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## **Book Review: Sex and Seclusion, Class and Custody: Perspectives on Gender and Class in the History of British and Irish Psychiatry**

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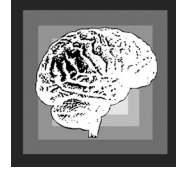
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## Book Reviews

Jonathan Andrews and Anne Digby (eds). **Sex and Seclusion, Class and Custody: Perspectives on Gender and Class in the History of British and Irish Psychiatry.** *Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004. Pp. 338. ISBN 90-420-1176-9 (paperback); 90-420-1186-6 (hardback).*

It is not news that the last quarter century has seen a renaissance in the history of psychiatry. Early work by scholars such as Foucault and Scull re-conceptualized the development of modern psychiatric knowledge and professionalization. More recent academic writing has looked to empirical analysis of psychiatric practice at the micro level, challenging new and old theories alike as to how psychiatric care was actually implemented.

Part of the early re-conceptualization involved feminist challenges to psychiatric history. Scholars such as Elaine Showalter, Phyllis Chesler and Jane Ussher raised important questions about the application of psychiatry's social control functions to women, and these views quickly entered the realm of public mythology. There have long been rumbles among the new empirical scholars that this new history of gender in psychiatry was problematic. Certainly, gender figured large in nineteenth-century psychiatric theory, but it was becoming increasingly clear that theory and practice did not seem to integrate smoothly. This historiography is described with insight and intelligence in Jonathan Andrews' and Anne Digby's exemplary and comprehensive introduction to the book.

This edited collection addresses these gender concerns empirically and systematically in one volume for the first time. For this reason alone, it is a very important book. Contrary to the popular image, the consensus of the papers by Oonagh Walsh, Pamela Michael, Marjorie Levine-Clark, David Wright and Anne Shepherd is that women do not appear to have been over-confined. The disorders such as hysteria associated with women in the nineteenth-century medical literature appear only rarely in the asylum casebooks. If anything, it was single men who were statistically over-represented in the nineteenth-century asylum. Similarly, while patterns of release differed somewhat between the genders, with some suggestion that women may have been released somewhat more quickly than men, release rates of women and men overall do not appear to vary much. If nothing else, this volume puts to rest many of the myths of nineteenth-century psychiatric care of women.

A number of the papers note gender differences in treatment and definition of insanity. Rab Houston's paper on eighteenth-century mental disorder in Scotland notes that men would be assessed according to their ability to run a business, whereas women would be assessed by their ability to cope in domestic environments, for example, although he also provides a wide array of criteria common to both sexes. Similarly, Shepherd notes that therapeutic work for men was on farms and for women in the asylum laundry. That said, the papers are unanimous that men and women alike were admitted only upon evidence of significant mental disorder. There is little if any evidence that persons of either gender were admitted primarily for social control in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. In his analysis of pre-legislative debate, Mark Jackson does claim that the Mental Deficiency Act can be seen as an attempt to control fertility of poor feeble-minded women, but that is with reference to the early twentieth century.

The volume also raises issues of class in the context of the history of modern psychiatry. The recent administrative histories have acknowledged the role of the Poor Law in nineteenth-century asylum county administration, but how Poor Law and private administrative structures mapped onto class differences more generally has been a matter of some debate. Lorraine Walsh addresses this question directly, with reference to the Dundee Royal Lunatic Asylum between 1890 and 1910, finding that social class does not map comfortably onto the private/pauper divide in this institution, and that private status flowed from a combination of ability to meet the fee and also behavioural factors.

A number of the papers examine the intersection of class and gender. On this, Shepherd's paper is perhaps most interesting, as it compares women patient experience in a county asylum with a private facility. A number of papers also make the point that county asylum admission, with its consequent legal pauperization, posed a considerable social risk for women of previously respectable standing. Joseph Melling discusses these questions in the context of the Victorian governess, and Marjorie Levine-Clarke and, to a lesser degree, Pamela Michael and Oonagh Walsh address these issues more generally. These papers serve as salient reminders that gender and class do not operate independently in understanding the situation of the asylum patient.

This is an important book. It raises the discussion of nineteenth-century insanity and gender to a new level. It is essentially a book about the nineteenth century, albeit a long nineteenth century. Houston's paper reaches back to the eighteenth century, and Jackson's forward to the years just prior to World War I, but it is only Joan Busfield's rather summary paper that extends to the rest of the twentieth century. That leaves an important question unaddressed. The collection makes a strong case that women were not over-represented in nineteenth-century asylums; they clearly were by the mid-twentieth century. The story of how that occurred remains to be written.

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