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Re-Imagining Non-Domination: Troubling Assumptions in Psychoanalytic Critical Theory

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Abstract *Psychoanalytic critical theory understands the strong association between the psyche and the social, and theorizes resistance to oppressive norms. Critical theorists such as Adorno and Horkheimer, Iris Marion Young and Jessica Benjamin believe that the imagination of a better society has to confront deep psychological structures of oppression. However, they draw on various psychoanalytic concepts without thoroughly investigating and critiquing the psychoanalytic theories that generated the concepts in the first place. “Paranoia” (Freud), “abject” (Kristeva) and “destruction” (Winnicott) are three examples of psychoanalytic concepts that carry problematic implications for a theory of non-domination. I show that paranoia builds on the view of fascists as repressed homosexuals; that abject presupposes separation from mothers as the only route to healthy child development; and that destruction derives from a model where citizens are modeled on the image of a “perseverating baby” caught in a developmental arrest phase. The goals of the paper are to re-examine the assumptions that inform the aim of social equality, and to suggest an alternative route. A relational theory of non-domination has to understand the complexity of gender development, incorporate the idea that mature dependence is healthy, and re-think the mother-child developmental model.*

Psychoanalysis and critical social theory are movements that historically shared a particular type of intimacy: they were both “products of the traumatic and fertile encounter between central European Jewry and the German Enlightenment”; the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute was originally established as a “guest institute” within the Institute for Social Research; and Frankfurt theorists treated Freud on a par with Hegel, Nietzsche and Kant (Whitebook, 1996). Fromm, Reich, Adorno and Horkheimer used psychoanalytic thinking to investigate the circumstances of domination and oppression. After the Second World War, Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* and Habermas’ *Knowledge and Human Interests* drew on Freud’s and Marx’s theories to analyze the deep inequalities of capitalism. Habermas (1972) saw exciting potential within psychoanalysis as “critique of ideology” because it would transform normal social science by bringing self-reflection to its own practices. More recently, Honneth (1996) theorized the struggle for recognition in Western societies drawing on Winnicott’s concept of “good-enough mother”.

However, many critical theorists use psychoanalysis without thoroughly investigating key assumptions underpinning psychoanalytic theories. Psychoanalytic critical theory is a part of

critical theory, yet it refrains from analyzing psychoanalytic concepts. Marx’s understanding of critical theory as “the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age” (Fraser, 1989) has to be applied more thoroughly to psychoanalysis. I argue that by importing flawed psychoanalytic concepts social theorists undermine their effort to understand oppressive norms. Flawed premises weaken the psychological force behind social theory. An important strength of psychoanalytic critical theory is that it grasps the strong association between the social and the psychic, without reducing the psychic to the social, nor the social to the psychic. Understanding how norms are internalized and what makes resistance to oppressive social norms possible requires an investigation of both the social and the psychic. I believe that an alliance between psychoanalysis and social theory is in a privileged position to sharply account for various sources of social oppression. Yet, I argue that key psychoanalytical concepts carry troubling assumptions, and any theory imaging resistance to social oppression has to address them. This is an intervention that calls for increased awareness about theorizing the psychological roots of social domination.

Psychoanalysis is a wide and complex field in an on-going

transformation. By systematically investigating human nature, psychoanalytic theories elaborated a vast range of concepts. Sigmund Freud's concept of paranoia described important pathological behaviors and opened exciting theoretical developments regarding unconscious processes. Julia Kristeva's abjection and Donald Winnicott's destruction brilliantly illuminated a range of experiences that captured early developmental processes of human mind. However, in their effort to construct powerful hypotheses about human mind, psychoanalytic thinkers paid less attention to some of their grounding premises. Freud's understanding of paranoia builds on a patriarchal view about women and gay people. Kristeva's abject assumes that separation from caretakers is an irreversible psychological process. Winnicott's theorizing of destruction is underpinned by a highly asymmetrical relationship as a model for escaping domination.

Psychoanalytic critical theory draws on different schools in psychoanalysis, and uses insights from classical Freudianism, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Object-Relations theory. While T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer make use of Freudian theory, I.M. Young draws on Kristeva's Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and J. Benjamin sees herself as a relational theorist. Their critical work imagines strategies of resisting social domination, and mobilizes paranoia, abject and destruction to locate oppression in psychological processes. They believe that the imagination of a better society has to confront deep psychological structures of oppression. They consider that human action is heavily dependent on the child's development, and that prejudices and authoritarianism are generated by psychological abnormality. They take into account relations of power and understand that different people are oppressed in different ways according to their class status.

The Frankfurt School theorists were particularly interested in the psychological conditions and the type of personality that supported the Nazi regime. In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and particularly in "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment," Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) explored the rise of fascism with psychoanalytic tools. They believe that fascism is a reaction of repressed internal desires, and the form by which modern nature rebels against the demands of reason. Like Jessica Benjamin, they believe that not every rebellion is positive, and that a revolt of the repressed might strengthen a system based on domination. Moreover, they claim that paranoia is the symptom that serves the fascists to protect themselves, and that the anti-Semitic projections reflects the fascists' own essence. By stretching the idea of repression to any repressed content, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that fascistic personalities and homosexuals share an "inverted element"; this common symptom makes them particularly susceptible to Nazi ideology. Freud's assumptions about gays and women seep into their critique of domination, and undermine their critical analysis. Like fascists, gays and women cannot hate their father consciously -- they do not go through a "normal" Oedipal development, and would have to repress their hatred of the father as "endless rancor." By incorporating sexist

and homophobic assumptions, Horkheimer and Adorno's critique upholds oppressive notions of gender and sexuality.

Like Adorno and Horkheimer, Young (1990) uses psychoanalytic concepts to analyze the source of social oppression. Unlike them, Young wants to articulate a full theory of social justice. Even though skeptical about Kristeva's brand of feminism, Young uses Kristeva's concept of abject to psychoanalytically explain a vast range structural inequality: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. To her, all the groups that experience oppression as groups -- blacks, Latinos, Asians, gays, lesbians, disabled, old people and poor people -- "occupy" a similar status as despised, ugly and fearful bodies, as a crucial element of their oppression" (Young, 1990, p.142). Different forms of prejudice would thus be explained as being partially generated by fear of the abject. Yet, Kristeva's abject designates any type of exclusion, regardless of its content: fear of rapists, fear of Nazis, and fear of food stem from the same abject. Consequently, if Young's theory borrows Kristeva's concept of abject without qualifications, then any group in Young's theory (including rapists and Nazis) might claim oppression. If oppression lacks clear boundaries and racists are as oppressed as gays, Young's democratic theory is seriously affected. By not explicitly challenging Kristeva's assumptions, Young's theory allows an import of troubling psychoanalytic assumptions.

Unlike Freud, who believes that rationality is needed to control our instincts, Benjamin (1998) thinks that repression is domination. To Benjamin, the Freudian father-son relationship, like the master and slave relationship, is a model that only reverses the victor, but not the pattern of domination. The son's rejection of the father is part of a cycle of domination, which reproduces the idealized authority even in the act of liberation. The son who overthrows the authority of the father becomes afraid of its own aggression, and revolt is followed by guilt and the restoration of authority. Yet, unlike Horkheimer and Adorno, Benjamin explores a second face of domination, which is not located primarily in rebellion and guilt, but in love. Domination is a two-way process, because it is based upon a system involving the participation of those who submit to power, as well as those who exercise it. Domination is not only exercised by the oppressor, but is also exercised by the oppressed. Because women are part of system of domination, they need to recapture agency and see their own contribution to structures of patriarchy. As such, women need to reject "the fantasy of perfect mother," because the idea that mother is perfect "expresses the inability to see the mother as an independently existing subject" (Benjamin, 1988, p.214). In this regard, Benjamin breaks with a Marxist model of domination where domination is primarily located in external factors (ruling class, capitalistic relations of production).

Benjamin claims that a viable alternative to domination can be re-imagined through a reconstructed relationship between the mother and the child. Winnicott's concept of destruction under-

pins Benjamin's theorizing of social non-domination. However, Benjamin's model—the mother-child relationship—has two major flaws. First, the mother-child model is powerfully asymmetric, yet stands as a model for equal relationships. The image of the adult within this model duplicates the image of a “perseverating baby” caught in a developmental arrest phase. Equal relationships among citizens have a distinct complexity, which parts company with the strong asymmetry involved in the mother-child model. In addition, her model presupposes a direct causality between early and adult life. Yet, a more complex understanding of causality would underscore the diverse and multiple paths by which child-rearing influences the life of adults.

What are the implications of my analysis for a theory of non-domination? What should we learn from understanding the limitations of important psychoanalytic concepts? First, a theory of non-domination needs to fundamentally re-think the Oedipus complex to allow for alternative routes to the healthy development of women and gay people. In this respect, a theory that challenges domination, particularly domination that rests on the “primacy of the phallus,” has to take at face value the complexity of the child's motivations and growth. Second, separation from caretakers needs to be conceptualized as a dual process, which involves both dependence and separation. Separation is not an absolute phase of ego formation. Maturation is, in this regard, the capacity to be dependent on parental objects; this dependence is a “mature dependence” (Fairbairn, 1952), where relationships with parents are based on differentiation from parents. Third, the mother-child model is flawed because it presupposes a strong asymmetry. The baby is thoroughly dependent on the mother. Yet, unlike the relationship between the baby and the mother, a relationship among equal citizens presupposes conflict and cooperation, and has a distinct complexity. Relational psychoanalysts have begun to show the way towards a new understanding of the therapeutic setting, which limits the strength of the asymmetry between the caretaker and the receiver of care.

Women, Gays and Fascism

In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) analyze the historical and social conditions that lead to the rise of Nazism, as well as the features that characterize an authoritarian personality. Although they draw on research based on Freud's clinical descriptions, their work focuses primarily on social phenomena. For them, anti-Semitism, Fascism and Enlightenment are legitimate social objects for psychoanalytic analysis. By heavily using Freud's theory, they aim to construct an ideal-type, a model of a fascistic personality. Freud's particular analysis of Schreber is the theoretical framework on which Adorno and Horkheimer theorize about the fascistic personality. Consequently, Freud's assumptions about homosexuality and women's inferiority become Adorno and Horkheimer's premises in drawing the portrait of the fascist.

The Dialectic of Enlightenment's (2002) key thesis is that the Western reason is “inextricably entangled with domination” (p.218). Repression of internal desires and social domination are at work in Enlightenment, and more generally in the project of Western civilization. In psychoanalytic thought, repression is the operation by which the subject “repels and keeps at distance from consciousness representations (thought, images, and memories) that are disagreeable because they are incompatible with the ego” (Mijolla, 2005, pp. 1481-1482). To Adorno and Horkheimer, fascism is the form taken by the repressed nature to rebel against reason's demands. More specifically, fascism uses the revolt against domination to establish domination, because “it seeks to make the rebellion of suppressed nature against domination directly useful to domination” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002, p.185). Here, Adorno and Horkheimer's psychoanalytic argument is that the revolt of the repressed underpins a system based upon inequality.

Further, following Freud's distinction between a “normal” and a “pathological” projection, they elaborate the notion of “false projection,” which represents the core of fascistic personality. The notion of projection is central to Freud's discussion of Schreber.¹ Freud's concept of pathological projection sees it as a particular type of a symptom formation of paranoia; it happens when “an internal perception is suppressed, and, instead, its content, after undergoing a certain kind of disorientation, enters consciousness in the form of external perception” (Freud, 1911, p.65). For Freud, the source of paranoia is the failure to remove the homosexual tendency (Freud, 1911, p.44). The paranoiac is unconscious about his feelings of hate. He does not know his hatred, and projects it on the environment:

“I do not love him—I hate him.’ This contradiction, which must have run thus in the unconscious, cannot, however, become conscious to a paranoiac in this form. The mechanism of symptom-formation in paranoia requires that internal perceptions—feelings—shall be replaced by external perceptions.” (Freud, 1911, p.62)

Like Freud, Adorno and Horkheimer believe that false projection is fundamental to paranoiac's behavior. For the paranoiac, the external world becomes only a construction of the mind, without any checks from external objects or reality. Because of the paranoiac's confusion of inner and outer world, his desire is to control and dominate others. Anti-Semitism is a projective behavior. The fascist is unaware of his hatred towards Jewish people, and projects his own disowned feelings on the Jew. In short, fascism emerges from the desire to dominate and control the objects of fascists' projections.

¹ Daniel Paul Schreber was a president judge at the Dresden Higher Regional Court when he suffered a severe breakdown; he spent about thirteen years in mental institutions and wrote a book about his struggle. Freud used the book to show that there is a causal link between homosexuality and paranoia.

Furthermore, for Adorno and Horkheimer, homosexuals and

women cannot hate their father consciously in the Oedipal stages, and do not go through the same developmental trajectory as male heterosexuals. A “normal” Oedipus stage presupposes that men hate their fathers, and gradually understand their repressed feelings. Like Freud, Horkheimer and Adorno believe that women and gays’ aggression is not channeled by a male heterosexual route, but by the impossibility of reaching a “normal” Oedipal position. Because they cannot express their hate as men do, gays and women are obedient. Homosexuals fear their hate toward the father, and hate is converted into an urge to destroy:

“The proscribed material converted into aggression is usually homosexual in nature. Through fear of castration, obedience toward the father preempts castration by adapting the conscious emotional life to that of a little girl, and hatred of the father is repressed as endless rancor. In paranoia, this hatred is intensified to a castration wish expressed as a universal urge to destroy.” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p.159)

Women and homosexuals share the incapacity to be aware of hate. Women are attracted to, and follow the fascists in their hatred. They are constitutionally obedient to paranoiacs, because they have a similar paranoid element in their psyche. They follow the paranoiac blindly, and feel gratitude towards their persecutor:

“Just as women adore the unmoved paranoid man, nations fall to their knee before totalitarian fascism. The paranoid element in the devotees responds to the paranoiac as to the evil spirit, their fear of conscience to his utter lack of scruples, for which they feel gratitude. They follow the man who looks past them, who does not treat them as subjects but hands them to the operations of his many purposes (...) Their world is inverted...” (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002, p.157)

Adorno and Horkheimer suggest that fascism develops from two key psychological routes. First, false projections and paranoia describe the fascist’s pathological mind. Repressed hatred is projected to others, in order to control and dominate. Homosexuals repress their hate, and serve as the material for fascistic behavior. Second, homosexuals and women repress their aggression because they do not follow the classical Oedipus. While boys are more inclined to acknowledge their aggression towards their father, women and gay people are more vulnerable to unconscious hatred. As a result, the urge to destroy and the submission to authority are conducive to a fascistic personality. In their attempt to criticize domination and analyze the sources of fascism, Adorno and Horkheimer make use of strong homophobic and patriarchal assumptions. The strength of their explanation is undercut not only by vagueness of their terms, but also by their uncritical use of Freudian analysis. By importing Freud’s assumptions about women and gays in their critique, they give support to processes of social domination, which they were critical of. Unlike Adorno

and Horkheimer, I believe that domination is not only manifested through repression, but it also emerges when oppressive ideas are incorporated within one’s critical theory.

A theory based upon an alliance between the social and the psychological has to re-imagine non-domination on different premises. When they draw on either Freud or Adorno and Horkheimer, critical theorists need awareness about the psychoanalytic implications of oppression. In this regard, the Oedipus explanation has to point towards more complex processes that lead to the acquiring of gender. Relational psychoanalysts have begun to show the way toward multiple and different processes of becoming “man” or “woman.” Harris (2000) argues that there is no one developmental outcome, namely a teleological story that ends with having an Oedipal identity. A phenomenon like gender is not a structure, but, rather, “softly assembled” behavioral patterns whose form and stability depend on the context, individual life stories and particular relationships. As such, there is no strong causality leading to a “normal” Oedipus route. If developmental theory is attuned to the complexity of gender formation, then strong dichotomies such as gay-straight, and men-women, are challenged. In consequence, Adorno and Horkheimer’s assumption about gays and women is not only false, because gays and women’s aggression would not necessarily lead to fascism. Their assumption about a single developmental route – the heteronormative model—is false because it also ignores the multiplicity of developmental routes. The bedrock of classical psychoanalysis—the Oedipus complex—needs to be re-conceptualized to incorporate variability and difference.

Equally, a theory of non-domination has to take at face value the complexity of child’s experience of gender and growth. Corbett’s (2009) research on boys is important for re-thinking different developmental trajectories affecting gender formation. Like Corbett, I believe that resetting the terms of a psychoanalytic narrative is necessary. The terms of the narrative are set by (a) a married, heterosexual couple (2) gender binary, where masculinity and femininity are each defined by what the other is not (3) the focus on family without taking into account culture (4) anatomy is gender, and viceversa (Corbett, 2009, p.8). Equally, Butler (2004) argues that reconstructed psychoanalytic theory has to move beyond “mother” and “father” as the only positions available for care-taking roles. A new understanding of the gender formation challenges heteronormativity, and shows that various identifications, fantasies and behaviors do not fall within the limits of a classical framework. By re-interpreting *Little Hans*, Corbett (2009) argues that the Ur-boy of psychoanalysis, Hans, is part of a web of rivalry, aggression, dependence and desire left undertheorized by Freud. By challenging a theory underpinned by the primacy of the phallus, a more flexible understanding of gender illuminates the interplay of identifications, desire, and mutual recognition, which constitute its formation. A more flexible idea of gender seeks “to establish relations with others outside a dynamic of domination” (Corbett, 2009, p.49).

Yet, by strongly focusing on theory of gender formation, a theory of non-domination does not have to overlook class domination. Processes of gender formation are complexly intertwined with material realities of class. Class assumptions underpin any process of “acquiring” a gender, while particular assumptions about gender structurally define class positions. The married, heterosexual couple is not just an oppressive ideal because it defines the boundaries of legitimate sexuality. It is also oppressive because it limits the possibilities of imagining more equal class relationships. Heteronormativity has strong class implications, which need to be theorized and understood. For instance, Dora’s lesbian desire threatens class relationships and Freud’s own class assumptions. At the same time, class positionality has impact on the formation of gender. In Freud’s cases about Hans and Dora, both patients are raised by middle to upper class families and their fantasies and desires are analyzed according to Freud and their parents’ Oedipal expectations. Both Hans and Dora are supposed to occupy distinct heterosexual positions in their families, and class expectations powerfully influence their desires, identities and identifications. Middle class expectations shape Oedipal expectations. The intersection between class and gender provides an important standpoint for re-thinking a theory of non-domination by urging us to re-consider hegemonic assumptions.

What is Wrong with Kristeva’s Subject?

Contemporary critical feminists use psychoanalytic concepts to articulate theories of social justice. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young (1990) draws upon Kristeva’s concept of subject in order to explain the roots of various forms of oppression and domination. Young is ambivalent about psychoanalysis, as well as about Kristeva’s psychoanalytic feminism.² Kristeva is part of what Young (1985) describes as “gynocentric feminism.” Kristeva’s essentializes the opposition between masculine and feminine, and tends to reduce women’s specificity to reproductive biology and the function of mothering (Young, 1985). More generally, the gynocentric feminism tends to see gender differences as a relation of inside and outside; the gynocentric reevaluation of traditional femininity can weaken the claim that women are oppressed; and gynocentric feminism inclines to reject too categorically the value of the activities and ambitions associated traditionally with masculinity (Young, 1985).

Yet, although Kristeva’s approach is flawed in important ways, Young appropriates concepts generated by flawed theories. Young uses the concept of the subject to psychoanalytically explain her five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. For her, all the groups that experience oppression as groups—black, Latinos, Asians, gays, lesbians, disabled, old people and often poor

2 Because psychoanalytic theorists “ignore concrete relations of domination,” Young believes that they overlook relations of power and domination (1983, p.138).

people—“occupy a similar status as despised, ugly and fearful bodies, as a crucial element of their oppression” (1990, p.142). The refusal of the despised, the ugly and the abnormal generates different forms of prejudice. The despised and the abnormal derive from the subject, which defines a particular process of human development. The subject is located in the early processes of differentiation of the baby from the mother. It has a key developmental importance. Both repelling and fascinating, the subject establishes the border between oneself and others. It is “the fear of loathing and disgust the subject has in encountering certain matter, images, and fantasies- the horrible (...)” (1990, p.142). It arises from “the primal repression” in which the infant struggled to separate from the mothers’ body that nourishes and comforts. Baby’s fear is expressed in reactions of disgust to body excretions: blood, pus, sweat, excrement, urine, vomit, menstrual fluid, and the smells associated with each of these. The subject is constituted by a fundamental ambiguity. It marks the moment of individuation, of becoming ‘the self,’ but the very moment of separation is threatened by an attraction to the realm of unity with the mother. It marks a phobia and an “obsessive attraction,” and is thus never stabilized. The outcome of subject is fear; the fear of the subject is “a dread of the unnamable” and brings out an “obsessed attraction” (1990, p.145).

Young’s use of Kristeva’s concept points to the fear of the other, who is excluded and oppressed by hegemonic norms. Groups who experience injustice do so because they provoke fear. Yet, Kristeva’s concept has a complexity that is not accounted for in Young’s use of the subject. For Kristeva (1982), food loathing, Nazi crimes, and the fear of rapists and killers underline the fear of other. We are horrified and attracted at the same time by the rapist and the killer: “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order (...) The traitor, the liar, the criminal, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior...” (p.4). Kristeva’s subject describes both the experience of fearing alternative sexualities and shameless rapists.

The subject becomes a name for everything that is excluded, regardless of the content of exclusion. Nancy Fraser (1992) pointed out Kristeva’s anti-nomian bent, or “her tendency, at least in this early quasi-Maoist phase of her career, to valorize transgression and innovation per se irrespective of content” (p.62). In this regard, what is seriously problematic in the subject is that any kind of interdiction or separation points to subject. Any threat to the order or the norm is therefore an example of how the subject works. If the content of the exclusion is not important, then this assumption has devastating consequences for Young’s theory of justice. Her premise is that injustice is institutionally exercised over specific social groups. Injustice works at the level of unconscious reactions and assumptions, as well as by being located within bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms. If one extends the attribute of oppressed to social groups such as rapists or Nazi sympathizers, then the whole concept of justice as requiring “institutions that promote reproduction of, and respect

for, group differences” becomes useless. Any group transgressing the norms may claim oppression. In Kristeva’s theory, there are no boundaries distinguishing a legitimate fear of the other from an oppressive fear of the other.

Kristeva’s understanding of the abject emerges from her transformation of Lacanian psychoanalysis. For Lacan, the symbolic register is similar to the paternal, and is a monolithic, rule-bound order to which the subjects submit when they resolve the Oedipal complex by accepting the father’s Law. By re-thinking Lacan, Kristeva distinguishes between the symbolic – an axis of social practices that reproduce the social order by imposing linguistic conventions on desires, and the semiotic – a material, bodily source of opposition, which has the power to break through convention. The semiotic therefore becomes the realm of resistance to the symbolic. It is the pre-Oedipal, the maternal, and more generally, the oppositional feminine to the order of the symbolic.

However, Kristeva’s semiotic preserves many of the patriarchal assumptions within Lacanian psychoanalysis. First, even though the semiotic resists to the hegemony of the symbolic, and momentarily disrupts the symbolic order, it does not constitute an alternative to the symbolic, because it is by definition transitory and subordinate, “always doomed in advance to reabsorption by the symbolic order” (Fraser, 1992, p.64). Second, the semiotic is “defined parasitically over against the symbolic as the latter’s mirror image and abstract negation” (Fraser, 1992, p.64). The feminine realm, the locus of resistance, is a simple reflection of something more fundamental, which is the paternal. Third, in Kristeva there is a Lacanian deterministic structure to the development of subjectivity: the subject has to necessarily go through Lacan’s Oedipal stage, and thus to submit to the phallogocentric symbolic order (Fraser, 1992, pp. 56-57). There is no escape to the authority of the symbolic and only means of undermining it. Further, Nancy Fraser (1992) argues that Kristeva’s theory is plagued by an oscillation between a regressive version of gynocentric essentialism and a post-feminist anti-essentialism. In the same vein, Grosz (1990) points out that Kristeva enacts and reproduces the roles of passivity and subordination dictated to women by patriarchy. In short, Kristeva’s theoretical framework has little in common with emancipatory practices, nor her subject can be a feminist political agent.

What are the theoretical implications of Kristeva’s flawed psychoanalytic structure for her abject? The abject is the necessary, deterministic moment shaping the ego through the separation from the mother. The first important consequence is that the abject is necessary to form an ego. Ego-development is conceived as separation from the mother and the tendency to move to pre-oedipal –or the semiotic—is an effort to undermine the symbolic (or the paternal). However, this subversion is neither an alternative to the symbolic, nor a territory that escapes submission to patriarchy. The mother is an obstacle to independence. In Kristeva’s theory, ego development is constructed by disavowing the need for other. Separation from the mother is the moment of opening

up the abject. Yet, feminist critics show that separation “denies the possibility of maternal nurturance which actually encourages autonomy” (Benjamin, 1978, p.51). A different notion of autonomy conceptualizes the tension between attachment and separation as necessary for human development. As various relational thinkers (Fairbairn, 1952; Benjamin, 1988) show, the ego develops not because it is permanently threatened by the moment of differentiation, but because it better manages the tension between identification and separation.

More importantly, Kristeva’s separation from the mother suggests that dependence is something that needs to be feared of. Yet, no one can truly extricate himself or herself of dependence, and many feminists (Gilligan, 1982; Ruddick, 1995) argue that dependence is a normal route to development. The stark dichotomy between dependence and independence obscures the different paths to healthy development. Dependency and autonomy are not incompatible, and Fairbairn’s (1952) concept of “mature dependence” points toward incorporating dependence as a normal feature of human development. Fairbairn, like Freud, believed that homosexuality has a strong pathological element. However, unlike Freud, he argued that mature dependence is critical to mental health. Whereas the infant completely relies upon the caretaker to satisfy her physical well being and psychological needs, relative dependence is necessary for healthy development in later stages of human life. In contrast with infantile dependence, mature dependence is a stage where two mature individuals are dependent upon one another, and completely differentiated. In Fairbairn’s words, a capacity for relationships implies “dependence of some sort,” as well as an orientation to co-operation with different subjects (1952, p.145).

Young rejects many of the premises of Kristeva’s abject in her theorizing. She strongly points out that dependence is the fundamental for human beings, because female experiences of social relations “tend to recognize dependence as a basic human condition” (1990, p.55). She suggests that feminist theory need to take into account those who are dependent, because they need justice and participation in decision-making. Although she sees the value of dependence, Young’s theory is plagued by other troubling assumptions. The ‘abject’ is hard to integrate within a feminist theory of social justice because it values the excluded, regardless of its content. Young’s theory of social justice needs to distinguish between social oppression and curtailing the rights of criminals and rapists. Similarly, the assumption that separation from the mother is the route to ego-development needs to be challenged. Because Kristeva’s theory is flawed, critical theorists might think about ways of incorporating dependence as a strategy towards non-domination.

Benjamin, Winnicott and Social Oppression

Jessica Benjamin’s theory about social domination draws upon

concepts from the object-relations psychoanalytic school. Like Young, Benjamin interrogates the conditions of social inequality from a feminist standpoint. Unlike her, Benjamin is a psychoanalyst who builds on, and reframes psychoanalytic theory, in order to re-think the experience of social domination. Benjamin's analysis brilliantly exposes the psychoanalytical underpinnings of gender inequality by tracing subordination from early infant life to adult sexuality. Focusing simultaneously upon the internalization of norms and the possibilities of resistance to oppressive norms, Benjamin's theory illuminates pathologies of individual development, as well as the roots of social domination.

How does Benjamin theorize domination? On the one hand, an important piece of social domination is the ideal of the autonomous individual who rejects dependence. The rough, independent man is a strong normative ideal, and is thoroughly gendered. It partially derives from the man's rejection of his mother. However, the rejection of the mother does not lead to liberation, because the man will be "threatened by his own destruction," and would fear his mother: "The more the individual repudiates the mother, the more is threatened by his own destructiveness and her all-powerful weakness or retaliation" (1988, p.215). On the other hand, women have their own oppressive fantasies. The ideal of perfect mother – and of perfect femininity – promotes domination, because it represents the other radical side of complete autonomy. If the ideal of masculinity emerges from the separation from women, the ideal of femininity becomes the realm of "true" feminine values: care, nurturance, and love. Women do not have independent needs because they have to care for their family. In both ideals, domination emerges from the exclusive identification with an ideal gender. It is also an effect of the identification with, or submission to, "powerful others who personify the fantasy of omnipotence" (1988, p.219).

Benjamin's central question is whether the bonds of domination could be broken without re-enforcing domination. Her answer derives the possibility of equal non-dominative relationship from Donald Winnicott's (1991) theorizing of "destruction." Winnicott was concerned with the question of what makes a person feel real. He argues that in order to become "real," one needs to be able "to use objects." There are two dimensions of experiencing an object: "relating," which is when an object is not experienced as external and independent, and "using," when one has the ability to enter in exchange with the outside world. When one cannot make the transition to "using" from "relating," then one cannot distinguish his experience from omnipotence. In the omnipotent stage, the object is not an object in "its own right," and merely functions as a projective entity. However, in order to feel the object as being different from one's own projection, Winnicott says that the object needs to be destroyed. The child has to destruct the mother in fantasy so that she would become an independent, external object in reality. Benjamin draws extensively on Winnicott's "The Use of an Object and Playing through Identification," where Winnicott builds his theory on the analogy between the

analyst and the mother. Winnicott's theory focuses on the baby/patient's aggression and the mother/analyst's need to survive aggression. For Benjamin, the wish to assert oneself, the demand to have one's way, must "sometime crash against the reality of another who reflects back the intransigent assertion that the self displays" (1988, p.39). This insight is fundamental to Benjamin's theorizing of mother-child relationship. The child has to destruct the mother in fantasy in order to reach her as an independent, external object in reality. Destruction is an important element of a transitional experience. Transitional objects, like teddy bears, blankets, and special ways of humming are passages toward the awareness of the other. The child would establish therefore a good relationship between the inside world and the outside reality. The transitional realm is a significant part of the life of a human being, an intermediate area of experiencing, to which inner reality and external life both contribute. This area is referred to as reality testing, and the transitional object is an object that "describes the infant's journey from the purely subjective to objectivity" (1991, p.5). Benjamin (1988) makes clear that for Winnicott destruction is a process located at the intersection between the child's aggression and mother's survival.

However, what is Benjamin's solution to social oppression? How is resistance possible? A first route to resisting domination is to acknowledge the need to fulfill our needs and the needs of the other as being complementary. Both ego assertion and the recognition of the other are important, particularly when they are kept in tension. If the tension between the two breaks down, then domination is actualized through the fantasy of omnipotence. Either complete independence or complete dependence would prevail. Men's omnipotence leads to the rejection of dependence, whereas women's omnipotence leads to the abandonment of their needs. A second route to tackling domination is to change the child-rearing practices. If the relationship between the mother and the child were the key to human relationships, then a better model of parenting would lead to abolishing gender domination. One can break the cycle of domination if one restores the balance between destruction and recognition. Babies need good-enough mothering. If they receive it, they would be in a better position to navigate a social system of inequality. Better child rearing practices may lead to radical change, or to what Benjamin calls "the social abolition of gender domination" (1988, p.176).

Does, however, the mother-baby relationship provide a good model for undermining domination? Does the mother-baby model represent a good normative model for equal relationships? On the one hand, I agree with Benjamin that the relationship between the baby and the caregivers shape psychic structures. On the other hand, my worry is that the mother-child model reinforces in important ways an actual dissymmetry of power, which establishes an unequal dynamic between two people. Her model of love is generated within a framework where early emotional life has been arrested. As Fairbairn (1952) pointed out, a baby is extremely dependent on the mother, in ways which part fundamen-

tally from the dependence of a patient to the analyst. If a baby is dependent upon satisfying basic needs such as food and safety, a normal patient is not in such position to his/her analyst.

Benjamin's mother-child builds on a model of arrested development. What assumptions underpin this model? First, the child suffers from important environmental failures, and breakdowns of maternal care generate the later neuroses. The child within the adult transfers infantile desires onto each interaction in an ongoing search for what was not provided by the mother. Environmental deficiencies result in highly specific developmental issues, as the adult in this model "becomes a kind of perseverating baby, stuck in developmental time" (Mitchell, 1988, p.149). The question is whether equal relationships among citizens could be imagined within this model. Benjamin believes that to transcend domination—or the experience of what she calls "gender polarity"—partners need to be equal: "To transcend the experience of duality, so that both partners are equal, requires a notion of mutuality and sharing" (1988, p.48). Yet, how can one imagine equal relationships when the relationship between a caring mother and a "perseverating baby" freezes in a developmental arrest? There is clear asymmetry between roles, as long the mother offers care and nurture to an unequal receiver. Further, inequality emerges from the mother's superior capacities. Whereas the baby is in a relationship of permanent dependence, the mother is able to interact with the external world. The fundamental metaphor of mothering implies an "infantilization" of citizens, who are now seen as being permanently dependent of their caregivers.

Further, Benjamin's model endorses inequality in a different way. Women need to reclaim their subjectivity and be able to survive destruction. Women offer to men, as they were offering to the babies, the experience of the "fresh, cold outside." Women, who act like good analysts, need to survive destruction and ensure that equality between men and women could be achieved (1990, p.221). The impetus for social change is located exclusively within women's experience, who became the only responsible agents of change. On the one hand, she claims that the burdens of oppression seem to be equally shared, because both men and women have internalized domination in distinct ways. On the other hand, social change becomes primarily a task for women. Placing too many expectations on one particular category ignores that domination flourishes primarily in relationships between people, and identifies one class—women—as the engine of change. Of course, the activism of feminism is an important source of change, yet essentializing women's experience limits the possibility of exploring alliances and tapping into men's own experience of sexism. Relational psychoanalysts (Mitchell, 1996; Aron, 1996; Tansey 1992) imagine ways to re-think the psychoanalytic setting as a model for relationships of non-domination. They believe that a good relationship between a patient and an analyst emerges from the analyst's ability to engage the patient "in a collaborative effort" to find a way out of pathological dynamics (Tansey, 1992, p.311). In this regard, a relational model of equality moves be-

yond the deep asymmetries in the mother-child model, and finds ways to bring about collaboration and adult mutuality. Both the analyst and the analysand make mistakes in analyses, and psychoanalysts' reactions and feelings become critical for the patient in analysis. Disagreement and confrontation are healthy sources of insight during the therapeutic process. Unlike the mother-child relationship, the recognition of the other in adult relationships has a distinct complexity. Fairbairn (1952) argues that "the mature dependence" is a different developmental stage than infantile dependence. Recognizing the other as different in a good therapeutic setting involves a process of differentiation from the caretaker. If equality presupposes collaboration, disagreement and conflict, then a highly asymmetrical model does not fit well these conditions. A model that would accept the necessity of mature dependence would better address highly unequal positions of power. Benjamin's theory focuses on gender dynamics and less on social structures and class inequalities that make domination possible. In many ways, it seems that she critically overlooks the class underpinnings of gender inequality. Benjamin does not take into account, for instance, who has access to therapy, and what are the conditions that actualize the economic and legal conditions of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis. Benjamin writes in *The Bonds of Love* as if anybody would have access to psychotherapy, yet access to mental health care is a function of class. The rise of managed care (HMO and PPO) plans in the US links mental health care to insurance companies who rationalize and limit the access to long-term psychotherapy. People who are jobless do not have to forms of specialized care, because health care is offered primarily through employers. Similarly, changes in child-rearing practices could not be imagined only as a function of individual response, because those practices emerge in a context where the division of labor is traditional. Tackling gender polarity is a social effort that could not be performed only through practices of self-transformation. In this regard, a stronger awareness about class inequality would help the imagination of dismantling gender domination.

Conclusion:

This paper is an effort to identify some important flaws in psychoanalytic critical theory, and suggest different alternatives to imagining non-oppressive practices. I draw on recent work in relational psychoanalysis to re-think non-domination. My first point is that causal mechanisms at work in psychoanalytic theory need to be re-conceptualized. The classical Oedipus complex allows little space for the healthy development of women and gay people. Yet, a more complex understanding of multiplicity and diversity would point to alternative routes to mental health. If the Oedipus complex is not the only developmental story in psychoanalysis, then alternative ways of tracing gender formation would challenge heteronormative assumptions. In addition, patterns of domination emerge from many factors, and a causal narrative that would trace them exclusively to early child development ignores

that human development is an on-going process. Pathologies of development are both rooted in interpersonal experiences, social conditions and childhood patterns. The class component of domination might also be easily overlooked in theories that offer too much emphasis on early childhood patterns. Class inequality structures the access to psychotherapy and class position has impact on acquiring gender identity. The effort of dismantling domination needs to be targeted not only to intra-psychic components of inequality, but also to larger social patterns such as access to health care.

Whereas attributing too much causal power to early years could be misleading, the notion that the separation from the caretaker is the only route to ego development distorts the importance of dependence. Unlike Kristeva who assumes that separation would necessarily lead to the formation of the abject, Fairbairn understands that separation from, and dependence upon, the caretakers represents normality within human development. If the abject is a mere complement to phallogocentric symbolic order, then structures of oppression could only be resisted. However, a different understanding of ego formation leads to a different strategy toward oppressive practices. A new strategy of non-domination builds on the necessity of dependence in adult relationships. It conceptualizes the tension between attachment and separation not only as threatening, but also as being a healthy tension, which needs to be dealt with. A new understanding of non-domination does not only oppose patriarchy, but it also suggests a way of moving beyond oppressive practices.

My third point is that a theory of non-domination should re-imagine models of equal relationships beyond the mother-child model. A powerful asymmetry between the caretaker and the baby emerges within Benjamin's mother-child model. The notion of care is important in rethinking equality. However, mature dependence is different from infantile dependence, and a more equal relationship between citizens would presuppose a good degree of differentiation from the caretaker. A model that would allow for mature conflict, disagreement and cooperation addresses the strong asymmetry. Relational psychoanalytic theorists point toward a new model of mental development. In contrast with a classical model where the analyst had the privilege of interpretation, relational psychoanalysts argue that the work of interpretation is a constructed process where intersubjective understandings are critical for psychological development. Similarly, one may imagine equality among citizens as being generated by intersubjective processes where conflict and cooperation are strongly articulated.

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