

Women are different from men, maybe?

DiPs at The Blue Mugge Mon 14th March 2016, 19.45 – 21.15...

Notes from *BBC IoT & Thinking Allowed, Telegraph, Wikipedia, Keywords & New Left Review...*

1. As ever, we aim not to state the obvious in the *Mugge, Churchill Room* so let's start with more recent arguments around transgender issues. One, or more of us, will define 'transgender' and summarise some recent controversies. We'll then assess this: 'What's the difference between sex and gender? Put simply sex is your anatomy, gender is what's between your ears'.
2. 'What's between our ears' takes us directly to big nature/nurture issues because the way we think and what we think is arguably both physical (our brain genetic inheritance) and cultural (environment and education in all its spheres...).
3. On a human feminine>masculine spectrum are there still qualities, attitudes and emotions that we see as predominantly male or female? In other words, the boys, lads and men behave - are conditioned to behave - differently from the girls and women?

Also, linked to this: Interest and investment in the **human body** have been recently widespread in Western societies... as indicated by the extensive proliferation of terms, including **body language, body image, body management** and **body work**. Western societies have fostered the emergence and commercialization of sites dedicated to **body culture** (gyms, health clubs, spas, health farms, magazines, videos etc...) and of regimes for **body management** and enhancement (diets, exercise and **body-building** programmes etc) and plastic surgery. Much, if not all of this, has gender implications and influences?

4. Words and language used (as with 'transgender') remain crucially important. Take this old example: The word '**hysteria**' was first used by the Greeks during C5th BC, trying to explain an illness which involved breathing difficulties and a sense of suffocation. Most sufferers were recently bereaved widows. The Greek doctors' explanation was a 'wandering womb'. Trauma was in the background. The recommended solution for the widows to re-marry and end the trauma! The C17th British surgeon, Edmund Jordan, referred to a hysterical person feeling, 'the womb rising'. Cf. *King Lear* "I feel the mother rising in me". Freud famously, making the leap from the emotional to the physical, from the mind to the body, treated and wrote about his work with many 'hysterical women'.... ?
5. In the general social and political sphere, we are all feminists now. All of us in the *Mugge* this evening are in favour of women's equality in terms of voting, standing for election, work opportunities and so on... Fine, but the 'glass ceiling' can still operate in some crude and many subtle ways. In any case, there are apparently different ways men and women evaluate political policies. Evidence of gender differences in voting generally: in the USA since 1980 more women have voted Democrat; not so straight forward here in Britain but there are clear differences between men and women in voting patterns: more younger women voted Labour in recent elections, more older women voted Conservative.... Then there's focus group evidence: men talk more in abstract terms (socialism, capitalism); women are more concerned about family and children... Another focus group political attitude survey: 75% women made reference to family; 11% men... Nature/nurture issues again...
6. On the confidence and self-assurance spectrum do men remain generally stronger? In recent times there have been many 'assertiveness training' courses, primarily for women. It's good to be assertive. Is there a case for '*strength-through-diffidence*' courses for some men?
7. Consider recent 'scientific evidence' that women are better than men at 'multi-tasking'.. This going back to hunter-gatherer millenia and therefore deep in our DNA and psyches - men single-mindedly hunting, women nurturing and caring for everything and everyone back at base. Or is this too bio-deterministic? With new men 'house-husbands'; greater sharing of domestic, child-rearing and household management making men just as good at multi-tasking....
8. Anything we have missed? *Religion; Sport...* for future sessions maybe...