

Building

Before we can begin to understand what makes the opposite sex tick, we have to gain self-knowledge. To get to know our "inner reality"—our shame, our anger, our weaknesses—leaders in the field suggest these approaches you can work on in your daily life. by Pythia S. Peay

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE SEXES ARE THE GREAT riddle of our time, a source of perplexity in the life of almost every man and woman I know. The question is one worthy of a modern-day Solomon—how can men and women live together in a mutually harmonious way? Indeed, it appeared easier for Bush and Yeltsin to negotiate a nuclear arms accord than for my boyfriend and me to decide whether we should be in a committed relationship. For while the Cold War may be over and the remnants of the Berlin Wall a mere tourist attraction, that long-standing battle between the sexes continues to rage on.

In fact, as story after story breaks—the Willie Smith and Mike Tyson rape trials, the Navy Tail-

joined forces to offer a provocative and original new approach to healing male-female relationships.

The roots of the misunderstanding and anger dividing the sexes, believe Bly and Woodman, lie in the unconscious psychological condition of individual men and women. Before "men's liberation" and "women's liberation" can truly be achieved, they say, the liberation of the *internal* psychological energies within each individual must first take place.

To become familiar with our "inner reality" is what is described by Bly and Woodman as "inner work." This means to shift our focus away from the concerns of the outer world toward the inner landscape of our emotions and psyche. Here we face the forgotten parts of ourselves—our anger and vulnerabilities, our shame and grief. Unless we do the hard inner work of bringing these forces to our conscious awareness, they can act blindly, sabotaging our relationships in the process. Ultimately, say Bly and Woodman, this inner work paves the royal road to meaningful relationships.

Although enhanced by individual therapy, as well as some forms of couples' therapy, inner work can also be incorporated into our everyday life. Based upon the material offered by Bly and Woodman in their workshops, here are six ways to enrich your relationships through the insights gained from inner work.

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hook scandal, statistics showing that 50 percent of all marriages will end in divorce and that domestic violence against women is getting worse, not better—the battle between the sexes seems like a civil war tearing apart the very fabric of Western culture.

But like many wars, the war between the sexes has generated its own peace movement, a diplomatic corps of people dedicated to what has been termed "reconciliation work"—the delicate art of negotiating harmonious relationships—between men and women.

Two "diplomats" to emerge recently in this field of reconciliation work are men's movement leader Robert Bly and Jungian analyst Marion Woodman. Bly, a well-known poet, is the author of *Iron John: A Book about Men*, which resulted from his intensive work over the last decade with men's psychological issues.

His insights into the inner lives of contemporary men have been paralleled by Woodman. She is the author of *Leaving My Father's House: A Journey to Conscious Femininity* and numerous books about eating disorders and relationships. In conferences and workshops around the country, the two have

1 See Yourself in the Mirror of Your Relationship

Often, our relationships are like a mirror in which our own individual psyche is reflected. In this way, the problems we have with our partner contain clues to our own unresolved internal conflicts. Within the unconscious of every man and woman, believe Bly and Woodman, function two different energies, female and male. The classic anima and animus of Jungian psychology, these energies are also the yin and yang of ancient Oriental philosophy, the polarities upon which the harmony of the universe depends.

In the same way, say Bly and Woodman, our own psychological maturity depends upon a healthy balance between these two energies. Psychological im-

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balance results when the expression of one energy in our life predominates over the other, when one side of us grows while the other side remains dormant or repressed.

A woman or man whose feminine energies are undeveloped, for instance, might be exclusively concerned with excelling in life, with producing and achieving, organizing and competing. A person whose feminine energies are more developed may be concerned with emotional intimacy, self-knowledge, and introspection, yet may lack the discipline and focus necessary to achieve her or his goals in life.

This imbalance between the masculine and feminine energies in our psyche, says Woodman, is often acted out in our relationships. Indeed, agrees Bly, it is not unusual for a person to choose a partner who mirrors back to us the maturity—or immaturity—of our own inner “opposite sex.” Take, for example, the man who is married to a woman who is cold and indifferent. His relationship with her may reflect the fact that he has not allowed his own inner feminine side mature expression.

Reversing the example, a 30-year-old woman may be very wise emotionally, skilled in articulating her feelings and respecting her intuitions, but her inner masculine may have only reached the maturity of a 16-year-old rebel. As a result, the man she loves may be angry and restless, someone who avoids commitment and responsibilities.

As we learn to rebalance the male and female energies within us, say Bly and Woodman—cultivating the undeveloped aspects of ourselves rather than focusing exclusively on the weaknesses of our partner—our relationships may undergo radical transformations.

Take Pride in Your Sexual Identity

The psychological task of balancing the masculine and feminine energies within us is further helped when we begin to reclaim pride in our respective gender differences. Rehabilitating the values of our own sex—feminine vulnerability and connectedness, masculine strength and protectiveness—boosts our regard for what it means to be a woman or man, say Bly and Woodman, and enables us to build a foundation for our relationships with the opposite sex.

To facilitate this process in the workshops they lead, Bly and Woodman of-

ten divide the men and women into separate groups. Alone with their own sex, the different sexes explore the essence of what it means to “be a woman” or to “be a man” in today’s world.

While not all of us are free to attend a Bly-Woodman conference, the process of valuing our masculinity or femininity can be fostered within our circle of friends. Following my divorce, I took a car trip through the Southwest with two close women friends. Bolstered by their support and nurtured by their understanding, I returned from my journey with a newfound confidence in myself as a woman, and the courage to go on with my life.

Recognize the Ways We Shame Our Partner

Meeting within the sanctuary of their same-sex groups, says Bly, allows both men and women the freedom to speak more openly about their personal grief and anger. One reason for this, he says, is that “the sexes shame each other so easily.” This shaming, usually unintentional, occurs in a variety of ways.

Say, for example, that a woman is upset with her boyfriend and wants to talk about how hurt and angry she feels. Articulating emotions, however, is much easier for her—indeed, the man may have no idea how to put his own emotions into words. Immediately sensing his inadequacy in this area, the man may turn away from her, switching on the television or picking up the paper. Frustrated, the woman continues to let the man know how she feels. Her emotional expertise only makes him feel more stupid, as though she is trying to tell him how to behave.

While a woman may more easily shame a man during conversations that revolve around emotional intimacy, the man may do the same to the woman in public situations. As she attempts to express her opinions or offer her advice, the man may, with a subtle lift of the brow, convey the impression that, after all, *she’s just a woman*. This type of put-down contributes to a woman’s feelings of shame and uneasiness over her aggression and assertiveness.

Let Grief Heal Your Differences

Indeed, the power of the sexes to shame each other stems from the painful childhood memories we evoke in each other. Encountering these memories often triggers an immense outpouring of grief and rage. Feeling ashamed and humiliat-

ed rather than proud of who we are stems from the subtle put-downs we may have experienced during our childhood: “You’re too fat” or “If you ever get to be mediocre you’ll be at the height of your powers.”

Grieving for the shame we have carried with us since childhood, says Bly, is important, as it not only initiates our healing process but brings more compassion into our relationship with our mate. The recognition that both men and women carry within them a wounded inner child can help bridge the division between the sexes.

Heal Your Shame through Your Dreams

An important part of the process of healing our shame, says Woodman, involves watching our dreams for figures of children. As we confront our past, for example, we may dream of a little boy or girl, says Bly, “dressed in rags, skinny, terrified, and deeply ashamed from the put-downs of his youth.” This figure is not literal, but a message from our unconscious signaling the presence of deep wounds in our psyche. Pondering the meaning of these dream images can lead to psychic health and wholeness.

One woman I know, for example, repeatedly found herself in relationships that were sexually unsatisfying. The appearance in her dreams of a baby dying from a sexually transmitted disease made her aware of the deep sense of shame and fear she had concerning her sexuality. As she began to appreciate and honor her sexuality, the figure in her dreams matured into an energetic young girl—and she found herself in a sexually vital relationship.

Discover the Power of Fairy Tales

Many of the insights Woodman and Bly have gained into male-female relationships have been inspired by their mutual study of legends and fairy tales. Bly’s book, for example, was based upon the Grimm’s fairy tale *Iron John*. The archetypal patterns in our unconscious, they believe, are expressed in the characters and motifs found in fairy tales. Here we find the enraged feminine playing the role of wicked witch, the power-hungry masculine in the part of the cruel king, our innocence as the young princess, or our courage as the brave knight.

In dreams or fairy tales, these energies may take the form of a wise old man or woman or an animal with magical powers. These figures are like “medicine”

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provided by our psyche.

For Bly and Woodman, two of the most significant of these healing energies are expressed in the mythic images of the "wild man" and "wild woman." Long repressed in both men and women, the wild man and wild woman are symbolic of the instinctual side of our personality. Indeed, says Bly, wild-man energy is characterized by spontaneity. He is careful to point out, however, that this instinctive spontaneity has nothing to do with any sort of primitive brutality. As he writes in his book, "[T]he distinction between the savage man and the Wild Man is crucial. . . . The savage mode does great damage to soul, earth, and humankind."

The expression of this energy differs with each individual. My own understanding of it is of the kind of ecstasy I occasionally experienced as a child when, lying on my back on a summer night,

staring into the immense, black mystery of the sky, I experienced such joy at being alive I thought I would explode.

For another friend, it is that exhilaration she feels when, having just finished a project, she puts on some Latin music and sings and dances by herself like some Spanish gypsy. For a man I know, wild-man energy is a high-spiritedness and aliveness that comes over him when, at the beach, the dolphins suddenly appear on the horizon, leaping and diving through the waves.

It is this type of energy, say Bly and Woodman, that men and women need to bring into their relationships. As we settle into a humdrum existence with our mate, when life becomes nothing more than work and responsibility and duty, a certain spirit and vitality is lost. We "fall out of love," sex is no longer what it once was, and we blame each other for the boredom in our lives.

By learning to connect to our inner spontaneity and freshness, by finding something that we really love to

do that awakens a certain sort of passion in us—painting, for instance, or dancing, going for long walks at dusk, or joining the local actors' troupe—we help rekindle the passion, the sexiness, in our relationships.

It is this sort of impassioned energy that also gives us the spirit to work toward ending the battle between the sexes. Ultimately, the battle between the sexes may be the battle that, when resolved, will bring about the lasting peace our society seeks. For although it is a battle that has prompted many of us to turn away from our partner and turn within ourselves, perhaps the internal harmony we discover, the peace we gain through our inner work, and the joy we find in the depths of our own passionate nature may contribute to a new poetry of love possible between men and women. □

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Are You Angry with Him With All the Men You've Ever Known?

Working with our unconscious inevitably leads to a confrontation with the deep-seated anger most of us have toward the opposite sex. Indeed, says Jungian analyst Marion Woodman, it is this unconscious anger and aggression in all of us toward the opposite sex that pose the most serious threat to relationships. Understanding the roots of this anger is critical because, while men and women genuinely want to relate, she says, "as long as those unconscious forces are digging at each other they can't relate—and they don't understand why."

For example, says Woodman, when a man and a woman argue, their personal anger can quickly turn into a rage she calls "transpersonal." They become "possessed" by an anger much bigger than the topic of their argument. A woman arguing with her boyfriend because he forgot to phone her, for example, may suddenly see in him all the other men who have either ignored or overlooked her, catalyzing her anger into rage over her feelings of abandonment.

To stop punishing our mate for all the wrongs we may have suffered, we must bring to light the deeper layers of our anger. Indeed, says men's movement leader Robert Bly, the sources of this anger are often generations old. It may

surprise some women to know, says Bly, that much of the anger men have against women has nothing to do with women—something most men are not aware of themselves. Instead, it has to do with the anger of sons who were not helped into manhood by their fathers. In traditional cultures, writes Bly in his book *Iron John: A Book about Men*, "Uncles loosen the son up or tell him about women. Grandfathers give him stories . . . old men teach ritual and soul—all of them honorary fathers." Today, however, as older men spend less time with young men, boys suffer from what Bly calls "father hunger." In the absence of their fathers and other male figures, boys blame their mothers for not helping them move from boyhood to the adult masculine.

This anger toward women, says Bly, is misplaced. "Beneath the initial layer of anger men uncover against their mothers," says Bly, "they find an anger against . . . men so intense that the first one is forgotten." When a woman feels abandoned by her father, he says, she may go into a depression. But the anger in young men has been building for four or five generations. "And if our culture does not learn to help young boys become men," he says passionately, "I've got news for you—

they're going to burn our cities down."

Much of women's transpersonal anger toward men, says Woodman, derives from having endured, collectively, centuries of shame and abuse of their bodies. Most women, she says, look in the mirror and lacerate themselves with self-criticisms. "I'm not beautiful enough" or, especially, "I'm not thin enough." Most of a woman's anger stems from being born in a woman's body. Women inherit this anger, says Woodman, from their mothers and grandmothers before them, who felt that they were inferior to men.

As men's anger can be healed through developing more closely bonded relationships among themselves, so women's anger can be healed by finding their own self-esteem with the help of other women. "Women particularly need to value one another," says Woodman. "Because they consider themselves inferior at an unconscious level, they have to find their full stature among themselves. This is a very difficult thing to do . . . because there's an underground feeling that they're criticizing one another as their mothers criticized them. Until they can relate to one another without judgment, however, they have great difficulty with men."