

Part I

Thinking about Sexuality

How do men and women differ sexually? Where do our notions of what is normal and natural and what is not come from? For most of the twentieth century, scientific approaches dominated sexual knowledge. This book, in contrast, begins with the belief that sexuality is socially constructed. To know how men and women experience their sexual selves, we need to consider the worlds in which they live. A case in point: heterosexuality is a social institution. It transmits certain notions of how we should act, and how love and reproduction should occur.

The heterosexual romantic ideal dominates our cultural imagination. And it shapes social practices in the family, and also outside, in the workplace, for example. In Part I of the book, we explore different ways of thinking about sex and sexuality as social phenomena. We begin with psychoanalytic theory (Dorothy Dinnerstein) and symbolic interactionism (Ken Plummer), and then explore radical feminism (Catharine MacKinnon). We end with a look at an emerging body of sexual thought, queer theory (Steve Epstein).



1 Higamous-Hogamous

Dorothy Dinnerstein

Higamous hogamous, woman's monogamous.

Hogamous higamous, man is polygamous.

Folk rhyme

A central rule under a strikingly widespread range of conditions is, first, that men act sexually more possessive than women, and second, that women act less free than men to seek "selfish" sexual pleasure.

The reason for this rule can seem deceptively simple. Wherever we look common sense offers us glaringly visible explanations. And the presence of these common-sense explanations – the existence of obvious *external* supports for the double-standard rule – makes it easy to overlook the presence of vital, but less obvious, *internal* supports. The rule will not be understood, or centrally changed, until people see that it rests not only on brute force, practical pressure, societal coercion, but also on something subtler and harder to defy: it is supported within each person on that stubborn wordless level of adult feeling which is continuous with infant feeling and with the emotional realm of early childhood.

The "practical" bases for asymmetric human sexual privilege have clearly started to crumble, and if advanced industrial civilization survives they will clearly crumble further. What remains very much intact, however, is its deepest emotional basis: a central psychological asymmetry between the sexes, laid down in the first months, and consolidated in the first years, of life, is built into the primary-group arrangement that Washburn describes as the "fundamental pattern... [of human] social organization." This central asymmetry, which drives men to insist on unilateral sexual prerogative and inclines women to consent to their

insistence, will endure as a powerful force until the "fundamental pattern" is outgrown – until, that is, the female monopoly of child care is broken.

To see how this complex asymmetry develops and ramifies, one must examine it aspect by aspect. (And the necessity, I must warn the reader, makes a certain amount of repetition inevitable.) Let us look first at the special sexual possessiveness of men; then at the special muting of women's erotic impulsivity; and then at a third tendency which is – in our own culture at least – a close relative of these two: the tendency for sexual excitement to be more tightly tied to personal sentiment in women than in men.

My discussion here is in one sense frankly ethnocentric; it is mainly couched, in its literal details, in terms of the nuclear family of contemporary white middle-class America. *Its central points are meant, however, to be usefully translatable to any human situation in which women preside over life's first stages and men are at the same time present as emotionally significant figures for young children.*

Unilateral Sexual Possessiveness

The human male's tendency to claim one-sided access to a female, and the human female's tendency to consent to this claim, are rooted first of all in infancy, in the differing relationships of boy and girl to the parent who has so far always dominated the beginning of life. On this initial set of differences another set is overlaid in early childhood. These two layers of experience (along with later ones) fuse, to be sure, in the formation of adult emotional proclivities;

they are considered separately here only in order to help clarify their nature.

Roots in infancy

At the outset, for the infant it is in the relation with the mother that all joy is centered, and it is largely through body contact that this joy comes. Other people with a claim on the mother's intimate concern, and especially on her body, are resented competitors for a vital resource. Boy or girl, one wants her for oneself; on the most primitive level of feeling, one remains unreconciled to sharing her: to possess a woman (more precisely, to possess a creature of the kind who later, as our perceptions develop, turns out to belong to the category "woman") is under present conditions every child's early wish. What happens to this wish – which survives throughout life in what used to be called the heart – depends on whether its original object is later reincarnated partially inside, or primarily outside, one's own skin. And this later reincarnation, of course, is inevitably a different matter for the girl than for the boy.

The pleasure that lures animals into procreative activity has an additional function on the human level: it allows us to relive some of the original life-giving delight of infancy. When the boy, as an adult, finds this delight in heterosexual lovemaking, he finds it outside himself, as before, in a female body. And if the inhabitant of this female body feels free to bestow its resources on a competitor, she is re-evoking for him the situation in which mother, unbearably, did not belong to baby.

The girl grows up into a heterosexual situation significantly more complex. She has – at least partially – *become* the mother. She now lives in the female body that was once the vital source of nourishment, entertainment, reassurance. It is true, to be sure, that a man – despite his male physique – can provide for her, as she provides for him, a direct opportunity for reliving the original embrace. There are momentous physical

facts to support this emotional opportunity: he is corporeally large, warm, and strong, as the mother was; and his penis, taken into a yearning orifice of the body as the nipple once was taken, can provide a comparably miraculous joy. To the extent that he has this meaning for her, she is vulnerable to something like the simple, direct distress that he feels in the face of sexual competition. And yet their distress is not wholly the same. Hers is apt to be modulated in several ways.

First, despite the man's size, and his penis, the physical differences that are likely to exist between a man and the early mother – in shape and skin texture, in voice quality, gesture, rhythm – are important ones. His bodily presence typically cannot in itself call up the atmosphere of infancy for her in these respects so literally as hers can call it up for him. In the sense and to the extent that this is the case, his physical infidelity cannot revive the grief of infancy for her so graphically as hers can for him: its shock value for her is apt to be less concrete, more purely symbolic.

What may be more important, however, is the fact that even the *symbolic* shock value of the other's physical infidelity is far less absolute for her than for him. The mother-raised woman is likely to feel, more deeply than the mother-raised man, that she carries within herself a source of the magic early parental richness. In this sense – even if not in others – she is more self-sufficient than the mother-raised man: what is inside oneself cannot be directly taken away by a rival.

The tranquillity that goes with this conviction typically rests, of course, on external confirmation of the woman's feeling of inner richness; she requires evidence that somebody else depends on access to what she has. It is not unusual for her to accept a man's infidelities – even to enjoy them, for reasons discussed below – so long as she is sure he would be desolate to lose possession of her. If this is how she feels, it is only by making him give her up altogether that a rival can shake the foundations of her confidence in herself as a being equipped with an

internal supply of what is most basically needed. The fact that this attitude is far less usual in a man stems not just from the pressure of convention. More basically it stems from the mother-raised boy's sense that the original, most primitive source of life will always lie outside himself, that to be sure of reliable access to it he must have exclusive access to a woman.

Roots in early childhood

There is another way in which female-dominated childhood tends to make jealousy more complex for women than for men, less continuous with the infant's imperious, monolithic rage at maternal infidelity, less likely to arouse sharp impulses of self-assertion. To understand it, one must consider not only the relation between the pre-verbal infant and its mother, but also the shape of the small child's situation as it starts to enter a wider world. During this period, formal sex-role education – learning what is expected of a girl and of a boy – is of course going on. The importance of this process is by now well understood; it is a process that deserves, and is currently getting, detailed attention from writers oriented to the project of reorganizing our sexual arrangements. Here, however, we are concerned with a set of emotional facts whose significance is much less widely recognized, facts which have so far been discussed mainly in the conservative psychoanalytic spirit of understanding why things must be the way they are, not in the revolutionary psychoanalytic spirit of thinking out how they can be changed.

Under prevailing conditions the little girl, if she is to develop the early orientation to gender that will later allow her to feel heterosexual passion, must overcome an initial handicap. What is required of her is a central shift of erotic allegiance: it is to this shift that Freud and his students point, more unanimously than to the shaky theory of penis envy, as a basis for their working assumption that woman's sexual disadvantage

is inevitable. (And in fact this assumption would be a wholly reasonable one, if female-dominated childhood were inevitable. There is nothing wrong with the logic behind it. The error is in its tacit initial premise.) The girl's original love, they remind us, was, like the boy's, a woman. Upon this prototypic erotic image, the image of man must be superimposed.

This emotional feat is typically in progress during the two- or three- to five-year-old period that Freud – naming it from the viewpoint of the boy – called Oedipal. During these years, the child's worldly awareness expands dramatically. The father becomes a more distinct figure, and as he does so it becomes clear that there are two sexes, with physical and social differences between them that are crucial for one's own present and future privileges, obligations, and opportunities. It becomes clear also that there exists a special and exclusive relation between the parents, the nature of which has sharp bearing on one's own place in the affections of each.

“Oedipal” jealousy. The little boy's concern about his own position in the relation with the two parents is apt to be focused mainly on the father's rival claim to the mother: she is the parent with whom the boy has been physically intimate from the outset, and to whom he is likely still to be much more attached, in this way, than to his newly vivid father; and now his growing awareness of bodily and social maleness tells him that she is a member of the sex for whose affections he is destined to compete with other males.

In the girl's case, this jealous concern about one's place with the parents is typically much more deeply two-edged. The father's animal allure is likely to be more powerful for her than it is for the boy. (This may be simply because he acts more seductive with her: he can treat her openly as an attractive little female; he is less free to flirt on an animal-poetic level with his son. It may also be – we do not know – that even in the small child some central neural basis for a specific

interest in the opposite sex is already operating.) At the same time, the mother is for the girl, as for the boy, the parent around whom bodily based tender passion was first organized. This means that for her, love of this kind is more evenly directed toward both parents than it is for the boy, and rivalry with the mother for the father's love is more evenly balanced against rivalry with the father for the mother's. The growing insight that this balance is scheduled to tip mainly in the father's direction is on some level wounding. To realize that one is a female, destined to compete with females for the erotic resources of males, is to discover that one is doomed to renounce one's first love.

In the jealous woman, the emotional atmosphere of this childhood discovery is apt to be reactivated: she can feel at the same time pained by the other woman's access to the man and excited by the man's access to the other woman, through which she is offered vicarious re-access to a female erotic figure. The eruption of this more or less buried early erotic interest can distract or humiliate or baffle her, taking the sharp edge off jealous anger. She may find herself helpless in the throes not only of masochistic satisfaction at being forced to accept the painful presence of a rival but also of bisexual pleasure in simultaneous contact with a man and – vicariously – a woman. (There are, of course, many women in whom no such feelings erupt, and whose jealousy is as fierce as any man's.)

In the jealous man, two-edged feeling of this kind (though it does in fact often occur) is less typical. A certain degree of straightforward animal-poetic attraction toward the same-sex parent is likely to have been part of his, like the girl's, childhood Oedipal dilemma. The likelihood that this factor will later work to take the edge off heterosexual jealousy is less in his case, however, because his attraction to his father is apt to have differed in two crucial ways from the girl's attraction to her mother. One difference – to which I have referred just above from the father's point of view – is that the boy's

erotic pull toward his father is apt to have been more ego-alien, less compatible with his own self-image and the expectations of the people around him, than the girl's toward her mother (which had to be accepted as an expression of the young child's still lively physical dependence on parental – a word that under prevailing conditions means maternal – care). Another, related, difference between these two early homoerotic pulls is that the onset of his was later. The father under present conditions tends to be a far less distinct figure than the mother until the child is verbal and mobile, and relatively knowledgeable and rational. The attraction to him is thus inevitably less primitive, more modulated from the beginning by the abstract considerations that language carries. It is an attraction, moreover, far less deeply tied up with sheer survival: bodily contact with him can be exhilarating and playful (he typically carries the child, and tosses it in the air), or threatening (he may administer corporal punishment, or show terrifying anger, or figure in violent sexual fantasies), but it does not ordinarily have to do, as contact with the mother does, with the basic maintenance of life.

What has been said above about the difference between the boy's "Oedipal" jealousy and the girl's, as these bear on one-sided male possessiveness in adult sex life, can be summed up as follows.

First, the young child's ties to its mother are earlier born, more continuous with the passions of helpless pre-verbal infancy, than those to its father. This means that in the mother–father–child triangle the heteroerotic side of the child's feeling has more primitive weight for the boy than for the girl, while the homoerotic side has more primitive weight for the girl than for the boy. The adult consequence of this difference is that a woman's heterosexual jealousy is apt to be more deeply complicated than a man's by homoerotic excitement, her rage more blurred, her impulse to get rid of the intruder less pure.

Second, not only is the homoerotic side of the boy's feeling in this early triangle later born and less primitive than the girl's; it is also more disgraceful. The adult consequence is that even where homoerotic excitement *is* strong enough to complicate a man's heterosexual jealousy, this excitement is likelier to be suppressed, since it is too shameful to be admitted into awareness. Suppressed erotic feeling toward a rival does not defuse jealous rage as it can when it comes closer to the surface of consciousness. Indeed, it is apt to have the opposite effect: suppressed, its energy can feed into the rage, making the latter even more primitive and self-righteous.

But the boy's relation to the parents contrasts with the girl's in a way that goes far beyond these intimate strains within the original threesome.

The "Oedipal" dilemma and the wider human realm. It is true that both son and daughter in these early years feel – and handle somewhat differently for the reasons discussed above – the pull between an old love and the possibility of adding a new one. A momentous additional difference between his case and hers, however, lies in the human-social nature of this new possibility, its implications for one's future place in the world beyond the parent-child triangle.

In the son's case, what is apt to be salient is that resentment of the father's claims upon the mother threatens to interfere with a crucial opportunity that is now opening before him: attachment to his newly interesting and powerful male parent represents solidarity with his own sex, a solidarity upon which much of his thrust toward worldly competence is starting to depend. His main task is to find a balance between two contrasting varieties of love, one that provides primitive emotional sustenance, and another that promises – if rivalry over the first can be handled – to offer membership in the wider community where prowess is displayed, enterprise planned, public event organized. His old tie to his mother starts at this point

to be felt as an obstacle to new and more grown-up ties with his own sex. These are the ties upon which – in the world he is beginning to know, the world as it now is – the opportunity will rest to exercise some of his most important human capacities.

This new difficulty in the boy's relations with his mother is now likely to coalesce with certain longer-standing grievances, rooted in the inevitable frustrations of infancy, that had been part of his feeling for her from the beginning. (What these grievances are, and how they bear on the atmosphere between men and women, is one of the questions to which chapters 6, 7, and 8 [of *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*] are devoted. At this point, let me assert merely that they exist, and that they are formidable.) Together, these older and newer difficulties help form the basis for the eventual adult feeling that love for women must be kept in its place, not allowed to interfere with the vital ties between men.

Ideally, the little boy manages to find some provisional balance between the old, jealous, aggrieved erotic tug toward the mother and the new feeling of friendship with the father. Later on, he will have an opportunity to resolve this conflict more decisively. He will discover that authority over a woman or women is a mark of status, respected by men. This discovery will help him reconcile what were once competing wishes: the wish for secure access to certain essential emotional resources, which in his experience reside in females, and the wish to take part in certain essential human activities, which in the world he now enters are defined as male.

What is reflected in man's unilateral possessiveness, then, is not only the original, monolithic infant wish for ownership of a woman but also a second, more equivocal feeling, rooted in early boyhood: that attachment to a woman is emotionally bearable, consistent with the solidarity among men which is part of maleness, only if she, and one's feelings toward her, remain under safe control.

For the girl, this aspect of the “Oedipal” conflict takes a different form and its resolution is likely to have the opposite outcome. To her, too, the father is an interesting, powerful figure through whom one reaches out toward the wider world. But he does not normally invite her, as he invites the boy, to follow him out into this fascinating world, and take on its challenges in recompense for the impossibility of owning the mother. Instead he offers the more direct recompense of a second erotic tie, excitingly, but not so sharply as in the boy’s case, different from the first one. This second love at its outset valuably supplements the first (for the daughter, like the son, needs another relation to help her achieve perspective on the relation with the mother). And in the girl’s situation, the new love for man – unlike the boy’s new love for man – is expected gradually to supplant the original love for woman. Her jealousy of the parents, as I said earlier, is more two-edged than the boy’s; and at the same time, neither parent is likely to contest her erotic claim on the other as directly as the father contests the boy’s claim on the mother. All in all, then, she is under less urgent pressure than the boy is to find some clear-cut way of reconciling the second love with the first.

It will nevertheless turn out to be true in her case, as in the boy’s, that ties to the opposite sex and solidarity with one’s own sex will pull in opposite directions. But the nature of this pull – as she feels it in childhood, and as she acts on it later – is different for her than for him. For her the deepest obstacles to solidarity with one’s own sex first appear not in the mother–father–baby triangle, where the boy first meets them, but in the deep ambivalence of the earlier mother–baby pair. Once the triangle forms, both the “truly masculine” boy and the “truly feminine” girl use its existence to help handle the formidable tensions inherent in the original pair. But they do so in contrasting ways; and the outcome is that women are on the whole far less able than men to balance dependence on each

other against dependence on the opposite sex.

When the father first emerges to offer the girl a tie that can supplement (and in part substitute for) the tie to the mother, he makes available to her a new way of handling – a way, that is, of side-stepping the task of resolving – the ambivalence at the heart of the infant–mother tie. What he offers is a fatefully tempting (pseudo) solution to this central dilemma: positive feelings toward the mother are normally split off from negative ones in early life in order to preserve the possibility of feeling, at least sometimes, a sense of unqualified oneness with this central source of all that is good. What the girl can now do is transfer to the father – who starts out with a clean slate, so to speak, innocent of association with the inevitable griefs of infancy – much of the weight of these positive feelings, while leaving the negative ones mainly attached to their original object. She thus gains a less equivocal focus for her feelings of pure love, and feels freer to experience her grievances against her mother without fear of being cut off altogether from the ideal of wholehearted harmony with a magic, animally loved, parental being.

This opportunity comes at a particularly timely point in her development since a new grievance against the mother is just adding itself to those already stored up: just as the boy, during this period, is learning that outside the family an arena exists in which he can exercise some central human capacities, the girl (who possesses these same capacities, and is too young to have been persuaded that she does not) also learns of this arena and begins at about the same time to grasp the strange fact that she is unwelcome to enter it. This misfortune she is apt to blame on her omnipotent mother, who has so far been responsible for every misfortune – as well as every delight – in her young life. The father, if she is to become a “truly feminine” woman who contents herself with motherhood and the maintenance of family life, is typically absolved of blame for her

exclusion from this vital extrafamilial arena. Indeed, he is all the more glamorous and newly needed because he provides the only access to it – vicarious access – that she can expect to have. He is glamorous also because the special compensation that she will be offered for keeping the home fires burning and forgoing the rewards of effort in the wide world – the compensation that lies in a certain kind of erotic attention, in exemption from certain risky challenges, in safety from certain possible humiliations – is foreshadowed in the special homage that he has begun to express toward her as a little female: the deprivation for which she feels her mother is to blame is repaired, so far as it can be, by her father.

Early rage at the first parent, in other words, is typically used by the “masculine” boy during the Oedipal period to *consolidate* his tie with his own sex by establishing a principled independence, a more or less derogatory distance, from women. And it is typically used by the “feminine” girl in this same period to *loosen* her tie with her own sex by establishing a worshipful, dependent stance toward men. Just when that boy is learning to keep his feelings for the mother under control, that girl (precisely because her first emotional problems also centered on the mother) is learning to over-idealize the father. This contrast, of course, heavily supports asymmetry of sexual privilege. For without comparably strong, well-defined ways of counterbalancing feelings for the opposite sex with a sense of human identity based on solidarity with each other, women are far less free than men to set their own terms in love.

The nature of the rule

In sum, then: unilateral male sexual possessiveness rests on strong old feelings, both in men and in women. And so long as the care of the very young remains in female hands these feelings – in which echoes of infancy and of early childhood are fused – will persist.

But before turning to the next part of the higamous-hogamous rule, let me emphasize again the dual sense in which unilateral male possessiveness is in fact a “rule.” What I have been offering is a *description* of psychological forces, rooted in mother-dominated childhood, which are widespread enough to make it possible for society to enforce a *prescription* about male and female adult behavior. When I say, for example, that a certain emotional situation, or frame of mind, “as a rule” characterizes father-emulating little boys, or jealous women, I am describing a tendency, a probability: there are many little boys, and many jealous women, whose experiences are quite different from the ones I describe. And it is very lucky that this is so, for if the tensions inherent in the “normal” human situation led uniformly to the same outcome for everyone we would have little hope of out-growing what is maiming in our sexual arrangements. As a code of conventionally accepted comportment, on the other hand, the double standard of sexual possessiveness is a “rule” that, whether obeyed or defied, exerts some real coercive force on *every* person. To survive as this kind of rule, it need not have powerful emotional roots in all of us: just in most of us.

The same is true for the rule – to which I now turn – that female erotic impulse must be curbed: it is a societal prescription, fed psychologically by an amalgam of very early and slightly later experience in enough mother-dominated childhoods to make it generally enforceable.

The Muting of Female Erotic Impulsivity

Roots in infancy

Suppression of female sexual impulse has an obvious practical congruence with one-sided male possessiveness: a woman with a strong sexual will of her own may defy a man’s wish to keep her for himself. But on the

more covert emotional level that we are considering here, there is not only this practical, realistic concern; there is also a different, non-rational kind of fear, a deep fantasy-ridden resentment, directed against her impulsivity itself. Her own bodily pleasure in sex, independent of the pleasure she gives her partner, is the essential threatening fact. It is threatening, first of all, because it resonates with the distress of a very early discovery, a distress that antedates jealousy since it is felt while the infant is still too young to notice the existence of competitors for the mother's resources. This discovery is simply that the infant does not own or control the mother's body: because this body has needs and impulses of its own, its responsiveness to the infant's needs is never totally reliable. (A mother's milk, for example, may sometimes flow faster or slower than is comfortable for the infant. She may be sleepy, distracted, or sluggish when it wants to play; she may alarm it or disturb its peace with over-avid caresses.) The very same spontaneous, impulsive, autonomous erotic spirit in the first parent which – as the baby will later find out – allows her to turn at will to others makes her from the outset imperfectly subject to its desire even when they are alone.

The significance of this awareness on the infant's part goes far beyond the purely sexual matters now under discussion. Some broader consequences of the trouble we have in coming to terms with the early mother's inconveniently human autonomy are explored in chapter 6 [ibid.]. And much of the rest of this book has to do with the trouble we have in handling the more general problem of which this autonomy of hers is just one manifestation: as Freud pointed out, the fact that human infants receive such nearly perfect care seduces them into fantasies which are inevitably crushed, fantasies of a world that automatically obeys, even anticipates, their wishes. The loss of this infant illusion of omnipotence – the discovery that circumstance is incompletely controllable, and that there exist centers of

subjectivity, of desire and will, opposed or indifferent to one's own – is an original and basic human grief.

All of us, male and female, feel this grief. To some degree, it is irreparable. We manage in part to console ourselves for it indirectly, through mastery, competence, enterprise: the new joy of successful activity is some compensation for the old joy of passive, effortless wish-fulfillment. This indirect way of handling the grief is central to the pathology of civilized life, a pathology to which our male-female arrangements contribute in a way that will be discussed in chapters 7, 8, and 9 [ibid.]. At the same time, for the sexual situation with which we are concerned here, the important fact is that we also attempt to undo the grief *directly*. Indefatigably, we go on trying to recover what has been lost: we try it first-hand by seeking out situations in which we can reexperience personally, at least for a moment, the infant sense of omnipotence. And we try it second-hand by acting as nurturers, pleasure-givers, empathic wish-granters, by recreating the mother-infant atmosphere so as to relive vicariously some part of the lost delight.

In lovemaking, both man and woman make this direct attempt to repair the old loss. Each of them does so both first-hand, by taking bodily pleasure, and vicariously, by providing pleasure for the other person. But the balance tends not to be symmetrical. She is the one whose physique more closely resembles the physique of the first parent, and who is likely to have incorporated this parent's attitudes more deeply; he is therefore apt to be the one who can more literally relive the infant experience of fulfilling primitive wishes through unqualified access to another body. For her, the vicarious version of this reliving – providing the body through which the other's wishes are perfectly granted – is likely to be a more prominent feature of the interplay. If this symbiotic arrangement is to succeed, the woman's own sexual impulsivity must not be freely unleashed. Unleashed, it can disrupt the recreated harmony; it can revive – in a first-

hand way for him and vicariously for her – the first intimations of isolated, non-omnipotent selfhood; it can reactivate in both of them the malaise that originated in the nursling's discovery of the mother's separate, uncontrollable subjective existence.

The arrangement, of course, is an unstable one. Vicarious bliss has some advantages over direct bliss (imagination fills in gaps, glosses over blemishes), but no vigorous person willingly makes do with it as his or her whole portion. The infant in every adult wants pleasure unlimited and uninterrupted by the ebb and flow of another creature's impulses. On some level woman, like man, resents the other person's uncontrollable erotic rhythm. This resentment is softened in the mother-reared woman by her greater emotional access to vicarious delight. On the other hand, it is sharpened by the crucial physical fact that in coitus she is far more dependent on the man's erection than he is on her vaginal responsiveness. Men have doubtless always sensed the explosive potentialities of this fact: it feeds into their archetypal nightmare vision of the insatiable female, and deepens their feeling that the unleashing of woman's own erotic impulses would disturb the precarious heterosexual peace.

The independent sexual impulsivity of the female, then, is feared because it recalls the terrifying erotic independence of every baby's mother. To soothe the fear, we subordinate Eve's lust to Adam's, but this cure only makes the sickness worse: subordinated, Eve's lust is more frightening still.

Woman's sexuality is under doubly explosive pressure. Her physical situation in coitus, as compared with man's, has in it much more of the infant's dependence on an imperfectly reliable source of fulfillment. Yet it is she who must make reparation to him for what both endured as babies. Coital satiety (to be fucked as the baby would like to be fed: on demand and at the rate one chooses and as long as one wants) is for

anatomic reasons a chancier matter for her than for him; and in addition she is for social and emotional reasons less free to seek it out. Inevitably, like any other suppressed force, her sex impulses come to seem boundless, ominous. And inevitably, this makes it more urgent to suppress them.

Roots in early childhood

The feelings discussed in the preceding section are primarily male feelings. Women share them only vicariously. But there are factors working to mute female lust that stem from a peculiarly female emotional situation. This situation takes shape not in infancy but in very early girlhood.

To repeat what I pointed out above in connection with sexual possessiveness, the mother-father-child triangle that Freud has called Oedipal is apt to arouse much more symmetrically balanced feelings in the girl than in the boy: since the homoerotic side of this triangle is older and more openly acceptable in her case than in his, she is not so purely the rival of the mother as the boy is the rival of the father. (Not only is her own jealousy more ambiguous than the boy's; her same-sex rival is herself more mildly, ambiguously jealous than the boy's is. The mother, to be sure, is an earlier, less rational authority, and in that sense a more formidable competitor than the father; still, competition with her is less apt to feel acutely risky since she is likely to feel less resentful than the father of the claims her child makes on her spouse.)

What is salient for the girl at this stage is not so much rivalry as another, more primitive problem: the realization that she must now, in some basic way, start to renounce, let go of, her first, life-giving love. To yield wholeheartedly to the charm of the opposite sex, she – unlike the boy – must shift a large portion of her early animal-poetic passion away from the parent to whom it was at first exclusively attached. The boy faces a clear crisis of nerve. She must handle a

more diffuse, pervasive guilt, a vague sense of disloyalty, an ancient, primal fear of loss.

The sacrifice of sexual spontaneity, the curbing of sexual willfulness, that men will require of her in adult life can serve her own purposes, too, then: it can serve as a penance for this pervasive guilt. In turning toward man, but forgoing the vigorous pursuit of "selfish" body pleasure with him, she can achieve some of the heterosexual rapport that her love for her father taught her to want, and at the same time allay this primal fear of loss.

Woman's need for penance and her sense of primal loss are complicated, moreover, by the other large fact about the girl's Oedipal situation that was discussed above: the fact that the infidelity to her first love that began in this period typically went far deeper than her shift toward the second actually required. The sacrifice of full bodily pleasure with man, which I have heard described as "the gift to the mother," atones for something more than the partial desertion of her that the girl's growth toward heteroerotic susceptibility would in itself inevitably entail. What the girl has been guilty of is lavishing upon her father – that is, upon man – not only the erotic recognition, and the warmth and trust, that he on his own could inspire in her, but also much of the physical affection and filial-romantic gratitude that would have remained attached to her mother – that is, to woman – if they had been integrated with the child's inevitable antagonisms toward her. What she has done is to give away to someone else love that a part of her knew belonged rightly to the mother, in order to spare herself an emotional effort that seemed – but was not really – unnecessary. The result is that she has cut herself off from a continuity with her own early feeling, for which she now mourns. It is in part to propitiate her fantasy mother, to punish herself, and thereby to regain some of this inner continuity that she holds back the final force of her "selfish" carnal passion for man. She holds it back out of love for

him too, out of unwillingness to alarm him and pleasure in acceding to his wishes; but also out of anger at herself and at him: anger at a gratuitous betrayal of her oldest root in life, a betrayal for which she was responsible but of which he (in the form of his original parental predecessor) was the instrument.

But feelings of guilt and loss connected with her first love are not the only preoccupations that work to take the edge off woman's sensual passion for man. She tends also to feel more preoccupied than he does, while they are making love, with the opportunity to achieve vicarious homoerotic contact, and in this way to steal back some of what life has taken away from her: she is apt to be busier than he is imagining herself in the other person's situation, more engrossed in the other person's access to her own body and thus less engrossed in her own access to the other person's body. And in the meantime this holding back, this abstention from full use of the male body as a source of direct pleasure for herself, can also express another, related, feeling: a grudge against the male, her rival for her first, female, parent. The grudge is not normally strong enough to make him unattractive to her. But she can reconcile resentment and attraction by embracing him and at the same time vengefully using the embrace for an ulterior purpose: to get access to the mother again after all.

The mother-raised woman, then, submits to the mother-raised man's demand that she mute her own adult lust; and in submitting she consoles herself by betraying him and going back to her first, infant, love. She avenges herself on him by making him her instrument of re-access to what she has renounced. But it is a weak consolation and a poor revenge. For her re-access is only second-hand, and her old feelings of guilt and loss only feebly assuaged. What she is giving up is the right to use her body's sensuous capacities as directly, concretely, immediately as she did in the original embrace.

Sexual Excitement and Personal Sentiment

Closely related to the two aspects of the double standard of sexual behavior discussed above (at least in our own culture) is a third psychological sex difference: that carnal excitement tends to be more firmly tied to strong personal feeling in women than in men.

This tendency, like some others discussed just above, is supported by a fact that follows inexorably from our prevailing child-care arrangements: since the first parent is female, heteroerotic feeling has deeper roots in infancy for men than for women.

A male disability and a female one

What these deeper roots mean is that in intimate relations between a man and a woman he is in one very important respect more vulnerable than she is: she can more readily re-evolve in him the unqualified, boundless, helpless passion of infancy. If he lets her, she can shatter his adult sense of power and control; she can bring out the soft, wild, naked baby in him.

Men try to handle this danger with the many kinds of sex-segregating institutions that they seem always and everywhere driven to create. Secret societies, hunting trips, pool parlors, wars – all of these provide men with sanctuary from the impact of women, with refuges in which they can recuperate from the temptation to give way to ferocious, voracious dependence, and recover their feelings of competence, autonomy, dignity.

But they need other safeguards too. Short of avoiding women altogether, the best safeguard is to renounce the opportunity for deep feeling inherent in heterosexual love. One way to do this is to keep heterosexual love superficial, emotionally and physically. Another is to dissociate its physical from its emotional possibilities.

Woman is less vulnerable to this danger: in the sexual recapitulation of the infant-mother interplay, she has more of a sense than he does of embodying the powerful mother within herself; a greater part of her than of his reliving of the infant role is vicarious, through the other person. This makes her less afraid of being plunged back into the atmosphere of helpless infancy, and therefore typically better able to fuse intense emotional and intense physical intimacy.

Unfortunately, however, she is also typically less able to *separate* these two feelings when it would be appropriate to do so. Indeed, the gentlest hint that such separation may sometimes be appropriate is obnoxious to many women. To give way to bodily lust for a man without a sense of magical personal fusion with him seems to them unworthy, or dangerous, or degrading; incapacity to do this seems to them a mark of human dignity, rather than the disability which in fact it is. For this disability, there are many well-known practical reasons (women's economic and social dependence makes them emotionally clingy; sex is a more serious matter for them because it can make them pregnant; etc.). But there are also other reasons, less widely understood and at least as important.

I said above that a woman can assuage guilt about betraying her first, homoerotic, love in sex with a man by renouncing the pursuit of "selfish" bodily pleasure with him. But there is also another way for her to assuage this guilt: she can find that she is unable to give way to sensual delight except when romantic love – love shot through with the flavor of the original blissful mother-infant union – has flooded her being. This solution allows her to reap the joy of heterosexual carnality while keeping some magical, loyal connection to her earliest tie. (In her case, unlike his, the sense of catastrophic helplessness that return to the atmosphere of the old union can rekindle is kept within bounds by her own gender continuity, and her partner's gender

discontinuity, with the first parent. And to the extent that she does feel painfully helpless with him, her pain [see chapter 8, *ibid.*] redresses for both of them an old imbalance: now it is mama who cries for baby and baby who lets mama cry.)

The hapless tendency of many women to melt into a feeling of emotional closeness with any man who manages to excite them sexually is related to still another factor: the mother, as a number of writers point out, is likely to experience a more effortless identification, a smoother communication, with a girl baby than with a boy baby. With him, there is more difference and separateness, more of a barrier to be bridged. This means that girls and boys are likely to be treated differently in the prototypic adult–infant situation in which bodily intimacy first occurs. The nature of this difference helps account for the differing degrees of ego-distinctness that they later bring to sex. The girl, as she did at the beginning, melts more easily into the personality of the person to whose flesh she is drawn. Infancy has not taught her, as surely as it has taught him, to feel simultaneously the boundaries of herself and the current between herself and what attracts her.

A male “solution”

For reasons that so far as I know remain to be explored, the degree to which men and women differ in their need and/or ability to dissociate personal love from sex feeling varies from one historical or cultural situation to another. (The present account does not explain this variation: clearly, it depends upon factors that have not been considered here.) But to the extent that it is in fact emotionally feasible for him to maintain such a dissociation, there is one further function, not yet mentioned, that it can always serve for a mother-raised man: it can help him to cope with the problem of ambivalence toward the first parent.

For this problem, as I have been pointing out, the Oedipal triangle offers the girl, but

not the boy, a solution of sorts. (To repeat: she can dodge the work of healing the split between bad and good feelings toward the first parent by shifting a substantial portion of the magically good ones onto the second, so that her love for the opposite sex comes to be infused with the infant’s grateful passion toward the mother while most of the hostile, derogatory attitudes remain attached to their original object.) The boy cannot use his father in this way without giving homoerotic attraction a dominant place in his love life. If woman is to remain for him the central human object of the passions most deeply rooted in life’s beginnings, his relation to her must embrace, at a primitive level, *both* the worshipful and the derogatory, the grateful and the greedy, the affectionate and the hostile feeling toward the early mother.

(Before going further, it seems best to stop and acknowledge a question that may well, by now, be irking the reader so seriously that a digression which articulates it – even an arbitrarily timed digression – will be felt as a relief: what makes me think that any conceivable child-care arrangement could magically dispel the problem of infantile ambivalence? What good would it do, after all, if fathers were as actively parental from the beginning as mothers and ambivalence therefore extended impartially to all our relations with people instead of focusing mainly on women? Trial readers of this chapter have asked this question with levels of indignation ranging from gentle to vituperative.

To return, then, to our discussion of male heterosexual ambivalence: one way a man can handle this fundamental difficulty is to sort out the conflicting ingredients into two kinds of love, tender and sensual. Lust then carries all the angry, predatory impulses from which the protective, trusting side of his love for woman must be kept insulated. He may keep tender and sensual love separate by expressing them toward different women, or toward the same woman in different situations or moods. Or he may largely bury one side of his heteroerotic feeling,

giving direct expression mainly to the other.

Another way he can handle the difficulty is to mute all animal-poetic feeling for other people. In this case, romantic and sexual interest play such a minor role in his life that women can remain the central object of such interest without causing any serious inner tumult. The result may or may not be a general constriction of the emotional flow between the man and his world. If not, what happens often enough to color the whole climate of history is that his passion can flow into work – that is, into the exercise of competence in the public domain – while his heteroerotic affection stays absent-minded and tepid, his sex life perfunctory. A man like this need not be literally polygamous: his wife is still apt to feel that he is “married” to his business, to the army, to the sea, to science as much as to her, or more so, while she is married only to him. A sex relation that he finds quite adequate to his needs is apt to leave her dissatisfied in one of two ways: either it engages her deepest feelings, which she then finds unreciprocated, since his are engaged elsewhere; or it does not, in which case she feels centrally restless, her personal depths untapped, stagnating. It has often been pointed out that women depend lopsidedly on love for emotional fulfillment because they are barred from absorbing activity in the public domain. This is true. But it is also true that men can depend lopsidedly on participation in the public domain because they are stymied by love.

Consequences for the atmosphere between the sexes

The tendency of the sexes to differ in their ability to integrate, or separate, sensuality and sentiment has the same early origins, then, as the double standard. It also has the same worldly outcome. It originates in mother-dominated childhood and it contributes to the overall subordination of women. A woman’s lust for a man is likely to tie her to him emotionally more closely than his

lust ties him to her. Affection is likelier to keep her physically faithful to him than him to her. If he has a strong animal passion for her, his human loyalty and protectiveness may well be reserved mainly for another woman. If she is the one he tenderly loves, she may well have to make do with a sexual pittance. If he has not split off affection from lust – and sometimes even if he has – the chances are that he has muted both, turning most of his passion into realms from which she is excluded. His trouble fusing tender and sensual feeling, and her trouble separating them, enslaves and/or castrates her. She is typically dealing with a partner in some way heavily calloused, and he typically lives in an atmosphere of some kind of reproach: he is heartless; she nags and complains.

The Upshot

The higamous-hogamous adult consequence of mother-dominated childhood maims both sexes. It makes women – for internal, not only external reasons – normally less able than men to defend their interests against rivals; or to give free rein to erotic impulse; or to enjoy sex (in the special way that it can be so enjoyed) without deep personal involvement. And at the same time, it makes men – for complementary internal reasons – normally less able than women to accept the fact that it is impossible wholly to monopolize the erotic interest of another person without crushing the untameable part of that person which makes her/him erotically interesting; or the fact that the other person’s sexual impulses and rhythms are by no means automatically synchronized with one’s own. It also makes them more frightened than women of the crucial realm of personal feeling to which sex offers access.

The maiming of men under higamous-hogamous conditions is in some respects more cruel than the maiming of women. The truth of emotional experience – their

own and others' – tends on the whole to be more threatening to them. As a result their freedom to feel emotional intimacy – with themselves and with others – tends on the whole to be more constricted, hemmed in by the massive denial which is necessary to keep so much truth at bay. And their physical sex pleasure – though wider-ranging than women's and much less likely to be plumb thwarted – is likelier to be impoverished by dissociation from deep personal feeling.

Nevertheless, both sexes see the double standard – quite correctly, I think – as more damaging to women. Men are on the whole content with it, and women on the whole pained by it, for the simple reason that it is women who bear the brunt of the crudest, most primitive constriction to which the double standard gives rise: our sexual arrangements make for a head-on clash between a fact of human anatomy and the emotional constraints that stem inevitably from what Washburn calls the "fundamental pattern" imposed by evolutionary pressures "on the social organization of the human species."

Anatomically, coitus offers a far less reliable guarantee of orgasm – or indeed of any intense direct local genital pleasure – to woman than to man. The first-hand coital pleasure of which she is capable more often requires conditions that must be purposefully sought out. Yet it is woman who has less liberty to conduct this kind of search: the societal and psychological constraints inherent in our "fundamental pattern" leave her less free than man to explore the erotic resources of a variety of partners, or even to affirm erotic impulse with any one partner. These constraints also make her less able to give way to simple physical delight without a sense of total self-surrender – a disability that further narrows her choice of partners, and makes her still more afraid of disrupting her rapport with any one partner by acting to intensify the delight, that is, by asserting her own sexual wishes.

The bodily bind in which this contradiction puts women – less leeway to pursue a primitive goal which is itself more elusive – is part (not the main part, but a vital part) of the reason why it is mainly women, not men, who are urging upon our species the terrifying task of reorganizing its technologically obsolete gender arrangements. As everyone on some level really understands, the issue at stake is not only freedom to seek out genital pleasure but something more as well: the sexual realm under dispute is a wildlife preserve in the civilized world, a refuge within which inarticulate, undomesticated private creative initiative is protected from extinction.

What the double standard hurts in women (to the extent that they genuinely, inwardly, bow to it) is the animal center of self-respect: the brute sense of bodily prerogative, of having a right to one's bodily feelings. A conviction that physical urges which one cannot help having are unjustified, undignified, presumptuous, undercuts the deepest, oldest basis for a sense of worth; it contaminates the original wellspring of subjective autonomy. Fromm made this point very clearly when he argued, in *Man for Himself*, that socially imposed shame about the body serves the function of keeping people submissive to societal authority by weakening in them some inner core of individual authority.

Antagonism to the body is not, of course, simply imposed by society. It does not stem solely from external constraints designed to foster social obedience. It is an attitude with deep spontaneous roots in the psychological situation of our species. It is often used, moreover, to express not compliance, but defiance, independence, strength of will: fleshly ordeals such as fasting – and celibacy – are typically undertaken by humans in a spirit of willful, autonomous personal choice. But the burden of sensual self-abnegation imposed on women by the double standard is not undertaken in a willful spirit. It is passively accepted; and for this reason it does work as Fromm indicated that sensual self-abnegation can work: it helps make

women in a special way humble, dependent, malleable.

The chronic bodily muting accepted by “feminine” women is the opposite of dramatic and self-assertive: it wholly lacks the brightness and clarity of a hunger strike or a religious vow of abstinence from sex. Occasionally women flare up a bit and use it vengefully, affirming it as a sign of their own

moral superiority to, and power over, the abjectly lust-ridden male. On the whole, however, the female burden of genital deprivation is carried meekly, invisibly. Sometimes it cripples real interest in sexual interaction, but often it does not: indeed, it can deepen a woman’s need for the emotional rewards of carnal contact. What it most reliably cripples is human pride.