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The Concept of Androgyny and Its Application in Clinical and Counseling Psychology

—A literature review—

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Masculinity and femininity are two basic concepts in gender issue. Generally, it was thought that a person has to be either masculine or feminine, but not both. However, it is possible a person may possess both the quality of masculinity and femininity thus may be “androgynous” psychologically. This concept of androgyny is linked to the flexibility and adaptation that improve the psychological well-being of individual. This paper reviews the concept of androgyny from the perspectives of classical and contemporary psychological theories. Comparison of various views is done to deepen the understanding of the concept of psychological androgyny. Further discussion is proceeded to examine various issues when applying this concept in the field of clinical psychology and counseling psychology.

Keywords: psychological androgyny, clinical psychology, counseling psychology, literature review

1. Introduction

The concepts of sex and gender are important aspects in the field of psychology. In spite of various studies done on these two concepts, the definitions of sex, gender and sexuality remain complicated and diversified (Hashimoto, 1998; Gilbert & Murray, 1999; Ogura, 2001). In general, for brief definitions, “sex” refers to whether one is born biologically female or male, while “gender” refers to the psychological, social, and cultural features and characteristics that have become strongly associated with the biological categories of female and male (Gilbert & Murray, 1999). These concepts are particularly important when we discuss human personality and self-concept - The biological sex of male and female has no doubt an important issue in influencing human behavior but on top of that the “social sex”, that is gender, has no less important part to play in shaping the behaviors and thoughts of human being.

Two concepts emerge as the core concepts in the gender issue that is masculinity and femininity. Generally, masculinity and femininity have long been conceptualized as bipolar ends of a single continuum (Bem, 1974). The general concept was that a person has had to be either masculine or feminine, but not both. But many people might possess both the quality of masculinity and femininity thus might be “androgynous”. For example, a person can be assertive (the masculine quality) but yielding (the feminine quality) at the same time.

This idea of androgyny is linked to the flexibility and adaptation ability in various situations. The androgynous person has more flexibility and act depending on situational appropriateness compared to the sex-typed individuals who might be seriously limited in the range of behavior available to them as they move from situation to situation (Bem, 1974).

Since its inception the concept of psychological androgyny has received attention from several areas, especially the field of social psychology. However, it lacked the attention from the fields of clinical and counseling psychology. Understanding the clients from the perspective of androgyny is yet to gain attention of the psychotherapists. This article aims to look into how the concept of androgyny is being discussed in various fields and how this concept is linked to the field of psychology in general and clinical and counseling psychology in particular. Furthermore, the article will propose the possibility of the application of the concept of androgyny in clinical psychology and psychotherapy as a way to understanding client and as a direction to provide assistance to client in psychotherapy sessions.

2. “Androgyny” in classical psychological theories

Sigmund Freud

Freud claims that the sexual instinct acts as a “driver” throughout life, starting in infancy. His hypothesis of the five stages of psychosexual development is well-known. The word

“androgyny” did not appear in Freud’s writings when he discussed about the psychosexuality. Although Freud (1905) did propose the idea of bisexual characteristics, androgyny did not find its place in his writings on psychosexual developments; rather bisexuality was discussed from biological point of view. In his classical work, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud (1905) mentions that the popular belief is that a human being is either a man or a woman. However, “science knows of cases in which the sexual character are obscured, and in which it is consequently difficult to determine the sex” (Freud, 1905, p.52). According to him, this phenomenon “arises in the first instance in the field of anatomy. The genitals of the individuals concerned combine male and female characteristics. (This condition is known as hermaphroditism.) In rare cases both kinds of sexual apparatus are found side by side fully developed (true hermaphroditism); but far more frequently both sets of organs are found in an atrophied condition” (Freud, 1905, p.52).

Although Freud’s elucidation of “bisexuality” is biological and did not touch on the psychological aspect of “bisexuality” or “androgyny”, his discussion on biological bisexuality has provided the idea for discussion on the possibility of possession of both “maleness” or “masculinity” and “femaleness” or “femininity” in human being that can be applied in discussion on the issue of psychological androgyny.

Carl Jung

Jung called the man’s feminine counterpart as anima (the Latin word for soul), and the woman’s masculine counterpart as animus or spirit (Christopher, 2000). In *Memoirs, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung, 1963, p.211-212), Jung described his mother as having two sides to her personality — a warm, motherly, feminine side, and a hidden unconscious masculine side with traits and modes of behavior generally ascribed to men, such as ruthlessness, rationality and power (cited in Christopher, 2000). He considered that the anima and animus not only influence relationships and marriage, but also the choice of partner which may result from anima and animus projections. According to Jung (1963), anima and animus are unconscious, the femininity or masculinity represented by the anima or animus was generally ill-developed. For Jung, of central importance to the going health and creativity of the psyche as a whole was the capacity of relationship, which he denoted in archetypal terms as the coniunctio (Christopher, 2000). Jung stressed the importance of the coniunctio or “internal marriage” as the internal union of

opposites. Since it was his conviction that the “entire range of psychological possibilities is available to everyone ... (it) follows that personality can be described in terms of a balance between masculine and feminine factors” (Samuels et al., 1986).

Even though the concept of “androgyny” did not appear in Jung’s discussion of anima and animus, the idea of “coniunctio” has very similar connotation to the idea of androgyny. This early idea advocates the balance between both the masculinity and femininity in psyche of human beings is essential for one’s well-being.

3. The concept of “androgyny” in contemporary psychological world

Many personality tests like MMPI and so forth have included the aspects of masculinity and femininity. However both in the field of psychology and also in society at large, both the concepts of masculinity and femininity have long been conceptualized as bipolar ends of a single continuum, as shown in Fig.1.

Sandra Bem is one of the pioneers in the area of empirical study of psychological androgyny. Her view of psychological androgyny has been the major forces in promoting this idea in the area of psychology. Instead of characterizing femininity and masculinity as bipolar, Bem (1974) argued that individuals might be “androgynous” that is, they might be both masculine and feminine, both assertive and yielding, both instrumental and expressive, depending on the situational appropriateness. According to her, the sex-typed individuals might be seriously limited in the range of behaviors available to them as they move from situation to situation. Bem (1974) specifically argues that androgyny is a psychologically healthier and more human way of being than conforming to traditional gender roles.

Bem further developed a new sex-role inventory that treats masculinity and femininity as two independent dimensions, thereby making it possible to characterize a person as “masculine”, “feminine” or “androgynous”. The scale is named “The Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI)”. The initial and original scale consists of 60 items, 20 of which are “



Fig.1 Femininity and masculinity as bipolar ends of a single continuum

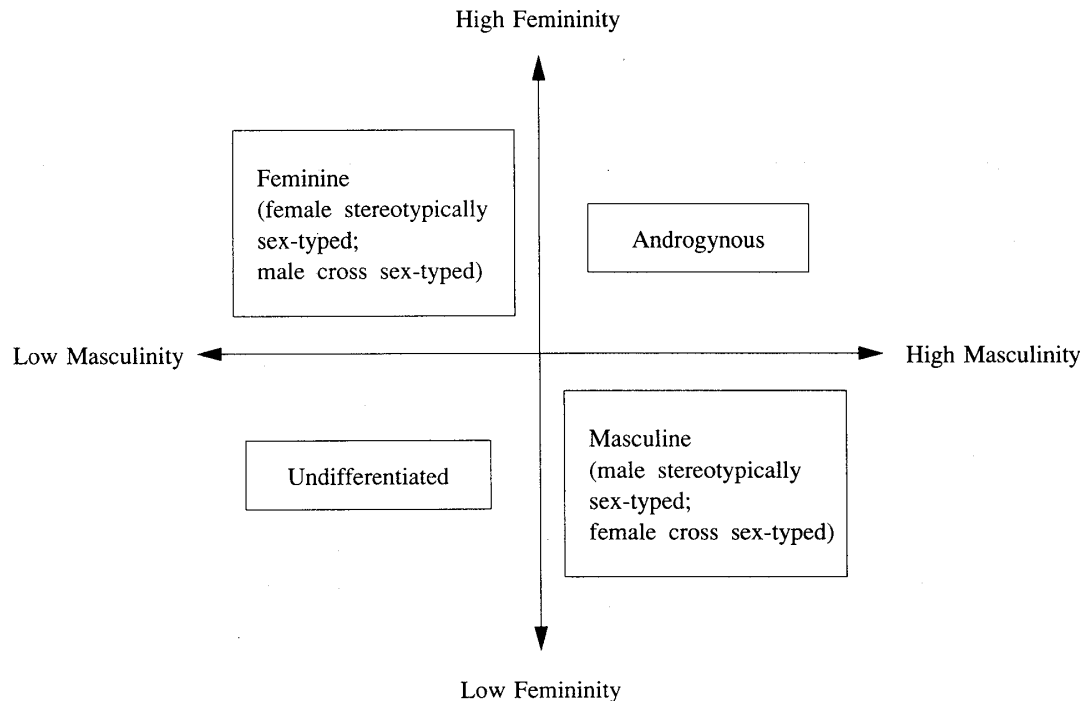


Fig.2 Gender types based on the masculinity and femininity (Doi, 1999)

masculine" items (independent, acts as a leader, assertive, ambitious), 20 "feminine" items (gentle, loyal, loves children, affectionate) and 20 "neutral" items (happy, adaptable, jealous) which are the qualities that desired by the society. The subject is required to rate them self on a seven-point-scale from "never true"/"almost never true" to "almost always true"/"always true". Bem (1981a) revised the scale. The revised version of this scale (Bem, 1981a) recommends scoring and analysis of only the feminine and masculine items of BSRI (20 items each). The androgyny score is the difference between an individual's masculinity and femininity normalized with respect to the standard deviations of the subject's masculinity and femininity scores. The closer the androgyny score is to zero, the more the person is androgynous. Anyway, there are individuals who score low in both masculinity and femininity score. In this case, although the difference of both scores is close to zero, it is categorized as undifferentiated type. This scale has been adapted to other languages (Andachi et al., 1985; Maznah & Choo, 1986).

The concept of androgyny can be summarized as in Fig.2 (adapted from Doi (1999)).

According to Doi (1994), individuals have undifferentiated gender identity during the early stages of development. At this stage the gender schema and gender identity are still weak. Only in the later stages of development children start to learn the gender values and hence understand them and shape up their personality and self-concept by referring to the gender schema that exists in the society.

The idea of androgyny was criticized as a tool to bring and promote the feminist movement in the field of psychology (see Mitsui, 1989). However, Bem's presumably feminist intentions were subverted by the methods and assumptions she reproduced uncritically and other psychologists have discussed the concept from various perspective that made the concept more acceptable in the field of psychology (Hollway, 1989).

Although androgyny is often seen as synonymous with Sandra Bem's work, there have been a variety of alternative conceptualizations developed by many other psychologists (Rogers & Rogers, 2001). Table 1 summarizes various perspectives on psychological androgyny.

Table 1
The concept of psychological androgyny from various perspectives
 (adapted from Rogers & Rogers, 2001, p. 114)

Conjoint models: These models focus on the interplay between feminine and masculine qualities.	
Androgyny as modulation or balance (Bem, 1974)	Femininity and masculinity are seen as extreme tendencies, but where they are manifested together, each tends to moderate the other, producing a more rounded and well-balanced person.
Androgyny as additive (Spence et al., 1975)	This is a 'more is better' formulation, which sees androgyny as the possession of both feminine and masculine qualities and sees having lots of qualities and capacities as more desirable than having a few.
Androgyny as multiplicative or interactive (Spence, 1983; Harrington & Anderson, 1981)	A 'the-whole-is-more-than-the-sum-of-the-parts' model, in which the interplay of feminine and masculine qualities is seen to make androgynous people quite different from those who are either strongly feminine or strongly masculine.
Developmental models: These models view androgyny as a developmental stage, where individuals transcend the limitations of conventional sex roles.	
Androgyny as the acquisition of hybrid qualities (Kaplan, 1979)	Here androgyny may be seen as producing desirable hybrid qualities such as assertive-dependency, or compassionate-ambition.
Androgyny as sex-role transcendence (Heffner et al., 1975; Olds 1981)	Androgyny is portrayed as a final stage in development. Olds (1985), for example, saw androgyny as progress beyond the duality of femininity and masculinity and the achievement of a fluid, integrated wholeness.
Cognitive schema theory: Bem's (1981b) later formulations viewed androgyny as a particular way of thinking, where an individual comes to categorize the world without reference to gender stereotypes.	
Personality trait model: In their later formulation, Spence and Helmreich (1979) viewed femininity and masculinity as personality traits, operating in an additive manner.	
Behavioural models: See androgyny as what people do.	
Androgyny as the diversifying of social skills (Kelly & Worell, 1977; Yager & Baker 1979)	Here androgyny is a matter of developing high levels of competence across a wide range of social skills, both those usually attributed to women and those more generally seen in men.
Androgyny as lifestyle (Orlofsky, 1977)	Here androgyny becomes a way of life, spanning recreational choices, vocational preferences and behaviour in relationships.

4. Androgyny in other fields

Androgyny, before getting attention in the field of psychology, was an ancient concept that deeply rooted in the philosophies of both Western and Eastern cultures. For example, Plato mentions the existence of three primordial races, one of which is made of the union between men and women. The motif of androgyny abounds in Western creation and classic literature (Zhou, 2003).

In Eastern cultures especially Chinese and Korean cultures, the idea of “yin” and “yang” in the Taoism has very similar concepts as androgyny. “Yin” appears as the passive principle, derivative and conditioned while “yang” appears as the active principle, initiating and conditioning (Singer, 2000). “Yin” and “yang” begin with the principles of darkness and light, but these opposites are expanded into all the polar opposites, including the sexual designations of “yang” for the masculine and “yin” for the feminine. The combination of both “yin” and “yang” is seen as important balance in human body.

5. The concept of androgyny in psychological researches

Heshusius (1980) studied on female self-injury and suicide attempts and concluded that sex-role expectations are essential in explaining female self-injury and suicide attempts. Persons, either female or male, who commit suicide, were rated significantly higher on both masculinity and potency scales than persons, female or male, who attempted suicide (Linehan, 1971). Thus suicidal behavior has relationship with the masculine and feminine roles that the society prescribes rather than with the biological sex of the person. Heshusius (1980) suggests that socialization for androgyny offers a direction for solutions to female suicide attempts and self-injury behaviors since correlates of such behaviors constitute a lack of adaptive and affective functioning in the society.

In a study of the gender-role differences in susceptibility to the influence of support availability on depression, Cheng (1999) pointed out that androgynous individuals, with high levels of both communal and agentic needs, may tend to seek a greater variety and amount of social support to gratify their distinctive needs. Therefore they can cope better with depression. Androgynous individuals are said to possess the “emergent property” which refers to the beneficial integration of masculine and feminine qualities in androgynous individuals, with one type of qualities being complementary to the other.

Therefore they may be more effective in obtaining support than are feminine individuals.

The studies of “androgyny” in Japan

Very few studies are available on androgyny in the field of Japanese psychology. More studies were done on the masculinity and femininity especially in developing the scale measuring both traits of masculinity and femininity to suit Japanese society better (Ito, 1997).

Hirokawa et al. (2000) conducted a study on the effects of sex, self gender type, and partner’s gender type on interpersonal adjustment during a first encounter. The result shows that androgynous individuals are found may have better interpersonal relationships and also have better interpersonal adjustment.

6. The application of androgyny in clinical and counseling psychology & conclusion

As mentioned above, the concept of androgyny was actually nothing new — it goes back at least as far as Greek mythology (Heilbrun, 1978) and, indeed, it is an idea found in a number of ancient mythical systems. It was also an important theme in the work of Jung. The adoption of androgyny into mainstream psychology in 1970s, most notably through the writing of Sandra Bem (1974) has led to a new perspective on how this concept can be better applied. Yet, when the idea of androgyny is discussed in the many areas in the field of psychology, there are still many resistances and misunderstandings towards the concept.

The fear and rejection of androgyny

Exploring anything to do with gender issues can be controversial, and even potentially damaging, for both men and women, in different ways (Christopher, 2000). Exploring gender issues then can arise more questions than offer answers. In the field of psychotherapy and counseling, gender is still largely ignored as an “active” variable, and is typically, and erroneously, viewed as pertaining to women’s issues or problems (Gilbert & Murray, 1999). Perhaps this is because gender issue is too complex and attentions tends to be switched to others issues rather than focusing on the gender issues of clients in psychotherapy settings.

The same phenomenon happens when it comes to the concept of androgyny. Androgyny is often confused with the idea of bisexuality regarding the sexual orientation. Many people misunderstand that the promotion of the androgyny will mean to the supporting of homosexuality. The fears of

androgyny arise because the concept is often associated with the image of people who possess outlook with the unisex features. These features appear to the society in general as a confusing identity. More discussions are needed to deal with this misconception and androgyny should be distinguished from the bisexuality and unisex in sexual orientation and appearance.

According to Singer (2000),

"The new androgyne is not confused about his or her sexual identity. Androgynous men express a natural, unforced and uninhibited male sexuality, while androgynous women can be totally female in their own sexuality. Yet neither tends to extremes: Men do not need to exude machismo, or women to pretend a naïve and dependent character. Excessively polarized personality types thrive in a culture that demands the repression of certain natural tendencies while people are developing the so-called "masculine" and the so-called "feminine" traits which that society considers to be appropriate for each sex" (p.14).

Thus the androgyny feature may help the client to be more adaptable and flexible in their daily life.

The idea of the androgynous man and woman does not mean that men and women should be expected to behave in exactly the same way, nor that the differences between men and women, of which there are many, should be altogether minimized or ignored. Similarly it does not imply that the use of gender schemas necessarily leads to sexism. What the concept does suggest is that rather than acting in ways that society deems appropriate for men and women, people should behave in a human way, based on freely made choices (Feldman, 1998: p.110).

The idea of androgyny may be helpful in the assertion training of client. If client could learn to be more androgynous in their personal behavior, that is, possess both feminine expressive personality characteristics and masculine instrumental characteristics, we could re-socialize individuals to go beyond socialized sex roles (Gilbert & Murray, 1999).

In conclusion, there is still room for the application of the concept of androgyny in psychotherapy to help client be freed from the rigid image of masculinity and femininity. By exploring the possibility of possessing the quality of androgyny psychologically, client can act and live in a more humanistic way.

Note of Gratitude

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付 録

和文タイトル

臨床心理学とカウンセリング心理学におけるアンドロジニーの概念およびその応用について—文献レビュー—

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和文要約

男性性及び女性性はジェンダーの問題において重要な概念である。一般的に、人は男性性、また女性性の、いずれか携えている。しかし、男性性と女性性の両方を持ち合わせる事、つまり、「アンドロジニー (心理的両

性具有性)」の性質をもつ可能性がある。多くの研究から、アンドロジニーは柔軟性や適応性などつながり、心理的安寧を促すことができると強調されている。本稿ではまず古典的な心理学と現代心理学など理論の側面からアンドロジニーの概念を紹介する。また、様々な角度からこの概念をどのように理解できるのかを検討し、理解を深める。さらに、応用に関して臨床心理学とカウンセリング心理学において、この概念を活用する課題について検討する。

キーワード： アンドロジニー (心理的両性具有性), 臨床心理学, カウンセリング心理学, 文献レビュー