

ANDROGYNY AND OPENNESS TO EXPERIENCE IN A CHINESE POPULATION

IVY HONG
JOHN RUST
*Institute of London
University of London*

Androgyny and openness to experience were both investigated in a population of 100 Chinese people living in England. Androgyny was measured by the Bem scale, and openness to experience by the α scale developed by Coan. It was found that the androgynous subjects showed more openness to experience. However it was also noted that the scores for the Chinese subjects deviated from the US norms in a manner which suggested that the conceptualization of androgyny may vary, both theoretically and empirically, between cultures.

Bem's earlier formulation of psychological androgyny emphasised the superior behavioural flexibility of androgenous persons over their more stereotyped masculine and feminine counterparts (Bem, 1974 and 1975), and indeed evidence suggests (Bem and Lenny, 1976) that androgenous persons may indeed be more flexible in being able to engage in either 'masculine' or 'feminine' behavior depending on the situation. Work in the humanistic tradition has also looked at psychological flexibility, but in terms of 'openness to experience', a phrase defined by Rogers (1961) as being one of the chief characteristics of the 'fully functioning' person. Coan (1974) also defined flexibility as being one of the attributes of the psychologically well adjusted person. The integration of androgyny into the traditions of humanistic growth psychology received further impetus when Costa and McCrae (1976) pointed out that developmental changes, particularly personal growth, are more likely to occur in the individuals who most fully experience the events of their lives.

The present study looks at the relationship between androgyny as measured by the Bem scale and openness to experience as measured by a version

of the Experience Inventory (Coan, 1974) in a sample of Chinese residents in England. Cross cultural aspects of androgyny are also examined by comparing the norms obtained from this Chinese group with the US norms provided by Bem (1981).

METHOD

SUBJECTS

Subjects were 52 men and 48 women, all Hong Kong Chinese currently living in Britain. These subjects were either students undertaking tertiary education or were working full time in the UK. All subjects had a good command of English, but had been born or lived in Hong Kong for at least ten years, and had Cantonese as their mother tongue. The mean age of the sample was 29.5 years, and ranged between 19 and 54 years.

QUESTIONNAIRES

The short form of the Bem Sex Role Inventory was used (Bem, 1981), and was scored using the median split technique (Bem, 1977), that is, persons who were above the median split on both masculinity and femininity were defined as androgenous. Openness to experience was measured using the Experience Inventory of Coan (1974), as modified by Costa and McCrae (1978).

PROCEDURE

Each questionnaire was administered individually to each subject by one of four researchers in Bristol, Buckingham or London. Instructions were written on the questionnaires. Only four subjects refused to fill in the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 96%.

RESULTS

The correlation between masculinity and femininity scores was .07 (n.s.) which conformed to the data given by Bem (1981). Nineteen of the 52 men, and 14 of the 48 women were defined as androgenous by the median split criteria. There were significantly more female Hong Kong Chinese subjects classified as female than in the normative US sample ($p < .05$). For the male sample there was a significantly higher proportion of Hong Kong Chinese classified as androgenous than the US norms ($P < .05$).

Analysis of variance showed that androgynous subjects were significantly more open to experience than non androgenous subjects ($p < .05$), the respective means on the openness to experience scale being 27.1935 for androgenous, 23.64 for undifferentiated, 23.84 for feminine and 25.55 for masculine subjects.

DISCUSSION

The finding that androgenous subjects are more open to experience than non-androgenous subjects lends support to the hypothesis that androgenous individuals are more flexible in their approach to life. However this can be interpreted in either a positive or negative construction. Positively we could instantiate the androgenous individual as being, for example, a business woman more able to cope in a man's world, or as being a man (perhaps a counsellor) who has developed a more caring personality through allowing his 'feminine' side to express itself. Negatively we could construe the androgenous individual as one who exploits learned social skills to his/her own advantage, or who has learned to cynically manipulate those others who obey the traditions and values of their society. While it would be charitable to believe that the first pair of constructions reflects true androgyny, it does need to be recognized that such a construction may itself be dependent on the self actualization metaphor. That is, androgynized individuals may be more "self-actualized" by definition in so far as they have a wider repertoire of social skills. This interpretation can be construed differently (and negatively) if it is suggested that many of these social skills are ones which are universally available, but that the well adjusted person has learned, through self discipline, to restrict his/her behaviors to only those appropriate for their society.

Previous studies of the Chinese personality (Yang, 1986; Tarwater, 1966; Chinese Psychological Association, 1979) have found that in Chinese samples, filial duty and respect for parents are the most important values, while least important were enjoying the present and being independent. It would appear from these studies that the rugged individualism, often seen as a positive attribute within American society, does not play the same positive role within Chinese culture, in which instrumental attitudes such as leadership and independence are devalued. In this context the finding of differences between Chinese and American samples in the present study can be explained by a probable interaction among value orientation, need pattern and sex-role orientation. This may result in a higher endorsement of expressive characteristics in self-description among the Chinese sample, leading to a higher femininity score for Chinese women and a higher androgyny score for Chinese men. This interpretation gives an alternative perspective to the idea, popular within the human potential movement in the West, that human cognitive evolution is following a single preordained path from its animal origins to a higher creative/independent form of consciousness. Rather it seems as if the values of the human potential movement itself may be nothing more than a reflection and a projection of the current ascendancy of "go-getting" values in Western Society. This possibility highlights the ever-present need to investigate the presuppositions of ideas which appear to emerge as neutral hypothetico-deductive findings from scientific psychology, and demonstrates that social constructionism (Witlig, 1985) may not

adequately extend itself to deal with cross cultural issues.

REFERENCES

- Bem, S. L. (1974) The measurement of clinical androgyny. *Journal of Counselling and Clinical Psychology*, 42, 155-162.
- Bem, S. L. (1975) Sex-role adaptability: One consequence of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 31, 634-643.
- Bem, S. L. (1977) On the utility of alternative procedures for assessing psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 45, 196-205.
- Bem, S. L. (1981) *Bem Sex Role Inventory Professional Manual*, Consulting Psychologists Press: Palo Alto.
- Bem, S. L. and Lenny, E. (1976) Sex-typing and the avoidance of cross sex behaviour. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 33, 48-54.
- Coan, R. W. (1974) *The Optimal Personality*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Costa, P. T. and McCrae, R. R. (1978) Objective personality assessment. In: *The Clinical Psychology of Aqing*, Storandt, M., Seigher, L. C. and Elias, M. F. (Eds), New York: Plenum Press.
- Chinese Psychological Association (1970). *Attitudes towards the environment of life among college and university students in Taiwan*. Taipei, Taiwan: Chinese Psychological Association.
- Rogers, C. (1961). *On Becoming a Person: a Therapist's View of Psychotherapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Tarwater, J.W. (1966). Chinese and American students interpersonal values: A cross cultural comparison. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 7, 351-354.
- Wittig, M.A. (1985). Metatheoretical dilemmas in the psychology of gender. *American Psychologist*, 40 (7), 800-811.
- Yang, K.S. (1986). The personality of Chinese people. In M.H. Bond, Ed. *The Psychology of the Chinese people*. London: Oxford University Press.

Requests for reprints should be addressed to:

JOHN RUST,
 Department of Child Development and Educational Psychology,
 University of London Institute of Education,
 20 Bedford Way,
 London WC1H 0AL
 U.K.