

THE RADICAL FEMINIST  
ACCOUNT OF  
**DOMINATION**

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*Abstract:*

It has been said that the radical feminist emphasis on women's oppression is unable to account for other forms of oppression such as those of race and class. I argue that the radical feminist emphasis, the placing of male domination at the centre of the analysis, is a more theoretically adequate account of oppression in general than the additive approach of socialist or postmodernist feminism. These latter accounts merely place different forms of oppression side by side while failing to draw out the distinctions between them. The emphasis of radical feminism, on the other hand, by attributing oppression to the construction of masculinity, exposes the male supremacist interests involved in all hierarchical and invidious distinctions between categories of human beings.

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Radical feminism has often been accused, mainly by those who identify as socialist feminists, of being unconcerned with forms of domination other than male domination. The political concentration of radical feminism on the oppression of women by men, it is argued, is too narrow a focus of political attention to include other forms of oppression, in particular, the oppressions of race and class. Socialist feminism, on the other hand, because it is concerned with the elimination of all forms of oppression, is better equipped, or so it is said, to mount a political challenge to domination however it is manifested.

Hester Eisenstein, for example, pointed to what she characterised as the distinction between radical feminism, which holds that gender oppression is the oldest and most profound form of exploitation, which predates and underlies all other forms including those of race and class; and socialist feminism, which argues that class, race, and gender oppression interact in a complex way, that class oppression stems from capitalism, and that capitalism must be eliminated for women to be liberated. (Eisenstein, 1984: xix-xx)

Ann Curthoys asserted that 'feminism, through its notion of "women's oppression", tends to obscure a class analysis and a socialist politics', and that 'other power relationships and inequalities cut across sexual ones'. (Curthoys, 1988: 66, 70)

Juliet Mitchell argued that

if we simply develop feminist consciousness (as radical feminists suggest) we will get, not political consciousness, but ... simply a self-directed gaze, that sees only the internal workings of one segment; only this segment's self-interest. (Mitchell, 1971: 93-4)

Mitchell also argued that socialism had to incorporate a feminist consciousness if it was to be relevant to 'our oppression as women'. She argued, too, in favour of a 'separatist politics' for Women's Liberation, a politics based on women's analysis of their own oppression, and which excluded men from feminist organisations. She even acknowledged that feminist politics could include 'the awareness of other oppressed groups under capitalism' (pp.56-8). But she still insisted that feminism was some kind of junior partner to socialism. It was a socialism which would have to include the 'oppressed consciousness of all groups', including women. The present form of socialism had not yet succeeded in doing this, so it was a socialism which did not yet exist. Nonetheless, it was only socialism which was revolutionary, in Mitchell's view, and it was only through socialism that feminism could realise its revolutionary potential. By itself, feminism, in her view, was too limited to be revolutionary because it was 'only' concerned with women.

Michèle Barrett also saw radical feminism's focus on women's oppression as politically limiting:

In posing women's oppression simply as the effect of male domination, [radical

feminism] refuses to take account of the widely differing structures and experience of that oppression in different societies, periods of history and social classes ... Even in the areas where it has contributed most, such as the analysis of sexual politics, radical feminism refuses to attend to issues that cannot be incorporated into the elemental model of male supremacy.

(Barrett, 1980: 4)

And Lynne Segal:

the distinction [between radical feminism and socialist feminism] stemmed from whether we believed women's oppression was primary and underlay all other forms of domination, or whether it was interconnected with other equally basic forms of oppression in capitalist class society. (Segal, 44)

One of the most detailed criticisms of the radical feminist position is Elizabeth Spelman's *Inessential Woman*. Spelman does not refer to the position she criticises as 'radical feminism', but as 'dominant Western feminist thought'. Neither would she identify as a socialist feminist. But she reiterates many of the criticisms which are to be found in the socialist feminist debate against radical feminism.

Spelman's arguments, like those of socialist feminism, fail for a number of reasons, most of which I do not want to address here. Suffice it to say for the moment that her chief fault is to regard feminism as centrally concerned with 'women', 'women's issues', or 'women's viewpoint', instead of with the critique of male supremacy. As a consequence, her feminist insight frequently fails, in the sense that she entirely misses the forms of male supremacy contained in her own examples. Her approach is a less additive one than that of socialist feminism. She does not merely place the three oppressions of sex (or 'gender', as she prefers to call it), race and class together side by side. Rather, she argues that 'gender' is experienced differently according to the race and class location of women. And while that is true enough, her failure to locate male supremacy at the centre of her analysis means that the theoretical links she makes lead her to privilege race or class over 'gender', and to suppress any insights she might have had into the ways in which male domination might manifest itself variously, but persistently nonetheless.

The critics who allude to the supposed political limitations of radical feminism are wrong. Despite the radical feminist concentration of political energy on the oppression of women, or rather, because of that very emphasis, an emphasis which has never excluded an explicit concern with the oppressions of race and class, the radical feminist account of oppression in general is more theoretically adequate than that of socialist feminism. The socialist feminist account merely adds oppressions together, while failing to supply the connections between them. Radical feminism's privileging of male domination, on the other hand, provides the conceptual insight linking all forms of oppression, and promises to provide an explanatory account of the origins and nature of domination per se.

The early radical feminist writings tended to find that link in 'history',

in hypothetical accounts of the 'origins of patriarchy' in a distant past before the advent of written records. There was no attempt to provide a theoretical analysis of those origins, although such an analysis has been there potentially from the beginning.

More recently, however, it is feminist 'object relations' theory which has laid the groundwork for a theoretically adequate account of the 'origins' of domination. Its adequacy depends, however, on two major, radical changes to the theory as it stands at the moment. In the first place, feminist 'object relations' theory must get rid of its insistence that women's mothering is responsible for the establishment and maintenance of male domination, capitalism, or, in Dorothy Dinnerstein's phrase, that 'human malaise' which is leading us all to destruction. Instead of women's mothering, feminist 'object relations' theory must acknowledge the crucial signifier of domination, the penis-as-phallus, the vital theoretical ingredient which the theory as it stands is curiously lacking. Nevertheless, despite these two vital theoretical (and political) mistakes, feminist 'object relations' theory does hold the potential for the fullest theory of domination because it identifies the process whereby the masculine desire for domination is engendered. But more about that later.

From the beginning of this 'second wave' of feminism, radical feminism has maintained that the domination of women by men is the primary form of domination, that it predates and underpins all other forms, that it is the structuring principle, root cause and motivating force of domination per se. As Ti-Grace Atkinson put it:

The oppression of women by men is the source of *all* the corrupt values throughout the world. (Atkinson, 1974, 'Vaginal Orgasm as a Mass Hysterical Survival Response', p.5—her emphasis)

Since the oppression of women is generally agreed to be the beginning of the class system and women the first exploited class, every culture or institution or value since that time contains that oppression as a major foundational ingredient and renders all political constructs after that initial model of human oppression at the very least suspect (op. cit., 'Juniata I: The Sacrificial Lambs', p.30. See also, p.42).

Robin Morgan concurred:

women ... comprise the oldest oppressed group on the face of the planet. (Morgan, ed., 1970, 'Introduction', p.xxiii)

[There is a] profoundly radical analysis beginning to emerge from revolutionary feminism: that capitalism, imperialism, and racism are *symptoms* of male supremacy—sexism.

Racism as a major contradiction, for example, is surely based on the first "alienizing" act: the basic primary contradiction that occurred with the enslavement of half the human species by the other half (op. cit., p.xxxix—her emphasis).

Shulamith Firestone said:

the natural reproductive difference between the sexes led directly to the first division of labor at the origins of class, as well as furnishing the paradigm of caste (discrimination based on biological characteristics). (Firestone, 1970: 9)

[Radical feminism] sees feminist issues not only as *women's* first priority, but as central to any larger revolutionary analysis ... the current leftist analysis ... does not relate the structures of the economic class system to its origins in the sexual class system, the model for all other exploitative systems, and thus the tapeworm which must be eliminated first by any true revolution (op. cit., p.37—her emphasis).

And THE FEMINISTS, a group of radical feminists formed in New York in October, 1968, said in their manifesto:

Women, or "females", were the first class to be separated out from humanity and thus denied their humanity. (THE FEMINISTS, 1969: 360)

To a certain extent, this early radical feminist argument was no more than a necessary rejoinder to the male left insistence on putting socialism first. All feminists, socialist feminists included, were aware that socialism, at least as it had been traditionally defined by men, would not lead automatically to the liberation of women. Experience in organisations of the male left had taught feminists the need for women to organise independently, although socialist feminists continued to be more optimistic than radical feminists about the possibilities of coalition politics. Feminists were tired of being told by male politicians that the liberation of women could wait until after the socialist revolution, that, because women's subordination was connected to the private ownership of the means of production, the abolition of that ownership would automatically mean the abolition of women's subordination.

But the radical feminist emphasis on the primacy of women's oppression went further than this. It was not simply an organisational strategy for establishing political priorities, although it was certainly that. It was also a radically different way of looking at the world, different, that is, from the standpoint of the male dominant status quo. It placed the interests of women first, and interpreted the dominant reality from that standpoint with the aim of changing that reality. This was never at the expense of 'other oppressed groups', as so often alleged by socialist feminism. As Robin Morgan pointed out, all oppressed peoples are half women anyway. Morgan argued that the political priority given to female oppression by radical feminism was necessary in order to establish solidarity among women across racial, class and cultural barriers, across those divisions between women set up by women's subordination to hierarchies erected among men. 'It seems obvious', she said,

that half of all oppressed peoples, black, brown, and otherwise, are *women*, and that I, as a not-starving white American woman living in the very belly of the beast, must fight for those sisters to *survive* before we can even talk together as oppressed women (ibid.—her emphasis).

For Ti-Grace Atkinson, the oppression of women by men created a world where no human being could be free:

A human being is not born from the womb; it must create itself. It must be *free, self-*

generative. A human being must feel that it can grow in a world where injustice, inequity, hatred, sadism are not directed at it. No person can grow into a life within these conditions; it is enough of a miracle to survive as a *functioning* organism (op. cit., p.5—her emphasis).

The liberation of women was the necessary prerequisite for the liberation of all. Radical feminism did not argue that the struggle for women's liberation should take precedence over all other liberation struggles, but that, because all forms of oppression hurt women, the liberation of women would mean liberation for everyone.

Ti-Grace Atkinson argued the case from both directions. In the first place, she argued that women's liberation depended on the liberation of all: 'Women will not be free until all oppressed classes are free', she said (op. cit., 'Juniata II: The Equality Issue', p.73); and: 'we [women] are the most obviously dependent class on the liberation of other oppressed classes' (op. cit., p.74). At the same time she argued that the liberation of all was dependent on the liberation of women, that no one would be free until women were free: 'Other oppressed groups are also dependent on *our* liberation' (ibid.). All previous revolutions had failed, she said,

because they left the seeds of oppression intact in some form ... usually in the form of the oppression of women, although often, *in addition*, in the oppression of black or ethnic groups (op. cit., p.74—her emphasis).

But although it was clear that radical feminists saw race and class oppression, and war, as the direct result of male domination, they did not tell us how this was so. Ti-Grace Atkinson, for example, merely placed them together in the same context, and asserted a link without arguing for it. For example:

Women have been *murdered* by their so-called *function* of childbearing exactly as the black people were murdered by their *function* of color [and black women by both, although Atkinson did not say so] (op. cit., p.5—her emphasis).

This difference [between the male and female genitals] is the basis for the whole distinction between men and women and the ground for the inequities that are heaped on women by men. But men have no shame.

That's what power does for you—like Johnson raping Vietnam (op. cit., p.7).

By God you'd better learn it [the vaginal orgasm], lady, especially if you're with a liberal man; you'd better learn to shuffle, nigger, because if you don't you won't get the job (ibid.).

Try comparing the young woman's treatment with that of the darling little pickaninnies of the plantation; the whip was rarely applied before the black became serviceable (op. cit., 'Juniata I: The Sacrificial Lambs', p.26).

Similarly as women to men, nonwhites could not exist without the positing of whites. Of course, both the terms "men" and "whites" are role definitions, but that is, after all, what political definitions are all about (op. cit., 'Radical Feminism and Love', p.41).

it is as women—or "females"—that women are persecuted, just as it was as slaves—or "blacks"—that slaves were persecuted in America (op. cit., 'Radical Feminism: Declaration of War', p.49).

She did pose an interesting theoretical question about the implications of what she called 'the fact that women were the first oppressed group in history'. She asked:

Does this fact indicate ... that the class of women is the *model* for all other class systems of oppression? Or does it mean that all other class systems are intended as the *means* of shoring up the original class of oppressed people, women (op. cit., 'University of Rhode Island: Movement Politics and Other Sleights of Hand', p.102—her emphasis).

Unfortunately, she did not attempt to answer the question. At a later point she did say that 'this assumption, that the male-female division was the first major class division ... suggests that the male-female division is the *model* for human oppression' (op. cit., 'Individual Responsibility and Human Oppression', p.119—her emphasis). Later still, in a note written for this collection of her writings, she said:

Part of the feminist theory that I projected very early ... was that "women" were the beginning of the political notion of class, and, as such, were the foundation and contained the conceptual essence of oppression as a phenomenon in its totality (op. cit., 'Acknowledgements', p.cxxxix).

Hence, it would seem as though she had decided without further discussion for the 'model' theory of women's oppression, i.e. men oppressed women first and then applied that model to the oppression of other categories of men. As far as I know, she did not develop the thesis that hierarchies among men function to maintain male control over women.

The priority accorded female oppression in this early radical feminist account was usually couched in terms of 'history'. This was not entirely satisfactory as a theoretical enterprise. I have put 'history' in quotation marks because the enterprise was more akin to myth-making than to historical research. The historical facts appealed to as evidence were few and far between. Given that the historical times referred to have left few traces, we cannot truly be said to know what happened thousands of years ago. Neither am I convinced that such knowledge would have any relevance for present purposes. We do not, after all, live in hunter-gatherer, tribal or agricultural societies, nor do we live in archaic city states, or those of us who engage in the esoteric task of theory-making do not. In that sense, I have some sympathy with the socialist feminist insistence that 'women's oppression', or 'patriarchy', or as I would prefer to call the problem, male supremacy, be historically and culturally located.

Nevertheless, the making of myth has its own uses, especially given the monopolisation of 'history' by male interests and the historical suppression of the interests of the female. The argument from history went something like this: the oppression of women provided the model for all

other forms of oppression because it happened first in human history. Women were the first social group to be enslaved. An example of this kind of argument can be found in Roxanne Dunbar's 1970 paper, 'Female Liberation as the Basis for Social Revolution'. Dunbar herself saw her task as 're-examining history'. She started by asserting that the earliest human social groupings were formed by women: 'Because women's reproductive capacity led to her being forced into sedentary (immobile, not inactive) life, the female developed community life', she said (p.538). At first, adult males were hunters and warriors, whose connections with the female community were brief and sporadic. Once women had developed agriculture and domesticated animals, however, she said, the males started to settle down. But they brought with them the values acquired in hunting and warfare—competition, technical efficiency, organisational skills and violence—and imposed those values on the previously female-led communities. With the advent of affluence and private property, the males enslaved the females in order to keep the property in male hands.

This argument is reminiscent of Frederick Engels' argument in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (ironically, given socialist feminism's antagonism to similar arguments put forward by radical feminists). Engels did not attribute the development of agriculture and animal husbandry to women. Neither did he regard the slavery of women as the first form of slavery, although he was somewhat unclear on this latter point. On the one hand, he regarded the possession of slaves as one form of private property, which appeared at the same historical period as the possession of goods, utensils and herds of domestic animals: 'on the threshold of authenticated history we find that everywhere the herds are already the separate property of the family chiefs, in exactly the same way as were the artistic products of barbarism, metal utensils, articles of luxury and, finally, human cattle—the slaves'. (Engels, 1884[1972]: 65) In this account, slavery was a consequence of the kind of property ownership characteristic of the historical period Engels called 'the upper stage of barbarism'. Slaves were of both sexes. And although females were useful as reproducers of 'human cattle', the males were more immediately useful as shepherds, cultivators and artisans. Hence, the original slaves, in Engels' account, were not only female.

On the other hand, Engels also seemed to imply that the exchanging of women as wives provided the model for the buying and selling of human beings: 'Just as the once so easily obtainable wives had now acquired an exchange value and were bought, so it happened with labour power, especially after the herds had finally been converted into family possessions' (p.66). In this account, men first learned that human beings *could* be bought and sold through the experience of exchanging women among themselves. At one point, he even asserted outright that

The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamian marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male (p.75).

However, it should be noted that in this passage Engels was not arguing a causal relationship between the oppression of women on the one hand, and class oppression and slavery on the other. The term Engels used was 'coincides'. He was arguing that all forms of oppression, including the oppression of women by men, arose at the same historical time, and for the same historical reason—the development of the means of production to a point where property could be concentrated in the hands of a few.

Another Marxist, August Bebel, a leader of the German Social Democratic Party from its inception in 1876, was less equivocal than Engels about the primacy of women's oppression: '*Woman was the first human being to come into bondage: she was a slave before the slave existed*', he said. (Bebel, 1883[1971]: 9—emphasis in the original).

It is this point that Gerda Lerner takes up in her book, *The Creation of Patriarchy*. (Lerner, 1986) And despite the doubts I expressed above about the validity and usefulness of appealing to 'history', I must admit that Lerner came close to convincing me with her erudite and rigorous work. She said that one purpose of her work was to demonstrate that, since 'patriarchy' had an historical beginning, it could have an historical end. She argued that, once men learned that other human beings, i.e. women, *could* be enslaved, they applied that model to other groups of men. She demonstrates that, as far as can be ascertained from the historical evidence available, women were the first slaves. She cites a number of authorities who agree on this point (p.78-80), although, writing as men in the male supremacist tradition, they placed little importance on this fact. Lerner points out that the first slaves were war captives. The male prisoners were usually killed because, as warriors, they posed a constant threat to the conquerors. Female prisoners could be subdued through rape, so they were kept alive to serve the conquerors. Lerner also points out that slavery was a fairly late development—the earliest extant references in Mesopotamia date from about 2,500B.C. It could not exist in hunter-gatherer societies, but was 'connected to the establishment of a market economy, hierarchies and the state' (p.76). In order to enslave others, she said, men needed as already existing model. That model, she argued,

which was available to men prior to the invention of slavery, was the subordination of women of their own group. The oppression of women antedates slavery and makes it possible (p.77).

In suggesting a 'working hypothesis' to account for the subordination of women by men of their own group, Lerner admits its highly speculative nature. There is no way we can know for certain what social arrangements were made by Paleolithic and early Neolithic cultures which have left no written records, she says. However, she goes on to postulate a likely scenario which could plausibly account for the subordination of women prior to the development of the complex, organised cultures of the archaic city states. She starts by pointing to the long dependency of the human infant, which required constant and long-term care by adults and for which females were most suited under conditions of subsistence and

periodic scarcity. 'My point here', she said,

is to stress the *necessity*, which created the initial division of labour by which women do the mothering. For millennia group survival depended upon it, and no alternative was available (p.40—her emphasis)

She also suggested that it was likely that women would have originally consented to the restrictions on their cultural activities necessitated by 'devot[ing] most of their adulthood to pregnancy, child-bearing, and nursing', and to the 'beliefs, mores, and values within their cultures ... constructed ... to sustain such necessary practices' (p.41). Hence such restrictions need not initially have been imposed on females by males, since the survival of the whole group depended upon such arrangements. Nonetheless, Lerner suggests, it is plausible to suppose that the restrictions on women necessitated by their reproductive ability led to the eventual appropriation and control of that ability by men. The process would have taken tens of thousands of years. Even as late as 4,000B.C., there is evidence of the existence of sexually egalitarian societies, such as that in Çatal Huyuk in Anatolia. But by the third millennium B.C., when lasting written records were being kept in Mesopotamian societies, the subordination of women was already in place.

Interesting though this account is, and it is far more detailed and convincing than I can convey here, I am not sure what relevance it has for current feminist purposes, except as one more example of excellent feminist scholarship in yet one more male-dominated field. But although such scholarship has its own fascination, an account of the origins of male domination, and of other invidious hierarchies between categories of human beings, must be located in the here and now if it is to be changed in the here and now.

Which brings me to feminist 'object relations' theory and its usefulness as an account of the 'origins' of social relations of male domination and hence of domination in general. As I mentioned above, the usefulness of feminist 'object relations' is limited by two major drawbacks: its tendency to hold women, in their role as mothers, responsible for male supremacy, or capitalism, or 'the sex-gender system', or 'the human malaise', or whatever else is preoccupying the writer at the time; and its failure to identify the role the phallus plays as the foundational symbol structuring a hierarchical social order. As well, feminist 'object relations' theory has surprisingly little to say about masculinity, although what little is said is full of potential insights for a theory of domination. All are agreed that the masculine sense of self is characterised by the lack of a sense of connectedness to others, by an isolated, detached, emotionless form of autonomy defined by means of a contemptuous repudiation of the female, and by an objective, disinterested, neutral persona which takes itself as the universal model of the 'human'. All agree, too, that this is the kind of 'human' identity which is predominant and valued by the society within which we live.

Nancy Chodorow, for example, argues that masculine identity is more problematic than feminine identity, because boys must change from

their original identification with the primary caretaker, the mother, and come to identify with men instead. As a consequence of this discontinuity in male ego development, adult masculinity is characterised by, she says, a '[d]enial of a sense of connectedness and isolation of affect ... and may produce a more rigid and punitive superego'. (Chodorow, 1978: 169)

Sandra Harding, a feminist philosopher of science, argues that it is those who have reproduced in their own selves the 'stereotypically masculine personality' who, as she puts it, 'design and control patriarchy and capital'. (Harding, 1981: 153) All the invidious, hierarchical dichotomies characteristic of a capitalistic and 'patriarchal' social order, she maintains, 'take their first forms in the process of becoming a male person who must individuate himself from a devalued woman' (p.152). This process, she says, produces men whose primary mode of being in the world is domination and control—of self, of other, of 'their feelings, their physical bodies, and other bodies—nature—in general'. It produces men who are competitive, who perceive their own projects and concerns as radically distinct from those of others, and who maintain an excessive distance between themselves and others. It is this process which produces men who

want to dominate others ... who conceptualize nature and others in ways which make such domination appear appropriate and natural (p.154—her emphasis)

Unfortunately, the peculiarly fragmented male psyche, whose social domination leads to all the evils mentioned above, is seen by feminist 'object relations' theorists as a consequence of the fact that women do the mothering. Nancy Chodorow even says that it is not only women's sole parenting role which is responsible for the form of masculinity which dominates within our social environment, but also women's propensity for seducing their sons: 'a mother may ... confuse her relationship to [her son] as an infant with a sexualised relationship to him as a male' (p.108). This maternal seduction, according to Chodorow, ensures that the boy will drop his identification with the female realm of the maternal, and strive to take up his proper masculine identification. The maternal seduction threatens the father/husband, and brings into play the paternal threat of castration and promise of male privilege which drive and entice the boy into the male realm (p.131). Thus, on Chodorow's account, it is women who actively inculcate masculinity and hence the contempt men feel for them. Women invite contempt because they behave contemptibly, or at least the ones who 'seduce' their sons do. At a later point, Chodorow mentions the part masculine contempt plays in 'freeing' the boy 'not only from his mother but also from the femininity within himself' (p.182). But nowhere does she mention the male supremacist 'reason' for that contempt—the glorification of penis-possession.

Feminist 'object relations' theorists argue that, because it is a woman who is the first nurturer and caretaker of infants, it is in relation to a woman that the first precarious steps in the individuation process are made. It is, therefore, towards a woman that the inundating emotional storms of infancy are directed: the boundless rage of helplessness and frustration, the

overwhelming dread of engulfment and annihilation, and the insatiable desire for the one who satisfies all needs and provides (or withholds) all comfort, pleasure and love. The intense emotional ambivalence this generates cannot be resolved in relation to the mother because she is the source of it at a time when the infant sense of self is fragile and helpless. Men are not the targets of this ambivalence. They arrive in the child's world later, as separate, distanced beings who appear from and disappear into their own world without becoming entangled in the messy process of the child's dawning sense of self and reality. The world of men provides the escape route from the irresolvable contradictions of the maternal relation. Male children can take up their own places within the male world. Female children can find a place only at second hand, through heterosexual desire, as servicers of and ancillaries to men.

The price paid for this dichotomous divergence between the sexes is the forgetting (i.e. repressing) of the maternal bond and the raging ambivalence that characterised it. Because that bond is repressed, the ambivalence it gives rise to is never overcome. It is managed by locating the source of the never resolved and still infantile passions in women. Since men are not women, they can control the still influential because unacknowledged dread of personal annihilation by the powerful mother, by controlling women and subordinating them to the interests of men. It is thus, according to feminist 'object relations' theorists, that male domination comes about.

The solution they suggest is male parenting. If men took equal responsibility for the care of infants, they argue, then the intense ambivalences characteristic of the earliest stages of the separation process would be directed towards both sexes, instead of only towards women. As a consequence, men would not be able to evade responsibility for their own ambivalence. They would be forced to see it as a common human problem, and to locate its source within themselves. There would then be no need to control women, and male domination would come to an end.

But there are a number of serious problems with this account. In the first place, even if men were to take on 'parenting', unless male domination were already at an end, they would simply dominate 'parenting' like they dominate every other sphere of life. Women would be forced out, the job would be revalued in accordance with the male's higher status and changed beyond recognition, and not necessarily in ways which validated the interests of women (or children). And let us not forget the problem of incest. Too many men can only relate intimately through the penis, a situation which is not likely to change until male supremacy does.

Moreover, feminist 'object relations' theory as it now stands reverses the causal relationship involved. The confining of mothering to women, and women to mothering, is an *effect* of male domination, not its cause. One of the benefits to the rulers of having a subordinate class which they dominate, is that the rulers are freed from the labour necessary for survival. The rulers rule by ensuring that the tasks of maintaining existence are performed by subordinates, thus freeing the rulers for 'higher things'.

Behind the fact that women mother lies the male supremacist ordering of social relations. Not only mothering, but all mundane, tedious, but vitally necessary life support work is performed by women. It is hardly likely that men could be cajoled or forced into giving up the benefits of their appropriation of the 'higher' reaches of 'human' understanding, to take on the exhausting, self-abnegating work of mothering. It suits men to have women do the mothering. Women's mothering is not just an anachronistic hold-over from our hunter-gatherer prehistory (or whatever). It is a systematic function of a male supremacist social order which requires the servicing of men by women.

A further problem with the feminist 'object relations' account is its failure to recognise the part played by the penis-as-phallus in inculcating the structuring principles of domination upon the psyche of each new individual bearer of social relations from birth onwards. In particular, feminist 'object relations' theory fails to recognise the role of the phallus in establishing and maintaining that contempt for the female which is the central principle of masculinity.

All feminist 'object relations' theorists agree that the male infant is 'different' from his mother. What they do not tell us, however, is what that 'difference' consists of. As a helpless infant and dependent small child, he is certainly different from an adult woman. But in this kind of difference, he is no different from a female infant. The 'difference' which the feminist 'object relations' theorists are alluding to, but never mention as such, is his 'difference' from all females, a 'difference' signalled immediately by his male genitals. It is his possession of a penis which signifies from the beginning that he is a potential man, who must grow into his masculine heritage and the benefits and privileges awaiting him. These benefits and privileges are maintained at the expense of women. Indeed, the chief of them is that he is, and will continue to be, served by women. So his 'difference' from his mother is imprinted through contempt for the female. This contempt is implanted through the dawning realisation that females are those who lack the precious symbol of 'human' status. That contempt is never contested—mother is undoubtedly powerful in the eyes of a small child, as well as being essential to his welfare, beloved, and the first model of an adult human individual the child encounters. There is, therefore, from its inception, a split in the masculine psyche. On the one hand, there is the male supremacist requirement that he know himself as 'human' because he is not female. On the other hand, there is the inescapable, no matter how well suppressed, knowledge that women are undoubtedly human, despite the best efforts of a male supremacist social order to suppress that knowledge.

We have now arrived at my main point—the relevance of feminist 'object relations' theory, appropriately modified, to an account of domination per se. This is the merest sketch, a series of suggestive insights only. But it contains, I think, the germ of a theory of domination. So: the first mode of domination, the first invidious hierarchical distinction between identifiable categories of human beings, is that between male and female. Masculinity

is engendered in the psychic reality of the infant individual, identifiable as the appropriate bearer of the masculine mode of 'human' status by his possession of a penis, through contempt for the female, who is the bearer of the ancillary feminine mode because she lacks that precious symbolic organ. But the public world of adult males is no realm of equality. Women are excluded by their confinement to the private world of service and nurturance (except for those 'token' women who are allowed into statuses already structured by male interests, but who are isolated from other women and from their own female lives outside the public domain). Men's relationships with other men bear the imprint of their origins. That contempt which is the driving principle of masculinity continues to hold sway. The public world where masculinity reigns supreme is a world of competitive individualism, exploitation and invidious hierarchies. It is characterised by an utter lack of caring, nurturance and empathy, all of which have been excluded along with women, and confined to the privacy of isolated individual lives. Men control and manage a world where masculinity flourishes. And masculinity flourishes, not through mutual recognition of equals, but through the defining of others as not worthy of human respect and dignity.

I want to conclude this paper with two important points extending the theory outlined above. The first of these is that the concrete, empirical manifestations of racism and class domination (as well as of male supremacy) are culturally and historically specific. As such, they take different forms. The oppression of the Aboriginal people of Australia, for example, differs from the oppression of black people in the United States, although both are oppressed by racism. Class society under present day capitalism differs from that in medieval Europe or classical Greece, although all (indeed, all historical societies, as Marx pointed out) are (or were) stratified hierarchically. Present day capitalism is different in Australia from the way it is structured in, say, South Korea or the Phillipines, although all are modern class societies. What is constant is the condoned treating of other human beings with contempt, the systematic depriving of human beings of the basic requisites for life.

The second point concerns the involvement of women in racism and other kinds of structured elitism. By attributing domination to masculinity, I am not arguing that women cannot be racist or elitist (or, for that matter, sexist or misogynist). Masculinity, as I am using the term, is not merely a property of individuals, not just a set of character traits appropriate to males. Masculinity defines a social system, a system of norms, values and principles which structure and make meaningful social relations of domination. In that sense, femininity is not the opposite of masculinity, but a necessary part of the masculine ethos. Femininity bolsters and reinforces masculinity. It requires women to embrace the interests of men as women's own interests by 'reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size' (in Virginia Wolfe's delightful phrase), by acquiescing in the world which is constructed in the image and likeness of men. To the extent that women are unthinking participants in a social order which defines certain human

beings as not worthy of consideration, women too can treat with contempt those who can be defined as less privileged than themselves. Hence, to the extent that women subscribe to the dominant status quo, to the extent that they perceive it as the only reality and do not question it, women too can be complicit in domination, even their own.

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