

WOMEN'S OPPRESSION



Pam Levin, RN, is a Clinical Teaching Member of the ITAA. She lives in an alternative lifestyle healing community near Ukiah.

An Herstorical Note

This paper was written at the request of Eric Berne for the annual summer conference in Monterey, California, August, 1970. Eric's request came from his curiosity and excitement about the reaction of women to his forthcoming book, Sex in Human Loving. What I saw was sexism, and I told him so with pertinent and less pertinent remarks. Eric responded by rewriting the section, "Female Power" in his book, and by adding footnotes labeled E.W. and E.B., i.e., Emancipated Woman and Eric Berne. It was then he asked that I present a paper for discussion at the summer conference. I agreed to do so.

In July of that year, just before the conference, Eric died—leaving us all in shock and confusion. Somehow in the unclear events that followed, the paper on women I was to give became a panel discussion with the addition of one woman and three men. Many women were disturbed about this, feeling that women should be able to speak about themselves and for themselves.

We attempted to have the program changed so that the panel would be composed entirely of women—all to no avail. This defeat strengthened our conviction and determination to have our feelings dealt with in the program. Added to that was a growing recognition among the women members of ITAA that they were being given a harder time than men on clinical exams, that there

were greater obstacles to their attainment of goals within the organization, and that they were weary of feeling impotent in the face of these events.

We were rapidly learning that talk is relatively powerless, compared to action. We decided to take action.

Women worked together, talking to ITAA members personally, writing, printing, and passing out leaflets, wearing "Sisterhood is Powerful" buttons, confronting disparaging remarks, and refusing to be divided among themselves. Within a day's time it became clear that the "woman question" was serious business. Women began to feel that people were at least listening. However, the three male members remained on the panel.

When the time for the panel discussion had arrived, the room was jammed with an active, seething crowd, anxious to be informed of the latest turn in events. In front sat the "officially designated" panel on women, including three men. Tension mounted and there was shouting between panel members and the audience. Some insisted, "Don't give your paper! Insist that the men step down, or refuse to speak!" Others said, "Don't let them silence you! This is a chance to be heard, and we need to hear this paper!"

I asked the men to step down, and when this did not happen, it became clear to me that I could not in clear conscience speak. A second later a woman from the audience took the microphone away from the panel. "I always wondered what women were so angry about and now I know. We are tired of having men tell us about ourselves. Let the women speak!"

A roar of approval ran through the crowd. New women members approached the panel, and the men yielded their places. After a brief and tumultuous celebration, women spoke: eloquently, emotionally, personally and powerfully, for themselves.

The purposes of this paper are first, to show that sex roles harm both men and women; second, to note that because

of our cultural values, women are "one down" compared to men; and third, to point out how child-rearing practices, social influences, and psychiatric theory reinforce these roles.

People make clear distinctions between what is masculine and what is feminine, based, no doubt, on biological differences between the sexes. I believe that all sex roles must die, and that, when they do, sexism will at last give way to sexuality. The truth will make both men and women free; but until women are freed from the myths that currently impede their growth, no man can be truly free or have a completely healthy mind. The liberation of women means the liberation of men.

Each human being is born with the potential to experience the entire range of human emotions, thought, and action. However, conformity to sex roles limits this capacity because those roles are based on the supposition that these experiences are different for each sex!

Men and women are brought up to be like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, with pieces carved out of themselves so they can fit into one another in the neurotic dependence most of us call love (Tax, 1970).

Boys are not supposed to exhibit fear, shyness, passivity, or pain; girls are not to show independence or logic. Boys become the creators and controllers, girls become the sustainers and the controlled. It is assumed that little boys should be aggressive, while little girls should be gentle and passive. Girls are thought to be naturally emotional, intuitive, irrational, naive, and instinctive rather than logical; boys are thought to see emotion as a threat and to react with defensive condescension. Boys are dressed for warmth, comfort, and freedom of movement, and they are encouraged to go in for rugged sports; girls are encouraged to look pretty, to sit still and play quietly; and to feel abnormal if they would rather move freely and actively.

Girls are supposed to help Mommy and Daddy with domestic chores, to be sweet, loving and useful. They are taught that the home is the center of their universe.

An adult woman may become the emotional service center for her husband and children, and if she dislikes being a menial laborer in a masculine world, she may be told to work out her "blocks to fulfillment in the feminine role" that she, not the sex role, is at fault.

Girls are taught to see themselves as objects or as things by constantly being told how important it is to be pretty and to be liked so that they can compete successfully for the spoils (a man) that society allows them. Progress is hindered, however, by even the most minute blemish: a pimple, a few extra pounds, a funny nose, smaller than average breasts—all can ruin days or even years by generating constant embarrassment (Tax, 1970). But the real source of misery is that women have been taught to see themselves as objects for sale; and every fault, no matter how insignificant it may be to others, makes them feel less valuable.

Both sexes are harmed by sex roles. Men are forced to be aggressive, competitive, and ambitious, whether these qualities come easily or not. The entire burden of supporting three or four other people has traditionally been theirs, and the attendant stress can lead to circulatory disease, ulcers, and coronaries. Women may live longer, but they are cornered into being nonachievers. Usually, they have only one role model—that of 24-hour-a-day mother and consumer of products. These products are designed to encourage married women to feel less inferior to their spouses who supply the purchasing power.

A woman's financial dependence on a man puts pressure on him and puts her in a one-down position. But should she try to earn her own support, she finds that job discrimination also keeps her one-

down. In every major industry, full-time women earn an average of forty percent less than men in similar jobs. Half of all women who work full-time earn less than \$3,700 per year (poverty level being \$3,300), and only 1.4% of working women earn over \$10,000 a year. Today only one in ten PhDs is granted to a woman—fewer than in 1940 (voice of women's liberation)—and a girl needs higher marks than a boy does to enter college. Women are disqualified for many top jobs because they don't have wives (the company buys a package deal). A male bank teller earns \$5 to \$31 per day more than a female teller and in certain fields, \$12,000 is the maximum salary a woman can earn regardless of her talent and experience. Protective legislation discriminates against women by prohibiting them from working late hours or overtime, when the pay is higher (Bird, 1970). To answer for yourself if women are one-down to men, note this: "The lowest job used as punishment in the army is, a) working 9 to 5; b) K.P." (Mondiari, 1970).

Even pre-school children seem to recognize that women are one-down. In *Early Childhood Behavior and Learning*, Catherine Landreth (1970) states, "There is evidence to suggest that even in early childhood the masculine role is considered more desirable than the feminine one." Paul Mussen, in *Early Sexual Development*, (1970), states, "A substantial number of little girls wish they were boys or daddies, but very few boys want to be girls or mommies. This may be a reflection of the girl's incipient awareness of the relative devaluation of the female role in the culture."

Much of the language used in our society makes woman feel even more left out and "one-down":

When your baby girl is fretful and you go to the good book, you read, "Turn *him* over on *his* back, change *his* diaper, and

take a look.

Then your daughter is old enough to go to school, and the instructions at the top of every test read: "Everyone take *his* assigned place and do *his* best."

At the PTA meeting the *chairman* is Mrs. Rule.

The minister exhorts, "Act as a *brother* unto one another."

The college catalogue lists courses with the titles, *Man* and Society; *Man* and Survival; *Man*, is he Godhead's New Rival?

You graduate as a *Bachelor* or Science, and with *fellowship* your *Master's* degree is underway.

All of this until one day you wind up calling a psychiatrist, and *he* exclaims, "I can't understand why you should be feeling an identity crisis!"

—*Ladies' Home Journal*, 1970

Everything that has been said about almost any allegedly inferior race has been said about women. Anthropologists have told us that women's brains are smaller, that their intelligence is lower, and that they cannot be trusted to govern their affairs (Montagu, 1970).

Women have been denied the opportunity to choose for so long that they are often unable to choose. The woman in the cartoon who sits dithering in a shoe store over two pairs of pumps is part of American folklore. But when you've been told all your life that the right pair of pumps or the right hairdo can determine your destiny, it is difficult to make decisions casually, or quickly.

Girls are encouraged to be both inferior and confused about their gender from an early age, and this position is constantly reinforced by parents, by social influences, and by psychiatric theory. There are some contradictory instructions which young girls receive: be sexy but remain a virgin; be appreciative but challenging (don't give in too easily); be vulnerable but protect yourself; be smart enough to get a man, but hide your intelligence (that is, be manipulative); be desired by all men, but interested in only one; be sophisticated but naive.

Girls are taught to feel inferior about their biology; they are taught that menstruation is a curse and a handicap, while pregnancy is a precarious condition, and childbirth has been surrounded with so many myths and mysteries that most Western women have, until recently, rarely approached or experienced it without foreboding and anxiety. Menstruation is, of course, neither a curse nor a mystery, but just a healthy female function which is still used as a justification not to hire or promote women.

Psychological theories often define women as inferior. Freud's use of such phrases as "the boy's far superior equipment," "her inferior clitoris," and her "genital deficiency," generated his theory of penis envy with its three corollaries of feminine psychology—passivity, masochism, and narcissism. In his treatise entitled "Masochism in Men," he says:

"The Masochist wants to be treated like a little helpless dependent child, but especially like a naughty child. If one has the opportunity of studying cases in which the masochistic phantasies have undergone especially rich elaboration, one immediately discovers that in them the subject is placed in a situation characteristic of womanhood. They mean that he is playing the passive part in coitus, accepting castration, or giving birth."

Therefore, according to Freud, identification with women must be masochistic, especially since little boys view feminine females as "mutilated creatures" (Millett, 1970).

The neo-Freudians have taught that a woman who reaches orgasm by clitoral stimulation is expressing hostility towards men, and that a "real" woman will reach orgasm by vaginal stimulation. This theory, however, clearly serves the men who proclaim it, since it enhances their egos and encourages their preference for vaginal penetration. Vaginal tissues, however, are so insensitive that no anesthesia is required during vaginal

surgery. And when women masturbate, they stimulate the clitoris, not the vagina. The clitoris is the center of genital excitement in a woman, just as the penis is in a man. In fact, sexual pleasure is the *only* function of the clitoris; and asking a woman to achieve orgasm without clitoral stimulation is like asking a man to ejaculate without stimulation of his penis. If he were unable to do so, he would certainly not be considered hostile toward women.

Women are alienated from their sexuality. A survey of women who read *Psychology Today* reveals that thirty percent of them reached orgasm—at the most—only one-fourth as often as their male partners did. But Masters and Johnson maintain that, physiologically, women are capable of infinitely greater sexual response than men.

Haim Ginott's *Between Parent and Child* speculates that penis envy is not predetermined by anatomy but may instead be created in little girls by child-rearing practices. In an early section of the book, Ginott advises parents *not* to say "You don't have..." because that implies that the child lacks something important and makes the child feel incomplete until she or he has the item in question. Later on he contradicts himself by suggesting that parents say to their daughters: "Sometimes little girls have scary thoughts when they see that they *don't have* a penis (emphasis added). Do you sometimes wonder about that?" He adds that a girl might imagine that her penis was lost, stolen, or taken away as punishment, or that it might appear when she is older; and a boy might imagine that whatever happened to her might happen to him. Both seem to be natural reactions to the idea that girls are biologically *incomplete*, that they *lack* something. If this is a male chauvinist statement, what would be the effect on children of a female chauvinist

statement? Would boys end up feeling inferior or mutilated if their parents said to them, "Sometimes little boys have scary thoughts when they see they don't have a nice smooth place like little girls do. Are you sometimes afraid you've turned inside out?"

Herstory — 1970-1976

The women's revolution has just begun.

In 1970 a women's caucus was formed and a huge number of women attending the 1970 conference agreed on a list of 15 Recommendations for ITAA from the Women's Caucus. In 1976 as this January 1977 Journal goes to press, about half of the recommendations have been accomplished, e.g. 1) it is now required that one woman be on each examining board, 2) the number of women nominated as officers and women members of the Board of Trustees is in nearly equal proportion to the number of women members in ITAA, (in 1971 women comprised 30% of the advanced membership but only three were Trustees out of 19 on the Board—in 1972, seven women were elected out of 28 on the Board), 3) we now have a woman managing editor for the TA Journal; however, only four women out of eleven are involved in the Journal decision-making process (in 1970 there were none). This January Journal satisfies the 1970 item "to publish a Journal issue with a woman editor about 'Women and TA.' "

In 1976 a panel about and by men on men's problems and scripts was presented. There has still been no Journal issue devoted to men and done by men. Also still to be done—to hire women for the top paying professional positions in ITAA, not just the secretarial ones; to edit out all sexism from official literature (including audio visual) and to incorporate a women's consciousness into TA literature and use the pronouns "he" and "she" without bias in the literature.

Women have made major theoretical contributions since then. This plump Journal issue stands as an exquisite testimonial to the intelligence and creativity of women.

The women of Radical Psychiatry taught me in 1970 that Awareness + Contact = Liberation. I would amend it thus: Awareness + Contact + Vigilance = Liberation.

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SUMMARY

This paper, a "period piece" written in 1970 at the request of Eric Berne, discusses sex roles, how sex roles harm both men and women, and how cultural values keep women in a one-down position to men. It also shows how the consciousness of women in the ITAA has evolved since 1970.

Sumario en Español

Este artículo, un «documento de la época» (escrito en 1970 a petición del doctor Eric Berne), informa sobre los papeles sexuales («sex roles»); es decir, cómo éstos hacen daño tanto al hombre como a la mujer y cómo los valores culturales dejan a la mujer abajado en relación al hombre. Además, demuestra cómo la conciencia de las mujeres que forman parte de la ITAA ha evolucionado desde 1970.

Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch

Nach den Wunsch Eric Bernes, entstand in 1970 dieser Aufsatz. Er beschreibt die Geschlechtsrollen, wie diese Rollen Männer und Frauen schaden, und wie kulturelle Werte die Unterdrückung der Frauen verlängert. Dadurch wird auch erwiesen, wie sich das Frauenbewußtsein in ITAA seit 1970 entwickelt hat.

Résumé en français

Cet article, un « morceau de style » écrit en 1970 à la demande d'Eric Berne, discute des rôles différenciés de l'homme et de la femme, des effets nuisibles de ceux-ci pour les hommes comme pour les femmes, et de

la manière dont les valeurs culturelles maintiennent les femmes dans une situation subordonnée à celle des hommes. Il montre également l'évolution de la conscience des femmes de l'ITAA depuis 1970.

Yesterday, I came home from a two day workshop on TA and Women's Issues. It was pointed out by the leader of the workshop that women tend to be "closet thinkers": Thinking, but only inside their own heads. Thinking, but inside their homes and to their families, and seldom outside in a crowded room of people. Thinking, but rarely in words down on paper which someone could accidentally see.

The workshop told of an organization that had over 10,000 members, many of them women, and only six women had thus far contributed articles to a Journal issue focused on women. Someone at the workshop suggested that this alone would make a good article. I agreed to myself: Yes, that's true, women can think, write. Why aren't they? Why aren't they doing it? Where are the creative women thinkers?

Today I am home from the workshop having given myself the gift of a free day off from work. As I am leisurely doing this and that around the house and enjoying the luxury of "no pressure," "no demand" time, a voice way in the deepest part mumbles to me, "I can write." A blaring voice inside me snorts, "Write for publication, that's crazy! You don't have the brains, the research, the skill, the reputation. Anything you would say would sound so puny and unsophisticated." The small voice inside whispers "Writing for publication is not where it's at. I can write. I can write for me." And then it hit me. Worrying about publication, worrying about other people's judgment of my thinking is keeping me from writing at all. The little voice gets stronger "I can write. I can think. I can feel. I have lived forty years of a life. I am familiar with words. I know how to put them in sentences. I have at home pen, pencil, and paper, and a free afternoon. I can write." All the way to the pet shop to pick up cedar shavings for the guinea pig the voice kept declaring "I can WRITE. I can WRITE."

Today, for the first time in my whole forty years I am listening to the voice. I am home with pen and paper at the dining table writing. Not a sound is to be heard in the house, but I feel my thinking is rushing and screaming with words tumbling over each other as I put them down on paper. Yes, I can write. The voice doesn't have to say it any more because I know. I know I can. My whole self is doing it and enjoying it down to my toes.

— Jean Poorman