

According to Freud, sexual drive, along with aggression, is the central factor in determining the personalities of human beings and the main driving force that gives reason to, and influences what we do and who we become. He asserts that if each psycho-sexual—oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital – stage is not resolved, fixation at that particular stage, and thereafter personality and behavioural problems might occur in latter life.

More importantly, infantile sexuality, which encompasses the first three stages, is said to play an imperative role in the shaping the personalities of adults. Freud believes that while boys and girls would progress similarly during the earlier oral and anal stages, it is at the phallic stage where complications in undergoing a two-fold change in sexual object and leading sexual organ might make it more difficult for girls to progress through this stage, if at all. His work experiences dealing with neurotic women has also led him to proclaim that, “Now will *you* have escaped worrying over this problem – those of you of are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply – you are yourselves the problem”.¹ He believes that women’s constant need for attention and attention from their parents -and in later life, their husbands- leads them to have illnesses, which “*are* the result of intentions”², albeit unconsciously. His cure for such hysteria is through psychoanalysing the patient and convincing the patient of this ‘fact’.

Freud’s theory of psycho-sexual development and its effects as pertaining to female psychology has been rejected by some theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir for being too

¹ Sigmund Freud, “Femininity” in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, vol 2 of the *The Penguin Freud Library*, trans. James Strachey, ed., Angela Richards.(London: Penguin,1991), 146.

² Sigmund Freud, “Selections from “Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria” in *Freud on Women: a Reader*, ed., Elizabeth Young-Bruehl. (New York: Norton, 1990), 74

superficial in its claims and assumptions. However, she is also equally guilty of making similar mistakes as her own criticisms are based upon and reflective of a shallow and selective reading of Freud's own work

Freud redefines the perceptions of sexuality during his time, and "rewrites the history of sexual development"³. According to Freud's psychoanalytic model, the five phases of expressions of the sexual drive are the oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital stages; the erogenous zones in focus are therefore the mouth, anus, genital, nothing, and genital respectively. Throughout the first two stages of oral and sadistic-anal which take place in the first 3 years of a child's life, boys and girls receive gratification in the exactly the same way – through the mouth by nursing and eating and other related oral activities, and anally by the movement, and withholding of movement of bowels. While fixation might occur in these first two stages, gender and biological differences do not come into play at all.

It is at the later pre-Oedipal and Oedipal phallic phase between the age of four and five that such differences might lead to complications and problems for girls, as "the development of a little girl into a normal woman ... includes two extra tasks, to which there is nothing corresponding in the development of a man"⁴. Entering the phallic phase, both sexes are derive pleasure from their genitals, however, while men only have to continue their focus on their penis as the leading erotogenic zone at the time of sexual maturity, women have make a change their erotogenic zone from their clitoris to their vagina. Moreover, while the boy retains his maternal love-object, a girl would have to switch from that to her paternal love-object, and therefore make the transition from

³ Richard Wollheim, "Sexuality," in *Freud*, 2^d ed. (London: Fontana,1991), 122.

⁴ Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, vol 2 of the *The Penguin Freud Library*, trans. James Strachey, ed, Angela Richards (London: Penguin,1991), 150.

masculinity to femininity. Such a two-fold change is so difficult for girls and require so much of them, that it renders them too passive for anything other than motherhood.

At the pre-oedipal stage, both she and the little boy receive pleasure from playing with their small penises – although for the girl, it is an even smaller clitoris in lieu of the penis. Both are told cautioned by parents not to engaged in masturbation by playing with their genitals.

At this stage, the mother is the love-object of both the little boy and little girl; “the first object-cartexes occur in attachment to the satisfaction of the major and simple vital needs, and the circumstances of the care of children are the same for both sexes”⁵. Entering the Oedipal phase, the little boy would see his father as the rival for the love of his mother. However, the castration complex also occurs when his realises their biological differences. The little boy think that the little girl has been castrated, probably because of her wrongdoings, and it is this fear of being castrated as well that leads to him behaving himself, and developing an efficient superego; it “will be the most powerful motive force in his subsequent development”⁶. Thus, he manages to retain his maternal love-object, without subsequently alienating his father.

For the little girl, the castration complex leads her to develop a hostility towards her mother, as her love was only for her phallic mother. Once she ‘realises’ that her mother has been castrated as well, she loses all respect and love for her. She also finds a variety of reasons for hating her mother such as for giving her too little milk (which for the little girl is symbolic of love), for poisoning her and causing to be ill, and for being unfaithful to her by having another baby. “A child’s demand for love are immoderate, they make

⁵ Ibid., 153.

⁶ Ibid., 158

exclusive claims and tolerate no sharing”⁷. If the little girl is not satisfied by her sexual wishes at any stage – but more significantly at the phallic stage when she is forbidden to touch her genitals by her mother – she finds even more reason behind her hostility towards her mother.

The little girl feels wronged and becomes envious of boys who have something that they do not have – a penis. According to Freud, such an envy would “leave eradicable traces on their development and the formation of their character and which will not be surmounted in even the most favourable cases without a severe expenditure of psychical energy”⁸. The little girls longs for a penis as well, and over time, even if she knows realistically that she does not and will never have one, such a wish still perseveres in the unconscious and retains much energy. According to Freud, such a repressed desire might lead women deviating from their correct place in society and wanting to have an academic or a more “constructive” profession instead.

Both early infantile fixations and the influence of later experiences and developments have some bearing on neuroses, but Freud argues the predominance of the infantile dynamic. The castration complex is a determinant factor in a girl’s growth. There are three developmental outcomes which would arise from thereon. Firstly, the girl could turn out to be sexually inhibited or becomes neurotic. Because of penis envy, she loses interest in her phallic sexuality, and she “begins to share her contempt felt by men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect, and, at least in holding that opinion, insists on being like a man”⁹.

⁷ Ibid., 157.

⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, “Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes,” in *On Sexuality Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, vol 7 of the The Penguin Freud Library, trans. James Strachey, ed., Angela Richards

If a girl tries unsuccessfully to stop masturbating at that stage because of her envy for a boy's penis and the shame of her inadequate clitoris, such infantile masturbation, and the suppression of it would leave permanent markings on her character and neurosis. It may also cause her to sympathise with other females and also play a motivating factor in her wanting a marriage and as well as influence her choice of a husband later on.

The little girl tries to renounce her clitoridal masturbation as well as well as some activity, and turns passive and instinctually looks towards her father as a love-object. If much of this is not repressed, the little girl may turn out to have a 'normal' femininity. However, for that to be completed, the wish for a penis has to be supplanted by a wish for a child, more specifically, a boy who has a penis that she longs for. In her Oedipal stage, she wants a baby with her Daddy, and since it is her mother who enjoys sexual relations with her father, she hates her even more. She might also be jealous of other females, as in seen in the case of Dora.

By this time, she would have completed the two-fold change in her leading sexual organ and sexual object, yet because of the absence of a fear of castration as present in boys to help them overcome the Oedipal complex, Freud believes that women remain in this stage for an indefinite period of time. females are unable to formulate an efficient super-ego –“ it cannot attain the strength and independence which gives it its cultural significance”¹⁰.

A third developmental outcome that could arise is the change of character in the sense of a masculine complex. After the little girl realises that she has been castrated, she may intentionally rebel against that, and insist on clinging on to her clitoridal gratification, and

(London: Penguin,1977), 337.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, vol 2 of the *The Penguin Freud Library*, trans. James Strachey, ed, Angela Richards (London: Penguin,1991), 163.

become more active instead of passive as femininity dictates. Freud believes that female homosexuality might occur. Although the girl may still change her maternal love-object to that of a paternal one, a regression to masculinity may occur if she feels that she has been let down by her father. In such a case, while paternal disappointments might occur to all girls, they do not have the same effect on girls who are predisposed to femininity. “The predominance of the constitutional factor seems indisputable; but the two phases in the development of homosexuals, who play the parts of mother and baby with each other as often and as clearly as those of husband and wife”¹¹.

The development of femininity can also be affected by remnants of the infantile masculine period, and regressions to pre-Oedipal fixations over time may cause women to switch from feminine to masculine stages. According to Freud, the libido – which is the motivating factor of sexuality, serves both masculine and feminine utilities; however “the accomplishment of the aim of biology has been entrusted to the aggressiveness of men and has been made to some extent independent of women’s consent”¹². Female sexual frigidity seems to confirm this as well, according to Freud.

Freud points out several mental idiosyncrasies of mature femininity, such as the narcissistic need to be loved by their choice of object, a physical vanity due to the effects of penis envy, which is said to compensate for their lack of one, and lastly shame, which is said to cover up for the inferiority of having a genital deficiency – the lack of a penis. The choice of a love object seems to correspond with the narcissistic model of the man she had wanted to be. She wants to have a son to compensate for her own lack of a penis; in her son, she can realise all her suppressed masculine dreams. She also feels that her

¹¹ Ibid., 164.

¹² Ibid., 21.

marriage is insecure until she is able to make her husband into her child through mothering him.

The pre-Oedipal and Oedipal phase for a woman causes her to develop immaturely due to the insurmountable problems she faces. However, it is during the pre-Oedipal stage that is the most significant – “during it preparations are made for the acquisition of the characteristics with which she will later fulfil her role in the sexual function and perform her invaluable social tasks...she [also] acquires her attractiveness to men, which Oedipus attachment to his mother it kindles into passion”¹³.

According to Freud, women have an inadequate discernment for justice as they are ruled by envy in their psychical life. They are also not as strong in their societal interests as they have a lesser capacity for sublimating their instincts. A woman, when compared to her male peers, is rigid and inflexible mentally and her libido also seems to have stagnated. She cannot develop any further and cannot be influenced at all; it is as if the entire process of femininity has worn her out so much that it is impossible for her to achieve anything further.

However, in response to Freud’s take on women, Simone de Beauvoir believes that it is not biological differences that demarcate women, rather, “it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life”¹⁴. She believes that psychoanalysis debase women by relegating to a fixed role – that which is predetermined by their biological differences and not by conscious action.

She objects to the psychoanalytic view of women as being too flexible in the interpretation rigid concepts, and insists that Freud “never showed much concern with the

¹³ Ibid., 168.

¹⁴ Simone De Beauvoir, “The Psychoanalytic Point of View,” in *The Second Sex*, trans. & ed., H. M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape), 65.

destiny of woman; it is clear that he simply adapted his account from that of the destiny of man, with slight modification”¹⁵. She also accuses him of not studying the particular sexuality of women, and basing it on the masculine pattern.

De Beauvoir objects to Freud’s theory of psycho-sexual development on two counts- Freud assumes that the little girl feels that she has been castrated and is a mutilated little boy, and his concept of an Electra complex –which was introduced by Jung- is too vague as it is not supported by even a rudimentary depiction of the feminine libido. She states that a little girl may regret not having a penis without entering the castration complex; she may even feel disgusted or even indifference at the sight of a penis; “her covetousness, when it exists, results from a previous evaluation of virility [which] Freud takes for granted, when it should be accounted for”¹⁶.

De Beauvoir also discounts it as being instinctual, as the sovereignty of the father should arise from a social origin instead, again, unaccounted for by Freud. She believes that if women are to experience an inferiority complex, it would be due to the shamed rejection of her total situation as compared to boys, and the penis is only symbolic in nature. She also disagrees with psychoanalysis as she believes that it takes for granted many unexplained ‘facts’ such as the origins of shame and pride in penis. She deems that the only reason psychoanalysis seems acceptable, is because there is some element of generality in individual cases- “analogous people, placed in analogous situations, while see analogous points of significance in the given circumstances; this analogy does not establish a rigorous universality”¹⁷.

¹⁵ Ibid., 66.

¹⁶ Ibid., 68.

¹⁷ Ibid., 73.

For men, the penis is seen as a separate phallic object- it is at once a separate entity and a measure of his self worth. For women, not having a penis, she is left 'no' choice - De Beauvoir believes that women *do* have a choice in this, although social situations make it difficult for many to see this - but to look upon herself as an object in itself, to see herself as the Other in relation to men. She takes her doll, and later, her baby as a equivalent of the phallic object. However, according to De Beauvoir, since there are matrilineal societies in which the penis envy would not occur, psychoanalysis can be accounted for in a historical context, as “the fact is that a true human privilege is based upon the anatomical privilege only in virtue of the total situation”¹⁸.

As psychoanalysis fails to explain why males should be seen as supreme and women should be the Other, De Beauvoir asserts that answers for this must be derived from the world and societal norms. She rejects the psychoanalytic view of sexuality and libido as having too masculine a stand, and believes that women should be liberalised. De Beauvoir thinks that women should “have the power to choose between the assertion of her transcendence and her alienation as object; she is not the plaything of contradictory drives; she devises solutions of diverse values in the ethical scale”¹⁹.

De Beauvoir contends that psychoanalysis regards conduct involving alienation as being feminine in nature, and instead of being torn between predispositions of masculine and feminine, girls are torn between the role of Other and the affirmation of her liberty. She affirms that women should transcend this and defines that a woman is “a human

¹⁸ Ibid., 75.

¹⁹ Ibid., 76.

being in quest of values in a world of values, a world of which it is indispensable to know the economic and social structure”²⁰.

A reading of De Beauvoir’s work brings into question the nature of the relations between men and women, “mainly, the problem of the origin of sexual differences, the nature and the elaboration of sexual inequality and difference, and the issue of how men and women should live”²¹. However, she does not go into detail of the influences of Freud as well as the social-scientific literature that was present in that time. Also, having not experienced any feminine disadvantages on account of her upbringing, she is unable to engage fully in the feministic point of view. Evans criticises De Beauvoir for viewing maternity as a passive act, and questions her concept of the general and wide-ranging differences between the sexes. Moreover, she has also taken for granted that her study of animal behaviour can be correlated to that of human beings.

Evans also judges that De Beauvoir over-emphasises the complexity of women, and that her attitudes towards female biology in negative terms. More importantly, when it comes to reading Freud, she tends to emphasise what he says about women so as to strengthen her own argument, and leaving out what he says about bisexuality. She also makes a categorical assumption that Freud does not concern himself with the destiny of women, which has been pointed out by several subsequent writers to be inaccurate.

Evans also criticises De Beauvoir for not showing concrete evidence for her claims about the social world; “De Beauvoir proposes a thesis about women, or men’s perception of them, and she proceeds to illustrate it by reference to literature...

²⁰ Ibid., 73.

²¹ Mary Evans, “The Second Sex,” in *Simone De Beauvoir, A Feminist Mandarin* (London: Tavistock, 1985), 57.

substantiating footnote... is largely absent”²². Evans believes that by examining an ideology, De Beauvoir was trying give herself room to manipulate material and not have to account for facts.

Existentialism, as advocated by De Beauvoir, is “ a philosophical system of belief, whereas psychoanalysis purports to be a scientific method of investigation. They thus claim to exist on different planes, but in order to compare and contrast them and favour one over the other, de Beauvoir has had to ensure that they meet on the same plane; to do this, she has infused Freudian psychoanalysis with Jungian metaphysics”²³. For example, Freud never encouraged the term Electra complex, yet De Beauvoir attacks him on that point. De Beauvoir also has many contradictory statements in her writing, which is pointed out to by Leon: “ as it is plain to see, [de Beauvoir] does not speak with a single voice. Either she wishes to have it both ways, or she takes with one hand that which she gives with the other”²⁴.

There are problems with both Freud and De Beauvoir’s arguments; Freud’s theory of psycho-sexual development and its effects as pertaining to female psychology has been rejected by Simone de Beauvoir for reasons which were in turn found to be lacking by other writers. However, it is possible, by using Freud’s theories as a starting point, to be able to emancipate women into assertive free individuals if we focus on the effects of male-supremacist culture on the development of females. Instead of rejecting femininity totally, they should embrace their femininity instead. As for De Beauvoir, although she

²² Ibid., 70.

²³ Juliet Mitchell, “Simone de Beauvoir: Freud and the Second Sex,” in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), 318.

²⁴ Celine T. Leon, “Beauvoir’s Woman: Eunuch or Male?,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, ed. Margaret A. Simons, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 152.

might not seem able to solve the femininity problem, her writing describes the problematic nature of women in relation to their Freudian psycho-sexual development.

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