

INTRODUCTION

The lives of men and women are shaped in very distinct ways by an invisible force that is unavoidable. Betty Freidan called it “a problem without a name.” I call it gender socialization. In this book, I will introduce a model for understanding how deeply “gendering” invades the inner life of women.

During my years as a psychotherapist and educator, I have observed distinctive patterns in the psychology of women. Her need to be a “bride” is a dream so powerful that she will abandon her good judgment; put aside her dreams; be willing to endure years of unhappiness; and cling to hope in a hopeless situation. There is a “bride” in every woman, regardless of her race, color, or sexual orientation. The bride is the romanticized ideal of herself and her life. The metaphor of the “Old Bride” and the “New Bride” used in this book put us in touch with a model every woman can relate to.

To be an “Old Bride,” you don’t need to walk down the aisle in a white gown and veil and be given away to a man. You simply have to be a woman. I have seen this ideal control the lives of lesbian women who search for the perfect love. A woman needs to believe in the underlying definition of a bride: that in order to exist; to be worthwhile; to be a real and proper woman, she must be in a romantic relationship. She must habitually be willing to defer to those she loves and be responsible for the well-being of everyone who touches her life.

A woman who firmly commits herself to social expectation, no matter how unreasonable they feel, is an “Old Bride.” The “Old Bride” belongs to everyone, but not herself.