

The "Feminine Protest"¹

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Adler started his Individual Psychology with two dynamic conceptions: the tendency of the organism to compensate, which was peculiar to every part as well as to the whole, and the tendency for aggression which appeared as soon as the compensation failed.

In the beginning, this concept of aggression meant the "will to power," but during Adler's development the contents of this concept, through many transformations, gradually took on more general significance and at the same time several other names. At first he gave it a sexual meaning and called it "masculine protest." At that time he identified the feeling of inferiority with the assumption of femininity. Therefore he felt that the compulsion to compensate forced the psychic structure to emphasize the masculine role.

Later on the "masculine protest" changed into the sexually neutral wish for superiority of which the masculine protest became only a special instance. This more or less neurotically colored tendency finally made place for a general striving to overcome the various difficulties of life, which in its turn revealed itself in a striving for perfection.

The earlier concept of "masculine protest" at first played a predominant role in Adler's psychology. Freud, who readily adopted this Adlerian idea, declared that the fundamental rejection of femininity was absolutely inexplicable. One has the impression that with the penis-wish and the masculine protest, one has penetrated through all psychological layers to the solid rock and thus has come to the end of his labours. It seems absolutely wrong to suppose that the rejection of femininity should be based on the social aspect of womanliness.

Though Adler—unlike Freud—was convinced that this social aspect was the only cause of that rejection, he nevertheless agreed with Freud that without any exception both sexes preferred the masculine principle. He simply identifies "manliness" with high status, "womanliness" with low.

Contrary to this I should like to propose that in case the child, for reasons of his own, considers the aspects of femininity much pre-

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ferable to those of masculinity, he will possibly develop a "feminine protest."

In support of this opinion, I should like to mention briefly, three cases. The first is that of a young man, aged 35, the eldest of five brothers. He occupies a fairly high position in a large business concern where he has considerable difficulty in maintaining his prestige in his relationship with his subordinates.

He worships his mother, while his father has never been of much importance to him. His mother always openly preferred the feminine principle and suffered deeply because she had no daughters. She educated her eldest son as if he were a girl, and he has accepted this role to a large extent. He attends his mother's guests, accompanies her to the dressmaker, chooses her dresses, and invents all sorts of refinements. He assists his numerous girl-friends in the same way.

His real professional ideal is to be a fashion-designer. His movements and carriage are typically womanly, his clothes much too elegant and colorful. At his place of business he is nicknamed "Miss X." Though he gladly associates with women and girls in a friendly manner, he has an inner aversion against erotic or sexual relations with them. Somehow he got the impression that his mother has a strong dislike for sexual intercourse. He has always regretted not having been born a girl.

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The second case is that of a student who came to me because of masturbation and various nervous symptoms. His father is a very disagreeable individual who neglected his business and ill-treated his wife. The mother conducted the business and educated her children with great care whereas the father was only a nuisance in the family. One of the earliest recollections of the young man is that one night he, his mother and the other children were driven out of the house and had to take shelter with neighbors. To him, his father is a contemptible person, his mother an adored, triumphant being. He also remembers a very queer game he used to play when he was a young child. Alone in the attic of the house he had tied a string to his penis, dragging himself on with this string, at the same time imagining that he was a slave who was being ill-treated in this way.

Ever since he became aware of childbirth, he has tended to identify himself with any woman of his acquaintance who was lying in child-

bed. He then tries intensely to imagine himself in her place and to feel as if he were undergoing all her sensations and experiences.

During treatment he dreamed that the breasts of his fiancée had been amputated and were lying somewhere wrapped up in paper. A little baby was crying of hunger and had to be fed. Vaguely he felt as if the child were lying against his own breast and therefore he told his fiancée to ask the surgeon to put her breasts back again, otherwise the baby might die of starvation.

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The third case is that of a young theologian aged 30, who was unable to get a post because everybody took a strong dislike to him. In fact, his appearance is not attractive, he is extremely "skinny." His behavior is very uncertain and deeply introverted. His father, a subordinate employee, is very hot-tempered and bullies his wife, who, on the contrary, is very reasonable and tries to make the best of her difficult situation. She gave her son a careful education and proved to be a motherly woman.

The patient's earliest recollection is of dreaming repeatedly that he saw his father's face changing, to his great alarm, into the head of a terrible monster.

After much hesitation he related that for several years he had been drinking his own urine, at the same time fancying that it belonged to any girl he had seen on the street that day. In the same way he had often put his own stool into his mouth and once, in a public swimming pool, after a girl had left the lavatory, he went in there and put some stool into his mouth which he supposed belonged to her.

He further mentioned various masochistic dreams and daydreams, all of which pointed in the same direction, namely, the wish to incorporate the womanly principle and to accept the submissive role.

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It seems to me that in these three cases an increasing aversion against masculinity and a strong hankering for femininity can be observed. In the last case in particular, we can see a man whose strongest wish is to absorb the womanly principle, abhorring masculinity. Here it is not the masculine principle which is poured out into the woman, but the womanly principle taken in by the man.

Information from other patients also convinced me that Freud's opinion that the "penis-envy," the "castration-complex" and the "masculine protest" constituted without exception some of the strongest urges in all men and women, was not always true; especially not so in these cases where the social aspect of the womanliness seemed to the child far more preferable than manliness. In those cases it might be justifiable to speak of the existence of a "feminine" rather than the more frequent "masculine" protest.

Until now, as far as I know, this problem of "feminine" protest has never been mentioned in Adlerian literature, though most therapists will have met many patients with similar attitudes.