



Keep Your House in Order

Helping professionals are reminded:
constantly improve your skills

However, the skill of separating one's own personal issues from work done with the person seeking help receives little attention after college, but is paramount to effective and ethical work. If helping professionals believe they have no personal issues, deny them or otherwise neglect to address them, they can lose focus or worse use counseling with clients to work through their own issues. For example, a professional with a previous substance abuse problem may be so strongly impacted by a client who is just beginning the recovery process that they may struggle to work effectively with that person.

Unlike substance abuse, *everyone* is intimately acquainted with gender. They can relate. They can speak from experience. Therefore, working with girls, which requires addressing gender, has the potential to prompt over-identification and problems for any professional.

To increase awareness of possible trouble spots in yourself and others ask these types of questions:

- ✓ Have I had experiences like this young woman?
- ✓ Do I find myself reacting more emotionally/strongly than I usually do?
- ✓ Do I have strong opinions/beliefs about this?
 - ✓ Do I find myself doing most of the talking?
- ✓ Am I thinking/talking about my own experiences rather than actively listening?
- ✓ Am I feeling judgmental about this young woman?
- ✓ What have been my experiences with harassment, discrimination and gender role stereotyping?
 - ✓ Do I have beliefs about what is acceptable behavior if a person is female vs. male?

They must be asked on a frequent basis if they are to be effective. Self-awareness is not something you arrive at and then stop striving to achieve.

It can be an unpleasant process but is a governing principle for ethical practice. If you don't know yourself and your biases, at minimum you are doing clients a disservice and at worst you are putting them at risk for further pain and suffering.

Girl Connection

FOR THOSE WHO SERVE ADOLESCENT FEMALES
IOWA GENDER-SPECIFIC SERVICES TASK FORCE
JUNE 2004

Women and men have varying gender-related actions to take and ideas to entertain in their work with girls.

Women Can

Explore their own "unfeminine" emotions

Confront fears of standing up to the powerful

Feel the disruption girls cause in the precarious balance of women's lives without silencing them

Support other women in all of their complexity

Refuse to engage in relational aggression

Men Can

Know girls are taught to seek male attention

Maintain clear boundaries

Overcome their own gender role association

Encourage girls to value other girls & women

Model respect for women with coworkers

Take action on social issues involving girls

These actions/ideas increase capacity to examine gender bias and the effect of any related personal issues on work with girls. It also begins the process of challenging these biases and mitigating negative gender-related personal issues.

It is the responsibility of professionals to expand their own gendered behaviors, attitudes and expectations as well as strive to alleviate detrimental effects of unresolved personal issues. This will demonstrate to girls that narrow definitions of gender can be challenged, broadened and changed for the better and that personal issues can be overcome.

If you spend all your time thrashing about in relational quicksand, scrambling to pull yourself out or to throw someone else in, especially that someone who has the courage to challenge the status quo, stand out, or take a leadership role, you have done nothing to change current patterns of sexism and their intimate relationship to other forms of oppression. You are simply living in it and enabling it.

-adapted from *Girlfighting*

There are also actions everyone can take to avoid personal issues getting in the way of work with girls and to deliver effective, appropriate services and advocacy:

Everyone Can

Be open to and emotionally available for mutual relationships with girls

Design programming around female development not personal beliefs

Reflect an understanding of the realities of girls' lives

Take social and political action on behalf of girls

Stop using and accepting thoughtless clichés, behaviors and attitudes about women & girls

Be honest with themselves - is what I'm doing in the best interest of girls?

Work toward optimal functioning & self-awareness in their own life

Struggle with the dominant culture -

ROCK THE BOAT!

Brown, L.M. (2003). *Girlfighting: Betrayal and Rejection among Girls*. New York: New York University Press.

The Girl Connection

newsletter is provided as a service of the Iowa Gender-Specific Services Task Force.

August 2004 ~ "Keep Your House in Order"

For back issues of *The Girl Connection*, more information about the Gender-Specific Services Task Force, or if you are willing to receive future issues via e-mail to save mailing costs, please contact us:

Kathy Nesteby, Challenge Grant Coordinator
Iowa Commission on the Status of Women
1-800-558-4427 or (515) 281-6915
Kathy.Nesteby@iowa.gov
www.state.ia.us/dhr/sw/girls

**PLEASE
COPY
AND
DISTRIBUTE
WIDELY**

Iowa Gender-Specific Services Task Force
Iowa Commission on the Status of Women
Lucas State Office Building
Des Moines, IA 50319