

Does anatomy still mean destiny in U.S.?



Write Angles

"Women, like men, are both born and made. One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces this creature."

— Simone de Beauvoir

In Eugene there is a daily radio program that includes a competition called "The Battles of the Sexes." The participants are a man and a woman who each receive questions that they ("according to the American gender system") should have a hard time to answer. The man answers questions about products in the house and children, and the woman has to answer questions concerning math, cars and sports.

Most Americans grow up to feel that men and women play very distinct parts in society, where the women and their work is to serve primarily family needs — her husband and children.

The breadwinning husband has the benefit of coming home to a clean house with dinner served in the kitchen, while the housewife can enjoy the luxury of being "financially supported" by her husband.

From outside, this picture can be regarded as ideal and valuable, but from inside it is clear that both men and women are suffering from this traditional system, perhaps without even being aware of it. The American women have become too dependent upon the breadwinning husband, which means that they are neglecting themselves opportunities like an education and a career. Even if the role of a housewife is important, it's time to see beyond the traditional system and realize that anatomy still means destiny in the United States.

If you are born a woman, you can never be regarded as equal and reach goals in life because your destiny is to please the man and neglect your own feelings and opinions. Studies in a number of countries have shown that women who are employed, and especially those who continue to be employed in the middle years of life, are more liable to take an interest in community activities, to display more independence in political judgment, to play active rather than passive roles.

Coming from Norway, a leading country in the field of equal rights, I was raised by a father who changed my diapers and a mother who was out all day working. My father had moved his office home for the while, so that my mother could continue in her position as a medical doctor. It was a wonderful way to get to know my parents who had adapted into their new roles in the 1960s.

In Norway the principle of equality between the sexes was fully sanctioned during this time, which meant that fundamental attitude held by people was rapidly changing. Both individuals and families were prepared to alter their lifestyles in keeping with the newly espoused principle of equality, which meant that my father took on his share of work in the house, while my mother was an emancipated working mother. I grew up acknowledging that both my mum and dad had something valuable to give me, and that my personality would have been split in half if I would just have had my mum by my side during my upbringing.

Coming to the United States then was not at all easy, facing a totally different gender system. I still remember arriving in Seattle and meeting Americans for the first time.

I called my parents and told them that I was regarded as an egocentric person who placed personal gratification above (the traditional American) family duty, by claiming that women

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should be able to seek fulfillment both in the public and the private world. They laughed, and wished me good luck, and from that stage on I knew I was in for a battle in defending my position and sex in a new society.

Although I was fighting a different battle than the American feminists, I believed I could change the traditional men's picture of women and women's picture of themselves by educating them about the gender system in Norway, using my home as the perfect example of how it is possible to reach equality, and to show it values and benefits. If I could make the American women comprehend that they are treated in every circumstance by their sex, and that the life outside of the house is more than just a trap of monotonous low-paying jobs, I know they will win more than just personal gratification.

And maybe most important, where men are accustomed to women working, and to the broader interrelation of the sexes that follows from this, they are more likely to be tolerant of women seeking roles beyond those that are traditionally accepted.

Today, more than 70 percent of Norwegian women have paid employment outside of the home, and the country has an increasing number of women in parliament. The prime minister is a woman, as are nine out of 19 cabinet ministers and the leaders of two of the political parties.

After 10 months in the United States, I am still regarded by American male traditionalists in terms of my sex, even if I have tried to discuss, and show them otherwise. I believe that most American men recognize that

they have been comfortable with the benefits of the status quo, not allowing themselves to change in the same way as the Norwegian men and women.

The attitude is clearly much the same as it was even before the feminist movement started, and it is this attitude that has to change if the United States wants to reach a gender-neutral system. If the American women can realize that it will be more beneficial to place personal gratification above family duty, and the American men will recognize that the role of playing breadwinner and macho are no longer necessary, both sexes can work together for equality which will provide them with new knowledge about each other. The restricted boundaries to both men and women will open so that exchange of roles can begin, and so we can find tolerance for the roles sought beyond those that are traditionally accepted.

I realize that to close the gap between principle and legislation on the one hand, and reality and individual attitudes on the other hand will be extremely difficult in a society where inequality is a part of the American culture. Maybe it's about time that the Americans can see that something is sincerely wrong with the places of the sexes and recognize that anatomy does not have to mean destiny.

Being a woman in 1993 should mean equal opportunities, not only a contract into marriage. The dreams and goals that many American women carry inside should be brought into light and recognized both by the opposite sex and the government.

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