

# Gender Equality: Celebrating Our Differences

By Barrington H. Brennen, June 1, 2018



Why are so many confusing gender equality with sameness? Some individuals think that gender equality has to do with body parts, tasks, and abilities. Gender equality is not sameness, and no one is seeking to develop an argument for sameness between the sexes. Here is my clear and simple definition of gender equality. Gender equality means that males and females on planet earth have equal voice, vote, authority, decision-making power, opportunity, self-governance, and protection under the law. This is intrinsic equality. However, culture and tradition have sought to remove equality by imposing gender roles, limiting functions, and restricting opportunity for females, based on misconceptions about value and ability. This false teaching created the nesting place for the development of male supremacy, slavery, racism,

xenophobia, misogyny, bigotry, child abuse, incest, intimate partner abuse, marital rape, totalitarianism, communism, patriarchy, and matriarchy, etc.

This is why the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was passed by the United Nations in 1948. It sought to restore the natural rights of human beings that were being trampled upon. The first three articles of the declaration states: “1) We are all born free. We all have our own thoughts and ideas. We should all be treated in the same way. 2) Don’t Discriminate. These rights belong to everybody, whatever our differences. 3) The Right to Life. We all have the right to life, and to live in freedom and safety.” Ironically, the last article of the declaration, Article 30 states: “No one can take away your human rights.” Isn’t this what some religious leaders and churches have been doing over the centuries—taking away human rights!

## **THE DIFFERENCES TO CELEBRATE**

Yes! Everyone is intrinsically equal in value, and equality fortifies the beauty and purpose of the differences between the sexes and other groupings. There are differences between the sexes—genital, muscularity, organ size, hormones, just to name a few. Then within one sex, for example the male sex, there are differences in height, language, depth of voice, hair texture, ethnicity, race, skills, abilities, etc. We are not all the same. Our differences, even those within the same gender, have literally nothing to do with gender equality. Let me stress again this point. Gender equality has nothing to do with sameness, and it does not infer nor require sameness. It has all to do with intrinsic human value.

Some who are supporting gender equality but are passionately against sameness have it all wrong. Why? Is it because they are seeking to prevent same-sex relationships? Since the word “same” is a part of the description of that kind of relationship, there seems to be a fear of application and a false understanding. The truth is that sameness has nothing to do with gender equality. Even within some same-sex relationships, there is no gender equality. Some of them follow harmful traditional roles that result in abuse, discord, and ultimately physical and emotional harm.

To illustrate how tradition and culture have confused the topic of gender equality and sameness, I will share a few points from the book, “*The Mismeasure of Woman*” by Carol

Tavris. In this book the author reveals “The Three Myths of the Universal Male” that will help explain this painful misconception. Here are the direct quotes: “1) “Men are normal: women, being the “opposite” are deficient. Masculine is good, feminine is bad (or anything attributed to male/female traits, qualities).” 2) Men are normal: women are opposite from men, but superior to them. Proponents of this view emphasize aspects of female experience or nature (childbirth, spirituality, pacifism, compassion, empathy) as morally superior to men’s experiences and qualities. In this view, man is still the standard against which women’s behavior is judged, even if the judgments are kinder. 3) Men are normal: and women should be like them. This would appear as an antidote to the fundamental school of differences. It ignores that differences do exist between men and women—in life experiences, resources, power, and physiology—and it assumes that it is appropriate to generalize from the male standard to all women.” Carol Tavris explains that “these three errors have done serious harm to women’s feelings, sense of worth, and their position in our society—and to men’s feelings and position in society as well.”

Could it be that in our country these myths are still relevant? It is my view that this article is correct. In our country the confusion of gender equality and sameness comes of out the view that males are used as the measuring rod for gender standards or values, thus obliterating the intrinsic equality and value of the sexes.

Here is a main point in my article today. It is my view that it is wrong to say that males and females are not equal in all aspects. Why? Because it represents a misunderstanding of terms. In addition, the differences in gender type, ability, etc., have nothing to do with equality. Healthy males and females are not seeking sameness. They are celebrating the differences and learning how to integrate, participate, appreciate and value each other fully. They are standing up for each other to have equal voice, vote, authority, decision-making power, opportunity, self-governance, and protection under the law. That’s equality.

### **WE DON’T WANT SAMENESS**

Here’s another point. Could it also be that the confusion between the terms “gender equality” and “sameness” is because there is a fixation on gender roles? Traditionalists have a list of roles for males and another for females. I teach that roles in the home or society should be based on talent and not gender. I caution you that roles and biological functions are two different things. Pregnancy and breast feeding are biological functions based on anatomical design. From a traditionalist concept, roles are pre-assigned duties based on cultural expectations and family traditions that are created out of a misconception of the abilities of males and females. Hence, women cook and men clean cars. From the gender equality context, roles are based on gifts, talents, skills, abilities, not gender. These are voluntarily applied. On the other hand, for traditionalists, roles are imposed, and those who transgress are penalized. In traditionalist relationships, roles cause much tension and stress, even if it is not discussed openly. On the other hand, equalitarian couples are more contented and happier—they are equal.

For Christians there should be a clear understanding of gender equality that comes right out of the design. Note that there is a differentiation between gender equality and biological differences right in the scripture passage Genesis 1:26-7: “Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground. . . So, God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them.” Note that in verse 26 it is

about equality, value, authority, voice, and vote. In verse 27 it is about biological differences. Both equality and gender differences are neatly packaged into a beautiful, harmonious creature—humankind—male and female.

## **THE FACTS**

For those who believe that masculine or maleness means bigger, stronger, and better, then how do we interpret the following facts? Men have larger hearts and lungs than women. However, women have larger livers, stomachs, thyroid glands, and kidneys than men. Women have lower blood pressure and a faster heartbeat than men. Women have greater endurance than men. Men have more brute force than women. Here is another fact. Research indicates that “women are thought to have more resistance to disease due to the fact that their adrenal glands produce more cortin than men do. The only three diseases that women die from more often than men are breast cancer, female reproductive disorders, and benign tumors pressing against vital organs. Otherwise, every other disease, including of course cancer and heart disease, kills men at a higher frequency.” The point is that there are many differences to celebrate, yet males and females are equal.

While we fight for gender equality let us not confuse the points. The fight for gender equality began centuries ago. Remember females could not be educated and hold professions. In The Bahamas, females could not vote in a general election, own property, have bank accounts, inherit, etc. Women had to fight to be recognized as having equal value with equal voice, vote, opportunity and deserving of equal protection under the law. Why was that so? For the same reason some people are fighting against “sameness;” for fear that their own belief system will come crashing down. Let me repeat, gender equality is not sameness; neither are gender equality proponents like myself, agitating for sameness. In fact, such sameness does not and cannot exist anywhere in the world. We want the differences and are celebrating them. Gender equality simply means that both sexes have equal voice, vote, authority, decision-making power, self-governance, opportunity, and protection under the law. We are equal! Let’s celebrate the difference!

Barrington H. Brennen, MA, NCP, BCCP, a marriage and family therapist and board certified clinical psychotherapist, USA. Send your questions or comments to [barringtonbrennen@gmail.com](mailto:barringtonbrennen@gmail.com) or write to P.O. Box CB-13019, Nassau, The Bahamas, or visit [www.soencouragement.org](http://www.soencouragement.org) or call 242-327-1980