

Pregnancy Envy and the Politics of Compensatory Masculinities

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Dominant psychoanalytic paradigms locate the breast or penis/phallus as the touchstone for gender/sex/sexual development. This essay offers a critique of these accounts and an alternative theory of sexed forms of being: pregnancy envy and the kinship rules that result from this. The essay also provides an intellectual history of how previous efforts to theorize pregnancy envy, especially work by Ida Macalpine, were suppressed.

Why do we call the encounters with sex difference, which everyone acknowledges occur before “castration anxiety,” the “*pre-Oedipal*” stage? Even granting that there is a child–parent competition for the opposite sexed parent’s affection (a claim rejected by object relations theories, in which boys and girls both resent the father), how do we make sense of a developmental model in which the first stage (pre-Oedipal) is named as a function of what happens next? Ruth Brunswick, who consulted with Sigmund Freud on the subject, writes that Freud personally coined the term “pre-Oedipal” in 1931 (Brunswick 1940, 293). Having authored the “Oedipal complex,” Freud himself is committed to characterizing prior developments as pre-Oedipal. Does this make sense? Should this convention be upheld? Given that conventional understandings of the Oedipal complex underlie culturally specific understandings of masculinity, these conventions ultimately have political consequences.

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Why do not the experiences and questions about sex difference between 18 months and two years—the “pregnancy complex” (Freud [1909a] 1955, 10: 83)¹—give rise instead to a “post-pregnancy complex”? Why are all popular theories of childhood sexual development, including those of feminist object relations theorists, expressed with respect to the power of the father? Why was Jacques Lacan one of the few scholars who listened to “Mrs. Macalpine,” even as he attempted to undermine her views?

Despite their authors’ best intentions, most feminist and queer psychoanalytic theory actually reinvigorates the patriarchal Oedipal family romance and its imbricated structures of male dominance. Texts written by and with reference to authors as different as Nancy Chodorow and Judith Butler remain captive to Freud’s misleading master narrative of the penis. In the case of feminist object relations theory, the putatively asexual pre-Oedipal stage never overcomes its implied teleology: As *pre-Oedipal*, these children are ready-made actors for the ensuing Oedipal drama of penis-centric desire (Benjamin 1988; Chodorow 1978, 1989; Dinnerstein 1976).² And for traditional and feminist Lacanians, the opaque but tasteful signifier of the literary phallus³ elides a signified referent, the result being the most grandiose absent presence one cannot

1. This essay will be referred to as “Little Hans.”

2. Chodorow and Benjamin both have offered subsequent, more nuanced analyses of gender development. In later writings, Chodorow criticizes some of the conventional Freudian premises of drive theory on which *Mothering* relies (1994), and Benjamin more thoroughly explores the meanings of an omnipotent mother (1995). I focus on Chodorow’s *Mothering* (1978) because it is a classic in feminist object relations theory and because her subsequent work (1994) does not offer these critiques of this book or provide an alternative trajectory for its findings (see esp. pp. 33–69). Benjamin’s very thoughtful essay on maternal omnipotence (1995, 81–114) does not distinguish birth from other maternal caregiving activities, in part because she wants to highlight maternal subjectivity and not simply see the mother as a narcissistic reflection of male fantasies (1995, 111–12). Since Benjamin reiterates her older schema for understanding the dynamics of recognition (1995, 106), it seems sensible to consider that 1988 narrative here as well.

3. In some places, Lacan states that the phallus is *not* the “organ, penis or clitoris that it symbolizes” and identifies the phallus with the law of the father, which is the authoritative voice on and in language (Lacan 1977d, 285, 288–89). He then, however, explains that “this signifier [the phallus/penis] is chosen because it is the most tangible element in the real of sexual copulation. . . . It might also be said that, by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation” (p. 287, and see pp. 289, 290, 319). While feminists such as Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose applaud Lacan’s ridicule of any literal interpretations of Freud on the penis (Mitchell 1985; Rose 1985), they overlook Freud’s and Lacan’s many accounts of masculinity that center the penis in particular, not the law of the father, as a pivot and “turgid” focal point, as though the world revolves around this thing and not some other. This is necessary for Freud and Lacan if their theories are to offer noncircular explanations of masculine authority, discussed below, 270–72. Acknowledging the real cannot be known; Lacan nonetheless locates kinship rules there. For related feminist and queer engagements with the penis/phallus, see, e.g., Bernheimer (1992); Butler (1990b, 1993); De Lauretis (1994); and Flax (1990, 92, 104–5; 1993).

imagine, as the thing remains quietly there, as plain and unnoticed as the nose on one's face. The breast of object relations theory and the absent penis of feminist and queer theory overwhelm the scholarly landscape on sex development and performativity, distracting writers from the psychodynamics of birth at the foundation of kinship structures that produce our sexed subjectivities.⁴

The problem with the prevailing feminist psychoanalytic literatures is not that feminists unconsciously rely on an anatomically sexed body.⁵ The problem is that their textual bodies are decoys, the accentuated breast or penis/phallus distracting from the psychoanatomy of the uterus. The plastic human—who in object relations theory has a breast that can be turned into a bottle and paternal care, and in feminist Lacanian theory a floating phallus/penis—is a poor metonymic mannequin for understanding present political kinship structures and for inspiring their supersession. Those who draw on D. W. Winnicott and Jacques Lacan do not realize that these texts are the unacknowledged supplements to the foundational matrices produced by womb-centric psychoanalytic writers in the 1920s through 1950s, especially Lacan's nemeses Dr. Ida Macalpine and her son Richard Hunter. These matricentric writings on pregnancy envy describe young boys who see the penis as pointing to their inability to give birth, so that this organ is valued in a compensatory and anxious fashion. Acknowledging the desire for a baby among small boys sheds light on the *compensatory* character of the father and his law, both of which are overblown by feminist and other Lacanian investigations, to wit, the conventional capitalization of Father and Law—a typographical honor bestowed because the father without upper-case garlands raises questions about the source of his enormous power that leave the father's defenders and critics alike confused and nervous. The matricentric psychoanalytic literature invites a neofoundational approach to sex development that emanates from the vast literature on pregnancy envy. Too long ignored, this literature offers us an alterna-

4. In an effort to resist the misleading dichotomization of anatomy and performativity the sex/gender difference implies, I use "sex" and "sexuality" to refer to forms of being designated through kinship roles and eschew the use of "gender" in my own characterizations of psychological development. "Gender" is used only when quoting or paraphrasing those who use the word in the aforementioned manner, as a tacit alternative to the real biological difference they see in "sex". See Butler (1993, introduction) and especially Joan Scott's retreat from the title of her book *Gender and the Politics of History* (1999).

5. For this critique, see Butler (1993, introduction); Fuss (1989, 8); Gallup (1981); Silverman (1992a).

tive way to theorize the sex/gender/sexuality system, one not embedded in the Oedipal complex.⁶

BIRTH AND IDENTITY

Pregnancy envy has profound political consequences, the most significant being the creation of kinship rules, meaning the law of the father, as the universal function of kinship rules is to put men into relationships with children. Hence, fatherhood follows from men's legal relation to the mother, not men's possible genetic ties to progeny. This continues to be the general law even in societies that have paternity tests, including the United States, such that law enables a compensatory reproductive power denied by men's inability to give birth (Stevens 1999, 2005). Although each of us is born from a woman, half of us are told that we are boys, and hence we will not be able to reproduce this feat. As adults, men sublimate the trauma of their childhood realization of this difference through kinship rituals and laws. Understanding that the inability to give birth is a psychic hurdle for boys alone⁷ allows us to address the question of why and how it is that intergenerational groups—of family, nationality, ethnicity, and race—are so important to the constitution of one's form of being, as well as to the constitution of sex roles. The psychic investments in constituting these affiliations as essential and natural (from the Latin *nasci*, meaning birth) are the answer to the question, "What can those without wombs do to compensate for our inability to give birth?" Kinship rules establish membership in these intergenerational groups. Insofar as kinship rules figure men, specifically fathers, as

6. This objective differs from the allusions to feminized empowerment wrought by maternity in the writings of Kristeva (1986) and Irigaray (1991). Their works eschew pursuing a detailed phenomenology of sex development, which they dismiss as unsophisticated essentialist attempts at drive theory or object relations theory. Kristeva and Irigaray aim to mythify the body differently than did Freud and Lacan. Striving to demonstrate that Freudian explanations are instrumental conveniences of masculinist hegemony, the French feminist psychoanalytic literature, akin to many efforts at writing from the margins, may, however, self-consume their main point. Readers inhabiting the hegemonic and materialized texts of the Oedipus complex may experience Irigaray and Kristeva as offering just-a-narrative and those working with original Freudian metonymies as telling the truth. This is not what Irigaray and Kristeva intend, of course. My own goal in offering a critique of object relations theory and Lacanian theory while describing pregnancy envy's alternative phenomenology is to make visible the moving pieces of competing approaches to sex development, a literal-mindedness that may be incorrectly confused with anatomical essentialism. For insights on how foundations are made and not found, see Seery (1999).

7. Of course, many women cannot or do not give birth, but girls as a class are not told they will never give birth. Boys as a class are told that instead of being able to give birth, they have a penis.

dominant—even in matrilineal societies, and even in so-called liberal states providing apparent juridical equality between husbands and wives—these practices invite examination of the particular investments in controlling birth that men seem to have.⁸ Commenting on one such compensatory practice, the *couvade* (where husbands pretend they have given birth), Bruno Bettelheim writes: “Such an apeing of superficials only emphasizes the more how much the real, essential powers are envied. Women, emotionally satisfied by having given birth and secure in their ability to produce life, can agree to the *couvade*; men need it to fill the emotional vacuum created by their inability to bear children” (Bettelheim 1962, 111).

Bettelheim’s metastudies of work by B. Spencer and F. J. Gillen (1899), Theodore Reik (1931), M. F. Montagu (1946), Bronislaw Malinowski (1948), Margaret Mead (1949), and many others documenting pregnancy envy in preliterate societies still resonate, as women still accede to marriage rules that create and ritualize the law of the father, giving husbands prerogatives by law that biology denies them (Herdt 1981; Lévi-Strauss 1969; Rubin 1975). The power of life and death mothers have through biology was appropriated by men, creating a class of “husbands” who for much of recorded history had the power to kill or enslave their wives’ children.⁹ Bettelheim would explain that these laws of *ressentiment* occur because of men’s reflexive efforts to compensate for the ontological superiority of mothers over fathers, the premise being that giving birth is in itself more powerful than anything fathers can do.

Of course, giving birth is just one contribution to childhood development. Adults may contribute to the sustenance of young dependents in many other crucial ways. When infant and even toddler boys, however, first encounter information about their lack, they cannot easily grasp alternative avenues for acquiring power similar to that which, they realize, resulted in their own birth. This leaves boys frustrated. Rather than pregnancy envy resulting from an inherent superiority of female reproductive organs over those of males, as Bettelheim suggests, it seems that the sexed compensatory dynamics of kinship laws stem from boys’ fantasies of maternal omnipotence. Boys’ overinvestments in these *fantasies* of ma-

8. Benjamin points out that those men who especially “idealize motherhood are those who most loudly defend the virtues of the paternal familial order” (1995, 107).

9. “A father shall have the right of life and death over his son born in lawful marriage” in Table Four, Law One, from the Roman “Twelve Tables” (c. 450 B.C.), translated and quoted by Samuel Scott, *The Civil Law* (17 volumes), 1932 (copyright expired). Online at <http://www.constitution.org/sps/sps01.htm> (April 17, 2005).

ternal omnipotence and the failure to address these fantasies by a socially recognized naming of them appear to underlie widespread, cross-cultural compensatory laws and rituals of masculinity.

COMPENSATORY MASCULINITIES: A CRITICAL HISTORY

This section argues that the male subject is distinguished from the female subject by a set of attitudes and behaviors compensatory to “his” inability to give birth. This argument is developed through a schematic critical history of well-known observations about sexuality, sex, and gender in psychoanalytic theory. Sex is understood to mean different subject positions located in relation to the mother, as she and other kinship roles are interpellated through legal, behavioral, and linguistic practices and institutions. This is a formal observation about the structures of sexed dichotomies in contrast to other dichotomized or pluralized forms of being: We do not need anatomy per se, but we do need some clear criteria to distinguish sexed subjectivities from other ones, so that a habit of dress or manner of speech is recognizably butch or femme (sexed) and not northern and southern Californian (regional), for instance. That these sexed dichotomies are structured in relationship to the biological event of pregnancy *does not imply that those born with uteruses must behave one way and those born without uteruses must behave another way*, nor does it speak to the content of sexed behaviors or, say, butch or femme subject positions. In psychic terms, we might say that kinship rules comprise a power grid built by anxious males to organize the distribution of erotic energies.¹⁰ What follows is a sketch of some dominant paradigms of sex development, with critiques from the vantage point of pregnancy envy theory.¹¹

Freud

In his essay, “Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes,” Freud offers two explanations for why both boys and girls come to value the penis (Freud [1925] 1955).¹² First, “the penis

10. The various enactments of sex difference, e.g., Butler’s “gender trouble” (1990a) or Judith Halberstam’s “female masculinities” (1998) only require an erotically charged site of phenomenological sex roles. Sexed and sexualized forms of being, or more phenomenologically temporary performances, are built—often metonymically and in delightfully varied and subtle permutations—on the foundation of kinship systems.

11. For a clear summary of differences between drive theory and object relations theory, see Chodorow (1986).

12. Citations to Freud in the text refer to the date of first publication. Quotations are all from the *Standard Edition* (Freud 1955), except for the Freud texts from which Macalpine and Hunter quote.

... owes its extraordinarily high narcissistic cathexis to its organic significance for the propagation of the species" (Freud [1925] 1955, 21: 256). This is thought to occur at the level of the unconscious. Sperm's importance is tacitly, universally known, according to Freud. Second, Freud thinks girls value the penis because it is bigger than their genitalia. Girls "notice the penis of a brother or playmate, strikingly visible and of larger proportions, at once recognize it as the superior counterpart of their own small and inconspicuous organ, and from that time forward fall a victim to envy for the penis" (ibid., 21: 252). Freud extrapolates from this to conclude that boys also value their penises for reasons of size, apparently as a narcissistic attachment to the view of themselves held by girls (ibid.).

The penis also points to the father, with his "superior organ" that triggers sexual development and identity (ibid.). In addition to the supremacy of the penis in itself, the father's—penis possessor's—role as the family's protector imbues the penis with its sacred character. In explaining the "oceanic feeling" underlying religious experiences, Freud writes, "I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection. . . . The origin of the religious attitude can be traced back in clear outlines as far as the feeling of infantile helplessness (Freud [1930] 1955, 21: 72). The possibility of an omnipotent protector being female is categorically ruled out: "The common man cannot imagine this Providence otherwise than in the figure of an enormously exalted father" (ibid., 21: 74).¹³ So far we have two factors explaining the power of the penis and its symbols: first, the potency of the penis itself (because it reproduces the species and is big); and second, the authority of the father over the family. These are the *preconditions* for the boy's Oedipal complex, according to Freud, and there is a sense of sex identity that occurs at ages two to three. Yet not until the "girl gives up her wish for a penis and puts in place of it a wish for a child: *and with this purpose in view* . . . takes her father as a love-object" do we see the sexed drives Freud locates in the Elektra complex (Freud [1925] 1955, 19: 256, emphasis in original).

The boy's entrance into the Oedipus complex, Freud writes, also occurs between the ages of three and six, when the "little boy" expresses his sexual desire for his mother (Freud [1915–1917] 1955, 16: 329, 333). In contrast with the earlier "object love" of her as caretaker, found in boys and

13. Freud's conviction on this point seems odd, in light of his earlier acknowledgment of the "great mother-goddesses, who may perhaps in general have preceded the father-gods" ([1913] 1955, 13: 149). Bettelheim discusses this (1962, 42, 45, 61, and esp. 158).

girls, boys at the Oedipal stage compete with their fathers for the sexual love of the mother. Freud emphasizes the sexual as opposed to diffuse egoistical regard for the mother, arguing that if the attraction were the former, the boy would attempt to engage the father in a similar fashion, “since it would be merely foolish if he did not tolerate two people in his service rather than only one of them” (ibid.). Freud dates the Oedipal stage considerably later than Melanie Klein (1985), who says it begins when the child is one year old, and than Lacan (1977b), who believes that it occurs at 18 months. Freud says that castration anxiety at this stage is a result of the boy’s projected fear of the father’s eliminating the boy as a competitor for the mother’s affections by castrating the boy. Hence, the penis is valued as instrumental to the possession of a mother-surrogate, what the boy accomplishes when he grows up and has a woman of his own.

This account raises more questions than it answers. If the penis’s exalted function in reproduction (not its size) makes its way into our unconscious, then why not also the woman’s eggs and uterus? And what is so intrinsically desirable about having an external organ that can become erect at inappropriate moments, that may not be erect and lead to other embarrassing moments, and that is extremely vulnerable to injury?¹⁴ These equally empirical features of the penis are as biologically determined as the relative size of genitalia, but Freud omits their mention. His hypotheses, however, are quite valuable. They signal awareness that if “castration anxiety” is to have meaning, then one must explain the importance of the penis. Why would the boy care more about losing his penis than, say, his right arm, especially when Freud elsewhere ([1905] 1955) states that children do not grasp the role of penises in reproduction? Asking this question rather explicitly is a different tack than that pursued by Lacan and others, including feminists, who deny any determinate relation between anatomy and sex. These more ambiguous writers end up with the tautology Freud tried to escape: Boys fear losing the phallus (a symbolic entry to the gift economy and law of the father) because without it they will have no phallus.

Feminist Object Relations Theory

Perhaps one of the most important early feminist challenges to Freud’s Oedipal complex is Philip Slater’s “Hera complex,” a masculinity defen-

14. These observations lead psychologist Carla Golden to refer to “penis pity” as a logical fantasy supplement to “penis envy” (in a lecture, Smith College, 1983).

sively reacting to narcissistic, punishing mothers. Slater's avowedly causal (but ultimately circular) explanation of men's self-aggrandizing behaviors in ancient Greece and the contemporary West is that deprived of the company of her husband, the mother treats her son as a surrogate husband—making demands of him that she would like to make of her husband, and punishing him the way she would like to punish her husband. In response to this behavior, boys grow up fearing and consequently disdaining women.¹⁵ Institutionalized misogyny is born of boys seeing themselves as weak, according to Slater. This results in overbearing husbands and leads to resentful mothering practices that reinvigorate boys' anxiety about women. These sons, as the next generation's husbands, have no interest in spending time with their wives and families, and so the pattern continues.

As opposed to D. W. Winnicott's classic object relations theory (Winnicott 1953) locating the breast as the primary site of children's fantasies, Slater reintroduces the notion, appearing in Freud's earlier work, that the *uterus* is the central source of boys' preoccupation with maternal power and sex differences. Pointing to metaphors of the womb as a source of death (a tomb) (Slater 1968, 78) and an agent that may swallow a child (pp. 51, 64, 89), Slater argues that boys develop their sexual identities in reaction to anxieties about being destroyed or consumed by their mothers.¹⁶ Boys react to these fears by attempting to separate themselves from their mothers, as well as from any remnants of femininity in their own identity (rooted in an initial experience of identification with the mother). This results in a "sexuality . . . fundamentally concerned with the dissolution and rearrangement of boundaries" (p. 102). In this regard, Slater quotes Jane Harrison: "Manhood, among primitive peoples, seems to be envisaged as ceasing to be a woman'" (1968, 102, quoting Harrison 1962, 506–7). The male's devaluation of his mother and, by extension, women results in a sex-segregated society that reproduces these child-rearing pathologies (Slater 1968, 416, citing Whiting 1965, 123–37).

In *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), Nancy Chodorow, a student of Slater, offers a story that appears vaguely similar to his in its broad

15. Slater focuses on ancient Greece, but he makes a point of arguing for the broader relevance of his observations.

16. Slater does not speak to the quite reasonable proposition that girls might have similar fantasies and that this might affect their psychic development as well. Instead, he states that mothers actually treat(ed) their sons badly, and says this explains why men hate(d) women. He thereby accords the status of observed events to what may be infant fantasies.

outline, but is fundamentally at odds with it (1978).¹⁷ Both argue that boys react to their dependence on, and subsequent separation from, their mothers by becoming vigilant about establishing and maintaining personal boundaries. Slater argues that boys' difference from their mothers prompts feelings of otherness and, hence, heightened separation, whereas Chodorow, following Freud, believes that this sexual difference, in reproducing the adult heterosexual dyad, makes the mother/son relation "more intense" (Chodorow 1978, 130).

For Slater, the sexual difference between the mother and the son reminds the mother of her absent husband—whom she resents. For Chodorow, the sexual difference between the mother and the son reminds the mother (and the son) of adult sexual intimacy that must be repressed. The two versions, however, both claim to challenge the centrality of the penis as dispositive of one's sense of self, either positively or defensively.

Chodorow appears eager to recast the Oedipal story from one about the penis per se to one in which gender identity evolves through changing relations between the infant and parents. Specifically, awareness of a sexual relation between males and females, not the valuation of the penis in itself, determines the mother/son relation. Chodorow reverses Freud's version of the causal relation between the penis and the sexual tension in the family. Freud states that the penis causes anxieties about sex. Chodorow maintains that boys' anxiety about gender—rooted in their mothers' anxieties—is responsible for boys' ideas about the penis (Chodorow 1978, 98, 193, 108, and passim). She goes to some lengths to emphasize that a girl's attraction to her father may occur because his separateness from her represents the possibility of freedom from her mother and is not necessarily caused by drives rooted in sexual difference (1978, 121). Chodorow suggests that there is nothing special about the penis, other than the fact that it belongs to the person in the family who is not around very much, but she later states that paternal absence is nonetheless destined by anatomy, as it is the "genitally toned relationship" that "draws the son into triangular conflicts" (1978, 110; see also 1989, 49).

Genital difference is at the heart of the mother/son relationship. Chodorow herself seems to recognize a problem in this:

17. Laura Green suggests that in *Mothering*, Chodorow's account of boys' gender development sticks much more closely to the traditional Freudian one than does her description of girls' gender identity (personal communication, 1990).

I must admit to fudging here about the contributory effect in all of this of a mother's sexual orientation—whether she is heterosexual or lesbian. Given a female gender identity, she is “the same as” her daughter and “different from” her son, but part of what I am talking about also presumes a different kind of cathexis of daughter and son *deriving from heterosexuality*. (1978, 110, emphasis added)

Chodorow repeats this analysis as well later (1989, 53, 71, 73). If the effects of gender are informed by sexual orientation, indeed, if gender itself occurs in the crucible of an innate sexual orientation (not the ideology of a “society like ours”) (1978, 108), then this “fudging” warrants far more than a footnote's worth of acknowledgment. At bottom, Chodorow's story about gender (1978, 1989), at least for boys, is largely the same as Freud's, since Chodorow believes that the ultimate causal forces in determining the gendered nature of the experience of the mother are heterosexual drives rooted in anatomical difference.¹⁸

Ida Macalpine

“Mrs. Macalpine” (a British M.D.) appears prominently in Lacan's “On a Question Preliminary to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis” (Lacan 1977c). His article is a rebuttal to Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter's critique of Freud's reading of Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoir of My Nervous Illness* (Macalpine and Hunter 1955, 2).¹⁹ In his “Psychoanalytic Notes upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)” (Freud [1911] 1955), Freud first works out his theory of psychoses. Drawing on the memoir of a mental patient, Freud forcefully

18. In explaining why sexuality is a function of socialization, not biology, Chodorow refers to the socializing functions of incest taboos. Contrary to the antibiologism she propounds elsewhere, she claims here that the incest taboo is rooted in *innate drives* to develop new families (1978, 132). Even Freud understood that the principal lesson taught by the Oedipal drama was the social character of the incest taboo and the absence of any innate aversion to sex within a gens: The “findings of psycho-analysis make the hypothesis of an innate aversion to incestuous intercourse totally untenable” (Freud [1913] 1955, 13: 123). In accounting for why the taboo exists, Freud rules out biological explanations and concludes, “We are ignorant of the cause of the horror of incest and cannot tell in what direction to look for it” (*ibid.*, 125). See also Lévi-Strauss (1969). For more on Freud himself questioning heterosexuality's innateness, see Flax (1990, 57, n. 22).

19. Although many others (see n. 23) have figured the Oedipal complex as a compensatory psychic struggle for masculinity, I focus on the Macalpine and Hunter texts because of their historiography of the Schreber case and their own sociology of knowledge on its reception. In their introductory and concluding essays to this text (Schreber [1903] 1955), and in a separate work in which they introduce their translation of the Austrian archive's manuscript (Macalpine and Hunter 1956) on which Freud based his “A Seventeenth Century Demonological Neurosis” (Freud [1923] 1955), they sustain a critique of a key Freudian text, a contribution that still has not been satisfactorily addressed as a legitimate minority perspective in the feminist psychoanalytic literature.

argues that repressed homosexual desire is at the root of Schreber's and many other patients' disturbances. Schreber was the perfect Freudian case study. A well-educated German official who held the position of president of the Court of Appeals in Dresden in the late nineteenth century, Schreber documented his erudite fantasies in great detail. He was clearly psychotic, and had been institutionalized on three occasions for a total of at least nine years. He was also an articulate observer of his symptoms, often expressing what he referred to as his "nervous illness" in mythical dimensions, as he described various agents of God attempting to impregnate him for the purpose of reproducing future generations of Schrebers, and indeed, the human race. In doing so, he often drew on the same ancient myths and literary classics that Freud used.

Freud believed that Schreber's anxiety over his homosexual desires resulted in castration anxiety of such magnitude that it precipitated a radical withdrawal from reality. According to British psychiatrists Macalpine and Hunter, who translated and republished Schreber's *Memoirs* in English in 1955:

[B]y psychoanalysts, Freud's thesis was immediately and generally accepted as forming the basis of 'paranoia'. Thenceforth paranoid symptom formation was considered as explained by conflict over unconscious homosexuality. (Macalpine and Hunter 1955, 10)

They then quote several psychoanalysts who root modern ideas about psychosis in Freud's discussion of the Schreber case (Macalpine and Hunter 1955, 10–11). I reproduce the Macalpine and Hunter text rather extensively to document just how much of this cogent, radical critique of Freud's Oedipal complex was again ignored or forgotten, an intellectual historical phenomenon significant in itself. That an argument that appeared in a widely read, well-respected journal of psychoanalytic theory, as well as in an important book of Freud studies, has been almost entirely excluded from the field of psychoanalytic inquiry suggests repression of no small dimensions.

Aware that only a handful of psychoanalysts had actually read Schreber's *Memoirs*, Macalpine and Hunter were troubled that Freud's rendition of Schreber's symptoms had such widespread acceptance. The *Memoirs* were published in 1903 and were largely out of circulation by the time Freud's essay appeared, as most remaining copies had been bought by Schreber's family upon his death in 1910 (Macalpine and Hunter 1955, 2). In addition, the English translations of many passages used in Freud's essay appear in "such a manner that not only is their

meaning lost, but sometimes actually reversed'” (Macalpine and Hunter 1955, 369, quoting Niederland 1951, 579). In 1953, Macalpine and Hunter published an article in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, and thereby launched the first full-scale attack on Freud's reading of the *Memoirs*. So that readers could evaluate Freud's interpretations of Schreber's *Memoirs* for themselves, two years later Macalpine and Hunter published the *Memoirs*, which they translated into English, edited, and introduced. The Schreber volume was not republished in German until 1973 (Schreber [1903] 1973). Macalpine and Hunter's remains the standard English translation of the *Memoirs*, having been reissued in 1988 with a contentious introduction by Samuel M. Weber (Weber 1988). This edition is now also out of print. The most recent publication of the *Memoirs* uses the Macalpine and Hunter translation but omits their framing essays (Schreber [1903] 2000).

The following passages are Macalpine and Hunter's selections and paraphrases from Freud explaining that Schreber's psychosis grew out of his desire for and fear of being penetrated by his psychiatrist, Dr. Flechsig:²⁰

'[Schreber had] a feminine (that is, passive homosexual) wish-fantasy, which took as its object the figure of his physician . . . (F.431). The feminine fantasy, which aroused such violent opposition in the patient, thus had its root in a longing, intensified to an erotic pitch, for his father and brother (F.435). Thus in the case of Schreber we find ourselves once again upon the familiar ground of the father-complex (F.440). . . . The person he longed for now became his persecutor, and the content of his wish-fantasy became the content of his persecution' (F.431–2), because it implied degradation and castration: hence 'it was impossible for Schreber to become reconciled to playing the part of a female prostitute towards his physician (F.432). He took up a feminine attitude towards God; he felt that he was God's wife' (F.413). . . . 'A new race of men, born from the spirit of Schreber', would, so he thought, revere as their ancestor this man who believed himself the victim of persecution (Macalpine and Hunter 1955, 372–73, quoting Freud ([1911] 1955), quoting Schreber [1903]).

In sum, Freud believed that Schreber's psychoses was due to unresolved anxieties precipitated by homosexual fantasies in which he was God's wife, although Schreber also claims at times to be God's whore.

20. For purposes of clarity in this passage, only Freud's statements are in italics with sentences identified by F numbers, Schreber's in bold, and Macalpine and Hunter's in regular typeface.

Macalpine and Hunter take issue with Freud's analysis, suggesting that his preoccupation with inserting Schreber into paradigms of the Oedipal complex—such as Schreber's "father complex" or "castration anxiety"—precluded Freud from seeing the true source of Schreber's homosexual fantasies: *procreation fantasies*. Macalpine and Hunter write: "When Freud assumed the sun to be a father symbol and God equivalent to an earthly father, he failed to see that Schreber was preoccupied with the origin and giving of life" (Macalpine and Hunter 1955, 377). They argue that Schreber's fantasies about being impregnated by his physician, Flechsig, were *instrumental* to his fantasy of being able to give birth. Schreber believed that to be able to give birth he would have to be penetrated by a man. His procreation fantasies underlay his homosexual fantasies, and not vice versa (Macalpine and Hunter 1955, 382). Freud's emphasis on the sex act allows him to fix the penis as the linchpin in pathological and, therefore, normal constructions of masculinity. A reading that grasps the significance of Schreber's anxiety about pregnancy would privilege the capacity to give birth and not overestimate the contribution of the Oedipal complex to his psychic longings and anxieties.

In offering this pointed, political criticism of Freud and Freud studies, Macalpine and Hunter realize that theirs is a counternarrative:

It is surprising that so little interest has been shown in pregnancy fantasies as Freud held that the child assumes first that everybody is like itself, and that when it discovers this is not so, it wishes to have what it has not got. Thus the girl's penis envy fills psychoanalytic literature to overflow, while the boy's envy of child-bearing receives almost no attention. (1955, 381)

Making up for the systematic avoidance of the topic, Macalpine and Hunter offer their readers a section titled "Literature on Pregnancy Fantasies":

Glover (1946) notes, ". . . although less attention is paid to the fact, it is undeniable that the boy's unconscious disappointment at being unable to emulate his mother's feat of baby-production is as deep as the corresponding jealousy of the girl that she does not possess male organs. . . ." Jones (1942) finds "mutual envy between the sexes is common in early childhood. . . . [T]he male one, envy of the female capacity to give birth to children, is less recognized than its counterpart" (1955, 351–82).²¹

21. The authors also quote from Freud ([1908] 1955, 9; [1909a] 1955, 10; [1923] 1955, 19). Macalpine and Hunter's passing comment about the "confusion between neurosis and psychosis" refers to their belief that pregnancy fantasies are not only the cause of psychoses but the root of garden variety neuroses as well.

In the passages Macalpine and Hunter quote, procreation is described as so central to children's understandings about who people are and what they do that very young children cannot imagine someone unable to give birth, and hence develop accounts in which boys also grow up into mothers. Their argument is as compelling for what it says about Freud's mistakes as it is for the virtual vacuum into which their criticisms disappeared.²² They maintain, on the authority of an array of reputable psychoanalytic theorists, that Freud had stated just about everything important about Schreber's psychoses backwards. Yet in today's psychoanalytic literature, Freud's Oedipal foundations and the Lacanian readings that stand on them seem not only unscathed but almost eerily untouched.

What happens when boys learn they cannot give birth? Should we assume, with Freud, that they simply forget about earlier fantasies, their identification with their mother assuming the relation to subsequent development that Freud claimed the matrilineal Mynoean-Mycenean civilization bore to Athenian civilization—that is, no relation at all (Freud [1931] 1955, 21: 226)?²³ Macalpine and Hunter offer an alternative hypothesis. As opposed to Freud and his followers, who argue that boys first develop their sex identity on the basis of their fantasies about the penis, Macalpine and Hunter suggest that boys' valorization of the penis is one of compensation. Arguing in opposition to the traditional Freudian formula, whereby babies are understood as substitutes for penises, Macalpine and Hunter challenge the directionality of these equivalences: The penis is understood as a substitute for being able to have babies (Schreber [1903] 1955, 383; and see Brunswick 1940 and Rogin 1989). Thus, fantasies about reproduction, and not sexual desire, initially form the core of sex identity for boys.

One last point needs to be drawn from Macalpine and Hunter's piece, one that is crucial for beginning to understand the precise mechanism by which their argument has been displaced from the psychoanalytic canon. According to Macalpine and Hunter, a major defect in Freud's

22. Exceptions to this general trend are Kittay (1983, 1995) and Sprengnether (1990). Although Ettinger specifically challenges the centrality of the "Phallus" as opposed to the "Matrix" (her motive for capitalization is unclear), she devotes just two sentences to pregnancy envy (1992, 203). For important earlier studies of pregnancy envy and compensatory masculinities not cited elsewhere, see Boehm (1930); Eisler (1921); Evans (1951); Jacobson (1950); Lample de Groot (1946); Reik (1931); Van Der Leeuw (1958); and Van Leeuwen (1966).

23. Freud states that the early relation of girls to their mothers undergoes a thorough rupture during the Oedipal stage, as did ancient Greece, supposedly, in exhibiting no continuities with more archaic civilizations. The break, Freud says here, is even more intense for boys. Abel's (1989) reading of Freud also discusses this.

analysis of Schreber was that Freud overlooked Schreber's hypochondriacal experiences, concentrating instead on his written accounts:

Lack of understanding and confusion appear to hinge around neglect of hypochondriacal symptoms, their mechanism and diagnostic significance, in favour of the more dramatic, more easily understood, and perhaps less disturbing psychic symptoms [Macalpine 1954]. It is noteworthy that all cases of pregnancy fantasies quoted in the literature had *somatic symptoms predominantly*; however, they are not accorded any significance and are therefore scattered at random through the case histories. (Macalpine and Hunter 1955, 385, emphasis added)

Freud selectively ignores information about the body's textualization in the same ways as do the ancient Greek mythologies of which Freudian psychoanalysis was wrought. A patrilineal society needs Athena to be born from Zeus's head, and not boys from their mothers, precisely because birth is so important.²⁴

Bettelheim's *Symbolic Wounds: Puberty Rites and the Envious Male* (1962) lists dozens, if not hundreds, of pregnancy-envy rituals across time and place. A sample includes teenage boys in Chicago private schools whose blood initiation rites are timed to correspond with their girlfriends' menstruation cycles (p. 28); fathers in Africa feeding their blood to children as a means of supposedly giving them life (p. 118); African men killing some boys in initiation rites to "convince the women that all have been killed and that men have brought some of them back to life," the apparent resurrection demonstrating men's ability to initiate life (p. 125); and African anus plugging at the time of marriage: Husbands conceal their excretions, hence simulating a state of constant pregnancy and fertility with the mimicked symbolic cessation of menstruation (Bettelheim 1962, 128–29). Bettelheim ascribes this last practice to the "desire of the men to demonstrate their legal right over their progeny . . . by demonstration of the care they have exercised to arouse fecundity and to arouse the accomplishment of the mother on the occasion of giving

24. Margaret Homans argues that the tendency among Lacanians and "other theorists of the French school" to treat any challenge to the phallic imaginary as a naive humanism "derives from the peculiarities of masculine psychosocial development," and hence, "we would be justified in arguing that to call Chodorow's account only a myth would be once again to exclude the mother's body" (Homans 1986, 15). Rank also attributes the silence about "long and important periods of the development of human culture [that] stood under the sway of the so-called mother right" to "that primal repression which tries to degrade and to deny woman both socially and intellectually on account of her original connection with birth trauma" (Rank 1952, 36–37). So the very denial of birth trauma (and envy) is associated with a repression of information attributed to the body. See also Bettelheim (1962, 56–57).

birth” (p. 129) by a putatively parallel fertility event. In an article about Italian husbands of pregnant women, S. Masoni and colleagues write that the “couvade syndrome can be considered to be the psychosomatic equivalent of primitive rituals of initiation into paternity. Various symptoms have been described in the husbands of pregnant women with an incidence from 11% to 65%” (Masoni et al. 1994, 125). Other articles document symptoms of bloating, morning sickness, diarrhea, and constipation that are higher for husbands of pregnant wives than for husbands in control groups (Klein 1991; Wilson 1977).

The silence greeting the work on pregnancy envy from the 1920s through the 1940s in the clinical literature, repeated in the 1950s with the reception of the critical works by Macalpine and Hunter, is puzzling in view of the many myths associated with images of an omnipotent mother—archetypes of power associated with goddesses of fertility. These potent ancient symbols have been explored deeply by anthropologists, historians, and poets and yet have left little imprint on psychoanalysts investigating sex development. Bettelheim himself attributes the silence simply to male sexism (1962, 158), but this does not explain why some men have discussed pregnancy envy, and it especially does not account for the absence of any systematic use of pregnancy-envy analytics among feminist writers on psychological development. D. W. Winnicott and his feminist disciples Dorothy Dinnerstein, Nancy Chodorow, and Jessica Benjamin all put great stress on parental roles in *infant nurturing* and offer little discussion of the fact that everyone is born from a woman.

One reason to follow up on the work by Macalpine and Hunter and to move away from theories centering the breast, the penis, or the phallus is that *except for the fact that everyone is born from a woman, all else thought crucial to sex development is contingent*: the type of child-rearing structures in place (e.g., large networks, a nuclear family, a single parent); parental sex and sexuality; family dynamics; whether the child is breast-fed; how much time parents of each sex spend with a child; whether the child has siblings, and then, whether they are older or younger; or whether the parents is of the same or different sex. Some object relations theorists acknowledge the problem that the contingencies of parenting pose for a robust theory of sex development. For instance, Dinnerstein defends generalization of her findings on the grounds that even if a biological mother does not raise her children, some other woman will (1976, 48). But this is not universally true. Sometimes fathers are the primary caretakers. Feminist theorists are caught between, on the one hand, a desire for plasticity in sex roles such that the patrilineage and male domination might be over-

come and, on the other hand, a desire to explain the ubiquity of these systems until now. For the most part, the desire for contingency has meant an almost willful blindness to some important facts.

A few colleagues of Freud understood the importance of the non-contingent role birth played in the consolidation of sex identity. For instance, Otto Rank wrote: "This conception finds a strong heuristic support in that it solves the riddle of the ubiquity of the 'castration complex' in a natural way by deriving it from the indisputable universality of the act of birth" (Rank 1952, 20). The universality of one group's inability to give birth is commensurate with the universality of kinship rules and sex distinctions, a statement that cannot be made for the assumptions of Freudian, Lacanian, or object relations theory. The ubiquity of what Gayle Rubin later called the "sex/gender system" (1975) is the same context Horney references in her sketches of young boys' experiences of mothers, along with the academic neglect of the masculine anxieties that follow from this:

We are familiar with this envy [of motherhood] as such, but it has hardly received due consideration as a dynamic factor. When one begins, as I did, to analyze men only after a fairly long experience of analyzing women, one receives a most surprising impression of the intensity of this envy of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood. . . (Horney 1967, 60)

Even if Horney is overcommitted to a foundational story about the importance of maternity and not an equally plausible account that maternity imputes power to women via infant *fantasies* about the significance of this activity, her point, reiterated by Macalpine and Hunter, cries out for an extended intellectual engagement with these accounts of pregnancy envy and sex development. Yet the likely place for a telling of such a developmental story—feminist psychoanalytic theory—does something else instead. Fearful of essentialist inferences about sex roles that might follow from theorizing the uterus, feminist psychoanalytic theorists emphasize the breast or the clitoris, or, in the case of De Lauretis, the fetish (1994). The reasons differ, but the result is the same: the penis remains enshrined as the object that bestows sex identity to both boys and girls.²⁵

25. Briefly, French psychoanalytic theorists such as Luce Irigaray prefer to theorize the clitoris and the vulva, rather than the uterus—out of fear of eliding women's sexual desire (Irigaray 1985). Kristeva (1986) figures the uterus as a lack that marks women's ambiguous difference. And U.S.-American object relations theorists Benjamin (1988), Chodorow (1978), and Dinnerstein (1976) theorize the breast and historically contingent relations of child-rearing—to allow for a possibility of changing gender development patterns through shifting more parental responsibilities to fathers. By appropriating themes from Freud and Lacan, Butler and De Lauretis have laid the groundwork for a feminist lesbian phallus (Butler 1993; De Lauretis 1994, 189–190, 203–253, 263).

Pregnancy Envy and Rubin's Sex/Gender System

Now that we have seen that a male lack may play a crucial role in the experience of sex development, let us consider how this insight affects predominant explanations of the sex/gender system, most notably, the one developed so brilliantly and influentially by Gayle Rubin. It is one thing to claim, as a matter of setting the record straight, that an aspect of sex development has been overlooked, but to note this does not by itself invite any specifically feminist engagement. Here I want to suggest that as useful as Rubin's work has been for understanding the dialectical structuring of sexuality and sex, it also gives rise to certain confusions (about the penis) that attention to pregnancy envy helps address. Rubin—writing before object relations theory had been gendered *feminine/ist*—stated that the sex/gender system of the gift economy had its origins in the Oedipally constructed meanings of the phallus.²⁶ By inquiring into premodern business-as-usual practices that Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss simply describe, Rubin denaturalizes the exchange of women. Anatomy is not destiny, she says, but rather something less pithy: a precondition for certain family configurations resulting in men's need to maintain bonds among themselves through their exchange of women.

According to Rubin, following Freud, the exchange of the mother for the phallus appeases boys' fears of castration and is central to their individuation from their mothers and consolidation of identity.²⁷ The gift economy, according to Rubin, affirms the phallus as the source of autonomy and desire—circulating women as an “expression of male dominance” (1975, 192). The traffic in women is thus explained as a wide-scale reenactment by men of their childhood exchange of mothers for a masculine identity. The mutual affirmation of the phallus among men requires their reciprocity in the exchange of women.

Why do women go along with this? Again following Freud, Rubin believes that a similar valuation of the phallus occurs in the worldview of the girl. Understanding the taboo against homosexuality and lacking the phallus that can be exchanged for a woman, she withdraws from the mother and turns to the father as the favored love-object, seeing him as

26. Rubin defines the sex/gender system as the “set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied” (1975, 159).

27. Marilyn Strathern disagrees with the equation of women with objects, drawing on Mauss's observation that gifts are not mere objects but are imbued with a personality. So, Strathern (1984) reasons, women in the subject position of the gift must also have a personality.

the vehicle for acquiring the phallus (Rubin 1975, 193–94). Thus, the girl only receives the phallus as “in intercourse, or as a child . . . as a gift from a man. She never gets to give it away” (p. 195). Freud and Lévi-Strauss see necessity and culture in the sex/gender system, while Rubin hopes that exposure of its phallic roots to the light of thoughtful, feminist inquiry will kill the damn thing (Rubin 1975, 197–99).

As rich and provocative as Rubin’s essay is, she concedes one crucial, originary point of Freud’s: the assumption of the seemingly ontological sanctity of the phallus as (a symbol of) the penis (or vice versa). What do children find so compelling about the phallus? Why is the boy so fearful of being castrated by his father and becoming a girl? Why do girls desire the penis/phallus? Rubin’s answer, unlike Freud’s, claims to eschew biologism but leaves no other alternative. Drawing a distinction between the penis and the phallus, Rubin argues that the meanings imbued in masculinity are social artifacts, not biological ones (1975, 190). Thus, the phallus is valued because it allows one to participate in the gift economy in which the phallus is valued.

This tautology begs the central questions: What *is* the phallus and *why* is it valued at all? What is so special about that penis/phallus that it gives one a privileged access to the gift economy in the first place? Why even bother with this near synonym?²⁸ Why not be explicit, recognizing that a “penis” is inextricably zippered within the teeth of “phallic” meanings that have numerous metonymic associations, as do many words? Why worry that a penis might come free and float around as a biological menace and not a symbolic one, as though the two could be separate that way, as though the worries about “biology” are not themselves best figured through a phenomenology of that sign as well? We use these other metonymies of “sex” or “breast” or “womb” without veiling them in a more decent garb. To do otherwise with the penis seems akin to the filmic double standard that allows frontal female nudity but not a view of male genitalia (Mulvey 1989). One function of the name of the phallus is to perform an authority that the penis cannot possibly elicit on its own. The language of the penis is the emperor with no clothes. The phallus is the costume that makes the penis the fetish, the possibility of something fancy that invites imagination about the penis’s potency that goes far beyond its actual biological functions.

28. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “phallus” is from the ancient Greek word meaning penis. In English it means: “An image of the male generative organ, symbolizing the generative power in nature, venerated in various religious systems; *spec.* that carried in solemn procession in the Dionysiac festivals in ancient Greece. In later times commonly worn as an amulet or protection against the evil eye.”

Rubin notes that the relation of the phallus to the gift economy only makes sense if we assume its origins in “paleolithic relations of sexuality” that are still with us. “We still live,” she writes “in a ‘phallic’ culture” (1975, 191). But paleolithic cultures, having no understanding of fathers as we now understand them, much less of the role men played in impregnating women, were obsessed with the womb and with birth (e.g., Neumann 1964; Rich 1976, 84–109), or at least there is far more evidence for this pre-history than the one Rubin borrows from Freud, that of the primal horde that Bettelheim notes has no data in its support (1962, 42, 61). In compensation for the lack of a womb and anger at the humiliation that entails, and out of a fear of reproducing the initial experience of dependence—all experiences wrought in *early childhood fantasies* about mothers—men apparently organize their public, social lives through the manipulation of women and things. In the cultures Mauss and Lévi-Strauss consider, including those of modern Europe, this is done through various kinship and clan systems.

The Womb in the Gift Economy

As much as the penis represents desire, it may also be the sine qua non of a lack, and as much as the penis allows men to possess women and things, it seems born of *ressentiment*, a sign of men’s experience of ultimate dependence and humiliation. Recognition of this helps untangle a piece of Rubin’s exchange system that is at least as mystifying as the role of women: the role of the gift. Why attach such importance to these objects? What explains how a cow, some shells, or a piece of jewelry might be viewed as an equivalent to a woman (Mauss 1967; Strathern 1988)? One can understand the desire for the women, but how does this enable an exchange if the other object is not even a human being? Understanding fantasies about this so-called phallic mother, one who reminds the boy of the penis’s futility compared with her fertility, helps to explain the tendency to imbue property with a sacred importance. Boys, sensing from early on a power associated with the womb and their own inability to give birth, spend their lives attempting to overcome their initial humiliation in the originary moment of any gift economy, which is the gift of life from the mother to the child.²⁹ By highlighting the metonymies among feces, gifts, babies, and penises, Freud himself illustrates the basis of these associations and substitutions (Freud [1909b] 1955).

29. For further accounts of men’s compensatory excesses, see Lerner (1986, especially 45–46), which includes a literature review on this subject.

Reconciliations

Feminist Lacanian theory, object relations theory, and especially Freud in his early work offer themes consistent with a return to theories of pregnancy envy. Hence, those comfortable with any of these literatures may find reasons therein to consider the uses of a pregnancy-envy narrative. The case for pregnancy envy is made implicitly by some feminist Lacanians themselves, especially Kaja Silverman (1988, 1992a, 1992b), who appreciates what she calls the pre-Oedipal aspects of desire for the mother. The fetishes and drives that she lists, although far more expansive than the Freudian Oedipal denominator of the penis, do not include pregnancy envy. Perhaps they should, because this would accommodate her desire to explain how the boy's early bond with his mother that is not primarily sexual would nonetheless lead to a valuation of the penis, the site of difference.

Analyses from feminist object relations theory also may accommodate recognition of pregnancy envy. First, object relations theory insists that gender identity emerges *before* children engage in any sexual triangles with their parents. According to Jessica Benjamin, "children consolidate a fixed unalterable sense of gender in the first two years of life, well *before* the onset of the Oedipal complications Freud described" (1988, 90). If gender identity occurs before the fear of castration, then the penis cannot be, at least initially, valued for its promise of redemption from a lack, hence prompting inquiry into another explanation for its significance. Second, Benjamin maintains that "maternal identification is the initial orientation for children of both sexes. . . . [G]irls sustain the primary identification with the mother while boys must switch to an identification with the father" (ibid.). This is consistent with the notion that boys initially think themselves, like their mothers, capable of giving birth. Hence, the movement away from this self-understanding might be significant to boys' developmental self-discovery. Third, boys view their mothers as omnipotent, and themselves as dependent: "While the little boy may consciously represent the mother as castrated, clinical evidence reveals that unconsciously the boy sees this mother as extremely powerful. She does not appear lacking a sexual organ; rather her vagina is known and feared for its potential to re-engulf the boy" (Benjamin 1988, 94, citing Chasseguet-Smirgel 1970). Mothers are also understood as omnipotent because of their role as exclusive caregivers. As opposed to Freud, who says that children cannot imagine the "protector" being a woman, object relations theorists hold that women as mothers are the essence of omnip-

otence, because they nurse and care for children. If ensuring life is power, then what could be phenomenologically more powerful, at least from the point of view of someone recently born, than the act of giving birth? Freud's adult timidity toward his own overbearing mother, his acceptance of his wife Martha's refusal to let him participate in raising his children, his melancholia and persistent anxieties about death, his insistence that he have the sole prerogative to name his six children and many of their children, and his secret, unorthodox analysis of his daughter Anna all point to the role of pregnancy envy in the establishment of psychoanalytic theory's father, whose naming of children is a defensive act and not a triumphant one.³⁰

Further evidence for emphasizing the significance of the womb and giving birth in children's imaginations comes from Freud himself. In contrast to his Oedipal model, whereby relations are presumed to be (hetero)sexually charged *unconsciously* (no one states that three-year-old boys actually try to have intercourse with their mothers or even talk about it), he realizes that two-year-old girls *and boys* consciously mimic their pregnant mothers. Boys will put pillows or dolls under their shirts and announce with pride that they too will be having babies. Little boys, when told they cannot have babies, after recovering from their surprise and confusion, become defiant. The notorious "Little Hans" tells his father he gave birth to children and his father responds, "You know quite well that boys can't have children," to which Hans says, "Well, yes. But I believe they can all the same" (Freud [1909a] 1955, 10: 94–95). At another point, on watching Hans play with his imaginary children, the father says: "You know quite well a boy can't have any children." And Hans replies: "I know. I was their Mommy before, now I'm their Daddy" (ibid. 96–97). Hans also projects this ability to his own father (ibid., 87):

[Father]: Boys don't have children. Only Mummies have children.

Hans: But why shouldn't I?

[Father]: Because God's arranged it like that.

Hans: But why don't you have one? Oh yes, you'll have one alright. Just you wait . . .

30. These biographical references are from Paul Roazen (1993, 96, 110, 130, 140, 154, 155, 168, 190, 194, 195), who writes: "Curiously enough for the discoverer of the Oedipus complex, Freud's mother was the dictatorial person, whereas his father seems to have been kindly and improvident" (p. 190), quoting Roazen ([1969] 1990: 119–20).

And this at four and one-half years, in the midst of the Oedipal stage that presumably straightens all this out.³¹

This scenario finds confirmation in a larger empirical study indicating that boys from three to five years have vivid pregnancy fantasies, regardless of their mothers' appearance. Dr. Linda Linday writes that her own curiosity on boys' pregnancy envy was piqued by her three-year-old son when he "repeatedly stuffed a small doll under his shirt and said 'I have a baby in my "room" [womb]'" (1994, 416), although Linday herself was not pregnant. Her study found that mothers' reports on their preschoolers' gender fantasies showed "no statistically significant difference between the percentage of girls (14/31 = 45%) reported to have penis/gender fantasies and the percentage of boys (15/34 = 44%) reported to have pregnancy fantasies" (p. 418).

One reason for pregnancy envy in boys is that two-year-olds do not know that penises may play a role in reproduction. Freud himself recognized the significance of this. In "Some Psychological Consequences," after stating that a girl gains her sexual identity when she realizes she does not have a penis, Freud adds in a footnote that this observation is at odds with his observation 20 years earlier that children's "sexual interest . . . was aroused not by the difference between the sexes, but *by the problem of where babies come from*" (Freud [1925] 1955, 21: n. 252, emphasis added).³² Translator James Strachey adds, in a bracketed portion, that this earlier sentiment "appears in more than one place," and he cites three other examples.³³ In this early work, Freud ([1905] 1955) sets the stage for an entirely different enactment of the Oedipal drama, one that addresses the question "Who am I?" by considering the question "Where do babies come from?"—not who has the penis: "[T]he first problem with which [the child's sexual curiosity] deals is not the question of the distinction between the sexes, but the riddle of where babies come from?" ([1905] 1955, 7: 194).³⁴

31. Since I began this research 15 years ago, numerous parents have supplied anecdotal accounts of their sons' pregnancy fantasies. For instance: "I can too have a baby!" two-year-old David replied to his mother after she said he could not. Jacob at the age of three was often pregnant with three to five babies whom he had also named, although his mother was not pregnant.

32. Freud's retraction here is odd because much of his subsequent work relies heavily on just these passages, including his discussion of "Little Hans" ([1909a] 1955, 10: 101).

33. The sources are Freud ([1905] 1955, 7: 195; [1908] 1955, 9: 212; [1909a] 1955, 10: 133).

34. Rank echoes the reading, saying he follows Karl Abraham in noting the "vaginal symbolism of the ravine in the Oedipal saga" and describing Oedipus's blindness as a metaphorical return to the womb (Rank 1952, 43), suggesting parallels among knowing, being, and being born.

Other studies suggest that the preoccupation with this question may arise earlier than Freud indicates, closer to age two than to three.³⁵ His point here is persuasive. Not only do children connect the question of who they are with the problem of birth, but they also connect birth with mothers and have little understanding of how fathers contribute to this process:

Children also perceive the alterations that take place in their mother owing to pregnancy and are able to interpret them correctly. The fable of the stork is often told to an audience that receives it with a deep, though mostly silent, mistrust. Two elements remain undiscovered by the sexual researches of children: the fertilizing role of semen and the existence of the female sexual orifice. (Freud [1905] 1955, 7: 196–97)

If we follow Freud's initial ideas about infantile sexuality and consider these alongside works by object relations theorists and writings on pregnancy envy, it appears that sex identity develops in response to the mother, the one who is the source of one's existence. This is the origin of the sexed other, the boy who cannot maintain this identity, this power, who experiences his difference as many things, but especially here as a lack (Kittay 1983).

The girl may experience the lack of a penis (Lindsay 1994), but far more crucially, the girl is potentially a little mother and the boy a little not-mother. The mother is the one who first renders her child as identical with her and eventually as a son incapable of bearing children. This is the phallic, or rather the omnipotent, mother (Rogin 1989). She is the source of the boy's *ressentiment*, since at this young age, he is overinvested in birth and cannot fathom being restricted from this activity. That this also occurs at the same moment when the mother is pushing the son away, encouraging him to be more separate, makes for a double resentment: Not only can he not be a mother, but he cannot have her either. Each of these upset fantasies leads in turn to compensatory masculine myths about phallic power and even birth-giving abilities, as well as a heightened interest in developing strategies to hold onto mother. In humiliation, boys renounce the mother and fetishize their lack. Politically, masculine compensation manifests at its most basic structural level in the urge to control reproduction, to determine rules that govern the traffic in mothers and their children.

35. Freud states that children's curiosity about reproductive organs begins between the ages of three and five ([1905] 1955, 7: 54). But see Benjamin (1988) and Chodorow (1978), who point out that recognition of differences between the sexes and consciousness of women giving birth occur around the age of two, or around the time children begin to speak.

Freud points out the repression of these infant and toddler experiences. Far from a boy's preoccupation with pregnancy leading to any especially erratic psychological development, Hans grows up to be a happy adult who, when shown this account, "did not recognize himself" (Freud [1909a] 1955, 10: 148). Boys, we may infer, can have ongoing and repeated pregnancy fantasies that they will not recall as such when they grow up into supposedly well-adjusted adults, such as Hans's father—the one reporting their exchanges. Consider the following (*ibid.*, 10: 92).

[*Father*]: Do you know why you wish for [a baby]? It's because you'd like to be a Daddy.

Hans: Yes . . . How does it work?

[*Father*]: How does what work?

Hans: You say Daddies don't have babies, so how does it work, my wanting to be a Daddy?

[*Father*]: You'd like to be a Daddy and married to Mummy; you'd like to be as big as me and have a moustache; and you'd like Mummy to have a baby . . .

In this passage, we see the way that men (Hans's father) act on marriage fantasies as a means of achieving their desire for the baby. To be a Daddy requires being "married to a Mummy" so that Mummy can give one a baby, which is what Hans wants, too. Hans and his father seem normal only because they and other adult men have managed to enact kinship rules that allow them to pursue a desire for a Mummy to have their babies, desires based on childhood fantasies about the importance to being of bearing children (Stevens 1999, 209–35). Indeed "matrimony" is from the Latin *matrix*, meaning uterus. Men cannot have a uterus, but they can acquire one through marriage.

CONCLUSION

The analysis here is open to numerous criticisms similar to those leveled against Freud.³⁶ These range from a dismissal of psychoanalytic theory altogether to a narrower concern about applying individual-level

36. Freud's theory of the Oedipal complex is wrongheaded, but the premise that analyses of infant and early childhood experiences are useful for understanding the lives of individuals as well as macrolevel narratives is a very important discovery. I also believe there is much useful material in Freud's case studies. Such a view follows that of Jeffrey Masson and many others who use Freud's own observations against his theory (Masson 1983). There are two ways to evaluate the claims in this essay. On one reading, this simply is an intellectual history of the Oedipal complex and a description of the power/knowledge system implicit in representing the penis as central to sex roles. Viewed in this light, sex is a textual but nonetheless authentic category and experience, no less or

narratives to entire civilizations. Why assume a link between infant fantasies and kinship rules? What about cultural specificities? On the first point, there are a variety of possible responses. Those offered by the pregnancy-envy researchers discussed here are simply that Freud was wrong about his micro- and macro-accounts about sex development, that the psychological and anthropological data on pregnancy envy are much more robust than those suggesting that sex roles are based on castration anxiety. Furthermore, pregnancy envy's political significance also commends these heuristics. Understanding the relation between birth and kinship rules is crucial for overcoming the father.

The universalizing inferences and implications of a pregnancy-envy paradigm also may cause some to cringe. Because some generalizations may be wrong, however, does not mean that every single possibility of a pattern's existence, discovery, and refashioning is doomed. Birth is a non-trivial event and it is universally performed by one sex. Not everyone has children, but everyone has a mother, the only individual in whose body everyone grew and from which everyone emerged. It would be stunning if this were not important, everywhere. Although this fact alone may not prompt any acute neuroses among most boys, psychic disturbances over birth for a threshold number of boys may be sufficiently strong that as adults, they have reacted by establishing and perpetuating a template of sex roles that ensures men, as husbands, the same easily recognizable status as Hans's father. If enough people are moved by intense feelings of inadequacy, it is easy to infer that they will establish myths, rituals, and especially laws—to wit, the law of the father—that shape reality for everyone, regardless of these tenets' lack of foundational support in a phallic presence beyond the ideology itself.

Religion and the family, or the law of the father, are more than parallel symbolic systems. Together they are invested in regulating deeply held dialectical fantasies about birth and death. Religion produces rules, practices, and symbols to assuage anxieties about death, and kinship systems do likewise because of anxieties about not being able to give birth. These myths and edicts giving men the power of creation become self-fulfilling prophecies, the law of the father that affects us all.

What Lévi-Strauss calls kinship structures and what Rubin calls the traffic in women create more than intergenerational membership groups

more so than any other. On another reading, however, I am also making claims based on what happens to children *before* (and after) they enter this web of language and law.

giving us our strongest affective ties; these kinship rules and roles serve also as the cornerstones of our daily experience of normal and deviant sex roles. These sex roles will vary among different contexts, but they will persist as long as kinship laws and rituals persist. Fundamentally, a challenge to kinship systems requires no new laws but a confrontation with and then eradication of those presently in place. Eliminating kinship rules and the nation that produces them may not be the end of all oppressive sex roles, but it is the first step to undoing the ones we have had until now.

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