

## Shapiro, Johanna

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Thank You.

NEW REVIEW -- WELLS / Out of the Dead House: Nineteenth-Century Women Physicians and the Writing of Medicine. The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001, \$22.95.

[AUTHOR]  
Wells, Susan

[BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATA]  
ISBN: 0-299-17174-4, 312 pages, soft cover.

[DOODY'S NOTES]

[REVIEWER'S EXPERT OPINION]  
Johanna Shapiro, PhD(University of California Irvine College of Medicine)

**\*\*Description\*\***

Using professional and popular contemporary written sources, this book examines how mid-nineteenth century women physicians employed variously "regular" (or normative), masquerading, or transgressive approaches to speak to their patients, write about medicine, and participate in dissection and clinical lectures within the predominantly male-gendered profession of medicine.

**\*\*Purpose\*\***

The purpose is to examine women physicians' "distinctive strategies for speaking and writing" as well as employing the clinical gaze, in their struggle to attain a legitimate place in the "hostile profession" of medicine. This type of textual approach has been underutilized in examining the history of women in medicine and as such the book addresses an important oversight. Generally speaking, the book meets its aims, although the detailed analysis sometimes can leave the reader overlooking the forest for the trees.

**\*\*Audience\*\***

The book will likely be of value primarily to historians of medicine and experts in historical textual analysis. The author

probably intends a wider audience, which the issues and concepts raised in the book deserves, but the average medical student, resident, or practicing physician will find the book's jargon and occasional resultant opacity heavy going. If general medical readers could somehow penetrate the thicket of the book's postmodernist terms, they would be well-rewarded by the subtle and thought-provoking post-feminist insights contained between its covers. The author is certainly a legitimate expert in the area about which she writes.

**\*\*Features\*\***

The author analyzes the similarities and differences in how male and female physicians talked to their patients; in how they wrote professionally about patients and their diseases; and in the public spectacle created when they "gazed upon" and observed the human body. A particular strength of the book lies in its ability to bring to life a series of very different, but uniformly intriguing, women physicians. The final chapter on "Forbidden Sights" is especially insightful and theoretically coherent. The inclusion of several black-and-white photographs of these women doctors enlivens the text.

**\*\*Assessment\*\***

The book is rather densely written and suffers from an overreliance on arcane and inaccessible vocabulary. Nevertheless, the pleasure the author takes in her topic is palpable, and this enthusiasm, coupled with meticulous research, compensates for any stylistic deficits. For the patient reader, this book will open previously unexplored vistas of understanding the complexity and diversity of the "mothers" of medicine.

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Weighted Numerical Score: 83 - 3 Stars