GENDER HAS AN IMPACT ON OUR LIVES –
*Even When We Aren't Paying Attention*

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There are many different ways to describe ourselves. One way is to utilize a set of statuses that are common to all human beings. The inner ring of these statuses is made up of what are known as Master Statuses, ones that are assigned at birth and that we cannot change. Within this ring, we find characteristics such as age, race, physical abilities/qualities, sex and gender, and sexual orientation. And although you would have to select just one Master Status to describe yourself if you were filing a lawsuit, in reality we are a combination of all of these Master Statuses (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 6 June 2003). Using the Master Statuses to describe myself, I could say that I am a 47-year-old, non-disabled, heterosexual, Asian-European female. I can then go beyond these Master Statuses and examine the outer ring of Acquired Statuses common to all humans. These are statuses that we acquire throughout life and which are things that we can theoretically change. Thus I could also describe myself using such Acquired Statuses as income (could be better), marital status (single), military status (none), education (working on graduate degree), and parental status (no kids) (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 6 June 2003). What a nice, straightforward way to describe myself.
Or is it?

By defining myself in this way, I see that these labels group me with some people and set me apart from others. As members of society, we have been programmed since childhood to find differences rather than commonalties – and from an early age we learn that there are judgments and values associated with these differences (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 6 June 2003). As a result, the terms with which we describe ourselves and create our personal identity can serve to not only bring us together, but to separate and lead us to compare ourselves against our fellow human beings as well. Miller and Savoie discuss a myriad of costs – lack of political participation, fewer educational and economic opportunities, struggle for social acceptance – that can result from the disrespect people show for people who have been grouped into categories that are different from themselves. They note that "how we are named and name Others affects how we are regarded and regard 'them'" (Miller 2002:87).

Thus, these statuses have power beyond being simple naming conventions because of the meaning and value given to them by past and current societal

interpretation and use (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 6 June 2003). As a matter of course, those in positions of power within a society are the ones who make these interpretations – and they do what they can to maintain the system that put them into power. In a patriarchal society, or one that it is male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered, positions of authority – political, economical, legal, religious, educational, military, domestic – are obviously reserved for men. To maintain their positions of power, the oppression of women becomes the heart of patriarchy (Johnson 2001:129-33). For women in such a society, as Sandra Lipsitz Bem notes, it's not that the fact that women might be different from men, either biologically or in some other way, but "the problem for women – and what limits their chances for equality – is that they are different from men in a social world that disguises what are really just male standards or norms as gender-neutral principles" (Bem 2001:61).

Those in power use these social constructs to maintain their power and control through an ongoing system of inequality. If you belong to a gender (or race or class) that is different – and perceived to be lesser – from those in power, it becomes a monumental struggle to overcome ingrained, systemic difference and judgments. For example, we often think of sex and gender as being the same thing. In fact, our sex is biological, while gender is a set of socially-constructed characteristics that are based on our visible sexual organs at birth and that limit an individual's behavior, attitudes, and values to preset possibilities (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 6 June 2003). In a male-dominated society the characteristics of the powerful (men) are always presented as better than the characteristics of the powerless (women), whether these distinctions make sense or not.

The sometimes-illogical value placed on the characteristics of the powerful, by the powerful, is vividly illustrated by Gloria Steinem's article "If Men Could Menstruate." She writes that "Male human beings have built whole cultures around the idea that penis-envy is "natural" to women – though having such an unprotected organ might be said to make men vulnerable, and the power to give birth makes womb-envy at least as logical." She goes on to show how current assumptions about the capabilities of men versus women based upon menstruation would be completely turned around if men were the ones who menstruated and women couldn't. Suddenly, men would be celebrating something they currently decry as a sign of women's weakness, as a sign of men's physical, intellectual and moral superiority. Women on the other hand, would be

trained to accept these views as normal and "non-menstruation" would be seen as the source of all oppression (Steinem 1995: 392-93). And this amazing change in what is important to everyone in society would come about simply because those in power will always value and promote their own characteristics at the expense of others.

These socially-constructed characteristics become part of people's ingrained and often unconscious beliefs about themselves and others. As a result of the social, political and economic inequities that derive from these constructions, gender – along with race – has become one of the most sensitive issues that divides rather than unites human beings. This is interesting because although we are asked to assign ourselves to one of the "Federal Five" race/ethnic categories on government forms, biologists now know from the Human Genome Project that it is impossible to isolate one race from another. What we call "race"– and what has a great deal of power to bring about fear and alienation among people – is merely a difference in the amount of melanin our skin produces. On a continuum of all 6.2 billion human beings on Earth, there would be no way to pick two people and say this is where one race ends and another begins. A very similar problem exists with isolating human beings into one gender or another. There is a whole range of human behaviors – which anyone who is human, male or female, can experience and exhibit – yet we insist on making people choose one group of gender characteristics or another (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 6 June, 2003). Robert L. Nadeau, while arguing that there are differences in the "s/he brain," stresses that an entrenched either-or logic isn't found in true nature. "Since life evolved from one source and all life forms share one parent DNA, sameness was the initial and ongoing condition of life. Similarly, the human species is a single reality, and males and females are complementary aspects of this reality" (Nadeau 1996:138).

Often the belief in the inherent superiority of one gender or race has become so systemic that the participants aren't even aware they might be engaging in their own superiority – or inferiority. It takes strength, and resources, and energy to recognize and fight the effects of systemic differences; and too often those who are oppressed see these differences as insurmountable barriers or choose to pretend they do not exist at all (Lorde 2001: 589). On the other hand, Peggy McIntosh links the unwillingness of men to grant that they are overpriviliged with her own personal realization that until she began to examine her life, she was virtually unaware of the privileges she received as a white person – and more important, of how society wanted her to stay that way. She has come

to view white privilege as "an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious" and applies the same reasoning to male privilege (McIntosh 2001:163-69).

However, this recognition of the unexpected, unearned advantages of being white or male is difficult for some men to accept. According to Kenneth Clatterbaugh, the men's movement, from its early beginnings in the 1970s to the 1990s, has been ruled from conservatism. Different waves of the movement have changed from an early negative response against feminism, to a period of pro-feminism, to using feminism to prove that men were oppressed, too. A later wave encouraged men to lionize traditional masculine activities – along with poetry and displaying men's feeling – while continuing to expound on the wounds men suffer. Finally, Clatterbaugh sees the last wave of evangelical Christianity as striving to completely return to a traditional patriarchy, asking less and less change of men (Clatterbaugh 1997:205-6). Thus, a large part of the men's movement has not seen a need to change their behavior because they believe their behavior is inherently correct and that, in fact, they are the injured party.

Until recently, I hadn't spent a great deal of time thinking specifically about the role that gender has played in my life either. Although I was born in the 1950s and lived through the Civil Rights and Women's Movements, it has only been in the last few years that I've begun to question the role gender expectations might have played in my life choices – or, more disturbingly, whether I was actually making my own choices at all. I am finding – gratefully and sadly – that my unquestioning acceptance of the gender role assigned to me isn't unique. Many others, notes Judith Lorber, "voluntarily go along with their society's prescriptions for those of their gender status because the norms and expectations get built into their sense of worth and identity as a certain kind of human being and because they believe their society's way is the natural way" (Lorber 2001:54). We may not even realize that society's interpretation of what is normal becomes self-fulfilling prophecies that don't just describe how we are, but dictate how we should be (Hubbard 2001a:46). Perhaps it's a mid-life perspective, but as I examine my life, from friendships to romance to children to career, the more I'm reminded of how gender – along with the very interrelated issues of race and class – is actually about inequality of resources, especially status and power (Miller 2001:86).

In grade school, Mike Bratcher was the fastest and best kid in our class at math. Or was he? Although studies show that girls have fallen behind boys – especially in

math and science – by the time they graduate from high school or college, in early grades girls are equal to or even ahead of boys on most standardized measures of achievement and psychological well being (Sadker 2001:557). Sitting in class, even when I knew the answer, I would never raise my hand, while Mike's was the first to shoot up. Was it my natural shyness? After all, an earlier teacher had written that I was "too quiet" on my report card, so I must be shy, right? (Snyder 2001:515-16). Or was it our teacher's subconscious tendency to call on the boys first? When Myra and David Sadker videotape classrooms, they often find an interesting pattern. Boys call out eight times more than girls, and when girls do call out, teachers suddenly remember the "Raise your hand" rule. "So the girl, not as assertive as her brother to begin with, is deftly and swiftly put back in her place…" Later, when the teachers view the tapes, most are "stunned to see themselves teaching subtle gender lessons along with math and spelling" (Sadker 2001:558-60). Subtle, yet insidious.

These hidden, and sometimes not-so-hidden, lessons take hold at an early age and are passed from generation to generation. These lessons are taught both by the oppressors, and as William Chafe argues, can also be taught effectively by internal pressure from within the oppressed group itself to conform to other's expectations (Chafe 2001:543). Even as girls are told they can be athletes, scholars, businesswomen, and politicians, they are also bombarded with messages of feminine attractiveness and the value of motherhood. Women, at increasingly younger and younger ages, learn about society's (men's) expectations of how they should look and behave. In the film, *Barbie Nation*, almost more important than Barbie's impossible, male-idealized appearance, was the fact that in order to maintain that look – and any lifestyle associated with such a look – she had to shop. Despite the denials of Barbie's creator, Ruth Nation, or the thousands of women caught up in the Barbie collector's mania, these two factors have had an effect on several generations of girls as an impossible illusion to aspire to, whether they realize it or not. As one little girl insisted, "It's not important to be pretty," even as she later said, "But, if you're a little pretty, then people might like you a just a little more." And what about those avid collectors who shop ferociously for that special Barbie? Even though it would be impossible to give Barbie all the credit (or blame) for these girls' and women's perspectives, she certainly has had an effect, however marginal – as that little girl's innocent comment and the Barbie Collect-o-Maniacs reflects (*Barbie Nation*. POV Documentary).

In fact, researchers suggest that the growing dissatisfaction of younger and younger girls with their bodies is because our culture is constantly bombarded with visual images, added to the fact that the last several generations of children have been photographed constantly, virtually from before they are even born. This unceasing obsession with image making has caused the incidences of eating disorders and depression to rise among young women, as girls become unhappy with their bodies even before puberty (Gerhart 2001:394-95). And because so many women fail to meet the impossible beauty ideals they see every day, the beauty industry benefits tremendously by fueling feminine insecurities. Food and diet industries fall in step as they encourage women to eat more expensive "lite" foods or to buy and try the latest fad in quick weight-loss cures. If that one doesn't work, another diet or exercise fad will be right behind. And, it is a dangerous road to follow. Many women succumb to society's unrealistic standards of beauty as normal, even as these impossible standards work to undermine self-image, self-esteem, or physical health (Hesse-Biber 2001:527-33).

Women have always received messages not only about how to shop and look feminine, but also how to act feminine. I was happy to join the Pom-Pon squad in high school, but I might have been happier joining the softball team – if only we'd had one in the early 1970s. After all, my Dad had taught me to play baseball with my brother, and I was pretty good. Dad made sure we both knew how to throw "right," which meant that we didn't "throw like a girl." According to Mike Messner, learning to "throw like a man" was a crucial skill that he, along with most of his male peers, learned at a very young age. Messner argues, however, that "throwing like a man" is actually an unnatural physiological act, "an act that (like most aspects of 'masculinity') must be learned" (Messner 2001:59). For most girls my age, organized sports weren't even an option. Although I had a pretty mean arm and loved to play softball, it didn't occur to me at the time that I was missing out on anything. Without realizing it, I had taken it for granted that girls joined the dance team and supported the (male) athletes. I enjoyed the role I was assigned, without understanding its limitations until much later. No one mocked or threatened me for my athletic ability, even if I wasn't allowed to use it. Unfortunately, that's not the case for everyone.

Tommi Avicolli recounts the pain of being branded a "sissy" by the other kids in the neighborhood because he preferred playing jump rope to baseball and dolls to

playing soldiers. And he paid dearly for being different – getting beat up, being afraid to go to his Catholic school every day because of the taunting he would face, his brothers ashamed of him and his parents "begging him to act more like other boys" (Avicolli 2001:377-82). As Tommi's story demonstrates, expectations about sexuality are fraught with deep insecurity. According to Richard Mohr, a 1948 Alfred Kinsey study found that nearly two out of every five American men had had at least one homosexual experience, yet a later Gallup Poll found that only one in five Americans reported having a gay acquaintance. Mohr concludes that the country as a whole is profoundly unaware of the actual experiences of gays and that most gays actively hide, making exposure or "coming out" a central fixture of gay consciousness (Mohr 2001: 517-18).

David Grossman is having a somewhat better experience growing up gay than Tommi Avicolli did, possibly in part because David grew up in a later generation. David's instinct told him he was attracted to other boys at a young age and he started entering online chat rooms when he was 11, something that wasn't available to Tommi. And although David's mother cried when he told his parents the next year that he was gay, she stood behind him and was "outraged" when he wasn't allowed to announce that he was gay at a small, personal rally on the school grounds. Many teenagers – whether gay or straight – struggle with issues of sexuality, but it is a particularly difficult time for youth that question their sexuality. Gay-youth advocacy groups say the average age of kids "coming out" has dropped significantly, and gay-rights activists are striving to open dialogues in schools throughout the country, moving slowly away from the unofficial "ask don't tell" policy that ruled schools (and the military) in the past (Copeland 2001: 388-92). Yet, there is still a long way to go. In 1998, Matthew Shepard, a young freshman at the University of Wisconsin, was tied to a ranch fence and beaten to death because he was gay. Despite an outpouring of sympathy at candlelight vigils across the nation, Kevin Jennings, executive director of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network said, "People would like to think that what happened to Matthew was an exception to the rule but, it was an extreme version of what happens in our schools on a daily basis" (Brooke 2001:203).

Although it is widely accepted that heterosexuality has existed since man and woman have existed, "homosexual " and "heterosexual" are relatively modern concepts, dating only from the late nineteenth century. Jonathan Katz states that as doctors began to label same-sex attraction, they were creating a category that "provided

the basis for a move from a production-oriented, pro-creative imperative to a consumerist pleasure principle." It was only gradually that doctors began to agree among themselves that heterosexuality referred to a "normal" eros, so that by default, "homosexuality" was "abnormal" (Katz 2001:71). This might have been due in part to Western attitudes toward sexuality, which are primarily based on the Christian association of sexuality with sin, which must be redeemed through procreation (Hubbard 2001b:64-67). Later, Alfred Kinsey's report in the late 1940s denied the distinction of a heterosexual and homosexual personhood. This was a scientific rejection of what had become a historically-constructed tradition, but the constructs have prevailed. Perhaps Gore Vidal, Kinsey's son, has the reason. Embracing his father's assertion that there are no heterosexual or homosexual persons, he asks and answers, "So why all the fuss? … In order for a ruling class to rule, there must be arbitrary prohibitions. Of all prohibitions, sexual taboo is the most useful because sex involves everyone" (Katz 2001:71).

Examples of prohibitions against homosexuals abound. The Children's Theatre in Charlotte, North Carolina refused to perform a play by Sarah Geller, one of the winners of a young playwright contest. The play, "Life Versus the Paperback Romance," is about two adult women – one of whom is blind – who meet and ultimately fall in love (Bounds 2001:240). In New York City in 1999, the courts continued to support parade organizers' right to ban Irish gays and lesbians from the city's annual St. Patrick's Day Parade (Lefevere 2001:233-34). In 1998, the ACLU filed a lawsuit in California on behalf of Michelle Dupoint, a lesbian who was refused treatment at a medical clinic. While the doctor did treat Michelle on her initial visit to the clinic, he referred her to other doctors in the practice for further care, writing in his notes that he felt "uncomfortable treating her because of her lifestyle" (Allen 2001:216-218). A more disturbing story involves Sharon Kowalski and Karen Thompson. In 1983, the two women were living together in a committed relationship when Sharon was severely injured in a car accident and needed round-the-clock medical care. A rift grew between Karen and Sharon's parents about Karen's personal involvement as well as Sharon's medical care. When Karen learned she had no legal rights to be involved in Sharon's care unless she won guardianship of Sharon, a long legal battle began that finally ended 1991 when a judge granted guardianship of Sharon to Karen. In the meantime, Sharon suffered irreparable emotional and medical harm because of the

delay. Karen's battle highlights the difficulty of people living in non-traditional families – whether gay/lesbian, unmarried heterosexuals, or communities of choice – to secure legal and medical rights. In this particular case, however, the venom that Sharon's father held against Karen, regardless of his daughter's needs, was directed at their lesbian relationship (Griscom 2001:410-20). Although the Seinfeld gang stressed, "Not that there's anything wrong with it" in referring to gay relationships, it is still a deeply sensitive and deeply divisive subject among many.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender is based upon a patriarchal need to dominate, and economic discrimination is one of the most pervasive ways that men maintain their base of power. When I took my first job out of college in the 1970s, I didn't realize it at the time, but I was working for a very unusual company. It was led by two remarkable people – a male president and a female CFO – who acted as true partners. That was long ago. Today, as I am faced with the barriers of what many of us at the office call the "boys' club," I find it hard to accept. I was spoiled into believing that a respectful, egalitarian work relationship between a man and woman in equal positions of power is not only possible but the way it should be. Welcome to the real world, as they say. A world where, in 1998, white men still earned almost 18 percent more than white women, 37 percent more than black women and 47 percent more than Hispanic women (National Committee on Pay Equity 2001:294). A world where a single mother is resigned to working the graveyard shift for over 11 1/2 years as a custodian, but who finally will no longer tolerate the fact that she earns $1 per hour less than men doing essentially the same hard work. A world where a 25-year-old woman who works full time year-round for 40 years will earn $400,000 to $500,000 less than her male peer, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research (WPR) in Washington (Tyson 2001:207). Do I tell these things to my nieces as they enter college? Would they believe me?

Or would they think it happens to other women, not them? Like the 25,000 women who won $87.5 million in 1997 only after they had to file a lawsuit against Home Depot for confining women to jobs with little prospect of advancement, even if they had the same sort of construction experience that helped men qualify for coveted sales floor positions and promotions (Myerson 2001a:251-252). Or the over 100,000 women who won $81.5 million the same year when Publix Supermarkets agreed to a settlement over accusations that it had systematically denied promotions, raises, and

preferred assignments to women. As a side note, legal fees for the two cases totaled $40.5 million or 40 percent of the settlements (Myerson 2001b: 220-22). During this time, women were moving – or crawling – up the corporate ladder. Still, while there were women heading large divisions of major corporations and others who were CFOs, there were no women CEO's in 1998. This wasn't much of a surprise, given an early 1990s study of 201 chief executives. When asked about the likelihood of a female becoming CEO of a major corporation, only 2 percent thought it "very likely" while 14 percent said "somewhat likely" (Zweigenhaft 1998:41-77).

In fact, when Carly Fiorina became the CEO of Hewlett-Packard in 1999, she was only the third woman heading a Fortune 500 company at that time. What made Ms. Fiorina noteworthy was not necessarily Ms. Fiorina herself, but Lewis E. Platt, the chairman of H-P who appointed her. As Reed Abelson notes, Mr. Platt is "a middle-aged white guy who never thought much about women in the workplace – until he was thrust suddenly into the challenging role of single parent." Mr. Platt it seems, is one of those rare humans who learns from his misfortunes and takes those lessons to heart. Although he did remarry after his wife's death, he made it a company-wide mission to promote the role of family, and women by extension. He never tired of reminding his employees that "while the vast majority of women are married to men who work, two-thirds of male managers have stay-at home wives" (Abelson 2001:636-39). As enlightened as Mr. Platt is, others have not readily joined him. In fact, Abelson notes, after becoming CEO Ms. Fiorina herself made a widely reported, controversial assertion that there was no glass ceiling. How quickly one forgets.

Or doesn't even notice. Although I loved and enjoyed the freedom that birth control, a college education, and a white-collar job gave me, I never gave much though about the efforts on the part of other women to give me those opportunities. As I take a deeper look at women and their activism, I am discovering more about how the Women's Movement and Feminism evolved through the years as different groups of women took up the struggle for equal rights – and that I've benefited from all of them. At the root of the struggle is fighting the systemic oppression of women in a patriarchal society. In discussing why most men fail to see this oppression of women, Marilyn Frye contends that men don't see – or don't want to see – the overall structure of deliberate, constant barriers that women face, instead focusing on individual symbols such as "do I hold the door open or not?" (Frye 2001:141). This obliviousness to the plight of half of

the world's population didn't just appear in modern society. In fact, men throughout history have failed to see women as having issues of concern at all.

It wasn't until the 19th century, though, with advances in education and communication, that women began to talk with each other – and to realize they weren't alone in their feelings of isolation and entrapment. For years, even as men ignored or dismissed their writing, women began to compile documents such as journals, diaries, and letters that weren't intended for publication but which later gave vivid evidence of both the historical facts and social development of the period (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 7 June 2003). Women such as Frederika Brenner expressed the frustration that women felt with their lives in the 1850s. She wrote of feeling "alike in spirit" with the Native American women, and ventured that the wigwam was happier than the drawing rooms many American women were resigned to during that period. (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 7 June 2003). Although Native American women are absent from today's Women's Movement, they had a great deal of power and status before they were "civilized" by those who forced the Native Americans from their land. It was American women who recognized their commonalties as they began to meet and see each other as human beings (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 7 June 2003). In contrast to the strength of Native American women, the only real options for American women who weren't of the working class – who faced their own daily struggles just to survive – were either domestic service or marriage. And marriage itself was a form of slavery for women, as they had virtually no political or economic rights after they said, "I do."

Since those early days, women of all classes and races have banded together and also worked separately in the struggle for equal rights. Although the government's "Federal Five" races – white European, Black, Latina, Asian, Native-American – aren't all-inclusive, they do offer good coverage for discussion. These groups united as women struggling against male oppression, but race and class added sometimes-competing issues and agendas. (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 7 June 2003). The Women's Movement is an evolving struggle. As the Civil Rights Movement took hold in the 1960s, women wanted to participate, but not surprisingly were often relegated to the roll of "coffeemaker." During this same period, Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, was published. Individual women began to realize that they weren't alone in their feelings of frustration with the "Cult of Domesticity" that had sprung up after World War II in America and kept them trapped at home or in low-paying jobs. Women

began to speak with each other and gain a newfound sense of "sisterhood" and a growing sense that together they could achieve social, economic, and perhaps political power (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 7 June 2003). In 1970 in New York City, 50,000 women marched together to fight for their rights against entrenched male attitudes, and the Women's Movement came alive.

As the Women's Movement unfolded, Feminism blended different themes introduced by each of the "Federal Five." White women initially began to bring women together in a national dialogue and sense of shared experiences and obstacles, while black women added the complexity of race to women's issues. Asian and Latina women later brought a sense of the practical problems of immigrant women and cultural discrimination to the table (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 7 June 2003). This merging of interests increased the power of the movement to speak to a much wider audience. As bell hooks notes, "By calling attention to the interlocking systems of domination – sex, race, and class – black woman and many other groups of women acknowledge the diversity and complexity of female experience, of our relationship to power and domination" (hook 2001:603). Yet, even with their common need to unite against a male-dominated power structure, these groups also faced their own unique racial or ethnic issues.

In the 1980s, the Women's Movement saw individual women's groups beginning to form to address specific needs. While this allowed these women to focus on their own particular issues, it also has had the effect of diluting the power women gained by banding together. Audrey Lorde writes that "in a patriarchal power system where whiteskin privilege is a major prop, the entrapments used to neutralize Black women and white woman are not the same." But, she feels it isn't these differences which separate women, but a reluctance to recognize and deal effectively with distortions that arise from ignoring and misnaming them. She argues it is important for women to develop new definitions of power that will let embrace their differences in their joint struggles (Lorde 2001:588-94). Life rarely boils down to one nice and neat issue. To fight oppression, Feminists *should* focus on the intersection of race, class, and gender in the daily lives of women in American society and worldwide (Bonnekessen Class Lecture, 7 June 2003). One issue can't be ignored at the expense of the others. People are more complicated than that.

Thus, even when we use a relatively straightforward system of statuses to describe ourselves as human beings, we must also acknowledge that each of these statuses has a socially-constructed meaning and value associated with it. Most people are very aware of the roles they have been assigned by society – male/female, homosexual/heterosexual, African-American, Asian, Latino, white, rich/poor, single/married. If we look around, there is a wealth of information we can gather – from books or by simply watching people interact– about people's expectations about these roles. Yet, often people choose to ignore the implications of how they are limited by the roles society wants them to play. Or perhaps they feel there is little they can do to change such systemic problems, thinking, "that's just the way it is." Or in the case of men in a patriarchal society, they don't believe these limitations exist at all – or if by chance people are limited, it is their own fault. But, we can't escape so easily from the implications. It's fairly easy to accept what we're taught from birth, especially about gender expectations. Even when we "know" better. And so I wonder, just a little, if my sadness at not having gotten married and had 1.2 kids in the suburbs is really because I've lost something that I wanted for myself – or if I'm just missing what I was always told I should want. Perhaps that's best left for another analysis.

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