The Fear of the Feminine; its Effect on Men and on Psychotherapy

Keywords:
Men, male, fear, gender role, feminine,

ABSTRACT

Various authors, including Horney, Neumann and Blazina said the fear of the feminine FOF in men is a major aspect of male psychology.

The FOF describes emotions, which are difficult for many men, including vulnerability or helplessness. Equally, the FOF is a defence, shielding men from such emotions; then the FOF can cause reactions such as anger.

Methodology:

Invitations were sent to various businesses and special interest groups. Male volunteers, with varied job titles, aged between 25–64, were asked to complete O’Neil’s gender-role-conflict-scale GRCS to determine if they were in conflict or accord with traditional masculine values. Men with high and low scores were interviewed, using a semi-structured questionnaire, to explore their FOF experiences. The aim of dividing participants in low and high GRCS scorers allowed comparisons of FOF levels between both groups. Interviews were analysed using a constant comparative method.

Middlesex University granted ethical approval.

Results:

The internal and external aspects of FOF were recognised by all participants. Internal aspects relate to feeling defenceless or out of control; external aspects relate to experiencing women and their strengths as threatening.

When describing how FOF manifests, participants talked about other men rather than themselves. This suggests that admitting to FOF may expose men to vulnerabilities that must be hidden. Related to FOF are deep life fears that force men to adopt certain emotional and behaviour patterns. This is linked to elaborate views on differences between masculinity and femininity. These views keep men on one side of the gender divide as perceived by self and others.

Research Limitations:

Most men demonstrated a tendency of outward-projection of FOF. Consequently, the analysis relied on deductions and interpretations of the complex data.
Value:

The lack of accurate information about how men really feel and think can make it difficult to offer effective therapeutic interventions. In the light of their higher suicide, addiction, violence and other problem-behaviour-rates, more effective interventions are required.

Implications:

Psychotherapy has not got a high regard amongst men, owing to a masculine value of splitting/projecting difficult feelings in order to avoid fear.

Understanding this dominant dynamic can help to work with men more effectively in psychotherapy.

References:

Blazina, Chris. 1997. The fear of the feminine in the Western psyche and the masculine task of dis-identification. The Journal of Men’s Studies, Vol 6, issue 1, pages 55-68