CUTTING THE SYMBIOTIC BOND

A Challenge to Some Female Developmental Mythology

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Way Beyond Freud

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Feminists and feminist psychoanalysts have upbraided, denounced, and discarded many aspects of classical theory. There is much in traditional Freudian theory that warrants this. In many ways we are in an evolutionary period in our thinking about female development. We can say that even so-called classical ideas have not remained constant as they frequently evolve, responsive to the changing times and especially to the feminist movement.

For example, we are more mindful of how in small and large ways our psychoanalytic culture can discipline us into upholding traditional views so that they become integrated as accepted theory. Such views manage to become institutionalized, and thus the chronic need of minority voices to revolt against the natural pulls of the dominant positions. Foucault (Silverman, 2003), a revolutionary theorist and historian-philosopher, teaches us that a seemingly enlightened expansion of knowledge can counterintuitively offer subtle control over our thinking. We need to be vigilant about scanning our belief systems so that they do not become entrenched dogmas.

A view through the lens of anticonservatism may be a particularly felicitous way to explore some traditional conceptualizations of female sexuality and development, some of which have become almost foundational in our psychoanalytic literature. By this I mean that there is a continued use of certain constructs that organize our theoretical perspective and clinical understanding, and that with time they have become foundational.

As one example, I plan to discuss the concept of symbiosis. This concept is consistently utilized to understand early infant experience, and also it is particularly stressed in describing the mental life of early childhood for females. By "symbiotic" I am referring to the traditional way that psychoanalysis has conceptualized it, namely, as an experience of a merged relationship. It is the emotional sense of the temporary obliteration of the boundary between the self and the other. Freud, (1930/196 lb) commented: "An infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish his ego from the external world as the source of the sensations flowing in on him. For the infant the breast and the ego are one. Only gradually does the infant learn about the reality of their distinctiveness." Mahler (1968) cited Anna Freud's (I960) description of merger in infant psychic life in which an "object is drawn wholly into the internal narcissistic milieu and treated as part of it to the extent that self and object merge into one" (Freud, 1960, p. 56). Mahler wrote: "This corresponds to what I name the symbiotic dual-unity stage of primary narcissism" (Mahler, 1968, p. 221).

Symbiosis is conceptualized as a normal stage of infant development spanning the second to the third month of life until the fifth or sixth month of life. Much of the psychoanalytic literature accepts the infant's experience of merger and fusion as a natural developmental stage. (In fact a scan of the articles in PEP CD-ROM on the concept of symbiosis indicates that most psychoanalytic writers support such a concept. It is rarely challenged. Some contemporary feminist psychoanlysts continue to theorize its importance for understanding female development (Benjamin, 1995; Chodorow, 1978, 1994; Elise, 2001; Kristeva, 1980; however, for different views see Brody, 1982; Klein & Tribich, 1981; Harrison, 1986; Lachmann & Beebe, 1989; Peterfreund, 1978).

I am not discarding the concept of symbiosis. I believe it to be a powerful and pervasive fantasy in psychic life. It can be found in literature, art and mythology. Freud described it as characteristic of men's love. The German writer Walter Benjamin (Coetzee, 2001) wrote in his journal: "Every time I've experienced a great love I've undergone a change so fundamental that I have amazed myself. . . . A genuine love makes me resemble the woman I love." It is frequently written about as an aspiring or enthroned aspect of sexual intercourse. There is a humorous literature about merger experiences among marriage partners. In addition, it is found in people's description of their meditation practices (Silverman, Lachmann, & Milich, 1982; Silverman, Lachmann, & Milich, 1984a; Silverman, Lachmann, & Milich, 1984b). Oneness

and merger fantasies have been experimentally demonstrated to strengthen some performances, reduce symptoms, and allow for adaptation-enhancing fantasies and behavior (Silverman, Lachmann, & Milich, 1982). Tallis (2002) summarized Silverman's work on the therapeutic properties of a merger fantasy. Silverman used a well-controlled research design and he labeled his work, "subliminal psychodynamic activation (SPA)." Using a subliminal merging stimulus, Silverman showed consistent beneficial effects for individuals suffering from schizophrenia, depression, anxiety, addictions, and eating disorders. In addition more general positive effects have been reported. "These include easier self-disclosure, better rapport with others, increased assertiveness . . . improved memory and improved academic performance" (Tallis, 2002, p. 159). Kohut's (1977) view of a lifelong need for a self-object has as a significant feature this experience of merger with the self-object providing functions that the person can not supply. Thus, I am not challenging the potential of symbiosis to increase a sense of well-being and effectance, although at the other end of the continuum it can lead to a temporary or more ongoing sense of a vanishing self, one completely dominated or incorporated into the other. In the latter form, when such needs/wishes are pervasive and persistent, the more maladaptive end of the continuum is seen. Nonetheless, I grant the power and importance of such symbiotic fantasies. However, such acceptance is quite different from positing a ubiquitous early symbiotic phase of development.

In its more extreme form, symbiosis is particularly theorized to be relevant in women's psychopathology (unless one considers a man's falling in love and merger as a sickness! See Freud, 1914/1957). As early as 1940, Reich wrote about the "extreme submissiveness" in some women (Reich, 1940, p. 85). She described one of her patients commenting: "The walls between him [her husband] and me do not exist any more. I feel what he feels; I even think what he thinks. We are one person . . .Reich describes many of her women patients' experiences in this way and she refers to them as "the magic of the unio mystica" (p. 88). Reich understood this wish as dominated by the lost union of early childhood due to early frustrations and/or loss of the mother. "It is like relapsing to a time in which the ego is about to be formed and when the boundaries between the ego and the outer world were still blurred and only painfully experienced in moments of frustration and tension" (Reich, 1940, p. 92). A view of the merged neonate led to the depiction of corresponding needs in nursing mothers and was accepted in various forms as characteristic of females and pathologized in its excessive form. Chodorow (1978) accepted the concept of a merged, symbiotic state for infants. Later Chodorow (1994) modified her more universalizing stance; nonetheless Kulish (2000) in her summary article on femininity commented that Chodorow's "point about the possible differential effects of separation from a same versus a different-sexed parent is a powerful one, and it is a major contribution to psychoanalytic thinking about feminine development"

(Kulish, 2000, p. 1361). The lessened differentiation between mother and daughter extends the sense of oneness characteristic of the symbiotic stage.

I suggest that the early symbiotic stage is a seriously questionable phase. I maintain that when an experience of symbiosis exists between mother and infant it is a result of a maladaptive attachment relationship. Such a potentially pathological interaction has been established dyadically, based on the mutual needs of both participants. The evol vement of merger fantasies concomitant with this patterned interaction is a likely developing scenario for some. Thus, my thesis is that when an adult patient gives expression to merger wishes, such fantasies are not a regressive retreat to an early symbiotic phase but, rather, they are based on an earlier dyadic adaptation.[1] In those instances where symbiotic fantasies occur, they are later developing mentation.

Rethinking the concept of symbiosis is important because its acceptance affects our views about how female development is conceptualized and understood and then how psychoanalytic treatment of women is conducted. Continued conceptualization of symbiosis and its implications supports a mythology about females which I plan to explicate.

I offer now some psychoanalytic history and present a wider cultural frame that might help to explain the persistence of the notion of an early

symbiotic phase, and I provide research data that challenges the existence of this stage. The second part of the paper is more speculative. Here I discuss some implications of the entrenched view of an infantile symbiotic stage and the shaping of the culture and especially women's lives that evolved from this particular perspective.

PSYCHOANALYTIC HISTORICAL VIEWS

Historically, beginning with Freud, analysts have written about the wish to return to the blissful experience of being the baby at the breast, that is, the fused or symbiotic experience of the infant. For Freud it was characteristic of the early narcissistic stage in the infant's life. During this period there is a tension between energy directed toward objects and that which remains in the ego-id (Freud 1923/1961 a). "The highest phase of development of which object-libido is capable is seen in the state of being in love, when the subject seems to give up his own personality [that is, he is merged] in favour of an object-cathexis" (Freud, 1914/1957, p. 76). The child's first love relationship would be an overvalued, idealized one where the self is submerged in the other.

Ferenczi (1913) addressing this early phase of the infant's life described the magical boundarylessness of the infant in which the gratified baby imputes omnipotence to the caregiver who anticipates her needs during her

initial stages of life. The baby's mind has been read and her needs gratified. Mahler (1967; Mahler et al., 1975) elaborated on the view of a naturally occurring stage of symbiosis with the baby experiencing a merged omnipotence (Kramer & Aktar, 1988). (Infantile omnipotence, like symbiosis, is a construct in need of attention and discussion, however, it is not the focus here, but see Peterfreund, 1978). Harrison (1986), summarizing psychoanalytic views on symbiosis comments, "The assumption of an original state of mother-infant unity is now widely accepted as a fact of individual psychic development" (p. 16). For example, Kristeva (1975), a contemporary feminist, eulogizes the event between mother and daughter. Her description of the early mother-daughter experience is one of blissful fusion. Here, we are in the land of her semiotics, where the early, archaic, nonverbal dominates. She believes this is the realm of the early infant fused experience. Eventually the child will be thrown out of paradise because language, the role of the symbolic, the entrance symbolically into the rational and reasonable world of what Lacan calls the law of the father, occurs. Females, in their same-sex orientation with mother, are assumed to be more prone to remain entrenched in a symbiotic orbit or need a paternal presence to wrest them from it.

"Blissful," "magical," "paradisiacal" are often the terms used to designate a symbiotic experience. It hardly captures the effects of an immature state system which leaves some infants, some of the time, fussy and irritable, unable to sleep and at times difficult to soothe (Silverman, 1981).

FURTHER CULTURAL INFLUENCES

This discourse on the concept of symbiosis may be further illuminated by an excursion that places it within a larger frame; one that briefly comments on economic, cultural, and social-historical considerations. Later, I will address feminist historical influences. I suggest that the concept of symbiosis carries particular significance in view of our culture's emphasis on individual autonomy (Silverman, 1987a, 1987b).

According to Sampson (2001; see also Cushman, 1990) some economists and historians have long claimed that the focus on the autonomous individual versus the collective individual (a more interdependent-person-other relationship) is understood as a West-East divide. Western civilization, with its growth of industrialization, called for the "kind of sharp person-other boundaries that are found in Western individualism, whereas more settled agriculture in the East historically has demanded interpersonal skills and thus favored the less distinct-other boundaries of collectivism" (Sampson, 2000, p. 1425). Sampson believes powerful religious views, especially the development of the Protestant ethic contributed to the emphasis on individuality. It extended the Greek view of self-sufficiency and led to Christianity's emphasis on the individual (Sampson, 2000; Cushman, 1990). Descartes' enlightenment view also contributed to a Western emphasis on the autonomous individual with a bounded mind.

Of course, Kuhn (1962) has discussed how the very questions scientists raise and explore are embedded in their social context and reflect their cultural values. Thus, our psychological and psychoanalytic perspective has focused more on the individual than on the social system in which he or she is embedded.

A variety of factors, therefore, contribute to our Western culture's favoring and fostering autonomy in our children (Silverman, 1987a, 1987b). Mahler's (1967, 1968) work was shaped by and contributed to the shaping of the idea of the increasing autonomy of the child from her mother. This was Freud's view as well, especially for the male child.

The baby's clear dependent needs, I suggest, pushed the idea of a blissful "unio mystica" back to a permissible early stage of life from which the infant must extricate herself, only to remain longing for such a state.

It would not be unreasonable for the reader to suggest that a critique against symbiosis is fashioned in the light of a continued Western emphasis on self-containment and individuality, now being extended back to early infancy, replacing a merger experience. However, I do not stress the autonomous self. It will shortly be clear that my substitution for symbiosis is the idea of an interdependent self.

A more collective view, or what I have referred to as a relational view

(Silverman, 1994a)—others have called it an intersubjective perspective—involves two subjects, each with a relative degree of individuality. (In the case of the infant and her mother, naturally tilted toward greater selfdelineation and differentiation in the mother.) These two are interdependent entities, each contributing a unique, individual voice to the interaction. Each plays a special, singular role in contributing to the formation of the other; the baby teaches the parent how to parent her, while the parent informs and shapes the baby. This is a view I will be elaborating on in describing early infant development and in challenging the concept of symbiosis.

Of course, the retention of what I believe are outmoded concepts continues to exist when psychoanalytic theory addresses developmental issues in general. In order to set the stage for a discussion of infant-mother and particularly female infant-mother symbiosis, I need to present data that have emerged from empirical studies of infants. These ideas, supported by these data, are not necessarily new, but I hope offering them will set the stage for understanding my further objections to the concept of an early symbiotic stage.

CURRENT VIEWS ON INFANT DEVELOPMENT

I provide a brief overview of contemporary views of infancy, which informs my subsequent analysis of symbiosis. There is by now significant

acknowledgment of the importance of the dyadic engagement for the growth and development of the infant (Silverman, 1981,1991,1992,1994b, 1998,2001). It is an interactive regulatory system that is necessary for the survival of the infant and for the important engagement of the mother's needs as well. Simultaneously, with interactive regulation, the infant develops and maintains self-regulation; that is, optimal self-regulation occurs when the infant engages in effective interactive regulation and vice versa. Important developmental achievements occur during mutual participatory experiences. In fact, it is only in the fifth month of the infant's life that she can become more attuned to the objects in her world and begin to explore these with interest. The faces of the caregivers are far more salient prior to this time. Initially, disjointed, inconsistent interchanges probably predominate, but eventually an increasingly co-ordinated interconnection develops. Such repetitive interactions between infant and mother become patterned and it is such a pattern that becomes internalized. These internalized arrangements are mental models, or what psychoanalysts refer to as representations.

The baby and each of her caregivers are eventually organized in different interactions, and these unique structured interactions are individually represented. I offer the idea of two different early representations because researchers have stressed the salience of context. When the context is altered, it is a new and different experience for the infant (Fischer & Pipp, 1984; Beebe, personal communication). Thus, mother and

infant and father and infant have different interactional experiences and their internalizations are distinctive within the child. Early in development, therefore, the baby has a particular internal representation for each parent. This evidence suggests that it does not occur sequentially (first mother, then father). This is important, because it sets the stage for a different way of conceptualizing the role of each; that is, both are importantly represented in the infant's mind, from early in development. Such a conceptualization eliminates the need for one (the father) to help extricate the child from the other (the mother). Of course, if the pattern of interaction is dominated by a mother who insists on exclusivity, or is intrusive and dominating, for example, it sets the stage for less than optimal structured representations, which may be repaired through different interactional patterns with father.

The importance of fathers, as distinct from mothers, for key developmental experiences is frequently asserted. They are typically viewed as "role models for boys and relationship models for girls . . ." (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999, p. 403). However, in a meta-analysis of 172 studies, the findings offered point to "few significant differences in the ways that mothers and fathers treated girls and boys" (Lamb, 1997). Lamb also concluded that "very little about the gender of the parent seems to be distinctly important" (p. 10). Parental differences in play have also been asserted repeatedly; that is, fathers play with their offspring and mothers engage in caregiving and nurturing. This is especially commented on (but not only) in relation to

infants. Fathers do spend a greater proportion of their time with their children in play, but in "absolute terms, most studies suggest that mothers play with their children more than fathers do" (Lamb, 1997, p. 5).

However, these data are not to be confused with how the infant experiences herself or himself. They do not address subtle, nonconscious cues between infant and caregiver. We now know that a considerable amount of learning occurs through nonconscious communication. Thus, on a gross behavioral level significant differences in childrearing practices of mothers and fathers are negligible; however, tacit interactive cues can communicate a sense of being a girl as opposed to being a boy. Knowing how (procedural knowledge) in contrast to knowing that (declarative knowledge) informs a young child's experiential understanding. From her interaction on an automatic level (procedural knowledge) with caregivers a little girl can intuit she is a girl. It will take the little girl much longer to know that it is because of genital differences (de Mameffe, 1997). Although they can know implicitly that they are girls, they do not necessarily understand that (declarative memory) they are not boys. (By age 2½ to 3 most children can say whether they are a boy or a girl (Egan & Perry, 2001). It takes a number of additional years (until 6 to 7) before gender constancy is achieved.)

CHALLENGES TO THE CONCEPT OF AN EARLY SYMBIOTIC STAGE

Thus, I am presenting a view of the infant as a unique individual, with her own trajectory of development, with an early slowly developing sense of gender and, what is germane to this section of the paper, with a differentiated sense of self. The self is not highly developed or articulated, but there appears to be, starting at birth, a beginning awareness of self as different from other (Stem, 1985, 2000). Of course, infants' mental states cannot be observed directly, but they can be inferred. Zeedyk (1996), in her summary of the literature on intentionality, has described the following pertinent cues about the infant's intentional behavior that demonstrate recognition of difference between the infant and her external world:

> anticipation of the outcome of an action; persistence; selecting from among alternative actions those which are appropriate to a goal; correcting for errors; stopping when the goal is attained; evidence of surprise as manifested through facial expressions; and demonstrating a preference (Bruner, 1973; Frye, 1991; Harding, 1982; Piaget, 1952; Wellman, 1977; Willatts, 1984). (Zeedyk, 1996, pp. 421-422)

Many researchers are in agreement about such cues and believe these are appropriate cues to measure intentionality.

There are many sources contributing to the idea of the infant's initial differentiation from the mother. It may be seen in the infant's early imitation of the other's facial expressions, tongue protrusions, hand gestures, as well as vocalizations. The literature on intentionality, that is, an inferred view of goal-directed behavior on the part of infants is, for many researchers, there at

birth. That is, the infant recognizes the outside world, has intentions, and is frustrated when he or she cannot achieve the goal. (For a review of those who maintain that intentionality exists at birth or shortly thereafter see Zeedyk, 1996.) Researchers have devised subtle and sophisticated ways of testing for intentionality. Butterworth and Hopkins (1988) argue for goal-directed behavior as reflected in the newborn's open mouth prior to arm movement when the hand was brought to the mouth. Rovee and collaborators (Fagen & Rovee, 1976; Rovee-Collier, 1983; Rovee-Collier, Morongiello, Aron & Kuppersmith, 1978; Rovee-Collier & Sullivan, 1980) have shown the infant's increased kicking when items on a mobile are reduced and crying when the number of items are greatly reduced (e.g., from 10 to 2). Infants can learn strategies to activate a visual and aural display and show joy when successful and anger when frustrated (Lewis, Alessandri & Sullivan, 1990). Other evidence of intentionality, as well as a sense of the other and the external world are found in such experiments as the baby sucking to hear a voice (De Casper & Fifer, 1980), sucking to control a visual display (Kalins & Bruner, 1973), and accuracy in arm reaching—to name just a few. There are a series of communicative behaviors that begin at birth and increasingly develop that demonstrate the infant's early interest in the other. Even in utero the infant prefers human voices (De Casper & Fifer, 1980). The infant is highly responsive to social stimuli, preferring the human voice to other sounds, recognizing the mother by sight within a few days (Bushnell, Sai & Mullin,

1989) as well as by smell (Cemoch & Porter, 1985). Infants can distinguish between social and nonsocial conditions by responding differentially (Legerstee, 1992). Many parents recognize their infant's decreased crying as they approach her. Lamb and Malkin (1986) have experimentally demonstrated that this pattern is established by the first month and that by five months of age babies will cry when they are not picked up.

Such theorists as Brazelton (1982; Brazelton, Koslowski & Main, 1974), Trevarthen (1977, 1979, 1980, 1993), and Tronick(1981; Cohn &Tronick, 1988; Gusella, Muir & Tronick, 1988) believe that intentionality is "fundamentally an emotional, interpersonal phenomenon and that infants are bom with an innate capacity for it, which evidences itself within their early social interactions" (Zeedyk, 1996, p. 429). According to Travarthen, it is particularly apparent in social communication. Both infants and their mothers engage in protoconversations with turn taking, and adjustment to each other's cues, all this occurring smoothly much as it does in adult conversations. In these conversations both mother and infant demonstrate intentionality, and each engages and disengages from this conversation.

Whereas such data may suggest uniformity of response on the part of mothers in their caretaking role, the idea of uniformity is more apparent than real. While some attachment theorists do maintain a biological, evolutionary understanding of the attachment system (Bowlby, 1969; George & Solomon

1999), Bowlby remarked that, "Because of a human's capacity to learn and to develop complex behavioral systems, it is usual for his instinctive behavior to become incorporated into flexible behavioral sequences that vary from individual to individual" (Bowlby, 1969, p. 160). In such a system, from both the baby's and the parent's point of view, some behaviors are favorable for attachment and others are antithetical for attachment (Bowlby, 1969; George & Solomon, 1999).

I have presented this rather extensive view of the presence of an early and discrete experience of the self in order to call into question the notion of early-stage symbiosis. Whereas there are different developmentalists' positions on the existence of goal-directed behavior immediately or shortly after birth, or later in the first year, the controversy is not about the infant's symbiotic status.

THE ATTACHMENT SYSTEM

Rather than assume, therefore, the inevitability of a merged experience between infant and mother, from which the male child must disidentify or the father must extricate the female child, I suggest that when such a scenario dominates the initial dyadic experience it may foreshadow problematic attachments. Hints of potentially maladaptive attachments can be seen during the first year of life.

Attachment researchers have highlighted such troubled attachments and have demonstrated their prominence by the end of the first year of life. Whereas the categories of secure and insecure attachments are understood as stylistic patterns, the extremes of insecure attachment, and especially those infants demonstrating a disorganized attachment, flag concern about the potential development of pathology (Lyons-Ruth, 1999; van Ijzendoom, 1994; Main, Tomasini & Tolan, 1979). In addition, an analysis of parental discourse addressing the nature of the parent's attachment to her own mother, as represented in the Adult Attachment Interview, predicts the type of attachment relationship the parent will establish with her offspring (van Ijzendoom, 1994), especially if she is securely attached to her own mother (George & Solomon, 1999). I am underscoring the significance of the categories of attachment between mothers and infants. When mother and infant demonstrate a seemingly fused, symbiotic relationship (mother as frequently intrusive, impinging on her infant, overly attentive—not permitting Winnicott's "spontaneous gesture"), it should highlight concern about the potential maladaptive patterning of this interaction.

Mismatches or nonmatches between mother and her infant are more common than not (Gianno & Tronick 1985; Beebe & Lachmann, 1994). One would anticipate that those mother-infant pairs demonstrating a pattern of symbiotic connection (a high degree of impingement) would also show a pattern of infrequent mismatching. This appears to be the case with vocal

rhythm co-ordination (vocalizing and turn-taking) between mothers and their infants monitored in face-to-face interactions (Jaffe et al., 2001). Highly co-ordinated matching of vocal rhythm and turn-taking were found with those infants labeled most insecure and/or disorganized in their attachments. Overly close monitoring of the other reflected what the researchers called" high tracking" or interactive vigilance. Thus, such overly close monitoring of mutual interaction, although intrusive, becomes the characteristic interaction pattern for infant and mother. Once it is established, it does not allow the child to develop and rely on inner cues and to provide for an adaptive self-regulatory system. I would understand such a patterned interaction as an outgrowth of the mother's difficulty in differentiating herself from her child and in her child's accommodation to the mother's needs. This results in the child's experience of a lack of her own personhood. However, the high tracking ability of the infant suggests the infant's early differentiation from her mother and her vigilant alertness to the cues of the other. Initially, this interaction pattern is not a merged fantasy experience but a mutual, powerful accommodation. Along with such an attachment pattern there are likely to develop fantasies of merger, especially when the child experiences a loss of her personhood.

Some similar findings have been reported in adult studies. Gottman (1981) found that close vocal tracking of one's marital partner was found in more disturbed marital couples when compared to less disturbed couples.

West and Sheldon (1988) report on the anxiously attached caregiving style of some adults. Such adults are chronically in the caregiving mode, readily anticipating the needs of the other. Levy and Blatt (1999) specifically talk about the reversal of the child-parent dyad, in that the child becomes the maternal figure to a mother who needs a symbiotic relationship.

Of course, a pattern of impingement needs to be distinguished from language mothers may use in describing the intimacy and attunement they experience with their babies. In fact, as I will shortly describe, the discourse of infant researchers may well have been misunderstood as supporting a notion of symbiosis. A second caveat is in order. Although a midrange of interactive responsiveness appears optimal for 12-month infant attachment, it should be understood that such a view must be contextualized. By that I mean contextualization is a sensible issue when one is aware of the complicated road traveled by infant and mother pairs to arrive at a reasonably healthy outcome for the child (Thelen & Smith, 1995). Thus, high tracking during the first year of the infant's life may be altered when the infant walks or talks. The mother, for example, may temper her "vigilance" when other means of communication are available between the two.

Whereas contemporary infant researchers do not subscribe to the view of an infant in a normal symbiotic phase, they use language that psychoanalysts can mistakenly interpret as supporting an idea of an early

symbiotic stage. Examples of this are the attunement between mother and infant as discussed by Stem (1985), the intersubjectivity that exists that Trevarthen (1977, 1979, 1980) has described, the security of attachment based in part on the sensitivity of the mother to her infant's needs explored by Ainsworth et al., (1978). Although, such concepts remain independent of the idea of symbiosis, they may also have mistakenly contributed to the acceptance of symbiosis. Researchers initially thought that those mothers who tracked most carefully produced more attuned and attached babies. It was only subsequent research (e.g., Jaffe et al., 2001; Gianino & Tronick, 1985) that began to more carefully delineate the nature of such attunements and discovered these more maladaptive attachments.

PROBLEMS WITH THE MODEL OF MERGING

First, we can think of the concept of symbiosis as our genetic "mythology." Primarily, it offers us a skewed view of early infant life and it shapes our considerations of normal development and pathological regressions. By the latter, I mean that when symbiosis is theorized clinically there is a tendency toward a particular developmental tilt in understanding such material, that is, in regression back to the first few months of life (Mitchell, 1988). If psychoanalytic theory flies in the face of what we learn about development. I believe the theory needs alteration and updating.

Second, maintaining that there is a developmental stage of symbiosis with its necessary "extrications" results in a linear view of development, and a universal similarity in stages for all of us. A linear view of development has had many challenges (see Silverman, 2001, 1981, 1998 for overviews). Those viewing even seemingly linear systems of development such as motor skills (Thelen & Smith, 1995) call universality in development into question. An intensive, proximal view of such development demonstrates its variability and individual uniqueness. There are highly individual patterns for each of us. As we all end by establishing such skills as walking, talking a gross view of development can seem, but is only apparently, linear.

Third, rather than a universal stage of development, individuals follow a unique and complex road. Children must negotiate a range of regulatory and adaptational challenges, and the nature of the established patterned interaction that evolves will facilitate or impede the management of their life conflicts (Lyons-Ruth, 1999). Our theories must incorporate the understanding of variability and complexity in development. Lastly, symbiotic fantasies should not be conceptualized as a regressive retreat to an earlier merged experience. Rather, fantasies that develop along with particular patterned interaction might entail merger.

FEMALE SYMBIOSIS

Symbiosis is especially seen as relevant for infant females. The gender similarity of the girl to her primary caregiver has led to the view that the little girl's separation and individuation is more of a problem than that of the little boy. The line between close, warm, affectionate reactions between a mother and daughter and a symbiotic relationship is often blurred, allowing for the idea of symbiosis. Our psychoanalytic literature has contributed to such blurring. For example, Adler (1989) believes that Mahler's (1968) symbiosis, Erikson's (1959) basic trust, Gitelson's (1962) diatrophic functions. Stone's (1961) mother associated with intimate bodily care, and Winnicott's (1968) holding environment are all addressing the early phase of treatment that is "undistinguishable from Kohut's self-object transferences" (Adler. 1989, p. 550). I believe these concepts refer to different infant experiences. In addition. Kohut's understanding of an individual's experience of a needed self-object occurred in the context of knowing the distinction between self and other, and also experiencing a merger fantasy.

Pine maintains that the concept of an early infant symbiotic stage is still useful (Pine. 1990a, 1990b). Although he acknowledges that infants are differentiated from their mothers, he attempts to rescue symbiosis with his belief in "moments" in the infant's experiences. I believe his idea about boundarylessness and merger in the infant-mother experience contributes to further blurring between language and subjective experience. I will also raise other concerns about Pine's position with regard to this early stage.

Pine believes such moments of merger occur when the infant has nursed, is falling asleep, and "melds into the mother's body" (Pine, 2001), or in moments of intense mutual eye-to-eye gaze, as well as during other intense moments, but also in quiet, calm times when the "infant is being carried in the mother's arms while she is in motion, the infant moving with her body, the two of them in complete synchrony" (Pine, 1990, p. 239). These are instances of "many moments when the subjective reality of the infant's experience may be one of merger or boundarylessness" (Pine, 1990, p. 239).

Pine's idea of the infant's "melding" or "falling into the mother's body" begs the question. His choice of "melding" and "falling into" is not necessarily an accurate account of either the infant's or mother's experience. It is his choice of language that supports a concept of merger. Whereas some mothers may describe such a bodily experience between their babies and themselves, it remains questionable whether this is the infant's or the mother's experience. Pine has acknowledged the importance of merger fantasies for some mothers. This may well intensify their early interactions, shading and coloring the experience for the infant so that intrusive preoccupations and lack of self-definition become salient for the child.

The intense experiences Pine highlights also need to be questioned. I would concur that when mother and infant engage in intense gazing, or overly concordant cooing and babbling, it sets the stage for experiences of

merger, but I would understand it as potentially maladaptive (see p. 241, above). Infants, not mothers, regularly disrupt the gaze experience. If it were so gratifying to produce the important boundarylessness experience, they would be less likely to avert their gaze as they regularly do. In addition, babies at two months of age can make quite adequate discriminations about emotional interactions between themselves and their caregivers (Legerstee, 2001; Moore, Cohn & Campbell, 200I). Infants rely on and expect social reciprocity as early as 2 months of age (Moore, Cohn & Campell, 2001). When social reciprocities are discordant (intense, intrusive) it leads to defensive behavior such as turning away, withdrawing, losing body tonus, or shutting down. In contrast to Pine's position, frequent moments of intensity would not necessarily highlight normal moments of merger.

Pine also invokes the quiet, soothing moods of being carried or held as merger experiences for the infant. I would understand these states as a result of mutual-regulatory experiences between mother and baby. Such states exist alongside of self-regulatory experiences of calm and impending sleep. Whereas we cannot rule out a subjective experience of merger, I maintain it is a construct from useful clinical work that is superimposed on an infant's self-regulating state.

FEMINIST HISTORY

In this section of the paper I am speculating about historical and cultural factors that may have contributed to the idea of infant-mother merger. I believe these factors are worth entertaining because they lent and continue to lend credence to the view of females as inherent nurturers, as less differentiated when compared to males and thus more vulnerable to fusion experiences. Further, I make inferences about how such features have shaped both our cultural values about women and influenced our psychoanalytic perspective. Women, I maintain, often responded by behaving in conventional ways that reflected these cultural goals.

The feminists of the early 20th century in Vienna stressed the powerful libidinal nature of the mother-infant experience and that the mother's intimate relationship to her child was one of the most gratifying experiences that a woman could achieve. Some of the important feminists at the time were involved in their own psychoanalysis, for example Emma Eckstein and Bertha Pappenheim (Anna O). These women undoubtedly influenced and were influenced by the then psychoanalytic theoretical Zeitgeist. Some of the leading feminists of the day advocated that strong, passionate feelings can be expressed through the outlet of motherhood. Gret Meisel-Hess, an Austrian feminist, spoke for increased sexual liberation for women (Buhle, 1998). She was concerned with the insufficient ways available for the discharge of their libidinal desires. She suggested that the problem could be solved through motherhood. Sexual discharge could be achieved through the act of childbirth,

nursing, and love for the baby. Helena Deutsch also supported the idea of parturition as the "acme of sexual pleasure" (Buhle, 1998). Bertha Pappenheim, another feminist who spearheaded both sexual and political reforms for women, voiced the belief that motherliness is the "primary feeling for women" (Buhle, 1998, p. 59).

Although early feminists were interested in providing outlets for women's sexual desires, psychoanalytic theory of that time had another focus and both the mother's role and her needs in relation to the baby were minimized. Because the theorizing was about the development of the psychic life of the baby, the emphasis was typically on the infant's needs and desires. The hot, intense discourse about libidinal gratification associated with birth and nurturing set the stage for fantasies and activity around the blissful experience of oneness with the baby. The belief in the mother's concentrated investment with her child might then have led to the assumption that it reflected the need of the baby. Here, for example is Chasseguet-Smirgel's (1976) scenario about the infant. She assumes that a child's wish for a "fusion with the primary object" (p. 348) is a lifelong goal. She maintains that the infant "senses within himself a gap which he seeks to fill throughout his life . .. the gap left in his ego cannot be closed except by returning to a fusion experience with the primary object" (p. 348). Chasseguet-Smirgel's language captures the symbiotic longing of the child and later the adult. Thus Aruffo (1971) argues that "The woman's desire to nurse the baby, to be close to it

bodily, represents the continuation of the original symbiosis not only for the infant but the mother as well" (p. 114). Supposedly, such a condition of joyous beatitude was one that all of us wished to reexperience. Those women not likely to manage such feelings might well feel atypical and/or abnormal. Theorizing that symbiosis is indispensable leads to the following classical scenarios: Women can recapture and satisfy this important longing in their roles as mothers by ministering to the baby what the baby needs, an experience of fusion. Men can recapture it in refinding an opposite-sex love object where fantasies of fusion with the breast-mother are re-experienced.

A belief in the baby's experience of a symbiotic union simultaneously places all women within a similar orbit of desire. This reduces a host of variable experiences within women. Furthermore, it highlights what Trad (1991) has commented on, .. the mother-infant relationship as being ideal is virtually universal, transcending the boundaries of culture and geography. . . . And yet buried in that image of perfect harmony and bliss, other forces of a dark and destructive nature may be present as well" (p. 33). Many feminist authors have written about the mixed emotions stirred by mothering (see Rich and other feminist writers as mentioned in DiQuinzio, 1999).

Furthermore, woman as nurturer continues a stereotypic division of labor for the sexes, men as "agentive"—assertive, dominant, relatively directive, daring, etc.; women as "communal" (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Macoby,

1998)—caregiving, nurturing, interpersonally facilitative, accommodating, cooperative, working to maintain social harmony, etc.

Thus, childbearing and childrearing, while inevitable in the first instance, are sociologically organized in the second. Silverstein & Auerbach (1999) have studied a sizable group of male parents (men actively involved with their children) from 10 different subcultures within the USA. They found that there is a need for a dual set of parents because of the emotional and practical stresses of raising children and that the satisfaction of that need contributes to the most positive outcome for children. However, they comment:

> Neither the sex of the adult(s) nor the biological relationship to the child has emerged as a significant variable in predicting positive development. One. none or both of those adults could be a father (or mother) . . . the stability of the emotional connection and the predictability of the caretaking relationship are the significant variables that predict positive child adjustment. (Silverstein & Auerbach, 1999, p. 398)

In an earlier paper (Silverman, 1987a) I commented on a study that demonstrated that despite fathers assuming the major caregiving role, children appeared more deeply connected to their mothers. Since then there has been considerable additional research highlighting the potentially socialized nature of empathic, attuned infant care and the possibilities for the alteration of such patterns when men are committed to child rearing.

Lamb, for example, raised the question about whether mothers are more natural caregivers than fathers are. He undertook such an investigation (Lamb, 1987). He studied the father's and mother's behavior toward their newborn infants but found no differences in the parenting behavior; neither the mother nor the father proved to be "naturals" in parenting. However, when parents were studied after a year, mothers who had far more interactions with their babies (became more familiar with the baby's signals, rhythms, etc.), were then found to be the superior parent. However, when fathers are the primary caregivers they are as competent and sensitive in their role of caregiver as are mothers (Lamb, 1997).

Until such data from the above studies are contravened, we need to put aside the great emphasis on inherent biological sex differences and the idea that pregnancy and childbirth generate strong instinctual nurturing needs that contribute to the creation of a mother-infant symbiotic dyad.

This is an important consideration to integrate, because a view of women as being naturally endowed to function as providers, nurturers, and caregivers continues to reinforce a hierarchical patriarchy, or what might be thought of as sympathetic prejudice. Here I am considering the roles of hostile and benevolent sexism in our society (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Hostile sexism refers to a variety of negative, contemptuous, and denigrating attitudes toward women. It is easy to experience and label. Benevolent sexism, on the

other hand, is more subtle. It paints particular qualities of women in a benign and positive light, and yet at the same time reinforces stereotypes and thereby tacitly limits women's strivings in other domains. The authors describe benevolent sexism "as characterizing women as pure creatures who ought to be protected, supported and adored and whose love is necessary to make a man complete" (Glick & Fiske, 2001, p. 109). This idealization of women simultaneously implies that they are weak and that they are probably best suited for conventional gender roles such as nurturing and childcare. The authors indicate that men who have such a view see it as "cherishing" (p. 109) a woman, and many women are appreciative of these views. Some men endorse both hostile and benevolent sexism because they are directed at different stereotypical women. Women who are "good" fall into conventional gender roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers. "Bad" women who defy this conventional role—career women and feminists— are seen as potentially usurping male power and are victims of hostile sexism (Glick & Fiske, 2001, p. 113).

This is not the only depiction of "bad women" in our society. Women are also demonized as seductive psychopaths and cold-hearted villainesses. One can see such stereotypes in contemporary films such as *The Last Seduction, Body Heat, Black Widow.* The mythic image of Medusa is in this category as well.

There are a variety of social and psychological contributors to the antagonism toward those engaged in nonconventional gender roles. One theme, however, that I am developing is the early and ongoing belief on the part of both sexes that blissful happiness for women can be achieved beginning with the opportunities for merger that babies provide. "Bad women" are thwarting "natural" experiences. Such a strong cultural influence is difficult to resist, especially for females.

Societal constraints appear to have a more negative effect on girls than on boys (Egan & Perry, 2001). Girls are less able to tolerate behavior that is inconsistent with their gender role (i.e., gender conformity is consistent with communal behaviors such as "intimate exchange, cooperation, and efforts to maintain social harmony," p. 453). Such pressures are felt by the fourth grade of girls' school life and negatively affects their adjustment (Egan & Perry, 2001). The opportunity to explore more agentic forms of behavior (dominance, daring, competitiveness, see Macoby, 1998), while available to girls, may make them feel that they are being inconsistent with their gender, and when there is pressure from parents and or peers they are made anxious.

Coupled with this finding, shyness is far more accepted in little girls than in boys. Parents are more likely to reward shyness in their daughters. In addition mothers "are more affectionate and tender to their shy daughters" (Coplan et al., 2001, pp. 465-66) and shy daughters have, in general, more

positive interactions with their parents. Thus, more reticent behaviors, as well as engaging only in communal activities, can potentially foster gender conformity and inhibit females from engaging or striving for more agentic activities that offer societal prestige and lead to a sense of effectance.

Shyness must also be differentiated from wishes for solitude and aloneness. Such needs are somewhat contradictory with an emphasis on communal aspects. The belief in women's yearning for merger, the stereotyped emphasis on her communality, can tilt the interpretation of her insistence on solitary time and activity as reflecting a woman's pathology (Burke, 1997). Maintaining that women are less differentiated and more communally oriented than men also underscores the potential to pathologize women's desire for solitude.

Since women are typically rewarded when they are "good," many of the above features that I have described—their increased difficulty in resisting gender conformity, their tendency to maintain more communal roles rather than agentic forms of behavior—reinforce conventionality. When woman engage in more customary femininity it is also protective. It thwarts potential attacks of hostile sexism, thereby strengthening their more stereotyped orientation.

Women, too, can underscore their unique position with the idea that

only women are capable of producing children and forming intense, fused bonds with their offspring. The dyad can then extrude or erect barriers against male inclusion, providing women with familial power that they do not have in the larger society. There is some support for this notion. When men have indicated their wish to be more involved with their children, "between 60% and 80% of women do not want their husbands to be more involved than they currently are" (Lamb, 1987, p. 20). Lamb suggests as well that greater paternal involvement may threaten the power relationships within the family.

SUMMARY

In this paper I am challenging the concept of the infant's early experience of a symbiotic stage. I substitute for it the longterm developmental need for an interdependent, intersubjective, or relational perspective. I offer empirical data to oppose the entrenched psychoanalytic notion of an early symbiotic phase. I provide some cultural, social-historical information that might have contributed support for the concept of symbiosis, especially when psychoanalysis was in its initial stage of theory formation. I discuss some of the problems for our theory that result from an adherence to a concept such as symbiosis. I also address the social-psychological limitations that arise from a continued focus on the exclusive domain of women's nurturing and communal qualities that follow from a use of the concept of symbiosis.

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Notes

[1] This point of view raises the challenging question about the concept of regression, which I am not discussing in this paper. However, for a rigorous disputation of this concept see Inderbitzin and Levy (2000).

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Doris K. Silverman. PhD, is adjunct clinical professor in the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy, engaged in teaching and supervision. She is a training analyst, fellow, teacher, and supervisor at the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research (IPTAR), as well as a training analyst of the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA). She is on the editorial boards of *Psychoanalytic Psychology, Psychoanalytic Dialogues,* and *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis.* She has written about infant research and its implications for psychoanalytic theories. She is interested in multitheoretical perspectives and has written about ways to think about the integration of theories. More recently she has been writing about affect regulation and attachment and its implications for clinical work, as well as its relevance for a theory of female development.