

Josefina Figueira-McDonough
& Rosemary Sarri, editors

The Trapped Woman

Catch-22 in Deviance and Control



The Trapped Woman

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For our daughters
Cathy, Graça, Julia and Kristen

PREFACE

In the past century women have joined together to form two powerful movements to bring about major social change. From the 1840s until 1920 women organized to achieve suffrage and equal rights in the voting place. Then, in the 1960s women joined together to achieve gender equality. The latter movement is still underway, and this book was written in the context of that continuing movement. The debate over women's rights is an important one, and one that has provoked much controversy. We hope that this book will inform the debate. The issues are contentious and challenge traditional values long held by many persons in positions of power.

Two particular concerns motivated us to organize this book. We both have had a long-standing interest in gender and deviance and felt that the literature in this area needed further clarification from the perspective of the rights of women. Through the centuries women have built their lives within the constraints of various economic, political, and social structures. Contemporary gendered societies, although costly for women, tend to have the legitimacy of an established order and a resilience born of fear of change. We have tried to alert the reader to the consequences of a gender-unequal order and to the mechanisms sustaining it.

We also wished to provide literature which would be of interest and benefit to policy makers and practitioners as well as to students and scholars. Such an effort is inevitably problematic—only the readers can tell us whether or not it has accomplished the dual objectives.

This book is the result of the collective effort of many people: the several authors who contributed their ideas and wealth of experience, the several editors and the publisher, the various readers and critics, and the many colleagues, students, and teachers from whom we have benefited over many years. Their comments and criticisms have all been helpful to us as we have attempted to clarify our thinking about gender, deviance, and social control. We are deeply grateful to the authors who contributed chapters to this

book; each of them struggled with our suggestions as we sought to clarify the sociological conceptualization and achieve some integration among the various areas. However, as the two primary editors and authors, we bear the ultimate responsibility for its contents.

We hope that this book will sensitize the reader to the position of women and the United States in the 1980s and will encourage them to initiate and support policies and programs for change in the social structures that perpetuate the subordinate status of women and the many Catch-22 situations.

To Margaret Lourie, Mary Frank Fox, and William Barton we give our special thanks for their help in editing this volume. Most of all we are deeply grateful to Deborah Eddy who typed and retyped this manuscript with kindness, cooperation, and friendship that both of us truly value. Finally, we particularly acknowledge the support and encouragement of our spouses, Peter and Romilos, and of our daughters—Cathy, Graça, Julia, and Kristen. Without their patience and forbearance it would not have been possible.

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Ann Arbor, Michigan

January 1987

CHAPTER 1

CATCH-22 STRATEGIES OF CONTROL AND THE DEPRIVATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Josefina Figueira-McDonough

Rosemary C. Sarri

Although numerically the majority of the population, women are a minority group in terms of their power and influence in the United States. They are a minority group in the sociological sense because of the individual and collective discrimination that they experience and because of their inability to resist being either thought of or treated as inferior. Whenever power discrepancies between the dominant and the dominated group are great, even the majority of the population can be treated as a minority (e.g., blacks in South Africa or Catholics in Northern Ireland).

Ever since the midnineteenth century women's rights have been an important political issue. First, women fought for equal treatment for blacks as they fought for their own right to vote. But it took them until 1920 to achieve the latter, and equal rights for women are still not a reality in 1986, almost a century after the Fourteenth Amendment was passed.

This book addresses the present status of gender inequality and its relationship to being defined as deviant and subjected to social control in ways that will prevent the attainment of equality. In the various sectors of society that are examined, the dominant group maintains inequality through their control of the deviance-defining and social control institutions.

Our objective is to unveil gender differences that persist in a variety of social institutions. Some of the differences might at first appear minor or natural, but in fact they have snowballing effects on the status of the majority of women. For example, the widespread acceptance of the "nurturant" vocation of women comes to determine their assigned duties and obligations in a variety of social arenas and ultimately to limit their equal access to social rights.

While progress in gender equalization has been made (for example, in the number of women professionals), there are important gaps that have not been closed; often they are not even fully acknowledged. Gender equalization refers to both equality in

numbers and in relative power of the statuses and roles of women in society. We view the persistence of those gaps as obstacles to the equalization process; they threaten the progress already made. Eleanor Holmes Norton (1985) contends that only continuing and diligent effort will ensure the pursuit of policies for affirmative action and comparable worth, both of which are necessary if women are to obtain equal justice.

In the Durkheimian tradition we contend that normative enforcement of gender-specific roles is a function of the strength of the definitions of deviance attached to them. Internal and external sanctions against deviant behavior reinforce normative behavior. There is a growing literature on the relationship between gender-role constraints, female subcultures, women's patterns of association, and attachment networks with women's deviant behavior (e.g., Cloward and Piven 1979; Harris 1977; Figueira-McDonough 1980; Hutter and Williams 1981). While this is relevant to the discussion in this book, our focus is on the use of deviance as a control mechanism. We argue that historically persistent restrictions on women's rights can be understood from this perspective because: (a) definitions of deviance impose restrictions on the rights of those labeled deviants; (b) women are often viewed as "all-purpose deviants"; and (c) extensive definitions of deviance trap women in no-win situations.

THE SOCIAL CONTROL PERSPECTIVE

Attribution, conflict and control theories of deviance are particularly useful for an interpretation of women's "inferior" status in society. Collectively these theories construe deviance as a social definition which results in negative personal and social status. Thus they provide the rationale for an analysis of social control as a strategy to bar powerless groups (in this case, women) from access to a variety of resources.

A quick examination of the tenets of these theories highlights their relevance to the thesis of this book. The basic postulate they share is that deviance is not a property inherent in certain forms of behavior but a property conferred upon persons by a social audience (Becker 1963; Erickson 1962). If definitions of deviance are socially created, the relevant questions become: by whom, for what, and how?

Study of the historical patterns and processes through which definitions of deviance emerge and become institutionalized indicates

that they tend to be imposed on the powerless by the powerful (Rothman 1980; Thompson 1977; Foucault 1975). Radical and conflict sociologists further argue the self-serving nature of this phenomenon. The purpose of creating and controlling deviance is to protect the interests of the dominant classes and to prevent access to their resources by outsiders (Quinney 1977).

To be complete, this "domination model" of deviance must explain how it can be implemented. Historical evidence does not support sustained enforcement of deviance definitions; therefore, questions about acceptance by social groups and the deviants themselves have to be answered. Deviant definitions must be justified, reinforced by institutions and then accepted. The control perspective proposes at least two ways through which this may be accomplished. The process of justification depends on defining deviant groups as different and inferior in one or more dimensions (Page 1984; Schur 1983); and second, the institutionalization of differential treatment of these groups results in the internalization of the deviance label and adjustment of their behavior to this self-definition (Schur 1983; Kitsuse 1962; Lemert 1964). Given highly stratified societies with conflicting interests, deviance and the control apparatus are created to prevent the powerless from pursuing their interests, particularly if that pursuit involves gaining access to resources monopolized by the powerful. Outlawing strikes at the onset of the labor movement in this country and the failure to pass the ERA amendment stand as examples of this argument. Furthermore, to the extent that the agents of control belong to the dominating group, an overall system of devaluation of the powerless group can easily be implemented. Schur (1983) contends that male control of deviance labeling (in the criminal system, mental health system, schools, work) results in their continued dominance in most spheres of life.

In sum, within this perspective the justification for the use of control strategies that limit the rights of certain groups depends on their characterization as deviants (e.g., denial of full citizenship by the criteria of the period and place). Examples abound regarding control of labor, religious, political, and ethnic groups (e.g., the barring of landless or illiterate individuals from voting, women from ownership of property, Jews from political participation, communists from public office, unionized workers from jobs, "promiscuous" poor from welfare, etc.).

There is a heuristic utility to this perspective on the study of gender inequality in society because the deprivation of rights of

women as a group has been historically justified by their definition as inferior human beings. At present, the evidence of little change in patterns of equity in such areas as work, family responsibilities, political access, and legal rights is well documented (Matthei 1982; Treiman and Hartman 1981; Powell and Jacobs 1984; Weitzman 1985; Anderson 1983; England 1984; Stallard et al. 1983). This stagnation has continued in spite of reported attitudinal support for gender equalization, affirmative action, feminist activism, and some favorable legislation (Cherlin and Walters 1981; Figueira-McDonough 1985; Herzog and Bachman 1982; Mason et al. 1976; Parelius 1975; Thornton and Freedman 1979; Thornton et al. 1983). If women have been and are as a group deprived of rights, it is important to investigate the definitions (deviant) and social arrangements (control) that perpetuate their position as social outsiders (Cohen and Scull 1983). Since definitions of deviance legitimate social controls, they are potentially efficient means to perpetuate women's second class citizenship and reduced access to resources.

In line with the theories of deviance reviewed here, a group's deprivation of rights can be interpreted as a reflection of their imputed inferiority or deviance. This in turn justifies the creation of controls barring that group from access to rights. The validity of this argument in explaining gender inequality depends on (1) the evidence supporting the attribution of social inferiority to the status of womanhood, (2) the uncovering of control mechanisms directly related to that definition of womanhood, and (3) the identification of the effect of such controls on the deprivation of rights.

NATURALLY DIFFERENT AND UNEQUAL

The constraints on women's rights can be interpreted as a function of the successful definition of women as different and inferior to men. As Simone de Beauvoir (1948) pointed out,

This humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself, but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being....She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other. (86)

Declaring Women Different. To understand the maintenance of women's status one needs to analyze the specific

content of socially constructed relationships between the sexes. The complex set of shared images and conceptions that are stereotypically attributed to women are mediated and maintained in a variety of ways. Once the image of "normal woman" gains ascendance, it becomes part of the formation and implementation of social policy and shapes day-to-day relations among individuals. For example, opposition to state programs in child care has been based on the assumption that "normal" mothers are involved full time in the care of their children in spite of available evidence that nearly half of the women with children participate full time in the labor force.

Sex role norms clearly differentiate men from women. When these norms become internalized, they are accepted as facts and seldom questioned. Goffman (1977: 303) refers to gender ideals as the essential source for maintaining gender differences. These ideals, he argues, "provide...a source of accounts that can be drawn in a million ways to exercise, justify, explain, or disapprove the behavior of an individual or the arrangement under which he lives." When norms are not explicit or clearly articulated, or are undergoing change, problems emerge. For example, sex role norms are changing in the workplace as more and more men and women work together in similar positions. Women may be in supervisory positions over men with roles that require assertive and executive behavior which some men find difficult to accept or tolerate because of contrasting perspectives internalized earlier by men.

The assigning of inferior group status starts with the imputation of categorical difference, because awareness of similarities is conducive to empathy and therefore an obstacle to discrimination (Goodin 1985). Schur's (1983) analysis of womanhood as stigma is very important in this context. He argues that womanhood has the characteristics of a master status. In all types of interactions a master status leads to a categorization that precedes and dominates all others. He argues that females in any type of situation, as well as in roles and positions involving a variety of attributes and actions, are first and foremost categorized as women. This predominant classification then characterizes the processes of stigmatization (Page 1984). It is not unusual for media coverage of public women to pay greater attention to their physical appearance and family roles as compared to public men. The descriptor of "attractive looking" was frequently used when Geraldine Ferraro was first introduced to the nation, and the investigation of her husband's finances had no parallel in the history of American politics. Her gender made her, rather than

Walter Mondale, the target of the furor of the prolife movement despite the fact that she had a more qualified position on abortion than Mondale. The usual perceptual filters of femaleness (sexual and family roles) set her apart from other candidates.

According to Page (1984), stigma is harder to resist when the referent deviant characteristic is highly visible (color, sex) and when it serves to define a category of people (e.g., caste or tribal stigmatization). He further contends that in instances of tribal stigmatization the members become socialized into the disadvantageous situation even while they are learning and incorporating those standards against which they supposedly fall short.

There is little question that to a large extent women born into a gendered society have developed characteristics different from men. Awareness of this permeates the feminist literature. In Komarovsky's (1953) words, "to be born a woman means to inhabit, from early infancy to the last day of life, a psychological world which differs from the world of men." To this As (1980) adds her observation that "women live in such a different economic, cultural and social world from men that their reactions cannot be understood from a master model developed in male society" (149). Millet (1970), long a fighter for gender equality, elaborates the same point, "Because of our social circumstances, male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different."

What is in question is not the existence of gender differences but the extent to which such differences justify restrictive role assignments to each gender. There is little disagreement regarding the cultural construction of gender, but there are conflicting views on the role biological factors play in such development. Some authors argue that beyond genitalia the objective sex differences are minimal. There is greater variance of other attributes within each sex than between the sexes (Maccoby and Jacklyn 1974; Fausto-Sterling 1986). Other scholars such as Rossi and associates (1983) contend that some biological differences are systematically prevalent between sexes but do not propose that gender roles are biologically determined.

Gender categorical differentiation is maintained when male-female similarities are played down and the within-group differences homogenized. This can be accomplished by assigning very limited normative roles to the stigmatized group. Women's roles will be more limited than those assigned to men. On the other