

Preface

by Jean Baker Miller

Over the last fifteen or twenty years women have created a vast amount of new material in psychology. Some of it has come from academic and professional women, but some of the most innovative and challenging work has come from women who have created alternative services outside of the established institutions — for example, from rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters and many others. I feel very honoured to be able to make this small contribution to this issue of *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* which seeks to link women within and outside of academia.

Overall, it may be fair to say that we can see certain trends in the work of any group or people who have been considered second class or who have been oppressed. These are the people who have not been involved previously in the making of science or theories, or indeed, in creating all the ways we learn to think, feel and act in the whole culture. Initially, the so-called "second class people" often work to dispel false ideas about their group — for example, to prove that women are as rational or as competent as men, or that black people are as intelligent as whites. Dispelling falsities is valuable. Along with it, however, there is often the implicit acceptance of the assumptions and values of the so-called "first class people" and the tendency to try to prove that we are "just as good as the first rate people," and should be treated similarly and allowed all of the benefits and privileges of current society.

Once this process is underway, a second possibility begins to emerge — that of perceiving the "second class people" in their own terms, without trying to fit their experience into old slots (categories). This examination begins to open up new understanding, often about central issues neglected by the first class people and therefore previously invisible for the total society. This new perspective can lead to new assumptions and values and even the necessity for new terms and words. These new assumptions can elucidate dilemmas important not only to the "second class people" but to everyone.

The point is not that "second class

people" immediately understand everything better, but that this kind of work can open up new paths. In our work at the Stone Center we find this starting point helps us to move along to see women's psychological development in new ways (and men's too). We also find new possibilities for action.¹ Other workers are proceeding along similar lines.² All of us do not agree on all points but we are, I think, all seeing that the whole world begins to look different when you can bring women's experience into it. I believe, too, we can do much more when we can connect our work to our own experience of the world, rather than feeling like aliens struggling to speak a language that never seems accurate. (Incidentally, I believe that it is essential to know and state our own starting points and values clearly rather than to pretend a scientific "objectivity" that doesn't really exist in anyone's work.

I will try to suggest some of these ideas by sketching just one part of them. If we examine women's life activity, we find that a large part of it can be described as "the active participation in the development of other people," certainly children's, but also adult's. Everyone has talked about this essential human activity, using such words as "nurturing," "care-taking," "mothering," and the like. While there may not be anything terrible about those words, they do not describe adequately the actual activity. It is a very complex activity — engaging with another person in such a manner that you foster the psychological development of the other person. When we try to describe this activity more accurately, we often find ourselves involved in long phrases (such as the phrase I've just used) because we do not find readily available words. Another way to describe this activity (in another long phrase) is to say that traditionally women have been using their powers to increase the power of others — that is, to increase other people's resources, strengths and effectiveness in many dimensions — emotional, intellectual, etc. At first glance, such a statement may sound altruistic, idealistic or unrealistic. But it is not. It is what most mothers

and other women try to do all the time, although we may not always succeed. Thus, it is going on all the time. Certainly everyone in education, counselling, therapy, and all of the helping professions is engaged in this form of activity, but it is not limited to professionals. It is the only way psychological development occurs at all. Everyone probably knows that people develop only in interaction with other people: no one develops in isolation. In the interactions in which everyone develops throughout childhood and adulthood, someone has to be acting in ways that foster development. If s/he is not, s/he is acting in ways which do the opposite — that is, diminish and restrict development, or worse. Thus, to talk of this form of activity is to talk about activity that is essential for all societies. In general, this is essential activity which has been assigned primarily to women. Individual men may engage in it in a variety of ways. Overall, however, men have been heavily pressured away from this form of activity because it has been defined as "womanly," and therefore as an entire way of acting that men should not pursue or desire. In our society, men have been encouraged to enhance their own development and are seriously penalized if they do not, as failures and as not "real men."

Many complications follow and many of them are not obvious. One neglected factor concerns the observation that women and others do develop psychologically from interacting in ways which enhance other people's development. I am not referring to sentimentalized thoughts such as "it is better to give than to receive." Rather, when we have interacted with another person in a way which leads that other person to expand and to increase her/his abilities in one or more ways, we experience expansion and pleasure ourselves, although the expansion and pleasure may occur on different levels for each of the people involved. Teachers, counsellors, therapists, mothers and others know this experience.

A second factor, which is a neglected but obvious one, is that these kinds of interactions have been going overwhelmingly in one direction. Nobody has been told that part of her/his purpose in life is to foster women's development. Our society has not said that everyone should be acting to see that women become strong, powerful people. Thus, our fundamental relationships have not been based on a search for mutuality and mutual empowerment. Such an asymmetrical situation, then, complicates and dis-

torts the entire picture for everyone. This is a societal situation, but our major psychological theories reflect the societal situation. Criteria for maturity, for example, have not included characteristics such as the ability to engage in interactions that enhance all of the people in the relationship or that empower all people in the interaction. Descriptions of the process of development do not delineate how the girl or boy "learns" to build such relationships.

If we examine psychological theories in general, they describe a line of development that is composed of a series of separations from others. For example, theorists and clinicians currently emphasize the attainment of a sense of "separation-individuation." Formulations built on these bases do not focus on the interactions which make for the child's sense of the growth of connections to others, connections within which the child becomes a more developed person — but not a separated person.

In our studies at the Stone Center we find that, at all ages, women are not involved in a process of "separation" in the ways that term is commonly used. To state a series of complex observations briefly, we find that women often are engaged in redefining or re-doing their relationships through childhood and adult life — a very different process. In essence, they seek an increasing ability to *represent* their experience *within* relationships, and the ability to *act* effectively within relationships. Their conception of desirable forms of all action also differs from the usual descriptions. They tend to perceive action as arising from the interactions within their relationships and as leading into increased connections with others, rather than away from connections. This is very different from a concept of the lone actor or of action in the service of becoming a separated person. Other workers are making similar observations, each group using somewhat different methods (for example, Gilligan and her colleagues, and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule and others).²

If these remarks have any validity, they have implications for men. Boys and men develop only within relationships. However, the kinds of interactions which are encouraged in these relationships have differed for boys and girls. This different "relational learning" has led to a different line of development (and problems) for members of each sex at this time in history. It has also led to a line of development in which men learn to become dominant persons, rather than full-

fledged human beings, whether any individual consciously plans this or not. This has given us a distorted conception of what a full human being can be. But it need not be this way at all.

At present, we at the Stone Center have been thinking about a new model of development. Janet Surrey has suggested the basic outline: she proposes that people can move through a process of mutual engagement, mutual empathy and mutual empowerment continually throughout life, starting in infancy. Several other Stone Center writers have developed various aspects of this process.

Following from these notions, Surrey proposes that the goal of development may be the creation of mutually empowering relationships. These relationships then provide for the continuing empowerment of the people in them. Mutually empowering relationships would, by definition, move towards helping each individual become stronger and unique, not weaker and more homogenous. None of us knows how to do this well. Our society's institutions, based on the search for individual power, have not provided these kinds of relationships for us. None of us has grown up in optimal mutually empowering relationships. We have to work at finding the ways to create them — but many women have many strengths on which to build.

Clearly, whenever one group of people is dominant and has more power, we cannot have mutually empowering relationships. Thus, we cannot have relationships in which all people flourish until we can change all of our institutions — educational, work, family and others. Meanwhile, however, many women have continued to seek out ways to move toward more mutuality in whatever forms are possible and to understand how psychological problems arise from the lack of such relational contexts.

Related to the question of power as opposed to mutuality, is another whole body of knowledge which women have created. Many women have done a huge amount of work to bring to light the fact of widespread violence against women in our society and, as always, the more devastating effects of violence on poor people, members of minority groups and all the groups who have less power. Prior to this work, most mental health professionals did not "know" that such sexual and physical violence existed. I can offer myself as an example. The work is not complete because the real goal certainly has to be prevention — that is, the elimination of the possibility of such violence.

In regard to new theory stemming from this work, several people, such as Judith Herman³, have raised the question: if there is such widespread violence against women, what is this saying about the psychological development of men, a psychological development which allows so many human beings to do violence to other human beings? In turn, if gross sexual and physical abuse is so common in families and in society, every girl is growing up within a milieu which contains the threat of being sexually violated. What are the developmental implications of that?

I will point to only one of the implications; there are others. Boys and men have not been required to develop a large part of their human potential. That is the potential I mentioned earlier — the ability to engage in interactions which foster the development and the powers of others simultaneously with one's own. Instead, boys and men have been quite forcefully directed away from such engagement and have been stimulated to become "strong individuals" and to become "aggressive." However, if men were required from the beginning of life to learn to build relationships which foster the resources of all the people in them, I believe men would have to create a different form of psychological integration. Such an integration would not foster the kind of "separation" from the experience of others which allows for violence.

As noted above, many women in psychology do not share the views I've sketched. I don't propose them as any total truth. Quite the contrary; I propose them as an outlook meant to be changed as we do more work, but an outlook that we have found to be stimulating and productive. The papers in this journal will help us and others to continue to enlarge and change our thinking.

¹This work is described in a series of Working Papers available by writing the Stone Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass., 02181.

²Some of these workers are C. Gilligan, *In A Different Voice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); M. Belenky, B. Clinchy, N. Goldberger, J. Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

³J. Herman, *Father-Daughter Incest* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981). This book is only one of a large number of valuable books and articles on this topic.