WHY PSYCHOLOGICAL ANDROGYNY IS ESSENTIAL FOR CREATIVITY

Summary

Psychological androgyny denotes an ability of individual to be at the same time nurturant and aggressive, rigid and sensitive, submissive and dominant. This ability can be experienced by both men and women, while the term is often used to denote someone’s behavior being in between the characteristics that are connected with males and females. Plenty of research were conducted linking the androgyny and creativity. What is more, several studies show that individuals with an androgynous orientation are more likely to engage in creative activities and demonstrate a higher level of creative skills than either stereotypical masculine individuals or stereotypical feminine individuals.

Key words: androgyny; psychological; creativity; gender role;

1. Introduction

The concept of psychological androgyny involves individuals with both stereotypic masculine and feminine behavioral traits. For example, such individuals can both be sensitive and aggressive – sensitive being the feminine trait and aggressive being the masculine trait. A number of studies show that individuals with an androgynous orientation are more likely to engage in creative activities. Both male and female androgynous individuals demonstrate a higher level of creative skills than either stereotypical masculine or stereotypical feminine individuals [1,2]. In men, cross-gender identification seems particularly influential in facilitating creativity. In addition, Torrance [3] has shown that creative boys possess more feminine characteristics than their peers, and that creative girls are perceived as more masculine than other girls.

During the 70s, Sandra Bem argued that psychological androgyny has important consequences to individuals’ characteristics. Bem believed that traditionally society has not encouraged the development of both masculine and feminine characteristics within the same individual, but that psychological androgyny can expand the range of behaviors available to everyone. Kelly and Worrell [4] found that androgynous individuals were raised by parents who stressed cognitive independence, curiosity and competence. Associations between androgyny and a wide range of positive outcomes were noticed, encouraging in individuals’ self-esteem, satisfaction with life, ego identity, etc. Abraham Maslow noticed that creative people often tend to display a healthy balance of what appear to be opposites: selfishness-unselfishness, thinking-feeling, work-play, maturity-childishness. These opposites can be viewed as two points on a single dimension and can be experienced in the same person at different stages of the creative process.
2. Psychological androgyny

Historically, men and women had always had different social status, requesting each gender to behave according to specific norms and expectations. Generally accepted, appropriate or desirable social norms are commonly called gender roles. Gender roles are centered around conceptions of femininity and masculinity, meaning that it is socially accepted that certain jobs are only for men while other are only for women. Eventually, as times began to change, these norms and expectations grew up to be stereotypes rather than meaningful rules. Fighters for feminine rights as well as homosexual and bisexual movements were changing the perception of what man should be and what a woman should be – leaving former norms being pure stereotypes.

So far, it is still debated to what extent gender roles are biologically determined and to what extent they are socially constructed. It is clear that women are perceived as thoughtful, sensitive and nurturant – which women biologically in most cases are – while men are perceived as aggressive, rigid and dominant. It is a widespread belief that human structure suggests that men should hunt for animals and women collect berries and fruit. This perception explains the social construction of gender roles according to biological characteristics, while these characteristics are not always true. Men can be sensitive and thoughtful and women can be aggressive and dominant. Having a combination of masculine and feminine characteristics is called androgyny. Androgyny is not related to sexuality in terms of homosexuality of bisexuality, but implies that individuals have traits that are generally attributed to the opposite gender. Two types of androgyny exist, physical androgyny and psychological androgyny. Physical androgyny means that individual has physical traits of opposite gender – most noticeable examples are David Bowie or Annie Lennox. Psychological androgyny refers to individual that has psychological traits of opposite gender in terms of character.

3. Androgyny and creativity

In 1980, Weinstein and Bobko [5] found that IQ of above 115 was no longer correlated with creativity. IQ is determined testing the ability to form remote associations and to generate associative uses which does not imply creative thinking. The question of creativity was active but still not fully answered. One of the answers to what creativity is related was already being explored – androgyny.

Weinstein and Bobko suggested androgyny after concluding that androgynous individuals, especially in a sex-stereotyped society, would need to be open to experience, flexible, accepting of apparent opposites, unconcerned about social norms and self-reliant. These traits are exactly the ones identified with a creative person. A year later, in 1981, androgyny is still not clearly connected to creativity, but Harrington and Anderson [6] reach out to new discoveries. The test they conducted was measuring creativity by measuring the ability to come up with alternate uses for an object. The result was that participants defined as masculine or androgynous scored higher than those conventionally defined as feminine or “unclassifiable”. The interesting discovery was that psychological masculinity was correlated positively with creative measures in both men and women, but psychological femininity had negative correlation with creativity for both men and women.

A number of research concerning mainly creativity and androgynous behavior was conducted through 1970s and 1980s by Sandra Bem. Her most noticeable work is called “The measurement of psychological androgyny” [7] where she postulates that creative person crosses the boundaries of commonly accepted gender roles, thereby acquiring greater freedom.
and more divergent experience. Bem’s research was concluded by creating a famous Bem’s Androgyny Test (also called Bem Sex Role Inventory or BSRI), used for simple testing of masculine and feminine traits. Bem also developed the gender schema theory, concerning again the gender roles, stereotypes and how it affected the individual. Due to her theory masculine and feminine dimensions could be divided into four spheres: masculine, feminine, androgynous and undifferentiated. Masculine is a person with high masculine and low feminine identification, feminine being the opposite, androgynous is a person who has both identifications high, while undifferentiated is a person who has low identifications with both dimensions. Recently, Jonsson and Carlsson [2] found that participants high in both femininity and masculinity (androgynous) and low on both scales (undifferentiated) scored higher on a measure of creativity than stereotypically female and stereotypically male participants. Similar to the Harrington and Anderson [6] study, they found that men alone accounted for this interaction. In other words, increased masculinity in creative women was weaker than increased femininity in men. Further more, Norlander et al. [1] were investigating groups of androgynous individuals, both men and women, measuring the creativity, creative attitude and optimism. Androgynous group scored higher than the stereotypic types. Similar to Jonsson’s and Carlsson’s discovery, the androgynous group did not score higher compared to retrotypic group – men and women displaying anti-stereotypic behaviors. The researchers raise the suggestion that retrotypic group have similar urge to cross the boundaries of traditional gender-roles as androgynous people have, thereby accumulating experience with elevated flexibility and creativity. Two years later, Hittner and Daniels looked at a wide range of creative behaviors. They found that androgynous individuals tended to report more creative accomplishments in literature, theater, and videophotography than non-androgynous individuals [8]. It is quite interesting to notice that when Hittner and Daniels controlled for creative theatre achievement, they did not find an association between androgyny and creative music achievement. This suggests that a crucial factor that determines the androgyny-music link is the extent to which the musical performance is theatrical.

All of these research suggest that psychological androgyny is associated with positive outcomes, including the ability to maintain social relationships, psychological well-being, life satisfaction, optimism, a secure sense of identity, and creativity. Although the precise direction of causality is not always clear in these studies, there is still doubt that the more we allow people to express their unique selves, and mentally and physically cross stereotypical gender boundaries, the more creative they will become.

### 4. Concluding remarks

The presented research suggests that we may be limiting the full potential of individuals, such as the case of androgynous women working in fields where it is frowned upon for women to exhibit stereotypically masculine traits. In Sandra Bem’s profound work on androgynous creativity, she explained that androgynous individuals are more capable of showing a minority opinion and having greatest flexibility in approaching situations. These traits are presented as psychologically vigorous for them. Some of these research and her pioneering work on gender roles, gender polarization and gender stereotypes led directly to more equal employment opportunities for women in the United States.
REFERENCES


