

## TOWARDS THE RE-CONSTRUCTION OF A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST AND A REFLEXIVE BODY OF PRACTICE.

### **9. Gender and a feminist critique - offering a way through.**

#### **Introduction**

The process I wish to describe now is not linear or smooth. It unfolds then folds back on itself, to and fro in time. It is a process by which I take a closer look at my own personal history and, in so doing, bring my personal experience more fully into the research field. The stories I have presented so far, the experiences I have reported and the sense I have made of them, both lead up to this period and also flow out of it. The journey I have narrated so far happened in the temporal order reported, but its inclusion in this research account in this form, with the interpretive gloss I put on it, happened because of the inward personal journey I will present here. It was the re-writing of aspects of my personal history, and the discovery that a feminist critique and a gender analysis had something powerful to say to me, that enabled me to take a discontinuous step forward. This was not only in my research but also in my personal and professional development. This new appreciation enabled me to see the events reported thus far as part of the inquiry process, as within the 'research field', and to feel more able to see 'practice as research' and 'research as practice'.

#### **An Inquiry into the personal: rewriting history.**

The dissonance between research and practice, together with the partially understood sense of vulnerability which I have commented on to date, reached a crisis point when I was required to produce a substantial piece of writing to transfer from MPhil to PhD status. This was to be read by fellow research students, supervisors and an internal university examiner. This created considerable personal tension. I considered I had failed so far to begin any research and that this failure was due to my personal inadequacy.

I had strongly resisted shifting the focus of research onto myself personally. It was all very well including the researcher's theorising and sense-making in the field of research, but as I saw it research was a primarily social process and it was self-indulgent to bring the deeply personal into it - research should benefit the participants and a wider audience, not just the researcher! I believed in the necessity for making explicit my values, frameworks, and beliefs about the social world. I had found it interesting and useful for my practice to write about my own reflections in action. After all, it was a basic tenet of new paradigm research and a cornerstone of the work at Bath that research should include the personal process of the researcher/s (Reason and Marshall, 1987). But I was wary about going beyond this point. It was 'my problem' and not a 'research problem'.

I had no clear understanding of what 'the problem' was which was blocking the research process. I was inclined to think it boiled down to 'not having enough bottle to take the bull by the horns' and explicitly invite colleagues to form some sort of collaborative research venture. This fitted with an old script I had about myself, that I tended to go with the line of least resistance, go with what was happening, go with what other people wanted. I recalled a metaphor I had about myself in my early twenties, of being like a stream which found the easiest pathway through the terrain, afraid of forging into new territory or of taking risks. I did not see the possible strengths immanent in this metaphor, it was a critical self-evaluation about 'passivity' and one which was surfacing again in the context of research.

Although I had taken what others considered to be risks in my professional life, although I had risked disapproval and faced conflict, this was sanctioned because it was on behalf of others. Where I was concerned, I tended to see myself as having difficulty asserting, or even knowing, what it was that I wished to see happen.

I began discussing this more often and in greater depth with Jan, who was also having to prepare a transfer paper. Her approach was to ask questions about my earlier life, prior to beginning the research, inquiring into how I worked in previous jobs - asking questions about style of working, ways in which I accounted for what I was doing, and commenting on patterns in the past which seemed to be mirrored in the present. As a result of these conversations, I reflected on the influence of my life as a child -

being virtually an only child with a sister who was away from home for most of her childhood in a school for the blind, considering the implications of the closeness in my relationship with my mother and the distance in the relationship with my father, and so on. This did not ease the frustration, nor my resistance to including all this as part of the research field, but seeds were sown.

Then, while at a writing week with fellow research students, exploring writing as a creative process, I began putting some of these reflections in writing. I intended as part of the transfer paper to give a summary of my readings of the literature and my attempts at beginning research, but first of all to honour the personal process aspects by giving an account of the values, theories and beliefs I was bringing into the research (I had already started doing this in my diaries, but they had been relegated to the back pages). As I started doing this, I found I could not punctuate where the 'story' should begin. I found myself taking steps back in time. For example, in writing about the influence of family therapy on my thinking and practice I found myself having to write about early professional experiences which led me into this area. Then, in doing that, found myself taking yet a further step back in reviewing my original training as a clinical psychologist. And so it went. I was "writing backwards" as I complained at the time.

Over the course of that week I wrote an autobiography of my life since leaving home to go to university. I traced the influence of family life and mapped the many transitions through tertiary education, from starting with engineering as a career choice, through several years of science, to exploring law studies and finally arriving at psychology. I re-visited the different 'pairs of shoes' I had tried on - hippie, Marxist Leninist, factory worker, tenants rights activist, leather craft worker, and so on. I looked again at friendships and intimate relationships over that decade.

I had previously seen that period of my life with a quiet sense of shame, as having 'mucked around', wasted time. I had seen myself as directionless, without a stable identity and as having given myself a 'slipshod' education. In the process of writing about this, I saw it through different eyes. I appreciated that what I now saw as assets in my life had been forming and taking shape over that time. I was more forgiving of myself. I saw how this period of my life was not necessarily discontinuous, that there were patterns connecting childhood ("good time") and the present which ran through this period. I had 're-written' my story of that time.

The process of writing was a deeply inward looking and healing one. It was also a recursive and emergent one. It was emergent in the sense that, despite intentions about what I wanted to say in writing, I would never know fully what meaning or slant would emerge until I had written. It was recursive to the extent that as new meaning emerged from writing, it informed and enriched the sense I made of the past and the present. It would then inform further writing and reflection, and suggest further action. Writing was no mere passive reporting of experience. It was active inquiry into the internal domain which generated new knowledge.

This gave me a personal licence to place myself a little more centrally in my writing as chief 'sense-maker' and to be more creative. It opened the way to experimenting more fully with writing in story form. It helped 'give life' to experience and to begin naming the voices in my internal dialogues around research. It began untangling the tangle. This in turn engendered a more curious dialogue with myself. The NZ stories in chapter three emerged in a more polished form from that week. However, it still did not show a way through my research-practice impasse.

I continued to wrestle with this as I prepared the transfer paper. On one occasion when I was feeling particularly blocked in writing I complained loudly to Jan. She suggested that we swap places and I talk about what ever came to mind concerning the research while she wrote it down. I began and quickly moved to talking about how frustrated and angry I was at some of the interactions with senior male colleagues in the department, particularly the two consultants. I talked of the difficulties I experienced in meetings where I felt the inquiry was one-way, where mystery-mastery strategies prevailed on their part, where cooperation could only be gained where there was self-interest, where blame was externalised, where everyone else but them was incompetent, where the only important agenda items were what they brought to the discussion. I talked about how I felt silenced by this, about how futile it seemed to confront this because I did not think they would be able to hear alternative viewpoints, about how I felt unheard unless I talked in their language, about how much I had to keep private my own views and experiences. Trying to join with them for the sake of the greater whole of

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the service seemed impossible. Either I felt 'holier than thou' if I gave voice to alternative and non-blaming viewpoints or, what was worse, I found myself sometimes joining with their 'us-against-the-world' attitude.

When I had finished Jan said: "That is how I feel. I have felt that way for years. For women that's a common experience. The only way I can manage is to try and carry both agendas - theirs, the public one, and mine the private one, where I am trying to make things work for everybody. The only time when I find it possible to disclose how I see things authentically is when it is on an issue which does not affect them at all. This is usually about taking care of patients as a nurse." She suggested I read several articles on women's experiences in organisations.

I began to wonder how my research fitted into this 'public' and 'private' separation. If my practice was about 'psychological treatment' in the usual sense, I was clear I would have no hesitation in discussing it with the two consultants and seeking their explicit involvement. We would have a language in common. Was it the case that my practice had a large element of 'taking care'? If so was this the reason why I hesitated. Had I intuited that they would have no interest, that they would in fact challenge my involvement in 'taking care' as not part of my job. Furthermore, it became clear to me that if this was the case, then they most certainly would not be interested in joining me in a research venture in which framings of practice as 'taking care' would certainly be present. It was the literature I read next which opened the way forward for me, and it is to this I now turn.

### **Dialogue with literature.**

Before beginning my reading of the literature, it is important to place it in the context of my analysis of gender at that time. My knowledge of feminist theory was slim. It came from reading several feminist novels and from conversations with female friends and colleagues. I came into the research with the view that women's experiences and knowledge were different from those of men. Hence my understanding of feminism was based on the importance of respecting the difference. It was not men's place to arbitrate over women's experience.

This had a grounding in New Zealand society, where there had been a strong women's voice saying 'each to their own'. Many women were reserving the right to no longer be the emotional care-takers for men. There was a strong challenge issued to men to start taking responsibility for their oppressive behaviour. It was their place to confront their own violence to women, and it was their place to start taking care of themselves and each other. This was based on a belief that partnership was only possible after a separate development of masculine and feminine identities. Only women could understand women's experience and men could not call themselves feminist. Within this context I did little reading and had no contact with a feminist critique of social science. I came into the research with the idea that gender was likely to be an important issue in teams and organisations, but I was only seeing this at a social and political level, not at a personal level.

### **Women's experiences in Organisations: a feminist critique.**

My first awakening came from reading a paper by Coleman (1991). She describes the use of a Cooperative Inquiry approach to investigate women's experiences in her own organisation. Her starting questions were about women and the extent to which, and the way in which, gender affects organisational members experience of work, the meaning work had for them, and the meaning they have for the organisation.

She starts from her own position as a postgraduate research student beginning a piece of research within a university and experiencing a disjunction between the knowledge publicly accepted as valid by the organisation and her own internal or private knowledge which she felt was not validated or allowed a voice. Rather than "problematise" this experience, she places it in the context of the organisation being gendered. Hence propositional, disembodied and objectified knowledge is legitimised, but at the expense of experiential and practical knowledge (Heron, 1981).

A further disjunction or incongruity for Coleman was that the 'university course-as-organisation' engaged in discussion and analysis related to the world beyond but not about processes related to itself.

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In this way only a 'partial' reality was created for participants. These incongruities generated a sense of discomfort which her gender awareness linked to those feelings of inadequacy and voicelessness which many women report in joining educational or work organisations. Rather than assigning this inner reality to the domain of a private problem, which ensures gendered stereotypical framings of inadequacy, subjectivity and emotionality, she decided to make 'her problem' a public 'problem-to-be-investigated'. In other words, her research would start from the basis of her own experience, and in turn would include that experience in the field to be researched.

Coleman takes her warrant for this position from a feminist critique of science in general, and of organisational theory in particular. I will summarise these positions as she describes them, and as shaped by my subsequent understandings from further reading and experience. It is difficult to summarise what is essentially a pluralistic viewpoint, but for my purposes here I wish to take an essence which grounds my further interest in the area.

- A Feminist critique.

Broadly speaking, feminist writers have developed a critique of mainstream science which contends that it is not the only possible way to go about understanding the world (Spender, 1981; Stanley and Wise, 1983; Eichler, 1988; Rosser, 1988). It is only *one* way, and one which occupies a particular place in history. It is patriarchal, and an example of how this is reflected lies in the dichotomising of experience, where the objective is greatly valued over the subjective. Use of objectified knowledge permits the development of hierarchies of expertise, where those who 'know' are able to judge the experiences and actions of those who 'don't know'. This is one way in which domination is sustained.

Feminist voices have in common their challenge to the patriarchal representation of what is known. They seek analyses of experience which take into account the underlying power relationships and the particular ways understanding is managed. Their starting point is 'felt experience', and through analysing the political dimensions of that felt experience, seek to validate that experience and reframe its usefulness for those whose experience it is. This starting point gives rise to the contention 'the personal is political'.

This contention is based on the assertion that women's everyday lives, because they are largely conducted in the private rather than the public sphere, have been largely omitted from accounts of history, from political theory, and from more general accounts of culture. Therefore, the world is largely constructed in male terms through male eyes. The resultant reality is at best 'partial'. Daly (1978) maintains that women have had the power of "naming" their experiences of the world taken from them. Their experience is named by men in terms which constitute a "language of theory" rather than a "language of experience".

What feminist writers have in common is their challenge to the probable genderedness of current representations of what is known. They proclaim there are alternative accounts of the way the world is and the starting point for building these accounts is felt experience. ( I note here that there is much continuing debate about the problematic links between sex and gender e.g. Connell, 1995 ).

In applying this critique to organisational theory (e.g. Mills, 1988), Coleman finds limited help for her purposes. She finds little in what is essentially a sociological analysis which gives a space where the individual can exercise agency in developing theory and a practice based on experience, and which at the same time helps bring about change. While she finds a feminist critique of theory lays out principles for knowledge building, she finds little is said about how this is translated into practice. For this reason, she chooses Cooperative Inquiry as a means for investigating her own and her women co-researchers' experience in their own organisations.

- The implications for myself.

It was not so much Coleman's use of a feminist critique, important though that was, but rather her experiences and those of her research participants which leapt out at me initially. These spoke directly to my own experience, and echoed my conversation with Jan. The metaphors describing the experiences of participants in the research mirrored my own. Those of 'muted voices', 'silence' and

'invisibility' captured how I felt in relation to exposing aspects of my practice and my thinking. The concept of organisations being gendered, of valuing and reflecting those qualities of experience and knowledge which are historically male and patriarchal, struck me forcibly at an experiential level. I suddenly could name my experiences in way which took them out of the domain of 'individual problem' and place them in a social and political domain in which I was not alone.

The researchers' stories also spoke to my current experience in attempting research. If organisations are gendered, and if I felt silenced as a researcher who wanted to speak out, did that mean my work was also gendered, located in the domain of female or feminine experience. I wondered whether a feminist critique went beyond gender and applied to any situation where there were dominant 'realities' at play which obscured minority and private realities. Or, was the over-arching construct one of gender, where in fact such a hierarchical arrangement of 'what is known' is a representation of patriarchal arrangements which go beyond culture.

At the time of reading this, I felt liberated to read more feminist literature, and to consider the role of gender in understanding my experiences. I realised how my earlier framing about gender, as a political domain in which I respected difference, had precluded me from seeing the implications for myself in my personal domain. I now realised that a feminist perspective had something powerful to say to me at a personal level. This left me very interested in gender, in the differences between male and female experiences, and in how this could apply to my own experiences. I turned to literature about gender, starting with what constituted 'masculine and feminine'. I was intrigued with the idea that there was a link between those aspects of myself I had 'problematized', my practice, and notions of 'the feminine'. For a start, I wanted to understand more of the 'feminine'.

### **The Masculine and the Feminine.**

I had been starting to read some of the new popular 'men's literature' about the contemporary 'masculine' (Keen, 1992 and Bly, 1990) but had not been very captured by it. I did not find anything particularly transformative for me there. I felt I needed a more thorough grounding of the notion of the feminine against which to understand the masculine, and hence their relationship with each other.

Colgrave (1979a) draws on several different sources to describe masculine and feminine principles. The idea of these as polarities separate-from-but-deeply-inter-connected-with each other is embedded in mythology and eastern philosophy (e.g. Yin-Yang theory from the 'I Ching') and more recently has been articulated in western analytic psychology (e.g. Jung and Steiner).

Jung holds that psychological maturity requires a relationship between the masculine and feminine aspects of self. This is a "sacred marriage" central to many religions and philosophies and is the highest form of psychological development which cannot take place before the complete differentiation of the masculine and feminine from each other.

Yin-Yang theory argues that there are two cosmic principles inherent in all phenomena and responsible by their interactions for the emergence and dissolution of all things. They are expressions of different parts of the one continuum or the one principle, the Tao, behind all creation. By its very nature the Tao is beyond definition. This theory has been elucidated and developed within western culture by analytic psychology.

Colgrave points out that the formulation of Yin-Yang theory could not have taken place without the birth of the masculine principle and the polarity in consciousness it created. She then draws on mythology which speaks of a time of pre-polarised consciousness when everything appears to be embraced in one undifferentiated unity, where masculine consciousness has not yet emerged or been born in order to split human awareness into subject and object, mother and child, male and female. This polarisation of consciousness allows for the emergence of a feminine principle whose salient characteristics are those of recognising and helping to create relationships, of being receptive and recognising harmony.

There are inherent dangers however of exploring and developing one polarity without the assistance of the other. While an awakening of the masculine principle is necessary for a sense of self, of

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independence and ability to discriminate, too much of this at the expense of the feminine can lead to isolation, loneliness, rigidity and despair. Similarly, the feminine provides attributes of listening, yielding, nurturing, accepting and trusting, which allow for relationship to inner and outer nature, but without relation to the male principle may lead to loss of self and undifferentiated chaos. These principles, according to Yin-Yang theory, underpin all aspects of life.

Colgrave describes the concept of Androgyny as a way of conceptualising a psychological union or marriage of the masculine and feminine, in which both are equally valued. The product of such a union would be the birth of a new sense of self. Within the concept of Androgyny, such a marriage would produce also a tension between opposite poles; between a search for knowledge and freedom on the one hand, and wholeness and peace on the other. This propels the individual ever onward in a journey toward a state of being in which understanding and peace are no longer in conflict.

In looking anew at my work, the idea that the construct of organisation itself was masculine, and hence excluded feminine knowledge, assumed a personal relevance. It seemed a gender analysis offered another way of understanding the incongruities between organisational processes, my work and research, and myself which liberated me from a self-blaming stance and opened up alternative possibilities. While I was not clear at that stage what these possibilities were, it was clear that this was something I needed to explore more fully and take more awarely with me into the research.

The idea of organisation as a construct without an independent reality seemed to link into further feminist critique relating to wider organisational structures. Pringle and Watson (1990) for example, theorise the state not as an entity but as a set of arenas or a collection of practises constructed by "fraternal discourses", super ordinate to organisations, families and individuals. They see the state as a site for the construction of meaning. This theorising leans heavily on Foucault and his development of the analysis that meaning is constructed and managed through discourse (e.g. Foucault, 1980). Hence links were made back into psychology for me, in that social psychology increasingly uses the discourse analogy. I will refer later to Foucault's analysis of power when reconsidering my relationships to power and gender as an outcome of this research venture.

It is important to note here that while I enthusiastically pursued the idea that there were masculine and feminine principles at play in the world, I did not pause to examine how those were arrived at. Later reading and experience revealed problems in this area. As I have already noted, the link between gender and sex is problematic and currently debated. There are wide differences in individuals' experiences of gender according to social and cultural conditions. In addition, such polarities run the risk of continuing gender stereotypes and are based implicitly on essentialist or foundationalist assumptions that there are dimensions of gender which are beyond history and the social processes by which they are constructed (e.g. Connell, 1995).

However, at the time, this was precisely their appeal for me. Through these constructs, I felt connected to some deeply patterned aspect of life which was enormously satisfying. At this stage I became excited about developing my ideas on masculine and feminine principles in a way which allowed for a more holistic view of myself as a man, and which also honoured both differences and similarities between men and women while acknowledging existing differences in power relations at a social level. I found these in Marshall (1984).

### **Gender and relationships**

Marshall starts from her interest in understanding the issues for women in relation to management jobs. She seeks a framework for understanding gender, and the relationships between sexes, which is free of those values which devalue either sex. I shall summarise the important ideas which stood out for me at the time. These ideas come from the key theoretical offering in her work in which she borrows from Bakan's (1966) analysis of Agency and Communion in order to develop her own model of male and female qualities, in a framework of potential equality and relationship.

In developing her analysis, she reviews literature which addressed both the personal and the political, drawing upon explanations from individual psychology and sociology. She draws attention to the role of language as a fundamental element of culture which reflects, perpetuates and shapes our values and

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consciousness. Women are rendered invisible and undergo a semantic derogation by language which takes male as the norm. They must emerge out of a translation process which converts their meanings into male forms of speech in order to express themselves in socially understood and accepted terms. For example, Olsen (1978) calls this process "telling it slant". Not to be able to express one's own truths "robs one of drive, of conviction and limits potential stature" (p.51).

Marshall also reviews notions of social power which offer an explanation for how the pattern of inequality between the sexes is maintained. For example, she considers sociological analyses of how the complementary interrelationship between dominant and subdominant or muted groups is maintained. She seeks the seeds within the dominant-muted construct for an equal valuing of different characteristics between male and female, but finds instead implicit and unexamined assumptions which derive from a male view of the world. In addition, much sociological theorising is at the political level and leaves little or no room for individual motivation or experience. Still seeking an explanation which extends into individual men's and women's lives and gives equal worth to non-equivalent characteristics or social positions, she draws upon Bakan's theory, also used by other feminists (e.g. Reinhartz, 1981). While there was much of importance for me in Marshall's analysis to this point, I was looking for something which spoke directly to my own experience. I found this in her rendering of Bakan's twin concepts of Agency and Communion. I will briefly summarise the key points I wish to take, before commenting on their importance for me.

### **Agency and Communion.**

Bakan proposes the concepts of Agency and Communion as twin styles individuals use to resolve existential questions of being and not-being, of independence and interdependence. They can be seen as coping strategies for facing the fundamentals and the anxieties of being alive, and Bakan distils these from religion, analytic psychology, mythology and philosophy of science. Agency is the expression of independence through self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion while Communion is the sense of being at one with other entities. Together, the two styles are potential complements. I will summarise the characteristics of each separately.

- Agency.

The agentic strategy's main aim is to reduce tension by changing the world around it. Agency is manifest in characteristics of focus, closedness and separation and achieves its aims through a series of stages. It is the style associated with the concept of ego, and with the individual's transactions with the external world. The underlying principles are the achievement of control through separating good from bad, and repressing the bad by, for example, projecting the bad qualities onto the external world. The agentic uses knowledge to instrumentally act on the world around it and in that way seeks mastery. However, this leaves many uncertainties beyond control, rendering the sense of mastery vulnerable. Hence denial is used to cope with the anxiety thus caused. The means of transcending this contradiction between mastery and vulnerability, and coming to terms with the anxiety is through 'healing'. This is achieved through 'beholding' what has been repressed or projected, fully encountering it and reuniting the previously 'bad'. The 'split' is thus 'healed'. In this way, understanding is substituted for control, and paradoxically the suspending of mastery results in a more profound mastery.

- Communion.

This is not characterised by separateness or stages, but rather, functions all at once. Its main strategies for dealing with the world are acceptance and personal adjustment. It seeks union as opposed to separateness, and its perceptions are not based on prior analytic classification but are naturalistic, reflecting the nature and patterns of its environment. Communion's openness to its environment produces intense personal impacts which contribute to richer understandings. It accepts the good and the bad and willingly adapts to circumstances, considering change natural. Following is a summary of the characteristics of both Agency and Communion as life strategies.

- Summary of characteristics of Agency and Communion as life strategies.

	AGENCY	COMMUNION
<i>Main Aim</i>	Control	Union
	Independence	Interdependence
<i>Dominant Strategies</i>	Assertiveness	Cooperation
	Control	Contact
	Change	Openness
		Acceptance
		Personal Adjustment
<i>Characteristics</i>	Doing	Being
	Egoic	
	Formal Organisation	Tolerance
	Physical Action	Trust
	Classifies, and projects classifications onto the environment	Naturalistic perception of environment: emphasis on wholes, patterns, relationships, contexts
	Distance	Emotional tone
	Contracts	Non-contractual cooperation; forgiveness
	Change-resisting	
	Achievement -oriented	Contextually motivated

From Marshall (1984).

- The implications for 'action'.

Marshall conceives of action from within the two domains in the following ways. Agency engages in idealisation and tries to change the environment to match its own preconceived images. Doing is directed by internal, personal objectives. Communion is not inactivity by comparison, but its activity emerges from radically different roots - from its open contact with and appreciation of the environment. Action is mainly context-motivated. Prior acceptance of the world-as-it-is results in action which is in tune with the surrounding context, but is not conceptually premeditated. Therefore, action based in the communion may be highly appropriate as a result, but it also risks being too thoroughly shaped and determined by the environment.

The agentic mode interprets the world as its product because of the deliberate intent involved in its doing, and the principle of independence on which it is based. From its perspective, 'success' is demonstrable and individual. In contrast, communion sees itself, and even its actions, as part of a wider context of interacting influences. It tends not to assume personal accomplishment when events turn out favourably.

- Agency and Communion in relationship.

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Agency and Communion have their degenerative tendencies as well as assets and I will present them in turn.

*Degenerative Tendencies.* The inherent qualities of each shape their relationship towards non-equivalence and inequality. Agency's insistence on control has profound effects. The distinction of communion from agency is itself a function of agency's attempt to suppress and deny the experiences of open contact with the environment which threaten its control. Agency therefore tries to repress the attributes of communion from which it has originally separated itself.

Through its own activities, agency creates around itself a world of competition within which it is naturally the dominance seeking style. In relation to agency, communion's cooperation seeking strategies are effectively complementary, but fated to submission rather than equality. Acceptance of the environment becomes subjugation rather than mutually influential union.

Degeneration of agency occurs if threats which have been suppressed to achieve control are not later recognised and re-incorporated. Instead, action on the environment is often interpreted as successful, and any conflicting evidence such as unintended consequences or other peoples' disagreement, are ignored (e.g. pollution of the environment). Over-control can also unknowingly damage elements of the context or its patterning whose importance were not originally appreciated in the narrow perspective taken.

Communion's strategies make it open to penetration, flooding and eventual destruction by contextual forces. The nature of its environment affects communion more than agency. This vulnerability is accentuated because communion has no strong base of self-worth from which to sustain itself - its attributions of success are also context dependent.

*Assets.* Each deals with uncertainty and anxiety in its own way and can be highly successful in appropriate circumstances. Agency's main achievements come from thrusting out into the unknown, pitting wits against environmental forces, imposing order on chaos. Communion's triumphs are by nature less tangible and come from integrating, reconciling, synthesising, and supporting the flow of events.

Either pattern alone runs the risk of an over determined pattern, robbing the individual or social group of flexible strategies for coping. But the use of the two *in synthesis* offers a broader base of potential coping. Marshall suggests by way of example that a professional who uses a dominant approach of control runs the risk of creating too much client dependence and possibly even antagonism. At the other extreme, she suggests, exclusive use of a communal strategy may confuse expectations the client holds about expertise, and provide too little structure to contain both parties anxieties.

- Implications for personhood and identity.

Marshall identifies potential links between agency and communion, and male and female sexuality respectively. She proposes that these links provide a potential pre-disposition which act as a grounding for later development. She then follows several lines of tentative inquiry towards notions of identity. Firstly, she explores the implications for communion as a female disposition. Social norms idealise a strong sense of self-identity, self-esteem, independence and confidence. These underpin commonly held notions of 'healthy development'. Marshall sees these as agency based and hence male-grounded. In these terms women are more likely to be viewed as 'dependent' and 'weak'. In contrast, some feminist theorising holds women to have 'relational' identities (e.g. Gilligan, 1982) - that is, women see themselves more in relation to others rather than via a strong sense of self. Viewing this alternative as an expression of the communion principle gives it a positive connotation.

It is possible to see the conceptual distinction between agency and communion as a reflection of the agentic. This, she speculates, offers a possible model of male as a differentiated organism in which one part has been actively repressed. From this perspective it is possible to conceive of female as communion and agency in unsplit wholeness. But this very conception makes it difficult to capture in analytic, distinction-making language.

Marshall draws from several sources which suggest that the female principle is dual in nature and concludes that it is likely that women have free access to both the communal and the agentic strategies of being. This conception is reflected in the experience of those contemporary women who seek satisfying lives through both motherhood roles and challenging paid employment roles. Such a mixture of roles reflect both relational and independence needs, and women typically portray them as part of an indivisible whole.

Drawing these strands together, Marshall suggests a model in which communion is women's dominant tendency, but is twinned with a more or less fully developed agentic auxiliary. This is a more viable combination for women than the alternative pairing of a dominant agency with an auxiliary communion. Agency will tend to repress alternative modes to gain control and make this an inherently unstable pattern, whereas communion will be tolerant of and accepting of supplementary tactics for coping. She sees several functions for agency as an auxiliary to communion for women.

- Providing protection for communion's vulnerability in hostile or new environments.
- Creating structures within which communion can operate.
- Supporting communion by giving it direction.
- Affording a systematic understanding of alternatives within which communion can locate itself.
- Helping translate communion into direct effects through judicial instrumental action.

Marshall has an image of a positive direction for women "based in who they have been and are...of communion enhanced, supplemented, protected, supported, aided, focused and armed with agency." (p.73)

Bakan's suggestion to men would be his paradoxical healing stage, relinquishing control to gain better mastery of what threatens them. Men need therefore to suspend stereotypical perceptions of the world, together with the judgements which accompany them, in order to perceive clearly and encounter what is. Only by mitigating agency by communion will this be possible.

Marshall places this speculative model alongside others to deepen her new description of alternative possibilities for women. One of these is the concept of Androgyny, and she identifies two broad traditions in the literature. One emerges from myth and symbolism, often via Jungian psychology, portraying androgyny as a holistic and mystical realm of possibility. This tradition can be seen as derived through communion as a process of sense-making. At the other extreme, androgyny is portrayed as dissected into parts, categorised, defined and prescribed. Such a portrayal can be seen as a hallmark of agentic thought processes.

Singer's (1976) 'Creative polarity' is such a communion-based approach. It is a mode of being characterised by 'the embracing of and easy flowing between one's masculine and feminine sides, whether woman or man.' Similarly, Colgrave (1979b), drawing from mythology and Chinese philosophy, interprets androgyny as 'the realisation of a self which is both differentiated and united'. Each of the unities must carry equal worth and be valued for the unity they imply rather than for the differences they reveal.

Link to: [http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc\\_theses\\_links/d\\_quinlan.html](http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/d_quinlan.html)

Writers in the area emphasise that the two principles must be distinct and clear in order to unite in this way. Bardwick (1979) is cited as an example. She sees gender identity as a critical existential anchor without which individuals would be unable to achieve a satisfactory sense of self or identity in relation to others. In this sense, androgyny would involve claiming the power of one's own gender and drawing on the characteristics of the other. Marshall links this to her notion of communion enhanced by agency, and agency mitigated by communion.

However, Marshall is disappointed with attempts to develop the notion of androgyny further. She finds Colgrave's analysis shed's some light on this. Colegrave depicts early matriarchal consciousness as an integration of humanity with the universe. People were communally rather than individually motivated, free of ego consciousness. Although in this order there may have been greater equality between the sexes, and greater harmony between people and nature, there was correspondingly little freedom of choice, individuality, understanding and control. There may have been no oppression of one sex by the other, but there was also no real possibility of relationship. Only through the overthrow of matriarchal consciousness by the emergence of patriarchy could the male and female principles emerge as distinct unities. However Colgrave cautions that the subsequent emergence of a fully developed female principle has been overshadowed and constrained by the male principle.

Marshall shares this concern and she warns that until we have adequate conceptions of the female, interpretations of androgyny will tend resolutely toward the agentic. More radical inquiry into the female principle is yet required, and this will benefit not only women but also men. "Only through such developments can men enhance their appreciation of the male principle in dialectic development with its complement". (p.86) Within the alternative formulation of agency and communion, to combine productively the two strategies each need to retain their clear and distinct identities. Compromise debases their qualities. The ways of communion, like those of the female principle, currently require the focus of attention in order to remedy previous neglect.

### **Lessons through a 'Gender Lens'.**

I connected strongly with the above strands I drew from my reading. I became aware that previously I had been locating myself outside my own theorising about the world. I had not been operating in a fully reflexive manner, but had been excluding my own personal process as separate from my sense making about my work. I now had a way of placing myself centrally in my experience, using a masculine-feminine/agency-communion set of spectacles. Through these I could better understand incongruities between myself and my environment, within my environment, and between the different ways of knowing within myself. I could now entertain all experience as potentially relevant in a rich way which had not been available to me previously. In other words I could allow the feminine/communion to value and incorporate the vulnerability and the not-knowing rather than exclude it in a masculine/agentic fashion.

I felt this new appreciation addressed important issues of authenticity which had troubled me to this point. If my sense of authenticity was in some fashion connected with a need to be able to account for how I knew about the world, and acted in the world, I realised I had not been fully present in this accounting. Major aspects of my experience, of my sense of self, had been in the back row, barely visible and muted. I wondered if I would have to revise my conditions for authenticity. Perhaps accounting is a masculine/agentic quality which has its uses in certain contexts. But perhaps there are experiences which are beyond language and naming, deeply embedded in the feminine/communion and therefore not available for a public accounting to others. Perhaps such experiences in certain contexts need to remain private, protected and sheltered but nonetheless acknowledged and valued to oneself, not shunned. Being able to name this domain to myself in a more powerful, hopeful and positive way took it out of the realm of the 'problematized' and into the realm of valid and useful experience. I could be more fully present in my own experience.

I could now forgive myself my wariness about setting up a Cooperative Inquiry group in the midst of a culture dominated by the mystery-mastery strategy. And conversely I now criticised myself for expecting that women on the staff might join with me in such a venture and make themselves even more vulnerable than I was.

Link to: [http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc\\_theses\\_links/d\\_quinlan.html](http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/d_quinlan.html)

I could now be fully present in the research and I could authentically research how it was I functioned as a psychologist because I had found a framework which authorised this at a propositional level and also spoke powerfully to me at an experiential level. Although I came into the research with questions about how I functioned as a psychologist, I had not felt it legitimate within my existing world view to place myself at the centre. This had seemed selfish and individualistic. A feminist critique now allowed me to do so, although not in an individualistic or solipsistic manner.

I could see more easily now how practice and rigorous inquiry could be intertwined. I now valued my inquiry to date. I had unwarily been in the grip of an agentic and masculine view that research should always be public, and represent action, success and achievement in terms valued by the dominant culture. I had chosen an imagined masculine and agentic 'researcher audience' to whom my masculine/agentic self wished to account. I now no longer felt compelled to do so. I felt I had choices. I had another researcher audience which would respect the feminine and the communion.

It became possible for me to see that my tentative inquiries to date constituted research, and I could now also see how research and practise could be more easily be made interchangeable. I could make sense of the extent to which much of my work had been located within the realm of communion. I could see how major aspects of the research methodology I had been grappling with seemed located in the realm of agency to the extent that it required considerable agency to initiate it. Hence this accounted for the disjunction between practice and research method by which I had felt disabled.

I could see much of my practice as being an interweaving of the masculine and the feminine, agency and communion. I could understand more my work with Sushi for example. Those aspects which I could not name in that setting were to do with feminine/communion qualities of acceptance, seeking contact and cooperation, being prepared to not act immediately, to understand in context, and seeking pattern. I did not see my self as a causal agent taking credit for change.

On the other hand, I could see that these communion characteristics were interlinked in my practice with alternative masculine/agentic qualities of taking control, facilitating change in the environment, implicit and explicit contracts, wishing to achieve, asserting my viewpoint in order to provide a structure for the encounters, and a belief that my actions would make a difference. These latter characteristics, masculine and agentic, were more visible and could be more easily named and accepted in my work setting - indeed, would have been expected.

In thinking about these new possibilities, I was not sure how they would translate into future practice. I found myself alternating between two positions, which I wrote in my reflective diary at the time.

"At times I have a strong sense that residing too strongly within communion when thinking and reflecting about my research leads to feeling flooded and not knowing where the edges are. One conscious strategy therefore could be to locate myself within agentic principles and see where that takes me, perhaps returning to communion to notice or reflect. Perhaps the paradox is that by adopting this seemingly artificial distinction and holding myself within the one will allow me to better understand/sense/intuit/experience what the interrelationship is and how it flows. This feels very challenging and I am sure I will not be able to keep hold of it for too long (is this communion, reminding me of her presence already?)

At other times it feels right at this stage to give more voice to the feminine, trusting that my essential masculine will prevent me from being swamped in the process (and noting that this act of drawing distinctions is an exercising of the masculine principle). By valuing personally and publicly the feminine principle in myself, my work and research, I am freer to let the masculine speak as well, (trusting the feminine to guide me in knowing when it is timely?). This approach has a wider contextual appeal because it seems possible that by valuing the feminine in themselves men can then come to equally value women and engage with others and nature in more respectful nurturing and holistic ways. This feels to be merely a starting place, accepting 'both/and' and accepting that I shall probably move to and from between."

A feminist critique had given me a warrant to include all my experience in the field of inquiry as potentially relevant. As a result, I could approach research as I did practice. I could 'go with what there was' and take that as the starting point. I could approach it from being located in communion, finding a form which 'fitted' naturalistically with the environment instead of seeking to impose a previously chosen form as I had to date.

This was what I chose to do. I could not be explicit to myself about what particular aspects of masculine-agency/feminine-communion I wished to take forward in a purposeful way. I decided therefore to pay attention to the pattern of interplay between the masculine/agentive and the feminine/communion, with a particular interest in exploring the presence of the latter.