

## Gender and wholeness: Different journeys, common destinies.

### Toward Wholeness

I know we argue a lot, but there is profoundly common ground between the 'movements' of women and men in the last 30 years of (at least western) cultural development. That common ground is the quest for wholeness - the chance of a life fully lived.

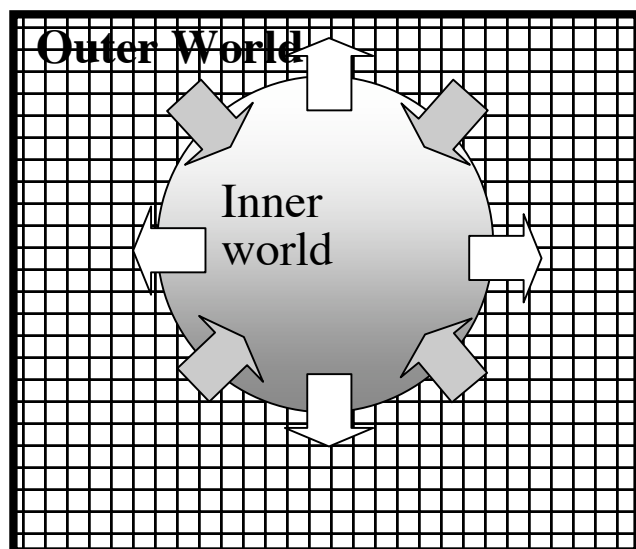
Let me be simplistic. (I don't have space, here, to be otherwise.) A human life has both an 'inner', domestic world -of home and heart and hearth - and an 'outer' formal world - of organisations, and paid work and competition. You might summarise these worlds like this:

<i>A life lived in this world....</i>	"INNER"	"OUTER"
<i>locates self in.....</i>	home	paid work
<i>rewards.....</i>	beauty and love	order and authority
<i>aims to accumulate</i>	more spirit	more money and things
<i>expresses truth through.....</i>	heart	intellect
<i>understands world through.....</i>	feelings	thoughts
<i>searches for 'answers' through.....</i>	intuition/insight	knowledge/logic
<i>'journeys' through.....</i>	soul	organisations
<i>recognises 'legitimacy' through.....</i>	family power	societal power
<i>is drawn towards</i>	cooperation	competition
<i>uses power for</i>	service	control

The list is certainly not comprehensive, but you get the idea.

Both these worlds are rich. Both are the source of genuine reward. Yet the outer world, badly used, can crush the inner world. And the inner world, neglected, can make the outer world meaningless and dangerous. (People with no connection with their inner life make dangerous lovers, managers and politicians.) We need access to, and authority in, both. Feminists and the 'men's movement' are both striving for that. But women, because of their traditional starting points in the 'inner' world of home, had to put the emphasis on moving outwards (the white arrows).

Whereas men, who have held the power in the outer world for so long, of largely striving to move 'inward' to fill the void that an exclusively 'outer' life leaves within. The grey arrows are no more or less valid than the white arrows. Both are striving for wholeness.



Women, through our cultural patriarchy, were excluded for much of history from the 'outer' world - or at least from having any form of power in that outer world. And so feminism was born, as women fought for the right to share power in that 'outer' world. This shook the tree of our western culture,

and from the seeds and fruits that fell grew the 'men's movement' - in it's enormous, and sometimes tense, diversity.

As feminism called for an equal place in the outer world, many men are calling - to themselves and others - for a place in the inner world.

Sometimes these calls get competitive - even nasty. Many men complain that they remain burdened with the 'main breadwinner' role, feeling trapped in jobs they hate to support the family financially. (This, of course, exacerbated when they feel they are also carrying a domestic workload.) Women, on the other hand, complain that they remain burdened with the 'domestic chores'; over-burdened by house and family work, with men too lazy or un-caring or disconnected to do their share. (This, of course, exacerbated when women are also doing paid work.)

### **Toward humanity**

These are essential issues to explore. Of course, in every relationship, we need to contribute our fair share in ways that we must negotiate with each other. But I wonder if there is something deeper in this particular battle of the 'gender wars'. Perhaps these arguments have come in part from the fact that we have de-humanised **both** home and workplace to such an extent that all of us feel deeply burdened and - well - inhuman within them. Diminished. Dispirited. Discarded. These are terrible feelings and we turn to those we love to help us escape them. Perhaps our cry to each other should not be 'do more to help me in my de-humanised world', but 'lets work out how we can be fully human together'.

This will take both courage and discipline - the courage and discipline to make very conscious decisions about how we manage our homes and our workplaces. For our homes and workplaces have been de-humanised by powerful forces. To take just three.....

- ⊞ **Technology** plays powerfully upon us. A sink and tea-towel is a job for two, the dishwasher a job for one. And so relationship and conversation is unwittingly diminished. The e-mail at work keeps us pinned to a screen, rather than talking to our colleagues.
- ⊞ A culture of **distractions** - the TV, the advertising, the accountability requirements, the latest organisational re-structures - all bring meaningless and fruitless distraction and busy-ness into our lives, and draws us away from the songs and dreams that nestle lonely in our hearts.
- ⊞ Ever higher **expectations** convince us of our own un-worthiness - 'productivity' and 'competition policy' at work; and at home, advertising messages that 'your bathroom can't be too clean....'; or lifestyle programs that prove to you just how useless you are in the kitchen/ round the house/ in the backyard.

### **Toward choice**

These are just a few of the ways that we can be de-humanised. But we should not fall victim to them. For all the challenges, we in the west know unprecedented freedom and opportunity. There is no reason why we, individually and collectively, cannot lead rich, fruitful, 'whole' lives. We just need to choose; to choose wholeness and humanity, rather than mere compliance.

Women have strived, and continue to strive, for an equal place in paid work, for more authority, more access to material wealth, more respect in the world of intellect and thoughts and knowledge, more power in organisations and social institutions, and more control over the elements that affect their lives. In doing so, they remind all of us of the great privilege of these things in a human life, and we should all celebrate and support the journey.

Men are responding to a great void within, and begin to strive for a more meaningful place in the home and family, for more beauty and love, more spirit and heart and feelings and soul and intuition. Sometimes we even struggle, awkwardly, with the concept of power in service rather than control.

Let us learn from each other and teach each other as we take these journeys of wholeness. Let us be courageous, separately and together - fighting for justice and equity when we must; joining in love and wholeness when we can. Let us assert our place in the outer world when it is denied us, and assert our place in the inner world when the culture within and around us tries to close it down.

Let us, on our different and separate journeys, be fully human together.

In a later article, I'd like to reflect on some of the particular challenges faced by men in this journey of being human.

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