

Progressive Psychoanalysts

I've just been reading a marvellous book, and wanted to share my surprise and joy with someone. It's *Psychoanalysis and Women*, edited by Jean Baker Miller (Penguin 1974), a book of readings which ranges from Karen Horney in 1926 to Jean Miller herself in 1973.

It reveals the existence of a group of people I didn't really believe existed - people who were psychoanalysts and yet had a belief in real social change. These are the names, apart from those already mentioned: Alfred Adler, Clara Thompson, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, Virginia Gunst, Gregory Zilboorg, Mary Jane Sherfey, Mabel Blake Cohen, Paul Chodoff, Leon Salzman, Judd Marmor, Ruth Moulton, Robert Stoller, Alexandra Symonds, Robert Seidenberg and Lester Gelb.

Over and over again in this book Freudian orthodoxies are happily overthrown, and I always felt, at each of these points, that it was being done from real knowledge and experience, rather than from any other motive. Penis envy, the weak female superego, female masochism, the vaginal orgasm - all these are thrown overboard. We find Marmor saying nice things like:

A male can be a passive and submissive penetrator, while a female can be an aggressive and dominant recipient, in the sexual act. Indeed, recent researches indicate that the female genital apparatus during orgasm is extremely active. Receptivity and passivity are not synonymous.

This is just what Alan Watts says in *Nature, Man and Woman*, and what I have often tried to say against much opposition from both men and women. It's refreshing to find a psychoanalyst, of all people, saying it too. And here is Mabel Cohen on autonomy:

An added difficulty is the high value we place on self-sufficiency or independence, considering it to be one of the qualities of healthy maturity. Could it be more correctly stated that self-sufficiency consists in knowing how to get one's dependency needs met without blood, sweat and tears?

What a good thing to say! That somehow takes all the heavy 'should' out of it, for me, and allows me to be more aware of my own needs for dependence on someone else, which are certainly there.

One of the most attractive people in this book, for me, is Robert Seidenberg, who has a real feeling for the way in which we live in a society with very specific pressures at a particular point in history.

Although it is a vast oversimplification to attribute mental illness to one cause, we are becoming aware of social forces that filter down to the family and mother-child unit. The effects of a male-dominant society on 'mothering' cannot be overlooked as potentially and actually disintegrative In the unconscious of men as found in psychoanalysis, there is a deep-seated fear and loathing of women. All the songs of love do not displace this underlying contempt for those 'unfortunates' with gaping wounds where a penis ought to be. It is the loathing of differences that encourages and maintains the male homosexual culture from which females are regularly excluded Women are different, but most of their purported differences are cultivated in the minds of men in order to justify oppressing them.

These are hard words, but coming from a Freudian they somehow carry more weight for me. I mean, I really do believe that he has analyzed some men and found what he says he found. In another paper, Seidenberg presents a case history of a woman with a phobia; the cure came when she saw that her problem lay in having no future - what Seidenberg calls the trauma of eventlessness. Her problem was being a woman in our culture, and realising that her daughter would share the same fate. As Seidenberg says:

These are real dangers and they are external but may not be apparent to the observer who has not thought about them. One is not justified in declaring these dangers either unreal or internal because they are not universally perceived or acknowledged. Often the therapist is still listening with the 'third' ear when the times call for a fourth.

What a nice slogan that would make, for those of us who want to attend to the political implications behind someone's words or actions! 'Listening with the fourth ear.' I like that very much. It means that many of women's symptoms can be seen not merely as defences, manoeuvres or other such tactics, but (as Jean Miller says) 'as struggles to preserve or express some deeply needed aspects of personal integrity in a milieu that will not allow for their direct expression. The task of a therapist then becomes the cooperative search for an understanding of those needs and an understanding of how they have been diverted or distorted.'

This led me on to read the collected papers of Judd Marmor, published under the title *Psychiatry in Transition* (Butterworth 1974). He adopts an overtly dialectical position, from which he criticises Freud as being basically a mechanistic materialist, in spite of some occasional insights at a different level.

The advanced psychoanalytic view sees the relationship between the

individual and society as a dialectical one, and denies that any basic conflict of interests inevitably exists between them . . . It asserts that the particular medium in which this interrelationship first takes place in our society is, for most individuals, the family . . . In this group the influence of the parents, or parent-substitutes, is preeminent, since the parents are in most instances the 'chief purveyors and reflectors to the growing child of the contradictory patterns in our culture.'

And he sees a view like this as being complementary to historical materialism in explaining the specific variants in each individual, within the overall pressures of his or her class position.

The kind of psychoanalytic approach which he favours does away with the couch as the only, or even the favoured, way of working, and also questions even such a basic technique as free association. Marmor points out that free association has certain inherent drawbacks: it is not only open to a tremendous amount of influence by the therapist (there is plenty of evidence to show this) but also it cannot help missing some very important material. The material it misses is that which is ego-syntonic. What Marmor means by this is that if the culture tells us that such and such behaviour is normal, we will not try to work on it as a problem, even if it is causing suffering to others.

One of the clinical facts that has forced itself strongly upon my awareness has been the repeated observation of people who have undergone prolonged and painstaking analyses and yet have been left with clear-cut residual patterns of narcissism, exploitativeness, social aggression, rigidity, compulsiveness and other similar characterological attitudes.

He quotes the case of a person who seemed fine in the consulting room, and free-associated with great freedom, but who complained of interpersonal difficulties which were seen as totally unprovoked. When put into a therapy group, this person did in fact arouse hostility by continually talking and never listening to what anyone else said. This seems to point to the value of groups in allowing this sort of material to emerge, and indeed Marmor strongly defends the use of groups, even in basic training.

Altogether I was quite inspired to find that psychoanalysts could be so open to change and aware of what was going on. I'd really like to know, now, if there are any in Britain like this?

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