

Impact of being a man or being a woman on the therapeutic system

Some Basic Considerations

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The topic focuses on being a man or a woman. Therefore I will approach the issue in terms of male or female personality, in terms of differences of essence (being), differences in identity, differences in positions and perspectives of the self.

I will not focus on male or female personality in terms of social positions and roles in society, although these are important aspects of the whole discussion.

Before I present definitions for the terms I use and give an outlay of my thoughts, let me report two dreams of a female trainee:

First dream - after I had confronted her with not accepting anything from me, but wanting to do everything on her own and relating to me by fighting. She dreams: I take my car to a petrol-station because I ran out of fuel. It is a self-service station, and when I go to the petrol pump and try to pick up the nozzle, I am astonished to find a hole in the petrol pump where the nozzle should be. Turning back to my car, I see the missing nozzle looking out of my car where the tank opening should be. I come to the conclusion that I cannot fill up my tank that way and end up irritated.

The second dream - after we had worked a lot on our relationship as trainer and trainee and on male/female qualities in relating to the world: I come into a living house and know that I live there. On the first floor I notice two doors, one on the right and one on the left. The door on the right leads into a large room with a big desk and other heavy furniture, a typical man's study ("Herrenzimmer"). The door on the left leads into a room that is somewhat smaller but lighter, with pastel colors and a soft carpet. The room seems more suited to a female, a woman's room ("Frauenzimmer"). Although I am attracted by the woman's room, my first impulse is to want to have the man's room because it is larger. But finally I decide to take the woman's room, and enter it. When I turn around, I see a handsome man of my age standing in the door of the man's study and kindly inviting me to have tea with him. I am appreciative and happy about the possibility to be in that man's study as a guest. After having a nice tea with this man, I leave him, glad that I live on the same floor with him but in my own room. Coming back into my room, I see a cat lying on the carpet. The cat is lying in a circle and I form a second circle around that cat with my body. After I have done this, an unknown mother-type of woman whom I like immediately joins us, forming a third circle around us with her body. I feel myself and at home more than I ever felt before in my life.

Making a Difference between Male and Female Personality

In order to expand on this question, let us first go into the meaning of the term "personality".

The term personality comes from the Latin term "personare", which means "sounding through".

Following this translation we arrive at two implicated questions:

1. What is it that sounds through?
2. Through what does it sound?

First let us answer the second question by the assumption that it is the social roles, the learned patterns of experiences and behavior, through which something sounds. To answer the first question I assume that there is something that can be called essence or self, that sounds through.

Footnote: (If you do not like the mechanistic metaphor of sounding through, you can assume that the self is a kind of order imbedded in and transcending the manifested patterns of experiences and behaviors.)

Let me further assume, that the essence of personality is always there. Basically it is a potentiality and it needs to be developed, just as the patterns of experience and behavior, our social roles, need to be developed in order to give a resonance to our self.

Footnote: (It is misleading to look for self-experience besides our social roles. It is more important to experience and express us within and through our social roles.)

Let me give you a metaphor to illustrate my assumptions: Probably we all agree that a musician can express something by her music that is more than the sum of her skills. If this has to do with personality, how then can a piano-player show her personality by playing? There is a lot of skill in learning to press the right keys and to play all the complex patterns of music pieces. For professionals it may be possible to define the necessary skills, that means all technical aspects of playing the piano, but in order to be moved and to move others by her piano playing, the pianist needs to connect her playing with something somewhere in her self. Some essence needs to come through. It is certainly necessary to develop techniques of playing that are appropriate to express this essence, but the technique itself does not make the personality of the music. It is something that sounds through that makes it unique.

If we accept this, the next question would be: Is there a difference between a male and a female personality? The answer is: I do not know, but I can make use of some differences that are postulated by others and see whether they will make a difference or not, and what this difference would signify. So we experiment with differences to make a difference.

Male and female identification

Let me again start with the definition of the term identification. Identical means basically "being of the same kind", being essentially alike (Wesensgleichheit, oder etwas lockerer: Wesensverwandtschaft). If I identify myself with something, I make myself to be of the same kind (idem facere = Wesensgleichheit herstellen).

If I talk from now on of male and female identity, I am presuming that there are male and female aspects of the self that can be sensed through the appearance of a personality. I experiment with the assumption that there may be male and female aspects of the self on a level of being, not of behavior. I talk about male or female identity as a location in the self as a perspective out of which the unfolding of a personality into social roles takes place.

Based on this assumption, I put the questions whether it makes a difference whether a personality is developed from and related to a male or a female identification on the level of self.

Male and female aspects of the self?

The jungian psychology differentiated between two aspects of the self, male dimensions of the self-called animus and female dimensions of the self-called anima. The following thoughts go back to Carl Gustav Jung and his followers, especially to Peter Schellenbaum (Die Homosexualität des Mannes; Kindler, Geist und Psyche). So let us now consider male and female principles or aspects of the self that may be embodied in men and women.

The animus-dimension of the self is related to the logos principle that we can circumscribe as being analytical, dividing, penetrating, inseminating, structuring, actively driving, etc. The anima-dimension of the self is related to the eros principle that can be circumscribed as the principle of relating, receiving, accepting, of letting things happen and grow, of incubation and breeding.

These two terms, logos and eros, in western philosophy are connected with Yang and Yin in chinese philosophy. The basic assumption is that both is different and need to interact in many combinations in order to bring forth the development of life.

In the jungian psychology the following is postulated: In order to become fully individuated personalities, men and women have to integrate aspects of animus and anima into his/her personality. And: Personal growth is not possible without equivalent consideration of both principles.

Nevertheless: Men and women tend to approach this development from essentially different positions. A man needs to identify with the animus principle and to integrate anima qualities into his personality out of this perspective. A woman needs to identify herself with the anima-principle and

has to integrate animus-qualities from that perspective. To put it briefly: You need to find your psychic side of the world in terms of being from which you relate to the whole.

Footnote: (According to Jung, it is a problematic development if a man tries to relate to Anima qualities through identification and not through integration. To put it simply: We get a "softy" but not a man who is able to relate, to receive, to let grow as qualities he has integrated from a male identity-position. In the case of a woman who identifies with Animus qualities, we get a so-called phallic woman (colloquial: gunwoman, etc.) instead of a woman with a clear mind integrated into a profound spirit. If a misidentified man and a misidentified woman have a close relationship, they may be in a dilemma-situation. The woman expects the man to bring in eros-qualities so that she can own them through participation, and she may be disappointed that he cannot really offer what she needs. And he may expect her to represent Animus-qualities so that he can own them by participation. At the same time he might be angry that she is not bringing in enough Eros qualities, and she may be disappointed that he does not assert himself in positive Animus-qualities. Out of this perspective this would be a crossed-over misidentified relationship. It is difficult for him to develop his male identity within this partnership, because he may often get into a competition situation when he tries to occupy a male position. She may compete although she hopes somewhere that he will win and help her to lose something (the misidentification). If she would experiment more with Eros qualities, he may be irritated and be scared to lose his place in the relationship, and he may not be confident enough to take over and identify more with Animus-qualities.)

The basic idea is that the animus dimensions lose their qualities if a woman tries to identify with them, to be them rather than to relate to them, for example, by relating to a man identified with the animus principle. Vice versa anima-dimensions lose their qualities if a male instead of relating to them, for example in a relationship with a woman, tries to identify with them.

How to evaluate possible differentiations

How can we know whether these ideas that Jung and Schellenbaum postulate have any meaning or not? Nothing can be gained on the level of explanation and proving. The crucial approach to evaluation is the quality of personal self-expression, the quality of an essential position I can feel.

In the "Typenlehre", Jung postulates four functions of the soul with which a person approaches reality. He says that these four functions are independent from one another. Each function needs to be developed in the process of individuation. One of them is the sense of quality, of value, of the essence of something.

We can examine the questions I am offering to you only if we accept this function of the self as an examination tool. If we accept it, we will certainly have a lot of additional problems, because we have different feelings for quality and essence. This is the same in the area of arts or music. The quality of things cannot finally be defined in theoretical or logical terms. For this examination we need heuristic procedures, this means that answers can't be given objectively, but only by people who understand and respond with the same functions of their selves.

Identification as a reality-construction

The identification with anima or animus-principles can be seen as a self-defining process. How can identification with animus- or anima-principles happen? I guess it happens the same way every defining of basic assumptions happens. Either we assume inherent tendency in the self to choose this location or way as same that it is attributed by others, or both. In the first case we assume that there is a potentiality and a tendency in the self to choose a specific identification. It is provided in the self and tends to be realized if it is not misled. In the second case others contribute something to invite one or the other identification, or they support or distort the self-definition process. So we help one another to support or irritate the constructions and definitions of identity we have accepted and/or developed. In the Jungian psychology this interaction is called mirroring.

In this frame of reference I can take identification as a reality-construction, as an assumed basic position from which a person relates to himself or herself, to other people or to the world. It is not so much a choice of content but choice of animus- or anima-modalities of how to be. And because constructions of reality tend to be realized, the development of a person is influenced by the choice of essential positions.

Identification aspects of relationships

The relation between people in terms of personality can be described as an identification-interaction in the sense that people define and redefine their identity-positions in relating to others. In relationships we relate to the other person as someone we assume or define he is or can be. One dimension of our relationships is the definition, the co-definition or re-definition of what the other person is in various dimensions. Like all other definitions around identity it is an attribution out of which a person may develop experiences and behaviors according to these accepted ideas.

Changes on the level of behavior and experience may not automatically change basic self-definitions. We often need something extra happening between people, for example between therapists and clients. Often something needs to happen through which the clients re-define

themselves on an identity-level. In order to provide that on purpose we must dare to focus on something the other person can be or possibly is meant to be. We introduce these visions into the relationship. I very much like Dostojewski's sentence: To love somebody means to see him as what God meant him to be.

Is personality-impact in therapeutic relationship avoidable? We could try to hold a neutral position by saying we introduce a lot of ideas of how people could be into the therapeutic process, and leave it to the client-system to adopt those ideas and develop something out of them or not. I appreciate this careful position as a safety belt against damaging people with problematic definitions or re-definitions. But I do not think we are neutral, can be neutral or should be neutral. It is probably part of the essence of human contact and also of therapeutic contact to inspire each other and to mirror each other as somebody we sense he could be or even should be. I guess this happens whether we intend it or not in the interactions of personalities. There is probably no way to step out of this position of existential guilt, because our self-positions, for example male or female identifications, sound through and have an impact on client-personalities. From the perspective of identification-interaction we assume that we define, co-define and re-define a person's identity, having explicit or implicit impact on their essential positions.

We also implicitly co-define or re-define sexual identity-positions and the way men and women relate to Animus- or Anima-qualities.

Apart from all therapeutic interactions concerning the understanding of roles and positions of men and women in families and other social systems, the therapeutic relationship can also be considered under the question: How does the sexual identity-position of the therapist relate to that of the client-system? And it makes in the first place a difference of essential quality.

An experiment:

If you like, try with two or three other people the following experiment. Allow yourself to "psyche out" male/female essential qualities of somebody. Allow yourself to have intuitive imaginations and to share them without further justification and compare your impressions.

If you like, you can make use of the following questions:

1. What is there?
2. What is missing?
3. Of which quality is what is there or missing?
4. Who and how will this man/woman be if everything is there?

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