

Women and Power

From *Women on the Couch* by Claudia Bernhardt Pacheco

Today, after so many battles and revindications (some successful, others not), the role of the great majority of women is still played behind the scenes in society. In this book I do not intend to analyze the many injustices and barbarities perpetrated against women along the course of history. A great deal has already been written about this, compendiums, in fact, and well-written ones at that, telling in detail of the witch hunts of the Middle Ages, the wives who have been battered and murdered, job discrimination, unequal pay opportunities and a great deal more. My purpose in this chapter is to try to alert the reader, albeit briefly, to the even more serious problem of how women contribute to the maintenance and fortification of the power structure.

This is a point I consider vitally important, since 51 percent of the world's population is female. If injustice among human beings still exists to such an extreme degree, the obvious conclusion is that we women have not done our part in bringing greater peace, health and progress to humanity. After all, women and men live side by side. It is we women who live intimately with men, who educate them from infancy to adolescence, who imbue in them the basic, perennial values of life. Whether as mothers, nursemaids or even as teachers in the schools, we have, without knowing it, contributed fundamentally to preserving today's inverted way of life.

It is we, through example and words, who teach the children to worship, serve and fear the powerful. Altogether too frequently mothers instill in their offspring the idea that fame, power and prestige lead to happiness.

Women are no different than men. To the contrary; we are all too similar in our desire for power. And unhappily, for reasons which I am not going to analyze here in greater depth, we are very often the losers in this competition.

It is the *means* that women possess to compete socially that differ from those of men. The fact that women have less physical strength limits them in this struggle in various ways, yet they have other means — which they use and perfect to the nth degree — that at times are highly effective. These include emotional blackmail, sexual dependence, apparent fragility and such. "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em," the saying goes. And this is what women have been doing century after century. Not successful in acquiring power for themselves, they try to attach themselves to the powerful, entering into a diabolic pact with them in order to cull whatever advantage they can in the jungle-like confines of an exploitative society.

Yes, it is indeed shameful. And it is equally true that very few women have made any real attempt to modify the status quo that prevails in this world of ours. I am certain that we could have succeeded if we had ever really made a serious effort in this direction. The problem is that women think the same way men think: they want money, prestige and power. If they succeed in getting it by way of inheritance or marriage, they are satisfied. If not, then they explore other means of exploitation, similar to those men use, to get what they desire. When this, too, fails to bring about the desired result, many then develop a series of physical and mental illnesses.

It is only relatively recently that women have begun to rebel against the socio-economic control men have held over them so long. The pact that was made initially in respect to

the division of "realms" (the woman inside the home, the man outside in society) has proven to be unsatisfactory, especially for the woman.

Indeed, that total state of alienation in which women chose to live, and which they obviously thought was good to begin with, has proven to be the greatest disaster for the female sex. Having thought was lost all control of the situation, women have now gradually begun to revindicate positions they had relinquished because they felt it was to their advantage to do so. They thought it was easier to live an alienated kind of life, within four walls, supported and "protected from life's problems" by a man.

From the beginning of this century to the present, scores of feminist movements have been organized, many battles waged, and innumerable protests made to combat the social injustices perpetrated against women. Gradually they have begun to acquire broader rights as citizens and as human beings. But *about* what and *for* what do women protest? From what we have found, and from the tragic results that are there for anyone to see, women want more freedom and more power, not for the purpose of bringing greater justice and dignity to human existence, but rather so that they will have the so-called "power" to do ' all of the unreal, psychopathological things men do.

It is obvious that women have the same right to travel freely, earn an honest living, follow the profession they choose, live with whomever they wish, and study whatever interests them. Indeed, freedom to be free, freedom to accomplish good and to be happy, is indisputably the inalienable right of every human being. But what, for the most part, have we seen to be the result of the so-called women's liberation? Women want freedom to acquire all of those insane things men want: power, wealth, prestige.

The germ of mental illness is to be found precisely in the mad, unbridled desire for power. The euphoria that comes of being able to exploit one's fellow human being, be served by others and mistreat them, of feeling "greater" than others, of controlling their lives and manipulating them as one pleases, has become the woman's desire. Not content with domestic control over children, husband, servants and the dog, women began to crave much more. Driven by inordinate ambition, modern woman reasoned: "Why must I depend on a man to get what I want? I can have all the power I want by myself."

Thus began the feminine assault upon professions that provide power and social influence. I am not saying that every woman has this intention, but certainly we have to admit that the overwhelming majority waits for the opportunity to fulfill this intimate wish.

It is safe to say that women have two basic desires: to have power over one or more men through sex (narcissism and sexual-affectionate behavior); or, more recently, to develop a professional career that brings them fame, wealth and social prestige. We have emerged from a position of total social insignificance to occupy one which is even worse, for we have become active participants in the race for power.

I note with considerable sadness that we women could accomplish a great deal more good than we have thus far. In fact, many times we have either been omissive or we have acted directly to jeopardize even further the already much-compromised well-being of our fellow man.

An article that appeared in *U. S. News & World Report* (November 12, 1984), entitled "Women Expand Their Roles in Crime, Too," stated the following:

Arrests of women for serious offenses jumped nearly 20 percent in the last 10 years, compared with a 13.3 percent rise for men. In all, women account for about 20 percent of arrests each year. The number of women in prison – about 20,000 – shot up 147 percent in the same decade, while male inmate ranks rose 96 percent. But what is more significant is that women are more and more likely to commit property crimes, particularly fraud and embezzlement.

This does not indicate that the female's ethical behavior has necessarily worsened; only that women's dishonesty, previously restricted to family relationships, now extends into the business world in which they participate more and more each day.

I would like to make it very clear that the notion that women are better than men, or more vulnerable or more fragile, is not really true. Such ideas are part of an extremely subtle, diabolical myth that has helped to protect women from social judgment which would be considerably beneficial to them.

In the same article, criminologist Anna Kuhl of San Jose State University remarks: "Most women are nurturers, and you can't nurture and murder at the same time." Adds sociologist Darell Steffensmeier, of Pennsylvania State University, "Most women find the character of criminal work at variance with the values of womanhood." On one hand this is undoubtedly true; yet on the other these comments show that society possesses a certain naiveté in its generalization of female behavior. Criminologist Ira Silverman of the University of South Florida is more accurate when he says, "In the old days, if a woman was arrested and started crying, the cops might let her go. That doesn't happen much today."

In reality, most female crimes and even violence have occurred among personal relations – family, relatives and friends – because this used to be the woman's usual sphere of influence. Yet the more women rise into high-level positions, the more they cheat employers or customers, the same way they have cheated husbands, children, relatives, friends, servants and others.

According to Diane Brown, of the Greater Washington Board of Trade, in the Washington, D.C., area alone, where \$500 million in goods are pilfered annually from stores, housewives account for the biggest share of arrests. (I do not refer here to women who steal to feed their starving children.) If women are the most frequent shoplifters, it follows that they will be dishonest in larger transactions as well.

Since more and more women have entered the job market (or the crime market), which was originally all masculine, they now also engage in the increasingly voracious battle for socio-economic power, as the following facts from the above-mentioned article illustrate:

- ❖ *New York lawyer Nancy Young stole \$300,000 from clients' accounts over a nine-year span*
- ❖ *Frances Cox pleaded guilty to embezzling \$48,000 from the Fairfax Virginia, government while serving as treasurer*
- ❖ *Mary Hudson, board chairman of Hudson Oil Company, pleaded no contest to a charge of fixing gas pumps to short-change customers*
- ❖ *Mary Tredwell was convicted of defrauding tenants of thousands of dollars in rent money at a Washington, D. C. , housing project she managed.*

The main reason women did not commit more crimes like the ones cited above is because formerly they led more or less reclusive lives centered around family and personal relationships – a fact which may indicate a greater degree of psychological equilibrium (less envy and greed).

Not rarely, however, the woman hides behind the violence of her male partner. For example, what need has the wife of a Mafia leader to kill, rob or commit any sort of violence against society when her husband already does all these things, thereby assuring her and her children the wealth and power she desires. Her position is indeed a very comfortable one.

The same holds true for any woman who attaches herself to a powerful man. She wants to take advantage of the benefits his position affords without risking herself in the outside world. Whether this type of pact is successful or not is another question entirely. Obviously it cannot bring good results, for the woman never imagines that one day she, too, will be the target of the same sort of violent and domineering acts her partner commits outside the home.

In other situations women sin through omission and alienation; that is, they close their eyes to what their fathers, husbands or sons are doing to exploit, attack or otherwise jeopardize humanity. Behind every powerful individual, every exploiter or criminal, there is always a dishonest mother or wife to be found. The great majority of women do not teach their children that they must serve humanity through honest, constructive social participation; nor do they permit anyone else to teach them. The same holds true for the many wives who encourage their husbands to rob and exploit so that they may benefit from the fruit of these actions.

Adolescent girls are not interested in the type of boy who is honest and dedicated. Beginning in early childhood, girls admire the most aggressive boys, the ones who exhibit the greatest power — an attitude which reflects their deep disdain for reality, goodness and honesty. It is no coincidence that thousands of teenage girls faint over rock stars and artists who clearly look and act like the very devil himself.

This being the case, how can we complain of being mistreated by these same demons to whom we give all of our support and protection? It is true that until now all of this has been occurring without women themselves being aware of it, a fact that has been to our great disadvantage in many ways, for it is precisely the "powerful" men who are most attractive to us, and who, sooner or later, crush us without mercy.

An American patient of mine, herself a psychotherapist, revealed to me that she had spent her entire youth with a book under her arm, a book which she made her new bible. Its title was *Power, Money and Prestige*. Only now, at an advanced age, has she come to realize that she was the victim of a great hoax and that happiness is to be found far from the place indicated in the book.

Women's greatest problem is that their life goal is the same as that of men. When a woman chooses a partner, a profession, or an institution to join, she is looking for a way to acquire some kind of power. To be sure, the rich man, the man with social status, prestige, physical strength and sexual prowess, the man who has influence and social power, is automatically preferred by women. And yet it is these men who seek power, the

men most interested in acquiring it, who are obviously the sickest. And of course it is these crazy, aggressive, destructive men who never spare their women.

It is also true that most nuns enter religious orders out of the same motives, since such institutions in and of themselves convey the idea that they protect those who enter there. The mother superiors of the convents have come to symbolize female despotism, envy and injustice. The story of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux is one of the most famous cases of persecution within a religious institution. This woman of extraordinary merit and goodness went through hell at the hands of her envious colleagues.

The woman who has gained a position of power can be worse than many a man. And the greater her power, the greater her tyranny. The female boss, for example, "massacres" her employees, making slaves of them and persecuting them far more than a male boss would. A patient of mine, a nurse who had worked eight-and-a-half years in the records and information department at the University of Sao Paulo clinical hospital, had always had female supervisors, and she recalled with horror the intrigue, favoritism and persecutive attitudes of those women. Intimidating fault-finders that they were, her supervisors took advantage of the smallest things to persecute their charges, calling them down for the way they combed their hair, the way their uniforms were starched or any lack of special deference shown to their superiors; yet questions of competence and efficiency were always relegated to secondary importance.

Today, this same person, working as a housekeeper for a married couple, two American psychiatrists, tells of the tyrannical manner in which she is treated by the woman of the house, in contrast to the man, who is always polite and considerate. The woman not only makes her get down on her hands and knees and scrub the kitchen floor every day; she keeps her until late at night, long after she is supposed to leave. On occasion the woman has insisted that she go out to the store in below-freezing temperatures, even though she did not have warm clothes. Her attention to the minutest details and frequent requests that the same task be re-done again and again demonstrate that the woman wants to take full advantage of every single minute that her "slave" is there and get all she possibly can out of the few paltry dollars she pays her for a day's work.

At the same time, the man of the house, himself a target of his wife's aggressiveness, makes a point of treating the former nurse more humanely, insisting she use his hat and gloves when necessary and often making an attempt to minimize his wife's fury toward her.

A lot of women complain that members of their sex are not chosen as often as men for supervisory positions. To a certain extent this is understandable inasmuch as so many of them, the moment they gain a position that gives them power over others, become irascible and fail to show any sense of fairness, picking on details and preventing the work from progressing smoothly.