

# Imagine: Gender 2025

## A vision of our gender future

By Herb Goldberg, PhD

A quarter of the way into the 21st century and the rage, the shock, the victim attitude and the blaming accusations of the men and women who thought they had become aware of the deeper realities and truths of gender, and had been witness to a standoff in which men and women equally felt abused and betrayed by each other began to give way to a new realization.

Both genders began to see that they had been equal players in a dance that they had expected and even demanded during its beginnings but then resented and felt betrayed by as it played out, ground down, spun painfully out of control and finally ended in rage and heartbreak. The fantasies created by defensive romantic beginnings shattered and left rage and righteous blaming in its place. These ending dramas were as painful and ugly as the beginning fantasies were ecstatic, hopeful and inspiring.

In 2025, men and women began to be able to see beyond the traditional games and defensive blaming that masqueraded as personal liberation and instead began to see themselves as part of a polarized psychological dysfunction and disease, complementary parts of an unknowingly defensive and toxic process where the other gender's 'sickness' was clearly visible but one's own was not. The essence of what had made a man feel masculine, 'like a man' and even 'macho' and that made a woman feel feminine, 'like a woman' and desirable by men had its roots in a toxic soil that victimized both genders equally through the loss of access by women to their outward power and by men to their inner vulnerability. What made her sexy also had made her childlike and cost her a sense of a separate self.

That which had made him attractive as a man also had made him machine-like and personally disconnected and crippled in his efforts to love and be loved. The price he had paid for his masculinity was his ability to connect intimately to others, to feel, to listen, to touch, to be afraid to say "I don't know," to express vulnerable emotions and to be playful and light in his world. Masculinity had produced instead a man who was a grim, paranoid, rigid, isolated, cold, controlling, sex-obsessed, critical and friendless being. While his masculine process made him a frustrating partner to women and an alienating figure to his children, it had also placed an emotional wall between himself and other men who were seen more as competitors than peers. The price he paid for 'being a man' rapidly out weighed the initial validations, victories and praise that behaving in a traditionally masculine way had brought him.

Her femininity came at the expense of her self-esteem, her ability to experience a carved-out, separate self; to know who she was and what she wanted; to feel when she was angry and to say so, to feel competent and in control, to love herself as a sexual being and to know she had it in her to make the choices that could lead to a feeling of healthy power and fulfilment. While others might have seen her as spiritual and loving because of her 'nice' outward facade, she knew that inside herself she felt angry; anxious, helpless and even crazy. That was the ultimate payoff for a femininity that she believed initially would bring her love, intimacy and womanly fulfilment.

The initial shock and terror of a new realization was beginning to set in for men and women both. The opposite sex was, after all, not to blame. The other gender was not the cause of the frustration and disillusionment for men's and women's inability to see past the fantasies and illusions of gender. The major culprit was the defensive process that lay beneath the masculine and feminine behaviours that both had so diligently cultivated. Each had paid the price for the gender goals they could not control or see beyond with bitterness and a sense of being defeated. Like moths to a flame, men and women both had been seduced by the siren calls of traditional

gender postures that were supposed to make them winners in a world of “happy ever after.” The more women and men manifested these myths of femininity and masculinity, the more crippled, inauthentic and frustrated they became. Nothing would turn out as it initially seemed it would. The promise of happiness deteriorated into the reality of confusion and pain. What each had romantically initially believed about the other had turned out to be untrue and not to be trusted. After a while, the exhilaration of identifying the other sex as the enemy could fade. Focus on one’s own process had to replace it or men and women would harden forever in defensive fear of each other.

The terror of knowing and the initial victim exhilaration of believing and identifying the cause of everything bad to be the other sex had to be transformed into a new understanding and way of being. That was the hard part and the scary journey ahead. Moving beyond misleading addictive beliefs, feelings and excitations that had motivated so much of what they both had believed and done was the new challenge. But what could replace being the fearless, goal directed, striving, proving and winning man he had previously sought to be, or the ultimate in beauty, spirituality, love, selflessness and intimacy that previously had defined her and given her a sense of being worthy and desirable? After all, the compelling but defensive illusions of gender had the power of so much history behind them. The romance of gender expectations and dreams had been passed from generation to generation, with hardly any resistance of examination except for the occasional protest or by the occasional gender ‘misfit’ who couldn’t play the game the way it was supposed to be played and who was made to feel like a loser and a deviant for that. As a new consciousness emerged, the old gender defensiveness became increasingly visible.

However, as bad as the endpoints of gender had proven to be, the absence of these illusions and compelling fantasies of masculinity and femininity seemed unthinkable. The alternative realities also seemed unexciting and unappealing. After all, what could life be like without the football hero and the cheerleader? The path towards being different than before seemed initially to be a lonely and frightening one, like a threatening void. The men and women who couldn’t play the traditional games of masculinity and femininity felt initially in danger of becoming invisible and reviled. The craving to go back to the old dreams and fantasy goals lurked in the shadows and beckoned in the way that old drug habits haunt the dreams of former addicts. How were men and women to cross the divide of anger and mistrust that had been created following the false liberation that had come from perceiving the other sex as the oppressors?

After all these initial resistances and terror of change, a new understanding, awareness and process of growth began to emerge. Initially, the withdrawal from the traditional polarized gender behaviours contained the same panic felt by the addicts of substances such as alcohol and drugs. That terror had always been a part of giving up an addiction without which living life initially seemed unimaginable. How would life feel without these crutches? How could life feel good if men didn’t behave ‘like men’ and women didn’t react ‘like women’?

However, a world unlike one anyone had previously imagined began slowly to emerge. Men and women slowly evolved beyond their traditional gender expectations. Without the destructive filters of traditional masculinity and femininity, women and men began to experience a new reality and way of being as their defences dissolved and they each became balanced and fluid individuals. Finally, a world could now be imagined in which men didn’t need to aggress and attack and turn the flow of life into a mechanical experience in order to prove themselves to be men. They no longer needed to create artificial problems for which they could endlessly pursue bogus, temporary and self-defeating solutions that would only create new problems, pain and destruction. In 2025, men could imagine being without needing to continuously prove or pursue illusory goals and truths mainly designed to validate their defensive sense of being men. They did not need to destroy their bodies and their feeling selves, their personal caring capacity for connection to others with behaviours and habits that allowed them temporary validation but destroyed them and others in the process. Furthermore, sex didn’t have to be men’s obsession, the primary reason to relate to women and their only way of experiencing relief from painful, personal alienation.

Women in 2025 at the same time discovered that being reactive objects of beauty who had to turn their power into helplessness and their separate uniqueness into a fusion with those they came close to, lovers, children and friends, could be replaced by a new way of being that would make their lives and their world a place to actively shape rather than to fear, experience pain in and protect themselves from. Men could be their new friends now that they didn't need to seek them out for protection and escape from fear. There was no longer reason to fear them as exploiters and controllers, once women learned to set boundaries and be powerful, separate and proactive beings. Loving and being powerful, being spiritual and yet rooted in the every day would could exist side by side.

Men and women in the year 2025 could become playful in the world and with each other without the artificial excitements and bottomless cravings of polarized gender that had previously disfigured them and that caused them to resent and fear each other. Both could experience the pleasure of being fully present without the defensive and hidden agendas that had made the simple beauty and pleasures of being their complete and natural selves on this planet previously impossible. Men and women would now become fellow voyagers and equal support systems in experiencing and exploring the mysteries and beauty of life while living with the flow of what is rather than disfiguring it and themselves with traditional gender rigidities, frustrating games and goals. That became the emerging and non-defensive liberation in 2025, a new beginning of men and women being complete, growing and similar beings moving in tandem rather than in opposing directions.

This article is taken from the 67th Jan-Mar 2004 edition of Everyman, A Men's Journal.

Dr. Herb Goldberg is a licensed clinical psychologist in California and a Professor Emeritus at California State University, Los Angeles.