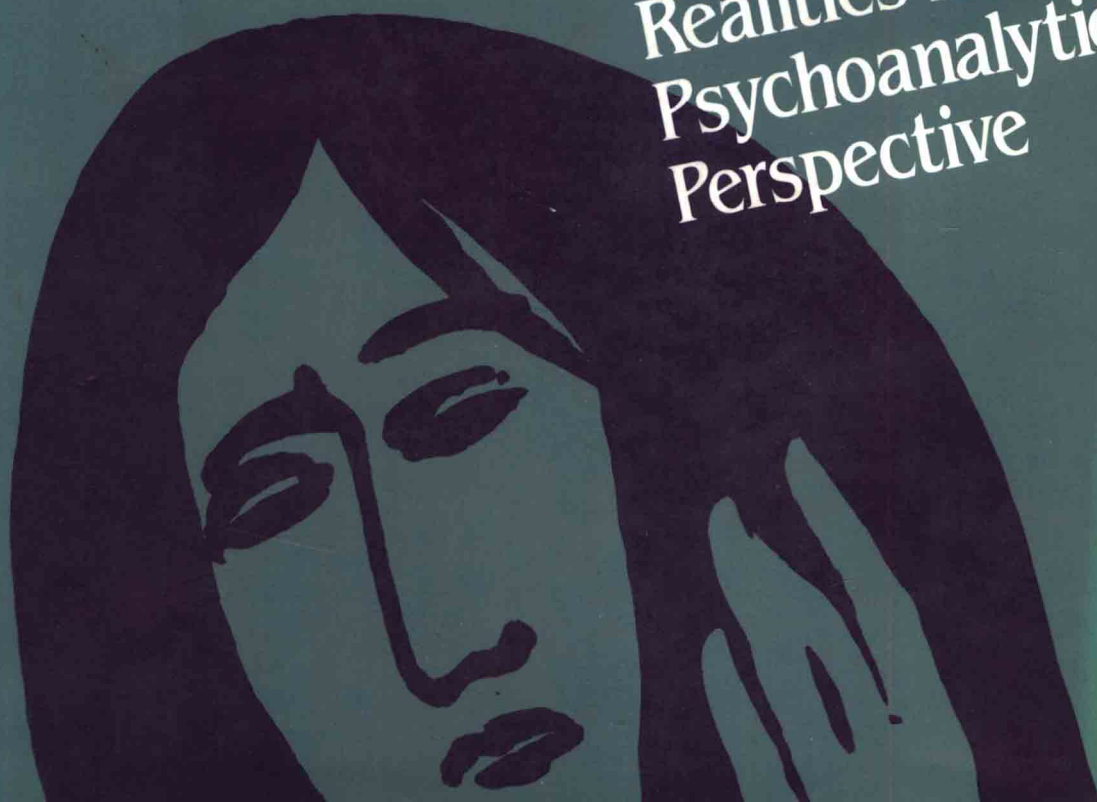


REUBEN FINE
**Troubled
Women**

Roles and
Realities in
Psychoanalytic
Perspective



TROUBLED WOMEN

Roles and Realities in Psychoanalytic Perspective



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PREFACE

When I began thinking about a companion work to *Troubled Men*, the natural topic was women. Freud's famous question—What does a woman want?—has been echoed and reechoed throughout history. Many answers have been forthcoming, but all raise an even more fundamental question: What is inherent in being a woman? In this book, on the basis of numerous case histories as well as a study of the literature, I have offered an answer to this question.

In psychoanalysis I have formulated the problem in terms of the analytic ideal, which states that any woman or man attains the greatest degree of happiness if she or he is able to love, has a healthy sex life, has pleasure in general (rather than pain), has feelings yet is guided by reason, is part of a family, is part of the social order, enjoys work, can communicate, has creative outlets, and is free from psychiatric symptomatology.

Looked at in this way, psychoanalysis represents a theory of happiness that makes sense to a large number of human beings. It cuts through political systems and economic arrangements to get to the heart of what makes human beings happy. Many instances have been cited in the text where defiance of this fundamental order has led to much unhappiness, while obedience to this scheme leads to much happiness.

Women are made, not born, and how they are made depends most heavily on the circumstances of their parents' lives. I adhere strictly to Freudian theory, that the kind of woman a woman becomes can be gauged most directly from her sources, from the influences that helped to shape her in the early part of her life. I do

not feel it necessary to hold on to some purely artificial theory of what women and men are, as many feminists seem to wish to do. That this is not the usual image of Freudian theory is a fact that I can deplore but cannot correct.

In its more scientific aspect, the women's liberation literature says essentially the same things (see Chodorow's *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*).

I present numerous clinical illustrations in this book to demonstrate how change can be effected in practice. The names of the individuals described in the cases have been changed to preserve anonymity. In addition, the details of the clinical material have been changed in nonessential ways to protect the identities of the individuals involved. *No direct reference to any particular person is intended or implied.*

Overview of the Contents

Chapter One provides a historical overview of men's attempts to define women's role in society—attempts that have been little more than methods of rationalizing the mistreatment of women. For the most part, men's views of women have been grossly distorted by the assumption that women are innately inferior to men. Since the eighteenth century, women's struggles for control of their lives have centered on the attack on this innatist view. As this chapter shows, the advent of psychoanalysis in the late nineteenth century gave women new ammunition in the fight for equality.

As the discussion in Chapter Two shows, the ends of women's liberation and psychoanalysis are essentially the same: liberation of the woman to achieve her own destiny. However, feminists have shortchanged many women by leaving marriage and motherhood out of the equation. The psychoanalytic ideal is to pursue the best solution for the individual woman, rather than for all women.

It is generally considered that love is more important to women than to men, especially romantic love. Chapter Three traces the problems women can have with love, including love for the mother, adolescent love, and romantic love. Contradictory aspects of love are examined as well.

Although love cannot truly be separated from sexuality, it

can be useful to consider them in isolation from one another. Chapter Four begins with an overview of Western attitudes (mostly repressive) toward female sexuality and goes on to examine the range of sexual problems that are presented in analysis, including rejection of sex, the adjustment neurosis, promiscuity and sexual experimentation, and sex for the older woman.

The biological basis of womanhood is the capacity to bear children. If this capacity is thwarted, it can lead to serious consequences for the woman. Chapter Five examines a variety of the problems women can face in becoming mothers.

The woman's first attachment is to her mother; the second is to her father. Chapter Six explores the consequences for the girl of inability to detach herself from her early love for her father. Problems can arise if the father is too seductive toward his daughter, but they are equally possible if he is too distant or passive.

Chapter Seven examines the phenomenon of the entertainer as a consequence of inability to get over early attachment to the father. Many women performers (actresses, singers, and dancers) spend their whole lives trying to please their fathers by entertaining surrogate fathers (the audience). However, it is possible for entertainers to mature past this extreme attachment to the father.

Once a woman has separated herself from her mother and father, many other attachments (and losses) become possible. Desertion, death, sudden life shifts (such as marriage), and birth make up the bulk of such situations. Chapter Eight shows how inability to handle these attachments and losses can make it impossible for a woman to lead a healthy life.

Since societies are traditionally organized around marriage, single women commonly face social and psychological difficulties. Chapter Nine begins with an overview of the financial difficulties faced by the single woman today and proceeds to an examination of how the single woman can combine love and work in her life. Needless to say, the issue of when and if to have children is a major one for the single woman.

Similar problems are faced by the divorced woman, whose situation is the subject of Chapter Ten. Many divorced women feel very bitter toward men following their divorce, and this anger can cause all kinds of difficulties in their lives. This chapter also exam-

ines the issue of extramarital sex, which is often a major factor in a divorce.

Chapter Eleven is a recapitulation of the analytic ideal for women's lives and an examination of how this ideal helps them live in a healthy fashion. Three women's lives are probed in depth to illuminate the origins of their psychological problems and their resolution of those problems.

Chapter Twelve turns again to the basic questions posed by this book: What is inherent in being a woman? What does it take to be fulfilled as a woman? The failure of the women's movement to set up an ideal broad enough for all women is treated in more depth, and it becomes clear that it is through psychoanalysis rather than feminism that the individual woman can most effectively find her way to a healthy life.

I wish to express my thanks to my wife Marcia for her constant encouragement and persistence, as well as to my secretary for her expert typing of the manuscript.

New York, New York
December 1991

Reuben Fine

THE AUTHOR

REUBEN FINE is a psychotherapist in private practice in New York City and director of the Consultation Center. Formerly, he was visiting professor at Adelphi University, director of the Center for Creative Living, and director of the New York Center for Psychoanalytic Training. He received his B.S. (1933) and M.S. (1939) degrees from the City University of New York, and his Ph.D. degree (1948) in clinical psychology from the University of Southern California.

Fine has long been active in the American Psychological Association (APA) and has been an APA fellow since 1955. He was president of the division of psychotherapy (1966–1967), a member of the council of representatives (1968–1970 and 1980–1983), and organizer and first president of the division of psychoanalysis (1979).

The author of numerous books, the latest of which is *Troubled Men* (1988), Fine also has served on a number of editorial boards and as consulting and honorary editor of such journals as *Psychotherapy*, *Book Forum*, *History of Childhood Quarterly*, *Journal of Psychoanalytic Psychology*, and *Current Issues in Psychoanalytic Practice*.

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1 | The Attack on the Traditional Role

From time immemorial, women have been seen as *inferior* to men in most societies. Greek and Roman authorities took the male as the standard and saw the female as an inferior variation. In his treatise on reproduction, Aristotle wrote that the female is as it were a deformed male and stated that the menstrual discharge is semen, though in an impure condition. The second century Greek physician Galen even argued, if it can be called that, that women were men turned outside in. (The ovaries, in this view, were smaller, less perfect testes.)

The ancients further claimed that the womb wandered around the body. The womb, according to Plato, when remaining unfruitful long beyond its proper time, gets discontented and angry, and wandering in every direction through the body, closes up the passages of the breath, and by obstructing respiration, drives them to extremity causing all varieties of disease. The notion that the wandering uterus causes all manner of diseases in the woman's body lingered on until the twentieth century, when it was finally demolished by Freud and his contemporaries.

The image of the woman's body as inadequate has persisted right into modern times. In nineteenth century America, for example, woman was seen as inherently weak, with the major seat of her weakness being the sexual apparatus, particularly the vagina. Various devices were invented to cure the "sick" vagina, including such horrible methods as applying leeches to the woman's private parts.

How have these erroneous views about women and women's bodies gained ground and sustained themselves over the centuries?

In their book, *The Search for Woman*, which traces the evolution of ideas about the nature of women, H. C. Marlow and H. M. Davis argue that Christianity played a powerful role in this process.

First came the influence of the early Christian Fathers. In their view, women were intrinsically evil and men ought to avoid them; when men were unable to do so, the Fathers advised them to assert sufficient authority over women for self-protection. The Church Fathers frowned on marriage because during the act of sexual intercourse a man could not pray or receive the sacrament. Although Jerome did not actually condemn marriage, he subordinated it to virginity and widowhood. Tertullian, however, called women the devil's gateway through which death entered the world. Origen even had himself castrated to free himself from the temptations of the flesh.

Obviously these Church Fathers were seriously disturbed men, and their hatred of women had disastrous consequences for the world when the Church became a dominant power in the Middle Ages. Hildebrand, a monk who spent his life promoting chastity among men, especially the clergy, was known as a man filled with hatred and ambition.

The Dominance of Innatism

Olive Dunbar, a feminist and free-lance writer, believes that the various theories about women have left them without a well-defined role and mankind without general agreement on the nature of women. At various times and places—sometimes even simultaneously—women have been treated as a superhuman, an instrument for pleasure, a thing of evil, a household servant, or a superbly egocentric being. Greenson writes that the struggle for identification is more difficult for women than for men because of the hatred women have been subjected to in the past (Greenson, 1978).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, innatism—essentially, the idea that women are innately inferior to men—dominated thought in both Europe and America. The struggle for feminine freedom centers around the elaborations of this idea of innatism and the attacks on it.

The innatist view rests on real and assumed physical differ-

ences between the sexes. Men are superior because they are straight and angular, women inferior because they are curved and rounded. Women are assumed to have a delicate nervous system requiring medical treatment—a view that can still be seen today in the readiness of some doctors to prescribe tranquilizers and other neuroleptic drugs for women. Innatists appealed to the Bible to confirm their views. One clergyman noted that the Book of Revelations proclaimed that there would be silence in heaven for the space of half an hour—surely, he argued, that was possible only in the absence of women.

On the psychological side, woman was made out to be a nonperson. In his *Commentaries*, Blackstone wrote that “the husband and wife [are] one person in law, that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of her husband. . . . For this reason a man cannot grant anything to his wife, or enter into a covenant with her; for the grant would suppose her separate existence; and to covenant with her would be only to covenant with himself” (Blackstone, 1966, p. 442). In other words, at marriage, the woman’s legal standing as a person was destroyed, and she was subsumed into the legal personality of her husband.

With the Enlightenment these misogynistic theories took another form. Rousseau, in his novel *Emile*, argued that only if the woman is revered as the throne of sensuality can the sexes be equal physically; otherwise the woman, having less physical strength than the man, will be subject to a life of rape.

Surprisingly, Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theories also urged the inferiority of women, especially his theory of sexual selection. In human beings, he believed, neither age, temperament, social position, nor any other factor approached the scope of the differences caused by the dissimilarity in men’s and women’s sexual natures. In his *Folkways*, William Sumner found sexual selection of crucial importance because the division of responsibilities between the sexes had such vast political and economic implications. In his view, specialization endowed each sex with different but complementary abilities from birth, making equality an “incongruous predicate.” The human female was seen as the passive factor in the evolutionary process. Darwinists showed that while sexual selection

was the prerogative of the male among higher animals, among lower animals it was the female that possessed the power of sexual selection and the male that exhibited secondary sexual characteristics to attract the female. Carl Vogt, the Geneva scholar, even felt that the woman, being closer to the animal world, provided a model for studying the link between man and ape.

Darwinian theories fueled interest in the field of eugenics. As the study of eugenics advanced, more people supported controlling the evolution of the race, the trademark of the eugenic societies. It is only recently that these arguments from evolution have been abandoned, or at least relegated to a secondary role. With the development of anthropology, it became the general belief that women's natures are determined more by their culture than by biology, although obviously the two must interact. The balance between them remains an open question. Indeed, the current vogue in the field of sociobiology is an attempt to redress what some sociobiologists consider an overemphasis on culture, even as the emphasis on culture was initially an attempt to redress the Darwinian overemphasis on biology.

In all these discussions of women, the question arose: How would the race continue if women refused to bear children? In 1916, two severe critics of feminism, Mr. and Mrs. John Martin, deplored the fact that women hungry for college degrees and self-fulfillment outside the home during their childbearing years forfeited maternity. According to them, nature implanted a strong sex urge in man in order to avoid racial extinction, but woman, with a feebler sex drive, had no such safeguard. Many eugenicists lamented the trend of declining fertility and advocated winning women over to the idea of a large family, but in this century women have, generally speaking, been reluctant to go back to the large families that were so common earlier.

The innatist argument had something to say about woman's intellectual capacities as well. According to early medieval treatises, the direct relationship between the woman's weak physique and her brain caused her very active mind, if unrestrained, to overtax her delicate nervous system by a constant demand for a rapid flow of sense data that her softer and smaller muscles could not shut down. The vogue of phrenology in the early part of the nineteenth century

reinforced the belief in mental differences between the sexes and female inferiority.

Overall, the innatist consensus was that the mental powers of women were circumscribed by female reason, wit, imagination, curiosity, memory, and imitation. The widespread acceptance of a limited female mind laid the rationale for restricting woman's opportunities in society. This belief in the inability of the feminine mind to perform like the masculine mind led to separate education for the two sexes. Women themselves suggested various changes in education. Abigail Adams, wife of the second president, suggested the need for a new approach to feminine education. In a letter to her husband, John, she said she could hear of the brilliant accomplishments of her sex with pleasure but at the same time she regretted the trifling, narrow, contracted educational females of her own country" (Withey, 1981).

Even psychoanalysts have been influenced by these hoary ideas. The nineteenth century psychologist William James adhered to the theory that women mature early, men late. In 1890 he argued that the woman of twenty had a firm, intuitive grasp of life with permanent likes and dislikes; for all practical purposes she was a finished product. Freud as well, whose views on women have by and large been superseded by later knowledge, claimed that the thirty-year-old man retained youthfulness and was still choosing and developing the possibilities before him, while a woman of the same age almost frightened observers with her "psychological rigidity and unchangeability" (Freud, [1933] 1964, p. 134). It was as if she had no paths open, as if the difficult development of femininity had exhausted all the possibilities of the individual.

The common-sense "proof" of woman's innate sexual nature has always been strong, and innatists have often claimed that women's inescapable fate from the creation of Eve was to be feminine in character. According to innatists, a person had only to observe a young girl and boy to quickly perceive that they are distinctive human beings developing in different directions and with different motivations. Although innatists were unanimous in their view of woman's instinctive sexual character, two conflicting views on the value of femininity existed at the end of the eighteenth century. One group of innatists emphasized the evilness of woman's character