

CHAPTER 13

Polarity: Masculinity and Femininity

As human beings we share common experiences. Each of us has a soul and a body. Beyond this, we are either a man or a woman. A man, while being predominantly masculine, also has some aspect of femininity inside of him. Likewise, a woman, although predominantly feminine, has some aspect of masculinity inside of her. An ancient American Indian saying states that, "Within every man there is the reflection of a woman, and within every woman there is the reflection of a man."

Our sex is determined at the moment of conception by the presence of X and Y chromosomes, with girls having an XX configuration and boys an XY. Even though we all have aspects of both masculinity and femininity inside us, we have a dominant sexual energy that is determined by our bodily form. If we are born a woman, we have a woman's destiny. If we are born a man, we have a man's destiny.

Extensive studies have shown that from conception to adulthood, in virtually every kind of society, boys and girls have different bodies, brains, and temperaments due mainly to nature rather than nurture or upbringing. Boys tend to be more aggressive, exploratory, volatile, competitive, dominant, career-oriented, visual, abstract, impulsive, muscular, appetitive, tall, and compulsive sexually. Girls tend to be more nurturing, stable, peaceful, communicative, audible, sympathetic, dependable and balanced.



Of course, these tendencies are shaped by environment and culture and are modified in crucial ways by society. Most of these characteristics are cross-cultural. These are generalized characteristics, and actual persons may deviate greatly from these characteristics.

The ancient Chinese philosophical text *I Ching*, or Book of Changes, which teaches that everything is the product of two forces or principles, known as *yang* and *yin*, describes male and female energies and their interrelationship in life so that we may understand the difference in their essential natures. Within the symbol of the *Tao* (the Supreme Ultimate) shown below, it is clear that the masculine (*yang*) and feminine (*yin*) energies fit together perfectly in one circular form. They are not opposites, nor are they identical. Rather, they are complementary. The dot within each form signifies the seed of the other. Within their duality is harmony and completion. Here are the essential qualities of the two principles:



Yin

relationship
space
community
nourishing
unity
responding
spontaneous
oneness

Yang

individualization
time
hierarchy/order
fertilizing
polarity
initiating
planned
differentiation

According to the I Ching, yang, the masculine energy, originates as heaven. Yin, the feminine energy, is pictured as the earth or nature.

The female energy

As expressed in the *I Ching*, the earth is always looking toward heaven, toward God. This is how the feminine energy, the earth, the bearer of children, the Mother, is continually connected to God. She has the quality of devotion. The feminine is the principle of relatedness. “Embracing all things, it becomes bright and shines forth. Its essential characteristic is glad acceptance—it embraces all things as though in a vast womb.”

The feminine energy is receptive, gentle and accommodating—the sustainer and foundation of life. If we never experienced nurturing, we could not survive. To live we must have food, and that food comes originally from our mother’s milk and then later from Mother Earth. We constantly need that nurturing energy in order to live.

Nurturing means giving. Feminine love is expressed in devotion and loyalty in relationships. *Yin* is the principle of maintaining relationships—it is the force that gathers and unites people. By nurturing her husband, her children, other people, plants and animals, the feminine quality of devotion emerges and grows.

Flexibility is also a *yin* quality. For example, the tree has roots that go deep into the earth. The tree can live a long time and grow strong because it can bend in the wind. The roots have gone so deep that the tree is able to withstand the pressure of a hurricane by yielding and being flexible. The same principle exists within a pregnant woman. Her body accommodates the growing child in many different ways. Conception, pregnancy, childbirth, breast-feeding, child rearing—all these represent the fact that flexibility accommodates strength and other important aspects of creativity.



The male energy

According to the *I Ching*, when the male energy is in balance, it is like heaven. Heaven is always looking toward the earth. The man must reach toward the woman to find God. Male energy is strong, outgoing, and directive. The authority of balanced male energy gives a man a sense of direction. When masculine energy has direction, it needs to be responsible. Responsibility and leadership are the main attributes of the male energy. Its course alters and shapes all things until each attains its true, specific nature. To live in accordance with the masculine energy is to bring peace and security to the world through one's activity in creating order.

Traditionally it has been said that a man is honorable if he is true to his word. If a man is committed to his word, he is trustworthy, perhaps even a man of God. When a man does not take responsibility for his masculine energy (actions), he loses his backbone. Male energy manifests the structural and active aspect of creativity. Creativity is reflected through productive action, and with action comes the responsibility for what we create.

Healthy male energy perfectly complements female energy. Our energies are in complementary balance, which gives us great vitality and harmony. There is an important disadvantage in relying exclusively on either the masculine or feminine energy. Neither aspect can realize its full potential without relating to its opposite. Human nature can reveal itself in its essential wholeness only when *yin* and *yang* are brought into conscious communion and harmony with each other.

This gives us a better understanding of why marriage is important not only *between* the sexes, but also in the sense of the masculine and feminine qualities *within* each individual. The masculinity inside us strives to actively organize and initiate, while the femininity receives, integrates and harmonizes. Both are equally valuable and necessary. While this integration occurs, it is important that a man develop his feminine side in a uniquely masculine way and a woman develop her masculine side in a uniquely feminine way so that neither one simply imitates the behavior of the opposite gender in a superficial way. Masculinity and femininity are strongly attracted to each other. When these essential natures are in balance, only then are husband and wife able to represent the full splendor and dignity of their partnership.

For Your Journal



- 1) What are three of your most thoughtful questions from this chapter?
- 2) Describe some of the emotional and psychological differences that you notice in male and female persons.

Femininity

by Susan Brownmiller

It is fashionable in some quarters to describe the feminine and masculine principles as polar ends of the human continuum, and to sagely profess that both polarities exist in all people. Sun and moon, yin and yang, soft and hard, active and passive, etcetera, may indeed be opposite, but a linear continuum does not illuminate the problem. (Femininity, in all its contrivances, is a very active endeavor.) What, then, is the basic distinction? The masculine principle is better understood as a driving ethos of superiority designed to inspire straightforward, confident success, while the feminine principle is composed of vulnerability, the need for protection, the formalities of compliance and the avoidance of conflict—in short, an appeal of dependence and good will that gives the masculine principle its romantic validity and its admiring applause.

Femininity pleases men because it makes them appear more masculine by contrast; and, in truth, conferring an extra portion of unearned gender distinction upon men, an unchallenged space in which to breathe freely and feel stronger, wiser, more competent, is femininity's special gift. One could say that masculinity is often an effort to please women, but masculinity is known to please by displays of mastery and competence while femininity pleases by suggesting that these concerns, except in small matters, are beyond its intent. Whimsy, unpredictability and patterns of thinking and behavior that are dominated by emotion, such as tearful expressions of sentiment and fear, are thought to be feminine precisely because they lie outside the established route to success.

Something to
think about



- What do you think of the characterizations of masculinity and femininity as expressed in the above passage?
- Are they flattering or disparaging characterizations?
- Are they accurate expressions of true masculinity and femininity or distortions of them?
- Do you feel that the author has a bias for or against one or the other?
- Why do you think the author feels the way she does?