

College would continue to talk and write about the general practitioner being *the* educators for health (I don't particularly like the term "health education") and strive to get the younger doctors to take up this new look of health-mindedness every day. This attitude plus the statement "call at my consulting room at 6 p.m." would be a good natural follow-up to removal of the word "surgery" and a suitable advancement from those awful times when it was customary for the doctor's surgery to be recognized by a red lamp!

I am sure that it is matters of this kind which the associates and members of the College could *gradually* set the new patterns of general practice in its allied functions with preventive and social medicine, mental health, family practice and total personal care—much, if not most, through advice and guidance by consultation in a good, clean, well-lighted, attractive room. The benefits (psychological and other) would be great, both to the doctor and to those who consult him. It would in many cases raise the mental habit. It would give a better place and opportunity for discussion and co-operation between the family doctor and any allied medical workers: the family doctor being the "first and last" adviser in the guidance of all those who work on his own patients. It could cut the national drug bill by millions of pounds! It would encourage medical practice, as it were, to emanate from a "clear running river rather than sometimes from a stagnant pool".

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Biological Sex Patterns and Modern Living

Sir,

Dr Philipp (*J. Coll. gen. Practit.* 1963, 6, 35) clearly has much experience of dealing with problems of marital maladjustment and has done well to open a discussion on the subject. Many more doctors and others prepared to spend time dealing with the problems of marital unhappiness are needed in this day and age, the more so as people are nowadays willing to discuss such difficulties more freely than a generation or so ago. There is no doubt, as can be seen from his closing pages, that Dr Philipp has done much to help many couples. He is quite right when he says that partners understand (and can therefore cope with) their difficulties so much more readily when they understand the contrasts between biological needs and modern living (although one could delete the "modern" and say living, for living involves a constant process of adjustment).

Since in practice Dr Philipp seems to be on the right lines, it seems a pity that theoretically he has made a number of fallacious assumptions. It is perhaps worthwhile pointing these out, not simply to pick holes, but because if our knowledge, and therefore our ability to help, is to increase, it must be on the basis of a developing theoretical knowledge. Unhappily a theory based on fallacies will not develop in a fruitful manner.

The first point to make is that Dr Philipp seems to confuse biological adjustment with social adjustment. Here it is important to remember that one must distinguish between biological inheritance and social

inheritance. Biological inheritance, as a matter involving genes and chromosomes, is well enough understood and need not be expanded here. Biological mutations take place slowly and over a long period of time, associated with an evolutionary process. Social inheritance is transmitted in quite another way, by laws, customs, sanctions, mores, history, legend. You are not (contrary to W. S. Gilbert's view) born a little conservative; although you may be born into a family or a *milieu* which makes it passing certain that you will become a little conservative or liberal, as the case may be. Social inheritance is passed to you by the group you live in quite independently of your physical inheritance. The latter (in terms of your I.Q. perhaps) may determine what use you make of your inheritance, but social behaviour is an acquired characteristic, so far as we understand at the moment, not transmuted with the genes.

Associated with his tendency to confuse biological and social inheritance, Dr Philipp seems to fall into the fallacy of believing in the inheritance of acquired characteristics. (The folly of this fallacy can be exposed at its extreme by the suggestion that a man, legless by amputation, will father a legless child.) The statement (p. 36) "man had to be built so that he could deal with this [absence of women] without undue hardship" is an illustration of this rather confused thinking. *Had* to be built, by whom? Why in this way when he also has to deal with the presence of demanding women? Surely what we really have is an animal who can adjust to both situations.

All the evidence we have suggests that it is always necessary for an adjustment to be made between biological and social needs. Many and varied are the customs about sharing out food, but some such set of customs is found in every society. They arise from each person's need for food and the fact that men must combine to get food. A balance must be struck between these, often conflicting, needs. The social customs are the mechanisms used to strike the balance, or so it would appear.

Similarly, every society has sets of rules to help in the adjustment between biological and social needs in sexual matters. Hence the fact that the family is found universally. But it is also clear that man is very malleable, almost infinitely adaptable to a wide variety of circumstance. Hence the wide range of family types, sex roles, and sex codes that are found. Margaret Mead's *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* is the best exposée of this point I imagine.

In one society both sexes are co-operative and unaggressive, sex is a powerful driving force for neither. In the second, both men and women are ruthless, aggressive and positively sexed. The third is a female-dominated society, the women taking on the aggressive and the men the submissive role, behaving much as our women used to do.

What is apparently true is that in all men and women sex urges are of such an order that unless controlled they would threaten the social group. The group must be maintained because man is too weak an animal to stand alone. There is therefore apparently an inevitable and permanent conflict between individual biological and social ends. There is a con-

sequent, and perennial, problem as to how best, in whatever may be the prevailing social circumstances, to resolve this conflict.

Philipp's paper rests in large part upon a description of a *hypothetical* primitive community. As a device for understanding social behaviour this is not very helpful. One can learn much more from studying the wide variety of ways in which people of all ages and colours have *actually* tried to resolve the problems of living. I doubt very much whether anybody actually lived in the way described for this hypothetical group. We know that not all contemporary simpler societies send their men away for prolonged periods. How do we know that *early* man, or all groups of early men, were away for long periods? And surely here we are mixing social and biological phenomena? For surely man's biological structure was already determined before so high a degree of social organization developed? But it is not helpful anyway to try and guess about these distant matters. The stone or iron pots left by early men help us to know how they lived. If they left paintings on cave walls we have some clearer idea of the way they lived, but nothing remains to tell us how much they enjoyed living or loving.

On the basis of his hypothetical hunting tribe, where the men were away for long periods at a time in all-male hunting parties, Dr Philipp draws the conclusion, or poses the hypothesis, that it is in some way "natural" for men to go without women for extended periods. This hypothesis he supports by reference to modern war when he says "men can go for long periods without women in comparative happiness". Trouble only arises, he says, when women appear "in the flesh". No doubt there is some truth in this, but one cannot help wondering why army songs throughout all the ages have been "dirty".

Dr Philipp is dealing with two separate problems and has run them together because he has confused the biological and social development of man. There is on the one hand the apparently biological fact that the male sex urge is of a different order from that of the female, more quickly aroused and more quickly satisfied. This is the way the sexes have evolved, it seems, and biological evolution is apparently much too slow a process for us to be able to see it going on. For the lifetime of any one of us we must therefore accept the biological aspects of the problem as given and the differences, for us, as immutable. These differences naturally lead to problems of adjustment, problems moreover which can be more easily solved when the biological facts are understood. Explanation will naturally help those who are not aware of the biological facts, but the explanation does not need to be wrapped in a fairy-story primitive past.

The other problem Dr Philipp is dealing with is that of the social roles of the sexes and the consequent expectations men and women have of each other. These are part of their social, as distinct from their biological inheritance. The roles vary from one society to another and from one period of history to another.

At this level the problem Philipp is dealing with is bound up with the

recent and fairly rapid change from a male-dominated society to one of much greater sex equality. The male-dominated society included dual sex roles (men can have many women, but women only one man each) and ideals of chastity, honoured frequently in the breach it should be said, a society in which women stayed at home to serve their men. The developing society may be more self-consciously hedonistic and is also one in which man and woman are found as partners in all things. A consideration of the detailed implications of this changeover would be more helpful for marriage counselling than the hypothetical and largely irrelevant comparison made. For example, a woman brought up to believe that her role is service to her men, father, husband, sons, may well feel guilty if she leaves them to fend for themselves, to make their meals or whatever. She is likely to feel this when she has, like her husband, gone to work for a wage outside the home, and even when she has done so with her partner's full agreement and in response to social change and her own needs for a wider life. Her guilt may appear as in-turning anxiety or out-turning aggression depending on her personality. Antagonistic and contradictory emotions of these kinds are the stuff of many modern difficulties. A conflict between how you behave now and how you were brought up to behave seems to be a more likely reason for marital difficulty than the way our remote ancestors behaved.

When this underlying change in the social roles of the sexes is seen, it is perhaps easier to disentangle some of the biological and social factors. If one assumes, as Philipp does, that the concepts of muscle energy and sexual energy are valid medically (which I am not competent to judge) and that one form of energy, if not spent, may be turned into the other, it is clear that a possible disequilibrium may develop between the sexes if one does heavy manual work and the other does not. Why, however, should one assume, as Philipp appears to assume, that among modern city dwellers it is more likely to be the man who will be tired in this way while his wife is as fresh as a daisy? It might be so, but if he is a sedentary worker, as so many city dwellers are, and she is a busy housewife with small children, long hours and doing a good deal of heavy manual work, it would seem that she might well be the one too tired to care for intercourse. (See Dr Marion Hilliard: *Fatigue in Women*.) Incidentally, at the biological level is it proved that the female sex urge is greater immediately after ovulation? Have enough cases been documented? There is room for some scepticism here.

Combining the cyclical fluctuations in women with their hypothetical past, Dr Philipp assures us that "leadership in matters of sex is commonly with the woman". This I very much doubt. With some women and in some societies, yes. In others quite the reverse. Let us not forget the example of the practice of female circumcision which not only renders foreplay pointless, but intercourse quite unenjoyable for the wife. No doubt an explanation which excuses a leadership role when assumed by women in a male-dominated society would be a comfort to the doctor's patients. Women in our society are inclined to feel guilty if they take the lead, indeed they may be quite inhibited from doing so. But this is surely because they were brought up to believe that men were dominant and

predatory in their sexual relations and were the leaders in all things? Women "ought", they were taught, to follow their man's lead with submission. But they do not always do so, as we know. Pursuit and flight are the stuff of courtship and marriage and are mutual activities common to both sexes. A male-dominated society eclipsed those facts perhaps.

Dr Philipp complains that in our small suburban houses, with our small families a man will "have to do his wife's work at least for short periods of time, even though most men have no natural inclination to do so". What is "natural"? Surely, all that "natural" can mean here is that in our society, or for the class of people in the practice, the fathers from whom these men learned their roles did not do housework. It means no more than that men were not socially trained for housework. It has nothing to do with what is biologically "natural". Had they been brought up to do it, and for those that were (for a generation of suffragette fathers are grandfathers now), some housework would seem, or does seem, quite "natural" in the sense that it is socially customary or acceptable. But this acceptance has nothing to do with the nature of man or his early evolution in the hunting tribe. It is learned afresh by each generation and is an individual and social decision unrelated to the biological function.

Dr Philipp is very right to stress the psychosocial approach. If he will look for explanations of some tensions in the conflicts between the ways people were brought up and the ways in which social change now leads them to behave on the one hand, and if he will keep this separate from the tensions arising from the equally important, but distinct, phenomenon of the different sexual needs of men and women, he will, I think, be able to weave what he knows to be therapeutic in practice into a more acceptable theory. It would be a theory, moreover, from which other practitioners could learn much and upon which they could build.

I find it hard to believe that there was ever a time, or a society, where a man did not want a woman who, though available, was unwilling, and *vice versa*. The circumstances in which the problem arises nowadays may be different, but the fundamental problem of unrequited love must be age-old, and likely to stay with us. Understanding can ease the pain, and make the suffering bearable, and so perhaps prevent difficulty turning into tragedy. This is why we should constantly seek to extend our understanding.

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