

Robinsons on Parallel Cooperation Between the Sexes

At ICASSI (the International Adlerian Summer School in Switzerland), Marion Balla delivered her usual provocative lecture, which was extremely well received. Marion, the owner of a successful counseling and consulting agency in Ottawa, Canada, publishes a magazine called Relationships, which is based on the work and theory of Alfred Adler, full of practical applications of how to build and sustain respectful connections with others.

Adler was dealing with men and women in society as early as 1911, although, the issue of the relationship between men and women is as old as men and women, right? Marion's discussion of how gender plays a role in homes, schools, and workplace, included the media messages about the place that men and women play in our society. At least two of the fathers of modern psychology, Freud and Adler, wrestled with the question, "What do women want?" Adler's answer was this: "Women want "cooperative, collaborative relationships."

Marion Balla reminded us that messages begin at birth (or actually before since we may know the gender of an unborn child.) We know what gifts to buy and what color based on the gender of the child. We learn our "roles" as boys and girls from a very early age. Often these roles do not serve us well, as Adlerian psychology points out. Our beliefs about ourselves as men and women can truly serve as stumbling blocks in our relationships.

Social equality is the ideal but we are not there yet. Adlerian psychology is a forerunner in the movement. Remember Adler was embedded in the era at the end of World War I. At that time he advocated marching, walking, writing for women. In his book, Cooperation Between the Sexes, Adler states: "All cultural history

shows that women's oppression and restrictions to which she is still subjected are unbearable for a person and urge her to revolt.”

Then along came Rudolf Dreikurs continuing to promote Social Equality when in the 1960's there was the big movement to equality. He pointed out that all through the 60's and 70's that these four rights have been exclusive to men:

- Political
- Economic
- Social
- Sexual

This factor is hard for both men and women to believe. (You may remember that Dreikurs followed Adler's footsteps and served as a very understandable teacher of the Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler.)

World wide there are stories and issues about gender inequality. In China, with the one child policy and the former preference for male children, women are now being imported to marry since the sexes are not numerically balanced. In Sweden, textbooks are not as gendered as they are in other countries.

In Toronto, a young couple didn't tell the gender of their child. They were featured on TV Reality shows; child welfare was contacted; and they were recommended for psychological counseling. What a commentary on how rooted we are in our traditional gender roles!!

Females are considered to be the partners who are the “talkers” when it comes to relationships. There are men who are afraid to get in the car with their wives because there will be long discourses on the relationship between them. Marion Balla thinks of the

relationship between men and women like a dance. I make a step; you make a step or there is no step at all.

So much in a relationship between a man and a woman is the scripts each brings to the relationship. WE DON'T SEE THINGS AS THEY ARE BUT AS WE ARE. (And, of course we believe our perceptions are right!)

We as Adlerian counselors must view every human being in terms of their social embeddedness: family circumstances, values, birth order, culture, gender, age, social economic status and even more. Every human being must be understood within the larger whole, which is formed by the groups to which he/she belongs. We refuse to recognize and examine an isolated human being.

Adler spoke of human beings as androgynous; we each have a masculine and a feminine side. Marion Balla put forth the following

GENDER GUIDING LINES:

- Outside of conscious awareness
- Patterns for gender expectations
- Experienced as presenting a distinguishing role
- Shaped to conform to images of mother, father, grandmother, grandfather etc who represent the gender roles we have observed.

Ask yourself these questions:

1. What qualities did you see in the women in your childhood?
2. What qualities did you see in men in your childhood?
3. What messages did you receive about women from your childhood

4. What messages did you receive about men from your childhood?

Hard worker, cook, clean up, powerful, strong, strong in the background, treated as second class citizens, knowledgeable, decision maker--- all are messages that we receive and choose to accept as our gender role (or not) ----for better or worse.

Can you just imagine the lively discussion that followed in our conversations about Marion Balla's thoughtful, informative, and intuitive lecture?