The Collusion with Patriarchy: a Psychoanalytic Account

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This paper seeks an understanding within psychoanalytic theory for how people come to collude with patriarchal structures that oppress them. The bisexuality of the child, the distinction between basic and surplus repression and Horowitz' analysis that surplus repression involves the repudiation of bisexuality is explored through the active and passive oedipal complexes. Their 'normal' result involves monogamy, heterosexuality and the denigration of femininity. The paper concludes that the struggles for sexual liberation belong at the centre of the struggle against capitalism and patriarchy.
The most important insight that feminist theory and practice has given to traditional Marxist theory is the insistence that the reproduction of the species, the institutions within which this occurs, and the entire network of relationships which result from it must be analysed if the nature of society is to be understood and transformed. Within Marxist-feminist theory, this has led to the analysis of the role played by the family in perpetuating both the social relations of capitalism and patriarchy.

While it is recognized, in the words of Christopher Lasch (1975), that "the development of capitalism and the rise of the state reverberate in the individual's inner being," understanding the mediations for this interchange has proven an elusive task. It is not just Marxists who have faltered in the attempt to understand why and how individuals collude with social and personal structures which exploit and oppress them, or for that matter why they resist, as miraculously they do, so often. It was Dennis Wrong who pointed out in his seminal article, "The Oversocialized Conception of Man in Modern Sociology," that sociologists have tended to generate a view of man sufficiently "disembodied and non-materialistic to satisfy Bishop Berkeley, as well as being desexualized enough to please Mrs. Grundy" (1961:183-193). As a result, he argues, there has been a marked failure to keep in mind the long-time sociological and philosophical question: "How is it that man becomes tractable to social discipline?". He called for a sociological reassessment of the nature of man which would incorporate the findings of Freud and psychoanalysis. And he did not have in mind the kind of truncated version of psychoanalysis that Talcott Parsons produced, extracting the concept of the superego from the rest of the theory to explain that men
internalise the values of their society. Rather, Wrong insisted that full weight be given to Freud's understanding of the human psyche as a complex, conflict-ridden arena in which there is a life-long attempt to reconcile the desires of the material body with social possibilities.

While mainstream sociology has, with few exceptions, resisted Wrong's challenge, tending, as Edward Boldt pointed out, to return to symbolic interactionism and George Herbert Mead for an understanding of human motivation (1979:1-4), the particular intersection of questions posed by Marxist-feminists are now leading to some tentative explorations of psychoanalytic theory.[1] What conjuncture of interests has brought this about? As Eli Zaretsky has put it (1976:133-34):

Marxists have rightly pointed out that society must organize the production of food, clothing and shelter, but they have forgotten that it must equally organize the sexual and instinctual life of its members and the process of human reproduction.

This lacuna was, of course, particularly important to feminists whose primary concern with the hierarchical relationship between men and women, even in their intimate day-to-day encounters, led them to the appreciation expressed in the slogan, 'the personal is political.'

The analysis that resulted from the Marxist-feminist encounter led to the breakdown of the mystification that there were two autonomous arenas for human activity: the public world of work and social relations of production and the private world of the family and personal relations.[2] Engel's (1948) understanding of the family as historically shaped by the particular mode of production has been extended to show the role of the family in capitalist society as both producer and reproducer of 'appropriate' kinds of labour power for capitalist enterprise and, also, as a unit of consumption for the products of that enterprise (Zaretsky, 1976). The sexual division of labour, both in the
family and in the work world, has been analysed and used to help account for the perpetuation both of social relations of production and of patriarchy (Armstrong and Armstrong, 1978).

This work has, however, tended to rely upon superficial assumptions about human motivations. The collusion of men and women with the social structure has been variously accounted for by political and economic coercion, behavioural conformity and individual intention. It is not surprising that this inadequacy has been more acutely felt in Marxist-feminist theory than in other theoretical perspectives. Our interest in that intersection between social and economic structure and the behaviour of individuals has forced us to be peculiarly sensitive to individual resistance to change. We have had to wonder in new and bitter ways about the cliche, 'she is her own worst enemy.' Kate Millett's expression 'interior colonization' is an effective description but also raises questions about how and why. Since our interest is not simply to understand the world but to change it, our theories are flawed if they do not include viable formulations about the nature of human beings. Just as we need to understand the social structure in order to participate actively in its transformation, so we need to understand how the psychosexual structure of men and women will lead them to conform to, or to resist, the social order that they encounter. At the same time, the consequences of the transformations of social systems without the transformations of underlying psychosexual structure are becoming apparent. This, together with the longevity of capitalism and the tenacity of patriarchy, can lead us to unbecomingly cynical answers to the old questions, 'can men and women in fact live by bread alone, and under what circumstances will they demand more than that?'

It has not been easy for feminists to turn to psychoanalysis.
Freud's personal commitment to patriarchy was often reflected in his writings about women and have been an easy foil for feminist anger.[3] This anger resonated with that of most Marxists who believe that their theory is irreconcilable with Freud. Yet, as Paul Robinson (1969:3) argues, a serious controversy about the nature of Freud's theories has long existed among the left:

The question can be formulated in both political and sexual terms. Did Freud's theoretical achievement imply a revolutionary or a reactionary attitude toward the human situation? Was Freud truly the apologist of sexual and political repression, drawing a picture of inevitable unhappiness, unfreedom, and aggression, or did his new science contain within it the promise of gratification, liberty and peace?

In the last ten years or so, sparked by Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), Marxist-feminists have begun to draw out the radical implications of Freud's theory as part of their attempt to show that patriarchy is not a universal but an historically specific phenomenon.[4] It is my own view that what we can have minimally from psychoanalytic theory are serious answers to questions about how and why women and men come to collude with the system of male dominance and female subordination and thereby participate in its perpetuation. It cannot explain why men are dominant and women subordinate. For that we must look elsewhere: to the implications of the unequal role men and women play in the perpetuation of the species and to the ramifications of the development of private property and social relations of production (Hamilton, 1978: 104-05). Here, I will argue that we internalise and legitimate this hierarchy in the course of the early development of our ego; that it becomes enmeshed in what we feel about or bodies, our behaviour and our actions, in our fantasies and dreams and in our self-concepts.

In particular, in this paper I want to outline the specific kind
of contribution that I believe psychoanalytic theory can make:

1. It can account for, as Freud put it (1965:116), how men and women are made in social terms and for how they are so tenaciously made.

2. It can account for the social reproduction of primarily heterosexual human beings out of bisexual human infants.

3. It can account for the social devaluation of what is perceived as femininity (with its more extreme manifestations in mysogyny) and the overvaluation of what is perceived as masculinity.

The social reproduction of heterosexual men and women who place unequal value upon masculinity and femininity implies its corollary: that a whole range of needs, feelings, attitudes, desires and behaviours have had to be repressed in the process.[5] In other words, we have individuals who, in the course of their development, come to collude both with patriarchal and social structures. I would, of course, not argue that economic, political and social coercion do not play a crucial role in ensuring this conformity. I maintain, however, that the system does not, nor could not, rely simply on coercion to ensure that individuals perform the thousands of small and large acts which sustain it from day to day.

To start, "we must remember that in the beginning is the body" (Wrong, 1961:183). Radical feminists have had no difficulty with this departure. Their concern has been with the social consequences of the biological differences between the sexes, differences which have made possible the reproduction of the species (Firestone, 1970:12). The question arising from biological differences that has been posed most fruitfully within psychoanalysis is at what point, and in what ways, do these biological differences register themselves in the psychic development of the human child? Before discussing this further, it is necessary to look briefly at Freud's theory of ego development. Our
interest is in that phase in the development of the ego (if indeed at all) that it becomes a gendered ego (Wollheim, 1975:65). While Marxists have had difficulty accepting the concept of repression, feminists have reacted negatively to the argument for penis envy. Both these aspects of Freud's theory have been the focus of new research, clarification, systematization and reformulation.

The first concern is the link which Freud drew between repression and civilization. On the surface at least, he advanced an image of the nature of man which is antithetical to Marx's formulation. For Marx, man's alienation from himself, from his fellows and from nature, is not an inevitable aspect of humanness but is historically specific, located in his alienation from the productive process and from the products of that process (Marx, 1964:106-19). In an attempt to reconcile Marx's theory with Freud's concept of repression, Herbert Marcuse (1955), and more recently, Gad Horowitz (1977) have undertaken the task of analytically separating basic repression from what they call 'surplus repression.'

What is basic repression and why is it fundamental to the Freudian account? Under its rubric come many different processes. As Horowitz says (1977:44-54), repression includes, for example, the physiological renunciation of certain infantile pleasures as the libido shifts to different areas of the body and sublimation, the process whereby some neutralization and redirection of libido occurs (painting instead of smearing). Repression also explains the resolving of the Oedipus complexes in which incestuous love objects are renounced and the subsequent identification with parental figures occurs. This neutralization, sublimation and substitution of desires occurs in the unconscious which operates according to its own laws and does not
recognize realities of time, space or 'logic.'

The nature of the human child makes repression intrinsic to human development. On the one hand, she arrives on this earth dependent and helpless, unable to satisfy her bodily drives without the active intervention of caretakers. On the other hand, unlike the young in the rest of the animal kingdom, she possesses no automatic script for the playing out of those drives.[6] What we have, therefore, is a small being alive with potential, but inevitable contradictions. She is not a tabula rasa, awaiting the imprint of her society. But, on the other hand, her dependence, helplessness and the very diffuseness of her drives means that she is unable to seek their gratification except insofar as they are being channelled, fashioned, controlled, redirected and mediated by others. This process does not result only from the social pressures being exerted by the primary caretakers who engage in a "training" process. It is also very much a physiological process, in which the ego and the concept of the ego are developing in response to the body's sexual maturation. That is, the libido (the sexual instincts) successively organizes around four erotogenic zones, the mouth, anus, phallus and genitals. Each stage does not simply replace the next but, in a dialectical fashion, the content of former stages persists in similar and altered forms within the new (Wollheim, 1975:64-65; Horowitz, 1977:54). Although with each successive stage, there is some repression of the wishes of earlier stages (it is unlikely even in the millenium that most adults would spend a lot of time sucking their thumbs), Marcuse and Horowitz argue that, in our society, there is more repression at each stage than is called for by the requirements of ego development or civilization, (maybe thumbs would be better than cigarettes).
Repression is, then, our guarantee of humanness; in Marcuse's words, (1955:38), it is that which enables the child "to transform the blind necessity of the fulfilment of want into desired gratification." But Freud believed that the amount of renunciation necessary for civilization had become so intolerable that he could characterize man in society as discontented, even though man apart from society was a logical and practical absurdity. Marcuse saw as his task, the rescuing of the idea of repression but without its devastating implications for man which Freud foresaw. His solution was to separate repression into "basic" and "surplus" components. This was an analytic distinction only; for, in experience, they were intertwined. Basic repression, necessary for civilization, is intrinsic to ego development and is not itself especially burdensome. Surplus repression, which he posited, is by far the greater component, refers to renunciation in order that man accept patriarchal domination and toil. Robinson (1969:232) refers to Marcuse's argument as follows:

He was able to correlate the repression of pregenital sexuality with the economic needs of the capitalist order — the requirement that libido be concentrated in the genitals in order that the rest of the body might be transformed into an instrument of labor.

Working with Marcuse's concepts, Horowitz' contribution was to separate out what constitutes basic repression and what surplus repression. He has provided an analysis which explains the internalization of patriarchy and which has important implications for revolutionary feminism. Horowitz' argument is that the main component of surplus repression involves the renunciation of all non-reproductive sexuality and therefore, primarily of bisexuality. In a society informed by scarcity, either actual or controlled, the libido will be free to pursue bodily pleasure insofar as it serves the perpetuation of
the species; i.e., heterosexual, genital sexuality. All other libidinal desires will be renounced and that energy will ultimately be redirected towards toil. This renunciation, firstly in the service of meeting human survival needs, but finally (and most evidently in capitalist society) in the service of the ruling class involves individual collusion with patriarchy.

Central to Horowitz' critique is an analysis of the oedipus complexes and it is at this point that his analysis intersects with the concept of penis envy which, as I pointed out earlier, has been a particular 'problem' for feminists. Freud posited the essential bisexuality of the human child (Freud, 1965:116; Wollheim, 1975:68). As the child proceeds through the first three stages of ego development (oral, anal, and phallic) she remains psychically bisexual. The biological differences between male and female do not yet register themselves psychically; for, the function of the dominant organ is experienced and represented in the same way in the two sexes (Wollheim, 1975:68). It is, then, a psychically bisexual child which arrives at the oedipal stage. Furthermore, for each sex, there is not one oedipus complex but two: the active and the passive. The resolution of these two oedipal dramas will determine the biological maturation of the child and its subsequent entry into 'human' society through the incorporation of the parents' social standards. When we consider the oedipus complex we can start with the assurance that for almost all children everywhere their first love object has been a female primary caretaker or caretakers.[7] In our society, because of the nuclear family structure (which has taken its shape from, and in the course of, the development of capitalist social relations of production), it is likely to be one woman, the mother, who will carry out her mothering task in virtual
isolation from all other adults. While a Marxist-feminist analysis has revealed the consequences of this for the hierarchical sex division of labour, the incorporation of a psychoanalytic account of ego development can demonstrate the manner in which children are prepared during their early psychosexual development for collusion with that structure. In other words, the renunciation of the oedipal complexes will also reflect the particular nature of the socializing society - in our case, a patriarchal, heterosexual, sexually monogamous one, based on a sexual division of labour that the infant will have experienced profoundly through her primary caretaker, in all likelihood the female parent.

Under these circumstances, both sexes will emerge from the stage of pre-oedipal attachment and identification with the mother towards the inevitable mother-infant separation and the taking up of the mother as a love object. The father, because he distracts maternal attention from the child, is experienced as a rival. The male child fears that his father will do to him what he would like to do to his father; namely, castrate him. In such a struggle, the child acknowledges his powerlessness, represses his oedipal love for his mother, and compensates himself for his loss through identification with his father. This internalization of the father's standards forces part of the child's ego to split off into the observing and judging function which Freud called the superego (1965:63-65). This is the renunciation of the male child's active oedipus complex; "active" because active libidinal aims are called up in the desire to possess the mother. For the male child, however, the active aims are not forfeited, since he will one day have what his father now has. The vehicle for the incorporation of society's standards is, therefore castration anxiety. But, it is precisely this experience of castration anxiety which, Horowitz argues
(95), is felt much more intensely than it has to be because of the 
child's perception of the undoubted value of the penis, and what it 
represents in patriarchal society.

The overvaluation (hyper-cathexis) of the penis in patriarchal 
society will also help determine the fate of the boy's passive oedipal 
complex. The male child will also take his father as love-object and 
see his mother as rival. When he realizes, however, that to desire his 
father means, in a patriarchal, heterosexual world, that he cannot have 
a penis, his desire for his father will arouse all the intense 
castration anxiety that was involved in his active oedipus complex. The 
'normal' way to deal with this will be for him to repress not only his 
inestuous desire for his father in particular, but his homosexual 
desires in general, and therefore, his passive libidinal aims (including 
his desire to be penetrated), for when roused they will summon up the 
 anxiety surrounding castration (Horowitz, 1977:95-103). What he 
represses, then, are his passive aims which he equates with femininity 
since only females do not have a penis. These desires will be projected 
onto the female, who, as the possessor of those anxiety-creating 
desires, will be threatening (Horowitz, 1977:108). She will have to be 
mastered or controlled and since this is an uncertain business, even in 
patriarchy - hostility and contempt for women will also be summoned to 
 aid in controlling his castration anxiety.

The male repudiation of femininity, which Ruth Brunswick 
(1948:246) described as "what we have come to consider the normal male 
contempt for women," is an intrinsic feature of male psychosexual 
structure in patriarchal society. Wollheim (1975:68-69) puts it this 
way: "What women have suffered from over the centuries is man's 
 inability to tolerate the feminine side of his nature." This, then, as
I understand it, would be, in skeletal form, the psychoanalytic case for male collusion with patriarchy.

Let us turn now to female children. Like the little boy, the little girl will emerge from pre-oedipal attachment to her mother to the taking of her mother as her first love object. In Freud's early formulations, the girl child passed directly from pre-oedipal attachment to her mother to the oedipal relationship with her father. He was, however, forced to reconsider (1965:119):

We knew, of course, that there had been a preliminary stage of attachment to the mother, but we did not know that it could be so rich in content and so long-lasting, and could leave behind so many opportunities for fixations and dispositions. During this time the girl's father is only a troublesome rival: in some cases the attachment to her mother lasts beyond the fourth year of life. Almost everything that we find later in her relation to her father was already present in this earlier attachment and has been transferred subsequently onto her father.

More concisely put by Brunswick (1948:236), "the pre-oedipal sexuality of the girl becomes her active oedipus complex with the mother as its object." The taking of the mother as love object will, however, be resolved in different ways by the male and female child. The little girl does experience her father as rival for her mother's attention, but this problem is soon eclipsed by a new dilemma. As she enters the genital phase she becomes aware of the significance of the fact that she does not have a penis and that a penis is what you need in a heterosexual world in order to possess your mother (Horowitz, 1977:103). The resulting penis envy then has two sources: (1) the wish of the bisexual child to possess the organs of the other sex (penis envy, uterus envy, breast envy), (Horowitz, 104) and (2) the desire to do the things that having those organs permits one to do. Lampl-De Groot (1948:186) puts it this way:
The acceptance of castration anxiety has for her (the girl) the same consequences as for the boy. Not only does her narcissism suffer a blow on account of her physical inferiority (the boy finds himself and his penis unbearably puny compared to his father; the girl finds her clitoris unimpressive compared to the larger and handier penis), but (secondly) she is forced to renounce the fulfilment of her first love longings. (Just as the boy had to renounce his mother to avoid castration anxiety, the girl has to renounce her because, lacking a penis, she cannot possess her.)

Horowitz argues, however, that penis envy becomes intense penis envy, just as castration anxiety becomes intense castration anxiety for the male, because the phallic civilisation, the patriarchal, heterosexual world announces to the girl child that she cannot possess her mother, or indeed any other woman, because she has no penis. She will be forced to repress not only her desire for her mother but also her homosexuality, in her case, her active libidinal aims. Intense penis envy is for her then, just as castration anxiety is for the male, a repudiation of 'femininity.' But in her case, it is a repudiation of precisely what patriarchal civilisation insists that she be - feminine, i.e. passive and submissive. In this resolution of her active oedipal complex, she gives up her active libidinal aims.

I have not yet dealt with the passive oedipal complex in which the girl takes her father as love object and experiences her mother as rival. By the time she turns to her father as love object, the girl child cannot be threatened by castration since, in the course of resolving her active oedipus complex, she has already accepted her 'castration,' and, more importantly, its implications (Lampl de Groot, 1948:186). As a result, she does not have the same motivation to renounce her father as love object. Equally interesting, however, is why she takes him as a love object at all in a society in which he is not her primary caretaker. Is it only, as Freud suggested, in defensive flight from her active oedipal complex? "The girl is driven out of her

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attachment to her mother through the influence of her envy for the penis and she enters the Oedipus situation (with her father) as though into a haven of refuge" (1965:129). Or is it, as Nancy Chodorow posits, (1978:160), a question of seduction by her father? In other words, she responds to his treatment of her as a little girl. Or is it, rather, a result of her 'essential' bisexuality? While I would not deny the role of the first two processes, particularly in patriarchal society, I agree with Horowitz that the acquisition of heterosexual genital aims by women (the acquisition of which is the species guarantee of survival; rape surely not being a viable alternative) cannot be an entirely learned behaviour (as Chodorow seems to posit) and is rather one of the outcomes of the normal psychosexual development of a bisexual child (Horowitz, 1977:115-116). Horowitz' aim is to show that the presence of these heterosexual genital aims is not incompatible with the retention both of pregenital sexuality and homosexuality. The male child need not give up his homosexuality and his passive aims and the girl child need not give up her homosexuality and her active aims, except in surplus repressive civilization (Horowitz, 1977:106).

The argument that both men and women repudiate femininity in the course of their early psychosexual development provides, I believe, a plausible explanation of the collusion of men and women with patriarchy. As Wollheim (1975:97) argues, "psychoanalysis can at best explain why men and for that matter women have colluded", have conspired with the organization of society to secure male dominance and female subordination. Part of this explanation demonstrates how both sexes come to repudiate their 'female' side, though only one sex is expected to live it.

Horowitz (1977:123) states categorically, "revolutionary
movements which do not revolutionize the psychosexual structure formed by surplus repression must fail, for this psychosexual structure is both product and source of domination." But if we are now trying to understand a world through such concepts as "basic" and "surplus" repression, are we in a realm that is not so much antithetical to Marxist theory, as foreign to it? And if that is the case, how can we view the relationship between the dismantling of patriarchy and the overthrow of capitalism? At this point, I can only indicate where one important point of convergence would seem to lie. I would suggest that the concepts of objectification and alienation in Marx have some affinity with the concepts of basic and surplus repression in Marcuse and Horowitz.

Psychoanalytic theory informs us that the young child's passage into human society involves an initial erotic dependence upon its primary caretakers, followed by the renunciation of that dependence and the internalization of the adults' socializing standards. This involves processes which Horowitz describes as basic repression. Intrinsic to this process, is the child's separation from her primary caretakers and, more especially, her growing realization that she is separate from the people and objects around her. In the course of ego development she moves from identification with the mother - "briefly one may state that every successful act of identification with the mother makes the mother less necessary to the child" (Brunswick, 1948:237) - to objectification, the separation of the self from the other, the capacity to reflect upon oneself, that is to take oneself as object and to take the other as love object. This occurs in the very process in which she interacts with others and achieves growing mastery over her environment. Compare Marx (1964:113-114) who, we must remember, did not, like some of his
disciples, ever believe that consciousness started at the factory door:

In creating a world of objects by his practical activity, in his work upon organic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being, i.e. as a being that treats the species as its own essential being, or that treats itself as a species being...Through and because of this production, nature appears as his work and his reality. The object of labor, is therefore, the objectification of man's species life: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself [emphasis added] in a world that he has created.

This activity in and upon the world commences with birth. We participate in the creation of our world even as we undergo its primary initiation rights. And this capacity for objectification is made possible through basic repression without which we could never experience separateness, without which we would never come to treat ourselves as the "actual living species" (Marx, 1964:112). In our society, the human capacity of objectification turns against itself (Marx, 1964:114):

In tearing away from man the object of his production, therefore, estranged labor tears from him his species life, [emphasis added] his real objectivity as a member of the species and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken away from him.

In the very process of producing objects which will be controlled by others and used by others to enhance their life, man is alienated from his labour, the objects of his labour, himself and his fellows. His preparation for this has been lifelong, and his willingness is both the result and the cause of surplus repression, a surplus repression that has been fashioned by scarcity, real and controlled. For, in the course of renouncing many forms of bodily gratification, we renounce many pleasures to be found in our own company and in the company of others. This is true not just in directly sexual pleasures but in all the derivatives of sexuality including general sociability, affection - 57 -
and in the activities arising from non-surplus repressive sublimation. We not only come to reflect upon ourselves, but also to experience a painful separation from self and from others.

Marx’s concept of alienation includes estrangement from self, other people and nature. Its transcendence involves the reclamation of work and the productive process as the species activity of man. A psychoanalytic account informs us that our understanding of what constitutes ‘work’ must include all the activities in which we engage as we produce and reproduce our social world (Williams, 1977:80, 91). Its reclamation, therefore, must include the re-eroticization of the body, the retention of pregenital sexuality and the re-fusion of passive and active libidinal aims. Such a perspective brings the struggles for sexual liberation away from the sidelines and into the centre of the struggle against capitalism and patriarchy.

NOTES

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See Footnote 1.

It should be clear here, as throughout the paper, that I am talking only about the general case; the life history of any particular individual has its own specificity and requires its own analysis. It is equally important and interesting to investigate the conditions under which individuals depart from heterosexuality and from societal concepts of masculinity and femininity but that is beyond the scope of this paper.

For example, the honey bee does not need to repress her desires in order for her to be willing to work until she dies of exhaustion.

Nancy Chodorow and Dorothy Dinnerstein have both provided interesting accounts of the implications for human development of the universality of mothering as a gendered activity (Footnote 1).

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