



Complaints & Disorders [Complaints and Disorders]: The Sexual Politics of Sickness (Contemporary Classics)

By Barbara Ehrenreich, Deirdre English

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From prescribing the "rest cure" to diagnosing hysteria, the medical profession has consistently treated women as weak and pathological. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English's concise history of the sexual politics of medical practices shows how this biomedical rationale was used to justify sex discrimination throughout the culture, and how its vestiges are evident in abortion policy and other reproductive rights struggles today.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In this follow-up to *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses*, Barbara Ehrenrich and Deidre English look at the evolution of the medical view of the female sex and how it has been used to reinforce the social view of women. Beginning in the late 19th century, the fact of women's inferiority was "proven" through medical science. Today, the medical establishment still serves to give "scientific" justifications for the sexist values of our society. The point here is that medicine is not an objective, unbiased science; rather, it reflects and supports the prevailing social attitudes. In their quest for better healthcare, women need to address not only access to care, but also the prejudices which affect that care."

—from *The WomanSource Catalog & Review: Tools for Connecting the Community for Women*; review by FGP

About the Author

Barbara Ehrenreich is author of the 2002 *New York Times* bestseller *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. She has written nearly twenty books, and has been a columnist for *Time* magazine and the *New York Times*. She has contributed to *The Progressive*, *Harpers*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Ms.*, *The New Republic*, *Z Magazine*, *In These Times*, and *Salon.com*.

Deirdre English is the former editor of *Mother Jones* magazine. She has written for the *Nation*, *New York Times Book Review*, *San Francisco Magazine*, *S.F. Chronicle Sunday Magazine*, *Vogue*, and public radio and television. Currently, English is a professor at University of California, Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism.

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The surgical approach to female psychological problems had what was considered a solid theoretical basis in the theory of the "psychology of the ovary." After all, if a woman's entire personality was dominated by her reproductive organs, then gynecological surgery was the most logical approach to any female psychological problems. Beginning in the late 1860s, doctors began to act on this principle....widely practiced was the surgical removal of the ovaries. Thousands of these operations were performed from 1860 to 1890....As we have seen, surgery was often performed with the explicit goal of "taming" a high-strung woman, and whether or not the surgery itself was effective, the very threat of surgery was probably enough to bring many women into line.

Users Review

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Genia Vanderford:

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