

The Oxytocin Antidote: Why the UN Must Sponsor a 5th WCW

by Jean Shinoda Bolen (February 2009)

What we think of as masculine and feminine qualities are innate human qualities that when allowed to develop in men and women result in psychologically whole people. In patriarchal societies where men rule through their ability to dominate other men, men fear being humiliated. Dominator values emerge early in boyhood, suppressing tender-heartedness. To have empathy becomes a handicap.

Under stress, men and women respond differently. Women such as those that ended the conflict in Liberia who are in a risky situation together bond with each other as women do, through talking about the situation, sharing ideas and feelings. Physiologically, there is an increase in oxytocin -- the maternal or bonding hormone that reduces stress, increases trust, and is enhanced by estrogen. Men respond to stress with an increase in adrenaline that is enhanced by testosterone.

Ongoing civil wars and conflicts, like gang wars in the neighborhood, are usually led by men who seek power and control, who are driven by fear of humiliation or fantasies of retaliation. The fate of the neighborhood or the world is then in the hands of psychologically adolescent, high adrenaline-testosterone men, who avoid any identification with weakness and aren't able to feel compassion. The oxytocin antidote to this is the power of women who come together to keep the children safe, who can draw upon "enough is enough" mother-bear energy and work for peace when men do not see anyway out of the conflict. Such is the situation in Gaza, the latest round in the nobody-can-win, Middle-East conflict. Such were the brutal years of civil war in Liberia with 200,000 deaths without hope of a sustainable peace until women became involved. Muslim and Christian women did not make religion divisive; as they saw it--they prayed to the same god and given their realistic fears and the suffering they endured, probably prayed for the same things. They were a moral force who appealed to the International community which responded. The Secretary-Generals of the United Nations, current and past, have been men with well-developed masculine and feminine qualities as have all leaders with wisdom, compassion, maturity and moral authority. Documents have been created at the United Nations that support and acknowledge the need for full participation of men and women. For example, if UN Security Council Resolution 1325 were followed, women would be involved in defusing the situation leading up to conflicts, and would be a strong presence in every peace negotiation. Women are usually not locked into either-or thinking, and with empathic understanding and ability to compromise without losing face, have these advantages.

That more oxytocin and less testosterone could have prevented the global financial crisis--attributed to risk-taking, competitive bankers and security traders--was seriously discussed at the World Economic Forum in Davos. The speculation was that the problem on Wall Street wasn't sub-prime mortgages but elevated testosterone, and that if the firm had been Lehman Brothers and Sisters, instead of Lehman Bros, this would be a different story.

5WCW The United Nations needs to be the sponsor of the 5th women's world conference, so that women from all 192 UN countries know that it is about and for them. Many will be able to come only because it is a UN conference that is recognized by their governments. It needs to be designated as the 5th, to acknowledge that it follows the other four, specifically Beijing and that it is intended to bring to fruition the goals and aspirations that were put into the Beijing Platform for Action (with no further debate on them). It would be as significant to women working for women as the Olympics are to athletes. Events leading up to it, the conference itself, and the ripples radiating out from it, including meeting in circles, would raise consciousness and oxytocin levels, moving us toward reaching a critical mass and a new era.