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Male Practice: How Doctors Manipulate Women
By Robert S. Mendelsohn, M.D. Contemporary Books, \$10.95. ★★★

ALTHOUGH WE HAVE all heard medical horror stories before, notably on news shows like *60 Minutes* and *20/20*, we've never heard them knit together with such finger-pointing zeal by a member of the medical profession. Mendelsohn, who has been in practice for nearly thirty years, certainly has the weight of experience behind him as he surveys the damage—physical, emotional and financial—done to women by certain avaricious, hurtful attitudes dear to the American medical establishment.

Women, he says, bear the brunt of the large numbers of unnecessary operations performed annually in the United States. The most common operations (mastectomies, hysterectomies and, especially, episiotomies—but also abortions, which he fails to mention are the most common operations *by far* in the United States) are all done to women, as a result of outmoded and questionable technology, and in response to ailments that doctors themselves have created. Far fewer Caesarian sections, for example, would be performed if the obstetrician didn't think babies ought to arrive during normal business hours.

Mendelsohn has a special hard spot in his heart for gyn/obstetrics, anyway. He documents the process by which the specialty has changed from one of the least lucrative specialties to one of the most in less than twenty years. He shows how the mystique of the skillful medical practitioner has replaced by an automaton who relies on a battery of lucrative and potentially harmful—and often fatally inaccurate—lab tests to diagnose illnesses, rather than taking time with the patient and discussing his medical history. He concludes that the structure of the American medical establishment has been altered to generate income rather than heal patients.

While most of us will agree with Mendelsohn's conclusions on X-rays (more harm than good) and pregnancy (should not be treated as a disease, return it to the domain of nurse/midwives) others will have to back off. Reading this book is a lot like watching Geraldo Rivera on *20/20* (except that, given a good wind, Mendelsohn can outargue even that prince of counterculture journalism). Mendelsohn manipulates your emotions until you feel angry and paranoid, then leaves you with little more to say except "Attaboy!" This feeling must be channeled into a more constructive response if the American medical establishment is to change its tune. Women *must* have viable therapeutic alternatives, and they must know the right questions to ask their omniscient doctor when—and *if*—they finally get him up against the wall. B.W.