Beyond Castration:

Recognizing Female Desire and Subjectivity in the Oedipus Complex

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CHAPTER 1

Argument and Methodology

Psychoanalysis was developed by Austrian physician Sigmund Freud in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of Freud’s most celebrated theories was that of the Oedipus complex, which explores the psychic structures that underlie sexual development. In the following chapters I will be examining the Oedipal and preoedipal stages of psychosexual development, drawing out their implicit gendered assumptions with the help of modern feminist theorists and psychoanalysts. I am pursuing a Lacanian reading of Freud, in which the biological roles of mother and father are given structural importance, so that whomever actually occupies these roles is less important than their positional significance.

After giving a brief history of the evolution of psychoanalytic theory in the first chapter, I move on in the second chapter to explicate Freud’s conception of the Oedipus complex (including the preoedipal stage) and the role of the Oedipal myth, making use of theorist Teresa de Lauretis. In the third chapter, I look at several of Freud’s texts on femininity and female sexuality. I will employ Simone de Beauvoir, Kaja Silverman and de Lauretis to discuss male and female investments in femininity and the identities that are open to women. After this, Jessica Benjamin takes the focus away from individuals and incorporates the other in her theory of intersubjectivity. I end chapter three with Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, who all attest to the necessity of symbolic female representation—Cixous proposes a specifically female manner of writing called ecriture feminine, Kristeva introduces the semiotic realm to contend with Lacan’s symbolic realm, and Irigaray believes in the need for corporeal
representation for women within a female economy. I am also indebted to the work of Nancy Chodorow, whose thoughts are interspersed throughout this paper.

In chapter four I will state my conclusions. I believe that Freud focused on infantile sexual development to the detriment of the role that parents play in transmitting social values. To the extent that he explicated them, parental roles are too strong and unnecessarily divided. In my view, the mother and father both should have law-giving and nurturing capacities within them in order to raise fully expressive children. Female desire and subjectivity have been suppressed in patriarchal culture, which the Oedipus complex both describes and prescribes. I believe that Freud’s Oedipal structure must be reworked to support women by giving them symbolic representation as men have always had in Freudian theory. I will also briefly point to the need for political representation to reinforce this change in cultural narrative.

Overview of the Historical Development of Psychoanalysis

Freud published texts covering psychoanalytic theory and practice over a span of nearly 50 years, until his death in 1939. His first major work was Studies on Hysteria, co-authored with Josef Bruer and published in 1895. The majority of the texts examined in this paper Freud published in the 1920s and ’30s. One exception is the Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, which was originally published in 1905 but was revised several times. In 1915 Freud made significant additions in the second and third essay on libido theory, and it was only in this year that he added sections on childhood sexuality in the second essay.\(^1\) The text used in this paper is the English translation of the 6th and last edition that Freud published, which was in 1925. Other texts used in this paper include Freud’s essay “The Infantile Genital Organization: an Interpolation Into the Theory of Sexuality” (1923) which discusses the different valences that

male and female genitals receive. A simple account of the feminine Oedipus complex is offered in “The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex” (1925) and a fuller account in “Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes” (1925). Freud wrote two major essays on women specifically, “Female Sexuality” (1931) and “Femininity” (1933). In “Female Sexuality” Freud discusses the young girl’s strong attachment to her mother in the “preoedipal stage” and her negotiation of the necessary renunciation of this relationship to come into a properly “female” sexuality. He continues this line of thought in “Femininity”, describing the increasingly “feminine” behavior that often accompanies the development of female sexuality and, in his mind, is proper to it.

In the early- to mid-twentieth century, Freudian psychoanalysis branched off into two major sections, ego psychology and object relations theory. The former was pioneered by Freud’s daughter, Anna. Though Freud himself focused largely on the unconscious, his work The Ego and the Id developed his theory of the conscious psychological functions of the ego, which was tasked to “represent reality and, through the erection of defenses, to channel and control internal drive pressures in the face of reality.”² Anna Freud studied how the ego developed unconscious defenses against libidinal drives stemming from the id and the superego.

Psychoanalyst Melanie Klein helped found the competing branch of psychoanalysis, object relations theory. Kleinians believe that the mind is “beset with deep psychotic-like terrors [and is] unstable, dynamic and fluid.”³ Kleinians are also interpretive to a greater extent than ego psychologists, and expand the notion of the drive to include “built-in human objects”.⁴ This means that the infant recognizes the society it is born into because of its innate humanity.

³ Mitchell and Black 88.
⁴ Mitchell and Black 113.
Klein was an extremely influential psychoanalyst, but a group of object relationists broke with her over theoretical and practical differences in the late 1940s. One such theorist was D.W. Winicott, who was a pediatrician by trade. Like Klein, he believed that infants are naturally social creatures, but for him they are “wired for harmonious interaction and nontraumatic development but thwarted by inadequate parenting.” 5 He was interested in the mother-infant relationship, and how the mother fostered an environment such that the infant could develop a positive sense of self.

The Freudian theorists explored in this paper are largely object relationists. A few, like Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin, are especially indebted to Winicott. The French feminists, like Cixous and Irigaray, are largely working within the framework explicated by Jacques Lacan, and it is worth looking into his theory of sexual difference before moving on to Freud’s conception of the Oedipus complex.

Sexual difference in Lacanian theory is predicated on one’s relationship to a single term, the phallus. The phallus is a signifier, 6 but it is easier to explain what the phallus does than what it is, and what it does in Lacanian theory is establish relationships. There are two sexual identities, “having the phallus” and “being the phallus.” 7 Having the phallus equates to having mastery in the “symbolic realm,” which is the realm of culture, language, and thus authority. Being the phallus puts one in a position of lack or castration, embodying the phallus for the one who “has” it. 8 Lacan states that men and women may occupy either position, but in his seminar “Signification of the Phallus” he discusses the role of “masquerade” in female behavior, where

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5 Mitchell and Black 114.
7 Lacan, 582.
women attempt to make their entire bodies the phallus for men, via make-up and coy behavior, etc. He insists that the phallus has no relation to the penis, but describes it symbolically using the anatomical characteristics of the penis, like turgidity. This is problematic, because the entry into the symbolic realm, i.e. culture, is one that every subject must make. However, because entering this realm means that one must take up a relationship to the phallus it is also an entry into sexual differentiation, being or having. In Lacanian theory, men and women enter culture with vastly different roles and possibilities delineated for them, as patriarchal power is reified in the symbol of the phallus.

Freudian and Lacanian theory place women in the margins. Women are only granted a limited ability to know themselves and their desires. What they can know is often dependent upon the recognition of male subjects within a patriarchal culture. Freud and Lacan described their times but called what they saw universal. Psychoanalytic theory must engage with changing sexual climates so that female desiring subjects may enjoy equal the expression that has so long been granted to males.

CHAPTER 2

The Preoedipal

In its early stages, the Oedipus complex was formulated upon the psychic development of the male child. Freud later postulated a "feminine" Oedipus complex, which he imagined to be symmetrical to the (male’s) Oedipus complex. He later abandoned this position in favor of an
asymmetrical theory of sexual development. In his 1931 paper "Female Sexuality" Freud introduced the “preoedipal stage”, and stated that this phase is important for young girls in a way that it is not for young boys. The preoedipal stage is defined by the dyadic relationship between the mother and her infant of either sex. Girls remain within this stage for longer than boys will, beyond four years of age.¹²

The preoedipal stage is a time of intense connection with the primary caretaker, who throughout history and in most if not all cultures has been the mother. The role of the mother has traditionally been idealized in the social imagination to provide exclusive, irreplaceable care for the child, even if the child is actually largely raised by nurses, in day cares, or in other child-rearing arrangements. During the preoedipal stage the infant’s demands are insatiable and it cries for food, affection, and most ardently for attention, as it asks for constant proof of the mother’s love and devotion. Infants are extremely dependent upon their mother during this time, and have difficulty reconciling her periodic absences.¹³

Despite the fact that the mother is the love-object for both male and female infants, the significance of this primary relationship differs for the two sexes. Nancy Chodorow believes that this is partially because of the presumed heterosexual orientation of the mother.¹⁴ In Freud’s conception of care-taking, a mother differentiates between her male and female child, viewing her daughter as an extension of herself while her son is seen as a distinct entity.

Freud postulates that there are elements of seduction in the relationship between mother and son, especially if the mother is isolated from other adults, which often includes her husband.

Men in Western culture spend a significant amount of time outside of the home in the public

¹⁴ Chodorow 107.
sphere, and as such may be distant fathers and husbands. Without a support system of her peers and her significant other, the mother looks for validation in the unconditional adoration she receives from her son. For the mother, ”her son as a definite other--an opposite-gendered and sexed other. Her emotional investments and conflicts, given her socialization around issues of gender and sex and membership in a sexist society, make this experience particularly strong.”

Indeed, Freud says that there is no more perfect relationship than that between the mother and the son because of the love and fulfillment they receive from each other. This mother-son investment does not last, however, as the father will eventually enter the scene and forbid an incestuous relationship between the two. This will usher the male child out of the preoedipal stage and into the Oedipus complex.

Mothers and daughters, in contrast, are bound to each other because of likeness, and encounter difficulties in establishing boundaries with each other. The preoedipal stage “sustains the mother-infant exclusivity and the intensity, ambivalence, and boundary confusion of the child still preoccupied with issues of dependence and individuation.” Young girls are not encouraged to separate from their primary love object, their mother, as young boys are, because ideally it is their mother they are to identify with. Girls are allowed to remain in this primary relationship until it becomes time for them to turn to their father and form heterosexual attachments, which will inaugurate their Oedipus complex. Freud specifies that girls may “regress” to their preoedipal stage at any time, which is why they may alternate between expressions of masculinity, the purview of the preoedipal stage, and femininity, which develops as a result of the Oedipus complex. Because girls love their mother during the preoedipal phase and only later

15 Chodorow 105.
16 Chodorow 97.
17 I am here assuming a positive Oedipus complex, which forms heterosexual attachments, and thus for women will lead to “normal” femininity. However, Freud also describes the negative Oedipus complex, which is homosexual, and will be discussed further on.
come to love their father, Freud posits that women are more likely to express bisexuality because they have had two primary love objects, where men have only had one.\footnote{Sigmund Freud, “Femininity,” The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud (hereafter, \textit{SE}), vol. 22, (London: Hogarth, 1933), 131.} However, Chodorow believes that the earlier emotional attachment to the mother will remain more influential in the lives of women than the development of “normal” sexual orientation. While heterosexual women raised by other heterosexual women will erotically desire men like their fathers, men cannot fully replace a woman’s bond with the mother and will remain emotionally secondary.\footnote{Chodorow 167.}

In contrast to Chodorow, Juliet Mitchell focuses on the hostile relationship between mothers and daughters, which will eventually become a contributing factor to the inauguration of the feminine Oedipus complex. Mitchell maintains that the young girl cannot displace her negative emotions onto her father, as the boy can, because she will later turn to him as a love-object.\footnote{Juliet Mitchell, \textit{Psychoanalysis and Feminism} (New York: Vintage, 1975), 57.} Girls instead turn their rage toward their mothers. Freud also focused on the hostility incumbent in this bond, which is why he claims that many women are destined to have an unsatisfying relationship with their husbands. A husband is “meant to be the inheritor of [his wife’s] relation to her father, but in reality he be[comes] the inheritor of her relationship to her mother,” a relationship that is fraught with resentment and anger.\footnote{Sigmund Freud, “Female Sexuality,” \textit{SE} vol. 21, (London: Hogarth, 1931), 231.} In contrast to the perfect mother-son bond described earlier, for daughters Freud believes that “the attachment to the mother ends in hate.”\footnote{Freud, “Femininity” 121.} Chodorow contends that this relationship never truly ends, however, as women replay throughout their lives their connection with their mothers.

\textbf{The Oedipal Myth}

Relations between infants and their caregivers change dramatically after the preoedipal stage, during what Freud called the “Oedipus complex”. The Oedipus complex is a time of prohibition and differentiation, an often difficult and painful process, but one that is necessary for the child to enter the world at large with his or her own sense of self. The Oedipus complex is so called because of Sophocles’ tale of murder and incest, preoccupations which Freud traces back to the beginnings of mankind.

In _Totem and Taboo_, Freud explains the origins of the Oedipus complex, which go back to the time of the “primal horde.” In this “primitive” period the leader of the tribal group, the father, initially kept all of the women of the tribe to himself because he had uncontested power. However, his sons resented his possession of all of the women of the tribe because they wanted women for themselves. To solve this problem they gathered together and killed and ate the father, becoming like him as they incorporated him into their bodies. However, their hatred of the father was not unconditional—they also admired him and aspired to his achievements. The brothers began to feel guilty for the murder, and the memory of their father loomed larger than he had in life. In response to this guilt, the group of brothers forbade the tribe to kill the totem animal, which represented the father and was his substitute. Sleeping with the women who had belonged to the father was also taboo, because the competition between the brothers for these women would drive the tribe apart. To ensure that this would not occur, the brothers instituted the incest prohibition, which also ensured exogamy by requiring the brothers to go outside of their tribe to find a bride. The aggrandizement of the totem animal and the prohibition of incest helped the band of brothers assuage their guilt. These two responses to the murder of the father bound the tribe together through complicity, remorse, and the need for atonement. This newly

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unified community was based upon shared values and prohibitions and thus for Freud was the origin of society, religion and morality.\textsuperscript{24} Freud will use this myth to explain the nuclear arrangement of the family, which is an important aspect of the Oedipus complex.

The primal origins of the incest prohibition attest to its strength and ubiquity throughout history and in human development. Freud chose the play \textit{Oedipus Rex}, written by the ancient Greek playwright Sophocles, as the exemplary model of the importance of the incest prohibition. In this narrative,\textsuperscript{25} Oedipus is abandoned on a hilltop as an infant and left to die, but rescued and taken to be raised by the king and queen of Corinth. After he is grown, Oedipus learns from the Oracle that he is destined to kill his father and sleep with his mother, so he attempts to escape his fate by leaving Corinth and journeying to Thebes. He unwittingly meets his real father amongst a group of travellers on the road to Thebes, and kills him because he was harassed by these men. After answering the riddle of the sphinx and thereby freeing the city from the Sphinx’s reign, Oedipus is awarded his mother’s hand in marriage, though again he is unaware of her true identity. Once Oedipus realizes what he has done he blinds himself for his transgressions. Freud used this narrative as the structural basis of his theory of the infantile Oedipus complex.

Teresa de Lauretis, a feminist film theorist, examines how desire exists within narrative and myth. Though Freud was interested in giving psychoanalysis scientific validity, he also worked to construct a narrative that wove together the elements of his theory. The Oedipus complex is a foundational narrative, working to explain infantile desire and how it grows to shape later sexual identity. As Freud used the Oedipus myth as a structure for the Oedipus complex, typical mythic concerns and structures are evident within this theory.

\textsuperscript{24} Freud, \textit{Totem and Taboo} 182-189.
Following the work of semiotician Jurij Lotman, de Lauretis traces the evolution of myth into plot-driven narrative. Myths are cyclical storylines that may be read from any point of the story. Their purpose is to establish regular, repeating laws that clarify or explain elements of culture. Lotman found that there are two primary conflicts that myth works through, and these are "entry into a closed space, and emergence from it," which often manifests in the hero-subject of the myth conquering boundaries. The boundaries themselves are morphologically female, as women symbolize the womb and other spaces to be territorialized. This necessitates that the hero be male, as "he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences." From this construction, de Lauretis concludes that "the business of the mythical subject is the construction of differences." As fiction and plot rise to prominence, "narrative itself takes over the function of the mythical subject. The work of narrative, then, is a mapping of differences, and specifically, first and foremost, of sexual difference into each text."

The question of sexual difference is of paramount importance in Sophocles' myth. In *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus effects the transformation of both himself and the city of Thebes by answering the riddle of the sphinx, defeating her and crossing the boundary she previously patrolled. He thus liberates the city of Thebes and in return is given the hand of the queen in marriage, becoming king. He may now rise to his destiny, tragic though it may be. This ancient play is a "drama [that] has the movement of a passage, a crossing, an actively experienced transformation of the human being into--man." A female sphinx occasioned the triumph of

26 Lotman qtd. de Lauretis 118.
27 de Lauretis 119.
28 de Lauretis 120.
29 de Lauretis 121.
30 de Lauretis 121.
Oedipus, and the queen, his wife and mother, will lead to his downfall. The queen, Jocasta, tries to prevent Oedipus from looking too closely into the death of the king and thus discovering the truth of his parentage, but he resists. Oedipus affirms the power of the tribal prohibitions of murder and incest when he blinds himself, upholding the value of social sanction against those who would let the city stagnate, like the sphinx and Jocasta. Freud upholds these gendered moral valuations in the Oedipus complex, which will be shown in chapter 3 of this paper.

The Infantile Oedipus Complex

The Oedipus complex is transmitted through infant sexuality. One of Freud’s great discoveries was that sexuality begins in infancy, and that infants engage in auto-eroticism. Masturbation allows the infant to control over its own pleasure, and Freud accords it great importance: "I wish I might have an opportunity some time of explaining to you at length how important all the factual details of early masturbation become for the individual's subsequent neurosis or character." However, parents often perceive this behavior as obscene or inappropriate, and the infant’s activity leads to punishment from the parents, under the authority of the father.

In Freud’s view, infant masturbation is significant because it leads the child to get to know his or her own genitals. He suggests that infants initially believe that everyone is endowed with a penis but will eventually realize, through play with other children, that this is untrue. Exploration of the genitals allows the infant to discover that females do not have penises, and this comes as a great shock to males and females alike, who then believe that females are "castrated".

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31 Freud, “Femininity” 127.
For boys, punishment by the father for masturbation combined with his "horror of the mutilated creature [the female]" leads him to fear that his possession of the penis is insecure and that it could be taken away from him at his father's whim.\(^{32}\) Freud called this fear the "castration complex". In the positive Oedipus complex, the boy also fears that the father may learn of his love for his mother and castrate him for desiring to possess her, as he knows that she belongs to his father. This initiates the father-son rivalry over the mother as the young boy views his father as an obstacle to fully loving his mother, and wishes to get rid of him, which hearkens back to the primal myth of killing the father. The father-son relationship is hostile and aggressive until the little boy accedes to the superior power of his father, waiting for the day when he will be powerful enough to attain a woman like his mother. "The confirmation of his first love-object for the boy which is his Oedipus complex is renounced till he grows up like his father whom he meanwhile internalizes as his superego by identification."\(^{33}\) However, the little boy may alternatively experience the "negative" Oedipus complex. Both sexes begin their lives with bisexual propensities, though Freud believes girls are bisexual to a greater extent.\(^{34}\) Boys may identify with their mothers and wish to be loved by the father, taking on a "passive" role, versus the "active" role of the positive Oedipus complex.\(^{35}\) In this case the boy behaves in a feminine manner and searches for men like his father for his love-object. Both of these incestuous desires involve castration, either by paternal threat or by taking the feminine position, and so the boy will identify with a parent and wait until puberty (after his latency period) to pursue his love-


\(^{33}\) Mitchell 111.


The little boy is symbolically castrated but has resolved his Oedipus complex and he may now “enter into the promise of his patriarchal heritage.”

In Freudian psychoanalytic theory, girls are always already castrated. At first, the little girl imagines that she alone lacks a penis, and hopes that her clitoris will grow to become a penis. However, she soon discovers that like herself her mother is castrated, and that in fact all women are. This leads to penis envy, or shame for females’ inadequate genitalia and a desire for a penis. The little girl, according to Freud, will search for substitutes, and “the appeased wish for a penis is destined to be converted into a wish for a baby and for a husband, who possesses a penis.”

This version of the castration complex inaugurates, rather than resolves, her Oedipus complex.

A female infant’s attachment must be switched from her mother to her father during the Oedipal stage, because while she still loves a woman Freud says we are “obliged to recognize that the little girl is a little man.” She must literally change her sex, for before she does her sexuality is masculine, active, and focused on the clitoris. Proper femininity for Freud is located in the vagina, rather than the clitoris, and is passive.

The female infant does not necessarily attain this normal state, but may instead experience the “negative” Oedipus and develop a masculinity complex. Freud describes this process in his study, “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman” (1920), where he analyzed a young woman who chased after a dilettante. Describing this young woman’s infantile Oedipus complex, he reports that she "changed into a man and took her

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36 Freud, “Dissolution” 177.
37 Mitchell 110.
38 Freud, “Analysis” 251.
39 Freud, “Femininity” 118.
mother in place of her father as the object of her love.” Freud does not, as Irigaray points out, allow for a woman to display feminine behavior while loving another woman. One other “abnormal” option is open for girls (though not for boys), and this is to give up on sexuality altogether.

In the positive Oedipus complex, the young girl grudgingly identifies with her mother, though she blames her mother for not giving her the desired penis. She gives up masturbation because it reminds her that she does not possess a penis. Her relationship with her mother has become one of hostility, and she turns to her father for love.

For infant girls, then, the positive Oedipus complex functions primarily to establish heterosexuality. Mitchell says “She makes the shift from mother-love to father-love only because she has to, and then with pain and protest. She has to, because she is without the phallus. No phallus, no power.” As boys are already oriented to the proper gender, for them the Oedipus complex ensures "the achievement of personal masculine identification with their father and sense of secure masculine self, achieved through superego formation and disparagement of women.”

The preoedipal and Oedipal stages of psychosexual development are strongly gendered in classic Freudian theory. Freud’s mythology differentiated subjects through their anatomy, which he believed corresponded to differences in psychic structures. As will be seen in the next chapter, the theory of the Oedipus complex must be reworked to allow for the expression of female
subjectivity, and several feminist theorists and psychoanalysts will propose specifically feminine
symbolic representations of female desire.

CHAPTER THREE

Critiquing Freud

The previous section details the traditional, Freudian conceptions of the Oedipal and
pre-oedipal phases. Feminists began responding to these claims early on, largely from within the
psychoanalytic tradition. Psychoanalysts like Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin agree that
Freud described patriarchal culture well. Chodorow writes that "psychoanalysis does describe
and interpret how people come to value themselves and their genitals, and how they come to
have particular sexual predilections, neuroses, character traits, and inner object worlds." 44 Freud
proposed a compelling theory of gender, and a theory of femininity where none had been before.
Teresa de Lauretis believes that it is often lost in critiques of Freud that he allowed women a
place in his mythology, though she also maintains that this mythology is ultimately about male
desire. 45

Sociologically, the Oedipus complex is useful in that it demonstrates how parents
transmit values and identities to their children. Psychoanalyst Juliet Mitchell criticizes feminists
for not understanding that Freud was describing how unconscious psychic structures are
reproduced rather than describing conscious behavior. However, Freud himself acknowledges
that social norms have influenced his theory. For example, he states that while he calls the
masculine active and the feminine passive, this distinction is a convention and not supported in

44 Chodorow 155.
45 de Lauretis 125.
the psychic realm. As he writes, "even in the sphere of human sexual life you soon see how inadequate it is to make masculine behavior coincide with activity and femininity with passivity." He goes on to say that women may behave passively, but "we must beware in this of underestimating the influence of social customs, which similarly force women into passive situations." Thus, social expression cannot solely be the result of our psychic makeup.

Similarly, when Freud explains that masochism is a feminine quality, he makes the caveat that "the suppression of women's aggressiveness which is prescribed for them constitutionally and imposed on them socially favors the development of powerful masochistic impulses." In his view, masochism can be explained both by the woman’s psychological desire to be castrated so she may win the love of her father, and by cultural imperatives. Freud’s conception of the Oedipus complex arose from existing social structures. The primary social arrangement in our society is the nuclear, heterosexual family, and the Oedipus complex illustrates how genders are formed within these structures. It also shows the different investments that male and female sexuality receive in a patriarchal culture.

Freud dismissed the female critics of his time. In Freud’s seminar on femininity, which he never delivered, he asks his imagined male audience what women want. Freud “stands in both places at once, for he first formulates--defines--the question and then answers it." He is not interested in what women, especially those women who advocate for other women, have to say about their condition. He has no love for those who tried to moderate his description of femininity, writing that "we must not allow ourselves to be deflected from such conclusions [moral inferiority] by the denial of the feminists, who are anxious to force us to regard the two

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46 Freud, “Femininity” 115.
49 de Lauretis 111.
sexes as completely equal in position and worth.⁵⁰ And again: "Feminists are not pleased when we point out to them the effects of this factor [a weak superego] upon the average feminine character."⁵¹ Though Freud stretched to make psychoanalysis scientifically rigorous, he tells his reader that he or she must ultimately look to the poets for answers about femininity.⁵² This lapse in Freud’s meticulous discourse is “part of an obvious condescension, if not misogyny, toward women and a virtual dismissal of interest in them.”⁵³

Freud allowed women to participate in his therapeutic sessions and did his best to help alleviate their symptoms. On a large, systematic scale, however, he did not hear what women were trying to say to him, the pain that went beyond individuals and signaled a problem in the very fabric of our social structure. As anthropologist Gayle Rubin writes, “if women, in finding their place in a sexual system, are robbed of libido and forced into a masochistic eroticism, why did the analysts not argue for novel arrangements, instead of rationalizing the old ones?”⁵⁴ And Freud perpetuated this system: “Transforming moral law into scientific law, clinical practice has acted to enforce sexual convention upon unruly participants.”⁵⁵ Freud listened, but only up to a point, which can be seen in his famous case study of a young woman known to the world as “Dora”.

In Dora: Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria (1905), Freud provides an example of his method of psychoanalytic interpretation. There are many layers involved in the case he is examining. On the surface level, he is analyzing two dreams of a young woman conflicted about love. On another level he is analyzing a young woman who loves another

⁵⁰ Freud, “Some Psychical Consequences” 258.
⁵¹ Freud, “Femininity” 129.
⁵² Freud, “Femininity” 135.
⁵³ Chodorow 143.
⁵⁵ Rubin 184.
woman, misrecognizing this love and assuming it is for a man. On still another level he is analyzing a young woman who was first pushed into an erotic encounter by her father and is now being pushed into interpretation by the same man. Dora, the young woman, has little control over her life, and has less control on Freud’s couch. Her intelligence is a hindrance to Freud, who imposes upon her with his hermeneutics and dominates her with his conclusions. Freud is interested in what he can find in her, not in what she has to say about her own situation. He privileges his subjectivity over her own, and this comes through clearly in the structure of the text. Dora is written like a detective novel, with a singular truth to be uncovered and clues to unravel along the way. It is an engrossing narrative, and the reader is encouraged to identify with the skillful, savvy Freud as opposed to the willful Dora. He appears to be a reliable narrator, noting when he is uncertain, detailing his methodology and providing information relevant to psychoanalysis in general or Dora’s case specifically when necessary. He uses footnotes and includes a post-script at the end and prefatory notes at the beginning, which add to a sense of thoroughness and completeness. Freud does everything he can to make his case study appear less fragmentary, which includes trying to wrap Dora’s case up neatly, even though she unexpectedly terminated her therapy. Freud works very hard to make his connections seem logical.

Complications and complexities are overcome by sheer authority, as when Freud writes "it was easy to brush aside this [Dora’s] objection (which was probably not very seriously intended)." Dora can protest, but when every ‘no’ is a ‘yes’ and every ‘yes’ is a ‘yes’, Freud is always right. Freud writes that Dora “understood very clearly” what her father was doing when he drank brandy before bed, but undermines this statement by putting the explanation in a footnote for the reader, because the link is non-obvious. He is willing to make absolute, definitive claims like

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67 Freud, *Dora*, 118.
“now I know your motive”, telling Dora this motive in a one-way exchange.\footnote{Freud, \textit{Dora}, 128} He glosses over his probable misinterpretation of Dora’s sexuality, footnoting the possibility that she may be a lesbian.\footnote{Freud, \textit{Dora}, 142} He is much more interested in her relationships with males, and only sees Frau K as a provider of sexual information and a rival for the love of the father. Dora’s dreams are analyzed to reveal her as an object of desire, not as a desiring agent. Psychoanalysis allows the analysand to engage with sexuality and the unconscious, but it is severely limited by an incomplete and sexist understanding of female sexuality. With Dora, Freud was preoccupied with establishing his own mastery over her story, a trend that runs throughout his discussions of female sexuality.

The only way to begin to fix this situation is for women to speak to each other about themselves. Women deserve to have their voices heard and their desires recognized. The Oedipus complex is still a useful framework. It has embedded itself within our culture and is part of our collective imagination. Though this may in fact be a result of the Freudian theories themselves, it does not lessen their strength now and it cannot be disregarded. Instead, the Oedipus complex should be used as a lens through which to critique society, beginning here with the feminist critique, imagining new, deviant bodies and symbolic structures.

Freudian Sexism

\textit{\ldots} Though Freud described patriarchal society well, he overstepped his boundaries when he began prescribing a “normal femininity”. Proposed attributes of this normalization include insulting, inborn character traits like envy, narcissism, and masochism. Classic psychoanalytic thought declares that all women suffer from penis envy, and then goes on to say that "the effect of penis-envy has a share, further, in the physical vanity of women, since they are bound to value
their charms more highly as a late compensation for their original sexual inferiority."\(^{60}\) There is no compassion in this pronouncement—women are placed into the role of pleasing men sexually and thus made to maintain their outward appearance, and then castigated for doing so.

Furthermore, women (as a whole) are allegedly more narcissistic, because they want to be loved more than they want to give love to others. However, this is precisely the passive existence that they have been mandated. Narcissism is produced by the structural position that women occupy and should thus be morally neutral, but isn't in the realm of psychoanalysis. Furthermore, in his essay “Femininity”, Freud proclaims that women possess an inferior sense of justice compared to men, as the female super-ego “cannot attain the strength and independence which give it its cultural significance.”\(^{61}\) In fact, in psychoanalytic theory women themselves are not culturally significant, as Freud alleges that the only thing women have contributed to civilization is weaving, which originated in the braiding of pubic hair to hide the shame of female genitalia.\(^{62}\)

Building civilization requires overcoming incestuous desires, to allow for the "detachment from parental authority, a process that alone makes possible the opposition, which is so important for the progress of civilization, between the new generation and the old."\(^{63}\) However, Freud claims that some girls do not adequately separate themselves from their parents, and persist to bask in parental love. He writes that "it is precisely these girls who in their later marriage lack the capacity to give their husbands what is due to them; they make cold wives and remain sexually anaesthetic."\(^{64}\) Not only will these girls be unable to participate in the growth of civilization, but they will be unable to fulfill their sexual obligations to their husbands. Female

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\(^{60}\) Freud, “Femininity” 132.

\(^{61}\) Freud, “Femininity” 129.

\(^{62}\) Freud, “Femininity” 132.

\(^{63}\) Freud, *Three Essays* 93.

\(^{64}\) Freud, *Three Essays* 93.
subjectivity is completely erased in the above quotation; Freud makes no mention of how women might feel in their relationships to their parents and their husbands, and where it is that they might find love and attention.

In psychoanalytic theory, building civilization is an activity proper only for men. Humans have acquired “religion and moral restraint by the actual process of mastering the Oedipus complex itself, and social feeling from the necessity for overcoming the rivalry that then remained between the members of the younger generation.”65 Mastering the Oedipus complex is an achievement reserved specifically for the male child, and the “rivalry” that is mentioned is only between male members of the primitive tribe. As the Oedipus complex is the foundation of morality, for Freud it follows logically that “the male sex has taken the lead in developing all of these moral acquisitions [like religion and justice]; and that they have then been transmitted to women by cross-inheritance.”66 Women have no contributions to make to moral development, but receive morality from men. Men also dominate in the realm of sexuality. Girls, Freud says, mostly masturbate by squeezing the thighs together, but "the preference for the hand which is shown by boys is already evidence of the important contribution which the instinct for mastery is destined to make to masculine sexual activity."67 This is a ridiculous claim, for Freud requires of female sexual activity that girls give up their stimulation of the clitoris, which means they are actively discouraged for displaying this de facto “masculine” mastery.

Contempt of women by both sexes is standard and acceptable in classic psychoanalytic theory. Here, castration is a woman's destiny; it is an assumed fact and in no need of justification, immediately recognized by all young girls who “at once notice the difference and, it

65 Freud, Totem and Taboo 50.
66 Freud, Totem and Taboo 50.
67 Freud, Three Essays 54.
must be admitted, its significance too." The significance, of course, is the natural dominance of the penis as the girl "acknowledges the fact of her castration, and with it, too, the superiority of the male and her own inferiority." She may initially rebel, but "after a woman has become aware of the wound to her narcissism, she develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority."  

Freud’s essays abound with the idea that women are a burden for all. In “Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Difference Between the Sexes” Freud explicates how women themselves are ashamed of the "sex which is the lesser in so important a respect," a self-hatred that is astounding for being constitutive of half the human population. Men too are disgusted, and Freud writes in “Female Sexuality” that “one thing that is left over in men from the influence of their Oedipus complex is a certain amount of disparagement in their attitude towards women, whom they regard as being castrated.” This behavior had to be learned however; little boys do not immediately accept the “castration” of little girls because they firmly believe that like them, everyone possesses a penis. Girls, according to Freud, immediately realize their lack “and are overcome by envy for the penis--an envy culminating in the wish, which is so important in its consequences, to be boys themselves.” However, Freud has stated that little girls are effectively little men and will remain so long as they do not renounce their clitoris. Additionally, the clitoris functions like the head of the penis in its pleasure-giving capabilities, and Freud recognizes this.

68 Freud, “Femininity” 125.
69 Freud, “Female Sexuality” 229.
72 Freud, “Female Sexuality” 229.
73 Freud, Three Essays 61.
74 Freud, Three Essays 61.
recognize the female clitoris as a true substitute for the penis."  

All young children have a genital organ which is capable of giving them pleasure. It is Freud who mandates that girls give theirs up, and as such it seems that these little boys, who do not accept castration, are more willing to receive girls as their equal than is Freud.

Before they reach the Oedipal stage, young girls possess an active sexuality, just as boys do. Passivity and the choice of a male love-object define femininity for Freud. Freud names the vagina the "female organ proper" because it is "valued as a place of shelter for the penis; it enters into the heritage of the womb." However, it is the clitoris that the female child initially receives pleasure from. Females have two genital organs where males only have one, and women must change their primary organ from the clitoris to the vagina to attain proper femininity. Freud believes that "masturbation, at all events of the clitoris, is a masculine activity and that the elimination of a clitoridal sexuality is a necessary precondition for the development of femininity." Nancy Chodorow questions Freud’s initial assumptions, for he has decreed the clitoris as active, because it "can bring gratification without penile penetration" but has also "defined femininity as vaginal and passive sexually". Freud does not adequately explain why both genitals are not feminine, being as they both belong to females. The little girl is a little man only in that Freud defines activity as masculine, and masculine as the behavior of males.

Freud's conclusions about women are grim. The Oedipus complex in the male is "the victory of the race over the individual", but unfortunately (or not), "the accomplishment of the aim of biology has been entrusted to the aggressiveness of men and has been made to some

75 Freud, Three Essays 61.
76 Freud, “Female Sexuality” 288.
78 Freud, “Some Psychical Consequences” 255.
79 Chodorow 146.
extent independent of women's consent." In this dehumanizing remark, Freud has lightly commented upon the rape of one sex upon the other. Freud famously said that the sexes love a phase apart, but this is completely beyond the realm of love. He continues this trend when he discusses the differences between thirty year-old men and women. Freud writes that after women have hit the 30-year landmark, "the difficult development of femininity had exhausted the possibilities of the person concerned." He posits a caveat, writing that he has only been describing the "sexual function" of women. He admits that "it is true that that influence extends very far; but we do not overlook the fact that an individual woman may be a human being in other respects as well." Men, on the other hand, are unequivocally human. In The Three Essays on a Theory of Sexuality, Freud writes of the boy that his destiny is "to grow up into a strong and capable person with vigorous sexual needs and to accomplish during his life all the things that human beings are urged to do by their instincts." The differences are startling.

These differences in moral acquisition, quality of life, and sexuality all stem from one fact: that all women fundamentally lack what all men have, a penis. The "libido is invariably and necessarily of a masculine nature, whether it occurs in men or in women and irrespectively of whether its object is man or woman." In early childhood, a period Freud places so much importance on for the development of sexed identity, "maleness exists, but not femaleness. The antithesis here is between having a male genital and being castrated. It is not until development has reached its completion at puberty that the sexual polarity coincides with male and female." Not only are women lacking, but because Freud believes that the "proper female organ" is the

80 Freud, "Femininity" 131.
81 Freud, "Femininity" 135.
82 Freud, "Femininity" 135.
83 Freud, Three Essays 89.
84 Freud, Three Essays 85.
85 Freud, "The Infant Genital Organization" 145.
vagina, women do not exist until they have switched their libidinal investment from their clitoris to their vagina, or in others words, until they have given up self-induced pleasure and sexually matured enough for intercourse with men. In this conception, "men have something and women have nothing, instead of having something different."^{86}

**Attaining Femininity**

Femininity is difficult to attain; it is a painful and humiliating process for young girls to be accorded this marginal position. Gayle Rubin believes that “one can read Freud’s essays on femininity as descriptions of how a group is prepared psychologically, at a tender age, to live with its oppression,”^{87} and Simone de Beauvoir, Kaja Silverman, and Teresa de Lauretis will agree. Each of these three theorists questions the viability of living the feminine role, and suggests that it is in men’s interests, not women’s, to uphold femininity.

Simone de Beauvoir discusses the construction of the myth of woman and how it affects female identity and sexual difference. She believes that men proposed the archetypal Eternal Feminine to explain the behavior of the monolith “women”, though this archetype does not correspond to the “dispersed, contingent, and multiple existences of actual women.”^{88} Men and women are different, but the myth of woman denies the reciprocity of this difference, which would acknowledge that man is other to woman and vice versa. Instead, “absolute mystery” is posited as a woman’s essence. This is strongly reminiscent of Freud’s assertion that there is only one libido, which is masculine, and that men and women are defined in relation to only one organ, the penis, as castrated or not-castrated. This lack of empathy or connectivity allows men

^{86} Chodorow 183.
^{87} Rubin 196.
to naturalize the burdens of women, rationalizing that they must be of her nature. Around the “enigma” of woman, man may be alone with himself and his preconceived notions about women, without the hardships of engaging in relationships. As a result, “few myths have been more advantageous to the ruling class than the myth of woman: it justifies all privileges and even authorizes their abuse.” The true danger of the myth, however, is when women internalize it, allowing it to influence her self-perception and her relations with others.

For the absolute mystery to be effective, women must not only be other to men, but also to themselves: “her body does not seem to her to be a clear expression of herself; within it she feels herself a stranger.” With others she is disingenuous, “taught from adolescence to lie to men, to scheme, to be wily. In speaking to them she wears an artificial expression on her face; she is cautious, hypocritical, play-acting.” Freud believes that these behaviors arise from the natural inferiority of women’s genitalia, which she must duly compensate for. Women cannot articulate themselves within the symbolic realm, but “to say that woman is mystery is to say, not that she is silent, but that her language is not understood,” a claim that Irigaray will make. However, these myths are powerful and persuasive, and through them “this society imposed its laws and customs upon individuals in a picturesque, effective manner.” The Oedipus complex works in this manner, upholding the order and stability of civilization even while obscuring its function of regulating sexuality. The chapter ends on an uncomfortable note, as de Beauvoir quotes Rimbaud writing “the infinite bondage of women is broken, when she will live in and for

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89 de Beauvoir 255.
90 de Beauvoir 257.
91 de Beauvoir 259.
92 de Beauvoir 257.
93 de Beauvoir 260.
herself, man--hitherto detestable--having let her go free.\textsuperscript{94} Can women not save themselves? Or are we back on the Freudian couch, waiting for the male psychoanalyst to explain female neurosis, holding the key to healthy subjectivity? Men must reconcile their own essentializing urges, but it should be up to women themselves to claim their identities. Not all identities are perceived as equal, however, as film theorist Kaja Silverman will argue.

Silverman examines Oedipal bodily perception in psychoanalytic theory and notes that not all bodies have access to “a lovable bodily ego.”\textsuperscript{95} Body images are formed within a specific culture and may have both negative and positive valences. Some bodies are privileged over others, and those that are privileged have the luxury of “repudiating whatever [they] cannot swallow--by refusing to live in and through alien corporealities.”\textsuperscript{96} Silverman applies this “principle of the self-same body,”\textsuperscript{97} where subjects desire all bodies to be the same, to Freud’s theories, maintaining that Freud’s representative male infant is completely unable to “perceive a body which does not replicate his own.”\textsuperscript{98} The differences between male and female bodies in infancy is extremely slight but the boy cannot see his female peer’s body as a “slightly divergent form”, but only as “a castrated version of the male body--as the materialization of the punishment with which he is threatened.”\textsuperscript{99}

Silverman uses Lacan’s notion of the gaze to discuss how subjects can take on unappealing identities. Subjects are defined by cultural and social gazes and “a representation from which any subject would recoil can nevertheless turn into a ‘mirror’, and induce a highly

\textsuperscript{94} Rimbaud, qtd. de Beauvoir 263.
\textsuperscript{96} Silverman 26.
\textsuperscript{97} Silverman 24.
\textsuperscript{98} Silverman 25.
\textsuperscript{99} Silverman 25.
unpleasurable identification." This is what occurs to female subjects during the Oedipus complex. In the preoedipus complex the young girl is free to love her mother, and the two form an intense bond. However, once the girl realizes her "castrated" state, she is "coerced into an identification with anatomical and discursive insufficiency ["lack"]." Simply for being male, infant boys are given the keys to civilization and the means to ensure their domination, including subjectivity, law, and an active sexuality. Women, in contrast, "have imposed upon them an image so deidealizing that no one would willingly identify with it." Film theorist Teresa de Lauretis asks how it is that women get seduced into this role.

As already noted, the drama of the Oedipus complex is of overcoming the castration complex and becoming an independent subject. For boys, this means postponing the attainment of the mother (or more technically, a woman like her) until they have achieved the power of their fathers. Girls do not overcome their castration complex, because they are always already castrated. Their journey, in the Oedipus complex, is of attaining "normal" femininity, which corresponds to a heterosexual orientation. The girl's journey towards proper femininity is the journey to be able to adequately fulfill male desire. But attaining this proper femininity is a difficult process, and women must be convinced that it is their desire to do so. For while the species may be perpetuated without women's consent, desire does not work in the same way. "Women must either consent or be seduced into consenting to femininity." De Lauretis believes that the path of sexual development that Freud lays out in the Oedipus complex, reinforced by the Oedipal myth, works to do just this.

100 Silverman 27.
101 Silverman 33.
102 Silverman 29.
103 de Lauretis 133.
104 de Lauretis 134.
Teresa de Lauretis maintains that “the very work of narrativity is the engagement of the subject in certain positionalities of meaning and desire.”\(^{105}\) Women are encouraged to occupy two gendered positions throughout their lives; Freud believes that women, but not men, oscillate between masculine and feminine identifications. This enables women to “uphold both positionalities of desire, both active and passive aims: desire for the other, and desire to be desired by the other.” Women can identify with the male gaze and uphold the maintenance of femininity for the pleasure of men, and also identify as that which is being gazed upon, the beautiful object. In this way, women are seduced and persuaded to consent to femininity through the "double identification, a surplus of pleasure produced by the spectators themselves for cinema and for society's profit."\(^{106}\) Though women get to enjoy some of their performance by seeing through male eyes, the profit, femininity itself, works largely for male benefit.

De Lauretis maintains that the Oedipal drama still maps the male’s journey towards his destiny and his desire. "Such is the work of cinema [narrative] as we know it: to represent the vicissitudes of his journey, fraught with false images (his blindness) but unerringly questing after the one true vision that will confirm the truth of his desire."\(^{107}\) If the male hero doesn’t find his love-object where she is supposed to be waiting for him, he will continue his journey until he does find her and she will desire what he desires. Her body has been territorialized by external discourse, but made to seem as an essential femininity, which she must internalize. She has been aligned with the body, and her body has come to signify sexuality. "Once her desire has been made congruent with the desire of the Other, the female, now woman, can gain access to speech and to that discourse [of desire]," the purview of men.\(^{108}\)

\(^{105}\) de Lauretis 106.  
\(^{106}\) de Lauretis 143.  
\(^{107}\) de Lauretis 155.  
\(^{108}\) de Lauretis 142.
Silverman, like de Lauretis, posits that “the conventional female spectator enjoys greater identificatory freedom than does her male counterpart.”\(^{109}\) Though men typically reject identities that they see as “other”, women may appropriate these identities and access a self-love that they cannot find in femininity. Femininity enacts the lack of the phallus. Many women strive to attain the feminine ideal, but it is an “unrequited love” that they are nonetheless “exhorted to approximate, but prohibited from replicating.”\(^{110}\) Women who respond in this way have no manner open to them of self-love. A woman may “seek access to self-love through another person’s love for her,” loving herself indirectly.\(^{111}\) She may also actively idealize a man and identify with him, loving herself through her embodiment of his characteristics. These strategies all place her outside of the realm of the self-same body, along with the strategies of the masculinity complex and asexuality. These strategies allow women to escape the bind of femininity, although clearly they are not ideal solutions.

Silverman ends her argument by warning against undue investment in cultural norms. These norms reify certain ideals when ideality instead works best as a contingent, removable form. “Visual texts” can help make divergent bodies visible, acting as a support system for new identity positions.\(^{112}\) For de Lauretis, these texts must remain “narrative and Oedipal with a vengeance, for [they] seek to stress the duplicity of that scenario and the specific contradiction of the female subject in it.”\(^{113}\) Both Silverman and de Lauretis emphasize the need to recognize and sustain difference. Where Freud would fear this move, these feminist theorists embrace it.

\(^{109}\) Silverman 35.
\(^{110}\) Silverman 34.
\(^{111}\) Silverman 34.
\(^{112}\) Silverman 37.
\(^{113}\) de Lauretis 157.
Incorporating the Other

Psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin’s theory of intersubjectivity offers a psychoanalytic account based on extensive clinical data that more fully incorporates the sociality of human beings. In Freud’s theory his proposed subjects used each other instrumentally, and he focused much more on separation, alienation, and frustration than connection. Benjamin, in contrast, describes subjects who are not frightened of difference and desire mutual recognition. Freud’s parental figures are too strong; the mother is suffocating and the father is vindictive. Masculinity limits emotional expression and femininity is repulsive. Intersubjectivity encourages desiring mothers and close fathers who do not oppose or estrange each other, but mutually recognize both their partner and their children.

In Bonds of Love, Jessica Benjamin argues for intersubjectivity and mutual recognition against imposed identification and separation. Building upon Winnicott’s theories of object relations, Benjamin looks closely at parental roles during the Oedipus complex and concludes that maternal subjectivity can act as a positive force against domination.

Benjamin emphasizes bonds between people rather than the internal and external struggles that characterize classic psychoanalytic theory. Freud’s model highlights the anxiety of separating from the mother and the frustration and hostility incumbent in identifying with either parent. For the infant, the Oedipus complex is an “experience of painful disappointments” because expressions of love and pleasure are limited and censored by the people the infant is closest to. Classic ego formation centers around repudiation, as the infant is originally polymorphously perverse and must chisel its sexual identity down, casting off whatever doesn’t fit. This is especially true of the male child, who reacts in horror to the genitals of the female,

114 Freud, “Dissolution” 173.
defining himself against her. In this way, "instead of recognizing the other who is different, the boy either identifies or disidentifies." 115

Benjamin contrasts what she calls “internalization theory”, which she associates with classical psychoanalytic thought and ego psychology, to her own “intersubjective theory”, which is indebted to the work of Winicott and the object relations psychologists. Freudian theory is concerned with developing the core of the self, largely as a result of outside influences. For instance, choosing a parent to identify with is of paramount importance for the rest of a child’s life. Whichever parent the child does not identify with is disavowed, fostering an either/or mindset that Benjamin maintains is damaging to the child’s relations with others. In Freudian theory, healthy subjects are autonomous subjects. 116

In contrast, “intersubjective theory is concerned not with how we take in enough from the other to be able to go away, but how the other gives us the opportunity to do it ourselves to begin with.” 117 Benjamin highlights the pleasure of connecting with others when each subject may sustain and enjoy the tension between sameness and difference within a relationship. In this way, others are not effaced by becoming incorporated by the discerning subject, and are not regulated because they are seen as foreign objects. Intersubjectivity requires mutual recognition between two independent subjects, which is the basis for connection. Reality may be discovered in the dialogue between two people and felt from within, rather than imposed from the outside. Freud placed too great an emphasis on separation, and by doing so he effectively introduced a theoretical system of domination and submission. Benjamin, however, believes that sharing, connection, and mutuality must replace complementarity.

116 Benjamin 43-45.
117 Benjamin 45.
The fear of connecting with others who are different that is described by Benjamin plays a large part in the dynamics of the Oedipus complex. Mutually exclusive parental roles limit childrens’ gender expression and "this split can be repaired only when each parent sustains sexual cross-identification and provides an example of integration rather than complementarity." If this does not occur, masculinity and femininity are polarized and children may become incomplete subjects, and boys especially may incur damaging beliefs about women. Fathers and sons alike deny their dependency on the caretaking of mothers, and in doing so establish a sense of superiority over and against her. Freud states outright that “it is at once clear that for the child who is growing up in the family circle the fact of the mother belonging to the father becomes an inseparable part of the mother's essence.” Their relationship is one-sided, for "in the parents' heterosexual love, the mother belongs to and acknowledges the father, but the father does not necessarily acknowledge her in return." This dynamic is reproduced through the Oedipus complex, as parents transmit their gendered roles to their children.

In intersubjective theory, children must be encouraged to acknowledge the separate existence of the mother. Fathers are accorded individuality because they spend less time being directly responsible for their children and thus less time in the private sphere of the home. According to Benjamin, this leads to a damaging, idealistic belief in the father’s power on the part of the infant where masculinity is revered because it is so unknown. Femininity, in contrast, surrounds the child. Freud presupposes the primary care of the mother but also views her love as overwhelming and all-consuming, and if left unchecked, the cause of crippling dependency in her children. Children may feel suffocated in their exclusive bond with the mother, and thus may privilege the recognition of the father over their mother’s nurturance. The father’s power is

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114 Benjamin 114.  
119 Freud, qtd. in Chodorow 130.  
120 Benjamin 165.
heralded as the only way children may attain separation from the mother. As Benjamin sees Freud’s model, children move directly from the all-encompassing nurturance of the mother to the law of the father, “exchanging one master for another.”\textsuperscript{121} Benjamin suggests that if mothers had interests that took them outside of the home, they too may be seen as separate subjects by their children. In this way mothers may effect a gentle separation that also signifies their ability to guide children into the outside world. It is important for Benjamin that mothers show their children of both sexes that women are not defined by men but may have their own desires. Also, if daughters are to become desiring subjects, mothers must be too, for "the mother who does not experience her own will and body as sources of pleasure, who does not enjoy her own agency and desire, cannot recognize her daughter's sexuality."\textsuperscript{122}

Little girls are defined by Freud as having penis envy, but Benjamin proposes that they may just desire a relationship with their father; girls need a way to mediate their bond with their mother in the same way that boys do. Girls reach out to the other sex, unafraid of difference, but Freud berates them for doing so and takes it as evidence of their lack or envy. "While women's wish to be like men was deemed illness, men's fear of being like women was deemed universal, a simple, immutable fact."\textsuperscript{123}

Descriptions of the father’s love for the child are conspicuous in their absence in Freudian texts. For boys the individuation process that their father initiates is a procedure of fear and submission. Their mothers’ love is also frightening. In \textit{Civilization and its Discontents}, Freud admits that he fears the return to oneness and the oceanic feeling that bonding with the mother entails. It is a regression that threatens to suffocate, a re-absorption that focuses inward rather than outward facing the world. The father represents salvation from this danger, allowing

\textsuperscript{121} Benjamin 96.\textsuperscript{122} Benjamin 98.\textsuperscript{123} Benjamin 160.
the child independence and control. Benjamin writes that "relaxing the boundaries of the self in communion with others threatened the identity of the isolate self. Yet this oneness was also seen as the ultimate pleasure, eclipsing the pleasure of difference. Oneness was not seen as a state that could coexist with (enhance and be enhanced by) the sense of separateness." Parental bonds are intense in Freudian theory. Benjamin does not deny the importance of individuation. However, she writes that ideally "the striving to individuate is not just an expression of hostility toward dependency; it also expresses love of the world." In the Oedipus complex, the sexes are not merely different, they are opposed: "When the oedipal standpoint takes over completely, men no longer confront women as other subjects who can recognize them. Only in other men can they meet their match." A boy’s complete separation from the mother is guaranteed, for she and the femininity she represents has been devalued for him. Benjamin believes that a boy who has lost his connection to his mother and to his own emotions will struggle with the external world, replacing affect with domination. Men have "a stance toward women--of fear, of mastery, of distance--which by no means recognizes her as a different but like subject."

Benjamin believes in the power and productivity of sustaining difference because it allows individuals to acknowledge the separate reality of those around them, which then allows for mutually beneficial connection. How are the sexes to not put aside their differences, but embrace and honor them? For feminist theorists like Helene Cixous and Julia Kristeva, this entails offering women an outlet of expression that does not require men for their satisfaction.

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124 Benjamin 47.  
125 Benjamin 96.  
126 Benjamin 171.  
127 Benjamin 164.
Female Symbolic Representation

Women have traditionally been barred from the realm of cultural signification, including ritual and authorship. Cixous and Kristeva have responded to the lack of representation for women by claiming access to the symbolic through writing. However, both are also interested in expanding the realm of the symbolic, for it denies affect and the body in its quest for rationality and impersonality. In her essay "Laugh of the Medusa", Helene Cixous focuses on writing as a means to enunciate the body.

In Freud's essay “On Narcissism”, Freud calls female sexuality a "dark continent." Cixous pushes back on this representation, responding that “the Dark Continent is neither dark nor unexplorable. --It is still unexplored only because we've been made to believe that it was too dark to be explorable.” Fear and shame have kept women from uncovering their sexuality, but Cixous encourages women to reclaim their bodies and enunciate their desires. As de Lauretis maintains, narrative is imminently caught up in the question of desire, and Cixous claims that writing in the open air can be a positive, dynamic force against the repression that has kept women silent for so long. For indeed, Cixous writes, “I, too, overflow: my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard of songs.” With writing, women can break free of the boundaries that men have imposed upon them, for "writing is precisely the very possibility of change". The symbolic realm, dominion of law and reason, is one such force that has limited the free play of women, which both Cixous and Jessica Benjamin speak out against.

Psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin believes that rationality has been used by men to dominate the public sphere. Re-imagining gender roles is made difficult by the co-optation of

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129 Cixous 246.
130 Cixous 249.
public and private life by normative gendering. Women’s concerns are seen as only fit for the home, unsuited for the individualistic and impersonal world of the public. Women’s experiences are viewed as particular rather than universal, concrete rather than abstract. The public sphere is no place for intersubjective or affective bonds. This characterization is reflected in psychoanalytic theory, and as Benjamin remarks, "what is extraordinary about the discussion of authority throughout Freudian thought is that it occurs exclusively in a world of men. The struggle for power takes place between father and son; woman plays no part in it, except as prize or temptation to regression, or as the third point of a triangle.” What is elided in this structure, however, is the extent to which the public sphere relies upon the private sphere to maintain and preserve it. Much labor goes into reproducing the means of labor, and much of this labor is performed by women. However, as both Gayle Rubin and Irigarary note, women are seen as non-essential, objects to be exchanged by men instead of necessary participants in the economy of labor.

As previously noted, the incest taboo was established between brothers in the primal horde, according to Freud’s mythology. Irigaray picks up this notion and questions why the establishment of social order specifically requires the exchange of women between tribes (in order that the incest taboo not be violated). She proposes that women are used as commodities in order to create social links between groups. This institutes mandatory heterosexuality, as women are married to men of other tribes to establish reciprocity and kinship relations for political and economic gain. Irigaray posits the caveat that the symbolic order is actually predicated upon male homosexuality, because “the only sex, the only sexes, are those needed to keep relationships among men running smoothly.”132 Men control this economy of desire. Women are

131 Benjamin 6.
132 Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 192.
barred from being part of transactions themselves, unable to establish the terms of exchange. Women are not valuable in themselves, but rather as an abstraction that reflects the labor men have put into them. Existing in a patriarchal order, women only relate to other women on men’s terms. Irigaray seems to end with a call reminiscent on one hand of Cixous, to speak in an all-embracing, open-ended voice, and on the other hand of lesbian separatists, refusing to be traded among men and instead communing only among women.

Cixous believes that rationality is limiting and that women speak with their entire bodies. They are always already both mother and daughter: "There always remains in woman that force which produces/is produced by the other." This connection to the other gives women access to affectivity, to rhythm and abundance, transformation. Castration is nowhere to be found in this description. Cixous declares that "we are in no way obliged to deposit our lives in their banks of lack, to consider the constitution of the subject in terms of a drama manglingly restaged, to reinstate again and again the religion of the father. Because we don’t want that. We don’t fawn around the supreme hole. We have no womanly reason to pledge allegiance to the negative.

Instead, women will live where “living means wanting everything that is, everything that lives, and wanting it alive.” Delueze and Guattari proclaim that desire is revolutionary, and this is just what Cixous is calling for. Her language is emphatic, almost manic in its insistence. She is indignant: men “have made for woman an antinarcissism! A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for for what women haven’t got! They have constructed the infamous logic of anti-love.” She is derisive: “too bad for them if they fall apart upon discovering that women aren’t men, or that the mother doesn’t have one. But isn’t this fear convenient for them? Wouldn’t the

133 Cixous 252.
134 Cixous 255.
135 Cixous 262.
136 Cixous 248.
worst be, isn’t the worst, in truth, that women aren’t castrated...?137 But Cixous does not advocate for a wholesale appropriation of the existing symbolic realm. She argues instead that this realm can be disrupted from within, as women rupture and dislocate the existing order. In this way, "a feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic..."138 So volcanic that Cixous can declare that "now, I-woman am going to blow up the Law."139

Rationality is a characteristic of human beings, along with affect. Is it possible or necessary to blow up the law? We all have a stake in the law, though all should be clearly be represented, including women. It is true that up until now, men have created the world in their own image, as a reflection of their desires. But once women take control of their own desire, they can be equal partners in this project. Women can intervene in this patriarchal system with their power as subjects, and produce a world that better represents us. A balanced world, not of the same, but celebrating difference.

Julia Kristeva offers a way to imagine the symbolic as being coexistent with another, more emotive realm. Kristeva believes that the symbolic realm alone is inadequate because it presupposes binary gender relations wherein there already exists a “paternal community that requires men and women to have different relationships to the symbolic.”140 The symbolic encompasses the law, which has historically been an incredibly powerful institution driven by males and run in the interests of the patriarchy. The law is not enough for Kristeva, and though she yearns for it she also writes that “it is not made for me alone, [and so] I venture to desire

137 Cixous 255.
138 Cixous 258.
139 Cixous 257.
140 Chopp 241.
outside the law." As a woman, Kristeva must move beyond the law and into what she calls the "semiotic."

The semiotic is Kristeva’s answer to her perceived limitations of symbolic. Rather than defining the two arenas as a perfect binary, feminist scholar Rebecca Chopp proposes the "symbolic [as] being constituted through the social contract of meaning, and the semiotic being the transgressive, that which ruptures, irrupts into, and enlarges the symbolic." Embracing the maternal, libidinal means of expression is essential to preserve the semiotic order as a method of "enlarging the arena of meaning and representing the currently unrepresentable." The semiotic is important to preserve "the speaking subject-the subject in process who is always surpassing herself, who speaks in ambiguities, expressing desires and wants she may not consciously recognize." This expands the possibilities both for subjectivity and signification in all of the sexes, creating a potential "to enlarge the imaginary in culture."

In *Tales of Love*, Kristeva offers a personal example of the dialogue between the symbolic and the semiotic in her chapter “Stabat Mater”. A critical analysis of the cult of the Virgin Mary runs along the right side of each page in this text using the authoritative, objective voice that most texts strive for, existing solely in the symbolic. This is juxtaposed against a personal meditation on motherhood on the left, written in a stream-of-conscious style, an ecriture feminine, fragmented and corporeal. It emotes childbirth and the love and hunger for one’s child, at times furiously, unyielding and unforgiving, and at other times mercifully. The two styles play off of each other, offering a visceral, thoughtful look into maternity.

141 Kristeva 250.
142 Chopp 244.
143 Chopp 243.
144 Chopp 244.
145 Chopp 244-245.
Kristeva reveals how patriarchal symbolic systems appropriate women’s experiences by critically examining the Marian tradition. Though women are accorded a place in this system, like in the Oedipal myth, they are made to serve men. Mary is an exemplary figure, an unattainable ideal, like Freud’s femininity. The Virgin Mary was a figure Kristeva looked up to as a young woman. Mary’s immaculate conception shows a women taking part in God’s existence. She becomes a “Queen of heaven and a mother of the earthly institutions,” thus encompassing great power.\textsuperscript{146} She is the great listener and the great healer. She overcomes time and death through the Assumption, though this sets her apart from other women and indeed from all of humanity. These features are what Christianity uses to think through sexuality and love, but also and especially death. The Virgin Mary does not necessarily reflect or satisfy women’s needs as much as cultural imperatives and traumas. A woman that never dies can be a comforting thought, displacing the “unthinkable of death by postulating maternal love in its place.”\textsuperscript{147} But Kristeva writes that motherhood specifically is “a catastrophe of being that the dialectics of the trinity and its supplements would be unable to subsume.”\textsuperscript{148} Masochism encompasses a mother’s experience, as she self-effaces while raising the children that will perpetuate civilization. Society engages in a “coded perversion,” co-opting women’s experiences and using them for the good of society without considering the women themselves.\textsuperscript{149} In addition, it is difficult for women to relate to Mary, to see their own lived experience reflected, in that she is sexless and immortal. She doesn’t speak of daughters, and she is alone, an unreachable ideal. Mary kneels before her son, one humiliating act out of the many that mothers perform, but is also able to experience the “immeasurable pride of the one who knows she is also his wife and daughter” where mortal

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{146} Kristeva 257.
\item\textsuperscript{147} Kristeva 252.
\item\textsuperscript{148} Kristeva 260.
\item\textsuperscript{149} Kristeva 260.
\end{itemize}
women do not receive that gratitude. However, Kristeva concludes the chapter by writing that women must speak their own demands and, like Irigaray will conclude, admit that men and women are different, that the gendered experiences are “irreconcilable” and “irreducible”. The ideal that Mary represents, like Freud’s femininity, is impossible to fully attain, and the only solution is to look elsewhere, towards a system that actually serves women. Kristeva calls women to reclaim their own voices and thus abandon the need for a Mary figure at all.

Though Kristeva clearly divides the symbolic from the semiotic in “Stabat Mater”, the two realms comment upon each other. Kristeva remembers the birth of her son in fragmented, emotionally charged phrases. Rather than just using dry “words that are always too distant, too abstract for this underground swarming of seconds, folding in unimaginable spaces” Kristeva attempts to “let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH”, a visceral combination of language and affect. She uses maternal imagery to symbolize the inadequacy of the word. Kristeva writes that “belief in the mother is rooted in fear, fascinated with a weakness--the weakness of language. If language is powerless to locate myself for and state myself to the other, I assume--I want to believe--that there is someone who makes up for that weakness.” Kristeva also feels that language without tears is insufficient, and states that “archaic maternal love would be an incorporation of my suffering that is unfailing, unlike what often happens with the lacunary network of signs. In that sense, any belief, anguished by definition, is upheld by the fascinated fear of language’s impotence. Every God, even including the God of the Word, relies on a mother Goddess.” This can be taken

150 Kristeva 247.
151 Kristeva 262.
152 Kristeva 235.
153 Kristeva 251.
154 Kristeva 252.
non-literally to mean that every symbolic system needs the semiotic, or, using gendered terms, that a mother is necessary.

The semiotic, however, is also fraught with danger: “In sensual rapture I am distraught. Nothing reassures, for only the law sets anything down. Who calls such a suffering jouissance [pleasure]? It is the suffering of the damned.”155 As Kristeva moves beyond the Word, she finds that she may be also be condemned, thrown outside of the socially sanctioned. She is adrift, inadequately represented. Irigaray proposes symbolic representation that moves beyond the masculine economy of law and into the realm of corpolarity, akin to Kristeva’s semiotic.

Beyond Symbolic Representation

Like Cixous and Kristeva, feminist theorist and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray is incredulous about the lack of symbolic structures for women. Contrary to feminists like Gayle Rubin or Donna Haraway, Irigaray does not argue for a post-gender society. Instead, she believes that sexual difference is fundamental and unavoidable, because in our culture “we cannot fail to take some sort of stance vis-a-vis our sex.”156 Irigaray does not want women to be trapped in the logic of the same, in men’s hom(m)osexual economy. Nor should women become interchangeable “civil subjects” of the public sphere, trapped by men’s sexual indifference.157 Because “there are no neuter individuals, we need rights for real persons--that is, sexed persons.”158

Female subjectivity will only be acknowledged once two full genders exist and women may claim a gender in their own right rather than acting merely as a counterpart to men. As it is

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155 Kristeva 250.
158 Lorraine, “Morphing” 240.
now, however, femininity operates as a mirror for men, reflecting and assuring men of their power. Cixous states this quite well: "it's [men's] business to let us know they're getting a hard-on, so that we'll assure them (we the maternal mistresses of their little pocket signifier) that they still can, that it's still there."159 When women act as mirrors men can preserve the illusion that they are self-made, discrete, and fully-formed, forgetting about others in their quest for mastery. Incontrovertibly, however, we are all born of others and thus need others for our own self definition.

Women uphold and ensure male subjectivity but have been denied their own subjectivity. Historically, men have been aligned with the mind, and women with the body. Throughout time corporeality has been maligned, and though women are associated with the flesh they have not been allowed to receive pleasure from it. Irigaray concludes from this fact that the material means of existence can no longer be denied. As Cixous champions, the body may be written into symbolic systems, but it must also be granted its concrete significance. There is room for sensuality in conceptual thought.

Irigaray’s phenomenology calls attention to the embodied subject. Swarthmore professor Tamsin Lorraine explores this concept further in her essay “Morphing the Body”. While Freud elevates visuality as the primary human sense, Irigaray privileges touch. Symbolic representation is limited, and in discourse one must listen to more than just words. Irigaray calls this touching upon, listening to “the other’s breath, the pulse of the body, the other in her or his corporeal manifestation, the bodies of both as they manifest in a specific environment.”160 In this way, others move beyond simple abstractions or objects and become differentiated, historical, relatable persons submerged within the world. Through the other we can face our own

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159 Cixous 260-261.
160 Lorraine, “Morphing” 243.
limitations, interacting without controlling and living without becoming alienated from ourselves. “When speech involves a touching upon, it can stay in word and flesh, language and sensibility. In such speech, sensibility and intelligence are no longer divided and thus there is no need for a hierarchically ordered division between active and passive, sensible and intelligible, body and mind, feminine and masculine.”

Lorraine believes that Irigaray offers an economy of participation and recognition, an economy that Benjamin has also called for.

In communion with others Irigaray finds it necessary to acknowledge the separate subjectivity of both parties. For her, subjectivity requires symbolic representation. Psychoanalysis decrees that women must accept their castration because of the formation of their genitals and Irigaray decries that "no attempt will be made by the little girl--nor by the mother? nor by the woman?--to find symbols for the state of ‘this nothing to be seen,’ to defend its goals, or to lay claim to its rewards?" If women are going to fight for their own representations, they must assert their sexual specificity and value, for “without a specific corporeal form and psychic image of self which she can confirm and insure as valuable, the would-be feminine subject has no form of her own.”

In our visual culture, a woman’s genitalia is expressed as a lack. However, women possess a sex organ that may touch itself, because it is two rather than one (as the phallus is). Even in reproduction, "the contribution of woman's germ cells, the part played by her sex organs, her body, in the formation of the child, are, in this explanation of the sexual evolution of 'femininity,' totally ignored." To create a signifier for females it is necessary to move beyond "the masculine, phallic way of relating to origin, that involves repetition,

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161 Lorraine, “Morphing” 243.
162 Irigaray, *Speculum* 49.
164 Irigaray, *Speculum* 74.
representation, reproduction.\textsuperscript{165} Freud declares that being a part of this economy is ‘the most powerful feminine wish,’\textsuperscript{166} but ignores feminine pleasure in touch, plurality, and excess which Irigaray proposes in her essay “This Sex Which is Not One”. The vagina has two lips which are in constant contact, caressing each other; Against the visuality of the penis women have the touch of the folds of the vagina. Women do not need penetration to experience pleasure. More than that, their entire bodies enjoy being touched. Womens’ desire speaks another language, apart from that of psychoanalysis, for "the pleasure gained from touching, caressing, parting the lips and vulva simply does not exist for Freud."\textsuperscript{167}

Irigaray’s suggestions that women speak differently and have access to an alternative economy of pleasure is contentious. Tamsin Lorraine cautions against accepting this solution wholesale: “If we women were to take Irigaray’s advice, we might experience more of the feminine jouissance that from the masculine position eludes our grasp, but we would also have no more power than before. I see no point in valorizing one over the other.”\textsuperscript{168} Irigaray seems to create a pleasure that is specifically feminine, essentializing woman. In his article “Irigaray’s Mimicry and the Problem of Essentialism” Ping Xu examines this claim, asserting that Irigaray’s practice of mimicry may mitigate these accusations. Mimicry is a rhetorical strategy employed by Irigaray in which she deliberately takes on roles that various systems, such as ancient philosophy and psychoanalysis, have assigned women, speaking in their voice and thus offering a parody of the systems themselves.\textsuperscript{169} Xu writes that "Irigaray's mimetic rewriting of Freud no doubt sounds both essentialist and ‘sexed’. But it is so in order to uncover the essentialist and

\textsuperscript{165} Irigaray, \textit{Speculum} 78.  
\textsuperscript{166} Freud qtd. in Irigaray, \textit{Speculum} 78.  
\textsuperscript{167} Irigaray, \textit{Speculum} 29.  
\textsuperscript{168} Lorraine, \textit{Irigaray} 85-86.  
\textsuperscript{169} Xu 85.
‘sexed’ nature of Freud’s theory itself.”

For instance, Irigaray may espouse mysticism because women’s speechlessness about female sexuality has become a fact about them, a mystery, when in fact women have been denied speech by the very practice that condemns them for it, psychoanalysis. Irigaray mimics “precisely because the entire phallogocentric tradition has been based on a certain morphology that is then manipulated to ‘prove’ its ‘scientific’ ‘truth’.”

For example, in “The Dissolution of the Infantile Oedipus Complex”, Freud writes that “the feminist demand for equal rights for the sexes does not take us far, for the morphological distinction [between men and women] is bound to find expression in differences of psychical development.” Freud is looking for and presupposing difference, and Irigaray shows her reader what it would look like if Freud “fleshed out” both terms rather than merely one. It looks absurd, but this is precisely what Irigaray aims to reveal.

Irigaray may be essentialist, but she is so in order to point out the essentialism of Freudian theory and also its contingency. For as Judith Butler remarks, “if there is a law that must compel a feminine identification with a position of castration, it appears that this law ‘knows’ that identification could function differently, that a feminine effort to identify with ‘having’ the phallus could resist its demand, and that this possibility must be renounced.” Freud made the penis the standard for subjective and sexual identity, but it could have been otherwise.

\[170\] Xu 82.
\[171\] Xu 83.
\[172\] Xu 82.
\[173\] Freud, “Dissolution” 178.
\[174\] Xu 84-85.
\[175\] Xu 85.
Though in Freudian theory the phallic phase is the culminating stage of sexual development, Irigaray states that "if stages there be, is there no question, for example, of a vulvar stage, a vaginal stage, a uterine stage, in a discussion of female sexuality?"\textsuperscript{177} She proposes an alternative developmental process, where the umbilical cord is the primal link, coming before the phallus. The womb nourishes but it also expels, and thus the separation of the child is enacted by the mother rather than by the father. Though Freud seems to fear undifferentiated fusion, the mother and the fetus are differentiated subjects within an asymmetrical relationship as the fetus could not survive without the mother.\textsuperscript{178} This formation is not part of our cultural imagination because it is not symbolized and thus granted legitimacy. Irigaray is forcing the question, demanding to know why there is only one term. She wants Freud to acknowledge women. Once he does, there is room for multiple pleasures within his theory. The body must be acknowledged, she says. She is right. All persons must have access to subjectivity and desire. Symbolic, corporeal representation is essential and Freud’s morphology is incomplete.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

"The social forms of sex and gender demand certain kinds of people. In the most general terms, the Oedipus complex is a machine which fashions the appropriate forms of sexual individuals."\textsuperscript{179}

\textsuperscript{177} Irigaray, \textit{Speculum} 29.
\textsuperscript{178} Irigaray, \textit{Speculum} 80.
\textsuperscript{179} Rubin 189.
In Freud’s Oedipus complex, the penis is the only organ that is invested with meaning and value. Freud initially reduced psychic and social behavior into male terms, exploring the sexual development only of the male child, but stated that they applied equally well to men and women both. In this conception, women are simply ignored. He later came up with the beginnings of an explanation of female sexuality, but one which took the female as a deviation from a male standard. The penis organizes the two sexes into male and female, as sexual difference is defined by Freud as castrated or not castrated. Though Freud draws normative conclusions from this systematic differentiation, feminists contend that anatomical difference cannot be of moral consequence, reflecting wholeness or lack, but may represent two different but equal morphological positions of pleasure, clitoris or penis.

The beauty of birth is obscured by castration in psychoanalytic theory. Freud does not begin his narration of sexual development with the miracle of life and the role of the mother, but the inscription of male ownership by fathers. In western culture, children take their father’s name and reproduce the hom(m)osexual economy of the self-same body. Girls are born castrated of a castrated mother, and Freud is eager to point out their shame, their lack, having always already lost everything that is worth anything. In Freud’s narrative mothers want children as penis-substitutes, and in this respect their daughters have already failed them. Without a son, women are worthless. They must reproduce and they must reproduce men. Women cannot be feminine and be happy, nor can they be masculine and be happy. Women can only find some measure of satisfaction, a pale reflection of happiness, once they have a phallus, which means once they have a husband and/or a son to take care of. It is easy to see how self-serving this cycle is to a patriarchal society invested in preserving power.
Before children enter the Oedipal stage, Freud maintains that both sexes function as little men because both boys and girls possess an active sexuality. For a girl to leave the preoedipal stage, which she must do to alleviate her dependency on her mother and form relationships with others, she must accept that she is castrated. Girls who are uninterested in having a penis or who do not accord it superior powers must in Freud’s eyes be homo- or a-sexual. Loving or being attracted to men means being subordinate to them. In fact, “the repudiation of femininity can be nothing else than a biological fact.”

Girls accept their castration by renouncing their clitoris, which Freud believes is only an inferior approximation of the penis, and their bond with their mother, who they could only love when they imagined she possessed a penis (the “phallic” mother). If girls were not to conceive of themselves as castrated then, they should remain invested in both the clitoris and the mother. Both mother and daughter must have access to their desire. Their bond must be as valued as much as Freud values the bond between mother and son. If the mother had a pleasure-giving organ of her own she would have no need for a penis-substitute in the form of her son. Also, she would be equally fulfilled in giving birth to a daughter, because women would lack nothing that men have. Men and women receive pleasure in different ways, whether through the penis or the clitoris, but this does not mean that either must be privileged over the other.

If the mother could affirm her own desire, she could uphold the desire of her daughter. Mothers could speak to their children without the need of the intervention of authority from the father if they felt able to take ownership of their bodies. No longer will the father prohibit at a distance. Girls will also be able to speak their desire. If the female child is not made to feel humiliated by her sex organ, then she will not feel the need to look outside of herself for valuation. If her father were not distant and her mother were articulate, the girl child would have

180 Freud, “Analysis” 252.
no reason to disproportionately value masculinity over femininity and thus the penis over the clitoris. Both means of gender expression would be available to children, and both parents would be role models of healthy subjectivity.

Femininity as Freud conceives it is painful. Freud saw the pain that femininity was causing women and the sexual neurosis of the culture and he still prescribed it. Tamsin Lorraine writes that “love should be sensual and involve the self-love of both lovers; one lover should not be disincarnated and the other reduced to carnality. Instead, both should fully experience their carnality. Symbolizing feminine subjectivity is a crucial step in the process of challenging the contemporary sexual hierarchy.”

Men and women both must be able to give and receive, prohibit and nurture, be passive and active, without being pathologized. Like Chodorow, I think that women providing sole childrearing reinforces sexism. Freud’s morphology demonstrates what patriarchal societies find important in the two genders. For women, the vagina is the proper female organ. She is to reproduce without any pleasure for herself. Thus, she has to renounce the clitoris. But owning one’s pleasure is a vital aspect of subjectivity, and thus the body cannot be denied. Symbolic representation is crucial but affect must also be acknowledged, difference must be sustained, and the other must be welcomed. A positive socialization process must be intersubjective.

Men and women are more similar than they are different. As Gayle Rubin says, “far from being an expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities.” Once both genders are afforded positions of subjectivity, the beauty of individuals, i.e. subjects, may be embraced. Subjects commune intersubjectively without the need for controlling or regulating others. From two sexes multiple subjects may arise.

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181 Lorraine, Irigaray 42.
182 Rubin 180.
Psychoanalysis lives on in today’s world largely in literary theory, where Freud and Lacan are read together for postmodern and deconstructive ends. In psychology departments across the country, psychoanalysis is taught as an important part of the history of modern psychology, but in practice has been eclipsed by such theories as behavioral and cognitive-behavioral therapies. *Psychology Today,* a popular magazine written for those without much background in the field of psychology, provides an apt description of this phenomenon: “For decades now, the Viennese doctor has been a caricature, a pop icon of the unconscious and sexual urges. Ego, id, and superego are terms familiar to all, but for many years, Freud’s psychoanalytic theory has thrived in English departments around the country as a tool for interpreting literary texts but has rarely, if ever, been discussed in science departments.”¹⁸³ In many ways, Freud began the open dialogue about human sexuality that is still going on today. However, Freud’s theories of childhood sexual development are no longer the reigning models, and professionals also acknowledge that Freud has little of lasting importance to say about female sexuality.

Freud and his theories have lasted in popular culture in a way that his critics have not, however. His name is known worldwide, both on the streets and in textbooks. Many laypeople are at least basically familiar with Freudian concepts like the Oedipus complex and penis envy, and though they may be mocked or derided, formal responses to these concepts by academics and psychologists have not entered popular discourse. A search in any collegiate database will reveal that dozens of books have been written just on Freud and his treatment of gender.

However, because Freud is largely treated as a curiosity, the average person does not realize that he provided a compelling theory of gender that is still relevant and must still be grappled with today. Psychoanalysts like Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin do just this, adding to the discussion the importance of intersubjective relationships, but this discussion is rarely had outside of the ivory tower. Feminist theorists have also responded to Freud, and they have largely suffered the same fate. Though the names of these women may not be widely known, some of the social changes that they called for, like increased symbolic representation for women, have come to pass in small and mediated ways.

Female narratives by women and about women have proliferated in the Western world since Freud was writing in the early 20th century. Women now are engaging in the kinds of cultural production that have been typically dominated by men, speaking in their own voices and expressing their desires, like Helene Cixous called for. Some of these productions are self-consciously “feminist” but the majority do not label themselves such, though they may actually be indebted to feminist ideas. Whether in books, music, or other media, women are telling their stories and thereby affirming their presence and significance in personal and social narratives.

Literature cultivates awareness, allowing individuals to “gain a better understanding of what is worth feeling and caring about in what ways,” argues Swarthmore professor Richard Eldridge. Eldridge sees literature as an essential part of life, one that allows individuals to participate in public forms of meaning-making, sharing and discussing a text and applying it to the specifics of their community. As Jessica Benjamin has pointed out, this type of intersubjectivity is lacking in Freud, who is primarily interested in what individuals make of themselves, or may take from their primary caregivers. Additionally, in classic psychoanalytic theory it is only men that actively shape their world, while women are relegated to passive

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receptivity. Eldridge makes no such gender distinction when he writes that through literature, "we lead more freely and fully the lives of persons or selves who take an interest in their worlds, rather than being buffeted about by experience received only passively and inchoately."^{185}

Literature allows both sexes to engage with the world and develop a sense of subjectivity, and women are active in this process both as readers and writers. For example, author Toni Morrison frequently centers her novels around strong, black, female characters and has won both the Nobel prize and the Pulitzer prize in fiction for her book *Beloved*.{\^{186}} Morrison herself has become "culturally significant" in a way that Freud did not believe was possible for women, and her female characters act and persevere as the model dutiful daughter in psychoanalytic theory cannot. *Beloved* is required reading in high schools across the country, and it teaches students to grapple with issues of possession, pride and sacrifice. Moving from literature to genre novels, some of the best-selling authors of all time are romance novelists like Barbara Cartland, Danielle Steel, and Jackie Collins, writing primarily for a female audience. These books give voice to female romantic and sexual fantasies that non-fictional men have little idea of. The hundreds of millions of copies sold attest to the popularity of these romance novels. Mystery detective novels by Agatha Christie, including the Miss Marple series which revolves around a perceptive elderly female detective, are outsold by only the Bible and texts by William Shakespeare.{\^{187}} The most popular children's book perhaps ever written and one of the best-selling book series of all time was penned by J.K. Rowling, and features a highly intelligent, world-saving heroine fighting alongside Harry Potter. These women have created stories and worlds that millions of people may identify with, suggesting a creativity and imagination that Freud did not acknowledge for

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^{185} Eldridge, 23.
^{186} "Toni Morrison," *The Literary Encyclopedia*.
women. Freud had close contact with the power of the imaginative mind in the inventions and interpretations of female hysterics, but he never suggested that this power could be channeled into the type of accomplishments he saw men making. Today, though some works written by women are looked down upon as "chick-lit," women's novels are being read in homes and in classrooms, in many cases providing entertaining and thought-provoking reads that both men and women can enjoy.

One narrative medium that affects youth especially is music. Helene Cixous elevated writing as liberatory for women in her own theory, but the rhythm and ecstasy that she believed this writing unleashes seems especially well-suited to music. Both through their lyrics and through their lives young female artists are getting their message out to their fans. One example of this is the artist Rihanna. In 2009 Rihanna was assaulted by then-boyfriend and fellow artist Chris Brown, and the story attracted much publicity. Though Rihanna has stated that she does not want to be a spokesperson for domestic violence, her music since the assault has changed in tone and has become its own message; where it was lighter and more upbeat before the assault, her later albums have included a song about domestic violence ("Love the Way You Lie"), songs with frank lyrics about sexual desire like "S&M" and "Cockiness," and songs about female resilience and agency like "G4L" and "Hard." Rihanna's discography also includes a controversial music video that depicts her as a young woman who has been sexually assaulted, shooting and killing the man who assaulted her. These songs and videos may be seen as a kind of public psychoanalysis, a working through of social issues that affect both the speaker and the listener. Rihanna calls her music video empowering, and "spoke [on television station BET] of double standards that allow depictions of women being exploited in music videos" but find
narrations of women fighting back “controversial.”\textsuperscript{188} Unfortunately, violence against women and using women for sex are common themes in popular music. Music from renown artists like Rihanna, Lady Gaga, and Kesha offer alternatives to misogynistic songs, singing about women having fun and expressing their sexuality, though there are some who question that these narratives of desire are actually expressing what women want, or if they’re playing into male fantasies. Though artists are more or less successful at presenting positive role models, young female performers are speaking (and singing) their minds, and becoming just as successful as their male counterparts.

Movies are typically male-centric, both onscreen and behind stage. Many films have only a token female lead whose sole purpose is to be the romantic/sexual interest of the male lead, and “according to a study by the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University, women made up [only] 18 percent of all directors, producers, writers, cinematographers and editors working on the top 250 highest-grossing movies last year [2011].”\textsuperscript{189} Not all films fit this bill, however. \textit{Bridesmaids}, a film that came out in 2011, was written by two women and centers around a female cast. This comedic film provides a refutation of “Christopher Hitchens and his 2007 assertion in \textit{Vanity Fair} that women are not funny, [and offers] irrefutable proof that along with producing and starring in a hit TV series (thank you, Tina Fey), women can go aggressive laugh to aggressive-and-absurd laugh with men.”\textsuperscript{190} In \textit{Bridesmaids}, women are shown outside of their culturally mandated and typical roles of beautiful, demure objects, a representation which which psychoanalysis is complicit in, and are instead shown enjoying male-coded behaviors like crudity and racousness. \textit{Bridesmaids} was

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{188} "Rihanna Says Violent Music Video 'empowering,'" ABC News, 6 June 2011.
  \item \textsuperscript{189} Rebecca Ford, "Fewer Female Directors Worked on Top Films in 2011," The Hollywood Reporter, 24 Jan. 2012.
\end{itemize}
immensely popular-- the film made $288 million worldwide and was nominated for the Golden Globe Award and two Academy Awards.\textsuperscript{191} Manohla Dargis of the New York Times writes that “the movie is smart about a lot of things, including the vital importance of female friendships. And it’s nice to see so many actresses taking up space while making fun of something besides other women.”\textsuperscript{192} This type of communion between women is not seen in psychoanalytic theory, where women find no allies amongst themselves. This film is just one example of female achievement in a field dominated by men, but it demonstrates that previously closed means of expression, like scriptwriting and the comedic genre, are now opening up to women.

The internet has democratized voices and access to information. Blogging has made available a new form of female community and has been a productive way for women to talk to other women about issues that affect them specifically. These issues may be particular lifestyle choices, like on “mommy blogs” or blogs for Christian women, or they can be more political in nature. For instance, when the breast cancer charity Susan G. Komen for the Cure pulled its funding of Planned Parenthood, Planned Parenthood immediately tweeted the news to their followers. They then effectively continued publishing updates online to various social media, and outrage erupted across the blogosphere. The plight of Planned Parenthood got so much publicity that Komen reinstated their funding and Komen’s vice-president, who had a large part in the orchestration of the change in policy, resigned.\textsuperscript{193} Contrary to psychoanalytic practice, these internet spaces require no male mediation, though they are open to male participation. Gayle Rubin alleges that psychoanalysts “try to accommodate women to a role whose destructiveness is

\textsuperscript{191} Bridesmaids (2011), Box Office Mojo.
\textsuperscript{192} Dargis
so lucidly detailed in their own theories,"194 while this recent debacle shows how online communities of women (and men) can actively effect change in the real world. In many ways, however, the internet is an unsafe space for women. Some women receive threats or unwanted sexual attention online, whether on their personal blogs or on dating sites. The twitter meme #mencallmethings addressed just this issue. Blogger Sady Doyle asked women to submit the insults and threats they had received online, which often included “jokes” about murdering and/or raping the recipient. Some brushed off the seriousness of this meme, rationalizing that ‘it’s just the internet, and women should have thicker skins’ about the confrontational messages they receive. But Time reporter Megan Gibson counters that “It’s not ‘just’ the Internet. It’s our culture. At this moment in time, you can work, socialize, date, learn, communicate and debate online. There is no longer a divide. What is happening online is happening in real life. This type of abuse reflects real-life attitudes, real-life misogyny and it’s prolific.”195 Feminist psychoanalysts like Jessica Benjamin may read these male aggressors as themselves being threatened by the feminist messages bloggers may be promoting, and thus lashing out in violent and othering rhetoric. As in the real world, the online world can foster social inequality. However, as women continue to make strides in everyday life online culture will reflect these positive changes.

Television is a popular medium that reaches a wide audience of people. Good television often portrays nuanced, complex characterization, where much of the plot focuses on the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. One example of this is the show Parks and Recreation, which revolves around the happenings of a small town governmental department. The lead character of this show is female Deputy Parks Director Leslie Knope,

194 Rubin, 202.
played by Amy Poehler. Leslie Knope is an exemplary person; she is recognized by everyone she works with to be excellent at her job and to genuinely care about helping others. Her co-workers are her friends, and they are proactive in each other’s lives. There are multiple female characters with diverse personalities, along with complex male characters. Leslie is both a hard worker and a compassionate civil servant, and she self-consciously tries to emulate the female political role models she has pictures of hanging in her office. In an open letter to Leslie Knope, Sady Doyle, on the blog Feministe, writes that “Parks and Recreation comes across as an entertainment put together by good people. People who genuinely like, and are interested in, other human beings. The comedy comes from a place of sweetness that I’m not used to seeing.”

Freud tended to see gender interactions as zero-sum games; if men were to be whole, women must be lacking. This television show does not place women in this inferior position relative to men. Gender does not give as much information about a character as does personality, for instance, and each gender does not have its own monolithic personality. Despite this care and nuance, Parks and Recreation has not received spectacular ratings, indicating that it is not widely popular with the general public. Many shows still rely on tropes, and women often get cast as catty, emotional and incompetent, a vision of women that Freud would be more familiar with. These characterizations are still considered safe for mass appeal. However, the feminist values that Parks and Recreation engages with contributes to the overall quality of the show, in that it treats its characters with respect and thinks much of its audience. One can hope that more shows will follow this example.

Narrative spaces for women in the public sphere have proliferated, and female points of view are more widely represented. However, there are those who are pushing back against this expression. Fights over reproductive freedom are framed as battle of a “culture war.” Some men and women are worrying about a “crisis of masculinity” in America. Men still overwhelmingly

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have power in the Western world and women’s issues are still largely seen as part of a particular interest group. Symbolic representation is necessary to expand what is thinkable in our culture, but it must be reinforced by political representation. To protect female agency and autonomy, women’s rights must be protected; female desire and subjectivity must be upheld through the law.

In the United States, women comprise 16.8% of Congress, 22.7% of state elective executive offices like governor, and 23.6% of state legislatures. Freud would not have been surprised at these numbers, understanding women to have a weaker sense of justice than men because of their weak superegos, a result of having never fully overcome their Oedipus complex. This explanation ignores systematic oppression at the macroscopic level, a blind spot in psychoanalytic theory. Freud likely would have been surprised that one of the most successful public figures in American politics is a woman, namely Hillary Clinton. Clinton, in her past capacity as First Lady and her present role as Secretary of State, has been an active spokesperson for the rights of the oppressed, both globally and in the United States. In 1995 at the United Nations 4th World Conference on Women she stated "If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that human rights are women’s rights and women's rights are human rights once and for all." Clinton has an approval rating of almost 70% and is one of the most popular politicians in the United States, a role model for young women hoping to enter politics.

Not only must individual women fight for women’s rights, but women must also get organized. There are many political organizations that center around women’s rights. One such organization is Planned Parenthood, which provides medical services and also engages in

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197 Women in Elective Office 2012, Center for American Women and Politics.
199 Sarasohn.
political activism. The National Organization for Women (NOW) is also involved in women’s activism. There are also groups that are not exclusively fighting for women’s rights that are important allies for the cause, like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The ACLU believes that “with reproductive freedom comes opportunity: opportunity to build a secure, productive, and meaningful life...the ability to decide whether or not to carry a pregnancy to term is essential to women’s equality, autonomy, and dignity, with implications for every aspect of her life – her educational aspirations, career goals, economic status, and, more broadly, her ability to live the life she planned.”

However, when male bodies are taken as the standard, as they are in both the Oedipus complex in psychoanalysis and in much of political, medical, and cultural discourse, the reproductive struggles and the impact these struggles have on the lives of women are made invisible. Organizations like the ACLU and Planned Parenthood help women navigate their health and take control of their livelihood and so respect and trust the women they represent.

Hysteria about regulation of and control over female sexuality can be seen in political stances and the laws that are being proposed and passed concerning women’s reproductive rights. All four of the Republican candidates still contending for the presidential nomination are against abortion. Rick Santorum believes that abortion should be made illegal with no exceptions, and that doctors found to be performing abortions should face criminal charges. Mitt Romney was once pro-choice, but this stance is no longer viable for republican candidates and he is now anti-choice. These politicians are acting as gatekeepers of female sexuality, who seem to intend to punish women for their sexual choices, often viewing pregnancy as a rightful “consequence” of sexual intercourse. These stances ignore the role men play in pregnancy,

200 Reproductive Freedom, ACLU.
placing undue social pressure on women alone to, for example, carry a pregnancy to term that is
the result of rape or incest or that will result in a stillborn or deformed child. The Republican
party has made opposition to abortion an integral part of their campaign platform, but women are
facing attacks on their health care from the current Democratic administration also. In December
of 2011, the FDA approved Plan B, a morning after pill, to be sold over-the-counter to people
under 17, whereas previously 17 was the minimum age limit for purchase. However, the
Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius overrode the FDA’s decision. Mr.
Obama supported her, saying “as the father of two daughters” he would not want 10 and 11 year
old children buying this medicine and having an adverse reaction, and he believes “most parents
would probably feel the same way.” 202 To many family-planning activists this was a triumph of
ideology over science. In related news, birth control coverage in health care plans has become
not only a matter of politics, but also of religion. Religious institutions have an exemption from
providing their employees with this coverage, but religiously affiliated institutions, like Catholic
hospitals, do not. Obama initially upheld that only houses of worship were exempt but the
administration then announced that women working in religiously affiliated institutions would
not receive birth control coverage under their employer, but directly from the insurance
company, so that the institutions themselves are not involved. 203 Some see this as a dangerous
concession that may only the first of many. Others, like Darrell Issa, chairman of the House
Oversight and Government Reform Committee, believed that this action was a breach of
religious freedom. He called a hearing entitled "Lines Crossed: Separation of Church and State.
Has the Obama Administration Trampled on Freedom of Religion and Freedom of Conscience?"

202 Jackie Calmes and Gardiner Harris, "Obama Endorses Decision to Limit Morning-After Pill," The New York
where all ten witnesses testified against contraceptive coverage, eight of them male.\textsuperscript{204} A female law student requested to testify for the benefits of contraception and she was refused.\textsuperscript{205} The combination of negative cultural narratives about female sexuality and the dearth of women in political power ensure that decisions about reproductive health, decisions that primarily affect women, will be made without or regardless of their participation.

The 1973 Supreme Court decision concerning the court case Roe v. Wade states that a woman has a right to an abortion under the 14th amendment, which protects her right to privacy.\textsuperscript{206} Since this decision Roe v. Wade has been attacked on all sides, and the war has escalated in the months leading up to the 2012 election. The following are just a few examples of legislation that have been proposed in 2012. The Oklahoma Senate passed a personhood amendment in February, which states that life begins at conception and which “provides embryos and fetuses with ‘all the rights privileges, and immunities’ of other citizens.”\textsuperscript{207} The amendment has been opposed by the Oklahoma State Medical Association because it would interfere with the free distribution of reproductive medicine, but is expected to pass in the House. Kansas proposed a bill that would “exempt doctors from malpractice suits if they withheld medical information to prevent an abortion. The measure would also take away tax credits for abortion providers, remove tax deductions for the purchase of abortion-related insurance coverage and require women to hear the fetal heartbeat... the bill would also require women be told about potential breast cancer risks from abortions, even though medical experts discount such a

\textsuperscript{205} “House Committee to Women: You’re Not Relevant to Discussion on Birth Control,” NARAL Pro-Choice America, 15 Feb. 2012.
\textsuperscript{206} Roe v. Wade, Cornell University Law School Legal Information Institute.
connection. In effect, this bill encourages deceit and misinformation and intends to place financial obstacles in the way of low-income women seeking abortions. In Virginia, a bill was proposed that would require women to undergo an invasive transvaginal procedure to produce an ultrasound before being allowed to have an abortion. Whether or not a woman looked at the ultrasound would be recorded and placed in her file. The purpose of this bill is allegedly to provide her with more information, as if she is not capable of making a fully informed decision on her own terms. However, the procedure would constitute rape under state law, as penetration is required to obtain this medical procedure, an abortion, so the woman’s choice cannot be said to have been meaningfully made. These bills are only a few in the growing trend of anti-abortion tactics of psychological manipulation and physical violation where women’s bodies and minds have been co-opted by the law.

Symbolic representation doesn’t protect women from real violence. The 2010 “National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey” reports that nearly one in five women have been raped in their lifetime and “approximately 80% of female victims experienced their first rape before the age of 25 and almost half experienced the first rape before age 18.” One in four women have experienced severe physical violence from an intimate partner. Resources are needed for these survivors of sexual violence. Laws protecting against domestic abuse and child abuse must be strengthened. Women’s livelihoods must also be protected. To make it easier for women to support themselves, maternity and paternity leave and daycare services could be mandated for all companies. To protect women in the workforce it is necessary to advance anti-discrimination and anti-harassment laws. Women are especially vulnerable to personal and

institutional violence, and while symbolic representation gives oppressed groups a way to talk about their oppression and feel a sense of community, it cannot stand alone. In the 19th century, Freud’s patient Dora lacked both symbolic and political representation. Her lesbianism was misunderstood by those around her; she could not freely express her interest in women, and the male attention she received caused her psychological pain. At one point she was forced into unwanted sexual contact with Herr K, with no available recourse to press charges for sexual assault. Women today have more developed systems of information, awareness and support but still face dismissal and isolation if they dare to bring forward reports of sexual or physical violence or discrimination. Political representation ensures that women have the right to make their own decisions about their bodies and their lives and be represented by those who are invested in having these rights upheld. It ensures that women have equal opportunities, resources, and care. Female subjectivity and desire can no longer be ignored or denied in the realm of cultural narrative or in politics. Rather, with symbolic and political representation, full female subjectivity, which necessarily includes desire, may flourish.

Works Cited


Conclusion Works Cited


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