



EROS AND LOGOS

Servant-Leadership, Feminism, and the Critical Unities of Gender Well-Being

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A question was asked of me by the inimitable Nike Imoru, a North Londoner raised in Nigeria, an exceptional casting director, and the first woman and person of color to gain a tenured position in the Theatre Department at Hull in the UK (when she was only twenty-eight.)

The question: What is your understanding of the masculine in America?

Nike's presence is water from a deep well.

Her direction elicited the following.

One could say an extreme mediocrity exists in much of the masculine in America today, characterized by emptiness, impoverished relational capacity, an overblown or under-developed sense of self, and a life with others that is often devoid of meaning. Such men are filled of things like excess media, sexual objectification, emotional shallowness, and the man's agenda at the expense of others, the age-old establishment of overt and covert patriarchal footing. No words for feelings. Violence. Privilege for privilege sake, which results in decadence, and in the end decay, and finally death. The Western world is currently experiencing this



decadence, decay, and death. Carl Jung (1959) gave a lucid and fear-invoking expression of the masculine and the feminine. In Jung's conception the masculine is symbolized by the logos, which he referred to as the power to make meaning, to be meaningful, and to be experienced as meaningful by loved ones and by the collective humanity around us. Not the super-rational man, incapable of emotion or regret, but a man who lives well, loves well, and is well loved. A question then rises, how many men do you know who are experienced as meaningful in their relationships with women and men, with their children, with others?

The modern father of servant-leadership, Robert K. Greenleaf (1977/2002), effectively embodied lesser-known servant-leadership aspects such as prophesy, foresight, healing, and the will to better society, often through personal and collective sacrifice. Through this embodiment, a subtle life force is exerted: the dynamic, steadying, and fiercely graceful notion of forgiveness as part of the central core of servant-leadership. In his telling essay on Robert Frost's (1947) poem "Directive," Greenleaf showed not only his strengths in linear thinking but also his uncommon gifts with regard to nonlinear, mystery-based, and more circular aspects of wisdom more readily associated with poets and painters than with business practitioners or social scientists, and in so doing, he opened the door for leaders to take greater responsibility for their own humanity and for humanity as a whole. Often the linear or rational is projected to be primarily associated with the masculine while circular or mystery-based ways of knowing are projected to be primarily associated with the feminine. To be a leader responsible for the healing so vitally important to the wholeness of individuals and society, the mystery of gender well-being along the he, she, they continuum, and the reality of repair, forgiveness, and making things right or whole again comes



forth from the shadows, illuminating often obscured and ancient truths.

Greenleaf's (1977/2002) essay "The Inward Journey" from his *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* contains an elegant, artistic, and in many respects, circular or mystery-based, look at the nature of the servant-leader. In the essay, Greenleaf relates how his reading Frost's "Directive" deepened his understanding of the courageous and wise presence of the servant as leader, be that leader woman, man, or otherwise positioned on the gender continuum.

Notably, the burgeoning of more linear or "rational/positivist" ways of knowing as found in quantitative research in servant-leadership conducted by Liden (Hu & Liden, 2011; Liden et al., 2015; Liden et al., 2016; Liden et al., 2014; Liden et al., 2008; Panaccio et al., 2015), van Dierendonck (Sousa & van Dierendonck, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; van Dierendonck et al., 2017; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011; van Dierendonck et al., 2014), and many others has revealed weighty implications for servant-leadership across many dimensions of human experience. This body of research significantly fortifies and brings to the fore the new quantitative frontier of servant-leadership understandings, leading the field in unforeseen directions while contributing invaluable new knowledge.

That said, more circular or "mystery-based qualitative/interpretivist" studies in servant-leadership perform a different function—again, a function aligned less with linear or super-rational knowledge than with poetic or symbolic knowledge. Quantitative research, in its emphasis on numerical reliability, validity, and generalizability at the expense of more intimate individual and collective expressions of human capacity, cannot, by definition, draw on the empirical grounding in lived experience found in qualitative research (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; van Manen, 1990, 2016). Privileging the linear/rational over the



circular/mystery generates profoundly masculinist holes in our collective knowledge, and often continues a toxic diminishment of that which is not rational or linear. In effect, favoring quantitative knowing over qualitative knowing, reifies toxic masculinity, colonizing practices, and the inherent inequities and human rights abuses so rampant in dominant cultures which lack the awareness to be not only equitable and liberatory, but loving, as true relational and emotional intelligence demands. Quantitative research typically disallows, or rather occludes, the researcher from acknowledging and challenging personal biases, a research practice that is a common requirement for qualitative studies. This refusal to acknowledge and detail personal bias can often prevent leaders from hard-earned self-knowledge, and thus dominant culture blindness or “head in the sand” occlusion can be a shadow force or unconscious frailty in much quantitative research and oppressive patriarchal leadership. This results in calcification, brittleness, and eventual fracture of the knowledge base. Certainly, research using qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies is necessary for more complete and robust understanding of servant-leadership. The gift of in-depth, well-designed, and deeply informed qualitative studies in servant-leadership offers the opportunity to expose our blind spots as people and leaders, and to bring us to a more intimate understanding of ourselves, others, and the world.

To understand the world more intimately, a move toward greater wholeness and healing, and deeper understanding is required. Both poets and researchers, women and men and beloved others, can lead us there.

Though the extent of Greenleaf’s personal connection with Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Robert Frost is unknown, they did know each other, and spent time in each other’s presence. The possibility



that they directly influenced one another's thought is apparent, and becomes a compelling thread in the history of leadership studies. Consider this moment, relayed by Greenleaf (1977/2002):

In a group conversation with him [Frost] one evening, he digressed on the subject of loyalty. At one point I interjected with: "Robert, that is not the way you have defined loyalty before." He turned to me with a broad friendly grin and asked softly, "How did I define it?" I replied, "In your talk on Emerson a few years ago, you said, 'Loyalty is that for the lack of which your gang will shoot you without benefit of trial by jury.'" To this man who had struggled without recognition until he was forty, and then had to move to England to get it, nothing could have pleased him more in his old age than to have an obscure passage like this quoted to him in a shared give-and-take with non-literary people. (p. 326)

In Greenleaf's (1977/2002) "engagement" with Frost's poem, he affirmed the necessity of a prophetic, circular orientation in going further into the depths of human awareness: "Our problem is circular: we must understand in order to be able to understand. It has something to do with awareness and symbols" (p. 329). Throughout history, such symbolic knowledge, though not solely feminine, can often be ascribed more naturally to the feminine. Symbolic understanding is formless, cannot be linearized, and cannot be understood by simple 1-2-3 progressions. Rather, it is absorbed; it is an element of life and leadership in which the servant-leader chooses to become willingly submerged.

Awareness, letting something significant and disturbing develop between oneself and a symbol, comes more by being waited upon rather than by being asked. One of the most baffling of life's experiences is to stand beside one who is



aware, one who is looking at a symbol and is deeply moved by it, and, confronting the same symbol, to be unmoved. Oh, that we could just be open in the presence of symbols that cry out to speak to us, let our guards down, and take the risks of being moved!

The power of a symbol is measured by its capacity to sustain a flow of significant new meaning. The substance of the symbol may be a painting, a poem or story, allegory, myth, scripture, a piece of music, a person, a crack in the sidewalk, or a blade of grass. Whatever or whoever, it produces a confrontation in which much that makes the symbol meaningful comes from the beholder.

The potentiality is both in the symbol and in the beholder. (p. 329)

From the broad foundations of qualitative research, thought leaders in human nature such as Heidegger (1962), Arendt (2006), Husserl (1970), Weil (2018), Gadamer (1975/2004, 1976), and Ricoeur (1981) have spoken of the impossibility of knowing humanity without knowing oneself. Qualitative research helps us find a more accessible avenue toward increased self-awareness: through symbol, depth, and meaning. The need to name, articulate, and bracket one's own biases in the attempt to show the lived human experience more clearly is inherent to qualitative research, even as it generally remains obscured in quantitative research. By extension, the person with a leader-first mentality, often mired in self-aggrandizement without foreknowledge, ambition at the expense of love and service, and an inappropriate power drive obscuring or negating authentic intimacy, generally lacks healthy self-awareness. The leader-first leader has limited or no capacity to name his or her



own faults, let alone invite others to influence, challenge, or help correct them. In this light, Greenleaf's (1977/2002) prophetic truths—warning individuals, communities, and nations against the leader-first mentality—take on pivotal and, in fact, essential meaning.

Reynolds' (2013) qualitative study through a feminist lens used content analysis methodology to better understand speeches delivered by fifty of the top female and male American business leaders whose companies made *Fortune* best-of lists. She took a profound and precise deep dive into whether gender differences among prominent American business leaders support the conceptualization that servant-leadership is a gender-integrative mode of leadership and found servant-leadership gender integration intuitively and qualitatively true. In her study, no overall gender distinctions were expressed in the main servant-leadership characteristics, but important gender differences were observed: for example, women spoke more about humility and standing back in leadership, whereas men highlighted accountability; and female speakers considered the motivation to lead as an ethical drive and a choice, whereas male speakers articulated it as an obligation (Reynolds, 2013).

Eicher-Catt's (2005) quick dismissal of the gender-integrative essence of servant-leadership was exposed by Reynolds' more in-depth read of the necessary counter-intuitive alignment of the terms servant and leader, purposely chosen by Greenleaf (1977/2002). Not only was Greenleaf's work explicitly not associated with being subservient, enslaved, or in a one-down position to dominant culture, toxic masculinity, or facile conceptions of gender, his approach was directly aimed at deconstructing such command and control leadership and replacing it with the prophetic notion that people will eventually refuse to be led by anyone but the kind of leader (he, she,



or they) who is a healer, who is known as one who helps shape people and society, women and men and all people along the gender continuum, toward greater health, wisdom, autonomy, freedom, and service of the least privileged of the human community. The servant-first ethos of legitimate leaders is shown in the will to put others' highest priority needs first—their vitality, wholeness, autonomy, freedom, wisdom, and health—placing others' well-being above one's own or the organization's economic, power, or ambition-oriented goals (Greenleaf, 1977/2002). By understanding the ways of life required to lead others in this way, as “*primus inter pares*”—a form of circular leadership in which each person is seen as equal—servant-leaders become crucial unifiers of others throughout the gender continuum. Of course, such understanding is hard won, requires long term self-development, and demands substantial moral and personal effort in communion with others who help lead the way to deeper more communal expressions of humanity. Notably, Eicher-Catt (2005) is determined to examine “servant” and “leader” for their undertones, deconstructing the toxicity such terms can often embody. But of more authentic alignment with Greenleaf's original thought, and of significant detriment to her own critical analysis, she appears to perform her deconstruction without recognizing the previous more humane, discerning, and multilayered deconstruction Greenleaf already arrived at through his own critical analysis of toxic American leadership propensities.

In Reynolds' (2013) study, gender differences found in her qualitative analysis could reify gender congruency expectations if read without critical gender understanding. To counteract such reification, her study presented evidence of female leaders combining care orientation and relationality (typically feminine aspects of leadership) with courage and contrarian thinking (typically



masculine aspects) and evidence of male leaders combining accountability and risk taking (typically masculine aspects) with forgiveness and being attuned to others' needs (typically feminine aspects). Reynolds concluded that servant-leadership combines both feminine and masculine aspects of leadership.

Furthermore, Eicher-Catt (2005) proposed that the serving aspect of servant-leadership is associated with submissive femininity, and the leading aspect with oppressive masculinity. Reynolds (like Greenleaf whose work predates Eicher-Catt) challenged Eicher-Catt's framework, revealing her conclusions with regard to servant-leadership to be largely based on her perception of the words "servant" and "leader" and not on Greenleaf's own interpretations of these words. Greenleaf's interpretations return the words to their original and imperative communal meanings (serving and leading others through healthy self-sacrifice by sacrificing ego, power, and ambition for the good of the community, especially the community's children, elders, and most marginalized peoples) affirming the value of the words *servant* and *leader* across gender, culture, time, and context. Reynolds analyzed Spears's (2002) 10 characteristics to examine servant-leadership constructs in terms of gender. She argued that six of the 10 characteristics distinguish servant-leadership from other forms of leadership, whereas the other four characteristics are more in line with traditional notions of leadership (Reynolds, 2014). These six distinguishing characteristics are stewardship, listening, empathizing, healing, commitment to the growth of people, and building community; the other four are foresight, conceptualization, awareness, and persuasion. Reynolds asserted that foresight, conceptualization, awareness, and persuasion can be characterized as leader behaviors, and are often associated with the more traditionally masculine aspect of leadership. The six distinguishing characteristics of servant-leadership, on the other hand, are predominantly needs-



focused and other-oriented, and thus, for Reynolds, comprise the feminine-attributed aspects of leadership.

Eicher-Catt (2005) claimed, from her particular feminist perspective, that the apposition of *servant* with *leader*, associated with subjugation and domination, respectively, instantiates a paradoxical discourse game that perpetuates male-centric patriarchal norms rather than neutralizing gender bias. Reynolds (2014) agreed that Eicher-Catt's (2005) critique reveals otherwise obscure discursive and behavioral meanings and hidden cultural assumptions that sometimes lie at the core of the words "servant" and "leader." However, Reynolds (2014) exposed how Eicher-Catt lacked the will to go deeply into Greenleaf's original texts in order to find the more central discursive and deconstructive reality that is ascribed to Greenleaf's sense of "making things whole" across gender, culture, and context. Reynolds (2014) argued that the combination of servant facets and leader facets of servant-leadership does not automatically confirm the negatives Eicher-Catt associated with gendered notions but, on the contrary, provides a model of ethical and gender equity-enhancing leadership: "Servant-leadership espouses a nonhierarchical, participative approach to defining organizational objectives and ethics that recognizes and values the subjectivity and situatedness of organizational members" (p. 57). Servant-leadership can serve as "a driving force for generating discourse on gender-integrative approaches to organizational leadership" (p. 51).

Reynolds (2014) proposed that the paradoxical linguistic term *servant-leader* is not a disguise for male-centric norms, as Eicher-Catt (2005) claimed, but a complementary and harmonious dualism. My colleague and Associate Editor of *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership*, Dr. Jiying Song wrote:



This dualism resonates with the concepts of *yin* and *yang*, which represent female and male, respectively, in ancient Chinese literature.

As for *yin* and *yang*, they are the Way of heaven and earth, the fundamental principles [governing] the myriad beings, father and mother to all changes and transformations, the basis and beginning of generating life and killing, the palace of spirit brilliance. (Unschuld, Tessenow, & Zheng, 2011, p. 95)

Lao Tzu (2005) said, “All the myriad things carry the Yin on their backs and hold the Yang in their embrace, deriving their vital harmony from the proper blending of the two vital Breaths” (p. 49). *Yin* and *yang* cannot exist without each other. They are a contradictory yet complementary unit. Women were degraded in ancient China based on the ascendancy of patriarchy, the focus on the contradictory aspect of *yin* and *yang*, and the elevation of *yang* (Bao, 1987). The same kind of degradation still exists in the leadership field today. Having stressed the equally and mutually complementary character of *yin-yang*, some scholars paved the way for the women’s egalitarian movement in nineteenth-century China (Bao, 1987). Likewise, this is what Reynolds (2013, 2014) and many other servant-leadership scholars are doing—elevating complementary aspects of gender without neglecting the contradictory aspects. Carrying *yin* and holding *yang* in intimate embrace, leaders learn to forgive more readily and more deeply, and help others gain the vital harmony so often missing in today’s families, organizations, and nations.

Through a discussion of the complementary character of *yin-yang* and servant-leader elements, without ignoring the contradictory aspects, leaders may establish harmony and



gender-integrative models wherever they serve. Although the results of Reynolds' (2013) study indicated that gender stereotyping continues to affect conceptualizations of leadership, her study also provided evidence of servant-leaders crossing gender boundaries and integrating gendered traits and behaviors. As Reynolds (2014) noted, by integrating the female perspective with a male perspective, a paradigm shift in leadership theory (through avenues inherent to servant-leadership) has the capacity to move organizations from hierarchy-driven, rules-based, and authoritative models to value-driven, follower-oriented, and participative models with gender balance. (Song & Ferch, 2020, pp. xxii-xxiii)

This brings me, in these postmodern days, to the good involved in multiple views, and to the Jesuit and Quaker notions, identifiably feminist, of the need for persuasion rather than coercion, listening rather than over-talking, and the timeless truth that among many good possibilities the mature person seeks ultimate good for others. We affirm Jung's (1959) typology as well as the current complexities that exist in human relations by noticing that each of us have both feminine and masculine within us and the extent to which we hide or subdue either of these, we harm ourselves and others.

Jung conceived of the feminine as the eros, but not the blown-out glammed and glitized porn culture of American media and Westernized masculine agendas. Neither is it the critical, enraged, contempt-focused feminine at odds with the masculine. Rather, he conceptualized the eros as the womblike existence that gives peace, the life-giving sacrificial essence willing to undergo great suffering in order to preserve more authentic life, the wild mystery at odds with all who might try to come against the child, the family, the collective, or the future. For me, Mochis comes to mind, the



Cheyenne woman warrior whose ferocity is legendary. After the Sand Creek Massacre in the late 1800s in which US Cavalry slaughtered the Cheyenne, Mochis took up the axe and fought as a warrior and killed many for eleven years until she was captured and shipped by train to Florida where she was incarcerated by the United States Army as a Prisoner of War. My mother comes to mind, with her bravery and her heart of forgiveness, and my wife with her radiance, power, and wisdom. Not to mention my Czech grandmother. In our family, we call her the Great One. Each of these, in their own way, reflect bell hooks (2001) liberatory ethic founded in critical race theory and Judith Butler's (2006) restorative wisdom founded in critical feminism aimed at overthrowing prejudicial supremacist patriarchal regimes. What rises from this overthrow, through revolutionary love and leadership, is a communal existence closer to dialogue than monologue, closer to care than apathy or alienation, and closer to peace than war.

It is increasingly more clear now how often the masculine seeks to subdue and overtake the feminine. The masculine is infatuated with a pseudo-eros, an eros he himself has pumped up to proportions that amount to oblivion. That brand of masculine cannot face its own feminine, for to do so would shatter him and he would then have to integrate the feminine, honor the feminine and truly love the feminine in order to be healed and made whole. In like fashion the feminine has often usurped the masculine, setting itself against the masculine through bitter alienation or outright hatred, a form of condemnation that amounts to giving the masculine pariah status, often naming the masculine as meaningless or absurd not only in the core of relationships, but also at national and international levels. That form of feminine cannot face its own masculine, for to do so would be too shattering and would then require the feminine to integrate the masculine, to take him in with care and enduring



affection as well as legitimate healing-oriented power, to truly love in order to be healed and made whole. In my experience working with women and men as a systems psychologist, we carry mutual desolation in our hands. Women and men are made of bone and blood, heart and spirit. I believe understanding and love are required if we are to embrace and heal the feminine and the masculine inside ourselves and in our relationships with others.

Modern day prophets such as bell hooks (2001) and Judith Butler (2006) see far into the mystery, depicting men who are often disintegrated, void, violent, and at odds with the feminine and in effect, at odds with themselves. Some of these men, including many men I know, desire to move and change and become capable of giving and receiving love. In symbiotic conflict with the harsh masculine, many women live silenced or enraged, embittered, and integrally ill at ease with the masculine. Some of these women also desire an unfolding that results in unity over fragmentation. But to become humble often requires being humbled. I know such women and men, whose shadows extend and do harm, and who are sometimes blessed to come into what bell hooks (2001) calls “redemptive love,” and who have wept at the beauty that exists when they let themselves be broken and let themselves emerge from that long darkness into something new.

I hope to be with them when the dawn comes.

In my own life the humility to surrender or submit to the redemptive love hooks refers too has often been elusive, and pride too present. I am reminded of how silent and songlike, how contemplative and prayerful the writing life is. “You must grasp life in its depths,” Van Gogh said. In response, the poet crafts poems, the novelist novels, and the short story writer stories that show love and respect for the grand, ominous landscapes of humanity and the



world. The result is rigorous honesty with regard to the shadow and light in women and men, in families of all forms, profoundly diverse in the interior life and the life of the collective. There has long been a philosophy that says the landscape, and people, grind you up and spit you out, so watch out or your head might get taken off. The mountains kill you. The animals kill you. Your family kills you. Life kills you.

This feels too absolute, too darkly nihilistic to me.

In the work of bell hooks I'm reminded the artist who serves humanity serves life.

The artist who serves life, serves love.

In the wake of authentic love, there is a deeply-felt sense of dignity. Internationally, I find this dignity often attends a holistic conception of the Divine. Cornel West (2014) spoke of W.E.B. Du Bois's (*The Souls of Black Folk*, *The Talented Tenth*, etc.) spirituality saying Du Bois was "more of a prophet than most Christians or religious Jews or religious Buddhists and so on, because . . . he was able to sustain himself spiritually without the apparatus of tradition" (p. 59). West noted with great respect how Du Boise didn't succumb to the reductionistic (and in fact, masculinist) bias of scientific positivism and the kind of narrow Darwinism plagued by "the more sophomoric atheists like . . . Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, and others who reduce the rich Darwin to narrow scientism. Darwin is the brook of fire through which we all must pass" (p. 99). West's uniquely revolutionary Christianity, underlined by healthy anti-imperialist Marxism, given in everyday life through loving acts of service and the willingness to die for the wretched of the earth, calls on Western powers, especially America, to overthrow the militarism, materialism, racism and poverty imperialism produces, which has always bred greater patriarchy, sexism, classism, homophobia, and xenophobia. In West's sisterhood with bell hooks, I find a genuine



sense of heartfelt welcome, identification with the love, justice, and truth embodied by Christ in the real world, and transmitted by the soul of Christ in historical and present-day Christianity. This Christianity fights for the freedom of others through truth, justice, and love, including the will to die for friends and strangers, and in the words of poet Nazim Hikmet, even those you know nothing of. This Christ, of which Cornel West, James Cone (*The Cross and the Lynching Tree*) and bell hooks speak, is not bound by undue optimism or facile understandings of grace, but sees clearly into the dark oblivion at the core of humanity, the Beckett-drawn existential emptiness of our collective evil, and stands courageously against it even to the point of death. Being a Christian, like West (2014), I find it “true that my atheistic brothers and sisters do not accept conceptions of God linked to love and justice as I do. But atheistic movement can be one of the carriers of prophetic tradition” (pp. 125-126). A community mosaic colored by love, truth, justice, beauty, and goodness, the transcendentals of which the Jesuits (or “little Christs”) speak across time, space, and belief (or anti-belief, which is another kind of belief), be it religious or otherwise, is the community to which I want to give myself in loving devotion.

Yes, we are harmed. Yes, we die. We all know these truths. Yet death can be met with love, and trauma with gravity, even grandeur: this we often overlook. Just as life can be embraced with healthy abandon, and togetherness with wisdom. I’ve been embedded in the mountains and rivers and skies of Montana, showing me there exists not merely the reality of my vain or vapor-like existence, but also the reality of an enduring sense of generosity, perhaps eternal, and with it, an abiding intimacy, despite and even within the presence of evil, decadence, decay and death. The bell hooks led poet does not ignore or forego or turn a blind eye to the presence of human evil, but



rather, reaches for light in the presence of evil.

To find light in the presence of evil involves foresight.

In great literature, foresight is ever present.

In poor literature, just as in unhealthy individuals and families, I find foresight lacking or nonexistent. In healthy art, as in healthy people, the wilderness of the human heart beckons us toward love. I think of foresight differently as a psychologist than I would if I was trained in another field. When a psychologist lacks foresight the costs are high. People may descend into suicide, or ramp toward homicide. Outside of troubling mental health deficits, even in “normal” people a lack of foresight is a symbol of relational disorder. Though painful to face, when we lack foresight, life holds us responsible. For dominant culture, consequence is a difficult concept, specifically in present day America where it is so easy to be irresponsible across the spectrum: in the family or at work, and on a larger scale in the way America engages with the marginalized and with other countries. Being that America, like all nations, contains manifold complexities, when we lack foresight collectively the results are ruinous. There is a need to hone our capacity for foresight, so when I think about it from a psychological perspective, I think, how can we train ourselves toward greater foresight?

And when I think of art, I ask how can we hone foresight in our artistic leanings?

Examples from the Gottman Institute’s research (J. M. Gottman, 1995, 1999; J. M. Gottman & DeClaire, 2002; J. S. Gottman, 2004) on relationships provide greater clarity. Their work shows a level of foresight never before realized in social science. In three to five minutes a Gottman-trained therapist can predict at a 95% rate how likely a couple is to fracture or descend further into negative sentiment override, a level of negative feeling and experience in which the relationship is plagued by impending dissolution rather



than essential unification (J. M. Gottman, 1995, 1999; J. S. Gottman, 2004). The institute's founder, John Gottman, and his wife Julie, also discovered that 80% of men who divorce all share one character quality, and that 80% of women who divorce share a different but mutually reinforcing character quality (J. M. Gottman, 1995, 1999; J. S. Gottman, 2004).

So what is it?

According to the Gottmans' research, 80% of men who divorce refuse to receive the influence of the feminine, and 80% of women who divorce have contempt for the masculine (J. M. Gottman, 1995, 1999; J. S. Gottman, 2004).

Such an imploding dynamic in human relations then becomes pure foresight when it is turned toward health: women who relate well affirm and love the masculine; and men who relate well receive the influence of the feminine and love the feminine. The whole person who relates well listens to and loves both the feminine and the masculine. In light of this, some suffering, generationally-bound, is unavoidable, while other suffering when met with foresight becomes predictable and can be turned away from.

Lest we become too binary or too set on defining women and men it's good to be reminded the amount of feminine or masculine in each person chromosomally is a mystery, a uniquely conceived blend in every individual. Again, the Gottmans' research (J. M. Gottman, 1995, 1999; J. S. Gottman, 2004) is tied to a systemic way of looking at the world, and has proven to be of significance across age, gender, and sexual orientation; if I am this type of person I'm generally going to attract that type of person. If I don't receive the influence of others, I attract contempt and evoke relational dissolution. If I am full of contempt, I attract people who are defensive, who put up a wall in their interactions with me, and who often refuse to receive my



influence. Again, I evoke dissolution. The same principles are reflected in organizational life, national policy, and global interactions. If I'm cynical I tend to attract opposition. If I'm depressed or angry at the world, anxious, or difficult to relate to, I tend to attract an equal but opposing desultory force. Similarly, the person who is humble or graced with common sense and self-responsibility, tends to attract healthiness in others. In other words, we attract to ourselves the same level of maturity we have attained. In psychological understanding, this is the disturbing fundamental foresight that you join with or marry an equal level of dysfunction as yourself.

In like fashion, art that embodies despair, showing contempt for light, gives despair to the world. Such art lacks foresight not because it speaks death but because it silences, effaces, or erases life. In this sense, great literature counters the homicidal and suicidal tendencies of humanity, with deeper humanity. Be it through comedy or tragedy, through descent or transcendence, or both, great art endures because it is fully human without reducing life's inherent mystery.

Many of the more curative psychological truths fall under the wing of foresight. We all understand some of these, such as: the only person in the world you can change is yourself. But there are also unwritten truths not as readily discovered that prove helpful not just in life but in discerning the processes involved in creativity. For example, a primary finding of systems psychology states: when you change yourself, others around you have to change. An interesting axiom, and a potent one. So, for example, if in my relationships with others I get more defensive or more fortified or more rigid or more severe in the coming months, it's generally predictable how people will respond to me: they will probably say something like, "What's going on?"; "I don't like this very much."; or "I wish he wasn't so difficult to be with." The outlay is also generally predictable. I'm going to make people irritated and, eventually, different types of



responses beyond irritation will come my way, like anger, frustration, and attacks on my character. Certain results follow when I become less mature, less fully human.

I believe much of current literary art, by cascading into or becoming overfocused on less responsible expressions, contains less moral gravitas, and therefore less humanity. In other words, as a person and as an artist, I can't give what I don't have. If I don't have much love in my heart, I don't have much love to give, and my art will lack the depths associated with love. In contemporary literature, where ancient tragedy is the overlord of ancient comedy, readers experience a poverty of love. Yet in great art, love rises through tragedy, attends to the voicelessness and desperation of which tragedy speaks, and still sings.

On the other hand, if a person changes in order to become more whole, the result is not generally what we think. It doesn't mean life suddenly tips over into healthy relationships. Why? Because all change must be tested. Our very biology tests change and requires homeostasis, challenging whether we are really going to change or not. Changing to a more full way of life or more fully developed moral character will receive resistance from others, because integrity requires endurance. Integrity is the difference between what is called first-order and second-order change. In first-order change, the system changes for a bit and then pops back to the same shape it was in before, maintaining its original homeostasis; in second-order change, the system changes for the long-term, others affirm the changes, and the changes eventually become aligned toward relational health as the system accomplishes a new more holistic homeostasis.

Greenleaf (1977/2002) had a wonderful grasp of foresight and the robust futures associated with foresight. He believed not only are people responsible to have foresight, they are individually



responsible to create collective responsibility for foresight so that families, communities, and nations can experience greater health, wisdom, freedom, and autonomy, and the least privileged of society are benefitted or at least not further deprived. In a larger sense the question is daunting: Will we gather the foresight we need to meaningfully address the current state of the globe, the volatile ways we relate to each other, our apathy and our lack of individual and collective well-being?

In art, as in life, our lives depend on the answer.

How did the Gottmans come to understand foresight? How did they become capable of predicting such significant relational fulcrums? First, they discovered that we either bind each other in mutual dysfunction or free each other into greater health. Then they began to break the mutual dysfunction or function down to its component parts, to the level of behaviors, words, voice tone, facial expression, patterns of action, patterns of inaction, resistances, energies, attitudes, motivations ... the myriad ways people relate to each other. They analyzed the thoughts that drive our words, the motives that shape our facial expressions signifying the interior engine behind our thoughts (J. M. Gottman, 1995, 1999; J. M. Gottman & DeClaire, 2002; J. S. Gottman, 2004). The Gottmans helped open the door to consciousness, to the ways we love or lack love, both subtle and direct.

For the artist, such knowledge is akin to grace.

A fortified, defended, protected, critical, fearful, angry, troubled self inevitably attracts a similarly troubled person. And a self of contentment, peace, discipline, responsibility, community, forgiveness, change, and love attracts like qualities in others. When we gain momentum toward greater wholeness, eventually critical mass is reached and the system surrenders to authentic change: the community, then, has drawn itself into a deeper expression of life.



Foresight, a distilled form of personal and collective awareness, leads us to the imaginative capacity to surrender to a deeper sense of our shared humanity.

So how did the Gottmans make such foolproof predictions about the ascent or decline of love? They realized that foresight has much to do with a person's facial expressions—they started to see certain critical elements in people's faces, like what drove them to become flooded, reactive, and conflictual rather than clear-minded, emotionally discerning or at peace. People's faces showed their reactive emotions and specific facial expressions became predictors, also revealed in the tone and general wording of the spoken voice and the thoughts driving that voice. How did the Gottmans train to achieve such foresight? John Gottman went to France and studied for two years under the world's foremost facial expression expert (J. M. Gottman, 1999).

His journey to France awakens me as an artist and makes me think, who would we study under regarding artistic foresight? Whose narratives can we find to mentor us in the symmetry of love and power? Shadow and light? Good and evil? I ask myself, how might I surrender to the study of life through the tragedy and uplift great artists carry in their hands? Can I listen fervently enough?

The gap between conceiving of and bringing something to fullness is wide when we consider the light speed pace of everyday society. Contemplative stability is needed. Quiet wisdom. Sable brilliance is powerful, and somehow aligned with or embedded in the illumination that comes up through darkness, like the light of a candle, or a forest fire at night. Avoiding or denying the reality of either darkness and or light makes art opaque and weakly envisioned.

In opening our eyes, in facing others with dignity, we see shadow and light.



Deeply-conceived, fiercely-imagined literary art embraces the tension between shadow and light, ingesting it and not running from it. Not fleeing, blocking, ignoring or denying the tension, but seeking to create weighty resolutions that build to a culminating and unifying force.

We know from personal and communal experience, and from scientific study, it takes a long time to change personal character. According to family systems research, it takes a generational family system about fifteen years to move from a living death to fully expressed life together. As a systems psychologist, that's why transitional figures in the generations are so important. Instead of alcoholism, alcoholism, alcoholism, when we find one person who pursues the emotional well-being required not just for sobriety but for depth of life, that person has the capacity to change the generational structure into the future. In organizations and nations, instead of over-ambition, over-dominance, or overuse of power down through the generations, we need a transitional generation: critical density and critical mass, a tipping point into a new and better way of being, where authentic love and authentic power are hand in hand. The previously mentioned Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, People Power 1 and 2 in the Philippines, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, the reconciliation ceremonies of the Nez Perce at the site of the Big Hole Massacre, and the Cheyenne at the site of the Sand Creek Massacre, as well as the American Civil Rights Movement are examples of a transitional generation reaching critical mass and changing the world.

Similarly, a transitional generation, capable of great foresight, is needed in American literary art. Narrative too weighted toward nihilism lacks love and therefore lacks power, and narrative too weighted toward sentiment lacks power and therefore lacks love. The



literary artists who balance love and power today call us back from dissolution and loneliness and lead us to new wellsprings of human connection. From them we receive value and intimacy, and in their presence we are renewed.

In the art of the poem, the short story, and the novel, the gap in American discernment regarding intimacy shows itself in the violence of men toward women, toward other men, and toward themselves. This is the shadow of which bell hooks and Paulo Freire (1990) speak, the age-old patriarchal house of dominance and victimhood in which we all reside regardless of gender, race, or creed. The loss of our mothers and fathers has left us wounded and hungry to enact either violence or apathy against ourselves and others. Men in America forfeit their sense of the feminine and so their masculinity is either over-expressed or under-expressed in response to this society-wide epidemic. A blotting out of the feminine results in the fear of intimacy, and the inability to address the spiritual side of life. The art that hails from a deformed sense of masculinity further divides women and men. Over-expressed masculinity symbolizes the death of the feminine and prevents men and women from coming together on mutually inviting, mutually loving, and mutually powerful terms. When a man loses or cuts off his sense of the feminine it is as if he has experienced the early death of his mother, a death from which all men find it very difficult to recover.

Similarly, a woman who has a truncated sense of the masculine lives as if she has experienced the premature death of her father, a loss that resounds throughout the lifespan. So the grief we bear is the grief of severe loss. Such death is not only untimely, but psychically excruciating. Women in America forfeit their sense of the masculine and so their feminine ethos is either over-expressed or under-



expressed. Hatred for the masculine also results in the fear of intimacy and the erasure of access to a more sacred or divine unity.

Understanding that personal and biological gender expression, sexual expression, and sexual orientation are natural, complex, and beautiful, the void between the feminine and the masculine (multitudinously defined, as the feminine/masculine dynamic should be) in American art signals the death of the beloved across all gender and sexual dimensions, and it is precisely this alienation between the feminine and the masculine that carries pervasive hopelessness in its wake.

Great art, on the other hand, transforms us.

A unified feminine/masculine dynamic leads people and nations into greater foresight. This embrace, the feminine for the masculine and the masculine for the feminine, is rarely seen in contemporary American literary art, and speaks to a disintegration at the core of nations. Movements in modernism and early postmodernism, and the styles of fortification men and women crowd themselves with have prevented people and nations from knowing how to love both womanhood and manhood. Contemporary literature overflows with characters characterized by moral malaise, sexual ego, sexual cutoff, or sexual degradation, emotional ego, cutoff, or degradation, grim thinking, crass consciousness and dismal representations of relationship in which discernment (or foresight) and relational intimacy are denied or deemed a fraud. In this sense, art must attend to or pass through the existential emptiness that inheres in the present age. How a writer chooses to navigate this passage reveals the writer's vision of humanity.

The notion of an abiding intimacy, championed by bell hooks (2001), Viktor Frankl (1997) and many others, suggests something I find to be much more believable than the cynicism, nihilism, and facile atheism that characterizes much of contemporary Western literature. How much faith does it take to believe life conspires



against you and annihilation is existence? I think it takes a great deal more faith to convince myself harm and ill will are the only reality than it does to open my eyes to the inviolability of life, the virtue of others, and authentic love. The experience of love, like the experience of a smile, achieves almost immediate affirmation of the existence of a transcendent essence in the world.

In the shadow of the Holocaust, Frankl (1997) had the gall to say this: “The salvation of [humanity] is through love and in love. I understood how a [person] who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of [the] beloved” (p. 85). Frankl also echoed the basic intimacy of our biology when he said:

Consider the eye. The eye, too, is self-transcendent in a way. The moment it perceives something of itself, its function—to perceive the surrounding world visually—has deteriorated. If it is afflicted with a cataract, it may ‘perceive’ its own cataract as a cloud; and if it is suffering from glaucoma, it might ‘see’ its own glaucoma as a rainbow halo around lights. Normally, however, the eye doesn’t see anything of itself.

To be human is to strive for something outside of oneself. I use the term “self-transcendence” to describe this quality behind the will to meaning, the grasping for something or someone outside oneself. Like the eye, we are made to turn outward toward another human being to whom we can love and give ourselves.

Only in such a way do people demonstrate themselves to be truly human.

Only when in service of another does a person truly know his or her humanity. (p. 85)



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