DILEMMAS OF LOVE AND DISCIPLINE IN THERAPY WITH COUPLES AND PARENTS: THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE GENDERED SELF

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Abstract

Feminist contributions to systemic approaches to human behaviour have led to gender being defined in interactional terms. Gender is seen not as a fixed quality or trait but as one socially constructed between men and women. This idea is discussed in relation to the gender debate in family therapy, attachment theory and feminist contributions to psychoanalytic thinking. Gender relationships are created as part of a person's internal working models of self and other. The ways that gender patterns are carried forward are examined, especially with respect to the contradictions between a person's gendered internal working models and their experience. These ideas will be examined through case examples.

Introduction – why is gender so hard to change?

This paper was developed from my research as part of my MSc in family therapy at Tavistock Clinic in England between 1992 and 1994. Primarily, this research considered how social context influences the individual's construction of gender. This was achieved through examining the gender constructions of men who are primary carers of children and focused on the lives of single parent fathers. In general, this research supported the idea that gender is substantially shaped by social context. Therefore, it suggests that masculinity and femininity are not inherent qualities applying to all men and women respectively. A more detailed examination of the results of this study is beyond the scope of this paper as I would like to focus on the thinking about gender that evolved out of this study and its implications for practice. Though the research focused specifically on single parent fathers, I have applied the issues more generally in order to understand how gender roles are constructed and maintained in the lives of families.

This leads us to consider the question: "Why are gender constructions so hard to change?" A more controversial question is: "Why do women seem to actively participate in their own oppression, even when given the opportunity to leave or change?" This last question was raised by Virginia Goldner and her associates

at the Gender and Violence Project at the Ackerman Institute in New York. They stated in their paper *Love and Violence: Gender Paradoxes in Volatile Relationships*:–

> ...we have attempted to co-construct with our women clients an explanation of how they were 'caught' in the battering situation. We wanted to understand why these women did not leave these relationships even when they had the material means to do so ... (Goldner et al, 1990, p 356)

I'd like to build on their work and explore particular dimensions of their thinking about gender. While it will not be possible to fully answer both questions in this paper, I will begin to outline some of the ideas that may help in understanding them.

Example One

A, who presented with bulimic symptoms, found herself repeatedly involving herself with men who would either physically or emotionally abuse her. She felt that she must have an invisible tattoo across her forehead saying "doormat". Every time she moved out of these relationships into a flat with others she felt anxious, empty and out of control inside herself. She would then quickly find another man similar to the one before. She found these relationships quite familiar to the one she had with her father, who repeatedly called her fat and ugly, with sexual undertones. On one hand, she wanted these men to take control of her and yet on the other she resented this. She needed to feel loved and wanted, but felt in order to get this she needed to be dependent and hopeless.

Exploring the nature of the gendered bond between men and women will enable us to begin to understand why men and women seem to 'mutually' participate in such relationships. This concerns the way that the external socio-political context becomes internalised in the patterns of family relationships and individual self concepts formed within these relationships. I will argue it is the nature of this gendered bond, as it is split between men and women in a polarised manner, that contributes to perpetuation of the oppression of women. Understanding this process in therapy with couples and parents enables alternatives to be considered and experienced, rather than being inevitable patterns of behaving and relating.

Gender is a social construction created and maintained between men and women and not a fixed quantity that one is born with. The terms 'masculine' and 'feminine' are then seen, not as belonging to either men or women respectively, but as formed in the relationships between them. As Chodorow states:–

> To see men and women as qualitatively different kinds of people, rather than seeing gender as processual, reflexive, and constructed, is to reify and deny relations of gender, to see gender as permanent rather than created and situated. (1989, p 113)

The division of household labour between men and women within the family highlights many of these issues. The social construction of gender emphasizes the various stereotypical norms predominant in our western culture, that prescribe different roles to men and women which, in turn, reinforce the inequalities between them. In the division of household tasks, particular views of men and women are perpetuated, which contain not just the allocation of tasks but also the person's perceptions of themselves as a man or woman. These perceptions include the attitudes about what men and women should do and the characteristics ascribed to each gender. For example, men are said to be stronger and better at technical tasks and women more sensitive and to know instinctively how to care for children. Within the family context, self concept is constructed as 'internal working models' that guide and regulate behaviour. As they are carried forward to other contexts, they contain gendered aspects of self and other, that help recreate the patterns of gender relations and power inequalities in society.

I will consider social constructionist views of self, feminist contributions to systemic approaches and psychoanalytic thinking in relation to concepts of internal working models as developed by attachment theory. I will begin to link together some of the connecting points between quite divergent paradigms in order to examine internal working models as gendered social constructions. Some implications of these ideas will be explored in my struggles with the issues in practice. Feminist contributions have often been seen as women's perspectives. However, as a man I will attempt in this paper to begin to develop an inclusive both/and view of men and women in considering the gendered nature of human relationships. I hope to shift the responsibility for sexual politics from women, who have done the bulk of work in this area, to include men as well.

The social construction of self

Social constructionists consider the self as being constructed through and in language and narratives (Gergen, 1977). Our knowledges of ourselves can be viewed as social or intrepetive constructions which adapt to changing social situations, rather than being immutable characteristics or existing in some independent or objective sense (Gergen, 1977; Gergen and Kaye, 1992). Interestingly, this is Chodorow's contention as well, as quoted above, though she has been writing from a feminist psychoanalytic perspective. Knowledges of the self form a multiverse of meanings which are created through one's experiences in relation to others and social contexts. Through these self knowledges we punctuate and construct our views and experiences of ourselves and others.

Our experiences are much broader and richer than the narratives that form the constructions of the self (Bruner, 1986). We highlight aspects of our experiences as they fit with the view we have about ourselves. Our experiences are shaped by the social contexts in which we live. Our interpretations of these experiences are in turn shaped by the constructions we have about ourselves. In this way there is

an interactive process between the social constructions of ourselves and the variety of our experiences. This creates the possibilities of alternative construction of the self from the dominant models in society.

Hence, there is no real self that is waiting to be discovered by the objective other (e.g. scientist or therapist) but differing versions of the self. No one perspective is more right than the other but each exists embracing different aspects of experience. There can be more than one self as different versions of self may be perceived by the person or by others as the self evolves over time and across different contexts. Such versions may contain contradictory aspects, existing alongside each other as part of a double consciousness or alternative knowledges of self (Abrahams, 1986; White, 1991). These create alternative possibilities in what appear to be fixed roles that the self performs.

The self is a product of human exchanges, being created in relation to 'the other'. This process begins in the early formative years before the infant knows any language, then continues to be modified and reinforced in the patterns of relationships in the years to follow. This creates what could be called the 'relational self' (Benhabib, 1987) or 'intersubjective self' (Benjamin, 1988). The self, through its formation in relation to the significant other, maintains aspects of what the other does not have. The dominant presupposes the submissive, subject presupposes the object, victim presupposes the persecutor, the carer presupposes the cared for, masculine presupposes the feminine. The former of each of these qualities depends on the latter for its survival, each defined recursively with its opposite in the significant other. These views of self and other are then internalised as mental constructions or working models, which function to interpret, guide, regulate behaviour and affect in oneself and in relation to others. Thus, the idea of the socially constructed and intersubjective self is both an internal and interactional model.

The social construction of gender

The language of gender is constructed in polarised terms, such as 'masculine' and 'feminine' implying that these qualities belong inherently to either men or women respectively (Bem, 1974). Research on sex roles has found considerable variability from established norms of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' within each group of men and women (Bem, 1975; Russell, 1978). Lott (1990), in her review of the research on gender differences, acknowledges the differences found in many studies on the performance of men and women. However she argues, differences between men and women were found to be negligible when situational variables were accounted for; gender differences reflect the different social contexts and positions of men and women.

In moving away from objective views of gender traits, we can develop a social constructionist perspective of gender roles, particularly with respect to the concepts of masculinity and femininity. There is no real 'masculinity' or

'femininity' but rather multiple versions of the 'gendered self' that exist within the social and interpersonal context. The word 'gendered' is used here to describe something that is in the process of continually being created and maintained, as opposed to being a given quality in the individual. Gender becomes a fluid web of socially constructed meanings that form an interpretive guide to one's own beliefs, behaviour, relationships and expression of affect.

In our society certain versions of the gendered self, the stereotyped and polarised images of male and female, are given privilege. Our experience of ourselves as men or women is broader than the social definitions of masculine and feminine that have been created in Western society. For example, sex role research demonstrates that many men score high on femininity scores and women high on masculinity (Bem, 1975; Russell, 1978). Certain aspects of the gendered self are not given validity in the evolving constructions of ourselves, given our experience in the gender polarised society that we live in and within familial relationships that reflect it. The narratives of gender that we have internalised then serve to sift out the parts of our experience that fit within the socially dominant working models we have developed of men and women.

Even with formal commitments by society in various spheres reinforcing equality in law, employment and social conditions for men and women, there has not been a corresponding change, in personal relationships in the domestic sphere. (Coverman and Shelley, 1986; Brannen, 1988). The dominant models of gender relationships can seem inevitable and unchangeable as part of a person's 'core sense of identity', both individually and collectively (Frosh 1994, Chodorow, 1989). Frosh (1994) concludes that:–

> ... sexual difference 'is' [not] anything absolutely fixed; rather the organisation of the social world around difference produces people in relation to gender, so that what are in principle 'empty' categories (masculine, feminine) become filled with expectations, stereotypes and projections. This does not make their effects any less real: though gender distinctions may be constructed and in important senses 'arbitrary', they have a hold over us and are difficult, perhaps impossible to transcend. (p 41)

Gendered internal working models of self and other

Self concept is part of the way that individuals internally represent and carry forward patterns of relationships, particularly gender roles. The relationship between individual characteristics, which are internally represented, and family patterns has been studied by those interested in attachment theory. Building on the work of Bowlby, the idea of 'internal working models' has developed. These are:–

> a set of conscious and/or unconscious rules for the organisation of information relevant to the attachment and for obtaining or limiting

> access to ... information regarding attachment related experiences, feelings, and ideations. (Main *et al*, 1985, p 67)

Internal working models pay attention to the way that early relationships construct and transmit patterns of relationships and self concept. These are constructed out of diadic and triadic experiences (Bretherton, 1985) and view individual characteristics as being relational (Stevenson-Hinde, 1988). The way that relationship patterns have been internalised and represented as internal working models has been studied with particular reference to the way these are carried forward into behaviour and patterns of relationships in other contexts (Grossmann *et al*, 1988; Sroufe *et al*, 1988). Not only do individuals internally represent particular relationships (such as with their own mother), but also more generalised roles (such as the roles of mothers and women in general) from these specific experiences. Individuals not only internalise generalised roles, but sets of relationships, for which reciprocal behaviours are learnt.

Given that gender is a fundamental organiser of family life and relationships, then gender would also be a fundamental organiser of the internal working models. However, this idea seems to be underestimated in the development of attachment theory. Main *et al* (1985) pay little attention to gender as a variable. Radke-Yarrow *et al* (1988) relegate it to being a 'mediating factor'. The focus is primarily on the gender of the *child* in the mother[parent] – child relationship, with fathers being hardly mentioned. The influence of gender differences between the parents and the way children of different sexes internalise concepts of themselves, as male or female, are virtually ignored.

Patterns of relationships are gendered, and these are internalised or represented as 'gendered internal working models'. These then interpret, guide and regulate both behaviour and affect in relationships, particularly behaviour that men and women display in various contexts. The patterns of relationships that are internalised would reflect the gendered nature of relationships of which the individual is a part. This would include the way that gender qualities are ascribed to respective roles and relationships.

Feminist contributions to psychology have demonstrated that men and women have different ways of responding throughout the human life cycle. Men and women have developed, through their socialisation, different self perceptions, ways of relating and processes fundamental to the development of their identity and relationships, as outlined by the 'Self In Relation' theorists (Millar, 1991; Surrey, 1991) and feminist psychoanalytic theorists (Chodorow 1989). Chodorow asserts that men develop their 'core identity' primarily around the principles of separateness and autonomy, whereas women develop through attachment and relatedness.

Millar (1991) suggests that women develop 'an interacting sense of self', one which is more encompassing, in contrast to the more boundaried or limited self

concept of men. Differentiation or separation is then viewed as a particular way of being attached to others and in maintaining different and more complex ways of being in relation to others (Millar, 1991). Women in general develop stronger expressive (or what is denoted feminine) characteristics which emphasise connectedness and attachment. In a similar way, men develop stronger instrumentality (or what is denoted masculinity), which emphasises separateness and achievement (Gilligan, 1982). These characteristics develop in a polarised manner between the genders.

These dichotomies are reflected in the polarised self concepts of individuals in the way that they conceptualise themselves as either men or women. Traditionally, definitions of gender (and the gendered self) have been created in opposition to each other. Male means not being female, and female means not being male. Chodorow (1989) suggests that the process is different for men and women. She states that in the socialisation process men develop a negative identification, where they learn to be 'not female', that is, developing identity through separation from their mother. On the other hand, women develop gender identity through a positive identification, that is, in connection with the primary carer, the mother. In this relational context, the gendered self is constructed.

Aspects of what it means to be male or female are formed in these relationships and these are internalised into working models of self and other, male and female, which are continually reinforced by the environment in which they are formed and the person develops. These internal representations of self, as male and female, are understood in terms of an "active interchange with other selves" and the self as part of interchange between persons (Millar, 1991). Such models of self exist in a recursive manner with the 'other' (maintained within a social context of power and domination). The formation of these gendered self-concepts does not occur in isolation, but develops in interaction with others. This begins in the early relationships in life, as highlighted by psychoanalytic perspectives (Chodorow, 1989), and then continues to be enacted and reinforced in later relationships within the family and in wider social contexts (Goldner *et al*, 1990).

Gender as a relational quality

Gender roles of men and women often exist recursively, defining within the relationship who performs what role or maintains certain traits or personality characteristics (Sheinberg *et al*, 1991). This can be seen in the way that in marriage the man's need for emotional connection or dependency is maintained by his wife leaving him free to be more autonomous, such as in the context of work (Sheinberg *et al*, 1991). This, however, may mean that the wife is more constrained as she plays out the other side for him, such as through managing the domestic and nurturing spheres of his life. His independence or autonomy is created at the expense of her dependency, both emotionally and economically

(Stiver, 1991). Such characteristics are held in the 'other' and are therefore not developed or recognised in oneself. In this way, gender has been socially constructed to mean that being a man means not being a woman. Masculinity is sustained through defining itself as opposite to its 'other', that is femininity (Cornell *et al*, 1987). When such self definitions are created in this way masculine and feminine qualities become split and can not be contained in the one person.

If, for example, a man within the context of a relationship defines himself as being "a *man* that is not responsible for child care", then this by definition implies that *women* are responsible for childcare. Certain characteristics could also be held in 'the other' in complementary ways. In some families there is the classic divide between showing love and discipline, with the wife taking on caring and comforting and the husband taking on discipline and strength. One may contain feeling and intuition with the other containing thinking and logic. The more the other contains that quality the less one needs to develop it, or acknowledge the possibility that it may already exist within one's own repertoire of behaviours and capabilities (Sheinberg *et al*, 1991). Goodrich *et al*, (1988) state that:–

> There is no self without the other, and the challenge is to integrate autonomy and connection. One reason a man can look so enviably strong and separate is because women are playing the other side for him. (p 19)

This is describing a positive process in which the partner seems voluntarily to take on the specific gendered characteristics for the other. Simultaneously, there may also be a negative process through which the unwanted feelings are projected into the other person to contain on their behalf. One reason the man *has* to look so strong is that firstly, he may be projecting his unwanted feelings of dependency and vulnerability onto his wife and secondly, she may project her uncertain feelings about autonomy and strength onto him. The vice versa situation will exist for the women. These dynamics are among the processes through which the power relations between men and women are reinforced internally within the individual and in familial relationships.

Example two

Mr and Mrs S came to therapy concerned about the behaviour of their teenage daughter at home. The situation had become very tense which had led to Mr S and his daughter having physical fights, some seeming quite serious. Mr S said on one occasion that he felt he had gone too far and it was close to someone (i.e. his daughter) getting hurt. Mr S worked as a money broker in the city and had been working two jobs, following financial difficulties a few years previously. This was leaving him with only four hours sleep a night. The stresses on the family seemed intolerable.

Mr S said he felt very sad about the tensions with in the family. Sometimes he cried on his own about the way it had become. He felt that he had to be strong to carry his family through the difficulties they were facing, though felt that soon they would be over (i.e. with the finances). I commented that perhaps he was strong and able to carry this burden as the rest of the family was playing out the other side for him, that is the emotional, seemingly 'weaker' part. The dilemmas and costs of how the roles and tensions were managed within the family were raised with them. I considered with them the costs and benefits of investing in the different ways of managing the division of emotional roles with in the family.

Changing gendered internal working models

The research on internal working models focuses substantially on the way that continuity of the self is maintained over time, which, in turn, causes patterns of relationships to be perpetuated. Belsky (1988) and Caspi *et al*, (1988) have investigated the way that family patterns are reproduced, often leading to repetition of problem behaviour in the next generation. This research would then lead one to be pessimistic about the prospect of any change. Comparatively, less attention has been given to the ways that change, or discontinuity, in internal working models may occur.

Overall the types of events that create such discontinuities and redirect developmental trajectories are not well established. These events could then become a 'turning point' in their lives (Rutter, 1988) and a 'corrective emotional experience' (Belsky, 1988) that will change or modify their lifestyle trajectory enabling a corresponding alteration in their internal working model or gendered self concept. Working with such events in creating change is clearly the concern of therapy. Techniques such as focusing on the 'exceptions to the rule', as used by solution focused approaches, may be a way of using these discontinuities as a turning point for change.

Research might need to focus on the ways that various crises, transitions and events in a person's life expose potential for creating a 'discontinuity' of the gendered self. These are possibilities for aspects of the gendered self to be reorganised or reconstructed. The feminist movement over the last few decades has paid considerable attention to changing the gender inequalities and power relations in society, which are also enacted within the domestic roles in the family. While there has been progress, to some extent, on the rights of women in the workplace, very little appears to have changed in the domestic sphere, women on the whole working a double shift of paid work and home responsibilities, with men's participation in domestic work being secondary, voluntary and largely unaffected by their wife's employment status (Manke *et al*, 1994; Almeida *et al*, 1993). The question of change of gender roles is more vexed.

The concept of gendered internal working models of self and other brings up additional issues. Defining gender as a quality that is created and maintained

between persons, rather than as inherent traits, means that alternative constructions are possible. Using a recursive, or interactive, definition of gender means that these issues need to focus on women and men in relation to each other. Transformation of these roles requires multiple changes within the individual and wider network of significant others. Considering that qualities of the gendered self are maintained in the other, means that change in one person threatens the other's gendered sense of identity and cohesion.

In addition, the prospect of change in oneself may mean losing aspects of self held in the other. It is easy to simply label men as being more resistant and unwilling to change than women, rather than understand the broader nature of such change. In the light of this analysis, the idea that men are objecting mainly because they lose their privileged position is rather simplistic. They are losing, in the 'significant other' the ability to maintain the aspects of self which they have contained within these relationships (Benjamin, 1988). Loss of the 'feminine other' for men (through their partner changing) means losing the essential (feminine) parts of themselves. The irrational rage that sometimes emerges as this is threatened demonstrates the fundamental nature of this change for themselves and the ways these crucial aspects for the maintenance of the male gendered self are contained in these relationships.

The complementary position exists for women in relation to men. It may begin to explain why women who have been abused often repeatedly involve themselves with violent partners and refuse to leave them (Benjamin, 1988). One of the difficulties for the feminist movement is that women sometimes appear to participate actively in their own oppression, even when given the opportunity to leave or change. This is not to deny the oppression of women, but rather to begin to deconstruct the contradictions that maintain such oppression. This might provide a basis to enable us to find ways in our work with men and women in families for dealing with the problems and abuses of power that can characterise gender relations. It might help us to understand why it has been so difficult to change gender roles within families and society.

Implications for practice

More positive and proactive responses from men in addressing the issues of gender inequality and men's roles in families, with a broad gender sensitive or feminist perspective, have recently been forthcoming (Allen *et al*, 1991; Reimers *et al*, 1990, Neal *et al*, 1991; Meth *et al*, 1990).

The crisis that brings families to therapy may be considered as a possible discontinuity or contradiction between a person's experience and their own internal working model of 'self and other'. This crisis may create a turning point in which the family may be more open to explore their own sexual politics as it relates to their difficulties. The assumptions that individuals within families hold about gender relationships and the way that the 'gendered self' is created in a

recursive manner between each other, become part of the family drama enacted before the therapist.

Families' difficulties frequently present at life-cycle transitions. These are times when established patterns of relationships may undergo change which involves a renegotiation of roles and relationships (Carter and McGoldrick, 1989). This challenges the old scripts or beliefs that have guided behaviour and the patterns of interaction (Byng-Hall, 1988), including those beliefs about gender roles (Burck and Daniels, 1990). Transitions and changes within the family structure will bring to the surface tensions through which these premises may be challenged by the therapist and renegotiated. Merely urging men to help out with more housework and childcare tasks would be too simplistic, though it is a useful start, and does not fully address the complexities of human relationships. All too often the performance of such tasks is within the framework of meaning that they are 'women's work'. In this way the assumptions and gender premises are not changed and inequalities in the relationship remain unchallenged.

Contributions from attachment theory, as discussed above, demonstrate the way these patterns are perpetuated across generations. Byng-Hall (1991) has used the concept of the family script as a way of applying attachment theory to family therapy. In the same way 'gender scripts' can be a way of applying the concept of 'gendered internal working models'. Exploring the patterns of gender relations in the family of origin can highlight the unspoken gender scripts, the ways these are enacted. Working with these tensions and incongruities between lifestyle and beliefs, lived experience and idealised images creates a potential for changing gendered self.

These gender scripts are not only patterns of acting, but qualities assigned to male and female roles within the family and ways of expressing affect. Fears of vulnerability, issues of intimacy and open expression of feelings are examples of such gendered qualities that are often assigned to one or other of the partners. Identifying the polarised manner in which these have been created and held in the other, enables the recursive nature of these qualities to be tracked in the family dialogue about their difficulties. Valuing the importance of each quality in each person, enables the dispute over who is right or wrong to be sidestepped, thus creating room for each to manoeuvre and consider. Creating greater flexibility in the gendered roles within the family gives them greater scope to resolve their difficulties. As Goldner et al (1990) state:–

> ...abuse and coercion exist with understanding and friendship in a unique and painful way. When the paradoxical terms of this gendered bond are clarified and critiqued, the freedom to change the terms of the relationship or to leave it behind becomes possible. (p 363)

Example three

Mr and Mrs C were referred for therapy by the local Community Medical Officer, because the parents were concerned about their fourteen year old son's bed wetting and behavioural problems. Simultaneously, the parents had contacted social services to have their son accommodated in foster care as they felt he was outside their control. Social services informed the clinic that there had been a long history of physical abuse by the husband on his wife and the older daughter. It was suspected that the son was also being abused. A couple of sessions after they started therapy, they admitted that Mr C would "go over top when things got tense". In the session I observed that the husband expressed the anger and the wife the sadness about what happened to their son. I identified a similar split in expressions of love and discipline at home. Here I was beginning to identify the recursive nature of the gender patterns in the family.

In Mr C's family his father had been an alcoholic. He was a very abusive man who had no time for his children, except for discipline in which he was punitive and violent. Mr C said that he did not want to repeat the patterns of his father and was extremely upset at himself when this occurred. He was scared that his son was beginning to be just like him in the way he would explode at times of stress. Like his father he found himself stepping in to make up for his wife's leniency in managing the children. The more punitive he was, the more lenient she would be. They felt trapped in this pattern of reciprocal behaviour. This highlights a three generational replication of the old family scripts or internal working models. From his early experiences Mr C had internalised a gendered model of himself as a man who guided the patterns of relationship and his self concept in the present time.

In their couple relationship they had created between them mutual and exclusive definitions of what it meant to be a man or woman along traditional gender lines. Each was maintaining in the other qualities that both recognised as being important for their family. Frequently they battled over this division: she would accuse him of being too harsh and he accuse her of spoiling their son. These polarised definitions of themselves and their gendered qualities (love versus discipline, or leniency versus harshness) became fixed so that both attributes could not be contained in the one person. The lack of flexibility in these definitions contributed to the family difficulties.

I connoted both sets of qualities positively. The dilemmas of the gender split between husband and wife and the reciprocal split of discipline and love were raised with the family. He identified occasions when he had been more loving and closer to his children and how much he enjoyed it. However, he and his wife then dismissed them as insignificant as he had not been able to follow them through. I (as a male therapist) challenged their view of the insignificance of these occasions. It may have been important, in this case, that it was a male therapist

who challenged the father and positively affirmed the new idea of himself as a father and a man. This appeared to assist Mr C to take responsibility for his violent behaviour. Mr C *wanted* to be a different kind of man from his father, one who was more loving and closer to his children. This may be described as a double consciousness or an alternative knowledge of himself as a father and a man. As this did not fit with the dominant view he had of himself it was then put aside as invalid information.

I suggested that Mr and Mrs C discuss the ways they might be able to share these roles rather than solely leave them with one or the other. Mr C would need to consider how he could share the discipline (and power) with his wife, so that he could be freer to find ways of discovering aspects of himself (as a loving father). For Mrs C, I suggested she consider how she could share with her husband the loving or nurturing aspects of the care of the children and begin to discover ways of taking on a stronger role. In this way Mr C would be able to continue to discover and validate these aspects of himself as a man, that had been seen on occasions. In this way, the recursive nature of the gender scripts were identified in the patterns of interaction that inscribed the particular qualities, often defined as 'masculine' and 'feminine', which were assigned in this family to the men and women respectively. Different formulations of these were re-labelled as being different ways of being a man or a woman.

Change with Mr C required a reciprocal change in his wife. They had to change the mutual definitions of self that they had maintained in the other person. Understandably, this was a delicate process and the potential was high for significant loss if the other person did not reciprocate. The risks and dilemmas were discussed with them, including the risks to their son if they continued in the same way. The dilemmas of change or not changing were weighed up with the family in the form of a debate going back and forth. This drew on the idea of the dilemma of change as highlighted by Papp (1983).

While at the foster care placement, the son's behaviour changed: the bed wetting and stealing stopped and his behaviour became more manageable. However, he reverted to being difficult to control on his weekend visits. The relationships within the family began to change soon after Mr C took his son out for the weekend – something he did not usually do. Mrs C found that she was more effective in following through in disciplining her son, as well as the two younger children. After further therapy their son returned home and follow up six months later indicated he was doing well. While the family may still be described as being traditional in their division of household labour, there appeared to be greater flexibility in the roles they ascribed to each other and in their ways of handling them.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to explore and link together ideas from quite different perspectives: attachment theory, social constructionist, and feminist contributions to systemic and analytic thinking. Despite areas of commonality there are numerous difficulties in bringing together such divergent paradigms, such as the incongruities in language and their modernist or postmodernist assumptions. Attempting to compare the similarities and differences between such divergent orientations is beyond the scope of this paper and further work is needed to deal with the inconsistencies between them.

I have suggested that it is essential to develop gender sensitive perspectives on men's issues, particularly regarding change for men. This is not to displace the focus on power and inequality that, quite rightly, has been brought to the forefront by feminist contributions, especially in the area of violence within the home; rather I have sought to integrate these views. In order to address the difficulties of changing gender stereotypes, further thinking needs to consider the ways that gender qualities or self concept are first constructed and internalised within the individual in their formative years from the influence of the early bonds, which is a different process for male and females. Secondly, it needs to consider the ways gender is maintained within the network of relationships in which they are imbedded in later life. This may begin to help us understand the seeming inevitability of the patterns of gender relations and inequalities in society and family relationships in order to begin working at ways of changing them.

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