I think we will have to face a truth about men, women, and families. As long as the world is an unfair place, as long as patriarchy prevails, love will be tainted by domination, subordination will be eroticized to make it tolerable, and symptoms will be necessary to keep families from flying apart.

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READING #8

4

The Problem of Gender in Family Therapy Theory

RACHEL T. HARE-MUSTIN

FAMILY THERAPY THEORISTS have given little attention to gender issues and feminist critiques, viewing such critiques as micro theory, peripheral to the development of macro theory. It is not surprising that this view is isomorphic to the problem feminist theory addresses, that is, the subordinate status of women in the family and society. Such an isomorphism demonstrates how characteristic modes of thought and perception about gender influence us on a number of levels. Rather than gender being a peripheral issue, gender is the basic category on which the world is organized. The fact that family therapy has had little impact on other disciplines and theories may well be due to its inability to deal with the basic issue of gender.

What feminist theory offers those who are trying to develop family therapy theory is an alternative construction of reality provided by a different lens. Feminism is futurist in calling for social change and changes in both men and women. Feminists have been concerned about the family because the family is the primary beneficiary and focus of women's labor as well as the source of women's most fundamental identity, that of mother. The family meets society's needs by shaping people for the roles in society. Feminists view the socially constructed role differences between the sexes as the basis of female oppression (Eisenstein, 1983).

A Constructed Reality

Our reality is a constructed reality. As Hume observed, what we learn from our experience is that the future will resemble the past. The way the therapist thinks about the world is the most powerful factor in family therapy. Despite a therapist's presumed neutrality, family therapy is not value-free, whether it involves a psychodynamic stance or a systems approach. Even neutrality itself represents a value. The idea of therapeutic neutrality denies the fact that all therapists hold normative concepts of good and poor functioning, growth and stagnation, male and female. These are so embedded in the therapeutic system and, in fact, in Western thinking as to rarely receive comment.

Family therapy has now developed into a successful, even an international, enterprise. Family therapy once felt its way along a lonely road. Now, we are like a driver on those long straight highways in the Midwest who has put the car on automatic cruise setting and gotten into the lotus position, legs folded on the driver's seat and so forth. Here is family therapy, roaring along into the future and unable to get out of the lotus position.

As Lao Tzu, the Chinese sage said, "Trying to make things easy results in great difficulties." One of the difficulties has become the inability of the family therapy field to respond to new ideas. We must ask ourselves, what functions do our theories serve? Perhaps they merely conserve the past. I will review some aspects of the family which influence our traditional ways of construing the family and lead to gender bias in family therapy. Then I will raise some questions about the gender role dichotomy.

The Construction of the Family

The meanings and symbols associated with the family frame the past and organize the future. Today the family has become a hot political issue, perhaps because less than 10% of American households still consist of the traditional family with a working father, a mother at home, and two school-aged children (Wattenberg & Reinhardt, 1981).

The modern family is a recent social invention, dating from the early 19th century, when work and home became separated in the Industrial Revolution. Workers could be better controlled in factories, and technology moved beyond the little workshops that were homes. For poor women in the early 19th century, the saying was not "A woman's place is in the home," but "A woman's place is in the mill," since the vast majority of mill workers prior to unionization were women and children. We view the past we never knew with nostalgia, for we have forgotten the idiocy and harshness of daily life and the repression of the young and lively associated with the stable family.

The idealization of the home as a haven by social critics like Lasch (1977) is a patriarchal view. As men became the primary wage earners, the home became organized as a place of rest and leisure for them. In those days, women had others to share domestic chores. Today, the American mother has the least help for childcare and housework of any mother in the world (Minturn & Lambert, 1974).

Housewives have been described as remaining at a preindustrial stage, doing work in the private sphere of the family which has no exchange value in the marketplace. Women's depression is often associated with the mindless and unappreciated routines of housework (Sobel & Russo, 1981).

Continuity and Change

In the 1950s, when family therapy began, a particular kind of family existed which was unlike the family of previous or subsequent eras; people married younger and had larger families. Today's one- and two-child families are more consistent with the long-term declining birth rate in the United States (Cherlin, 1979). Abortion is not a recent phenomenon; in fact, abortion was widespread in past centuries, terminating about the same proportion of pregnancies as today, the great majority sought by married women (Degler, 1980). At present, one-fifth of all children live with a single parent, perhaps in part because 25% of all births are now to unwed mothers. However, the most prevalent type of family currently is the two wage earner, two parent family.

The most dramatic change in the family in this century is not broken families, for desertion and early death were widespread in the past, but the entry of women into the world of paid work. Fifty-six percent of American wives work outside the home, albeit the majority isolated in sex-segregated and low-paying jobs (Packwood, 1982; Scanzoni, 1979). The lack of widespread childcare means American women are not about to be freed from domestic responsibilities just because they hold other jobs. Asymmetrical boundaries between work and family are so widely accepted as to be unquestioned by families or therapists (Hare-Mustin, 1988). For women intrusion of family responsibilities into work leads to negative evaluations of women as workers, but for men boundary permeability in the other direction means they can take work home or use family time to recuperate from occupational stress (Hare-Mustin, 1980).

The privacy of the family has led to isolation and made the domination of women less accessible to public scrutiny. We do not permit among strangers the violence permitted in the family. Attacks by husbands on wives result in more injuries requiring medical treatment than rapes, muggings, and automobile accidents combined. One-third of all women slain are killed by their

husbands or boyfriends (*New York Times*, 1984). Yet some family therapists within the framework of their theories claim there are no victims.

Will feminism free men first? Weitzman's (1985) recent research found that the breakdown of the family has provided freedom for men but poverty for women and children. Divorced women and their children are a new underclass, suffering a decline of 73% in living standard at the same time divorced men are experiencing an increase of 42%.

Rather than the private domain of the family being a refuge from the pressures of public life, public life today may be more attractive to family members. Public life may provide anonymity and a place where family members can live beyond assigned identities, as well as escape from the intensity, intimacy, and responsibility which characterize family life (Sennett, 1981).

The End of Childhood

Given smaller families, many children are growing up in neighborhoods without other children. Instead of having children nowadays, lots of couples are having lifestyles. Children may suffer from being too differentiated (Combrinck-Graham, 1985). Learning about gender differences starts early, and it is fathers more than mothers who teach gender stereotypes to both boys and girls (Hoffman, 1977; Lamb & Lamb, 1976).

Children have learned to expect their fathers to be absent, so they rarely complain about that, but they freely express their anger for mothers being away. Pleck (1977) has noted that, although maternal employment has long and incorrectly been thought to harm children psychologically, it is rarely asked whether paternal employment might harm children.

The Myth of Motherhood

Fathering and mothering are different: to father is to beget; to mother is to raise and care for. The emphasis on mothering in American society results from our peculiarly American view of the child as an innocent and vulnerable creature and of early influences as immutable and a cause for great potential harm. The tenacity of this view has hardly given way to recent research like that of Kagan (1984), which suggests that most children are remarkably robust, and that early influences do not have predominance over later influences in the individual's development.

Women's major identity is that of mother, yet women today spend but a small part of their lives in mothering. The idealization and blaming of the mother are two sides of the belief in the all powerful mother (Braverman, Chapter 12; Chodorow & Contratto, 1982). The formulation of dominant-

mother/ineffectual-father as the cause of every serious psychological difficulty is typically made without regard for the responsibilities assigned to women in the family. Society is beginning to espouse equality for women, but not yet for mothers (Hare-Mustin, Bennett, & Broderick, 1983; Hare-Mustin & Broderick, 1979). Despite the idealization of women's mothering role, there is consistent evidence that children have a negative effect on the mental health of women, a fact many family therapists seem oblivious to. Paradoxically, with the birth of each child, the mother's power in the family diminishes relative to that of her husband (Hess-Biber & Williamson, 1984).

Chodorow (1978) and Dinnerstein (1976) have suggested that fear of women may result from childhood helplessness. But that overlooks the fear small children have of men. Fathers are not just romantic strangers, but often fearsome strangers because of their remoteness, unpredictability, and, for the child, large size and loud voices. Fathers can be rivals as well as strangers for both boys and girls. Some therapists have held that everyone fears mothers (Pittman, 1985). It has been suggested that those who fear mothers may become family therapists so they can control mothers.

The Marital State

Marriage remains the preferred state in America, although many women in the baby boom cohort are not finding husbands (Norton & Glick, 1979). Marital problems are the most common problems people bring to therapy, but as Gurman and Klein (1980) observe, we have very little knowledge of what actually goes on inside marriage. Current emphasis on self-fulfillment has meant less tolerance for unhappy marriages. It is of interest that in Freud's day, psychoanalysis lasted a year and marriage lasted a lifetime. Now it's just the opposite.

Marriage is structured to assure the status differences between men and women. That is why in marriage the man is typically taller, older, more educated, hairier, hoarser, and from a higher social class (Bernard, 1973). Marriages where this is not the case we regard as strange. Therapists cannot overlook the fact that the standard of living and social status women have are derived primarily from their relationships with men, first their fathers, then their husbands. Women who have no men, like old women, single women, and divorced mothers, have low status and are the most likely to live in poverty.

Marriage has been found to have a protective effect for men but a detrimental effect for women in terms of both mental and physical health (Sobel & Russo, 1981). Miller (1976) has described women in marriage as de-selfing themselves so as not to threaten men. Although individual males complain

that they do not feel powerful, it is rare to find a male who seeks to give up masculine prerogatives. No dominant group has ever relinquished power voluntarily.

BIAS IN FAMILY THERAPY

Traditional constructions of the family on which our therapeutic approaches are based reflect society's male norm and female complementation. The therapeutic models which we have developed for working with families reveal widespread gender bias. Such bias can take two forms. One form of bias exaggerates differences between groups of people. This I call alpha bias. The other form of bias ignores differences when they do exist. This I call beta bias. This is the bias of systems theories.

The alpha-beta schema is in some ways analogous to that in hypothesis testing in research. In hypothesis testing, alpha or type 1 error involves reporting a significant difference when one does not exist; beta or type 2 error involves overlooking a significant difference when one does exist. I use the term "bias" to refer not to the probability of error but rather to a systematic inclination to emphasize certain aspects of experience and overlook other aspects. Here the alpha-beta schema is used to examine ideas about gender but it can also be used to understand ideas about race, class, age, and the like.

Psychoanalysis Deconstructed

There have been a number of critiques of psychoanalysis and how it has disadvantaged women; these do not need to be repeated in detail here (Albee, 1981; Brodsky, 1980; Hare-Mustin, 1983). Freud's pejorative attitude to the feminine, his misogyny, his treating masculinity as the human norm, his viewing female development against the standard of male anatomy are critical components of his theory, not incidental ones. Yet, it is sobering that in a recent survey of family therapists, Freud was ranked second of the 10 most influential theorists in family therapy (Sprenkle, Keeney, & Sutton, 1982).

Why has psychodynamic theory continued to be so influential among family therapists? Psychoanalysis originally was concerned primarily with women as patients, and it is questionable if psychotherapy could have survived without women's pervasive unhappiness. John Dewey's observation in 1922 remains true today:

> The treatment of sex by psychoanalysts is most instructive, for it flagrantly exhibits both the consequences of artificial simplification and the transformation of social results into psychic causes. Writers, usually male, hold forth on the

psychology of women as if they were dealing with a Platonic universal entity, although they habitually treat men as individuals, varying with structure and environment. (Cited in Shields, 1975, p. 752)

Alpha bias is apparent in the way psychodynamic theories have mystified women's psychology by ignoring their subordination. Developmental theories like Erikson's (1968) focus on intrapsychic explanations and are based on male development. Even in object relations versions of psychoanalytic theory the woman is an "object." Object relations theory shifted emphasis to the mother as a noxious influence in human development. Mothers were experienced solely as people who did or did not live up to their children's expectations.

Freud's famous case of Dora is a drama of betrayal involving two unhappy families. It vividly illustrates the psychoanalytic view of women, including the belief that the seduced girl is the seducer. Dora provides an important example of a woman who refuses to behave in accord with sex-role stereotypes (Hare-Mustin, 1983). Freud described her as a young woman of very independent judgment who occupied herself with attending lectures for women and more or less serious studies. It is her resistance to Mr. K's seduction and Freud's purposes when she quits therapy that leads to her being labeled as "disagreeable and vengeful" (Jones, 1955, p. 256). Dora has confronted the K family with Mr. K's sexual advances and her father's affair with Mrs. K, all of which the adults involved deny.

The appeal of psychodynamic theory to therapists may be its reversal of the Western primacy of conscious over unconscious, of logic over feelings. Psychodynamic theory attacks the authority of rationality and parental precepts. This is evident in its lack of interest in the patient's experience compared with its preoccupation with the search for the secret event, a search leading to an infinite regression.

What Dora needs most is confirmation of the truthfulness of her perceptions, and thus confirmation of herself, but Freud and his followers have developed the theory that patients are made ill by their fantasies, not by what happens to them. Object relations theorists would also minimize Dora's situation and attribute her problems to her early relationship with her mother. Freud never meets Dora's mother, but he diagnoses her as having a "housewife's psychosis" (Freud, 1959, pp. 27–28). (This is a diagnosis not found in *DSM-III*.) The frequent blaming of the mother for family problems (Caplan & Hall-McCorquodale, 1985) continues in family therapy. It is notable that the women in this family case—Dora, her mother, the maid, Mrs. K—are seen as the source of problems, not Dora's father or Mr. K.

Psychodynamic theories are marked by deconstruction, for what appears as reality is fiction, what appears literal is metaphorical, and every metaphor

...*volves a* distortion. The originating event that is sought is regarded as a *fiction,* something which never happened. Alpha bias is evident in the widely held belief that women cannot be believed.

Systems Theories

Family systems therapy, including structural and strategic approaches, is characterized by beta bias, ignoring differences when they do exist. Systemic models focus on recursive sequences and circular causality (Sluzki, 1983) and have been accused of rendering the family an abstract and mechanistic structure. From a presumed neutral position the therapist reframes the problem, that is, teaches the family the therapist's construction of reality.

From a wider vantage point, the "metaperspective" may be little more than a view over the moat to the opposite wall. Out of sight beyond the wall are the rules, boundaries, and hierarchies of the society. These are what the metaperspective fails to see. When we alter the internal functioning of families without concern for the social, economic, and political context, we are in complicity with the society to keep the family unchanged (James & McIntyre, 1983; Taggart, 1985). Thus, at the societal level, family therapy is "more of the same."

Systems approaches reflect Western conceptions of an objective, active, ahistoric way of dealing with the world. They are actually reductionistic, for they hold that one can learn about the family by looking only at the microscopic interactions of family members. Family dysfunction is viewed as an internal event, an intrafamily problem, independent of context.

In a recent survey, family therapists considered differentiation and negotiation to be the most important goals of therapy (Sprenkle & Fisher, 1980). These represent stereotyped male values of individuality and rationality. Differentiation and clarification of the self are utopian tasks for women until the structure of the family and society changes. It is notable that the lowest-ranked goal was caretaking, typically the mother's major responsibility.

Beta bias is evident in therapists who set up a quid pro quo bargaining exchange on the assumption that family members are equal. Margolin and her colleagues (1983) have pointed out that the changes women want may be less easily accomplished than those desired by men. When men feel there has been sufficient change, women may be dissatisfied, not only because women have more concerns about relationships, but also because women's requests for affection and understanding may be less easily achieved than the behavioral goals men desire and therapists more readily perceive.

There are four primary axes along which inequalities of power are organized: class, race, gender, and age. Two of these pertain to inequalities within every family: gender and age. Hierarchy is central to systems theorists like Haley (1976) and Minuchin (1974), but their categorizing marker for a position in the hierarchy is solely the person's age (generation). By exclusive use of this category they ignore the fact that males and females of the same generation do not necessarily have comparable positions in the family hierarchy.

Age and gender interact in complex ways. Indeed, since the woman typically has lower status than the man in the family and is in fact regarded by the society as less than a mature adult (child-like), her alliance with a child rather than with the father may not be such a violation of the hierarchy as these theories hold. The therapist who focuses only on generational differences is trying to unbalance a hierarchy which is already unbalanced. Gender, a crucial marker of hierarchy, is disregarded.

Systems approaches, by viewing family members as equal interacting parts in recursive complementarities, tend to ignore differences in power, resources, needs, and interests among family members. Such theories regard the nondifferential treatment of family members as equal treatment, assuming that men and women in the normal family are at the same hierarchical level. Thus, we have beta bias: By ignoring gender differences, the therapist supports them.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER OPPOSITES

Constructivism points out we do not discover facts; we interact with the world to invent them (Dell, 1985; Watzlawick, 1984). As Einstein noted, our theories determine what we can observe.

We construct oppositions to use for understanding the world. We easily slip into dualities which represent an everyday Manicheanism. Thus, we create two-sided perceptions which alternately cancel each other out (Riedl, 1984). Although we recognize the futility of oppositional models in our methods of treatment as generating "more of the same," in our theories of men and women we accept opposition as if it is reality (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974).

To see both sides of a problem is the surest way to prevent its solution, because there are always more than two sides. If we assume that one way is right, the other wrong, we are led to what is called the fallacy of opposites.

The symmetrical pseudomutuality of male and female can be challenged. Not-*a* is not necessarily the opposite of *a*. What do we observe in opposition to man? Man or mouse? Man or beast? Man or superman? Man or child? Man or mountain? Man or machine? Man or woman? Which is the opposite?

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I believe gendered thinking leads to false dichotomies. Let me point out how we succumb to the fallacy of opposites with regard to gender roles.

Gender Roles: A False Dichotomy

The nature of the world is to be complex, but we assume we can understand better by simplifying. Sex-role stereotypes are such simplifications. Masculinity and femininity are often considered opposites, but the differences in the ways we *perceive* men and women have been found to be much greater than their actual differences (Deaux, 1984).

Within our positivistic culture, claims about cognitive differences are assumed to be free of value judgments (Broughton, 1983). Characteristics associated with men, like rationality and independence, are regarded as ideal and a sign of mental health. Although qualities associated with women may appear complementary, in fact they are not equally valued, an asymmetry which reveals that the norm for behavior is maleness rather than femaleness.

Over 30 years ago, Parsons and Bales (1955) observed that men were instrumental and women expressive. For Parsons, this was a functional explanation of how gender roles are linked to power. The emphasis on distinct sex roles then led to these roles being used as the criterion for distinguishing normal and pathogenic families (Peal, 1975). Although most Americans have applauded the apparent decline in class, geneology, and tradition as determinants of social position, we have still clung to gender classifications as the last remaining insurance against social disorder (Rosenberg, 1982). The debate about gender roles currently going on in other disciplines raises questions for family therapists.

What is Masculinity?

In Western society, Judeo-Christian tradition has fostered the ideal of individualism and autonomy, but without making the ideal possible for all. Aspects of the traditional male role not permitted to females include assertion, intellectuality, and overt sexuality. Accompanying the ideal of individualism is the expectation that every person's conduct will be that person's own responsibility. The focus on individual responsibility ignores social forces and leads to individuals being polarized and categorized on a continuum of success and failure (Ho, 1985). A competitive society is the result.

Masculinity is defined by agonistic activity, by ritualistic combat. Masculinity is only achieved by continually engaging in such activity. From Homer's time until today, the first requirement of heroism is the exclusion of women as participants.

Overconformity is one consequence of gender roles. Men conform more than women because the violation of gender role requirements has more negative consequences for men. Traditionally, a man's greatest fear is to be thought to be like a woman. Aspects of the traditional female role avoided by "real men" include concentration on the home, living through others, and stress on adornment. That is why a man who dresses like a woman is called a "weirdo" but a woman who dresses like a man is called "dressed for success." Calling some men "wimps" is the way to pressure men back into the macho style. But there are no more genuinely nice, sensitive men around than in the past; there is no decline in rape or wife-battering, and no documented increase in men's doing housework. It is hard to go counter to the dominant themes of our cultural moment, which have been described as the politics of macho swagger, social meanness, and possessive individualism.

Feminine Relatedness

As for femininity, the preoccupation with defining the female sensibility has led in some cases to dangerously erroneous generalizations about women. As the theories of Dinnerstein (1976) and Chodorow (1978) were popularized, differences between men and women became viewed as part of their *essential* nature rather than due to gender arrangements in society. In stressing the heretofore undervalued quality of relatedness, some feminists from a psychoanalytic perspective have focused on the development of a gendered personality in the crucible of the early mother-child relationship (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1986). These theories of male-female differences rest on yet untested assumptions and ignore subsequent social learning (Kagan, 1984; Lott, 1985).

Gilligan (1982) has harked back to Parson's duality, describing women as relational and men as principled when faced with moral dilemmas. In point of fact, men and women alike may be both principled and relational. We can account better for which aspect is expressed by focusing on who has the power in an interaction rather than on gender. Thus, women's concern with relationships can be understood as the need to please others when one lacks of power. Zuk (1972) has pointed out that the powerful advocate rules and rationality, while the weak espouse relatedness. Thus, in husband-wife conflicts, husbands use logic, wives call on caring. But in parent-child conflicts, parents, including mothers, emphasize rules; it is children who appeal for understanding. Society rewards rationality, not emotions, but which is used is associated with who has the power, not primarily with being male or female.

The gender role ideals of both autonomy and affiliation, when closely examined, can be seen as simplifications and caricatures. Even seemingly

self-reliant men are dependent on wives to run their households and raise their children and on female staff at work. Autonomy can be criticized as encouraging "lifeboat ethics," narcissism, and selfishness (Wallach & Wallach, 1983). Paradoxically, the uniform striving for individualism leads to widespread conformity. Relatedness and affiliation are not always positive and fulfilling, either. Family therapists have observed how being helpful can render others helpless. A lifetime of putting others first may not benefit women, and the recipients of their concern may not welcome such caring.

Opposition and Hierarchy

What should be apparent is that men and women are opposites in no real sense at all. In fact, the concept of woman's role has no direct counterpart; men are defined by what they do, not by their sex. Because of the dominance of male institutions, women actually receive dual socialization. They are socialized in the dominant male culture, despite being largely excluded from it, as well as in the female subculture.

Like other dominants, men tend to assume their greater accomplishments are the result of inborn superiority (Goode, 1982). What men do affects women, who are subordinates, more than the converse. Thus, men do not observe carefully many aspects of women's behavior. In order to survive, women as subordinates attend to many seemingly insignificant aspects of behavior, which we call "women's intuition."

Dual socialization tempts women to try assimilation into the masculine culture, but also gives women insight into the artificiality of the value dichotomization. To men, socialized only in the masculine culture, women appear unpredictable and so need to be controlled, in the institution of marriage, or as witches, midwives, or nurses. One cannot help but be reminded of the witchcraft craze of past centuries. As Keller (1985) points out, witchcraft was associated with women's insatiable lust. Male knowledge was regarded as chaste. Historians estimate over 500,000 innocent women were put to death in a few centuries, a dramatic illustration of social control.

What needs to be challenged is the idea that a particular sexual division of labor is inevitable and mutually exclusive. Feminists have pointed out that the very language of sex roles conveys the sense of roles being fixed and dichotomous as well as separate but equal (Boss & Thorne; Chapter 5; Thorne, 1982). Uncritical use of terms like "sex roles" implies a harmonious balance and obscures not only differences in power between men and women but also the presence of conflict.

The concept of gender roles exaggerates other differences between men and women. Conflating autonomy with masculinity and relatedness with

femininity leads to their being construed as mutually exclusive. By dividing men's and women's roles, the sexual division of labor also makes it appear that one cannot be a complete person without the other. Thus, each sex's dependence on the other is exaggerated, whether the relationship is characterized, in Bateson's terms, as symmetrical or complementary.

Gender has come to be used to symbolize the relationship between reason and its opposites. Because women have been restricted to the private sphere, it is assumed that they do not *know* things discoverable in the larger realm.

The pronouncements of social scientists like Parsons, Erikson, and Gilligan, regarded as science and popularized in the media, have encouraged the ideology of sex roles. Parson's emphasis on sex-role dichotomy has confused what we see with what should be. Gilligan's research has been criticized as flawed and her claims of universal gender differences have not been corroborated (Benton et al., 1983; Broughton, 1983; Viewpoint, 1986). Why have people rushed to embrace the claims that women do not, cannot, and should not think like men? Why has Gilligan's idea that women who nurture have a moral duty to continue to do so been so widely hailed? Why have unsubstantiated ideas of the essential nature of male-female differences found such ready acceptance? I suggest it is because these ideas preserve the status quo and do not demand that either society or individuals change.

For every problem there is a solution which is simple, elegant, and wrong. Separate but equal is such a solution when the male way involves reason and power while the female way involves relationships.

Equality is difficult to achieve with polar opposites, but our competitive society emphasizes differences, not similarities. Dichotomies imply a zero sum game where if one wins, the other loses. Dichotomized thinking leads to hierarchical thinking where one polar opposite becomes more valued than the other. The hierarchical aspect of gender roles suggests another reason why they are so resistant to change. Gender roles serve to maintain a social system based on power. Note that men's presumed inability to be expressive is linked with power, with "stonewalling," with "toughing it out," with winning. The very definition of power is of instrumentality and control of resources. It may be that the very expressiveness encouraged in women detracts from their perceived competence (Gibbs, 1985).

On the other hand, a hierarchy based on presumed female virtues and morality may not be better. To idealize relatedness and claim an innate female superiority is as counter to the egalitarian spirit of feminism as is the claim of innate masculine rationality (Eisenstein, 1983).

It is our construction of gender that emphasizes difference, polarity, and hierarchy rather than similarity, equality, and commonality of experience in human thought and action.

CONCLUSION

What can we conclude? Change is the purpose of family therapy. But theories about what should be changed depend on those developing the theories.

Alpha bias exaggerates differences between men and women; beta bias ignores differences. What does it mean to call one aspect of human experience male and the other female? Men's lives are apersonal because women are personal? Women's lives are expressive because men are rational? Construing masculinity and femininity as opposites leads to hierarchy, one considered superior to the other. Construing them as equal ignores current inequities. Because gender inequities are embedded in the larger social system, they are assumed to be part of the natural order. What results is the implicit and often unintended support of sexism. Women have constituted an underclass, and as family therapists we are linked to the failure in society to accord equality to women.

Despite our interest in theory and innovative practice, family therapy has had virtually no impact on our culture and time. I suggest this is so because we have not provided a truly new vision of the family or a truly new way of thinking about changes in the family and society. Theories that once seemed innovative now appear conservative. Instead of looking for solutions to the basic problems of gender, we have looked for problems which correspond to the solutions we have available. Since we do not have a solution to the problem of the disadvantaged status of women, we have ignored the problem and defined it as a non-problem. Libow (1985) has aptly pointed out that we treat gender role issues like a family secret.

Gender is the basic category by which our species, the family, and all societies are organized. True, gender is not the only issue, but the avoidance of this most basic issue in family therapy makes it extraordinary. Until we deal with the question of gender we are unlikely to transcend it. As long as family therapy theory treats gender as but a micro issue, our theory cannot make the epistemological shift that I believe the field requires.

As Maturana has observed, every system functions to keep itself intact (Dell, 1985). Thus it is with the gender role system. Those who have sought to develop macro theory in family therapy have failed to recognize how their thinking is limited by traditional gender-biased ways of construing the family. The discontinuous change in thinking which a macro theory would require seems beyond our capacities. Our present constructions, limited by gender role simplifications, do not admit the complexity of human experience. Our views are impoverished and therefore dehumanizing.

The field of family therapy has been unable to apply its models of change to its own theory and practice. Family therapy is now a continuous process,

like a car streaming ahead with the driver comfortably in the lotus position. All we can expect is "more of the same." The solution has become the problem.

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