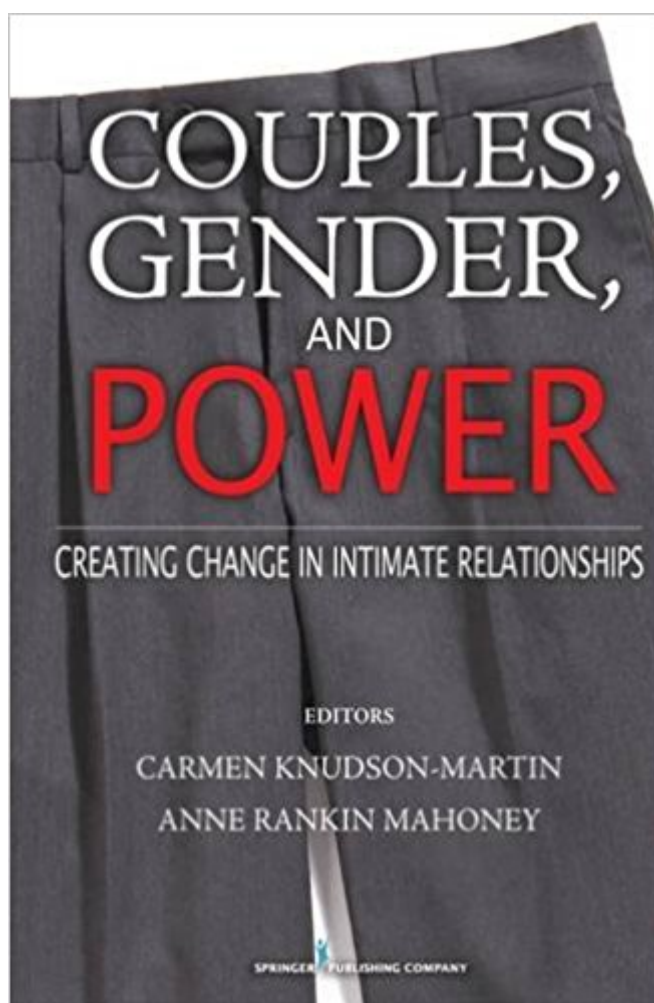


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# Couples, Gender, And Power: Creating Change In Intimate Relationships



## Synopsis

[A] comprehensive, critical, empirical, and practical compilation of investigations about how diverse couples are trying to implement change and pursue equality in their relationships." -Katherine R. Allen, PhD Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University [A] true gift to couple research. The studies reported in this marvelously disciplined collection hold living implications for couples and their therapists. -Evan Imber-Black Director, Center for Families and Health, Ackerman Institute for the Family While numerous couples strive for equality in their relationships, many are unaware of the insidious ways in which gender and power still affect them-from their career choices to communication patterns, child-rearing, housework, and more. Written for mental health professionals and others interested in contemporary couple relationships, this research-based book shows how couples are able to move beyond the dangers of gendered inequality and the legacy of hidden male power. The book analyzes the relationships of couples from various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The contributors present innovative clinical interventions, and suggest strategies therapists can use to help couples transform their relationships from being gender-based to equality-based. Explores these key issues: The risks of being in a relationship ruled by "gender legacy" behavior The differences between couples who get caught in gender legacy patterns and those who do not Gender-based patterns across the life cycle, including newly formed couples; early marriage; child-rearing; mothering and fathering Gendered power in couples dealing with illness; ethnic and racial differences; immigration and displacement issues

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## Customer Reviews

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is Professor Emerita of Sociology at the University of Denver, where she also served three years as Director of Women's Studies. Her current areas of interest are gender, women's studies, couple relationships, and family. She has written numerous articles in these areas as well as articles and a book on juvenile justice, entitled *Juvenile Justice in Context*. She earned her Ph.D. in sociology from Columbia University and her M.A. from Northwestern University.

for school

This book is about how the inequality between men and women affect marital relationships, and it gives reasons as to why it exists. It points to the differences among men and women as the issue: women, for example, are more accommodating than men, and men are more assertive in getting their needs met. I can see the logic in blaming gender roles for gender inequality. I also see its

futility. Yes, men and women are different, but when we keep our personal power, we like each other that way. The problem with the Knudson-Martin & Mahoney study, and the reason it resulted in poor marital equality among its subjects may lie in both their definition of and assumptions about equality. My experience as a woman is that I do think I am better at cleaning my home and raising my child than anyone else. This is not compensation for inequality as Knudson-Martin and Mahoney imply. I am a single mother. There is no man. It was my experience as a wife and girlfriend that I accommodated my schedule around men. I am more relationship oriented and take more initiative to be with men than they do with women, or anyone else for that matter. Traditionally, men are more inwardly focused. They do enjoy our company, but they are more aware of their need to be alone while I am more likely to overlook that need in myself. I also notice traditional men are more oriented toward hands-on projects that require large tools and math. Whether this is societally or biologically based is moot; if we put more value on these tasks (and I don't), we will say that men have greater status. Fortunately for all of us, the lines between what men and women are good at are blurred. We are all free to explore the interests previously relegated to either gender, and work toward excelling at them if we so choose. Still, I hope it is a mistake to believe that men and women must behave in the same ways in order to achieve an equal balance of power. "Women's orientation toward the needs of others and men's avoidance of one-down positions" (p. 33) are qualities that need not be suppressed. Women and men can learn from each others' strengths, but whether or not they do, both can discover power that does not necessitate becoming more like the other. All of that said, I personally do not relate to the traditional relationship, but still enjoy remnants of it. I was raised by a feminist, in a country that values personal freedoms, and in one of the most liberal communities within that country. Through reading books and travelling abroad, I have informally studied couples throughout the world. I have married into a traditional culture and learned firsthand what it feels like to be in such a relationship. As I look back, I cannot see where anyone did not have access to his or her own personal power. Everywhere, people made choices. As Taibbi illustrates, it the victim role that is so harmful to relationships (2009), not necessarily the gender roles. Partners may have felt that they were sacrificing power for love or the family unit or economic security. Whether or not the sacrifice was worth it, it was still a choice. I live with my 74-year old mother. I feel dominated by her and compelled to please her. I do most of the cooking and cleaning; she asks more of me than I do of her. She and I could not be more similar in temperament and personality, and she is not like a man. The source of our power imbalance is my mind. As I search for the ideal of respecting her while meeting my own needs, I make progress in recognizing my power and achieving a sense of equality within myself. As an African American woman who majored in social justice as an

undergrad and worked in organizations that work toward it, I have learned that to have equality, we must claim it, not by taking power from the other or getting the other to change, but by choosing it for ourselves. This is what Rosa Parks did when she sat at the front of the bus, and what Gandhi did when he refused to stop demonstrating. As a result of our recognizing power within ourselves, it has no other channel but toward manifesting in the outer world. As my example of my mother and my relationship illustrates, balancing power in relationships is challenging for any type of relationship, not just relationships between men and women, but between bosses and workers, siblings, even consumers and companies. We cannot point to the differences between genders as the culprit, and it is unwieldy to come up with an externally focused definition of equality and try to adhere to it by keeping score. Rather, it is the perception of either partner that determines whether there is a balance of power. Power balance begins and ends with the mind; equality exists when we choose it for ourselves. My suggestion? Use the Work, described in the book, *I Need Your Love - Is That True?: How to Stop Seeking Love, Approval, and Appreciation and Start Finding Them Instead* by Byron Katie to find your power, or to help your clients find their own power, in any relationship.

Great book

Dr. Knudson-Martin is brilliant and really understands power and gender as it relates to male/female relationships.

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