

**The Four Boxes of Gendered Sexuality:
Good Girl/Bad Girl & Tough Guy/Sweet Guy¹**

By Betsy Crane & Jesse Crane-Seeber

“I have chosen to narrate a history. Closer to myth than argument, it is nonetheless to be distinguished from myth on two levels: first because it is a true story (which myth could, but need not be), and second because my main interest is less a historian’s than a moralist’s; the present is more important to me than the past.” – T. Todorov (1992, p. 4)

The question

“So Mom, Why is it that even the coolest girls date the jerks?” This question from Jesse at age 13 prompted an initial response from Betsy about the social construction of gender roles and the effect on sexuality and relationships, and a curiosity about the question that continues for us both.

Why is it that all too often girls and women choose men who “aren’t good for them?” Is it, at some level, the promise of status or economic security? In Betsy’s generation, it was referred to as the “nice guys finish last” syndrome, as if that was a fact of nature. That was just “the way it is.” But it’s not. There are social and historical explanations for why we do what we do, feel what we feel, and have the attractions we do. As males and females we carry out our lives within the roles created for us by our cultures, for entirely understandable reasons given our social conditioning and the systems we find ourselves in.

The ways that we “are” men and women, the ways that these identities are “performed” have come under increasing scrutiny over the past 30 years, being studied by observation, cross-cultural analyses, and through an examination of the development of gender roles through time. It is this latter analysis that Betsy used to explain to 13-year-old Jesse why the relationships he observed in his middle school were so irrational. Why do intelligent, assertive girls overlook sweet, caring guys to date “jerks,” the males whose commitment to traditional masculinity makes them popular with other males, but who treat girls and women poorly. In order to answer Jesse’s question, and to write this piece, we have

¹ From Heasley, R. & Crane, B. (Ed.) (2003). *Sexual lives: A reader on the theories and realities of human sexualities*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

gone back 30,000 years into history. We will trace notions of gender from the earliest human societies to the dawn of patriarchy² in order to understand why women are popular because of how their bodies look, men are valued for their status, power, and aggressiveness, and what all this has to do with sex.

The ways that members of our culture are taught to be men or women have been traditionally dominated by the ideas of good girls vs. bad girls, and tough guys or “real men” versus “sweet guys.” We describe this historically constructed grid as the “four boxes of gendered sexuality.” Each of these “boxes” is a trap providing only limited space for people to be themselves. Each carries certain costs as well as benefits. The “cool girls” in Jesse’s school were, we believe, responding at some level to a feeling that they needed to get a tough guy who could protect and support themselves in a world dominated by men. While some might say this has a biological basis, we believe that women’s perceived need for a “protector/dominator” in order to live well and care for their children, is the legacy of the last 7,000 years of patriarchal social structures.

The power of the boxes has diminished somewhat over the last century, for instance it is less common today to hear a man say that he won’t “allow” his wife to work. Yet we are still very much affected by concept of what a ‘real man’ or ‘good girl’ is, with very real implications for our personal, romantic, and sexual lives. To understand the force of the boxes, and to provide a complete answer to Jesse’s question, requires an examination of the historical development of our society’s notions of ‘proper gender roles’ that led to the construction of the boxes.

Despite the lingering negative effects of stereotypical roles and pressures, it is important to note that change is possible and in fact, things are changing. There are many nice, sweet guys who are acting outside of prescribed male dominant ways of being, and doing very well. And there are girls and women who overcome the “good girl/bad girl” dichotomy to move into more authentic ways of living. Males and females who seek to break out of narrowly prescribed gender roles are finding new ways to be in relationships as real partners, who balance who’s “on top” in terms of power, nurturance, and sexuality.

² A system of social organization in which power is held by and transferred through males.

As we were considering Jesse's question, an important direction for inquiry came from Betsy's need to do some research for a lecture on the history of sexuality. She did not want to start, as such lectures often do, with the Victorians and their pronouncements that women had no sex drive and that men were walking out-of-control penises. She wanted to go further back, to see where those ideas came from. Her search brought her back to the very earliest evidence of human religious and communal life.

Since then, Jesse, now 22, and Betsy, now 52, have shared ideas and books, and presented the "four boxes" analysis to high school and college classes. We come from different generations and different genders, and so our perspectives vary based on what we've seen and felt. We also have different ideological and academic backgrounds, yet we have a remarkable concurrence of ideas about where we think the craziness about sexuality came from and what we can do to get out of it.

The way that we "perform" our genders is not "natural!"

There is an alternative explanation to those offered by evolutionary biologists (e.g. Buss, 1995) who see dominance-oriented male/female relations as the natural order. Biological essentialists claim that women, being physically smaller and weaker, need powerful men to take care of them so they and their children can survive. Such arguments presume the historical "naturalness" of pair bonding – the "you and me dear, off to conquer the world together" world of marriage and private property. This denies that there were once, and could again be communities where children were supported and protected by matrifocal³, matrilineal⁴, grandmothers' clans (e.g. Eisler, 1987; Sjoon & Mor, 1991). If we admit that men and women once shared power and responsibilities, the "naturalness" of man-woman pairs is called into question. If we begin to critically examine the history of gender relations, we can see that what we think of as "normal" is in fact only one of many ways that men and women have interacted over the 30,000 years of human societies.

What is natural, after all? The roles and relationships we currently live with are the results of social constructions, related to a long heritage of male supremacy that has perverted the lives of both women and men. Taking a social constructionist approach means that we do

³ Women-oriented and led by women

not see gender or sex as inherent, or as “natural,” but rather, we see the ways that we human-beings experience our bodies and our sexualities as profoundly affected by socialization, social systems, and culture.

What we currently see as the dominant model of gendered sexuality only makes sense if we take into account the past 7,000 – 10,000 years (depending on the part of the world) of patriarchy. During these relatively recent millennia, by the standards of the long history of human evolution, women's sexuality, spirituality, and independence have been suppressed while men have been socialized into a dominating, aggressive form of sexual and gender performance. We have inherited a poor legacy for gender equality and mutuality. Nevertheless, there is hope. If we can create a new understanding of our past, we can use it to envision a new future.

First we must examine the political, religious, and economic reasons for why the system of patriarchy came about, was maintained, and continues to cause beautiful, powerful, intelligent women to date “jerks.” Patriarchy hurts men too, which is why Jesse and young men all over the U.S. risk being called “faggot” when they walk with male friends, hug other men, or are “emotional.”

The history: When we shared power

There is strong evidence that during “prehistoric times⁵,” prior to the Neolithic revolution, and in various other cultures in more recent times, women and men shared power and status (Eisler, 1987, 1995; Gimbutas, 1980; Sjo & Mor, 1991; Stone, 1976; Tannahill, 1992). Women were not dependent on men, or specifically one man, for their economic and physical survival. Yet this does not imply that there was a matriarchy before the patriarchy, or a system of dominance by females before males came into dominance. According to the late archeologist Marija Gimbutas who studied early Europe, “a division of labor between the sexes is indicated, but not a superiority of either” (1980, p. 32); what Riane Eisler (1987, 1995) refers to as “partnership societies”, an experience of “power with” rather than “power

⁴ Descent traced through the female line. Matrilineal inheritance, practiced from early Egypt through the coming of Christianity in Europe, meant that property passed from mother to daughter, also typical in property transfers among indigenous peoples around the world.

⁵ Of course, there is no such thing as pre-history, just pre-his-story. “History” as recorded through writing is, at the oldest, less than 8,000 years old. But when we use the word “prehistory,” we would like to remind the reader that “history” can be (and is) passed on orally through stories, legends and myths, and we do not seek to dismiss these traditions by referring to them as “prehistoric,” we are simply following convention.

over” (Starhawk, 1990). Such social systems had mutuality and interdependence at their core, rather than domination and submission. The knowledge of existence of such social patterns can inspire us today when we fear that dominance by one gender over another has always been the norm, or has to be the way it is.

From what we know about the earliest human groupings, people lived in matrilineal/grandmother clans. Women were the ones who gathered grains and dug the earth for roots, providing the majority of nourishment as well as healing curatives for the group (Eisler, 1987). Women were the “mothers of invention,” creating critical elements of social evolution such as pottery to hold water and grain, and weaving to make clothing and fishing nets. The Neolithic era, ca. 10,000 – 5,000 BCE occurred when groups of women and their children settled, as they became “farmers” through their knowledge of seeds (Sjoo & Mor, 1991). Eventually men came to be the rulers (given events we will explain later), but early in the patriarchy, the power of succession passed through women and the woman’s line – a system of checks and balances between men and women, emphasizing interdependence, and allowing resistance to the consolidation of power.

A version of this cultural pattern exists even today in the Haudenosaunee lands, named by the French as the “Iroquois.” As one historian described the Haudenosaunee political system, the “senior women in the village named the men who represented the clans at village and tribal councils...and removed the men from office if they strayed too far from the wishes of the women” (Zinn, 1995, p. 20).

Yet, this critically important story of how our European ancestors lived (and many indigenous people live today) – that women were once inventors and leaders, and men and women once shared power – has been minimized or lost. It is not told to our young sons and daughters in school or at home. The story we were raised with teaches us that men have always been dominant, in charge. Not surprisingly, this “his-story,” whether based on ancient religious history or interpretations of archaeological findings, was compiled and interpreted by male authors. History is always recorded and told as a story from the perspective of the conquerors. And in the case of gender history, the “winner” of the right to tell the story of the past 7,000 – 10,000 years has been the men, and more specifically, dominant men, those with money and power.

This is an important distinction because while it is true that all boys and men benefit to some extent from the “patriarchy”– male control and reproduction of institutions of social and political power such as the church, the state and the family – it is also true, as we will discuss, that all males suffer from the imposed roles needed to keep this system in place.

But first, let’s go even further back in time, and then see what happened to get us to where we are today.

The Great Earth Mother Goddess and her consort: Earliest conceptions of the divine

Who and what we view as divine has a lot to do with who and what we value. The earliest creation stories from around the globe centered on the earth itself, and the female – who gives birth – as the source of all life (Walker, 1983). Hence the concept of the “earth, mother goddess⁶.” As Monica Sjo and Barbara Mor state, “All religion is about the mystery of creation” (1987, p. 71). Earth-based spirituality is the oldest spiritual form, reflecting ancient beliefs that goddesses and gods reflect the material world. “The principle of the immanence of the divine in matter appears to be the underlying religious conviction of the Paleolithic and Neolithic cultures in Europe and the ancient Near East” (Meador, 2000, p. 23). This is hard to imagine for western people because our Heaven-based, male-centered religions claim to have existed since the beginning of time (“In the beginning”... etc.).

Influenced by the creation myths that came to us from patriarchal religions, western science has adopted many of the assumptions of male supremacy and leadership as though they were “fact.” The founding texts of archeology, anthropology, and other fields of social science were developed by men influenced by Western cultural biases, so history and biology textbooks reflect traditional attitudes towards women and their role in history. The major texts of both religion and science, the leading paradigms for knowledge, tell us versions of our history in which men have always led, and women have always been subordinate. These stories have a profound effect on our self-conceptions, both as women and as men, and at their worst; they can really mess up our sex lives.

What is the evidence for early peoples’ worship of the divine feminine? History textbooks have a tendency to rush from “ape-men” to the Fertile Crescent without pausing to

⁶ Those of us trained to see “God” as male, and “goddess” as a pampered, self-centered teenage girl, may have trouble conceptualizing an ultimate divinity viewed as female, yet it is clear from archeological finds as early as

reflect on the 40,000 years of human culture that produced a wealth of religious, technological and artistic innovations. During this period, the Paleolithic era, anatomically modern humans first appeared and developed what we now call art, ceremony, and music. They created the first paintings, often in caves, the first musical instruments, and small statues of what may have been their primary deity, the earth mother goddess. These statues, carved from ivory and soft stone, and with ample breasts, bulging stomachs and buttocks, have been found in caves all over Eastern Central Europe, France, Ukraine and Siberia, preserved from as long ago as nearly 30,000 years BCE (Eisler, 1987; Gimbutas, 1980; Stone, 1976).

Some paintings and statues were found at a far distance from the cave entrance, suggesting that early people had a ceremonial torchlight procession into the earth to view these images. The art works included stick figures of animals, hunters, and people gathering plants, and many images of the female. They also featured prominent male figures, often horned that are believed to be the “horned god,” the ancestor of the Greek god Pan, and the consort, lover, and son of the supreme mother.

Insert picture here

The, “Venus” image from Willendorf, Austria, a masterpiece of Paleolithic art dating from ca. 26,000 BCE shows woman as life giver.

Such images or “idols” as they are called in the Bible, are mainstays of most human religions. Think of the images of Christ on the cross, the sitting Buddha, and shrines to Shiva in the Hindu tradition. Judaism and Islam may be the only two faiths that do not use any sort of images as devotional triggers to help focus the devotee’s thoughts on the divine. In most

30,000 BCE and poetry, pottery and ancient texts, that this was true throughout the world for most of the time we have been humans.

other traditions, the use of sacred artwork has been continuously used for millennia. The earliest of these images, were of the great mother and her lover, the horned one.

While early archeologists saw such art as merely fertility figurines, newer interpretations are offered by authors who look at the connections between earth-based spirituality and sexuality (Eisler, 1987; Walker, 1983) offering us powerful visions of what might have been. People in agrarian cultures were dependent on the recurring cycles of the seasons, hence their belief in resurrection and rebirth. Bodies of the dead were sometimes placed in caves - which may have been seen as the entrance to the body of the Earth Mother - surrounded by cowry⁷ shells shaped like a vulva, the portal through which life comes into the world (Walker, 1983). The vulva shaped cowry shell may have been used as a symbol of the life-giving power of the female, as was the red ochre used to paint the walls, a surrogate of life-giving or menstrual blood of women. Was this the time remembered as the “Garden of Eden,” when sexuality and sexual consciousness were viewed as gifts from the Great Ancestress/ Mother Nature to women and men? Archeologist G. Rachel Levy (1948) documented the unbroken continuity of religious images and ideas descending from the Cro-Magnon Peoples of the Upper Paleolithic period down to our own time. Such images include the birth of the sacred child of Christianity in a cave-like shelter, surrounded by magic animals, born to a “virgin mother.”

In societies that conceptualized the supreme power in the universe as a Goddess, revered as the wise and just source of all our material and spiritual gifts, women would have internalized a very different self-image, than they do in cultures that assume a single male God. Girls could see their bodies as images of those who are competent, independent, creative and inventive (Eisler, 1987). Sexuality would also have had a very different meaning for both men and women. The earliest sacred “communion” may have been imaged as woman, representing the goddess, ritually bringing the penis of the man, as consort of the goddess, into her body. For a male to “enter god” in this way is significantly at odds with the rape imagery of males invading women’s bodies. It is important to recognize that the myths we grow up with, whether they be religious, scientific, patriotic, or anything else, have a profound effect on how we see ourselves, our partners, and our sexuality. Indeed

anthropologists have found, societies in which women have higher status, have lower rates of rape (Grubin, 1993; Sanday, 1981).

The earliest families

In cultures that saw the source of all life as a divine mother, both women and men would have had a radically different notion of sexuality, family, and community. The focus on the female among the icons found in the caves reflects the focus on the female in the 'prehistoric' family. Lineage and descent were traced through the mother. Her children were her children - no matter who the biological father was - and were the children of the grandmother's clan, raised and supported all the men and women of the clan. In earliest times there may not have been any knowledge of the male role in procreation (Tannahill, 1992), and even when it was known, it may have been seen as equivalent to "planting a seed." In either case it may have been seen as the sacred and even magical fertility of the female that created new life. In some preliterate cultures "the man's role in procreation is seen as one of "opening" the womb, but it is believed that children are placed in the mother's womb by spirits, perhaps the returning spirits of dead kin" (Sjoo & Mor, 1991, p. 26)

Evidence suggests that neither sex was clearly dominant, nor was there any indication of an underclass or servants. "Grave goods" appear to be almost universally sparse, and no differences can be seen between genders or classes (Gimbutas, 1980). This can be inferred from the identical gravesites found throughout Eurasia. Unlike later (including modern) graves, there is no clear distinction between various classes of people based on status, gender, or wealth.

These societies were certainly not utopian, but they did manage to organize their economies, ecosystems, and spiritual lives in a way that was sustained for tens of thousands of years, and still exists in remote areas of the world where colonization has not yet fully spread. This can be hard to accept if we think that the way things are now must be the way it has always been, and especially if we learned that societies have "progressed" in a linear fashion to get us where we are today. Yet in our own country and around the world, millions of children go without basic needs being met by the "modern families" and community structures to which we have "evolved."

⁷ Walker (1983, p. 182) says the name of this shell is from "Kauri, or Kali-Cunti, Yoni of the Universe,

Patriarchal social/religious/political order

A major change occurred 6,000 - 12,000 years ago, varying by regions of the world, that affects each one of us, especially our sexual lives. The role of men changed from equal partners in societies that worshiped the life-giving power of women, to one of despots, whose “women” were the property of fathers, husbands and sons, and lineage began to be traced through the father, rather than the mother. As the traditional hunter-gatherer and small-plot agriculture systems were abandoned in the Neolithic period, two new types of societies emerged.

Agricultural – Men’s work as a hunter was no more important than women’s as a gatherer until men learned to castrate the bull and use it as a draft animal. He, the specialist on animals, became, like women, a cultivator of crops, as he learned to breed them. Even so, women retained ancestral memories of the worship of the goddess and their own importance, and retained their important work as farmers.

Nomadic/pastoral - People were dependent on flocks and the men who reared them. Men were dominant. As wanderers, women’s role in planting and harvesting crops would be gone. They may have come to be seen as chattel, like beasts, used for making and rearing babies, but having little other role or status in the social structure.

One theory (Tannahill, 1992) used to explain the major change in power relations between men and women says that it occurred after men discovered their role in reproduction. With livestock domestication, men may have observed what happened if females were kept separate or with males. They also discovered the fantastic power of the seed. One ram could impregnate many, many ewes. Tannahill asserts (1992, p. 47):

Men who emerged from the Neolithic into the period of recorded history had the kind of assurance, arrogance and authority that sprang not just from useful toil... but from a blinding revelation... Was it that, discovering their own crucial role in an area where men’s potency had always been denied, they had (very humanly) overreacted? On a more specific level, it was now possible for a man to look at a child and call him “my son,” to feel the need to call a woman, “my wife” ... After it, women's sexual freedom began to be seriously curtailed. A man might have a harem if he chose and he could defend it, but the concept of “my son” required a woman to be monogamous.

According to this theory, the realization of the male role in reproduction led to a desire

representing the divine vulva, usually conveying the idea of rebirth.” Still prized in many cultures.

by men to control women's behavior so they could be sure that the sons born to a woman would be their own. This is known as the patrilineal system (lineage traced through the father) and it required cultural change of a massive order, with severe measures to inhibit female mate selection/ sexual assertiveness, and prevent other males from having access to a "man's woman/women."

Though in some ways attractive, this theory posits a cultural evolution (mutation might be a better term), which spread as men learned of their own roles in procreation. However it is far too reliant on the idea that knowledge of the male role in reproduction automatically leads to patriarchy. In fact, there is another theory that has two strong advantages: it doesn't require people to be ignorant of male contributions to reproduction to get along as relative equals, nor does it require men's understanding of their role in reproduction to automatically lead to their domination of women. The second of these points is crucial, for if the fact of men's contribution to the process of procreation *necessarily* causes men to want to dominate women, then there is no way out. We can't unlearn this fact, the knowledge of which produces an irrevocable shift in human culture towards domination and oppression of women. We refuse to accept this conclusion, believing that it is both deeply conservative in its implications for how we can build a more equitable world, and because another version of the story may be more accurate.

The nomadic tribes and invasions

There is another theory that attempts to account for the massive change in power between women and men that relates to politics, the results of invasion and conquest. About 7,000 years ago, 5,000 BCE, nomadic bands from the deserts and steppes of Central Asia began waves of invasion, conquering and destroying agricultural societies in the fertile regions of Eurasia, India, and the Middle East. These people lived in the dry grasslands of Western China, Russia, and the Central Asian Republics. On all sides, they were surrounded by people who lived in more hospitable regions, as in the ancient Chinese, Indian, and Iraqi farming communities which grew up along large rivers. Ruled by powerful warrior-priests, they brought with them aggressive and powerful male gods.

Why the gender difference in their conception of divinity? Climatic differences caused a fundamentally different understanding of nature. The small agricultural communities conceived of a world held in balance between mother earth and father sky, reflected in the

recurring cycles of death and rebirth of their crops. The Indo-Europeans (people of the Steppe, whose language is the root of modern languages as varied as Hindi, Pashto, Persian, German, and Latin) experienced nature as much more hostile. On the dry steppes of Central Asia, these people imaged the divine as a harsh sky god who punished humans through drought, thunder, and lightening.

Unlike the earth mother goddess of the Fertile Crescent, the omnipresent Gaia-like presence of the shamanic and Native American traditions, or the various river goddesses of India and Egypt, the gods of these desert people were thunder beings, angry and not easily appeased. Their god was a partisan who fought with his people against other people and their gods. Skirmishes over pasture were associated with the offering of various types of sacrifice in order to give their god his share in the spoils of war. The herding people were accustomed to fighting with one another for access to rare water and pasture for their herds, and were adept at killing both their animals and each other. The Indo-Europeans lived similar lives to those of the Semitic people who came from the deserts of Arabia, and both invaded the Fertile Crescent and Canaan.

The small agricultural communities of China, India, and Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq) were surrounded by less fertile lands, and their nomadic neighbors found them inviting targets. Agriculture had come into being when women moved from the gathering of grains and fruits to growing most of their food in one place, requiring far less roaming and hunting to support their people. Farming communities would have been attractive to those groups who lost a fight over pasturage with other groups, a pattern that would eventually cause the Huns to leave central Asia and conquer most of Europe.

At first the invaders may have just raided their neighbors, taking what they could carry, but some eventually decided to stay, at the expense of the people and cultures they had conquered. The steppe and desert-dwellers both brought a fierce god of war, thunder, and the sky (like Jehovah or YHWH of the Old Testament) into the lands they conquered. Their myths and beliefs became integrated into existing religious structures, and the earth-based goddesses and gods, still revered by the people, were co-opted. This can be most clearly seen in the Greek pantheon. Zeus, the sky-thunder-war god had the highest place in a hierarchy of gods and goddesses, most of whom were much more ancient divinities from cultural and

religious traditions that had all been absorbed into the Greek mythology from the various tribes and city-states their empire captured.

After the nomadic-herders had conquered their farming neighbors, they claimed authority and dominance over the indigenous populations. The small autonomous farming communities became tribute-paying centers of production, while the nomadic-herders became a class of warriors who lived off the tribute paid to them by those that they conquered. A class of warrior-priests used the labor of women and men in the agricultural communities to create food surpluses, to support themselves as full-time soldiers. Armies were created, and due to the pressure to produce ever more food for tribute, communities began fighting over access to water. The first true wars of conquest emerged from this pressure, with wars being fought solely for control of subject-populations and access to irrigation waters.

The patriarchy begins

These conditions created both the first class-based societies, and the first true patriarchies, with social institutions based on male domination. This period saw the beginnings of a split between spirituality as a democratic and universal activity of the people, and what became the more modern form, spirituality being the province of a professional ecclesiastical class. It is useful to bear in mind the fact that “pagan” originally meant “country-person.” The victors practiced their brand of religion and mocked that of those they conquered, the pagans, as being simple, satanic, or non-existent.

Since the conquering culture was one of war and male-supremacy, the traditional values of the people were devalued. For example, sexual equality for both women and men was decried by patriarchal religious leaders as “loose moral values,” peaceful coexistence came to be seen as weakness, and closeness to the soil demeaned by labels such as “dirt scraping peasant.” The concept of man as warrior/dominator and woman as virgin/mother emerged from this relationship between the new governing powers and those they conquered, based on male dominant and female subordinate power relations.

What does all this have to do with Jesse’s question about the cool girls and the jerks? This was the beginning of the times, continuing up through the last century, and still real in many ways today, when “tough guys win” and “women need protection.”

For whatever reasons – males’ knowledge of their role in procreation, and/or the spirituality of the nomadic peoples with their “god as male” ideologies – a patrilineal system

in which ancestry is traced through the father became instituted through the creation of religious and civic laws. This had major implications for re-imaging of female and male sexuality. Severe measures were put into place to inhibit female mate selection and sexual assertiveness and to prevent other males from having access to “wives.”

With the formation of city-states and greater militarization, men were needed to fight in the wars of control, and people may have begun to value male sons more, since if they were not killed, they would return with pillage and be able to marry as many women as they could afford. It seems probable that the first systems of polygamy emerged after the natural balance of male/female in humans was upset through the constant loss of young men to war.

The new system of male/female relations now called the patriarchy - in which males control access to power and resources - spread to many parts of the world over the millennia leading up to the birth of Christianity. During these years, ca. 7,000 BCE – 1 BCE, worship of the goddess as a Supreme Being was increasingly attacked and diminished and male gods and male authority gained greater supremacy.

The attitude toward women in the Far East remained more favorable for some of this period. In ancient India, for example, women were not deprived of property rights or individual freedoms by marriage. However, Hinduism, which evolved in India after about 500 BCE, instituted the concept of obedience of women toward men. Women had to walk behind their husbands. Females did not have inheritance rights from their father’s land, and widows could not remarry. In both East and West, male children were preferred over female children, a condition that continues today in many cultures.

Since the victorious peoples were able to write the histories and laws - and destroy the art and writing of earlier cultures - what we are able to know about conquered peoples is sparse. But we are able to surmise beliefs and practices of earlier earth-based spirituality societies because they remain evident in folk traditions, such as the Solstice traditions of the Yule log and “bringing in the green” at Christmas. Now heretical fertility rites such as Saturnalia – a time of going to the fields and having sex as a way of “praying” for the crops to come once again from the earth - are evident at Easter, the Christian holy day that occurs just as the earth is again giving birth to new life. Witness the association with ancient fertility symbols such as rabbits and eggs. These symbols are holdouts from a time when religion was centered on the cycles of the earth and reproduction, and not as it might first appear, around

near-eastern religious history. Jesus was not born at the end of December; rather the celebration of his birth was moved to that date, in the 3rd century AD, to coincide with the attempt to co-opt the “pagan” country people’s Yule holiday, and bring them into the church.

The image of the great earth mother goddess came to be diminished, first by incorporating her into a pantheon of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses where she was secondary to the gods. Then she was removed from western culture altogether except in remaining images of Mary, Mother of God. Yet, the idea that woman was once imagined as divine is a powerful one. It is important for both females and males today to have images of the female as both sacred and powerful, and as sexual.

Evidence of women’s leadership and spiritual/sexual potency

What evidence do we have of women’s leadership and spiritual and sexual potency? Did you know the earliest known author of written literature was a woman? Enheduanna lived around 2300 BCE in ancient Mesopotamia, now southern Iraq. Holding the most important religious office in Sumer, the high priestess at Ur, Enheduanna had a powerful position, managing agriculture at the temple and overseeing the local fishing industry. Only 300 years after written language had evolved, she wrote with a stylus on wet clay, in the earliest cuneiform script. What she wrote were poems of devotion to Inanna, a goddess of unbridled sexuality as exposed in the following lines (Meador, 2001, p. 11).

peg my vulva
my star-sketches horn of the dipper
moor my slender boat of heaven
my new moon crescent cunt beauty

Inanna has often been described simply as a goddess of love. Yet as Enheduanna’s translator, Betty De Shong Meador states (p. 158):

Her arousal and sexuality is seen as a blessing that engenders growth and prosperity of every kind. In Mesopotamia, the primary focus of religion was to ensure the continuity of life through the fertility of the fields, the animals, and the human beings who tended them. Sexuality became the principle metaphor for the continuity of life, any as such, it was part of ritual in the temple, myths of the gods and the daily life of the populace.

Effects on roles and relationships

After about 3,000 BCE, male superiority had become enshrined in law and custom. Rulers treaded a fine line between their political aims and the remaining polytheistic beliefs of the people, who still gave honor to the female, as seen in the poems to Inanna. However, the monotheistic strand of the near-eastern culture, with the authority of a male god and male rulers, won in the end.

In the Greek, Roman, or Jewish civilizations of the ancient world, the "free woman" as distinct from the slave, was the property of her father during childhood, and her husband from adolescence on. Unless love intervened, she was to her husband a mother for his children and a housekeeper. She was a higher-level servant to be treated well unless she failed in her duties, e.g. producing a male heir, for which she could be dismissed or pensioned off. This overall pattern of relationships, established in the Near East over 3000 years ago, was to persist in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, with minor variations according to time and place, until the beginning of the feminist revolution in the middle years of the 19th century. It still continues, depending parts of the world, and the attitudes of the people, today.

As social, political and religious systems and norms evolved to support the patriarchal order – to ensure that all children born into a marriage would be those of the father - certain expectations for males and females developed that came to be seen as “normal.” While there have been variations across time and culture, we can see throughout the remainder of history and today, patriarchal practices that:

- *Prevent premarital sex by female* – e.g. moral dictates about virginity, child marriages and clitorectomies in some cultures, abstinence-only education in U.S. schools.
- *Reduce women's liberty to prevent extramarital sex by wives* – e.g. no vote, no education; no job; no owning or inheriting property; “woman's place is in the home,” keep covered with Burkha in some Islamic countries, threat and practice of rape & battering; keep her terrified of the dark and being alone, as in the U.S.; subjugation of lesbianism.
- *Allow for extramarital sex for men* – the social role of the harlot, courtesan, and prostitute, and in many early cultures, lawful taking of many wives by wealthy men and successful warriors.

- *Brutalize boys* – make little boys so scared of being victims of bullying, lack of respect, and violence at the hands of other males, that they will become dominators and enforce these codes against their children and wives; denigrate homosexuals.

The bottom line is that men have been taught to “go for it” around sex and power, while women were taught to accept repression. Patriarchal rules and norms required an acceptance of the social order by men, including a rigid set of male roles, dominating personal behavior by males, repression of homosexuality (or institutionalization of it as in Ancient Greece where men had wives for bearing children, and young male lovers or female courtesans for sex) and repression of female-like male behavior. There were costs, in the form of male violence against males, to boys and men who did not like brutalizing and repressing the women in their lives, as there still are today.

While women have made large political gains in the past century around citizenship rights such as voting, and opportunities for education and making money, the remnants of previous 7,000 – 10,000 years of patriarchal social and religious policies are still with us today. The social institution of marriage, and the roles of wife and husband, still carries symbolically, certain expectations for women and men - “boxes” - that we both long for and fear. There is a tug and pull for both men and women, between parts of us that want security and “social acceptability” and those that represent in some cases, a more free way of being, free from the limitations imposed by patriarchy.

Four boxes of gender and sexuality

We face what feel like dichotomies. Either we are the “good girl” who will be a wife and mother, or we are a “bad girl.” We are either a “real man,” or the “nice guy” who finishes last. There are parts of the second “box” that offer each gender more freedom, but being in that box comes with its costs. Neither box really works for us, or represents the full range of our authentic selves. Yet the “boxes” represent images and labels that can have tremendous power. We have termed this trap, the *Four Boxes of Gender and Sexuality*. Let’s look first at the two boxes for women, based on the “good girl/bad girl” split.

Good Girl - Wife/ Mother

(stereotypes/ images)

- Virgin at marriage.
- Monogamous during marriage.
- Heterosexual; takes name of husband & produces children/heirs.
- Financially dependent on husband.
- Non-sexual; low sex interest, doesn't initiate or enjoy sex.
- "Feminine" – meets social standards of beauty but isn't too dangerously sexy.
- Not too smart, educated, assertive or goal-oriented.
- Middle or upper class or aspires to be.
- Doesn't have career (or subordinates own career to husband's).

Bad Girl - Whore/Dyke

(stereotypes/ images)

- "Lower class" or servant/slave.
- Socially and financially independent of men/marriage.
- May keep own name if married.
- Educated or has mind of her own.
- "Welfare queen" or "Career Girl."
- Free in bodily expression, size, and gender expression. May be large.
- Sexually free; enjoys sex.
- Non-monogamous.
- May have sex with men, women or both; be lesbian or bisexual
- May be very "sexy" or not at all; very feminine or very masculine.

Good girl - Wife/mother

Most of us are familiar with the dichotomy for women of the Good Girl – Bad Girl, or the Madonna – Whore complex. But what is the stereotype of the good girl? She is of course the Wife/ Mother, needed to produce children, particularly sons, who will inherit the father's name, money and class privilege. Given the biological reality that men can never really *know* that they are the "real father" of their children without modern genetic testing, what does this system require? We are talking stereotypes of course, but that is what the boxes are about – pressures to conform.

There are many problems with the Good Girl/Wife-Mother role for both women and men, as it is a set-up. On the one hand, she is supposed to be a "partner for life" who bears his children, looks good, and is an adept social companion and hostess helping him advance his career so they can both have what they want and need financially. On the other hand, she must not be too sexy, initiate sex too often or even like "kinky" sex – the kind of sex men must then seek from prostitutes or affairs – so neither she, nor her husband, will worry about her being a "bad girl." She must be smart enough to be interesting socially but not so smart or assertive about her ideas so that she threatens or intimidates her husband or business colleagues, or give the impression she could "make it on her own." Above all she must not make too many demands or be "difficult" or her husband may cast her off once the children are grown and find a new young "trophy" wife to have on his arm.

The wife must be a virgin when married, and not be very interested in sex (or else she might pursue sex with other men). She should be feminine (retiring and demure/ not aggressive), and meet current standards of beauty so she makes her husband look good, but not dress or act too sexy and attract other men's interest. These "good girls" are expected to be ignorant of sex, including their own bodies. In the Bible, "knowing" someone was the code for having sex with them. Women were kept away from information about sex, in order to limit their interest in it. This can still be seen today in those who argue that teaching children about sex will cause them to have sex at a younger age.

Socially and politically, the wife/mother is financially dependent on her husband (so there is less risk of her thinking she could have her own life, have affairs, or leave him and the children) and is not expected to be or act too smart, educated, or goal-oriented. At the same time, it is best if she is "has class" so she can manage the household and be a social companion to her husband in such a way as to maximize his chance of financial success. You get the picture. Sound familiar?

Bad girl - Whore/dyke

The Bad Girl represents everything the wife/mother tries not to be, and may be accused of being when/if she steps out of the good girl role. The bad girl stereotype is the whore or dyke who is sexually free, likes sex too much, and may even assert her desire to have sex with women. She can be free in her bodily expression, size, and gender expression, looking very sexy or not sexy at all, and/or she may be more masculine in appearance and style. Traditionally such women were seen as "lower class" and as servants or slaves. Since poor and working class men had less money and privilege to pass down, poor and working class women had to work to support their children and were thus more socially and financially independent of men/marriage. The image of the "Welfare Queen" is that of the bad girl, who "cannot get or keep a husband" or doesn't care, and "wants the government to support her lifestyle." The political pressure for poor women to marry is related to the desire to make these women into good girls. The social pressures to avoid this box are immense and intense.

The split for males

There are also two very confining and oppressive boxes for males. Although it is not as readily apparent as the good girl/bad girl split, the split is based on a similar gender/sex dichotomy. For males it comes down to whether you are a boy or a girl, and it is not as simple

as blue versus pink. Women know they are women. That is what they are told once they begin menstruating. “You’re a woman now.” It is generally not contested for most women. But given the social importance of men being “real men” and retaining supremacy in social systems of power and control, males must earn the right to be considered men, at least “real men.”

If they deviate from a very narrow script, they are threatened, primarily by other males, particularly older males (big brothers, neighborhood bullies) with being seen as girls – sissies, fags, and queers. To young boys raised in a patriarchal society, it can look like you have to be a “tough guy” just to survive. The alternative is the stereotype of the “sweet guy,” equated with sissy, and the price paid for being in the wrong box is high. Males, who are supposed to be at the top of the social hierarchy, have a lot to lose if they don’t play the game.

**Tough Guy – Husband/Father
Dominator/Protector**
(stereotypes/ images)

- Needs wife to have his name/ displays dominance
- Must “provide” for wife/ children so must succeed in the world of men.
- Heterosexual; pursues sex with girls/women whether wife, lover or prostitute.
- Competes with other males for rank/position in hierarchy.
- Wants attractive girlfriend/wife as status symbol.
- Is a bully or hangs out with bullies.
- Only emotion shown is anger.
- Dominates - may be abusive to female partner/children.
- Restricts lives of wife/children in name of protecting them.
- Plays/watches aggressive sports.
- Doesn’t study or read much but likes to win all arguments.
- Drives the car & controls TV remote.

Sweet Guy – Nice Guy
(stereotypes/ images)

- “Finishes last” – is liked by girls as friend but not for marriage.
- Got bullied/ “beat up” as boy.
- Reads, studies, thinks, seen as “nerd”
- Is sensitive /emotional; can cry
- May be artist, musician, or dancer.
- Seen as gay or bisexual whether he is or not.
- If married, shares housework and parenting. Wife may keep own name.
- Not obsessed with sports; may play soccer.
- Hugs his friends – male & female
- “Eats quiche”; likes gourmet or health food.
- Moves his body in relaxed ways.
- Dresses colorfully or fancifully

Tough guy – Husband/father and Dominator/protector

The corollary to the good girl–wife/mother box, is the tough guy– husband/father and dominator/protector box. The stereotype of the male in this box is that of the “real man,” ready and able to compete and succeed in the world of men so they can “bring home the bacon,” and so their wife won’t “wear the pants in the family.” The job of the “real man” is to make money, accumulate resources, and pass it all down to their legitimate heirs – males who will carry their name; sons who they are “sure” are theirs.

They must be willing and able to enforce “the rules” of virginity and monogamy for females and not let “their women” – their wives and daughters – have lives of freedom and self-defined sexuality. These rules are particularly strong in the most conservative religious traditions, which built patrilineal property exchange into their laws, customs, and dogmas.

Tough guys fear being perceived as a “girl” and thus not “making it” in the world of men; not getting or keeping the jobs, status, and power that are controlled primarily by men. This fear pushes boys and men toward stereotypical male role behavior such as playing and/or watching aggressive sports, while devaluing less violent ones, and not studying or reading much but still insisting on winning all arguments, especially with females. The tough guy is likely to be the one who drives the car⁸ and controls the television remote. They are in control. They may have male friends, but don’t share much about their inner lives, doing “parallel play” – golfing, fishing, hunting, drinking, or playing/watching sports – showing off what they can do, and sizing themselves up in comparison to each other.

Being a protector/dominator means that you must “protect” your wife and children from other males. But being able to protect also requires being able to dominate. And being willing to be the bully means being “shut down” emotionally. Having been told since they were tiny that “big boys don’t cry,” in fact, tough guys don’t cry (Kindlon & Thompson, 1999; Pollack, 1998). Men can struggle emotionally, but not know what they are really feeling, because the only emotion they are allowed to feel or express is anger. They may be feeling sad, disappointed, scared, or lost, but all they will show is emptiness or anger.

⁸ One of the clearest indicators we might have of the “end of the patriarchy” would be if we saw women driving, with men as passengers, as often as what is now the norm, the men driving when women are in the car. Rationally this would make more sense since statistically, women have fewer accidents, take fewer risks, and are less likely to drive while drunk.

Sweet guy - Nice guy

What's the alternative? The other confining stereotype for males is the nice guy or sweet guy, all too often associated with sissy, queer, fag or "girl." In a world controlled by males for the past 7,000 – 10,000 years, being seen as a girl/female is the last thing most males want to be, or feel safe being. The sweet guy feels he won't "make it" unless he acts tough enough to compete with the dominator-type males for the high status jobs and positions. Nice guys finish last, is what they hear, and what they fear. They also worry that no girl will want them, except as a friend, and having friends who are girls ceases to become an option for many boys at a young age, again due to male peer pressure to be a "guy."

The sweet guys are often the boys who got bullied and "beat up" throughout their childhoods as other males use them to display their "tough guy" masculinity to other males. Perhaps they are smaller, or they play the violin, or read books. Perhaps they aren't obsessed with sports, or computers, and perhaps they hold hands with each other, play with dolls, or are close to their mothers or sisters.

As adults many sweet guys are seen as gay or bisexual whether they are or not. If married, they share housework and parenting. Their wives may keep their own names because for these men, being in an equal partnership is more important than the patriarchal symbol of "owning" their wives and children, having their name be the "family name." They hug their friends – male and female. They "eat quiche" – to use a stereotype of the "sensitive guy" from the 1970s – but in fact, men who dare to break out of the dominator/tough guy box may let themselves be a gourmet, eat vegetables or "health" food, instead of going for the burgers every day, and may as a result, live longer and healthier lives.

Letting go of fears of not being seen as "masculine enough" lets men dance freely – even outside the male space of mosh-pits – and use their bodies in more relaxed and sensuous ways, and dress colorfully or fancifully. In Jesse's life this means having male friends who will cuddle on the couch while watching a video, just like their friends who are females do with each other. Perhaps most crucial, in terms of their own health and the safety of others, the "sweet guy" may demonstrate more emotional intelligence, be compassionate, and cry, not just in a crisis but when it could be a helpful way to release distressful feelings, or to express joy.

The standard, the pole if you will, that males need to make it over to be able to measure up as male, is set pretty high. In fact it has gotten higher over the last past half century. It used to be that you could be a “gentleman scholar” but that was before girls started going to college and doing well. Now being studious is being nerdy, or being a girl. The image of the gentleman scholar or even gentleman soldier has been replaced with a hyper-masculinity that plays itself out in extreme sports, extreme drinking, and extreme sex (Faludi, 1999)

The biceps on GI Joe increased in size over the past 34 years, from 12.2 inches in 1964 to 26.8 inches in 1998 (Kimmel & Messner, 2001), almost in proportion to the increasingly excessive curves on the Barbie doll. No real human being could look like either GI Joe or Barbie, and yet millions of people around the world measure themselves up to these symbols of the white, “perfect” body.

The answer to the question

If it isn't obvious yet, the answer to Jesse's question about why all the really “cool girls” hang out with “the jerks” is that up until just this past century, women had little chance of acquiring the education/income sufficient to support themselves and their children alone. So they needed a “real man” who could “succeed in the world of men” since men controlled power and resources, jobs and money. Perhaps a conscious or unconscious level, girls and women still believe this is what they need, and think it is the tough guys, not the sweet guys, who will be able to take care of them.

Of course, given rates of domestic violence, extramarital affairs, and divorce, it may be a Faustian bargain. Females “sell their soul” – their emotional and possibly physical safety – for what appears to be the promise of financial security for them and their children. This may be true for even the most “liberated” of women, since even though their mothers and fathers may have raised them to be independent, their brothers and boyfriends were still raised to be protector/ dominators.

So it is that “cool girls,” those who are attractive inside and outside, who are strong, and smart, and loving, and playful (and all of the other ways we can describe the powerful women we all know and love), are still caught in a bind. Their mother's generation fought to create more options for them, more ways to be a woman than the two boxes that 10,000 years

of history had left us with. But their male contemporaries are still growing up in an environment in which it is acceptable for men to order the bombing of far away lands, to ruthlessly slash jobs while making record profits, and to compete with one another at every possible level for advantage.

In this world of hyper-masculinity, sweet guys are still very much at a disadvantage. In middle and high school (and even at college), Jesse knew dozens of women who were “liberated,” who were strong and had been raised to stick up for themselves. But they still dated men who hit, raped, or abused them emotionally. They would cry on Jesse’s shoulder, saying, “I wish more men were like you,” but then say “We’re friends, we’re close, I don’t want to ruin that by getting closer.” These women were subconsciously looking for men to protect them, and were willing to pay the price in violence and domination for the status that dating a “tough guy” brought. They were also trained to believe that a man they could talk to, be emotionally close to, and really relate to, was good “as a friend,” but not suitable for dating. Until our images and expectations of “maleness” change, this bind will continue to affect women who want to live fuller lives, causing sweet guys to be measured against GI Joe. Fortunately, for Jesse and his sweet guy friends, increasing numbers of young women are breaking out of the boxes, and finding themselves attracted to males who are more box-free as well.

How is this system reinforced?

As the mother of a son – this is Betsy speaking now – I wondered, from a functional perspective, what a society would have to do to raise sweet, innocent, baby boys, to grow up to be the dominators that patriarchal societies have historically required. Given my deep belief that we are all really more alike than we are different – hormones vary in both women and men and do not provide the explanation – why would boys agree to a system in which they had to restrict and restrain the women in their lives, whether wives, daughters or sisters? Current social arrangements in reactionary theocratic countries show us clear examples of this; women must cover themselves from head to toe and cannot leave their homes without their husband or a male blood relative.

As Jesse’s speaking, it is one question to ask why women would “put up” with such an arrangement, but given the millennia of male domination few of us even wonder very long about that; it has been about survival. What is more fascinating to me is why men do. It is too

easy to just say that we benefit from the system. While some men benefit, it is also true that most men are afraid. The repercussions for me (Jesse) of not “going along” are great and real. Men physically and verbally attack, and even kill other men whose way of living defies the normative, heterosexual, patriarchal order. Fathers who turn away from their sons who do not “measure up,” help keep the system going.

Men who have looked at patriarchal oppression and its impact on their lives, recognize that most men walk around feeling afraid of other men in a different yet similar terror to that which women feel. There is a constant “sizing up” process going on in which men assess their social standing relative to other men, and take action to be in a superior or at least acceptable position. This behavior is both a result of and a cause of bullying. From a very young age, males who are perceived as vulnerable are teased, harassed and beat up by other boys and men. Teachers and parents come to expect this, and allow the “boys will be boys” argument to justify ignoring and masking the reality of this violent social conditioning.

Of course, at some level, men have the most to gain from keeping other men in line. Mocking the “sensitive guys” who are in egalitarian marriages, and who want to stay home with their babies, helps keep the tough guy system functioning. The homophobic insults – sissy, queer, fag – are weapons of sexism that serve to perpetuate a social order in which males are to be “real males who are superior to women or queers, and pass on the oppression of both other males and of females, maintaining the social order.

But it is both women and men who participate in perpetuating the harassment; boys and girls, father and mothers, sisters and brothers, teachers and friends, all carry out the socialization process that teaches boys that it’s not acceptable to be emotional, to cry, to be seen as weak, or to be anything like girls. Mothers as well as fathers counsel their daughters to become women who will be attractive and acceptable to men; pretty but not too sexy, outgoing but not too pushy, smart but not too accomplished, and so on.

The Four Boxes in action

The implications of the four boxes are profound. Just look at the messages we get about sexuality. When we’ve presented this theory in classes, and asked students to brainstorm the messages that women and men get about sex, this is what they’ve created:

<p><i>For females:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Say no to sex (or be swept away).- Pursue love (security, romance).- “Get a man.”- Women are to <i>be</i>; attractive but passive.- Don’t act too knowledgeable
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<p><i>For males:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Pursue sex. Get as much as you can.- Love is a trap/responsibility.- “Be a man” (get a woman).- Men <i>do</i>, plan, accomplish (don’t give up; she’ll give in).
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Let's look at the dynamics behind this. For many males, touching equates with sex. Boys are touched less from the time they are babies, and homophobia keeps them from touching each other, so all their needs for touch must be channeled through the "keyhole" of sex. Males are supposed to "know it all" and be in control. Yet, they receive little real information about sexuality from parents or schools; what they know may come from porn. They get pressure from peers to "go for it." Some men have sex with females to enhance their status with other males, and may bypass learning the sensual, the sacred beauty of sex as they pursue "it" - orgasm. Others, wary of relationships with women, may feel awkward and embarrassed about pursuing sex. Males are "homosocial" (prefer being with males), yet they have higher rates of homophobia, keeping them from having emotionally close male friendships. And males have higher rates of risky behaviors of all types, again in part to impress other males with their "toughness" and thus their heterosexuality.

Girls are taught not to acknowledge sexual desire or plan for sex, then get caught up in the "swept away syndrome" (Cassell, 1984), which makes planning for use of birth control and safer sex less likely. The messages are: Don't explore your own "privates," masturbate, or come to orgasm on your own. Don't know or communicate your sexual needs to males (who are supposed to be "in control" and "know" what is going on). And don't be angry when he wants more than you feel ready for.

Since females are supposed to say no, and males to pursue sex, neither can easily be honest about what they do and don't want. Neither has a language for talking about sex. Females are socialized to be the relationship builders, and may be afraid to put pressure on the relationship for fear of losing it. Males, having been socialized not to have or talk about feelings, may bring less "emotional intelligence" (Goleman, 1997) to relationships, again making honest, intimate communication difficult.

What these historically constructed gender boxes cause is a maze of twisted, strained, and non-existent communication between men and women. Men are raised to find women attractive for their looks, to desire women sexually, and to “open up” emotionally only enough to get a woman to have sex with them (or to see female attention as their only outlet for opening up). Women are taught to desire strong men, aggressive and confident men who are born wealthy or will be able to “succeed” in the male-controlled world of corporate competition. These boxes have often meant that the most attractive women are the “cheerleaders” who are attractive and supportive of male prowess in competition, while the most attractive men are the football quarterbacks, men who are strong, aggressive, respected by other men, and are smart enough to “make the play.” For everyone else, there is a constant self-criticism that is implanted from birth, one that measures our bodies, behaviors, attitudes, and performances against those of the “good girls” and “tough guys.”

Yet in everyday life, the sluts/dykes who are strong, self-confident and independent are often more interesting and dynamic than the non-threatening “good girls,” and the fag/sissy is probably better in bed, more caring, and more compassionate a partner than a “tough guy.”

Reemergence: Breaking out of the boxes

While the picture of traditional gendered sexuality and relationships can be bleak, it is also true that there is not universal participation. There is resistance, now as there has always been. And the resistance may be growing. There is increasing support for change, coming to a large extent from the women’s and the gay rights movements of the past 30 years.

There are many men who see themselves as pro-feminists (even if they lack a large visible organization to represent them) and are making changes in their own lives that are liberating, that allow their “sweet self” to emerge and celebrate itself. Such men are willing to risk breaking out of the tough guy role, the protective and isolating barriers that keep them from truly knowing themselves, other men, women or their children. But it is also true that there is much less overall societal support for men to change than there is for women. It is more threatening to the patriarchal system for men to claim their “feminine” side, than for women to aspire to male values of competition and success, (which is unfortunately the most concrete way that the feminist movement has made change).

An important ingredient in this emerging change, of imagining and moving into a new partnership-oriented society in which the boxes of gender have much less power, is an understanding and acknowledgement that it hasn't always been this way. The way that men are and women are, and the way we relate with each other. It's been worse, and...it's been better. Knowing that can help us now. That is why we spent so much time in this article telling the story of ancient times.

There is also evidence from other sources. Anthropologist Meredith Small, writing on the evolution of human mating, states (1995, 123):

One cultural strategy to keep women away from other men has been to “castrate” women in the social and psychological sense, and turn them off to sex. Women might be interested in sexual variety, but this kind of behavior is made socially unacceptable in a patriarchal society... Women alone have their reputations ruined when the word gets out they've had sex with many partners.

Small sees strong evidence for a social/cultural explanation (as opposed to an evolutionary biology one) in the narrowing gap between how women and men relate to their sexualities, as women become more liberated. Rates of sexual activity, reports of sexual desire, and enjoyment of sex draw closer and closer in studies as women have more choices in life, and face less stigmatization for being sexual (1995).

By paying attention to the history of our ancestors, and to evidence from scholars creating new interpretations, we can realize that there is nothing “normal” or “natural” about a society that vilifies female sexuality. Then we more fully can believe in the possibility of change.

It means looking as well for models of human society that don't exploit and dominate. Models for societies that instead produce for consumption (instead of surplus to support war and conspicuous consumption), allow full partnership and value in various forms of work and play (instead of privileging war, exploitation, and acquisition), and that affirm human connection to the land, the feminine, and to each other. For many young people, challenging the types of gender traps we've been discussing also means challenging the fundamental structures of our society, whether they be capitalist, racist, militarist, or sexist. This has manifested itself in many ways, including the massive “anti-globalization” movements that

have sprung up across the planet in the last 10-200 years. Haitians stood up to colonialism and slavery in the 1790's, and Americans have done so on and off since the days of Tom Paine.

Even some feminists accept the patriarchal notion that humans have always been divided in half by gender, with one half raping and brutalizing the other. They hope that scientific rationalism, based on enlightenment notions of liberty (from 17th & 18th century Europe) can create the conditions under which men and women can live as partners. While this hope is certainly valid, by failing to take into account the ways that various tribal societies live today, and that our ancestors once did live, we can easily mistake what is a reality in modern life, for what has always been. By remembering the history presented in this article, and sharing stories of ancient times, we can see that gender and sexuality are not fixed aspects of our lives, they change over time as the result of religious, political, and military policies.

At a very personal level, it is clear that we need a partnership model for relationships, for families, and for society. We need a way to think about gender that is affirming of gentleness and nurturance, as well as personal resourcefulness and accomplishment, for both males and females. The “sweet guy” is an integral part of the authentic, conscious male, just as the “bad girl” is a proud, free, sex-affirming part of the authentic, conscious female. A key to this is our ability, as females and males, to accept and affirm all parts of ourselves, instead of denying, running from, or hating (or projecting that hate), the hard, sexual side of women, and the soft, sensual side of men. Denying this leads to depression in women and anger in men. Women implode. Men explode. What we need, if we are to be real with ourselves and with each other, men and women in relationships, is the ability to have access to our sadness and grieving, as well as healthy expressions of anger when needed for self-protection and defense of our boundaries.

At another level, true partnership will only be possible when we let go of gender dichotomies altogether, or multiply them, as the transgender movement and Queer theory suggest. We are neither male nor female as those categories are currently constructed. At some level, we are pure awareness. When we can see spirit in each other and ourselves, we can let go of dominance-oriented “power over” ways of being and cooperate in the ways that “power with” partnerships require. Society will have to change, as will religion, and the economy, for the residues of 10,000 years of violence and oppression to be unlearned, but

where there has been change, change is possible, and luckily, our history can give us both new memory and hope.

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