

EQUALITY AMONG WOMEN

Mingwôn Mingwôn (Shirley Bear)

WE ARE BORN WITH A CERTAIN NUMBER of talents, emotions and needs that are developed as we grow older. Much of our development depends on the environment that we are born to or involved in as we mature. If our environment is conducive to promoting a healthy respectful view of ourselves, then there is a likelihood that we will respect other persons too. However, there are other factors and adopted attitudes that are accumulated as we develop into adults.

Much has been said and written about sexual discrimination and to illustrate the issue now would probably be somewhat boring; however, we have pretty much gone full circle. We have gone that circle but we have not managed to connect yet.

Circle

Creation is female. In the beginning was thought, and her name was woman . . . to her we owe our lives (Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop*).

Among the indigenous people of North America there are countless verbal documents on the female source of creation. Any written documentation of our creation as it referred to the original North Americans was always coloured by the writers to conform with their beliefs, be they religious or political. Also since most of the original research was done during colonialism, the historical documentation would basically be written with a strong paternalistic bias. Colonialism and paternalistic religions were largely responsible in devaluing the matrilineal society that they found among the people of North America. Their influence is still being felt, but because of the questions from many women throughout the whole world on the origin of creation, the theory of the god person being only male is not so valid any more. Before the male gods, there were female gods or goddesses. Maat, the great goddess, whose name is identified as the original mother symbol, was personified as the bearer of truth and justice. And according to the Pueblo legend, Thought Woman was the first person in creation, thus the first goddess. Huring Wuhti or Hard Beings Woman lives in the worlds above and owns the moon and the stars and breathes life into the male and female parents of the Hopi. Sky Woman, who lived on this Turtle Island (now known as the world), is the original

goddess of the Iroquois. There are several connections among these stories of our creation, and the point is that they are all originally female.

Paternalism was at its beginning in the religions and governments around the time of the ninth century (Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*). The evolution of the written word is largely biased towards male deities and the denigration of female power. Because nothing stays static forever, female persons, after nineteen hundred years of powerlessness, are finally gathering together enough information and understanding of themselves as well as the paternal system to start a change in the government and the religions. This change is bringing about not another one-sided sexual generation but hopefully a more equipotent society. This will be the circle. The connection of the circle of understanding is still a long way from being the total view of creation; if it took nineteen hundred years for women to understand that men are not alone in this creation (and some women still do not believe or understand this), then we have several hundred years to complete the GRAND CIRCLE towards equality and unity.

Men and Women

Early writings from Egypt depict a matrilineal society, with strong clans led by women (Barbara G. Walker). All property, names, and family traced lineage through the woman. Because property meant power, and the only property holders were women, it meant that the power belonged to the women. In the pre-Columbian governments in North America, women were the power. The women were the name-givers, as well as law-makers, land-owners, healers, and spiritual leaders. There is also evidence in the oral documents to indicate that there were women warriors. Until the influx of the Europeans to this continent, women held high positions among the original North Americans.

The last evidence of a matrilineal system shows up about the ninth century in Europe. Paternalism started in the churches through acquisition of property. Paternalistic religions, in their acquisition of property, were also acquiring power, therefore in their powerful state were able to make and change laws. As the laws changed, so did the shift of equal status, attitude, and respect between men and women. The Churches made laws as though they were written by god, who by now was undeniably male. Where laws were centred on land and people before, now they were totally male-centred. Women and children had no more rights. Everything and everyone considered subservient became the property of powerful males. All the high governmental offices and religious offices were held by males. The laws were made by these religions and governments. At the height of paternal power, women held negligible power, and children even less. Over these generations, many myths, attitudes, and stereotypes about women have developed, reconfirming the image of a dominant Paternal Society ruling the subservient maternals. It isn't

difficult to understand why women are still expected to assume their husband's last name, or why children are expected to assume their father's name, or why women are assumed to be better housekeepers, babysitters, and gossips. Just about everything regarded by the dominant group as belittling or demeaning activity for them is attributed to the subservient group, most always women.

The unequal status of women and the shift in the religious leadership are largely responsible for the most recent creation story, as told in the Bible.

Women and Women

Dominant personalities have always been recognized as leaders, whether they are male, female, or animal. It may be important to understand dominance as a valued trait in the society that we are living in. *Dominant* means "superior to all others in power, influence, and importance" (Merriam-Webster). The way we think of and treat others distinguishes us both as personalities and as societies.

Dominant persons regard themselves as leaders; leaders delegate work and expect those who follow them to do the work that requires the dominant person to function without hindrance of any kind. In the Paternal Society, the males work with finances, lawmaking, and enforcing. They are so important in the process of world politics and church matters that they have delegated the care of their personal needs to women — i.e., washing, cleaning, shopping, cooking — and because women are the child-bearers, the care of children has been largely delegated to women. In recent years some women have entered into the dominant circle of males and taken on leadership roles. As more women move into this area, the pressure to emulate the paternalistic personality wears heavy on them. Ironically, women have to double their responsibilities and perform both the dominant and subservient roles.

But even subservients have to dominate over someone else, and we descend and dominate over other women, or persons of colour, or children.

Equality

Racial superiority expresses itself when one race of people feel that they can dominate another race of people. When people are powered over, it always results in either transferring this dominance over others less powerful than themselves or indignation on being powered over. Indignant persons realize the inequality of their situation and proceed to rectify it. But the others — those who practise dominance over others — are promoting inequality among people.

Inequality among men and women can be explained easily, based on history. Inequality among races of people can be explained by a lack of understanding of each other's languages, customs, and colour. Inequality among women is the most difficult to address or explain. The basis for any unequal situation is power. As

among races, we sometimes are not ready to admit that other women of colour make us feel uncomfortable and we view them (people of colour) as not being as intelligent as we are. Those of us who can afford to dress well will not feel equal to those women who cannot; rather, we feel superior, or think that the fact we dress well makes us more intelligent. Those of us who can articulate our feelings via Merriam-Webster also dominate over those who explain themselves with simple words. Our status in the work force or financial community always determines for us our power. Women are POWERFUL — but the total concept of our power is *equal*.

Women are powerful because they birth the whole world. We are equal. Women are born from women. We are equal.

Women's basic needs are to eat, sleep, and to love and be loved. We are equal. Because we, as women have had to endure the inequality of Paternalism, Racism, Sexism, and now Matronism, we should ask ourselves if this world is destined to continue for the next nineteen hundred years in its process of change, or if we can take charge of our attitudes and re-evaluate them and understand that history has indeed taught us that materialistic society did not work, paternal society did not work, colonialism does not work.

What Will Work?

At the risk of sounding Christian in theory, individual respect for each other — regardless of sex, race, or colour — may be in order for the next millennium: for the survival not only of us as people, but also of this planet that we all profess to call OUR WORLD.

THE RED IN WINTER

Emma LaRocque

The blushing river the Cree called her
 She wears no rouge today
 She speaks no Cree
 I ask about her other lifetimes
 beneath her white mask.