THE CONCEPT OF ANDROGYNY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE POSSIBILITY OF RAISING A CHILD WITH VARYING CHARACTERISTICS IN TODAY'S SOCIETY

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Androgyny is defined as, "the social and psychological condition by which individuals can think, feel, and behave both instrumentally and expressively" (Lamanna 1994). With this definition in mind, I believe that raising an androgynous child would be a difficult, but not impossible task.

It would be hard to specify a particular plan of action regarding clothing, and dealing with individuals that are rigid in the traditional fe/male roles. I believe that I was raised with an open view of gender roles. Unlike my sister, I was more a tomboy with a passion for sports, camping, and the like. My hair was always cut short and I was not afraid to get dirty. I also grew up with a working mother. Although my father works, he often had to play the "house-wife" role of cooking and greeting my sister and I when we got home from school. Thus, both of my parents have been appropriate role models for me as a child growing up in an increasingly androgynous world.

This upbringing, as well as society's increasing acceptance for differing roles, could allow the possibility for raising a child to have a role flexibility. Society's views of fe/male roles not only have a great impact on growing children, but these views also pose many challenges to the goal of raising an androgynous child. The impact of media, peers, coaches, and teachers all contribute to shaping a child's view of the world and his/her role in this world.

If I were going to raise an androgynous child, I think that I would build a coalition of people willing to support and act in this view. These people would most likely have children of a similar age that my child could associate with and not feel isolated. For example, some children's sports teams are now coed, offering more flexibility for both genders. In addition to coed sports, the media on television and magazines have proposed "unidress." For example, fashion shows and articles have shown clothes, like oxfords and khakis, for both males and females. Although the media has encouraged some diversity in traditional sex roles, the changes have been minimal. Girls still are influenced to buy and model after Barbie dolls and boys to buy trucks, cars, and war figurines. This is why it would be vital to
associate with other individuals who are flexible about their child’s characteristics and activities. This way we could allow the boys to play with the Barbies and the Little Tykes kitchenette. Similarly, we could allow the girls to play with the trucks and the blocks. This way the child is able to associate with children whose parents are flexible.

Associating with like-minded parents, as well as the increasing acceptance for differing career choices, both contribute to the possibility of raising an androgynous child. More women are entering fields of business, psychology, law, and politics. Additionally, some men are increasingly entering the fields of teaching, day-care, and nursing. Some people still have problems with these transformations of fe/male roles because these changes do not fit into their particular gender schema. This is perhaps why people often experience harassment and discrimination when occupying “non-traditional” roles. Susan Campbell amplifies this thought as she states that “because the pay and prestige are so low, people assume male day-care workers might be child molesters” (quoted in Papalia 1993). The coverage about the incidence of harassment of females is ever increasing in the media. For example, the whole nation was faced with the Anita Hill hearings, talk shows exploding with cases of harassment, and movies of real-life discrimination enactments.

All of these issues are important to think about when raising a child to be androgynous. Since the first wave of the women’s movement, more women have been entering the work force, the number of divorces have increased, and the traditional roles are in a constant flux. These changes not only pose a threat to traditional roles, but they offer an increasing awareness and acceptance of the androgynous individual. Indeed, it is comforting to know that I would not be alone in my attempt at raising an androgynous child. In fact, it is becoming more acceptable in today’s society. I would like to think that I have properly raised a well-rounded child unchained to the traditional roles and stereotypes of the past. And I would like to think that this child could express his/her assertiveness, passiveness, aggressiveness, or kindness according to the particular situation rather than their sex.

Works Cited

