EQUAL CIRCLES

Women and Men in the Bahá'í Community

Edited by Peggy Caton

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To
CORINNE TRUE
for her great service to the cause of
women and her pioneering efforts to
promote equality in the Bahá'í community

Gender Relations: A Cross-Cultural Dilemma

by Peggy Caton

"WHY CAN'T A WOMAN be more like a man?" laments many a Professor Higgins past and present.

"Vive la différence!" reply a myriad Chevaliers, escorting their Gigis along the promenade.

And how many unsung women have wished secretly that men were more like women?

Many men and women do not really understand or like each other, although they depend on the other sex for the qualities and services they provide. Although each sex is conditioned to perform different roles and behaviors, often they both wish the other were more like themselves.

Relations between the sexes mirror the difficulties and problems associated with relations between different cultures, particularly cultures with a history of uneven power relations, such as Britain and colonial India or black and white America. Masculinity and femininity really spring from two different cultural or subcultural systems, each with its own values, goals, and styles of communication. Male-female relations reflect these cross-cultural differences, and also reveal differences in power, roles, and expectations.

This essay discusses these differences and their implications for understanding inequality between the sexes. It proposes a communications model based on the idea of men and women sharing power, values, and personality traits formerly assigned only to one or the other of them. This model would allow for individual and for gender differences, but not those created by inequality of power or assigned and limited roles and personalities.

Cross-cultural studies have found no absolute personality differences between men and women that exist in all societies. In some cultures both men and women are more like either the male or the female type in our society. For example, both may be gentle, or both aggressive. In some cases there is trait reversal, depending on what a society considers desirable and appropriate.[1] In one society it is the women who carry heavy loads and the men who are considered gossips.[2]

Margaret Mead's study of three different societies in New Guinea found one group in which both men and women are cooperative and gentle; another where both are aggressive and violent; and a third in which men and women had different and complementary temperaments, but reversed from what is traditional in Western European societies.[3] The women controlled production and were regarded as stable, dominant, unemotional, and highly sexed. The men were emotionally volatile, highly adorned, dependent, and sexually passive. Although the men retained official control of the society and would resort to physical violence when they felt it necessary, their main role was to stage elaborate music and dance ceremonies for the benefit of the women.

Many studies conducted in the United States indicate, however, that males may be innately more aggressive than females.[4] In this country, this trait is cultivated by social patterns that permit males to display direct aggression.[5] In general, women's position as mother has oriented her

towards home and family, and her status in society has been assigned on the basis of this biological role.[6] This role has often kept her from greater participation and achievement in the public sphere of society. Women relate to each other in an egalitarian manner, based on the relative similarity of their roles within their respective cultures.[7]

Men, however, are associated with the creation and transmission of cultural systems, and a nation is judged most often by the behavior of its dominant men.[8] Men develop hierarchies of dominance based on achievement within the social order they have created.[9]

We derive many of our current Western attitudes toward the roles and personality traits of men and women from the changes brought about by industrialization. Toffler, author of *Future Shock* and *The Third Wave*, proposes that in agricultural societies both men and women work at home. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, men were forced to leave home to work in factories. They soon discovered that the skills and personality traits required for individualized home production were not appropriate in factory work. A worker in an agricultural society performed a variety of tasks according to a relatively flexible schedule. Products were hand-crafted and designed, often by a single worker. In contrast, an industrial worker had to be objective and precise, producing standardized goods as one specialized unit in a highly coordinated and efficient system. By remaining at home, women retained the more personalized and flexible agrarian life-style.[10]

Toffler believes that male-female differences in the industrialized West stem from the difference between agrarian and industrial economic requirements. In the United States, the female value system is similar to that of certain non-American cultures in, for example, its emphasis on group identity, harmony with nature, and interdependence.[11]

The industrial society found this new split of public and

private spheres as necessary to support a well-functioning economy.[12] Women at home raised children and provided a nurturing environment for the men, who traveled to their jobs and worked long, concentrated hours. This pattern became the basis for much of our current thinking of men as task-oriented, or instrumental; and of women as emotional, or expressive.[13] We have forgotten that this is a relatively new phenomenon within our own culture. Nor have we turned to other societies to recognize the wide variety of temperaments expressed in human cultures.

Alternative Value System. Within American society, there are two basic value systems: the dominant system, represented by males of higher status and rank, and a variant or alternative system represented by females and other low-status groups.[14] This alternative value system exists within, and supports, the framework of male values which is used to define American society.[15]

The male focuses on himself as a creative and active individual, while the female focuses on her responsiveness to and harmony with others:

Male Type	*Female Type*
instrumental	affective
active	passive
doing	being
verbal	nonverbal
aggressive	supportive
domineering	submissive
individual achievement	group identity
self-concerned	responsive
demanding	accommodating
independent	interdependent
external evaluation	self-actualization
future time	present time
conquest of nature	harmony with nature

According to a study by Carol Gilligan, society defines the male identity as its standard.[16] For example, U.S. psychologists consider male ethics (although not identified as such) as more mature than female morality.[17]

Let us take a hypothetical situation in the Bahá'í community: Someone has been observed drinking alcohol. According to Gilligan's theory, a male would see to it that the law-breaker was duly reported to the local Assembly, treated according to established guidelines, and that he receive the same treatment as anyone else in this situation. The male would typically make sure that in reporting the person to the Assembly none of his own rights (to confidentiality, perhaps) were violated and that he was not violating anyone else's rights.

A female, according to this theory, may or may not report the offender, depending on the individual and his particular circumstances. She would be concerned that the person might feel shamed and alienated after being reported, or might react in a rebellious manner that would have longterm negative effects on himself and his community. If she knew him, she might talk to him herself, keeping in mind his feelings and how this would affect their relationship, his relationship to his family and friends, his self-esteem, and his physical and emotional health. If she felt that the particular people on the Assembly were better able to handle this person or situation, she might consult them, possibly after discussing this with the individual himself.

In this situation, the male would emphasize individual rights, logic, procedures, and principles of right and wrong; the female would emphasize relationships, caring, individual needs, and the specific situation. Both within this society, and within the Bahá'í community, it is the former approach—or the male ethic—which has official sanction and has been considered morally superior.

Among the many theories seeking to explain differences of values between men and women, one credits them to the

process of early gender identification that takes place within infants and children. This theory suggests essentially that girls identify with their mothers to form their self-concept, while boys need to separate themselves from their mother to form theirs. According to this theory, female values reflect a need for attachment and male values reflect a need for separation.[18] Those attitudes expressing intimacy, interdependence, and group harmony would be strongly held by women, and those expressing independence and individuation would be held by men. Conversely, each would be threatened by what is the core of the other's identity.[19]

These strong differences might be altered in a society where the roles and traits of men and women are more evenly balanced, and where men share the caretaking of young children. But, according to Eakins, whatever the source of these male-female differences, there is "no evidence that either men or women are biologically better suited for either an expressive, stroking role, or an instrumental, task-oriented one."[20]

Inequality of Power. A number of feminist writers assert that the differences in male and female personality traits are not so much characteristic of sexual roles and styles per se, as they are characteristic of the traits that two groups of people will display in any unequal relationship: child to parent, subordinate to boss, slave to master. Subservient behavior might include excessive smiling, dependency, passivity, receptivity, and the desire to serve and to please. Hoagland even suggests that many of these traits, including seeming irrationality, are actually attempts at resisting domination.[21]

Cross-cultural studies of gender relationships show that inequality is universal. That is, men are always regarded as the center of cultural value, and their activities are always regarded as more important than those of women.[22] For example, in parts of New Guinea where women grow sweet potatoes and men grow yams, two virtually identical crops, yams are considered the more important food.[23] Regardless of how equal men and women are in a society, Rosaldo observes, "some area of activity is always seen as exclusively or predominantly male, and therefore overwhelmingly and morally important."[24] In our own Bahá'í community, for example, the exclusive right of men to serve on the Universal House of Justice might be viewed by observers as just such an activity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that men in the past ruled over women by force. Nancy Henley confirms this statement in her study of the politics of communication: "the ultimate underpinning of power is force."[25] Even in the female-dominant society studied by Mead, men ultimately resorted to beating women when they felt shamed by them.[26]

Where actual force is not used, the threat of force may be sufficient. For example, nonverbal behavior studies indicate that staring, towering over, raising one's voice, and even touching may be used to carry the threat of force.[27] Indeed, logic itself has been used as a weapon of power:

> In masculine hands logic is often a form of violence, a sly kind of tyranny; the husband, if older and better educated than his wife, assumes on the basis of this superiority to give no weight at all to her opinions when he does not share them; he tirelessly *proves* to her that he is right —Simone de Beauvoir.[28]

Henley asserts that these small gestures of daily communication are really micropolitical acts that support, and are an integral part of, a system that fosters and justifies inequality.[29] She believes that traditional differences in gender styles are actually traceable to differences in power, and are learned rather than innate.[30] For example, personal use of territory is one of the behaviors found to reflect dominance and inequality of power in both animal and human studies. Women consistently have less personal and office

space than men, yield their space more to others, and have their space violated more than do men.[31] Further, all other aspects of status being equal, men will receive preferred space.[32] In many homes, for example, it is the husband who has a personal den or office. The wife, who has no room of her own, is also subject to interruptions and requests from both her children and husband on a near twenty-four-hour basis.

Women are also less mobile than men, controlling less personal space. Women traveling alone or frequenting public places such as nightclubs or parks, particularly after dark, are subjected to social disapproval as well as male violence. These male-female differences in the use of space mirror the findings of animal and human dominance which show that subordinates have less control over territory than those in superior positions.[33]

The Women's Movement of the 1960s. Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, which addresses the psychological oppression of women of her generation, came at the beginning of a resurgence of feminism in the United States in the 1960s.[34] Women at that time were participating in civil rights groups and student, new-left organizations, such as Students for a Democratic Society. The women's movement grew out of their work with these groups, not so much as an extension of their efforts there as a reaction to the oppression they experienced from their new-left brothers.[35]

The position they had in these organizations was much like the position women held in society as a whole—"important but invisible."[36] The writing and position-formulating was done mainly by the men, and the support work of secretary and housekeeper was done by the women.[37] Decisions were made in informal male groups beyond the reach of women. At Harvard, for example, men convened at night in the all-male dormitory and the campus newspaper announced their decisions in the morning.[38] The new-left

student groups were designed along male value and social structures, were highly competitive and intellectual, and emphasized the value of verbal and political skills.[39] Despite their egalitarian attitude towards minority groups and oppressed lower classes, they largely ignored women and their oppression.[40]

What made this a particularly sour experience for these women was that these liberal groups espoused an ideology of participatory democracy, equality, and openness.[41] While women were on occasion openly referred to in denigrating terms, such as "dumb chick," for the most part the subservient role women held was unconsciously created, a result of long-standing behaviors and attitudes reflective of society as a whole.[42]

These women decided to form their own movement, one in which they could define their own issues and enjoy the opportunity to experience decision-making and leadership. As the women's movement emerged out of the new left and civil rights groups of the 1960s, it modelled itself after black power groups, by defining issues in women's own terms rather than those of men.[43]

Both women and blacks have filled supportive and inferior roles in a society based on white male standards and institutions. White men viewed both women and blacks as having little individual identity apart from their assigned roles in a white man's society.[44] Both women and blacks learned to "read" their superiors and adopted behaviors and attitudes that reflected their subordinate positions.[45] Women and blacks, therefore, learned to be more sensitive than most men to subtle nonverbal cues of approval or disapproval, much as an office subordinate monitors his boss's moods before approaching him with a question.[46]

When blacks began to raise their position in society, they first adopted white male standards.[47] It was the black power movement that eventually established separate standards for blacks, ones that represented their own strengths and virtues.[48] Women, following suit, created a women's

movement based on female values and virtues. While forming their separate movements, however, both blacks and women still faced the reality that they lived in a society in which they intermingle with and are subservient to white men.

As these liberal groups found out, it is not enough simply to state a belief in equality. The present system of inequality is based on a complex set of power relations which manifest themselves even at the microlevel of communication and social relationship. The women's experience in the Bahá'í study class described in the Introduction to this book parallels that of the women in these new-left groups. By forming separate women's groups within the Bahá'í community, women can practice leadership, develop self-confidence, and explore issues of concern to them as a group. However, this cannot be regarded as a permanent alternative or substitute for projects and social action involving both sexes.

The issue of inequality cannot be resolved merely by keeping men and women apart. Both must confront the attitudes and behaviors that have kept men in a position of power and control over women. And this must eventually be done in a context that includes both sexes. Otherwise, there will inevitably result a struggle for power between men and women. Armstrong-Ingram's essay in this volume documents just such a struggle between all-male and all-female groups in the early Chicago Bahá'í community. Women's groups eventually became a means for both sexes to avoid gender issues, and for men to retain control of power within the community.

Women's Self-Image. Women have been defined by their relationships to men and derive their self-image and sense of self-worth from how they appear to others, rather than from an independent sense of self.[49] A man is a farmer, a scholar, or a gentleman, and a woman is his mother, wife, or daughter.

Woman's identity is often defined by how she relates to a particular man, not by her own achievments or even her own separate identity as an individual. She derives much of her status from her husband's or father's status, and not from her own efforts or place in society. Young girls are often taught to aim high, to marry the president of the company, although their actual role in their husband's life may not be much different from that of the wife of the bookkeeper. Much of this gaining of a sense of self through attachment to another is beginning to change, but it would still be considered a source of shame for most women executives to marry a grocery clerk. Their sense of self-worth and their status in the eyes of others might be significantly lowered.

A woman is taught that taking care of others is her primary role, and thus she has developed a less autonomous self than have most men.[50] Her difficulty with developing herself as an independent individual arises both from her early identification with her mother, as well as from the continuing emphasis on nurturing and maintaining relationships.[51]

Women judge themselves according to their ability to care, to relate to others, and to be supportive and self-sacrificing.[52] This may truly represent an alternative value system, or it may be only a rationalization for the position they have long held within a male-dominated society.[53] Women's position as nurturers may be biologically based and cultivated in society as a necessity for the well-being and development of children. However, this position may also have resulted from the lack of opportunity to hold positions of authority within society.

If, for example, a particular group of people hold major positions of power and make use of other groups as support or service personnel, giving them no opportunity to do otherwise, not only do these support groups develop support skills by practice and necessity, they may even believe the value of service to be superior to that of power, as a

compensation for their subordinate position. Women in the Bahá'í Faith are often told that they are superior to men because of these nurturing qualities. Does such praise also function to make these women content with their secondary position within the community?

Given that society views male behavior as the norm, male traits are used as the standard by which all in society are eventually judged.[54] Males tend to devalue women's caretaking because they value personal achievement among themselves.[55] When a man does focus on personal relationships, others consider him to be weak.[56]

Women have not generally adopted the prerequisites to success in the male hierarchical system.[57] They fear they would lose what status and position they now have as wives and mothers if they were to be successful.[58] They also experience anxiety when they become successful and must sacrifice their primary values, particularly those of cooperation and nurturance.[59] Trained from infancy to be indirect, polite, and deferential; they have difficulty wielding direct formal power and displaying aggression.[60] They experience a conflict of values and behavior, as well as role and status conflict—the well-known fear (and reality) for many women is that they must choose between career and family.

Women generally lack the self-confidence that comes from possessing independent status, recognition, and power.[61] Though women may acquire status through their husband or through physical beauty, they do not generally acquire the same power a man would.[62] Women with expertise are still devalued by the belief that only men can be experts.[63] And being male in itself carries higher status.[64]

Because of the supportive role they play in society, women have become passive, dependent, and limited in their individual development.[65] They are subject to psychological depression leading to physical and mental illness. Without a personal sense of identity, they feel bored, insecure, trapped, limited, and often worthless.[66]

'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself has stated that depression in

women can be caused by continued assumptions of male superiority and lack of confidence in her ability to achieve.[67] He has praised women for their accomplishments and traditional qualities and encouraged them to continue to develop through education and effort to acquire abilities and positions formerly assumed by men. He says special attention should be paid to this matter, and that it is more important to educate women than men.[68] He asks that men regard women as equals, and so give them the self-assurance and courage they need to take their rightful place in society.[69]

Nonverbal Behavior. Communication styles, verbal and nonverbal, reflect both the value and the power differences between men and women. We may be unaware of the influence and role that nonverbal behavior plays in conveying messages, as it tends to operate out of our conscious awareness.[70] Nonverbal behavior has an important role in displaying power, as it can be verbally denied, thus enabling a person or group to exert control more easily.[71] In the male-female dance of dominance and submission, the male may display a number of signals in his voice or posture that demand compliance. If the female does not react appropriately, for example, by smiling or speaking softly, the man may eventually react violently.[72] Wife- and child-beating is a common occurrence, one that has often been justified as a necessary means for men to keep order and control within the household.

As mentioned earlier, women are generally more sensitive to nonverbal signals than are men, a skill also ascribed to other subordinate groups, such as blacks in relationship to whites.[73] Generally, the less powerful group knows the more powerful one better than vice versa.[74] They use this sensitivity to obtain the feedback necessary to their survival in a world where force is still a major underpinning of power.[75]

Women look for signs of approval and disapproval from

others. They look for these in eye gaze, body tension, tone and intensity of voice. In addition, they are sensitive to cues of possible threat in physical nearness, direction and intensity of glance and body motion. In Iran, when I walked on the streets of Tehran, I learned to modify my behavior and to monitor the behavior of every man within a certain distance. I walked briskly, maintaining a business-like hold on the way my own body moved, keeping my eyes scanning, but without looking specifically at any one person. Since "accidental" touching and bumping was common, when a man walked toward me on the same sidewalk, I had to judge how close he would be to me when we passed each other. I then subtly altered my direction, so that when we passed we would be far enough apart that it would appear to be a purposeful act were he to bump into me or touch me. I simply learned, as the Persian women did, how to avoid these situations altogether.

The same issues exist in this country, but on a much more dangerous level. Here women's subtle monitoring and assessments must be used, not just to avoid unwanted touching and fondling, but to save our lives. When I go to a public park, I have to carefully consider the time of day, whether to sit on a park bench, whether to smile or respond to a greeting from a man, and whether to linger or walk briskly. I have to be concerned that I may appear too vulnerable or open, and I must be automatically aware of the activities, the body and eye signals of the men within my range of sight. Women constantly monitor the behavior of others in their family, on their jobs, and in the community —always aware of power differences, of being dependent on male favor and approval, and ultimately seeking to diffuse or avoid any overt violence.

Female Communication Style. Women's speech reflects their values, self-image, and position in society. The key word in female communication style is *cooperation.*[76]

Women stress getting along with others, interpersonal exploration, fairness, and sharing.[77]

Within all-female groups, women cooperate, taking turns both in speaking and leadership on an egalitarian basis.[78] In their discussions, they are likely to be personal and to talk about human relationships.[79] In their actual speech style, they tend to express feelings and are sensitive to social cues, such as facial expressions.[80] They are polite and indirect, using implication, qualifiers, and softening devices. A woman might say, "You're coming to my party, aren't you?" using the tagged-on question to soften the preceding statement. She may also modify statements by adding such phrases as "I think" or "I really don't know, but it seems to me . . ." And rather than directly order a subordinate to perform an errand, she might suggest this in an indirect manner: "It would be nice if we had some coffee for this morning's meeting."[81] In all-female communication, there is a shared style and the ease of communication that comes from talking with a person from one's own culture.[82]

A common stereotype of women is that they spend most of their time talking and that they talk more than men do. This has developed, in part, as a result of men measuring women's behavior against the expectation that they should be silent.[83] Another factor in creating this stereotype is that we often see what we expect, screening out what does not fit our preconceptions. A recent classroom study illustrated that, while observers rated girls as talking more than boys in a classroom situation, films of the class revealed that boys actually talked three times more than girls.[84]

Male Communication Style. The key concept in the male communication style is *competition.*[85] Male communication patterns are designed to promote the individual speaker, who vies with others in placing himself in the most prominent position possible within the male hierarchy.[86] Men view competition in speaking as a sport or a game, where

each player practices and develops skills to achieve victory.[87] They feel that this competition provides both players with the most effective means of self-improvement.

Male speech patterns emphasize the abstract and stress the external and literal.[88] A man might typically talk about how the equality of the sexes might affect long-range economic productivity in Third-World natons, where a woman might typically ask how this equality would affect decision-making in her family. Men use specialized professional or technical language that demands verifiable proof.[89] Expression of feelings or impressions without either logical or objective evidence is rejected. The male response to a woman's statement like, "the committee dismissed my petition in an offhand manner," would be to challenge: "How do you know that? What did they say?" While a woman's response would be to sympathize: "They did? How awful! How do you feel?" In contrast to the female's nonassertive style, males tend to be louder and more assertive in their speech, directing their attention toward winning an argument.[90]

In all-male groups, men are more likely to talk about themselves than are women in all-female groups.[91] Men usually talk about themselves to show superiority or aggression, while women normally mention themselves to share an emotional reaction to what has been said. Steinem quotes Phil Donahue, the well-known television interviewer, who summarizes this difference:

> If you're in a social situation, and women are talking to each other, and one woman says, "I was hit by a car today," all the other women will say, "You're kidding! What happened? Where? Are you all right?" In the same situation with males, one male says, "I was hit by a car today." I guarantee you that there will be another male in the group who will say, "Wait till I tell you what happened to *me*."[92]

Mixed Sex Communication. Most women are not comfortable with the argumentative and competitive style of men.[93] Further, women who do excel at this style risk losing social approval.[94] Women generally are more comfortable talking with other women, sharing their communication styles and common experience.[95]

Men talk more than women in mixed group settings, and tend to dominate and control topics.[96] They do this by a number of communicative devices, particularly by interrupting. Normal turn-taking in conversation is regulated by such behaviors as eye movement, vocalizations, and head nods. Interruptions of this turn-taking process reflect and assert power differences.[97] Studies indicate that "men interrupt women more often than they interrupt other men and that they do so more often than women interrupt either men or other women."[98]

A sample of male-female dialogue is given in this hypothetical discussion of attendance at the Nineteen-Day Feast by John, Susan, Fred, and Mary:

Fred: Let's get started. First, we'll list the points we've covered at the meeting and go from there.

Mary: It seems to me everyone would like to get to know each other, (Fred interrupts here) don't you think?

Fred: We covered that yesterday. We need some concrete solutions.

John: Attendance at Feast has dropped from 100 to 80 over the last year, along with contributions. We should use the canvassing methods I've developed for my firm. They have an 85% success rate.

Fred: The cost to the Fund from these marketing techniques is too high. The fall recruitment drive I started last year is a hands-on program with guaranteed results at low cost.

Mary: How did the participants feel about it? Was every . . .
Fred: All right, are there any more suggestions?

In addition, topics introduced by men succeed much more often than those introduced by women.[99] In a study by Fishman, topics introduced by men succeeded 96% of the time, while those introduced by women succeeded 36% of the time.[100] Both women and men use communicative patterns that encourage male control of topics. Women tend to be supportive in their speech, generally drawing others out. They work harder in conversations to keep them going, asking questions three times as much as men.[101] They hesitate and are nonassertive, even self-disparaging. For example, women request while men command.[102]

Women will listen more while men talk more.[103] In addition, men's silence may not necessarily mean they are listening, but may indicate that they are rejecting the topic or issue.[104] In addition to silence, men use minimal or perfunctory response to kill a conversation, for example, using a pause or "um-humm."[105] The topic then becomes one-sided, not jointly developed by both people, and eventually breaks down.[106] In other words, men may effectively ignore those topics in which they have no interest.

Women have a harder time gaining the floor in mixed groups.[107] Men are more likely to give direct, assertive and even commanding statements and to take charge of a group.[108] They use communicative techniques that tend to dominate: staring, pointing, interrupting, ignoring or responding minimally, using commands, talking loudly, and using argumentative language. Their use of professional or abstract language mystifies others. Women tend to use more concrete and personal language.[109] In addition to and because of the difficulties imposed by male dominating strategies, women feel hesitant, shy, and inferior about

speaking in front of men.[110] Both sexes perpetuate unequal communicative relations between men and women that parallel those between superiors and subordinates and between parents and children.[111]

Directions: The Meaning of Equality. Communication studies reveal that there is an asymmetrical power relationship between men and women. We cannot continue to believe that we can have equality by merely stating that we believe in it. Behavior and attitudes need to be truly reflective of this principle.

Safilios-Rothschild describes three models of equality: pluralist, assimilationist, and hybrid.[112] The pluralist model states that each subculture in a society should be valued as it is for its own unique characteristics. These subcultures, however, have developed within a system that is based on inequality. Thus, some or many of the characteristics of these subcultures are actually products of assigned roles and oppression in a system designed to support a dominant elite.[113] The fact that women smile more than do men may not be so much an integral part of their personality as it is an expression of submission and an attempt to please and appease.[114] Both the acquired traits of women and the consequent support position they have held in society give them a certain indirect power, but for the most part they simply perpetuate their roles as subordinates.

Within the Bahá'í community, those who argue that women are better suited to the role of mother and supporter of their husbands subscribe to the pluralist theory. Essentially, they argue that different male and female functions have equal spiritual and social value. They see little need for change in traditional roles, but focus instead on the importance of a change in attitudes.

The assimilationist model also supports the current male-dominated social system by assuming that in order to be equal, women and other minorities must adopt the dominant

male value system and assume traditional male roles.[115] In effect, the dominant group retains its superior position and reserves its right to judge the behavior of subordinate groups by its own standards.[116] Since the traditional social system is dependent on using subordinate groups for support services, to press for equality on the basis of assimilation goes against the very grain of the system and fosters its breakdown. The balance of society is disrupted, theoretically leaving no one to supply these nurturing or support services.[117]

Striving for so-called androgyny actually pressures women to become like men, but does not urge men to take on female characteristics, or promote self-actualization for either sex.[118] Assimilation promotes male careers for women and the acquisition of masculine communication skills through, for example, assertiveness training, to prepare them for their new roles.[119]

In the Bahá'í community, the advocates of this view encourage women to become more assertive, to speak out in meetings, and to assume more positions of responsibility and prominence within the community, to take their places alongside men. They emphasize statistics that show the discrepancy between men and women in positions of leadership in the community and work to reconcile these differences. Their focus is on women's development, addressing men primarily to ask for support.

The third model is that of the hybrid society, which suggests the transformation of the entire value base and social structure of society.[120] It implies changes in both men and women, each acquiring traits formerly assigned to the other. In essence it means infusing current social structures with traditionally "feminine" traits of nurturing, caring, and cooperation. It also implies that men need to make greater changes in themselves than do women.[121] The reason for this greater change in the role of men stems from the need to feminize both the existing male-dominated social structure and also the traditional behaviors and attitudes that have characterized male roles.

Within the Bahá'í community, advocates of this position urge men to play an equal role in bringing about equality by working on their own development and examining their own goals and behaviors. They call for cooperation and sharing for both men and women in reducing the dichotomy of power, roles, and behavioral styles that have been adopted in Western society.

Although support for all three models may be found in the Bahá'í writings, the hybrid model of equality best embodies 'Abdu'l-Bahá's well-known assessment of the future balance of masculinity and femininity:

> *Hence the new age will be an age less masculine, and more permeated with the feminine ideals—or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced.*[122]

It calls for a transformation of society and women's and men's place within it.[123] This hybrid model presented by Safilios-Rothschild is essentially the Bahá'í blueprint of a future society based on humanitarian principles, social responsibility, and a more meaningful sense of community.[124]

In this society, men would learn to acquire for themselves patience, cooperation, and intimacy in relationships, and women would become more individuated, assertive, and self-confident. Neither would need to discard the positive traits that were part of their traditional roles.[125] Both could learn these qualities from each other.[126] Androgyny in this context would represent a balancing of male and female qualities within each person, providing for individual and gender differences, but not those based on inequality of power and privilege.[127]

This transformation and reformulation of society and

gender identities is one of great complexity, with ramifications beyond a balance of gender power. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said that world peace will not come about until women have achieved true equality with men:

> *When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed.*[128]

To achieve this equality, 'Abdu'l-Bahá strongly promoted education and encouraged women to enter into all aspects of the public sphere, including politics, science, and art.[129] As De Beauvoir has stated: "Only gainful employment will liberate women from their dependent, relative, submissive status."[130]

I do not take entering the public sphere to mean that women should provide the "nurturing" role within the sphere while the men provide the "leadership." Although some elements of this have and will certainly happen, I feel that the ultimate goal of a Bahá'í society is for both men and women to exhibit leadership and caretaking, not for women to be again compartmentalized into functions based on tradition and male needs.

The peace movement, for example, is thought by some Bahá'ís to be primarily a woman's issue, as she is "peaceful" while men are "warlike." But for the task of peace to be particularly delegated to women is to keep both women and peace as side issues that do not seriously threaten the dominant system of competition and warfare. It is men, as well as women, who need to incorporate peace into their roles and institutions. Without the skills, confidence, and channels necessary for women to fully participate in all aspects of the public sphere, they can have little effect on mainstream attitudes. An all-female peace movement would become, in effect, yet another version of the traditional women's auxiliary, a method of diverting women from positions of prominence and influence within an organization

or community (and thus preventing them from really affecting it).[131]

While 'Abdu'l-Bahá admonishes men to change their attitudes toward women, those in power in actuality seldom give it up without a fight.[132] Nor do women want to be "granted" equality, as though it were another privilege for men to bestow. Women need to define their own issues, not have men define issues for them.[133]

Towards a New Model of Communication. Communication between men and women is currently a cross-cultural encounter, with differences in power, styles, and goals. Accomplishing changes in traditional roles and attitudes won't be easy, since each cultural group generally favors itself and its own personal style. Women see themselves, for example, as more cooperative and egalitarian in their conversation styles, drawing out each person and being sensitive to his or her feelings. They see men as just the opposite, as competing and showing off, being insensitive and impolite. Men see themselves as strong, independent, and competent. They view their struggle for dominance as a test of mettle, a honing of skills, and a way of improving the quality of intellectual and practical performance. They see women as pandering to weakness, unwilling to test their strength, and unconcerned with political, social, and economic issues.

In a mixed discussion women's tendency to listen and draw the other out puts them at a disadvantage with men who do not always wait for conversational pauses before jumping in with their own ideas. The question for women is how are they going to deal with this more aggressive style. In mixed-sex communication it is typically the male that dominates the conversation. In order to achieve a balance, men need to learn to listen, to be sensitive to others and develop a spirit of cooperation; women need to develop self-confidence and a willingness to risk speaking their mind.

An examination of the existing communication patterns

in the Bahá'í community will reveal a tendency for men to lead meetings, initiate and control topics, and dominate conversations. Women do much of the actual support work and faithfully keep the social fabric of the community together. These practices are the result of our current beliefs, as well as our upbringing. They reflect the pluralists' inability to face the full implications of keeping women in subordinate positions while maintaining that they are spiritually superior.

The assimilationists among us would have everyone jostling for position to serve in leadership capacities. Women essentially would be expected to speak and act the way men do, with the subtle assumption that men would set the standards and decide whether and when the women were equal. However, this would foster an impossible imbalance in our community, with everyone wanting to speak at meetings and generate ideas, and with few people willing to teach children's classes, serve tea, take minutes, or type correspondence.

Only when both men and women are fully able to value and adopt the positive qualities of masculinity and femininity as human virtues will the community be able to realize the spiritual ideals of a Bahá'í society. Only then will the concepts of masculinity and femininity no longer stand as barriers impeding the gradual unfoldment of equality within Bahá'í family and community life.

Notes

1. Chodorow, "Being and Doing," pp. 173–74.
2. Mead, *Male and Female*, p. 16.
3. Mead, *Sex and Temperament*.
4. Frieze et al., *Women and Sex Roles*, p. 53.
5. Ibid., pp. 81–82.

6. Rosaldo, "Women, Culture, and Society," p. 30.
7. Parlee, "Deal Me In," p. 14; Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 183; Rosaldo, "Women, Culture, and Society," p. 29.
8. Ibid., p. 30.
9. Ibid., pp. 29, 42; Rosaldo and Lamphere, "Introduction," p. 7.
10. Toffler, *The Third Wave*, pp. 42–44, 49.
11. Adler, "Women as Androgynous Managers," pp. 418–19.
12. Toffler, *The Third Wave*, p. 209; Whitehurst, *Women in America*, p. 15.
13. Whitehurst, *Women in America*, p. 15.
14. Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, p. 19.
15. Battle-Sister, "Conjectures," p. 416.
16. Gilligan, *Different Voice*, pp. 16–17; Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, p. 19.
17. Gilligan, *Different Voice*, pp. 1, 19, 22.
18. Ibid., p. 171.
19. Ibid., pp. 8, 17.
20. Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, p. 79.
21. Hoagland, "'Femininity,'" pp. 90–91.
22. Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture, and Society," pp. 19–20; Rosaldo and Lamphere, "Introduction," p. 2; Frieze et al., *Women and Sex Roles*, p. 80.
23. Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture, and Society," p. 19.
24. Ibid., p. 20.
25. Women: #25, p. 13; Henley, *Body Politics*, p. 189.
26. Mead, *Sex and Temperament*, p. 263.
27. Henley, *Body Politics*, p. 183.
28. Battle-Sister, "Conjectures," p. 418.
29. Henley, *Body Politics*, p. 179.
30. Ibid., p. 2.
31. Ibid., p. 39; Safilios-Rothschild, *Toward a Sociology*, p. 41.
32. Henley, *Body Politics*, p. 37.
33. Ibid., p. 36
34. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 215.
35. Evans, *Personal Politics*, pp. 212–13.
36. Ibid., p. 111.
37. Ibid., pp. 108, 213; Schwarzer, *After the Second Sex*, pp. 32–33.

38. Evans, *Personal Politics*, p. 116.
39. Ibid., pp. 108–09, 112–13.
40. Ibid., pp. 116, 212–13.
41. Ibid., pp. 108, 213.
42. Ibid., pp. 109, 213; Schwarzer, *After the Second Sex*, p. 33.
43. Evans, *Personal Politics*, p. 200.
44. Kochman, *Black and White Styles*, p. 8.
45. Steinem, "The Politics of Talking," p. 86; Blassingame, *The Slave Community*, p. 200.
46. Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, pp. 149–50.
47. Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, pp. 146–49; Coombs, "Booker T. Washington," pp. 123–31.
48. "Martin Luther King Writes," p. 41; Cortés et al., *Three Perspectives*, p. 311; Killens, "Explanation," p. 315.
49. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. xix; Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, p. 53; Whitehurst, *Women in America*, p. 109.
50. Gilligan, *Different Voice*, pp. 7–8.
51. Ibid., p. 7.
52. Ibid., p. 17; Whitehurst, *Women in America*, p. 98.
53. Whitehurst, *Women in America*, p. 98.
54. Gilligan, *Different Voice*, p. 14; Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, p. 38.
55. Gilligan, *Different Voice*, p. 17.
56. Ibid., p. 17.
57. Bernard, *Women, Wives, Mothers*, p. 11.
58. Whitehurst, *Women in America*, p. 125.
59. Gilligan, *Different Voice*, p. 15.
60. Frieze et al., *Women and Sex Roles*, pp. 54, 308; Matthiasson, "Conclusion," p. 423.
61. Frieze et al., *Women and Sex Roles*, pp. 304–08.
62. Parlee, "Deal Me In," p. 305.
63. Frieze et al., *Women and Sex Roles*, p. 307.
64. Ibid., p. 305.
65. Whitehurst, *Women in America*, p. 126.
66. Ibid., pp. 119–20, 126.
67. Women: #104, p. 52.
68. Women: #24, p. 13.
69. Women: #104, p. 52.

70. Soucie, "Common Misconceptions," p. 209.
71. Parlee, "Conversational Politics," p. 55.
72. Battle-Sister, "Conjectures," p. 418.
73. Henley, *Body Politics*, p. 13; Blassingame, *Slave Community*, p. 200.
74. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 185; Steinem, "Politics of Talking," p. 86.
75. Blassingame, *Slave Community*, p. 200; Eisenberg and Smith, *Nonverbal Communication*, pp. 93–94; Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 185.
76. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 183; Gilligan, *Different Voice*, pp. 10–11; Parlee, "Deal Me In," p. 14.
77. Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, pp. 38, 51.
78. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 183; Parlee, "Deal Me In," p. 14.
79. Gilligan, *Different Voice*, p. 16; Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 182.
80. Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, p. 149.
81. Ibid., pp. 41–48.
82. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 156; idem, "Politics of Talking," p. 86.
83. Steinem, "Politics of Talking," p. 45.
84. Sadker, "Sexism in the Schoolroom," p. 54.
85. Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, p. 51; Gilligan, *Different Voice*, pp. 10–11; Parlee, "Conversational Politics," p. 14; Ehrenreich, "Talking in Couples," p. 36.
86. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 183; Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, p. 38.
87. Ehrenreich, "Talking in Couples," p. 36.
88. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 183.
89. Battle-Sister, "Conjectures," p. 418; Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, pp. 48–49.
90. Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, pp. 48, 51, 105.
91. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 182; Steinem, "Politics of Talking," p. 84.
92. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 182.
93. Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, p. 49.
94. Ibid., p. 52.
95. Steinem, "Politics of Talking," p. 86.

96. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, pp. 178–79; Schwarzer, *After the Second Sex*, p. 34; Henley, *Body Politics*, p. 74; Sadker, "Sexism in the Schoolroom," p. 54.
97. Parlee, "Conversational Politics," p. 52.
98. Ehrenreich, "Talking in Couples," p. 48; Henley, *Body Politics*, p. 74; Parlee, "Conversational Politics," p. 52.
99. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 182.
100. Ehrenreich, "Talking in Couples," p. 48; Parlee, "Conversational Politics," p. 55.
101. Parlee, "Conversational Politics," p. 55.
102. Henley, *Body Politics*, pp. 77–78.
103. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 178; Henley, *Body Politics*, p. 74.
104. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 179.
105. Parlee, "Conversational Politics," p. 56.
106. Ibid., p. 55.
107. Henley, *Body Politics*, p. 74.
108. Schwarzer, *After the Second Sex*, p. 34; Henley, *Body Politics*, p. 77; Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 179.
109. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 179; Battle-Sister, "Conjectures," p. 418; Gilligan, *Different Voice*, p. 16.
110. Schwarzer, *After the Second Sex*, p. 34.
111. Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, p. 176; Parlee, "Conversational Politics," p. 52.
112. Safilios-Rothschild, *Toward a Sociology*, p. 348.
113. Schwarzer, *After the Second Sex*, p. 78; Safilios-Rothschild, *Toward a Sociology*, p. 349.
114. Eakins and Eakins, *Sex Differences*, pp. 155–59.
115. Safilios-Rothschild, *Toward a Sociology*, pp. 351, 353.
116. Ibid., p. 353; Allport, *Nature of Prejudice*, p. 39.
117. Safilios-Rothschild, *Toward a Sociology*, p. 351.
118. Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 158.
119. Safilios-Rothschild, *Toward a Sociology*, p. 353; Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 177.
120. Whitehurst, *Women in America*, p. 101; Safilios-Rothschild, *Toward a Sociology*, p. 353.
121. Safilios-Rothschild, *Toward a Sociology*, p. 352.
122. Women: #25, p. 13.
123. Schwarzer, *After the Second Sex*, p. 116.
124. Safilios-Rothschild, *Toward a Sociology*, p. 352.

125. Bernard, *Women, Wives, Mothers*, p. 27.
126. Schwarzer, *After the Second Sex*, p. 78; Steinem, *Outrageous Acts*, p. 175.
127. Mandle, *Women and Social Change*, p. 187.
128. Women: #82, p. 38.
129. Women: #23, pp. 11–12; #106, p. 53.
130. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 755.
131. Safilios-Rothschild, *Toward a Sociology*, p. 352.
132. Goldenberg, *Oppression*, p. 24; Bernard, *Women, Wives, Mothers*, p. 24.
133. Schwarzer, *After the Second Sex*, p. 35.

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