

Masculinity and femininity are both synonymous and interchangeable.

Man Woman

BY TRUDY JOHNSTON

LEAVING ASIDE THE NEED FOR ACHIEVING SO-CALLED EQUALITY BETWEEN THE SEXES, WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO YOURSELF AND YOUR COMMUNITY WHEN YOU RECONNECT TO YOUR OWN TRUE FEMININE OR MASCULINE ESSENCE?

The gains and opportunities afforded to women in the past 40 years, thanks to the women's movement, are well documented and prolific. Women have certainly come a long way. Few would advocate that we turn back the clock to a time of production-line childbearing and mindless domestic drudgery. Yet somewhere in the mix much has been overlooked in the fight for equal rights. If you're a woman and you're not into feminism, are you letting the side down? If you're not a feminist or a 1950s cake-baking housewife, how can you reclaim your essence?

In fact, what are "feminine essence" and "masculine essence" in the first place and how do they relate to being female and being male? How do you move through the world from a place of "essence" in your work, with your family, being available to yourself, your partner and the community? More importantly, how do you remain empowered without either dropping into stereotypes of socially ascribed gender roles or jumping the fence in your efforts to repudiate them?

IDENTIFYING ESSENCE

The identification and significance of sex and gender roles (female/feminine and male/masculine) has been long argued by feminists, sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, cultural theorists and scientists. The debate is far from over, particularly in terms of the nature-vs-nurture causality. Perhaps another useful (but non-exclusive) way is to investigate these essences in terms of their energy and polarity, a perspective embraced by proponents of tantra and other modalities.

Author Diana Richardson says, "The

understanding of tantra is that man is 50 per cent woman and woman is 50 per cent man and that this is a 15,000-year-old understanding that goes into the myths of humanity ... and only now, in the past 100 years, it's been proved to be embedded in chromosomes."

"We need to discern between gender construct here and between these energies, which are like ying and yang. It's not a new construct; it's been around forever — polarity is the basis of biology," adds Jungian psychoanalyst, Jutka Freiman.

"The qualities of the masculine, as I understand it, are those qualities which include rational, linear thinking and cognition, not to be confused with intelligence; it's that more transcendent function. It is goal-orientated towards taking

but I'm in my own centre and it makes it easier for the other to actually direct without feeling like they have to hold me up," she says.

When asked about the relationship between female/feminine and male/masculine, tantra master Shantam Nityama says, "They're pretty much synonymous terms in the sense that they are representing the positive and negative poles.

"Both male and masculinity are speaking of the positive pole; both female and femininity are speaking of the negative pole; so they are pretty much interchangeable at the level that most people would have an understanding of it.

"Everyone has both aspects. You have a positive aspect and negative polarity. The two polarities exist within each and every

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charge and making it all happen, so it's more an active principle.

"The feminine, on the other hand, is the much more open and receptive position where we allow the impact of things to direct us and we move with them in a relational way. Some people call it receptive, but we can't confuse that with passivity," explains Freiman.

"When I am in the receptive, I am on my own two feet or in my own belly, if you like. I'm open to being directed by the masculine. I'm open to going with the flow of the world,

one of us. For the man, his masculinity will be outer, while his femininity will be inner; for the women, the femininity will be outer and the masculinity will be inner," he says.

INTEGRATING ESSENCES

In investigating ways to integrate the feminine and masculine essences and bring them back into alignment and balance, throwing a spotlight on attitudes held by today's young women illuminates some of the confusion experienced when these energies are out of balance. →

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Masculinity and femininity are unable to manifest or exert influence without each other.

Eighteen-year-old Catherine's confident worldliness conceals her country-town upbringing. "I've grown up in a household that totally flips every traditional Stepford wife concept on its head," she says. "I had a mum who worked and I think cooked for me a total of twice in my life and a pa who was totally different.

"It's shown me that women can get out and succeed and the whole glass ceiling for me doesn't exist. My mother has showed me that you don't need a man to financially support you. You can get out and get your own career; you can support yourself."

So if the Stepford wives have given up cooking dinner and the men are no longer needed, who is at the stove, oven mitts poised, holding the evening's dinner? In this common family scenario, a healthy expression of both masculine and feminine is missing and, in the meantime, the family is being fed takeaway.

Richardson continues: "What is a man today? What is a woman today? I can say from my perspective that we are living a confusing distortion. Woman is distorted; man is distorted."

Mid-40s financier Amy Lee wears heels and perfume and, dropping her briefcase after coming in late from work, explains, "My suit is my armour. It's a costume for the man's world. It fits in with them. I've had a history of hiding my femininity because I took on what I thought was required in the business world, which blocked out all the softness of the feminine and neutralised femininity."

"The accolades for women to trash their feminine and ride into their masculine are huge, and I think it is a very strong and brave woman who can push that to one side and say no, there is something more important than all the money, accolades and career moves," says Freiman. "There's something missing here that's drying me up and I need to take responsibility for that and I need to find a place where I can reinstate my feminine in a safe, relational environment."

GOING WITH THE FLOW

In the flow of energy, the masculine energy follows the feminine, so when the women are out of touch with their femininity, men don't tend to fare that well, either. "Some men get scared when the topic of 'empowering women' comes up," adds Louise, a 35-year-old professional. "They immediately think it's about feminism and this causes separation." →

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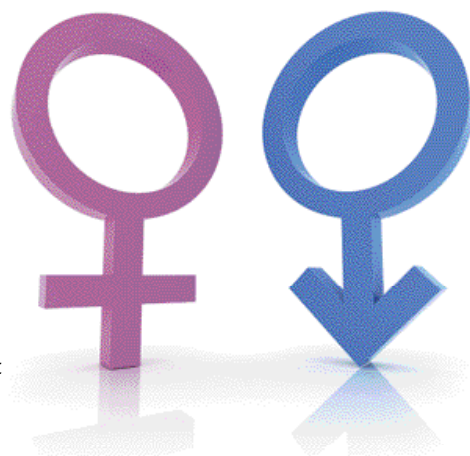
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Getting back into the body, for both men and women, is the first step to reconnect to one's essence.

On the state of men in the Western world, Nityama doesn't mince words. "Most of them [men] are very wishy-washy, confused and unclear of what their purpose for being on the planet is because, normally, they would be assisting women, but the moment that women go into being a man, then who do you assist? So they wind up feeling lost. They feel unnecessary. These lost men have become unrecognisable as men by women. Most of them are purposeless, wandering, lost little boys attempting to cater to mamma, but they have no idea what mamma wants any more because mamma doesn't even know what she wants any more.

"Men want to interact with women, but it's unclear how to interact with them any more because of the internal confusion," he adds.

Amy Lee echoes this: "When I wear that stuff [suit], I feel asexual. How I've approached that world is to make my femininity invisible because I wanted to be taken seriously."

"The moment he's just like you, where's the attraction?" asks Nityama. "He needs to be able to go and do and be how he needs to do and be in order to keep his male testosterone and his whole masculine thing alive, and that's what you are attracted to."

LAWs OF ATTRACTiON

"As we know, all opposites attract — that's just a function of life on the planet — so we have a kind of an intra-psychic process as well as the biological and physiological processes," says Freiman.

Part of Amy Lee's journey back to more balanced energetic polarity and to being more energetically attractive initially meant recognising the parts of being a woman she had devalued. "In the fight for equality, women put aside what they thought made them vulnerable, which was softness and celebration of the female essence," she says. "But I don't blame them because, when you go to war, you have to wear armour and protection, but in a safe place you can take off your armour and be yourself."

For her, one step was the simple one of discarding her armoured suit. "I saw my flatmate dressing for work in a beautifully feminine way," she adds. "It showed me a woman being proud of her femininity, essentially enjoying it, accepting it, putting it out for others to enjoy. She was putting her full self into her business."

"Your essence is what actually animates you so that if you are out of touch with your essence then you are basically pretending to

be someone that you never truly have been," says Nityama. "If you are playing like you're someone else, all it means is that you never get recognised in your life for being who you really are. Everyone is always interfacing with you as though you are somebody else because you are presenting yourself as somebody else."

TOO MUCH MALE

For Richardson, it's about redressing the over-orientation with the male and masculine, on both an individual and cultural level, which means taking a step in the feminine direction. "Man has to become more feminine, which means to listen to his inner world and woman also," she says. "So, funnily enough, to find the balance again, we both have to become more feminine."

With the masculine being basically the initiator and the feminine being the nurturer, Nityama says, "There is no community without some solidness within the women. The two work hand in hand with one another, so the masculine is incapable of carrying out or having any influence here without the feminine and vice versa — the feminine is unable to have influence here and to manifest here without the masculine. Both parts are needed."

RECONNECTING

Getting back into and understanding the body, for both men and women, is the first step to reconnect to one's essence. "I go in and find the home in the body," says Richardson. "You become more aware of this aliveness in the body and expansion through your awareness, because it grows with attention. You can totally change your inner reality just through having more attention in the body, but what is needed is

a shift in how we perceive the body."

One of the major keys in getting back into the body is through the breath, which directly builds awareness of one's essence. There are many meditation practices available to activate key points in the body and its energy fields.

Using the breath, Nityama also strongly advocates the Universal Life Energy exercises, which are a set of three simple meditative qi goong exercises for channelling life energy. Taken to the US by Baron Eugene Fersen over a century ago, the exercises start to calm and centre the practitioner, often facilitating spiritual downloads of information, purging what needs to be cleared from the body and building qi.

COMMUNITY ESSENCE

Healthy communities arise from centred individuals coming together with shared intention. Forming community — particularly for women, the ones who hold the community together — is a vital step in reconnecting with a healthy feminine essence. What supports women together in reconnecting is activities that engage touch, talking, sharing experiences, dancing and generally anything that is more "right-brained" in approach.

"Men are a little different," says Freiman. "Men grow their masculine more in being in their solitary, meditative, transcendent function, or in the world in their action."

"Men and women really need to come back and really evaluate how they can support each other in their respective roles, stop fighting with one another over the different roles they are here to play, and accept the role you are here to play willingly, joyously as a form of prayer," says Nityama.

"Men need to learn how to create environments where women feel safe enough to surrender and women learn to really understand what it means to be around a man." Building mutual respect and understanding is essential.

In service and devotion, we're ultimately moving to a deeper place than a "right or wrong", "tit for tat" sense of fairness and equality. As Freiman concludes, "In relationship, we are moving toward a kind of transparency where we are able to take each other to God by reinstating each other's essential position. I can't think of anything more beautiful, can you?" ☺

Trudy Johnston has been studying tantra for a number of years and assisted with the Dancing the Divine journeys for women. www.tjc.com.au

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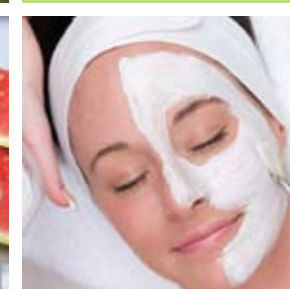
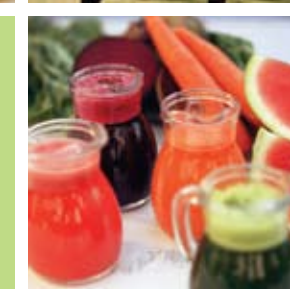
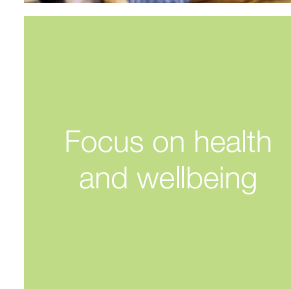
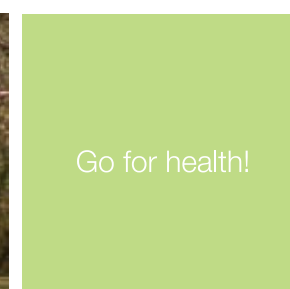
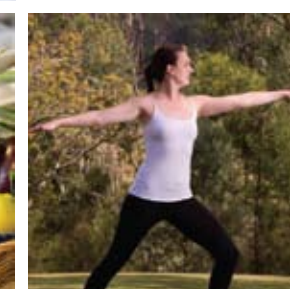
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