



Nancy Chodorow and  
*The Reproduction of  
Mothering*

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Forty Years On

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*Edited by*  
Petra Bueskens

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# Women Mother Daughters: *The Reproduction of Mothering After Forty Years*

*Nancy J. Chodorow*

I, as a woman, ask in amazement, and what about motherhood?  
Karen Horney, 1926<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>From Karen Horney, “The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity-Complex in Women, as Viewed by Men and by Women,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 7 (1926): 324–339. Reprinted with permission.

<sup>2</sup>From Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (Hogarth Press, 1929). Reprinted with permission from Penguin Random House.

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I presented an early version of this chapter in 2015 as a plenary address at the conference, “Motherhood and Culture,” at Maynooth University, Ireland. There I discovered to my great pleasure that throughout the world, there is a thriving field of motherhood studies that draws scholars from disciplines across the social sciences and humanities. There I met Petra Bueskens, to whom I am so grateful for the honor of this book.

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For we think back through our mothers if we are women.

Virginia Woolf, 1929<sup>2</sup>

Women mother daughters who, when they become women, mother.

Nancy Chodorow, 1978

Women mother. So opens *The Reproduction of Mothering*.<sup>3</sup> Here is a book about mother and daughter, the intertwining of generation and gender, even as I myself have changed generations and developed. It is a great honor, and also daunting, to be invited to look back on this book after 40 years.

*The Reproduction of Mothering* comes from a time in second-wave feminism when the personal was political, but feminists were with rare exception hostile to psychoanalysis and suspicious of any account that began from the psyche rather than from political and economic forces. The book argues that the personal is *personal*, and that that's important in itself, even as it also shows how the personal connects to the socio-cultural and political-economic. I begin from the everyday, observing that the mother–daughter relationship—especially, being a daughter—seems important in women's experience and development. I explore, in an open-ended way, this relationship over the course of the daughter's development: how do we understand this important relationship, especially in the daughter's psyche and development? How is it being the mother of a daughter? How do women *become* mothers? I discover that these questions are connected, that it is through the mother–daughter relationship, through women's mothering, that daughters develop maternity. The female relatedness that develops in the mother–daughter relationship and goes into mothering is described by women writers in novels, autobiography, memoir, and poetry, even as this foundational emotional and relational experience and identity helps to put women into a psychosocial and psychocultural world of gender inequality and male dominance.

In articles that precede the book, I claim that women's mothering is fundamental to male dominance in culture and society. In my first publication, "Being and Doing: A cross-cultural examination of the

<sup>3</sup>Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978).

socialization of males and females,”<sup>4</sup> I suggest that male dominance is rooted in a defensive and aggressive psychology of male selfhood and masculinity that grows from the son’s relationship to his mother. This territory—the mother-son dynamics of misogyny—had been explored (though not named as such) by theorists from psychological anthropology and sociology and the Frankfurt School (in Chodorow 2015, I call this mother-son theory the second-wave feminist theory of masculinity).<sup>5</sup> I wonder: if women’s mothering universally grounds sociopolitical and cultural male dominance, how does this mothering come to be? It must be more than female biology and less than coercion: you can’t coerce good-enough mothering. What seemed missing here, as in most of psychoanalysis (focused as it was on penis envy and the Oedipus complex), was attention to the experience of daughters and the mother–daughter relationship.<sup>6</sup> I wonder, what does it mean for *daughters* to be mothered, that mothers are *like them*?

More basically, I pose an open-ended question. What *about* mothers and daughters, “Family structure and feminine personality” (1974) asked.<sup>7</sup> In that early writing, I describe mother–daughter beginning in the preoedipal period, and I conceptualize women’s flexible ego boundaries and relational self. The article was part of what became an influential tripartite theory of society, psyche, and culture, with Michelle Rosaldo’s articulation of the domestic–public divide as sociopolitical anchor of male dominance and Sherry Ortner’s “Is female to male as nature is

<sup>4</sup>Nancy J. Chodorow, “Being and Doing: A Cross-Cultural Examination of the Socialization of Males and Females,” in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven: Yale and London: Polity Press, 1989 [1971]), 23–44.

<sup>5</sup>Nancy J. Chodorow, “From the Glory of Hera to the Wrath of Achilles: Narratives of Second Wave Masculinity and Beyond,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 16 (2015): 261–270.

<sup>6</sup>At a recent panel, “Ghosts in the Nursery,” the folklorist Maria Tatar drew on graphic illustrations from Grimm and Disney to remind us of the evil, terrifying mothers (often disguised as stepmothers) that terrorize beautiful, innocent daughters throughout folklore. The devouring mother is of course exciting, and devoured by children, but then, the daughter becomes this very mother. See also Barbara Almond, *The Monster Within: The Hidden Side of Motherhood* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010); Petra Bueskens, ed., *Mothering and Psychoanalysis: Clinical, Sociological and Feminist Perspectives* (Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2014).

<sup>7</sup>Nancy J. Chodorow, “Family Structure and Feminine Personality,” in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*, Nancy J. Chodorow (New Haven: Yale and London: Polity Press, 1989 [1974]), 45–65.

to culture?” as cultural formulation.<sup>8</sup> That women mother, we suggest, underpins the domestic–public split that constitutes gender inequality in society and the polity and the division of nature and culture, in which men’s appropriation of culture, against women’s location in nature, gives men superiority. This was a time of integrative theory in the social sciences and a sense of right among feminists. We were all under 30 when we presented our papers at the 1972 Meetings of the American Anthropological Association.

*The Reproduction of Mothering* documents, in its theory and developmental story, how complicated and far-reaching something as everyday as the fact that women mother can be.<sup>9</sup> It takes this universal fact and shows how the psychology of women develops out of this fact of women’s mothering, and the internal mother–daughter relationship, in all its ramifications. At the same time, in the book’s instigating theoretical background, there is a noticing and a curiosity: in writings across a broad theoretical spectrum (psychological anthropology, psychoanalytic sociology, Frankfurt School theory) the psychodynamics of male dominance begin from the mother–son relationship.

*The Reproduction of Mothering* had impact and endured, I believe, because it had both experiential immediacy and theoretical-political complexity. First and foremost, it spoke to women personally. It made sense of, helped them to understand, a relationship, mother–daughter, that seems universally central in women’s lives, and especially of the experience and intensity of that relationship for the daughter. It got to the heart of something central to women’s sense of self and ways of being. By extension, it was usable by writers and thinkers from a wide variety of fields. Literary critics could draw upon it to reread women novelists and poets and understand women characters in novels. It provided

<sup>8</sup>Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Women, Culture, and Society* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974); Sherry B. Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” In Rosaldo and Lamphere, *Woman, Culture & Society*, 1974, 67–87.

<sup>9</sup>I come from fields that query the obvious. In anthropology, where I spent five years as undergraduate and graduate student, scholars (at least at that time) went to “other” cultures to learn about what, from the point of view of those cultures’ members, was simply lived. My graduate training in sociology was rooted in ethnomethodology, a field that tried to unpack the taken-for-granted in everyday life (women mother). Psychoanalysis wants to get at the substance and roots of unconscious taken-for-granted pictures of self and world (transference) that inhibit and constrain living and being.

women in philosophy and political theory with a way of understanding certain characteristics of [male] thinking in their fields—an emphasis on autonomy and individuality, for example—while sociologists and anthropologists had a grand theoretical as well as on-the-ground guideline for studying women, men, and gender in society and culture.

Finally, the book contributed to transformations in psychoanalysis itself. First, it pointed to the need for, and helped to create, revision and reconsideration of the theory of femininity and clinical treatment of women, especially, excavating a past and anticipating later psychoanalytic attention to the mother–daughter relationship. Second, in its affirmation of a relational self, of relatedness and relationality in the internal world, it anticipated relational psychoanalysis. In “Gender, relation and difference in psychoanalytic perspective,” an article that came out a year after the book, I claim that differentiation is a form of connection, a way of experiencing and relating to another.

Equally important, *The Reproduction of Mothering* took on, in a grand theoretical way, the question of inequality—women’s oppression, the organization of gender and their dynamic bases. This was a time in second-wave feminism when the personal was political, but when feminists with rare exception were hostile to psychoanalysis. They were suspicious of Freud’s sexist theories and their clinical application and suspicious in general, along with Marxist colleagues, of any account of the psyche and personal relations that didn’t begin from determinative political and economic forces. The book, by contrast, not only made something substantial of the personal is political. It implied that the personal is *personal*—being a daughter, being a mother.<sup>10</sup> Within psychoanalysis, it brought back a relationship that had been unremarked since the 1930s (Deutsch extended these ’30s accounts in her 1944–1945 volumes),<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Now, in 2019, we are aware every moment of how the personal is personal, how feelings and culture as much as or more than economics, seem to drive people and politics nationally and throughout the world. We see rage, racial hatred and bigotry; an emotional virulence extending to violence in the anti-abortion movement; nationalisms and xenophobia that echo the 1930s and 1940s; more forms of misogyny and mistreatment of women and girls than can be counted; and the almost unthinkable separation of even the littlest children from migrant parents.

<sup>11</sup>Helene Deutsch, *The Psychology of Women*, Vols. 1 and 2 (New York: Grune & Stratton, 1944 and 1945).

just as, says Freud (incorrectly!) the daughter–mother relationship is buried in the female psyche.<sup>12</sup>

There are, then, two ways to read the book. *The Reproduction of Mothering* goes inward, to the deepest affects and conflicts of gender, especially of the mother–daughter connection, and herein, surely, lies its lasting appeal: it is a story about mothers and daughters, especially the mother in the daughter’s psyche. Along with this, it is about ways of being, feeling and relating in women, women’s sense of self and gender. The book also goes outward to the impact of women’s mothering on everything. It is a “grand theory” of male dominance and the social organization of gender, of the organization and structure of the world, Western individualism, capitalism, politics and culture.<sup>13</sup> The book ties the intrapsychic dynamics of individuality, selfhood, and gender-sexuality to the sociology, political economy, and culture of gender. And it puts mothering at the center of psychoanalytic theories of women, femininity and feminism.

In what follows, I begin from my earliest observations. Mothering and maternal identity are internal mother–daughter experiences, and this internal mother–daughter maternity—identity, practices, and concerns, maternal sense of self, being a mother, having been mothered—goes through the life cycle. Mothering is generational and developmental, defined by internal and external place in the cycle of generations and by age as much as by gender. Because of these generational and developmental aspects, *time* is integral to mothering. Following my suggestion that sex-gender is composed of multiple components,<sup>14</sup> we notice varying components of maternity—what a woman makes of her maternal, gestational body; how she creates an inner mother–daughter world; her individual filtering of culture; her personal emotional mother–daughter tonality, and her fantasy animation of maternity.

When *The Reproduction of Mothering* was accepted for publication, my publisher suggested that mothering *wasn’t a word*: couldn’t I call the

<sup>12</sup>Sigmund Freud, “Female Sexuality,” in *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Vol. 21 (London: Hogarth Press, 1931), 223–243.

<sup>13</sup>I myself first found psychoanalysis as grand theory when I was about 18, in Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* and Erikson’s *Childhood and Society* (Chodorow, 2019, returns to these roots).

<sup>14</sup>Nancy J. Chodorow, *Individualizing Gender and Sexuality: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011).

book *The Reproduction of Motherhood*? My intuitive choice was mothering. Motherhood seemed static, to fix a woman in a *state*, to be a *status* that a woman takes on rather than a psychic constellation, identity, and activity. The psychological and cultural resonance of *motherhood*, even more than mothering, echoes mother and baby, a status or state, echoed in our extensive Madonna and child iconography, that changes when you have birthed a child.

In psychoanalysis also, most conceptualizations of mothering or maternity refer to mother-infant. Winnicott's "primary maternal preoccupation"<sup>15</sup> has in mind a mother's activity and attitude with her baby, and Loewald writes in several places of the "magical-evocational" mother-baby emotional communication that underpins language.<sup>16</sup> For Freud and Klein, mother *is* the maternal breast, seen from the viewpoint of the child and not from that of the maternal subject herself. As Freud puts it, "I can give you no idea of the important bearing of this first object upon the choice of every later object, of the profound effects it has in its transformations and substitutions in even the remotest regions of our sexual life".<sup>17</sup> For Klein, mother is both object and subject of all primal aggression and drive, all projection and splitting.

Horney is the exception (as she is in much of psychoanalysis). After asking "in amazement" about motherhood, she goes on:

And the blissful consciousness of bearing new life within oneself? And the ineffable happiness of the increasing expectation of the appearance of this new being? And the joy when it finally makes its appearance and one holds it for the first time in one's arms? And the deep pleasurable feeling of satisfaction in suckling it and the happiness of the whole period when the infant needs her care?<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Donald W. Winnicott, "Primary Maternal Preoccupation," in *Collected Papers: Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis* (London: Tavistock, 1958 [1956]), 300–305.

<sup>16</sup> Hans W. Loewald, "Primary Process, Secondary Process, and Language," in *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980 [1978]), 194.

<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis: Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, Vol. 16 (London: Hogarth Press, 1916–1917), 314.

<sup>18</sup> Karen Horney, "The Flight from Womanhood: The Masculinity Complex in Women, as Viewed by Men and Women," in *Feminine Psychology* Karen Horney (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968 [1926]), 60.

Following Horney, *The Reproduction of Mothering* notices mothering as an ongoing identity, activity, and psychic constellation. Once you are a mother, it goes throughout your life and it never stops, even if your children are no longer alive. The gerund form, mothering, indicates the active nature (both intrapsychic and in the world) of being a mother, as well as a girl's orientation to *becoming a mother* and the maternal identity that she brings from her internal object-relational location as daughter.<sup>19</sup>

*The Reproduction of Mothering* thus invites considerations of generation and development, life history and history. It turns us toward Eriksonian considerations of generativity and the life cycle. I completed my dissertation, from which the book is virtually unchanged, when I was 30, and the book was published when I was 34.<sup>20</sup> In the preface to the book's second edition (1999), I notice that my 25–30-year-old self was very much a product of her personal, intellectual and political time. Further, the writer of this generation-centered book was a daughter, but not yet a mother. Now I am both mother and grandmother, and I am an academic mother and grandmother as well. My students have had students who have now had their own students, and my clinical trainees now have their own patients and practices.

The book, then, is written (as is most of psychoanalysis) developmentally, from the point of view of the daughter and the daughter's development. I begin from the daughter's infancy and describe the layerings of internal object-relations created by girls and women, in contrast to boys and men, over the course of development. When I asked about mothers and daughters and the mother–daughter relationship, I was more curious about daughters and their experience than about mothers, even as my account also paid close attention to maternal experience in relation to daughters versus sons. As a daughter, I had certainly noticed the absence of attention to daughters in the psychoanalytic literature, as in the literatures of psychological anthropology and sociology. I did not have available, it goes without saying, my colleagues' later investigations into

<sup>19</sup>Of course, not all women become mothers, and each mother's maternity is her own.

<sup>20</sup>This 1974 dissertation was called, after my first mother-daughter article, *Family Structure and Feminine Personality*. Its subtitle was *The Reproduction of Mothering*, a formulation jointly discovered (or created) late in the process in a conversation with Egon Bittner, my dissertation advisor.

women's fantasies and psychic experiences of pregnancy and childbirth<sup>21</sup> or clinical investigations of daughter–mother attachment.<sup>22</sup> My developmental story, then, hinges on maternal experience of daughters versus sons, but I start from infancy.

At the same time, *The Reproduction of Mothering* also begins from maternal subjectivity. I notice those few psychoanalytic writers who consider pregnancy, childbirth, and inner genital experience,<sup>23</sup> as I develop an account (from a few scattered, not specific to the question, psychoanalytic articles) of how mothers experience their daughters in contrast to their sons. My intuitive choice to write of *mothering*, rather than *motherhood*, enabled an active, agentic focus often missing in the psychoanalytic literature. The book was published after what Fliegel called the “quiescent interval”<sup>24</sup> in psychoanalytic interest in women, and

<sup>21</sup> Barbara Almond, *The Monster Within* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010); Rosemary Balsam, *Women's Bodies in Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012); Malkah Notman and Carol Nadelson, eds., *The Woman Patient, Volume 1: Sexual and Reproductive Aspects of Women's Health Care* (New York: Plenum, 1979); Dinora Pines, *A Woman's Unconscious Use of Her Body* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); Joan Raphael-Leff, *Pregnancy: The Inside Story* (London: Sheldon Press, 1993).

<sup>22</sup> See Nancy Kulish and Deanna Holtzman, *A Story of Her Own: The Female Oedipus Complex Reexamined and Renamed* (New York: Jason Aronson, 2008). Here and in the previous note I am making a point about what was available to me, in terms of psychoanalytic writing on pregnancy, childbirth, and maternity when I was writing *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Thus, I cite books rather than the articles (all written after my book) that are found within them, and I am not going up to the present, thereby giving short shrift to the continued generativity of these writers.

<sup>23</sup> For example, Benedek, 1956, 1959, 1960, Therese Benedek, “Psychobiological Aspects of Mothering,” *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 26 (1956): 272–278; Therese Benedek, “Parenthood as a Developmental Phase,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 7 (1959): 389–417; Therese Benedek, “The Organization of the Reproductive Drive,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 41 (1960): 1–15; Grete Bibring, “Some Considerations of the Psychobiological Processes in Pregnancy,” *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 14 (1959): 113–121; Grete Bibring, Thomas F. Dwyer, Dorothy S. Huntington, and Arthur F. Valenstein, “A Study of the Psychological Processes in Pregnancy and of the Earliest Mother-Child Relationship,” *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 16 (1961a and 1961b): 9–72; Judith S. Kestenberg, “On the Development of Maternal Feelings in Early Childhood: Observations and Reflections,” *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* 11 (1956): 257–291; Judith S. Kestenberg, “Regression and Reintegration in Pregnancy,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 24 (Suppl. 1976): 213–250.

<sup>24</sup> Zenia O. Fliegel, “Women's Development in Analytic Theory,” in *Psychoanalysis and Women: Contemporary Reappraisals*, ed. J. L. Alpert (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press 1986), 17.

amidst a fair amount of hostility toward psychoanalysis among feminists. Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* appeared in 1974, the same year as "Family Structure and Feminine Personality."<sup>25</sup> It was followed by Gayle Rubin's brilliant "The 'Traffic in Women'"<sup>26</sup> in 1975 and in 1976 by a special issue on women of the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*.<sup>27</sup>

As I look back, my own life cycle and generational position enter in. I have returned to Erikson's understanding of the life cycle,<sup>28</sup> especially to his conceptualization of ego integrity as the stage when one looks back on oneself and one's life, holds oneself in mind as a parent once held us—as Erikson puts it, "the acceptance of one's one and only life cycle as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions."<sup>29</sup> I attend to the psychoanalyst Hans Loewald bringing in the parental, as he writes that internalization, making the external truly internal, requires us "to experience ourselves as agents notwithstanding the fact that we were born without our informed consent and did not pick our parents."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, psychoanalysis, beginning from Oedipus, has always centered on generation as much as on gender, as Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel and Joyce McDougall (1986) both notice,<sup>31</sup> along with the fact that generation is intrinsically linked to gender.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Pantheon, 1974); Nancy J. Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality".

<sup>26</sup> Gayle S. Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–210.

<sup>27</sup> *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 1976.

<sup>28</sup> Nancy J. Chodorow, *The Power of Feelings: Personal Meaning in Psychoanalysis, Gender and Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); Nancy J. Chodorow, *Psychoanalytic Ear and the Sociological Eye: Toward an American Independent Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950), 268.

<sup>30</sup> Hans W. Loewald, "The Waning of the Oedipus Complex," in *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980 [1979]), 392.

<sup>31</sup> Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, *Creativity and Perversion* (London: Free Association Books, 1984); Joyce McDougall, *Theatres of the Mind: Illusion and Truth on the Psychoanalytic Stage* (London: Free Association Books, 1986).

<sup>32</sup> These psychoanalytic mothers proceeded me, but it took my own development and rereading, taking the point of view of the other and talking with them, to understand how insightful and pioneering they were. In her psychoanalytically-informed three generation

In *The Reproduction of Mothering* as in much of my subsequent work (for example, “Heterosexuality as a compromise formation”),<sup>33</sup> I notice the taken-for-granted (though it’s probably the case that the fresh straightforwardness of my 20-something self has been layered over). “Women mother” is the book’s opening sentence. Here is something very everyday: women mother, and women are mothers. Yet the mother–daughter dyad is absent in the family dynamics and psychoanalytic literature.

By contrast, as I note earlier, mothers and sons were well-observed and theorized. Popular psychology and culture had given us momism, maternal deprivation, maternal overprotection, and the “generation of vipers.”<sup>34</sup> In psychoanalysis, Greenson described the masculine challenge of “dis-identifying” from mother and Stoller the developing boy’s struggle with his mother-generated primary femininity.<sup>35</sup> In like vein, the Frankfurt Institute claimed that a decline in paternal authority and father absence—“society without the father”—underpinned authoritarianism and the rise of fascism.<sup>36</sup> Drawing on these writings, I argue in articles that preceded *The Reproduction of Mothering* and in the book itself that male dominance is rooted in a defensive and aggressive psychodynamics of masculinity that grows from the son’s relationship to his mother. What about these mothers?

Cross-cultural commentators also made my case, as they described the defensive and aggressive psychodynamics of masculinity that grow from

interview study of Norwegian women and men, Harriet Bjerrum Nielsen documents the centrality of generation to gender. Nielsen, Harriet Bjerrum, *Feeling Gender: A Generational and Psychosocial Approach* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>33</sup>Nancy J. Chodorow, “Heterosexuality as a Compromise Formation,” in *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press and London, UK: Free Association Books, 1994 [1992]), 33–69.

<sup>34</sup>David Levy, *Maternal Overprotection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers: In Which the Author Rails against Congress, the President, Professors, Motherhood, Businessmen, and Other Matters American* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1942).

<sup>35</sup>Ralph R. Greenson, “Dis-identifying from Mother: Its Special Importance for the Boy,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 49 (1968): 370–374; Robert Stoller, *Sex and Gender*, Vol. 1 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

<sup>36</sup>Max Horkheimer, “Authority and the Family,” in *Critical Theory* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972 [1936]), 47–128; Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Seabury Press, 1947); Alexander Mitscherlich, *Society without the Father* (New York: Schocken, 1970 [1963]).

the son's relationship to his mother. The anthropologist Margaret Mead observed how easily a girl, following her mother around from birth until marriage, could slip into becoming a woman and mother. Maleness, by contrast, "has to be kept and re-earned every day."<sup>37</sup> John Whiting, along with Beatrice Whiting, both undergraduate mentors of mine, suggested that the goal of tribal male initiation rites throughout the world is to wipe out femininity and enforce masculinity, and that these rites are more severe in cultures with exclusive mother-infant sleeping arrangements—again, too much of mother.<sup>38</sup> Philip Slater, also a teacher, claimed in *The Glory of Hera* that most of Greek mythology can be said to describe a vulnerable male omnipotence and narcissism that arises from the Greek mother-son relationship.<sup>39</sup> You could find in the literature occasional writing on fathers and daughters, though actually no one much noticed female development at all.

*The Reproduction of Mothering* begins, then, from these personal and intellectual roots. It tells a story of female development and female personality that is at the same time a story of how women develop intrapsychic maternity, of how women's internal world and intrapsychic life constitute an unconscious and conscious maternal identity, maternal capacities, and the desire to mother. I suggest that we cannot think of mothering nor conflicts about mothering and maternity without thinking of the mother-daughter relationship—a woman in relation to her own mother. Throughout, the book attends to this relationship itself, to its intensity, complexity, and pervasive internal presence in women's lives. Reading and interpreting psychoanalytic articles through a mother-daughter lens, I take the daughter (and mother) from the mother-infant and preoedipal dyad through the Oedipal triangle to what I called the adolescent daughter-mother replay.

<sup>37</sup> Margaret Mead, *Male and Female* (New York: William Morrow, 1949), 303. My first published paper, "Being and Doing," was partly inspired by this observation. See Nancy J. Chodorow, "Being and Doing," 1971.

<sup>38</sup> John W.M. Whiting, Richard Kluckhohn, and Albert Anthony, "The Function of Male Initiation Rites at Puberty," in *Readings in Social Psychology*, eds. Eleanor E. Maccoby, Theodore M. Newcomb, and Eugene L. Hartley (New York: Holt, 1958), 359–370.

<sup>39</sup> Philip E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family* (Boston: Beacon, 1968).

Built into each girl's development is an internal early (preoedipal) mother–daughter dyad of both attachment/desire and oneness/identification. Layered onto that is an Oedipal triangle, a girl whose first sexual feelings develop in relation to mother rather than father, a girl who is then attached to both mother and father and wants to reproduce the mother–daughter relationship, whether she is straight or gay. The internal layerings of daughter-mother (and mother-daughter) go through the life cycle and into maternity.

I discovered (or excavated: we recall Freud's claim that the girl's preoedipal attachment to her mother is buried in the female psyche as the Mycenaean and Minoan civilizations were buried under the ruins of classical—Oedipal?—Greece) a buried classical psychoanalytic literature.<sup>40</sup> Several women analysts of the 1920s and early 1930s—Lampl-de Groot, Deutsch, and Brunswick, followed by Freud—had described features of the preoedipal and oedipal connections between mothers and daughters and the intrapsychic world in the developing girl that results.<sup>41</sup> These analysts described, and Deutsch named, the girl's bisexual triangle, noticing oscillation between Oedipal mother and Oedipal father and between preoedipal and Oedipal mother.

From these writings, I was able to elaborate an account of the layerings of connection between mothers and daughters in the developing girl, which I then extended to female sexuality, describing the “Oedipal asymmetries and heterosexual knots” of female sexual attachment. I described

<sup>40</sup>This is a personal as well as professional retrospective. I note that, inspired by a children's magazine that described Schliemann's discovery of Troy, I wanted as a child to be an archaeologist, and that I spent an undergraduate summer on an early Neolithic archaeological dig in Greek Macedonia.

<sup>41</sup>After I finished the book, I became curious. Who *were* these women, and how did it happen that there were so many early women analysts? I spent several years searching out this generation and interviewing those I could find. See for example, Nancy J. Chodorow, “Varieties of Leadership among Women Psychoanalysts,” in *Women Physicians in Leadership Roles*, eds. L. Dickstein and C. Nadelson (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association Monograph, 1986), 45–54; Nancy J. Chodorow, “Seventies Questions for Thirties Women,” in *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press and Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1989), 199–218; Nancy J. Chodorow, “Where Have All the Eminent Women Psychoanalysts Gone? Like the Bubbles in Champagne, They Rose to the Top and Disappeared,” in *Social Roles and Social Institutions: Essays in Honor of Rose Laub Coser*, eds. J. Blau and N. Goodman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Second edition, 1995), 167–194; Nancy J. Chodorow, “Seventies Questions for Thirties Women: Some Nineties Reflections,” in *Feminist Social Psychologies: International Perspectives*, ed. S. Wilkinson (Berkshire, UK: Open University Press, 1996), 21–50.

women's development of a self-in-relationship, in contrast to boys' need to differentiate themselves from their mother and their preoccupation with denying relationship and dependency. I remind the reader that the female "Oedipus" features the girl's continued attachment to her mother and an oscillation between mother and father: an internal and external bisexual triangle. I investigate the multiple *mother-centered* reasons for penis envy and the turn to the father.

For girls, both the preoedipal daughter–mother dyad and the Oedipal triangle, in which there is *always* mother-daughter in addition to daughter-father, begin to generate an intrapsychic reproduction of mothering. Revisited and consolidated in adolescence, this maternal orientation—choice to become a mother, sense of self as mother, and differential relation to daughters and sons—draws upon these preoedipal and Oedipal mother–daughter constellations. Later I call this Freud's Persephone story, a girl's continued attachment to her mother and reluctance to give up mother for father.<sup>42</sup> I suggest that it is both Freud's story of normal female development and one of his stories of "abnormal" development.<sup>43</sup> Here is the book's conclusion:

Women's mothering capacities and commitments, and the general psychological capacities and wants which are the basis of women's emotion work, are built developmentally into feminine personality. Because women are themselves mothered by women, they grow up with the relational capacities and needs, and the psychological definition of self-in-relationship,

<sup>42</sup>Nancy J. Chodorow, "Freud on Women," in *Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond*, Nancy J. Chodorow (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press and London, UK: Free Association Books, 1994 [1991]), 1–32. See also Nancy Kulish and Deanna Holtzman, "Persephone, the Loss of Virginity, and the Female Oedipal Complex," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 79 (1998): 57–71.

<sup>43</sup>My first mother-daughter article, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," was reprinted in a classics anthology, *The Homeric "Hymn to Demeter": Translation, Commentary, Interpretive Essays*, ed. Helena Foley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 243–265. Later, in a chapter called "Rethinking Freud on Women" (Chodorow 1994, pp. 1–32), I notice that Freud's second "abnormal" developmental pathway—the girl who rejects her mother, but not for her father as object—also finds a mythic analogue. This girl remains virginal, identifies with her father, and "cling[s] with defiant self-assertiveness to her threatened masculinity" (Freud 1931, p. 229). As I suggest (Chodorow 1994, p. 31): Athena. "Rethinking Freud on Women" remarks in passing on several mythic analogues for Freud's theories and patients, including, in addition to Demeter and Persephone, Cassandra, Iphigenia, Aphrodite, Hera, Medusa, and, from the Old Testament, Judith [needs reformatting in Chicago style].

which commit them to mothering .... Women mother daughters who, when they become women, mother.<sup>44</sup>

*The Reproduction of Mothering*, then, is both grand theory—a complex and detailed investigation of maternity, female development, and psychology, the mother–daughter relationship, and patriarchy—and a simple story.<sup>45</sup> I claim that the mother is central to the daughter’s psyche and sense of self and that core bodily, psychological and interpersonal experiences for women, culminating in women’s orientation to mothering, can be understood in terms of this internal mother–daughter lineage.

These were generalizations. The internal mother–daughter constellation is central to the feminine psyche, but each internal mother–daughter relationship is its own. Yet my clinical experience, garnered well after I wrote the book, also confirms the book’s argument.<sup>46</sup> Each woman, whether she has children or not, brings something of daughter–mother/mother–daughter to her concerns, conflicts, and sense of self. Each in her own individual way brings her conscious and unconscious relation to her mother into a psychological and psychophysical maternal identity (another way of putting this, drawing on Harris, 2009, would be to say that mother–daughter is by each individual and each dyad softly assembled).<sup>47</sup> As each clinician brings some preconceptions, a pre-attuned ear, to her listening, I am perhaps more attuned than others to mother–daughter resonances. These are patterns, theories held in the back of the mind and clinical discovery at the same time.<sup>48</sup> If a clinician notices one element in a pattern, she is alerted to other elements that might (but also might not!) be around. *The Reproduction of Mothering* describes a pattern that revolves around the mother–daughter relationship, dyadically and as part of the Oedipal triad.

<sup>44</sup>Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, 209.

<sup>45</sup>How simple? When my son’s fourth grade class was “writing books,” I gave a presentation on book writing. Some of the children were puzzled, but one little girl said, “It’s easy! Mommies have daughters, and when they grow up, they become mommies!”

<sup>46</sup>My own (complex and overdetermined) response to my insights, that moved many people and seemed true to me, was to undertake psychoanalytic training: I could not go deeper without clinical experience.

<sup>47</sup>Adrienne Harris, *Gender as Soft Assembly* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>48</sup>Chodorow, *Individualizing Gender and Sexuality*.

Patterns illuminate the everyday. A young woman talks longingly of childhood memories when her father traveled or worked late and her mother made her comfort food for supper—noodles with butter and cheese, scrambled eggs and toast, tomato soup, and grilled cheese—which she ate at the kitchen counter. Her mother let her fall asleep in the parental bed. Another weeps, as she reports that her mother always puts her phone on speaker mode when she calls, so father can participate. I might say, very simply, “you want your mother all to yourself.” I was reminded of these everyday wants when reading *Lost and Wanted*,<sup>49</sup> a novel that focuses partly on a little girl, Simmi, who has lost her mother and tries to keep her alive through texting in her mother’s voice on the mother’s secretly purloined cell phone. Simmi says, “They forget how much they used to love their own parents ... when they were kids.”<sup>50</sup>

I notice, as I sit in my consulting room, that I am attentive to daughter-mother/mother-daughter. This must be both because of what my patients bring—the centrality of daughter-mother for women—and because, in some way, I notice, or elicit, such fantasies and transferences. In *The Power of Feelings*, I describe a woman who devalues her mother (and her female analyst) in favor of her father (and her employer). As a child, she hated the weekly post-divorce return from a day with her father to her mother and her mother’s run-down house. Now, she feels torn when she has to leave work to come to her analytic hour. I describe another woman who is preoccupied with invidious, shaming, and shameful bodily comparisons between her own felt little girl body and that of mature women like her mother. A third woman feels sadness and longing. She can never seem to engage women in close relationships, because they would always rather be with men. For me, she imagines, all my women patients are alike.<sup>51</sup>

I also notice mother-daughter in cultural-psychological patterns, for example, “weeping for the mother” in women from patriarchal cultures.<sup>52</sup> Women who weep for their mothers, often in spite of conscious feminism, cannot enjoy life and undermine their own freedoms and pleasures. They feel guilty and sad: their mothers could not go out alone, could not enjoy the lights of the city or a meal or drink with friends. They

<sup>49</sup>Nell Freudenberger, *Lost and Wanted* (New York: Knopf, 2019).

<sup>50</sup>Freudenberger, *Lost and Wanted*, 197.

<sup>51</sup>Chodorow, *The Power of Feelings*, 79–90.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 121–126.

had to endure the rage of their husbands, my patients' fathers. These are not universals, not the experience of all women from patriarchal cultures, but my attunement to mother-daughter interacted with my patients' self-descriptions (sometimes also their choice of analyst) and the transference-countertransference that emerged between us.

I attend to reported maternal communications: a mother who told her daughter that children destroy a woman's career, another who claimed that pregnancy and nursing ruin a woman's body and brains. We sometimes give shape to these internal mothers by calling up culturally resonant images—the 13th fairy in *Sleeping Beauty*, the witch in *Rapunzel*, or *The Snow Queen*. When I wished to describe women for whom becoming a mother was “too late,” I was attuned to mother-daughter resonances, whereas previous analysts were more likely to focus on penis envy, Oedipal fixation on the father, or a rejection of femininity.<sup>53</sup> We pay attention to the internal mother, to how the woman's own and their mother's imagined uterus are deadened, collapsed, the opposite of generative.

Clinical experience has also expanded into a rethinking that grows from what I call clinical individuality. *The Reproduction of Mothering*, like most developmental theorizing, offers a generalized account, yet within this widespread phenomenon, we find a range of experience. Even as many women experience what feels like a drive or biological urge to become a mother, yet this biology is itself shaped through a daughter's internal, individual relation to her own mother, her unconscious fantasies and affects that cast what becoming pregnant and being a mother mean.<sup>54</sup> For each woman, her internal mother-daughter world, her sense of self as maternal and her actions that express these are individual. It is each girl's particular mother (and father or other-mother, whether the one in

<sup>53</sup>Nancy J. Chodorow, “‘Too Late’: Ambivalence about Motherhood, Choice and Time,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 51 (2003): 1181–1198.

<sup>54</sup>I note in the preface to the book's second edition that *The Reproduction of Mothering* does not address the psychobiology of mothering or the rootedness of maternity in the female body, even as an internal mother-daughter bodily story can be taken from it. The physicality of childbirth, the stirrings of body in the young girl observing her mother's pregnancy, menstruation, with its promise and danger of pregnancy—these all help constitute maternal experience. There were political, professional and personal reasons for this choice. When I was writing *The Reproduction of Mothering*, and long afterwards, women were not getting into graduate school or getting fellowships and jobs because, as they were told, “you will just get pregnant and leave.”

the home or a fantasied father<sup>55</sup>) whom she takes in and internally transforms, whom she brings to mothering? Does she want boys or girls? Does she see mothering as an overwhelming burden or in psychic terms that echo an idealized nineteenth-century maternal perfection? Does she see mothering as no different than fathering? Does she become a mother at all? How does she experience pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, and nursing? A mother-daughter lens affirms that gender is intrapsychically always same-gender/cross-generation—mother and daughter/daughter and mother—as much as it is gender difference. An internal, conscious and unconscious mother-daughter/daughter-mother helps to shape the individuality of maternal identity and mothering. And each daughter, as infancy research has shown, brings her own psychophysical propensities and emotional vulnerabilities.

Reciprocally, mothers are as varied psychologically as people in general, ranging across character and personality. They are permanent worriers or confident that a child will be fine, attuned to nonverbal communication or not. A daughter takes a *particular* mother into her own maternity, her own internal reproduction of mothering.

Of course, all parental figures have some impact. I focus in *The Reproduction of Mothering* on mother-daughter, and even after these many years, I still find that it is key. Women of whatever age, mothers and non-mothers, live internally, in conscious as well as unconscious reality, with their mothers in mind. Becoming a mother and mothering occur as a woman psychically takes, or begins to take, or shifts—but never completely, and that is my point—her internal mother-daughter constellation toward the maternal side.

An important outcome of the book was my undertaking psychoanalytic training. I have always been a theorist, but I felt that to understand the psyche more deeply, I needed clinical experience. Accordingly, as I have developed and changed, and as I have engaged in clinical work, I have come to extend my original account, to see mother-daughter and maternal identity as psychological constellations that go across the life cycle. We can see developmental and generational components as we look at mothering and maternity in women of different ages, and in women who have different relations to being mother and daughter.

<sup>55</sup> Diane Ehrensaft finds that children and parents both imagine a father in the parental constellation, even if there is not one in the actual family. See Diane Ehrensaft, *Mommies, Daddies, Donors, Surrogates* (New York: Guilford Press, 2005).

In what follows, I explore some generational, developmental, and life cycle components of mothering and maternity in three periods in women's lives. I look at early maternal identity, the worries of a young mother about her own external and internal mother's effect on her maternity. I consider mothering in later life—an older woman's maternal feelings that are also shaped by being a daughter. Finally, I consider how the internal mother-daughter bodily and relational constellation affect non-maternity, in some women who do not become mothers. Becoming a mother and maternal identity involve an internal mother-daughter world, even as, for each woman, the mother-daughter world is clinically individual. Maternity may include psychic representations and experiences of the mother's and daughter's reproductive body, a psychological filtering of culture, and emotional tonalities, affect and fantasy that do not initially seem to be about mothering. I affirm the tacit argument, expressed in my title, that in the realm of psychologies of gender, we are also in the realm of generation. The inner mother-daughter world helps and hinders mothering and maternal identity, and it changes over the life cycle.<sup>56</sup>

Danielle, an academic and mother of a daughter and son, began treatment when her daughter was a toddler and her son was a baby. Danielle hadn't been able to nurse her daughter and was feeling self-critical and a failure. She also worried that she might become angry like her mother, someone who could harm her children psychologically. She felt like a lucky survivor, but not sturdy or secure. No matter whether she felt good about an achievement or bad about something that had gone wrong, she heard a sarcastic internal maternal voice: "Everyone finishes their dissertation! You still have to get a job and tenure!" "Getting pregnant is easy! It's raising children that's hard!" Danielle felt that she carried this scornful maternal voice within 24/7.

Danielle told me that before she had her daughter, she had had a pregnancy that terminated spontaneously in the 11th week. This completely common occurrence had happened to several of her friends, but for Danielle it was grounds for self-blame. "I wasn't a safe place for a baby to grow," she said. "I was too preoccupied with finishing my thesis, TA-ing and not taking care of myself *or* the baby! What baby would want to grow inside such an overwhelmed mother?"

<sup>56</sup>My clinical examples are disguised and composite.

Danielle's daughter had been born early, just as she was finishing her dissertation. Her milk didn't come in, and her daughter was bottle fed throughout her infancy. Danielle felt that this was her own fault. She was working too hard to complete her degree, keep up with her field, and applying for her first academic position. She worried that she could not be a good mother to a daughter, feeling that her mother had done okay with her brothers but not with her and her sister: "You mess daughters up! I'll mess her up!" Moreover, she felt, as she put it, that between her early miscarriage and her premature baby "I never got to be big and pregnant! I never got to be Mother Earth."

Danielle wanted to have a second child as soon as possible and got pregnant easily. As she had hoped, her second child was a boy, but again she was unable to nurse. Her son was colicky and not gaining weight, and she felt bereft and a failure. Even holding and cuddling him was difficult. Danielle blamed herself, felt depressed, and sought treatment. Her last child, another daughter, was born a few years later after a relatively uneventful pregnancy. Her milk came in, and her daughter latched on and nursed actively.

We see a correlation here and internal sense making, though certainly not causation. As Danielle began to come to terms with her internal disparaging mother and to recognize some of the psychic costs of her attachment, she could relax into her own motherhood psychologically, relationally, and even, it seemed, physically. Her progression from miscarriage, premature birth, and difficulty nursing—all within normal range, all seen as her fault—to a full-term birth and lactation mirrored Danielle's progression, one that remained a challenge, in recognizing the destructive particulars of her experiences with her mother. Along the way, she formed attachments to maternal figures—a couple of senior women in her department, me, her mother-analyst who wrote *The Reproduction of Mothering*. She became increasingly able to modulate these attachments, to see how she had overidealized women mentors (and her analyst!), women who had, it turned out, both good and bad aspects. Her internal maternal world and division of older women was no longer all good or all bad. She noticed how her own mothering became more spontaneous, and she helped form a junior faculty mothers' group.

Though we get some sense here of how mother-daughter plays out, I do not mean to be causal. I do not suggest that Danielle's disentangling from her mother, or her treatment with me as a different mother, enabled her physiologically to carry a baby to term and to nurse. What we learn

clinically is about personal experience: for both Danielle and me, there was a shift.

As Danielle was expecting her third child, there was leftover fear and hope. She worried that she should not plan ahead, pack a bag for the hospital, or pick names. All this would be tempting fate, and I myself might weigh in, a maternal 13th fairy who would ruin everything. “If I plan too much, it’s dangerous. It’s me acknowledging I’m going to have a baby and bring it home.” Then there’s the thought, “you’re not clairvoyant! You’re not going to have a baby today!” Danielle decided that if you don’t plan, just *maybe* things will be okay. One day, when she came in en route to a department meeting wearing sexy designer pregnancy jeans, I found myself feeling jealous. Designer pregnancy *jeans*? Not, as I remembered my own pregnant academic self, pregnancy *schmatas*?

It is impossible to describe fully how the mind works, including the relation of the physical and the psychological in reproduction. Yet somehow, Danielle and I could both see—or it was important for us to think—that via her attachment to (and struggle with) me, and our beginning to uncover unconscious fears and forbidden thoughts, Danielle was able to rework her internal mother-daughter/reproduction of mothering world. After she had her third child (another daughter), Danielle said, “I wanted to be the Great Mother, a woman who’s soft, warm, and comfortable in her own skin, a safe, warm place for the baby to be, not in a rush, not having a premie. I’ve had no trouble getting pregnant, but then there’s this fear: I’m cold, I’m a bad environment, what baby would want to grow in there? And I had – I now realize that I *created* – this dissertation deadline, so I was working too hard, drinking too much coffee. Now, I see I’m not such an unsafe host, not so toxic. My uterus can be warm and safe. The baby can think ‘OK, I’ll stay here.’ As if embryos have free will! But then, there’s always my mother’s voice, my own [she now recognized] internal voice: “Women have had children since time immemorial! What’s the big deal?”

We notice how pregnancy, birth, and mothering changed over Danielle’s treatment, as we were able, to some extent, to disentangle her conflictual, complicated loyalty to her mother. Childbirth and nursing are largely bio-physical: therapy and analysis don’t causally transform the

fertile body, as analysts may once have thought.<sup>57</sup> But we would be wrong if we did not also recognize that in mothering, as in so much else, body and mind go together. Analysis and psychotherapy do not create the fertile body, but we are nonetheless lucky that new relationships, reworking the mother-relation in treatment or elsewhere, may help shift things internally, so that the experiences of pregnancy, childbirth, or nursing may themselves, in their felt biology, shift.<sup>58</sup>

We notice also a not-negligible cultural component. The United States (including its academic institutions) has the shortest maternity leave policies (and highest infant and maternal mortality rate) in the developed world. Danielle's miscarriage took place and her babies were born during grueling academic years, and any time off was at the expense of her dissertation. After her second child, she had to return to teaching when her baby was just three months old. One day, when her third child was a baby, Danielle noticed with wonder that when she woke up, breasts engorged, at 6:45, and knew that she would have to leave for her 8 o'clock class by 7:30, she chose to awaken her baby to nurse, rather than pumping and leaving her milk behind.

We see the reproduction of mothering not only in young mothers but also in mothers at the other end of the life cycle. Older women often enter treatment because of concerns about themselves as mothers or about their children. One of the greatest tragedies as you age is when an adult child is suffering or not doing well, or when there is estrangement, and you feel helpless or at fault. If things are mended, these mothers often feel that they no longer need treatment.

Frances, in her late 70s, had four children. She had lost her mother in her mid-40s. Yet she remained both mother and daughter. One day I say to Frances, "We're noticing that in order to keep your mother idealized, you are in danger of losing your daughter." When Frances was young, and also now, it turns out, there was no one more perfect than her mother. Her mother never made a mistake. At the same time, she remembers a

<sup>57</sup> We recall Apfel and Keylor's cautionary warning about thinking that sterility, infertility and other reproductive challenges are mainly psychogenic and best addressed through analysis or therapy rather than through infertility treatment. Roberta J. Apfel and Rheta G. Keylor, "Psychoanalysis and Infertility: Myths and Realities," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 83 (2002): 85–104.

<sup>58</sup> Almond, Pines, and Raphael-Leff provide clinically rich, biologically attuned accounts of these processes. See Almond, *The Monster Within*; Pines, *A Woman's Unconscious Use of her Body*; Raphael-Leff, *Pregnancy*.

mother who was rarely home, who was out most of the day playing golf, tennis, or bridge, or was at luncheons with her friends. Her mother had told Frances that she didn't particularly like children and had agreed to two. An unplanned-for third child, Frances had been taken care of by nannies, who could be fired if she became too attached to them. Even as Frances had had a successful career, marriage and children, her mother once said to her, "I thought you'd take after me, but you haven't."

Frances's mother had expected deference, and Frances now feels that her own daughters have not been properly deferential. She describes how, 20 years earlier, her older daughter, proudly married, a mother, and in a new home, had expressed a wish to host the family Christmas. Frances was humiliated, and furious. The offer, as we came to recognize, was a devastating challenge to her own status and sense of self. She and her husband had recently sold the family home and downsized. Now, she was no longer the center of the family, no longer even a mother!

In the experience prompting my remark, a dinner at a local restaurant had been planned for some relatives and family friends. When Frances and her husband arrived, she found that one of her daughters had invited a few friends of her own, had arrived early, had already ordered hors d'oeuvres for the table, and had asked her brother to select the wine. She suggested where her parents might sit. An otherwise lovely dinner, with people whom parents and children had known forever, became an experience of insult and indignation. *Frances* was the hostess: *she* should oversee the menu and the seating, and her husband should choose the wine. She was not being respected—was not being allowed to inhabit her maternal heritage.

Here we see mother-daughter across the generations, with no easy solution. Frances has long been without her mother, yet internally her attachment remains fiercely strong, almost a matter of survival. She cannot bear, consciously and, we infer, unconsciously, to lose her idealized inner mother-daughter world, even as she watches herself over and over driving a wedge between herself and her daughters, the people whom she now loves and counts upon most. Mothers deserve respect, Frances repeats, which includes being recognized as the arranger of family events.

But there is another side to her feelings. Whenever we get close to exploring Frances's relationship with her daughters, who do not call her every day as she called her own mother, and who have professional ups and downs, tears well up. She worries about her daughters (and her

daughters' children), and the worry feels unbearable. Such worries and tensions contrast with her less intense, more modulated concerns about her sons. Repeatedly, as we move toward the end of a session, Frances's face collapses and her tears begin: her concern over one or the other daughter is unbearable. The same concerns that evoked criticism now take on a different tonality: *How* is this daughter's marriage going? *Will* she be okay? *Will* her other daughter's children be all right? *Can* the one hold onto her professional life? Frances says, "This is the saddest thing in my life now! This is all that matters, all that I care about."

One day, Frances came in frantic. One of her daughters was en route to a meeting in the south, and Frances had heard reports of a possible hurricane. Would her daughter's plane be okay? She remembers trying to forbid this daughter from travelling to Europe on her own when she was in her early 20s. And will her granddaughter, about to start at a faraway university known for its student politics and alternate lifestyle, be safe? Where are the dorms? She is always anxious about her daughters, and by extension, her granddaughters. It is all danger and fear of loss. By contrast, she notices, she does not worry about men. She didn't worry about her husband's professional travel or now about her sons: of course they fly to meetings! And what if one of her professionally successful daughters takes a job elsewhere? She will have to move as well.

"We're noticing that in order to keep your mother idealized, you are in danger of losing your daughter." Which is worse, losing mother or daughter? On the one side is an identification with, connection to, and deep love for a mother that goes back 70-plus years. Part of this identification is maternal entitlement—being in charge of dinners and holidays. Yet there is agonizing worry and sadness on the other side. Anything might happen to daughters—a professional problem or move, planes blown away during a hurricane. To get away from these thoughts and feelings, it seems easier to hold onto entitlement and to a mother with whom Frances's relationship is now internal and eternal—part of who she is. Yet, my words, maybe my tone, evoke not only Frances now but also layers of bodily and emotional memory, known in the ways that we retain images of particular childhood times, the longings and disappointments

of our earliest years, and our earliest connections to our mothers. The reproduction of mothering.<sup>59</sup>

In “Too late: The Reproduction and non-reproduction of mothering,”<sup>60</sup> I turn to another facet of the reproduction of mothering, a disruption in gender, generation and the life cycle. At some point, I noticed patients who had put off motherhood or possibly sabotaged their fertility, and who had done so partly through the denial of time and age (my original subtitle was “ambivalence about motherhood, choice, and time”). I noticed the cultural and personal settings and sets of meanings in which this may happen, the regret that (some) women may feel, and the reparation in which they may engage. Of course, in drawing upon this article, and in the article itself, I do not prescribe. I hope to illuminate further the internal mother–daughter world, not to suggest that not being a mother is bad or that infertility is a woman’s fault.

Jenny, in her early 40s, was childless and desperately wanted a child.<sup>61</sup> During her 20s and 30s, Jenny had had six pregnancies, all of which she had chosen to abort. She described a drivenness to these pregnancies and the slightest and briefest of reasons and reasoning for their not being kept. Looking back, it sometimes seemed to us both that Jenny had gotten pregnant almost in order to have an abortion. In like vein, about the time in her mid-30s that she decided that she wanted children, now, Jenny chose as her boyfriend an unreliable, divorced man who was uninterested in his children. Jenny’s abortions were a source of self-punishment, a constant reminder that she had only herself to blame for ruining her chances to become a mother. She thought that her abortions had destroyed her capacity to get pregnant, and her belief seemed not unrealistic.

Jenny told a mother-daughter story. She was the oldest of five children, and she reported feeling from early childhood protective toward her younger siblings, and guilty when their lives were harder than hers. Her

<sup>59</sup>The child analyst Calvin Settlage describes his centenarian patient’s reaction when both her daughter and her analyst were to be out of town at the same time and how this reaction echoed pre-oedipal separation fears from a century earlier. See Calvin F. Settlage, “Transcending Old Age: Creativity, Development and Psychoanalysis in the Life of a Centenarian,” *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 77 (1996): 549–564.

<sup>60</sup>Chodorow, “Too Late”.

<sup>61</sup>In “Too Late,” I call Jenny and Susan (not their real names) “J” and “S.”

parents had been off-and-on separated for several years when an unanticipated pregnancy brought her father back to the home. Shortly after this sibling was born, her mother had a miscarriage, along with severe hemorrhaging. As she was rushed off to the hospital for a hysterectomy, Jenny was left to take care of her younger siblings. She was terrified that her mother would die but at the same time relieved to learn that there could no more babies.

As she reached her mid-40s, Jenny realized that she would never be a biological mother. We also came to understand that for Jenny, getting pregnant would have meant not so much becoming a mother as making reparation, undoing the damage she felt she had done to herself, her body, her siblings, and her mother. She felt that she could never undo this damage nor get over the sadness, guilt, and anger about her own self-destructiveness. She had harmed, not protected, her younger siblings and had to destroy her own potential children.

Like Jenny, Susan came from a large family, in which she was the youngest of six. She always felt that there was not enough to go around, that by the time she was born, her mother was tired, depleted, and unable to give. Susan was angry at her mother for being unavailable, but at the same time, she believed that her mother's exhaustion was entirely her own (Susan's own) fault: last born, she was the last straw. Her own birth, feeding and care were responsible for her mother's depletion. When she was younger, Susan had had risky, unprotected sex. As she had never gotten pregnant, she speculated that she herself had ruined her fertility.

Jenny and Susan filtered maternity through an internal mother-daughter psyche—constellations of unconscious mother-daughter-sibling fantasies, and rage and destructive wishes toward their own and their mothers' wombs. We learned how these feelings and fantasies led to behaviors that may have sabotaged fertility and pregnancy. Not having children was felt as their own internal doing.

*The Reproduction of Mothering* makes generation intrinsic to gender, and generation points us toward time, which, Kristeva suggests, is intertwined with maternity.<sup>62</sup> Over the course of our work together, Susan and I discovered her unconscious belief in, and commitment to, time standing still, how she kept her analysis and her life timeless. From her late 20s well into her 40s, Susan thought of herself as a girl, at most a young

<sup>62</sup> Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986 [1979]), 187–213.

woman. She did not notice her friends marrying and getting pregnant, or, if she noticed, she thought she herself was not old enough. She talked of “keeping things timeless,” “rolling back the clock,” and “running in place,” and she had fantasies of playing family movies backward.

Along similar lines, Jenny often came late for her appointments or had to leave early, frequently because she was meant to be in three places at once, in her therapy hour and at two different meetings. For Jenny, time needed not to exist, because to acknowledge that time moves forward would be to acknowledge that she was too old to have children. Jenny and Susan both had to deny or stop time.

Mothering is generational, and generations involve time. Denying or playing with time has now become a marker that I am attuned to (so that it is sometimes *not* too late) in women who have put off pregnancy and motherhood, and as a wider index of conflicts about generativity. As Susan and I discussed time standing still, she was able to move forward not only in her career but also in finding a relationship in which she could be a stepmother. For Jenny, by contrast, the denial of time was a weaker psychic element, and her sabotage of her fertility more virulent.

Women for whom mothering is too late may begin from conscious or unconscious feelings that there was not enough of mother. Mother seemed depressed, downtrodden, and tired. Jenny, Susan, and others may feel that they themselves destroyed their mother with greed or envy. They also sometimes discover an envy of siblings and memories of destructive wishes toward them, furthering guilt. Contrary to what the analyst Melanie Klein might predict, however, daughters like Susan and Jenny do not fear maternal retaliation for these destructive wishes. Their mothers are already tired and weakened by motherhood, perhaps especially by this particular daughter’s demands and attacks on her very being and her uterus. It is the mother herself who needs protection, and her daughter who has to take destruction, and non-maternality, upon herself.

My clinical observations reflect back upon and extend my original theorizing. Each woman’s internal world includes pre-Oedipal and Oedipal (Persephonal and post-Persephonal? Persephonal and Demeterian?) layerings of the mother–daughter relationship. Mother–daughter figures throughout the life cycle, for foundational experiences like being or not being a mother and for the everyday worlds of grilled cheese or organizing a family dinner.

I first described the daughter–mother/mother–daughter relationship in a book that was basically written before I was thirty. I was young,

then, and not yet a mother. Here, well along in the cycle of personal and professional generations and (hopefully) of generativity, shading over (also hopefully) toward ego integrity, I consider and expand upon the psychological dilemmas and developmental formulations I describe in the book. Perhaps because they were rooted intrapsychically as much as intellectually, my insights have for me, and it seems for others, withstood the test of time, even as I, along with others, have challenged and revised them.

“Women mother daughters who, when they become women, mother.” Here, I describe a young mother whose biological and psychic maternity changes over time and a grandmother who feels as psychically tied to her own mother as she is to her adult daughters. I describe women whose internal relation to their mother has led them, through conscious and unconscious processes, not to become a mother. Throughout, we find identifications with and fears of a fantasied internal mother and of the mother whom one remembers, a mother felt as generative or a toxic mother who can never be given up. For each woman who mothers (or who does not), we find that specific, individual internal experiences go into how she feels about her children and herself as mother.

In *The Reproduction of Mothering*, we see mothering through the lenses of development and time. Throughout the life cycle, mothering and maternal identities and practices are for women generational and gendered, for those who become mothers and those who do not. Mothering, just as being mothered, reflects a mother–daughter constellation that inheres in the psychic and physical body and in the effects of the psychic body on the “real” body, as well as the reverse, in the sense of self as daughter and the sense of self as mother. Gender and generation, development and time, are fundamental components of maternity throughout the life cycle.

I wanted to understand female development and the mother–daughter relationship, and I began from an open-ended, inductive query: What about mothers and daughters? What do we know about them? What is the effect of mothers on daughters? How do mothers come into being? What resulted was at the same time a simple answer to a simple question that spoke to women personally and a complex theory that described female development, male development, and the strains in romantic and sexual relationships, that proposed a grand theory about the sociology of sex-gender. Maternity and its daughterly reciprocal are central, in manifold clinical and cultural variations, in women’s lives and psyche and in the social and cultural organization of gender.

When I am fortunate enough to visit the Louvre, I glance at the *Mona Lisa*, but it is essential that I spend time with Leonardo's *The Virgin and Child and St. Anne*. Here, Mary sits on her mother's lap and holds her son, who himself holds a sort of lovey, a little lamb (the lamb of God, of course, but also ...) as he looks back at his mother.<sup>63</sup> Whereas we find countless portrayals throughout Western history of Mary and the baby Jesus, iconic, often astonishingly gorgeous and moving images of *motherhood*, it was Leonardo's genius to depict the reproduction of *mothering*—motherhood, certainly, but also a maternal mother–daughter lineage. In this extraordinary painting, St. Anne holds the *adult* Mary on her lap and looks benevolently upon her, as Mary leans forward to hold the baby Jesus (not negligibly, a son who seems to have caregiving capacities). In a lovely related sketch, Mary sits facing forward on her mother's lap, and their legs are so intertwined that you cannot tell whose legs are whose. St. Anne, holding Mary, the post-partum adult mother, but also, in fantasy for both of them, Mary her mother's little girl, who can be held on her lap. Women mother daughters who, when they become women, mother.

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<sup>63</sup> In "Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood," Freud (1910) writes about the *Mona Lisa* and what he calls "St. Anne with two others," about how they stand near one another in time of painting and also in the Louvre. My observations here are, unlike Freud's, not psychobiographical (or if they are, they draw from my own associations and psychobiography, not from Leonardo's or Freud's).

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