

Equality Patterns Between Gender: How to Empower Women and Embolden Men to Embrace Care and Empathy

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Introduction

Traditionally – maybe for the past 7000 years (Riane Eisler) – boys were socialized into power and hierarchy, strength and decision-making, while girls were socialized into obedience and caring, into doing domestic work and educating children.

This system has functioned nearly perfectly – roughly up to the end of the eighteenth century, the time of the French Revolution. Women who opposed or challenged this system were most often either put in prison or even put to death.

During the nineteenth century, more and more women began to protest against not being allowed to use their intelligence, their abilities and their know how, and in the late nineteenth century women forced their ways into universities and also into some positions in politics. They empowered themselves and supported each other with the aim to take part in decision-making for themselves and society. In Norway women got the right to vote in 1913 and the other Nordic countries followed. More women educated themselves, went to universities, and forced their way into jobs such as teachers, lawyers, doctors, or researchers – and policymaking.

The “Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom” (WILPF) was founded as a peace organization in 1915-1918, during World War I in The Haag, and the suffragettes started their campaigns and upraising at the same time in England.

This was the beginning of the long way for women’s liberation during the twentieth century – to be a holistic person with equal rights to men. It was a hard struggle, and still women in most of the world’s regions have hardly started on this process.

The Nordic women’s peace movement has been strong and efficient during the twentieth century. At the end of 1979, when NATO declared that the organization would modernize their nuclear weapons, some Nordic women came together and asked themselves: *What can we do to stop this madness?* They decided to walk through Europe to inform people – from Copenhagen to Paris in summer 1981. In 1982, 300 women from the five Nordic countries went to the peoples of the East, to USSR/Russia, to make peace: Stockholm-Moscow-Minsk. In 1983, we walked the last *No to Nuclear Weapons in East and West* march through USA: Oslo-New York-Washington.

On these marches, we made friends with many women from other countries, with whom we continued to collaborate also during the eighties, and among them were many women from East Europe. During the eighties up to 1989 (Berlin Wall), several peace conferences were organized in East Europe – in Berlin, Prague, Budapest and Moscow – nearly always with people from the same organizations

In Stockholm and Helsinki, we met with-women from the Baltic countries and the Ukraine, but always the same ones. At some point, I therefore asked if I might come to them and give

lectures for the rest of the peace groups in their countries. They were delighted if so could happen. I asked the Norwegian Foreign Department if they would sponsor my trips, and they said yes. Then I was fit for fight in these countries for eight years, from 1994 to 2002, starting in Estonia, as a politician. I used my holydays and long weekends to travel with my portable overhead and visited especially Ukraine from west to east every year with my lectures on gender and on democratizing processes – how to build a democracy. Every year I went to Estonia and Lithuania, twice I was in Georgia, and once in Crimea and in Azerbaijan. My “students” were mostly teachers, but also women from grassroot NGOs.

I used many overheads on Communication, Power-over-structures (Berit Ås), Conflict Understanding / Conflict Resolution, Violence / Roots of violence, and so forth. Especially those on Violence were part of all of my seminars. In the following, I walk through some of the drawings I used in the presentations I gave on gender perspectives, especially for newcomers and in regions where the old family patterns still were very strong.

- . *The drawings were made by Norwegian priest and family therapist David Kvebæk.*
- . *The circle drawing is taken from the Nordic Women's University (www.kvinnor.no).*
- . *The textboxes were written by myself.*

The traditional pattern of family and society systems

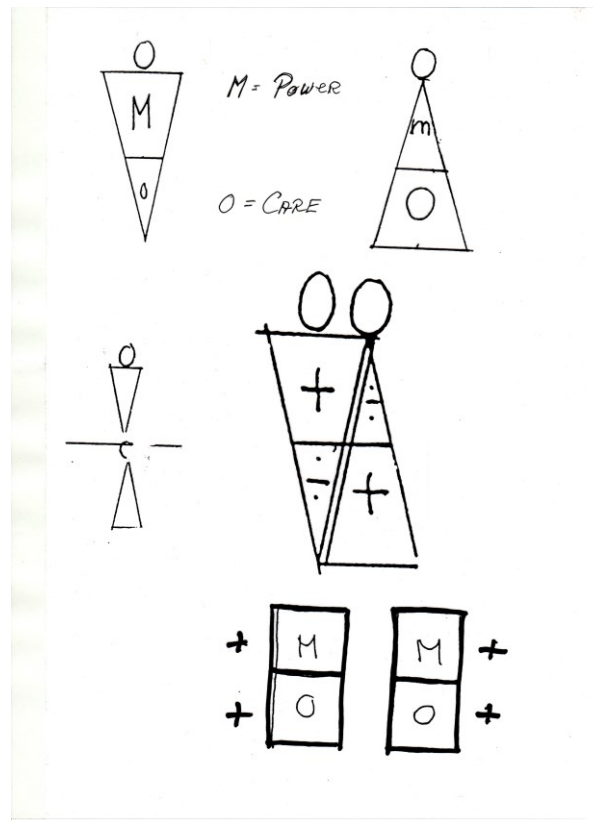
For centuries, the traditional pattern of a functional family and society system as shown in **figure 1** was recognized to be perfect, as the only way to organize family and society life. The father was the decision maker with complete power, while the mother was the care person who had to obey. Together, they formed a holistic pattern which by many people, especially among men and politicians, is still seen as perfect today.

After World War II, and especially in the seventies, many women had been well educated at school which had by now been obligatory for generations, and girls, like boys, started higher education in most fields. Women now also aspired to power – and they became empowered. We saw a general uprising – with protests specially in the Nordic countries, where women always had been rather independent. Not least due to the relatively harsh Nordic climate and nature and the necessity to survive in it, also men looked upon women as equal partners.

With some strong women at the front, more and more women started to claim their rights and to take part in politics and society decision-making. They obliged men to take part in caring and domestic work, so that women would be free to participate in meetings and politics.

A few generations later, we have succeeded, to a large extent, in having a society where women are highly empowered and men take part in caring. This is depicted as the holistic entity/pattern/system that you see at the bottom of figure 1. It shows a win-win situation that benefits men and women, as well as society and culture at large.

Evidently, also here problems and conflicts are plenty, yet, we need to solve these conflicts with nonviolent methods. Decent communication is crucial and has to be learned by all, so as to solve the many conflicts with dignity and without arrogance and humiliation.

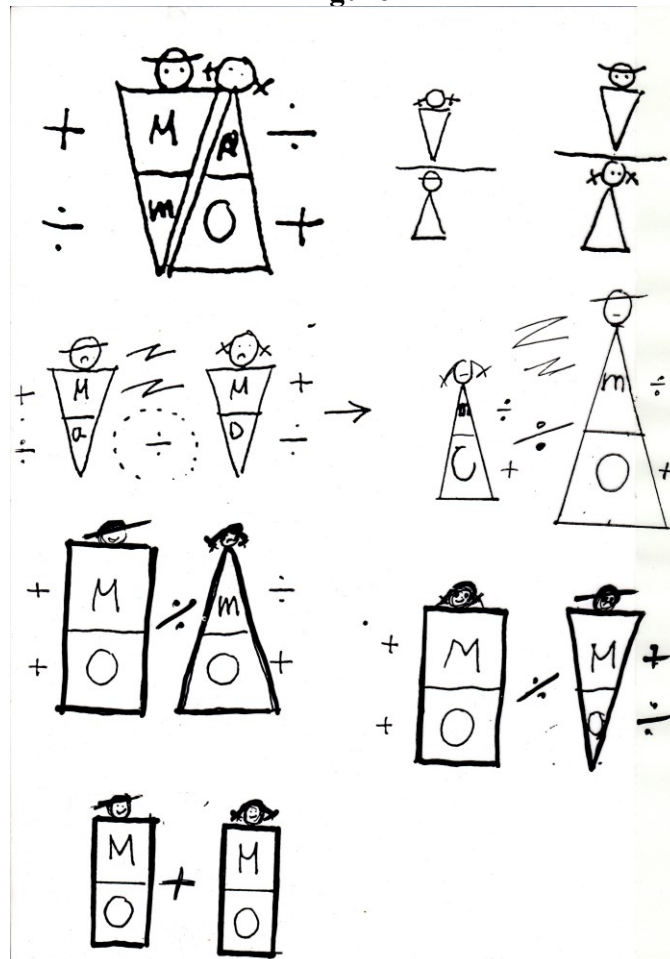
Figure 1

This drawing was made by pastor and family therapist David Kvebæk (1933 – 2013)

Figure 2 shows the same situation as figure 1, only with a plus and minus sign indicating situations you may experience. When men or women have too much power and too little caring empathy, we expect clashes. Or, when a man still acts in traditional ways, even while his partner has the same qualifications, and he neither hears or sees her. It is not a good situation either, if the man has a lot of power and little empathy, while she has empowered herself to both power and empathy. A combination of a lot of caring empathy and little power does not produce a good situation, as when power is a quality of only one part.

The best situation for a partnership is when both partners possess power and caring empathy in equal measures. Such a situation expresses equal rights and equal empathy and caring. It means equality between genders, and it fosters equality in society at large, for example with respect to the gap between rich and poor. Research shows that inequality never produces good societies.

Figure 2



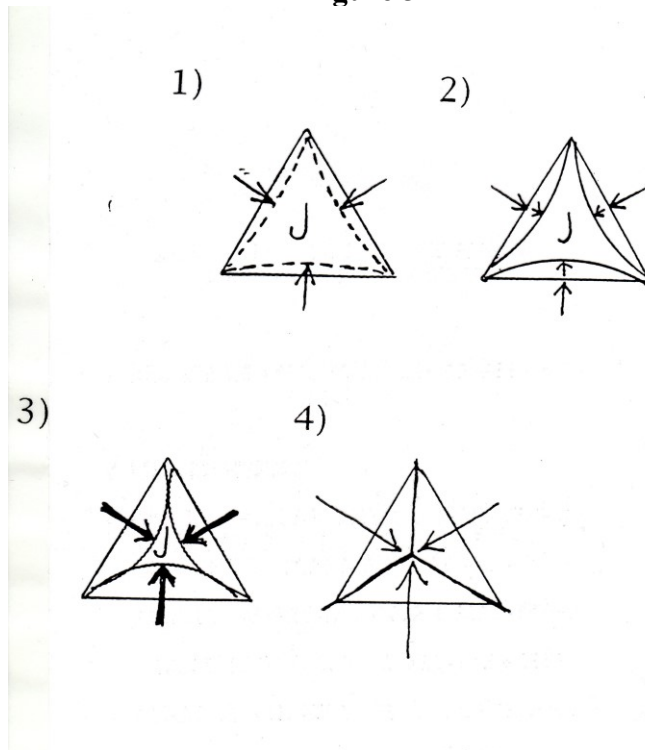
This drawing was made by pastor and family therapist David Kvebæk (1933 – 2013)

Figure 3 shows how a person can be squeezed – a child or grown-up – by being exposed to oppressive techniques (see also the 5 power-over techniques by Norwegian researcher, author, politician, and activist Berit Ås, translated into most languages).

Always to hear that you are stupid and not worth anything, always being punished or exposed to various kinds of psychological and/or physical violence, this slowly undermines a person. By not showing respect to a child or others, by not seeing or listening to her/him, this person will develop negative reactions. This can happen to everybody, everybody is vulnerable, and it can come from anyone – such as parents, teachers, leaders, or in job situations. The consequences may go as far as depression, dysfunctional behavior, violence, suicide, pains, illnesses – the list is long. Due to the detrimental treatment by others, from being a healthy, well-functioning child or grown up, you become a person that does not function.

To learn about humiliation – what it does to others – and about dignity – are crucial elements for well-functioning people and societies. But this is something that has to be learned !

Figure 3



This drawing was made by pastor and family therapist David Kvebæk (1933 – 2013)

Text box 1**STRESS**

WHAT STRESS MEANS FOR ONE PERSON,
IS A CHALLENGE FOR ANOTHER -

HOW ARE WE AFFECTED BY HIGH DEGREE OF
STRESS ?

- REDUCED ATTENTION
- ATTENTION WILL BE FOCUSED ON PARTS OF A N
ISSUE, INSTEAD OF THE ISSUE ITSELF.
THE ATTENTION GOES FOR THE DETAILS -
- REDUCED CAPACITY TO HANDLE INFORMATION
- A TENDENCY TO FOCUS THE NEGATIVE SIDES
- POLARIZING - «BLACK/ WHITE» WAY OF THINKING
- A CONSEQUENCE WILL BE THAT ISSUES
DEPENDENT ON FLEXIBILITY , WILL HAVE
REDUCED ATTENTION

This text box was made by Trine Eklund

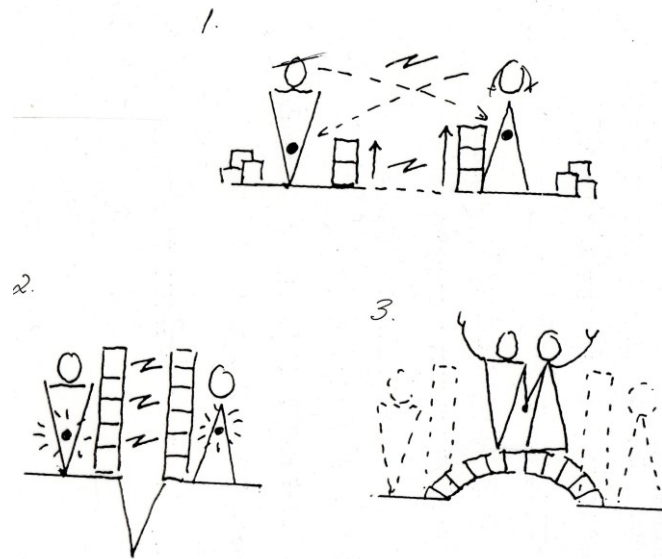
New bridge building

Figure 4 shows the same patterns as the old-fashioned family pattern – where the man is high on power and she on care – and they do not *speak the same language*. They do not understand each other and easily start shouting instead of listening. They have two sets of completely different ways of understanding and behaving and cannot agree about much. They are erecting walls between themselves. This happens between individuals as well as between societies and nations with their politicians, or between religions.

The solution lies in tearing down misunderstandings and enemy images, together with the negative motives for erecting walls – it means starting to build bridges instead of demonizing the other. It means to show empathy, to listen, and to find the positive sides in the other. It means being aware of people who may be too “nice”, always wanting to “help” and take over, to show how clever they are, instead of being supportive, or people who sweep conflicts under the carpet to maintain “peace.” Others are smart in the sense that they manipulate others into serving their interests. It means stopping to put guilt on the other for one’s own shortcomings. It means calling

on professional mediators, particularly in the case of conflict between nations, rather than leaving it to politicians or any third person, as it is done in today's world.

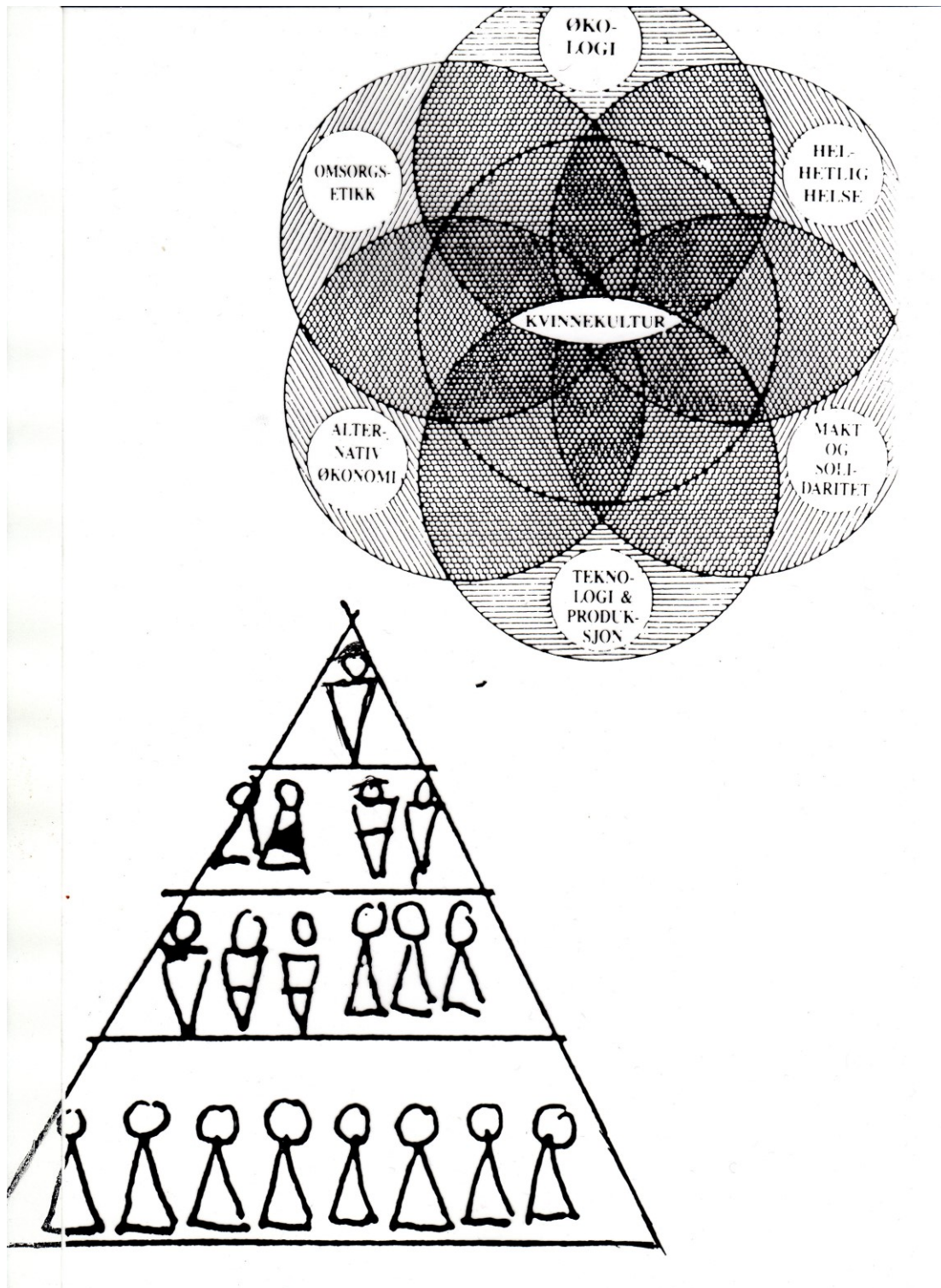
Figure 4



This drawing was made by pastor and family therapist David Kvebæk (1933 – 2013)

Figure 5 shows the difference between the masculine way of thinking and the feminine way – we all have both feminine and masculine aspects in our personalities, and it depends which ones are developed through childhood and education. This means that some women may even be more power-oriented and absolutistic in their behavior than men, while some men can be very flexible in their way of leading and coping. Here we show two different systems of leadership or how to act and think – see the hierarchy or circle pattern. As usual a combination will be the best – or just be aware about the different systems of leading and/or thinking.

Figure 5



The circle drawing is taken from the Nordic Women's University (www.kvinnor.no)

Text box 2

TALKS ABOUT PROBLEMS




- WHAT IS THE PROBLEM ?
- CAN THE PROBLEM BE DEVIDED UP INTO PARTS
- WHICH PART IS THE MOST IMPORTANT ?
- WHAT KIND OF RESOURCES DO WE HAVE ?
- WHAT HAVE YOU DONE UNTIL NOW ?
- WITH WHOM CAN WE DISCUSS + TRUST ?
- HOW REACT THE OTHERS ?
- HOW LONG HAVE THE PROBLEM EXCISTED ?
- WHAT KIND OF CHANGES MUST BE DONE TO BE ACCEPTED ?

This text box was made by Trine Eklund

Text box 3

FACE TO FACE COMMUNICATION

HOW YOUR COUNTERPART COMPREHENDS -

- *  **BY WORDS**
- *  **BY THE QUALITY OF YOUR VOICE**
- *  **BY YOUR BODY LANGUAGE**

- * **VERBAL = WHAT YOU ARE SAYING**
- * **NON-VERBAL = THE WAY YOU SAY IT !**

- * **IMPORTANT IS: TO DEVELOPE THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE OTHER REALLY WANTS TO TELL YOU**

- * **IMPORTANT IS: TO TAKE SIGNALS FROM THE OTHER PERSON SO YOU DON'T MISINTERPRET HER/HIM**

This text box was made by Trine Eklund

Figure 6

