

Eduard Reich, *Studies of Women* (1875)

Abstract

Purporting to be based on the latest scientific evidence, this excerpt from *Studies of Women* [*Studien über die Frauen*] by Eduard Reich, a doctor of medicine and surgery, attempts to explain the genesis, physiognomy, and social impact of four distinct female temperaments: sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic. Reich also considers the characteristics of various “mixed” temperaments and the link between temperament and the shape of female skulls.

Source

[...]

On Temperament.

§ 163

If the circumstances are so favorable or unfavorable as to give free rein to the development of temperament, then the sanguine woman can easily become an angel; the choleric woman easily a devil; the phlegmatic woman, not an angel but also not a devil; the melancholy woman, not a devil, but also not an angel. The sanguine and the choleric temperaments are fully developed; female creatures of other temperaments are not sufficiently pronounced, and therefore they also do not attain the high points of characteristic development.

The so-called philosophical or tempered temperament can generally not be found in the female sex, and where one finds it, it presents itself only as a hint, an outline, while the true substance is always expressed by one of the ordinary temperaments.

§ 164

For what reason is the philosophical temperament not proper to women? Only the most highly developed men, with the most perfected brain organization, are possessed of the tempered temperament beginning at a certain age. Since, in the female sex, the greatest potential of development is simply not possible, due to the sex life occupying such a broad base and being so predominant in women, the philosophical temperament is not proper to the daughters of Eve.

Every woman, therefore, has her particular ordinary temperament. Sometimes she has two or more of them. Sometimes she has as many temperaments as there are directions of the compass rose, yet without her partaking of a happy temperament. Happy temperaments are rare because their development presupposes very advantageous conditions: health of the parents, good upbringing, wealth, attention to physical needs, harmonious formation of the mind, stimulating living conditions that fortify peoples' lighter side—these are the circumstances under which happy temperaments develop, also in the female sex.

With women, the sanguine temperament will always be the happiest, if it is formed under favorable conditions of individual predisposition and external influences. Women of such temperament are always cheerful, always lively, always youthful; exhilarating, enlivening, and rejuvenating everyone with whom they come into contact, they are as far from the bluestocking type of woman as they are from the Xanthippe type.

Phlegmatic women, under otherwise good circumstances, are happy unto themselves; but they do not so much contribute positively to the happiness of others as they refrain from disturbing others' happiness through harmful interference.

Choleric women tend to be happy when the world is directed toward them but discontented when they have to direct themselves toward the world. Here, however, much can be done and corrected through education.

With melancholy women, happiness is not on the best footing, even if the melancholy temperament is situated quite broadly throughout the person's constitution. If women of this temperament are not given an expert education and do not live under satisfactory conditions, they themselves are not happy and are not able to make others happy.

Sanguine Women.

§ 165

Concerning the sanguine temperament, Johann Georg Heinrich Feder says, among other things, "Since this temperament has as its basis the healthiest physical constitution, energy without taxing urgency, sensitivity without nervous tension, an agile, not racing, evenly diffusing blood flow, this condition usually provides the soul with the most comfortable physical feeling, or at least, above all, it guards against all arduous body sensation, and thus does more than other factors in contributing to the capacity for joy and kindness. More than other temperaments, it also invites the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. Most impressions are definitely pleasing to this sanguine temperament....The sanguine person makes the best social partner; so serene, open without mistrust or anger in the heart; not too lazy to contribute to shared pleasures; not too rigid and intractable to accommodate the wishes of others; filled with enough pleasure to spread among others as well; and not too insensitive or too closed to feel others' joys; not so irritable as to be offended and insulted at the slightest occasion; but not too weak to resist those who disturb others' enjoyment or abuse patience and kindness."

"Feeling physically comfortable, it is possible for the sanguine person to languish so agreeably," Feder notes further, "that he is not safe from letting himself fall into an inclination to idleness and lethargy; but the liveliness of his feelings, the good stock of strength that he possesses and that always restores itself easily, together with his cooperative spirit and easy sympathy with the condition and wishes of others, make it easy to pull him out of his inactivity and accustom him to extended periods of industry. Generally, this temperament requires only a good education and proper principles in order to produce the most perfect, even-tempered character." All of these observations apply in equal measure to the female as to the male sex, and in their especial application to the female sex, they provide many points of reference for consideration.

§ 166

In all situations, sanguine women are the most flexible and adapt most readily to living conditions, especially if those in charge of their education know how to develop the good side of their temperament, that is, to develop their more accommodative capacity and to strengthen their health. What is most necessary for a woman? Cheerfulness, satisfaction, contentment, consistency, and industry! All these qualities are a defense against every impact of fate; a talisman in all adverse situations; a means to keep oneself and companions safely above water, even during storms; the ability to instill courage in critical situations and to find a painless escape route.

If all women of sanguine temperament were healthy and well educated, there would hardly be any female, and only very few male, criminals, and the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth would be on the eve of its realization. There would be hardly any hysteria or nervousness, and no tormented souls would feel

the temptation to lose control. One would only seldom observe the manifestations and effects of simple-minded fear, philistine impulses, and petty despondency, but rather, would see the proliferation of genius, energy, and determination. All this and many other good things would come to light if greater numbers of women of sanguine temperament were healthy and well educated.

[...]

§170

According to the studies of Le Canu, reproduced by Robert Bird, the difference in the composition of the blood of sanguine and phlegmatic women is not inconsiderable. The following chart compares the blood content in thousand parts by weight:

-	Sanguine Temperament Man	Sanguine Temperament Woman	Phlegmatic Temperament Man	Phlegmatic Temperament Woman
Water	786,584	793,007	800,566	803,716
Protein	65,850	71,264	71,781	68,660
Blood Cells	136,197	126,174	116,667	117,586

If we believe for a moment that these numbers are of real value in a relative sense, then the great difference in the relation of several chief constituents of the blood immediately catches our attention. While the blood of sanguine people clearly indicates the sex difference, phlegmatic men and women are very close in the nature of their blood. While protein is contained in greater quantity in the blood of sanguine women than in the blood of sanguine men, in the phlegmatic temperament, this substance appears in the opposite relationship: men have more of it than women. But in both temperaments, the blood of women contains more water than does that of men; however, in the sanguine temperament this difference is more evident than in the phlegmatic temperament. It is nevertheless remarkable that blood corpuscles are so prominent in sanguine people, and that they are present in far greater numbers in sanguine men than in sanguine women, and that phlegmatic women have somewhat more blood cells than men of phlegmatic temperament.

[...]

Phlegmatic Women.

§ 173

Within the bounds of civilized life there are many positions that suit phlegmatic women by their nature. There are occupations and employments in which the phlegmatic temperament becomes a true safeguard and can guarantee contentment and happiness. If every temperament could readily assume the position to which it is suited by nature, dissatisfaction and unhappiness would occur so rarely that one might readily believe in the presence of the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

Occupations and employments that require work and exclude ambition will be more easily performed by phlegmatics than by people of other temperaments. A phlegmatic woman will therefore have the greatest endurance under such circumstances and will relieve a man substantially in an arduous profession that does not bring respect.

[...]

§ 175

The general physical condition that forms the basis of the phlegmatic temperament is characterized by the peculiarities of the head structure, the composition of the blood, and the condition of the skin as well as of the abdominal organs. Because, in such persons, the movement of substances occurs less energetically, blood circulation is slower, and the nerves, due to less substantive blood, are not stimulated to very intense activity, the phlegmatic man, just like the phlegmatic woman, is calm, slow, deliberate, and heavy in his movements. The man exhibits these traits even more than the woman.

From what has hitherto been discussed, it may easily be seen that in women of phlegmatic temperament, good education and hygiene, and habituation to a simple way of life and regular activity, will contribute significantly to the improvement of the blood, and thus to the whole constitution, while at the same time preventing those faults that characterize a poorly developed person of phlegmatic temperament. Hence, it depends to a great extent on external circumstances, whether the phlegmatic temperament develops towards the favorable or unfavorable side, whether it appears paired with bodily weakness or strength, whether its possessor is a lazy fool or is active and clear-minded. External conditions determine the mixture of blood, the degree and manner of brain development, and finally, the state of physical and moral well-being.

For no woman does the phlegmatic temperament in and of itself mean happiness or doom; it becomes one or the other only through the influence of external circumstances, especially education, attention to physical needs, and the degree and nature of wealth or poverty and consequently, employment or non-employment.

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Choleric Women.

§ 183

Women of choleric temperament, as a rule, are intensely active in mind, but also, are more than equally active in their passions. The predominant passion of these beings may be regarded as either ambition, or avarice, or both, along with pride or arrogance. It cannot be said that in persons for whom this temperament is strong, the imagination necessarily prevails; but it can be considered certain that here, the imagination achieves a great degree of development.

Carl Friedrich Floegel makes the following remarks, among others, about choleric: "Therefore, persons who possess this temperament to a great degree have very vivid ideas. So, too, they are exceptionally adept at study, especially in the fine arts and sciences, which require a vivid imagination. They are arrogant and wrathful, and honor is the main motivator of their actions. Thus, they cultivate such insights as will earn them the proud resonance of lasting fame." This ambition holds for women as well as for men, and one finds the choleric temperament very often among female artists and writers.

One can coexist splendidly with choleric women, if they are not mis-educated or spoiled. If one does not offend their honor, does not interfere with their ambition, and if one does not confront them with naked power, unkindness, infidelity, or poverty, one can certainly be made content by them and contribute very much to their happiness. If one violates their sense of honor, cruelly removes the object of their ambition, if they are brought up and educated incorrectly and perversely, or if one acts coldly and without sympathy towards them, then their choleric temperament will surely be devastated; the positive aspects of this temperament will be suppressed while the dark aspects will be enhanced; and women of this temperament will possibly be transformed into monsters, driven to debauchery, vice, and crime.

[...]

§ 185

In the development of the choleric temperament two organs play a predominant role: the brain and the liver. The former seems in all of its parts to be more developed, and with respect to certain areas, exceptionally well endowed. The liver of choleric appears to be larger and more active than in those of other temperaments. This statement is not based on comparative measuring and weighing, but rather, on simple observations, and is all the more strongly confirmed in its veracity when the actions of choleric men and women are studied.

Of all the temperaments, the choleric possesses the most strikingly characteristic skull and face shape. Women with such choleric features cannot possibly find happiness in positions and situations of life where honor plays no role, and in which they are required to subordinate themselves under rude, overbearing, heartless, and intellectually limited people.

Choleric women tend to be characterized by strength of will, sharpness of mind, and power of imagination, and this is all the more so when the characteristic formation of the head and face is pronounced. Accordingly, they will only feel entirely well under the condition that an opportunity exists to bring out the moral qualities just mentioned. Higher social positions are therefore the best environment, the most fertile soil for these women. When well-educated and well-guided, they can utilize their moral resources and talents for the benefit of the whole middle class.

[...]

§ 188

The passions of women of choleric temperament need a strong counterweight if they are not to become excessive or degenerate. Where this counterbalance is lacking, wicked passions, even vices and crimes come to light, at which choleric women excel, just as they are able to reach the pinnacle of virtue under favorable circumstances. What aggravates the passions and makes the choleric woman into a monster is lack of true religion, constant reading of novels, unrestrained interaction with the opposite sex—especially when he is from the corrupted classes—lack of proper education, and the opportunity to give commands from earliest youth. Nothing affects the choleric temperament of women so detrimentally as abuse of authority, perverted education, and bad company. The disadvantages that arise under such conditions are extremely difficult to eliminate. Their effects are not restricted to the individual but become dangerous to the family and to society as a whole.

In Europe there are regions where the temperament of the people as a whole is choleric; where religion is only form without true content, only engaging and benumbing the senses; where the reading and acting out of novels goes hand in hand with practical materialism; where interaction with the other sex takes place according to the norms of expediency, not of morality; where the male sex presents itself not only without a moral core, but also without true intellect, shows interest and understanding only in the acquisition of material goods and sensual enjoyment; where the serving classes, by their astonishing ignorance and moral lethargy, furnish the object of unlimited domination. In these regions, the choleric temperament of women often enough takes on a deplorable, indeed abominable, character.

[...]

A woman whose melancholy temperament is protected from pathological formation through the influence of favorable external circumstances may indeed not raise herself to great heights of the ideal but in any case may be tolerable and may not nakedly exhibit self-involvement. One cannot call even the exclusively physiological, mature melancholy temperament in women happy, because the excessive concerns and rumination that this emotional and mental constitution entails are not suited to generating satisfaction with oneself nor to making others happy.

§190

Because the melancholy temperament is connected with a certain general constitution and possessors of this temperament exhibit a skull form that is precisely the opposite of an ideally shaped skull, it will depend, beginning with their earliest youth, on the healthiest possible formation of the constitution, and on painstaking upbringing as much as on good instruction, to achieve the most favorable possible formation of the brain—and thus also of the skull. The more melancholically tempered women there are in a country, the less cheerfulness and *joie de vivre* there will be, and the more mean-spiritedness and depressiveness—hence, the less happiness. There are regions where the melancholy temperament has many representatives of both sexes. There one finds no sociability, but only those psychic states that favor superstition and clericalism, discourage any cheerful person from visiting, and make true philosophy as well as true poetry impossible.

I consider it one of the most important tasks of national education and hygiene to eradicate as far as possible the melancholy temperament, especially in women. As long as this temperament continues to develop, religious and other types of fanaticism will reign, along with grumpiness, dissatisfaction, envy, avarice, and other such miserable states entrenched in human nature. And under such conditions, genius as well as any true blossoming of spirit will face a very difficult struggle. But that's not all. Because the melancholy temperament is so closely related to hypochondria, this evil will be given the advantage when the named temperament becomes more common.

[...]

§ 194

Otto Heinrich von Schädler paid special attention to the mixed temperaments of women. Let us point out some of his descriptions. “The sanguine reddish-blond woman,” says Schädler of the representative of this by no means wholly pure temperament, “is in general characterized by a cheerful, animated, and sympathetic disposition; but in cases where no solid education has been made to exert a decisive influence, she will tend toward flippancy, restlessness, and capricious, thoughtless babbling.”

“The choleric brownish-blond woman is often gifted with brilliant mental faculties. Nevertheless, she is not always amiable. A less painstaking education often produces a cold, unsociable disposition. She loses her childish charm at quite a young age and prefers to talk to older, clever people rather than to her playmates. This has a pernicious influence on her disposition and character. When she feels an inner urge to communicate, she learns that no one dares to approach her.... With good upbringing, her virtue is like a diamond that cannot be obscured through the deceptions of the moment. Her proud disposition can keep the coarsest people within the limits of decency.”

“In the choleric-sanguine woman, beauty is often combined with reason, and when at the same time these traits are merged with virtue—only where there has been an almost perfect education—the result is a delightful whole, but only when the person in question has enjoyed an almost perfect education.... If, however, for lack of a solid education and through the influence of dangerous surroundings, this person is drawn into the vortex of flippancy, she becomes dangerous to both herself and to others. For then the enjoyment of the moment becomes an idol, and the means to this end no longer matter to her.”

“When her education falls short, and her environment and bad examples have led her in the wrong direction, in daily life she often displays a distorted, misplaced sensitivity.... The subtlety of her mind and the ease with which she can ultimately manipulate herself grant her the true art of intrigue. Such women usually attain their goals; but if not, this temperament can yield the most dangerous pseudo-piety, since, under the mask of true reverence admired by fools, these women have ample opportunity to poison young plants. If these creatures who bring misfortune upon themselves and others had enjoyed an education appropriate to their temperament, they would certainly be a precious jewel of their sex.”

“The melancholy brunette,” remarked Schädler of this not unmixed temperament, “nourishes grief, rather than joy, in her breast. Noisy, extravagant enjoyments are repugnant to her; she behaves very calmly and quietly.... Her feelings are usually deep, and her face is like a chemically treated sheet of paper that conveys content and meaning only when exposed to a breeze. Her clothing usually does not reveal vanity, but rather, elegant simplicity, a phrase that can also be quite aptly applied to her mind, which does not dazzle, but draws one in over time.”

“When one considers her disposition, the melancholy-choleric woman most resembles a man. Over the years she often adopts his proud, serious nature, likes to involve herself in his affairs, and proves by stubbornness, severity, and insensitivity that a flawed education stamped out true femininity at an early age.”

“The melancholy-choleric woman often comprises the attractive center in social exchanges, and arouses the admiration of all eyes.... When a misfortune suddenly befalls her, she dispenses with advice and assistance, turns pale over the prospect of a hopeless future, feels the burden of a solitary heart, and throws herself with assertive passion into the arms of the first person who shows her sympathy.”

“In the choleric-sanguine-melancholy woman, one often finds a strange mixture of seriousness and humor, of gentle yielding and a strong sense of justice, which can induce the brashest actions.”

And concerning the sanguine-choleric-phlegmatic temperament, Schaedler says: “Ladies of this temperament are as much an ideal of beauty as of virtue. Beauty, grace, talent, gentleness, and firmness of character are often harmoniously united into a whole.... This combination of temperaments lends itself easily to acquiring deeper knowledge in scientific disciplines, and the shortest, most fleeting note from such a woman is always a model of good writing.”

“The choleric-sanguine-phlegmatic woman is a true chameleon, the most difficult to fathom, since the most striking contrasts are found united in her. Now crying and sighing, now proud and mocking ... now she is insincere and deceitful, and now, excessively candid.”

These precepts of Schädler are sufficient.

[...]

§ 199

[...]

L. A. Gosse provided evidence that the artificial shaping of the skull practiced by many peoples has had significant influence on intelligence, passions, in short, on the general psychic constitution, hence, on temperament. Gosse concludes, among other things, from his investigations on the artificial formation of the skull: “If the frontal and middle-upper parts of the skull are even moderately depressed, this seems more or less to impair the harmony of mental faculties, and to favor the indiscriminate passions. Exercised to a greater extent, this operation may inhibit the development of intelligence, or may alter mental faculties while favoring animalistic passions.” “With moderate depression of the posterior part of the head, neither intelligence nor civilized modes of behavior seem to be negatively affected; in certain cases, this operation seems to benefit intelligence and civilized behavior by restoring the balance of the various parts of the brain.” These are the thoughts of Gosse.

The facts articulated here hint at the transformation of the original disposition of the temperaments. We know that every temperament, be it a relatively pure or mixed one, accompanies a very specific form of the skull. If the skull is artificially reshaped, the original relationship of the parts of the brain changes, and hence also the temperament.

[...]

§ 200

In the course of old age, every temperament undergoes modifications, and the young girl is very different in temperament from the old woman, even if the basic features of disposition are the same in both. Unsuitable education and living conditions—of whatever kind—that run counter to nature aggravate the temperament of women according to the duration and intensity of the influence, and make a woman who, under other circumstances, would have become a quite tolerable person, into a demon of hell.

Sanguine-phlegmatic women, if the temperament has not been corrupted by unnatural influences, tend to be amiable into old age, especially when the scales tip toward the sanguine rather than toward the phlegmatic element—to use a pictorial mode of expression.

On the other hand, choleric-melancholic women behave differently with increasing age. In reaction to a less natural and healthy way of life, and to external circumstances that favor the development of the lower passions, they tend to become more snappish and caustic.

Women who have indulged in sexual relationships become all the more dangerous as they age, the more their temperament is mixed with melancholic elements.

There are so few youthful, lovable, and delightful old women because women's temperament is so often spoiled by clumsy education and all manner of biases in social life.

Source: Eduard Reich, *Studien über die Frauen*. Jena: H. Costenoble, 1875, pp. 182–218 (excerpts). Available online at: <http://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11312885-3>

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