

Gender flexing

"N" either sex, without some

fertilization of the complementary characteristics of the other, is capable of the highest reaches of human endeavor."

— H.L. Mencken

Manuel, my house painter, was looking at my walls.

"Wow, these are great colors," he said.

I had to admit the truth: I hadn't chosen the colors myself.

"I bet Geoff did," Manuel replied, with a glint in his eye. He was referring to Geoff, a builder. Manuel continued, "You know, Geoff is like a woman. He knows a lot about colors and decorating."

Anyone who interacts with Geoff knows he's not effeminate, in the least. But like everyone, he has a masculine and a feminine side. We all do.

As Susan Sontag pointed out, "What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine."

Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Jung, called it the two parts of our personalities: the anima and the animus. The Chinese have taught us about the masculine and feminine with the yin and the yang. As Susan Sontag pointed out, "What is most beautiful in virile men is something feminine; what is most beautiful in feminine women is something masculine."

Still, often when a woman

expresses her masculine side (has a strong opinion, is assertive, says what she thinks), she is seen as a threat. She is called names.

She is also healthier. She is seldom passive aggressive. And, surprise, she is respected and admired by other strong men and women. Finally, she gets her needs met.

It's healthy to express both our yin and yang every day. Research shows that people who are androgynous score higher on self-esteem indexes. Simply put, life requires us to sometimes be a compassionate, empathic listener, and sometimes we need to be assertive and say "No" or negotiate for money.

Expressing both sides is characteristic of a successful manager, according to business gurus like Kenneth Blanchard, and successful relationships outside of work with our children and spouses.

— *By Audrey Nelson*

Nelson, of Boulder, is a consultant, trainer, keynote speaker and author. Her book, "You Don't Say: Navigating Nonverbal Communication Between the Sexes," is in six languages. Check out www.audreynelson.com.



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