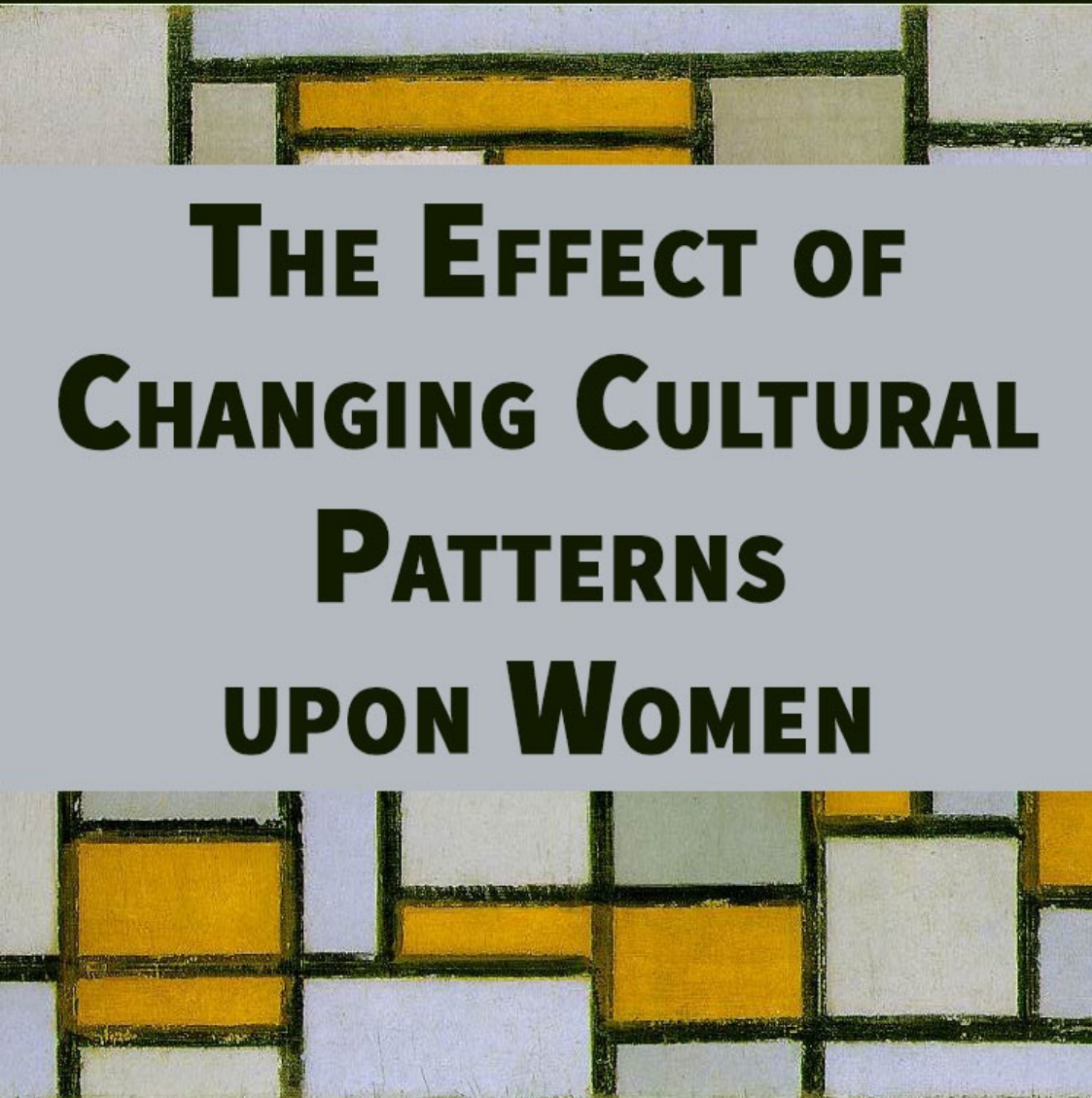


NATALIE SHAINNESS



**THE EFFECT OF
CHANGING CULTURAL
PATTERNS
UPON WOMEN**

American Handbook of Psychiatry

The Effect of Changing Cultural Patterns Upon Women

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The Effect of Changing Cultural Patterns Upon Women

It is generally agreed that the changes of the last decade have been so great that their extent is hardly recognized. The scientific advances alone are said to equal or exceed those of the last century, which in itself was remarkable. All human beings have experienced massive changes, and any specific changes affecting women have also affected men. Man and woman are interdependent, and each affects the balance and movement of the other.

Before considering the changes that appear to be specific to women, it is necessary to consider the major changes of the decade—the effect of technology and the mass media. In *The New People* Winick has observed changes in personality and social life that reflect a “massive shift of human consciousness.” He feels the “new people” have taken over the world, participating in the destruction of old concepts of identity, sexuality, and ways of living. He suggests that the most radical changes of all are in the areas of sexual identity and sex roles, and that the new tone of life—“a bitter, metallic existence”—may simply not be worth the price of living it. He comments that all extremes are becoming blurred into neuter—a tendency earlier sensed by both Freud and Erich Fromm in their consideration of Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* and the image of the button-molder. Winick also noted the significance of Playboy-fostered voyeurism, nongenital sex, and the general

lack of sexual passion.

In Slater's *Pursuit of Loneliness* Americans are described as hard, surly, bitter people, fanatically pursuing objects although already surfeited by them, and thus postponing (avoiding?) living. Slater describes the emotional and intellectual poverty of the housewife's role—one that often delivers the *coup de grace* to her early promise.

Arieti has noted a new type of alienation, which he distinguishes from the first type characteristic of the withdrawn schizophrenic individual, or the second, described by Horney, in which the person is cut off from his own feelings, although there is no other gross abnormality. In Arieti's "new alienation" the individual maintains effective contact with the outer environment and seeks ever more stimulation, but has undergone mutilation in his inner life: "Inner conflicts are denied, introspection is frowned upon . . . the person *bathes* in his environment . . . there are no long-range ideals or goals . . . and at times a new kind of depression occurs characterized by constant demands and claims on others." These claims utilize a projective style, blaming others, and are used by the young in particular to blame "society." Man, Arieti suggests, has become a robot—functioning, one might add, in an overstimulated and undercommitted society.

This conception of current personality and intrapsychic change can be

understood, from a genetic vantage point, as relating to another concept of Arieti's, that of volition. He views the inception of volition in the infant toward the end of the first year of life as the capacity for choice in pleasing self or mother—the inception of the capacity to defer instant gratification, leading to that maturational ability to choose the reality principle over the pleasure principle. Thus this viewpoint suggests that permissive childrearing,^[1] a change of the last two decades or so, in which mothers—and to some extent, fathers—did not “care enough” to engage in the process of resolving infantile grandiosity, has left this generation grandiose, disconnected, undisciplined, doubtful of self- worth, and empty.

So dehumanization and impulsivity are the all-pervasive undercurrents to any changes being considered. Turning to more specific change affecting women, the contrast with the picture of even a decade ago is very great; of course, this refers to Western woman, and particularly the American woman. Traditional stereotypes of the passive, in some ways delicate, woman, preoccupied with her double role as wife and mother, taking on all of the gender tasks assigned her—cooking, cleaning, caring for her children, serving her husband in a multitude of ways, and working outside the home, in the majority of cases, only out of economic necessity—all these are passing.

Fostered by social and technological changes, including the perfecting of contraceptive techniques, the general rise in sexual preoccupation, and

culminating in the women's liberation movement, a new woman is emerging. She rejects the traditional roles described, demanding individual satisfaction and success. Large families are essentially a thing of the past, and the one-child family, with or without a husband and father, is growing in numbers. The high divorce rate has resulted in women spending longer periods of life alone: most men divorce to remarry; women to get free of an unpleasant situation.

The sexual revolution—meaning, for the most part, free and casual sex—is a very real change, although many still tend to deny this. It is rather unique in terms of its genesis. Fostered in good measure very deliberately by SIECUS,^[2] and by the mechanistic and (in my view) methodologically unsound and unproven sex-in-the-laboratory studies and alienated therapy of Masters and Johnson, varied changes have taken place, from lessened guilt and greater freedom for some, to a general tendency to a greater voyeurism and exhibitionism, loss of authenticity, and sexual alienation, on to the setting up of sexual norms that have created new and more damaging demands upon sexual participation, with “forced change.”

While the old double standards have seemingly been abandoned, they are still present in new form, favoring the attractive young woman in her immediate sexual opportunities, but leaving long-range effects still to be appraised, and making marriage a rapidly disappearing option. The distress

for some has been great, noticeable at the university as well as beyond, and reported by patients in treatment.

The emphasis on youth and sexual desirability without regard to the *person* has created problems for the older woman. Whether changing values simply mean that women have to pay a price until new patterns are established, or whether it bodes ill for them ultimately, remains to be seen. Lederer, in *The Fear of Women*, makes a significant and disturbing statement that suggests the latter: "Nuclear Age Woman has reason to be concerned about the threats to these (the family, and her value). . . . Men, glorifying in the new technology, visualizing an eventual mastery over nature, accomplished in their own exuberant feats of strength . . . are no longer part of the mother-goddess scheme of things."

These changes have been part of the ongoing blurring of gender distinctions leading to an androgynous society (no value valence is intended here, as there are many facets to change of this kind). The fading of gender boundaries has been accompanied by fashion change, in the phenomenon of "unisex" clothing and fetishistic styles (the exposed thigh between boot and "hot pants" is a current example) as well as the alienated "hard" and hardware-trimmed space-age type of clothing. Greenson has also observed these changes.

Perhaps toughened by some aspects of the new alienation and student activism, the women's liberation movement has been the greatest single force for change affecting women. It has also been greatly concerned about gender distinctions because these have interfered with woman's status as equals, and studies of gender-role stereotypes have examined the validity of rigid concepts of masculinity and femininity, biologically, psychologically, and socially.

Cultural change has thus affected every aspect of women's lives: the acceptance of gender-role assignments, living style and work, mode of sexual expression, heterosexual relationships including dating style, all aspects of the reproductive function and role including concepts of marriage, family, motherhood and child care, abortion and contraception, and finally gender identity and psychology.

Changing Gender Concepts and Identifications

With regard to changing concepts of gender and gender role today, including sexual role, Erikson has described the “identity diffusion” of youth today—a lack of firm boundaries, or what might be called a failure of complete severance of the original symbiotic mother- child tie. Erikson notes that the process involved in the formation of identity lies at the core of the individual and also at the core of his communal culture. It involves what Sullivan termed “reflected appraisals” and Erikson calls “simultaneous reflection and observation,” the individual judging himself in the perceptions of others and molding himself along those lines. He observed that the media may take a major part in the identity-forming process, usurping the place of parents, and that traditional sources of identity-strength are now only fragments.

Erikson suggests that a new balance of male and female is presaged in the contemporary changes in the relations of the sexes and in the wider awareness spread by the media and technology. He notes the great change between the youth of today and those of 20 years ago. It appears that for many the identity conflict, more hidden than apparent, no longer exists in the same way, but instead it is dramatically displayed in dress. It includes bisexual confusions in sexual identity or a diffusion in which gender distinctions of dress no longer exist: the “hairy, unisex style” is a blatant

challenge to parents and authority. Yet there is also a very positive trend among the young to be more collaborative in household tasks, ignoring previously practiced false gender-role distinctions.

With what will the young identify today? This question is most disturbing. Sent early to day-care centers, perhaps never, even in their earliest moments, savoring the sweet experience of an exclusive loving relationship to their mother, they will start their identification process with the dispassionate day-care worker, the mechanical teacher—be it television or machine. Will they identify with the characters created to titillate or to sell learning, like the squawky Big Bird of “Sesame Street,” or the colored numbers jumping up and down? Perhaps they will identify with the characteristics of power as revealed in the violence on TV, or the visions of protesters and drug addicts paraded on TV and watched repeatedly as a *pleasurable* immersion in our ills, or the violent TV detective shows in which the female human being is being replaced with an image of the “sex-parts female.” Baby dolls have now been replaced with sex dolls, wearing bikinis and sexy clothes. Will their sexual identification be related to all of the pseudo- sex-education films—in or out of school or on TV—in which there is a programmed sexual style and response? Further, these exposures and images appear with ever increasing speed. All suggest the development of a hard, alienated woman who is primarily a sex object, unyielding in interpersonal transactions, and hardly likely to be a nurturant mother. All

women will want to work, even as that work loses meaning in itself and is only a means to an end: passing time and obtaining more *things*.

Neutering Process

The neutering process, one manifestation of which has been considered in relation to the new alienation and identity, contains other elements. As a result of technological growth, overpopulation, the increased size of business organizations, the messages spread by the mass media, the concept of team play, the rebellion against authority, and many other processes, a hatred (not too strong a word) has developed for elitism. A competitive resentment at anyone who rises, in nonconforming ways, above the masses, the denial of expertise and its misinterpretation as authority—all of these represent on a more general level what can also be observed on a sexual level: the denial of difference, the comfort and protection in being identical members of society, like sheep in a flock. In some ways it seems a return to primitive tribalism; for example, rock music, with its insistent beat provoking the loosely paired dance of masturbatory exhibitionism, is a reflection of the neutering.

Fostered by Playboy voyeurism (and its hidden premise: “You can be a man without being potent”), the voyeurism of television-filled lives, and by the exhibitionism of the tidal wave of pornography, young men and women seem arrested in the infantile sexuality of the Freudian pregenital phase; that is, sexual expression has increasingly become what was formerly considered foreplay, including acts also considered perversions. These are fast becoming the total aim in sex; they offer the instant satisfaction of partial sex and

masturbation to those who want to push a button and obtain a response, like buying something from a vending machine. The lack of anticipation, yearning, and passion, the too easy availability, the ocean of “sex-object sex” into which the individual is submerged and seems unwilling or unable to escape, especially the use of sexual innuendo in advertising every product from air travel to chutney, the alienation from the person’s own sentience—all result in this neutering, eliminating gender difference, disguising anatomical difference, and denying qualitative difference in sexual action and experience.

Social Perceptual Change: The Demand for Freedom and Equality

Turning to the adult, the rising expectations of women have accelerated in recent years and are both cause and effect of the women's liberation movement. These expectations apply to the social, sexual, and marital spheres, as well as to work and economic considerations. Sociologist Komarovsky observes that women have been hindered by "the old chestnuts" men have offered, and adds that men's "hostility and arrogance have been disguised as benevolent paternalism." She cites Marynia Farnham as an example of a psychiatric "neoantifeminist" (or Aunt Jane) who views feminine assertion as violating woman's deepest needs—the Freudian glorification of passivity and the child-penis equation supposedly characterizing feminine psychology. Komarovsky states that the housewife is discontented today because "*satisfaction depends upon aspiration,*" and the aspiration level has shot up like the mercury in a hot thermometer. "A dozen times a day, events belie the sermons directed to women."

Rossi suggests that equality between the sexes is regarded as an "immodest proposal." She feels that American society has been so inundated by psychoanalytic thinking that dissatisfaction of women with their role is invariably viewed as a personal problem. Ignored by society is the fact that girls often undergo a kind of cultural hazing process, keeping them locked in their assigned gender role at every level of development. Consider the

reinforcing effect of a statement by Albert Einstein: “The center of gravity for creative activity is located in different parts of the body in men and women.”^[3]

Although woman’s struggle for greater freedom and equality has continued from earliest recorded history, and was even expressed in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (Tale of the Wife of Bath), Betty Friedan’s outcry against the Freudian psychology of women and the bonds of the stereotyped feminine gender role gave new impetus and created an almost tangible new draught in the air. But how have the majority of women responded?

Erikson has observed that the relative emancipation ceded to women by middle-class “self-made men” has been utilized in “gaining access to *limited* career competition, standardized consumership, and strenuous one-family homemaking . . . it has not led to equivalent or actual role in the game of power.” He feels that the fashionable discussion about how women might become “fully human” is really a “cosmic parody,” and that it is still amazingly hard for the vast majority of women to say clearly what they feel most deeply. In considering woman’s psychic structure Erikson rejects Freud’s “wound concept” of female sexual psychology, substituting “inner bodily space”; this is a valid observation, yet insufficient in that it does not include the cultural.

Why the status quo is accepted by many women was strikingly revealed in a statement by a wealthy “professional wife” to a gathering that included a

number of professional women. She said: "Taking care of my husband is *my* profession, and it gives me all the satisfaction I want." Its pointedness was made even clearer by the elaborate jewel she was wearing. But why men actively maintain the status quo is even clearer: few people voluntarily surrender power.

As a reflection of women's growing discontent with their position, they are expressing themselves more confidently, and researchers in the social and psychological fields have undertaken numerous studies of gender concepts. Notable among these is one by Rosenkrantz, which concludes that different standards of emotional health are utilized for men and women, paralleling sex-role stereotypes; the very features that are considered healthy in men, such as aggressiveness, are judged unhealthy in women. The reverse also held: passivity, the standard for women, was considered sick for men. Other studies, such as one by Steinmann, confirmed this.

This observation was also noted by Jean Baker Miller, who studied man-woman relationships in terms of the processes between dominant and subordinate groups. She noted the self-criticism of the subordinate group ("identification with the aggressor") and suggested new political directions for women, stating unequivocally that "anger is necessary." Indeed, one aspect of cultural change is the growth of overt anger and the demand for change by women as a group—a group widespread and seeking identity in a

determined way, for perhaps the first time in history. The formation of the National Organization for Women was an indication of this change.

A curious side issue is the growing envy by men of certain aspects of the feminine gender-role stereotype, just as women themselves repudiate it. Not the breast-envy or womb-envy of an earlier time, it is now envy of the passive-dependent role and of the presumed idle time spent as the individual wishes, while being supported. Indications of this seem increasingly numerous of late. Women have observed that it is virtually impossible to take a taxi in a large city without listening to a monologue on this theme delivered by the driver, and generally including "how lucky you dolls are."

Sexual Expression and Dating Patterns

Studies have revealed that there is strong agreement in the young of both sexes on the inherent difference between the sexes in sexual self-concepts and in sexual stereotypes. Yet there is no doubt about the vast change in concepts of sexuality and sexual behavior within the last five years. Effective and easy (though not danger-free) contraceptives, especially the birth-control pill, have contributed, as well as value change. Virginity, perhaps always of ambivalent value, has now come to be considered “something to be gotten rid of”—an alienated, impersonal term in general usage. A female college student echoed the statements of friends, who discussed, not whether they might be overcome (with passion) at the moment and yield to their boyfriends, but when and how they could “lose their virginity.” Veryl Rosenbaum, a lay psychoanalyst, has written a sensitive poem describing the current view of the first sexual encounter and the loss of virginity as a “button to be ripped off, to roll in the dust under a shabby bed.”

Women seem to feel that frigidity, a symptom of a generation back, has in reality been an accusation against them, and they seem almost frantic in their efforts to overcome this and to live up to the norms set by sex researchers. In the women’s liberation movement the concept of anything beyond clitoral orgasm is denied, with Anne Koedt’s “The Myth of Vaginal Orgasm” as a banner. Many psychiatrists have adopted this position as well.

But while basically rejecting Freud's feminine psychology, I still see Freud as correct in postulating a vaginal response. I view the clitoral as a partial response, lending itself to "instant sex-on-demand" from manual stimulation. Concern with orgasm has become enormous and omnipresent, leading to what has been described as "orgasm worship." Noted along with this is the erotization of language and the use of sexual imagery to describe other problems.

Frequently dating patterns among young college students seem to be exercises in instant sex and nonrelationship, leading nowhere. A college senior had a blind date arranged with the brother of a girl she knew. He arrived at her apartment and within ten minutes announced that he was "horny." She thereupon felt it was incumbent upon her to relieve that state. She appeared as devoid of feeling as Camus' *Stranger*, who seemed to move through life without feeling, even without motivation, going like a vehicle along some predestined track, at a preordained pace, taking turns that he had no part in choosing. The Stranger attends his mother's funeral, even though he has no feeling for her, not even hate, meets a girl, goes to the beach, commits a senseless murder—and the reader is left wondering why, why? He is a new human among us, Camus' prophecy of the new alienation—a man of the Homey type of alienation on the verge of Arieti's third type: beginning to seek sensory experiences to submerge in. It is not by accident that the beach, a place for fun, is the setting for murder. But returning to the girl described,

she *did* note the young man's failure to call her again—the failure of her perhaps manipulative use of “instant sex” to buy a relationship.^[4]

As another example, a young professional woman, despairing of marriage prospects, decided to give up all restraints on sex. A friend arranged a holiday weekend date for her with a highly eligible young man. There was noticeable evidence of her self-esteem plummeting as she followed blindly her predetermined course. He departed the city without saying good-bye, but had time to comment to the mutual friend: “Say, that was a superchick you fixed me up with!” The young woman's subsequent depression almost resulted in a literal enactment of her symbolically suicidal behavior.

The problem generally seems to be that rejection of the “good” or “bad” value in relation to sexual behavior has left young people bereft of any other standards. Most lack the ability to evaluate sensibly the so-called situational ethics. Here is need for sex education, in terms of value in the individual's development and in interpersonal relations.

Halleck has noted that in spite of the sexual revolution, matters have not changed considerably for young women. The double standard, perhaps in a new form, persists because there cannot be equality in sex without total equality, especially in the distribution of power. “Women lose power and status when they become too indiscriminate in granting their sexual charms,

or when their sexual attractiveness begins to wane.”

Gloria Steinem has commented on the fact that “men wise in the ways of power understand its sexual uses well.” Perhaps the ugliness of sex in return for status and power on both sides of the equation is more clearly revealed in the involvement of glamorous young women of the entertainment world with top political figures—a long-enduring but recently accentuated pattern. Sex, of course, has always been a woman’s ticket of admission to the social scene, but it has now become virtually the *only* means, as little else enters into relationships. It incurs dangerous new risks for women.

The “singles bar” is a relatively new development in the United States, appearing especially in large cities. A manifestation of the growing hold of drinking alcoholic beverages on social style, these bars are establishments where men and women go with the acknowledged purpose of meeting for quick sexual liaisons. A very personable young male patient reported on his escapades via this medium. Although he appeared the soul of innocence and safety, he was something less than that, and it became unavoidable to reflect upon the risks young women were taking, in leaving a bar and going off to the apartment of a total stranger after a couple of drinks, and without telling anyone of their destination, as is common practice. Although no murders, to my knowledge, have as yet been reported, it seems inevitable that they will appear. This approach to sex exemplifies the new alienation, in terms of

instant precipitation into sensual experience devoid of inner meaning—the “drug kick” of the deadening of cognition through alcohol, and the instant immersion into sex with anyone. The new language of sexual request or invitation reflects the new alienated style. As reported in *The New York Times*, a man asked a woman he had just met: “Would you like a sensual visitor tonight?”^[5]

Sexual liaisons of young women, whether with young or older men, seem to conform to a style of abandoning their own pursuits in good measure and going to live with the man; however, there seems to be a local style involved, and in some cities the reverse is true in location, but not in who makes the major life change. This self-abandonment, in the face of the current struggle for equality, seems another aspect of the new alienation. Seidenberg has pointed out the problems of sexual inequality, especially for the gifted young woman of today who wants to share intellect as well as sex.

A new sexual aggressiveness in women has also manifested itself, visible in virtually assaultive passes at boyfriends in the street, who seem to endure rather than enjoy it. These have been in line with images fostered by the mass media as well as by sex researchers. In contrast—and perhaps astonishing to the older generation—is the practice of “bedding down,” of college-age boys and girls sleeping together without anything sexual transpiring. It seems a mode of obtaining comfort, to alleviate what could be

called a “babes-in-the-woods syndrome,” and also a manifestation of the neutering process going on.

With greater experience women are sexually wiser, have expectations of men as lovers, and experience a growing discontent. Many men are finding these expectations hard to live up to, especially since they cannot as successfully disguise or deny their inadequacies. Perhaps the new insistence on the normality and desirability of sex play that was formerly considered perverse is an effort to compensate; again it suggests a sexual neutering process. To the author it appears that *passion* favors genital sex.

Along different lines an old, and yet new, sexual style has developed—new in the sense that the age disparity of incest-model dating has grown in sexual relationships of very young women with considerably older men. From reports—and to be observed on the streets—young women in their late teens are to be seen with men easily in their fifties or even sixties. The “anything goes” concept of sex, together with the new alienation, seems responsible for this, and young women do not seem aware that they may be “selling themselves short.” Judith Viorst wrote a delightful poem called “A Lot To Give Each Other,” capturing the lack of commonality in anything but sex: “He worries about his prostate, and She worries about her acne, and He was born before television, and She was born after running boards—but they feel they’ve got a lot to give each other . . .” The reverse young-old pattern with

women as the older partners, of which there are always a few instances among the wealthy, seems not to have caught hold. In the light of the aforementioned change, many men are living in a “captain’s paradise,” that is, they have a girlfriend (young) and a wife over a period of many years. But, of course, it is not always pure fun for such men, some of whom are compulsively trapped in a dual relationship, which serves deep neurotic needs and is at times quite punishing.

The Older Woman

For the older woman new problems seem to exist, and the new sexual freedom is proving to be a bad check. If married, and unless there has been an extraordinarily satisfying marriage, there is a drifting apart of all interests including the sexual, especially as the large corporation has made increasing demands on men and offered all kinds of “rewards.” Infidelity has become almost a norm. Jessie Bernard has indicated that sex researchers have *promoted* the acceptance of infidelity. An example of sexual image-making is to be seen in Neubeck’s book, *Extramarital Relations*, in which virtually the first words to meet the eye, in big bold type, are: “WE ARE HUMAN.” It is an instance of incitement related to the indulge-yourself philosophy of the times, also expressed in a common phrase of late, especially by men: “After all, we’re not going to pass this way again.” Unverbalized is the concluding phrase: “so grab everything you can.”

Although Bernard questions the hurt involved if infidelity is not known to the partner (and the impression is that it is *always* known at some level), she does note that it is much more commonly acted upon by men. Wolf notes that in a patriarchal society there is less infidelity by women. He also observes the stress added to the wife’s role by the image she must fill as an organization wife. Yet he feels there is less hypocrisy in marriage today. Quite aside from the fact that marriages that do not have common goals are in the

process of destruction, Bernard fails to note the social and economic base to infidelity—in short, the power distribution makes infidelity by men more possible, while women have a history of accepting hurt, or settling for the most likely means of survival. My impression is that infidelity, whatever its basis, always causes a serious wound in either sex, however it is glossed over. When the interests of two partners diverge, marriage becomes a precarious living arrangement.

The problems of aging for men, aside from the inherent psychological components of the experience, relate primarily to retirement at an age when still valuable powers and capacities exist, so that Goodman Ace has humorously suggested a “Used Man Lot” to deal with the problem of male obsolescence. However, the older woman’s problems are even more serious. She has to contend with the menopause, which seems to punctuate the approaching end of her sexuality and her life, at the same time that she must cope with the “empty nest syndrome”—the end of her major life role as a mother. Where her stereotyped gender role, into which she has been molded, has not been tempered by any other interest or any activity bolstering self-esteem, her emptiness is experienced by her as a defect, and she is likely to “crack.” She views with horror the long period of life—empty life—still ahead of her in the face of her tenuous relationship with her husband, whose interest is virtually nonexistent or turned elsewhere. One divorced woman in her forties reported a dream with a single visual image: an empty suitcase. In

associating to the dream, she recalled the suitcase as an expensive one belonging to her former husband, usually stored in the closet, and now scratched and worn. She said: "I am alone and empty. I am unused as a woman. I am no longer valued, even by myself."

Fortunately women have begun to solve the problem belatedly by returning to study and work—although often at a level far below their neglected abilities. Yet this situation, compounded of "social maltraining" as well as personal difficulties, often results in serious depressions, as Rose Spiegel and others have stated.

For the older woman alone, social isolation is a singularly punishing reality in a paired society, especially for the woman who sees herself as only capable of the passive feminine role for which society ordains her. The combined despair and anger this elicits was revealed in a Christmas card sent me by an attractive but faded widow in her early sixties, who had arranged a consultation because of depression. When it seemed little could be done for her, the unreality of her approach to life in "waiting for my Prince Charming to come" was pointed out, and it was suggested (without complete conviction, it must be acknowledged, since nothing compensates for the lack of a close relationship) that feelings of pleasure and reward would grow as she undertook some useful activity, the various possibilities of which were explored, although rejected by her. The card contained the following note:

“Although I feel so disheartened because my contacting you was such a dismal failure, I am truly appreciative of your having seen me.”

This predicament of the older woman alone has been well documented by Isabella Taves, who observed her sexual as well as social dilemma: she must either engage in transient or (rarely) enduring sexual encounters with married men or live a celibate life. The divorced older men who remarry almost invariably seem to choose a considerably younger woman. As a professional man put it to a female colleague when discussing his own remarriage: “Why should I have undertaken the problems of marrying an older woman, when I can have an attractive, sexually appealing young woman who will wait on me hand and foot, be happy about what I can give her, and make few demands upon me? And it makes me feel young to start a family again.” As logic it seems unassailable, but it spells a serious existential dilemma for the older woman, especially as her value as the *person she has become* seems nonexistent, and her sexual life must either become degrading or disappear. One 39-year-old attractive divorcee, who had several affairs with inadequate men out of desperation, asked: “Why aren’t there men to appreciate the sterling qualities my friends insist I have?”

Marriage

In general, brittleness and unyielding self-centeredness of an almost militant nature seem to characterize marital attitudes of both sexes today. Perhaps the fact that for women, marriage with conventional gender-role stereotypes has often been a trap, a situation symbolized in Sartre's play *No Exit*, has contributed to this. Marmor points out how psychoanalytic interpretations of a woman's rebellion in a marriage depends upon the analyst's point of view, and whether he espouses the view that passivity is normal for women. Seidenberg also calls attention to the unfair expectations of woman's role in marriage, both in life and as portrayed in literature. And philosopher John Stuart Mill has given us one of the most moving and clear statements about what is wrong with unequal marriage, and what marriage can achieve with true equality and communion between partners. His view, of course, particularly relates to intellectuals.

Symonds has characterized the developmental restrictions of marriage for many women, and the symptomatic expression of the problem, as "Phobias after marriage: woman's declaration of dependence." She points out that phobias are the women's way of handling repressed anger within the marriage, and that with growth the marriage is often disrupted, as the fundamental nonverbalized premises are challenged. Yet up to now working and professional women have not greatly challenged these premises and still

undertake the Herculean effort of doing what amounts to three or four jobs at once. Caroline Bird, whose social study of the inequitable position of women broke ground for the women's liberation movement, recently pointed out the added advantage that men, and professional men in particular, have in wives who serve them personally and help them professionally. As professional women ruefully remark: what every successful woman needs is a *wife!*

Although the majority of women still seem satisfied with, or accept, the stereotyped view of marriage, as Komarovsky has indicated, or even have a false view of marriage as freedom in the sense of escape from the childhood home, there is a gap between expectations and reality. Among blue-collar workers Komarovsky found that the male was dominant in the marriage and that the threat of violence was an important basis for this power. She also pointed out a very important consideration in marriage: the individual partner's bargaining position depends on the degree of emotional involvement, which is one factor explaining feminine subservience. Yet caught in the crosscurrents of social change, women feel growing disappointment as some of the compensations of an earlier time have disappeared, and they find marriage less rewarding. As one woman, a professor of psychology, expressed it: "Marriage has become a living arrangement." Certainly less is heard of intimate relationship or of love, and more is heard of life style and sex.

Marriage as an institution is seriously embattled, and all sorts of alternatives are proposed, as Otto suggested, including serial monogamy, marriage networks, and open marriage, among others. Greene believes that the individual may be carrying out a neurotic repetition in sequential marriage. Yet the new choice may also be a good one, and the result of growth. Unfortunately women seem to have less opportunity for positive change by the time growth has occurred. Extreme woman liberationists support these alternative concepts, or deny that marriage can be viable in any form. From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, although undoubtedly some early choices of marital partner are predominantly neurotic mistakes, transference distortions and narcissism (self-centeredness) are still the major factors in marital failure, but the distribution of power in marriage is increasingly recognized as a determinant of workability.

Many express a belief that marriage and the nuclear family are failures, and some of the young have entered communal living arrangements and communal marriages. A famous illustration was that reported as a “course in communal living”—an experimental college set up at Columbia University.^[6] Yet no change is ever monolithic, and many young college students are marrying legally after living together in experimental marriages. These are healthy marriages based on a satisfying relationship, not entered into out of fantasied expectations and sexual guilt. Many young couples write their own marriage ceremony, stressing equality and mutuality. Along with these

changes sometimes goes the perhaps synthetic type of back-to-nature ceremony, complete with barefoot bride in see-through dress without underclothes. Of course, some of these experimental marriages are legalized because of the young woman's pressure: the nest-building tendency is still a part of feminine nature— and a valid one. On a positive note Rostow suggests that the newer concepts of marriage hold it to be a process in which the husband and wife cooperate on many levels to permit each separately and together to satisfy needs and achieve goals.

As part of the rejection of marriage, and while undoubtedly determined by other and unconscious forces, there has been a rise in lesbianism. Radical women seem to make a conscious effort in this direction, as part of an attempt to eliminate men from their lives. As one college girl, who was "trying out" lesbianism, put it, "If only my friend Vera had the head of Jane Fonda, and the body of a man!" Retreats and encounter weekends fostering lesbianism have become almost commonplace. This undoubtedly relates also to the growing reluctance to undertake motherhood.

Abortion, Mothering, and Child Care

In this aspect of women's lives some strange paradoxes are to be found. On the one hand, in spite of the range and availability of contraceptives, the one-parent family, consisting of unwed mother and child, is notably on the increase. There seems to be a kind of defiant pleasure in the pregnancy—in the street many girls seem to take pains to be noticed as pregnant. One gets the impression that this is their weapon against mother and society. But there is a large faction who totally reject the idea of motherhood, which Betty Rollin described in a *Look Magazine* article as “as unnecessary as spaghetti.” Yet many, married or otherwise, insist upon having children despite their reluctance to care for them, and they call for crèches for infants and child-care centers as a regular aspect of child life from birth on. That is, they seem to choose biological, but not nurturing, motherhood.

On the other hand, women are demanding the right to total control over their reproductive function, including abortion. Their efforts, coupled with those of physicians, psychiatrists, and attorneys, have brought about great change—a subject too wide to document here. However, psychiatrists have been slow to realize the unfairness and unfortunate consequences of unwilling motherhood, or to come to a conclusion that it has taken me a long time to clarify and state simply: there is absolutely no relationship between theological dogma and mythology and intrapsychic experience for women,

who *must* resent an unwanted pregnancy, and who carry their resentment over *unalterably*, whether consciously or not, into their affective relationship and dynamisms with the child. In the past women have been expected to be Christlike, carrying their crucifix within; they have often been sanctimoniously counseled by some who have had rather casual attitudes toward the act that placed women in this position and little empathy for their circumstances. The plethora of research now going on to ascertain the effects of abortion or its refusal is belated and almost ludicrous, in the light of the years of cruel entrapment of women by refusal to recognize their needs and best interests—without benefit of research!

Women are beginning to see the relationship between social mythology and reality; and those freed from the “psychological set” of having to defer to men are very clear about it and are taking effective action. They have begun to realize that the refusal of abortion can also be seen as a power mode to restrict sexual expression, but only by *one* sex, or, politically, to enlarge a specific group. In any event the tide is turning.

How will women ever solve the career versus motherhood problem? This is a difficult dilemma. Women have an added burden if they wish to function as both human beings and females, and it is hard to avoid the feeling that they must give something extra to achieve their goals. It does not seem in the best interests of children and society for women to attempt to live in

exactly the same style as men. Women's lives are perhaps more phase-oriented. It seems as if women should receive support from society to spend a few years with their young children, with the assurance that a place will be made for them when they return to their outside endeavors. Perhaps they need to be subsidized during the early mothering period, until child-care centers can take over. They also need more help from men, who have largely been absentee fathers, and who will gain from their wives' efforts. Already there is evidence among young couples of a change in the direction of a more participant father role.

My own solution, which I was fortunate in being able to carry out, was to stop my professional involvements—in all but a few limited instances—until my children were attending school full-time. The opportunities for any informal kind of study under such circumstances are great. Inevitably, of course, it does entail sacrifices and losses, certainly compensated in large measure by the evidence of happiness and growth in the child, as well as by the close relationship itself. Undue attention to the ease with which men direct their lives can be embittering. But as a corollary, men need to be more generous and more helpful in aiding women to do their best. For women whose work is an economic necessity when the children are small, or who flatly reject child care, obviously child-care centers are the answer.

Conclusion

Whether compounded of pessimism or a realistic appraisal, the impression persists that the direction in which the culture is moving is toward the creation of male and female “humanoids,” becoming still more alienated, mechanical, unfeeling, compulsively cruel, asexual but sexually preoccupied, frantically trying successive modes of sensual experience including drugs, devoid of the capacity for deep relationships, and with an increasing will to power by any means. The society of the on-rushing future, which is already today, has not only veered from the repressive to the expressive—it has lost its humanity along with its superego.

More specifically, the cultural factors affecting women are multidimensional, and in some areas they are in direct conflict. Women are more direct—and “harder.” They demand social equality in every form, yet a majority are slow to seek or accept change, which has always been promoted by the young. They are sexually freer, yet also sexually compulsive and alienated. They have not gained too much through the “sexual revolution.” They, as well as men, are less totally involved in the marital relationship. As a group they have considerably less interest in motherhood. And many are tending to doubt psychiatry’s ability to help them.

Implications for Treatment

How will psychiatry function as the changes relating to alienation grow? The zenith of human understanding, peaking with the appearance of Freud, Adler, Sullivan—to select a limited few as representatives of aspects of thought about inner experience and relationships—seems already to have begun to decline. The behavioral therapists, the symptom modifiers, and the “containers” will deal with the *symptoms* of an expanding human illness: alienation and the loss of humanity, in some ways an even greater problem for women than for men. Perhaps social psychiatrists and psychologists will join them to deal with broader aspects of this illness, but there is little ground for optimism about constructive change.

On the other hand, the degree of change and its effect upon women within the last decade suggests something not sufficiently recognized: human beings are remarkably plastic, and great care should be taken before considering psychic and behavioral expressions innate. Perhaps the most significant fact of our time in relation to treatment generally, and with regard to women specifically, is the necessity to understand the social setting of problems as well as their interpersonal determinants, rather than regarding them as exclusively intrapsychic in genesis.

Social psychiatry applies to the individual as well as the group, and a new concept of preventive psychiatry and treatment has been described by

Robert J. Lifton as “Advocacy Psychiatry.” Here he extends the view of Sullivan that the therapist must be clear about his own values yet not impose them on the patient, to examining the integrity of values and attempting social change where indicated.

In this sense Freudian feminine psychology, which has been nibbled at by dissenters, but not challenged as a totality, *must* be supplanted. Ideas of feminine passivity as health and the necessity of deference to masculine interests must be jettisoned if women are really to be helped to mature and attain reasonably satisfactory lives. Mastery over their own bodies and reproductive lines is essential for women’s emotional health and emancipation. The recognition that *all* humans are aggressive at times, that it is not a particularly desirable quality, but no worse in women than men, although more in conflict with male societal expectations, is another essential basis to good therapy for women. And again, as with all human beings, women must be helped to become as free of anxiety as possible and to learn collaborative modes of relationship as equals.

It has been suggested that there is psychologically *no* difference between men and women, except perhaps as a remote component of their biological sexual representation, in terms of receptiveness in a woman, the quality of being penetrating in a man. But even these are distorted by other processes. For women any specific feminine psychology relates only to the

significant nodal points of their developing reproductive function. These have yet to be properly organized into a body of psychological concepts, although the direction is suggested.

May Romm has asserted that “the thinking woman can no longer accept the demeaned and submissive role implied in the statement ‘Anatomy is Destiny.’ ” She feels women must be brought into the category of homo sapiens. So what emerges with great clarity is that male therapists, and female, too, who have previously been either unquestioning of or insistent upon old theories, must scrupulously examine their own gender concepts and prejudices, *listen* carefully to women patients, and search for the *setting* of their discontent, depression, or sexual unresponsiveness—and, indeed, other kinds of symptomatology that have been used perhaps more accusatively than therapeutically. Here the choice of language is an important modality to note.

Lastly awareness of the three modes of alienation suggests a way of leading women back into contact with themselves—an important issue for men as well. Certainly it has been my experience that many a rebellious, angry, or destructive young woman has been led along the path of introspection to greater rationality and more rewarding or vital living, after she has had a chance to perceive that stereotyped, and sometimes demeaning, labels have not been pressed upon her.

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Notes

- [1] It confirms the unfortunate reality that reaction is not improvement, and that valuable change must come from a new parameter.
- [2] Sex Information and Education Council of the United States.
- [3] *The Born-Einstein Letters*, reviewed by D. M. Locke, *Saturday Review*, September 11, 1971.
- [4] Case illustrations will be anecdotal, since they are intended only to illustrate cultural trends rather than specific pathology.
- [5] *New York Times*, January 23, 1972.
- [6] *New York Post*, December 5, 1970.