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**Mother-Daughter Relationships:
Psychodynamics, Politics, and Philosophy**

By:

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Introduction: An Autobiographical Note

This essay is a work-in-progress. It represents, in part, a return to my intellectual roots, which are in political theory and philosophy. I am beginning to explore the implications of the analysis of mother-daughter relationships for the study of philosophical problems. If we take it seriously, feminism forces us to revise radically the treatment of these problems, their nature, causes, and solutions. It is a truly revolutionary theory.

As an undergraduate I became interested in the problem of objectivity, on two levels. One is the relation between subject and object, the other, the broader epistemological question of the status of our knowledge and the accounts of it. How can we be certain that what we claim to be real and true is really real and true? What counts as reality and truth, and why? Are there any grounds for certainty about these questions?

I can see now that in part I was concerned with these issues because they were a very abstract and intellectualized, hence safe, approach to some of the difficulties arising out of my particular family relations. I can also see that I am not the only one who attempts to resolve inter- and intrapersonal problems in this manner. My own experience does have a political and social dimension, as feminism maintains. However, this perspective was not available to me in the late 1960s and early 1970s, since feminism was only beginning to reemerge as an active movement.

My dissertation was on the relation between politics and epistemology. I studied the history of philosophy in order to understand the emergence of modern empiricism and its impact on political science, especially in its claim to develop a "science" of politics. More generally I investigated the hegemony of the empiricist notion of science both as the only true form of knowledge and as the correct method for acquiring true knowledge. I

attempted to link these developments to changes in the political realm, particularly the emergence of technical rationality as a basis for the claim to power, and the necessity for certain social arrangements, especially bureaucracy, the rule of experts, and the depoliticization of what was formerly or potentially public.

I discovered that philosophy is riddled with dualisms. In empiricism and many forms of rationalism, the subject is considered totally different, in substance and process, from the object. On this premise, the question becomes, how can the subject and object have any relation to each other? All power is given to reason and to the "right" use of it to guarantee knowledge, but the subject is isolated, since the world is either posited as its product or as unknowable in itself. The subject becomes estranged from nature and from its own passions. Ontology (being) is separated from epistemology, and this is eventually elevated by Kant into a formal principle of philosophy. Epistemology emerges as a separate and specialized branch of philosophy.

Despite these developments, it still seems to me that knowledge is the product of human beings, for whom knowing is only one form of activity. The history and life situation of the knower cannot be completely different in kind from the form and content of the knowledge that this subject produces. Therefore, for me, it seemed that epistemology inevitably opens onto ontology, a suspicion confirmed by the study of dialectics, especially in Hegel and Marx, and of phenomenology (almost in spite of itself), especially in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.

In the process of studying these problems, I became interested in critical theory, especially the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and Habermas. Although steeped in the Enlightenment and German idealist traditions and riddled with internal contradictions, critical theory does grapple with these issues.¹ My study of critical theory and my involvement in the women's liberation movement led me to the study of psychoanalysis. Critical theory turned to Freud when the events predicted by Marxist theory did not occur, and especially after the "failure" of the German working class to seize power in Germany before World War II. Critical theorists argued that the success of fascism and other forms of authoritarianism could not be explained without an analysis of individual psychological structure and its interplay with and formation through social forces, such as the family and the dominance of the commodity form in capitalism. Similarly, it seemed to me that aspects of my experience within the women's liberation movement could not be explained by the available political and social theories, including Marxism, and the analysis that posited conscious, quasi-intentional "sex-role stereotyping." I found especially puzzling the intensity of certain consciousness-raising sessions, the avoidance within feminism of subjects like sexuality and mothering, and the painful and personal character of what were characterized as "purely political" splits within the movement (gay/straight, Marxist/radical feminist, academic/nonacademic, etc.).

With a group of women in New Haven, I helped establish a women's counseling service. Under the supervision of a psychiatric social worker, we received training in basic techniques and theory. The service was intended for women who had immediate

problems or decisions to make (divorce, or going back to work, for example) and as a referral service to sympathetic therapists and agencies.

I decided I would like more training in analytic psychotherapy. Counseling seemed too rationally and cognitively oriented to account for and deal with the intensity and persistence of the phenomena that puzzled me. I found a position teaching and working (including doing psychotherapy) in an experimental program at a state university. The supervision provided by psychologists and a psychiatrist enabled me to develop a deeper understanding of the process of psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Now, although I teach political theory full time, I have a small private practice. The patients I have worked with are all very disturbed. Most of them are borderline psychotics who lack a core self. This clinical experience has affected the issues and theory I focus on in this essay.

In what follows, I first outline what I believe is lacking, from a feminist viewpoint, in Freud's theory of psychological development because of his omission of a full account of the preoedipal period. I then trace the absence of this "repressed" preoedipal stage, and the theoretical consequences of this for philosophy and political theory, in Descartes and in the "state of nature" as depicted in Hobbes and Locke. Finally I give a casestudy from one of my own therapy patients to illustrate the kind of psychopolitical analysis of patriarchal structures that I believe feminism must begin to undertake.

The Contribution of Psychoanalysis to Feminism

Psychoanalysis provides essential insights into the problem of differentiation. In the therapeutic process and in psychoanalytic theory the abstract subject-object problem recurs on an individual and concrete level, above all, in the transference relationship central to psychoanalysis. The systematic use and exploration of transference (and countertransference) phenomena, and the focus on unconscious processes distinguish psychoanalysis from any other form of therapy. Since gender identity develops originally and most deeply through preverbal and nonrational experience, an understanding of unconscious processes is crucial for feminist theory. Differentiation is a central issue for women because of the special character of the mother-daughter relationship. My work differs from Nancy Chodorow's on this point, since I believe that the development of women's core identity is threatened and impeded by an inability to differentiate from the mother. I see as a central problematic in female development the very continuity of identity with the mother that she discusses in her essay (see Chodorow, this volume). This leads us to differences on the importance of the issue of autonomy for women as well. I have developed these ideas elsewhere² and will return to them below in an analysis of a patient's dream.

But I want to speculate here on the implications of recent feminist psychoanalytic theory for the more abstract philosophical issues mentioned earlier. This rich clinical and theoretical material can illuminate what have been seen as problems within thought or as characteristics of an abstract and unchangeable human nature. Like all other apparently abstract or universal problems, these problems have their roots in social existence, especially patterns of child-rearing.

Reading Dinnerstein is a profound, transformative experience, because she opens the path for these speculations.³ In addition, I, like Chodorow,⁴ have found object-relations theory to be the most useful and suggestive form of psychoanalytic theory because it analyzes humans as they develop in and through social relations, and stresses the centrality of preoedipal experience.⁵ For reasons I will discuss, feminism compels us to investigate the most primitive roots of human beings and of society. In this investigation the concerns and insights of feminism and psychoanalysis meet, engage, and mutually enrich each other.

The Contribution of Feminism to Psychoanalysis

According to Freud, individual development recapitulates social development. The reverse is also true. Yet Freud could never provide an adequate account of either process or of their interaction. In part, his difficulties arise out of an inability to reconcile his biological determinism with an account of psychological development in and through social relations.⁶ The notion of the Oedipus complex as the central event in the history both of human culture and of the individual reveals these difficulties. The Oedipus complex is meant to show the irreconcilability in principle between instinct and culture. What Freud's account of the Oedipus complex shows, in fact, is the *interaction* of instinct and culture, and the need for an integration of social and political factors into his theory. Freud argues:

It may be presumed . . . that in the case of men a childhood recollection of the affection shown them by their mother and others of the female sex who looked after them when they were children contributes powerfully to directing their choice towards women; on the other hand their early experience of being deterred by their father from sexual activity and their competitive relation with him deflect them from their own sex. Both of these two factors apply equally to girls, whose sexual activity is particularly subject to the watchful guardianship of their mother. They thus acquire a hostile relation to their own sex which influences their object-choice decisively in what is regarded as the normal direction.⁷

Freud assumes here that women look after small children. This is taken for granted and seems to require neither comment nor analysis. Freud also ignores an important way in which these "two factors" do *not* apply equally to girls: for them, their mother is both original love object and "guardian" of their sexual activity. Many questions remain unanswered in Freud's account of the Oedipal situation and its resolution. Where is the father's presence in the girl's experience? What does it mean that the girl's first love object is of her own (not the opposite) gender and that she must develop a hostile attitude toward this first object? Why does the father deter the boy from sexual activity? Why does the mother assume a "watchful guardianship" over the girl? Why does the boy have a "competitive" relationship with his father? Why is the girl's hostility toward her own sex so intense, while the boy's is not, despite his father's prohibitions? What about the boy's hostility toward and contempt for women?

These questions imply that the child's choice of object and attitudes toward his/her own gender take place within a context partially determined by factors that are neither biological nor intrapsychic and intrafamilial. This statement by Freud makes the problems more evident:

Psycho-analytic research is most decidedly opposed to any attempt at separating off homosexuals from the rest of mankind as a group of special character. By studying sexual excitations other than those that are manifestly displayed, it has found that all human beings are capable of making a homosexual object-choice and have in fact made one in their unconscious. Indeed, libidinal attachments to persons of the same sex play no less a part as factors in normal mental life, and a greater part as a motive force for illness, than do similar attachments to the opposite sex. On the contrary, psychoanalysis considers that a choice of an object independently of its sex—freedom to range equally over male and female objects—as it is found in childhood, in primitive states of society and early periods of history, is the original basis from which, as a result of restriction in one direction or the other, both the normal and the inverted types develop. Thus from the point of view of psychoanalysis the exclusive sexual interest felt by men for women is also a problem that needs elucidating and is not a self-evident fact based upon an attraction that is ultimately of a chemical nature.⁸

Not until late in his life did Freud begin to explore the exclusive sexual interest felt by *women* for men as a problem requiring elucidation. For a full analysis of this problem, it is necessary to investigate how power and power relations enter into and help shape the character of childhood development for both boy and girl, and what functions the restrictions of object-choice and sexuality in general serve for different aspects of society.⁹ One place to begin is with an investigation of the forces that shape the parents' attitude and behavior, conscious and unconscious, toward the child. These include not only their personal histories, but more general social factors: class; competition—an attribute of social relations under capitalism; and patriarchy, rooted in male control over the allocation of women. Freud himself admitted that he could not fully imagine what course psychological development would take were the family (i.e., the patriarchal family) to disappear.¹⁰

From a feminist viewpoint, there is an even more fundamental flaw in Freud's account. It consigns to preculture and hence to nature, in its appearance as instinct operating in the id, the entire preoedipal period, the very period when the mother is powerful in the life of the infant and which is especially central to the psychological development of women. Freud's comments on the preoedipal period and the psychology of women are, as he himself admits, "incomplete and fragmentary."¹¹ Even granting this (something his followers unfortunately did not always do), Freud's analysis is inadequate for a number of reasons: (1) He is unable to grasp fully the character of early infantile experience. This difficulty stems in part from his lack of direct clinical experience with children. (2) His analysis of the preoedipal period is still heavily influenced by what Freud thinks is to follow, i.e., the girl's discovery of her "castration," and the boy's discovery of his mother's "castration" and his fear of being castrated by the father. (3) He does not explore the mother's role in depth. In his account, she appears primarily as an object for the child. (4)

He does not analyze closely the impact of this period on the boy, so that Freud can make the naïve statement, "A mother is only brought unlimited satisfaction by her relation to a son; this is altogether the most perfect, the most free from ambivalence of all human relationships."¹²

As this astonishing statement shows, the focus on the Oedipal period introduces distortions into the account of individual psychological development. Freud had intimations of this when he discovered the "Minoan" (preoedipal) ruins underlying the Greek ones, significantly, in the context of discussing female psychology.¹³ This realization was never fully integrated into his psychological theory or into most subsequent psychoanalytic theory.

The omission of the preoedipal period distorts Freud's metapsychology as well. As Monique Wittig has pointed out, Freud's account of civilization is of a struggle among men after women are dominated.¹⁴ He cannot give an account of this domination or analyze its psychological and social consequences for women, men, and the character of culture. The original act of domination is thus relegated to nature, even though it shapes all that is to follow. It is significant that *Civilization and Its Discontents* begins with Freud discussing his inability to grasp a certain "oceanic" feeling (about which Romain Rolland had written him). This oceanic feeling seems to capture the affect of the early period of symbiotic unity between mother and child. Freud's difficulties in grasping this state and including it within his theory does, indeed, recapitulate social development. Earliest infantile experiences are repressed, not only by the individual in the process of maturation, but also in the collective memory and accounts of our history as well.

Toward a Feminist Analysis of Philosophy: The Return of the Repressed

We can see this repression and its consequences not only in individual psychological development and in Freud's account of it, but in philosophy and political theory and in the actual social relations they reflect. I can only outline these effects here. The repression of early infantile experience is reflected in and provides the grounding for our relationship with nature.¹⁵ This is true, as well, of our political life, especially the separation of public and private, the obsession with power and domination, and the consequent impoverishment both of political life and of theories about it. The repression of our passions and their transformation into something dangerous and shameful, the inability to achieve true reciprocity and cooperative relations with others, and the translation of difference into inferiority and superiority can also be traced in part to this individual and collective act of repression and denial.

Descartes's philosophy is especially interesting when read from a feminist viewpoint. His philosophy is important not only in itself, but also because it defined the problematics for much of modern Western philosophy. Descartes's philosophy can be read as a desperate attempt to escape from the body, sexuality, and the wiles of the unconscious. Experientially the first body we escape from (physically, and then emotionally) is that of our mother. As Dinnerstein points out, our relation with our own body is mediated through our continuing ambivalence about separating and differentiating from her.

In the *Discourse on Method*, the problem of the "cogito" ("I think, therefore I am") emerges in relation to the problem of distinguishing reality from a dream.¹⁶ For Descartes the solution to the problem of certainty and the confusion generated by the senses is a radical reduction of consciousness to pure ego, to that which thinks. The ego is emptied of all content, since in principle there is nothing it can know a priori about its life situation or history, all of that having been cast into doubt.

Consider the assumptions and implications contained within this statement:

The very fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed very evidently and very certainly that I existed while on the other hand, if I had only ceased to think, although all the rest of what I had ever imagined had been true, I would have had no reason to believe that I existed; I thereby concluded that I was a substance, of which the whole essence or nature consists in thinking, and which in order to exist, needs no place and depends on no material thing; so that this "I," that is to say, the mind by which I am what I am, is entirely distinct from the body, even that it is easier to know than the body, and moreover, that even if the body were not, it would not cease to be all that it is.¹⁷

My essence and the only thing of which I can be certain is thought. This self needs "no place and depends on no material thing," including (one presumes) other human beings. It is thus completely self-constituting and self-sustaining. The self is created and maintained by thought. This view of the self entails a denial of the body and any interaction between body and self (except somehow through the pineal gland). Social relations are not necessary for the development of the self. The self, it appears, is a static substance. Although it may think new thoughts, it is not transformed by them. One presumes that it comes into the world whole and complete and, like a perpetual motion machine, clicks into operation. It is noteworthy that the one thing Descartes does not throw into doubt and that, in fact, guarantees the success of his whole enterprise is the existence of God. The patriarchal father is not to be questioned by any of his sons.

What Descartes's ego contemplates is the material world, a material world also emptied of particularity and subjective content. Thought contemplates nature not as experienced—how this particular orange tastes or smells, for example—but nature as mathematics. Only when nature is reduced to extension and motion can it be known with certainty. Nature cannot be known in its full concreteness, but only as the abstract object of an abstract "cogito." Any knowledge not built on the foundations of mathematics is like the "moral writings of the ancient pagans," "the most proud and magnificent palaces, built on nothing but sand and mud."¹⁸

Underlying the concern for certainty is a desire for control, control both of nature and of the body. Descartes was convinced that

... it is possible to arrive at knowledge which is most useful in life and that instead of the speculative philosophy taught in the schools, a practical philosophy can be found by which, knowing the power and the effects of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies which surround us as distinctly as we know the various trades of our

craftsmen, we might put them in the same way to all the uses for which they are appropriate and thereby make ourselves, as it were, masters and possessors of nature.¹⁹

The purpose of science is to capture the power of nature and hence to make it one's own, thus compensating for the weakness of mortal flesh. Such a science might even overcome death, that reminder of the materiality of life, of the dependence on the body.

We could free ourselves of an infinity of illnesses, both of the body and of the mind, and even perhaps also of the decline of age, if we know enough about their causes and about all the remedies which nature has provided us.²⁰

There is a deep irony in Descartes's philosophy. The self, which is constituted by thought and created by an act of thought, by the separation of mind and body, is driven to master nature, because the self cannot ultimately deny its material character or dependence on nature. Despite Descartes's claim, the body reasserts itself, at least at the moment of death. In order to become fully the substance it is, the cogito must master nature and possess its secrets, "the remedies nature has provided us," so that the self will never "cease to be all that it is," that is, die. The desire to know is inextricably intermeshed with the desire to dominate. Nature is posited as pure otherness which must be conquered to be possessed and transformed into useful objects.

The posture of Descartes's cogito replicates that of a child under two in its relation to a caretaker (usually the mother and/or other females). The child originally believes that it and its mother are one person, a symbiotic unity.²¹ However, due to frustrations in having its needs met and internal psychological pressures (primarily a growing desire for autonomy), it begins to realize that its mother is a separate person, an other. This discovery is accompanied by panic, for the child is still dependent on the mother and can sense its dependency. At the same time, the child is exhilarated, for the possibility of autonomy and overcoming the state of powerlessness requires separation. One reaction and defense to the discovery of separateness is narcissism, in which the outside world is seen purely as an object for the self and as a creation of the self. Through "good enough" social relations,²² this stage is transformed into a genuine reciprocity in which separateness and mutuality (interdependence) exist simultaneously. However, denial of separateness, of the individual integrity of the object (mother), will lead to the adoption of narcissism as a permanent character structure.²³ This is precisely the type of solipsistic, isolated self with delusions of omnipotence that Descartes's cogito displays.

Why Are There No Women and Children in the State of Nature?

A parallel denial of early infantile experience, especially of primary relatedness to and dependence on the caretaker, can be seen in political theory. The notion of a "state of nature," as conceptualized, with variations, by Hobbes and Locke, is particularly relevant for feminist analysis, although many of their underlying assumptions are shared by other theorists. It is noteworthy that both Hobbes and Locke assume that "man" is a solitary creature by nature and that dependence, or indeed any social interaction, inevitably leads to power struggles and ultimately either to domination or submission.

I would like to point out several features of the state of nature. First is the persistent image of a solitary creature, roaming over a vast empty space. This is similar to an under-two-year-old child's experience of the world when the mother leaves it. In Hobbes, and, to a lesser degree, Locke, the state of nature is marked by the prevalence of anxiety and insecurity. Significantly, the anxiety is centered on the fear of wounds to the body and deprivation of needed and desired objects. This parallels the paranoid aspect of the separation process.²⁴ "Natural man" attributes this fear to an external "bad object"—to fear of aggression from other persons who will not respect his autonomy. In this view, aggression and separateness are viewed as innate to human nature, rather than as problems with social roots.

It is only possible to view people in this way if an early period of nurturance and dependence has been unsatisfactory and/or denied and repressed. The "state of nature" seems to be primarily populated by adult, single males, whose behavior is taken as constitutive of human nature and experience as a whole. Hobbes is clearly puzzled about how to fit the family into his state of nature. There are only a few fragments about the family, in which he offers an almost radical feminist account.²⁵ In the state of nature, men and women are equal (in ability to do harm to others). Children owe obedience to both parents, but if there is a conflict, children should obey the mother, for parentage can only be ascertained with certainty for the female. However, since men make the laws, once civil society exists, men dominate women.²⁶

Hobbes's mechanistic model of human behavior does not include the female. That is, it excludes the traits culturally attributed to females—sociability, nurturance, and concern for dependent and helpless persons. Humans are said to be motivated only by passions, especially fear and the wish to have no impediments to the gratification of desire, which is insatiable and asocial. Given these premises, the state of war inevitably follows. The parallels between Hobbes's and Freud's assumptions, especially as to the character of fundamental instincts and their social consequences, are striking and would be worth developing further.

Women and children exist, but it is not clear how they fit into this system. Similar statements could be made about Locke, although he denies that absolute patriarchal power exists in the state of nature (for political reasons, as a defense of the assertion that there is no "divine right" of kings).²⁷ Despite this, the inhabitants of his state of nature also appear primarily to be unattached male adults. The account of childrearing in the state of nature is focused on the problem of equality, rights, and reason. The implications for his theory of a period of human dependence are not explored. Although Locke is interested in education, these concerns did not seem to have an effect on his first premises. The family is discussed in terms of rights and the particular nature of the "contract" between husband and wife. Since it is a pre-rational state, childhood has no implications for political or civil society, which is occupied by rational adults. It seems to have no implications for the character of adulthood, either, since adulthood is equated with the ability to exercise reason.

In conclusion, then, philosophy and political theory reflect the fundamental division of the world according to gender. The work that only women do (child-rearing) and the qualities it demands—relatedness, sociability, nurturance, and concern for others—are not seen as part of human nature or the human condition, since the concepts of self and human nature reflect male experience after the preoedipal period. The period when women are powerful in their children's lives is repressed, on both a social and an individual level. Only thus is it possible to deny the most fundamental proof of human bonding, the sociability and interdependence which characterize early infantile experience.

This denial is an essential element of patriarchy, since, as Chodorow shows, male identity is created out of a rejection of the mother, including the female parts of the male self. The female represents all that is not civilized and not rational. In turn, this denial becomes a justification for relegating women to the private sphere and devaluing what women are allowed to do and be (see, for example, Aristotle's discussion of the family as the realm of freedom).²⁸ Not only is individual psychological development distorted, but these distortions are elevated into abstract theories of human nature, the character of politics, and of the self which reflect, it is claimed, unchangeable and inevitable aspects of human existence.

The Politics of the Unconscious: A Case Study

Precisely because human experience begins with and through a relation with a woman or women (and not men), it has different consequences for women and men. Under patriarchy, primary differentiation occurs according to and through engendering, but the two socially produced genders have very different qualities. This differentiation contributes to the reproduction of patriarchy. I want to discuss here the psychological consequences for women in our society of developing in and through patriarchal social relations. I will do this by analyzing a dream reported by one of my therapy patients. This dream is an example not only of typically female conflicts, present in a compressed form, but of the interaction of personal history with more general social and political dynamics. The careful use of the most traditional psychoanalytic procedures, from a feminist perspective, indicates the need to go beyond their usual boundaries.

K., a female, age twenty-five, reported the following dream: she is upstairs in her parents' house, packing books to take with her. She is moving out of the house, and her books are her most important possession. Downstairs, her mother is singing "Michelle," a Beatles love song, into a microphone. Around the room are amplifiers, speakers, and other sound equipment. Outside this room, in the doorway, sitting in an armchair and reading a paper with his back to the mother, is the father. The patient knows that as soon as the mother has finished the song, she (the mother) intends to kill herself. The patient runs downstairs and picks up a rifle—the weapon with which her mother intends to shoot herself. However, she is unable to smash the rifle, even by jumping on it, because it is encased in some sort of plastic. The dream ends at this point.

K. is from an upwardly mobile, working-class family. Her father is a plumber who, after much struggle, developed sufficient clientele to move his family out of an apartment in a midwestern city to a suburban house. K.'s parents identify with their Middle European ancestry; their parents were immigrants with whom they retained strong ties of loyalty and duty. K. has one brother, several years older than she, who became violent as a child. After he attempted to set fire to wooden apartment stairs, he was sent to a special school for emotionally disturbed children when K. was early school age and remained there for the rest of K.'s childhood. K. was not informed of the reasons for his disappearance (although the family visited him once a week) and feared that she, too, would be sent away. The parents would assert the "American" and "normal" character of their family by going bowling on Sunday with the brother.

K.'s father appears to her to be extremely controlling, controlled, and irrational. He would sort through the garbage to be certain that nothing he wanted was thrown out. He would fly into uncontrollable, unpredictable rages and would punish his children with severe strappings. This behavior would alternate with a remote, perfectionistic, demanding one. K.'s mother was an alcoholic for much of K.'s childhood. Her behavior ranged from drunken rejection of her children, to an occasional, genuine regard for their needs, to displays of affectionate but overly invested support. When K. was six, her mother chased her down the hall with a knife for requesting a hot lunch, like that prepared by the other children's mothers. When K. was eleven, she was raped by her grandfather (her mother's father) the night of the wake for his wife. The circumstances strongly imply K.'s mother's complicity in the rape. Many years later she told her daughter that she, too, had been raped by the same man. The need to deny her unconscious knowledge (or belief in) her mother's complicity in and compliance with her father's and grandfather's behavior, to avoid seeing her mother as a bad object, was one of the most powerful aspects of K.'s psychodynamics.

K. was in her early twenties when she came to therapy, and her presenting symptoms were paranoia, extreme anxiety, and an inability to concentrate so severe that she had to drop out of college despite her high intelligence. She lacked many of the reality testing skills and the ability to organize experience characteristic of a fairly well-developed ego. Her core self was underdeveloped, frozen in a state of panic and terror, and she was unable to form trusting relations with others. Her personal relations were marked by intense dependency and idealization, alternating with states of rage (usually unacknowledged and perceived as threatening both to herself and the object). Separation-individuation had not been successfully completed, owing in part to the narcissistic behavior of the mother. She harbored a deep desire to return to the symbiotic state with a "good mother" but had to deny this wish (despite acting it out both with her therapist and boyfriend) out of fear of her own rage and (perceived) powerlessness. She was diagnosed as a borderline personality tending, especially under stress or fear of abandonment, to disintegrate into psychosis.

The dream was built both out of her history of social relations and out of an actual event. K. had been visiting her parents and was sorting through her books, deciding which ones to keep and take with her, and which ones to sell. The mother suggested that K. should

allow her father to look through the books she intended to sell to see if there were any he wanted. This suggestion provoked an intense argument between the two and threw K. into such a state of anxiety (and unacknowledged rage) that she called her therapist long distance. Books and reading had always been her means of escape from the family into a world of order, rules, and regularity. They represented autonomy and freedom from the intrusions of her father and grandfather and the demands of her mother. Now her mother was trying to intervene even there and, worse, to introduce the father's presence as well, thus repeating from the patient's viewpoint both her role in the rape and her complicity in the father's behavior.

The symbolism and content of the dream throw light not only on this particular woman's psychodynamics, but on what Rubin calls the "sex-gender" system as a whole.²⁹ Upstairs, symbolically in the more rational part of the mind, the ego or reason, K. is packing her books, also the symbol of autonomy, order, and reason, and her means of escaping the craziness of the family dynamics which lie below in the unconscious. The books are an ambivalent symbol because they are identified with the male. Note the symmetry with the father reading his newspaper (a chronicle of the external, primarily male world of events). His back is turned to the mother, who is singing her desperate song of love. The mother is experienced by both father and daughter as the ultimate source and reflection of that messy, contradictory, sexual, and sometimes terrifying unconscious world, one they both wish to escape.

Yet the daughter is also tied to, and identified with, the mother. If she takes the male route of escape, it will, literally, kill her mother and that part of her which is like her mother. The mother's identity comes from inside the family. She will cease to exist when her daughter leaves because she cannot be a mother without her reciprocal partner, a child. The daughter is responsible for her mother, in that her leaving destroys the very ground of her mother's being. She must betray her mother if she is to exert her own autonomy. Even paying that terrible price, she will not be really free, since as a female she can never completely enter the world of men.

Thus she must rescue her mother, not only to avoid the guilt of her death but to make possible a total freedom for herself. The mother must become powerful for the daughter to exercise meaningful autonomy. The rage the daughter feels toward the mother is also important. Since dreams are wishes as well as expressions of conflict, the sources of the daughter's anger, so strong as to fantasize her mother's death (although masked by allowing the mother to be the active agent), must be explored. The daughter is angry with the mother for not possessing the sort of power that could free both of them from dependency, on each other and on the father, and which could provide the daughter with a means of entry to the outside world. The daughter sees the mother as both powerful and powerless. If she is so powerful in the emotional sphere, why is she so powerless in the world outside the family and in relation to the father and other men? Is she withholding her power, or has she perhaps given it away to the father? And in exchange for what? What is the barrier to the mother's possessing the sort of power which could free her daughter (for, surely, the mother is not powerless within the psyche of her daughter)? It is the power of the father, symbolized by the rifle and by his position: the armchair blocking

the exit from the room, holding a key to, and a chronicle of, the outside world (the newspaper). The father's source of power is mysterious and impenetrable, like the plastic, especially since it is exercised silently, with his back to the active participants. Yet his power ultimately determines the character of the drama.

Despite the fact that the rifle (a phallic symbol) is encased in plastic (a symbol of inauthenticity, of inorganic nature), it is still powerful enough to kill the mother. That very wrapping of plastic, making the phallic power invisible to the daughter and incapable of destruction, mirrors the father's apparent lack of involvement in the struggle between mother and daughter and his very real inability to provide emotional support to either mother or daughter. The source of his power is two-fold: the possession of a phallus in a phallogocentric world, and his connections to and with the world outside the family, a world which is split between inner and outer, public and private. Only he can connect the daughter to the public world. It is by his grace that she enters there. Yet he can withdraw his permission at any time, especially if she attempts to bring the mother (female identity) into that world. The daughter can neither use nor destroy the phallus, a symbol of both political and sexual privilege (access to the mother).

To whom is the mother singing, and why is all the sound equipment present in the dream? In this particular case, K.'s lover (a male) is a rock musician (reminding us of Freud's remark that what women really look for in their husbands is their mother).³⁰ That sort of technology is strongly identified with men, since men dominate in rock music, with occasionally a woman vocalist (only apparently) up front. Thus, the symbolism once again points to the mother's powerlessness. She has to use a symbol of male power (the microphone as phallus, the world of rock and roll, a male-written love song to a woman) to appeal—to her daughter certainly, but perhaps also to her husband. The song is partly in French, the language of romance, which also suggests the incomprehensibility of the object of the love. The content of the song is finding "the only words, that I know, that you'll understand; I love you."

The mother is so afraid of not being heard and of the husband's impenetrability that she must amplify her pleas. If her relationship with him were more gratifying, she could ask less of her daughter. Perhaps she is trying to free her daughter in the only ways she knows, either by annihilating herself or (very improbably) by finally getting through to her husband and being able to transfer her needs from her daughter to him. But the second solution would require breaking his phallic power, an outcome which, at least within the dream, seems impossible. Even more repressed and impossible to act on (for both mother and daughter) is the desire to turn the rifle on the father. The mother's shooting herself is a very hostile and angry act, addressed to both father and daughter, and an expression of powerlessness. The act exemplifies one of the main ways women deal with anger, by repressing it and then turning it against themselves and/or by acting out their own conflicts with their daughters, so these become the daughter's conflicts as well.

The Knots of Female Psychological Development under Patriarchy

Let me summarize the typically female psychodynamics the dream encapsulates. (1) Ego boundary confusion between mother and daughter. Women patients often feel as if they must rescue their mother in order to and before they can work on their own problems. Much time at the beginning of therapy may be taken up with a description and analysis of the mother's history and problems, without the recognition of this underlying motive. Women tend to feel guilty that they are somehow betraying their mother in the attempt to resolve and terminate the symbiotic tie. They are much more willing to discuss anger at the father.

(2) Rage at the mother, covered over by a consciously expressed concern for and desire to protect her. Daughters typically feel that they did not "get enough" from their mother. "Getting enough" includes both primary nurturance and encouragement, and strength for autonomy (separation). As I have argued elsewhere,³¹ mothers, because of their own ambivalent tie to their mothers, conflicts about being female, and narcissistic relation to their daughters, may be less able to nurture their daughters and provide them with a satisfactory symbiotic experience.

Daughters tend to be terrified of this deep "greedy" need for unconditional love and tend to deny it in the transference relation with a female therapist. With male therapists it may be hidden behind Oedipal material which is safer for the patient to acknowledge and resolve. A therapist not attuned to the special importance of the preoedipal period and the mother-daughter relation for women may never trace the Oedipal material to its earlier roots, leaving patients with a vague sense of dissatisfaction and being "unfinished." Orthodox analysts may incorrectly analyze this feeling as evidence of the "weaker female superego" or unresolved penis envy.

Therapy may replicate, not resolve, a woman's deepest psychodynamics by encouraging her to turn to the therapist for protection against the loved and feared infantile mother with the therapist's conscious or unconscious (countertransference) complicity. Patriarchal social relations and male psychological development require that the male therapist, too, deny the power of the mother. This denial may be reinforced by some forms of psychoanalytic theory and training, especially the concentration on Oedipal conflicts and the ego, which often constitute the material of orthodox psychoanalysis. The therapist's own unresolved preoedipal conflicts may continue to affect him and will thus enter the psychodynamics of the analytic situation (and affect the patient) through transference and countertransference. An orthodox female analyst may also have trouble with this material, but it is more likely to emerge in the transference relation with a female patient simply because of their gender identity.

(3) "Penis envy" is largely symbolic and should be traced back to its preoedipal roots. The penis is a means of sexual access to the mother, who is after all the girl's first loved object. This love inevitably has an erotic component that is especially threatening (to both mother and daughter) in an homophobic society. A woman's desire to have a penis is also bound up with a desire to have a baby with the mother, so that symbiotic unity can be maintained. The wish to have a baby is also a wish to *be* a baby, to redo the early developmental process with a "good mother" (the therapist).

Penis envy is also an expression of resentment at the mother. Her power in infancy is contradicted by her powerlessness and compliance with the father. The girl "needs" a penis both to be powerful in the nonfamily world and to rescue the mother from the father (and perhaps to satisfy the mother's erotic and achievement wishes for the child). The girl cannot understand why her mother did not give her a penis. She often feels she is in competition with her father for possession of her mother (feelings that the father often seems to reciprocate). The mother's ambivalent tie to them both permits this situation to remain unresolved.

(4) The separation of nurturance and autonomy within the family is reinforced by patriarchal control of both social relations and economic and political structures. The mother represents, however ambivalently, the only source of nurturance within the family for both father and daughter. Often the daughter, and not the father, is the primary source of nurturance for the mother. Daughters often report confusion from an early age (three years) as to exactly who was the mother and who the child in the relationship. Daughters serve as confidants, friends, and even lovers in a way that is often confusing and inappropriate to the daughter's developmental process. This behavior often retards a daughter's ability (and mother's as well) to separate. Separation is experienced as abandonment of the mother, and this fear often masks a deeper one—the fear of being abandoned by the mother, or the rage at having been abandoned emotionally by her. The father represents autonomy, reinforced by patriarchal authority and control outside the family. The daughter sees him as the gatekeeper to both autonomy and the outside, nonfamilial world. Yet the price of identifying with the father is high. It means acknowledging his (at least sexual) control over and privileged access to the mother. The daughter must give up her own preoedipal tie to the mother, and often take on the father's devaluation of and contemptuous attitude for the mother and, by extension, for women as a group. Sometimes, the daughter, especially if there are no sons or she is the oldest sibling, enters not only into a quasi-sexual "little girl" relation to the father, but a protomasculine one as well. This leaves women with what feels like an irresolvable dilemma: to be loved and nurtured, and remain tied to the mother, or to be autonomous and externally successful, to be like a man. The external success is often undercut and limited, not only by patriarchal control outside the home and the alienating quality of work, but by the inner psychic pain caused by this ongoing conflict.

The conflicts outlined above lead me to conclude that differentiation is at the core of women's psychological problems. There seems to be an endless chain of women tied ambivalently to their mothers, who replicate this relation with their daughters. This process occurs because only women take care of infants and do so under certain social conditions, namely, the rule of the father, whose power, while often hidden in the family, is ultimately determinant. He is the possessor of the mother and of rationality. He is representative of society and of culture itself. He generally has far more social wealth than women, whatever his class. His identity is built in part out of denying the mother's (wife's) power and devaluing her, attitudes he conveys to the daughter. She mothers sons who must grow contemptuous of her to be men. Thus patriarchy reproduces itself, reinforced by "the fruits of civilization"—the knowledge and the political and economic

systems which reflect and reinforce the splits between nurturance and autonomy, public and private, male and female. As long as patriarchy exists, differences will inevitably be translated into relations of dominance and submission, superiority and inferiority. Feminists are discovering that these are indeed poisonous, bitter fruits. They nourish only to destroy, first, the potential of half the human race, and now, as Dinnerstein argues, perhaps us all. We cannot re-vision the world with the tools we have been given. The unspoken and the repressed, as Wittig says, must become part of our social discourse and social reality, or there will be no one left to speak at all.

Notes

1. For an introduction to critical theory, see Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), especially the essays "Traditional and Critical Theory" and "Authority and the Family"; Herbert Marcuse, *Negations* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968); Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), especially the suggestive comments on Freud and the process of psychoanalysis on pp. 214-45. On the possible psychological and social motives for the "domination of nature," see Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972). Their argument cries out for feminist revision along the lines of Dinnerstein's work (see note 3, below). On the family, see the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, *Aspects of Sociology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), pp. 129-47. For commentaries on critical theory and its problems, see William Leiss, "Critical Theory and Its Future," *Political Theory* 2:3 (1974): esp. 333-35; Jane Flax, "Critical Theory as a Vocation," *Politics and Society* 8:2 (1978): 201-23; Jessica Benjamin, "The End of Internalization: Adorno's Social Psychology," *Telos* 32: (1977): 42-64.
2. See Jane Flax, "The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother-Daughter Relationships and within Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 4:2 (1978): 171-89.
3. Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).
4. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1978).
5. Especially useful are Harry Guntrip, *Personality Structure and Human Interaction* (New York: International Universities Press, 1961); Margaret S. Mahler, Fred Pine, and Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); and D. W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965).
6. On this point see Guntrip, pp. 55-86.

7. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), pp. 95-96.
8. Ibid., pp. 11-12. .
9. On this subject see Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' Of Sex," Rayna R(app) Reiter, ed., *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975). On the differentiation of psychological development by class, see Lillian Breslow Rubin, *Worlds of Pain: Life in the Working Class Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).
10. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 1961), pp.60-61.
11. Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1963), p. 135.
12. Ibid., p. 133.
13. Sigmund Freud, "Female Sexuality," reprinted in Jean Strouse, ed., *Women and Analysis* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1974), p. 54. This essay has much useful information about the preoedipal period, strikingly misinterpreted by Freud. For example, he notes the "surprising, yet regular fear" in women of being "killed (?devoured) by the mother." He interprets this as a projection of the girl's hostility to the mother "in consequence of the manifold restrictions imposed by [the mother] in the course of training and bodily care" (p. 55). This is basically the same position as that expressed in the much earlier *Three Essays*, despite Freud's acknowledgment in "Female Sexuality" that there is no neat parallelism between the boy's and girl's development. Clearly the fear he refers to has more to do with very early infantile experience (feeding frustration and, more generally, nurturance wishes) and ego boundary confusion between girl and mother. The mother's narcissistic attachment to the child makes the girl feel as if the mother would like to devour her, just as the child would like to devour the mother. This incorporation of the object is part of the internalization process and is felt as greedy in bad object relations.
14. Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind," *Questions féministes 7 (December 1979)*; *Feminist Issues* 1, 1 (Summer 1980).
15. On this point see Dinnerstein, pp. 91-114, and Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), pp. 73-109.
16. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968).
17. Ibid., p. 54.

18. Ibid., p. 31.
19. Ibid., p. 78.
20. Ibid., p. 79.
21. For an account of early psychological development see Mahler et al., *Psychological Birth*, esp. pp. 41-120.
22. See Winnicott, *Maturational Processes*, pp. 56-63.
23. On narcissism and the reasons for denying the separateness of the object see Otto Kernberg, *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1975), esp. pp. 3-47 and 213-43.
24. See Melanie Klein, *Envy, Gratitude and Other Works, 1946-1963* (New York: Delta Books, 1977), esp. papers 1-3.
25. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 251-57.
26. Ibid., p. 253.
27. See John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (New York: Mentor, 1960), pp. 344-94. See also Gordon J. Schochet, who discusses *Patriarchalism in Political Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1975). His perspective differs from mine in that he is interested in the overt content of theories and their history, while I am interested in the latent or repressed content. Consequently our analyses diverge on the relevance of patriarchalism to understanding modern political theory.
28. Aristotle, *The Politics*, tr. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), Book I.
29. Rubin, "Traffic in Women," pp. 198-210.
30. Freud, "Female Sexuality," p. 58.
31. Flax, "Conflict," pp. 171-84.