*To understand ourselves -- who am I? -- we need to understand our sexual identity: Who am as a man? Who am I as a woman?*

*RSJ from TML: “How we define ourselves as men and women greatly determines who we are and how we live our lives. How we identify with our gender lies at the very core of a person’s essence.*

*Great is the challenge today for men and women to be internally honest about their relationship with their particular gender. “*

It is really hard to be happy if you think that you are inadequate as a man or inadequate as a woman. Have you ever met someone who seemed to be “trying too hard”? If you are a woman, have you ever felt “not feminine enough”? On the flip side, have you ever felt like you are “too girly”? If you are a man, have you ever felt like you aren’t “man enough”? Have you ever intimidated others with hypermasculine behavior? The affects of not being comfortable with your gender are tangible.

Gender identity is culturally informed, but as individuals we have the power to define what it means to be a man or a woman for ourselves. We learn gendered behavior and presentation, but we have the power to choose the variation of gender expression that feels true to our own personalities.

There is no one way to be a man, and there is no one way to be a woman. A person can’t be a “good enough” man or woman – he or she can only be the best man or the best woman she can be. Are you man enough/woman enough to be the best man or woman you can be?

By “being the best man or woman you can be”, we mean being true to your essence. Each of us has his or her own unique essence – a mission to accomplish in the world. Our gendered attributes play an integral role in accomplishing that unique mission.

It’s empowering to be a man and it is empowering to be a woman. Each gender has its own power and should be honored. What is disempowering is to feel like you have to be a certain way in order to be a man or in order to be a woman. When it comes to being a man or being a woman, you have to be true to yourself.

Not all men and women are meant to express the same balance of masculine and feminine attributes. Some women are more assertive and less nurturing, while some men are more nurturing and less assertive. Your personal balance of masculine and feminine is fine: You just need to be at peace with it.

We are not going to tell you that women are “naturally” nurturing. Saying such a thing conjures up an unfair and inaccurate standard of female identity. Nurturing is a feminine (not female) attribute. How you express that nurturing aspect of yourself, whether you are a man or are a woman, has to be true to who you are. We won’t tell you that men are “naturally” assertive – if you are a man who is more nurturing than assertive by nature, that would make you feel defective.

You are not defective if you don’t live up to the image of masculinity or femininity that culture has fed you. You only need to be confident in who you are. In order to be confident in who you are, you need to fully embody the attributes of femininity and masculinity that resonate with you.

We know a woman who grew up feeling like she was not feminine enough because her personality is naturally reserved and serious. She grew up in a culture where being bubbly and social was considered the pinnacle of femininity. She got comfortable and confident with her own womanhood when she learned that being still and contemplative are actually feminine attributes. Instead of trying to embody the feminine attributes that she felt not natural to her personality, she played up the ones that were.

We know a young man who grew up in a family where being a man meant having a professional career, like being a lawyer or a doctor. Being a successful man in his family meant being a high academic achiever. This young man was bright, but had a hard time with academics. He did not feel like a successful man until he found a career that fit his personality type – being a profession chef. It turned out that the high activity level of being a chef was actually a masculine gender expression, while sitting still at a desk just did not resonate with his personality.

To understand ourselves -- who am I? -- we need to understand our sexual identity: Who am I as a man? Who am I as a woman? It’s not just a question of “Do I live up to society’s expectations of a man or of a woman?” It’s a fundamental part of our self-definition. You have to ask yourself: Who am I? Do I know my soul? Do I understand the masculine and feminine attributes of my soul? Am I manifesting masculinity and femininity in a way that is true to who I am? Am I trying too hard in some areas, and not developing my potential in others?

An exercise for you to help with understanding yourself as a man or as a woman: Make two columns on a piece of paper. Label the left column: My Strengths and Positive Attributes. Label the right column: How I Can Express My Strengths and Positive Attributes As a Man/As a Woman. Explore the ways that as a man or as a woman, you can play up your best emotional and mental attributes.