

## *Book Reviews*

### *The Logic of Sexuation: From Aristotle to Lacan*

Ellie Ragland

(Albany, NY: SUNY, 2004)

### *Anna Shane*

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Ellie Ragland's latest book *The Logic of Sexuation: From Aristotle to Lacan*, could not have come at a more critical time. Ragland looks at the question of sexuation apart from biological considerations and social commentary, and explains how it is that gender identification moves a subject in her relation with others and in her relation to her ideal. Only the precariousness of gender identification (subject in the unconscious to uncertainty, as opposed to the error-free ideal of a real identity) can point to the widely varied manifestations of the masculine and the feminine, variations which are often not only perplexing to social scientists, but which also resist any explanation whatsoever. Thus, questions about sexuality have often been left unexamined, as if the so-called natural or biological explanative accounts, with no requirement for better thinking on the matter.

Currently in the social sciences there is interest in examining the psychology, as it were, of serial criminals, yet no pattern has emerged that can differentiate even serial rapist-killers from many so-called normal men. There are research dollars going into the study of some of these criminals, toward an attempt to determine if there may be predictive patterns. Ragland's book will benefit those who are conducting this research.

This is an unprecedented time in the history of the world regarding male aggression toward women. There has been the phenomenon of ethnic cleansing involving systematic rape, and the well-documented international trade in sex slaves. Until now historians have mainly skipped questioning the prevalence of rape in war. Do soldiers rape merely because they can get away with it? Can rape be fueled by ideology, or by mob psychology? Can it be a so-called "male bonding experience?" Ragland demonstrates that the sexuated problem of lack placed on the side of the male necessitates a kind of 'desperate need,' to escape the symbolic via contact with the barred Other on the side of the feminine. This sets ripe conditions, not only for rape, but also for the various albeit common aberrations and misunderstandings that can characterize relations between the sexes.

Ragland's accomplishment lies in presenting the grammar of sexual difference, and in explaining founding alienation, which necessarily leads to a real confusion in human sexual relations. This turns the question of biological males and females into the question of the effect of the signifier on sexual reality. My hope is that her contribution will be taken as a starting point for reframing the discussion, such that modern humans may begin to make better sense of our predicament.

