

## Women's Psychology

In founding psychoanalysis, Freud's contribution lies in the theories he developed regarding the existence of subconscious complexes in man that exert a dominating influence on his personality. According to him, these complexes are mainly connected with sex and family relationships, (the Oedipus complex, the Electra complex, the Cain complex, etc.). They are commonly inherited but generally disappear in the period of adolescence; yet in some people they persist and are repressed into the subconscious, whence they may reappear under certain circumstances and cause psychological troubles. In analyzing a number of people who suffered from nervous depression, Freud overemphasized the influence of sexual differences on the character of both men and women and the part played by sexual repression in producing neurosis. Another debatable question in his theories is his belief in the determinist character of these theories. Men and women, he says, are born with certain natural tendencies which dominate them and which find outlets in different ways. In some cases, they lead to harmful behavior: for example, in men, they lead to sadism, desire to destroy or to commit suicide. In women, they produce masochism or the abnormal pleasure in suffering. They also produce the inferiority complex, the tendency to self-effacement, narrow narcissism, inability to love, inability to fight their complexes and to achieve distinction. Unlike a man, who is generally able to overcome his complexes, a woman remains passive, is apt to lose her personality by identifying with a mother or a father or, finally, by developing a neurosis.

Freud created psychotherapy to treat the above mentioned psychological troubles but in his studies, he adopted a biased, one-sided attitude when he attributed the psychological differences existing between men and women to biological factors alone. To him these differences are natural but environment may contribute to emphasize them.

Now if we consider the other side of the question and try to show the influence of environment on women's personality aside from biological factors, we may affirm that, throughout a long history of patriarchal domina-

tion, woman never enjoyed enough freedom to be herself, to cultivate fully her potentials and to reveal her real feelings. Though the work she did was equal in quantity or importance to that of man, she was not treated on an equal basis with him. I like to give here excerpts from an article on women's work, written by the well-known Lebanese writer May Ziadeh, a pioneering feminist, whose description of women's character is derived from both experience and wide reading on the topic:

*"She suffers from intense emotionality which allows her to tolerate suffering and hardship to an unusual degree. She pursues her aim keenly and stubbornly, to the point of injuring herself and accepting martyrdom."*

This is what Freud calls masochism and considers as an inherited characteristic of womanhood, but May explains it in a different way. According to her it is the result of accumulated tension and monotonous existence which clipped woman to one single purpose: love, marriage and family.

*"When matrimony is her sole raison d'être, she seeks it with all her might, unmindful of thorns, rocks and other obstacles. If a new purpose or task show up, she follows it with the same enthusiasm and achieves distinction either in wrong doing, like Marie Tudor, or in lofty deeds, like Joan of Arc. In both cases she shows a lack of equilibrium, a passionate character which may lead to self-annihilation."*

While Freud considered woman's inferiority and emotionality as results of her jealous attitude aroused by man's sexual superiority, May Ziadeh attributes those traits to the different orientation and treatment she receives at home, at school and in society. A change in treatment should result in a change in character.

Some time ago, I read about a secondary school principal who kept in her drawer a handkerchief with which she wiped the tears of young girls who came complaining about their problems and asking her help. That was before 1940. "Since that time," said the principal, "the

*hankie has remained dry and clean in my drawer. Times have changed. Knowledge and education have made our girls more self-reliant. They have achieved a high degree of poise and self-assertion.”*

*The change is bound to continue. Modern technology and the amazing progress attained in the field of gynecology and reproduction have reduced to a minimum women’s biological and housekeeping burdens.*

*Rose Ghurayyib*

