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A Great Divide Needs an Even Greater Bridge

"Between the Sexes, a Great Divide," by Anna Quindlen is an important outlook on inequality of sexes from a well known writer. Anna Quindlen doesn't pick a side, but rather does the best she can to explain that there is a "great division between sexes" (Quindlen 174). The division, however, is a matter of perspective. This perspective is looked at by Quindlen, who believes that sexes should be equal in every aspect. There is a lot to consider when looking at humans, and creating equality between us is something we are working toward. But part of creating an equal world should be abolishing our pre-established perspectives about the sexes, and possibly getting rid of gender altogether.

"Between the Sexes, a Great Divide" looks at the division of sexes in the world from early ages into adulthood. Anna Quindlen used her first memories of "the great division between sexes" to open her piece (Quindlen 174). She discussed the first boy-girl party most everyone had when they were younger, and how it formed the knowledge of the differences in gender. (Gender and sex are completely different. Sex is a person's parts and gender is who they are, male, female, or other.) From that point onward Quindlen found it hard to forget those differences. She could always see the "great shiny space in the middle of the dance floor where no one ever [met]" (Quindlen 174). She had constant reminders that women thought men were odd just as men thought women were odd. This oddness to her is being "the other" and everyone has it, everyone is "the other" (Quindlen 174, 175). Being the "other" means being the opposite gender of whichever gender is in question. If a male is talking to another male, females are "the other" and vice versa. Quindlen used examples from her personal life to explain that the gender differences stay the same, even from generation to generation. Anna

Quindlen raised her children in an egalitarian household, where “mothers do things fathers did once, and vice versa,” but she could still see the division in gender. She continuously returned to the first boy-girl party she attended because those feelings never left. The division was a constant line in her life that she could not avoid.

Quindlen couldn’t avoid the gap between genders; she said, “I’ve written some loving things about men, and some nasty things too, and I meant them all” (174). At first this thought struck me as quite rude, and then I realized I’ve done the same things and felt the same way. Regardless of gender, humans have good and bad things to say about each other constantly. There are times where we regret the things we say and times where we mean them with every inch of our being. The reason Quindlen may have brought this up is to share that she has had feelings about the opposite gender of each harsh extent of emotion. While women are capable of loving men, they are also capable of despising them as well, just as men are capable of feeling both ways towards women. What I have come to realize though, is that we are not men hating women or women loving men, we are humans loving and hating each other.

We are simply humans, so “man or woman” should not be an important part of our day to day lives, if any part at all. Would you speak to someone differently because they were a man? Would you go somewhere different with someone because they were a woman? Would you avoid telling someone something because of their gender? Why? You should decide you like someone because of them, not because of their gender. Quindlen recalled a phone conversation where a friend said, “I swear to God we are a different species...Men are the other” (174). She later goes on to say “We are the other, too, of course” (175). These two quotes perfectly summarize what most people think about gender on any given day, that the opposite is positively odd. I agree that this is what we tend to think, but I disagree that we should think this way. Quindlen gives two examples of males agreeing with other males and females agreeing

with other females about one thing, "Mom. Weird. Woman." and "Husband. Strange. Men." (175). In both the situations the reasoning for thinking the opposite gender is odd is the same: they don't ask. Both genders tend to ignore something the other does and dismiss it as just being a part of their gender when that is not the case. With this logic you could excuse a man raping a woman with "It's just boys being boys," and that is not okay. This example may seem exaggerated, but it has occurred in real life before. It is important to remember that sex and gender have little to do with reasoning; we are all humans, and talking is the only way to truly understand someone.

Quindlen talked about both traditional genders and tried to understand their reasons behind their actions: "...I've always been a feminist and I've been one of the boys as well, and I've given both sides a pretty good shot" (174). I don't know exactly what Quindlen meant by this, but being genderfluid I've gotten to experience "both sides" as she said. (A genderfluid person changes the gender they identify as throughout the gender spectrum. Their gender identity at any given time can be a binary or non-binary gender. Being Gender Fluid has nothing to do with which set of genitalia one has, nor their sexual orientation.) For the first part of my life I had not come to terms with my gender identity, and I had thought I was a cisgender female. (A cisgendered person identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth. Ex: A person who identifies as male and has male parts.) So I have had plenty of time to deal with the ins and outs of that gender. Females have different looking bodies; they dress differently; they shave their legs and spend too much time on their appearance. These are just a few of the things I believed about women when I identified as one. After accepting my gender fluidity and going about my life, I began to realize that the genders, every gender, are not different. I spent many of my days as a male hanging out with my group of guy friends discussing things most people assume guys do not discuss. I spent a lot of days as a female doing things many people would not think girls

thought twice about doing. Guys are allowed to shave their legs, wear dresses and makeup, and discuss their attractions to any gender, just as girls are. And girls are allowed to grow their hair out on any part of their body, wear suits and ties, workout, and watch their favorite sports team, just as guys are. My point is that we have put so much separation between genders that doesn't need to be there. While our actions may seem to create an ever growing space between genders on the dance floor, they don't have to.

Quindlen had strong beliefs in equality of all genders and they began within her home. My favorite part of Quindlen's passage was the end: "I have just met the dance downstairs. My elder son has one of his best friends over, and he does not care that she is a girl, and she does not care that he is a boy... and they are both having a great time" (175). Quindlen wrote that these two children were raised in egalitarian households, and that is why gender and sex do not matter to them. These children were happily able to play without considering what too many people still consider before "playing" with someone else. The problem is, despite how we were raised, we grow up in a world that has put a lot of effort into noticing the differences between the two traditional genders- they have yet to recognize any of the others. So, try as we might, we learn that boys are icky instead of boys are human just like us. And we learn that men are getting paid more to do the same jobs because that's always the way it has been. "Between [my son and his best friend] the floor already stretches, an ocean to cross before they can dance uneasily in one another's arms" (Quindlen 176). This gap between sexes and gender is not only affected by family at home, but the world as well and we, as individuals, have to bridge it.

Separating gender into two categories with very strict guidelines has thought to have been a good idea all around the world since the B.C. era. So of course, for Anna Quindlen, living in the 1980s, it was less acceptable for women to do things men did, and vice versa, than it is now. Quindlen said that she had thought about the divisions between gender for quite some

time. She points out some of those divisions, such as, "women should not only be permitted but be welcomed into a variety of positions and roles that only men occupy" (Quindlen 174). While nowadays it is tolerable for women to work the jobs that men do, things are still not equal.

Quindlen said "It was wonderful to think of a time when [the great division between sexes] would not be there, when the school gym would be a great meeting ground in which we would mingle freely, girl and boy, boy and girl, person to person, all alike. And maybe that's going to happen sometime in my lifetime, but I can't say I know when" (174). She wrote this for an OP ED column in 1988 and had high hopes for a future where we'd see no difference in gender or sex. I also have those hopes, and it is sad to think that they have not come to pass yet. I believe that if we lived in a world without gender everything would be a lot easier. We wouldn't have all of the issues that Quindlen brought up in this piece. Everything from sexism to gender slurs would disappear, and the world might be one step closer to equality for all.

Quindlen says that there is an unavoidable gap between sexes and genders and it is slowing down the steps that need to be taken to reach equality for all. This gap begins at a young age and follows us until we are brave enough to cross the dance floor and think about the music instead of the differences between our dance partners and ourselves. As kids we learn males and females are treated differently, act differently, and think differently of each other. There should never be that gap though. Quindlen said "...even in the gym with all that space between us, we still managed to pick partners and dance" (175). She consistently mentions this gym as if it's her world that she created equality in. We should learn from that and teach early on that "It's the dance that's important, not the difference" (Quindlen 175). If we are both thinking about the beat, we will be in sync, instead of thinking about the steps the other takes.