

Women's Roles and Strengths in Times of Family and Community Stress

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Abstract

In the aftermath of national crises in the U.S. such as the Oklahoma City bombing of the Federal building 11 years ago, the destruction on September 11, 2001, and the recent hurricanes and flooding in New Orleans and other areas, much attention has been given to how best families and communities can be assisted to recover from devastating events. I examine the question of what women's roles are in times of family and community stress and report that there is little in the literature to answer this question. I suggest that perhaps this is good news because what I found instead was a portrayal of *people's* roles and strengths in times of family and community crisis that did not differentiate along gender lines. I also present the notion that women have unique gifts and strengths to contribute when crisis strikes. I give three case examples, one of a special environment that a woman created for other women to share and relax in, another of a woman who creatively helped her community to heal after a terrorist attack, and the third of a woman in an Appalachian Virginia mining community who took on the prime-mover leadership role in community redevelopment following a period of overwhelming economic crisis. I discuss the role that rituals can play in coping with change and how women's sense of connectedness is illustrated in Carol Gilligan's work. Aspects of John Gottman's research on arousal pattern differences between women and men and what he terms *emotional intelligence* are considered, and I speculate on a possible implication that women make better leaders in general—and especially in times of crisis—than do men. Drawing on the partnership model developed by Riane Eisler, I conclude that women and men working collaboratively offer the greatest hope for family and community survival during times of crisis and rebuilding.

Introduction

In the aftermath of regional and national crises such as the Oklahoma City bombing of the Federal building 11 years ago, the destruction of the World Trade Center Towers and part of the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, and the recent hurricanes (Katrina and Rita) and subsequent flooding in New Orleans and other coastal areas after levies collapsed, much national attention has been given to how best families and communities can be assisted to recover from devastating events. Equally devastating, however, can be the sudden death of a family member in an accident caused by a drunken driver or the slow, insidious death of a family member diagnosed with cancer or Alzheimer's Disease. And how does a family measure and cope with the damage created when a young member attempts, or worse, successfully commits suicide? Women's responses and responsiveness to crisis apply equally to small-scale personal or family disruptions as well as communitywide catastrophes.

“Four score and seven years ago, our forefathers brought forth upon this [American] land a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all [White, landed] *men* are equal” [emphasis added]. For the most part, I am not talking in this paper about women’s issues and rights from a political or legal perspective as is the case with this annotated version of the opening of Lincoln’s Gettysburg address. When I focus here on women’s roles and strengths in times of family and community stress, I take as a given that any woman, like any man that Lincoln was thinking of, will work and fight and sacrifice for her life and lifestyle and for those of her family, friends, and fellow citizens to the degree to which she is capable and following the dictates of her conscience. Further, I assume that, indeed, no person or social expectation or legislation should prevent her from her pursuit of happiness and justice any more than any man is thus limited.

What I attempt to do in this paper is address ways in which women as a group have intrinsic—not just socialized—attributes that will call them to rise and respond when they themselves or others with whom they have a connection are confronted by stressful conditions, attributes that have long been ignored or discounted by Mainstream American (patriarchal) society. I maintain that women provide earnest, often quiet and unacknowledged leadership and support in their homes and among their larger social networks. And, ultimately, I am challenging Mainstream American culture to listen to the assertive, not always quiet, sometimes strident voice of women who will share leadership in helping the world culture that is emerging out of political, economic, and social pressures of living together on a shrinking planet to make essential and fundamental changes in the fabric of our shared lives in order to survive as a species. Those who have seen the recent film, *The Constant Gardener*, have seen an archetypal image of a woman unflinchingly addressing such a leadership need.

I had thought that it would be easy for me to write about women's roles and strengths in times of family and community stress. After all, I have been studying and teaching about family stress for more than 20 years. But when I began writing, I discovered a gap in the literature that I had never noticed before. There is information about differences between the genders in terms of their physiological responses to stress (and I will be describing them specifically later) as well as cognitive and emotional gender differences (e.g., Lillian Rubin's 1976 classic study of life in working-class families entitled *Worlds of Pain*). There are self-care strategy differences between female and male caregivers that been noted (e.g., see Boss, 1988, pp.103-106, where she depicts male caregivers' self-care strategies as more active and female caregivers' strategies as more passive). And there are studies of wives' responses when their husbands play dangerous roles such as military combatants (e.g., Dekel, Goldblatt, Keidar, Solomon, and Polliack, 2005) and firefighters (e.g., Regehr, Dimitropoulos, Bright, George, and Henderson, 2005). However, unlike historic trends such as the creation of Rosie the Riveter during World War II when women were recruited to fill vacancies in heavy manufacturing and other traditionally male occupations left by men going off to join the military but later expected to go back to their former domesticity to fulfill traditionally female roles once the war ended (Goodwin, 1994; see also Papachristou and Wald, 1975, p.155), I could find nothing about recent or current gender role expectation differences in times of crisis. Once I thought about it for a while, I found this void to be a hopeful sign because it implies that women aren't *relegated*—we aren't *excluded* or seen as *unequipped* to handle stressful situations or crises. And I haven't read empirical literature that indicates that women are being treated in such a way or defining themselves thus. In sum, what I have found in the literature is a portrayal of *people's* roles and strengths in times of family and community crisis, undifferentiated along gender lines.

The approach that I have decided upon as a result of these observations is to bring together diverse research findings, real-world examples, and assertions that may *imply* differences in leadership styles that women and men bring to the table during conflicts or crises. I argue that these styles are the result of different ways that female and male brains are hard-wired, so to speak. But I need to begin by pointing out two caveats that are relevant to beginning discussion of either intrinsic or socialized differences between women and men. First, there are wider ranges of variational differences *within* the groups of women and of men than there are *between* the two groups' trends or averages (Society for Neuroscience, 2006, p.9). Second, descriptions of the two groups' trends and averages primarily represent patterns found in members of the European American subculture, which numerically still overwhelms other subcultural variations within the U.S., although that disproportion is projected to dwindle within the next four decades or so (Strong, DeVault, and Sayad, 1998, pp.59-60).

I also wish to state that I understand the technical difference between the terms *gender* and *sex*, with the latter being biologically male or female and the former being “the learned behaviors and characteristics associated with being male or female in a particular culture” (Olson and DeFrain, 2000, p.101). Although I have gathered evidence of differences between men and women primarily from reports of biological findings, I am choosing to use the term *gender* throughout this paper, whether the context is primarily biological or social in nature, because I am coming from a biosocial theoretical perspective that acknowledges not only the importance of each dimension but also the inevitable intermingling of them in the human condition (Ingoldsby, Smith, and Miller, 2004). Booth, Carver, and Granger (2000) introduced their article on biosocial perspectives on families by saying that “new theoretical models conceptualize families as systems affected by, and effecting change in, reciprocal influences among social,

behavioral, and biological processes” (p.1018). The same notion of reciprocity will apply at both the individual and community levels as well.

Women’s Roles in Times of Family and Community Stress

I would suggest to anyone who wishes to do some in-depth reading about family stress theory and research that they look for two articles that I have written. The articles are companion pieces that are bookending the September 2006 special issue of *Stress, Trauma and Crisis: An International Journal*. One article is entitled “A Reader’s Guide to Family Stress Literature” and the second is “Basic Concepts and Models of Family Stress.” Other publications on the topic of family stress that I have authored are listed in an addendum to the reference list. Following that list, I also have referenced my publications that deal with two other topics related to the subject of this paper: (a) Family Conflict and Mediation and (b) Community Intervention Training.

The National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) has produced a DVD (Boss, Torrens, and Beaulieu, 2005) entitled *Multiple Learnings from Work with Families of 9/11* (available at the organization’s website, www.ncfr.org) that was recorded at a session during the 2005 annual conference. Boss, a faculty member at the University of Minnesota and a family therapist, had been contacted by a labor union that had lost many members during the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. In their presentation, Boss and her associates discussed how they approached their work over the course of many months with labor union member survivors and the families of union members who didn’t survive. What seemed to help the survivors and grieving family members most was attentive listening; empathy to acknowledge their losses, fears, and anger; patience and nurturing; and finally letting them go when they were ready to go it on their own once more. One group created a kind of graduation ceremony for themselves, a ritual to cross a

bridge (literally as well as figuratively) to the next phase of their lives. The assistance planned and provided by both women and men in Boss' team seems congruent with the nurturing, compassionate, healing approach that is known as a hallmark of women in effective helping roles.

Research on Differences Between Women's and Men's Brains

It is well established that there are important structural differences between the brains of women and men (Society for Neuroscience, 2006). "These include differences in the size and shape of brain structures in the hypothalamus and the arrangement of neurons in the cortex and hippocampus" (p.9). "Tests show that women generally can recall lists of words or paragraphs of text better than men. On the other hand, men usually perform better on tests that require the ability to mentally rotate an image in order to solve a problem" (Society for Neuroscience, (n.d., p.2).

An illustration. Springer and Deutsch (1998) expand on the list of performance differences between the genders.

Considerable evidence suggests that females, on average, are superior to males in a wide range of skills that require the use of language, such as verbal fluency, speed of articulation, and grammar. Women also tend to be faster than men at tasks involving perceptual speed (the ability to rapidly identify matching items), manual precision, and arithmetic calculation. Males, on the other hand, perform better, on average, in tasks that are spatial in nature, including maze performance, picture assembly, block design, mental rotation, and mechanical skills. In addition, males do better than women in mathematical reasoning and in finding their way through a route, and are also more accurate in guiding or intercepting projectiles. (pp.139-140)

However, a word of caution must be noted with at least one of these comparisons: Blakemore and Frith (2005) demonstrated that, regarding mathematical ability, the line between biological and socialized gender differences is somewhat blurry. They stated,

While boys [mathematically] outperform girls in both China and the USA, girls in China perform better than boys in the USA. This is not a biological difference between the Chinese and the Americans—when Chinese girls are taught in the USA their mathematical ability declines to the level of American girls. (p.62)

There is evidence that indicates female brains function by way of a somewhat different process than male brains do.

It's possible that male and female brains work at a similar capacity but process information differently. For example, one study shows that men and women perform equally well in a test that asks subjects to read a list of nonsense words and determine if they rhyme. Yet, imaging results found that women use areas on the right and left sides of the brain, while men only use areas on the left side to complete the test. (Society for Neuroscience, n.d., p.1)

An illustration of a new trend. A recent article in *Newsweek* (Tyre, 2006) described a shift in gender-difference trends that are showing up in U.S. elementary and adolescent students. The author suggested that changes in how schools are run (e.g., increasingly relying on and giving weight to standardized tests, increasing the ratio of numbers of students per teacher, decreasing the time they allot for students' physical activities) constitute "new pressures [that] are undermining the strengths and underscoring the limitations of what psychologists call the 'boy brain'—the kinetic, disorganized, maddening and sometimes brilliant behaviors that

scientists now believe are not learned but hard-wired” (p.48). Tyre indicated that research findings support the notion that

most 5-year-old girls are more fluent than boys and can sight-read more words. Boys tend to have better hand-eye coordination, but their fine motor skills are less developed. . . . Boys are more impulsive than girls; even if they can sit still, many prefer not to—at least not for long. (p.48)

Tyre stated that, in contrast to the common assumption that what are considered typical boy behaviors are socialized into male children, “these days scientists believe they are an expression of male brain chemistry” (p.48). She said, “Sometime in the first trimester, a boy fetus begins producing male sex hormones that bathe his brain in testosterone for the rest of his gestation” (p.48). She cited a UCLA physiological science professor, Arthur Arnold, who described this testosterone bath as the beginning of how the male brain becomes “wired” differently than the female brain. Winston (2005) states, “Male fetuses produce a surge of testosterone, which in turn informs the development of their brains, producing male-typical characteristics and behavior” (p.251).

Another illustration. On September 19, 1986, I attended a workshop given by Dr. Betty Edwards of California State University at Long Beach entitled *Drawing on the Artist Within* (Edwards, 1986a). Her then-new volume with the same title as the workshop either had just been or would soon be released (Edwards, 1986b)—I don’t remember which. Her landmark book, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, had come out in 1979, and with it had come a dawning appreciation in the general public for the creative right mode of the brain (that is, for normally organized right-handed people; the left mode may be the creative hemisphere for others). Among her memorable messages in that workshop was a rule of thumb for gaining access to the

right mode of the brain: “In order to access the subdominant visual, perceptual right mode of the brain, it is necessary to present the brain with a job that the left mode will turn down.” She said that the left mode jumps in first on any job; if it doesn’t like to do it (for instance, drawing upside down), then it may opt out. In one exercise, she had us sketching a sketch of a man that someone else had done but doing so by having the original sketch upside down. When we turned ours over, the renderings usually were done better than we would have if both were right side up! In another exercise, she instructed us to “sketch an abstract portrait of someone who puzzles you.” After we were finished drawing an abstract of our puzzling person, we were to turn the page upside down and write about what we noticed. My portrait was of a man with whom I reluctantly was forced to interact professionally. I dutifully turned it upside down, and here is what I wrote: “Upside down, this portrait has a number of penises that show up. I realize now that he is dangerous to me (he bites and also he hits below the belt).” Just as Edwards had predicted, my up-side-down, unconscious, right-brained abstract fit the subject even better than if I had consciously, left-brainedly planned and executed the abstract.

Springer and Deutsch (1998) have critiqued Edwards’ interpretation of how her method works. They favor crediting *both* brain hemispheres and, especially, the corpus callosum that appears to create collaboration between the hemispheres for creative thinking (pp.301-302). Winston (2005), reporting on recent research on gender behavior differences, noted that the corpus callosum is generally proportionately larger in women than men “because it has more neural connections, enabling the brain to communicate more quickly and easily between its different regions” (p.68). He stated, “Ruben and Raquel Gur at the Pennsylvania Medical Center in Philadelphia have confirmed that women tend to be more able to ‘multi-task’ . . . [while] men, on the other hand, are more inclined to focus on and complete each individual task they’re

given” (p.68). He noted also that “this difference in the corpus callosum might even explain some well-known emotional differences between men and women” (p.68), namely that “some sources claim emotional processing is largely located in the right hemisphere, and that the power to express our feelings through language lives in the left” (p.68). Blakemore and Frith (2005) describe men’s brains as being “more *lateralized* (or asymmetrical) than women’s brains, which use both hemispheres during language tasks” (p.63). These authors cite Simon Baron-Cohen from Cambridge University as making an argument that “men have a tendency to analyze and construct systems while women are inclined to empathize” (p.63).

A fourth illustration. Spring and Deutsch (1998) described a study of 30 professional classical musicians matched with 30 nonmusician controls who all underwent MRI scans. “Analysis of the MRI scans revealed that the anterior half of the corpus callosum, measured at the midsagittal plane between the hemispheres, was significantly larger in musicians” (p.224). Parenthetically, I find it interesting that “this difference was due almost entirely to the subgroup of musicians who had begun musical training before the age of seven” (p.224) because I am curious about the developmental ramifications for children.

Like the early-trained musicians, women in general apparently have easier access to the right brain than most men do, and unlike the more linear thinking that is typical in males (the result of dominant left-mode brain work), many women exhibit what I once heard labeled as *mosaic thinking* (i.e., the frequent nonlinear thinking that is associated with right-mode or cross-hemisphere brain work such as making free associations and producing spontaneous solutions to problems). Interestingly, preadolescent and adolescent boys sometimes exhibit unpredictable behaviors that seem to reflect that something has triggered mosaic thinking in them (Tyre, 2006).

In summary, the empirical literature on gender-difference brain research that I have consulted portrays significant systematic variation in between-group averages for men and women. Differences are both structural and functional in nature, and it is likely that they lead to important differences in how the genders respectively perceive and process information and how they learn or create strategies for responding to stressors they encounter. For instance, Sapolsky (2004) reported that “sex differences exist in the effects of stress on cognition” (p.1037). He continued, “Initially, the most parsimonious summary of these differences is that females are less vulnerable to the disruptive effects of stress” (p.1037).

Aspects of Dr. John Gottman’s Research on Arousal Pattern Differences Between Women and Men and What He Terms *Emotional Intelligence*

For several decades, Dr. John M. Gottman at the University of Washington has been studying couple interactions up-close-and-personal at his observation research facility, dubbed *The Love Lab*. Couples taking part in his research live in the lab for 24 hours and are videotaped for later analysis as they interact both informally and when assigned a number of tasks. While discussing a subject of potential conflict, they are each wired up to a variety of instruments measuring heart rate, Galvanic skin resistance, and so on—instruments tuning into the degree of physiological (and, therefore, emotional) arousal each is experiencing during the discussion. What Gottman has found, similarly to other researchers (e.g., Dr. Stephen B. Manuck of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine) is that, in general, male participants become aroused more quickly and intensely and stay aroused longer than their female counterparts (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, and Swanson, 1998; Gottman and Levenson, 1988).

A considerable body of research on gender show quite consistently that men’s bodies pump to higher elevations of stress chemicals and blood pressure than women’s do in

reaction to sudden danger or even a startling noise. Men also remain angry or vigilant longer, until they have a chance to retaliate (Sheehy, 1998, p.86).

She stated, “Men tend to have shorter fuses and longer-lasting explosions than women. . . . When overwhelmed by marital tension, men suffer from ‘flooding’ with stress chemicals. And when he experiences that ‘flooding,’ he must either fight or flee” (p.87). In the extreme, such flooding is an explanation for soldiers becoming *battle-crazed* and some ancient Viking warriors becoming so battle-crazed that they were called *berserkers*.

Perhaps as an attempt to avoid uncomfortable emotional arousal or in order to avoid becoming violent, many people respond to flooding stress chemicals by doing what is called *stonewalling*, or listener withdrawal (Gottman et al., 1988, p.6). It is important to note that 85% of the people whom Gottman identified in his Love Lab as stonewallers were men (Gottman with DeClaire, 1997). Gottman explained (p.154), “This effect could be due to basic sex differences in physiology, or it could be due to the fact that men are more likely than women to dwell on thoughts that maintain distress” following a conflictual interaction. Ironically, the female partner of a stonewalling man who is trying to control a potentially violent response by not reacting to her at all then may push at him harder in order to get some sort of reaction, which will only increase his nonresponse—a vicious cycle that may end up escalating (what Gottman terms *cascading*) toward divorce (Gottman, 1993).

Gottman’s recommendations based on his findings (Gottman et al., 1998) have been controversial albeit logical: Women who interact with men should consider both (a) softening their start-up of a potentially conflictual topic because “women typically start most of the conflict discussions [when couples are observed in lab settings], . . . [and] for 96% of these interactions, if the graphs began in the first few minutes with a positive or a negative slope, they

were not reversed” (p.7) and (b) soothing their male partners—or at least giving them wide berth—until the men signal they are ready to talk about what has upset them. Feminists have recoiled because this advice sounds all too familiar, conjuring up memories from the old days of women placating men and suppressing their (women’s) thoughts and feelings. However, this recommendation has physiological data to back it up, and these data also support Gottman’s further conclusion that men need to learn to soothe themselves and also accept influence from women (Gottman et al., 1998).

Emotional intelligence is a term coined by Daniel Goleman (1997) to mean persons who can “regulate their own emotional states” (Gottman with DeClaire, 1997, p.16). Gottman continues the description of such persons,

After a decade of research in my laboratory, my research team encountered a group of parents who did five very simple things with their children when the children were emotional. We call these five things “Emotion Coaching.” . . . The children were better at soothing themselves when they were upset. They could calm down their hearts faster. (pp.16-17)

The five things (steps) that Gottman identified for parents to do to encourage the development of emotional intelligence in their child are (a) being aware of the child’s emotions, (b) recognizing the emotion as an opportunity for intimacy and teaching, (c) listening empathetically and validating the child’s feelings, (d) helping the child verbally label emotions, and (e) setting limits while helping the child problem-solve (pp.76-109).

The importance of assisting one’s children to develop emotional intelligence as they grow is not limited to male children. Our daughter was the recipient of such assistance because my

husband and I both were aware of its value in shaping her character and her behavior toward self and others. Gilligan (2006) states,

Several decades ago, revolutionary psychological research on women led to a reframing of such concepts as intelligence and self. A new set of terms—“emotional intelligence,” “relational self,” and, most recently, the “feeling brain”—heralded a cultural shift. Emotions and relationships, once associated with women and therefore with limitation, are now understood to enhance intelligence and the self and have become desirable attributes of manhood. (p.53)

Gilligan provides an example of such a new attribute of manhood:

Boys as well as girls can read the human world astutely. Four-year-old Sam asked his mother one day, “Mommy, why are you sad?” Wanting to shield him from her sadness, she replied, “I’m not sad.” Sam said, “Mommy, I know you. I was inside you.” Yet when this kind of emotional openness, sensitivity, and connectedness are seen to compromise masculinity, boys often repudiate these human qualities. If boys can be encouraged to embrace them, these qualities will develop, expanding their capacity for relationships and also their sense of themselves. (Gilligan, 2006, p.53)

Gilligan also has suggested that “what often appears as boys’ intransigence, as disruptiveness, indifference or confrontation, may instead be a refusal to engage in false relationship” (p.53) and that they thus are “turning away from rather than seeking to repair or smooth over such ruptures as girls tend to do” (p.53). This conclusion refers to findings of her earlier research regarding female socialization, play, and conflict patterns (Gilligan, 1982a, 1982b; see also Tannen, 1990) that compared observed patterns of interactions between cohorts

of boys and girls at various ages and also found that girls tend to be concerned with repairing or smoothing over social ruptures.

Women's Unique Gifts and Strengths That Contribute to Resolving Family and Community Stress

During the evacuation process with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, it was often women who took their family's children to safer places while the family's menfolk stayed behind to try to protect family property as long as possible; often this dynamic occurred in spite of the women's attempts to keep their family all together during the crisis (Garrison, Jenkins, Weber, and Gonzalez, 2005). While the women wanted their property protected, in general they were more concerned about having their husband's comforting and supportive presence and the family ties to be maintained. But they did what they had to. And in this dire and protracted emergency situation, the parental role divisions apparently most often fell along the lines of traditional gender expectations. Family by family, decisions were made about how best to respond to the extreme demands being placed on them as a group and how to survive individually and try to reconnect later if the group was torn apart. (Garrison et al., 2005)

Following are recaps of three true stories of women making beneficial contributions to their little corners of the world. They are accounts of women who made special efforts, not because of gender role expectations, but simply because their wills drew out their unique spirits and creative, connective energy.

A case study of a special environment that a woman created for other women to share and relax in. Kathleen R. Wallace (1992) has said that "the absence of gender-based research is particularly evident in geography" (p.184). She went on to cite Lee and Schultz (1982), who stated,

Women have been ignored in most geographic research, which has traditionally treated humanity as being homogeneous. . . . Though many papers now show an awareness of sex differences, geographical exploration of the world of women so far has mapped only some general features of the periphery; more detail is needed. (quoted on p.184 of Wallace's chapter)

I would broaden these statements to include not just physical geography but emotional geography as well. How the two domains overlap for women is illustrated in an anthropological study conducted by Dr. Beverly Gordon.

Gordon (2003), writing about what she calls *Restroom World*, a small, third-floor bathroom in the University of Wisconsin building in which her office is located, describes a private space for women tucked out of the way and decorated with small, everyday items related to women's lives displayed in what she calls *vignettes* that change through the seasons. There is a couch and a stuffed animal that are part of "a comfortable lounge area with a stock of reading material, candy, and other give-away items and a guest book for patron commentary" (p.444). The original transformation and ongoing care of this space as a special place for women was the result of the efforts of a faculty member who Gordon calls *Carol* (a pseudonym for the professor, who happens to be a friend of mine).

Gordon said, "My study of this backstage environment points to a number of interrelated, internally consist themes that suggest a distinctive *women's* [italics added] approach and relationship to objects, space, and one another" (p.445). She explained,

The patrons of Restroom World are women who also participate in the broader social and intellectual life of the culture of which they are a part, but in this relaxed environment

where social front does not matter, they do so in an embodied, holistic, and connected manner. The women value generosity and care about community. . . . They also value rather than dismiss everyday things and the routines of daily life; ordinary objects are the primary vehicle, in fact, with which they foster connectedness, expressiveness, and creativity. (p.445)

Gordon (p.446) stated,

My observations and findings corroborate a number of established ideas about group identity and women's roles in American culture. (That is, it has been claimed that women are the keepers of calendar customs and bearers of tradition, the primary performers of social ritual, and the ones most identified with "gift relations" (Santino, 1996).

Later in the article, Gordon provided an example of this assertion when she said that the qualities of valuing and cultivating interpersonal connection and communication as well as an overall sense of community, "were evident from the inception of the space, when Carol brought the couch in to both provide for an ailing colleague and share Lenore's energy with others" (p.455). Lenore was not the ailing colleague but rather a close friend of Carol who had died and left Carol with the task of dealing with her household goods. Carol "was saddened by the idea that many of the things that had meant so much to Lenore would have little resale value" (p.448). Thus, when Carol came up with the idea of using Lenore's household items as the basis for redoing an ordinary institutional restroom into Restroom World, incorporating Lenore's items became the vehicle for Carol being able to "share Lenore's energy with others" (p.455) in a creative, ever-evolving memorial for her friend.

A case study of a woman who creatively helped her community to heal after a terrorist attack. The story of a woman named Priscilla who filled a quiet but powerful leadership role in the healing process following the Oklahoma City Federal Building bombing on April 19, 1995, is recounted on a DVD available through the Groves Conference on Marriage and Family (www.grovesconference.org). The DVD is entitled *Integrity and Survival in Families and Communities* and was recorded at a recent Groves Conference plenary panel presentation entitled “Ambiguous Losses: Helping Families Stay Strong in Times of Tragedy” (Boss, Leonald, Williams, and Poe, 2004).

Priscilla worked in the Federal Building, and she liked to knit during her breaks. She had her knitting in her desk drawer the morning of the bombing. She was wounded terribly in the explosion and experienced a long recovery period during which she physically was not able to knit. But the red yarn from her desk was recovered, and she became determined that “they weren’t going to take that [knitting] away from me too.” Slowly and painfully, she started to knit a sweater, incorporating that red yarn into the design to commemorate the adults and children and unborn children who had died in the bombing and including the symbols of love (the chain-link fence where people created small memorials for the dead) and hope (the Survivor Tree that is now part of the permanent memorial at the bombsite) that have developed multiple levels of meaning for the citizens of Oklahoma City. The sweater had been brought to our session so we could see and touch it; it travels often to events in the area because others recognize its significance and power.

A case study of a woman in an Appalachian Virginia mining community who took on the prime-mover leadership role in community redevelopment following a period of overwhelming economic crisis. Ivanhoe, Virginia, had been a boom town when zinc and iron

mining were going strong. But those industries closed down in the 1980s, and a true depression—both economic and emotional—settled over the town like a fog. (AmeriCorps*VISTA, n.d.)

Pearson (2002, p.1) provides further information about the progressive decline of the town:

In the global economy, many rural communities have shrunk from economic centers to mere ghosts of their former selves. Places like Dungannon and Ivanhoe, Virginia, were once thriving centers for commerce, education, and entertainment; now they are bedroom communities for people with long commutes. First the main employer—National Carbide and New Jersey Zinc in Ivanhoe, the rail yard in Dungannon—closes. Then local businesses start to fail. The branch bank closes. Eventually, schools get consolidated and children are bused across the country. Finally, the churches close or only have a preacher once a month. Folks compete with each other for the few scarce jobs, not just in the community, but in the region.

However, Ivanhoe was fortunate. The dedication and leadership of one woman in the reeling community effected a genuine turnaround for the local economy.

In September of 1986 when the Industrial Development Authorities of Wythe and Carroll Counties decided to sell the old factory sites, Maxine Waller—a lifelong Ivanhoe resident—decided that the town could not also lose all hope of future jobs. She mobilized other residents of Ivanhoe to oppose the land sale, and the Ivanhoe Civic League was born that same month. The civic league was successful in halting the land sale and eventually attracted a new small industry to locate there. That was the beginning of multiple efforts to clean up the decaying town. (AmeriCorps*VISTA, n.d., p.4)

Pearson (2002, p.3) reported that, in her experience, outsiders attempting to cultivate and assist local efforts for community development in Central Appalachia need to sustain their work through three phases, and the first part is “identifying and nurturing ‘new leaders,’ *most often women who are not part of either the existing governing structure or the more covert power structure of the ‘better’ families, and who are often the heart of a broader community and can authentically speak for a wider spectrum of people*” [emphasis added]. This description of Pearson’s experience is right on the mark for expressing what I have been suggesting are special gifts and strengths that women can bring to their communities in troubled times.

Mary Ann Hinsdale and Helen M. Lewis have co-authored an award-winning book with Maxine Waller (1994) about the process that the citizens of Ivanhoe went through in order to bring vitality back to their community and plan for a viable future.

A Challenge for Women as Leaders

In 1981, I participated in a week-long workshop entitled *Psychoergonetics: Women in Management* that brought together women in the field of substance abuse prevention from three Midwestern states. Workshop leaders Violet Plantz, Bobbi Tower, and two other colleagues challenged us to rely on and provide our unique gifts and strengths as women when acting in leadership roles rather than strive or settle for becoming what they termed *associate men*.

Plantz and her colleagues’ challenge to not allow myself to become an associate man when taking up leadership roles but instead stay true to myself and trust my own ways of knowing and being really struck a chord with me. I have continued to be sensitive to women having special knowledge, experience, skills, and ways of being that need to be shared and ought to be valued and harnessed for good.

Women's Sense of Connectedness

In 1970, Carol Gilligan worked as an assistant to Lawrence Kohlberg in his research that plotted the developmental course of moral judgment in children and adults (e.g., Kohlberg and Gilligan, 1971). Kohlberg had identified a six-stage process of moral development that still is being taught in college classrooms today (e.g., Blonna, 2005) as being an important contribution to the field of human development. However, Gilligan later (1982a, 1982b) challenged Kohlberg's model as one that disenfranchises half the population because he normed it on the patterns of *male* moral development. She stated,

This discussion of moral development takes place against the background of a field where, beginning with Freud's theory that tied superego formation to castration anxiety, extending through Piaget's study of boys' conceptions of the rules of their games, and culminating in Kohlberg's derivation of six stages of moral development from research on adolescent males, the line of development has been shaped by the pattern of male experience and thought (Gilligan, 1982a, p.201).

She rejected the notion of using the path of trajectory that males follow while they typically develop moral judgment as a yardstick for females' development, maintaining that that is unfair. Females have their own typical trajectory and end point because they use different moral criteria based on female experiences. She gave her reinterpretation of data Kohlberg had collected in his research as an example of how differently females and males approach resolving a moral dilemma. Two 6th-graders whom she called Jake and Amy, when faced with the same hypothetical dilemma, arrived at radically different conclusions. "These two children see two very different moral problems—Jake a conflict between life and property that can be resolved by logical deduction, Amy a fracture of human relationship that must be mended with its own

thread” (Gilligan, 1982a, p.206). She maintained that the two children’s approaches represented “two modes of self-definition and two modes of moral judgment, . . . different forms of thought—one relying on a formal logic whose development Piaget has described, the other on a narrative and contextual mode of thought whose development remains to be traced” (p.209). Gilligan did not conclude, however, that there is a male and a female mode of moral judgment. Rather, she suggested, “If women’s moral judgments reflect a different understanding of social relationships, then they may point to a line of social development whose presence in both sexes is currently obscured” (p.201).

Rituals and Change

The importance of rituals in family and community life such as is exemplified in the account of Restroom World—particularly during times of acute crisis or prolonged stress—should not be underestimated (Imber-Black, 1989, 1991, 1992). For instance, Bennett, Wolin, and Reiss (1988) found that, when families with an alcoholic member institute and/or continue with family rituals and traditions regardless of whether the alcoholic is sober or drinking, there is much less likelihood of alcoholism showing up again in a later generation.

At numerous professional conferences in the past 16 years, I have presented papers and/or led workshops on the functions played by rituals in family and community life (Bayles and Author, 1995a, 1995b; Hammond and Author, 2001; Author, 2004a, 2004b; Author and Flynn, 1990; Author and Hammond, 2001; Author and Malia, 2001; Author and Malia, 2002; Author and Mbitto, 2002; Author and Mbitto, 2004; Mbitto and Author, 2002a, 2002b; Mbitto and Author, 2003; Schrag and Author, 1990). It is clear that rituals play a particularly important part in helping people deal with powerful emotions that surround transitions in individuals’, families’, and communities’ lives (Imber-Black and Roberts, 1992; Author, 2004b).

Liminality, a word derived from the Latin word for *threshold*, connotes a sense of excitement, fear, and vulnerability that often accompanies being poised at the brink of change and then stepping into new territory not previously visited. Enacting liminality in a symbolic manner allows for the journey across the threshold and beyond to begin. (Author, 2004b)

Although men still predominate in regard to performing formal ritual roles such as those of pastors, rabbis, and justices of the peace, women very often play the informal role of primary ritual keepers in their families and communities, as was illustrated above in the report about Restroom World (Gordon, 2003). Women hold multigenerational family bonds together, which is an example of true power, according to Kranichfeld (1987). She argued that “women’s power is rooted in their roles as nurturers and kinkeepers” (p.48) and that women maintain support and control of the internal family domain.

Speculation on a Possible Implication That Women Make Better Leaders in General—and Especially in Times of Crisis—Than Do Men

Gilligan (2006) dryly commented, “Despite the lag in [boys’] school achievement, despite the fact that girls have always gotten better grades and more boys go to prison, men still outnumber women at the highest levels of academia, as well as in business and government” (p.53). On November 27, 2005, the *Knoxville News Sentinel* published an article about The University of Tennessee’s (UT’s) gender inequities, reporting that, while three out of six administrators in the Chancellor’s office are women, only 2 out of 48 Chairs of Excellence are held by women and only 3 of 13 academic deans are women (the Deans of Nursing, Libraries, and Social Work—all of which are traditionally women’s spheres). However, in 1997, there had been six women at UT who were Deans. Similarly, in 1997, we had 14 department heads who were women, but in 2005 only 7 out of 63 total. Concern about this report rippled along the

university's e-mail system because it would appear that women are fast losing our precious-little-to-begin-with leadership ground at UT. (It should be noted, however, that, when I asked the Chancellor about these statistics at a forum for women faculty, he cited a number of ways in which women are in what he called the sinews of the University.)

What I have described as a worrisome University of Tennessee leadership dynamic is, I believe, only a reflection of the larger culture's status:

The United States is 57th in the world in women's political representation (behind Slovakia and tied with Andorra); the pipeline to political leadership in America, the state legislatures, has been hovering at about 20 percent for a decade; men occupy 86 percent of Congressional seats, 84 percent of governorships, and 88 percent of the seats on top corporate boards. Yet women are more than half of the U.S. population. And the numbers get worse when we examine the diversity of women at the top, especially when you consider the enormous population growth in communities of color. (Wilson, 2004, p.xv)

These statistics constitute an indictment of American society as guilty of severe gender inequality when it comes to who treads the corridors of power. Throughout the history of Post-European-Contact America, men have been deemed the pool from which to tap leaders unless an organization is made up primarily of women. Think PTAs, and the image of a woman at its head comes to mind. However, as Wilson pointed out, think U.S. Presidents or Vice Presidents, and a woman at the helm isn't there—unless it is in the venue of popular (and recently cancelled) television fiction.

Importantly, there has been a significant shift in the domain of educating children in the U.S. Tyre (2006, p.47) asserted,

Thirty years ago it was girls, not boys, who were lagging [in school]. The 1972 federal law Title IX forced schools to provide equal opportunities for girls in the classroom and on the playing field. Over the next two decades, billions of dollars were funneled into finding new ways to help girls achieve. In 1992, the American Association of University Women issued a report claiming that the work of Title IX was not done—girls still fell behind in math and science; by the mid-1990s, girls had reduced the gap in math and more girls than boys were taking high-school-level biology and chemistry.

Sheehy (1998) stated that the evidence that men become and stay more aroused than women when they feel threatened

may seem contradictory to an observation made earlier in this book [*Understanding Men's Passages*] about male temperament: the ability to remain cool under physical attack. “Cool,” however refers to the ability to disconnect *emotionally* while the body remains on high alert *physically* to repel physical danger. (p.86)

Sheehy (1998) quoted Gottman as stating, “It may be more desirable biologically for women to get issues aired and settled and for men to avoid them” (p.88). One important implication of John Gottman’s research appears to me to be that women are hardwired to act with cooler *hearts* as well as heads in conflict situations, both initially and over time, because they can stay calmer throughout the whole process and therefore do not have as great a need to discharge physiological stress chemical build-up. If anything, rather than disconnecting emotionally as boys and men tend to do, girls’ and women’s stress tends to be relieved by *connecting* or *reconnecting* emotionally (Gilligan, 1982a, 1982b; Sheehy, 1998; Tannen, 1990). Considering the current Mainstream U.S. political climate, I personally question whether the power-brokering men heading American government could be deemed cool-headed. However did the U.S. attack

Iraq except for our *hot* (irrational) *head* of state who apparently had a grudge and a need to one-up his father? How on earth can we explain still being there except as the product of a stubborn hot-head caught up in denial? And there is reason to be concerned that differences in gender responses to conflict are exacerbated with age. Winston (2005) reported that the ageing process brings a decrease in brain size for both women and men. Whereas “women’s tissue loss occurs more in the hippocampus and parietal areas” with the result that women “tend to be more forgetful in old age, and worse at locating objects” (p.253), “a greater percentage of tissue loss in men occurs in the frontal and temporal lobes—areas concerned with *thinking and processing emotions*” [emphasis added] (p.253).

Intransigent conflicts are particularly troubling aspects of our collective lives. The Northern Ireland-Great Britain and the Palestinian-Israeli conflicts are examples: Apparent rays of hope ultimately are betrayed time and time again in an ongoing pattern of tail-chasing that has gone on for centuries. The only hope of resolution for such intransigent conflicts lies in finding some “difference that makes a difference” (Bateson, 1972). Such a difference would represent a second- or even third-order change that would replace centuries-old, still vividly alive grievances that have been carefully cherished and polished with new blood and friction each generation. Isolated instances of apparently long-term resolution of formerly intransigent conflicts do exist: India gaining independence from British control through massive nonviolent resistance and the (still amazing to me) peaceful end to apartheid and White-minority rule in South Africa are two examples. Marie Wilson, President of the White House Project (whose goal is to get a woman into the White House), has said, “We know the power of women as peacemakers in the world from scores of stories about their effectiveness at negotiation, from South Africa to India to Pakistan to Ireland and beyond” (Wilson, 2004, p.xvi). Similarly, broad-range fundamental

change harnessing the talents and energy of both women and men to create the necessary momentum for second- and third-order change is suggested by Dr. Riane Eisler and her collaborators.

The Partnership Model Developed by Dr. Riane Eisler

I attended a lecture given by Dr. Riane Eisler, author of *The Chalice and the Blade*, in the late 1980s in which she described her work reinterpreting archaeological findings in what had always been a male-dominated, male-interpreted field. I remember her telling about experiencing *Krystal Nacht* (the Night of Broken Glass) in her Austrian home community when she was a small child, which left her haunted by a lasting impression of chaos unleashed upon innocents by malevolence and aggression. Soon after, her Jewish family fled Nazi-held Austria and lived for a time in Cuba before ending up in the United States (Eisler, 1987).

As an adult, Eisler studied archaeology and discovered an alternative way of arranging the shards of prehistoric societies such as the Minoan culture in Crete to form a very different picture of relationships, organizations, and how their culture spun out over time compared to the version envisioned and perpetuated by traditional archaeologists. She identified two basic cultural modes: (a) *the dominator model* (represented by the blade) and (b) *the collaborator model* (represented by the chalice). These competing models have been described again recently in the popular mystery novel, *The Da Vinci Code* (Brown, 2003), not to mention also in the flurry of articles, books, lectures, and law suits responding to the novel that have come forth since its publication) and now visible on the silver screen with Tom Hanks playing the scholar/hero Robert Langdon who saves and is saved by the latest Chalice as they collaborate their way into solving the mystery.

The patriarchal dominator model, according to Eisler, replaced the Mother Goddess-worshipping collaborator (*not* matriarchal, or women-ruled) cultures that had prospered peacefully for many thousands of years in Old Europe during Paleolithic and Neolithic times. The historic detour that the Western world has taken for the past few millennia ever since brute force muscled its way into control seems like the natural order of things to us only because our lifetimes are so relatively brief, Eisler asserts. But, she warns, we are fast approaching a pivotal choice point. We need to get off the detour quickly—change the fundamental direction and structure and mindset of our civilization to move away from domination and the mining of Nature and relearn how to collaborate with the environment and other people—or else we die off as a species.

In addition to her book, *The Chalice and the Blade* (1987), I would recommend that you learn more about Eisler's work and the Center for Partnership Studies that she and her partner, David Loye, founded by reading some of her other books: *The Partnership Way: New Tools for Living and Learning, Healing Our Families, Our Communities, and Our World* (Eisler and Loye, 1990); *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21st Century* (2000); *The Power of Partnership: Seven Relationships That Will Change Your Life* (Eisler, 2002); and *Educating for a Culture of Peace* (Eisler and Miller, 2004).

In the future, I plan to further explore the ideas reported in this section of the paper and gather information about a notion I once heard espoused by Dr. Virginia Satir: her dream of creating a true global network of kindred good spirits. The energy lines Satir wanted to tap into are there, generated by the body of Mother Earth herself. Will we humans have the good sense to align ourselves with them in time? I certainly hope so!

Conclusion: Women and Men Working Collaboratively Offer the Greatest Hope for Family and Community Survival During Times of Crisis and Rebuilding

By almost every benchmark, boys across the nation [U.S.] and in every demographic group are falling behind [girls]. In elementary school, boys are two times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with learning disabilities and twice as likely to be placed in special-education classes. High-school boys are losing ground to girls on standardized writing tests. The number of boys who said they didn't like school rose 71 percent between 1980 and 2001, according to a University of Michigan study. Nowhere is the shift more evident than on college campuses. Thirty years ago men represented 59 percent of the undergraduate student body. Now they're a minority at 44 percent. This widening achievement gap, says Margaret Spellings, U.S. secretary of Education, "has profound implications for the economy, society, families and democracy." (Tyre, 2006, p.46)

One interpretation of these "profound implications" is that female Americans are gaining an edge over males in many traditionally male-dominated domains that are highly valued by Mainstream American culture—and many might say that it is about time. As Gilligan (2006, p.53) pointed out, "We are only a generation away from the time when girls were effectively off the map." She cited the observation made in a 1980 handbook of adolescent psychology that adolescent girls were a grossly understudied group. Why might this have been true when adolescent girls would have represented more than half of their age group (Wilson, 2004)? I remember feeling astounded when I learned from a spokesperson of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland (Groves Conference on Marriage and Family, 1998) that research on breast cancer had been normed by studying only male subjects! The reason given was that, until recently (at that time), women's bodies, with our hormonal shifts, had been judged as providing unreliable data—

a rationale that resonated in my memory with justifications I'd heard many times for why women couldn't be elected to the American Presidency or hold other positions of power that call for a cool head in time of crisis. However, Gilligan (2006) went on to state that excluding girls' development "did more than hurt them [girls]. It distorted our understanding of boys as well" (p.53). She concluded that "both sexes suffer when one is not understood" (p.53). Tannen (1990) suggested that the communication gap between men and women can best give way to genuine interaction and mutual understanding when each gender learns about and tunes into the other's ways of talking.

Illustration. In a brilliant episode of the television series *The West Wing*, President Bartlett simultaneously appointed a woman and a man as Supreme Court Justices with the woman filling the role as Chief Justice (a historic first, not yet reaching beyond the realm of fiction, of course). The two new Justices were polar opposites on a liberal/conservative continuum but who could respect and collaborate with each other as they cheerfully sparred. The President wanted the two extreme Justices to pull middle-of-the-road moderation into a debate of the full spectrum regarding issues that would be presented to them.

Another illustration. In a similar but real-life vein, Doris Kearns Goodwin, in her recent (2005) nonfiction book entitled *Team of Rivals*, has described how Abraham Lincoln, once he was elected, created a brilliant think-tank collaboration made up of his chief competitors for the presidency.

That Lincoln, after winning the presidency, made the unprecedented decision to incorporate his eminent rivals into his political family, the cabinet, was evidence of a profound self-confidence and a first indication of what would prove to others a most unexpected greatness. [New York senator William H.] Seward became secretary of state,

[Ohio governor Salmon P.] Chase secretary of the treasury, and [Missouri statesman Edward] Bates attorney general. . . . Their presence in the cabinet might have threatened to eclipse the obscure prairie lawyer from Springfield. (p.xvi)

However, these “eminent rivals” did not eclipse Lincoln. Goodwin went on to say that Lincoln was tuned into the web of human connections and skilled at forging and tending interpersonal bonds that called out the best in those around him.

Lincoln’s political genius [was] revealed through his extraordinary array of personal qualities that enabled him to form friendships with men who had previously opposed him; to repair injured feelings that, left untended, might have escalated into permanent hostility; to assume responsibility for the failures of subordinates; to share credit with ease; and to learn from mistakes. . . . His success in dealing with the strong egos of the men in his cabinet suggests that in the hands of a truly great politician the qualities we generally associate with decency and morality—kindness, sensitivity, compassion, honesty, and empathy—can also be impressive political resources. (p.xvii)

Notably, most of the stellar qualities of Lincoln’s team leadership style are considered typical of women’s approaches to relationships. President Lincoln’s was a collaborative approach that, even in a time of terrible conflict that was tearing the nation in two, did not degenerate into a dominator approach.

A final illustration. In 1992, then-Senator Al Gore demonstrated that he clearly “got it”—that is, he understood Mother Earth’s message that humankind is on the brink of ecological disaster, a message that his 2006 movie reportedly reiterates. In his 1992 book entitled *Earth in Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*, Gore outlined his conviction that the developed nations

are caught up in a destructive pattern of behaviors that are strikingly similar to those of an individual who is addicted to alcohol or other drugs.

I believe that our civilization is, in effect, addicted to the consumption of the earth itself. This addictive relationship distracts us from the pain of what we have lost: a direct experience of our connection to the vividness, vibrancy, and aliveness of the rest of the natural world. (p.220)

He then used the metaphor of our civilization being like a dysfunctional family system in which members are taught from infancy to internalize particular rules and assumptions about how to live.

In the modern culture of the West, the assumptions about life we are taught as infants are heavily influenced by our Cartesian world view—namely, that human beings should be separate from the earth, just as the mind should be separate from the body, and that nature is to be subdued, just as feelings are to be suppressed. (p.230)

Gore maintained that this large extended family engages in “unsustainable development [that] is . . . what might be called a form of ‘future abuse’” (p.235) and exhibits a strong *denial system*, defined as a “strategy used by those who wish to believe that they can continue their addicted lives with no ill effects for themselves or others” (p.223). Like a dysfunctional family, our dysfunctional civilization can open its self-awareness, confront its addiction and denial system, and begin traveling on a new path toward healing our relationship with nature, Gore concluded.

Gore indicated that

the way our civilization as a whole relates to the environment has been characterized by a determined extension outward into nature, with far too little emphasis on patterns that might contain, protect, and nurture the environment. According to this view, for the last

few thousand years, Western civilization has emphasized a distinctly male way of relating to the world and has organized itself around philosophical structures that devalue the distinctly female approach to life. . . . Ultimately, part of the solution for the environmental crisis may well lie in our ability to achieve a better balance between the sexes, leavening the dominant male perspective with a healthier respect for female ways of experiencing the world. (pp.212-213)

In conclusion, I would like to say that I recognize the irony that my final two illustrations shine the spotlight on men. But I like that. I have not been arguing that women should take over the running of the American government and the rest of the world. Biosocially speaking, women are not made that way. Rather, women generally are consensus builders and collaborators.

Neither am I saying that women have cornered the market on attributes like negotiating and finessing conflicts while maintaining a cool head, nor are we the exclusive dispensers of warmth, compassion, nurturance, creativity, and stamina under stress and crisis. Instead, I have been exploring reasons and, to a very limited extent, ways in which women and men could walk the corridors of political and social power together, reinforcing our similarities while learning from, honoring, and celebrating our differences. Only then can our families, communities, and home nation as a whole be playing with a full deck.

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I examine the question of what women's roles are in times of family and community stress and report that there is little in the literature to answer this question. I also present the notion that women have unique gifts and strengths to contribute when crisis strikes. I give three case examples, one of a special environment that a woman created for other women to share and relax in, another of a woman who creatively helped her community to heal after a terrorist attack, and the third of a woman in an Appalachian Virginia mining community who took on the prime-mover leadership role in community redevelopment following a period of overwhelming economic crisis. Healthy family dynamics lead to greater happiness and stress relief. Learn how to build healthy family relationships and address common issues. Strong family relationships also are a source of comfort, guidance, and strength that you can draw on in times of stress. Likewise, they provide a sense of belonging and unconditional love you are not likely to find anywhere else. Morsa Images / Taxi / Getty Images. But when these relationships are unhealthy or stress-filled, they can feel exhausting and emotionally draining. In fact, a highly-conflicted or toxic family relationship can cause a lot of damage. Not only do these unhealthy relationships deprive you of support, but they also can create additional stress, conflict, and even health