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The Curious Courtship of
Psychology and Women's
Liberation

The rapid progress of a psychological culture touting therapeutic change and adjustment animated the spirit of the 1960s, as surely as technologies of human behavior contributed to the foreign and domestic policies of that same era. The normalization of psychotherapy and the broad reach of government-supported programs in community mental health, two of the major developments discussed in chapters 4 and 9, contributed to the political priorities and cultural sensibilities of 1960s social movements. The popular diffusion of clinical concepts and practices in the years after World War II helps to explain the appearance of movements which seemed so at odds with the ethos of the 1950s, especially its superficial veneer of consumer contentment and its penchant to prioritize private pleasures over public duties.

It is certainly true that the New Left, and other varieties of radical political activism during the 1960s, had many roots. Beat literature and bohemian subcultures, radical pacifist organizing during and after World War II, the enduring remnants of the Old Left, and the growth of an omnivorous, youth-oriented consumer culture are just some of the factors that historians have repeatedly emphasized.¹ What made the period's movements different from previous radical, or even populist, movements, however, was the extent to which they rejected an ideological emphasis on material circumstances alone. Young people (or at least young white people) who had grown up in the 1950s and whose com-

plaints had been fashioned in an era of relative economic affluence were well positioned to develop perspectives that could challenge exclusively material understandings of what social problems were and what their solutions might be.²

In the culture of psychology, the period's activists saw possibilities for furthering a postmaterial agenda that could go beyond the basic requirements of food and shelter to include the emotional, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of people's lives. They were quick to appropriate psychological insights—about the perils of adjusting to pressures for conformity, for example, or the salience of “identity” to the division of power—to mobilize public pressure for civil rights and women's equality, and against the Vietnam War. The conviction that emotional experience and social organization could not ultimately be separated, that oppression and liberation alike took internal as well as external forms, was part of what made the New Left really “new.” Such convictions supported and energized Martin Luther King's insistence upon the “somebodiness” of black Americans, the student movement's vision of a “participatory democracy,” the counterculture's love affair with revolutionary bliss, and feminists' insistence that “the personal is political.”³

This chapter traces the impact of the evolving psychological culture within just one of those movements—women's liberation. Like historians of the New Left, historians of feminism have left the postwar growth of the psychotherapeutic enterprise out of the explanatory picture, focusing instead upon such factors as structural changes in women's labor force participation or the contradictions women faced in the civil rights movement and the New Left, where they were simultaneously expected to seek freedom and serve coffee.⁴ Yet the early years of the second wave of feminism, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, illustrate how profoundly psychology figured in the public reassessment of gender relations, a phenomenon in U.S. politics that continues unabated to this day.

Considering the publicity that surrounded investigations of sexuality during the postwar years (the Kinsey reports of 1948 and 1953 are famous examples) and the popularity of childrearing advice (millions of dog-eared copies of *Baby and Child Care* come to mind), it is hardly surprising that feminists would regard the psychological and behavioral experts who were fascinated with erotic and maternal behavior as extremely influential ideologues of sex and gender. Wartime preoccupations with “normal neurosis” in ordinary male soldiers faded after 1945 and expert attention shifted decisively toward the female gender. The

new focus on women revealed a plethora of gender disorders eating away at the domestic tranquillity and national security of the country.

First in line for inspection and reprimand were soldiers' mothers. As early as 1942, Philip Wylie blamed women's increasing independence for a rash of social disasters. "Momism," an unattractive female condition caused by an overdose of freedom, had developed into "a human calamity" while men were preoccupied with war and other manly pursuits.⁵ "Mom's first gracious presence at the ballot-box was roughly concomitant with the start toward a new all-time low in political scurviness, hoodlumism, gangsterism, labor strife, monopolistic thuggery, moral degeneration, civic corruption, smuggling, bribery, theft, murder, homosexuality, drunkenness, financial depression, chaos and war."⁶ Wylie understood well that such extreme overstatement allowed milder forms of antifeminism to attract the loyalty of experts, as he pointed out almost thirty years later. "After my somewhat ribald exposition of 'momism' a great many psychologists got up the nerve to produce books on the same subject, using my brashness as their ice-breaker."⁷

And so they did. It was Edward Strecker, chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania Medical School, former president of the American Psychiatric Association, and an initial appointee to the NIMH National Advisory Mental Health Council, who gave "momism" psychiatry's stamp of approval as a pathological syndrome. He recalled with dismay the epidemic of psychoneurosis he had witnessed as a consultant to the World War II military, accused mothers of producing immaturity in their sons by failing to "untie the emotional apron string," and concluded that momism was "the product of a social system veering toward a matriarchy":⁸ "Our war experiences—the alarming number of so-called 'psychoneurotic' young Americans—point to and emphasize this threat to our survival. No one could view this huge test tube of man power, tried and found wanting, without realizing that an extremely important factor was the inability or unwillingness of the American mom and her surrogates to grant the boon of emotional emancipation during childhood. Already we have incurred a large penalty. The threat to our security must not be allowed to go farther."⁹ In 1947 an influential book by Ferdinand Lundberg (a sociologist) and Marynia Farnham (a psychoanalyst), *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, argued that feminism was "a deep illness" infecting "the highly disturbed psychobiological organism: the mother."¹⁰ The government would be wise, the authors advised, to launch a massive psychotherapy

campaign aimed at controlling the outbreak of female independence and ensuring compliant maternalism in the future.¹¹ Lundberg and Farnham championed psychological solutions while adding sociological fuel to the antifeminist fire.

Blaming women for everything from children's misbehavior to the alarming state of Western civilization became a public ritual among experts during the postwar years, and it was not confined to the worlds of academia or professional exchange, though scholarly legitimacy certainly eased the wider expression of antifeminist sentiments. Clearly visible in the popular media was the message that feminism, "as quaint as linen dusters and high button shoes," had yielded one terribly damaging product: the working woman.¹² A 1956 *Life* special issue devoted to American women, for example, surveyed four psychiatrists on the question of changing roles within marriage. Glumly, the experts agreed that an epidemic of gender ambiguity was trickling downward from the top of society, producing a wave of masculinized women, feminized men, and confused children so emotionally unstable that the very future of the country was placed in jeopardy. Careers spelled an irreparable loss of feminine identity, warned New York psychiatrist John Cotton in no uncertain terms: "She may find satisfactions in her job, but the chances are that she, her husband and her children will suffer psychological damage, and that she will be basically an unhappy woman. . . . If they are feminine women, with truly feminine attitudes, they will—without self-conscious exhortations about the delights of domesticity—accept their wifely functions with good humor and pleasure."¹³ Only in the embrace of an avid domesticity, and in the sharply increasing reproductive output of educated, middle-class women, did the experts see any signs of hope.

Considering the postwar consensus that female independence was likely to poison marriage and harm children, it is hardly surprising that feminists in the late 1960s, especially feminists within the psychological professions, accused psychological theories and practices of contributing more than their fair share to the creation and maintenance of sexual inequality. During contemporary feminism's formative period, psychological experts and organizations functioned as frequent targets of angry protest. In the eyes of many feminists, psychology was little more than sexism masquerading as science. Even Dr. Spock, admired on the left for his peace activism, was unceremoniously called a "counterrevolutionary" for his authorship of the baby boom's childrearing bible and its presumption that mothers belonged at home with their children.¹⁴

Some psychologists dutifully lived up to their role as enemies of feminism by updating the antifeminist rhetoric of earlier decades. They dismissed the new movement as an unfortunate by-product of overpermissive childrearing practices or called it a pathological symptom of young women's collective inability to come to terms with adult gender identity. To which feminists responded in kind, with withering insults of their own. Perhaps because the dialogue between feminists and psychological experts was so acrimonious, feminist criticisms of psychological expertise and challenges to the psychological establishment are relatively well known.

The authority of psychological experts was best known to feminists early in the second wave as a burden limiting their humanity and an obstacle in their way. What I hope to show is that while psychology helped to "construct the female," it also helped to construct the feminist.¹⁵ It offered resources with which to support the ideas and actions of the women's movement: to resist the separation of private and public, to bridge the yawning chasms between the psychic and the social, the self and the other.

Finally, by inspiring a climate attuned to the nuances of subjectivity and identity, the culture of psychology supported a chorus of dissident voices within feminism itself, perhaps even more conspicuous in recent years than during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Monolithic understandings of "woman" and "gender" were discredited and eventually discarded not because feminists' analyses of gender were wrongheaded, but because their blindness to race, class, sexual orientation, and other differences among women had not done justice to the full truth of female experience.

Psychology Constructs the Female

THE CRITIQUE IS FORMULATED

In 1968 Naomi Weisstein boldly declared that "psychology constructs the female."¹⁶ This was not a compliment. Hers was the opening salvo in a battle that pitted the accumulated wisdom of psychological experts against the growing number of young women who took up the banner of women's liberation.

Weisstein was a Harvard-trained experimental psychologist who decided to investigate the evidence used to support psychological theories of gender development and difference. Like other women who received academic and professional training in the late 1950s and early 1960s, she had been intensely frustrated by her own educational and professional experience in psychology. A graduate of Wellesley College, where, she recalled later, the all-female student body "retarded my discovery that women were supposed to be stupid and incompetent," Weisstein went on to study psychology at Harvard.¹⁷ Denied the use of equipment she needed for her doctoral research (because she might break it), she somehow managed to graduate first in her class in 1964.¹⁸ Prospective employers asked: "How can a little girl like you teach a great big class of men?" and "Who did the research for you?"¹⁹ Even in a booming academic market, Weisstein received no job offers. Disappointed and outraged, she found support, and a feasible explanation for her own experience, in the emergence of feminism. She became a founding member of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union. An organized women's movement, she came to believe, was more likely to "change this man's world and this man's science" than were the empiricism and scientific reasoning she had cherished and nurtured for years.²⁰

Her 1968 manifesto combined a belief in women's equality with a thorough investigation of the psychological literature, including the work of Erik Erikson, Bruno Bettelheim, Joseph Rheingold, and others. What she discovered was that "psychology has nothing to say about what women are really like, what they need and what they want, essentially because psychology does not know."²¹ Because they relied on subjective assessment and not empirical evidence, Weisstein argued, the explanations personality theorists and clinicians offered for gender differences were not what they appeared to be. They falsely embraced the mantle of science when psychology was actually a repository for cultural myths about men and women. Sex differences were ideological, not scientific, constructions, propped up by "psychosexual incantation and biological ritual curses."²² Significantly, Weisstein remained an advocate for what "real" science could accomplish and pointed out that "psychologists must realize that it is they who are limiting discovery of human potential."²³

An authentically scientific psychology, in other words, could reveal the truth about gender, according to Weisstein, and would aid the

cause of sexual equality by subverting ossified notions of subordination and difference. In order to do so, it would have to cease its futile quest for inner traits and set its sights on social context, which was "the true signal which can predict behavior."²⁴ After citing the famous experiments of Yale psychologist Stanley Milgram, and other social psychological research directed at understanding conformity and obedience to authority, Weisstein noted that "it is obvious that a study of human behavior requires, first and foremost, a study of the social context within which people move, the expectations as to how they will behave, and the authority which tells them who they are and what they are supposed to do."²⁵

In the following years, a steady stream of feminist scholars and activists echoed Weisstein's accusation that psychological experts manufactured gender difference and created "ideological pollution" aimed at maintaining women's second-class status (fig. 18).²⁶ One by one, they exposed the sexist expectations underlying patriarchal authority. Clinicians were often singled out for especially harsh rebuke. Pauline Bart, a sociologist who had written a dissertation about depression in middle-aged women and who would later become a leading early expert on rape, was a vocal critic of psychotherapists, going so far as to suggest "demanding reparations from the psychotherapists for all the years that so many women have wasted and all the money that so many women have spent in psychotherapy, a psychotherapy based on false assumptions about the nature of women."²⁷

Psychologist Phyllis Chesler's work on women, madness, and psychiatric institutionalization was even better known. Not only did she condemn psychological experts for false assumptions about women; she theorized that marriage and psychiatry were two institutions closely implicated in women's subordination: each similarly presented male domination as women's salvation.²⁸ Further, she wrote, "What we consider 'madness,' whether it appears in women or in men, is either the acting out of the devalued female role or the total or partial rejection of one's sex-role stereotype."²⁹ Women were categorized as mentally unstable whether they conformed to the dictates of femininity or rebelled against them and femininity defined the territory of abnormality in which clinicians operated. "Madness and asylums generally function as mirror images of the female experience, and as penalties for *being* 'female,' as well as for desiring or daring *not* to be."³⁰ Unwilling to call for a total ban on therapeutic practice because she believed women's unhappiness was genuine, Chesler opposed the treatment of women by male profession-

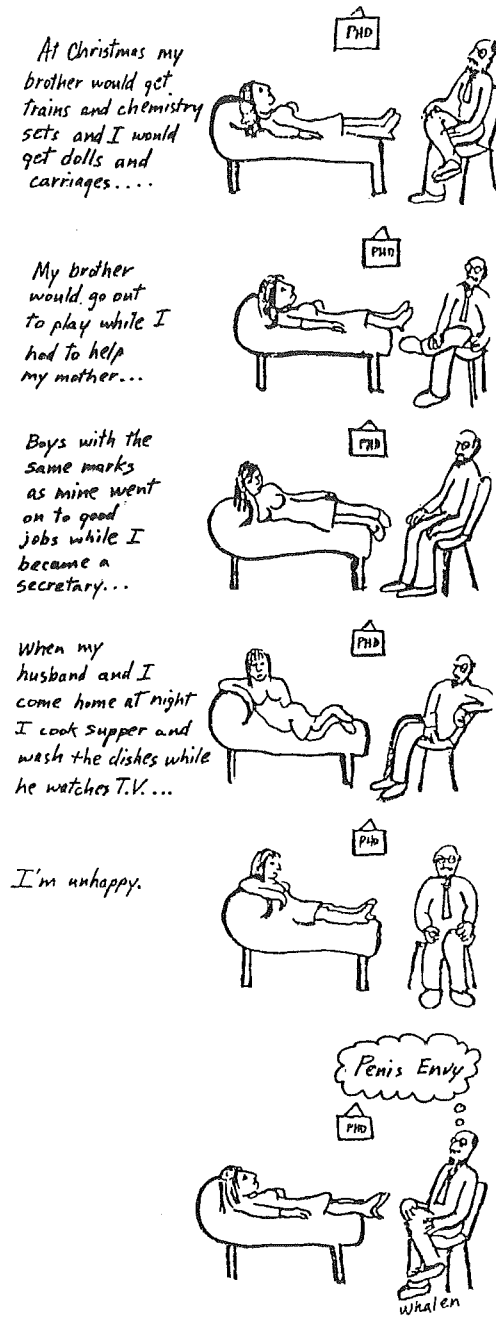


Figure 18. Feminist cartoon lampooning psychological (in this case psychoanalytical) sexism.

als ("even their sympathy is damaging and oppressive") and supported the development of "all-female therapeutic communities" and other separatist alternatives.³¹

By the late 1970s the effort to eliminate gender bias from psychological theories and practices and establish feminist beachheads in psychotherapy, child guidance, mental testing, psychoanalysis, and other fields had gained ground. Real steps had been taken toward showing exactly how psychology constructed the female: through distinctly male-centered theories of human development, psychiatric diagnoses that pathologized femininity, experimental methods that recapitulated gender dualisms, psychological tests that incorporated biases against women's ways of knowing, and so forth.³² The faith Weisstein had expressed in the power of science was fading fast, however, as was the conviction that women could ever be legitimately discussed as a unitary group.³³

Weisstein, who had been active in the Congress of Racial Equality and who also helped form a women's caucus within Students for a Democratic Society, relayed important elements of the New Left's general critique of expertise as she demolished the foundations of psychological knowledge about women and gender. This pattern of multiple political loyalties, of affiliation with a comprehensive "movement," was not unique to Weisstein. Ongoing exchange and influence between social movements was evident in the overall theoretical and organizational direction of feminism, and the new women's movement was deeply indebted to the ideas and strategies that had been forged by civil rights, student, and countercultural activists.³⁴

THE PLACE OF ANTIPSYCHIATRY AND RADICAL THERAPY

At least as important to feminist assessments of psychological expertise were the movements known as "antipsychiatry" and "radical therapy," which distilled general criticisms of experts as anti-democratic schemers and servants of power into specific indictments of clinical practices and professionals.³⁵ Centered around the theoretical writing of Thomas Szasz and R. D. Laing, antipsychiatry erased any remaining distinctions between psychological knowledge and politics by holding that the former merely presented the latter in mystified form.³⁶ Antipsychiatry suggested that psychiatry *was* politics—not medicine, humanitarian assistance, or anything else. Mental health and

illness were thus labels convenient for protecting existing social arrangements and shielding political repression from effective resistance.

Antipsychiatry turned the historic rhetoric of the "helping professions" entirely on its head. Instead of leaders in the cause of humanitarian progress, psychiatrists and other psychological experts were malevolent conspirators who scapegoated people unfortunate enough to be labeled socially different due to their (nonwhite) race, (female) gender, (homo) sexual orientation, or (impoverished) economic status. Instead of an enviable state of health, sanity designated a pitiful state of adjustment to the alienated conditions of modern existence. Instead of helpless and tormented sufferers, patients were people whose social circumstances placed them at odds with the status quo. However socially unacceptable and personally calamitous, "freaking out" was a way of speaking out.

Indistinguishable from deviance, mental anguish evaporated as a reality and became, in Szasz's famous phrase, a "myth." Much of this critique rested on a conventional, severe distinction between body and mind, between medicine and the healing of souls. Szasz, for example, held that psychiatric work bore no resemblance at all to that of other physicians, who treated actual bodily illnesses. In sharp contrast to the medical challenges of genuine disease, psychiatric clinicians encountered rage, fear, stupidity, poverty, and a variety of other problems in living. Confusing existential quandaries with sickness disguised moral and ethical dilemmas as medical problems and undermined personal responsibility by leading people to believe that they did not control their own behavior when, to a large degree, they did, at least according to Szasz. "It behooves us," he wrote, "to discriminate intelligently and to describe honestly the things doctors do to cure the sick and the things they do to control the deviant."³⁷

Szasz was unequivocally hostile to all forms of involuntary intervention (i.e., commitment procedures) and to the growing power of psychiatry in the legal system (i.e., insanity pleas). He warned that measures equating criminality with mental illness would "convert our society from a political democracy to a psychiatric autocracy."³⁸ Such views led him to oppose all welfare state programs on the grounds that they eroded individual freedoms. For example, Szasz called the policy of community mental health "moral Fascism" and argued that liberty was an absolute value, whereas mental health (whatever it was) was not.³⁹ Except for these libertarian strands of his thought, which en-

deared him to right-wing ideologues and organizations, much of Szasz's critique was shared by leftists, and it was on the Left that most of antipsychiatry's support was located.

In the view of British countercultural psychiatrist R. D. Laing, psychiatry appeared to be as controlling as it was for Szasz, but madness was much less wicked. In fact, breakdown dissolved into breakthrough in the more extreme statements of Laing's antipsychiatric position toward the end of the 1960s. Early in the decade, he had claimed that psychosis resulted from two things: first, a rupture between self and social (especially familial) context and, second, a perception of the resulting abnormality by a psychiatric expert assumed to be capable of making such judgments. "*Sanity or psychosis is tested by the degree of conjunction or disjunction between two persons where the one is sane by common consent.*"⁴⁰ In spite of his desire to offer a theoretical explanation for schizophrenia, Laing stressed the ultimate incomprehensibility of madness, the lonely gulf necessarily separating the experience of one human being from the next. By the end of the decade, Laing turned away from the effort to grasp what was really a tragic existential distinctiveness and instead promoted a highly romanticized version of that difference in subjective experience. The reinterpretation converted schizophrenia into a mode of prophetic transcendence and healing in a society gone haywire, "one of the forms in which, often through quite ordinary people, the light began to break through the cracks in our all-too-closed minds."⁴¹

The central theoretical works of antipsychiatry were not intended as feminist statements and all of the movement's major thinkers were men. It is nevertheless easy to see the exquisite fit between feminist denunciations of conventional gender expectations and the antipsychiatric assumption that what passed for mental anguish was a product of exploitation and alienation.⁴² The emerging outlines of feminist social thought dovetailed neatly with the core propositions of antipsychiatry: that the medical establishment had inappropriately usurped authority over vital social issues, including gender and sexuality; that psychotherapeutic practice harmed women by teaching that their problems were personal and intrapsychic rather than social and relational; that the neutral language of testing, diagnosis, and treatment concealed clinicians' complicity with male domination and their determination to make women adjust to sexism; that "mental health" was nothing but shorthand for gender conformity; that faith in experts (especially male ex-

perts) was counterproductive because experience—not expertise—imparted deserved authority. Only women could liberate themselves.

Radical therapy was an activist analogue to antipsychiatric theory. It consisted of a loose alliance between Left-leaning professionals, former mental patients, and radicals interested in psychotherapy. It appealed to large numbers of women (just as conventional psychotherapy had) and frequently addressed issues being debated within feminist circles, from sexuality to self-defense.⁴³ It emphasized that while mental disturbance was fictive, sexism, and other types of oppression, were quite genuine. In his 1969 "Radical Psychiatry Manifesto," Claude Steiner wrote,

PARANOIA IS A STATE OF HEIGHTENED AWARENESS. MOST PEOPLE ARE PERSECUTED BEYOND THEIR WILDEST DELUSIONS. THOSE WHO ARE AT EASE ARE INSENSITIVE.⁴⁴

Based on a thoroughly negative appraisal of psychotherapy's political function and worth, radical therapy nevertheless retained a kernel of hope that therapeutic practice could, if revolutionized, expedite both personal liberation and social change.⁴⁵ This coincided with the majority view among feminist critics, such as Bart and Chesler, that while psychotherapy as it existed was bad, abolishing it entirely might be worse.⁴⁶ "Feminist therapy," they agreed, was preferable, even if it was difficult to define beyond the obvious: it would be emptied of objectionable sexist biases but still capable of offering help and insight to women in pain.

FEMINIST ACTIVISTS CHALLENGE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ESTABLISHMENT

The proposition that illegitimate (male) experts had fabricated mental disturbances like "hysteria" and "depression" in order to keep patriarchy insulated from effective opposition was the theoretical rationale behind the activist campaign feminists mounted against the psychological establishment in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Antipsychiatry permeated the style, as well as the substance, of feminist protest. Dramatic zap actions were organized at conventions of the American Psychiatric Association and other institutional strongholds of psychological expertise, sometimes in conjunction with gay men and lesbians.⁴⁷ Typically, activists would interrupt the proceedings, shout slo-

gans like "The Psychiatric Profession Is Built on the Slavery of Women," and present a set of demands. Among other things, feminists called for an end to mother-blaming, freedom for the "political prisoners" living in mental institutions, assistance in filing legal claims against abusive clinicians, and a ban on sexist advertisements in professional journals and offensive exhibits at professional meetings. One typical communication, from San Francisco Redstockings to the American Psychiatric Association in 1970, offered the following suggestions to sympathetic clinicians:

1. Begin compiling a list of psychiatrists in every city who are willing to back women filing malpractice suits against psychiatrists who have fucked them over. . . .
2. Begin dealing with the treatment of women under welfare and the conditions of women in the state hospitals across the nation. . . .
3. Stop helping your male patients develop "healthy" male egos. . . .
4. Mother is not public enemy number one. Start looking for the real enemy. . . .
5. There are some exhibits at this convention that are oppressive to women. Trash them.⁴⁸

Feminists denounced the racist, sexist, and homophobic prejudices of psychological expertise and appealed for open discussion. Not infrequently, their bold actions were jeered by the (overwhelmingly male) professionals in attendance, who sometimes greeted the unwelcome feminists with "You're a paranoid fool, you stupid bitch!" and "Why don't you idiot girls shut up!"⁴⁹ On the other hand, radicals within the professions, many of whom were seeking to eliminate "psychiatric atrocities" such as lobotomy and electroshock or put their professions on record against the Vietnam War, functioned as important allies.⁵⁰ Cooperation between movement activists and dissident professionals was often the key to effective publicity and change.⁵¹ At the 1970 meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, for example, the Radical Caucus distributed literature to those attending the conference in a compilation titled "Psychic Tension" and presented a series of documents to the association's annual business meeting. One leaflet simply confronted the assembled masses with the question: "ARE YOU A MALE CHAUVINIST?"⁵² Another, "A Credo for Psychiatrists," embodied many of the themes of the feminist critique, reviewed above.

At least get off our backs. . . . It's not penis envy or inner space or maternal urges or natural passivity or hormone-caused emotionality that determines our lives. It's an uptight, repressive male supremists [*sic*] social structure and set of social attitudes that prevents us from seeing ourselves as full human beings struggling to live out our potential. . . . The only legitimate role for therapists is to catalyze our struggles. Psychiatry that tries to adjust to a bad situation is not help. It is betrayal [*sic*] in the guise of benevolence. Psychiatrists, heal thy-selves. . . . Help *us* become our own psychiatrists, to write our own theories, to define our own natures. If you can't do that then get out of the way. We don't want your crazy trips laid on us. We want LIBERATION NOW.⁵³

Feminist professionals also worked tirelessly to reform their colleagues' theories and practices and to advance the professional interests of women, usually through the formation of women's caucuses, radical caucuses, and autonomous professional organizations. For example, the Association for Women Psychologists (AWP) was founded in 1969 during the annual APA meeting in Washington, D.C., which was marked by protest from other dissident groups on the Left: Psychologists for Social Action, Psychologists for a Democratic Society, the Association of Black Psychologists, and the Association of Black Psychology Students.⁵⁴ In response, the APA passed an abortion rights resolution and agreed to eliminate sex designations in its own job listings after women threatened to shut down the offending job placement booths themselves and sue the APA for sex discrimination.⁵⁵ (The Women's Equity Action League filed suit in April 1970 anyway.)

At its inception and during its early years, AWP clearly represented the prevailing mood of radical feminist anger and adhered to the leaderless organizational style common among radical women's liberation groups. Phyllis Chesler, speaking on behalf of the new organization, demanded monetary "reparations" to be used to release women from mental hospitals and psychotherapy, a suggestion that, however heartfelt, was not taken very seriously.⁵⁶ Nancy Henley, another founding mother of the organization, reflected in disgust that "talking to psychologists about action is like talking to Spiro Agnew about engaging in civil disobedience."⁵⁷ Early structural decisions decentralized AWP authority by eliminating all elected officers, making all organizational roles voluntary, and warning members against "the creation of 'stars' by forces outside our organization."⁵⁸

Steeped in the politics of protest, the founding documents of the AWP nevertheless disclosed the positive role its authors hoped psychology might play. The statement of purpose declared that "AWP is dedicated to . . . exploring the contributions which psychology can, does

and should make to the definition, investigation, and modification of current sex role stereotypes."⁵⁹ In ensuing years, the AWP called repeatedly on the APA to make good on that organization's founding promise "to advance psychology as a means of promoting human welfare" and to assist "the realization of full human potential in all persons."⁶⁰

Psychology Constructs the Feminist

Feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s doggedly pursued the insight that "psychology constructs the female" and campaigned publicly against the psychological establishment, as we have seen. At the same time, psychology was also helping to construct the feminist, a process that has received comparatively little attention. The remainder of this chapter will illustrate how intellectual and clinical traditions rooted in the career of postwar psychological expertise inspired early feminist theory and mobilized feminist activism, even as they served as targets of protest. Examples discussed in the following pages include Betty Friedan's early adaptation of humanistic personality theory, the central place of "identity" (a concept affiliated with Erik Erikson) in the cultural reorganization feminists envisioned, and the assimilation of the psychotherapeutic sensibility into feminism through consciousness raising and feminist therapy.

BETTY FRIEDAN AND THE FORFEITED FEMALE SELF

Years before a mass women's movement materialized, Betty Friedan anticipated Weisstein's analysis and blamed the "new psychological religion" of adjustment for endowing a self-destructive femininity with social and scientific authority.⁶¹ Friedan, a Smith College graduate and middle-class housewife who had once aspired to a career in psychology herself, launched a journalistic attack on psychological experts in her best-selling *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Freudian theories about femininity, she claimed, were "an obstacle to truth for women in America today, and a major cause of the pervasive problem that has no name."⁶² Her survey of stories in women's magazines like *Redbook* and *Good Housekeeping* (publications for which she had written

herself during the 1950s) convinced Friedan that after 1945, "Freudian and pseudo-Freudian theories settled everywhere, like fine volcanic ash."⁶³ Because the gospel according to Freud allowed women to derive true happiness only from their relationships to husbands and children, popularizers made housewives feel neurotic for hungering after any independent self at all. Convinced that something was deeply wrong with their mental and emotional health, middle-class housewives lined up in psychotherapists' offices, seeking yet more expert help in their quest for feminine adjustment.

These were certainly harsh criticisms, coming as they did at a moment of widespread enthusiasm about psychoanalytic ideas. But Friedan was also careful to note the "basic genius of Freud's discoveries" and insisted there was no conspiracy against women among the experts.⁶⁴ Most important, she saw the liberating possibilities of harnessing psychological theory to feminist purposes. She emphasized the notion of "some positive growth tendency within the organism," advanced by Gordon Allport, Carl Rogers, Karen Horney, and Rollo May, among others.⁶⁵ Their humanistic formulations, and especially Abraham Maslow's motivational theory, could be used as ammunition to argue that the tragedy of the (middle-class) female condition was due to "the forfeited self."⁶⁶ Maslow's theory suggested that people moved progressively through a series of human motivations, from lower, material needs to higher, nonmaterial needs. When their needs for food and housing were assured, in other words, people could be expected to attend to their desires for creative experience and accomplishment. The most popular feature of his theory was Maslow's portrait of "self-actualizing" individuals, a term he used to designate those people who had climbed to the top of the motivational ladder in order to explore their humanity through exciting, "peak experiences."

Friedan was alarmed at the almost complete absence of women on Maslow's list of peakers. (The only two exceptions were historical figures Eleanor Roosevelt and Jane Addams.) She turned women's relative exclusion from the ultimate in psychological integration, at least according to Maslow, into an appeal for feminism. She treated the scarcity of female peakers as powerful evidence that cultural prescriptions requiring middle-class housewives to devote themselves exclusively to the needs of husbands and children also doomed them to a psychological hell, or at least a decidedly second-class emotional existence. The core of the feminine mystique, Friedan wrote, was that "our culture does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and

fulfill their potentialities as human beings."⁶⁷ Why, she asked, should women be expected to renounce their natural tendencies toward individuality and creativity? Were they not entitled to equal psychological opportunities?

If the ideology of femininity directly contradicted the process of self-actualization, as Friedan maintained, then psychology could provide real support to feminist arguments. Women deserved rights and opportunities, not only to employment and equal pay, but to the less tangible rewards of living as whole human beings. That her commitment to the value of psychological knowledge was not an abstract exercise is evident in the National Organization for Women's 1966 statement of purpose, which explicitly incorporated the humanistic refrain: "NOW is dedicated to the proposition that women first and foremost are human beings, who, like all other people in our society, must have the chance to develop their fullest human potential."⁶⁸

"IDENTITY"

Feminists' discovery that "identity" was politically serviceable did not end with Friedan's book. Subsequent feminist efforts illustrated even more broadly than Friedan's partiality to Maslovian theory how the language and theoretical tools of psychology could be made relevant and usable to the women's movement. Before the 1960s, discussions of "identity" were confined mainly to the literature on developmental psychology. During the 1960s and after, the term served as a clue to who had power, who did not, and why. It became so central to feminists, in fact, that the term "identity politics" circulated widely as a shorthand reference to a particular political position. In an abbreviated fashion, it alluded to the constellation of ideas that held the building blocks of individuality—gender, age, race, class, sexual orientation, among others—to be an efficient means of both understanding and dismantling the structure of social and political inequality. It offered, in other words, a way of tying individual experience to social context.

Throughout the postwar era, the concept of identity was closely identified with the work of German emigré psychoanalyst Erik Erikson.⁶⁹ Erikson dated its origin to his clinical work with World War II veterans, who had reported an eerie loss of feelings related to personal uniqueness and historical continuity.⁷⁰ It was during the 1950s that "identity crisis" entered the language as a common term for the first time. As a national panic over an epidemic of juvenile delinquency esca-

lated, the concept seemed a convenient way to think about the dangers posed by adolescent male development. During the 1960s, Erikson suggested that young people had also lost their place in history, just like the veterans he had treated. In Erikson's psychosocial ideas, many young people found confirmation (or at least an explanation) of their own commitment to radical politics. Numerous social scientists also used Erikson's work as an aid in exploring the origins of the period's social movements.⁷¹ Erikson repeatedly assented to such sociological applications.⁷²

A 1964 article, "Inner and Outer Space: Reflections on Womanhood," brought Erikson to the attention of feminists.⁷³ Based on Erikson's work in a two-year University of California child study (which had not been intended as an investigation of gender identity or development), the article explored the gender differences in special relationships that Erikson had observed in children's play. Boys, he found, emphasized outer spaces, protrusions, and people and animals in (sometimes destructive) motion. Girls, on the other hand, emphasized inner spaces and peaceful enclosures containing people and animals at rest.

To Erikson, it was obvious that such differences indicated that "a profound difference exists between the sexes in the experience of the ground plan of the human body."⁷⁴ He explained that his concern with women's reproductive biology was not "a renewed male attempt to 'doom' every woman to perpetual motherhood and to deny her the equivalence of individuality and the equality of citizenship."⁷⁵ He nevertheless concluded that "women have found their identities in the care suggested by their bodies and in the needs of their issue, and seem to have taken it for granted that the outer world space belongs to the men."⁷⁶

Erikson came under fierce feminist fire.⁷⁷ Kate Millett, in her widely read *Sexual Politics*, accused him of reducing sexist social arrangements to biological inevitabilities and denying women the freedom he automatically granted to men: to forge identities not circumscribed by "somatic design."⁷⁸ In part, what irked his feminist critics was also that Erikson's analysis sounded benign, at least in comparison to vulgar biological determinism. His sympathy for women, and his willingness to accord them ethical superiority in their presumed fidelity to peacefulness and nurturance, struck Millett as a clever way of leaving unquestioned the "clear understanding that civilization is a male department."⁷⁹

Wounded and angry, Erikson defended himself. He pointed out that the essay was intended as an alternative to orthodox psychoanalytic theory, a direct challenge to the objectionable notion that female psychological development revolved around the absence of a penis. Erikson, who considered himself a friend to women, was dismayed that his ideas had been interpreted as a mockery of women's human potential, and suggested that the unfortunate misunderstanding had occurred because his ideas had been ripped from the context that made them intelligible.⁸⁰ Their lack of appreciation for his prowoman stance prompted Erikson to attribute to feminists a "moralistic projection of erstwhile negative self-images upon men as representing evil oppressors and exploiters," a statement that feminists doubtlessly perceived as both a slur and yet another example of how easily experts could dismiss feminist demands by resorting to psychological analysis.⁸¹

Whatever their differences with and attitude toward Erikson, feminists proceeded to use "identity" in their own way and for their own purposes. Theorists at various points on the political spectrum of feminism quickly latched onto the process of female socialization as the preferred explanation for feminine thought and behavior. It was an explanation that necessarily favored nurture over nature, history and culture over biology. Because socialization was a social process by definition, highlighting it highlighted the power of deliberate social arrangements in the manufacture of gender's meaning. In comparison, most feminists believed, biological sex was purely accidental and altogether trivial.

Kate Millett proclaimed "socialization" to be the ideological foundation of patriarchal power. Without "the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sexual category," she argued, consent for a system of male-dominated "sexual politics" would be impossible to obtain.⁸² Such uncompromising emphasis upon the social dimensions of subjective experience was a common theme in the early years of the women's movement. Socialist-feminist Meredith Tax, for example, wrote,

We didn't get this way by heredity or accident. We have been *molded* into these deformed postures, *pushed* into these service jobs, *made* to apologize for existing, *taught* to be unable to do anything requiring any strength at all, like opening doors or bottles. We have been told to be stupid, to be silly. We have had our mental and emotional feet bound for thousands of years. And the fact that some of the pieces that have been cut out of us are ones we can never replace or reconstruct—an ego, self-confidence, an ability to make choices—is the most difficult of all to deal with.⁸³

Tax expressed the rage and pain many women felt about "the pieces that have been cut out of us." But the argument that female identity had been distorted by sexist social programming and interpersonal relationships had a very bright side. Identity could be changed through social decisions and actions.

Over the long term, alterations in childrearing practices appeared especially promising as a method of reforming gender socialization. Bringing children up differently held out the possibility of eliminating polarized roles, traits, and behaviors and encouraging girls and boys alike to explore a wider range of human possibilities. Nancy Chodorow, a graduate student in sociology during the late 1960s, was interested in how the division of childrearing labor reproduced gendered personalities. Inspired by the work of culture and personality anthropologists, she noticed that although wide cross-cultural variation existed in behaviors and traits categorized as either masculine or feminine, women were always the primary socializers of infants and young children. Female caretaking was an apparent "cultural universal."⁸⁴ She hypothesized that a developmental process requiring both girls and boys to separate from their mothers in order to gain an independent psychological identity was at the root of problematic gender differentiation.

In hers, as in the other feminist critiques reviewed above, a central theme was that most psychologists, anthropologists, and other social and behavioral experts had done a terrible disservice by transposing malleable feats of culture into supposedly ironclad facts of nature. Chodorow's analysis offered an alternative. The sharp division of socializing labor between men and women because of the alleged fit between childbearing and childrearing was revealed to be a thoroughly cultural construct with profound implications for the production of gendered personalities and the maintenance of male supremacy. Chodorow tried to illustrate how the construction of gender identity might be treated as a social process while still conserving the psychoanalytic tradition's close attention to the significance of early childhood and the familial environment.

Shocked to learn they were different from their female caretakers, she speculated, boys had to actually *do* something in order to achieve masculinity, and that something often involved distancing themselves from the feminine by attributing power and prestige to whatever activities were culturally defined in masculine terms. Girls' development was smoother, but the results were more self-destructive. Because they were not different from their female caretakers, their identity did not have

to be earned through activity distinguishing them from their mothers. Feminine identity simply *was*. Ascribed as a product of nature, women's identity was readily internalized by girls as a given, only to be re-created through the next generational cycle of childrearing. "Until male 'identity' does not depend on men's proving themselves, their 'doing' will be a reaction to insecurity, not a creative exercise of their humanity, and woman's 'being,' far from being an easy and positive acceptance of self, will be a resignation to inferiority."⁸⁵

Chodorow was neither the only theorist impressed by women's exclusive responsibility for child care nor the only one to stress that girls and boys alike would benefit from growing up around men and women whose creativity managed to encompass child nurture and a wider range of other activities than were typically allowed by either masculinity or femininity. An equal division of domestic labor between men and women, from dishes to diapers, became one of the movement's central demands. Organizing projects were formed to draft men into child care, to promote nonsexist educational materials, and to ease women's domestic responsibilities. Practical equality, feminists maintained, was a simple matter of social justice for women. But it was also, as Chodorow had suggested, a matter of everyone's mental health. If men and women were equally represented as socializers, and if children were exposed to a diversity of adult possibilities, the result might be a new, and improved, experience of self. Girls and boys alike would grow to be more integrated, secure, and fully human women and men.

THE PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC SENSIBILITY IN FEMINISM

Imagining cultural rearrangements durable enough to produce nongendered personalities in future generations was both a radical project and a very optimistic one, since it simultaneously required a great deal of patience and men's cooperation. The women's movement also advocated short-term approaches less dependent on reaching cultural consensus. Women, for example, could simply jettison the niceties of gender expectations. If enough women refused to make their behavior conform, then getting angry would amount to an effective political strategy. "A woman should be proud to declare she is a Bitch," one typical statement pointed out, because "bitches seek their identity strictly through themselves and what they do. They are subjects, not objects."⁸⁶

Bitches are aggressive, assertive, domineering, overbearing, strong-minded, spiteful, hostile, direct, blunt, candid, obnoxious, thick-skinned, hard-headed, vicious, dogmatic, competent, competitive, pushy, loud-mouthed, independent, stubborn, demanding, manipulative, egoistic, driven, achieving, overwhelming, threatening, scary, ambitious, tough, brassy, masculine, boisterous, and turbulent. Among other things, a Bitch occupies a lot of psychological space. You always know she is around. A Bitch takes shit from no one. You may not like her, but you cannot ignore her.⁸⁷

Being a bitch, many women discovered, was easier to appreciate in theory than to realize in practice. Layers of female socialization could not be shed so easily or comfortably, and acts of feminist willpower, no matter how resolute, were inadequate to the task. Those who did succeed found that their defiance, whether expressed at home or in public, met with swift and certain reaction, not infrequently in the form of punitive psychological intervention, as Weisstein, Chesler, Bart, and others had painstakingly shown. On the one hand, this frustrating state of affairs made the paternalism of psychological experts ever more galling to feminists. On the other hand, it confirmed the centrality of both "psychological oppression" to women's subordinated status and "psychological liberation" to a vision of sexual equality. In its early years, the women's movement addressed women's subjective experience explicitly and continually, making it the building block of movement organization, the foundation of feminist theory, and the justification for reforming the psychotherapeutic enterprise.

Consciousness raising (CR) groups, not coincidentally, were sometimes called "bitch sessions."⁸⁸ The practice of group discussion and support which formed the organizational nucleus of the movement's radical wing during its early years embodied a respectful attention to emotion and a desire to communicate the subjective feel of women's everyday lives, which ran the gamut from anger to anguish. CR groups originated with New York Radical Women (NYRW), a radical feminist group formed in the fall of 1967. After a meeting during which the women experimented with going around the room to describe their own feelings of oppression, NYRW member Kathie Sarachild coined the term "consciousness raising" to describe both the practice and the resulting insights. As a veteran of the civil rights movement and the student Left, Sarachild understood that this quintessentially feminist practice was inspired by recent civil rights activism, as well as more distant models among Chinese revolutionaries and Guatemalan guerrillas (fig. 19).⁸⁹



Figure 19. Consciousness raising group. Photo: Women's Movement Archives, Women's Educational Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

CR groups were small, met regularly, and often recruited members through friendship networks as well as feminist organizations. They emphasized introspection, emotional self-exposure, and the sharing of personal, experiential testimony. Pamela Allen's "Free Space," one of the best-known statements about CR, outlined four stages in the feminist group process. "Opening up" in a nonjudgmental context was the first, followed by "sharing," "analyzing," and "abstracting." "It is imperative for our understanding of ourselves and for our mental health," she explained, "that we maintain and deepen our contact with our feelings. Our first concern must not be with whether these feelings are good or bad, but what they are. Feelings are a reality."⁹⁰ The egalitarian practice of encouraging each woman to speak, the refrain of unconditional emotional acceptance, and the value placed on emotional awareness and mental health made CR reminiscent of humanistic psychotherapeutic trends such as Carl Rogers's client-centered psychotherapy. "We always stay in touch with our feelings," began one of Sarachild's descriptions of the place of CR within feminism.⁹¹

But the stated goals of CR—to develop feminist theory and build a women's movement—sharply distinguished it from psychotherapy, as many feminists were at pains to point out. That the distinction was

crucial is evident in numerous, repeated warnings against "thinking that women's liberation is therapy" and "thinking that male supremacy is only a psychological privilege."⁹² "Our oppression is not in our heads," Jennifer Gardner vehemently declared.⁹³ "Therapy assumes that someone is sick and that there is a cure," Carol Hanisch retorted.⁹⁴ Psychotherapy insulted women by appeasing them, whereas CR sessions "are a form of political action."⁹⁵ "Consciousness raising is not a form of encounter group or psychotherapy," Barbara Susan reflected. "I've been involved in both and I can tell you they are very different."⁹⁶

Still, questions persisted. "Is women's liberation a therapy group?"⁹⁷ At all points on the feminist political spectrum, women answered with a resounding no. Reducing women's status to the psychological obstructed individual consciousness and social change by trivializing the possibility that women could act collectively on the basis of a politics of gender. Dangling the illusion of a "personal solution" before women was a futile form of "go-it-alonism," according to radical feminist Kathie Sarachild, whose influential guidelines for running small feminist groups included a list of classic forms of resistance under the heading, "How to Avoid the Awful Truth."⁹⁸ Leftists interested in the radical potential of cultural politics also tried to remain alert to the difference between "life-style revolution" and "cultural revolution." In her article on this topic, Gail Kelly cautioned, "We have gotten so bogged down in the way we live that we lose the possibility of becoming relevant to the way others live."⁹⁹ For her part, Betty Friedan worried that feminist groups might deteriorate into "navel-gazing and consciousness-raising that doesn't go anywhere."¹⁰⁰ CR may have begun with feeling, but it was supposed to lead to thinking and acting.

The passion of feminist qualifications made it apparent that the differences between CR and psychotherapy were as elusive as they were important. There was just no way to sidestep the pressing psychological problems women brought with them into CR groups, and, for the most part, movement activists did not try. The healing spirit and communal support system CR offered were among the new movement's most conspicuous and attractive features.

Feminism's rapid growth through the vehicle of small groups was not lost on practicing psychotherapists either, especially psychotherapists with feminist sympathies. A flurry of research studies attempted to systematically analyze the group process of feminist CR.¹⁰¹ Some clinicians and clinical researchers went so far as to suggest that women's liberation was really a misnomer, disguising a movement dedicated to

↳ #
therapy

self-help and personal sustenance with fraudulent political rhetoric.¹⁰² Many others, however, were sensitive to the differences between feminism and psychotherapy, as well as the striking similarities. The expert guide, symbol of unwelcome authority, had been banished from the group, but CR still had therapeutic results and was "ideally suited to the exploration of personal identity issues."¹⁰³ It was possible to see the feminist practice as simultaneously a challenge and an alternative to conventional psychotherapy.

Annoyed by all the talk about psychotherapy, which they found dismissive, many feminists redoubled their efforts to convey the urgency of their political goals. But the confusion between psychological and political change endured. Feminists themselves were partially responsible. Practically every woman who spoke or wrote about CR mentioned its therapeutic results because it was obvious that collective sharing reduced the burden of self-blame and made women feel a lot better. In our groups, Pamela Allen wrote, "we begin to build (and to some extent, experience) a vision of our human potential."¹⁰⁴ Even feminists who worried that CR groups would "never get beyond the level of therapy sessions" to realize their "revolutionary potential" had to admit that "the rigid dichotomy between material oppression and psychological oppression fails to hold."¹⁰⁵ Carol Payne was one of many to describe how her own group wrestled with the perplexing relationship between individual needs and collective action.

We argued about this [the purpose of the CR group]. A women's group shouldn't be group therapy, we decided. But there were elements of group therapy in what we were trying to do, to help each other deal with personal problems. . . . We never resolved the question of what a women's liberation group was supposed to do. There was always a conflict between those who favored the personal, psychological approach and those who felt that a women's group should be building a bridge between the personal insight gained by being in a small group and political action with a larger body of women.¹⁰⁶

It was simply impossible to separate women's complaints about their lives and aspirations for change from an overall assessment of women's status as a gender category and, in the end, this was precisely the point. Feminists faced this dilemma because they treated women's experience as raw data, refusing to wall off "the personal" from "the political." Barbara Susan put it simply: "Consciousness raising is a way of forming a political analysis on information we can trust is true. That information is our experience."¹⁰⁷

Surely this twin belief that experience was truthful and deserved a

prominent place in comprehending public issues was one of feminism's most enlightening contributions. It was also deeply flawed, as Alice Echols has argued in her history of early radical feminist groups and ideas. Echols documents the internal factionalism that grew logically out of the erroneous assumption that most radical feminists made about the nature of that experience—namely, that women constituted a cohesive sex/gender class.¹⁰⁸ Kathie Sarachild, one of CR's architects, pointed out that the movement's group practice and the idea that gender necessarily unified women were inseparable. CR assumed "that most women were like ourselves—not different," by which she meant white, well-educated, and middle-class.¹⁰⁹

When movement organizations came face-to-face with the major internal challenges raised by working-class women and lesbians, many simply crumbled, as Echols has shown, unable to digest the fact of "differences" among women. A feminism based on the assumption of common experience could not long survive after that assumption was exposed as false. "The dream of a common language" was exchanged for "lies, secrets, and silence," and the very divisions and conflicts that (white, middle-class) feminists feared most came to the fore.¹¹⁰

Although the notion of a sex/gender class became suspect in later years, faith in the truth of experience remained at the heart of the women's movement. The conviction that "experience" was "information we can trust" continued to inspire the production of theory and the direction of activism in the late 1970s and 1980s, as a chorus of new feminist voices proceeded to describe how varied that experience could be and challenge the women's movement to account for the difference that "difference" made.¹¹¹

"Feminist therapy" surfaced early in the movement as a possible alternative to the sexist practice of traditional therapies, as we have already seen. What it was exactly and how it differed from CR were notoriously difficult to determine, but the persistence of discussion about it, and the strong demand for it by potential consumers, illustrated yet again the abiding place of the psychotherapeutic sensibility within feminism.

Predictably, CR was an important model considered by feminists who were also practicing psychotherapists interested in offering sensitive services to their female clients. "The CR groups of the women's movement have implications for the treatment of identity problems of women in therapy," concluded one examination of the relationship between the two, which also noted that many members of CR groups had

apparently had previous experience in psychotherapy.¹¹² "I prefer to view therapy as a consciousness raising process," wrote Anne Kent Rush, one of the authors of *Feminism as Therapy*, a superficial book that conflated feminism and psychotherapy and reasoned that anything that was "healing" and respectful must be both therapeutic and good for women.¹¹³

Most early efforts to define feminist therapy began and ended with the proposition that women's social environment, rather than their intrapsychic makeup, was the primary source of individual psychological problems. More specific, practical questions went unanswered. Was psychotherapy more likely to be feminist in individual or group forms? What could feminist therapy offer men, if anything, and could they practice it too? Did the theoretical orientation of the clinician make any difference? Were Rogerian psychotherapists more feminist than orthodox psychoanalysts? In the absence of guidelines for therapeutic form and content, the general feeling seemed to be that virtually any school or style of psychotherapy could qualify as feminist—from cognitive reprogramming to psychodrama and gestalt—as long as a feminist practiced it.¹¹⁴

This muddled thinking did little to interfere with the growing popular interest in therapeutic services with a feminist slant. One of the AWP's early projects, for example, was to compile a national Feminist Therapy Roster as a service to the larger feminist community.¹¹⁵ A brief comment in the AWP newsletter about who should be included reflected the nebulousness of feminist therapy itself: "If they don't know what that [feminist therapy] is, then we don't want them."¹¹⁶ In order to be listed, the AWP asked psychotherapists to specify their credentials, describe their services, and write up a "statement of your position on feminism."¹¹⁷ The first edition of the roster was a mere twelve pages long and included only forty-five resource listings in the entire country, a very modest effort indeed compared to the thriving industry in feminist therapy that would appear in the late 1970s and 1980s.¹¹⁸

While feminists declared war on the sexism of psychological experts, they were also willing to appropriate those aspects of psychological theory and practice perceived as potentially liberating for women or strategically useful to the women's movement. I have tried to show that the culture of psychology is not adequately understood as a competitor for women's hearts and minds, peddling adjustment while feminism pledged genuine change. Psychological expertise functioned as friend

and foe, with both roles facilitating feminist mobilization and lending credence to feminist thought.

That feminists quietly welcomed certain aspects of psychology while loudly denouncing others produced a paradox—but perhaps it was merely wisdom in paradoxical form—at the heart of feminism. Psychological knowledge could be feminist or antifeminist. It could promote feminist consciousness and inspire social change. It could instill self-hatred and vindicate the status quo. At times this state of affairs was extremely perplexing. Should the women's movement actively support personal growth strategies, or insist that women's only hope was in eliminating systemic barriers such as legal inequalities and discrimination? What would it matter if women achieved institutional gains, only to have their subjective experience remain mired in dependence and powerlessness? Could a line even be reasonably drawn between psychological and social experience?

The curious courtship of psychology and women's liberation thus recapitulated the ambivalent political dynamic that earlier chapters have demonstrated was so crucial to the overall historical direction of psychological expertise after World War II. Capable of soothing and exacerbating social and political ruptures, psychological experts were technologists of pacification one moment and prophets of renewal the next. For feminists, who understood keenly the danger of reducing women's social status to the psyche, the challenge was to link the dots between self and society, between the personal and the political, without making either appear to be a by-product of the other.

"Experience" was what the women's movement offered as connecting tissue. To grasp it was to anchor truth, probe the validity of theoretical formulations, and test the effectiveness of collective action against the inescapable measure of subjectivity. Historically rooted yet in constant motion, experience was feminism's ultimate evidence. It certified that psychology was a trap for women, but it also hinted that psychology might offer a way out of the trap. Experience was slippery and useful, demoralizing, liberating, and terribly confusing. Little wonder that women seeking to comprehend their past, chart their future, and realize their own humanity would sometimes long for some clearer, more reassuring way of understanding their lives. They did not find one.

The Romance of American Psychology

Political Culture in the
Age of Experts

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The type of oppression which threatens democracies is different from anything there has ever been in the world before. . . . It likes to see the citizens enjoy themselves, provided they think of nothing but enjoyment. It gladly works for their happiness but wants to be sole agent and judge of it. It provides for their security, foresees and supplies their necessities, facilitates their pleasures, manages their principal concerns, directs their industry, makes rules for their testaments, and divides their inheritances. Why should it not entirely relieve them from the trouble of thinking and all the cares of living?

—Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*