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A Study Of The Causes And Remedies For The Inferiority Complex

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A Study of the Causes and Remedies
For the Inferioty Complex

Inferiority

by

Joe Anna Webb

PRAIRIE VIEW STATE COLLEGE
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A Thesis in Education Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirement
for the Degree of

Bachelor of Science
in the

Division of Education

of the

Prairie View State Normal
and
Industrial College

Prairie View, Texas

PRAIRIE VIEW STATE COLLEGE
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August 1937

A DEDICATION

To

My Mother

Whose constant help
and inspiration has
made this opportunity
possible.

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manuscript.

J. A. W.

Chapter I

Introduction

In order to study the problem of adolescent maladjustment, clinics have been established to provide for scientific study of individual cases. The first guidance clinic along the line of Individual Psychology was organized (1912) by Dr. Alfred Adler in Vienna, Austria. Since that time several have been established in various sections of the United States. It was through guidance clinics that psychologists have been able to find sources of adolescent maladjustment. According to Meyer, Adler, and others personality disturbances are the results of undesirable habits which might have been avoided if the individual had received adequate training and proper guidance. According to Valentine a thwarted ambition may have created in individual a sense of inferiority, inability, incompleteness, or weakness. The sense of inferiority may have to do with one's stature, appearances, mentality or inadequacy in any respect. This study purposes:

1. To determine causes of the inferiority complex.
2. To discover its symptoms as are indicated by behavior.
3. To determine its effect upon the individual.
4. To suggest possible remedies.

Chapter II

Physical Causes

The individual with some physical defect naturally will dwell upon his own lack of ability and in this way develop a sense of inferiority.¹ The physical defects that cause the individual most concern are, loss of an eye, arm or some other member of the body, the size of his stature, unsightly scars and birthmarks, stammering, or deformity of some kind. For some of these defects there are remedies, for others there are not.

The individual who has any of these defects will try to conceal them. For example, a person with a deformed ear will arrange the hair to cover the ear. A person with a deformed hand will wear gloves to conceal it. Those persons who have defects that can be concealed have an advantage over those who have defects that cannot be concealed. It is when an individual had some defect that cannot be concealed that he becomes very much alarmed. His inadequacy becomes greater and more exaggerated because of his attitude toward it.

A person who develops an inferiority complex may attempt to compensate for this, and by some special effort and training overcome it and become superior

(1) Burnham - The Wholesome Personality - pp. 145-149
(2) IBID.

in something else.²

The case studies given in this thesis are for the most part personal observations that the writer made in the communities where she has served as a teacher. The other case studies were contributed by a teacher who is employed in the Houston Public School System.

Case I

Mae (14). Mae was a very brilliant girl while in grammar school. Although she had always been larger than the other children in her class, this caused her no concern until she reached the age of fourteen and was in the ninth grade. Her weight of over two hundred pounds made her look very much like a woman in every respect. It was about this time that she became conscious of her enormous size for her age and began to resent being teased by the boys. She did not like to walk in front of anyone, for she thought that every one had something to say about her being so fat, so she always expressed it. She would not participate in any games. She was very miserable when around other children and prevailed with her mother until the mother finally consented to stopping school. Now she sits at home and broods over her condition,

when she should be out playing and associating with other girls of her age.

Remedy: There are two probable remedies.

1. Her mother should have a good physician to examine her to see what has caused this excess fat. He would perhaps prescribe a diet to reduce some of mae's weight.

2. The second thing to be done is to help her forget herself. Give her good books to read of great women who have had some physical defect. Show her that she is just as good as those who cause her so much discomfort by teasing. Show her that she has all the possibilities to succeed, that no one can hinder her but herself.

Case II

Tim (14). Tim was a boy fourteen years old in Green Oak School. For three consecutive years he had attended this school without any trouble out of the other boys. Last year when he came back seemingly for the first time noticed that the other boys his age had outgrown him. The fellows took advantage of this and called him Shorty! This he took offense to and often got himself into difficulty. He finally grew tired of the boys

teasing and dropped out of school before the end of the term.

In this case as in many other cases of adolescent maladjustment, something could have done to help Tim make a different decision. If he had received the proper training, he could have been led to laugh with the other boys and continue to associate with them. For this individual's own adjustment, habits which will enable him to get along with his fellows should be formed. He should be led to the possibility of compensating for small stature in a whole some way. Tim should be informed that a persons failure or success in life does not depend upon stature alone. There is no written law as to who shall fail other than what the individual writes for him~~own~~ self. What he needs is enlightenment and encouragement. Give him good books to read that will aid him in getting his mind off himself.

Case III

Jenny enrolled in Booker T. Washington High School. Jenny had a crippled hand that resulted from a burn she had received while an infant. She made fair progress in school, but did not advance as she could have because she loathed herself for

being unable to use her hand. She liked the boys as any normal girl does, but avoided them because she felt they would not be interested in her on account of her misfortune. When a young man did seem interested in her, she thought that she should comply with all of his request to keep him interested. This she did and as a result she became a mother. When her teacher talked to her, Jenny told her this story, that all boys had avoided her before and when this one came along she thought that she could hold him by doing as he had asked her. Now she says that her life is ruined.

This could have been avoided had someone helped her to look upon her condition in a different light. Although she is thus afflicted there may be some way that she can become superior in. The remedy in this case could be to discover and develop her best talent. Show her the possibility of rising up over her handicap.

Unsightly Scars and Birthmarks

Case IV

Louise was now sixteen years of age. She had always been a normal jolly girl up to this time. But something happened to change her outlook on life. Unfortunately she was never vaccinated against smallpox. When the epidemic broke out in the com-

munity she was one of the victims. When she recovered, her face was covered with large pits. She first remained at home while she was using a perscription that was recommended as being a sure remedy for her condition. Since this remedy did not succeed, she does not like to go out with her associates. She says that people stare at her, that she can never apply make-up to look like other girls. She is constantly embarassed on account of her condition; therefore, remains quiet in order not to make herself conspicuous.

In Louise's case and in all cases where there is nothing that can be done to remove the defect, it is a reality and must be faced as such. The person with such a facial defect should be taught to see that there is something more valuable than facial beauty; and that beauty without is the result of beauty within. She should be taught to develop a wholesome pleasing personality. Reading some good books on personality would be helpful.

Case V

Stammering

Albert, age fifteen, a pupil in Mill River School, did not make much progress because he stammered so badly that it jerked his body for him to talk. He did not seem to be concerned much about

his condition until people came in that were not accustomed to seeing him stutter. When some new pupils came in and began to tease him continuously he became so furious that he dropped out of school. His teacher persuaded him to go to the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind School in Austin, Texas. His enrollment there showed fair progress made in manual training and singing. He was not cured of his stammering, but he gained confidence in himself.

Chapter III

Mental Causes

Many children are made to feel inferior because of a constant reminding by their mothers or teachers that they do not know anything. It is a common practice for mothers or some other member of the family to criticize the child in the meantime using his playmates as models. If this is continued over a period of time the child will become conscious of the difference between his ability and that of the more gifted child.

It sometimes happens in school that the child will not observe how much more rapidly some other child can accomplish his work; as a result he will not pay much attention. But if the child does observe how some other child can accomplish his work more rapidly or how much neater another person can do his work; as a result of this he feels inferior to that extent and will often refrain from participating in a recitation unless he is forced by the teacher to express himself.

In no event is the teacher to use one child as a model for another. The alert teacher realizes that all children are not of the same ability; therefore, all should not be required to do the same amount of work or the same quality of work.

On the other hand, have the child to understand that we as humans do not all have the same abilities, and that there is always some one thing that he can try to excell in. The teacher should help him rind out what he can do best and encourage him by showing the contribution he is making.

Case VI

Patricia (14). Patricia was in the eight grade in one of the Junior High Schools in Houston, Texas. She was considered an average student in school, having made her grades with the exception of the fifth grade which she had to repeat. Her mother became very angry and nagged at her saying that she would never learn anything, because she was just like her Aunt Pat. Other than these outburst on the evening the report card was to be signed, she paid little attention to Patricia's progress in school. Patricia had lost all interest in learning by the end of the seventh grade and as a result was retained again. The mother in a fit of anger replied, "You might as well stop school, because you will never learn anything". Patricia had come to the conclusion now that she was mentally inferior and would never learn. She was therefore, willing to give up. It happened that another aunt came to

visit Patricia's mother and saw how Patricia was being neglected; so she persuaded her mother to let Patricia go to Los Angeles with her. After spending two years with this kind and understanding aunt, Patricia returned home greatly improved. Instead of having an inferiority complex, she had developed a superiority complex.

A person's handicap that causes him to feel inferior is not always so serious as he feels it to be, and it can often be lessened by the help of someone who understands him and shows interest in his welfare.

Case VII

Leo was thirteen years old and in the fifth grade in Green Oak Rural School for several years. She was kept out of school quite a while because her father moved around from town to town on a contract job. Although she was not a very good student she made fair progress until two other children moved into the community who were smaller and much better students. These younger children could do their work in such short time that she was very uncomfortable in class with them. In order not to come in contact with them she pretended to be ill and remained out of

school for a long time. Her teacher having sensed the trouble went to see her where upon Leo sobbingly confessed to her teacher that she was not ill. The trouble was that she was ashamed because those smaller children knew more than she did, she had tried hard, but could not do her lessons so quickly as the smaller children in her class. The teacher told her, just as God had made no two things in the plant alike so no two people were alike. That was why some learn faster than others. Although these smaller children did excel in their classwork, there was something that Leo could do that these boys were not capable of doing as well. Through the wise guidance of the teacher, Leo gained back the confidence she formerly had in herself. Her mental ability was not increased, as that is impossible, but she overcame that feeling of inadequacy that would have marred her happiness.

In cases of this kind the teacher should study the pupil's interest and ability to see what she can do best. It may be that she would be interested in sewing. Give her that and encourage her to do her best work. Arrange some way of exhibiting her work in order to call for personal compliments.

Chapter IV

Material Causes

Adolescent boys and girls suffer much embarrassment because of the lack of fine clothes that they so much desire. It is at this period that they become interested in the opposite sex and want to dress to win their admiration. If for any financial reasons their parents cannot afford to give them the clothes they so much desire and they are forced to wear shabby clothes or ill-fitting turned over shoes, they will become very much alarmed. On account of the emotional changes characteristics of this period they are not able to make adjustments to existing conditions. Because of their inability to dress like their associates they assume a feeling of inferiority.

Much of the discomfort that the individual experiences could be avoided if the teacher and parents should make themselves instrumental in helping him.

These are the things that should be done to help the individual overcome this condition:

1. Give the child the best common sense, clothes, and other necessities you can afford.
2. Show him the value of moral and intellectual

development as against material things.

3. Keep this maximum ever before him. If a man empties his purse into his head no one can take it from him; and investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.³

Poor Home Conditions

Poor Home conditions may have much to do with the attitude the adolescent will take toward life. This seemingly causes girls more concern than boys.

If a girl's home does not compare with her chum's she is reluctant on that account about asking them to visit her. Girls may play together daily until they reach a certain age, finally they will begin to break off from one another. If the matter is questioned one will term the other as being funny, or say that she has changed. When in reality this is what has happened the girl from the home with poor facilities feels that she is inferior to the other girl and will avoid contacting her former friends.

There are several things that might be done:

1. If she is a girl of exceptional good looks or ability, she may compensate by developing that trait to such an extent that the group will accept her in spite of her poor home conditions.

(3) Abraham Lincoln

2. Get her to cheerfully accept her home conditions by helping her build a sound philosophy of life so that she will accept both her self and home conditions for what they are, finding her friends among respectable ambitious people in similar circumstances.

3. Give her autobiographies and biographies to read, from which she may gather that great men and women, too, have come from humble surroundings.

Chapter V

Domineering Parents

If in the home the child is not given the opportunity to do his own thinking or his own acting, he will naturally develop a feeling of deficiency. Some parents make the mistake of trying to protect their children from the outside world by keeping them close at home and doing their thinking for them, never allowing them any responsibility. If for any reason the child is thrown out on his own, fear and failure develop. He is totally unable to cope with the situation. Instead of protecting the child as was intended, the child has been hindered and handicapped not only for the time being, but maybe for life.

The parents are no more able to think for the child than they are to eat for the child. Let the child do his own thinking if he is ever to come self-confident. Let him get away from his family in his emotional life where he will be able to make his personal choice concerning the things that will mean most in adult life, that might be concerning his choice of vocation, of a mate, or his general attitude toward life.

Case VIII

John (16). John was in the eleventh grade

in high school. He is the only son of parents who are very religious. They have always taken him everywhere they go. They attend no social activities, but church and have formerly forced John to do the same. He has one privilege, that is a western movie on Saturday, providing he has attended church the previous Sunday. They think parties and social functions of any kind are harmful; John is cautioned repeatedly concerning the companionship of girls. When he finished high school he attended the class banquet, at which he was very ill at ease, acting as if he was afraid of the girls. He made several attempts to approach the stag line and ask some girl for a dance, but at each advance he failed to master courage. At last, alone disgusted and very much ashamed, he slipped from the banquet hall and went home vowing that he would never go to another party.

John's feelings of inferiority evidently grew out of the parental domination. He has never been given the privilege of acting according to his own desires. Incapacity for adjustment is often connected with abnormal persistence of attachment to the family. Hollingsworth and other psychologists speak of getting away from the parental domination in one's thinking and acting as "psychological

weaning" and advise that this is necessary if the individual is ever to make a satisfactory adjustment to life.

Three great problems of life: love, occupation, and marriage depend on the social adjustment that the individual first encounters and his social adjustment as a child is the prototype of his approach to the other problems as they arise.

Children who are reared in the rural, where the houses are less far apart do not receive the proper amount of social contact, consequently when they come in contact with people who have had or made a large number of social contacts they feel inferior because their past experiences have been limited. They often remain silent during a conversation unless directly addressed. This does not mean that the individual is inferior, but he feels himself to be inferior because he realizes that his expressions and experiences are limited when compared with another person who has been free to travel or who has lived in the city where he was numerous advantages, and wide contact with a large number of people daily.

The feeling of inadequacy that comes from poor social training produces the effects the person suffers to the physical defects. The child feels himself unacceptable to the group and unless techniques are acquired which will make him feel adequate

Chapter VI

Lack of Social Training

It must be understood that it is not always some mental or physical disorder that causes an individual to develop a feeling of inadequacy. Persons who are physically and mentally normal may acquire inferiority feelings from the lack of social training. Children who are reared in the rural, where the homes are less far apart do not receive the proper amount of social contact, consequently when they come in contact with people who have had or made a large number of social contacts they feel inferior because their past experiences have been limited. They often remain silent during a conversation unless directly addressed. This does not mean that the individual is inferior, but he feels himself to be inferior because he realizes that his expressions and experiences are limited when compared with another person who has been free to travel or who has lived in the city where he has numerous advantages, and wide contact with a large number of people daily.

The feeling of inadequacy that comes from poor social training produces and effects the person similar to the physical defects. The child feels himself unacceptable to the group and unless techniques are acquired which will make him feel adequate

insecurity results which leads to the use of escape mechanisms in one form or another.⁴

The individual who feels himself inadequate because of his lack of social training may develop some form of social maladjustment. Because of his timidity, he will withdraw from any situation that causes him to feel unaccepted. If nothing is done to help him to develop normally he will withdraw more and more into himself with a result of becoming introverted.

Arlitt describes this form of escape as being closely related to dementia praecox. Although the shy introverted individual may never develop any further form of maladjustment, and may be led to take his place among his fellows successfully to the extent that he overcomes this tendency to introversion. It is essential for the good of the individual to help him overcome such tendencies.

(4) Arlitt, Adolescent Psychology - pp. 65-180

Case VIII

Irene was a very studious girl in Green Oak Rural School. She graduated with honors. During her high school career she spent all of her time reading or at home helping her mother with the house work, and caring for the cows, garden, and chickens. She never cared to visit girls of her equal and felt uncomfortable around them.

When time came for the senior banquet, she attended out of her sense of duty. Being unable to dance or participate in the games she found herself a wall flower. She was so disturbed over her plight she complained of a headache and went home before the party was over. After commencement the girls seldom saw her until they left for boarding school. Here they saw her only when passing to and from classes, because she worked and spent all of her time studying. She took no part in games and was a very poor conversationist. Because the school from which she graduated was not affiliated with this particular college, she was repeating her fourth year high school work in which she excelled in all her classes. Her teachers noticed her excellent work and advised her to take an examination to make up this deficiency. This necessitated her

interviewing the principal which she could never make up her mind to do. Irene lacked the courage to face him with her problem as a result she wasted the entire year repeating this grade when she might have easily passed on to the next class.

When the child shows fear responses because of a lack of social training the teacher can help him by encouraging him to do the thing that he fears doing. If the child has developed the habit of fear and does not like to take part in the class activities the teacher can help him to overcome this habit by placing him in positions where he will have to respond. At first it will cause him much discomfort, but he will eventually learn to adjust himself to the situation.

One of the most effective remedies for fear is what is called direct action. Do the thing you are afraid to face; if you are afraid to speak before others, speak in public as much as you can.⁵

(5) Burnham, The Wholesome Personality - p. 318.

Chapter VII

Summary

A common personality characteristics which greatly influences our lives is a feeling of inadequacy or a feeling of inferiority. All individuals are influenced by a feeling in various ways or situations by a feeling of inferiority.

This feeling of inferiority or inferiority complex usually arises from a sensitiveness to some physical or mental defect, and from lack of social training, or the lack of ability to keep pace with material things. In some other cases it is caused by parental domination or unwillingness of the parent to give their children freedom of thought and action. Boys and girls usually develop inferiority complex during the adolescent stage.

Table I

Findings from case studies are given in tabulated form:

Cause of Inferiority
Complex

- In ability to adjust to any physical defect, deformity.
- Undue worry over birthmarks, or scars left by accident or disease.
- Loss of a limb, or organ.
- Extremely small in stature.
- Extremely large for one's age.
- Stammering or speech defect.
- Inability to bear trouble of mishaps as motherhood out of wedlock.

Older people reminding a young child of his lack of knowledge. ✓
Being made to compare one's self unfavorably with others. ✓
Inability to compete with others in speed and quality of school work, or in games. ✓
Continually failing in school work. ✓
Sensitivity to nagging from parents or teachers. ✓
Telling a child he will never succeed. ✓
Overprotecting the child allowing him no opportunity to his choices. ✓
Being brought up too different from one's associates in religious practices or in any way. ✓
Failure to make friends among those of equal age in childhood. ✓
Keeping away from parties and social functions. ✓
Constantly playing with children too old. ✓
Emotional attachment for one's immediate family. ✓
Lack of knowledge or specific skills in doing things such as dancing, playing games for recreation. ✓
Unable to keep up respectable appearance during adolescence so far as shoes and clothes are concerned. ✓
Unfortunate attitude toward poverty and unattractive home surroundings. ✓
Feeling one's self too homely to be accepted by the opposite sex. ✓
Identifying the child with an inferior relative or person. ✓
Too much cautioning about relationship with the opposite sex. ✓

Table II

SYMPTOMS OF INFERIORITY
COMPLEX

Trying to hide defects in various ways. ✓
Embarrassment when walking in front of people. ✓
Easily hurt over being called "fat or short". ✓
Avoiding association with the gang or set. ✓
Avoiding opposite sex. ✓
Too easily led, complying with request of others for the sake of getting along. ✓
Believing that they are being watched by everyone. ✓
Showing lack of confidence. ✓
Refusing to try because others are better at a given task. ✓
Extremely sensitive to criticism. ✓
Frequent embarrassment. ✓
Excessive timidity or shyness. ✓

Table II Cont'd

Relinquish former associates.—
Refusal to accept responsibility.—
Extreme docility.
Seclusiveness. ✓
Slipping out the back way from social affairs.
Unable to find enjoyment in parties, being a wall
flower.
Clinging to parents or to find friends who are protecting.—
Timid approach to people, timid approach to situations.—
Inability to converse with others in a social situation
for fear of making a mistake.—
Having a feeling of not being wanted around people.
Daydreaming.—
Escape or defense mechanisms.
Fear of those in authority.
accepting any advantage for the sake of remaining
comfortable in one's life.

Table III

Effect on the
Individual

✓ Over compensation may cause emotional instability,
a social behavior.
Failure in school work.
Leaving School early.
✓ Jealousy of others ability and success.
✓ Failure to develop calmness and poise.
Unfortunate attitudes toward people.
Stunts mental and moral growth.
Shut in personality.
Mental illness.
Failure to make friends.
Failure to get married.
Failure to fall in love.
Failure to find a vocation.
Failure in a vocation.
If married, failure to get along with ones's mate.

Conclusion

Since it is not an easy task to help individual overcome inferiority complexes, it is very necessary that something should be done to prevent them from developing. The surest way to prevent an inferiority complex from developing is to remedy any impending defect. Parents should have their children examined to correct all physical defects that will yield to professional cure. If any condition exists that cannot be corrected the child should be led to accept it as such. Since the parents are the child's first teacher, it is necessary that they have some scientific knowledge of child guidance in order that they may be able to direct their children in forming the right attitude toward life.

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