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Introduction

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Love vs. self-development

Since the 1950s Americans have gained considerable freedom in their personal lives. Choices that used to be condemned, such as living together without being married, or remaining single or childless, have become acceptable options. Family and gender roles are much more flexible and being free to develop oneself is becoming a goal for both women and men.

The price of greater freedom, according to most scholars, is a weakening of close relationships. Now that many women are leaving their traditional role of caring for others, we seem to be moving towards a "culture of narcissism" in which no one is responsible for love and nurturance. Many observers believe that family relations have been strained to the breaking point by the self-centeredness of recent decades. To strengthen close relationships, they argue, we must stop pursuing self-development and reassert the importance of enduring commitments and obligations.[1]

These observers compare two images of private life: (1) the traditional family, based on restricting individual freedom, especially for women, and (2) the contemporary pattern of limited commitments between independent individuals, each focused on his or her own self-development. They conclude that there is a fundamental conflict between family bonds and self-development, and that we must choose between them.

There is a third alternative that most scholars ignore. A new image of love that combines enduring love with self-development has emerged in popular culture. Many Americans believe that to develop their individual potential, they need a supportive, intimate relationship with their spouse or lover. They see self-development and love as mutually reinforcing, not conflicting, and their view is supported by social and psychoanalytic theories of self-development. In this popular image, love and self-development both grow from the mutual interdependence of two people, not from extreme independence, nor from the one-way dependency of a woman on a man encouraged by traditional marriage.

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My purpose is to examine these three images of heterosexual love: traditional marriage, independence, and interdependence. I will describe how they developed historically, and examine how they are shaping contemporary close relationships. Middle-class marriage is my major focus, but I also consider couples who are living together and working-class marriage.

FEMININE LOVE AND MASCULINE SELF-DEVELOPMENT

The apparent conflict between love and self-development is linked to the polarization of gender roles. Since the nineteenth century the feminine sphere of love and the family has been split off from the masculine sphere of self-assertion and work, as numerous historians have documented.[2] Women were expected to provide affection and care at home and forego autonomous achievement, while men provided money for the family and sought individual success, foregoing close attachments with their children or friends. Through marriage, people could become whole, vicariously realizing in their spouses the qualities that they denied in themselves. The distinction between the emotionally expressive wife and the competent, instrumental husband provided a blueprint for marital love and family behavior. But it implied that if women as well as men pursued self-development, the family would collapse.

Contemporary gender role stereotypes still show this split between feminine love and masculine self-assertion. According to several studies, most Americans distinguish feminine and masculine as follows:[3]

Feminine qualities	*Masculine qualities*
1 Dependent	1 Independent
2 Submissive	2 Dominant
3 Not self-confident	3 Very self-confident
4 Illogical and passive	4 Logical and active
5 Expresses tender feelings	5 Hides emotions
6 Aware of others' feelings	6 Not aware of others' feelings
7 Gentle	7 Aggressive

Gender roles portray women as dependent, loving and incapable of practical action, while men are portrayed as independent and competent, needing no help from others, and incapable of giving emotional support. These beliefs effect our behavior, as well as our expectations of ourselves and others; for example, research indicates that most boys try to hide their tender feelings and are rewarded for doing so.[4] In particular, gender stereotypes reinforce the power of men over women by describing men as naturally dominant, and implying that women need heterosexual love much more than men do.

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Gender roles describe men and women in terms of opposed, mutually exclusive qualities. Insofar as love is identified with the feminine role, and self-development with the masculine role, love and self-development are also seen as opposed.

The dominant definition of love in our culture is feminized. Love is identified with women and with qualities seen as feminine, such as tenderness and expressing feelings. We tend to ignore the practical, material aspects of love such as giving help or sharing activities – qualities associated with masculinity and strength. Identifying love with expressing feelings is biased towards the way women prefer to behave in a love relationship. Women are more skilled and more interested than men in talking about feelings, while men are more interested in giving practical help, as I will show in Chapter 5.

The feminization of love encourages women to focus their lives on love and family, and implies that strong family bonds depend on maintaining traditional gender roles. Since men have difficulty in expressing tender emotions, women must devote themselves to love, otherwise there will be little love for anyone. Researchers have ignored this process, although they have documented the other social forces that lead women and not men to specialize in love, such as encouraging girls to play with dolls and work as babysitters, expecting mothers to be the primary parent, and paying men higher wages than women.[5]

While love has been feminized, our conception of self-development has been masculinized. Becoming a healthy personality typically means developing from a dependent child to an autonomous, independent adult, in psychological theories of personality development. Thus, for Erik Erikson, the individual ideally passes from an initial crisis of "trust versus mistrust" to "autonomy," "initiative," "industry," and "identity." Only with full adulthood does the issue become "intimacy versus isolation." As Carol Gilligan comments, "development itself comes to be identified with separation, and attachments appear to be developmental impediments."[6] Women emphasize attachment in their personal development, Gilligan found. But women are judged by a masculine standard and their close ties to others are interpreted as a sign of being developmentally retarded, overly "field-dependent," or insufficiently individuated. This masculine conception of self-development is one of the social forces that encourages men, and not women, to assert themselves and develop their capacity for independent achievement.

The split between feminine love and masculine self-development persists despite the trend to more flexible gender roles. It is part of our language and our culture. David Bakan, in *The Duality of Human Existence*, points to a basic contrast in Western society between masculine "agency" and feminine "communion":

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> Agency manifests itself in self-protection, self-assertion, and self-expansion; communion manifests itself in the sense of being at one with other organisms. Agency manifests itself in the formation of separations, communion in the lack of separations. Agency manifests itself in isolation, alienation, and aloneness; communion in contact, openness, and union.[7]

Modern thought from our everyday discussions to academic analyses is pervaded by a series of related dualisms: mind vs. body, doing vs. being, reason vs. passion, abstract vs. concrete. Underlying these dualisms is the opposition of masculine freedom to develop oneself vs. feminine attachment to others.[8]

GENDER IN A CONTEMPORARY MARRIAGE

The pervasive effects of split gender roles on marriage can be seen in the experience of Lyn and Tommy Gilmore, a couple in their middle thirties who were intensively interviewed for this book.[9] Lyn Gilmore was a housewife until recently, and her husband is a successful engineer in an aerospace company near their home in a southern California suburb. They have been married for fourteen years and have three daughters, aged 5, 8, and 11.

A few months before the interview, Lyn returned to college, and the year before she took a psychology course on communication and self-assertion, and had several months of psychotherapy. "Right now," says her husband Tommy, "she's expanding and she's trying to move out into a self-sufficient, stand-by-herself type person." He has adapted to these changes by supporting Lyn's return to school and taking on some of the child care and housework.

Despite these changes, they conform to traditional gender roles in many ways. Tommy focuses on individual achievement and independence in all aspects of his life except his marriage. "I enjoy my job very much . . . I enjoy the challenge of it. It's high stress, very demanding, very technical, and it requires a lot of, it demands a lot of me." He seems very involved in his marriage, and the only change he would like in his relation to Lyn, he said, was "I would change it so we have more time together." But this independent man has few other attachments. "I'm a loner, not making many friends, acquaintances, life in the fast lane, that kind of thing. As soon as something is almost done, I lose interest in it and am ready to move on to the next." Lyn, in contrast, has several close friends.

Both Lyn and Tommy define their personalities in sex-stereotyped ways. When Tommy is asked to describe Lyn in one word, he says: "Feeling. She's the most feeling person I ever knew. Sometimes she feels too much for people." Later he adds: "When things don't work, she gets very emotional . . . she can't see or she can't listen to comments from

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outside the thing she's looking at." Lyn describes Tommy as "someone who sees solutions better than I do . . . he sees the overview." But she also believes that his intellectual superiority is a facade covering his sensitive ego, something she has to work around. For example, when the solution to a problem "doesn't come from his mind, and it comes from me," she mentions her idea and then drops it until he brings up the idea as his own.

Gender also determines the division of labor in the family. Tommy provides all the income, while Lyn is responsible for the cooking, child care, and housework. Although Tommy does a lot of the work at home, it is defined as "babysitting" or "helping Lyn," and she is careful to thank him for his efforts.

The division of personality traits and activities by gender is creating conflicts in the family. Lyn complains about Tommy's aggressive treatment of the children: "He's always been one of these people who say 'do what I say or I'm going to slug you' which he never does, but it's always that verbal I'm-going-to-clobber-you stuff. They don't really react to that very well." She also longs for sensitive, emphatic communication with her husband. "I'm working on changing our intimacy level," she comments, but the change is progressing very, very slowly. For Lyn, like many women, intimacy focuses on talking, while for Tommy it focuses on sex.

For the Gilmores love is feminized. It is primarily Lyn's responsibility and her conception of love dominates. The split between the loving, dependent woman and the achieving, independent man structures their marriage. But their relationship is also influenced by a different, more androgynous image of marriage – a marriage that is the joint responsibility of both partners and helps both of them develop themselves.[10]

ANDROGYNOUS LOVE AND SELF: TRENDS AND DEBATES

The trend to more androgynous images of love and self has been visible since the end of the nineteenth century. The separation of the home and the workplace had contradictory effects. At first it polarized gender roles, but in later decades it encouraged a growing interest in self-development that is undermining these roles. During the twentieth century, the glorification of independence and individualism for the masculine role and the public sphere spread to women and the private sphere. Wives increasingly joined the paid labor force, which made them less economically dependent on their husbands, and strengthened their aspirations for self-development.

By the seventies, self-development was a primary value for both men and women, and more androgynous images of love and self were developing. National surveys reported a shift towards more flexible,

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androgynous gender roles, and more concern with private life and expressing feelings. Americans increasingly described a good marriage or love relationships in terms of both partners communicating openly, developing an autonomous self, and working on the relationship.[11] This new ideal of love is more androgynous because the man and woman are equally responsible for the relationship; and they are both openly dependent on the other, and committed to self-development. However, love is still feminized in that emotional and verbal expression are emphasized.

Conceptions of the ideal self are also becoming more androgynous, and portray a developed person as someone who combines feminine intimacy and emotional expression with masculine independence and competence. This expanded, androgynous self is replacing the older ideal of a restricted masculine self – the ideal of a self-made man who is independent, emotionally controlled, and economically successful.

Love and self-development are mutually reinforcing, not opposed, in the new ideals, in part because gender roles are not polarized. The combined emphasis on intimacy and self-development also reflects the influence of popular psychology and the new therapies of the human potential movement, leading some scholars to label new ideals as "therapeutic" images of love.[12]

Is the trend to androgyny and self-development beneficial or harmful for close relationships? This question is the focus of much of the current debate about the family. Most scholars, including Robert Bellah *et al.*, Ralph Turner, and Christopher Lasch, argue that the therapeutic perspective has had predominantly negative effects on personal life, and is undermining committed relationships and real self-development. The human potential movement encourages an "empty" or "impulsive" self, in their view, a self focused on expressing individual needs and desires that are ungrounded in social ties or shared culture. Personal life, they charge, is becoming a marketplace where individuals negotiate temporary relations that best meet their needs, while therapy instructs them in skilled negotiation and provides a model of brief relationships of limited commitment.[13]

These critics have an inaccurate, overly negative view of recent trends. In particular, they do not understand how self-development and enduring love can be mutually reinforcing.

Their misinterpretation stems from a failure to distinguish between two different images of love and self-development in popular culture, which I label "Independence" and "Interdependence." The Independence image undermines committed relationships, as the critics charge, but the image of Interdependence strengthens commitment.

In the Independent image of love a person first develops an independent self and then love follows. Developing one's self consists mainly in

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expressing one's needs and feelings. This perspective easily leads to the "me first," "I do my thing, you do yours" orientation that has received so much attention from the mass media. In the Interdependent image, self-development and committed love occur together, and mutual support is emphasized. For example, M. Scott Peck's 1985 bestseller on self-development and spiritual growth, *The Road Less Traveled*, counsels that the journey to individual growth is "the ultimate goal of life," but "significant journeys cannot be accomplished without the nurture provided by a successful marriage . . ."[14]

While the critics consider only the Independence image, I focus on Interdependence, and emphasize the positive effects of the search for self-development. The Interdependence blueprint suggests a realistic way of integrating self-development and enduring love, in my view, and is a better model for relationships than traditional family and gender roles. Moreover, people in androgynous, Interdependent relationships tend to be healthier and happier. The ideal of Interdependent love has several problems. It overemphasizes expressing emotions and ignores material interdependence, and the focus on emotions and the self may encourage people to withdraw from public life, as the critics charge. But, as I will try to demonstrate, it is a better model for close relationships than the alternatives.

Both the Independence and Interdependence images have an important influence on the close relationships of many Americans. For example, in the Gilmore's marriage, Lyn's search for self-development has involved greater interdependence – more cooperation and sharing in raising the children, more gratifying sexual intimacy, and the opportunity to expand beyond the limits of rigid gender roles, all without any apparent weakening of their mutual love and commitment. On the other hand, Tommy sometimes complains that Lyn is becoming too self-centered and independent. She "becomes so self-sufficient that sometimes she steps on other people's toes. And she loses track of the sight that other people have the same rights or the same needs to be just as independent."

Why have most scholars been blind to the more positive, interdependent side of self-development? There is plenty of evidence that the interest in personal growth during the seventies was linked to close relationships; intimacy, not isolation, was a sign of a developed self.[15] But observers usually dismissed this preoccupation with intimacy as a symptom of weakening close relationships, or as a survival of traditional family values that persisted in spite of the new concern with self.[16]

Theoretical assumptions about social life explain part of this negative reaction. Critics like Bellah, believing that a good society requires strong communities and a shared moral code, are alarmed by the increasing tolerance and declining respect for authority that has accompanied the

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trend to self-development. They assume that valuing individual fulfillment and accepting a diversity of changing life styles will lead to anomie and the breakdown of social bonds.

Social scientists and intellectuals also resist seeing the link between adult self-development and intimacy. They devalue the "feminine" realm of attachments, as Carol Gilligan has pointed out, and follow the masculine pattern of identifying the self with abstract moral principles, the general community, or the distant intimacies of childhood, not with current close relationships. Theories in psychoanalysis and social psychology showing how the self develops in committed relationships are generally ignored, and the importance of intimacy in therapy is usually misunderstood. Scholars fail to see that the warm relationship between therapist and patient is an important part of what makes the patient better – more self-developed and more capable of love.

Some scholars see the positive side of self-development. Peter Clecak argues that it is part of a larger, progressive development in American culture since the fifties: a quest for "personal fulfillment within small communities of significant others," that includes the political activists of the sixties and the human potential movement.[17] These movements have improved the quality of life for many Americans, Clecak argues, and they usually integrate self-development with intimacy and family ties. But close relationships are not a major focus for Clecak, nor for most others with a positive perspective on recent cultural change.[18] That topic is the agenda for this book.

PLAN OF THE BOOK: ARGUMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The book has three parts. Part I presents the historical development of feminine and androgynous love. I trace the split between feminine love and masculine self-development in the nineteenth century, and then I describe the twentieth-century trend from role to self – the shift away from rigid family and gender roles, towards self-fulfillment, flexible roles, and androgynous love. A positive evaluation of the trend from role to self is supported by Marxist and feminist theoretical assumptions. The negative evaluation of most scholars, I argue, rests on theories that exaggerate the benefits of constraining rules and fixed family and gender roles.

Part II examines feminized love in contemporary close relationships. A feminine image of love continues to be influential in popular culture and academic studies; love is identified with emotional expression, not practical help, and women are expected to be responsible for close relationships. The feminization of love encourages women to be dependent and preoccupied with relationships, and men to be independent and

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preoccupied with work. This overspecialization results in illness and premature death for both sexes, and it produces intense conflicts in marriage between women who want more closeness and men who withdraw, as a case study of a marriage illustrates.

In Part III I focus on the new, more androgynous images of love that combine love and self-development, and give both partners responsibility for the relationship. A psychoanalytic perspective on the self shows how love and self-development can reinforce each other, and clarifies the limits of therapy as a model for love. The kind of love relationship that best fosters self-development, from this perspective, is secure and flexible, and includes both emotional and material interdependence. Case studies of several couples show how interdependent, androgynous relationships can foster both self-development and enduring love. Examples of androgynous love among friends illustrate the possibilities of committed love without pre-set roles, while loving relationships among relatives show the benefits of material and emotional interdependence among a group of people.

In the future, I conclude, the trend from role to self will continue, and androgynous love will be more important. This trend may lead us to more interdependent relationships or more independence and isolation. The outcome partly depends on economic and political changes in the wider society.

The evidence to support these arguments was generated by many methods of research, partly because I am integrating sociological, historical, and psychological perspectives, and partly because I believe that a statement is more likely to be true if it is supported by evidence from diverse sources.

Changes in images of love are documented by examining popular magazines between 1900 to 1979. I analyzed the content of 124 randomly selected articles on how to have a happy marriage, and the results give strong support for a trend from role to self. Historical and sociological studies by other researchers confirm this trend.

Evidence on contemporary close relationships was obtained from a series of surveys and intensive interviews in southern California, conducted by my students between 1980 and 1983. A survey of 133 adults showed that the ideal of Interdependence is more widely accepted than Independence. Structured interviews with 46 heterosexual couples showed that polarized gender roles and feminized love frequently produce conflicts over intimacy. Finally, intensive, open-ended interviews about close relationships were conducted with 32 individuals, and their relatives and friends. These interviews provide the case studies, such as the description of the Gilmores, that show how general social factors operate within concrete relationships. (The interviews are the source of all

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