

## *Gender2*

### Gender work's second generation – sensitivity to female *and* male culture

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Why *Gender2*? We have had Gender1, the first generation of gender work in corporations and society, for some forty years now. Gender1 is women centered - it is sensitive to female culture, and it has made a positive difference for countless women. However, it can lack sensitivity to male culture. Some aspects of Gender1 can be in reaction to male culture which may be seen as ‘in need of fixing’. Given that we are still very much in the midst of Gender1, this claim needs some explanation.

Consider an analogy. In the early twentieth century, Canada embraced the idea of residential schools for Aboriginal Canadians. There is little doubt that this was done with the best of intentions and a lot of careful thought, yet we have recognized today that it was a partial solution at best, and did significant damage to aboriginal culture. Why was this not noticed at the time?

The answer is that it was noticed, but was disregarded. The damage done to aboriginal families was thought to be necessary for their improvement, to help them become educated and productive. The good people pushing these programs were sensitive to their own European culture, but in reaction to Aboriginal culture which they saw as needing fixing. They were insensitive to the value of Aboriginal ways, because of an implicit assumption that the ‘European’ way of life was superior.

These attitudes expressed themselves through the feelings of the individuals involved. The bureaucrats who forcibly separated Aboriginal children from their parents may not have enjoyed that part of their job very much, but they did it because they knew it was necessary. And they knew that it was necessary primarily because the idea of educating Native children *felt* right, it felt important, noble and good.

We are all like this, products of our contemporary culture such that, for the most part, the values held by our society feel right to us, and many of us are willing to dedicate our lives to advancing them. Gender1 is a coherent, self-consistent set of ideas that feel right in our contemporary society, a society which remains chivalrously sensitive to women's lives and culture. Gender1 is women-centered in that it addresses the felt needs of women, from an implicit assumption that these needs are the main gender issues, the important ones. The lack of programs focused on men is dismissed with the belief that men don't need any: they have the power and the privilege. This insensitivity to men's real lives means that men's issues don't show up on the Gender1 radar screen.

Men's issues, like those of Aboriginal Canadians, can be deduced from the shape of their lives. Both groups (men and aboriginals) are hugely over-represented in incarceration rates, interpersonal violence rates, suicide rates, and rates of alcohol and drug addiction – all signs of major cultural stress. And both groups have significantly lower longevity. Part of the historic male culture is to not complain (“real men solve problems, whiners and losers complain”); therefore we have to look below the surface to recognize the effects of gender inequity on men.



*Gender2* is an initiative which takes as its founding assumption that men and women are equal, and that both genders have major issues of significant consequence which deserve to be addressed. Because achieving balanced sensitivity to men and women is achieved through a change in attitude, i.e., in one's feelings, *Gender2* workshops emphasize experiential processes which work at deeper levels than knowledge and intellect, processes which focus on testing and reframing knowledge and beliefs.

The *Beyond Pink* and *Blue* workshop by Maureen Geddes and David Shackleton at the Federated Press **3rd Annual Women & Leadership Summit** offers a brief sample or taste of a *Gender2* workshop process. A condensed version of the longer 1 ½ to 2 day workshop developed for corporate clients, it features guided experiential processing as a means of moving beyond compliance or understanding toward alignment. These words, too, need explanation.

When an organization is interested in encouraging certain behaviours (e.g., gender equality), there are three ways to engage people with the strategy, which are listed here in order of desirability.

1. Compliance
2. Understanding
3. Alignment

Compliance is when a person doesn't necessarily understand or agree with a requirement, but recognizes that it is in their interest to go along with it. The requirement may be seen as unfair, there may be resentment, but it is observed because the individual feels that the risk involved in speaking their concerns or to opposing it overtly is too great.

Understanding is when a person can see intellectually the reasons for a requirement, without necessarily feeling any sense of rightness to the behaviour that is called for. The desired behaviour is then engaged in voluntarily, but from memory rather than from natural inclination. What a person says or does from this intellectual space is behaviour we often call 'politically correct'.

Alignment is when a person's thoughts and feelings both lead towards the desired behaviour, so that the behaviour occurs naturally, without effort or artificiality.

For the most part, Gender1 approaches to gender issues have achieved compliance and understanding, but rarely alignment. The reason for this is that Gender1 approaches were driven by a partial or abbreviated power analysis, in which only one half of the gendered power relationship was acknowledged and explored, i.e., the ways that men are powerful and women are powerless. With significant aspects of the problem left out of the analysis, alignment was rarely achieved. Men, who knew at a gut level that their lives were not filled with power and privilege, were often left with feelings that their issues were being ignored and invalidated. For example, when men and women

argue, research shows that men's apparent calmness is an act, and that they are actually much more physiologically disturbed by the woman's anger than is the woman who may appear more visibly upset. For women, with so much emphasis on their powerlessness and little on their authentic personal and traditional power, many had difficulty feeling their power and continued to experience themselves as victims. For example, some women do not naturally ask for promotions they desire, which can be interpreted as lack of ambition. When coupled with women's social conditioning emphasizing equality with their peers over self-promotion, it can lead to women perceiving gender discrimination when in fact it may be behavioural differences that are being incorrectly interpreted.

Successful, effective leadership is a product of personal integration, in short, of alignment. A person in alignment is a person with an abiding passion for their life, a person who deals with real and objective issues, not energy-wasting internal mismatches between thoughts and feelings. Someone in compliance or understanding around gender will often feel that they are walking on eggshells, never quite sure if they are doing the right thing. In contrast, a person whose understanding of gender has aligned with their natural feelings about it will act with confidence and competence, trusting themselves to do the right thing from a sense of empathy with others and understanding of the issues. Such a person is highly effective in an organization: indeed, they are a natural leader. They tend to deal with difficult individuals and situations competently, without taking personal offense, since they can empathize with the other's issues and don't feel threatened by stereotypes and misjudgments.

Gender2 workshop processes actively seek and encourage participants to move towards this kind of alignment and personal integration. Firstly, the gender analysis that informs the workshop is balanced between women and men, and does not create an "us and them" mindset. Secondly, the emotional integration processes assist participants to reframe actual experiences of lack of power or inappropriate use of power from their own lives, especially their work lives, leading to a new and deep awareness of personal power and increased competence in similar situations in the future. Such greater competence is not "learned" in that it is understanding based, but flows naturally out of the integration of thought and feeling that is a consequence of effective experiential process.

### **Benefits of the *Gender2* Experience:**

The *Gender2* workshop inspires a culture of inclusiveness, and enables corporations to hire and retain the most talented people of both genders at all levels of the organization. It reduces unproductive conflict between men and women, eliminates 'political correctness', and enhances honest and effective communication. In a word, it raises consciousness.

From this new level of awareness, corporations can set appropriate measures and examine policies, practices, and procedures to create what is necessary, what is fair, and what is workable for everyone.

David Shackleton and Maureen Geddes, June 2007. To be published July 2007 in *Gender2 Magazine* at [www.gender2.org](http://www.gender2.org) See also [www.gripmagazine.org](http://www.gripmagazine.org)