

Battle of the Sexes: Dead or Alive?

Marla Estes, M.A.

If there is any doubt about the current status of the Battle, we need only look at the multitude of email “jokes” which bash both women and men (I keep a file of them, and they aren’t pretty). We laugh because they feel true to us and perhaps there is some self-righteousness involved. But every time we forward one of them, we need to ask ourselves if we are perpetuating the very system we complain about.

“A woman worries about the future until she gets a husband.

A man never worries about the future until he gets a wife.

A successful man is one who makes more money than his wife can spend.

A successful woman is one who can find such a man.”

Some say the Battle of the Sexes is over, or that by using this expression we promote negativity. But my sense is that this term is much like the word “racism.” It’s something we wish were over and that we believe *should* be over by now. There is power in naming it, though, because by naming it, we can see it, track it and aspire to do something about it. We can bring the light of our awareness to it. We can see where it is still alive.

As in any battle, this one is about who can prove themselves the more powerful. There are ways in which both men and women feel powerless. Both genders try to obtain their sense of power by any means they can, often in ways which have been culturally prescribed and into which we have all been indoctrinated. The irony is that in this system, no one wins.

“As we began to look at all our personal concerns from a global perspective, we could see that the patterns of control, denial and projection that sabotage intimate relationships are the very patterns that endanger the world. To change these patterns is to change not just our social lives but our relationship to the planet” (Terrance O’Connor, eco-psychologist, author of *Therapy for a Dying Planet*). So we can see that by addressing this power struggle, we do more than simply create well-being in the lives of couples or families; we also contribute to peace on earth via our schools, workplaces, organizations, politics, everywhere. Needless to say, the fall-out is felt by everyone, regardless of sexual orientation.

One way out of this is to look at our unconscious and conscious beliefs about the other gender. Another way is to move *away* from the model of power which is defined by domination and submission. We move then *towards* self-empowerment, each of us standing in our own strength. We no longer need to have power *over* anyone to feel strong.

Yet another way is for each of us to cultivate true empathy for the other sex, by deeply listening to and comprehending the experiences of both “sides.” This is a matter of the heart; it is not enough to only understand in our heads. It is *crucial* that this pain be *felt*. Tears shed for another’s pain is the path to profound healing and reconciliation. Matriarchal societies have existed in the past, and now we live in a patriarchal one. This is not about making one right or wrong, or better or worse. What we need now is an

integration of both, combining the strengths, abilities and perspectives of each. In this model, we complement one another, partnering as equals but honoring our differences.

These things may seem impossible to change looked at from a global perspective. But the larger change starts in our personal lives and, I promise you, each of us has the power – each of us is *empowered* – to act on the ideas mentioned above. We need to become conscious of where the battle of the sexes is still alive in each one of us so that *peace* between the sexes can be consciously created.

Join Marla Estes, M.A. in a forum “Battle of the Sexes: Dead or Alive?” Thursday, June 24th at the Ashland Library, Gresham Room, 7 to 9 pm. Contact marla16@charter.net or visit her website www.marlaestes.com