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Female Perversions

By Louise Kaplan



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Conventional petticoats make ingenious hiding places for what Louise Kaplan calls "stolen phallic trophies" - intellectual mastery and erotic strivings whose full and open display is forbidden to women even now, at the close of the 20th century. In socialized collaboration with the still-prevailing primitive gender stereotypes, women devise strategies that caricature their femininity to disguise "masculine" accomplishments and ambitions. That consignment to bondage, bondage to the myth of primary femininity is, Dr. Kaplan concludes, a perversion. The existing definition of perversion (whereby the manifest focus, whatever the scenario, revolves around the erect penis and its sexual performance), derives from the psychology of males. Applying a new lens - feminist, Freudian and literary - Dr. Kaplan has created a new template for developing ideas regarding the nature of female perversion.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Distinguished psychoanalyst and author Louise Kaplan scrutinizes the world of sexual perversions and exposes the misconceptions behind them in her masterful study, *Female Perversions*. Her effort earned the book a nomination for a National Book Critics Circle Award. Kaplan's general thesis is that perversions are as much a function of gender role identity as they are of sexuality. Her thesis also maintains that the predominantly male medical profession has created and perpetuated many of the myths of perverse female sexual behavior. The book outlines various types of perverse behavior--fetishism, voyeurism, exhibitionism--and then analyzes each type outside of society's traditional perspective. As she expounds on her theory, Kaplan invokes Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. She sees many parallels between the plight of Emma Bovary and the perception of female perversions in society today. Kaplan writes lucidly, offering an enlightening insight into the provocative and complex issue of female erotic expression to a range of readers.

From Publishers Weekly

Foot fetishist Gustave Flaubert preferred his mistress's slippers to her body. For the heroine of *Madame Bovary*, the sexually thwarted novelist created an adulterous provincial housewife who seems as burdened by gender conventions as Flaubert himself. Kaplan sees Emma Bovary as a woman enslaved by social stereotypes, her successive love relationships a series of dominance/submission games. A psychoanalyst and co-editor of the journal *American Imago*, the author of this hefty tome uses Flaubert's novel, the love lives of George Sand and Edith Wharton, and numerous clinical case studies to illustrate her thesis that perversions (sadomasochism, fetishism, cross-dressing, voyeurism, kleptomania, etc.) are gender-identity disorders. In Kaplan's view, women's perversions parody feminine gender ideals of innocence and submission, while men's perversions express forbidden and shameful feminine impulses. This masterful study breaks new ground in our understanding of sexuality, gender roles and the way modern society trivializes erotic expression.

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From Library Journal

New York psychoanalyst Kaplan mixes Freudian theories with gender stereotyping and comes up with perversions--aberrant human behaviors designed to deceive the conscious mind and subvert anxieties, feelings of shame, repressed aggression, and cross-gender ambitions. For proof, she relies on case studies and her analysis of major characters in Flaubert's *Ma dame Bovary*. Although she emphasizes "female" perversions--defined as kleptomania, anorexia, and "delicate self-cutting"--Kaplan also gives an overview of such "male" aberrations as exhibitionism and pedophilia, plus an analysis of four perverse male scenarios reported in the literature. A comprehensive and compelling academic work, well documented and replete with many literary references--not to mention jargon. Recommended for academic libraries and public libraries with large women's studies collections.

-Janice Arenofsky, formerly with Arizona State Lib., Phoenix

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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