitivity you will then project it out and stereotype your partner as the carrier of anger or sensitivity:

This dynamic is deadly in relationships between men and women.

**The traits that are prohibited come out as mixed messages (double signals) in communication and in body symptoms and creates all sorts of confusion.**

**Let’s talk about a typical case**

**Example 4:**

**Upper middle class heterosexual couple**

They are working on a conflict around their kid’s birthday party. She told him he had to pick kids up at movies at 10pm. He blew up—it was past his bedtime. Had to be at work. She feels he is another child. Why can’t he be flexible? He says she should have asked him in a gentler way.

### **Homemaker and mother**

She has a critical negative mother. Hates herself. Because she doesn't work and he supports family she feels she has to be super mom. If she is imperfect she hates herself. Therefore when he says she should have asked him at a better time, she goes into a spin, criticizing herself.

**Her internalized oppression:** I have to sacrifice. You should too. She develops a hard tumor in the soft tissue of her breast. It is her hardness, her insistence on following herself and not just sacrificing. Only way she can say no is by not having sex

### **Husband**

He has no right to his feelings. Not entitled to have reactions or any say in his kids lives because she does most of the house and child work. Therefore he represses his needs and then breaks out in a rage. Shuts up, shuts up, blows up. When he finally expresses himself he criticizes her and she freaks out. He acts accommodating but really he is afraid of her emotions.

**His internalized oppression:** I am not entitled to my feelings. He develops heart problems. All of his unexpressed feelings and needs. He is afraid to ask her for sex; pretends it is okay with him.

### **Example 5:**

#### **Young heterosexual couple about to get married**

We worked together for several years on the possibility of getting married. Problems around her wanting kids and a conventional life. Wanting him to earn money and support family. He is an extremely talented artist and has big dreams for an unconventional lifestyle

She has a terrible abuse history. She wants children and the conventional life she never had in her family of origin. She wants kids by age 35

He is afraid to commit. May want kids later in life.. They decide to split difference and get married and have kids by age 37 ½. . **Very consensus reality solution**

**Internalized oppression of man:** He believes he has to grow up and be a man and stop thinking he can be an artist. He should settle down and marry. Stop thinking he can have everything. He gives up art, moves studio and starts a firm. Works like a dog. Goes into debt. Develops symptoms.

He is so afraid of becoming anything like the abuser of her childhood that he can't be direct with her. Certain things are prohibited from being discussed that remind her of her background. If she is mean to him he has to buck up and take it. Then he sneaks things and lies. In therapy, he has to learn to bring out his fear of her. Then he has to assert his needs directly.

**Internalized oppression of man:** He has no right to be assertive. He doesn't want to be like macho men. He doesn't want to be like aggressive mean step-father who hurt him as a child. Don't be too tough and masculine

**Internalized oppression in woman:** Because of her hurt she is hanging on to the conventional thing. She can only see one model for happiness. She doesn't realize how powerful she is. She is blinded by her desire to have a family and she hurts the man she loves. She becomes, in some small way, like the abuser.

### **Example 6:**

#### **Anorexic woman and husband**

The relationship revolved around her anorexia. It was all they talked about. He could not get her to eat, until he threatened to leave. She had to come out of her denial. Then, in the next phase of the relationship work, the next problem revealed itself. He constantly talked over her and put her down. It turned out that controlling her eating was the only way for her to be powerful and express her autonomy. Now she has to learn to interrupt him. He has to learn to listen to her. She has to learn to express her pain. The gender roles inhibited her freedom to be powerful with him. It was easier for her to starve herself than say shut up to him.

## **CONCLUSION:**

**The division into two genders and the separation of the qualities of each gender creates obstacles to intimacy and loving between men and women:**

- We try to identify or value the gender role even when it doesn't suit us. We then value one part of ourselves over the other. I.e. If we are women we overvalue and identify with "feminine traits" to be acceptable
- It also creates self-hatred, when we don't seem to have the qualities that our gender says we should have.
- Creates animosity, jealousy and competition between genders-- it builds those factors into the relationship. You are jealous and competitive about what is withheld from you by your gender expectation.
- We split off parts of ourselves that we think belongs to the other gender and then we depend on them to bring us those qualities. We either love them or hate them for what they have and possess and we don't. We envy them or idealize them. We need them or we need to reject them. It is a dependency relationship

**Men and women may or may not be inherently different. Certainly we have problems getting along, due to a number of factors.**

Power differentials cause a lot of our problems together as well as differences in upbringing, class, race, religion, etc. This is true in cross gender or same gender relationships.

Assumptions about our differences cause us to accept behavior as unchangeable. We are biological animals but we are also psychological creatures with the capacity to make choices. Maybe there are inherent differences but why should we be slaves to our biology, physiology, genetics, or our psychology and personality.

Let's expect ourselves and each other to be capable of growing and expanding our awareness and identities. Let's expect our partner—male or female to be capable of listening, changing, respecting, discovering, growing. And not just be the victim of whatever differences, inherent or acquired exist between us.

**Some Strategies for dealing with conflict:**

- “the communication container” listening and repeating back, making I statements
- Picking up accusations
- Taking own side, other side, neutral—ability to do this depends on rank
- Recognizing and naming rank and power signals
- Unfolding dreaming process in double signals—differentiating what a person says from their non verbal signals

## **Bibliography**

Barnett, Rosalind & Rivers, Caryl. (2004) *Same Difference: How Gender Myths are Hurting our Relationships, Our Children, Our Jobs*. Cambridge: Basic Books

Bornstein, Kate. (1994) *Gender Outlaw*. London: Routledge

Butler, Judith (2004) *Undoing Gender*, New York & London : Routledge.

Disch, Estelle, ed. (1997) *Reconstructing Gender: A Multicultural Anthology*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield

Feinberg, Leslie (1996) *Transgender Warriors*. Boston : Beacon Press.

Gilligan, Carol. (1982) *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, ME: Harvard University Press

Gray, John (1992) *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* . New York: HarperCollins

Jackson & Scott (2002) *Gender: A Sociological Reader*. New York & London: Routledge.

Kaschak (1992) *Engendered Lives : A New Psychology of Womens Experience*.

Mindell, Arnold (1995) *Sitting in the Fire*. Portland, OR. Lao Tse Press

Nestle, Joan (ed)(1992) *The Persistent Desire-A Butch Femme Reader* .New York: Alyson.

Tannen, Deborah (1990) *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. New York: Morrow