

## The Social Origins of Male Dominance<sup>1</sup>

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*Writings in psychoanalytic theory and social science that discuss the basis of men's motive to dominate women are reviewed. Both men's fear and envy of women and men's tenuous masculine identity arise from the exclusive early mother-child tie. It is suggested that an important step in altering the development of the motive underlying male dominance would be to have men, as well as women, care for infants. The possibility of greater equality in the family and in the economy is discussed.*

Recent feminist thought in this country has differed from that of past generations by pointing not only to the specific inequities women face in the job market and under the law but also to the wider system of male dominance which colors the perceptions of both men and women about the nature of the world. While males do have greater physical strength than females and probably a greater biologically based aggressiveness (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974), these factors in themselves do not adequately explain a cultural system that gives higher value and prestige to masculinity than to femininity, to some extent regardless of the particular behaviors involved. Although the content of the roles assigned to women and men may vary considerably from society to society, male dominance is reflected in the fact that whatever roles are assigned to men tend to be valued more highly than the roles assigned to women. As a feminist writing in the early 1970s put it, "gender, not behavior, [appears to be] the relevant variable in producing inequity" (Battle-Sister, 1971, p. 297). It may be that *whatever* women do is negatively valued, no matter how essential these roles are to the survival of the society.

<sup>1</sup> This article represents a considerable expansion of the first part of a paper entitled "Sex Role Development and Sex Discrimination: A Theoretical Perspective" by Jean Stockard, Miriam M. Johnson, Joan Acker, and Marion Goldman, presented at the annual meetings of the American Sociological Association in San Francisco in 1975. We wish to thank Joan Acker and Marion Goldman for the earlier discussions we had with them which led to this article.

In attempting to understand why this is the case, feminists at first did not see any positive possibilities in psychoanalytic theory. Most feminists saw psychoanalysis as upholding and legitimating male dominance rather than analyzing or explaining it.<sup>2</sup> Since those early days some feminist theorists have taken a new look at psychoanalysis because it is the only body of theory which gives major attention to sex differences, the patterning of sexuality, and the dominance relationships between men and women. It is also the only major psychological theory that attempts to explain the nonrational aspects of human behavior.

In this paper we explore the implications of a branch of psychoanalytic thought largely ignored by contemporary feminists. While Freud's own "phallogocentric" perspective focuses on the Oedipal period and the child's relation to the father in creating or affirming sexual identity, "gynocentric" theorists focus on the pre-Oedipal mother relationship and assume the initial primacy of a feminine (maternal) orientation in both sexes. Gynocentric theorists do not take the superiority of the penis for granted and suggest that phallic pride in boys is a secondary manifestation developed as a reaction to and defense against aspects of the mother relationship.

In the first part of this article we trace the strands of gynocentric theory which have implications for explaining why men are motivated to be dominant over women, while women have no comparable motive to dominate men.<sup>3</sup> Some of the arguments we review are more compelling than others. We include them all, however, in order to show the range of thought that points to similar conclusions about why cultures have tended to give greater prominence and prestige to males. In the second part we discuss how institutional arrangements (especially the relationship of the family to the economy) that support women's primacy in early child care perpetuate the development of the motivation behind male dominance. Finally we discuss how these arrangements might be altered.

### A GYNOCENTRIC EXPLANATION OF MALE DOMINANCE

Most feminists who have attempted to put Freud to radical use have chosen his theory precisely because it lays bare so clearly the "phallogocentric" assump-

<sup>2</sup> Among those who criticized the use of Freud and psychoanalysis were Chesler (1972) and Weisstein (1971). Some early feminists, most notably Shulamith Firestone (1970), did not totally dismiss Freud. They tended, however, to "translate" his work into more "rational" terms which led away from the kinds of insights which we discuss.

<sup>3</sup> There have been societies where relations between the sexes were relatively equalitarian, but none has been found where women were clearly dominant. We would argue that this is not because women are naturally passive or compliant (or because they had no power), but because women have no psychological need to dominate men. The utopias envisioned by feminists are based on equalitarian relations between women and men, not on women having a higher status than men.

tions that permeate his own thought and the culture in which he lived. Freud *assumed* male dominance and saw it as connected with the "obvious" superiority of the penis to the clitoris. He made this superiority the keystone for the psychic development of both sexes. Thus phallogocentric theorists within the psychoanalytic tradition stress the primacy of the penis, the early active masculine impulses vis-à-vis the mother characterizing both sexes, the importance for girls of the discovery that they lack a penis, and the importance for boys of castration fears. Phallogocentric theorists also stress the Oedipal period and the child's relationship to its father in the creating or affirming of sexual identity (Johnson, 1975). Juliet Mitchell (1974) and Gayle Rubin (1975) have argued that if we look at Freud's work as "description" rather than as "prescription" it can become an analysis of the process by which bisexual females are "feminized" and how in a phallogocentric culture this feminization is oppressive.

In contrast, gynocentric psychoanalytic theory, by focusing more on the pre-Oedipal period of intense mother-child contact can be used to explain *why* this phallogocentric culture exists. Two basic themes may be detected in gynocentric accounts of early development. One involves the unconscious fear and envy children of both sexes, but especially males, feel toward the mother; and the other concerns the problems males encounter in establishing a secure sense of masculine gender identity. Both aspects stem from the primacy of the mother or other females in early child care, when the child is in a state of almost total dependence. The earliest gynocentric theories tended to emphasize the "fear and envy" hypothesis, and later ones emphasized "identity" problems of males. None of the early theorists was primarily concerned with explaining male dominance, but some did point to how the early primacy of the mother was related to a male tendency to devalue females and femininity. We shall trace these themes separately and then explain how they merge.

In this review of the literature a historical trend that cross-cuts both themes is apparent. Early writings in psychoanalysis tended to use a number of biological and physiological terms that are often embarrassing to modern readers. Beginning around the 1940s, however, psychoanalysts began to speak more of object relations and ego psychology. This approach is more familiar to social scientists; and the work of some sociologists such as Talcott Parsons, Ruth Hartley, and Nancy Chodorow began to complement the writings of some psychoanalysts at that time.

#### *The "Fear and Envy" Hypothesis*

In the decade from 1925 to 1935 a great deal of attention among psychoanalytic thinkers focused on questions of masculine and feminine development, and the gynocentric point of view began early. Indeed, Freud's own articles on feminine development were mainly written as replies and rebuttals to other writings. Ernest Jones (1966, p. 21) was the first to call Freud's theories phal-

locentric and noted that such views were more often accepted by analysts practicing in and around Vienna, while the other viewpoint (which we term "gynocentric") was more dominant in London. Jones (1957, p. 137) implies that this can be attributed to the large number of women analysts working in England. Because Jones gave the most definitive articulation of the different approaches and tried to arbitrate the phallogocentric-gynocentric debate, it has become known as the Freud-Jones controversy (Mitchell, 1974, p. 120). Jones, however, was careful to point out that a large number of theorists besides himself contributed to the ideas in the gynocentric vein of thought, most notably Melanie Klein and Karen Horney.

*Men's Fear of Women.* Based on her analyses of children, Klein emphasized the importance of the oral, incorporative stage and the child's close relationship with the mother. In this stage the child desires the mother's breast and wants to incorporate it in its mouth. This oral incorporative desire involves, according to Klein, the father's penis as well. Indeed at this stage, mother and father are not clearly distinguished. Klein feels that at the same time the child has sadistic or destructive urges. While these urges are first directed toward the self, they become deflected outwards against the mother, the primary object in the child's world. Both boys and girls then experience considerable anxiety over the possible consequences of these sadistic urges directed toward the mother. For Klein, then, the penis envy that Freud attributed to girls was really a secondary manifestation and a defense against their anxiety about aggression against their mothers. Klein (1960) and Jones (1948) suggest that the wish that the clitoris were a penis comes from the girl's efforts to cope with the sadism directed toward her mother.

The boy too develops anxiety over his sadism and fears reprisals from his mother. The boy, however, can handle this anxiety more easily than the girl by directing part of it toward the father when he becomes his sexual rival and by exteriorizing much of his anxiety onto his penis (Jones, 1948, p. 488). According to Klein the boy compensates for his feelings of "hate, anxiety, envy and inferiority that spring from his feminine phase by reinforcing his pride in the possession of a penis" (1932/1960, p. 338; 1928).

Jones (1948, p. 475) suggested that the boy feels his own genital is inferior in size to his mother's vagina, and that the vagina is related to the boy's castration fears. Freud himself noted men's dread of women's genitals in his early analysis of "The Taboo on Virginity" (Freud, 1972, pp. 76-79) but he later dropped this in favor of men's fear of castration by the father or his representatives. Horney (1967a) reported a small experiment conducted in a children's clinic in Germany and interpreted it as confirming the strength of the symbolic fear of the vagina among males.

The physician (who conducted the experiment) was playing ball with the children at a treatment center and after a time showed them that the ball had a slit in it. She pulled the edges of the slit apart and put her finger in, so that it was held

fast by the ball. Of 28 boys whom she asked to do the same, only 6 did it without fear and 8 could not be induced to do it at all. Of 19 girls, 9 put their finger in without a trace of fear; the rest showed a slight uneasiness but none of them serious anxiety (pp. 137-138).

Horney herself linked men's general fear of women to the boy's fear of being rebuffed by the mother and the subsequent loss of self-esteem. In turn she saw this fear as the prime motivating factor in men's compulsion to "prove" their manhood. This compulsion becomes linked to the desire to conquer or "possess" many women, "the propensity to debase the love object" or to love only women who are seen as less than their equal, and the tendency to "diminish the self-respect of the woman" (Horney, 1967a, pp. 145-146).

Lederer (1968) has amassed a number of cases which he interprets as indicating fear of women and female genitalia in both myths and written history in widely varying cultures. He gives examples of symbolic representations such as carvings and statues and myths that outwardly appear to glorify women, while also depicting women as filled with fearful and deadly elements. He describes, for example, a medieval statue which viewed from the front appears to be a peaceful serene woman, but from the back is "covered with sores, ulcers, worms and all manner of pestilence" (Lederer, 1968, p. 37). Similarly, Horney (1967a, p. 136) suggested that men's glorification of women often hides a dread of female procreative capacities. Slater (1968) has analyzed the fear of maternal women in ancient Greece and suggests that "infantilizing" women is one way of coping with this fear. Hays, in his book *The Dangerous Sex* (1972), specifically argues that social institutions all the way from the most primitive societies to the most modern have been designed to defend men against their fears of women by circumscribing, regulating, and containing women. He points out, for example, how in primitive societies the shaman "in order to protect his fellow men from contagion and terror, from sickness, mutilation and death, has contrived to surround [woman] with sanctions and avoidances which scarcely admit her into the same tribe" (Hays, 1972, p. 28).

*Men's Envy of Women.* In addition to fear, however, there is an element of envy, and even awe, in men's attitude toward women. Horney and later Margaret Mead have argued that men's devaluation of women results in part from their envy of women's capacity for motherhood. Horney says that there surely must have been a time in the psychic development of boys and girls when neither sex was convinced that women were inferior. She posits that initially both sexes see superiority in women's capacity for motherhood, rather than in the male genital. She backs this up by referring to her experiences in analyzing men where "one receives a most surprising impression of the intensity of this envy of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood as well as of the breasts and of the act of suckling" (Horney, 1967b, pp. 60-61). Boys then defend themselves against this envy by asserting the phallogocentric idea that motherhood is in reality a burden and that what women basically want is not a child,

but a penis. In Horney's view, Freud's phallogocentric ideas represented a masculine defense against womb envy.

Mead (1974) has also argued that men envy women's procreative powers. She has interpreted some initiation ceremonies and puberty rites of primitive tribes as attempts to give this mysterious power to men. In the parts of New Guinea Mead (1974) studied, "It is men who spend their ceremonial lives pretending that it was they who had borne the children, that they can 'make men'" (p. 97). According to Mead, men in New Guinea also tell stories about how their mythical man-making powers were invented by a woman and stolen from her by men.<sup>4</sup>

Horney (1967b, p. 61) suggested that there was probably a link between men's envy of women and their cultural productivity or their creation of material and cultural goods. Mead has also argued that men's need for achievement has its source in their envy of women's procreative powers. Mead (1955, p. 125) stressed the male need to define the male role "satisfactorily enough" to make up for male inability to procreate, and she noted that whatever activities were assigned to men were voted by men and women alike to be important. Of the popular writers we have discussed so far, Hays (1972) stands out as one who most clearly relates human institutional arrangements, including the exclusion of women from male affairs, to men's fear and envy of women. He ends his book (p. 283) by exhorting men to abandon their magical approach to women, to accept their existential anguish, and to realize that the menace of the female lies within themselves.

*Fear, Envy, and Male Dominance.* The writers we have discussed up to now have taken the position that male fear and envy of women derives in one way or another from the fact that women bear children and are the primary caretakers of infants. These writers tend to assume that this is an unalterable fact of life. But now feminists are asking, "If motherhood is at the root of male mysogyny what can be done about motherhood?" One of the first of the new wave of feminists, Shulamith Firestone (1970) proposed a radical solution — do away with it. Her concern was largely with the disabilities motherhood caused women directly and she suggested that fetuses be grown in a controlled environment outside women's bodies. This is indeed a way of making a radical separation between women and childbearing, but we suggest that a more tenable direction of change would be to make a distinction between the biologically determined fact of women being the childbearers and the social assignment of women to the role of child rearing.

More recently Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) has made this distinction quite clearly and has explicitly stated that what she is concerned with is not personal

<sup>4</sup>This idea has been attributed to Bruno Bettelheim, who devotes a chapter to it in his book *Symbolic Wounds*, published in 1954. Mead (1974) notes that Bettelheim used her own discussion of these activities, published in *Male and Female* in 1949, without acknowledgment and then speculated on "why men said they had stolen their supernatural imitative feminine powers from women" (p. 97)!

male mysogyny, but the system of male dominance in which both males and females conspire. While it is not always clear what Dinnerstein thinks the crucial mechanisms are that intervene between early child care by women and male dominance, her central theme is this: Women and men agree to let males have the power in the adult world because this power is less of a psychological threat than the power the mother had over us as infants. Dinnerstein (1976) follows Klein in explaining men's fear and contempt for women and argues that since the mother does not always meet the infant's needs, she is perceived as "capricious, sometimes actively malevolent" (p. 95). The ambivalence toward the fickle mother — made up of destructive rage as well as abounding gratitude — is then projected onto women in general. The girl as well as the boy experiences this ambivalence, but Dinnerstein argues that since she is female, the girl is later able to see her mother as a real person in a way that the boy does not. Dinnerstein (1976) sees men's sexual possessiveness as representing an attempt to "own" women's life-giving powers, while sex-segregated institutions are created by men in order to defend themselves from "the temptation to give way to ferocious, voracious dependence" (p. 67) on women. In explicitly tackling the issue of why formal authority is always vested in males, Dinnerstein (1976) argues that we give males authority because this appears to be a refuge from female authority. Female rule is more threatening because it is more primitive and all encompassing — "the relatively limited despotism of the father is a relief to us" (p. 189), thus "both men and women use the unresolved early threat of female domination to justify keeping the infantilism in themselves alive under male dominion" (p. 191). She concludes that the only hope for ending this system is for both mothers and fathers to nurture, that men must join women in caring for infants.

A major difficulty with Dinnerstein's argument is that she consistently ignores the question of how sex identity comes about and tends to treat it as an unproblematic biological given. Although she refers briefly to the work of Chodorow, Dinnerstein seems largely unaware of the body of work in the gynocentric tradition which relates the early primacy of the mother to "identity" problems in the male.

#### *The Tenuous Masculine Identity Hypothesis*

Concern with ego formation and identity problems represents a later development both within and outside psychoanalytic thinking and marks a shift away from the more physiological or biologically oriented views shown in the writings of the 1920s and 1930s. Those who stress identity problems are more sociologically oriented. They stress the ego and the importance of object relationships in personality formation. Both psychoanalysts and social scientists have explored this hypothesis.

*The Tenuous Masculine Identity Hypothesis in Psychoanalysis.* Even the early gynocentric writings contained the idea that both sexes originally have a

feminine orientation because of the early primacy of the mother. Both Klein and Jones argued that both boys' and girls' first orientation is "feminine" and that boys' masculine orientation only develops later. On another level, Horney (1967a) pointed out the fragility of the masculine self-concept; she spoke of "the ever-precarious self-respect of the 'average man'" (p. 146) and suggested that this contributed to men's tendency to disparage women.

Recently among psychoanalysts the idea that males have a less secure gender identity than females, because their first close human relationship is with the mother, has been explicitly argued by Robert Stoller. Based on his work with transsexuals, Stoller concluded that "masculinity" is not a "core-gender identity," as is femininity. Rather, masculinity is achieved by males only after they have separated themselves from the "femininity" of the mother. Males, in order to feel "masculine" must "disidentify" (Greenson, 1968) with the mother in a way that women need not do in order to feel "feminine."

Stoller (1974) thinks that female transsexualism has quite different origins than male transsexualism. He considers female transsexuals to be a type of homosexual, while male transsexuals are different from either homosexuals or transvestites. They do not just want to relate sexually to males or to dress in women's clothing. Their "femininity" goes much deeper; psychically (but not physically) they *are* women. Stoller sees this phenomenon as the result of a too close and too gratifying mother-infant symbiosis, which occurs before the child has enough ego structure to be said to actually "identify with" the mother. This symbiosis is even more primitive. It is "*being the same as* mother, which would be the destruction of masculinity" (Stoller, 1974, p. 353).

The most significant thing about Stoller's work from our standpoint is that he argues that *every* male must overcome and resist the excessive merging with the mother that actually happens with the male transsexual. As Stoller sees it, every male infant experiences some degree of symbiosis with the mother. Transsexuals are simply those at the far end of a continuum. Thus Stoller does not consider males making a feminine identification as a "defense" of one sort or another, but as the primary state. This takes the idea of the primacy of the maternal feminine in the male ego farther than most other psychoanalysts have done.

Stoller (1974) suggests that males' greater dread than females' of homosexuality is a result of males' more tenuous sense of identity: "Those who fear homosexual impulses do so in part because they fear that these desires indicate a weakness [weakening] of their sense of being fully anchored in their own sex" (p. 350). He argues that women are less threatened by homosexuality because their gender identity is more secure. Stoller (1974, p. 359) notes that homosexual accusations are less frequent in both psychotic and nonpsychotic women, and that in his and others' clinical experience women are much more casual than men are about trying out a homosexual experience. However, he does not relate his idea of a primitive symbiosis with the mother in both sexes

to male mysogyny, much less male dominance. He also sees a sharp difference between his theory and the "fear and envy" hypothesis in that his emphasis on the idyllic symbiosis causes him to deny that there is early ambivalence and conflict in this relationship.

*The Tenuous Masculine Identity Hypothesis in Social Science.* Generally speaking, theorists concerned with the various consequences of an initial "feminine" identification in boys have been social scientists who were not themselves psychoanalysts, but who had been influenced by psychoanalytic ideas. Social learning theorists have often readily assumed that because mothers are far more available and primary than fathers in the lives of young children that children of both sexes do initially make a "feminine" identification. Growing up for males, then, involves making a shift from a feminine identification to a masculine one. Psychoanalysts and social learning theorists alike have assumed that it is important for the son to have a "good" relationship with his father in order to be helped to identify with him and thus to become "masculine" or learn "masculinity." Although most of these theorists have not directly related male dominance or male mysogyny to this early feminine identification, some of their work can help illuminate this issue.

In the 1950s the concept of "compulsive masculinity" gained prominence. For example, Walter Miller (1958) argued that lower-class boys who grow up in predominantly female homes which lack "a consistently present male figure with whom to identify" are likely to become compulsively concerned with toughness and masculinity as a reaction formation against the femininity surrounding them (p. 270). Miller claimed that father-deprived males are likely to commit delinquent acts to prove their masculinity to the gang. In a similar vein, Rohrer and Edmonson (1960) studied a group of Black males in New Orleans and argued that the Black male joined a gang in a "search for masculinity he cannot find at home"; these gangs in turn come to see "the common enemy not as a class, nor even as a sex, but as the 'feminine principle' in society" (pp. 162-163).

While most of the studies in this country on compulsive masculinity have concerned "the lower class" and particularly Blacks, Parsons (1954) applied one version of the idea of compulsive masculinity to middle-class children. Parsons pointed out that in highly industrialized societies the place of work is separated from the place of residence and fathers leave home to work. In the middle class this work is time consuming and often incomprehensible to a child. Thus in a way "father absence" occurs in the middle class, and children interact chiefly with their mothers and other women who are also the rule givers and representatives of the demand to "be good." This situation tends to produce what he calls "the bad boy pattern," whereby males in attempting to be masculine without a clear masculine model express masculinity in largely negative ways by being "bad." In revolting against the mother or rejecting a feminine identification with her, the boy unconsciously identifies "goodness" with

femininity and being a "bad boy" becomes a positive goal (Parsons, 1954, p. 306).

Leslie Fieldler (1968) has described what is essentially "the bad boy pattern" as a pervasive theme in United States literature. He cites numerous works of fiction – from Mark Twain's stories to Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* – as sagas in which men (or boys) seek to escape from a world dominated by female morality. In almost all this literature one's sympathy is with the "bad boy." As Parsons (1954, p. 306) pointed out, mothers themselves seem to love the "bad" son more than the "good" son, who tries too hard to please them. Thus it seems implicitly understood by all of us that somehow "boys" must be "bad" to be "real boys," that is, they must be unquestionably masculine. Girls may generally be "better" than boys because they feel no need to reject the mother and establish alternative role patterns (Parsons, 1954, p. 306).

The idea of boys making an initial feminine identification was also used by anthropologists in the 1950s in interpreting other behavior patterns in a given society. J. W. M. Whiting, Kluckhohn, and Anthony (1958) and Burton and Whiting (1961) reported that societies in which fathers are absent or virtually absent during boys' infancy are more likely than others to have compensating rituals later on which symbolically break the mother-son bond and affirm the boy's masculinity. In a different but related vein Bacon, Child, and Barry (1963) in an analysis of 48 societies reported that the frequency of crime in these societies is associated with situations in which the opportunity for the young boy to form an identification with his father is limited. Later, B. B. Whiting (1965) reported that in her and her associates' study of children from six different cultures, there was greater adult violence in the two societies where infants saw their fathers infrequently. She specifically assumed the "status envy" hypothesis that young children would identify with the person who seems most important to them, the person seen as controlling the resources they want. In the earliest years, when this person is almost exclusively the mother, boys would be expected to make a feminine identification. The compulsive masculinity hypothesis explains the violence in later years, when the boys must break this feminine identification.

*Tenuous Masculine Identity and Male Dominance.* The authors discussed above presented the idea that early exclusive involvement with the mother leads to "protest" or "compulsive" masculinity as a reaction against a feminine identification in males. Yet the authors did not link this phenomenon to male dominance. Hartley began to move in this direction in 1959. Writing at a time when male dominance was rarely studied critically, she noted that males generally learn what they must *not* be in order to be masculine before they learn what they can be. Because adult males are rarely closely involved with them, boys' definitions of masculinity often involve simply "not being feminine." Hartley (1959) also pointed out that males tend to compensate for the pains involved in breaking away from the world of women by viewing the feminine role and

females in very negative ways. She suggests that the greater prestige that masculinity enjoys in relation to femininity helps induce males to become "masculine."

More recently Chodorow (1974) has also stressed that the boy, in "his attempt to gain an elusive masculine identification, often comes to define his masculinity largely in negative terms, as that which is not feminine or involved with women"; she suggests that this aspect "explains the psychological dynamics of the universal social and cultural devaluation and subordination of women." The boy, in order to deny his attachment and deep personal identification with his mother, does so "by repressing whatever he takes to be feminine inside himself, and, importantly, by denigrating and devaluing whatever he considers to be feminine in the outside world." Beyond this, Chodorow (1974) suggests that in the social world "he also appropriates to himself and defines as superior particular social activities and cultural spheres – possibly, in fact, 'society' . . . and 'culture' . . . themselves" (p. 50).

Taking Chodorow's argument further, we may say that in the last analysis societal arrangements which actually give prestige and authority to males provide the most effective and concrete support for masculine identity. The system of male dominance allows men to demonstrate concretely that they are not only different from but "better than" women. Furthermore, defining masculinity as superior, giving the highest prestige to the things males do (very much a part of male dominance), is a way of inducing men to give up "femininity" and take on a masculine identity. The greater rewards and power of masculinity then act as an inducement to men to break with femininity.

In developing their gender identity, females on the other hand do not need to reject their first identification with their mothers, although they do need to become less dependent. Thus they do not have an unstable gender identity or a need for "greater glory" as an inducement to be feminine. In fact, even though they increasingly realize that males receive more prestige, girls continue to remain feminine. Kohlberg (1966), in surveying the research literature on this, has reported that "Girls continue to prefer feminine objects and activities at all ages, and their own preferences seem to be even more feminine than their more objective and stereotyped judgments of value" (p. 121) This strongly suggests that girls are "feminine" in a way that boys are not "masculine," and that girls remain "feminine" in spite of the prestige that accrues to masculinity. As we have pointed out earlier, feminists' vision of utopias are not of societies in which women dominate men, but, in which equalitarian relations exist between women and men. Women have no need for dominance to reinforce them in who they are.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>We do not mean to suggest that women passively accept men's dominance. In fact, in their everyday interactions with men even nonfeminist women seem to consistently counter men's attempts to devalue them. While nonfeminists rarely openly challenge men's power, feminists do so in an attempt to gain equality with men – not to reverse the dominance hierarchy.

### *Linking the Two Hypotheses in Gynocentric Thought*

While it may superficially seem that the "fear and envy" hypothesis and the "tenuous masculine identity" hypothesis concerning the source of males' motive to dominate women are quite distinct, they may be compatible on a general level. Children first identify with the mother because she is the most central person in their early lives. She interacts more with the child than any other person does and also controls the resources on which the child depends. This first feminine identification cannot continue as the male child learns that he not a woman, nor destined to be a woman, but *is* a male. But, since male figures tend to be conspicuously absent in early infant care, the boy in rejecting this feminine identification and in trying to feel masculine tends to devalue and degrade feminine activities and stress the superiority of masculine to feminine roles.

The male fear and envy of women that the early gynocentric theorists have noted also develop because of this primary identification with the mother. As males begin to break this first feminine identification and become more autonomous they realize that they cannot be like the mother, they cannot have or do what she does. It might be expected that they would envy her capacities that are so important in maintaining and even creating their lives. While we agree with Stoller that the overriding emotion in the early mother-child symbiosis is love, we can see how fear may also develop as part of the separation process. As Klein suggests, infants fear the consequences for themselves if this person on whom they are so dependent were to turn against them. Those who stress the "fear and envy" hypothesis, then, seem essentially to be saying that men's motive to segregate and dominate women comes not so much from the necessity to break their "identification" with a woman, but from a fear of the consequences of their dependency on a woman whose power they cannot duplicate. They fear the consequences of her power over them and envy this power also. Thus, in a sense, men are motivated to dominate women to cope with male dependency needs.

Males, then, face both their dependency and their lack of clear identity as they struggle for autonomy from the mother. Girls also experience the dangers of dependency, but cope with these by retaining and elaborating their initial feminine identification and eventually becoming mothers themselves. Males, on the other hand, continue throughout their lives to be threatened in different ways and on different levels with an identity problem and a fear of dependency linked to this identity problem. The institutional arrangements embodying male dominance and the cultural justification of male dominance ordinarily serve to help males cope with these threats (cf. Lidz & Lidz, 1977).

### MALE DOMINANCE AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

To isolate a psychological motive supporting male dominance does not explain the historical processes by which male dominance is translated into institutional and cultural forms. This is a very complex problem, and we cannot pretend to deal with it here. Our concern is more limited. We will simply take as given that a system of male dominance exists to a greater or lesser extent in all societies and that this system rests in part on males' "need" to see themselves as separate and better creatures and on the absence of such a need in females. It is then possible to ask how the institutions that embody male dominance act to reproduce the very motives which further its institutional entrenchment. In order to begin to see ways in which this self-perpetuating cycle might be broken, it is important not to remain "stuck" at the level of male and female motivation, but to examine the institutional arrangements that reproduce these motives in succeeding generations.

Institutional arrangements vary so much from one culture to another that we generally restrict our discussion in the following sections to the situation in the contemporary United States. We first discuss how current institutional patterns of the economy and family support the development of males' motivation to dominate others. Then we explore how the family and the economy may be altered to allow men as well as women to nurture infants. Finally we discuss the possibility that these changes could actually occur.

#### *How Social Institutions Support the Motive Behind Male Dominance*

Both males' rejection and devaluation of femininity may be seen in social institutions. In turn, these institutional arrangements promote the continual development of men's psychological motive to dominate women by perpetuating women's roles as the primary nurturers. Men and women do different tasks in the family. Women are primarily responsible for child care in the home, and thus most of children's first interactions are with a woman. If a woman works and her child is in some form of care outside the home, the caretaker is almost certainly a woman. The most important point of convergence of all the gynocentric theories discussed above is that women have been universally assigned primary responsibility for early child care. This phenomenon seems to set in motion in each male to a greater or lesser degree the "need" to achieve selfhood through dominance.

This sex-role division in child care is reinforced by the nature of the economy in the United States. Men and women generally work in separate

occupations, and men are paid much more than women are, even when both sexes have the same formal qualifications. Because men are paid much more than women, it is usually not economically feasible for men to leave their jobs to stay home with a child. In this country paid paternity leaves that allow men to spend time with their newborn children are almost unheard of. Because the work is traditionally a female area, child care workers are paid low salaries, and economically rational men generally choose other areas of employment. Thus, at this time institutional arrangements within the family and economy promote, if not require, that women be primarily responsible for early child care.

#### *Changes in the Family: Fathers Nurturing*

The possibility of altering this pattern comes from the fact that early child care by women is in the last analysis a social assignment, not a biological one. The introduction of "the bottle" has long since separated women's capacity to breastfeed from the necessity of their doing so. Moreover, it would be possible for women to continue to breastfeed and still have less than primary responsibility for the care of infants and children.

In this society the assignment of women to child care has been legitimated by the belief that women are naturally nurturant. However, most women may be nurturant largely because women's "being nurturant" is a powerful societal norm, enforced by severe negative sanctions for noncompliance. Childless women and women who abuse children are felt to be selfish and unnatural. Thus women may nurture because of societal prescription rather than biological necessity. In addition, recent research findings concerning the "nurturance eliciting" behavior of infants, suggests that women also may nurture children because they are around children rather than because they are somehow innately nurturant (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Having said all this, we do not wish to contend that there is *no* biological basis for women's nurturing behavior. There probably is such a basis, connected with hormonal factors (see Rossi, 1977). This in itself, however, is not decisive. In our society we continue to assign child rearing to women and justify it on the basis of biology. Theoretically, males could participate much more in early child care than they do; but again we have used biological arguments to explain why they do not. People in the United States tend to say that men do not know how to care of infants or would not be good at it. In fact, however, infants seem to elicit nurturant behavior in males too.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Biologically based theories have also been used to account for the universality of male dominance. For instance, Steven Goldberg (1977) has asserted that the universality of male dominance can be explained by "neuroendocrinological differences between men and

Bronfenbrenner (1977) has pointed out in a recent interview that the cross-cultural evidence clearly shows that in societies where males are constantly exposed to young children they are as adept at caring for them as are females. In a study carried out in this country, Parke and O'Leary (1976) found that both working-class and middle-class fathers showed a great deal of nurturing behavior toward their newborn infants at the hospital. While nurturing may not be as "natural" for men as for women (Rossi, 1977) there is no inherent reason why a society could not encourage men to nurture, even if it required "compensatory training."

While several theorists have linked males' motivation to denigrate and dominate women to the fact that women are the primary nurturers, these theorists have not spelled out what would happen if males also nurtured. Are males to become as nurturant as females? Will this eliminate gender identity altogether? Alternately, if gender identity is to remain, how will this occur if men play the traditional, nurturing mother role? Our own view is that men's taking a more direct and nurturant role vis-à-vis young children would facilitate a masculine identification in boys, even though the fathers would be playing what is usually considered a feminine role.

This apparent contradiction is resolved if we see that a nurturant father will make it easier for a boy to feel masculine by making masculinity seem less formidable. Men's nurturing will not obliterate sex differences because the physical differences between adult males and females will still be apparent to children. Furthermore, men's style of nurturing may differ somewhat from women's. Kohlberg (1966) has observed that boys do not "identify" with their own fathers early or readily because adult males in their physical presence and demeanor are in fact formidable to the young child. This is why, he suggests, boys actually identify with other boys before they identify with men. Kohlberg's position suggests that the early presence of adult males who are neither aloof nor fearsome would enable young males to make a masculine identification more readily. At the same time this "masculinity" would consist largely in the recognition that one *is* a male (like Daddy) but would not carry with it the idea that "masculinity" is necessarily better than "femininity." In addition, the more securely masculine a boy feels, the less likely he will be to "need" to bolster his masculinity by denigrating women. Furthermore, having males share in nurturant activities would mean that dependency needs, the precipitators of fear and envy of females, could also be met by males. This would have the effect of preventing women from being the sole source of

women that engender different male and female 'motivational' responses to the environment" (p. 523; see also Goldberg, 1974). While we do not dismiss biological influences on sex differences, we assert here that universal *social* patterns influence the motivation behind male dominance. Furthermore, these social patterns, because they *are* social, are not "inevitable" but can be changed.



dependency gratification and would allow males to feel less threatened by their own dependency needs.

In sum, then, if males become more nurturant it will likely not end the phenomenon of early gender identification in both sexes; but it will make a strong masculine identification more possible for males and thus eliminate the motive for compulsive masculinity. Some evidence for this exists in the research literature. Biller (1971; Biller & Meredith, 1975) in particular has summarized studies indicating that father nurturance makes both for nurturance and secure gender identity in children.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to deal with the possible effects of males' becoming more nurturant on girls' development, we can suggest that it would make masculinity seem less alien to girls and, if the father is not literally seductive, might promote heterosexuality in adulthood. A recent study of lesbian and heterosexual women (Johnson, Stockard, Rothbart, & Friedman, in press) suggests that homosexual women have not had affectionate or supportive fathers, while the relationship they have had with their mothers does not differ substantially from that of heterosexual women. Father nurturance would also mitigate the excessive dependency Chodorow (1974) thinks mothers without support are likely to encourage in daughters.

#### *Changes in the Economy*

If men are to nurture along with women on a broad scale, other structural changes will have to occur. Most importantly, the asymmetric relationship of the sexes to the economy will have to change. If men and women were rewarded equally for their work, it would be equally possible for men or women to lessen their work force participation to care for infants. This could involve part-time work and/or paternity and maternity leaves.

Altering the "clockwork of male careers" (Hochschild, 1975) would be necessary if shared nurturing is to succeed. Many typically male jobs now require continuous participation and heavy dedication in the first years on the job when people generally have children. For instance, both blue-collar and white-collar workers devote many hours to "working their way up the ladder" by doing extra work, attending evening meetings, and devoting continuous time periods to their occupation. If both males and females are to help with early child care, employers would have to legitimate the alteration of the typical male job pattern.

One of the most important ways to legitimate a change in this "clockwork" would be to standardize the practice of paid maternity and paternity leaves, which workers can take without penalty to advancement opportunities. Many families depend on the wages of two full-time workers to survive (Griffiths, 1976) and are financially unable to cease work, even part time, when a child is

born. These leaves would help ensure that children in such families could receive care from both their mothers and fathers.<sup>7</sup>

Providing quality child care for children of all ages and raising the pay of child care workers would also be necessary. Such steps are obviously needed in a society such as ours where a growing number of women work (31% of women with husbands and with children under 3 years of age in 1974; Kreps & Clark, 1975 p. 17), most out of economic necessity. Raising the wages of child care workers would be necessary if men, as well as women, were to hold the jobs. Raising the value of child care in the economic system would signify a higher evaluation of child care and could affect men's participation in this work in the home.

One of the reasons males are not eagerly entering into housework and child care, even when it is made economically feasible, is that these activities are themselves devalued. What women do, including child care, is considered by men to be less worthwhile than what men do. Men with the most tenuous gender identities are likely to be the most reluctant to have their "masculinity" threatened by participating in child care. While men are often willing to participate in female activities around the home as a hobby or a diversion, to take responsibility in these areas is considered by many to be "unmanly."

Equality in economic matters is undoubtedly related to the sexes being more equal in power in the general, public sphere. Most importantly this equality is intimately related to the absence of compulsive masculinity. B. B. Whiting (1965) has pointed out that in her study of children in six cultures and in the studies of other anthropologists, the phenomenon of sex identity conflict occurs only when a great deal of sex segregation and male dominance exists in the adult society. If the sexes are relatively equal as adults, one of the motives for "overdoing" the masculine role is lost. It seems reasonable to suggest, then, that equalizing men and women's status in the economy is a necessary (but not sufficient) step in ending the motivation behind male dominance. The other necessary step is changing men's role in the family to encompass nurturing of children in early infancy.

#### *The Possibility of Change*

Even though more women are working now than a few years ago, the wage gap between the sex groups is widening, mainly because men and women work

<sup>7</sup>We do not mean to neglect the important need to minimize the wage gap between families. The fact that many families require two paychecks to survive is obviously connected to the fact that many more single-parent than two-parent households live below the poverty level. In the long run, these problems can only be solved by minimizing the variance in wages in the society.

in different jobs and women's jobs are poorly paid in comparison to men's (Braverman, 1975). This is partially a result of males' devaluation of whatever women do and males' desire to separate their own activities from those of women. Also, as women participate more in the work force, there is no indication that men increase their participation in household chores, including child care (Boulding, 1976; Pleck, 1977). Furthermore, even in countries where it is economically feasible for men to participate in child care by using paternity leaves, they have been initially somewhat slow to respond. Although the participation rate has risen, only a relatively small number of eligible fathers have participated. These facts testify to the strength and persistence of men's desire to separate their activities from women's and to devalue what women do.

On the other hand, while sex segregation of jobs continues to subvert equality of opportunity, important changes in the status of women have occurred. Professional schools have opened their doors to women, Title IX has enhanced educational opportunity at all levels, and women have a new view of their own potentialities as individuals. Civil rights laws and affirmative action mandates have provided the legal basis for women's equal participation in the economy. The very fact that mothers are working makes them less involved with motherhood than they had been previously. And even though the pay is often low, having a job at all gives many women more economic power than they had previously.

In addition, there seems to be a general cultural drift in the direction of nurturance and caring as opposed to competitive striving (see Johnson, 1977). The phenomena that indicate this trend surfaced in this country a full decade ago with the counter culture movement and the war resistance movement. Even though "hippies" may have fallen far short of realizing their ideals, they at least wanted to be gentle, sharing, caring, feeling, and equalitarian. However misogynist their actual behavior may have been, members of the counter culture did seriously challenge the stereotypical, competitive masculine role and did move the rest of the society into a position more critical of its own norms.<sup>8</sup>

Women's working, the passing of legislation that requires equality in the economy, and the general cultural trend toward "expressiveness" have set the stage for what we believe to be the most crucial step to be taken toward ending male dominance — men's greater acceptance of a nurturing role vis-à-vis children. If present trends are any indication, however, men's assuming equal responsibility

<sup>8</sup> Even though we see a general cultural trend toward greater "expressiveness," we do not believe that the various attempts to alter the family structure through "communes," or "collective child care" in the U.S. have met the original goals that some groups had of involving men in infant care. Rossi (1977) provides a convincing argument that so far, at least, these alternatives have not placed the responsibility for nurturing on men. They often result in women being totally responsible for the care of infants; and older children may be left with no adult responsible for their well-being.

with women for child care will be one of the last changes to occur. But if we read the implications of gynocentric psychoanalytic theory correctly, it is a change which is essential if men's devaluation of women and male dominance are to end.

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