

How Do Masculine and Feminine Energies Affect Diversity and Inclusion?

Often, D&I issues are exacerbated by separation, particularly physical distance between overrepresented and underrepresented groups. However, when it comes to gender, physical distance between females and males is not a significant barrier. With gender, no absolute majorities exist to tilt acceptance or rejection of gender equality. Still, gender differences are the largest D&I area to address, especially given the number of people impacted. This newsletter is intended to explore this nuanced and polarized topic in a way that encourages meaningful exchange around diversity and inclusion (D&I).

A large aspect of my approach to D&I is based on examining human polarities – elements that oppose each other, but are complimentary when in balance. Without balance, energy cannot properly flow between two poles. Examining the science of a battery, we observe positive and negative poles opposing each other, but working in concert to generate power and energy flow. In nature, night & day and winter & summer are examples of polarities. In human beings, the poles of female and male not only produce life, but also generate power and vitality.

When we examine polarities, we see countless possibilities along the continuum and between opposing poles. This necessitates “both/and” versus “either/or” thinking and recognizes a kaleidoscope of variations and differences. Because the two poles can be defined does not imply a binary representation of females and males. Feminine and masculine are only useful for describing states of being rather than describing a particular man or woman. To say a woman does not have masculine energy or a man does not have feminine energy suggests a simple duality, which ignores the whole person. Both women and men have varying degrees of masculine and feminine energy. Accordingly, feminine and masculine polarities can only glimpse commonalities, not define the essence of a person.

Females and males are quite similar as a species, but a number of differences exist as well. Many of the differences are observable in human physiology and hormonal functions. A body of research also suggests differences in neural wiring between males and females. As collectives, women and men can bring different energies and perspectives to situations. If we grouped 100 women to the left side of a room and 100 men to the right, it is likely we would observe more feminine energy on the left side and more masculine energy on the right. However, if we randomly selected one woman and man from each side, the selected woman could embody more masculine energy than the selected man. To add some complexity, the woman could possess more masculine energy in some areas than their male counterpart, and the man could possess more feminine energy in some areas than their female counterpart.

One relevant question becomes, “If women make up half the population, and both feminine and masculine energies are needed to generate life’s flow, why does our world seem to embolden masculine energies?”

To contemplate this question requires us to examine and contrast polarities with feminine and masculine counterparts (i.e., preponderance of one pole found in groups of women, and preponderance of an opposing pole found in groups of men). Some elements are more closely associated with feminine nature while opposing elements are more closely associated with masculine nature. Some polarities are merely rooted in social constructs, but others are rooted in biological and psychological differences between men and women. I have selected four to examine:

- Soft and Hard
- Yielding and Asserting
- Feeling and Desire
- Mercy and Justice

Soft and Hard

Soft (or fluid) energy surrounds and envelops other energy while hard (or solid) energy displaces other energy. In nature, water and wind are examples of soft energies and metal is an example of hard energy. While water and wind are soft, they can be forces of nature that overcome anything in their path. Floods and hurricanes display the powerful force of water and wind. While metal is hard and can displace softer elements, it is inflexible and can be uprooted by softer, more flexible elements that flow with force.

In humans, an imbalance of hard energy over soft energy can be overbearing, and an imbalance of soft energy over hard energy can be smothering.

Yielding and Asserting

Yielding energy lets other energies into its space and maintains its roots, while assertive energy enters and establishes itself inside the space of other energies and maintains its roots. In nature, a reed is an example of yielding energy and a stone is an example of assertive energy. While a reed is yielding, it can root itself and grow in a variety of challenging conditions. A stone asserts itself by making other elements move around it, but over time, can be worn down or fractured by elements it displaced (e.g., water and wind).

In humans, an imbalance of assertive energy over yielding energy can be aggressive, and an imbalance of yielding energy over assertive energy can be passive.

Feeling and Desire

Feeling and desire are human characteristics. Feeling energy is sensitive and reflective, while desire energy is action-oriented and purposeful. If a person tips greatly toward feeling over desire, they are likely to know how they feel about something, but are unsure what they want to do about it. If a person tips greatly toward desire over feeling, they are likely to know what they want to do with something, but are unsure how they feel about it.

In humans, an imbalance of feeling energy over desire energy can be indecisive, and an imbalance of desire energy over feeling energy can be relentless.

Mercy and Justice

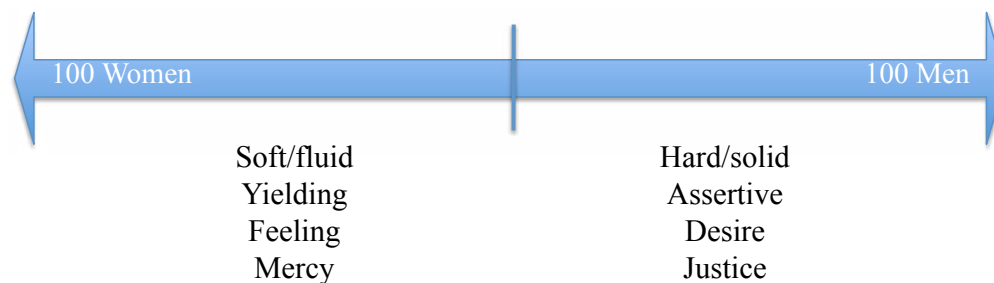
Similar to feeling and desire, mercy and justice are human characteristics. Mercy energy is compassionate and forgiving, while justice energy is fair and impartial. When mercy is applied to those who make mistakes by hurting others or breaking societal rules, they are given opportunities to redeem themselves if they express remorse. When justice is applied to those who make mistakes, they are held accountable for their actions and face appropriate consequences.

In humans, an imbalance of mercy energy without justice energy can be lenient, and an imbalance of justice energy without mercy energy can be harsh.

When balance is maintained within each of these polarities, the best of human nature emerges. It does not require a man and a woman to balance these polarities, simply a human being who acknowledges and values the need for balance. Balance between polarities cannot be attributed to gender, but it is just as important to recognize balance is stifled when one gender dominates, or attempts to dominate the other.

Masculine energy is no more powerful than feminine energy, and vice versa. However, history has shown masculine energy to be more forceful. Unfortunately, societies, and especially men in societies, perpetuate the use of force by equating force with power. Scientists and anthropologists have theories on why masculine energy is more forceful than feminine energy, and a number of the theories are based on human evolution. In today's world, these theories have less and less relevance. Regrettably, men still use physical and psychological force to suppress and dominate others, particularly the opposite sex. This has kept masculine and feminine polarities imbalanced in many societies around the globe.

If we look at the polar elements I selected, and ponder where they are more prevalent between the male and female sexes, the following diagram shows how they would likely appear on the continuum:



To reiterate earlier thoughts, this diagram is based on the likelihood of finding more of one element when women are congregated (e.g., caring) and more of an opposing element when men are congregated (e.g., stoic). This does not preclude the fact some women will embody more elements deemed masculine than their gender counterpart, or some men will embody more elements deemed feminine than their gender counterpart. Looking along the continuum, such variation is normal and expected. The real goal of examining opposing poles is to identify healthy and unhealthy balances – within our societies, and within ourselves. Wholeness cannot happen when the energies of one polarize or dominate the other.

In too many societies, the expediency of hardness and assertiveness is valued over softness and yielding. In such societies, hardness is often rewarded as strong while softness is punished as weak. When societies are dictated by masculine energy, they tend to be hard and aggressive. They also tend to have limited sensitivity to the ramifications of abuse and violence. When unchecked, this unbalanced energy can escalate and pose threats to humankind. A fitting adage is often attributed to Mark Twain, “If your only tool is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail.” Accordingly, if only masculine perspectives are given credence, they fall short of the full human insight required to cultivate lasting relationships and communities. From a D&I perspective, if we are to fully embrace all members of society and benefit from their contributions, we cannot allow unjust treatment or control of any human beings to persist. Oppression lessens the power of our humanity, especially when it impacts a significant portion of our population.

One question we need to ask, “Why do masculine and feminine imbalances continue to exist in our world?” We could attribute the imbalance to the forcefulness of men, an argument with merit. Throughout history, forcefulness has been used repeatedly to conquer others. However, it does not fully explain why in a democratic country like ours where women represent a significant voting block, men are still overrepresented in political offices. My thought is we have too many members of society who are influenced by their fears and acquiesce to masculine energies to make them feel safe and secure. Whether men or women are serving or running for

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office, the appeal of toughness and might to quell threats often tips the scale toward masculine energy. Sadly enough, in our current political season, we have witnessed tremendous rhetoric aimed at stoking fears that bolster forceful interventions. This is no different than many political seasons past and illustrates the power of fear in our society and countless others. In many ways, it also spotlights the imbalances we are willing to accept to suppress our fears.

My supposition is that our ability to balance masculine and feminine energies requires courage; courage to accept our fears and vulnerabilities and work through them rather than suppress them. The powers of softness, yielding, feeling and mercy have so much to bring to the table. Without the balance of these elements and other more feminine energies that cultivate connections and relationships, fears and threats will continue to grip our societies.

Paradoxically, the power of masculine energy is both real and illusory. For those subjected to the primal force of men, particularly women, this is a tremendous issue to resolve and heal in our communities. For those who believe added force can conquer fears and threats, this is an illusion that often leads to greater conflict in the world.

My hope is that we consider feminine and masculine polarities as we cultivate greater balance and harmony in our societies. The answer is not to replace masculine energy with feminine energy. Rather, we need to have the courage to ensure both energies are at the table with equal voices. For diversity and inclusion to be successful and sustainable, feminine energy is required. In the end, I expect the notion that we can sustain peace and harmony with force to go the way of the dinosaurs.

Should you have questions or comments regarding this newsletter, please contact me. If you find my thoughts intriguing and would like to hear more about my approach and methods, I welcome your inquiries. If you would like someone added to my distribution list or want to unsubscribe for future additions, please reply to my e-mail address.



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Presenter and workshop facilitator:

Robert Colbert has over 30 years of corporate experience. He began his career in public accounting, continued into the private sector, moved into the non-profit sector, and subsequently became a business and diversity consultant. During his career, he has had assignments in audit, finance, corporate development, technical sales, marketing and non-profit operations. His educational credentials include a BA from Minnesota State University, Mankato and an MBA from the University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management. He is also a CPA and holder of a U.S. patent. Robert currently serves on the boards of Cammack Marshall Fund for Children, the Cleveland Neighborhood Association and the finance committee of Youthprise. In addition, he teaches tai chi in the Minneapolis community. His approach to diversity is informed by his tai chi practice and was developed and honed from experiences he and many others faced during their time in the private and non-profit sectors. His basic premise is that human beings struggle with change and variation; challenges that impede our ability to accept and value one another. To build sustainable diversity, our challenge is to find answers to an overlooked question, “How do we compensate for the human condition as it contends with change and variation?”

