

FREUD, FEMALES, CHILDBIRTH, AND DISSIDENCE: Margarete Hilferding, Karen Horney, and Otto Rank

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These three early psychoanalysts, who differed in important ways from Freud, each tried to shift his fundamental beliefs about women's bodies in basic developmental theory. This paper illustrates this point by elaborating their materials concerning the centrality of childbirth. One thematic aspect of Freud's disruptive fights with colleagues lay in his loyalty to phallographic certainties. These problems still affect us, a century later, even in today's clinically pluralistic climate.

No one said it more clearly than Karen Horney, one of the illustrious foremothers of psychoanalysis, in 1924—that Freud's female developmental theory “amount[s] to an assertion that one half of the human race is discontented with the sex assigned to it,” and that it “is decidedly unsatisfying, not only to feminine narcissism but also to biological science” (p. 50). In her exasperation with Freud's lack of receptivity to change, she also penned in 1926 one of our literature's most moving and spontaneously vivid passages about childbirth:

At this point I, as a woman, ask in amazement, and what about motherhood? And the blissful consciousness of bearing a new life within oneself? And the ineffable happiness of the increasing expectation of the appearance of this new being? And the joy when it finally makes its appearance and one holds it for the first time in one's arms? And the deep pleasurable feeling of satisfaction in suckling it and the happiness of the whole period when the infant needs her care? (p. 329).

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Horney seemed to have had little problem in seeing how the phallocratic cultural bias of Central Europe had colored Freud and his followers' developmental thinking about sex and gender much too much. We have been struggling with this in psychoanalytic theory, or struggling against it by ignoring its impact, ever since. Off and on this turmoil has surfaced in the last hundred-plus years of our discipline. We have never managed to remake a female developmental theory that is based on a *female* libido that reflects an average, expectable sense of *femaleness* in bodily terms, (such as has been long accepted as commonsensical by the common populace).

Freud famously had fights with those who passionately disagreed with him, and who had their own ideas about how to correct his schema. On his own timetable it is true that he rethought and changed many issues—such as moving away from the seduction theory, or shifting to a dual-instinct theory rather than maintaining the exclusive emphasis on eros, or supplanting the topographic model with the structural theory, or developing a more sophisticated theory of anxiety. According to a 1940 paper by Ruth Mack Brunswick, Freud had discussed the content of it with her during the 1930s, and agreed with her (thus shifting his views) about a very young girl's desire to have a baby that predates penis envy, emphasizing girls' long preoedipal phase with their mothers that he had already described (Freud, 1933). However, even in Freud's late gender portrait, a girl's prolonged dependence is readily pathologized, and is still conceptualized as a doomed *masculine* seduction of her mother, which inevitably causes her to bitterly reject her mother. Freud never budged on a female's *male* origins, despite the criticisms of colleagues at the time of this "one-sex theory" (Laqueur, 1990). Eve developed from Adam's rib in the Garden of Eden. That was that. Freud, the otherwise subtle thinker, wrote amazingly un-self-consciously of females' resistance to "*the fact* of her castration" in his 1925 "Some Psychological Consequences for the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes." Women's inferiority to men therefore seemed just a fact of life, simply proven by his theory making. Giselle Galdi in a 2010 presentation called "Women under the Spell"—a reference to Hor-

ney's view of the phallographic atmospherics surrounding females—wittily calls this Freud's "man-made" theory.

Adding to the historical, personal, political, philosophical, or scientific influences affecting Freud's attitudes to those dissident analysts whom he managed to eject from the early circle, I believe that I can develop another important angle. It concerns this fixed attitude toward the psychology of women. Many, if not all, of those who fought directly with Freud in print had implicitly or manifestly granted females *at least* an equal position with males as the centerpiece of human neuroses. For him, I think, this touched a nerve of psychological, scientific, and moral incredulity. It has been pointed out frequently that anyone who challenged the centrality of the Oedipus complex was condemned to exit, and that Freud's nurtured this understanding that he believed was crucial to the formation of "die sache" as he referred to it—"the cause," the psychoanalytic movement itself (as described by such historians of psychoanalysis as Gay, 1988; Makari, 2008; Roazen, 1975; or Rudnytsky, 2002).

Belief in a monolithic Oedipus complex assumes and holds in place a stable patriarchal hierarchy, as many academics have pointed out. Thus, for example, Jung's 1913 breakup and disagreement over some of the basic tenets of Freudian theory could be described as his objection to the exclusive focus on sexuality as a motivating force; consequently, he seriously challenged the Oedipus complex. But a related way of reading Freud's fierce protection of the patriarchy shows that he was also greatly offended at Jung's passionate interest in the archaic era of the matriarchies as *preceding* and influencing the patriarchal era (Balsam, 2013; Makari, 2008). This assertion was perceived by Freud as unsound, at the least, and insulting at the most. Jung's rejected muse, Sabina Spielrein, in her flight from her broken heart and Zurich, gave a paper in the Vienna psychoanalytic society in 1912 that provoked Freud to feel further beset by these ideas. It was called "On Transformations," and it showed her and Jung's collaborative, combined fascination with "Destruction as a Way of Coming into Being." (Covington & Wharton, 2003; Kerr, 1993). One can also read that paper as deeply indicative of the processes of birth (Bal-

sam, 2013)—which, irritatingly to Freud, again suggests the female being and matriarchy as the core of the psyche, as it were.

Now I would like to turn back to 1911 and the first dissident, Alfred Adler, who also broke with Freud. Influenced by his socialist passionate creed of equality, he read the power dynamics between humans through the lens of “masculine protest” against internally perceived weakness, but applied this equally to men and women in their human helplessness. His subsequent “individual psychology” also toppled male hegemony.

MARGARETE HILFERDING

One of Adler’s colleagues, Margarete Hilferding, also an avid socialist, was the first woman to graduate from the medical school in Vienna in 1910 (Balsam, 2003, 2012). She was the first female member accepted into the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, as recorded in their minutes (Nunberg & Federn, 1974). Her introductory talk in January 1911 (and her only talk, as it turned out, because of Adler’s ouster and her resignation nine months later) was called “On the Basis of Mother Love.” There Dr. Hilferding managed quite innocently, openly, and fully in the spirit of expected shared scientific enquiry to challenge many shibboleths about women that the analytic world was actively in the process of developing and cementing in that early workshop. These were the “old saws and modern instances” that managed to become more immutable in the years between Freud’s 1925 pronouncement of the female shock at genital difference and the 1970s, when a challenge took shape in the second wave of feminism and psychoanalysis in the United States. Some of Hilferding’s ideas from this paper pointed to subsequent classic errors about female development with which we are all familiar these days, and that she, in fact, effortlessly opened up.

Here is a short summary of her paper: Hilferding had observed in her medical practice that some mothers look forward to the birth of a child, but after the baby is born have no love. After a while, she says, a “sympathy” may develop, based on the “*convention* that demands love on the part of the mother” (emphasis added), and “substitutes for physiological mother love” (Nunberg &

Federn, 1974, p. 113). This was especially pronounced in well-educated mothers (p. 113). She presaged Horney's observation about the pressures of conventional social correctness, and also what we might now call the ego defense of reaction-formation in a mother. Hilferding noted the "nonexistence of mother-love" in a refusal to nurse, a desire to give the child away, hostile acts (extending to infanticide), or a dislike for a particular child because, say, the father has deserted. Maltreatment, she said, can occur, especially with illegitimate children and those not brought up by mother herself. Hilferding questioned whether these women were as "deranged" as the law would have had it in those days (p. 114), was thus socially progressive, and was quite ready to debunk the authorities on the topic of degeneracy that Paul Federn cited comfortably to *counter* her (p. 123). The first-born child, she noted, may evoke maximal hostility, while the youngest may suffer from its reversal into the opposite. Exaggerated love and overanxiousness compensate for a mother's hostile impulses. She stated boldly: "*There is no innate mother love*" (emphasis added; p. 114). The latter statement was audacious for a medical practitioner in 1911.

Hilferding Presaging Modern Developments

Hilferding opened up some issues that were formulated much later in order to correct previous errors in psychoanalysis, as, for example, the following:

1. She was prescient about contemporary work on female corporeality of a century later, such as Dinora Pines (1993), or Joan Raphael-Leff (1995, 2005), or writings that have emerged from COWAP (the Committee on Women and Psychoanalysis of the International Psychoanalytic Association), for example, Moeslein-Teising and Thomson-Salo (2013). In a paper on the pregnant mother and the body image of her daughter (Balsam, 1996), I noted how the mother's experience of her pregnant body has been overlooked and bypassed in favor of rushing on to accounts of "mothering" of the newborn child. A woman's subjective experience of her body in pregnancy can be experienced differently in birthing, and then again differently in the postpartum period. These phenomena still have been little studied in our

field. Hilferding captured this notion of a woman's differing corporeal experiences way back in 1911, and she, too, helpfully separated these experiences. Thus she notices that some women can have a wonderful pregnancy, where they believe that they are longing for the child, but then during or after the birth, their attitude to their bodies and the babies can change to disappointment. Hilferding situates attention on the female in her bodily procreative power, and on the woman herself—and not on the much commoner duo “mother-and-child,” treated as if they were one unit. In those early days, (and still) all roads of conceptual understanding can merge speedily straight from heterosexual intercourse right to the newborn in its mother's arms. This bypasses much of an individual woman's subjectivity and forecloses time.

A few writers in the last century were able to see the mothers and their subjectivity as distinct from the commonly studied “mother-and-baby” unit. Helene Deutsch (1944–1945) did, in her clinical studies, although the biological essentialism in her proposed metapsychology of “female” narcissism and masochism left much to be desired. Marie Langer (1951) also did, by headlining “sexuality” alongside “motherhood” in her thinking. However, say, Therese Benedek (1959) in her pioneering “parenthood as a developmental phase,” or Daniel Stern (1995) on what he calls “The Motherhood Constellation” cannot be included here because the female body is conceptually overly enmeshed with the “results,” that is, the offspring, in these works. Thus birth itself gets no special or different emphasis from “becoming a mother.” These authors' emphases, important though they are, constitute a phase of life—and are not focused on what the individual female experiences in her body's maturity.

2. Hilferding noted that mothers are not only nurturing, but can be evil to their child. That was hard to bear for these men of the Vienna circle, who idealized mothers consciously in their caretaking roles, but also, of course, unconsciously denigrated females in their physical mothering, birthing, and sexual roles. Hilferding did not view the mother as someone whose fated role was just appreciatively to diaper “His Majesty the Baby” (Freud, 1914, p. 91)! She presented to the group a portrait of a mother who can be sexual in her own right, can love a child, but can hate or physi-

cally maltreat a child too. This was not the pale female maternal figure of Freud's case histories, "monotonous, drab, all chiaroscuro, no color" (Erlich, 1977, p. 334).

3. Hilferding acknowledges the important role of the surrounding culture as setting up ideals that can influence maternal behaviors, but may leave an individual woman empty and inauthentic. These concepts echoed down the years in Horney's later work, and for many academic and psychoanalytic feminist scholars that followed her lead.

4. Raw female aggression is one of the newer themes in the analysis of women, and this, of course, is in contrast to the limited early descriptions of female aggression, which only focused on their attempt to masquerade as men, and in which aggression was obscured by the concept of penis envy. Hilferding never once mentions maternal inadequacy here as being due to a missing penis or due to unresolved yearnings to be a man! Hilferding also challenged the notion that the first born is necessarily precious . . . hard to hear when this group had recently had a session on their concern about first-born sons, whom they thought inevitably suffered from too much mother love. Here Hilferding said hatred can exist, especially if the mother is disappointed in the delivery, and feels a radical loss of the pleasures of a pregnant state.

5. This pioneer suggested that is no such thing as a "degenerate mother" in the inheritance or "tainted" sense—a common notion in 1911, but one that Freud himself would almost certainly have challenged, even if some of his followers that night during the discussion still adhered to the notion.

6. Hilferding deployed her new interest in psychoanalysis to argue that "it is by way of the physical involvement between mother and child that love is called forth," and that "certain changes in the mother's sexual life are brought on through the child" (Nunberg & Federn, 1974, p. 114). She notes that a woman may avoid sex during weaning. Painful uterine contractions can be brought on by suckling the baby and frigidity can occur during the nursing period. She concluded that, for a time after delivery, the child represents "a natural sexual object for the mother. There "exist between mother and child certain sexual relationships which must be capable of further development" (p. 115). Hilferding sug-

gests that fetal movements awaken the mother's love and pleasure, and these may be sexual. The loss of bodily pleasure because of the baby's birth may cause aversion to set in. Milk shooting into the breast gives another pleasurable sensation: "It can be said that the infant's sexual sensations must find a correlate in corresponding sensations in the mother" (p. 115). Hilferding startlingly generalizes: "If we assume an oedipal complex in the child, it finds its origin in sexual excitation by way of the mother, the prerequisite for which is an equally erotic feeling on the mother's part" (p. 115). This theoretical statement is prescient of Hans Loewald's (1960) vision of the impact of mother's necessarily formative force within the infant's responsive growth, or Jean Laplanche (2007), who espoused the normative seduction of infants by their parents' sexuality, or Ruth Stein (2008), who talked of the enigmatic excess and interactive element in sexuality. Maternal love, Hilferding concludes, while not innate, can be acquired through the nursing and physical care of the first child, after which it is bestowed on subsequent children by the ignition of these intimate memories.

Freud must have heard all these suggestions and observations as quite mutinous, even though he did say that it was praiseworthy that "the speaker undertook a psychoanalytic investigation into a topic that, as the result of the convention that we maintain, had been held back from investigation" (Nunberg & Federn, 1974, p. 118). Hilferding's jarring ideas strongly presaged an interactive, two-person psychology. Her ideas—unknown and undiscovered by subsequent authors—were prescient of Winnicott, Bowlby, and others, often post-1970, especially those in the Relational School, such as Aron (1990) and Greenberg and Mitchell (1983). Freud was condescendingly critical, saying that the points of interest here were in observations made *before* she developed her analytic interests; further, he is quoted as saying, strangely, "the only way to find out something about mother love can be only through statistical examination" (p. 119)—this from the man who had derided statistics in letters to colleagues! Freud steered clear of Hilferding's commentary on both the maternal body and its impact on the mother-child bond.¹

At the time of her paper, Hilferding was forty years old and had two little sons, ages three and six. She was thus close to early

mothering herself. Her emphasis on the sexual sensations of fetal movement, suckling, and touching shows her sensitivity to the interplay between the bodies of mother and infant. In choosing sides between Freud and Adler, she voted to stay in both groups, rejecting the notion that Freud's and Adler's theories were incompatible. Had she stayed in Freud's circle, a modern reader wonders how she might have helped to promote a two-person outlook, educated the group about females, or challenged the notion of an exclusively *male* libido.

KAREN HORNEY

Horney's early thinking, while she lived in Berlin until 1932, is the focus here. Her actual break from mainstream psychoanalysis of the day occurred later, with the New York Psychoanalytic Institute in 1941. The substance of the latter controversial theoretical issues, though, had begun much earlier with Freud, as her critique of male bias in his account of psychosexual development. Her ideas were much more highly elaborated in the United States, culminating in the development of her own gender-neutral theory of personality. In the New York split, as I read it, a dominant atmosphere reigned, where there existed the exact same earlier Freudian fixities in misreading females. Her bitter opponent in New York, Fritz Wittels, for example, held such views. Horney was pushed out for teaching unorthodox theory, and perhaps also for her alleged sexual indiscretions and boundary violations with supervisees. But a notion of a theory of mind that depicted equality between females and males, such as she espoused, was gall to those who upheld Oedipus as the True North of the psyche's axis, and viewed this belief as a measurement of fealty to Freud. Horney then started her own school in New York. Originally it was devoted to open-minded theory making, with her own followers.

The atmosphere in the 1920s and 1930s group at the time of Horney's arrival on the psychoanalytic stage, we are told by the historians, was lively and full of discussion of possible disagreements with the Freudian view. The 7th International Congress was held in 1922 in Berlin, and had over 250 members as compared to the 20 or so at the beginning. She delivered a well-argued,

level-headed, clever, and respectful paper in front of Freud, a thesis that challenged the status of penis envy as *so* centrally perceived by him in the formation of womanhood. She suggested instead, penis envy as a swerve away from womanhood. Horney's three most famous dissident early papers of 1924, 1926, and 1933 appeared in the exciting new journal, the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, established in 1920 by Ernest Jones, a fellow dissident of the period. Otto Fenichel, too, in the 1930s favored a female-as-female developmental formulation, but rather ignored Karen Horney's place in this discourse by focusing only on Freud and Jones (Paris, 1996). Jones, who incidentally coined the word "phallocratic," was frankly supportive of and interested in Horney's work. As an example of what Horney would have been reading, in that first 1920 *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* there was Freud's (1920) paper "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Female Homosexuality" and one by Hanns Sachs (1920) called "The Wish to Be a Man." As an example of the thinking of the time, this is a summary of Sachs's case: After an account of a girl's uncomfortable genital play with a boy in early childhood, a possible pubertal seduction by an older male cousin, and current signs of what Horney might easily have viewed as her traumatic flight from her womanhood, Sachs (1920) sums up: "I thought it justifiable to assume that at this time (of the forbidden act) she had seen her playfellow's genital organ and this had caused her envy. She had naturally asked herself why she was lacking in this important part, and had given herself the answer that it had been somehow taken away from her as a punishment for misusing it" (p. 266). Because of a habit of biting her hand and being extremely restless on the couch and fearful, Sachs interpreted that she was enacting her penis having been bitten off. At that, she apparently became very quiet and motionless. He thought her response a good sign of a successful interpretation. These were the kind of interpretative assumptions to which Horney likely had reactions and alternative thoughts!

It is interesting to consider some of the elements of Horney's professional life that may have allowed her to be intellectually brave enough to have her own mind. Galdi (2010) points out that it is important that Horney came from Berlin and not Vienna,

right under the daily spell of Freud's charisma, like Helene Deutsch, for example. Karen Horney and the Berliners were less obsequious to the Professor. She had been analyzed by Karl Abraham, who, though, seemed quite doctrinaire and phallogocentric in his own work on female castration anxiety. In the "Secret Committee" (begun 1912) Abraham, incidentally, was quite capable of being ferocious about Rank, a member (but another dissident), so Abraham was not passive. Abraham, as a clinical analyst, however, must have been relatively tolerant and respectful of an individual patient's "otherness"—given that both remarkably independent female thinkers, Karen Horney and Melanie Klein (in her second analysis), were analyzed by him. In her diary kept over those years and beyond (1910–1912 and again in 1918), Horney seems to have been involved in a positive way with him in finding out about her depressive symptoms (Paris, 1996). Her biographers Bernard Paris (1996) and Susan Quinn (1987) feel that her insight that Freud's view of girls was excessively narrow was at least partially self-referential, which means that it would not be surprising if her different ideas came up in her analysis.

Horney's father, a sea captain, was figure of some commanding fear for her, even as she yearned to be more involved with him, as also was her older brother. She viewed her father as physically almost brutal, and she spoke in her diary of being attracted to two kinds of men—the one, like her husband, Oskar, whom she married during medical school, interesting and kind. The other, where her lust lay, was brutal and domineeringly cruel. These views of men likely helped on some insights she developed, such as a girl's fear of vaginal penetration, due to an active oedipal fantasy of the disparate size of her father's erect penis compared to her own little vagina. In weighing the personal versus the general in her clinical data about females, Horney had at least a decade's experience of practicing analysis before she wrote up her ideas because she had begun seeing patients in 1912. In those days of shorter treatments, that would mean she had seen many female analysands, and likely, then, she had a chance to test out her own personal experiences in a different way, by hearing and comparing others' stories. In addition, while in her own analysis, her experience with females was enhanced further by having giv-

en birth to three daughters—in 1911, 1913, and 1918. In fact, Paris’s account of the content of her diaries at that time, in her analysis, reported much fatigue, even suicidal ideas, exhaustion, and her constant analyzing search for internal dynamics such as an issue about her adolescent sexual rejection by her brother, or combing her feelings about various men and guilt toward her husband, and so on. There is only one word, “nursing,” in there that I managed to see . . . can it be that there is nothing in her diaries about her own body in childbirth or after the births? Paris quotes much material about her preservation of her outer and inner life, but has no mention at all of the fact that she was a medical student and a married woman who had two children very fast, whilst in the middle of her demanding studies (where she was getting the equivalent of honors grades). I wonder if she had a postpartum depression with all her talk of lethargy, exhaustion, and feeling depleted?²

Horney said that a little girl does have very early normal childhood penis envy, (and in this she sounds modern, as it is generally recognized now that all little children want everything, and every organ). If later, in the so-called Freudian “phallic period,” this becomes a strong desire to be male, this phenomenon, Horney says, is *secondary* to a strong love for the father that has been badly disappointed, the result of an oedipal defeat. A girl’s identification as male signals to Horney a *loss* of the father’s love that she once aspired to in a (given) female fashion. This loss may provoke her to spurn her female sexuality too. Girls can feel so disappointed (such as in the birth of a child to the mother) that they can turn away from heterosexuality. (This formulation actually sounds to me like Freud’s view of homosexuality as espoused in his 1920 paper.) Horney accepted here without question—revealing herself as a woman of her time—the idea that a strong “castration complex” is inevitable in lesbianism. For many years after Freud, psychoanalysis conflated an inescapable, negative oedipal situation love as synonymous with homosexuality. Chodorow (1994) definitively shifts this certainty for us, to conceptualize “the homosexualities” (in the plural).

Makari (2008), though, credits Horney with more complexity: “[Horney] employed the new ‘I’ psychology to make a different argument [from Freud], one with large ramification for gen-

der identity” (p. 380). We can appreciate in her theory a mix of old ideas and audacious new ideas. The old elaborations were penis envy; childhood omnipotence of desire following Freud’s 1905 polymorphous view of children’s sexuality; more focus on the role of father toward the girl than the mother; and the outcome of a negative oedipal complex as necessarily homosexuality. The new ideas were that only early penis envy is normative; developed penis envy is a defensive flight away from normative enjoyment of the vagina as acceptably safely admired by father, as opposed to being frightened of and disappointed in him; a wish to be a man is associated with severe disappointment in the father; and analytic theory can incorporate a recognition of a child’s knowledge of her own organs, a possibility for a joyful recognition of girl genitals, and the possibility of true *girl* genital anxieties such as penetration anxiety. Hers was an exciting work in progress in these early papers.

In a recent reading with candidates, one student responded to the unfolding of Horney’s ideas this way: “I was reading along feeling that I was with her, and I understood, and then . . . wham! . . . suddenly I thought, where *is* she?—she seemed to go back straight to Freud . . . but then she’d emerge again.” This oscillation in the writing may signify Horney’s struggle to find her own voice and sustain it. It is a sign too that she was a part of the same phallocratic culture that nurtured Freud, but valiantly seeking independence from it.

In her second, more polemical paper in 1926, “The Flight from Womanhood,” Horney describes Freud’s view of female development as the view of a little boy looking at the mother. Fliegel (1973) believes that this stronger dissidence grew out of manifestly being ignored by Freud, but then being vigorously contradicted by him in print in 1925. Graphically, Horney compares what Freud says about the female body and what a little frightened boy sees when transfixed on the mother’s different genitals that are, for him, certainly missing a penis. She invents in 1926 the brand-new idea of womb envy:

. . . from the biological point of view woman has in motherhood, or in the capacity for motherhood, a quite indisputable and by no means negligible physiological superiority. This is most clearly reflected in the unconscious of the male psyche in the boy’s intense envy of motherhood. We are familiar with this envy as such, but it

has hardly received due consideration as a dynamic factor. When one begins, as I did, to analyse men only after a fairly long experience of analysing women, one receives a most surprising impression of the intensity of this envy of pregnancy, child-birth and motherhood, as well as of the breasts and of the act of suckling. In the light of this impression derived from analysis one must naturally enquire whether an unconscious masculine tendency to depreciation is not expressing itself intellectually in the abovementioned view of motherhood? This depreciation would run as follows: In reality women do simply desire the penis; when all is said and done motherhood is only a burden which makes the struggle for existence harder, and men may be glad that they have not to bear it. (p. 330)

In blasting Helene Deutsch, Freud's favorite female analyst, she challenges the former's phallocratic theoretical position:

When Helene Deutsch writes that the masculinity-complex in women plays a much greater part than the femininity-complex in man, she would seem to overlook the fact that the masculine envy is clearly capable of more successful sublimation than the penis-envy of the girl, and that it certainly serves as one, if not as the essential, driving force in the setting-up of cultural values. (p. 330)

A modern view, because of a greater appreciation for multi- and overdeterminism, would tend to take neither of these psychodynamic assertions very seriously.

Horney's paper on the denial of the vagina of 1933 tells how the "deepest anxiety which springs out of masturbation for a woman, the dread that it has made her unable to have children, seems to *relate to the inside of the body* rather than to the clitoris" (p. 64, emphasis added). This claim has been virtually ignored, and has not been given a fraction of the power that I believe it may have for female development or experience. Perhaps fears of inability to bear children are associated with masturbation, or perhaps not, in many cases. But they certainly express females' malignant fantasies of bodily punishment that occur for many women during pregnancy and childbirth.

OTTO RANK

Otto Rank—in the way that the once-disenfranchised in our field often reappear later in force—may be coming into fashion again,

after a long hiatus in the wings of the psychoanalytic movement. An entire current issue of the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* in 2012 is totally devoted to commentary on Rank. Francesco Obaid published an article in December 2012 in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* on his dissident relation to Freud. Without having the benefit of reading either journal beforehand, I had independently decided to speak and write about Rank's "The Trauma of Birth" in a paper on childbirth (Balsam, 2013). My reason for writing about Rank is that I am impressed with how momentous childbirth is as an experience, and yet how little it has been even noted in accounts of female body experience in our analytic literature.

Otto Rank's 1924 *The Trauma of Birth* is not really about *women's* experiences or their subjectivity, but it is about his claim of universal experience of the origins of human anxiety for us all in having traversed a woman's birth canal. Otto Rank, of the three authors discussed in this paper, brought before Freud, in a graphic and sustained fashion, I believe, the unconscious horror of contemplating the centrality of the embodied procreative female. Jung had trouble with Freud in pressing for origins within his ancient matriarchies. Horney was logically working to free Freud's own theory from its own constraints initially, but Rank created a vivid corporeal tale to focus on the importance of birth experience in his announcement and pronouncement of the instantiation of anxiety in an individual human's life.

"Little Rank" was what Freud called his beloved student in 1906, when, at 22, Otto was a devotee who was counseled professionally by Freud and who meticulously kept the notes of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. He was a brilliant young man who applied himself vigorously to the study of literature and classical mythology. Twenty years of close collaboration later, Rank was ejected from the movement by Freud and his Secret Committee, due to this book, "The Trauma of Birth." Rank's (1924) central thesis is "that the child's every anxiety consists of the anxiety at birth (and the child's every pleasure aims at the re-establishing of the intrauterine primal pleasure)" (p. 20). The work contains many gems of insight, but a modern reader would notice Rank's zeal in discovering everywhere his birth trauma anxiety as *the* definitive unconscious experience. It was basic in everything from the child's fear of the dark to the blinding of Oedipus in the play, as a

return to the darkness of the womb, to phobias about animals, ultimately sublimated into art, religion, and theater. Importantly, Rank questioned the centrality of Oedipus. He put the mother at the center of every neurosis. Freud initially downplayed the importance of Rank's claim because both he and Rank himself believed that this was just a proposed extension of his master's views. Jones and Abraham were avidly opposed, and they helped Freud see the dissidence, especially in Rank's recommendations for shorter therapies focused on separation anxiety within a rhythm and time-frame of pregnancy and birth. Eventually Rank was cast out as a misguided heretic whose father-complex and greed for fame in America supposedly had interfered with his clearer vision.

Obaid (2012) quotes a letter to Freud in 1924, in which Rank explains that "the transference libido is a purely maternal one, and the anxiety basic to all symptoms was originally tied to the maternal genital, and was transferred to the father only secondarily" (p. 703). Obaid (2012) says that it was "clear that the birth trauma thesis threatened to undermine the very pillars of their theory by trying to displace, or directly refute the value assigned to the Oedipus complex, the function of the father and castration. It was not just a complement to their theories but indeed a radical attempt to reformulate the theory and praxis of psychoanalysis" (pp. 703–704). Gay (1988) quotes a letter from Freud to Rank in 1925, "You are the formidable David who, with his trauma of birth, will manage to invalidate my work" (p. 480). Rank was putting the *female* genitals instead of male genitals at the heart of the neuroses! It was Rank who invented the term "preoedipal." He explains a boy's denial of the vagina as his primal anxiety—refusal to remember the pain of emerging from the birth canal during the birth process. This was a more basic level of castration anxiety than Freud's classical castration anxiety suffered in relation to the father, which Rank viewed as a later and displaced iteration of a confrontation with birth trauma: "[The boy] wishes to avoid the horror of passing this organ [the vagina], which still haunts him in every member" (Rank, 1924, p. 38).

Rank's definitive (but limited) level of central focus on the female body was enough to cause enormous consternation in the inner circle of Freud. But to a modern reader like me, how easy it

would have been in Rank's vision to see that the young girl's genital anxieties and difficulty with the vagina were a part of her own female contemplation of the terror of giving birth herself someday. Instead, as is usual for a writer of Rank's era, even when challenging Freud and seeming so close to understanding something more about women's relationship to their own bodies, a veil descends on his curiosity; what he sees is only that "the little girl has the same negative attitude towards her own genitals [because] she cannot share in the narcissistic advantage of possessing a penis" (Rank, 1924, p. 38). The young girl is still perceived through male eyes. Rank's theory states that a pursuit of the primal pleasure of returning the womb is melded with sexual intercourse, in which the boy is fortunate to be able to seek the return, while the poor girl has to "give up all active idea of return to the mother, a penetration which is recognized or imagined to be the masculine privilege, and in the supreme joy of motherhood, to be content with the wish to regain the blessed primal state by means of passive reproduction—that is, by means of pregnancy and the birth of her own child" (p.42). Rank is still a man of his day.

However, he is to be admired for his effortless depiction of a corporeal sense of psychic dilemmas that are vigorous in his expressive writing. He speaks of the adult's lost memory of the child's "earlier place abode," or the woman's "genital exit-and-entrance"; he connects the image of the so-called "woman-with-the-phallus" to a huge over-lively phallus like an elephant's trunk that is unmistakably a baby equivalent. "The phallus as baby" reverses "the baby as phallus" for a refreshing change! He sees misogyny as a "primal repression which tries to degrade and to deny woman both socially and intellectually on account of her original connection with the birth trauma" (Rank, 1924, p. 37). This may be an unfortunate and vital truth to connect denigration of females with a common (unconscious) horror from childhood of the imagined childbirth processes. Rank (1924) gets carried away in his defense of women that begins to betray his own recoil, however: "In attempting to make conscious again the repressed primal memory of the birth trauma, we believe we shall reinstate the high estimation of women which was repressed simultaneously

with the birth trauma, and we can do this by *freeing her from the weight of the curse on her genitals*" (p. 37, emphasis added).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we are today much more influenced by Horney than the other authors described here. Few have heard of Margarete Hilferding (Balsam, 2003). That is because after leaving Freud, she worked with Adler, and she actually became a president of his society. She was known for her work with women in clinics for the poor in Vienna, before suffering a tragic death in the Holocaust. Horney, who emigrated and stayed in mainstream psychoanalysis long enough to argue well and effectively with Freud—albeit mostly in print—is the most influential of these three. Homage to Rank, also an émigré to the United States, is as yet very unsatisfactory and incomplete, according to the contributors to the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* (2012). For me, his insights take us vibrantly back to early Freud, which I find promising and refreshing: I think his great insight for me is the affirmation that “the whole problem of infantile sex is really contained in the famous question as to the origin of children” (Rank, 1924, p. 30). In this day and age, when analysts are so interested in preverbal and unformulated experience, there should surely be a place for this innovator and his wonderful sense of primary process and archaic fantasy as it relates to the maternal body. In a beautifully edited 2011 selection of letters between Rank and Freud, by James Lieberman and Robert Kramer (important contributors to the recent journal issue devoted to Rank mentioned earlier), it is clear that Rank seems to have been giving birth to himself, as it were, to achieve emancipation from Freud. DuPont (2012), in her introduction to the *American Journal of Psychoanalysis* issue, regrets that Rank has had so little attention, unlike Ferenczi, who after fifty years has been somewhat reinstated in the analytic community. She points out, for example, that Rank’s influence on Klein and Winnicott was not acknowledged. Those who write about him say that he was a difficult person, and this did not help.

But I wonder if Rank’s possible suppression in our literature actually may have also to do with our anxious associations to this

very problematic subject matter that he is most famous for—this 1924 book that broke apart his alliance with Freud, about the impact of birth on the psyche. I am aware that he developed far beyond this starting point, and in only loosely related ways to his original research, as far as I can understand. Lieberman (2012), for example, writes about his sweeping theories about creativity in his theory of the role of “will.” At times Rank sounds a little like a motivational speaker in the United States, and not like the intense, young, densely scholarly writer of *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (Rank, 1909). He sounds so much more expansive, and almost transcendent in his inspirational intent. In that sense, I wonder who ever remembers that he first wrote about birth in 1924? *The Trauma of Birth* too is flawed by the vast enthusiasm of his writing, where he seems overly definite and dictatorial about ideas that are, after all, highly speculative. But his sweeping claims at the end of the book about how one does not need to waste time unfolding the patient’s story seem unwise. His rationale is that the analyst now knows in advance that *every* therapy will be a reliving of the pregnancy and birth experience of the patient. Therefore his aim is to prepare the patient for an inevitable birth separation from the beginning. His rapidity and urgency is likely too alien for clinical analysts from all current schools, even in these times of social pressure for quicker therapies. But Rank’s rich sense of preoedipal fantasy potentially could be a vibrant contribution to our work and our thinking. Rank’s ability to draw attention to childbirth as a central bodily female experience and a vital trope in our minds is surely a highly valuable vision worthy of animation.

The motto of the Karen Horney Institute in New York is “Our work goes on.” This is apt to the spirit of Karen Horney, and speaks to the need in our field for further open-minded work on the body, sex, and gender. Much is not known about the bodily and psychic impact of childbirth on the woman herself, on the child that is born, and on her male or female partner, if she has one.

NOTES

1. More substantively, Freud stressed that the mother’s disappointment with the baby could be due to the contrast between her fantasy and reality, as when

- newborns are perceived as “ugly,” which, he says, they actually are! But again, in a biased way, he says that conflict can also occur in “mothers who have experienced the harmful effect of modern literature and who used the yearning for a child as a subterfuge for their sexual cravings” (Nunberg & Federn, 1974, p. 119)!
2. I do not claim to have read or researched this diary material thoroughly enough to come to any conclusion. These are speculative thoughts.

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