

Swarthmore College

Works

Psychology Faculty Works

Psychology

Spring 1991

Review Of "Women Analyze Women In France, England, And The United States" By E. H. Baruch And L. J. Serrano, "Don't Blame Mother: Mending The Mother-Daughter Relationship" By P. J. Caplan, And "The Family Interpreted: Feminist Theory In Clinical Practice" By D. A. Luepnitz

Jeanne Marecek

Swarthmore College, jmarece1@swarthmore.edu

Rachel T. Hare-Mustin , '49

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-psychology>



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

[Let us know how access to these works benefits you](#)

Recommended Citation

Jeanne Marecek and Rachel T. Hare-Mustin , '49. (1991). "Review Of "Women Analyze Women In France, England, And The United States" By E. H. Baruch And L. J. Serrano, "Don't Blame Mother: Mending The Mother-Daughter Relationship" By P. J. Caplan, And "The Family Interpreted: Feminist Theory In Clinical Practice" By D. A. Luepnitz". *Signs*. Volume 16, Issue 3. 625-630. DOI: 10.1086/494693
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-psychology/1044>

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Psychology Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Women Analyze Women in France, England, and the United States by Elaine Hoffman Baruch and Lucienne J. Serrano; Don't Blame Mother: Mending the Mother-Daughter Relationship by Paula J. Caplan; The Family Interpreted: Feminist Theory in Clinical Practice by Deborah Anna Luepnitz

Review by: Jeanne Marecek and Rachel T. Hare-Mustin

Source: *Signs*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Spring, 1991), pp. 625-630

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174599>

Accessed: 26-06-2017 20:14 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Signs*

type machine altered the terms of the debate as publishers struck a deal with unionized male workers. Owners agreed to exclude women from printing under the guise of protective legislation if the men agreed to accept mechanization of their trade and lower wages. Although not every selection in *Women, Work, and Technology* is matched in quality, each chapter makes a valuable statement on the relationship between technology and women's work.

These three volumes provide diverse insights into the wide-ranging circumstances that shape women's work. What they share is a reminder that the structures of work which define women's lives are subject to change. Allen and Wolkowitz emphasize economic transitions and the potential to reconfigure supplier-homeworker arrangements in ways that would benefit women workers. Christensen concentrates on individual women's potential to redefine work/family expectations. Wright's anthology speaks to the many ways in which women can effect and be affected by technological changes. In sum, each of these books contributes new and important evidence, augmenting our knowledge of the specific work arrangements that enhance and constrain women's lives.

Women Analyze Women in France, England, and the United States. Edited by ELAINE HOFFMAN BARUCH and LUCIENNE J. SERRANO. New York: New York University Press, 1988.

Don't Blame Mother: Mending the Mother-Daughter Relationship. By PAULA J. CAPLAN. New York: Harper & Row, 1989.

The Family Interpreted: Feminist Theory in Clinical Practice. By DEBORAH ANNA LUEPNITZ. New York: Basic Books, 1988.

Jeanne Marecek, Swarthmore College
Rachel T. Hare-Mustin, Villanova University

In an era when what we know and how we know are being called into question, feminist scholars are challenging accepted ways of understanding women's experience. Such challenges must confront the paradox of trying to alter a system of thought while remaining within it. Each of these books, in reexamining the psychology of women, struggles with this dilemma, while recognizing that the dominant system sets the terms of the discourse. One book offers new readings of women's experience by women psychoanalysts; the second, a feminist approach to family therapy; and the third, a feminist reappraisal of relationships between mothers and daughters.

Women Analyze Women in France, England, and the United States is a sampler of contemporary psychoanalytic ideas about gender issues and women's development. The book consists of interviews with nineteen women, most of them scholars of psychoanalysis or practicing analysts. Among those best known to feminists in the United States are Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Jessica Benjamin.

Editors Elaine Hoffman Baruch and Lucienne J. Serrano characterize the analysis of women by women as "a new form of psychoanalysis causing a quiet revolution" (1). What is immediately apparent, however, is the difficulty of breaking away from the dominant discourses of psychoanalysis. Most of the women interviewed are in dialogue with classic psychoanalytic texts and with the (usually) male analysts who wrote them, notably Freud and Lacan. Furthermore, few of the women seem to view their work as part of a shared enterprise that could become a "new form of psychoanalysis." Indeed, one of the stronger impressions left by the book is of the subjects' insularity and their apparent lack of interest in drawing connections to one another's work or to other revisionist efforts in psychoanalysis. Of course, the eight-year span of the interviews could explain in part this lack of connection; interviews conducted in 1980 cannot be expected to address issues that emerged over the next eight years.

The diversity of the collection is both its strength and its weakness. The women interviewed represent three countries, varied strains of psychoanalytic thought, and many feminisms, not to mention antifeminism. But why these particular thinkers were chosen remains a mystery. Some women who are neither practicing analysts nor scholars of women and gender are included. At the same time, a number of prominent women in psychoanalysis whose work focuses directly on women and gender are not. Also problematic is the book's organization. The grouping of interviews by country imparts the flavor of a travelogue. Psychoanalytic territory does not divide neatly along geographic boundaries: French psychoanalysis is not restricted to France, nor is object relations theory confined to Britain. Organizing the interviews around schools of thought, thematic content, or even chronology would have helped readers make more sense of the welter of conflicting ideas.

Baruch and Serrano believe that the immediacy of the interview "replicates the analytic hour in that it can bridge the conscious and unconscious" (2). What the question-and-answer format in fact reveals, however, is that the interviewers are squarely in control of the agenda—in sharp contrast to the analytic hour. The conversations swerve according to the interviewers' interests, which run the gamut from abstruse theory ("Is what you have said about the eroticization

of abjection connected with Freud's theory of the splitting of the sexual object into the degraded and exalted?") to personal tidbits reminiscent of *People* magazine (details about household decor, as well as queries like "Why did you become an analyst?" and "Who was your analyst?"). Regrettably, we do not learn what the subject of the interview sees as the important issues. Moreover, although the interviews are peppered with anecdotes and observations that pique the reader's interest, the format works against sustained elaboration of ideas. There is a certain appeal in hearing theorists speak "off the top of the head," but, as is usually the case with prolonged eavesdropping, the conversations get tedious.

Women Analyze Women will be valued most by readers who are already familiar with those interviewed. Marianne Eckhardt's reminiscences about her mother, Karen Horney, are intriguing. Jessica Benjamin's interview is rich with ideas, and her efforts to set her work within the context of ongoing feminist scholarship are especially valuable. Muriel Dimen and Monique Schneider, though unfamiliar to many Americans, offer provocative views on feminism and psychoanalysis. The final entry, an interview with Diana Trilling, is a trenchant counterpoint to nearly everything that precedes it.

The Family Interpreted: Feminist Theory in Clinical Practice, by Deborah Anna Luepnitz, is a recent addition to the explosion of feminist works in family therapy. Feminism has had much to say about family life, because the family is a primary social context in which gendered behavior is learned and played out. More than any other subspecialty of psychotherapy, family therapy has been an arena of open debate about gender issues, a place where feminist thought is taken seriously, if not always embraced. For those familiar with family therapy, it is puzzling that *The Family Interpreted* proclaims itself to be the first and only feminist offering in the field; in fact, it was published more than a decade after feminist work in the field began.

In the first section of her book, Luepnitz offers critiques of eight prevailing theories of family therapy. Positioning herself in dialogue with well-established figures in the field, she draws attention to sexist stereotypes in some of their writings and to the gender politics in certain clinical interventions (such as blaming the mother, using language disrespectful to women, and discouraging gender equality). Unfortunately, this hundred-page section cannot do justice to the richness and nuanced character of many of the theories.

Having surveyed eight theories of family therapy, the author pronounces the field "notoriously deficient in theory." In her view, an adequate theory of family therapy "rests contingent on under-

standing the family in its temporal context" (109). Most of the work by feminist family therapists has sought just such understanding by examining the political, social, and cultural forces that shape the lives of contemporary families.¹ Luepnitz's allegiance to psychoanalysis leads her to overlook this work and to focus instead on the family in history.

The history of the family is presented as five snapshots of families existing at widely divergent points within the last two millenia, each composed from one or two secondary sources. Like photos in a family album, these portraits conceal the processes of change; moreover, they are contrived to display only certain features of their subjects. The portraits make engaging reading, but their lack of scholarly self-consciousness may set historians' teeth on edge. Moreover, the link between "re-membering the family" at different periods of history and revising the practice of family therapy is obscure. Luepnitz appears to conflate social history with personal "history" as reconstructed in psychoanalytic therapy, implying—wrongly, we think—that the history of *the* family is the same as the history of *a* family.

¹ For example, Marianne Ault-Riche, ed., *Women and Family Therapy* (Rockville, Md.: Aspen, 1986); Judith Myers Avis, "The Politics of Functional Family Therapy: A Feminist Critique," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 11, no. 2 (April 1985): 127–38; Michelle Bograd, "Family Systems Approaches to Wife Battering: A Feminist Critique," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 54, no. 4 (October 1984): 558–68; Lois Braverman, ed., *A Guide to Feminist Family Therapy* (New York: Haworth, 1988); Virginia Goldner, "Feminism and Family Therapy," *Family Process* 24, no. 1 (March 1985): 17–32; Thelma Jean Goodrich, Cheryl Rampage, Barbara Ellman, and Kris Halstead, eds., *Feminist Family Therapy* (New York: Norton, 1988); Alan A. Gurman and Marjorie H. Klein, "Marital and Family Conflicts," in *Women and Psychotherapy: An Assessment of Research and Practice*, eds. Annette M. Brodsky and Rachel T. Hare-Mustin (New York: Guilford, 1980); Rachel T. Hare-Mustin, "A Feminist Approach to Family Therapy," *Family Process* 17, no. 2 (June 1978): 181–94, and "Family Therapy May Be Dangerous for Your Health," *Professional Psychology* 11, no. 6 (December 1980): 935–38; Kerry James and Deborah McIntyre, "The Reproduction of Families: The Social Role of Family Therapy?" *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 9, no. 2 (April 1983): 119–29; Judith A. Libow, P. A. Raskin, and B. L. Caust, "Feminist and Family Systems Therapy: Are They Irreconcilable?" *American Journal of Family Therapy* 10, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 3–12; Laurie K. MacKinnon and Dusty Miller, "The New Epistemology and the Milan Approach: Feminist and Sociopolitical Considerations," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 13, no. 2 (April 1987): 139–55; Monica McGoldrick, Carol M. Anderson, and Froma Walsh, eds., *Women in Families: A Framework for Family Therapy* (New York: Norton, 1989); Morris Taggart, "The Feminist Critique in Epistemological Perspective: Questions of Context in Family Therapy," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 11, no. 2 (April 1985): 113–26; Marianne Walters, Betty Carter, Peggy Papp, and Olga Silverstein, *The Invisible Web: Gender Patterns in Family Relationships* (New York: Guilford, 1988); Dorothy Wheeler, Judith Myers Avis, L. Miller, and Sitra Chaney, "Rethinking Family Therapy Training and Supervision: A Feminist Model," *Journal of Psychotherapy and the Family* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1985): 53–71.

What is innovative and feminist about her approach, says Lupenitz, is its integration of psychoanalysis and family therapy. This claim needs to be considered carefully. There is, of course, a tradition of psychoanalytic family therapy that traces its roots to Frieda Fromm Reichmann's concept of the "schizophrenogenic mother," set out in the early 1940s; most would not see this tradition as affirmative to women. Another doubtful claim is that most feminist therapists "agree that the cure *is* 'through love' " (189), an assertion that seems to identify feminism with the notion that women have unique capacities for love and empathy—an idea over which there is sharp debate among feminists.

The case presentations are the book's greatest strength. A hallmark of family therapy since its earliest days has been the presentation of case material in the form of dialogue interspersed with the therapist's reflections on her or his working assumptions, intentions, and reactions to events in the sessions; this form of presentation is used to great advantage here. As a therapist, Luepnitz follows closely the conventions of the field. Indeed, the therapeutic techniques and strategies she uses come directly from the theories that she criticizes in the book's opening section; what is different (and laudable) is the feminist sensibility revealed in her commentary.

Don't Blame Mother: Mending the Mother-Daughter Relationship takes a self-help approach to healing family relationships. Paula Caplan's message is that strained mother-daughter relationships are a product of the cultural context, specifically, of myths about mothers that the culture promulgates. The myths of the good mother demand perfection: the good mother is an inexhaustible fount of nurturance; she never gets angry; and she knows naturally how to raise children. What Caplan terms "Bad Mother" myths depict mothers as "bottomless pits of neediness" and mother-daughter closeness as unhealthy. What is missing from this analysis is an exploration of the origins of these myths and the ways they serve to maintain the status quo. Also, Caplan skirts important questions of how race, ethnicity, and class shape myths about mothers and how mother-daughter relationships differ for women in different social groups.

The book is directed primarily toward helping readers improve their relationships with their mothers and their daughters. It suggests a wide variety of strategies for bringing about positive changes in mother-daughter relationships and for freeing oneself from the myths of motherhood. Feminist teachers, counselors, and therapists will find Caplan's tasks and exercises useful in their work.

The spirit of the book is reminiscent of the spirit of the women's liberation movement of the early 1970s. Caplan is optimistic about the possibility that behavior can change without extensive investment in psychotherapy. At a time when many feminists have turned to theory, she reinstates the value of women's sharing experiences with other women as a means of personal change, and reasserts faith in the efficacy of individual change efforts. Moreover, at a time when pop psychology books for women promulgate self-hatred under the guise of self-help, and the "codependency" movement promotes mother-blaming as a means of psychological growth, *Don't Blame Mother* is a much-needed antidote.

Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change. By RITA FELSKI. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Language the Unknown: An Initiation into Linguistics. By JULIA KRISTEVA; translated by ANNE M. MENKE. New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.

Temma F. Berg, Gettysburg College

Whether the French/Anglo-American split in current feminist theory is a product of media hype or simply another example of how social construction works (and couldn't the difference between the two be, after all, simply a matter of language?), the two books reviewed here might easily support such a break. *Language the Unknown* is written by Julia Kristeva, a psychoanalyst and professor of linguistics considered to be one of the leading French feminists. *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, written by Rita Felski, an Australian lecturer in English and comparative literature, and bearing praise from Elaine Showalter and Terry Eagleton on its back cover, presents itself solidly in the Anglo-American sociohistorical camp.

Kristeva's *Language the Unknown*, first published in 1981 in France, is divided into three parts: an introduction to linguistics, its terms, methods, and assumptions; a historical survey of theories of language, ranging from those of "so-called primitive societies" to modern structural linguistics; and a look at how psychoanalysis and semiotics provide linguistics with an invigorating future. If I were to teach a course in linguistics, I would be tempted to make this stimulating and eminently readable book required reading.

Language the Unknown is a textbook, and it is hard to argue with a textbook. Nevertheless, Kristeva makes a few points that might prove controversial. As a teacher of critical theory, I find