

Ayim not what I think I am: The Myth of
Language and the Kind and Gentle Woman

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June, 2002

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There is no greater myth that perpetuates the feminist mystique than the myth that women are by their very nature kind, thoughtful and altruistic.

In reality, they are after all human like us men. Like any large collection of test subjects, the behaviour of women spans a spectrum, a spectrum that includes the extremes of angelic and the violent. In truth, the only attribute this group of test subjects have in common are XX chromosomes. To state any further generalities about such a varied group does not serve a functional purpose.

This is becoming more and more evident as this mystique is pushed aside by the cold and sober realities we see expressed nearly daily. A mother kills her infant here in Vancouver (60% of all infanticides are caused by women), or girls bully another girl to suicide (bullying between girls is as prevalent as that between boys; it just takes a different form), or in the case of Reena Virk, several girls torment, bully and then murder a female class mate.

It was wise and courageous for the Solicitor General of the Province of British Columbia to make the Virk trial a trial case, for it has served to lay bare the fact that lady justice's breasts are born by angels and fiends alike. These violent acts are not isolated actions. They are indicative of the extent to which actions that were once hidden, are now becoming more and more evident.

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To use sex as an attribute to decide whether one is good or not is not a valid test. To add prejudice to poor scholarship, many feminists strive to perpetuate biased stereotypes and questionable assumptions both about what it is to be female, and about maleness, male anger and male aggression.

In the words of the authors of the Health Canada landmark study the Invisible Boy: “[a]ll too often, these writers take as a starting point a caricature of the worst imaginable elements of ‘masculinity’ and assume it applies to all male persons.” (Invisible, p. 11, 1996)

The Ayim essay Dominance and Affiliation: Paradigms in Conflict, is an example of the myth and poor scholarship that is to be found within the feminist movement. I call it an essay because it is closer to being what you read in a newspaper or Saturday circular than an article in a journal of academic merit.

Starting with a tenuous thesis, and using very questionable sources, (many of which stem from a backward period of sociological research – the late 1970’s and early 1980’s), the author asserts that the language of women is kind and gentle while that of men is confrontational and aggressive.

Research has progressed far beyond what is asserted by Ayim in her essay. Her views are some what out of date and incomplete. We should perhaps not forget

that where once it was thought Freud had merit, modern medical science has shown most of his assertions invalid.

In honesty the Ayim essay leaves me disappointed. There is no supportive evidence to this essay, only a handful of anecdotal comments and marginal studies that very few have read or take as authoritative. There is a scarcity of clinical or scientific evidence. There are no robust, longitudinal studies included in the essay. Her writing indeed lives up to the title of the magazine "Informal Logic" (with informal connoting a lacking of rigour or formality).

Starting with a tired thesis Aiym never strays far from her bias using such threadbare standbys as the KKK and war as her characterizations of male attitudes. As any scholar of merit will tell you do not use subjects or attitudes two standard deviations from the norm to characterize the norm: if you do so you are not speaking of the norm.

For instance, looking at Ayim's notions of war, even at the height of the Second World War only around 5 % of adult males in Europe and North America were actual combatants. The picture changes when you appreciate that over 10% of European and North American women directly participated in the war effort through war production and other such warlike activities.

We should not lose sight that men were more likely to be the victims of that conflict than women or children, whether they were combatants or not. We should also not lose sight that the citizens of the victorious benefit irrespective of their gender.

I think that anyone who cannot understand this should be asked to tend the gravesite of the Canadians who gave their lives in support of democratic freedoms and in pursuit of the rule of international law. They can start with the grave of my godfather in Nancy France. He was killed in 1965 while on active service with the RCAF, in support of our commitments to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. They are also welcome to send a picture of his gravesite to his widow, Peggy - he had been married three short weeks.

It doesn't help Ayim's case when we are reminded that in the 1930's a majority of German women voted Hitler into power, while a majority of German men voted for another candidate, because these men were tired of war. (Langsam, p. 439 – 441, 1952) It is so shocking for feminists to accept that right up to nearly the end of the war, the majority of women of Germany supported the Nazis.

If one were not thoughtful, and used Ayim's argument of language in the fashion it is rendered in her essay, we must argue then that the women of Germany were just as responsible for the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis as those whom themselves perpetrated the atrocities.

Indeed in the findings of the Nuremberg Tribunal it was stated as a matter of International Law that *nations fight wars* and that *the citizens of nations which conspire to war are themselves guilty of a breach of international law*; no distinction being made as to the gender of its citizens. By their actions in the Second World War, all citizens of Germany, including women, were in breach of International Law.

Setting the notion of conflict aside, (a concept that Ayim clearly does not understand), her thesis becomes weaker still in her reference to Zero-sum games. Modern thought affirms that competition is not governed by John Von Neuman's Zero-sum theory (one participant's loss is the other's gain) but instead by John Nash's Theory of Competitive Equilibrium (participants seek a cooperative resolution to competition).

The two Johns, (Von Neuman and Nash) knew each other at Princeton in the 1950's and the junior of the two, John Nash, felt that there was much need for improvement in the theory of competition. Von Neuman's zero-sum game theory was by then twenty-five years old.

In a modern sense competition is cooperative because competition seeks a resolution that is both functional and stable; its equilibrium defined by the Nash Equilibrium. It is clear that Ayim does not understand this, focusing instead on engendered misconceptions of competition.

The Cold War is an example of Competitive Equilibrium. Now that it is over it is clear that the Cold War was an affirmation that unlike Clausewitz's notion that "war is a continuation of diplomacy by other means", our modern notion of competition is more sophisticated – that of an affirmation that even *amongst political adversaries war is not a legal or moral option, ideas and ideology are*. Ideas and ideology are words, competitive and cooperative. Modern notions of conflict seek equilibrium, lawfulness and morality.

Few layman understand this, including Ayim. She doesn't understand language for what it is. Language is not just words, but context.

In his 1946 Westminster College address Churchill spoke the words "[f]rom Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic an **Iron** Curtain has descended across the continent"; his message was both political and personal. The politics is obvious. Stalin means Iron or steel in Russian. Fortunately Stalin and Truman understood that Churchill was addressing the notion of spheres of influence. Churchill's address was diplomatic yet purposeful. Truman added to this through his Truman **D**octrine, of confining Stalin to his sphere of influence.

Together these statements defined the fifty years of the Cold War, with the competitive spheres of influence eventually evolving into cooperative stability in the last decade of the twentieth century. The notions of freedom and democracy being so much stronger than the tanks and guns that kept men from being free. The pen was, indeed, mightier than the sword.

In expressing her gender bias Ayim turns her back on such clear evidence of affiliative and cooperative language as found in institutions like Democracy, Parliament, the Rule of Law, the International Court, the United Nations (and its myriad of functioning bodies like the World Health Organization) **all of which are male constructs**.

In her article Dominance and Affiliation: Paradigms in Conflict, Ayim has hope to argue for ^{the} ~~an~~ ^{of} engenderment in language. Her thesis does not survive what is outlined above regarding modern theories of competition and cooperation. Nor does it endure a closer look at the aggressive behaviour of younger females.

Modern clinical and medical science shows that women are not immune to aggression and violence, not as victims of aggression and violence but ^{as} perpetrators of such acts. Adolescent girls are beginning to show unsettling behaviour, in some situations more troubling than their male classmates.

The John Hopkins trained neuroscientist Dr. Debra Niehoff notes in her book The Biology of Violence that over the past ten years studies have shown that

“[f]emales... may not be less aggressive as much as different in their aggression. Women, for example, are less obvious about their aggression. To protect themselves from both social disapproval and painful retaliation, they learn to select methods and victims (e.g. children) less likely to provoke public scrutiny. “(Biology of Violence, p. 168, 1999)

Women, along with being more covert in their violence, use verbal and indirect means of aggression more so than men.

Since, for reasons of bias or politics, some writers have blinded themselves by using caricatures of male-centred aggression, they have not understood how women develop and utilize their aggressive power.

Extensive studies have shown that language is the primary tool for female-centred aggression and that this linguistic aggression begins at a young age.

You are naïve to think that adolescent girls and young women today are made of sugar and spice and all things nice.

As noted recently by author Patricia Pearson in her book When She was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence⁴, when asked to answer the precise question “do boys and girls differ in their specific types of aggression”, modern scholars have discovered that

“as soon as girls hone their verbal and social skills, at around ten or eleven, they become aggressors of a different kind. They abandon physical aggression, even though their prepubescent hormones are still no different than boys’, and adopt a new set of tactics: they bully, they name call, they set up and frame fellow kids. They become masters of indirection. “(Bad, p. 17, 1997)

Interestingly enough, this behaviour does not appear to be tied to any one culture but appears to be universal. We must, because we are to be teachers of boys and girls alike, take special note as to how this affect^s our students.

If we were to take any random sampling of high school girls across Canada and put the following question to them: “*Defining aggression in as broad a manner as you wish, are you most afraid of the boys or girls in your class?*” The answer overwhelmingly is they are not afraid of the boys, but instead are afraid of the female-centred aggression by other girls.

At the heart of female-centred aggression is language. The Finnish psychologist Kaj Bjorkqvist has extensively studied this form of aggression and has noted that

“it is a kind of social manipulation: the aggressor manipulates others to attack the victim, or, by other means, makes use of the social structure in order to harm the target person ... the basic power plays, the objective of which was to gain currency or dominance within the social milieu. “(Bad, p. 18, 1997)

This is supported by observations by Dr. Debra Niehoff when she notes that:

“[a]t age ten, both sexes tend to settle their differences openly, using fists, feet and verbal insults. But by age thirteen, the girls have stopped shouting and punching. Their teachers believe they’ve matured into peaceful citizens. But the girls themselves reveal that what has changed is their tactics. They’ve replaced physical violence with emotional violence: ostracism, snubbing, gossip, mongering, and backstabbing. Their aggressive behaviour ... hasn’t vanished, it has gone ‘underground, invisible to nonintimate peers and adult authorities.’ Because their aggression is ‘no longer a classroom management problem’, they can act out freely without incurring punishment. The preference for covert

methods over direct confrontation may persist into adulthood.”

(Biology of Violence, p. 168, 1999)

As teachers we have to become acutely aware of the dynamics amongst both boys and girls in our classrooms, particularly as it relates to the use of verbal and indirect aggression.

In a 1994 article written by Daniel Goleman ^{in?} of the New York Times, he makes an interesting observation that amongst boys and girls alike:

“Emotional and behavioral problems have been increasing since the mid-1970’s ... Problems showing the greatest increase ranged from destroying other people’s property and hanging out with other children who get into trouble to doing poorly in school work, being sullen and whining ... there was a small but significant increase ... in a wide variety of problems along with an erosion of basic emotional and social competencies ... Of 118 specific problems and abilities assessed, there was a significant worsening in 45, and an improvement in only one: the number of sports which a child likes to take part. Among the largest changes were a sharp dropoff in the amount of time children spent with friends, and increases in apathy and lack of motivation, in sadness and feelings of depression and in children disliking school. The increase in

problems is not clearly a result of any one cause, and affects boys and girls of different ethnic groups and economic status more or less equally." (Goleman, p A17, 1994)

The findings show an erosion of basic emotional and social competencies that are affecting boys and girls alike. Yet the focus appears to be on the male-centred behaviour. A double standard is at play. (Bruskiewich, 2001)

If language is the cornerstone of our culture and we are prejudiced by our gender bias, as Ayim is, then we can be blinded by our biases.

In focusing on ^{the} engenderment of language, Maryann Ayim misses the context of our language. In contrast, Sir Bertrand Russell states a better view of language and cultivation, one that is not stuck in the mud of gender bias:

"mental cultivation produces positive humanitarian feelings ... it gives other interests than the ill-treatment of neighbours, and other sources of self-respect than the assertion of domination. The two things most universally desired are power and admiration. Ignorant men can, as a rule, only achieve either by brutal means, involving the acquisition of physical mastery. Culture gives a man less harmful forms of power and more deserving ways of making himself admired. Galileo did more than any monarch has done to

change the world, and his power immeasurably exceeded that of his persecutors. He had no need to become a persecutor in his turn. " (Russell, p 41, 1972)

There is no greater myth that perpetuates the feminist mystique than the myth that women are by their very nature kind, thoughtful and altruistic.

Since some writers have blinded themselves by using caricatures of male-centred aggression, they have not fully understood how women develop and utilize their aggressive power. Women, along with being more covert in their violence, use verbal and indirect means of aggression more so than men.

Much of feminist writing is focused in the realm of politics. There is an irony, not lost, when we remember that politics is indirect and verbal.

To use gender as an attribute to decide whether one is good or not is not valid scholarship. We must be careful not to perpetuate biased stereotypes and questionable assumptions both about what it is to be female, and about what it is to be male. We must also be careful as to not discriminate based on gender.

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