

PREFERENCE FOR A MALE CHILD: CULTURAL FACTOR

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These days when we hear so much about the feminist movement, starting with Betty Friedan's book (4), it would seem to be particularly in order to investigate to what extent the cultural disadvantage of women is still a fact, as it was in the days of Freud and Adler.

Both Freud and Adler took the disadvantage of woman strongly into account in their theories. For Adler it was a purely cultural matter, a value and as such a mistaken one that needed to be changed. But while it existed, both men and women who suffered from strong inferiority feelings would often attempt to raise their self-esteem by self-assertive and ruthless behavior in accordance with their guiding image "to be a real man" (1, p. 108). This is what Adler called the "masculine protest" (1, p. 48), not in the sense of male sex, but what is today known as male gender, i.e., the cultural role of a man.

For Freud woman's disadvantage was essentially a biological matter, the little girl's lack of a penis, resulting in castration fear in man and penis envy in woman. When Freud took over Adler's term, "masculine protest" (2), he merged it with his own biological views. Thus, in one of his last papers he still stated: "We must not be misled by the term 'masculine protest' into supposing that what the man repudiates is . . . the social aspect of femininity. . . . The 'masculine protest' is in fact nothing other than fear of castration" (3, p. 357n).

The present study was aimed at examining the extent of the male advantage in our culture today by asking adults without children the simple question: if they only had one child, would they rather have a little boy or a little girl. If both men and women would prefer a boy, this would be a verification of a still existing cultural bias in favor of men. One might say that men would be more welcome from birth on.

To shed light on the Freud-Adler controversy regarding the explanation of the phenomenon, a cultural variable is required. If

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the results were the same regardless of culture they would tip the scales in favor of Freud. If the results varied with culture they would support Adler's cultural hypothesis.

METHOD

The subjects were (a) 174 unmarried male and 236 unmarried female college students, (b) 29 married male and 21 married female college students, (c) 18 married male and 26 married female non-college adults (ages 18-25). The college students were taken from various courses in psychology, the non-college adults, from various local housing developments.

Each subject was asked and responded to the question: "If you knew for sure that you could have only one child would you prefer that child to be a male or a female?" The differences obtained were treated statistically by the use of chi square.

RESULTS

Table I shows that among unmarried college students 90% of the males and 78% of the females prefer to have a male child. Among married college students, 83% of the males and 73% of the females would prefer a boy. But among non-college adults 90% of the males would prefer a boy, and only 30% of the females share this preference. 70% of the non-college women would rather have a girl. While particularly in the last group the numbers are small, still significant chi squares were obtained.

TABLE I. PREFERENCE FOR SEX OF CHILD, BY SOCIAL FACTORS AND SEX OF ADULT RESPONDENTS

Preference	Unmarried coll. students		Married coll. students		Married non-college adults	
	m	f	m	f	m	f
boy	156*** (90%)	184*** (78%)	24** (83%)	16* (73%)	16*** (90%)	8 (30%)
girl	18 (10%)	52 (22%)	5 (17%)	6 (27%)	2 (10%)	18* (70%)
N	174	236	29	21	18	26

* Chi square $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The results among college students clearly indicate that both men and women, married and unmarried, overwhelmingly prefer a boy to a girl if they could have only one child. This can be taken as indicator that prejudice against women does indeed still exist in

our culture. But this prejudice is not uniformly distributed throughout the culture. In a small group of non-college adults, the men still prefer a male child, but 70% of the women prefer a little girl as their only child.

Although these results, obtained from small numbers, are significant, they should of course be replicated with larger numbers. As they stand, the results would disprove the Freudian notion that women prefer a male child to make up for their own lack of a penis. In this case all women should equally prefer to have a little boy, regardless of education, or other cultural variables. The results support the Adlerian notion that preference for a male child is based on cultural values as is the case with the masculine protest. Dissatisfaction with the female role is apparently greater among the more educated, and conversely satisfaction with the female role is greater among the less educated women who are culturally less ambitious. All studies with masculinity-femininity scales have resulted in higher femininity scores among less educated women. Being less ambitious in the direction of male activities and privileges than her more educated sister the less educated woman is apparently less likely to seek vicarious compensation through a male child, and more willing to have a child like herself in whom she is likely to see more future kinship, companionship and help.

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