

## Book Review

# Book Review: *Female Psychology: An Annotated Psychoanalytic Bibliography*; Schuker, E., Levinson, N.A., Eds.; Routledge: England, UK, 2017; ISBN 978-1-138-87226-4

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**Abstract:** Rarely is a book published with a specific focus on 'Female Psychology'—one of the three branches of the 'Psychology of Women' field of study. It is more common to see texts that focus on 'Feminine Psychology', and arguably the greatest number of texts in this area are in fact dedicated to 'Feminist Psychology'. This makes the annotated psychoanalytic bibliography, edited by Eleanor Schuker and Nadine A. Levinson a rare, but important resource. This book review assesses the re-printed text for its content and novel contribution to the field, but does so framing it in the wider context of studies into the Psychology of Women, the changing times, and the current landscape of similar research. Furthermore, this review frames the text in a wider psycho-socio-cultural academic debate about the similarities, differences, and conceptual meanings of the three (distinct) branches of: Feminist, Feminine, and Female Psychology; concluding the difference in origin of these schools of thought has allowed for their individualization and continued utility as separate areas of study into the Psychology of Women.



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## 1. Introduction

Seldom does one stumble across a book entirely dedicated to the 'Female Psychology' strand of the Psychology of Women umbrella. 'Feminist Psychology' and 'Feminine Psychology' are far more commonplace as approaches to this field of research, and much written can be found in books, both old, and recent. Along with those dedicated to the Psychology of Women [1–3], or those more broadly covering gender studies [4–6], 'Feminist Psychology' boasts many authors, including those of international origin and standing [7–9]; whilst 'Feminine Psychology' enjoys perhaps the longest history of texts dedicated to its discipline, specifically by Karen Horney [10]. However, to our knowledge there are only two books in existence which explicitly *pin their flag* to the 'Female Psychology' pole, as it were: Helene Deutsch's collection of psychoanalytic papers (reprinted in 1991 [11]) and the annotated psychoanalytic bibliography [12], edited by Eleanor Schuker and Nadine A. Levinson (2017)—first published by The Analytic Press in 1991—which hereinafter we set out to review.

The interesting aspect about both these texts which purport to be focused on 'Female Psychology', is that they assume a psychoanalytic lens, though differ greatly insofar as Deutsch's is an assemblage of essays [11], whilst Schuker and Levinson have edited the collaborative efforts of almost a hundred researchers to produce a 'go to' text collating over two thousand examples of 20th Century research into the psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis of women [12]. The process not only took a number of years to complete, but involved many people engaged in a variety of roles, in order to produce this catalogue;

therefore, the first comment on this feat should definitely be one of commendation for the authors for having successfully completing an endeavour of this colossal scale.

Books such as Schuker and Levinson's 28-chapter bibliography [12] can be dense and often not easy to navigate; however, one extremely positive aspect of this book is the fact it is neatly divided into five separate sections. Each chapter within these sections begins with a brief introduction allowing the reader to understand what they are likely to find in the subsequent pages. In doing this, what the authors have achieved is a text which immediately allows readers to tackle their searching exercise in a logical, systematic, and perhaps most importantly, manageable fashion. These sections are also the most sensible way to review the whole book; therefore, what continues after is a brief précis and measured appraisal of each of the sections listed. The sections are titled as follows: "*Section I: Historical Views*" (pp. 3–78); "*Section II: Developmental Perspective*" (pp. 79–330); "*Section III: Female Sexuality, Character, Psychopathology*" (pp. 331–566); "*Section IV: Clinical Concepts*" (pp. 567–604); and finally, "*Section V: Reading Lists*" (pp. 605–626).

## 2. Review

Starting with Historical Views, the bibliography outlines the backdrop to studies into Female Psychology and Women's Mental Health, commencing with Freudian perspectives listing thirty-eight of Sigmund Freud's own papers ranging in date from 1893 to 1940. After this, early psychoanalytic authors are documented, including Melanie Klein, Karen Horney, Helene Deutsch, as well as Freud's own 'best student', Karl Abraham. This chapter along with the next two on modern commentaries, and theoretical perspectives allow the reader to grapple with the foundation blocks of this field—immediately highlighting the influential thinkers and thought which preceded much of the work we now see as commonplace as researchers of women's mental health and psychological wellbeing. For anyone wishing to begin their career in this field or gain the underpinning knowledge from which this field has emerged, Section I is a vital signposting service. It would also be high on the recommended list for anyone wishing to develop teaching material for historical and theoretical perspectives in courses on Women's Mental Health or on the Psychology of Women. The texts listed in this section offer a strong reference list for the purposes previously described, as well as documenting the very first glimpses of Female Psychology and the origin of what is now a relatively unexplored stranger to the wider women's psychology research movement.

Moving onto the Developmental Perspective—the book's longest section with twelve chapters—the literature discussed ranges from the development of gendered differences with Eleanor Maccoby, Lawrence Kohlberg, Nancy Chodorow, and Erik Erikson being amongst the authors cited for their pioneering work undertaken in the mid-twentieth century. Once again, this detailed appraisal of developmental perspectives on Female Psychology provides a thorough collection upon which researchers can draw, but perhaps most interestingly is that this section is evidence of perhaps the most obvious display of support that 'Female Psychology' is underpinned by a psychoanalytic and lifecourse perspective [13,14]. This section has detailed chapters on Adolescence and Early Adulthood, in Chapters 9 and 12, respectively; as well as transitional life experiences such as the Menstrual Cycle (Chapter 10), Pregnancy and Motherhood (Chapter 14), and the Menopause and Aging (Chapter 15). The life course approach detailing women's experiences of key life transitions in Section II allows for a continuous understanding of how women's mental health changes during these transitions, but also records how these psychological changes have been understood, documented, and addressed by Psychologists, Psychoanalysts, and Psychiatrists over time. In doing so, it also shows the challenges both women and psychological professionals have faced when addressing women-specific developmental and psychological health.

The third section of the bibliography captures Female Sexuality, Psychopathology, and also Character (a term which is now probably obsolete in modern psychological sciences, due to the rise in pursuance of the field of personality traits instead). Again, a large

section, the seven chapters contained within Section III meticulously list a spectrum on gendered health issues including works on Gender Identity Disorders (Chapter 19) and even a substantial list of works dedicated to Eating Disorders (Chapter 23)—though notably with the main foci being on anorexia nervosa and bulimia. This section also sensitively documents work on Sexual Abuse (Chapter 24), beginning with Freud’s case studies before moving onto more general works on women’s and childhood trauma by Sandor Ferenczi and Phyllis Greenacre, as well as publications which discussed parental abuse of children by the likes of Irving Kaufman and Anna Freud. Section III is perhaps the one which is least cohesive, as the chapters within it appear disparate, or at best, not fully cohesive as one section. Nevertheless, the documentation of the works contained within the section is as in other chapters impeccable, but should there be a further version released of this bibliography, it might be helpful for readers if the section was divided in two: Female Sexuality and Sexual Abuse, and then Health and Personality Disorders. For readers, our recommendation would be to search each chapter individually, rather than looking at it as a whole section as this may well aid in teasing apart what is otherwise a potentially overwhelming section of breadth over depth.

Much of the bibliography falls in the preceding three sections, however it ends with two slightly different parts: Section IV on Clinical Concepts and Section V which contains reading lists. The first of these two sections offers a reflective look at clinical settings where they will undoubtedly meet and spend much of their time with patients. Though only a small section consisting of just thirty-seven pages (in two chapters), the content is nevertheless crucial to understanding researcher and therapist positionality within a clinical setting, and the addition in this type of text (which was originally published almost three decades ago), is wonderfully refreshing. What the reader learns by reading the brief descriptions of the papers listed in the first of these chapters: Gender Issues in Transference and Countertransference (Chapter 25), is how many researchers have addressed, and continue to address how their own self can influence their therapeutic relationship with patients. This is especially important for therapists of either sex, with patients who have suffered sexual abuse or psychological trauma from someone with the same sex as the therapist (i.e., a male therapist for female sexually abused patient—notably Sydney Smith’s 1984 paper on therapists who abuse abused patients). The following chapter is The Pregnant Analyst: Clinical Issues (Chapter 26), which although limited because—as the editors state—of it being a relatively new area of exploration, offers an invaluable insight to how patients may react differently to their therapist now she is pregnant. For readers, these two chapters provide a group of fascinating insights and examples of previous introspections and reflections into therapeutic positionality, which, as noted in the description for Alexandra Kaplan’s (1986) paper, is important for “*the teaching of female psychology early in training, particularly for male therapists*” (p. 580). It is also important for readers to recognise, that just because these issues are well documented through history, they are far from over, and they too must reflect on their own position and privileges even today [13,14]. Section V is an almost superfluous addition to a book which already boasts more than one career’s worth of reading. Contained within it are two chapters dedicated to Reading Lists for psychoanalytic and female psychology, which if nothing else offer a thorough and manageable guide for the development of a degree course in this field.

### 3. Discussion

Having appraised this new issue of the bibliography [12], there is one nagging criticism, that the re-issue does not contain any new studies from 1991 onwards. It could be argued that there would be potentially thousands of new additions to include, or contrastingly, it would not be so surprising that little more has been published in this field, as psychoanalysis seems to have waned, and ‘Female Psychology’ being almost unseen in the field of Women’s Psychological Studies, as compared to its Feminine and Feminist Psychology counterparts. In concluding this review, it is right to then question, what exactly is meant by ‘Female

Psychology’ and how far one strand of the Psychology of Women differs from the others. To offer some clarity on the matter, definitions have recently been established, which for the first time, provides both a unique meaning for ‘Female Psychology’, and offers suggestions for the divide between the strands [13,14]. If we are to adopt these definitions, whereas ‘Feminist Psychology’ deals with the interaction between women and familial or social hierarchies; ‘Feminine Psychology’ covers the psychosocial and psychosexual challenges which occur when adopting a feminine gender identity; and ‘Female Psychology’ takes a lifecourse approach to examine women’s lived experience of mental health and social wellbeing; it is easy to see how psychoanalytic roots have helped to shape the nuances of ‘Female Psychology’. What Schuker and Levinson [12] therefore provide is an in-depth, yet accessible, text to which any therapist, academic, student, or interested layperson could turn, in order to discover a concise yet detailed appraisal of a wide range of literature written about women and their psychological health over the last century.

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