

## Sexist therapists: An APA report

"The iatrogenic effects of urging a woman to accept her 'femininity' should be obvious." In other words, the sexist attitudes of a psychotherapist might cause rather than cure some of the emotional problems faced by women. But even if this conclusion is "obvious," as Julia A. Sherman of the University of Wisconsin says, it does not keep sexism from entering into psychotherapy. This is among the findings of the American Psychological Association's task force on sex bias and sex role stereotyping in psychotherapeutic practice.

Last summer, the APA's Board of Professional Affairs appointed a 10-member group (including Sherman) to examine the extent and manner of sex bias and stereotyping in psychotherapy. A preliminary document has been prepared, and the final report is due in June.

As part of the study, 2,000 questionnaires were sent to female members of the APA. The psychologists were asked to give detailed information on sexist practices encountered during their schooling, as consumers of psychotherapy and as colleagues in the discipline of psychology. Five general areas of sex bias were identified: fostering of traditional sex roles, bias in expectations and devaluation of women, sexist use of psychoanalytic concepts, sexual exploitation of female clients and viewing women as sex objects.

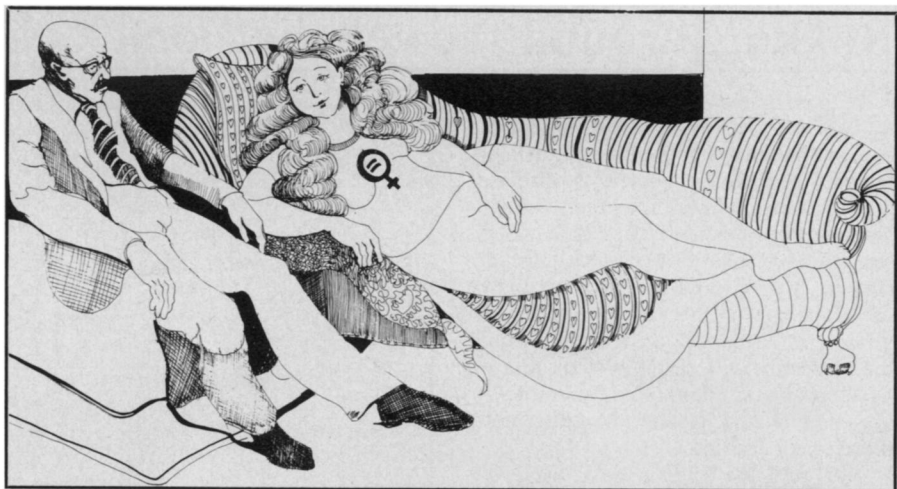
More than 100 responses to the questionnaire have been compiled as a casebook intended to be used to sensitize therapists to the problems of sexism. The examples in the casebook vividly illustrate the type (if not the amount) of sexism that exists among psychotherapists:

- . . . the therapist's failure to point out that it is quite natural for an intelligent woman with a Ph.D. to feel frustrated and unsatisfied by a 24-hour-a-day, 7-days-a-week routine of housework and care of small children.

- . . . I have had women report to me that they could not continue in therapy because the objective seemed to be for them to learn to adjust better to their roles as wives, mothers, daughters (underlings of one kind or another) and they needed to become free persons.

- I know of a therapist, seeing a married couple, who asked questions about the husband's work, then went on to other matters, unaware that the wife was an eminent biologist.

- My femininity was "questioned" by a male therapist colleague when I disagreed with him over marital and child-rearing principles.



- Initially I went to my husband's ex-analyst since I respected him and his skill . . . his priority was to 'adjust' me to my husband's needs without much reference to what might be ideal for me.

- I was in psychoanalytic therapy and was constantly reminded the man should run the home . . . that women were naturally bitchy and need to be controlled.

- . . . women should be docile, supportive and submissive to men.

- . . . a male therapist . . . insisted that there was no such thing as rape—that the woman always asked for it in some way.

- All psychologists I had were males. Several of them made jokes about and/or ridiculed the work, writing, research and ideas of women who presented opposing ideas to those advanced by males (e.g., any question of "penis envy" was treated as a joke). No serious consideration could be elicited for "breast envy" or other such topics meriting study.

- . . . I found my colleagues (male) chuckling over their decision that all a client needed was a "good man" banging her once in a while. When I disagreed, one psychologist said, "Don't give us any more of that liberation crap."

- Surprisingly many colleagues (male and female) still define maturity in women as the capacity for vaginal or-

gasm. My feeling is that women who do not experience or report this are seen (and therefore subtly treated) as emotionally limited.

- I have personally seen three cases where the woman had sexual relations with her previous therapist and have indirect knowledge that this is a highly prevalent activity. In the cases I have seen, this experience was detrimental. One woman took her case to the local Ethics Committee wherein I witnessed additional lack of regard for her and her feelings. [In an appendix to the report Freyda Zell argues that physical intimacies between therapist and patient are not necessarily destructive.]

The questionnaire also asked how psychology should respond to the problems of sexism. Most respondents urged an educational effort on the graduate-school level and in postgraduate workshops, lectures and consciousness-raising sessions. Part of this effort would be reexamination of theories and texts. It was also urged that the APA code of ethics be changed to deal with the question. Some respondents even suggested legal sanctions to deal with sexism.

How the APA will respond to the report is still in doubt. According to the APA MONITOR, the report is meeting with some resistance from the Board of Professional Affairs. The complaint is that the report itself is biased, since only women were questioned and since only 320 of 2,000 responded. □

## X-ray source with a new twist

The term pulsar covers different kinds of objects, some of which emit radio waves, some X-rays, at least one light and several more than one kind of radiation. X-ray pulsars have generally come in two classes, the short period and the long period. The short-period pulsars, with pulses on the order of every few seconds, are believed to be single objects, probably neutron stars, and the pulsations are attributed to the motion of a radiation-emitting hot spot

that is carried around like a lighthouse beam. The long-period variety are thought to be binary systems, and the pulsations, of a few hours duration or more, are explained as a result of repeated eclipsing of the emitting object as it orbits its companion.

Now there is a third class, intermediate period. It is represented by the source designated A1118-61, discovered by an experiment built by the Mullard Space Science Laboratory of