THE IMPACT OF FEMINIST AND GENDER THEORIES ON PSYCHOANALYSIS

The Interface with Self Psychology and the Moderate Postmoderns

After long maintaining that the orchestra's superior sound and style came partly from its maleness, the members . . . voted to welcome women to their annual auditions . . . when positions would be available for a violist, a tuba player, and a trumpet player . . . Beyond the possibility of the women destroying their special sound, the orchestra had [earlier expressed fears about women] and also argued that it would suffer financially if women took maternity leaves and had to be replaced. But the new Austrian Chancellor, Viktor Klime, publicly told the orchestra members . . . that there was "creative potential in the other half of humanity and this should be used."

—Jane Perlez

Men no longer barbecue in our movies; instead they are the ones being skewered. But why did they barbecue in the first place? Because we once lived in a gendered world built out of piled-on oppositions: outdoors versus indoors, work versus family, production versus reproduction, salaried versus unsalaried, competitive versus cooperative, hard versus soft . . .

But now those distinctions have been blurred. Women are in the workplace, where they are more productive and less reproductive . . . Men are being downsized and losing their jobs . . .
1980, 1984; Butler, 1990). These and other contributions heighten our awareness that, in addition to the difficulties of teasing apart the separate contributions of feminist and gender studies to psychoanalysis, it is no easy task to find a balance between our attention to sociocultural factors and those pertaining to individual psychology as we approach feminist issues and concepts of gender.

Given the complexities in the fields of feminist and gender studies, the nature of the relationship between these contributions and the major tenets of self psychology is not always clear. For instance, although self psychology has sometimes been included in the broad category of relational theories that are felt to be in some ways compatible with feminist theory (Chodorow, 1989), self psychology has been somewhat out of the loop of excitement generated within psychoanalysis by new developments in feminist and gender theories. Self psychology seems neither to contribute significantly to, nor to be greatly enriched by, the ongoing debates.

Unlike Kohut, Loewald did not overtly reject the Freudian view of sexuality. But in his writings, sexuality was frequently subordinate to ego and relational considerations (Loewald, 1960) or to concerns for autonomy of the self (Loewald, 1979b). Presumably, Loewald shared Freud’s views on sublimation but ultimately had in common with Kohut a focus on the noninstinctual aspects of development and experience. This focus resulted in his writings’ being fairly devoid of commentary on the specifics of sexuality and gender experience. For the most part we must read between the lines to infer what his position might have been in relation to contemporary feminist and gender theories, and even then we have very little on which to rely. For instance, in Loewald’s (1977) book review of the Freud–Jung correspondence (McGuire, 1974), he presented the respective arguments of Freud and Jung concerning the importance of sexuality versus spirituality in human experience. Although Loewald (1977) acknowledged that the views of both men were colored by their personal interests or quests, he went on to say: “But one cannot simply dismiss Jung’s impressions and ‘intuitions’ in regard to Freud’s deep concern with sexuality as nothing more than expressions of Jung’s own preoccupations and inclinations” (p. 416). From this comment we might infer that Loewald was supporting Jung’s suggestion that Freud’s interest in sexuality betrayed a personal and emotional overinvolvement not in keeping with his observations on other topics (in McGuire, 1974, p. 150).

But Loewald (1977) soon followed this comment with statements suggesting agreement with Freud

that superpersonal and transcendental aspects of human existence and of unconscious and instinctual life (so much stressed by Jung) can be experienced and integrated convincingly . . . only in the concreteness of one’s own personal life, including the ugliness, trivialities, and shame that go with it [p. 426].

With this observation, Loewald seemed slightly to tip the balance of his support back in the direction of Freud’s grounding of his theory in the body, with relationships perhaps included as part of what constitutes one’s “personal life.” For the most part, the paucity of Loewald’s exploration of specific issues of sexuality and gender has led me to stretch toward an interpretation of his position on the basis of meager material in his writings. This absence alone probably speaks for itself.

While contemporary relational theorists often share Kohut and Loewald the tendency to downplay sexual issues, we have seen that feminists, gender theorists, and the moderate postmoderns nevertheless converge in a certain critique directed at the concepts of self, identity, and gender identity. In arguments that bear a striking similarity to one another across the varying contemporary paradigms, notions of self, identity, and gender identity are faulted for their apparent assumption of unity and coherence. Eschewing a privileged position for these qualities of self or identity, contemporary feminists, gender theorists, and the moderate postmoderns alike all place a greater emphasis on multiplicity, fluidity, and even chaos in their conceptualizations of normative self and gender experience.

Many interesting and successful efforts have been made to summarize late 20th-century developments in feminist and gender theories from varying psychoanalytic viewpoints (for example: J. Mitchell, 1974; Fast, 1979, 1984, 1990; Person and Ovesey, 1983; Mayer, 1985, 1991, 1995; Cherazi, 1986; Benjamin, 1988, 1991, 1995b, 1996; Chodorow, 1989, 1994, 1995; Person, 1990; Coates, 1990, 1997; Coates, Friedman, and Wolfe, 1991; Harris, 1991b; Coates and Wolfe, 1995; Stack, 1995; Mitchell, 1996b; Young-Bruehl, 1996; de Marneffe, 1997). Relying on this impressive body of literature, I will provide only a brief and selective summary. I hope to bring some of the feminist and gender contributions into relationship with aspects of self psychology and with the postmodern concepts of subjectivity and intersubjectivity.
Countering Male Supremacy from Within and Outside of Biological Positivism

From the start, there have been many diverse issues at stake in the separate but overlapping feminist and gender debates. Most of the early discourse took as its starting point direct statements in Freud’s writings that, from the viewpoints of feminism and gender theory, had to be countered. Among the statements that early feminists and emergent gender theorists alike felt impelled to challenge were those in which Freud (1905, 1924, 1933) repeatedly expressed the view that female sexuality and feminine personality development were secondary to all that was male and masculine. Feminist critics and gender theorists also identified certain contradictions within Freud’s evolving commentary on sexual development over the decades of his professional life. For instance, they perceived contradictions between his concepts of biological determinism and male supremacy, on one hand, and the broader psychoanalytic theory and methodology that tended toward enlightened theories of male and female psychologies and gender development, on the other. As examples of further contradictions that have been cited in Freud’s theory of sexuality are his assertion that bisexuality is universal and that homosexual love is not necessarily pathological (Freud, 1905), yet his theory of the Oedipus complex was so weighted in a heterosexist direction that he labeled as “negative” the eroticized relationship between a child and his same-sex parent while calling love for the opposite sex parent the “positive” oedipal (Freud, 1917).

Freud’s extensive writings on sexuality (see, e.g., 1898, 1908, 1910, 1912, 1918, 1920, 1923b, 1925) focused on the anatomical differences between the sexes and what he saw as the “bedrock” psychological consequences of these differences (1925). Although his psychoanalytic method and its assumptions allowed for infinite variety in the personal construction of meaning attributed to any biological or anatomical “given,” he was primarily interested in identifying the universals of psychological experience emanating from what he saw as central and inescapable biological “realities,” namely, the male phallicus, the female “absence” or lack of a penis, and the normality and desirability of heterosexual reproduction.

Especially in the area of reproductive sexuality, Freud’s views were influenced by concepts derived from Darwin’s theory of evolution, which carried the weight of such notions as survival of the species. From the viewpoint of today’s feminist and postmodern critics, Freud’s theory of male supremacy, his heterosexist views, and his derivative emphasis on reproductive sexuality all are understood as having been multiply determined by a mix of the intellectual/sociopolitical climate of his times, the limiting effects of his personal subjectivity, certain unanalyzed aspects of his childhood misperceptions, and defensive unconscious fantasy (see Stolorow and Atwood, 1979). It is commonly recognized today that, for all analysts, similar factors influence our individual preferences for one theory among the multiple available paradigms.

For example, in keeping with changing times and social/intellectual climates, some contemporary analysts tend to be less fascinated with Darwin and more interested in Einstein’s theory of relativity (Eagle, 1987); Heisenberg’s uncertainty theory (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983); and chaos theory (Schwartz, 1995; Mayer, 1996b). Astrophysicists almost daily provide new metaphors with which we can enhance our ability to characterize our psychoanalytic theories of mind. But these accelerating findings from the empirical sciences also give us new ways of seeing and thinking about human experience. Currently, most new ideas tend to emphasize the randomness and discontinuities in nature or the multiplicity and fragmentation of experience (Elliott and Spezzano, 1996; Goldner, 1991; Dimen, 1991; Barratt, 1993; and others), as opposed to an ordered and predictable biological determinism, or reliable experiences of unity and coherence.

I earlier noted the differences in the prevailing intellectual climates of Freud’s versus our own times. I suggested that Kohut’s self psychology and Loewald’s relational ego psychology can be seen as important waystations between classical and postmodern theories, looking both forward and backward and manifesting elements of both essentialism and constructionism. For instance, Kohut rejected Freud’s biological determinism but clung to a belief in the possibility of psychic order and coherence on the basis of certain kinds of relationships available to the individual during childhood. Loewald’s (1979b) work more than Kohut’s straddled the line between relational and biological determinism; for example, he maintained the centrality of the Oedipus complex as posited in Freud’s theory but reinterpreted it as a universal striving toward autonomy, with a greatly diminished role for the sexual and aggressive instincts.

We shall soon see that the earlier noted criticisms leveled by the postmoderns at Kohut are echoed in the feminist and gender theorists’
critiques of Freud and some aspects of self psychology as well. But, interestingly, the feminist and postmodern critiques of self psychology are not at all directed toward Loewald's very similar ideas. Chodorow (1989) in particular sees in Loewald's work a significant compatibility with feminist psychoanalytic interests and cites his writings at length in putting forth her own feminist object relations viewpoint. But the ideas Chodorow wishes to appropriate from Loewald's writings for feminist psychoanalysis are not incompatible with Kohut's thinking, even though they may be more explicitly and poetically elaborated by Loewald than by Kohut. For instance, Chodorow credits Loewald with having provided a bridge between the two "sometimes disparate dialogues" pertaining to psychoanalytic treatment on one hand, and the early mother-child relationship on the other (p. 12). I submit that Kohut too provided such bridges; he saw the selfobject relationship as constitutive of both early development and later growth in psychoanalysis. Additionally, Chodorow points to Loewald's success in having captured "the ways that unconscious processes resonate with conscious and thus give conscious life depth and richness of meaning" (p. 12, referring to Loewald, 1960). She also cites Loewald's (1976) appreciation of the interplay between fantasy and reality and between rationality and irrationality (Loewald, 1979b). I already cited passages in which Kohut too argued for a measure of irrationality as well as rationality in human affairs, and I have singled out his notion of omnipotent merger as one instance in which he recognized the normative value of fantasy. In fact, Kohut's self psychology is generally constructed on the basis of his conviction that the grandiose fantasies of childhood have to become a "tamed" but integral part of the adult personality if healthy relationships, creative pursuits, and a general sense of well-being are to prevail in an individual's life. Thus, although Kohut's writings failed to capture the imagination of the feminists, his ideas often significantly overlapped with those of Loewald, from whom Chodorow borrows heavily.

All the passages cited by Chodorow to bring together Loewald's ideas with her own object relations feminism involve juxtapositions of opposites. These juxtapositions foreshadow the enthusiastic embrace of the dialectic as a way of containing intellectual and affective tensions in psychoanalytic theory and practice in the 1990s. I have pointed out that Kohut's self is constantly immersed in a selfobject milieu that simultaneously undermines and contributes to its autonomy. Although Kohut did not use the terms paradox or dialectic in his theory, his concepts of self and selfobject seem to meet the criteria for Ogden's (1986) use of the term dialectic, namely, opposing poles of experience that simultaneously create and destroy each other's meaning.

In postmodern thought and current feminist views of gender, an attempt is often made to resolve the dichotomy between masculine and feminine by invoking a dialectical relationship between them. For example, Benjamin and Sweetnam have applied Ogden's concept of dialectically related modes of organizing experience to issues of gender. Brining together Fast's (1979, 1984) ideas of gender inclusiveness in young children with Ogden's (1986) dialectical "positions," Benjamin (1996) has suggested that children move from a preoedipal, overinclusive stage in their conceptualization of gender, through a dichotomous oedipal stage (the resolution of which represents the developmental endpoint of classical theory), to a more fluid and complex postoedipal period in which the overinclusive and the dichotomous experiences of gender are combined in dialectical relation to one another. Similarly turning to Ogden's modes of organizing experience, Sweetnam (1996) argues for a dialectical relationship between qualities of rigidity and fluidity in the experiencing of gender. Harris (1991a), while not explicitly invoking the concept of the dialectic, nevertheless speaks of gender experience as having qualities of both tenaciousness and evanescence (p. 198).

Although Kohut made no reference to the feminist and gender literature emerging simultaneously with his own theorizing in the 1970s, his selfobject concept helped to move psychoanalysis toward one of feminism's central goals by replacing Freud's universalist biological determinism with a new personal/relational "determinism," laying the groundwork for later contractionism. In Kohut's version of development, the current and future health of the self is tied not to biology but to the quality of the selfobject relationships and milieu. Although not always explicitly recognized as such, Kohut's emphasis on relationship in the construction of individual experience and meaning turned out to be compatible not only with the more purely relational theories of the moderate postmoderns, but also with many strands of feminist and gender theory as well (Chodorow, 1989).

In an earlier discussion, we noted that the primary difference between Kohut and some of these other theorists was in the kinds of relational experiences believed to be pivotal for psychological development.
Whereas Kohut usually limited his discussions of the relational field to four specified selfobject functions, the moderate postmoderns leave the field more open to include other kinds of interactions; they emphasize in particular interactions in which the analyst makes herself known as a differentiated subject. But among the moderate postmoderns, Benjamin (1988) singles out recognition as a relational experience pivotal to the development of subjectivity and intersubjective relatedness. Beyond the fact that her emphasis is exclusively on mutual rather than one-way recognition, it is not clear how her notion of recognition differs from Kohut’s concept of mirroring in self psychology.

Certainly, in Kohut’s theory, the capacity for mutual recognition is one of the primary goals of development. And, while he posits a stage before which this achievement is established, so too does Stern (1983, 1985), of whose work Benjamin (1988) is appreciative. We may conclude that both Benjamin and Kohut place a high value on mutual recognition but differ in their notions of how individuals acquire this capability. Whereas Kohut believed that children (or patients) will develop this ability if they are reliably the recipients of the other’s recognition or mirroring, Benjamin focuses on the child’s need for interactions with important others, who, through expressions of their own subjectivities, serve as models or identification figures for self-recognition. Benjamin sees Kohut’s theory as demanding that the mother (or analyst) sacrifice or downplay expressions of her own subjectivity and argues for an approach to both mothering and psychoanalysis that runs counter to this tendency.

In spite of these important differences, certain similarities between Benjamin’s recognition and Kohut’s mirroring may have been missed by Benjamin. Moreover, many feminist and postmodern critics have failed to grasp the limitations that Kohut’s notion of the selfobject places on the autonomy of the self. Nonetheless, the widespread criticism of Kohut’s emphasis on coherence in healthy self-experience does need to be addressed. Resonating closely with postmodern emphases in general, late 20th-century feminist and gender theories suggest that any sense of coherence is either “a necessary fiction” (Goldner, 1991; Harris, 1991a), a defense against the confusions of multiplicity, or both.

Would Kohut have disagreed with this rendering of a coherent sense of self (or coherent gender identity) as a necessary fiction? Although he saw the coherent self as adaptive rather than defensive, he would certainly have agreed with the adjective “necessary.” Also, his concept of coherence was not as far from postmodern and feminist views of the self as it is sometimes taken to be; it was clearly meant to include the integration of multiple and varied strands of experience. Be that as it may, Kohut would probably have been uncomfortable with the designation of “fiction” to the individual’s sense of coherence. His view emphasized the (psychic) “reality” rather than the fictional status of anything felt by the individual. Thus, if an individual had a sense of coherence, Kohut might well have said that it mattered little whether or not an epistemologist judged the feeling to be a fiction. The critical issue for Kohut was whether or not the sense of coherence functioned in such a way that the individual was able successfully to pursue personal ambitions, goals, and ideals and to engage in mutually satisfying and enhancing relationships with important others. In other words, for Kohut, the significance of the sense of coherence was in its functionality. Its “truth” value—whether it was fact or fiction—was more or less irrelevant.

Still, in keeping with radical postmodern thought, today’s feminist and gender theorists tend to focus on what is lost through coherence, self, or identity rather than on what is gained. This psychology of loss is currently being applied even more to gender identity and sexual orientation than to other aspects of selfhood. While “fictions” of self, gender, and sexual identity are seen as necessary for functional purposes within our present culture and society, they are also seen as foreclosing alternative identities (Barratt, 1995), as inhibiting choices and limiting realms of relating (Goldner, 1991), as entailing lost connections never adequately mourned (Butler, 1990; Layton, 1997), and as being generally destructive to many individuals whose psychic realities or fictions do not fit with society’s prescriptive norms (Goldner, 1991).

Thus many contemporary feminist and gender theorists go beyond critiquing our psychoanalytic concepts of self and gender identity to criticize a society that pressures individuals into complying with these necessary fictions under threat of exclusion from many of society’s comforts and rewards. This argument pertains more to issues of gender and sexual identity than to the concept of self, for there are not only strong cultural pressures but also laws regulating some aspects of sexual identity and orientation. Even though there are no such laws directed toward the more generic concept of self, a self that is fragmented and unstable is considered, if not illegal and immoral, then at least unwell. Yet the writers who understandably criticize rigid and unitary gender and sexual identities seem to ignore the coexisting problem that people
whose self-experience is fragmented or very unstable are suffering profoundly, are often unable to enter sustaining relationships, and cannot set and work toward goals that provide them with some sense of purpose and worth.

Early History of Feminist Views in Psychoanalysis

The earliest challenges to Freud's psychology of women came from Jones (1927, 1933), Horney (1924, 1926, 1933), and Klein (1928), all of whom argued against his notions of female sexuality as secondary and inferior. But, despite these strong and eloquent voices, Freud's views managed to prevail as the official psychoanalytic pronouncement on female psychology until what has become known as the "second wave" of psychoanalytic feminism in the 1970s and 80s. Elucidating the "first wave," or "prehistory," of psychoanalytic feminism, Chodorow (1989) credits Horney with having recognized the "male-dominant society and culture" while providing us with "a model of women with positive primary feminine qualities and self-valuation, as against Freud's model of woman as defective and forever limited" (p. 3). Chodorow similarly credits Klein with having turned psychoanalysis "from a psychology of the boy's relation to the father to a psychology of the relation to the mother in children (people) of both sexes" (p. 3), thus shifting the analytic focus from oedipal to preoedipal. She sees Klein's theory as "attentive, in an unmediated way, to the emotions and conflicts that relations rooted in gender evoke in the child and in the child within the adult" (p. 3).

By attributing to Klein an important role in the prehistory of psychoanalytic feminism, Chodorow takes little note of a biological determinism in Klein's work that is more extreme even than Freud's. Of course, unlike Freud, Klein did not use her version to promote a view of women as inferior to men but, rather, saw it as an explanation for the ubiquity of aggression in human experience and interactions. Furthermore, although Klein granted to the mother, more than to the father, central significance in early childhood development, her emphasis on the drives and their constitutional basis tipped her theory in the direction of holding the baby responsible for destructive elements seen to be universal in mother–infant relations. This destructiveness came about through the biologically determined creation of the bad object—the inevitable result of inborn aggressiveness deriving from the death instinct—and the negative and painful object relations established in its wake.

Although the Kleinian narrative can be seen, problematically, as letting the mother off the hook at the expense of blaming the baby, some contemporary feminists (Doane and Hodges, 1992) have viewed Klein's work in a positive light; her theory is praised and contrasted with that of Winnicott, whose work is seen as prescribing an impossible ideal of motherhood that entraps women by suggesting that they give up all aspects of their lives and subjectivity not directly involved in mothering. But Winnicott's "good enough" mother does not have to be perfectly available—she only has to be available "enough." And although Winnicott's theory does encourage the mother initially to meet her baby's omnipotence and allow him the illusion of having created his own fulfilment, it places equal emphasis on subsequent phases in which the mother naturally disillusion the baby through gradually diminishing attunement and responsiveness. Winnicott's (1960b) concept of primary maternal preoccupation covers a very brief period of time at the beginning of the baby's life, and he also spells out the mother's need, during this time, to be supported by the father so that she can transiently but safely put aside outside interests and relationships. Thus, although Winnicott assigns roles on the basis of traditional notions of gender, never questioning that mothers do all the mothering, he does seem to appreciate, if only in passing, the family as a system, and he does not view the mothering role entirely in isolation from other family members.

Because women have traditionally and overwhelmingly been the primary or exclusive caretakers, the problem of parenting has been a central issue for feminists inside and out of psychoanalysis. Initially the feminist movement saw mothering as a problem only for women. But Chodorow (1978), Benjamin (1988), and others then began to elucidate the problems created by our usual parenting arrangements, problems not just for women but also for men and for children of both sexes. Although Klein, focused as she was on the instinctual origins of behavior, seldom suggested that the aggression of children toward their mothers was mobilized in part because of the isolation of mothers and the absence of fathers from the caretaking scene, many contemporary feminists believe that children's all too common destructive rage toward their mothers, or sometimes crippling defenses against it, could be
greatly diminished if caretaking were shared by mothers and fathers rather than carried out by mothers alone (Chodorow, 1978).

Taking a position almost diametrically opposed to the biological determinism of either Freud or Klein, Simone de Beauvoir (1949), in The Second Sex, made a lasting contribution to feminist literature outside of psychoanalysis. She argued, decades before postmodernism, that women are relationally and socially constructed rather than biologically determined by their sex. But at the same time that de Beauvoir’s feminist existentialism turned Freud’s phallocentrism and male supremacy upside down, she credited psychoanalysis with the recognition that no factor becomes involved in the psychic life without having taken on human significance; it is not the body-object described by biologists that actually exists, but the body as lived in by the subject. Woman is female to the extent that she feels as such. . . . It is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life [p. 42; also cited in Young-Bruehl, 1996].

In spite of de Beauvoir’s groundbreaking treatise, two decades were to pass before new responses to Freud’s psychology of women began to emerge within psychoanalysis. When they did, the earliest efforts to counter Freud’s psychology of women took a path very different from that of de Beauvoir. In France, for instance, Chassagne-Smirgel (1975) argues for a maternal and paternal law, each essential to human development. Under the maternal law, children of both sexes long to return to the womb, and this infantile dependence must be acknowledged rather than denied. Facilitating integration of the maternal law is the subsequent identification with paternal law, which represents separation and the oedipal order. Chassagne-Smirgel (1986) believes that both men and women fear the “primitive Mother,” a fear that prompts them “to control the female powers and to accord inferior status to women” (p. 4). Thus, Chassagne-Smirgel rejects Freud’s particular biological determinism but maintains his gender binary, reinterpreting women’s inferior status on the basis of universal psychological experiences and solutions. She does not question the necessity of women’s power over their children but seems to accept it as a given.

Chassagne-Smirgel’s contribution, although unique and original, has in common with the work of several other female analysts the attempt to offer complex object relational interpretations of behavior and attitudes in women that Freud explained only in biological terms. Important examples of this approach include works by Torok (1964), Bernstein (1993), Benjamin (1996), and Harris (1997) on penis envy; by Bernstein (1983) on the female superego; by McDougall (1964) on homosexuality in women; by Mayer (1985, 1995) on castration anxiety; and by Tyson (1982) on object choice. These and other contributions propose equally valued, parallel or complementary lines of development for boys and girls and suggest that neither masculinity nor femininity is primary for both sexes. An exception to this recurring egalitarian theme appears in the work of Stoller (1976), who went so far as to reverse Freud’s ordering of things by arguing that femininity, not masculinity, was primary in both boys and girls.

Another body of psychoanalytic responses to Freud’s psychology of women generally tended to accept his biologically determined terms of the debate, but then tried to find evidence that he was wrong in his devaluation of women and femininity. Most of those who first argued with Freud on the subject of women looked specifically for evidence of primary femininity (Kestenberg, 1956, 1968, 1976; Schafer, 1974; Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1975; Galenson and Roiphe, 1976; Meluk, 1976; Parenets et al., 1976; Ritvo, 1976; Stoller, 1976) or for ways to valorize the different qualities and traits that women seemed to exhibit (Miller, 1976; Gilligan, 1982). The division of all humanity into two sexes was not questioned, and the direct relationship between one’s given sex and one’s emergent gender continued to be seen as fixed and immutable.

Among those who undertook logically or empirically to “prove” the existence of primary femininity, many sought evidence of early genital awareness in preoedipal children of both sexes, or of “maternal” instincts (Benedek, 1959; Kestenberg, 1976; Galenson and Roiphe, 1976; Keeserman, 1976). Kubic (1974) and Fast (1979, 1984) have argued that both girls and boys go through an early stage of believing that they have or could have the genitals, personal characteristics, and gender roles of both sexes. Fast suggests that narcissistic injury is entailed for boys and girls alike in the subsequent recognition that this is not so. This view repositioned girls’ penis envy in relationship to boy’s womb or reproductive envy. The case for primary femininity continues to be made in an ongoing literature exploring the multiple aspects of female sexuality and feminine identity (Bernstein, 1990; Kulish, 1991; Mayer, 1991, 1995; Richards, 1992, 1996; Lax, 1994; Tyson, 1994).
Preceding most of these efforts were studies by Money and Eberhart, (1972), later elaborated by Stoller (1976), that established the concept of core gender identity. Money, Hampson, and Hampson (1955a, b), cited in Coates and Wolfe, 1995) reported on one such study in which each child in a group of infants born with indeterminate genitals was arbitrarily assigned to either the male or female sex at birth. With the goal of creating a sex for each child that would make later heterosexual activity possible, surgeons constructed the indeterminate genitalia of each child into either a penis or vagina, and the child was then labeled and raised as either boy or girl. Despite their preexisting theoretical commitments to biological determinism apropos gender, the researchers who followed the development of these hermaphroditic children found that most of them attained “normal” gender identity in accordance with the genitalia and gender label assigned to them at birth. This was the case even for children in whom there was a discrepancy between their sex chromosomes and the gender and genitalia chosen and constructed for them. These and other gender studies, carried out and reported independently of the early feminist movement, established a new way of looking at problems of masculinity and femininity. This approach was soon taken up by feminist psychoanalysts as well, who moved their focus from female psychology to problems of gender.

The feminists were able to make constructive use of Money’s, Stoller’s, and others’ work on gender to bolster their own attempts to pry apart the conflation of sex and gender, or body and psyche, in Freud’s instinct theory. Thus, while within psychoanalysis the search continued through the 1970s to establish evidence of primary femininity in an effort to counter Freud’s view of women as the second sex, a parallel movement was soon launched in which feminists began to question the biological/sexual roots of gender (Goldner, 1991; Layton, 1997). In this questioning, the acquisition of language, the culture at large, and parental attitudes and interactions were understood to play a much larger role in the establishment of gender identity and gender roles than had previously been believed (Coates and Wolfe, 1995; Benjamin, 1995a; de Marneffe, 1997). At the radical edge of this postmodern view, “there is no precultural, presocial, or prelinguistic body; the body is a social and discursive object, a body bound up in the order of desire, signification, and power” (Schwartz, 1997, p. 198).

A quick review of the language of sex and gender is useful here (taken from Coates and Wolfe, 1995, pp. 10–11). Sex refers to the external genitalia, which normally correspond with the chromosomal status of 46 xx chromosomes for females and 46 xy chromosomes for males. Gender, by contrast, is a social/psychological construct designating how persons are categorized by others and how they categorize themselves. Gender role is the outwardly observable activities, proclivities, and attitudes that are consistent with either the male or the female stereotypes currently afloat in a given time and place; gender identity is the complementary intrapsychic sense of being either male or female in accordance (or discordance) with one’s social roles. Core gender identity is the affectively laden sense that one is the “right” sex. Benjamin (1995b) and de Marneffe (1997) suggest another designation, nominal gender identity, the child’s earliest ability to name his or her gender correctly, regardless of the affective loading this holds for the child.

The study of gender, removed from biological determinism, ultimately opened the door to late 20th-century gender and queer theories, particularly the idea that, if gender is not biologically determined, then it must be “performative” (Butler, 1990; Goldner, 1991; Layton, 1997). Each act performed in accordance with a male or female stereotype contributes to the individual’s sense that he or she is masculine or feminine. Society rewards gender behavior that is concordant with one’s sex and punishes gender-discordant behavior. Repetition of ungendered acts in childhood eventually leads to a core sense that one is masculine or feminine. An important aspect of the masculine stereotype is that men are sexually attracted to women. Similarly, an important aspect of the feminine stereotype is that women are attracted to men. Therefore, inherent in the gender stereotypes is the notion of normative heterosexuality.

In contemporary gender and queer theories, these stereotypes or gender prescriptions are seen as greatly compromising the choices available to both men and women as to how they may live their lives and with whom they may form emotionally intimate, romantic, and sexual relationships. Butler (1995) therefore sees gender as a melancholy phenomenon, in which vast segments of the population are unable to grieve their lost identifications (with opposite-sex parents and partners) or their lost relationships (with same-sex parents and partners). At least as far as identifications are concerned, Benjamin (1995a, 1996), taking

1 Scholars of gay and lesbian life have chosen to call their academic discipline “queer studies.”
a more optimistic view, suggests that children of both sexes can benefit from identifications with both parents. She places special emphasis on the identifications that children of both sexes are able to make with their fathers and that facilitate movement away from the mother of early childhood and out into the world. Traditionally, the importance of the girl’s identifications with her father has been neglected. But in the view of more radical postmodern thought in both feminist and queer theories, Benjamin’s emphasis on the beneficial effects of girls’ identification with their fathers entails a problematic acceptance of the polarized differences between mothers’ and fathers’ gender roles and characteristics.

Feminist Theory, Gender Theory, and Self Psychology

Self psychology’s emergence in the early 1970s overlapped with some of the ground-breaking empirical research on gender (Stoller, 1968; Money and Eberhardt, 1972) and preceded only slightly the “second wave” of feminist writings within psychoanalysis (Chodorow, 1978; Benjamin, 1988). In spite of this near-convergence, there seems to have been little cross-fertilization between self psychology, on one hand, and feminist and gender writings, on the other. Because Kohut intended his theory of self to apply equally to men and to women, and because self psychology can be understood to transcend issues of gender (Lang, 1984), one might have expected the feminists to seize upon his writings for support. Kohut’s lack of offensiveness in matters of gender (as opposed to Freud’s ubiquitous offense) might have been used to counter Freud’s theory of sexuality in which he highlighted differences between the sexes both anatomical and psychological, to women’s disadvantage.

Chodorow (1989) does recognize the gender-neutral quality of object relations theory and in some of her remarks seems indirectly to have included Kohut in that category.

That feminist analysts did not generally turn to self psychology for support in countering Freud’s phallocentrism and male supremacy can be understood to be at least partially related to the fact that feminist analysts at first accepted the central importance that Freud placed on biology and sexuality in human psychic development. In the early 70s they did not usually argue with his essentialist stance; they simply thought that Freud had gotten it wrong where women were concerned.

Therefore, instead of seeing in self psychology a liberating, gender-free theory, they saw in it little of interest or use at all: very little nuanced discussion of sexuality, female or otherwise, and no new insights into gendered relationships. But a question that still remains is why Kohut’s work was ignored for these reasons, while, for instance, Winnicott’s, Loewald’s, and the moderate postmoderns were not. Explicit issues of sexuality and gender generally play no greater role for these latter theorists than they did for Kohut.

The feminist movement of the 1960s and early 70s was concerned primarily with equality between the sexes and the attempt to reverse pervasive social patterns of male privilege and dominance. Within psychoanalysis, the feminist effort was directed toward finding a basis on which to reject Freud’s explicit phallocentrism, his understanding of femininity as derivative of masculinity, and his belief in the “bedrock” inferiority of the female sex. Kohut shared with the feminists a wish to re-visions Freud’s psychosexual theory of development, but the different pathways taken to this end by feminist psychoanalysts and self psychology could not have been more different. Whereas Freud saw sexuality at the root of all normal and pathological development, Kohut, in a 1981 letter to Stolorow, stated his belief that conflicts around drive experience were only secondary to self-deficit (cited in Cocks, 1994). Consonant with this view, Kohut constructed a theory in which sexuality plays a minor role as one of many aspects of experience contributing to the vitality of the self. In Kohut’s view, a firm and robust self, in turn, contributed to the possibility for satisfying relationships in which sexuality could play its part.

Kohut predated the feminists in his efforts to counter Freud’s belief that biology was destiny; he argued that sexuality became a problem for men and women alike only in the absence of self-cohesion. For Kohut, it was the parent–child relationship, not biologically determined drives, that contributed centrally to the child’s psychological and sexual development. In particular, it was the parents’ selective responsiveness to the child from birth onward that led to the development of the child’s sense of self and to her greater or lesser ability to live richly and fully in close and satisfying relationships, in accordance with her ambitions, goals, and ideals. The self evolved similarly in both male and female children: for both men and women, ambitions and ideals were seen as its “poles.”

Kohut did not elaborate on the different ways that boys and girls might develop because of their different sex or genders, nor did he
attribute great significance to the different sexes in parental selfobject functioning. Although he suggested that the mother was usually the first mirroring selfobject and that the father was more likely to function as an idealizable parent imago, these assignations derived from the (unquestioned) roles traditionally played by mothers and fathers in their families. He was explicit that the selfobject functions were interchangeable between mother and father (Kohut, 1971, p. 185; 1977a, pp. 179, 185). Thus, although Kohut was no feminist and although he did not directly question the gender status quo, his theory did provide a framework for "equal opportunity" parenting and equal opportunity childhood development.

Kohut's emphasis on the importance of gender-neutral ambitions and goals in self-development could have been used by feminists to underscore the necessity for children of both sexes to receive encouragement and support in developing talents and skills in constructing lives in which those assets would gain broad expression. Furthermore, given that in Freud's theory the ego ideal was a substructure of the superego, Kohut's emphasis on the importance of internalized ideals for all persons might have served indirectly to counter Freud's notion that girls develop superego functioning inferior to that of boys. For Kohut, the ideal self was a gender-transcendent concept: it was equally important in male and female development, and he did not suggest a difference between the sexes in its achievement. Kohut's theory also allowed for children of both sexes to turn to the father for idealizing identifications, thus implicitly anticipating Benjamin's (1991, 1995) ideas. But the feminists within psychoanalysis seem not to have turned specifically to self psychology for support on any of these points. Benjamin and Chodorow are virtually alone among major feminist psychoanalysts in even bringing Kohut into the discourse by name.

Although Kohut and other early self psychologists did not directly address the nature of the relationship between self-experience and gender identity, others have struggled with aspects of this issue. Chodorow (1995) has urged us to acknowledge that "the 'solution' of gender problems involves the solutions of general problems of personal subjectivity and . . . intersubjectivity" (p. 297). Corbett (1997) has argued for recognition of the need for primary self- cohesion as the basis on which gender identity can be established. He proposes that we distinguish between gender problems that derive primarily from deficits in the primary establishment of self and those which have their origin in later periods of development when issues of guilt and desire are prevalent. While acknowledging a certain validity in the postmodern and gender theorists' critique of linear thinking and developmental stages, he nevertheless reminds us that there is "an order in which things cannot happen" (p. 262). He offers a metaphor to illustrate his meaning, suggesting that, just as we cannot hang a door before we have built our house, we cannot construct a gender identity before we have built a self.

Approaching the relationship between self and gender from a slightly different angle, Stack (1995) distinguishes between a generic sense of self—"the enduring quality of self-recognition that forms when primary caretakers provide the developing infant with a safe enough and loving holding environment"—and the more politically and emotionally specific "choices," both conscious and unconscious, involved in the establishment of sexual and gender identities. These latter are more subject to change than is the abstract sense of personal existence involved in the concept of self (p. 335). Resonating with a point made earlier in this chapter, Stack notes that in valuing flexibility and fluidity of self and gender identity, many postmodern theorists have failed "to distinguish between a fluid sense of self that is flexible and highly functional and the fragmented self that underlies the tortured lives of many of our patients" (p. 335). She rightly asks whether we can "envision a model that allows optimal flexibility for sexual identity without undermining the necessary psychological work of self cohesion" (p. 335).

### Differing Feminist Approaches to Psychoanalytic Theory

We have already noted that early analytic feminists did not initially see the concept of gender as a problem in its own right. They simply saw Freud's theory of male supremacy and primacy as the problem, and they worked to attain recognition for a theory of primary femininity that revolved around equally valuable female traits and qualities. Following this line of thinking, and taking it one step further to privilege and valorize women's traits as opposed to men's, Miller's (1976) work attracted a large feminist following. Under her founding leadership, scholars at the Stone Center for Women's Studies have emphasized women's differences and special capacities, mostly relational and cooperative (Stiver, 1983, 1986; Surrey, 1984; Jordan, 1984, 1986). Also in this tradition is
the work of Carol Gilligan (1982), who emphasizes the different "voice" of women and their responsibility and caring in the relational orientation.

In work coming from the Stone Center, the qualities valued in women, especially empathy (Jordan, 1984, 1987), closely resemble qualities Kohut associated with the optimal development of both sexes. Yet Kohut is barely mentioned, only to be faulted once more for his alleged emphasis on autonomy (Jordan, 1987). In one such instance, almost simultaneously with offering this critique of self psychology, Jordan makes a statement of her own supposedly different viewpoint but makes no mention of its striking similarity to Kohut's central ideas: "The expectation that someone will listen and make an effort to understand greatly enhances the clarity and sureness of the message" (p. 2). Furthermore, although the Stone Center's emphasis on relational needs has much in common with Loewald's (1960) viewpoint, its authors cite Loewald not at all. Nevertheless, the Stone Center participants have been outstanding contributors to the feminist effort to respond to society's gender inequality; they have challenged Freud's theory of male supremacy by identifying and valorizing women's unique qualities and contributions while problematizing what have historically been seen as men's more healthy and successful adaptations. Not directly addressed in this literature is the question of whether women mother because they are relational by constitution or whether they are relational because they are socially constructed to mother.

The whole question of mothering was first comprehensively addressed in psychoanalytic terms by Chodorow (1978). Although today there are multiple significant feminist voices and issues being taken up within psychoanalysis, I am singling out Chodorow and Benjamin, whose early and comprehensive explorations of mothering and of the relations between the sexes continue to exert broad influence on feminist and gender theories within psychoanalysis. My overview of their contribution in this context will necessarily fail to convey the richness, depth, and complexity of their respective writings.

Nancy Chodorow

In her first book, The Reproduction of Mothering, Chodorow (1978) emphasized societal and cultural contributions to women's mothering role and the negative impact it had on children of both sexes. She thought that the organization of society, in which mothers alone raised their children, produced women who have "relational capacities and needs, and psychological definition of self-in-relationship, which commits them to mothering" (p. 209). In contrast, "men develop ... a self based more on denial of relation and connection and on a more fixed and firmly split and repressed inner self-object world." She concluded that "the basic masculine sense of self is separate" (p. 160). In Chodorow's view, the only way out of this infinite reproduction of mothering, and the resulting incompatibilities between men and women, was to reorganize society in such a way that men and women would share parenting.

By 1989, Chodorow had become increasingly impressed with the unique ways that individuals internalize societal prescriptions as they are variously communicated in the intimate relationships between parent and child in the nuclear family. As her view became more identified with psychoanalysis, Chodorow was convinced that not only the social and cultural promotion of the notion of male superiority, but also the specifics of mother-child relationships, reproduced and sustained the system in which male supremacy prevails. She wrote:

If I were to discover that the 'central dynamic' or 'cause' of women's oppression were located outside of the personal, interiorized, subjective, and intersubjective realm of psychic life and primary relationships that psychoanalysis describes, I would still be concerned with this realm and its relation to gender, sexuality, and self [p. 7].

In Chodorow's (1978) view, the fact that both male and female children are raised primarily by mothers leads the little boy forcefully to separate in order to establish his male gender identity. The ramifications of this phenomenon, earlier observed by Greenson (1967), continue to be explored by feminist psychoanalysts today. They see in it an explanation of the value that men, more than women, have historically placed on separation and autonomy. It offers a way of understanding as well what is now seen as men's defensive stance against emotional intimacy and the widespread occurrence of male aggression against women. The personal and societal losses from this state of affairs include the reproduction of mothering exclusively by women, polarized roles for children of both sexes, and the resulting profound incompatibility between the sexes. Chodorow concluded that women gain in relatedness...
and in empathic connections but remain dependent on men who do not reciprocate these needs and interests. Men gain in the independent pursuit of personal goals, reaping the narcissistic and financial rewards granted by society for such endeavors; but they are cut off from their emotional and relational selves, with widespread negative repercussions for themselves, their wives, their children, and society at large.

In later work, in which she moved toward theories that are more decentered, Chodorow (1989) acknowledged that women's inequality may be "multiply caused and situated" (p. 6) and that she had earlier emphasized the mother and the pre-oedipal period as a reaction to "the nearly exclusive Freudian focus on the father and the oedipal complex" (p. 6). Despite this broadening of her understanding, however, she avowed that she had "yet to find a convincing explanation for the virulence of masculine anger, fear, and resentment of women, or aggression toward them, that bypasses—even if it does not rest with—the psychoanalytic account, first suggested by Horney, that men resent and fear women because they experience them as powerful mothers" (p. 6). Thus, through the 1980s she seemed alternately to move away from, and then come back to, the reproduction of mothering.

Reflecting multiple current shifts of interest in feminist psychoanalysis, Chodorow's (1994) most recent book examines notions of difference and variation in our understanding of gender categories and questions what is increasingly perceived as the heterosexist bias in both psychoanalysis and society at large. In this exploration, she observes that "sexual feelings are psychological, charged, and subjectively meaningful" to an extent that individual psychodynamic history and cultural/linguistic location offer far better ways of understanding than biological explanations (p. 41).

Chodorow finds a deficiency not only in Freudian, but also in most subsequent, psychoanalytic attempts to elucidate normal heterosexual experience and behavior. She suggests that authors as diverse as Kernberg, Stoller, Person, and McDougall tend to stress defense and compromise formation, while a certain richness and vitality seems to escape most interpersonal explications. She suggests that we need to treat sexuality per se as problematic since psychopathology seems to be more or less equally distributed among those who prefer homosexual and those who prefer heterosexual relationships.

But, while arguing for a balanced look at both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, Chodorow comes back to the problematic differ-

ences that she finds to be pervasive in adult love attachments between the sexes. She suggests that women more than men seem to seek an unconscious, internal affective dialogue with their prelinguistic and pre-oedipal mothers in which self-other and gendered differentiations play a small role. Although in intimate relationships men often experience similar regressive pulls in relation to their internalized mothers, these unconscious longings tend to push men toward a more exaggerated expression of their masculinity. That very masculinity is understandably threatened by an invitation to internal dialogue with the pre-oedipal mother in a way that women's corresponding sense of femininity is not. We see how Chodorow has moved away from her initially exclusive focus on mothering while continuing to struggle with the differences and incompatibilities between the sexes. In her continuing quest for understanding, she asks, "[H]ow [can we] consider gendered subjectivity without turning such a consideration into objective claims about gender difference [?]" (p. 91). With this question she brings us back to properly postmodern epistemological tensions among objectivity and subjectivity, essentialism, and constructionism. In other words, feminist and postmodern analysts alike undertake to deconstruct the status quo but struggle not to create inadvertently an ever new suggestion of "givens" to be questioned by themselves and the next generation of critics.

Jessica Benjamin

Expanding beyond problems of mothering to a broad examination of the relationship between the sexes, Benjamin (1988) has provided one of the most thorough, complex, and original accountings to date of the interlocking difficulties of male and female development. I have included Benjamin among my highlighted group of moderate postmoderns because she has in common with the others a focus on subjectivity and intersubjectivity without sacrificing the complexity and richness of psychoanalytic understanding. But Benjamin's feminism means that her exploration of intersubjectivity is consistently carried out in a gendered context which distinguishes her from the other postmoderns in my group.

Consonant with Chodorow's earlier project, Benjamin's approach to feminism entails a study of society's entire system of gender, refusing
to see the problems of women in isolation. The link that Benjamin makes between societal structures of mothering and the relationship between the sexes hinged most importantly on society's support of mothers' sacrificing their subjectivity in the process of caring for their children. She sees this phenomenon as leading to several destructive aspects of development for men and women and in the relations between them.

Benjamin believes that, in sacrificing their subjectivity, mothers fail to provide a model for their daughters in the later establishment of the daughters' own subjectivity. Although boys similarly lack such a model from their mothers, boys tend to develop by forceful separation from their mothers and a turning toward their fathers during the separation-individuation process, whereas girls are more likely to remain identified with their mothers. Thus, boys alone have an alternative model for identification, with their father's subjectivity. This bifurcated developmental path preserves societal norms for girls, who then grow up without a strong sense of their own subjectivity, while boys have a monopoly of this sense. Societally this situation tends to result in heterosexual couples consisting of a man as subject and a woman as object. It is because of this perceived mismatch in the developmental achievements of men and women pertaining to subjectivity that Benjamin focuses on intersubjectivity as the necessary goal in gendered relations.

Where there has historically tended to be one male subject and one female object in every heterosexual dyad, Benjamin wants to see two subjects in recognition of one another. She feels that such mutual recognition of subjectivity in the gendered relationships of adulthood has to originate in the mother's earlier insistence on recognition of her own subjectivity in parent–child interactions. Benjamin argues generally for the expression of the mother's unique subjectivity, even though she recognizes and accepts Stern's (1985) positing of a developmental progression through which modes of experiencing are built upon and added to in the first years of life and lead to late first-year achievements for the child in the area of subjectivity and intersubjective relatedness. Thus she is aware that the early caretaking interactions hold a potential for either a relatively smooth or a less successful movement along this pathway for individual children in relation to their mothers.

Stern's theory suggests that, during the first several months of life, the mother's empathy has to be more or less taken for granted, because the child has not yet attained a capacity to recognize either his own or an other's mind. Only following the achievement of such recognition, in Stern's view, can the mother's expression of her own subjectivity become meaningful for her baby. And, even then, empathy remains important as a way to reassure the newly cognizant child that, even though mother's and child's minds are separate, affective connections can still be established and sustained.

In Benjamin's (1988) focus on women's problems and on gendered relationships, however, she refers only to the problems that come about in the wake of mothers' common tendencies to sacrifice too much of themselves for their children. She does not address the different but equally destructive outcomes for children whose parents are unable to decenter enough from their own subjectivities to empathize with their children. The very problems for girls which Benjamin claims are the consequence of mothers' absent subjectivity are sometimes also seen in the wake of cumulative parent–child interactions in which the mother's subjectivity is too much in the foreground. In other words, parents who can imaginatively enter into no one's subjectivity but their own are likely to do as much damage to the development of robust subjectivities in their children of either sex as are parents who too consistently sacrifice their subjectivities in the name of good mothering or fathering.

These comments raise further questions but do not diminish Benjamin's very original contribution to elucidating male and female development on the basis of parenting practices rather than biological determinism. For instance, whereas Freud saw a biologically determined passivity at the root of women's apparently less active desire, Benjamin offers a social/psychological explanation of this phenomenon. She suggests that it is because girls are raised by mothers who deny their own subjectivity and desires that they tend to grow up to do the same. They then easily and even willingly become slaves to men who embrace their own subjectivities and desires. This master-slave relationship, in Benjamin's (1988) view, is the basis of strong sadomasochistic trends in the relations between men and women:

[T]he splitting that is so typical in sadomasochism is in large part a problem of gender. The defensive masculine stance promotes a dualism, a polarization of subject and object. The assumption of subject status to male and object status to female flows from the simply unavoidable fact that the boy must struggle free with all the violence of a second birth from the woman.
who bore him. In this second birth, the fantasy of omnipotence and erotic domination begins [p. 81].

Although in this particular passage, Benjamin emphasizes the male fantasy of omnipotence and domination, her book generally distributes the weight evenly between men’s and women’s contribution to the establishment and maintenance of master–slave relationships; just as current parenting arrangements tend to create dominant men, they simultaneously create women who lack their own subjectivity and sense of agency and therefore long to surrender to one who enjoys these enlivening and direction-enhancing qualities.

To summarize Chodorow’s and Benjamin’s early contributions: Chodorow’s (1978, 1989) view emphasizes how the mother’s undiluted power over her children by virtue of her functioning alone in the role of day-to-day parent has had negative consequences for persons of both sexes: it has led women to deal with their early experience of mother’s domination by becoming dominant mothers themselves; and, for men, it has led to a compensatory and vengeful assertion of power over women in adult life. Adopting a different emphasis, Benjamin (1988) argues that it is the mother’s abdication of her subjectivity and desire that has led insidiously to both male domination and female submission. Therefore, while Chodorow makes a plea for the sharing of parenting between mothers and fathers, Benjamin (1988) supports a two-pronged attack on the problem: that mothers retain and express their subjectivity throughout their mothering years and that girls as well as boys be encouraged to turn to their fathers for identification with a more fully expressed subjectivity and desire (Benjamin, 1991). Both Benjamin and Chodorow have moved on to address broader issues in the ongoing discourse on women’s development and gendered relationships.

Gender Discourse in Psychoanalysis

Chodorow’s and Benjamin’s earlier approaches to feminist problems by way of investigation of the developmental situation for both men and women and the relationships between the sexes are increasingly yielding to a psychoanalytic study of the problems inherent in the concept of gender per se. One of the most widely influential contributions to psychoanalytic notions of gender in recent years has come from Goldner (1991), who set out to establish a new psychoanalytic goal consisting of “the ability to tolerate the ambiguity and instability of gender categories” rather than the previous “goal of ‘achieving’ a single, pure, sex-appropriate view of oneself” (p. 249). Furthering this viewpoint, Harris (1991a) presents both theoretical support and case material to underscore the “constructed and complex dynamics” of gender and sexual identity (p. 200). Because of largely unconscious dynamics, the external sex of the participants in a relationship does not necessarily correspond to their sexual identities and orientations at a psychological level. This means that, in Harris’s view, a relationship between same-sex partners is not necessarily homosexual and that some outwardly heterosexual relationships carry a primarily homosexual meaning to one or both participants.

Whatever the simultaneous influences coming from social/political/intellectual ferment interacting with feminist psychoanalytic contributions, once Chodorow had suggested mothering was socially constructed rather than biologically determined, and once Benjamin had suggested that male dominance was coconstructed with female submission through mothers’ “voluntary” sacrifice of their subjectivity and desire, then we could begin to wonder what other gender attributes might be constructed rather than biologically determined. Such wondering occasionally seems to be moving in the direction of complete social construction. But some analysts, even though attuned to the new gender literature, still struggle to maintain a continuing awareness of the body in psychoanalytic thinking even while embracing social constructionism. This struggle has yielded such terminology as “embodied subjectivity” and “psychic corporeality” (cited in Schwartz, 1997, p. 198).

If we accept social constructionism as an explanation for our organization of gender, however tentatively, then we must begin to question vigorously the seemingly arbitrary bifurcation of gender such that every individual feels a coercion to “perform” in accordance with either masculine or feminine stereotypes (Butler, 1990; Layton, 1997). And, to the extent that sexual orientation is understood to be an aspect of gender relations, then we must question the privileged position that heterosexuality has until now enjoyed in our culture as well (Domenici and Lesser, 1995). In the thinking of theorists participating in this questioning, there is a strong recognition that where gender and sexuality are concerned, classical analysis has actively maintained the status quo rather than leading the exploration in accordance with its revolutionary potential (Goldner, 1991; Dimen, 1991; Corbett, 1997; Mitchell,
of her knowledge and authority, leading her clinically to take the
patient’s perceptions very seriously and theoretically to remain open to
others’ viewpoints.

As exemplars of this openness, Mitchell (1996b) and Aron (1995)
have kept fully abreast of innovations in the feminist and gender
literature and have been stimulated to original thinking in attempting to
integrate the concerns of these theorists into their own relational the-
ories. Mitchell (1993), for instance, has reminded us that we are not
gendered in isolation but in relation to significant objects and the cul-
tural-linguistic matrix into which we are born. He adds, “There is no
way to ascertain what it is like to have a male as opposed to a female
body, apart from a particular culture and its gender definitions within
which the meanings of those bodies are shaped” (p. 127). Of course,
the cultural gender definitions can be supported or countered in indi-
vidual families, significantly adding unique content and texture to every
individual’s sexual and gender development. Mitchell (1996b) has tried
to maintain a balance between a qualified biologism and a qualified
constructionism. This makes sense to me, given that we do have bod-
ies and that our experience is shaped by what we feel in those bodies
even as our personal relationships, language, and sociocultural milieu
structure the meanings and valuations of those experiences.

Interested in reworking previous psychoanalytic concepts in the
light of new theoretical developments, Aron (1995) has revisited the
child’s experience of the primal scene in an attempt to integrate into
his thinking the deconstructed notions of sexuality and gender avail-
able in the contributions of contemporary feminist and queer theories.
Sounding quite Kohutian as well as postmodern, he suggests that we
take “a more affirmative approach” to “the omnipotent wish ‘to have it
all,’ to fulfill symbolically the phantasy of being both sexes” (p. 197).
He argues that “we need both a notion of gender identity and a notion
of gender multiplicity; more broadly, we need an emphasis on people
both as unified, stable, cohesive subjects and as multiple, fragmented,
and different from moment to moment” (p. 195).

From this passage, we get an impression of why Aron has labeled
himself and his fellow relational theorists “moderate” rather than “rad-
cial” postmoderns. What we see in their approach to gender and sexu-
ality, as in other areas of their theorizing, is an attempt to bring ideas
together, to preserve what they identify as useful in old ways of think-
ing but also to integrate and apply what they perceive as valid in the
postmodern. Kohut deliberately tried to close himself off to other ways of thinking while he developed his theory of self and selfobject. The moderate postmoderns have done the very opposite, creating a sense of great uncertainty and flux as they rapidly shift in response to each other's ideas and ideas from multiple contemporary psychoanalytic quarters. This uncertainty and flux may keep all of us just a little off balance as we try to keep up with the latest integrations, but it also makes this a very enlivening time to be a psychoanalyst.

PART IV

KOBUT, LOEWALD'S AND THE POSTMODERN AT CENTURY'S END