

The Reproduction of Mothering

*Psychoanalysis and the
Sociology of Gender*

With a New Preface

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tions in the role of kinship and size of household, also contributes to the interchangeability and mobility of families.* It has facilitated several other tendencies in the modern family such as nuclearization and isolation of the household, and the belief that the polity, or the society, has no responsibility for young children.

Another problem with the psychoanalytic account's false universality is its assumption that the type of exclusive care mothers in this society give is, like the fact of exclusivity, natural and inevitable. The account thus reifies the quality of care as well as the gender and number of people who provide it. Psychoanalysts do not often notice** the extensive differences within single mothering that are possible. Infants may be carried on the hip, back, or chest, in a loose sling which molds to the mother's body or directly against her body, or they may be swaddled, left in a cradleboard, or left in a crib except for brief nursing periods. They may sleep alone, with their mother, or with their mother and father. They may be weaned at six months, when they can just begin to experience the cognitive difference between themselves and the outside world, or at two, three, or five, when they can walk and talk. These differences obviously have effects, which, again, have not been treated sufficiently in the psychoanalytic literature.⁷⁴ The typical Western industrial arrangement, in which infants are left in cribs except for brief periods of time when they are held and nursed, and in which they are weaned during the first year, provides relatively little contact with caretakers in the world societal spectrum. In a comparative framework, it is not the extreme constancy of care which psychoanalysts assume.

These objections do not invalidate the psychoanalytic account, but they show how to read it. And they indicate its real subject: a socially and historically specific mother-child relationship of a particular intensity and exclusivity and a particular infantile development that this relationship produces. Psychoanalysis does not describe those parenting arrangements that have to be for infants to become people. The account is certainly adequate and accurate for the situation it describes and interprets. It should not be read, however, as prescription or inevitable destiny. An account of the early mother-infant relationship in contemporary Western society reveals the overwhelming importance of the mother in everyone's psychological development, in their sense of self, and in their basic relational stance. It reveals that becoming a person is the same thing as becoming a person in relationship and in social context.

*Whose usefulness Parsons and Goode have described.⁷³

**With the exception of periodic generalization about primitive society and longer nursing periods.

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The Relation to the Mother and the Mothering Relation

The ideal mother has no interests of her own. . . . For all of us it remains self-evident that the interests of mother and child are identical, and it is the generally acknowledged measure of the goodness or badness of the mother how far she really feels this identity of interests.

ALICE BALINT,

"Love for the Mother and Mother Love"

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.

FREUD,

Introductory Lectures

I have argued that the most important feature of early infantile development is that this development occurs *in relation to* another person or persons—in the account I am giving, to a mother. A description of early development, then, is a description of a social and interpersonal relationship, not only of individual psychological or physiological growth. We can now isolate and investigate each side of this relationship: the mother's experience of her child and the child's experience of its mother. An investigation of the child's experience of being mothered shows that fundamental expectations of women as mothers emerge during this period. An investigation of the requirements of mothering and the mothering experience shows that the foundations of parenting capacities emerge during the early period as well.

THE EFFECTS OF EARLY MOTHERING

The character of the infant's early relation to its mother profoundly affects its sense of self, its later object-relationships, and its feelings about its mother and about women in general. The continuity of care

enables the infant to develop a self—a sense that “I am.” The quality of any particular relationship, however, affects the infant’s personality and self-identity. The experience of self concerns *who* “I am” and not simply *that* “I am.”

In a society where mothers provide nearly exclusive care and certainly the most meaningful relationship to the infant, the infant develops its sense of self mainly in relation to her. Insofar as the relationship with its mother has continuity, the infant comes to define aspects of its self (affectively and structurally) in relation to internalized representations of aspects of its mother and the perceived quality of her care.¹ (As I have indicated, to call this quality “perceived” brackets the variety of fantasies and transformations the infant may engage in to deal with its anxiety and ambivalence.) For instance, the experience of satisfactory feeding and holding enables the child to develop a sense of loved self in relation to a loving and caring mother. Insofar as aspects of the maternal relationship are unsatisfactory, or such that the infant feels rejected or unloved, it is likely to define itself as rejected, or as someone who drives love away. In this situation, part of infantile attention, and then the infantile ego, remains preoccupied with this negatively experienced internal relationship. Because this situation is unresolvable, and interferes with the ongoing need for love, the infant represses its preoccupation. Part of its definition of self and its affective energy thus splits off experientially from its central self, drawing to an internal object energy and commitment which would otherwise be available for ongoing external relationships. The growing child’s psychic structure and sense of self thus comes to consist of unconscious, quasi-independent, divided experiences of self in affective (libidinal-attached, aggressive, angry, ambivalent, helpless-dependent) relation with an inner object world, made up originally of aspects of its relation to its mother.

The infant’s mental and physical existence depends on its mother, and the infant comes to feel that it does. It experiences a sense of oneness with her and develops a self only by convincing itself that it is in fact a separate being from her. She is the person whom it loves with egoistic primary love and to whom it becomes attached. She is the person who first imposes on it the demands of reality. Internally she is also important. The infant comes to define itself as a person through its relationship to her, by internalizing the most important aspects of their relationship. Its stance toward itself and the world—its emotions, its quality of self-love (narcissism), or self-hate (depression)—all derive in the first instance from this earliest relationship.

In later life, a person’s early relation to her or his mother leads

to a preoccupation with issues of primary intimacy and merging. On one psychological level, all people who have experienced primary love and primary identification have some aspect of self that wants to recreate these experiences, and most people try to do so. Freud talks about the turn to religion as an attempt to recreate the lost feeling of oneness.² Michael Balint suggests that adult love relationships are an attempt to recreate primary intimacy and merging, and that the “tranquil sense of well-being” is their ultimate goal: “This primary tendency, I shall be loved always, everywhere, in every way, my whole body, my whole being—without any criticism, without the slightest effort on my part—is the final aim of all erotic striving.”³

The preoccupation with issues of intimacy and merging, however, can also lead to avoidance. Fear of fusion may overwhelm the attraction to it, and fear of loss of a love object may make the experience of love too risky. When a person’s early experience tells him or her that only one unique person can provide emotional gratifications—a realistic expectation when they have been intensely and exclusively mothered—the desire to recreate that experience has to be ambivalent.⁴

The earliest relationship and its affective quality inform and interact with all other relationships during development. As Benedek puts it, “It is characteristic of the spiral of human development that the representations of the primary object relationship with the mother are in continual transaction with the representations of all later object relationships according to the age and maturity of the child and the significance of the particular object.”⁵ In later years as well, the relation to the mother informs a person’s internal and external relational stance. Fairbairn considers the child’s relationship with its mother as “the foundation upon which all his future relationships with love objects are based.”⁶ His theory of personality and the clinical evidence he discusses elaborate and support this claim. Even Freud, whose clinical work and theory provide more insight into later relationships, emphasizes the way the mother, through her influence on all subsequent relationships, remains as an important inner object throughout her growing infant’s life.⁷

The actual relationship to the mother, and the infant’s feelings about her, also remain important. Alice Balint argues that the essence of “love for the mother” is that it is not under the sway of the reality principle.⁸ The child does not originally recognize that the mother has or could have any separate interests from it. Therefore, when it finds out that its mother has separate interests, it cannot understand it.

This contrasts to love for the father. The child knows its father from the beginning as a separate being, unless the father provides

the same kind of primary relationship and care as the mother.* Thus, it is very much in the nature of things when the father expresses his own interests.** Balint concludes that "love for the mother is originally a love without a sense of reality, while love and hate for the father—including the Oedipus situation—is under the sway of reality."

This dichotomy has several consequences. First, the child can develop true hate and true ambivalence more easily in relation to a father whose wants differ from those of his child. The child's reaction to its mother in such a situation is not true hate, but confusion that is part of the failure to recognize the mother's separateness. That children are more obedient to their father results not primarily from any greater strictness on his part, nor from the fact that he represents "society" or "authority" (as Freud and others would have it). Instead, Balint claims, "the child behaves towards the father more in accordance with reality because the archaic foundations of an original, natural identity of interests has never existed in its relation to the father."†¹⁰

Although the father represents reality to the child, he is at the same time a fantasy figure whose contours, because they are less tied to real object-relational experiences for the child, must be imagined and are often therefore idealized.¹² As a special person who is not consistently present but is clearly important to the mother, he may become an object of attraction, one whose arrival—as a break from the daily routine—is greeted joyously, with particular attention. If the mother has been present during his absence, there is no need for the ambivalence growing from anxiety and remembered loss—classic attachment behavior—which the child often reserves for its mother when she reappears.‡

*Recall, also, Jacobson's claim that comparison of self to father provides major impetus to the original establishment of separateness in the child.

**Folk tales, Balint claims, reflect this dichotomy: "The wicked mother is always the stepmother, while the wicked father is not necessarily the stepfather, and this is true for both son and daughter."⁹

†In another part of her essay, Balint stresses the mother's absolute control over her child's existence, and suggests that society, to defend against this, has transferred rights over children's lives to the father. She concludes, "It argues for the primordality of the maternal right that it is an informal and private affair of the woman. The paternal right, however, is a social institution."¹¹ Balint here uncritically appropriates the prevailing opposition between public and domestic life, and even assigns this opposition a "primordial" status. She points correctly, however, to the structural basis of the opposition. We can infer that on the level of fantasy and ideology there has been a trade-off between women's right to exclusivity of primary connection to children and men's to primary access to society.

‡He can also be, as a more familiar person than a stranger, an attachment figure in the traditional sense. His goings and comings, when they leave his child with a

This dual orientation is not just a product of the mother-infant bond, but is created by the typical father's relationship to his infant as well. Dorothy Burlingham has found that fathers see babies not as babies but as potentially grown-up—that they are more likely than mothers to transform their perception of their newborn into fantasies about the adult it will become, and about the things they (father and child) will be able to do together when the infant is much older.¹⁴ She also points to the ways that paternal treatment (which does not start at birth) enforces the infant's separateness, and to the contrast between the father's treating his infant as an object or toy (stimulating and exciting it, lifting and tossing it) and the mother's holding and cuddling it.

Juliet Mitchell, in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, speaks to the sociological dynamics of this asymmetry.¹⁵ Drawing on a psychoanalytic model of development, she points out that the early mother-infant relationship, though socially constructed, is experienced by the child as presocial, or nonsocial. It is the person who intervenes in this relationship—the father—who represents culture and society to the child. Hitherto, the social organization of parenting has meant that it is women who represent the nonsocial—or the confusion of biological and social—and men who unambiguously represent society. Mitchell argues that the child's becoming social and enculturated is the same thing as becoming social and enculturated in patriarchal society.

These contrasts between the relation to the mother and the relation to the father are not unique to infancy. Alice Balint argues that people continue not to recognize their mother's interests while developing capacities for "altruistic love" in the process of growing up. They support their egoism, moreover, by idealizing mothers and by the creation of social ideology:

Most men (and women)—even when otherwise quite normal and capable of an "adult," altruistic form of love which acknowledges the interests of the partner—retain towards their own mothers this naive egoistic attitude throughout their lives. For all of us it remains self-evident that the interests of mother and child are identical, and it is the generally acknowledged measure of the goodness or badness of the mother how far she really feels this identity of interests.¹⁶

stranger or relieve it from her or him, can bring traditional attachment reactions—crying, following, and stopping of play when the father leaves, touching, creating proximity, and clinging when he returns.¹³ Kotelchuck shows, however, that attachment behavior was stronger toward mothers than fathers, though mothers and fathers were closer to each other than either was to the stranger.

This statement does not mean that mothers have no interests apart from their children—we all know that this kind of overinvestment is “bad” for children. But social commentators, legislators, and most clinicians expect women’s interests to enhance their mothering and expect women to want only interests that do so. Psychoanalytic theory is paradigmatic here, as Balint’s use of “all of us” suggests.

Psychoanalytic accounts assume that good and desirable maternal care will indeed arise from the mother’s “empathy” with her infant and her treatment of it as an extension of herself—as someone whose interests she knows through total regressive identification, or as someone whose interests are absolutely identical with her own. It seems to me* that one explanation for the assumption that the baby’s interest is really the maternal interest and for the lack of analytic recognition (in theory, though not in clinical accounts) of possible conflicting interests is that these theories reproduce those infantile expectations of mothers which they describe so well. Anna Freud, as Alice Balint, understands this tendency:

The mother is merely the representation and symbol of inevitable frustration in the oral phase, just as the father in the oedipal phase is the representative of inevitable phallic frustration which gives him his symbolic role of castrator. The new concept of the rejecting mother has to be understood in the same sense as the familiar older concept of the castrating father. . . . Even a most devoted mother finds it a difficult task to fulfill her infant’s needs.¹⁷

Children wish to remain one with their mother, and expect that she will never have different interests from them; yet they define development in terms of growing away from her. In the face of their dependence, lack of certainty of her emotional permanence, fear of merging, and overwhelming love and attachment, a mother looms large and powerful. Several analytic formulations speak to this, and to the way growing children come to experience their mothers. Mothers, they suggest, come to symbolize dependence, regression, passivity, and the lack of adaptation to reality.¹⁷ Turning from mother (and father) represents independence and individuation, progress, activity, and participation in the real world: “It is by turning away from our mother that we finally become, by our different paths, grown men and women.”¹⁸

These attitudes, and the different relations to mother and father, are generalized as people grow up. During most of the early period, gender is not salient to the child (nor does it know gender categories).

*With due recognition of the riskiness of sociology of knowledge evaluations of validity, and especially of the way psychoanalytic “insights” have been used within the field of psychoanalysis itself to discredit opposing theories.

However, the fact that the child’s earliest relationship is with a woman becomes exceedingly important for the object-relations of subsequent developmental periods; that women mother and men do not is projected back by the child *after* gender comes to count. Women’s early mothering, then, creates specific conscious and unconscious attitudes or expectations in children. Girls and boys expect and assume women’s unique capacities for sacrifice, caring, and mothering, and associate women with their own fears of regression and powerlessness. They fantasize more about men, and associate them with idealized virtues and growth.

THE MATERNAL ROLE

Psychoanalysts agree on a clinical conception of what constitutes “good mothering.” Because of the infant’s absolute physiological and psychological dependence, and the total lack of development of its adaptive ego faculties, the mother must initially make “total environmental provision” for her infant. This provision includes more than simple fulfillment of physiological needs and relief of drives. Maternal care is crucial for the infant’s eventual ability to deal with anxiety and to master drives and environment.¹⁹

If the mother fails to serve as her infant’s external ego, and requires the infant to develop adaptive ego capacities before it is ready, or if she controls the environment and serves as an adaptive ego for too long, the infant is prevented from developing capacities to deal with anxiety. Those relational capacities and that sense of being which form the core of the integrative “central ego” do not emerge. The mother must know when and how to begin to allow the child to differentiate from her—to allow some of the functions which she provides to be taken over by the infant’s budding adaptive ego capacities.²⁰ Thus, she must guide her child’s separation from her. In the process, she often awakens her child’s ambivalence toward her, and unintentionally brings on its rejection of her and of the care which she has provided.

These processes take place on a physical level as well. The infant develops the physical capacity to go away from the mother before it has an operative conception of a psychologically “safe” distance from its mother. Therefore, the mother begins with almost total responsibility for what Bowlby describes as the “maintenance of proximity.” Through the child’s early years, however, responsibility for the maintenance of proximity shifts, and must shift, to the child. By the end of the child’s third year, it maintains proximity as much as does its

mother; thereafter the maintenance of proximity is increasingly left to the child.

At every stage of this changeover, the mother must be sensitive to what the child can take and needs. She needs to know both when her child is ready to distance itself and to initiate demands for care, and when it is feeling unable to be distant or separate. This transition can be very difficult because children at this early stage may one minute sense themselves merged with the mother (and require complete anticipatory understanding of their needs), and the next, experience themselves as separate and her as dangerous (if she knows their needs in advance). The mother is caught between engaging in "maternal overprotection" (maintaining primary identification and total dependence too long)²¹ and engaging in "maternal deprivation" (making premature demands on her infant's instrumentality).²² Winnicott describes the magic mother: "If now [when the child begins to be capable of giving signals] she knows too well what the infant needs, this is magic and forms no basis for an object relationship."²³

The ability to know when and how to relinquish control of her infant, then, is just as important as a mother's initial ability to provide total care. I have described Winnicott's claim that a failure in this latter task leads the infant to develop only reactively. But a mother may fulfill her initial responsibilities to her infant, and then not be able to give up this total control. Winnicott suggests that in such a case, an infant has two options. Either it must remain permanently regressed and merged with its mother, or it must totally reject its mother, even though this mother has, until now, been a "good mother" from the infant's point of view.

The accounts of these theorists suggest that good maternal behavior requires both a constant delicate assessment of infantile needs and wants and an extreme selflessness. Winnicott, for instance, points out that the infant is aware only of the failure of maternal care—of the overwhelming disruptions which result from too little care, and the lack of autonomy and sense of effectiveness which result from too much—and otherwise takes this care for granted. The infant is unaware of satisfactory care from the mother, because it is "almost a continuity of the physiological provisions of the prenatal state."²⁴ In similar terms, Michael Balint, in his description of primary love, has pointed out that the satisfactions of this love bring well-being and tranquillity and fulfill infantile expectations, whereas the failure to satisfy it brings a violent and intense reaction.*

*Bowlby provides a telling example of the taken-for-grantedness which psychoanalytic theorists expect of and attribute to mothers, in the form of a sentimental chapter epigraph:

Analysts do not consider their prescriptions difficult for most "normal" mothers to fulfill. This is because of their view of the special nature of mothers, mothering, and mother-infant relationships. (Mothering, effuses Winnicott, is an "extraordinary condition which is almost like an illness, though it is very much a sign of health."²⁵) They suggest that women get gratification from and fulfill maternal role expectations at a fundamentally different level of experience from that of any other human relationship. Mothering requires and elicits relational capacities which are unique. Analysts emphasize that the mother-infant relationship provides gratification to mother as well as infant, and that good-enough mothering is done through empathy, primary identification, and experiencing the infant as continuous with the self and not separate.

Analysts stress different aspects of mutuality in the mother-infant relationship. Benedek, for instance, claims that the relationship centers on oral and alimentary psychological issues, fantasies, modes of relating—for both mother and infant.²⁷ Alice Balint makes the more general claim that the infant's lack of reality principle and its primary love toward its mother is reciprocated by the mother. Mother and infant are instinctually interdependent: "The two parties in this relation are libidinally equal. Libidinally the mother is receiver and giver to the same extent as her child."²⁸ This "interdependence of the reciprocal instinctual aims"²⁹ enables the infant's primary love based on naive egoism to work. It can afford to ignore possible opposing interests on the part of the mother because, according to Balint, mother's and baby's interests are completely complementary. For the mother, also, the interests of her baby are the same as her own, and gratification is always mutual: "What is good for one is right for the other also."³⁰ Furthermore, both love for the mother and mother love are remote from reality: "Just as the child does not recognize the separate identity of the mother, so the mother looks upon her child as a part of herself whose interests are identical with her own."³¹

Women get gratification from caring for an infant, analysts generally suggest, because they experience either oneness with their infant or because they experience it as an extension of themselves. The basis for "good-enough" early mothering is "maternal empathy" with her infant, coming from total identification with it rather than (more intellectual) "understanding of what is or could be verbally expressed" about infantile needs:

They must go free/Like fishes in the sea
Or starlings in the skies/Whilst you remain
The Shore where casually they come again.³²

The important thing, in my view, is that the mother through identification of herself with the infant knows what the infant feels like and so is able to provide almost exactly what the infant needs in the way of holding and in the provision of an environment generally. Without such identification I consider that she is not able to provide what the infant needs at the beginning, which is a *live adaptation to the infant's needs*.³²

Christine Olden claims that the mother, during her infant's first few weeks, "gives herself up and becomes one with him."³³ The mother feels "a new kind of love for the child who is at once her own self and yet separate and outside, [and] concentrates entirely on the infant."³⁴ For these theorists, gratification of the infant serves the same psychological purpose as self-gratification, because the infant is one with the self of the mother and their interests are therefore identical.

Many mothers and infants are mutually gratified through their relationship, and many mothers enjoy taking care of their infants. Still, when we say that the mother-infant relationship has been exclusive, mutual, and special, this means different things from the child's point of view than from its mother's.

For the child, the relation to its mother is its social experience and guarantees its psychological and physical development. The infant relates to its mother, in reality and in fantasy, or it does not relate. For the mother, the relationship has a *quality* of exclusivity and mutuality, in that it does not include other people and because it is different from relationships to adults. However, a mother also participates in her family and in the rest of the community and society. She experiences herself as a socialized adult member of this society and knows the meanings of family, child-rearing, and mothering within it. She usually participates in a marriage with a deep sexual division of labor, in which she is financially dependent,* and she expects her husband to be dominant. Her mothering, then, is informed by her relationship to her husband, her experience of financial dependence, her expectations of marital inequality, and her expectations about gender roles.

For sociologists Parsons and Bales, the asymmetry in this situation is crucial.³⁵ It typifies the asymmetry which founds their theory of development. For them, the mother represents a "superordinate" social system as well as participating in the mother-child social system. As a representative of this larger system, and with encouragement from it, she socializes the child into it, by denying reciprocity. The child's integration into larger social units as it grows up proceeds ac-

*This is almost inevitable in contemporary marriage, given the income and earnings inequality of men and women.

ording to the same principle, in which the socializing agent plays a part in two systems and uses this dual participation to move the child from one to the other.

The analytic account, by contrast, tends to see only the psychological level of the maternal role. Even at this level, only Benedek and Alice Balint at least mention a potential psychological asymmetry in the mother-infant mutuality and suggest that this lack of symmetry requires the infant to emerge from its naive egoism. It is not surprising that only women analysts mention this.* Male theorists (Bowlby and Winnicott are cases in point) ignore the mother's involvements outside of her relationship to her infant and her possible interest in mitigating its intensity. Instead, they contrast the infant's moves toward differentiation and separation to the mother's attempts to retain symbiosis.**

Though the analytic formulation is extreme in its lack of recognition of the differences in commitment, the analysts nevertheless point to important characteristics of the mother-infant relationship and to necessary maternal (or parental) capacities. The particular characteristics they point to, moreover, indicate when, in human development, parental capacities first arise. Empathy, the sense of the infant as an extension of the self, reciprocated primary love, primary identification and sense of oneness, orality, mutual mother-infant attachment, are part of both contemporary mother-infant relationships and, as my account of early development makes clear, relational states of the incipient infantile ego.

Analysts explain how some adults—that is, mothers—come to reexperience these originally infantile states. They imply that empathy, or experiencing the child as continuous with the self, may grow partially out of the experience of pregnancy and nursing (though nonbiological mothers can be fine parents). However, their major argument is that (with or without pregnancy and nursing) the ability to parent an infant derives from having experienced this kind of relationship oneself as a child and being able to regress—while remaining adult—to the psychological state of that experience.

On a theoretical level, then, *anyone*—boy or girl—who has participated in a "good-enough" mother-infant relationship has the rela-

*Nor that a woman sociologist chose to make Benedek's insight the take-off point for an insightful article on parenthood.³⁶

**It is hard to tell whether Parsons and Bales fit this masculine pattern. They see personality in terms of social roles and not enough in terms of psychological conceptions of personality. Thus, the theory does not indicate *how* mothers experience their participation in the two levels of social system which they describe.

tional basis of the capacity for parenting. Benedek equates the total early infantile experience with preparedness for parenting:

When the infant integrates the memory traces of gratified needs with his developing confidence in his mother, he implants the confidence in his well-being, in his thriving good self. In contrast, with the memory traces of frustrating experiences he introjects the frustrating mother as "bad mother" and himself as crying and frustrated, as "bad self." Thus he inculcates into his psychic structure the core of ambivalence. These primary ego structures, confidence and the core of ambivalence, originating in the rudimentary emotional experiences of early infancy, are significant for the infant of either sex. They determine the child's further relationships with his mother and through it, to a great extent, his personality. A generation later these primary ego structures can be recognized as motivating factors in the parental attitudes of the individual.³⁷

This early experience does not differentiate by gender:

The primary drive organization of the oral phase, the prerequisite and consequence of the metabolic needs which sustain growth, maturation, and lead to the differentiation of the reproductive function, is the origin of parental tendencies, of motherliness and fatherliness. It should then be emphasized, as is evident, that the primary drive organization of the oral phase has no sex differentiation; it is asexual.³⁸

Empirically, however, analysts assume that women will parent, and that the parenting capacities laid down in people of *both* genders will be called up in *women only*. In some places, for instance, Benedek assumes women's mothering and claims that the *mother's* experiencing of her relationship to her infant as oral and alimentary originates in the oral relationship which she had with her own mother.³⁹ Winnicott in the same vein bypasses the issue of gender and emphasizes that regression to infantile feelings and the experience of oneness enables a *mother* to empathize with her infant.⁴⁰

There is a contradiction here. All people have the relational basis for parenting if they themselves are parented. Yet in spite of this, women—and not men—continue to provide parental (we call it "maternal") care. What happens to potential parenting capacities in males?

Because most analysts assume that physiology explains women's child-care responsibilities ("It is women's biological destiny to bear and deliver, to nurse and to rear children"), they do not generally ask this question. Those that do provide inadequate answers. Some who argue that the foundations for parenting are laid down in both boys and girls in the earliest relation to the mother assume subsequent physiological differentiation. Benedek, for instance, speaks of "innate maleness" and "innate femaleness," though she never explains what these consist in.⁴¹ Others hypothesize physiological bases for the *wish for a child*—Kestenbergs's vaginal sensations⁴² or Freud's symbolic

penis-baby equation (when a girl cannot get a penis, she substitutes the wish for a child)⁴³—but do not relate these to *maternal capacities*. As I have argued here, physiology is not a sufficient explanation for women's current mothering role and capacities.

Another prevalent assumption is that girls naturally identify with their mother as they grow up, and that this makes them into mothers.⁴⁴ How and why this identification happens are left vague and unanalyzed. But as cognitive psychologists have shown, children identify with a parent of a particular gender because they have already learned that this is how to be appropriately feminine or masculine.⁴⁵ Identification is a product of conscious teaching about gender differences, that is, a learning phenomenon. Psychoanalytic clinical studies illustrate particularly vividly how parents teach children about what biological gender differences are supposed to mean, and what their biology is supposed to entail for their adult role. The identification they describe takes place in a socially constructed, heavily value-laden context. Identification and learning clearly goes on, and helps to make women into mothers, but these processes are not sufficient.

Finally, analysts describe in persuasive clinical detail how the "wish for a child"⁴⁶ or "the need to be pregnant"⁴⁷ develops in *specific* women out of their early relationship to their own mother, and especially out of the particular contradictions and conflicts within this. Their accounts by implication claim to show how *women in general* come to wish for a child, or need to be pregnant. Being a parent, they argue, calls up a *woman's* early experience and relationship to *her* own mother.

Both the form (primary identification, primary love, and so forth) and the content of a mother's mutual relation with her infant grow out of her early experience. Her mothering experience and expectations are informed (for the most part unconsciously) by her own childhood history, and her current and past relationships, both external and internal, to her own natal family. This history and these relationships have over the course of her development come to have their own independent psychological reality. A mother's regression to early relational stances in the course of mothering activates these early constituted internal object-relationships, defenses, and conflicts. Thus, a complex object world affects and gives character to even the most seemingly psychologically private and exclusive mother-infant relationship.

Klein discusses the dynamics of maternal regression and the identifications and interactions it entails.⁴⁸ She speaks of the mother's multiple identifications and the variety of internal object-relation-

ships which go into her mothering. A mother identifies with her own mother (or with the mother she wishes she had) and tries to provide nurturant care for the child. At the same time, she reexperiences herself as a cared-for child, thus sharing with her child the possession of a good mother.

Both her identification with her mother and her reexperience of self as child may lead to conflict over those particular issues from a mother's own childhood which remain unresolved.⁴⁸ One mother, for instance, may delight in the earliest mothering experience, when she can attend to her infant's early needs, and then withdraw and be rejecting when the child becomes more independent. Another may behave in exactly the reverse manner. Both alternatives depend on the associations and (unconscious) memories and feelings related to these issues in each's own infancy. Motherhood may be a (fantasied) attempt to make reparation to a mother's own mother for the injuries she did (also in fantasy) to her mother's children (her siblings). Alternatively, it may be a way to get back at her mother for (fantasied) injuries done by her mother to her.

The contradiction remains. The experiences these accounts describe are experiences that children of both genders have. Yet none of them explains why the wishes and conflicts which contribute to the sense of self as parent, the desire to be a parent, and parenting capacities and practices become activated in women and not in men. They do not examine the dynamic or outcome of these same experiences, wishes, and conflicts in boys.*

CONCLUSIONS

Psychoanalytic theory describes a mother-infant relationship of particular quality, and argues that the foundation for the mother's participation in such a relationship is laid in her early relationship to her own mother. But the foundation for parenting is laid in a *boy's* early relationship to *his* mother as well. The early relationship generates a basic relational stance and creates potential parenting capacities in everyone who has been mothered, and a desire to recreate such a relationship as well. My account of the early mother-infant relation-

*Jacobson discusses the development of a "wish for a child" in boys, but in this case treats it as the product of special complications and conflicts. In her clinical case study of the development of the wish for a child in a girl, the complications and conflicts she describes are equally severe, and she describes an enormous amount of explicit teaching about sex differences which obviously influenced the way they got resolved, that is, in the wish for a child. Yet she treats this outcome as entirely unproblematic.⁴⁹

ship in Western industrial society reveals the conscious and unconscious attitudes and expectations that all people—male and female—have of their mothers in particular, and of women in general. These expectations build into the reproduction of mothering, but expectations are not enough to explain or assure it.

Because neither the theory nor the clinical accounts directly ask why women, and not men, parent, they cannot provide a complete answer. The clinical focus on specific relational issues and unconscious conflicts, however, and specific elements in a mother's early relationship to her own mother, points us in the right direction, beyond vague appeals to identification and unsubstantiated biological assumptions.

In what follows, I argue that the relationship to the mother differs in systematic ways for boys and girls, beginning in the earliest period. The development of mothering in girls—and not in boys—results from differential object-relational experiences, and the ways these are internalized and organized. Development in the infantile period and particularly the emergence and resolution of the oedipus complex entail different psychological reactions, needs, and experiences, which cut off or curtail relational possibilities for parenting in boys, and keep them open and extend them in girls.

47. Balint points this out, *ibid*.
48. Fairbairn, 1952, *An Object-Relations Theory*.
49. Freud, 1926, "Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety," *SE*, vol. 20, pp. 77-174.
50. Anna Freud, 1936, *The Ego and the Mechanisms*; Brody and Axelrad, 1970, *Anxiety and Ego Formation*.
51. Brody and Axelrad, 1970, *Anxiety and Ego Formation*, p. 8.
52. Fairbairn is the major theorist of these processes. See also Parens, 1971, "A Contribution of Separation-Individuation." For an interesting clinical account, see Herman Rouphe and Eleanor Galenson, 1973, "Object Loss and Early Sexual Development," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 52, pp. 73-90.
53. For further discussion of the role of the father and other rivals in individuation, see Jacobson, 1964, *The Self and the Object World*; Mitchell, 1974, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*; and Ernest L. Abelin, 1971, "The Role of the Father in the Separation-Individuation Phase," in McDevitt and Settlege, eds., *Separation-Individuation*, pp. 229-252.
54. See on this Abelin, 1971, "The Role of the Father."
55. Bowlby, 1969, *Attachment and Loss*.
56. See especially H. Rudolph Schaffer and Peggy Emerson, 1964, "The Development of Social Attachments in Infancy," *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 29, #3, and H. R. Schaffer, 1971, *The Growth of Sociability*. See also Milton Kotelchuck, 1972, *The Nature of the Child's Tie to His Father*.
57. Winnicott, 1960, "The Theory of the Parent," p. 589.
58. Fairbairn, 1952, *An Object-Relations Theory*.
59. Jacobson, 1964, *The Self and the Object World*.
60. Alice Balint, 1939, "Love for the Mother," p. 107.
61. My account here derives mainly from Jacobson, 1964, *The Self and the Object World*.
62. See, for example, Bowlby, 1951, *Maternal Care*; Mahler, 1968, *On Human Symbiosis*; Spitz, 1965, *The First Year*.
63. Rose Coser reminded me of this (personal communication).
64. The only exception I have found is a study by Cambor (C. Glenn Cambor, 1969, "Preoedipal Factors in Superego Development: The Influence of Multiple Mothers," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 38, #1, pp. 81-96), who reports a clinical case demonstrating the effect on superego formation of dual parenting by a rejecting, white biological mother and a nurturant black nurse.
65. Bowlby, 1969, *Attachment and Loss*, p. 367.
66. Bettye Caldwell et al., 1963, "Mother-Infant Interaction in Monomatric and Polymatric Families," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 33, p. 663.
67. Bettye Caldwell, Charlene Wright, Alice Honig, and Jordan Tannenbaum, 1970, "Infant Day Care and Attachment," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 40, #3, pp. 397-412.
68. Rutter, 1972, *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed*; Schaffer, 1977, *Mothering*.
69. Yudkin and Holme, 1963, cited in Rutter, 1972, *Maternal Deprivation*, p. 61, and Schaffer, 1977, *Mothering*, p. 105.
70. Irvine, 1966, and Miller, 1969, cited in Rutter, 1972, *Maternal Deprivation*, p. 62.
71. Margaret Mead, 1954, "Some Theoretical Considerations on the Problem of Mother-Child Separation," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 24, pp. 471-483, and 1962, "A Cultural Anthropologist's Approach to Maternal Deprivation," *Maternal Care and Mental Health/Deprivation of Maternal Care*, pp. 237-254.
72. Schaffer, 1977, *Mothering*, p. 100. See also for an equivalent conclusion, Rutter, 1972, *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed*, p. 125.
73. Parsons, 1942, "Age and Sex," and 1943, "The Kinship System"; and Goode, 1963, *World Revolution*.
74. An exception here is Muensterberger (Warner Muensterberger, 1969, "Psyche and Environment: Sociocultural Variations in Separation and Individuation," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 38, pp. 191-216), whose discussion, though marred by Western ethnocentrism, nevertheless makes a persuasive case that psychoanalytic theory derives

from dealing with a specific developmental situation. See also George W. Goethals, 1974, "Mother-Infant Attachment and Premarital Behavior: The Contact Hypothesis," for further cross-cultural comparison of the effects of these differences, as well as Margaret Mead, 1954, "Some Theoretical Considerations," and John W. M. Whiting, "Causes and Consequences of the Amount of Body Contact between Mother and Infant."

CHAPTER 5

1. See Benedek, 1959, "Parenthood as Developmental Phase," and Fairbairn, 1952, *An Object-Relations Theory*, for descriptions of this process.
2. Freud, 1930, *Civilization and Its Discontents*.
3. Michael Balint, 1935, "Critical Notes on the Theory," p. 50.
4. Mead, 1954, "Some Theoretical Considerations," and 1962, "A Cultural Anthropologist's Approach"; Slater, 1970, *Pursuit*, and 1974, *Earthwalk*; and George W. Goethals, 1974, "Mother-Infant Attachment," discuss the two-person relationship (intensely monogamous, potentially jealous, fearful of loss or, alternately, entirely denying of need by extreme fickleness and refusal to commit oneself) that our culture's exclusive mothering produces.
5. Benedek, 1959, "Parenthood as Developmental Phase," p. 400.
6. Fairbairn, 1940, "Schizoid Factors in the Personality," in *An Object-Relations Theory*, p. 24.
7. See chapter epigraph, from *Introductory Lectures*, *SE*, vol. 26, p. 314.
8. Alice Balint, 1939, "Love for the Mother."
9. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
12. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1964, "Feminine Guilt and the Oedipus Complex," in *Female Sexuality*, pp. 94-134, and Dorothy Burlingham, 1973, "The Pre-Oedipal Infant-Father Relationship," *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 28, pp. 23-47, discuss this side of the relation to the father.
13. See Kotelchuck, 1972, *The Nature of the Child's Tie*.
14. Burlingham, 1973, "The Pre-Oedipal Infant-Father Relationship."
15. Mitchell, 1974, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*.
16. A. Balint, 1939, "Love for the Mother," p. 97.
17. Quoted in Henriette Glatzer, 1959, "Notes on the Preoedipal Fantasy," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 24, pp. 383-390.
18. Joan Riviere, 1937, "Hate, Greed, and Aggression," in Melanie Klein and Joan Riviere, *Love, Hate and Reparation*. See also Helene Deutsch, 1944, *Psychology of Women*, vols. 1 and 2; Parsons, 1964, *Social Structure and Personality*; Parsons and Bales, 1955, *Family, Socialization*. Erik Erikson, 1964a, *Insight and Responsibility*, discusses a dream of Freud's (the dream of the Three Fates) in a way that exhibits the same associative complex around women and mothers. (What is relevant here is not the accuracy or completeness of his interpretation, but his unquestioning formulation of the symbolic associations). He talks of Freud's "successful" and "forward-looking" reexperiencing of oral issues in which Freud "turns resolutely away from the mother" (p. 184), and approvingly shows how Freud associates women and death; makes autonomy from women synonymous with participation in the intellectual world; and, finally, draws parallels among the turn "from dependence to self-help, from women to men, [and] from perishable to eternal substances" (p. 184).
19. See Brody and Axelrad, 1970, *Anxiety and Ego Formation*; Mahler, 1968, *On Human Symbiosis*; and Winnicott, 1965b, *The Maturational Processes*.
20. For a clinical description of the development of a false sense of self in a little girl as a defensive reaction to both overwhelming environmental intrusion and non-empathic, while overcontrolling, maternal behavior, see Samuel Ritvo and Albert J.

Solnit, 1958, "Influences of Early Mother-Child Interaction on Identification Processes," *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 13, pp. 64-85.

21. What David Levy (1943, *Maternal Overprotection*) bemoans.

22. What Bowlby (1951, *Maternal Care*), Spitz (1965, *The First Year of Life*), and Mahler (1968, *On Human Symbiosis*) fear. See also Winnicott, 1960, "The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship." For an account of the continuance of this double-bind in later mother-child relationships, see Rose Laub Coser, 1974a, "Authority and Structural Ambivalence in the Middle-Class Family," in *The Family: Its Structures and Functions*.

23. Winnicott, 1960, "The Theory," p. 592.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 591.

25. Bowlby, 1969, *Attachment and Loss*, p. 286.

26. Winnicott, 1965a, *The Family and Individual Development*, p. 15.

27. Benedek, 1956, "Psychobiological Aspects of Mothering."

28. Michael Balint, 1937, "Early Developmental States," p. 83, citing Alice Balint.

29. Alice Balint, 1939, "Love for the Mother," p. 101.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.* See also Robert Fliess, 1961, *Ego and Body Ego: Contributions to Their Psychoanalytic Psychology*, who suggests that the baby is a "regressively erotogenic zone" of the mother in addition to being an object of her affection, and that mothers get narcissistic (as well as, or as opposed to, object-libidinal) gratification from fondling, rocking, and caring for their babies. He and medical researcher Niles Newton, 1973, "Interrelationships between Sexual Responsiveness," point also to the sexual sensations that nursing may evoke in a mother.

32. Winnicott, 1960, "The Theory," p. 594.

33. Christine Olden, 1958, "Notes on the Development of Empathy," *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 13, p. 513.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 514.

35. Parsons and Bales, 1955, *Family, Socialization*.

36. Alice S. Rossi, 1968, "Transition to Parenthood," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 30, pp. 26-39.

37. Therese Benedek, 1960, "The Organization of the Reproductive Drive," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 41, p. 10.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

39. See Benedek, 1956, "Psychobiological Aspects of Mothering," and 1959, "Parenthood as Developmental Phase."

40. See Winnicott, 1965b, *The Maturation Processes*.

41. See Benedek, 1956, "Psychobiological Aspects," and 1960, "The Organization."

42. Kestenberg, 1956a, "On the Development of Maternal Feelings."

43. See Freud, 1925, "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes," *SE*, vol. 29, pp. 248-258. I discuss this theory more fully in a later chapter.

44. See, for example, Benedek, 1949, "Psychosomatic Implications," 1952, *Psychosexual Functions*, and 1960, "Organization," and Ruth Mack Brunswick, 1940, "The Preoedipal Phase of the Libido Development," in Robert Fliess, ed., *The Psychoanalytic Reader: An Anthology of Essential Papers with Critical Introductions*, pp. 231-253.

45. See, for example, Kohlberg, 1966, "A Cognitive-Developmental Analysis."

46. Edith Jacobson, 1968, "On the Development of the Girl's Wish for a Child," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 37, pp. 523-538.

47. Burton Lerner, Raymond Raskin, and Elizabeth Davis, 1967, "On the Need to Be Pregnant," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 48, pp. 288-297. Jacobson focuses on libidinal issues and body fantasies; Lerner et al. focus on ego issues.

48. Melanie Klein, 1937, "Love, Guilt and Reparation," in Klein and Riviere, eds., *Love, Hate and Reparation*.

49. See also R. W. Coleman, E. Kris, and S. Provence, 1953, "Study of Variations in Early Parental Attitudes," *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, 8, pp. 20-47, and Benedek, 1959, "Parenthood as Developmental Phase."

50. Edith Jacobson, 1950, "Development of the Wish for a Child in Boys," *Psychoan-*

alytic Study of the Child, 5, pp. 139-152, and 1968, "On the Development of the Girl's Wish for a Child."

CHAPTER 6

1. See, for example, Roy Schafer, 1974, "Problems in Freud's Psychology of Women," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 22, #3, pp. 459-485; William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, 1966, *Human Sexual Response*; Mary Jane Sherfey, 1966, "The Evolution and Nature of Female Sexuality in Relation to Psychoanalytic Theory," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 14, #1, pp. 28-128.

2. Freud, 1924, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," *SE*, vol. 19, pp. 172-179; Freud, 1933, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*.

3. Freud, 1925, "Some Psychological Consequences."

4. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

5. Jeanne Lampl-de Groot, 1927, "The Evolution of the Oedipus Complex in Women," in Fliess, ed., *The Psychoanalytic Reader*, pp. 180-194.

6. Freud, 1931, "Female Sexuality," *SE*, vol. 21, pp. 223-243; see also Freud, 1933, *New Introductory Lectures*.

7. Freud, 1933, *New Introductory Lectures*, and Brunswick, 1940, "The Preoedipal Phase."

8. Helene Deutsch, 1944, *Psychology of Women*.

9. Freud, 1933, *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 237.

10. Maccoby and Jacklin, 1974, *The Psychology of Sex Differences*.

11. Eleanor Galenson, 1976, "Scientific Proceedings—Panel Reports," Panels on the Psychology of Women, Annual Meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 1974. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 24, #1, p. 159.

12. Jerome Kagan and Marion Freeman, 1963, "Relation of Childhood Intelligence, Maternal Behaviors and Social Class to Behavior During Adolescence," *Child Development*, 36, pp. 899-911, and Virginia C. Crandall, 1972, "The Fels Study; Some Contributions to Personality Development and Achievement in Childhood and Adulthood," *Seminars in Psychiatry*, 4, #4, pp. 383-397.

13. Robert Fliess, 1961, *Ego and Body Ego*; Klaus Angel, 1967, "On Symbiosis and Pseudosymbiosis," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 15, #2, pp. 294-316; Enid Balint, 1963, "On Being Empty of Oneself," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 44, #4, pp. 470-480; Melitta Sperling, 1950, "Children's Interpretation and Reaction to the Unconscious of Their Mothers," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 31, pp. 36-41; C. Olden, 1958, "Notes on Empathy"; and Dorothy Burlingham, 1967, "Empathy Between Infant and Mother," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 15, pp. 764-780.

14. Robert Fliess, 1961, *Ego and Body Ego*.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

17. For a more accessible example of what Fliess describes—again, a mother-daughter case—see Flora Schreiber, 1973, *Sybil*.

18. Enid Balint, 1963, "On Being Empty."

19. *Ibid.*, p. 478.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 476.

21. Christine Olden, 1958, "Notes on Empathy."

22. *Ibid.*, p. 505.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*, p. 512.

25. Klaus Angel, 1967, "On Symbiosis."

26. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

27. Dorothy Burlingham, 1967, "Empathy Between Infant."

28. Melitta Sperling, 1950, "Children's Interpretation."

29. Dorothy Burlingham, 1967, "Empathy Between Infant," p. 779.

16. Zick Rubin, 1975, "Loving and Leaving."
 17. Jessie Bernard, 1972, *The Future of Marriage*.
 18. Freud, 1933, *New Introductory Lectures*, p. 134.
 19. Booth, 1972, "Sex and Social Participation"; this is a finding certainly confirmed by most writing from the men's liberation movement.
 20. See, for cross-cultural confirmation, most ethnographies and also Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974, *Woman, Culture and Society*. For contemporary capitalist society, see Booth, 1972, "Sex and Social Participation," and for concrete illustration, Elizabeth Bott, 1957, *Family and Social Network: Roles, Norms and External Relationships in Ordinary Urban Families*; Herbert Gans, 1967, *The Levittowners*; Mirra Komarovsky, 1962, *Blue-Collar Marriage*; Carol B. Stack, 1974, *All Our Km*; Young and Willmott, 1957, *Family and Kinship*.
 21. See Deutsch, 1944, *Psychology of Women*; Charlotte Wolff, 1971, *Love Between Women*; Adrienne Rich, 1976, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*.
 22. For a contemporary account of exactly this transition, see Young and Willmott, 1957, *Family and Kinship*.
 23. Deutsch, 1925, "The Psychology of Woman," p. 171.
 24. Freud, 1914, "On Narcissism," p. 88.
 25. See Heinz Kohut, 1971, *Analysis of Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders. Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, monograph #4. New York, International Universities Press; Otto Kernberg, 1975, *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism*.
 26. Fliess, 1961, *Ego and Body Ego*; Deutsch, 1944, *Psychology of Women*.
 27. Deutsch, 1944, *Psychology of Women*.
 28. Benedek, 1949, "Psychosomatic Implications," p. 643.
 29. On this, see Alice Balint, 1939, "Love for the Mother"; Fliess, 1961, *Ego and Body Ego*; Whiting et al., 1958, "The Function of Male Initiation Rites"; Newton, 1955, *Maternal Emotions*, and 1973, "Interrelationships between Sexual Responsiveness."
 30. Deutsch, 1944, *Psychology of Women*, p. 205.
 31. Benedek, 1959, "Parenthood as Developmental Phase."
 32. See Klein, 1937, "Love, Guilt and Reparation." Barbara Deck (personal communication) pointed out to me that Klein's interpretation of a woman's participation in mothering is homologous to that described by Ferenczi and Balint in coitus. A woman's gratification in mothering comes from becoming her mother and from identifying with her mothered infant. Similarly, she is both the receiving mother (womb) and identifies with the male penetrating her in coitus.
 33. The mothers I describe in Chapter 6 are cases in point.

AFTERWORD

1. Bernard, 1974, *The Future of Motherhood*, citing Minturn and Lambert, 1964.
2. See Friedl, 1975, *Women and Men*.
3. See Ortner, 1974, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?"
4. U.S. Department of Labor, Employment Standards Administration, Women's Bureau, 1975 *Handbook on Women Workers*, Bulletin 297.

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