

SEX-ROLE UNCERTAINTY AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

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Adler listed "uncertainty of one's sexual role and of one's masculinity" first among "the typical occasions for the onset of a neurosis and psychosis" (1, pp. 296-297). In support of Adler's hypothesis, there has been considerable recent research suggesting relationships between inadequate sex-role development and psychopathology (e.g., 2, 3, 6, 7, 8).

Most recently, Kayton and Biller (7) studied the sex-role development of four groups of adult males, matched in terms of age ($M = 29.33$ years), education ($M = 13.35$ years), and social class (primarily lower-middle class). Nonparanoid schizophrenics, paranoid schizophrenics, neurotics, and normals ($N = 20$ in each group) were compared in terms of the masculinity-femininity of their self-perceptions through Gough and Heilbrun's Adjective Check List (5) and their interests and attitudes through Gough's Femininity Scale (4). Although there were no clear-cut differences between the disturbed groups, all the disturbed groups consistently scored less masculine than did the normal group.

A related study by Kayton and Biller (6) gives a clue as to the main determinant of what Adler called "uncertainty of one's sexual role." In this study, the four groups of adult males were assessed with respect to their perceptions of their parents' sex-role behavior (Heilbrun's Parental Description Survey). The normal subjects generally perceived their parents as possessing sex-appropriate behaviors to a greater extent than did the disturbed subjects. In the disturbed groups a smaller proportion of individuals viewed their fathers as exhibiting masculine-instrumental traits, and (particularly among the schizophrenics), their mothers as having feminine-expressive characteristics.

Of course there is a great need for more direct investigations of the developing child and his relationship with his parents. Available evidence (e.g., 2) is, however, consistent with the view that sex-role uncertainty is a very basic determinant of psychopathology, and is

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often a reflection of parental sex-role conflicts. Indeed, Adler seems to have been particularly astute in listing sex-role uncertainty first among his list of developmental precursors to psychopathology.

An interesting question arises as to whether the relatively asexual hairstyles and attire among many adolescents and young adults today reflect an increase in sex-role uncertainty. This is a very complex issue. The basic motivation for an asexual appearance is *not necessarily* sex-role uncertainty. For some young people it is a way in which to make explicit their belonging to certain social groupings, for others it is a visible protest against what they view as a very rigid sex-role stereotyping. They may reject cultural stereotypes but still feel very positively about their biological sexuality. In an individual case, whether or not there is sex-role uncertainty can often only be ascertained from a thorough clinical evaluation. Systematic research is needed to clarify the possibility of a general relationship between sex-role uncertainty and sexually neutral (or sexually exaggerated) hair and clothing styles.

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