



***EARL
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***WOMAN
IN MODERN
SOCIETY***

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Woman in Modern Society

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I

What it Means to be a Woman

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If we go back to the earliest forms of life, where the unit is simply a minute mass of protoplasm surrounded by a cell wall, we find each of these divisions to be a complete individual. It can feed itself, that its life may go on to-day; it can fight or run away, that it may be here to fight tomorrow; and by a process of division it can create a new life so that its existence may continue across the generations. With such units it is quite conceivable that life might go on through all eternity, death following birth, were it not that protoplasm contains within itself a principle of change. Life and change are synonymous.

And this change moves ever toward a complexity, which we call development, where cells unite in a larger life, and functions and organs are specialized. Thus there comes a time when the part split off carries with it power to eat and digest, to fight or run away, but only half the power of procreation. This half unit, this incomplete individual, is either male or female, and from this time on, the epic of life gathers around the search of these half-lives for their complements. The force that impels to this search, while at first valuable only for the perpetuation of the generations, gathers into itself modifying feeling and desires and, at a later period, ideas and ideals, which finally, when men and women appear, make it the greatest of all the shaping forces in life.[\[1\]](#)

[1] The fact that sexual selection does not play the part in organic evolution which Darwin assigned it does not affect this statement. See chapter on Sexual Selection in YVES DELAGEE and MARIE GOLDSMITH, *The Theories of Evolution*, New York: Huebsch, 1912.

Of course, in such a sweeping statement as this, one must include under sex hunger all the forces that drive men and women to seek each other's society, rather than that of their own sex. In this sense, it can be truly said that it gives a motive for our care of offspring, and for all our other most self-forgetful devotions, our finest altruisms, our most polished expressions in language, manners and dress. It justifies labor, ambition, and at times even self-effacement. It underlies nearly all the lyric expressions in art; furnishes almost the only theme for that delineation of modern life which we call the novel; and is a main support for music, painting, statuary and belles-lettres. It gives us the institution of the family, which is the parent of the state; it is closely allied to religion; and in our individual lives it lifts us to the heights of self-realization and happiness, or plunges us down to the depths of degradation and tragedy.

While this sex hunger belongs equally to men and women, it has come to be associated with women, until we even speak of them as "the sex." Hence, when we are discussing women, we are generally discussing the sex interest common to both men and women, and this disturbs our point of view. The fact is that sex interest is a common possession, that the unit in human life, even more than among lower animals, is always a male and a female bound together by love. Just as a body can function in sleep or under the influence of a narcotic, for a time seemingly independent of the mind, so a man or a woman can live for

a time in seeming independence of the opposite sex; but from any biological point of view, such a separate existence of male and female is only a transient effort. The half-life must find its mate or, after a few brief days, it dies, leaving its line extinct. For all the larger purposes of life, man is but a half-creature, and woman is equally a fragment.

It is, of course, conceivable that these two halves of the biological unit might have been made, or might have developed, alike in everything except the sexual function. At least they might have been as much alike as men are alike. They might have been of the same size, possessed of the same strength, of the same figures and gestures, complexion and hair. Their voices might have been alike. They might have had the same kinds of nervous systems, with the same desires, feelings, ideas and tendencies. In the assertions and arguments born of intellectual, industrial, social and political readjustments, it is often assumed that this is the case. Differences are minimized or denied, and an attempt is made to resolve the world of men and women into a world of human beings capable of living together in mingled competitions and coöperations, regardless of sex, except where the reproductive process is considered. But this view is superficial; born of argument it breaks down when confronted by any body of significant facts.

Again, it has happened that in the long struggle of developing civilization, sometimes one and sometimes the other sex has gained what has seemed an advantage over the other, just as in the development of any man's individual life, his brain may gain a seeming advantage over his stomach, so that it has more than its fair share of

nourishment and activity. Arguing from such a case, we might declare the brain superior to the stomach in power, health and function; but in the long accounting, all such temporary superiorities are wiped out. So with men and women, seeming advantages for either are gained only at the expense of the common life; and in the last analysis, each finds his individual value only in the common life of the unit.

Let us try then to see what the special characteristics of women are, ignoring as far as possible the accidental variations of individuals, and the temporary advantages or disadvantages due to economic or ideational forces, and all assertions of what would be if things were not as they are.

While the whole matter of sex differences is in a state of unsettlement, it seems very certain that males are more active and more variable than females. This superabundant vitality appears in the males of the higher animals in secondary sex characteristics, such as more abundant and unnecessary hair and feathers, tusks, spurs, antlers, wattles, brilliant colors and scent pouches. It also appears in mating calls, songs, and general carriage of the body. Correspondingly, the female is smaller, duller colored, and less immediately attractive than the male.

All the studies that have been made on men and women, also confirm our ordinary observation that men are taller, heavier, stronger and more active than women, and this holds true in all stages of civilization, wherever tests have been made. In strength, rapidity of movement, and rate of fatigue Miss Thompson's studies[2] show that men have a very decided advantage over women. Thus in strength

tests, the men in Yale have double the power of women in Oberlin;^[3] while our college athletic records place men far ahead of women in all events requiring strength and endurance.

^[2] HELEN B. THOMPSON, *Psychological Norms in Men and Women*, p. 167. University of Chicago Press, 1903.

^[3] THOMAS, *Sex and Society*, p. 21. University of Chicago Press, 1907.

The differences in structure between men and women are such as to correspond with the functional differences just stated. A woman's bones are smaller in proportion to her size, than are those of a man. The body is longer, the hips broader, and the abdomen more prominent. Relatively to the length of the body, the arms, legs, feet and hands are shorter than in men, the lower leg and arm are shorter in proportion to the upper leg and arm. Man has the long levers and the active frame. One has only to look at two good statues of a man and a woman to realize the greater strength and activity of the man.

Woman, as she actually appears in modern society, is also less subject to variation than man;^[4] she is much less liable to be a genius or an idiot than her brother.^[5] She offers greater resistance to disease, endures pain and want more stoically, and lives longer; so that while more boys than girls are born in all parts of the world, where statistics are kept, in mature years women always outnumber men.

^[4] KARL PEARSON denies this. See *The Chances of Death*, Vol. I, p. 256. London, 1897.

^[5] C.W. SALEEBY, in *Woman and Womanhood*, p. 54, New York, Mitchell Kennerley, 1911, maintains that woman is biologically more variable than man, and that woman's less variable activity is due to her training.

All these statements are summed up by saying that not only in women, but in most female animals of the higher orders, life is more anabolic than in males. They tend to more static conditions; they collect, organize, conserve; they are patient and stable; they move about less; they more easily lay on adipose tissue. Compared with the female, the male animal is katabolic; he is active, impulsive, destructive, skilful, creative, intense, spasmodic, violent. Such a generalization as this must not be pushed too far in its applications to our daily life; but as a statement of basal differences it seems justified by ordinary observation as well as by scientific tests.[6]

[6] PATRICK GEDDES and ARTHUR THOMPSON, in *The Evolution of Sex*, D. Appleton & Co., 1889, first advanced this position.

Meantime, it is probably true that the female, as mother of the race, is more important biologically than the male, since she both furnishes germ plasm and nourishes the newly conceived life. The latest studies, along lines laid down by Mendel, seem to indicate that the female brings to the new creation both male and female attributes, while the male brings only male qualities. Thus when either sex sinks into insignificance, as sometimes happens in lower forms of life, it is generally the male which exists merely for purposes of reproduction.[7]

[7] C.W. SALEEBY, *Woman and Womanhood*, Chapter V. New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1911.

The differences in the nervous systems of men and women are now fairly established on the quantitative side. Marshall has shown that if we compare brain weight with the stature in the two sexes there is a slight preponderance

of cerebrum in males; but if the other parts of the brain are taken into consideration, the sexes are equal.[8] Havelock Ellis has carefully gathered the results of many investigators and declares that woman's brain is slightly superior to man's in proportion to her size.[9] But these quantitative differences are now felt to have comparatively little significance; and of the relative qualities of the brain substance in the two sexes we know nothing positively. In fact, if we give a scientist a section of brain substance he cannot tell whether it is the brain of a man or a woman.

[8] MARSHALL, *Journal of Anatomy and Physiology*, July, 1892.

[9] HAVELOCK ELLIS, *Man and Woman*, p. 97, Contemporary Science Series.

It is very probable that the average woman's mind is capable of much the same activity as the average man's mind, given the same heredity and the same training. They are both alike capable of remarkable feats of imitation, and an ordinarily intelligent man could probably learn to wear woman's clothes, and walk as she generally walks, so as to deceive even a jury of women, if there were a motive to justify the effort. Women also can perform, and they do perform, most of the feats of men.

At the same time it is desirable to note present differences in modes of thinking and feeling, for while they may have been produced by environment and ideals, and may hence give way to education, they must be reckoned with in making the next steps. In the chapter on education we shall discuss certain academic peculiarities of women's minds, but here we are interested in seeing what fundamental differences characterize the thinking of the sexes.

Women seem more subject to emotional states than men;[10] and this general observation agrees with the fact that the basal ganglia of the brain are more developed in women than in men, and these parts of the brain seem most intimately concerned with emotional activity. Whether emotion follows acts or leads to acts remains a disputed question, but certainly emotion gives charm and significance to life and distinguishes modes of thinking. Particularly in the dramatic art, this quality of mind gives women special excellence. The fact that she more often appeals to emotion than to reason, as cause for action, in no way marks her as inferior to man, but simply as different. As Ellen Key says: "There is nothing more futile than to try to prove the inferiority of woman to man, unless it be to try to prove her equality."[11]

[10] HELEN BRADFORD THOMPSON, *Psychological Norms in Men and Women*, p. 171, University of Chicago Press, 1903.

[11] ELLEN KEY, *Love and Ethics*, p. 52. New York: Huebsch, 1911.

Most women think in particulars as compared with men. The individual circumstance seems to them very important; and it is hard for them to get away from the concrete. On the other hand, a man's thinking is more impersonal and general; and he is more easily drawn into abstractions. It is true that woman's domestic life would naturally develop this quality but we are not now concerned with the question of origins. Most women find it easy to live from day to day; the man is more given to systematizing and planning. Thus in offices, men are more efficient as heads of departments, while women handle details admirably. In public life we have recently seen thousands of women eager to depose a

United States Senator, accused of polygamy, without regard to the bearing of the concrete act on constitutional guarantees. Women have done little with abstract studies like metaphysics; they have done much with the novel, where ideas are presented in the concrete and particular.

This habit of dealing with particulars, and disinclination for abstraction, leads easily to habitual action. It is easy for women to stock up their lower nerve centers with reflex actions. This, of course, goes along with the general anabolic characteristics of the sex. Hence women are the conservers of traditions; rules of conducting social intercourse appeal to them; and they are the final supporters of theological dogmas.^[12] Women naturally uphold caste, and Daughters of the Revolution and Colonial Dames flourish on the scantiest foundations of ancestral excellence. Man, on the other hand, is more radical and creative. He has perfected most of our inventions; he has painted our great pictures; carved our great statues; he has written music, while women have interpreted it.

^[12] HELEN B. THOMPSON, *Psychological Norms in Men and Women*, p. 171, University of Chicago Press, 1903.

Along with these fixed qualities of action, women have a tendency to indirection when they advance. We say they have diplomacy, tact and coquetry, while man is more direct and bald in his methods. Of course, one easily understands how these qualities may have arisen, since "fraud is the force of weak natures," and woman has always been driven to supplement her weakness with tact, from the days of Jael and Delilah down to the present day adventuress.

These qualities of mind naturally drive women to literary interests which are concrete, personal and emotional. Men turn more easily than women to the abstract generalizations of science. Of course, there are marked exceptions to these general statements, in both sexes. Madame Curie, who was recently a candidate for the honors of the French Academy, and who, in 1911, was given the Nobel prize for her distinguished services to chemistry, is but one of many women who are famous to-day in the world of science. Still the private life of these women, as in the case of Sónya Kovalévsky, seems to bear out our general conclusion. Men, on the other hand, as milliners and editors of ladies' journals, show marked skill in catering to women's tastes; but on the whole the differences indicated seem important and widely diffused.

Another profound difference between men and women is the woman's greater tendency to periodicity in all her functions and adjustments to life.[13] In all normal societies the life of the man is fairly regular and constant from birth to old age. He moves along lines mainly predetermined by his heredity and his environment, his habits and his work. Even puberty is less disturbing in its effect upon a boy than upon a girl; and often by eighteen we can anticipate the life of a young man with great accuracy. The one element in his life hardest to forecast is the effect of his love-affairs.

[13] See chapter on Periodicity in G. STANLEY HALL'S *Adolescence*, Vol. I, p. 472.

With a woman, it is quite different. As a girl, the period of puberty produces profound changes; and after that, for more than thirty years she passes through periodical exaltations and depressions that must play a large part in

determining her health, happiness and efficiency. In the forties, comes another great change which affects her life to a degree strangely ignored by those who have dealt with her possibilities in the past.[14]

[14] KARIN MICHAËLIS, *The Dangerous Age*, John Lane Co., 1911, is said to have sold 80,000 in six weeks when it first appeared in Berlin. *The Bride of the Mistletoe*, by JAMES LANE ALLEN (Macmillan), deals with the same period.

But the great element of uncertainty, always fronting the girl and young woman, is marriage. Marriage for her generally means abandonment of old working interests, and a substitution of new; it brings her geographical change; new acquaintances and friendships; and the steady adjustment of her personal life to the man she has married in its relation to industry, religion, society and the arts. If children come to her, they must inevitably retire her from public life, for a time, with the danger of losing connections which comes to all who temporarily drop out of the race.

A boy, industrious, observant, with some power of administration, studies mining engineering, moves to a mining center and expresses his individual and social powers along the lines of his work until he is sixty. The women who impinge against his life may deflect him from the mines in California to those in Australia, or from the actual work of superintendence to an office; or from an interest in Browning to Tennyson; or from Methodism to Christian Science. The girl with industrious and observant interests studies stenography and type-writing, moves to the vicinity of offices, but is then caught up in the life of a farmer-husband who shifts her center of activity to a farm in Idaho where she must devote herself to entirely different activities, form new associations, think in new terms,

respond to new emotions, and adjust herself to her farmer-husband's personality. When, after twenty-five years, she has reared a family of children, and when improved circumstances enable them to move up to the county seat, she confronts many of the conditions for which she originally prepared herself, but with farm habits, diminishing adaptability and diminishing power of appealing to her husband. His powers are still comparatively unimpaired, and as a dealer in farm produce or farm machinery his interests undergo slight change. In general, it may be said that a woman's life falls into three great periods of twenty-five years each. The first twenty-five years of childhood and girlhood is a time of getting ready for the puzzling combination of her personal needs as a human being, her needs as a self-supporting social unit, and her probabilities of matrimony. The second twenty-five years, the domestic period of her life, is a time of adjustments as wife and mother, which may instead prove to be a period of barren waiting, or a time of professional and industrial self-direction and self-support. The third twenty-five years is a time of mature and ripened powers, of lessened romantic interests, and if the preceding period has been devoted to husband and children, it is often a time of social detachment, of weakened individual initiative, of old-fashioned knowledge, of inefficiency, of premature retirement and old age.

On the moral side, as Professor Thomas has so admirably pointed out,[\[15\]](#) women have evolved a morality of the person and of the family, while men have evolved a morality of the group and of property. Since men have had a monopoly of property and of law-making they have shaped

laws mainly for the protection of property, and in a secondary degree for the protection of the person. Under these laws a man who beats another nearly to death is less severely punished than one who signs the wrong name to a check for five dollars. Man's katabolic nature and his greater freedom have given him almost a monopoly of crime under these laws which he has made. Offences against the coming generation, against health, social efficiency and good taste have until recently been left to the tribunal of public opinion as expressed in social usage; and here, as we have seen, women are generally the judges and executioners. In this, her own field of moral judgment, woman is idealistic and uncompromising. If one of her sisters falls from virtue she will often pursue her unmercifully. If a man, on the other hand, commits a burglary or forgery her sympathy and mercy may make her a very lenient judge.

[15] WILLIAM I. THOMAS, *Sex and Society*, p. 149. University of Chicago Press, 1907. ELLEN KEY, in *Love and Marriage*, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1911, traces the same lines of growth.

In æsthetics, the differences follow the same general law. Women express beauty in themselves; jewels are for their ornament; and rooms are furnished as a setting for themselves. The lives of millions of workers go to the adornment of women. In painting they sometimes excel, but a Madame Le Brun does her best work when she paints herself and her child, and when Angelica Kauffmann would paint a vestal virgin, she drapes a veil over her own head and transfers her features to the canvas. Sculpture and architecture are too impersonal and abstract to attract much attention from women at present. Even a sculptor like

Mrs. Bessie Potter Vonnoh finds her truest theme in statuettes of mothers with their children about them.

During the past few years psychologists have paid great attention to secondary sex characteristics of the mind, and doubtless many qualities of the thought and feeling of men and women owe their origin to the same source as brilliant plumage, antlers, combs and wattles. Thus the shy, retiring, reticent, self-effacing, languishing, adoring excesses of maidenhood and the peculiar psychological manifestations of the late forties must probably be understood from this point of view. So, also, must the bold, swaggering, assertive, compelling bearing of youth be interpreted. The shy or modish, dandified, lackadaisical cane-carrying youth is naturally disliked as a sexual perversion.

Women alone, whether individually or in groups, tend to develop certain hard, dry, arid qualities of mind and heart, or they become emotional and unbalanced. Losing a sense of large significances, they become overcareful, saving, sometimes penurious, while in matters of feeling they lavish sentiment and sympathy on unimportant pets and movements.

Men, when alone, become selfish, coarse, and reckless; their judgments become extravagant and their pursuits remorseless.

Thus it is certainly true that men and women supplement each other in the subjective as in the objective life. Man creates, woman conserves; man composes, woman interprets; man generalizes, woman particularizes; man seeks beauty, woman embodies beauty; man thinks more than he feels, woman feels more than she thinks. For new