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Review Margaret Mead: "Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies"

Erich Fromm
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Review „Margaret Mead: Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies“, in: *The Family*, New York (Family Welfare Association of America) 1936. – Translation by Erich Fromm.

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This stimulating and important book is a result of field work among three Australian tribes and deals with the observations of the author under one particular viewpoint: the difference of those character traits which we are accustomed to look upon as specially masculine and feminine ones. With the Arapesh, the author describes a structure of personality with both, men and women, which we would define in our culture as a motherly or feminine one. Men and woman are unaggressive and the highest virtue for both of them is a caring and furthering attitude, not only to the child but to everything growing and helpless.

Sexual desire is not looked upon by them as an important force of human nature. With the Mundugumor on the contrary we find a character structure which although being the same for men and women is extremely aggressive and competitive. Motherly love is an unimportant factor. Men and women are highly sexed. In the categories of our culture we would describe the characters of both sexes as masculine and aggressive. While with the first two tribes a similar character formation is to be found with men and women, the Tschambuli show a similarity with our culture in this sense that both sexes have different temperaments. Both these temperaments are the reverse of what we consider to be masculine and feminine. Women are unpersonal, of matter of fact and dominating, while men are less responsible, more emotional and dependant.

Among the main theoretical conclusions from her observations is the authors opinion that the difference in temperament between men and women is not naturally and biologically, but culturally conditioned. The main factor in the formation of a certain temperament is seen in the Influence of the family in the early years of the child. The author sees the reason for the possibility that different childhood experiences can create entirely different temperaments and character structures in the enormous malleability of human nature. Dr. Mead's book is not only important for the anthropologist, but it is also to be highly recommended to the psychologist and to the student of family life as a brilliant and original contribution to each of these fields.

Erich Fromm (New York).