

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE SEXUAL LIFE OF MAN IN SIGMUND FREUD

1.0 INTRODUCTION

It is a word that rings a bell, it penetrates all cultures and overwhelms all humanity. It means many things to many people; to some, it is sacred and should be treated with respect. To others, it is pleasurable and should be lured to without repression; expressed it is worded “human sexuality”.

Reiterating the central place which sexuality occupied in the life of man, Dietrich writes:

*Sex ... as contrasted with other departments of bodily
Experience is essentially deep. Every manifestation
of sex produces an effect which transcends the physical
sphere and in a fashion quite unlike the other bodily
desires involves the soul deeply in its passion ...*

(Dietrich, 1935:12-14)

There is a crusade carried out to give sexual enlightenment to the youths and those who are ignorant of this all important and integral aspect of man. In this crusade some inquisitive minds may come in contact with some erroneous opinions that – claims to be authority on the subject. Therefore our concern here is to expose and criticize some of these erroneous opinions on human sexuality; so as to prevent frail, emotional and gullible minds against easy assimilation of such misgivings especially when it is not compatible with the injunctions of moral standards. One of such erroneous doctrines was postulated by Sigmund Freud, who is our cynosure in this work. Sigmund Freud extended the meaning of sexuality to include early childhood sucking for nourishment and evacuation of the content of the bowel. Consequently, he constructed the doctrine of psychosexual development, which is summarized as aiming at the libido.

Another intriguing area is his description of instinct as a constant force from within which seeks after pleasure and cannot be controlled by the nervous system. For him then, there is no reason why sexual satisfaction should be repressed because of moral principles since it does not cause pain but

pleasure. The acme of his whole doctrine of the libido is that he considered man as a libidinal being. He also conceived the spiritual activities as being rooted in instincts. The gross reduction of man to the instinctive level is precisely the point of concern in this work

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Within the panorama of rational analysis as well as the biological framework of man and his psychological responsiveness, it is expedient to say without qualms of conscience that man is a sexual being. Therefore the ambiguous interrogative remains: when and how is sexual expression permissible to man? So, contrary to the age-long view that sexuality develops only at puberty, Freud identifies that sexuality has its arche from the earliest days of infancy and only undergoes transformation at puberty. For Freud, man is a being unto sex. All the nature of human activities and desires from cradle to the grave are directly or indirectly traceable to his sexual nature. Elucidating the veracity of this inborn infantile sexual pleasure, David said:

Parents in some culture are well aware of the pleasure the babies receive from sexual gratification and will occasionally use genital stimulation as a means of soothing a fussy or distressed infant
(Shaffer, 1989:496)

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

That man is a sexual being is utterly factual and indisputable. But does this reduce man to a merely libidinal being? Hence a sexologist – Theodore Reik defines sex as a biological function that aims at the release of physical tension. If human persons artificially exclude life from the sexual act they are not expressing love, they are only having sex. Since human love is to mirror God's love, our sexual act (power), and the physical means by which love is expressed is life giving.

These implications of sexuality have remained a mind-boggling debate on the subject of sexuality.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The increasing rate at which modern man has abused his sexual power, which is an all-embracing gift from God, is quite alarming. We are living in an over-sexed age, modern man view everything through the spectacle of sex. He lives by bed alone; “the sexier the better”. Hence, the purpose of this study is to re-state the damaged status of man’s sexual life. It also endeavours to see the excesses of Freudian tenets and considers a healthy appropriation of his psychosexual development vis-à-vis healthy and moral sexual life. Finally, it will debunk and bring to light that genital sex is not the primary language or ultimate proof of love. Thus Burchaell (1985:33) writes;

*There may be many people who one loves profoundly
yet without sexual expression. Sex is not the only
expression of love, nor the necessary one. It is
not even the greatest.*

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This work will critically expose the basics of psychosexual development of man in the light of Sigmund Freud. It will attempt to discuss sexual behaviour and variation in sexual expressions.

1.5 METHPDODOLOGY

In this work we shall employ the methods of expository cum evaluative. An attempt will be made to carry out probity into the nature and place of sex in human life. Nonetheless, we shall conclude this segment by contextual explication of terms as used. Chapter two x-rays the view of some great minds on the subject. In chapter three, we shall discuss the profundity and fundamental thrust of Freud’s sexual development. Chapter four will highlight and juxtapose variation in sexual expression; and chapter five will give an evaluative synthesis and synchronize the entire idea.

1.6 EXPLICATION OF TERMS

1.6.1 MAN

Our concept ‘man’ refers to human being generally including male and female . It will be used interchangeable with human beings. It will also connote human persons. The human being is specie of the genus ‘animal’ but differentiated from other animals by its rationality. The human being is a composition of mind, body, soul and intellect.

Personhood is a psychological concept which describes the nature of human being as possessing consciousness, desires, intentions, memories and so on.

1.6.2 HUMAN SEXUALITY

Describing human sexuality, the Congregation for the doctrine of faith says that, the human person is so profoundly affected by sexuality that it must be considered as one of the factors which give to each individual's life the principal traits that distinguish it. In fact, it is from sex that the human person receives the characteristics which on the biological, psychological and spiritual levels make the person a man or woman.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of human sexuality has existed prior to the dawn of history. It is in fact as old as the creation of man because to describe man as male or female is already a subject matter of sexuality. It has manifested itself differently in various ages. To some age, it was not a subject for discussion, to others, a man and a woman may spend time discussing intimately on sex and stimulating themselves; yet they wear poker faces and feel liberated. A critical introspection into the subject of sexuality reveals that the richness and complexity of human sexuality has not been fully acknowledged. Often times a simplistic or reductionistic portrayal of sexuality emphasizes one of its dimensions while neglecting others. In this chapter, we shall see how different epochs dabbled into the notion of sexuality, starting from the cradle of history of human kind and as they differed from Freudianism. We shall also glean from the personality theory of Harry Stack Sullivan, McDougall, instinct and drive theorists, the physicist and socialist views of human sexuality.

2.2 HUMAN SEXUALITY IN SCRIPTURE

In Genesis 1, the creation of mankind witnessed the acme of all the other creative work. "In the image he of God, he created them both male and female" (v27). What is suggested here is human sexuality of the two sexes. The account in chapter 2 suggests the two sexes. This is seen first of all in the divine reflection that "it is not good for the man to be alone". This provides for the inevitability and special closeness and attraction in the relationship of man and

woman. It is as though they were returning to the original unity from which the two were formed. The unitive aspects elucidates the complimentary of both sexes. Again, the sexual powers here was solely for anticipation of procreation, unlike that of Freud that was for pleasure.

2.3 ST. THOMAS AQUINAS AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

In his book the 'Summa Theologica' Aquinas (Q.94, Art, Pt,1-11) writes:

*Sexuality is intended by nature for procreation
Consequently, all forms of sexual activity, which
excludes the possibility of procreation are morally
wrong since they frustrate the purpose of sexuality.*

Thomas Aquinas made natural law a vade mecum for human sexuality, for nature made nothing in vain. In line with his theory of natural law, he identifies human sexuality immediately and primarily with its biological or physical dimension. In fact, he views procreation as the finality of human sexuality. Toeing his way, Stumpf (1989:90) maintains that:

*The natural inclination to propagate the species
forms the basis of the union of man and wife, and any
basis for this relationship would be wrong.*

2.4 HARRY STACK SULLIVAN

In his personality theory, he said that during the stage of early adolescence, the genitals are fully developed and the individual is highly heterosexual whilst the peer relationship of the previous stage is still strong. The individual now becomes lustful as a result of the psychological changes that have occur because of puberty. The individual at this stage have double social needs; erotic need for the opposite sex and intimacy for the same peer. According to him, if the double social needs are met, the self-system becomes stabilized. But if confusion arises between these two social needs homosexuality results.

He believes that most adolescent problems arise because of the conflict between sexual gratification on one side and intimacy and security on the other side.

2.4 MCDOUGALL'S NOTION OF SEXUALITY

For McDougall, instinct (inherited propensity) and emotion are always combined. The object that arouses the propensity simultaneously arouses the emotion. When a cognitive disposition (an instinct) is aroused to action, it is experienced as an impulse of desires and associated with emotion. McDougall takes desire (and in this case sexual desires) to mean simply the impulse of action and never deviated from this view. For him, desire or wanting is not an emotion but a connotation which however is always connected with an emotion according to its special mode of action. This distinctive quality of emotion is likened to the bodily change in emotion, but this bodily change is according to the instinct they express.

Thus as hunger is an instinct for nourishment so sexuality is and particularly should be directed to its proper object of which the biological features of man and woman postulates. Arguing on this, he said:

But there can be no doubt that the sex instinct is normally so organized as to be susceptible to or responsive to physical character of the opposite sex.
(McDougall, 1929:322)

2.5 INSTINCT AND DRIVE THEORISTS

Commenting on the tenets of this school of thought, Magda (1960) said; the older instinct theorist had conceived of instinct as a force that make animals (man) act in a definite way since instinct is a special force (in this case sexual force). Hence, for him, instinct became a fixed action pattern as well as a driving force.

Both instinct and drive theorists explain why men and lower animals act by postulating a special set of biological engine they drive. These have their sources in special organs or organs system and account for the activities that are naturally determined. This means that instinct has rendered the sexual responsiveness of man deterministic in nature and he cannot but opt for a way of gratifying this innate urge.

2.6 THE PHYSICALISTS VIEW OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

The physicalists hold that there is a physiological energy that follows arousal, which is seeing outlets. They are of the view that all acts (that are not sexual intercourse) engaging the genitals are alternatively ways of tapping the

same reservoir of psychological energy. This alternative channels such as masturbation, nocturnal emission, bestiality are due to non-coitus.

According to Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, physicalists such as Ford and Beach saw sexual behaviour in terms of tension reduction and sex behaviour has some dependence on gonadal hormones. Eayrs and Glass equally observed that hormone variables influence sexual behaviour, especially in women during oestrus. When these hormones are not released, they create tension.

2.7 THE SOCIALISTS' VIEW OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

This group fundamentally believes that tension results from non-coitus. Hence, they hold that all motives of social contacts are modifications of the sexual instinct. All social contact between opposite sex such as talking, playing are modified forms of achieving sexual life. For instance, sexual behaviour contains a non-verbal language through which individuals express or achieve sexual fulfillment. Such suggestive behaviour as sensory exploration, gesture and wearing of cloths that reveals most part of the body (as mostly observed in women) are sexually related behaviours.

From the data of this chapter ranging from biblical account of man's creation, where he was endowed with the gift of sexuality, sex is the most perceptible reality as is naturally seen in the complementarity of the opposite sexes, to the moralist view which situated sexuality in the confines of procreation, to psychologists, who saw it as analogous with personality development and the physicalists and the socialists inferences. Even though they disagreed in some areas, it is glaring that sexless life is against the nature of a normal human being. At this juncture, it becomes paramount to x-ray the Freudian doctrine of psychosexual development which forms the backdrop of this study

3.0: SIGMUND FREUD AND HUMAN SEXUALITY

For Sigmund Freud, man is a being unto sex. He emphasized the importance of sexual urges as determinants of behaviour for children as well as adults. Freud views the sex instinct as the most important of the life forces because he often discovered that the mental disturbances of his patients revolve around childhood sexual conflict that they had repressed. Hence, no matter

how sex is suppressed or repressed, it cannot be repressed forever. A time will come when it will explode and then its expression takes an abnormal way.

Leixner (1867) succumbed to this idea when he writes;

sensuality is beginning to stir within me more powerfully than before, although I struggle against it up to now, I have not embraced any female being but I do not know whether I will have strength enough to offer resistance much longer.

Certainly the doctrine of childhood sexuality was among the more controversial of Freud's ideas. In fact it earned for him the ugly name of a "pan-sexualist". Yet, his use of the term 'sex' refers much more than a need to copulate. Many simple bodily functions that most of us will not consider sexual were viewed by Freud as erotic. David (1968) painted the picture clearer when he writes that Freud's view of the term sex included not only specific sex interests and activities but what he would call the 'whole pleasure life' of human being. The term might be more closely linked to the way we presently use the word 'love', implying things as diverse as artistic endeavours, religious experience.

The sexual instinct although presumably inborn, Freud felt that its character changes overtime as dictated by biological maturation. As the sex instinct matures its energy of libido gradually shift from one part of the body to another and the child enters a new phase of psycho-sexuality. In Freudian sexual psychology, every one must experience certain tension at different stages in different areas of the body. He called these parts the erogenous zones. These developments are in a sequence of five different stages, from childhood.

3.1: DEVELOPMENT AND GENITIZATION OF THE LIBIDO

The development of the libido aims at genitization and socialization of the diffused instincts.

Genitization of the libido is the first stage of psychosexual development. It aims at concentrating the diffused sexual instinct at the genitals. It involves the phases of oral, anal and phallic stages.

3.1.1: ORAL PHASE (8 months – 1 year)

Freud regarded this stage as sexual. It refers to the type of pleasure a child receives through the mouth, which is a sensitive erogenous zone, while sucking for nourishment. He observed that even when the mother's breast or feeding bottle is absent a child enjoys his own thumb for its own sake. This is capable of giving similar satisfaction. He concluded that such pleasure is sexual. One wonders if Freud was really sure of this.

Reporting this view, Munroes writes:

Freud pointed out systematically the dual function of the mouth as utilitarian organ subordinate to hunger drive and a pleasure co-ordinate with other zones of libidinal satisfaction.

However, this phase, which is autocratic, is given up when the child is weaned to give room for the anal phase.

3.1.2: ANAL PHASE (1-3year)

In this stage a child derives pleasure from evacuation of urine and the content of the bowel. So that the contrivance which a child exhibits serve the purpose of gratification. Freud says; "the accompanying excitation of the membranes in this erogenous zones may secure them the maximum possible gratification.

He called it sexual because of the pleasure derived by the function and the interest shown by the child. Giving credence to Freud's view, Munroes says that; "smearing the crib with contents of the diaper seems to be naturally an agreeable pastime. In the years, such pleasures are thinly disgusted in the joy of mud pies or playing with finger paints and other smearing materials".

The phase continues until the baby learns to keep clean.

3.1.3: PHALLIC PHASE (3-5years)

It is derived from the Latin word phallus, meaning penis. Freud holds that the oral and anal phases must be centralized at the genitals. The genitalization here occurs when a child accidentally discovers a new source of gratification. Consequently, the child begins to practice infantile masturbation to produce the pleasurable sense by itself. Hence, at this stage, if everything has preceded normally without inhibition, the libido is said to be genitalized around the genital organ. According to Freud; "with the phallic phase and in

the course of it, the sexuality of the early childhood reaches its height and approaches its decline.

3.2: SOCIALIZATION OF THE LIBIDO

Generally the aforementioned phases are auto-erotic, that is to say, that the only object of love is discovered by the baby within himself – a stage of narcissism so that the selfish personality needs to be socialized, choosing object outside himself. In that case Freud observed that the first object – choice of love is incestuous in which case a child is either attached to the father or mother, from subsequent aversion for either of which as the case may be. Later the shift moves to one's sister or brother because of negligence from the parents. Consequently, this period gives rise to Oedipus complex which later results to repression. This pre-inhibiting period is accompanied by the period of latency.

3.3: LATENCY STAGE (5 – 12years)

The oral, anal and phallic stages are collectively called the pre-genital period. A major characteristic of this period is a narcissistic orientation or an inward and self centred preoccupation. During latency period new interests replace infantile sexual impulses. Freud holds that after the phallic stage, there is a lapse of time before the next major changes in the child's sexual development. Again, this is a school age and sexual drive is temporarily sublimated due to activities in school, hobbies, sports and friendship with members of the same sex. There is a turning outward towards relationships and learning to adjust to an ever-widening world. This hold sway till the onset of puberty.

3.4: PUBERTY

puberty may be defined as that short period of time (generally 2 years) during which the reproductive system matures and the secondary sexual characteristics appears. The ovaries and the testis begin to produce much larger amount of hormones; public hair appears, female breasts develop. The menstrual cycle begins in females, spermatozoa and viable egg are produced and male experience voice change and a sudden acceleration ion growth. Puberty generally occurs in female around the ages of 12 – 13 years and in

males about 13 – 14 years; but there is much individual variation. With puberty there is generally intensification or the first appearance of sexual interest. Puberty marks the beginning of adolescence. Here the libido is said to be back to consciousness. Puberty sets in changes, which transform the infantile sexual life and its new definitive normal form. At puberty, the inner genitals develop to such an extent as to be able to furnish sexual products or to receive them for the purpose of forming a new living being. They can be set in motion by stimuli.

3.5: THE GENITAL STAGE (12 – 18years and above)

The further changes in hormones and genital organ that take place during puberty reawakens the sexual energy of the child. Adolescents typically develop interest in the opposite sex, engage in some sexual experiments and begin to assume adults responsibility. Freud placed some emphasis on the fact that not everyone walks through this stage to a point of mature heterosexual love. If there has been no major fixation at any of the earlier stages of development. There are still many societal sanctions and taboo concerning sexual expression to which the adolescent must conform. Conflict is minimized through the use of sublimation as the adolescent at this stage moves out of adolescent to mature adulthood. They develop intimate relationships, become free of parental influence and develop the capacity to be interested in others. There is a trend away from narcissism and towards altruistic behaviour and concern for others. Accordingly, working and loving as well as deriving satisfaction from them are of paramount importance.

Each of these stages is fraught with the potentiality for producing frustrations, conflicts and threats. Freud believed that individuals deal with these tensions through identification, displacement and other defence mechanisms.

3.6: THEORY OF THE LIBIDO

Libido is the Latin name for desire which Freud later considered to be sexual. Whereas later psychoanalysts used it to designate vital energy. Freud says; “in every where analogous to hunger libido is the force by which the instinct (in this case sexual instinct) as with hunger the nutritional instinct achieved expression”. The force is such that it can not be removed by the

activities of the nervous system, which reacts only to external stimuli because instinct is a stimulus only to the mind. Besides stimulus of intellectual origin is aroused from within the organism with a different effect and action for satisfaction. Because it acts as a constant force from within, withdrawal attitude of the nervous system avail against it. It is a need and only goes away when satisfied.

4.1: CRITICAL EVALUATION

We have seen the wonders of human sexuality and we cannot but echo with Gerald (1992:3) that;

...human sexuality is a divine gift, a gift which must be approached with a deep and abiding sense of appreciation, wonder and respect. Human sexuality is a primal dimension of each person, a mysterious blend of spirit and body, which share in God's own creative love and life.

Man needs sexually fulfilled life to be normal and fulfilled. This does not necessarily mean sexual intercourse but a life where the 'animus' and the 'anima' in every normal person are complementarily fulfilled. Sexual intercourse is only one out of many end points of these natural needs for fulfillment from sexuality.

Man indeed is a sexual being and not a being for sex. Freud's seemingly hyperbolic presentation of man as a being unto sex is questionable following its implications.

a. OEDIPAL STAGE

David R. Shaffer in criticizing Freud's oedipal age quoted Mcconagbu (1999) in pages 48 of his book "Development Psychology" writes;

Clearly at this oedipal stage children were confused or ignorance about sex's differences in genital anatomy and it seems highly unlikely that they could be experiencing any castration anxiety or penis envy.

b. IMPLICATION OF PSYCHOSEXUALITY ON MODERNITY

In the ancient and medieval ages sex was seen as sacred. It was not discussed openly and that helped to maintain the sacredness and sanctity of sexuality. But with the advent of Freud and his doctrine on sex, sex seems to have been unmasked of all its taboo and every thing, sacred about sex have been desecrated and disdained. Following Freud, modern man views everything through the spectacle of sex.

That we live in an oversexed age is as a result of Freudianism which ascertains that man is a being unto sex. Countering this position, Zimbardo Philip writes;

Survival of the individual organism does not depend on satisfaction of the sexual drive, some animal and human remain celibate for a lifetime without apparent detriment to their daily functioning.

4.2: CONCLUSION

We commend Freud for his work, especially going into the area which many people dreaded going into despite its relevance in our world and in our time.

What is obvious is that man is a sexual being, in fact it is a study on course. But that man is a being unto sex is an excess on the part of Freud. Freud has not said the final word. What we need in this regard is honest introspective investigation into the nature of man and this will pave way for us to understand his sexuality and discard what is excess about Freudianism.

WRITTEN BY DAMIAN ODUNZE

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