

# Journal article review about sigmund freud

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Larissa J. Taylor-Smith. Elizabeth I: A Psychological Profile. *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Spring, 1984), pp, 47-72 Larissa J. Taylor-Smith's article, Elizabeth I: A Psychological Profile, researches into which factors determined Elizabeth's position as an effective leader and how she achieved success in her reign, despite the odds stacked against her. The text seeks to understand why male attitudes towards ruling women still remained negative despite this successful reign of Elizabeth I.

Moreover, it looks into her childhood and analyses how events shaped her development to make her into a confident woman ruling a man's world. The key argument, maintained throughout the text, is that Sigmund Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex was not fully completed by Elizabeth and so Larissa J. Taylor-Smith suggests that this led to unresolved issues therefore the subconscious psychological issues are what made her rule with masculine traits.

Overall, I found it a simplistic article that doesn't consider other psychological factors or theories that may well provide more substantial evidence to the findings as well as allow the reader a more balanced analysis of Elizabeth's psychological profile. Taylor-Smith begins her argument by evaluating Elizabeth's childhood between the Oral (0-2 years) and Anal (2-3 years) developmental years. It combines the events of Anne Boleyn's death and the consequential lack of love from her father as the key reasons why Elizabeth could not complete her Oedipus complex development.

In Freud's interpretation of the theory he links it the development of the superego " which uses guilt to prevent continuation of incestuously oriented relationships. " Taylor-Smith then relates this to Elizabeth in that her being

unable to complete the process she constantly uses the said guilt as a way of remaining out of conjugal relationships. It also looks into other aspects that played into the Oedipus complex being unresolved such as the change Lady Bryan's (Elizabeth's carer) attention when Edward was born.

It is suggested that Elizabeth learnt the lesson: maleness is what counts, through this change in Lady Bryan's responsibilities. Furthermore, the complex is unresolved as Elizabeth no longer has a satisfactory female model and therefore she is only left with masculine identification. The article also includes Karen Harney's theory that without a suitable female role model Elizabeth developed a dread of pregnancy and childbirth as well as Anna Freud's 'identification with the aggressor' theory; Freud suggests it could be a normal aspect of development in Elizabeth's character or it could well be the outcome of unresolved Oedipal conflicts.

The article continues to take interest in key aspects of Elizabeth's life such as the Seymour scandal which, is said to have come about because when he married Katherine Parr, Elizabeth felt personal disappointment and was outraged by propriety, particularly as he proposed to her before the marriage. This became her first tentative exploration of male to female relationships however it led Elizabeth to disgrace as well as Seymour's death. This had repercussions of her childhood and therefore it must be from this event that the article argues Elizabeth's attitudes on marriage and childbearing had been decided.

Mary I's accession marked a great period of personal change for Elizabeth as Mary's mistakes reinforced her humanism beliefs as well as her attitude on marriage. Elizabeth's imprisonment in Mary's reign proved beneficial as she

turned to her studies and learned a cautious and dissembling approach to politics and diplomacy. Therefore, Taylor-Smith suggests Elizabeth ruled as the only way she knew how: as a man. Taylor-Smith also puts forward ideas that Elizabeth had an attachment to Henrican models as well as having intentions to restore religion as her father left it.

There are also implications that she enjoyed her position of being in control of men however it is contradictory to the article's view of how she feels about men. It suggests she has feelings of identification, love, hate, fear and guilt which are brought about with her interactions with other men, such as Robert Dudley, where once again Elizabeth suffered more disgrace in a possible relationship. The final area the article develops is that Elizabeth's last years were marked by the loss of lifelong colleagues and friends.

It again links to the Oedipus as the reason for her melancholia which "... extend[s]...beyond the clear case of a loss by death, and include[s] all those situations of being slighted, neglected or disappointed. " The article, overall, suggests it was the combination of drastic and emotional changes in her life that shaped her into the person and ruler that she became. It is also suggested that Elizabeth's personal beliefs closely resembled her father's; that she enjoyed her position of control over men as well as exhibiting masculine traits of dominance, aggression and fearlessness.

These are all factors of the Oedipus complex and so are the actual effects of this incomplete process in its allowance for her to function comfortably on a masculine level. The article applies a twentieth-century psychoanalytic theory as a way of understanding Elizabeth's development which is an interesting approach as this may well provide some new ground on what

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affected Elizabeth to be one of the most prominent monarchs in English history.

The approach also maintains its depth by looking at her “ psychological traumata at critical stages in Elizabeth’s life”. The combination of looking at a specific time of her life, her childhood which is when we are most impressionable, and combining it with modern theory should provide an accurate picture of how Elizabeth became the woman she was. However, the article only applies one modern psychological thesis of the Oedipus complex and fails to consult other theories, which may be relevant, on a regular basis.

The structure of the argument reflects a sense that the author is trying to apply later events of Elizabeth’s life to the complex rather than the complex being completely relevant to the events in her life. “ She was obviously suffering from melancholia, a depressive state linked in theory to Oedipal disturbances which ‘...extend[s]...beyond the clear case of a loss by death’”. This quote is a clear example of trying to place Elizabeth’s life in the Oedipus complex when in modern psychology there have been theories for suffering from melancholia at an old age because of the deaths of a partner or friends.

The article does make the most out of primary sources that relate to the time period by using original letters and Elizabeth’s own work to interpret her psychological profile. There is quite prominent secondary sources that have been used to develop her own ideas and incorporate the use of other historians of this era, “...Scarisbrick calls Elizabeth ‘...the most unwelcome royal daughter... in English history. ’” This is encouraging for the audience as they can see there is a wide range of material quoted as she also quotes other psychological sources.

On the other hand, it is clear from the footnoting that there is more quoted for the historical context of the article than there is for the psychological aspects. There is only Sigmund Freud; the psychologist Erikson who focuses on childhood developments and Juliet Mitchel's book: *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. The article uses these sources effectively to strengthen her argument surrounding the Oedipus complex however they are not used often enough to maintain a strong argument.

The article also fails to consult historian's point of view on Elizabeth's psychological profile which is a fatal downfall in the legitimacy of the article's claims; it is these historians' point of view and findings that will be able to make the article's argument legitimate. Such as when Taylor-Smith argues that with the death of Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, caused emotional and psychological issues within the Oedipus complex because, " as Elizabeth must have begun to experience hostile feelings for her mother and desire for her father, her mother was permanently removed through her father's actions.

This statement could then either be backed up or disproved by different historians as Susan Doran suggests that there were no physical signs of Elizabeth showing distress over the death of her mother and that her health remained good. She suggests that there was no emotional void. This then disproves Taylor-Smith's ideas of the psychological and emotional imbalance in Elizabeth because the complex could not be completed. Whereas, David Starkey suggests instead that Anne's death was a terrible blow to Elizabeth and that her father's role was just as terrible as it became treason to even mention Anne Boleyn's name.

He also suggests that the silence Elizabeth held on her mother was the result of her repressing the trauma of the situation and that perhaps it was too hurtful for a conscious mind to acknowledge. His ideas on the situation then supports Taylor-Smith's ideas on the Oedipus complex as both ideas are dealing with subconscious effects on Elizabeth and so Taylor-Smith could have used this to strengthen her argument and make her point clearer, particularly when the Oedipus complex has no physical or substantial evidence that proves it exists.

The article also has a great understanding and depth of the main events that surrounded Elizabeth's life as " it is unnecessary to examine all aspects of Elizabethan policy...Certain key issues will be highlighted. " Therefore, the audience is more accepting of the information and creates a strong argument as Taylor-Smith is focusing on depth and detail thus creating a legitimate argument. On the other hand, although there is depth the interpretations presented in the article is regularly one sided and offer no other possible interpretations that may be found. That subjects should presume to judge their sovereign was unthinkable to Elizabeth, who felt she was being asked to sanction an inverted order. " This is all the opinion Taylor-Smith has to offer and it is also nonsensical to presume that Elizabeth though this anyway as it is general knowledge that everyone is judged and that monarchs are exempt from this preposterous. It is also unrealistic to presume this opinion as Elizabeth was constantly judged on a daily basis and not just by her subjects but by powers abroad too.

Overall, it is a well written article that has great potential for influencing new ideas and ways of interpreting Elizabeth's psychological profile yet the one

greatest failings of the article is the constant need to apply all evidence toward one thesis: the Oedipus complex. It has fantastic primary and secondary sources to consult and strengthen their views however it doesn't impress with the actual psychological analysis, as the Oedipus complex has no physical evidence to support its existence; all other psychological evidence is legitimate.

To summarise, it would be a strong substantial argument which many would readily accept however it doesn't use other psychological theories to its advantage. Nor does it consult enough of other historians' views as they may not be psychologists but they ultimately understand Elizabeth on a high level and use their intellect to draw them to their own conclusions. Therefore it is a recommended and insightful piece into Elizabeth's psychological profile however it is advisable not to accept all ideas and concepts within it and to question the article's entirety.