

Adding Nuance to the Masculine and Feminine Polarity

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Integral Facilitator Program – Cohort Three

Project Introduction

Our project began during the Fall 2015 Integral Facilitator Intensive, as the two of us started to discuss the pros and cons of using the terms “masculine” and “feminine” in order to describe energetic polarities that manifest in individuals, groups and cultures. The masculine and feminine polarity is (or seems to be) a fundamental and essential way for Integral Facilitators to discuss and describe energetic interplays and dynamics. In some ways, the Masculine and Feminine polarity seems to capture (or is used to capture) many potentially more nuanced energetic ideas and there is value to adding more nuance to this polarity in order to help us work with ourselves and with groups.

Why does this topic matter to us?

Amy has and has had strong responses to the way the masculine and feminine polarity is often discussed and is used to observe energetic dynamics. The conflation of gender (male/female) with the terms masculine and feminine is almost unavoidable for most. This conflation has influenced how most of us have been acculturated to behave and the reinforcement or redirection we receive from our cultures regarding our behavior. This conflation can limit our individual capabilities to both demonstrate and appreciate the range of energetics on either sides of the masculine and feminine polarity regardless of our own or another’s gender. Group facilitators, she asked, how can we

free our work of these traditional /limiting but no longer fixed conceptions of masculine and feminine?

Kathy shared Amy's desire to challenge stereotypes, and suggested a book that adds nuance to the masculine-feminine distinction. This book is Gareth Hill's Masculine and Feminine: The Natural Flow of Archetypes in the Psyche. Hill updates a Jungian framework that speaks of "archetypes" rather than stereotypes: "an archetype is a regular and orderly pattern of behavior whose content can be infinitely variable and unique between individuals and cultures but which can be reduced to its typical form." (210). An archetype thus has an underlying structure that is recognizable but, unlike a stereotype, has an infinite variety of expressions.

Amy read the chapter and this POD project was born with the aim to introduce the group to Hill's updated Jungian framework and engage the group to explore more nuances around this important polarity, so we are all equipped to fully recognize the polarities in ourselves and in the people with whom we work. We agreed that this might be a way to open up the definitions in a way that revalues both the masculine and the feminine, and also indicates the negative or excess of each in one person or in a group. Clarity about this as facilitators could help us to value each form of energy in the group, creating the sense of safety that comes when more kinds of energy and polarity find expression.

Gareth Hill's Framework: Four Patterns of Energy

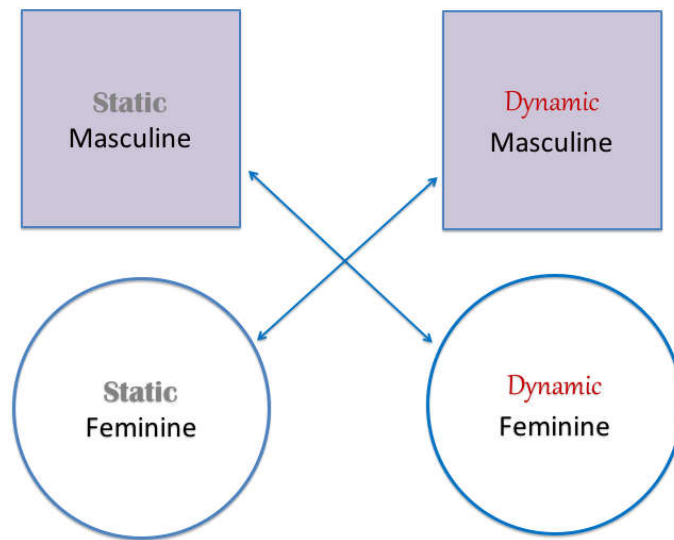
Hill's description of these archetypes accomplishes several things: 1) to separate the

discussion of masculine and feminine energy from male and female bodies, 2) to identify and integrate another axis of energy, a “static/dynamic” axis that is non-gendered, 3) to create useful categories that are not rigid or fixed, 4) to clearly articulate and value in equal measure the qualities of the feminine that are so often overlooked, as well as the many positive dimensions of the masculine, and 5) to identify negative or excessive traits of each that are often confused with the archetype itself. The framework first identifies **four patterns of energy** that underlie all human activity. “These patterns are revealed in behavior, motivation, dreams, fantasies, and other aspects of psychic functioning. They operate in family and social systems, and they underlie basic cultural patterns.” (3) Each pattern also has a variant that is a negative or excess expression of that energy. The patterns overlay masculine and feminine characteristics with static and dynamic qualities as follows:

Polarity	In Balance	In Excess	Symbolized by
Static Masculine	<p>Seeks and develops order and structure, with attention to rules, laws, and codes of conduct.</p> <p>Values standards and hierarchy, theories and judgments and theories of value.</p> <p>Archetype: The Great Father</p>	<p>Pushes this order too far, resulting in bureaucracy, rigidity, rules for rules’ sake, envy and self-righteousness, and pettiness.</p>	Line or Square
Dynamic Masculine	<p>Energy of drive and ambition, goal direction, a linear trajectory toward the objective, protection of the group, and the development of technology.</p> <p>Archetype: Dragon-slaying Hero</p>	<p>Rape and violence, destruction of nature, can be a dehumanizing force.</p>	Arrow

Static Feminine	Encircling care, the womb, safety, inclusion, nurturance, the warm of family and hearth, a sense of home. Archetype: The Great Mother	cloying, inertial, suffocating, and overprotective, with an overpowering sameness and regularity—one cannot leave the circle.	Circle
Dynamic Feminine	Creativity, the dance, pushing of boundaries, transforming, growing, the muse of the arts, and play. Archetype: The Trickster	Spin out of control into chaos, despair and depression, including addiction and self-destruction.	Spiral

An illustration of the four quadrants anchored in two polarities is below:



The task of the facilitator, and any person or system seeking integration, is to cultivate all forms of energy in their positive expressions, and to help the group to notice excess. Essential strength is present in all four archetypes, and weakness in their excess. Masculine and feminine, dynamic and static—all are needed by the healthy system.

Two Polarities

Although all four patterns constantly interact with and affect each other, there are two particular polarities that come into play (and are indicated by the arrows in the graphic above), these are: (1) Static Masculine to Dynamic Feminine polarity and (2) Static Feminine to Dynamic Masculine. These two polarities give and receive energy as they maintain balance and “pull back” the other from the excess. So for example, the Dynamic Masculine energy (symbolized by the arrow) has the energetic push toward taking action and accomplishing, the balance of Static Feminine energy (symbolized by the circle) will ensure that as the forward motion of Dynamic Masculine is present, the pull toward ensuring the inclusion of all parties and ideas is also present. These energetic qualities are no longer viewed as facets of or the purview of a particular gender, although Hill does note that “at the most elemental, innate level, no male can experience the static feminine to the depth and degree known by the pregnant female, and no female can experience so elementally a fulfillment of the phallic necessity as can a male, these phenomena are limited to only one polarity of the relationship between masculine and feminine...and in any case, there appears to be no basis for supposing

that men and women, by virtue of elemental necessity, *must* follow radically different paths of hierarchical development, however often in a given culture they do.” (34)

Conclusion

Our goal for the project is to help each other to identify these patterns in ourselves and in the group, and to learn how to contribute to and cultivate the positive forms and work with the negative expressions as they arise. Our hope is that including more nuance around the dynamic and static aspects of the feminine and masculine energies and supporting overt awareness around the difference between these energies and our gender will enable greater facility and dexterity in working with these important and essential energetics.