

RIANE EISLER'S "PARTNERSHIP MODEL OF WHOLE SYSTEMS CHANGE"

Riane Eisler, bestselling author of *The Chalice and the Blade* and co-founder of the Center for Partnership Studies (CPS), imagines a better world in which caregiving is valued and violence no longer ubiquitous. Her paper, *Whole Systems Change: A Framework and First Steps for Social/Economic Transformation*, lays out the key elements of a cultural transformation from a system based on coercion and domination to one based on empathy and mutual respect. This, according to Eisler, is new thinking that doesn't look for solutions in socialism, the ballot box, or religion, which to date have only replicated repression, injustice, and environmental destruction.

Relational dynamics provides the conceptual lens through which Eisler views systems change. Her framework assumes that intimate relationships in the private sphere shape beliefs, behaviors, and even brain development. Children experience, observe, and are taught what is considered normal and moral in the family. This then becomes embedded in broader institutions and social systems. To study relationships in a social system, says Eisler, is to understand its beliefs and guiding values.

Using the study of relational dynamics, Eisler identifies two models of social configurations. The domination model applies to brutally violent and repressive societies, such as Hitler's Germany, Stalin's USSR, and ISIL in Iraq and Syria. This model exhibits four components. First, there is a rigid top-down ranking in the family, state, or tribe. Second, men and "masculine" qualities are considered superior to women and "feminine" traits. Third, the model is maintained through culturally accepted abuse and violence, in the home in the form of domestic abuse or abroad through chronic and persistent warfare. Fourth, those living in a dominant system believe that the qualities above are inevitable, normal, and moral.

The partnership model, by contrast, can be found in more egalitarian societies, from the Tleduray of the Philippines to the Nordic nations of Sweden, Finland, and Norway. Four components characterize the partnership model. First, the structure of the family, state, or tribe is a democratic one. Second, women and men are valued equally, as are the traits associated with each gender. Third, abuse and violence are not institutionalized nor idealized, since they are not needed to maintain rigid rankings of domination. And finally, beliefs about human nature support empathic and mutually respectful relationships.

According to Eisler, we have the potential to shift from a domination to a partnership model. Using cultural transformation theory, she argues that systems change during times of great disequilibrium. Human society has undergone rapid change at various points in history. We shifted from predominantly partnership-oriented gathering-hunting cultures towards domination during a period of climate change, mass migrations, and other dislocations. However, the trend since the shift from agrarian to industrial and postindustrial

age has been back towards partnership. Eisler points to examples of movements, from the “rights of man” in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to contemporary struggles for economic justice, as challenges to the rule of domination.

For us to accelerate the change towards a partnership model, Eisler proposes the laying down of four cornerstones. The first cornerstone is ensuring that childhood relations are grounded in nonviolence and empathy. Children who are raised in families that are violent and coercive learn that violence by those in power toward those less powerful is an acceptable way of dealing with conflict. The second is equitable gender relations. When one gender is considered superior over the other, we internalize a template that then applies to other differences, such as race, religion, and sexual orientation.

The third cornerstone is economic relations that value caregiving. Eisler contends that both Adam Smith and Karl Marx dismissed caring for the environment or children as important to an economy. Eisler believes this is a major oversight and proposes that a new economic map include the contributions of unpaid labor, the household economy, and the natural environment. Childcare and early education are important in developing high quality human capital in the knowledge-service age. Yet, the disproportionate poverty of women and children today is largely due to the fact that women receive low wages for the care they provide in the market, and none at all for their work in the home.

The last cornerstone of Eisler’s proposal revolves around the importance of stories, morality, and spirituality. Eisler proposes that we create new narratives about our past, present, and the possibilities for our future. Spirituality can also be a path to creating a better world right here on Earth, one where caring for nature and investing in people is a basic economic and social principle.