Dialogues between Feminists and Jacques Lacan on Female Hysteria and Femininity

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DIALOGUES BETWEEN FEMINISTS AND JACQUES LACAN ON
FEMALE HYSTERIA AND FEMININITY

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College
and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Katerina (or Catherine) Daniel

May 2009
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2009
DIALOGUES BETWEEN FEMINISTS AND JACQUES LACAN ON
FEMALE HYSTERIA AND FEMININITY

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ABSTRACT

DIALOGUES BETWEEN FEMINISTS AND JACQUES LACAN ON FEMALE HYSTERIA AND FEMININITY

By

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May 2009

Dissertation Supervised by Bruce Fink, Ph.D.

This theoretical dissertation aims to initiate a dialogue between Lacan and Irigaray, Butler, and poststructuralist Anglophone feminists on the relationship between hysteria and femininity. The very existence of hysteria has been called into question by the majority of Anglophone feminists, who have criticized its diagnostic proliferation, claiming that it has negative implications for social change and has played a central part in women’s oppression. The Anglophone feminist tradition views Lacanian psychoanalytic theories of sexuation and hysteria with a critical eye, arguing that Lacan’s oeuvre is another version of patriarchal discourse, another reductionistic paradigm of female suffering, and another essentialist scheme that theorizes the subject within the normative realities of sexual difference and psychopathology. I argue that Anglophone feminism theorizes the unconscious superficially and fails to conceptualize how women’s unconscious desires sustain rather than subvert patriarchy. Whereas feminists challenge traditional assumptions about women’s subjectivity and make a substantial contribution to our knowledge about the oppressions brought on by patriarchal discourses, they misread Lacan’s
revisionist approach to Freud and undermine Lacan’s theoretical contributions regarding the role of unconscious desire and the real in the constitution of subjectivity. Hence, they fail to explain how the female hysteric, as a victim of patriarchal discourses, preserves the dominance of patriarchy. In this dissertation, I elucidate the structural differences between female hysteria and femininity. I assume that the subject has a particular structural relationship with the Other, and take Lacan’s and Irigaray’s oeuvres as points of departure to articulate an ethics of feminine desire and jouissance and the differences between how a woman maintains her victimhood by being dominated by the law and how a woman achieves her emancipated potentialities by realizing her infinities in relation to the law.
To

my mentors, friends, and family,

with gratitude!
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Feminists on Women and Hysteria</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Irigaray’s Theory of Femininity and Psychoanalytic</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Butler’s Theory of Femininity and Psychoanalytic</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Feminist Descriptions of Female Hysteria and the Question of</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine Desire</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 The Feminist (Mis)use of Lacanian Theory</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Towards a Dialogue between Feminism and Lacan</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>**2. The Ethics of Feminine Desire and <strong>Jouissance</strong></td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 What Do a Woman and a Tortoise Have in Common?</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Sexuation</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.21 The Phallus</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.22 Masculinity and Femininity</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Lacan’s Subversions of Neo-Freudian Theories of Hysteria

4. A Lacanian Case Formulation of a Female Hysteric

4.1 Description of the Case

4.11 Presenting Problems

4.12 Family History

4.13 Personal History

4.14 A Fantasy, a Dream, and a Tale

4.2 A Lacanian Case Formulation

4.21 The Paradoxes of Speech

4.22 Metaphorical and Metonymic Functions in the Dream

4.23 Being Sad, Being the Phallus, and Seeking Love

5. Feminist-Lacan Dialogues

Appendix A: A Brief History of Hysteria

Appendix B: The Freudian Theory of Bisexuality and Femininity

References
LIST OF FIGURES

4.1 Quadrangular Schema.................................................................................. 111
4.2 Hysterical Fundamental Fantasy................................................................. 122
4.3 The Metonymical Structure........................................................................ 125
Introduction

For centuries, the concept of hysteria has been intertwined with conceptions of sexual difference. Certain feminists understand hysterical symptoms as protests by women against patriarchal norms. Other feminists see hysteria not as a female revolt against patriarchy but rather as a declaration of defeat. Such views seem to assume that hysteria and femininity are the same and that a woman’s subjectivity is limited to patriarchal norms. A number of Anglophone feminists use Lacanian theory selectively to support their views on the role of language and culture in psychosexual development and distress, and to articulate the ways in which females are more prone to hysteria because of their subjugation to patriarchy.

Since hysteria was originally defined by the wandering womb, many feminist theorists insist that hysteria constituted a fundamentally female disorder (Showalter, 1985). For centuries, the female reproductive system seemed to be naturally “invalid” and puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause symbolized the pathology of the female body (see Appendix A). In addition, feminine nature was considered to be determined by the female reproductive system, which in turn was linked with sickness and mental instability (Malson, 1998). Showalter (1985) maintains that the discourses of hysteria played a central part in woman’s oppression. They determined her proper social role and served as “a cultural bar to education and suffrage for women” (p. 136). The diagnosis of hysteria was used when women resisted their gender roles, wanted to vote, sought
education, and filed for divorce. The conceptual paradigms of hysteria quite literally reinforced misogynistic power.

The conceptual history of hysteria brings today for some researchers and scholars an unequivocal need for a solid epistemology at the beginning of the 21st century. The word “hysteria” is currently used informally in our discourse and it usually refers to negative characterological traits, often more than other clinical entities do. The female hysteric has been attributed the negative aspects of femininity and has been compared with the mythical figure of Medusa. The male hysteric, on the other hand, has been conceptualized as being non-masculine and having infantile qualities (Mitchell, 2000). Although the historian Micale (1995) makes the points that nobody really knows why hysteria has disappeared from sight today and that the disappearance of hysteria in the psychological and psychiatric milieu is a theoretical illusion, other authors argue that the inconsistent clinical formulations of hysterical phenomena, which usually do not have good theoretical bases, and the unflattering equation of hysteria with femininity have been important reasons for its disappearance.

There are profoundly problematic and conflictual notions about the nature of femininity and hysteria. Mitchell (2000) contends that there is an ideological slippage between the feminine—which is conceptualized as involving passivity, infantile helplessness, feelings of envy, and emptiness—and the hysterical condition. Mitchell says that “women and hysteria are found synonymously unattractive” (p. 333); hysteria has been feminized, and when a man shows hysterical symptoms, he is ideologically defined as feminine. As the feminine has been repudiated in society, hysteria vanished from the clinical picture at the time when we increasingly found hysterical men.

There was a significant problem with the studies of hysteria done before Freud’s time, and there is a similar one with many studies done since Freud’s time.
Theoretical formulations of hysteria have been “disparate, fragmented, and uncoordinated” (Micale, 1995, p. 11). Hysteria has been primarily linked to femininity and theorized almost exclusively in relation to female sexuality (Mitchell, 2000). Hysteria has been understood differently at different times, which has led a number of researchers to the conviction that it did not exist. The link between hysteria and femininity has also sparked feminist reactions to its negative implications for social change.

Some feminists contend that feminism and hysteria are violent reactions against male-dominated societies (Showalter, 1985; Cixous in Cixous and Clément, 1986) and that hysteria is a form of feminism. Other feminists find that hysteria is “a cry for help when defeat becomes real” (as cited in Malson, 1998, p. 68; Clément in Cixous and Clément, 1986). In other words, these feminists perceive hysteria as a failed form of feminism. Feminist epistemology is widely controversial within psychoanalytic circles and, because of its diverse theoretical orientation, it is even controversial within the various feminist groups.

In general, feminists are renowned for their critiques and interrogations of psychoanalytic theories of sexuality and conceptualizations of femininity and women’s distress. They suspend ontological certainties and challenge the power-relational cultural constructions of femininity. They raise critical questions about psychoanalytic theories of sexual difference. Their aim is to challenge and bring forward alternative ways of thinking about sexual subjectivity. Feminist critiques open dynamic dialogues between contemporary psychoanalysis and feminism in regard to sexuality, sexual oppression, and women’s distress. Feminist interrogations of psychoanalytic theories of sexual difference and hysteria provoke readers to engage in a dialogue between feminism and psychoanalysis.

Within the Lacanian psychoanalytic circle, Irigaray, Butler, and other major Anglophone feminists are controversial. Lacanians critique feminists for
misinterpreting Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory and failing to formulate the unconscious of the sexual subject. They also critique them for prescribing how gender is supposed to be and for not describing how subjectivity is structured.

Although Irigaray is critical of certain theoretical elements in Lacan’s opus, she also gives primacy to his psychoanalytic theory when she elucidates women’s distress, women’s unconscious in our culture, and the ethics of sexual difference. Irigaray formulates the differences between the sexes by both incorporating and deviating from Lacan’s theory. Butler and other Anglophone feminists, however, with their post-structural orientation, critique the psychoanalytic theory of sexual difference, arguing that it reverts to conventional patriarchal and essentialist ideologies. Anglophone feminists view Lacan’s psychoanalytic interpretations of hysteria and femininity with a critical eye. Their questionings and critiques are such that, as Rose (1990) puts it, the dialogue between feminism and psychoanalysis “constantly slides away from the point of a possible encounter” (p. 128). For feminists, Lacanian theory is another version of patriarchal discourse, another reductionistic paradigm of female suffering, and another essentialist scheme that theorizes the subject within the normative realities of sexual difference and psychopathology. For Lacanians, on the other hand, Lacan’s theory is not what feminists refer to in their critiques. Instead, they describe Lacan’s theory as an open system—a theoretical system that is more anti-essentialist and anti-patriarchal than any other psychoanalytic theory.

As a reader of feminism and Lacan, the following questions have troubled me: “What makes the encounter between these two theoretical paradigms impossible?” “If there is no bridge to connect these theories, why do I find that both theoretical paradigms make major contributions to formulating sexuality and psychopathology?” The purpose of this dissertation is therefore to engage the reader in the dialogue between feminists and Lacan on hysteria and femininity. Since feminists critique and
question Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory, my purpose is to take feminist psychoanalytic skepticism and Lacan’s psychoanalytic descriptions as my guides, as my methods of engaging with a theoretical ethics of the relationship between femininity and hysteria—an ethics that excludes neither feminism, with its purpose to change the politics of patriarchal oppression, nor Lacan’s psychoanalysis, with its purpose to describe the subject as a structure, as an effect of language. It is my aim to dialogue interrogative feminism with descriptive Lacanian theory.

It often seems to me that Lacan’s theory is both a mystery and a nuisance to feminists. Lacan has introduced us to a way of thinking that is extraordinarily different from the kind of thinking we are used to in academia and in our daily lives. The aspect of Lacanian theory that feminists accept is primarily Lacan’s argument that subjectivity is an effect of language. For Lacan, subjects’ utterances come from somewhere else, from the locus of the Other as language; subjects emerge in the field of the Other. The subject disappears under the Other’s desires and jouissances—the Other being the locus of speech, "the phantom of Omnipotence ..., bridled by the Law" (Écrits, p. 689/814). Feminists accept Lacan’s notion that no subject exists without the appearance of the signifier. Therefore in the theories of feminism and Lacan, subjectivity is conceptualized as neither an agency nor a substance nor a pre-given content, but an effect of language.

Nevertheless, Lacan goes beyond not only biological but also socio-cultural theories of subjectivity. In Écrits, Lacan argues that his emphasis on man’s relation to the signifier has nothing to do with socio-cultural theories of language. Hence, he is not of the same mind as feminist theorists when he discusses the effects of language on subjects. Lacan contends that the woven effects of speech resonate in humans, but these effects cannot be understood by mainstream psychological or socio-cultural theories (Écrits, p. 578/689).
According to Barnard (2002a, 2002b), Lacan’s oeuvre differs from feminism substantially. Whereas feminists refer to gender as an imaginary-symbolic construct within socio-cultural idealized norms of embodiment and behaviors, Lacan formulates sexuation in terms of the impossibility of symbolization and the failure of meaning. The reason why Lacan’s concept of sexuation cannot be grasped via feminism is because feminist theorists do not incorporate the role of the real into their work. Indeed, Lacan’s main thesis on sexuation is that the sexual subject is caused by “the [traumatic] gap between the real and the symbolic.” His attempt is “to trace the impact of this trauma ... on the functioning of the symbolic itself” (Barnard, 2002a, p. 4). As we will see throughout this dissertation, a theory about the gap between the symbolic and the real produces a different form of knowledge about the relationship between the subject and the Other. Lacan’s oeuvre provides a kind of knowledge that cannot be grasped in the same way as in feminism or other fields, e.g., positive science.

The process of understanding Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory does not simply entail assimilation of new meanings. Following Fink’s (1995) assertion that “true understanding” is a process “which goes beyond the automatic functioning of the symbolic order and involves an incursion of the symbolic into the real” (p. 71), I argue that Lacan’s analytic knowledge requires the reader to work between consciousness and unconsciousness, recognize subjective ruptures, and accept that imaginary wholeness and consistency are illusions. This acceptance is obviously a challenge, not to mention traumatic in certain situations, for the subject. A reader of Lacan’s work encounters a theory that runs counter to the utopian and idealistic ideas of mainstream psychological, political, and positive sciences. To understand the manifestations of the gap between the real and the symbolic in symbolic functioning itself means to be confronted by the deceptions of the reality we live in.
For Lacan, structural subjectivity is real (Copjec, 1994). Lacan understands structural subjectivity as the subject’s internal failure to be wholly realized in language, which does not point to a substantial existence. In other words, the subject is in itself a failed whole. Anglophone feminists formulate gender as being constructed by language and they see the function of language in positive terms as what constructs beings. Lacan, however, sees language in terms of both: the subject comes to be within language and is subjected by the Other, eclipsed by the Other. The subject is not simply a sedimentation of meanings, it is also realized in the forged links between signifiers (Fink, 1995). The signifier, which is irreducible to the signified, has a double (splitting) function: it unifies an image and institutes discontinuity. Lacan’s descriptions of sexual and clinical structures presuppose exclusion, an empty set, and discontinuity of a unified and stable specular image.

Whereas contemporary Lacanians often pinpoint the shortcomings of Anglophone feminist theories of sexuality and subjectivity, they also acknowledge feminists’ contributions to social change. In Soler’s (2006) words,

What is certain is that, today, there is no field to which women do not have access. Although this movement has not yet accomplished its goals completely, its effects are becoming more and more general, and its triumph seems irreversible to me …. There are still, of course, a few bastions of male supremacy …. Concerning this evolution, [Lacanian] psychoanalysis as such does not have to take a side. Its consequences for both sexes must not, however, be misunderstood. (pp. 158-159)

Soler suggests that the feminist movement has succeeded in changing the roles of women in relation to men. In Western societies, women’s jouissances are no longer confined to the home, as they were for centuries. Nowadays, women are freer and more equal to men under civil law. Aside from their enduring (and perhaps endearing?) married and maternal realities, they also enjoy plenty of opportunities to obtain knowledge and power.
Soler, however, warns us that women’s equality to men does not necessarily mean that women are liberated from oppression. Several feminists also make the same argument. While feminism stands for the empowerment of women, feminists must deal with the question whether or not women are liberated from male oppression when women compete in the same ways as men do (Soler, 2006; Walsh, 2001) and when women become aware of the power structures in “benign” discourses. The subsequent questions that arise are, “How do women understand their differences from men?” ”How do they understand their femininity, when they adopt the pre-existing norms and assimilate to men’s belief systems, values, and practices for equality purposes?”1 “How are suffering women able to accomplish change?” These questions are not answered in feminist movements today.

Whereas Anglophone feminists have succeeded in empowering women to some extent and challenging patriarchal ideologies, they have failed to conceptualize what is different and particular about femininity. These feminists end up reinforcing masculine values in the lives of women. Lacanian theory, however, is a theory of difference. It recognizes the alterity and otherness of the subject. It is the theory that surpasses the dominant social paradigm of similarities, dichotomies, comparisons, and analogies. Nonetheless, it seems to me that Irigaray’s, Butler’s, and other Anglophone feminists’ interrogations of psychoanalytic theory can make major contributions to the evolution of Lacanian psychoanalytic articulations of sexual difference and suffering. They can also make major contributions that would allow Lacanians to expand their articulation of what constitutes an effective change in the relationship between the feminine subject and the Other (patriarchal culture).

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1 Walsh (2001) brings up the example of the former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who claimed that she was an exception. Thatcher encouraged other women to take her as an example. However, Thatcher’s widespread descriptions of herself were that she was “the best man in the Cabinet” and the “honorary man.” Thatcher safeguarded her success by assimilating to the androcentric norms and by doing little to promote the careers of other women (pp. 67-103).
These are some of the reasons why I chose to write my dissertation on the dialogue between feminists and Lacan on female hysteria and femininity.

In chapter 1, I provide detailed descriptions of Irigaray’s and Butler’s critiques of the Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theories of hysteria and femininity. Irigaray and Butler challenge ontological certainties and interrogate psychoanalytic theories of women’s subjectivity. Whereas Butler has misformulated major Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts, such as the phallus, foreclosure, and sexuation, the reader may find that she provokes psychoanalytic theorists to respond to her critical questions and provide clearer formulations of these concepts. I subsequently lay out feminist descriptions of female hysteria. Unlike Freud’s and Lacan’s technical use of language, feminists, such as Irigaray, Cixous, and Clément, use rich and poetic language to describe how the female hysteric truly suffers from the abuses of patriarchy. Feminists, however, are not clear on the question whether or not the hysteric contests or conserves patriarchy. They thus leave this question open without providing a rigorous response to it. Finally, I show how Anglophone feminists misread Lacan’s notion of the symbolic and fail to conceptualize his theory of the subject’s relationship with the symbolic Other. Feminists theorize the unconscious superficially. Insofar as Anglophone feminists are committed to an epistemology which overvalues conscious negotiations of subjective positions, it makes it difficult to see how women’s unconscious desires sustain rather than subvert patriarchy.

In chapter 2, I elaborate on what it means to approach the question of a woman’s desire, since it is often raised as an unresolved question by feminists. In approaching the issue of feminine desire, I describe Lacan’s theory of the phallus and provide reasons why I think Anglophone feminists have misinterpreted that concept. I make a distinction between female hysteria and femininity based on Irigaray’s and Lacan’s theories and argue that Anglophone feminists may not realize that the
Lacanian woman is the plurality and multiplicity of discourses; she is the force that transcends men’s dichotomous logic and monologue. I also argue that one cannot agree with Irigaray’s concept of speaking as a woman without first exploring Lacan’s distinction between hysteria and femininity and his theories of sexuation and psychoanalytic ethics. In order to explore a woman’s desire, one must not approach hysteria and femininity as sociopolitical discourses but as structures. Lacan, thus, makes a major contribution to the theory of the subject’s desire in relation to the Law. When one conceptualizes Lacan’s distinction between having desire vis-à-vis the Other and being the cause of desire, one is also able to realize what it takes for the subject to be liberated from the oppressions of external reality.

In chapter 3, I describe Lacan’s theories of identification and repetition of the symptom in order to exemplify further Lacan’s anti-essentialist approach to subjectivity. I lay out the differences between Lacan’s structural theory and neo-Freudian psychodiagnostic formulation. My aim is to explain to feminist readers that the Lacanian subject cannot be inscribed as a stable meaning within language because, as Lacan explains, the unconscious subject is always in conflict with the ego and with discourses that promise self-coherence, unity, and satisfaction. I discuss how Lacan’s concept of the real shifts psychoanalytic description to a substantively different kind of logic—a logic which is not fully comprehended by neo-Freudian and feminist theorists. I describe how Lacan’s structural descriptions of hysteria differ significantly from the neo-Freudian reductionistic and essentialist psychoanalytic formulations of hysteria as a personality trait.

In chapter 4, I present a Lacanian case formulation of a female hysteric whom I refer to as Sofia. Although Sofia consciously understood herself as a feminist and was adamant in expressing her views on women’s sufferings owing to patriarchy, I show how she unconsciously participated in being the oppressed victim in relation to men. I provide a detailed discussion of Sofia’s unconscious signifiers which arose
from fantasies and dreams. Sofia consciously challenged the Other’s patriarchal ideals but unconsciously was situated in self-defeating ways. By being the imaginary phallus for men, Sofia upheld the Other’s patriarchal authority over her destiny.

Finally, in chapter 5 I argue that, in order to have a further dialogue between feminism and Lacan on women’s experiences, feminists need to read Lacan’s work more closely. I conclude that the Lacanian theory is an analytic discourse and not a sociopolitical one. I conjecture, however, that if feminists engage with Lacanian theory more rigorously, both epistemologies will evolve. If feminists were to speak the Irigararian feminine language—a language that is similar to Lacan’s concept of the analyst’s discourse—they would succeed in questioning subjects’ enunciations instead of designating truths at the level of the ego. Anglophone feminists criticize psychoanalytic theory in a passive way and they speak instead the hysteric’s discourse. Speaking the feminine language on issues related to oppression is the same technique that Lacanian psychoanalysts use with their analysands to question their unconscious desire and the etiologies of their symptoms. I conjecture that if feminists used Lacanian theory, they would succeed in motivating subjects to ask more questions about themselves. It is well known that oppressors and the oppressed live and act without asking etiological questions about themselves. Furthermore, if feminists engage with Lacanian psychoanalytic theory rigorously, neo-Lacanian psychoanalysts will be inspired by feminists to elaborate further Lacan’s own concepts, which at times seem to be treated as pre-given and remain theoretically static. Neo-Lacanians will provide deeper theoretical clarifications to questions, including to the question that is often raised by feminists in regards to how the subject relates to the Other in various sociopolitical settings.
Chapter 1

Feminists on Women and Hysteria

1.1 Irigaray’s Theory of Femininity and Psychoanalytic Critiques

Is hysteria a feminine neurosis? Isn’t it—today, on a privileged basis—a “sufferance” of the feminine? In particular in its inarticulable relation to the desire for the mother? For the woman-mother? Which does not mean that it is found simply in women. (Irigaray, 1985b, p. 137)

Irigaray is best known for both embracing and challenging Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory. She accepts Lacan’s concepts of enunciated and enunciation. The author’s analyses of hysterical, obsessive, and psychotic use of language coincide with Lacan’s theoretical formulations (Irigaray, 2000). When it comes to the issue of sexuality, however, Irigaray is critical of Lacan’s re-reading of Freud. Irigaray\(^2\) deconstructs Freud’s and Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories of female sexuality and comes to the conclusion that in these theories femininity is reduced to “masculine parameters” (1985b, p. 23). She points out that sexuality is appropriated by masculine norms and that psychoanalytic theories perpetuate dominant cultural fantasies (Whitford, 1991).

Irigaray interrogates conceptualizations of sexual difference in terms of genitality, the phallus, and Oedipal relations that situate the category “woman” as

both an object of patriarchy and a rebus. The category “woman” is implicated in the patriarchal male-female opposition, which normalizes the male to subjugate the female. Femininity also is conceptualized as exceeding the signifying chain. Unlike Freud, who situates the mystery of femininity in terms of the girl’s difficulty resolving her Oedipal complex, Irigaray asserts that what is inarticulate about femininity is the relation of woman to woman, of the maternal-feminine, of daughter to mother. There is a physical and cultural separation of daughter from mother “in order [for her] to enter male families or male institutions” (Irigaray, 1994, p. 7).

Irigaray sets out to look “for the phantasies that haunt” (Whitford, 1991, p. 34) psychoanalytic discourses. She aims to change these discourses and shift the linguistic phenomena of the feminine subject so that the feminine subject does not speak as a man; she does not speak about other women; she rather speaks as a woman. To illuminate Irigaray’s theory of female sexuality, it is worthwhile to discuss briefly the ways she understands the phantasmagoria of Freud and Lacan, and how, based on these understandings, she formulates her theses on women’s sufferings and speaking as a woman.

Irigaray (1985b) asserts that psychoanalytic designations of femininity as enigmatic perpetuate discourses that define it as “lack, deficiency, or as imitation and negative image of the subject” (p. 78). For Irigaray, what psychoanalytic theorists should focus on is how to signify the “disruptive excess” that is possible for femininity. To reconceptualize femininity means to challenge and contest the historically embedded patriarchal ideologies in psychoanalysis. Irigaray suggests that we need to read psychoanalytic language—its representations—psychoanalytically. In other words, as readers of psychoanalysis we need to examine its imaginary configurations and, above all, “what it does not articulate at the level of utterance: its silences” (Irigaray, 1985b, p. 75). To re-signify femininity also means to speak as a woman, that is, to find continuity between hysterical
psychosomatic expressions and the speaking of feminine desire. For Irigaray, to speak as an hysteric is to preserve, in suffering, that which one does not articulate with words. Irigaray (1985b) asks, “[D]oes psychoanalysis offer any cure to hysterics beyond a surfeit of suggestions intended to adapt them, if only a little better, to masculine society?” (p. 137). Whereas the psychoanalytic talking cure helps the hysterical woman to speak in language, it also re-imposes patriarchal norms in the guise of a cure.

Speaking as a woman is not simple. It is not a production of discourse of which a woman would either be the object or the subject. Feminine syntax transcends the privileged “oneness”—the oneness of the male sex. It goes beyond proper masculine meanings, names, and attributes. To speak as a woman means to speak to other women and not about other women. Feminine speaking obviously occurs within the available signifying system, which is patriarchal. But if a woman cannot speak outside the already established signifying system, how can she speak to other women? Following Chisholm’s (1994) interpretations of Irigaray, speaking as a woman occurs concentrically; it exposes the structural abyss that is concealed in male-dominated theories. It shows the blind spots of the psychoanalytic paradigm, or any other philosophical paradigm, so that other women can get in touch with their own unrepresented and unacknowledged sense of difference. It presses women to feel the limitations of dominant discourses and begin to invent collectively different metaphors of self-representation.

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Freud’s theory of femininity in the early 1930’s (see Appendix B) implies, for Irigaray, inadequate representation of what it means to be feminine. Freud’s inquiry

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3 Chisholm (1994) writes that for Irigaray a woman can either speak concentrically, exposing thus the con (in French con means cunt, female orifice) and the phallic lack, or ex-centrically as if she is an outsider from phallocentric discourse.
into how a woman comes into being with a bisexual disposition—his belief that becoming a woman is “more difficult and more complicated than becoming a man”—appropriates notions that are regulated by male values and masculine paradigms (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 22). For Irigaray (1985b), femininity remains in psychoanalysis the “Dark Continent” (p. 48). Irigaray (1985a) contends that when Freud theorizes that libido is masculine, he implies that sexual difference is a function of sameness. He understands women in the same way as men. He characterizes women as the others of the same, as the negatives of males, as defective men.

Irigaray questions Freud’s argument that the little girl is a little boy. She finds Freud unreasonable for believing the clitoris alone to be erotogenic and for arguing that the little girl’s sexuality is incomplete and impoverished. Irigaray (1985a) raises the question, “Why, when discussing the little girl, give the name phallic to this moment when her discovery of erotogenic sensitivity is, or is supposed to be, so incomplete and impoverished?” (p. 29). For Irigaray, when Freud describes the little girl’s ignorance of the vagina as an erotogenic zone, he understands female genitalia as defective male genitals and gives primacy to the penis. A woman is represented by Freud as “a man minus the possibility of (re)presenting oneself as a man” (p. 27). If we leave Freud’s arguments unchallenged, the theory of female sexuality remains fragmentary and reduced to the margins of a dominant patriarchal ideology. Freud’s arguments fail to conceptualize the multiple loci of female pleasures and desires; they fail to formulate her sexuality as plural. For Irigaray, a woman is not forced to choose between clitoral activity and vaginal passivity; her whole body is her pleasure.

Freud’s examination of the girl’s preoedipal phase in the early 1930’s relies on the same patriarchal presumptions he had in the early 1900’s, regardless of his claim that the early attachment of the little girl to her mother is a new addition to his theory. Irigaray (1985b) points out that Freud continues to believe in the early
1930’s that the libido is masculine in males and females. According to Irigaray (1985b), Freud’s concept of the preoedipal, which describes the little girl’s love for her mother, is another patriarchal version of reality. The little girl, as a little man, loves her phallic mother; her love is thus a masculine love. The specific relation between daughter-mother and girl-woman receives “very little attention from Freud” (p. 37).

As I also illustrate in Appendix B, because Freud goes so far as to identify early signs of the Oedipus complex during the preodipal phase, he seems to deny the exclusiveness of the mother-daughter relationship in the preoedipal phase (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). Therefore, in Freudian theory, the Oedipal complex predominates over the preoedipal in the etiologies of sexual difference and neuroses. The subject’s sexual maturity depends on the subject’s perceptions of what it means to have or not to have the phallic organ. For the little girl, full entry into the Oedipal complex presupposes the development of penis envy. It also presupposes that the little girl blames/hates her woman-mother for being castrated and desires instead her man-father to give her the phallus.

Irigaray points out that, in Freudian theory, in order for the little girl to become feminine, she has to transform her active masculine libido to passive libido. In other words, she has to transform her masculine sadistic pleasures to feminine masochistic ones. Irigaray finds that Freud’s ideological system encourages a link between normal femininity and masochism. Within that ideological system, Irigaray interprets Freud’s theory of the beating fantasy as the little girl’s desire to be beaten by her father, because she is sexually inferior to her brother. Her brother has the superior penis and she instead has the inferior clitoris, which is the equivalent of an under-developed male organ. Irigaray (1985b) calls into question Freud’s views and asks instead, “Or does masochism constitute a sexual deviation, a morbid process, that is particularly frequent in women?” (p. 45).
For Irigaray, hysteria—the neurosis of passivity, masochistic obedience, and psychosomatic pain—is prevalent in women. Hysteria is the neurosis in which women remain silent and speak only in the mode of bodily symptoms. Their psychosomatic symptoms exhibit desires, revolts, and refusals. The woman-hysteric unconsciously refuses to be the maternal corporeal, a reproductive body for the benefit of her patriarchal society. She unconsciously revolts against the appropriation/exploitation of her body, especially when her body is situated in the system of economic and sexual production.

In Freudian theory, Irigaray says, the concept of normal femininity is reduced to the economy of sameness in the ideologies of masculine standards, of one sex. In Freud’s work, normal women remain objects of exchange in men’s sexual imaginary. Indeed, for Irigaray, these women are not normal but hysterical. Hysterical women mime and reproduce masculine language. When they speak in masculine language, they produce caricatured and deceitful words about their own bodies and desires. They envelop their subjectivity in the needs, desires, and fantasies of men.

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For Irigaray (1994), masculine language is the language of mastery and action. Masculine speech endorses competition in order to produce “consumable and exchangeable goods (even in most leisure time)” (p. 48). With masculine speech, man distances himself from himself, from his concrete and living environment; he enters instead into an environment that reinforce exchange skills—possession, combat, and waging war. For the sake of possession, wealth, and competition, the masculine subject is allowed to be disrespectful of nature and humanity, abuse human rights, disrespect life, and misrecognize intersubjectivity; he is legitimizized to respect order, calculations, and reductive discourses; he is approved to obey the civil
written law and, simultaneously, lose interest in life, in the oral law, in spirituality, and in the unpredictable possibilities of human relations.

Masculine language fails to represent women as subjects who can be addressed. It privileges the male interlocutrix. The interlocutrix, *il* (he), is present everywhere. The interlocutrix, *elle* (she), is erased when it is present with the *il* (he): *il + elle = ils* (they; masculine). The married woman becomes *ils* (they), the family being designated by the masculine plural, because it consists of mother, father, and children. The woman loses her status as an existing interlocutor. When the woman uses *I* as the subject of the sentence, she often addresses another man and not another woman. In her speech, she cannot represent herself and respect her mother and other women as other than herself.

One of the major theses of Irigaray’s oeuvre is the idea that a hysterical woman, who speaks masculine language, mimes patriarchy. The woman-hysteric struggles with the repressions imposed by patriarchal power. Patriarchy subordinates feminine desire and constrains a woman to silence and mimicry. The hysterical-woman suffers, impotent to say what disturbs her. Hysteria is a necessary remainder of a muted, frustrated, and mad response to patriarchy. Hysteria is “the nonsymbolization of her desire for origin, of her relationship to her mother” (Irigaray, 1985a, p. 71). The hysterical is this hole, this deficiency in the signifying economy. She borrows signifiers from the patriarchal order, but “she cannot make her mark, or re-mark upon them” (p. 71). Hysteria is the hole in the dominant representations of mother-daughter, woman-to-woman relationship.

Irigaray reverses the psychoanalytic theory of the preoedipal mother-daughter relationship. She takes issue with the Freudian notion of the oedipal triangle that sustains the little girl’s separation from the mother. She also takes issue with the Lacanian concept of the phallus—a concept that I will discuss in later chapters—that situates the feminine in an economy of sexual difference that
privileges the masculine subject. Irigaray asserts that what is inarticulate in psychoanalytic theory is the relationship between mother-daughter and female speech. In female speech, women speak about themselves to other women, without the interference of men. In order for a woman to speak to another woman with love, psychoanalysts need to go beyond the conventions of the Oedipal triangle and explore further the relationship between daughter and mother.

For Irigaray, in order for women to stop suffering they need to differentiate from patriarchal expectations and values. Women need to learn to love themselves and other women. But this love should not be confined to passionate relationships at the individual level. Rather, love for femininity must take a public form. The task of symbolizing love in the collective arena entails representation of femininity as a different sex. This difference needs to be embodied in language, socio-cultural practices, civil laws, symbols, and religion (Whitford, 1991). The coming-to-be feminine transcends merged relationships with the mother and other women. Irigaray sees the merged relations of women-to-women as oppressive, as static relations that prevent women from having any real effect on the wider society, on the society that is hom(m)osexual—an economy of the same, in which only masculinity is recognized.

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In her essay, “And the One Doesn’t Stir Without the Other,” Irigaray (1981) narrates the daughter’s own experiences with her mother. She uses the “I” in order to address the specific “you,” the mother. Irigaray describes the infant’s early experiences with its mother by using a rich and poetic language that represents the infant’s sensations of the mother’s body. Irigaray elaborates on the merging of the daughter-mother. She represents this merging as both erotic and suffocating. The

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4 Irigaray here seems to mimic Lacan’s *homo*sexuelle, which is a play on *homme* (man) and homosexual. Lacan (1998b) states that the hysteric is *homo*sexual, because she loves herself by what she finds in the Other (p. 84-85/78-79). She loves the Other for what the Other recognizes in her.
eroticism between the infant-mother is described by Irigaray as when the infant and
mother “taste each other, feel each other, listen to each other, see each other” (p. 61). The mother nourishes her infant. The mother-infant metamorphosize each
other into the One with the sharing of fluids: “To let nothing pass between us but
blood, milk, [and] honey” (p. 62).

The infant, however, feels suffocated by the mother’s attempt to fill up its
mouth. This filling up signifies the mother’s attempt to assimilate her infant in
accordance with her own mirages, in accordance with her desire to transform her
infant into an inanimate object and turn to a man’s validating gaze. When the
mother attempts to assimilate her daughter to her ideals, the daughter wants to
abandon her. The daughter wants to undo this paralytic relationship—a relationship
that is suffocating and deadening when it leaves little space for subjective difference.
The daughter turns away from the mother and turns to the father, to the male figure
who appears to nourish this difference and thus be more alive.

When the mother assimilates her daughter blindly to her mirages, or when
the daughter and mother are reduced to the disguises of being and doing in
accordance with the social ideals of femininity, or when the mother remains faceless
and invisible due to her surroundings, the daughter is imprisoned by her mother’s
masculine desires; she feels trapped in her mother’s single function of patriarchal
mothering; she is frozen, immobilized, by the mirrored images of her mother.

Where are you? Where am I? Where to find the traces of our
passage? …. Imprisoned by your desire for a reflection, I became a
statue, an image of your mobility …. With your milk, Mother, you fed
me ice. And if I leave, you lose the reflection of life. And if I remain,
am I not the guarantor of your death? Each of us lacks her own image
 …. My paralysis signifying your abduction in the mirror (pp. 65-66).

I’ll turn to my father. I’ll leave you for someone who seems more
alive than you …. Farewell, Mother, I shall never become your likeness
(p. 62).
Irigaray knows that there is no purely female language, a language that is not mediated by masculine interference (Whitford, 1991). However, Irigaray encourages her readers to reflect on the idea that if women speak the language of sameness, the language that men have spoken for centuries, they then become absent from themselves; they speak mechanistically; and they become enveloped by proper names that make women feel that these names are not their own. Irigaray points out that the exclusion of women is not merely an exclusion from opportunities equal to those of men, but rather an exclusion of women’s subjectivity. Women’s unsymbolized relation with their mothers has the consequence of alienating them from language and self.

If women are to gain a language of their own, they need to develop/create a language that would articulate female love. Irigaray (1985b) portrays speaking as a woman by describing her love of another woman. For Irigaray, to love another woman is not to love equality. When the two lips cannot articulate more than one word, a word outside of sameness, then women become mute and closed off. In sameness, women are trapped in the dichotomous thoughts: virgin/deflowered, innocent/experienced, pure/impure, and so on. They are subordinated, paralyzed, by the words of men.

The articulation of female love embodies female difference. Women’s lips are not simply open or closed upon one truth. They express multiplicities of truths. They resist the language that is formed “of a single thread,” a single pattern (p. 209). The you/I—the we—are not open or closed. Between the lips of you/I, there are several ways of speaking, there are multiple tones and voices. Female language is not the language of rigid definitions, images, and metaphors that stabilize meanings.
According to Irigaray (2002), psychoanalytic theory and practice rest upon whole, ahistorical, and absolute foundations. Freud and the first psychoanalysts used their psychoanalytic practice to uncover a new knowledge. They listened to their analysands as though their analysands had the knowledge to contribute to the evolution of psychoanalytic theory. Once the psychoanalytic “science” was established and the psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious was determined, psychoanalysts no longer questioned further the workings of the unconscious, but perceived psychoanalytic science as complete. Nowadays, psychoanalytic theory is reduced to “a pre-established corpus, a pre-existing knowledge, a pre-determined law” (p. 84). In this pre-established system—in the system of codes that have already been articulated and fixed—the psychoanalyst complies with an *a priori* Other, an *a priori* psychoanalytic science. Hence, the Truth of a subject’s unconscious still remains veiled. Contemporary psychoanalysts analyze patients without seeing any real difference between the sexes.

Psychoanalysts often find that women, after an analytic session, are “shut in, closed up, withdrawn” (p. 99). They often interpret these women as bisexual and hysterical. Asserting that contemporary psychoanalysts fail to evaluate their theoretical assumptions, Irigaray (2002) asks the following questions: “But is bisexuality not both inscribed on the body and a process of identification? … How does [identification] differ in men from in women?” (p. 223). The psychoanalytic theory of sexuality formulates identifications as a “double polarity within the economy of one sex and one sex alone” (p. 223).

Within the psychoanalytic frame of mind, women are theorized as identifying with the other, masculine or phallic, but, “When she has become the other—masculine or phallic—where are her own desires and jouissances to be found?” Women end up speaking men’s language, a language that separates them from their
mothers and other women. They speak language without speaking it. Women’s love and desire for other women and between women are still beyond the articulations of language. Being exiled from feminine speech, women experience various psychosomatic symptoms and other symptoms related to their non-differentiation from other women and their mothers—from the maternal flesh, which is not fully recognized but is only reduced to a reproductive body.

Irigaray (2002) argues that women are reduced to the theory of the Oedipal complex that establishes a law of "the non-return of the daughter to the mother, except in the doing like [faire comme] of motherhood" (p. 224). Women are then conceptualized not within a process of becoming but in a process of dependency on the masculine Other. The feminine Other is annulled. Both sexes cannot strive to realize their powers; instead, they are reduced to fictions.

Irigaray (1985a) asserts that the dominant fantasy of the mother is the maternal reproductive, “a mute soil, a mystery beyond metaphor” (p. 228). She represents castration and death; she is the inconceivable heterogenous Other. Her reproduction of a child is associated with an unrepresentable secret remainder, the maternal fluids: “Blood, but also milk, sperm, lymph, saliva, spit, tears, humors, gas, waves, airs, fire” (1985a, p. 237).

Yet, the woman-Other is undefinable, unformulated, and unformalized. She is beyond the individualization, the dichotomies of activity/passivity, or the closed volume (container)—the support of reproduction and discourse. The woman-Other touches a new ground with her body, superseding the repeatable shape that has already been established in the social realm (Irigaray, 1985a). She is ontologically an un-closed container. She is inside the placenta and mucous membranes that hold
the child, but she is also outside of those. She is the place that contains containers and gaps, intervals, between these containers.5

Why are women always dissatisfied? What do women want? Irigaray (2002) replies that they want more. They want something that overflows the small, finite, and numerical within the closed fields of codes and numbers. They seek the place they have lost, which is the undifferentiating place of the womb. They want to supersede their sexed determination; they want to become the feminine with their never-completed potentials. The daughter-woman is clothed in the mother-Other. When the daughter is missing the woman-mother's identity, her speech is mimetic. It expresses only the desire of that feminine Other. Since the hysteric’s language is mimetic, her verbal exchanges become impossible. The woman-hysteric becomes the fragments of the woman-Other, “of discourse, of silences, of blanks that are still immaculate” (1985a, p. 228). She struggles to thrust the body within which she has been imprisoned so as to fracture the enveloping discourses that represent her as finite, whole, and unified.

1.2 Butler’s Theory of Femininity and Psychoanalytic Critiques

In Bodies That Matter (1993) and Gender Trouble (1999), Butler interrogates prominent theories of sexuality and subjectivity with the intention to suspend ontological certainties. She aims to destabilize exclusionary gendered/sexed norms that foreclose multiple enactments of sexual desire. For Butler (1993), it is not enough to say that human subjects are constructed—such a theory does not allow us to understand what is excluded as constitutive outside. Discursive and reiterative sexual practices open up gaps and fissures that show their “constitutive instabilities”

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5 I further describe Irigaray’s theses on woman as place and woman’s unlimited boundaries of embodiment in chapter 2.
It is also not enough to say that the materiality of the body escapes language, because when we refer to materiality we speak of a signifying process. Butler inquires into the kinds of erasures, exclusions, foreclosures, and disruptions by which any construction of the subject operates. Any construction of gendered subjectivity gains its authority by citing the status quo of regulatory sexual regimes, especially of heterosexuality. The subject is subjected to the norms of sex. Whereas the subject appears as the author of discursive effects, agency is located as “a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power” (p. 15).

Butler formulates the notion of performative gender. She describes performative gender “not as a singular or deliberate act, but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (p. 2). Butler argues that performative gender is not the same as gender performance. The subject is not an agency by which he/she can choose gender as actors choose parts in plays. In other words, Butler does not represent gender as a theatrical or singular act. Rather, gender is “a reiteration of a norm or set of norms” (p. 12). When gender performativity becomes an act, this act again conceals the status quo and repeats the conventions of heterosexuality. Within the matrix of the regulatory laws of sexuality, the subject is neither an agency nor a passive recipient of discourses. Gender identification is cited and resisted by compulsory normative sexual discourses. Discourses open up spaces of resistance, and so the subject does not conform to all the ideals of gender categories.

Yet, the process of reiteration or citation allows the heterosexual sexual categories to be performed again and again. With the repetition of gender performatives, the subject assumes authority over his/her sexuality. Gender performatives iterate interpellating codes in such a way that the gendered subject is always subjected to a normative identity. The paradox, however, is that whereas
gender categories maintain an authoritative law because of their repeated performativity, they also reinstitute the possibility of their own failure. Repetition of gender performativity offers the possibility of subverting and re-articulating identity. It offers the possibility of re-articulating the codes and the laws with a difference. Hence, citational performativity is not fixed and goes beyond the dichotomies of sexual difference.

As Butler argues, unlike the psychoanalytic grand narratives of gender as a unitary entity, gender is a set of cultural codes, rather than a core aspect of essential identity. Gender is a site of a double movement: identification with and resistance to regulatory norms. Butler’s reiterated gender is not the same as the predominant feminists’ concept of gender as socially constructed. The author contends that contemporary feminist movements mobilize the subject with certain identity categories in order to change the specific laws that concern the equality of the sexes. However, these feminist theories undermine the importance of the subject’s persistent disidentifications with regulatory norms. Butler encourages feminists to look at cultural situations that foreclose and exclude multiplicities of gender performatives.

Butler (1993) defines foreclosure, a concept which she allegedly borrows from Lacan (2006), as the mechanism that founds the unconscious subject by producing “sociality through a repudiation of a primary signifier” (p. 243, n. 2). Foreclosure threatens the subject with psychosis. Butler (2004) argues that Lacan’s concept of foreclosure implies that there is always a lack of self-understanding for any subject. Since foreclosure founds the unconscious subject, the subject cannot know his or her origins, cannot undo the operations of the unconscious.6 In other words, in Butler’s interpretation of the psychoanalytic concept of foreclosure as the founding moment

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6 The psychoanalytic theory of foreclosure is different from Butler’s formulation of foreclosure (see Appendix B). Butler seems to confuse Lacan’s foreclosure with repression.
of the subject, the sexual subject is fixed. If the subject seeks to undo foreclosure, the subject also loses him/herself. Butler says that, in Lacan’s theory, if the subject becomes undone, the subject also becomes psychotic.

Butler believes that foreclosure produces a coherent subjectivity. The foreclosure of homosexuality, for example, inaugurates the heterosexual subject. But when “homosexuality returns as a possibility, it returns precisely as the possibility of the unraveling of the subject itself” (2004, p. 333). The possibility of homosexuality leads the subject to think that if he or she was homosexual, he or she would be undone. Butler, however, asserts that, in contradiction to Lacanian theory, it is “possible sometimes to undergo an undoing” (p. 333). The Lacanian concept of foreclosure is not necessarily “a founding act,” but “a temporally renewable structure.” While the subject is socially constituted in certain limited ways—constituted through exclusions and foreclosures—the subject is not stable or fixed. The subject is open to the possibility to alter his/her limitations. According to Butler, subjectivity should be thought of as a dynamic site. Although the subject never goes beyond foreclosure, it is possible to alter the subject’s thematizations and limitations to some degree.

Hence, the author finds that both psychoanalysis and feminism represent sexual difference within the ideologies of heteronormativity. She formulates the idea that gender *drags*—lesbians, gays, transsexuals, bisexuals, and the inter-sexed—destabilize sexual categories and norms. Drag queens, transfags, and queers transgress the ideals of femininity and masculinity. The enactments of gender never fully approximate the norm. Gender is cited by the norm, but this citation always produces remainders and violent exclusions in the subject’s constitutive identity. In other words, the subject lives in ways that are irreducible to the norms by which he/she is constituted.
Butler critiques various psychoanalytic texts. She finds that descriptions of sex and sexual difference imply an unexamined framework of phallocentric essentialism and heterosexual normativity. Like other feminists, such as Grosz and Gallop, who critique Lacan, Butler believes Lacan’s descriptions of sexual difference and his key concept of the phallus to be symptomatic. Citing Gallop, Butler argues that the Lacanian aim to situate the phallus at the center of language shows an “inability to control the meaning of the word phallus” (Gallop, as cited in Butler, 1993, p. 57). In other words, it evinces an inability to restrain the power of patriarchy.

In Gender Trouble, Butler (1999) reflects on Lacan’s opposition between being the phallus and having the phallus. Butler writes that being and having the phallus connotes for Lacan “divergent sexual positions, or nonpositions (impossible positions, really), within language” (p. 56). Being and having the phallus are ontologically specific for femininity and masculinity respectively, since they describe their desires and demands. In Butler’s reading of Lacan, by having the phallus, the masculine subject appears to be autonomous and self-grounded; he “appears to originate meanings and thereby to signify” (p. 57). With his autonomy, the masculine subject shows certainty and conceals the possibility of his own ungrounding. Whereas men appear to have the phallus, originate meanings, and

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7 In her book called, Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction (1990), Grosz provides detailed discussions of Lacan’s theories of subjectivity and the unconscious. She encourages feminists to appreciate Lacan’s theoretical relevance to socio-political theories, because Lacan’s theory is based on language. Grosz, however, critiques Lacan’s concepts of the phallus and jouissance. She argues that the phallus is not simply a neutral term that functions to position both sexes in the symbolic order. The phallus, as the word suggests, privileges masculinity and, specifically, the penis (p. 122). Thus, for Grosz, the theory of the phallus is itself part of patriarchal discourse. Grosz also argues that when Lacan discusses women’s jouissance as being the jouissance beyond the phallus and discourse, no less than Freud, Lacan conveys the message that women are passive (p. 139). The author points out that although Lacan helps us to understand women’s oppression in relation to the Other, he “does not acknowledge the structure of patriarchal oppression” and he does not challenge the patriarchal dominance in the law. According to Grosz, Lacan advocates the idea that the socio-linguistic law of the father is unchangeable (p. 145).
signify, they cannot be it; their penis is not equivalent to the Law and therefore men cannot symbolize the Law fully.

By being the phallus, on the other hand, the feminine subject appears to be the object of a heterosexualized masculine desire. Woman does not have the phallus. She is rather what a man is not; she is “the essential function” of the masculine subject (p. 45). Butler finds that in Lacan’s understanding of femininity as being the phallus, power is yielded by the feminine position. Woman reconfirms the autonomy and power of a man. She is what a man is not in order to reconfirm his identity. Being the phallus is signified by the paternal law. Yet, it is always dissatisfying, because she “can never fully reflect that law” (p. 58). It often requires her to renounce her desire for a man.

Butler finds Lacan contradictory when he theorizes these ontological sexual positions as comedic failures to fully symbolize the paternal law. In her reflections on Lacan’s contradiction, Butler asserts that both positions enact repeated impossibilities to occupy the reality of heterosexuality (p. 59). Women and men are involved in a heterosexual comedy; they are reduced to the play of masquerades (appearances) and to the performative productions of patriarchal society.

For Butler, Lacan’s ambiguous structural positions of the sexes in terms of the phallus and his concept of masquerade raise the question whether masquerade conceals a femininity that might be understood as authentic or whether masquerade produces femininity. Butler (1999) asks, “Does masquerade construct femininity as the reflection of the Phallus in order to disguise bisexual possibilities that otherwise disrupt the seamless construction of a heterosexualized femininity?” (p. 61). Does masquerade conceal feminine desire so as to protect the authority of masculinity?

For Butler (1993), Freud’s and Lacan’s theories of the phallus—Freud’s argument that the erotogenic zones of the body act as substitutes for the genitals and Lacan’s designation of the phallus as the signifier of sexual difference—fix the
meaning of the phallic signifier. Butler finds that Freud’s analysis of psychosomatic symptoms is awry when the body becomes equated with the erotogenic drives and male genitals. The author writes that Freud produces “a pathological discourse on sexuality that allows figures of organic disease to construct figures for erotogenic body parts” (p. 64). According to Butler, the subject’s unconscious guilt—Freud’s leading cause of hypochondria—has its roots in the subject’s resistance to the social ideals of conventional heterosexual polarities. In contrast to Freud, Butler contends that the subject’s unconscious guilt is not rooted in the individual’s narcissism or refusal to love others. Instead, it is the prohibition of homosexuality that generates the pangs of guilt.

Homosexuality is thus the performative of gender that destabilizes and reterritorializes heterosexual norms. Queer and drag do not oppose heterosexuality but rather are “the allegorization[s] of heterosexuality and its constitutive melancholia” (1993, p. 237). Drag exposes the failures and dissimulations of the heterosexual regime. To that extent, the seemingly coherent normative discourses fall apart when, for example, no one is listening to those discourses anymore. In the same vein, Butler says, Lacan’s opposition between having and being the phallus cannot be attributed to an ontological difference between the sexes. The phallus, as a primary signifier, is displaceable. That means that it is possible for men and women both to be and have the phallus and both to suffer from castration anxiety and penis envy. The phallus as a privileged signifier gains its privilege from

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8 Butler refers to Freud’s text, “On Narcissism: An Introduction” (1989), where Freud discusses the “notion that certain other parts of the body—the ‘erotogenic’ zones—may act as substitutes for the genitals and behave analogously to them” (p. 552). Freud explains that hypochondria links to “damming-up of libido in the ego” which is experienced as unpleasurable. According to Freud, when the ego is cathected with libido excessively, the individual must love in order not to fall ill. If the individual falls ill, it is because he/she is unable to love. The individual struggles to master internal excitations. In analysis, the individual works over these internal excitations and drains them away towards an outward discharge. Discharge is often experienced as undesirable.

9 Butler, however, acknowledges that because heterosexual norms are “taken not as commands to be obeyed, but as imperatives to be cited, twisted, queered,” drag is not necessarily subversive of sexual ideals.
reiterations and citations. This reiteration, however, does not establish a fixed sexual subject. The very force of repetition shows the ongoing possibility of variation, plasticity, and deprivileging the master signifier.

1.3 Feminist Descriptions of Female Hysteria and the Question of Feminine Desire

Cixous: Dora [seems] to me to be the one who resists the system .... Yes, the hysterical with her way of questioning others (because if she succeeds in bringing down the men who surround her, it is by questioning them, by ceaselessly reflecting to them the image that truly castrates them to the extent that the power they have wished to impose is an illegitimate power of rape and violence), the hysterical is, to my eyes, the typical woman in all her force.

Clément: Yes, it introduces dissension, but it doesn't explode anything at all; it doesn't disperse the bourgeois family, which also exists only through its dissension, which holds together only in the possibility or the reality of its own disturbance, always reclosable, always reclosed.


Cixous and Clément reflect on whether a woman’s hysteria is a revolutionary act against socio-political and familial patriarchal power or a manifestation of powerlessness. Cixous argues that a hysterical woman, a "typical woman in all her force," disturbs or even dismantles oppressive structures, challenges men's abuses, and destabilizes a system of silences and hypocrisy.

Clément, on the other hand, sees nothing revolutionary about a hysterical woman; she argues, instead, that she is a passive victim, whose pathology is an obstacle to bringing about meaningful change when she is pitted against a rigid and powerful patriarchal system. For Clément, Dora provokes and disturbs oppressive
dynamics but fails to transform these dynamics because she is predominantly caught up in the imaginary realm—the realm that inhibits the circulation of satisfaction and knowledge. Clément argues that whereas Dora contests and introduces some dissension into her familial context she does not lead to positive or satisfactory changes within her family in the end.

Cixous fervently supports Dora for being the one who defies men’s views, including the views of her father, her father’s friend, Herr K, and her analyst, Freud (see Appendix B). Cixous disagrees with Freud’s interpretations of Dora’s case. Cixous and many other feminist writers who accentuate the sociopolitical constructions of male-dominated narratives challenge Freud’s theoretical assumptions about femininity and the repercussions that these assumptions have on his conceptualization of hysteria.

Cixous’ book, called *Portrait de Dora/de Hélène Cixous/des femmes*, written in 1976, is also an expression of the French feminist movement against patriarchy (Gallop, 1982). It is associated with the publishing house “Psychoanalysis and Politics.” From the title of Cixous’ book, we see the substitution of one woman for another, so that the reader is able to link the hysteric portrait of Dora with the portrait of Cixous and with the portrait of all women in general (Gallop, 1982). Cixous argues that women with hysteria protest against the phallocentric system in which their bodies become “despised, rejected … once they have been used” (Cixous & Clément, 1986, p. 154) and serve as a medium of exchange between men.

The discussion of hysteria, especially in feminist literature, is key in discourses on femininity and politics. While Cixous and Clément differ about whether the female hysteric contests patriarchy heroically (as Cixous argues) or preserves the existing system by being a victim within patriarchy (as Clément asserts), both writers discuss hysteria in terms of women’s oppression under patriarchy. Like Cixous and Clément, many other feminist writers either view hysteria as a male
construct that defends patriarchal notions of femininity and female sexuality\textsuperscript{10} or as a female disease in patriarchal culture.\textsuperscript{11} These arguments raise complex questions about the theory of hysteria: Is hysteria caused by patriarchal power? Is hysteria related to femininity? Is the hysterical, distressed subject able to challenge social structures?

Some feminists tackle these questions by concentrating on the psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious and psychical reality. Their main purpose is to use some of Freud’s concepts to describe sexual difference and the effects of patriarchal power on the subject’s unconscious. They provide an analysis of the relationship between psychoanalytic discourse on hysteria and socio-political discourse on femininity. However, they often end up discussing Freud’s theories of hysteria and femininity by emphasizing Freud’s inability to understand the essence of femininity and preoedipal desire for the mother. They question Freud’s overemphasis of the Oedipal complex and privileging of the father. They focus, instead, on the dynamics of the preoedipal mother-child relationship.

Ramas (1990), for example, conceptualizes hysteria as a form of compromise between preoedipal sexuality and heterosexuality. She asserts that Dora protests against relationships between men and women that are structured in terms of dominance and submission, respectively. According to Ramas, Dora understands heterosexuality as a power relation. She argues that Dora preserves her preoedipal love for the mother and wishes to retain access to the maternal/female body. Dora’s admiration for the Madonna suggests a preoedipal fantasy—a fantasy in which the “mother/child dyad could exist undisturbed by the implications of sexual difference”

\textsuperscript{10} For example, men have frequently misused the diagnosis of hysteria in their attempt to explain women’s biological make-up, psychological conditions, and resistance to conform to the \textit{status quo} of heterosexuality and to their roles as mothers and wives.

\textsuperscript{11} Hysterical symptoms (hypochondria, psychosomatic pains, irritations, and nervousness) have predominantly been observed in females in past and present times. The most common explanation of this phenomenon has been that females are looked to to represent gentleness, submissiveness, serenity, and domesticity. Females disavow hostility and sexuality and transform their repressed aggressive and sexual desire into physical symptoms.
Ramas contends that Dora’s identifications with men indicate a protest against post-oedipal femininity. Dora is confronted with the inequality of the sexes—with masculinity as activity, sadism, and power and femininity as passivity, masochism, and powerlessness. Ramas critiques psychoanalytic formulations that present the phallus (the signifier of desire) as the symbol of protection and freedom from a devouring, preoedipal mother. She argues that the girl’s escape from mother to father is not liberating at all. The girl’s relationship with her father is imbued with patriarchal social meanings and is thus fraught with imprisonment and dependency. Ramas sees Dora’s hysteria as a compromise formation: Dora is in the midst of complying and not complying with the patriarchal laws of femininity and heterosexuality. Her compliance with feminine roles is a conscious attempt whereas her non-compliance is an unconscious revolt against patriarchy. Ramas concludes that Dora’s unconscious belief is that “femininity, bondage, and debasement [are] synonymous” (p. 176). Her hysterical symptoms indicate a wish to reconstitute her identity within the patriarchal system and reclaim her freedom.

Rose (1990), who is conversant in Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, however, contends that while many feminists critique Freud for describing normal femininity within the confines of drive theory and the Oedipal complex, they also make their own mistake when they base their explanation of Dora’s sexuality on preoedipal attachment to her mother. Rose contends that these explanations are inadequate for understanding Dora’s hysterical identifications with men and women. In the case of Dora, the question about her feminine sexuality is the question about her desire and being a woman within discourses. Rose (1990) writes,

I want to conclude with this, not because I think it answers anything but because I believe it to be a necessary caution to certain current developments within feminist theory. What seems to me to need attention is precisely this movement of psychoanalysis away from sexuality as content (preoedipal or otherwise) to a concept of sexuality as caught up in the register of demand and desire (p. 146).
To this day, the question of feminine desire remains unresolved in feminist texts.

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Whereas for centuries, men have asked the question, “What does a woman want?”—today this question is posed by women themselves. It is a question about feminine identity and the dialectic between feminine desire and social recognition. According to Mills (1991), when a woman is confined to the family, her desire remains subject to a man’s desire. When she is an active heterosexual lover and mother, she is perceived “as deadly by the male” (p. 127). The man proceeds to castrate the woman psychically, because he fears castration from her. This psychic castration is effectuated by social domination.

Feminists argue that the Western patriarchal Other does not impose its power on women directly. It rather imposes it in subtle ways. It manifests itself in hidden and repressed meanings. In other words, patriarchy is not a totalizing or monolithic system in which all men dominate all women directly and thus all women know that they are victims of men (Walsh, 2001). Rather, the masculine hegemony is diffuse; it is embedded in interpersonal discursive practices and institutions that are historically associated with men. These institutional “discourses maintain their dominance because they are organized around practices of exclusion, often involving speech rituals” (Walsh, 2001, p. 17). For example, religious, judicial, therapeutic, and political discourses “determine both the particular properties and the stipulated roles” of the speaking women-subjects (Foucault, as cited in Walsh, 2001, p. 17). The positioning of women as excluded others or as “outsiders within” circulates within these masculine discursive or institutionalized systems and forms a complex matrix of power relations between genders.

When women do as well as men do, these women identify with masculinity. Femininity is thus devalued through the overvaluation of masculine discourses and
practices. Women are generally required to understand their identity by adopting and assimilating the pre-existing male-dominated norms and practices. They are asked, in other words, to be somehow more masculine. According to Soler (2006), when women identify with masculinity their *jouissance* is determined by the phallic function. Women’s identification with masculinity positions women as wholly hemmed in by the symbolic order of competition and exchange value. Therefore, with the notion of equality we eradicate the differences between the sexes, and when we eradicate these differences women passively follow patriarchal values.

How does inequality between the sexes lead to hysterical symptoms? Cixous’ and Clément’s *The Newly Born Woman* (1986) is, in my estimation, an outstanding Francophone feminist text that describes the hysteric’s sufferings within the patriarchal system and the hysteric’s provocations which destabilize the rigidity of that system. For Cixous and Clément, the woman-hysteric is oppressed by the rigid patriarchal system. The authors present patriarchy as the tarantula—“the invisible yet powerful insect of patriarchal lore, lure, and law” (p. xi). When the tarantula bites, the hysteric dances madly. The tarantula bites cause depression, paralysis, coughs, pains, dizziness, and migraines. The hysteric is bitten by the rigid masculine hierarchical oppositions of masculinity and femininity. A woman does not exist in man’s precise calculations. Her subordination to a man’s domination preserves the functioning of the masculine order. She holds her marriage together and promotes patriarchal values.

A woman, however, transcends the rules of language; she steps outside her function as sign. Feminine rhythm consists of uncontrollable flow; it is close to unruly nature. Man’s law is overly possessive. The woman-hysteric suffers from the males (father, brother, brother-in-law, and husband) who act like sexual aggressors.

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12 In Lacan’s work, the phallic function refers to “the alienating function of language,” that which institutes lack and desire (Fink, 1995, p. 103). As I explain in chapter 2, each sex has a different relation to the Other as language, to the ways he or she is used by language.
She cries and cries and speaks words of agony. Her words are blown to bits by rage and suffering. She demolishes discourse. When masculine power pushes her offstage, she cries out. She complies with harassment and repeated attempts at castration. And when the repressed of her culture comes back, it is an explosive return, “absolutely shattering, staggering, overturning, with a force never let loose before” (p. 95). Each hysterical attack permits a return to the man’s promised love. She manifests in her body what she cannot represent with words. Her role is ambiguous. With her symptoms, she provokes, revolts, and shakes up the public realm, institutional laws, and order. She destabilizes familiar bonds and introduces disorder into the well regulated system. With her struggles, she desires. Inequality leads her to desire. Without desire, she is inert; she feels dead. When her desire is not heard, she breaks loose and releases lions with her symptoms. Her body articulates the words she cannot speak. Her body is the theater, the spectacle. Doctors examine her word-body and attempt to domesticate it again within the patriarchal order. When the hysteric-woman is calm, she returns to her social life of marriage and motherhood; she returns to the masculine world.

1.4 The Feminist (Mis)use of Lacanian Theory

Anglophone feminists deconstruct Western cultural values of femininity with the intent to subvert imaginary views of sex and social ideals of sexual roles and heterosexuality. They make a useful contribution to our knowledge about the ways we are alienated in the Other and the ways we are psychologically and physically affected by this alienation. Using discourse analysis as a method of qualitative research, feminists elucidate the ways in which subjects are alienated in the Other’s ideals. Analyses of subjects’ discourses challenge our assumed roles as sexual
individuals; they help us resist conformity to cultural taboos and change oppressive stereotypes.

Let us consider the case of anorexia nervosa, which is the most frequent psychosomatic symptom in women today. Malson’s (1998) deconstructive study of anorexia nervosa elucidates the ways in which anorexia is not simply an individual female pathology. Rather, Malson’s work allows readers to understand anorexia within a framework that transgresses the individual-society dichotomy and acknowledges the complexities of multiple socio-political and patriarchal discourses of gender. Malson analyzes the discourses of female participants who share their experiences of being anorectic and female. The purpose of Malson’s study is to show readers that patriarchal discourse and practices constitute and regulate women’s experiences of gender and embodiment. Malson’s readers become aware of the ways participants are subjected to social pressures to be thin and the ways they conform to and resist men’s desires.

Malson uses Foucauldian theory of discourse and Lacan’s concept of the symbolic order to explain how language constitutes and decenters subjectivity. The larger purpose of her study is to change the discursive constructions of anorexia nervosa and femininity that oppress women. The author envisions women’s freedom from patriarchy by subverting patriarchal discourses and privileging instead women’s voices about their subjective experiences.

However, Malson reaches a theoretical impasse when she implies that subjects change when they change their own language/discourse. The feminist view that if we change discourses about femininity then women will be liberated from men’s oppression—and they will thus not suffer from hysteria—ignores the dialectic of desire in subjects’ unconscious. Burr (1995), a renowned feminist social-constructionist, also finds that the feminist theory of desire is problematic. Burr points out that the subversion of social taboos does not necessarily mean that
subjects are able to live happier and more satisfied lives. Subjects may conform to or rebel against social taboos. Their conformity or rebellion says nothing about how they sustain their unconscious desire. To say that subjects are negotiators of positions and that their subjectivity is formed by discourse does not inform us adequately how subjects are willing or able to make positive changes in their lives. It fails to explain why subjects who understand that power relations and discourses impact their identity and decision-making still do not feel free to make better choices for themselves.

Subjects are conflicted. They know, for example, that when they make dire choices, they have negative consequences. In the 1970’s, Chodorow struggled with this issue too, and described this kind of feminist theoretical deadlock. Chodorow found in her own research that some women knew that motherhood and sexual relations with abusive men would oppress them, but still they wanted children and got involved with abusive men (as cited in Burr, 1995). In other words, we often see subjects identifying with discourses even when they consciously know that these discourses are harmful to them or that they have the choice to identify with other better ones. Even when feminists understand the implications of discourse and power relations for identity, they often fail to explain why subjects do not choose an alternative way of life and how subjects’ unconscious desires are the same as the Other’s desires.

Conversely, Lacan teaches us that unconscious desire should not be confused with conscious desire (Fink, 2004). What seems to be abnormal/enigmatic on the conscious level has significance on the unconscious level. A subject’s choice to remain dissatisfied and go on desiring serves a purpose; desire emerges as a transgression of, rather than a conformity to, the law.

When Anglophone feminists cite Lacan, they often interpret the symbolic as an order that constructs identity and makes the subject conform to the status quo.
When they describe the symbolic construction of the subject, they confuse it with Lacan’s concept of the imaginary. Feminists misconstrue Lacan’s thesis on split subjectivity and misunderstand his conceptualization of the subject’s real and symbolic relationship with the Other.

Malson’s study on anorexia nervosa in females is a prime example of how Anglophone feminists have a propensity to apply Lacan’s concepts of the symbolic order and real erroneously. Malson, for example, writes,

Lacanian theory emphasizes that masculinity and femininity do not arise from the real of the body but from the way in which male and female bodies are signified within a Symbolic order. This concept of the Symbolic order, central to Lacan’s thought, moves psychoanalytic theory further in the direction of the social because the Symbolic order is primarily a linguistic (and therefore social) order (see Saussure, 1960). (Malson, 1998, p. 16)

Malson’s emphasis on the signified and her reference to Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* shows us that she is unaware of Lacan’s subversion of the Saussurian theory of the sign. In Lacan’s work, and in contrast to Saussure, the signifier (word) and the signified (meaning) are not complementary. As Lacan (1998b) writes, “the signifier is posited only insofar as it has no relation to the signified” (p. 32/29). In addition, Lacan’s major thesis on sexuation, as I indicate in chapter 2, is that sex is real.

To Lacan’s mind, the ego (consciousness) is an imaginary function whereas the unconscious is a symbolic function. The unconscious is structured like a language. It is not, however, structured in the same way as spoken English. With the unconscious, we do not construct meaning and make sense of the world or ourselves as we do on a conscious level. The contents of the unconscious are signifiers, which do not obey the same set of grammatical rules as the language we speak ordinarily. No specific signified harmoniously binds or restricts a signifier. Lacan understands the function of the signifier inscribed in the unconscious as polyvalent and ambiguous, whereas he considers norms to be imaginary. He says
that meaning is imaginary and so the reality that we construct with our words on the
conscious level is a fantasy; we conceptualize ourselves and this world as whole
(*tout*) (Lacan, 1998b, p. 43). With our ego talk, everyday conscious talk, we echo
the belief that the reality lying behind language is reliable and unfailing.

It seems to me then that Malson confuses Lacan’s theory of the symbolic
order with his theory of the imaginary. Malson’s analyses of her participants’
statements lead her to a variety of often contradictory statements, which she
nevertheless interprets in imaginary terms—that is, in terms of the ego, in terms of
how participants recognize or rather *mis*recognize themselves. Malson concludes
that the female anorexic body allows for a multiplicity of meanings. She writes that
anorexia is both a manifestation of traditional femininity that seduces men and a
manifestation of masculinity that resists female roles. The anorectic imitates super-
thin female models and wants to be the object of men’s attention. However, she
also imitates men by looking boyish. She resists female sexuality, reproduction, and
her social role as a woman. Her refusal of food is a refusal to have breasts, have a
belly, or menstruate. Malson sums up her findings by stating that discourses of
sexual difference produce multiple and conflictual meanings and thus the thin body
both resists and embodies patriarchal gender identities.

Malson interprets these discourses in imaginary terms because she theorizes
the ways in which her participants assimilate the Other and resist the Other. In
Lacan’s theory, however, when subjects are subjugated by the Other and demand
that the Other supply ideal answers about their identities, they remain dissatisfied
and stuck on their demands. Lacan formulates the idea that when subjects evaluate
their sense of self on the basis of conscious meanings, they engage in an ego/ego-
ideal dialectic and produce empty speech. In the dialectic of ego/ego-ideal, subjects
internalize and assimilate the Other’s ideals (Fink, 2004). Subjects become further
alienated in the Other when the Other provides meaning about their existence and
needs. Alienated subjects are often betrayed by the certainties of meanings, empty speech, and demands. They are conflicted and come to realize that the Other is not a guarantor of ideal answers about their being. Subjects’ desires are set into motion when the Other is experienced as failing to provide a reason for their being. Lacan (2006) writes,

Let us ask ourselves instead where this frustration comes from. Is it from the analyst’s silence? Responding to the subject’s empty speech—even and especially in an approving manner—often proves, by its effects to be far more frustrating than silence. Isn’t it, rather, a frustration that is inherent in the subject’s very discourse? Doesn’t the subject become involved here in an ever greater dispossession of himself as being, concerning which … he ends up recognizing that his being has never been anything more than his own construction [oeuvre] in the imaginary and that this certainty undercuts all certainty in him? (p. 207/249).

Lacan here argues that unified/fixed discourses consist of empty speech—a kind of speech that arouses frustration when we fail to articulate unconscious desire.

Malson neglects to theorize the speech of the unconscious. In other words, she does not theorize how her participants’ anorexia, their self-deprivation, is a way to sustain their desire. This omission has much to do with the fact that feminists conceptualize feminine identity only as a construct of the Other, of the patriarchal social order.

From a Lacanian perspective, this assumption is incomplete. When Lacan says that man’s desire (is the same as) the Other’s desire, he indicates that the subject also recognizes the fallibility, the incompleteness of the Other. The Other’s desire is indeterminate and this very indeterminacy causes the subject to desire continually. The subject’s recognition that the Other is lacking causes him or her to seek a representation of his or her being beyond the image that the Other presents. We need to keep in mind here that the Other gives answers with signifiers. But the Other’s answers always fall short, because as I mentioned earlier, signifiers resist signifieds, have no unequivocal meaning.
Between the lines of the subject’s statements there is the enunciation of desire. Desire results from the subject’s splitting by the signifier. It inclines the subject to resist the signifieds that the social order provides as answers about his or her being at the imaginary level. The desiring subject finds the Other to be lacking. The split subject, however, especially the hysterical subject, is the one who is dependent on the Other’s dissatisfied desires. The anorectic hysteric finds his or her image, as presented by the Other, to be inadequate, lacking. By refusing food, the anorectic challenges the Other’s demands of her and motivates the Other to desire.

How can we then listen to the enunciation of desire in a subject’s discourse? To answer this question, we can take as an example one of Malson’s (1998) participants who described her experience of being an anorexic:

MICHELLE: I remember having lots of chats about her (a supermodel) with my dad (.) and my mum and everything (.) and um my dad was saying: oh she's she's terribly thin. /H: right hu / You know: I hate hate women that look so thin an' (.) / H: mm/ you know she should, she doesn't really look like a woman an' hu (.) / H: (laughing) right/ But I admit I didn't really agree with him and I don't think (.) if there were ever any women in the room (.) when (.) he was saying this I don't think they would either … Yeah she was very um (.) I don't know how to put it really (.) um. She was kind of dignified really … I think yeah /H: mm/ I could be like her (pp. 112-113)

At the semantic level, Michelle is obsessed with thin bodies and issues of femininity. Michelle associates a thin body with dignified femininity. Following Malson’s interpretations, Michelle struggles with the male (her father’s) opinion of femininity and thus struggles with “the multiple competing meanings of the thin female body” (p. 113).

From a Lacanian perspective, to understand her discourse, it is important not to get mesmerized by the manifest meanings, the conscious/preconscious meanings of her words. Malson’s point that Michelle expresses a conflict over competing discourses on femininity and sexuality is insightful. Michelle here embodies the Other’s failures to represent femininity and sexuality adequately. We can argue,
however, that Michele is aware of, or at least preconscious of, the influences that the Other has on her. In other words, it is on the level of her ego that Michelle sees the thin body as dignified femininity.\textsuperscript{13} What she is not aware of is not the “signifieds” of sexuality and femininity (p. 118) but rather the signifiers that represent her desire.

Lacan (2006) prompts us to take desire literally (pp. 518-37/620-42). For Lacan, the symptom of anorexia is the metonymy of desire. Despite the fact that we do not know Michelle’s personal and family history or the cause(s) of her symptom, we can argue that her anorexia is linked to her unconscious desire.

As opposed to her father, who believes that curvy women are feminine, for Michelle, anorexia, \textit{lack of food}, represents \textit{dignified femininity}. For one reason or another, Michelle rebels against the parental Other. Michelle refuses to be fed or get stuffed by the Other and identifies with incompleteness. Michelle wants to be the \textit{dignified feminine}. We can decipher in Michelle’s speech that \textit{lack of food} is replaced by the \textit{dignified feminine}—the feminine of which Michelle tries to find adequate meaning from the Other. \textit{Dignified} connotes exaltation of femininity and can be read as the \textit{lack of signifieds}.

Michelle tells us that the supermodel represents the feminine. The Other, as culture, however, does not provide an adequate representation of dignified femininity. Nevertheless, the Other makes dignified femininity desirable. Michelle’s desire to be a \textit{dignified woman} enunciates the Other’s failure to represent femininity sufficiently. Her desire to be feminine remains an unsatisfied desire. Michelle is not interested in being the object of the Other’s \textit{jouissance} (satisfaction)—the object of the \textit{jouissance} of her father, for example, who likes women with curvy bodies, but

\textsuperscript{13} Based on my clinical experience with anorectic patients, anorectics often seem to be aware of their experiences of being influenced by the media, which encourages the symptom of anorexia in women. My patients told me that they knew how modern society encouraged them to be thin; they wanted to feel happier with how they looked; and they even admired other women who were confident with their body and sense of self and were not anorectics. In fact, one of my patients adored the singer, Amanda Palmer, for her singing and admired her for being comfortable with her body, despite her chubbiness. Yet, despite my patients’ sufferings and insights regarding the culture of thinness, they could not stop not eating.
who perhaps reduces women to certain meanings. In feminist interpretations, her refusal to be the object of the Other’s *jouissance* would be construed as unconscious resistance to male-dominated views of femininity.

As I explain in subsequent chapters, the hysterical woman is interested in being the object of the Other’s desire. Her being depends on the Other’s desire. This desire is articulated in the void, abyss, and emptiness. Michelle desires to be feminine in relation to patriarchal desire. She is captured and frozen by imaginary social ideals of thinness and by the signifiers of desire that point to the rejection of femininity. Michelle desires to be the dignified feminine but, at the same time, she rejects femininity. Instead, she is involved in an endless circle of self-hatred and self-loathing. Michelle’s unconscious rejection is the same as the Other’s rejection of femininity. Therefore, in contrast to Malson’s interpretations of Lacan, Michelle desires to be thin not because the Other wants her to be feminine, but because the Other desires a representation of femininity. The Other’s desire is metonymic and always demands a new satisfying representation. Michelle is swayed and spoken by the Other’s dissatisfactions and rejections of her feminine being. The Other’s desire captures, enslaves her. The Other’s gaze disapproves of the possibility of becoming feminine and annihilates her existence. She incarnates the Other’s desire, which has a destructive character. She is trapped in the desire to desire that points to nothingness. Michelle is not aware of this trap; she is not aware of the ways her desire functions as the metonymy (cancellation) of her being.

1.5 Towards a Dialogue between Feminism and Lacan

Feminist interrogations of the psychoanalytic theory of women’s hysteria, and I would go so far as to say, even feminist misinterpretations of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, are vital forces for engaging in a dialogue between feminism
and Lacanian theory on the relationship between women and hysteria. The following questions can help us begin a dialogue between these two different theoretical paradigms:

A) How can we conceptualize Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory in relation to feminist critiques of patriarchy? How would Lacan respond to Irigaray’s thesis on speaking as a woman, Butler’s theory of gender as performative, and to all the feminists who critique his psychoanalysis as another version of essentialist and patriarchal discourse?

B) Following Rose’s argument that the unresolved issue in feminism is feminine desire, in what ways can feminists use Lacanian theory to advance their theorizations of femininity and women’s distress?

C) According to Lacan, Irigaray, and Butler, does the hysteric contest or conserve patriarchy? In what ways can the hysterical woman be liberated from oppression by the patriarchal Other?
Chapter 2

The Ethics of Feminine Desire and *Jouissance*

2.1 What Do a Ψηφιδά and a Tortoise Have in Common?

Zeno’s paradox of Achilles and the tortoise invites us to theorize sexual difference and the ethics of feminine desire and *jouissance*. Zeno’s paradox goes as follows: Suppose you have Achilles, the fastest man and the hero of the Trojan war, race a tortoise. 

Suppose also that Achilles decides to do the tortoise a favor and allow her a head start. After the tortoise gets a certain distance ahead, Achilles finds out to his surprise that he cannot get ahead of the tortoise, which leads her to win the race. Had Achilles not allowed the tortoise a head start, Achilles would have obviously been the winner; thus a competition of this kind would have been unnecessary, which of course would have led Achilles not to have any relationship with the tortoise whatsoever. In Zeno’s logic, the reason why Achilles cannot win the race after deciding to give her a ten-meter head start is because when Achilles runs the ten meters, the tortoise goes one meter further; when Achilles runs one meter, the tortoise goes one decimeter further; and when he runs one decimeter, she goes one centimeter further, and so on. Zeno argues that the sum of an infinite series of numbers is infinite.

14 Tortoise is a feminine noun in some spoken languages, for example, in Greek (ἡ χελώνα) and French (la tortue).
Nowadays, we know that this paradox is not valid. We know that Zeno only takes into account space and ignores time. Since Achilles is faster than the tortoise, Achilles will overtake the tortoise in the race despite her head start because time is finite and time makes space finite too. Hence, Zeno’s paradox is false because if, for example, Achilles is able to run ten meters per second the tortoise will run five meters per second, and so eventually Achilles will pass her. Assuming that Achilles does not become like Aesop’s rabbit—the rabbit who lost the race to a tortoise because he devalued both the tortoise’s capabilities in the race and the finitudes of time and thus gave up his efforts to go on running—one can conclude that Achilles will overtake the tortoise before she reaches the finish line.\(^{15}\)

In *Encore*, Lacan (1998b) briefly mentions Zeno’s paradox to argue that the tortoise is not wholly inscribed within the symbolic order and that whereas Achilles is fast enough to “pass the tortoise—he cannot catch up with it. He only catches up with it at infinity” (p. 8). In other words, in Lacan’s logic, the tortoise’s emancipated potentialities are not reducible to a man’s reason. Although we know today that Zeno’s paradox is false, strangely enough, its falsification tells us something about how “the feminine is experienced as space,” with the connotation of infinity, while “the masculine is experienced as time” (Irigaray, 1993, p. 7). As Barnard (2002b) also puts it, Achilles’ relation to the tortoise is such that his phallic *jouissance* is limited by a remainder which “forever escapes” and “eludes his pursuit” (p. 177).

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Irigaray (1993) elucidates that a woman who has discovered her infinity dismantles men’s certainties and the closure of opposing terms—terms such as ignorance versus wisdom, mortality versus immortality, poverty versus wealth, ugliness versus beauty, and so on. Her mystery lies in the paradoxical notion that she shows that what seems to be most assured is

\(^{15}\) The details of Zeno’s paradox were taken from [http://www.suitcaseofdreams.net/Paradox_Achilles.htm#A](http://www.suitcaseofdreams.net/Paradox_Achilles.htm#A), August 2008.
indeed inadequate and useless. And thus she is capable of undoing conclusive works, denouncing the already established truths, and allowing space for new becomings to occur in life. Irigaray (2001), however, tells us that both sexes realize their differences and potentialities when they accept their own embodied boundaries and limitations. Their becomings are thus not “abstract, neutral, fabricated, and fictitious,” but rather “concrete” and “corporeal” (p. 26). Both sexes appropriate and step out of their static identities and assimilations of sameness, when they re-think the relations of space and time and “of the interval between” (p. 7). Irigaray locates sexual difference and new becomings in one’s transformative thinking about desire, power, infinity, limitations, and sameness.

In Seminar XX, Lacan (1998b) suggests in his theory of sexuation that whereas the masculine subject is wholly inscribed in the finitudes of the phallic function, the feminine subject is both alienated in the phallic function and a remainder which exposes the contingency and the failures of the Law. A woman’s relation to the contingency of the Law, however, does not make her a passive object of a man’s desire or force her to give up her own desire. Although Butler criticizes Lacan for saying that a normal woman is a woman who is the phallus for a man and who reconfirms male power and patriarchal significations, Lacan provides instead a theory which differentiates the hysterical from the feminine subject. Whereas the female hysteric is the phallic signifier for the masculine Other, the feminine actualizes her own desiring cause, overcomes the automatic law-like symbolic functioning, and engenders something new in the social realm. For Lacan, the feminine subject inhabits the symbolic but, because she accepts her castration, she also has a mysterious presence in it—a presence which unveils the impotence of the Law. As I will discuss further, although the hysterical exposes the Other’s impotence, she is not inhabited by the symbolic function in the same as way as the feminine is. The hysterical restricts herself to the limitations of symbolic functioning and becomes
the phallic object for the Other. The feminine subject, on the other hand, has a relation to infinity which unveils the Law’s strangeness and contingency. She triumphs over repetitious dissatisfactions and engenders change.

One can see from Zeno’s paradox that time and space are interrelated. Men and women are subjected to the finite logic of phallic competitions, yet within this finite logic, there is always something unsettling and infinite. According to Lacan, both sexes are alienated in the symbolic order, but each sex has a different relationship with infinity. Similarly, Irigaray describes sexual difference in terms of how a man and a woman come to discover their infinity regardless of their own finite identifications with sociocultural ideals. In this chapter, however, I will argue that one cannot clearly grasp Irigaray’s notions of speaking as a woman and of a woman’s potentiality to discover the infinite place within herself without first understanding Lacan’s theories of sexuation and psychoanalytic ethics. By following Lacan’s and Irigaray’s works, one is able to see that Zeno’s paradox is a call for us to theorize how the masculine finite logic of temporality excludes the feminine logic of infinite pace/place and how both sexes discover their infinities when they realize their own structural limitations in relation to the symbolic Other.

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16 In psychoanalytic theory, neurotics are restricted to the alienating effects of language when they are spoken by a symptom that causes them to suffer. When neurotics are spoken by a particular symptom, they want to get rid of it, but they cannot. They feel that it is out of their control when they repeat their symptom compulsively. Thus, when I refer to finitude, I refer to the subject’s state of suffering. In Lacan’s theory, the symptom retroactively gives meaning to the master signifier. As Fink (1995) explains, the subject’s symptom is organized around a unique and rigid master signifier, S1, which is pronounceable but yet opaque to the analysand and which “always seems to put an end to associations instead of opening things up” (p. 77). The subject, therefore, who is represented and fixed through the effects of one signifier (S2) for another (S1) is castrated and finite, because it is presented by the Other and is dependent on winning “attention and recognition from the Other” (p. 73). On the other hand, the analyzed subject is the one who has dialectized master signifiers and is no longer inhibited in its pursuit of satisfaction. As Fink (1997) further explains, the fully analyzed subject enjoys and seeks out its satisfaction without being inhibited by an unsatisfied desire. As I discuss in this dissertation, the hysteric is limited by her alienation within language in her attempts to be the phallic signifier for a man’s desire. The feminine subject, on the other hand, who is a fully analyzed subject, may have access to limitless Other jouissance. Feminine jouissance is not limited to the jouissance of the organ as a man’s phallic jouissance (Fink, 2004, p. 161). Her whole body enjoys. The feminine subject also loves and enjoys by her act of speaking. As opposed to man’s finite logic of deriving satisfaction only in sexual intercourse, a woman makes love by speaking about love and engaging in “the act of love” (p. 162). The feminine subject, thus, is not pinned down by the castrating effects of signifiers. A woman enjoys when she speaks of love.
One could argue that Achilles and the tortoise are capable of attaining their potentialities if they both see the paradox that there is infinity within finitudes. Achilles does not really need to race a tortoise to prove to himself or others that he is fast. But in order for Achilles to have access to love and realize further his infinity, he will have to allow himself to be surprised by the tortoise’s infinite potentialities at her pace. He will be able to do so if he also accepts the finitudes of time and does not become like Aesop’s rabbit. And in order for the tortoise to realize her emancipated potentialities, overcome dependencies, subvert dominant views, shift away from her victim role, and transcend the win vs. lose binary, she will have to accept her structural limitations in relation to Achilles and realize her cause. These realizations, however, are not matters of conscious awareness but kinds of analytic working through.

One may wonder, however, if the use of these analogies is anything but idealism. Anglophone feminists have raised serious questions about the dialectical relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed between the sexes—questions that are claimed to be far from idealistic. They ask: What does it mean to be a woman in an oppressive and unfair patriarchal society—in a society which does not make it easy for a woman to succeed or have equal rights to a man, which violates her psyche and misuses her body, and which causes her hysterical fits and outbursts? How are men victimized by the social ideals of being aggressive and having to meet high social expectations—expectations to be the primary providers for the family, to be warriors for their country, to be invulnerable and detached, and to maintain a certain status quo male identity?

Anglophone feminists thus would not consider looking at the internal logic of Zeno’s paradox to formulate an ethics of sexual difference. Being primarily influenced by Foucault’s works, Anglophone feminists concentrate instead on discourses which affect women’s oppression in patriarchy and men’s enslavement to
meet social and at times dehumanizing expectations. They argue that men and women are implicated in the complexities of discourses and that institutions function to compare, hierarchize, homogenize, exclude, and normalize. Since, as Foucault (1978) contends, discourses qualify, classify, and punish, Anglophone feminists have done an outstanding job developing methods to question the “tactical productivity” and the “political strategy” of a subject’s use of a certain discourse (p. 102). Feminists, however, misconstrue sexuation and theorize it only as an imaginary discursive representation. They thus ignore the psychoanalytic theory of the ethics of human tragedy—a tragedy seen in the subject’s realization of his or her unconscious desire, which goes beyond his or her conscious perceptions of personages, and which manages to suspend, destroy, and interrupt the continuity and fixed mirages of the ego.

But if we concentrate on the ethics of femininity, some questions remain unresolved from the Foucauldian and Anglophone feminist analyses of political strategies of oppression: In what ways can women realize their own unconscious desires so they do not fall victim to patriarchal oppression? Is it possible that social oppression is not only an external force exercised upon subjects, but also that subjects, by inhabiting the symbolic, participate in preserving this oppression unconsciously? As I discussed in chapter 1, when we become aware of the social and power relations of discourses, we do not necessarily change our structural position in relation to the symbolic Other.

In this chapter, I explore the ethics of feminine desire and jouissance primarily from a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective and explicate similarities and differences between Lacan and feminists. Lacan does not provide easy answers to questions. In his seminars and writings, Lacan allows readers to interpret his theory by requiring them to work through his difficult texts to grasp his internal logic. If readers are motivated enough to read him, they will realize that his theory is about
the unthinkable and infinite paradoxes of life and about the unknown and strange potentialities of one’s ex-sistence. In order for a woman to discover her infinite potentialities, she will need first to realize what it means to be a Woman vis-à-vis the symbolic Other. I should specify that a Woman is not free from conflicts or struggles—of course, no one is really free from experiencing constraints and conflicts. I will argue, however, that, unlike the female hysteric, she is able to achieve her emancipated potentialities and overcome patriarchal discursive oppressions.

2.2 Sexuation

In my attempt to formulate an ethics of femininity, I would like first to provide a feminist reason why one should concentrate on feminine desire. By doing so in this section, I will also describe Lacan’s theories of the phallus, castration, and sexuation, and show some of the similarities and differences between Lacan and feminists.

A woman often posits herself in relation to a man as powerless, weak, needy, irresistible, or as a person who is without limits and pursues aimless pleasure. Cixous and Clément (1986) assert that women have been associated with the eternal-natural, because she is beautiful, but passive; a desirable, but dependent nonentity; unreasonable, but adorable; a threatening force to the social order, but

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17 Lacan (1998b) writes, “Strange is a word that can be broken down in French—étrange, être-ange,” which means “angel-being” (p. 8) and implies, eternity or infinity.
18 I do not intend to use woman under erasure like Derrida. Derrida puts all words under erasure (sous rature) to indicate that there is always a lost presence in them. For Derrida, “Word and thing or thought never in fact become one” (Spivak, 1997, p. xx). As Derrida also contends, every signified functions as a signifier. Every word renders its meaning undecidable and so there is never a univocity of meaning attached to a word. Lacan expresses the same idea with his theory of “there is no Other of the Other” or “there is no metalanguage” as I explain in chapter 3. I am referring to Woman (la femme), however, the same way Lacan does in Seminar XX. My software does not allow me to write it as it appears in Lacan’s work. The feminine subject, for Lacan, is not a signifier, not a word under erasure. It is rather a structure that has a specific relationship with the Other, that relates to a particular failure to be inscribed in language.
mysterious; dangerous, but easily domesticated; devouring, but longed for; excessive, but unreasonable and forbidden. Irigaray (1993) also elucidates that in the masculine economy the female becomes an immobile container, an inseparable envelope for the man and the child whom she loves. A man longs for the maternal which has been forever lost, and ends up loving a woman whom he imagines can mother him and envelope him (p. 60). He longs for the maternal home which provides boundless possibilities for future creations. He thus experiences a woman as the indefinite "series of one plus one plus one" (p. 61). However, he cuts himself off from feminine spatiality and situates himself as durational time. He defers his infinity with his concrete creations. He creates a woman with his tools and achievements.

A woman, on the other hand, sets out her infinity into space and loses time. She does not measure time in the same way as a man does, and thus, being occupied by the man whom she loves, she offers herself up in the here and now to an expansive jouissance (p. 64). Linear time is questionable for a woman. Temporal relations are circular in the feminine realm. Her circularity of time is bounded by the eternal. A woman delves into the pleasurable abysses of the here and now and comes up against the masculine attitudes of timing, which are grounded in the adage of “never more and not yet” (p. 64). By extending herself infinitely into space, a woman is thus in the intermediate between being verbal and being voiceless. She is neither passive nor active; she opens up the possibility of taking the course of a durational time, but her capacity to present or represent finitude is questionable. She is subjunctive and infinitive, because she is formed in an endless circular movement. When a woman is left to do only minor acts and is unable to generate full effects for her own cause, Irigaray (1993) calls her infinity “abyss and night” (p. 7).
Irigaray challenges predominant assumptions of space and time. In her way of establishing an ethics of sexual difference, Irigaray interrogates issues related to “pure space,” “ecstatic time,” presence, absence, and the “place which gathers and protects everything” (Chanter, 1995, p. 149). Irigaray argues that all philosophical paradigms neglect to theorize how a woman’s body serves as a receptacle for a man and is used as a kind of envelope in order to help a man sets limits and boundaries. A woman thus does not have a place for herself but is rather a place of others. She is the one who gives shape to forms; she is the envelope through which a man draws boundaries, articulates limits, and creates coherent wholes (Chanter, 1995). According to Irigaray, rethinking space means to rethink the mother’s mucous, skin, blood, and milk—the amorphous fluids associated with the maternal body. The mother’s protective membrane, blood, and milk, which are essential for the growth of the fetus, are suppressed in speech. A woman is treated as a place to provide for others. She is the provider for men’s comforts to actualize their cause, cut off from the abstract, and transition to the concrete.

Irigaray adumbrates the thesis that women do not realize that they annihilate themselves, constitute their own oppression, and lose their own voice in the depths of their assimilation of sameness. In order for a woman to speak feminine language and discover her cause and the infinite place within herself, not simply to quest for infinity, she has to differentiate herself from her mother’s identity and dis-identify from the sameness of patriarchal expectations. As I mentioned in chapter 1, Irigaray maintains that when a woman is undifferentiated from the maternal and blindly assimilates her mother’s mirages, she becomes dependent on the masculine Other, mimes masculine language, and fails to realize her femininity.

When a woman is subjugated by patriarchal oppressions, she becomes a passive wife and a passive mother and lacks access to her desire. She becomes the object of a man’s striving for control and a victim of humiliating forms of submission
only because she does not realize her own desires. Because of her lack of limits, she becomes men’s threatening force and remains stuck with men’s attempts to dominate and control her. Benjamin (1990) resorts to the idea that the problem of a woman’s desire lies in the daughter’s undifferentiation from the mother, which means that the daughter becomes a woman without having desires of her own. Likewise, her alienating submission is bound up with her fantasy that if she submits to an ideal man, she will escape from her problem of understanding her needs and desires as separate from him. By being desirable and igniting the passion of others, she ends up becoming more of an object used by a man than a subject who can realize her own cause. Because of the fact that she is not active in desiring something for herself, her power then “consists not of the freedom to do as she wills, not of control over her own destiny, but at best control over others” (p. 456). Using Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of the girl’s psychosexual development, Benjamin (1990) concludes that penis envy should be seen as the organizer of a woman’s assimilation to masculine ideals, of “female masculinity,” and not as the organizer of femininity (p. 469). A grown woman who has not resolved her penis envy resorts to love relationships with men with the hope that she will receive something from them which she does not have herself.

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As I describe in Appendix B, Freud understands the girl’s differentiation from her omnipotent preoedipal mother by formulating his Oedipal theory: the little girl realizes that her mother is defective in comparison to her father and turns her love towards her father in order to get the phallus from him. One should keep in mind, however, that when Irigaray critiques psychoanalytic theory for failing to represent a woman’s difference from masculinity and for conceptualizing the girl’s differentiation from the maternal as a means to hate and devalue her mother, she still misses
Lacan’s psychoanalytic point: the hysterical woman experiences a masculinity complex and attempts to find the ideal signifier that would represent her sexuality. Consciously or unconsciously, the hysterical woman depreciates her mother for her inability to provide her with the phallus. Irigaray also fails to realize that Lacan provides a structural psychoanalytic theory to explain sexuation. Although feminists interpret Lacan’s concept of the phallus as the male organ and critique him for privileging the male body, Lacan provides instead a complex description of the symbolic phallus and lays out its difference from the imaginary phallus. Therefore, if we look more closely at his concepts of the phallus, the symbolic Other, and *jouissance*, we will realize that Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory includes and expands further on Irigaray’s notion of sexual difference and Butler’s theory of gender.

### 2.21 The Phallus

Throughout his work, Lacan tells us that the phallus “is the signifier that has no signified, the one that is based, in the case of man, on phallic *jouissance*” (Lacan, 1998b, 81). In *Écrits*, Lacan (2006) contends that the phallus is not a “concrete idea” or a “symbol” (p. 579/690). When feminists understand the phallus as the same as the penis, they disregard Lacan’s thesis that the phallus is a signifier which designates the gap between a word and the desired image that the word represents. The phallus does not depict positive and visible properties. It rather represents a reason for the subject to desire. As a signifier, the phallus generates meaning and fixes the subject to an imaginary identification. The image associated with a word, however, only partly represents what it is supposed to represent, because there is always something lacking in that image. Lacan prompts us to conceptualize the
phallus in terms of its function in subjectivity and not in terms of stable meanings, fantasies, or symbols.

When Lacan explains his deviations from Saussure’s theory of the sign, he shows in the “Gentlemen and Ladies” example that the drawings of a man and a woman on the restroom doors are two signifiers that have no particular meaning on their own (Lacan, 2006, pp. 416-417/499). As Žižek (2002) points out, it is as if these restroom doors are reproduced twice. At the level of the imaginary, subjects understand their gender identity only by way of cultural images. Yet, these gender binaries are inherently unstable and illusory. As Butler (2004) also points out, we mostly observe this instability in drag queens, transfags, and queers whose gender performativity transgresses the sociocultural ideals of sexual difference. At the level of the symbolic, the difference between a man and a woman is mediated by the phallus. The signifier “man” makes sense only in its difference from the signifier “woman,” and vice versa. Sexual difference is not translated here into a set of symbolic meanings either. The phallic signifier does not provide stable or satisfying meanings to describe the precise nature of that sexual difference. One cannot, for example, describe adequately men’s and women’s concrete aims, goals, wants, and aspirations, because the desires of each sex are elusive; there is no specific object, goal, or aim to define their differences. We could very well say that desire is unisex. However, what Lacan means when he says that the phallic signifier (the signifier of lack-of-being) designates sexual difference, he is saying that men and women have a different relation to the symbolic Other, a relation that shows that the symbolic order cannot be sustained within meanings. As Barnard (2002b) and Copjec (1994) explain, men and women have a different relation to the limits of language.

It is worth mentioning here that Lacan’s logic of sexuation cannot be compared to the deconstructionist logic of gender. Whereas Butler understands gender within the dimension of language and views sexuality as performative and
manipulated in the interplay of various discursive practices, Lacan presents us with the paradox that subjectivity cannot be grasped in terms of sociopolitical discourses. Subjectivity is rather a site that points to the limits of signification. Hence, Lacan’s sexuated subjectivity is not a substance, but rather a site of resistance to meanings. As feminists too have observed, subjects’ discourses give rise to competing and conflictual meanings.

The function of the phallic signifier is to give access to the Other’s desire and differentiate the subject from a primordial state of oneness with the maternal. Submitting to the phallic law means that one submits to difference. The phallus marks the Other as lacking. It signifierizes some of the subject’s renunciation of its jouissance from the maternal Thing and transforms the Other into someone who has a desire that is not directed solely at the subject’s being. The Other as desire is the one who cannot provide a stable reason for the subject’s being. The “Other that allows for the absence of a reason” is the one who takes on a multiplicity of meanings and cannot guarantee how the subject will enunciate his/her unconscious desire (Fink, 2004, p. 123). The phallus, thus, designates the lack in the Other, S(A)\(^1\); it designates the fact that there is not an “objective” or neutral discourse that can guarantee what the subject will enunciate in speech. The subject’s cause of desire is enunciated in the very act of speaking. The Other cannot explain the unpredictability of the subject’s desire or how the subject is led to over-identify with one ideological discourse and dis-identify with another ideological discourse. In other words, there are no objective truths to describe subjects’ causes.

Lacan (1960-1961) clarifies that signifiers themselves do not lack anything. He writes, “There is no such thing as a missing signifier. At what moment can the lack of a signifier possibly begin to appear? In the subjective dimension which is

\(^{19}\) My computer software does not allow me to generate the symbol the way it should appear, as it is seen in Lacan’s (1998b) Seminar XX.
called questioning‖ (chapter 17). In fact, what one cannot express in language, one
does not experience. Lacan thus tells us that the signifier itself—an object, for
example, which the subject identifies with in order to satisfy the Other’s desire—only
has an effect on the subject when the subject is involved in the dialectic of desire, a
kind of dialectic which elevates the object to the status of presence-absence and
makes the object desired. Lacan (1961-1962) thus indicates to us that the mother’s
breast becomes the phallus, the signifier of desire, when the infant identifies with the
absence of mama and places its libido in language whose metonymies may relate to
the mother’s breast. The child, for example, may make its mama reappear by
playing with a transitional object, such as a blanket or a button. As I will explain
further on, when the phallus is positivized, it becomes the signifier of castration in
the sense that it names the lost primordial objects—the breast, the feces, the
absence of the mother, and the absence or threat of absence of the penis; yet, this
naming is the name of its own lack (Ragland, 2004). In other words, the symbolic
phallus, Φ, gives a positive existence to the threatened lack of jouissance (Fink,
2004). The phallic signifier is then that which signifies “presented absence” (Lacan,

The phallus is an important concept in Lacan’s work, and misunderstandings
of that concept also lead to misinterpretations of Lacan’s internal logic. The
Anglophone feminist (or poststructural) research method of discourse analysis
reaches its own impasses, for example, when it concludes that the subject’s speech
is contradictory because the subject both resists and embodies a dominant
discourse—a discourse which appears to be benign but is in reality oppressive. With
this conclusion, feminists attempt to provide an external reason for the subject’s
enunciations of these contradictions and hope change will occur when the subject
realizes that. However, clinical experience shows that subjects do not change in this
way. When other discourses are adopted, the subject still remains engulfed and
oppressed by the new “benign” discourses. If feminists understood Lacan’s logic of the phallus as the signifier of desire and the signifier of the lack in the Other, $S(A)$, they would realize that in order for the subject to be flexible in its identifications with various ideologies and to overcome the Other’s dominance, the subject first needs to develop a transference towards an Other, who no longer gives a new sign (a new explanation) for the subject’s being, but provides instead an enigmatic signifier that puts the subject’s desire into question, into motion. Feminists would then realize that subversion occurs only when the subject’s fantasy and identification with a certain discourse is called into question, and not so much when the discourses change. As Žižek (1989) and Stavrakakis (1999) point out, calling into question an ideological discourse and elevating it to the level of the signifier means to interrogate the utopian and idealistic fantasies that come with it; it means to expose its dystopia and lacking nature, to make subjects think that they cannot really be represented in a single discursive image so that they may indeed be what they exclude or eliminate from their conception of the good—in other words, so that they also identify with what was supposed to be impossible and unrepresentable for them.

On the one hand, feminists acknowledge that the Other is lacking. By challenging dominant sociopolitical discourses, practices, and “benign” assumptions about subjectivity and sexuality, feminists succeed in rearranging the old signifying order and reshaping subjects’ knowledge. Feminist epistemology succeeds in naming and conceptualizing certain discourses and bringing to light how subjects position themselves and are positioned within these available discourses. By shaking up the existing signifying order, feminists reform laws and institutional practices. Because of feminism, a vulnerable population—a population that has been abused or harassed, discriminated against due to its low socioeconomic status, diagnosed with an illness and given medication, and made to feel ashamed to communicate subjective experiences in various social contexts—is empowered and made more
aware of how discourses legitimate and perpetuate oppression and exploitation (Willig, 1999). By naming a certain discourse, feminists articulate an experience which had not been previously articulated.

On the other hand, because of feminist misinterpretations of the phallus, the real, and the symbolic, feminists cannot explain how hysteria functions, not as a sociopolitical discourse, but as a symptom in relation to the Other. Hysteria is not an organized discourse which can be understood at the level of the enunciated (consciousness) but can only be formulated at the level of the enunciation (unconscious). As Žižek (1989) points out, an ideological discourse, which might be a rigid designator that stops the metonymic sliding of meaning, is still not an absolute guarantee or meaning that one can use to make a fixed point of reference. It rather “represents the agency of the signifier within the field of the signified. In itself it is nothing but a ‘pure difference’ … in short it is a ‘signifier without the signified’” (p. 99). What lies beyond the enunciation of an external discourse to explain subjective experiences is nothing but its “inability to master the central impossibility, the constitutive lack around which human experience is organized” (Stavrakakis, 1999, p. 129).

Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory also demonstrates the following paradox: When the subject is dissatisfied with the prohibition imposed by the Law, the subject does not simply feel pain but, rather, feels pleasure in pain, which Lacan calls jouissance. The reason the subject repeats symptoms and cannot transgress his superego radically, even after he is given the choice to do so, is that his symptoms unveil an unrepresentable desire for a lost object, which is imagined by the subject as a source of total satisfaction. The neurotic, whose desire remains dissatisfied,

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20 In Lacan’s theory, jouissance always implies pleasure in pain. In his theory of sexuation, the masculine subject experiences phallic jouissance which is subservient to the superego, Law, and castration. The feminine subject experiences both phallic jouissance and the Other jouissance. The feminine subject, who loves beyond what one can articulate about it, who wants the abyss, suffers when she relates to other desiring subjects with their lack-in-being (see, Soler, 2006, p. 18).
desires only when he is subjected to prohibition. His desire transgresses the moral prohibition but not for the sake of radically altering this prohibition. As Lacan (1997) says, a commandment such as, “Thou shalt not covet”—not covet one’s neighbor’s partner, house, or servant—makes the subject covet all kinds of things merely because he is told not to. In other words, Lacan tells us that the desiring subject experiences jouissance due to prohibitions, because he desires to go on desiring infinitely. Prohibition is a recipe for having desire—a kind of desire, however, that makes the subject alienated and lack infinitely.

Lacan (2007) writes, “[T]he law remains something that is, first and foremost, inscribed in the structure” (p. 43). The hysterical subject organizes her discourse around her symptom in relation to the Other—the Other as Law or Master. Her symptom itself is structured around the Other’s hole, lacuna, or failure to represent her sexuality. As I will explain shortly, it is an unnameable trauma, which has not been articulated in words. The hysteric positions herself as the imaginary phallus—as the object of the Other’s desire—aiming to repair the Other’s deficiencies in his articulations of a truthful law. The hysteric is dissatisfied with the Other’s jouissance and articulations of truth and, because she wants to be understood within language entirely, she is trapped in her desire to relate to an infallible Other (Master). She thus has the fantasy that there is an omnipotent Other who possesses ultimate knowledge about her sexuality. Her desires and symptoms are structured around this fantasy, and thus, regardless of her transgressions of the law, she

21 Although Foucault also sees power and resistance (the subject’s refusal to obey it entirely) as linked, he differs from Lacan regarding the conceptualization of desire. Foucault sees the imposition of the law as a positive construction, as that which produces the norm (reality) and leads the subject to resist abiding its oppressiveness (Copjec, 1994). Lacan, however, shows that in every affirmation of a statement, there is an internal negation to it. For Lacan, the split subject aims at coherence but his/her unconscious desire imposes discontinuities and impasses in every coherent discourse. Thus, for Lacan, the imposition of the law accentuates the subject’s lack-in-being; it makes the subject desire something which is not articulated in any discourse.
remains an unrepresentable void in her attempts to be desired by an infallible Master.

I should mention here again that Lacan’s logic differs significantly from the poststructural conceptualization of gender and the Other. Whereas Butler recognizes that the subject is constituted through exclusions, she still tries to theorize this absence of meanings with her mistaken understanding of foreclosure. As I indicated in chapter 1, Butler assumes that, because homosexuality is “foreclosed” as a subjective possibility, the subject remains a victim of patriarchy. Thus, she suggests that only drags and queens are able to disrupt phallocentric views. Using this logic, Butler views the psychoanalytic theory of the phallus as patriarchal. Lacan, however, leads us to a different kind of logic. He shows us that the sexuated subject, regardless of its sexual orientation, disrupts the reality of dominant discourses by exposing the limitations of language. He also shows that the hysterical subject, who is unconsciously bisexual, mimes masculinity, as Irigaray also argues, only because she is phallicized, which means that she tries to be entirely within the symbolic order—an attempt which, of course, fails and which leads her instead to constitute herself as a void, as a voiceless subject whose desires remain dissatisfied.

Lacan insists that the concept of the phallus is multileveled and polarized. Its polarization involves two dimensions of language—the imaginary and the symbolic. It also involves two structural dimensions of subjectivity—the castration complex and castration. By differentiating between Lacan’s notions of the castration complex and of castration, we are led to differentiate between the hysterical and the feminine subject. In other words, we can distinguish between the subject who is alienated within language, subjugated by the Other’s desires and demands, and mortified by the phallic fantasy—a fantasy which involves the idea that there is an omnipotent Other who can provide ideal answers to subjects’ questions—and the subject whose
desire is purified and whose *jouissance* exposes the Other’s powerlessness and lack in subversive ways.

§

According to Lacan, whereas the imaginary phallus represents the subject’s alienation within language, the symbolic phallus represents the subject’s separation from the Other as demand. At the outset, the child identifies with its mOther’s desire (the mOther’s want-to-be) by trying to be the phallus in order to complete her—in other words, the child is the imaginary phallus when it strives to be the object that would presumably give the mOther *jouissance*. In the preoedipal phase, however, the mother is not experienced as lacking by the child but as omnipotent. The child learns to speak and the child’s being is represented by signifiers. The mother is the one who comes and goes and breastfeeds, and whose loving gaze, voice, and touch seduce the child. The child becomes a passive object of her *jouissance* and its whole body is taken “as an erotic doll” (Soler, 2006, p. 131).

Lacan (2006) though also points out that the child refuses to satisfy the mOther’s demand that the child be her erotic love object, because in order for the child to desire and become something more than what it is, the mOther needs to have a desire for something else too, and not only for the child (p. 524/628). When the mOther desires something more than the child, she also shows that she lacks, that she is not whole. The mOther then leaves a memory trace of completion in the child’s mind. The grown-up subject desires to refind this lost satisfaction in speech, possessions, and accomplishments. The mother’s partial corporeal objects—the breast, the gaze, the phoneme, the feces, and the urinary flow (or, since Irigaray also identifies these objects as fluids and air, mucous, milk, saliva, blood, gas, and tears) produce a real rem(a)inder in one’s articulations of speech: a rem(a)inder
which fell away as a fragment of the mother’s body. Lacan calls this remainder *objet petit a*—the object which elicits the subject’s desire.

Lacan does not focus on good or bad mothering or on the mother as a totalized person. Lacan rather insists that maternal omnipotence is interrupted by the intervention of a third term—the phallic signifier. As Soler (2006) argues, the Freudian oedipal structure divides two functions: “on the one hand, there is an object of primary satisfaction and on the other a limit-function” (p. 111). Freud’s theory, however, has been distorted by other psychoanalytic theorists who have conceptualized the subject’s misfortunes as a result of a bad or defective maternal love. Feminists, of course, express their criticisms of these neo-Freudian psychoanalytic theories, arguing that the notion of bad mothering gives legitimacy to the power of the father and, thus, to patriarchy. Soler (2006), however, brings to our attention another important point in Lacan’s theory. She writes:

> It is not the lack of love but too much of it that is harmful and that calls for a necessary effect of separation. This is why Lacan accentuated the mother’s desire. This is to be understood as the desire of a woman in the mother, a specific desire to limit maternal passion, to make her *not completely* mother: in other words, *not completely* concerned with her child, and even *not completely* concerned with the series of children, the sibling rivals. (p. 120)

We see here that Lacan’s theory regarding the daughter’s differentiation from the maternal and the mother’s desire to be a woman is the same as Irigaray’s. Irigaray argues that the hysterical woman is someone who has not been differentiated adequately from her mother’s alienating and patriarchal desires. Irigaray understands this differentiation as the daughter’s recognition of her mother’s Otherness. A woman, for Irigaray, is more than a mother. A woman is not reduced to the external demands to care for others, but is rather someone who asserts her singularity. She has an expansive *jouissance*, because she also transcends the expectations of patriarchal norms.
According to Lacan, from the moment that the mother appears to have a desire of her own—a desire which is not directed towards the child but elsewhere—she is experienced as deficient and incomplete. Language then functions to name the mother’s desires and this process of naming occurs when the Name-of-the-Father as a signifier intervenes in the symbiotic dyad of mother-child. The Name-of-the-Father “creates a rift in the mother-child unity and allows the child a space in which to breathe easy, a space of its own” (Fink, 1995, p. 58). Here, the reader should realize that Lacan differs from what we occasionally find in Irigaray’s romantic theory of establishing a harmonious mother-child dyadic relationship (Ragland, 2004). In the dialectic of desire, Lacan argues, there is no signifier that can establish a direct rapport between two subjects. The child’s initial identifications with images that form its ego are detached from the mother’s desires. When the child enters into the symbolic, he or she couples with the signifier of the Other’s desire, not with another human being, and his or her desires are subjected to various displacements. In other words, each subject partners with his/her own Other (unconscious) and not with the concrete other.

Lacan theorizes that the little girl undergoes two kinds of experience of lack during the Oedipal complex: privation and castration. With his concept of privation, Lacan attempts to theorize more rigorously the Freudian theory of penis envy. According to Lacan, privation is “the real lack of a symbolic object, the symbolic phallus, and it applies exclusively to women” (Chiesa, 2007, p. 75). When the little girl perceives the penis as absent, it is because she has the notion that it should be there. What is lacking in her mind, however, is the symbolic object (the symbolic phallus). Her vagina does not lack anything in the real. The male organ, thus, turns into the symbolic phallus only because it involves the opposition of presence and absence in the dialectic of desire. Lacan (1993) argues that a woman does not realize her sex “by identification with the mother, but on the contrary by
identification with the paternal object” (p. 172). Because there is no symbolization of the female organ—in other words, at the level of desire (at the symbolic level) she cannot assume her lack by identifying with her mOther’s lack—she identifies with the man, who is the bearer of the penis.

The feminist criticisms of the above argument are well-known. By arguing that Lacan is patriarchal, Irigaray (1985b) even goes so far as to contend that even though a woman does not have a penis, she has “two lips” (p. 28). Hence, Irigaray argues that her metaphor of the “two lips” implies that a woman’s sexuality and identity are plural; a woman’s pleasure is not located in a single male organ and is not even located in her vagina or clitoris. Her feminine pleasure comes from her whole body. Where one of her identities ends, another one begins. A woman’s sexuality is locatable in the multiplicity, ambiguity, and fluidity of discourses. A woman goes beyond dichotomous discourse. She is the remainder of what the rigid patriarchal discourse fails to represent of her. But, if we were to imagine what Lacan would have responded to Irigaray’s metaphor of the “two lips,” we can be sure, based on his Encore seminar, that he would have said—“yes, indeed, that is Woman!” Lacan’s Woman does not differ from Irigaray’s. Since the feminine subject is someone who transcends the finite logic of patriarchal discursive dichotomies, Anglophone feminists are also in sync, without realizing it, with Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory of the feminine subject.

Like Irigaray, Lacan is clear that hysteria is not the same as femininity. In Seminar XVII, Lacan (2007) argues that the hysteric is someone who suffers from her frustrations of being deprived of the phallus. Lacan (2007) writes,

Isn’t it to this experience, however much it could have altered his attitude subsequently, that we owe the fact that Freud observed ... that everything he was ever able to do for hysterics ends in nothing other than what he pins down as Penisneid? Which means, explicitly, when it is spelled out, that where this ends is in the girl’s reproaching her mother for not having created her a boy, that is, in carrying
forward onto the mother, in the form of frustration, what, in its meaningful essence, and in such a way that it gives the hysterics discourse its place and its living function with respect to the master's discourse, is divided into, on the one hand, the castration of the idealized father, who yields the master's secret, and, on the other hand, privation, the assumption, by the subject, whether feminine or not, of the jouissance of being deprived. (p. 99)

In Seminar III, Lacan (1993) contends that the hysteric, who has not resolved her penis envy, “literally uses the penis as an imaginary instrument for apprehending what she hasn’t succeeded in symbolizing” (p. 178). With her symptoms, the hysteric asks the question, “What is a woman?” and attempts “to symbolize the female organ as such” (p. 178). This theory seems to be even more confusing when we read from Lacan and post-Lacanian theorists that Lacan does not reduce castration to the missing male organ, as Freud did. It has been argued that Lacan’s castration refers to the subject’s realization that the Other (man or woman) does not have the phallus22 and to renunciation of the subject’s attempt to be the phallus for the mOther. The subject’s renunciation to be the phallus for the mOther involves giving up a certain jouissance—jouissance that is “squeezed out of the body [and] is refound in speech” (Fink, 1995, p. 99). By sacrificing a certain jouissance to the Other as language, the subject lets this jouissance circulate in the Other and attempts to gain it in the form of knowledge, possessions, talents, achievements, and so on. Thus, unlike Freud, Lacan conceptualizes the Oedipus complex as revolving around the dialectic of being versus having the phallus. When the child, for example, begins to notice that she is not the sole object of her mother’s desire, because the mother enigmatically desires other things, she begins to inquire as to who has the phallus—in other words, who has the object of the mother’s desire. One answer is that the mother’s partner has the phallus. The child then concludes that the phallus is a number of possessions and qualities which the child does not have.

22 Since the phallus is the signifier of desire, there is no subject who has a specific quality or attribute that would ensure his/her omnipotence or infallibility.
but the mOther’s partner does. Up to this point, it is no wonder that Grosz, Butler, and other feminists find that the phallus is not a neutral term, because it also refers to the male organ.

To go on a bit further with the ambiguity of the term, the hysteric thinks she is deprived of the phallus. Hysterical deprivation is not seen as the dispossessment of materials or talents but, instead, as deprivation of knowledge about her sexuality. Parenthetically, I should mention here that, day in and day out, psychoanalysts witness the fact that there are many hysterics who are rich in possessions and talents, but regardless of these possessions, they are still dissatisfied. What is particular about the hysterical subject is that she understands the Other’s desire (the Other’s lack-in-being) as what she lacks as an unconscious subject, as a subject of the signifier. As I will explain further in the subsequent chapters, the hysteric feels the void, suffers from her lack-in-being, and desperately searches for being. As Soler (1995) also explains, one of her strategies is to get herself loved and desired by the Other. She has a sense of being when she knows that she has a place in the Other. When she encounters her lack-in-being, she questions the Other’s desire and tries to make the Other incomplete so as to be the sole loved object for the Other.

Because the hysteric is an effect of the signifier—is represented by the signifier—she suffers from reminiscences. Without knowing why, she doubts and desires to know the true cause of her being in relation to the Other. She sees that the Other is incomplete—the Other cannot provide adequate signs for her being—and constitutes herself as the object that can make the Other desire. The hysteric thus covers over her castration (−φ), her separation from the Other, by both divining the Other’s power, mastery, and desire for knowledge and by constituting herself as an object with the fantasy that she can complete the Other’s void with her being. Thus, the hysteric cannot really exist without relating to a Master. She desires as if she
was a man. Her desire is the same as a man’s desire. For the hysterical, the Master is usually a man, a doctor, or a professional who is imbued with power and knowledge.

What exactly does the hysterical subject cover over and what does it mean to say that she is deprived of phallic jouissance? Lacan tells us explicitly that, because she wants to be the cause of the Other’s desire (and in the preoedipal phase, she wanted to be the loved object of her mOther's desire), she covers over her castration, which means that she covers over that which has not been represented in language, which is her sexuality. In Lacan’s theory, the hysterical is not adequately separated/differentiated from the maternal. Inadequate differentiation from the maternal is translated here into inadequate symbolic intervention of the paternal function in the mother-child imaginary dyadic unity. As one sees in Freud’s case studies of hysteria, the hysterics’ fathers were either villains or ill (Verhaeghe, 1999). Lacan (1960-1961), however, also reassures us that his terms castration and penis envy are signs, metaphors (substitutions) (chapter 3). The father is thus not approached as a totalized person, but is understood as a linguistic function. In the case of little Hans, for example, we see that Hans’ father, who was a good guy, did not adequately intervene to separate Hans from the engulfing and devouring erotic desire of the imaginary Other (Hans’ mOther). When one understands lack and castration as metaphors and the paternal function (the phallic signifier) as a linguistic function, one may also realize that there are case studies in which the biological mother instates the Law in the child’s subjectivity and the biological father functions as the engulfing imaginary Other.

By being insufficiently separated from the imaginary Other, the hysterical is caught in onerous bodily and emotional pain. The hysterical repeats symptoms and her symptoms revolve around something that is unnameable, unrepresentable with words. What is unrepresentable is an early experience of sexual trauma by which the hysterical reacts with “disgust or revulsion” (Fink, 1997, p. 117). The traumatic
event is evoked by analogous subsequent memories and events. With her various symptoms, the hysterics circles around this unrepresentable black hole. The hysteric desires to give a name to that hole. Every signification that fails to name it leads the hysteric to develop some kind of superficial and dissatisfying speech. One could say that the hysteric’s speech is cut off from her symptoms. Her body and emotions depend on the Other’s significations to name this traumatic lacuna. As I explain in chapter 3, the hysteric’s solution to her impasse is to become the object of the Other’s desire, which means, to become a sign (a meaning at the imaginary level) for the Other—a kind of sign that ends in nothing. The sign fails to symbolize what is experienced by the hysteric as extremely painful jouissance. Being the object of the Other’s desire is the hysteric’s method to avoid castration.

Because of the fact that the hysteric has not symbolized this hole, she has not been able to grasp it as a loss and, thus, to have a desire different from the Other’s desire. As Fink (2004) explains, when something is not symbolized, it is not experienced as a loss by the subject. When we name the absence of something, the subject becomes aware of her loss. She gives up some of her symptomatic jouissance and, with words, she “drains away its onerous charge” (p. 139). Giving up jouissance and symbolizing one’s being with words is, for Lacan, castration. When the hysteric symbolizes an absence or a lack, she gives a positive existence to it. Lacan symbolizes this positivization as Φ. Φ is the phallic signifier that gives the power of signification, the signifier which “sublates the loss into something positive” (Fink, 2004, p. 139). The subject names the absence and becomes more the master in her own house, so to speak. She is able to talk about the trauma without feeling pleasure in pain. When she puts herself into words, she is able to separate from the Other’s lack—from the Other’s inability to name her lack-in-being. She is able to have access to language in such a way that language itself does not mortify her, does not petrify her with those meaning effects which, in any case, had failed to
signifierize her lack-in-being. In Lacan’s theory, only then is the hysteric able to become a woman with “two lips.” More specifically, to use Lacan’s terminology, only then is she able to move from having a symptom in relation to the Other to becoming the symptom of the Other (see Soler, 2006, pp. 62-66), the symptom of a man’s finite and dichotomous logic.

Psychoanalytic experience shows that the hysteric suffers from a primal experience of sexual disgust. Disgust is her onerous, painful jouissance, caused by an early traumatic event. As I indicate in chapter 4, for the hysteric, her own body image is disgusting, fragile, and vacillating—her feminine organ is desexualized, as if it were lacking something at the imaginary level. Because she desires to find a sign that would establish her own femininity, she devotes herself to repairing a deficient symbolic Other with her symptoms, at the expense of her own and the Other’s well-being. Her method is to devote herself to receiving the sign of femininity. She ends up becoming masculinized, becoming the imaginary phallus for a man’s desire. What she receives in return is something she does not want. Lacan’s notion of the hysteric’s endless desire to receive the phallus from the Other is similar to Freud’s notion of Penisneid and to Irigaray’s notions hysterical “abyss and night” and of the hysterical incapacity to create or to discover her femininity and her infinity.

2.22 Masculinity and Femininity

In Seminar XX, Lacan (1998b) provides a diagram to describe sexuation. On the masculine side of the diagram, Lacan formulates men as being subjected to the phallic function. He provides two contradictory statements to describe masculinity in regard to the phallic function: an affirmative statement and a negation. Fink (2002) describes these statements in the following way:
All of man’s jouissance is phallic jouissance. Every single one of his satisfactions may come up short. Nevertheless, there is the belief in a jouissance that could never come up short, the belief in another jouissance. (Fink, 2002, p. 38)

Lacan tells us here that the phallic function is limited and finite and the masculine subject comes to be wholly inscribed in that finitude. In *Étourdit*, Lacan prompts us to understand the inscription of the phallic function as that with which subjects try to make sense and positivize with words the absence of a sexual relationship. Man’s pleasure is determined by the phallic function—in other words, it is limited to the interplay of signifiers. The masculine subject, however, fantasizes an exception to his inscription—an exception which points to infinity. As Barnard (2002b) maintains, this exception makes him not identify fully with castration. Although he is wholly subjected to the rules of the signifier, he also maintains some distance from it by believing that the Symbolic Law cannot inscribe his *jouissance* entirely. In a man’s logic of finitude there is always something which escapes—this exception exposes the impotence of the functioning of the symbolic Law. In other words, the masculine subject is fixed by the exclusion of the phallic inscription and relies on this exception to realize that there is a limit to the law.

The masculine subject has a relationship with object *a*, which Lacan places on the side of the feminine in the aforementioned diagram. As I indicated earlier, for Lacan, object *a* is the real remainder, the leftover of what one attempts to represent in language. In one’s articulations of speech, what is left out is a rem(a)inder. The subject desires to understand what seems to be incomprehensible about femininity and the maternal fragments. As Žižek (1989) points out, the masculine subject seeks out “maternal substitutes.” However, his fantasy of the maternal “is reduced to a limited set of (symbolic) features” (p. 119). As soon as he comes close to the maternal Thing, he feels anxiously suffocated. Ragland (2004) further points out that a man loves a woman with his fantasy that there is “a totalized essential
Woman—a kind of Ur-mother—who is thought (in Kleinian fashion) to contain the object(s) that Lacan says cause desire—the gaze, the breast, the urinary flow, the feces, the voice, the (imaginary) phallus, the nothing, and the phoneme” (p. 3). Thus, a man understands the cause of his desire via the fantasy that there is a complete Woman. This fantasy situates him in a finite and fixed logic. Yet, as Barnard (2002b) elaborates, although a man is wholly alienated in the symbolic function, he still takes exception to it in a certain way by also believing that there is something ungraspable about a woman. It seems to me, then, that when a man becomes surprised by an encounter with a woman’s infinity, he is able to realize that the automatic and law-like functioning of the symbolic order is an illusion. When a man relates to a hysterical female subject, he feels suffocated by her symptomatic dissatisfied desire and makes every effort to control her. The hysteric also validates his fantasy that there is a signifier to describe femininity. Thus, the hysteric plays an important role in his fixed and finite constructions of reality.

On the feminine side, Lacan understands woman as being “not wholly” (pas tout) inscribed in the phallic function. As Fink (2002) puts it:

> Not all of her jouissance is phallic jouissance .... All the jouissances that do exist are phallic, but that does not mean there cannot be some jouissances that are not phallic—it is just that they do not exist: they ex-sist. The Other jouissance can only ex-sist, it cannot exist, for to exist it would have to be spoken. (p. 39)

Unlike the masculine fantasy that there is a representable Woman, Lacan’s Woman proves that this fantasy is impossible, or even ridiculous. When Lacan (1998b) tells us, “Woman cannot be said,” “Woman has a relation with S(A),” “woman does not exist, woman is not whole” (pp. 7 & 81), he means that the masculine fantasy about a woman is erroneous, treacherous. Lacan (1998b) goes so far as to say that, because a woman is the impossibility and the inconsistency of the symbolic order, a
rem(a)inder that emerges in language from within, she is indeed the one who possesses a man and he is the “one who obeys orders (à la botte), not her” (p. 73).

In his sexuation diagram, Lacan shows that woman couples with the symbolic phallus (with Φ, not with −φ) and triples with the signifier of the lack in the Other, S(A). As Barnard (2002b) elaborates, although woman inhabits language, she inhabits it not as “a simple absence but as a mode of presence.” She has, in other words, “a strange form of positivity” (p. 178). Unlike the hysterical subject, who is inhabited by the Other’s lack and void, the feminine subject unveils something that is excessive, unlimited, and destabilizing in language. By having a relation to the contingency of the effects of the signifier and the failures of a rigid discourse, woman is able to engender something new in the automatic law-like functioning of the symbolic order. Woman “exhorts from and returns to the Law a certain strange corporeality” (Barnard, 2002b, p. 179). In her relation to the Other, she has an unpredictable and “mysterious presence to the Law” which exposes its impotence (p. 178).

The masculine subject is wholly inscribed in the phallic function. However, as I indicate in chapter 3, language itself is failing. In every affirmation, there is a contradiction, an exception. No subject can fully say what he intends to say because the word itself misses its referent—it cannot describe the lost maternal bliss of unity and fullness. Following Barnard’s (2002b) descriptions, the masculine subject believes in this exception because he desires to know the meaning of the absolute Woman, but he cannot possess that meaning. One could thus say that as much as one believes in exception, one is fully caught up in language. This is because in every exception, there is an affirmation and in every affirmation, there is an exception. In other words, every time one tries to give substance to the Other, one realizes that meaning is a failed meaning; meaning does not have meaning. As
Barnard (2002b) writes, "the phallus is at once both the signifier of enjoyment and its negation" (p. 177).

The feminine subject, on the other hand, is alienated within language without exception. With her not whole position, woman is neither inside nor outside the phallic function; she goes beyond phallic representation. One can, of course, see here why a man experiences a woman as adorable and as a threatening force to the social order at the same time. Woman both is subjected to and escapes the rules of the signifier. Lacan provides the notation, S(A), the signifier of the lack in the Other, to indicate that her relation to language is not all phallic. Woman lacks a limit. She is the absence of the limit, because she is not entirely susceptible to castration (Copjec, 1994).

To explain this further, woman is the place where meaning slips away. Instead of looking for a new signifier to fill up the hole that governs the unconscious, woman experiences an unlocatable jouissance, which transforms sense and logic into non-sense and non-logic. Unlike the hysterical subject who searches for the signifier to make sense of her unconscious discourse and who experiences onerous bodily and emotional pain, the feminine subject is not wholly bounded by the rules of the signifier. She is not pinned down by the signifier, not explained by it; she is not its slave. She becomes the real (enjoying body) in the sense that she extracts from the Law something strange. She shows that the signifier is stupid and cannot sustain its imaginary hold. Paradoxically, she shows its stupidity by identifying with it—in other words, by identifying with the signifier's impossible representation. She identifies with the impossibility of its representation. She does not expect to receive that signifier from the Other, but instead becomes it (ça).
2.3 Ethics

In Seminar VII, Lacan (1997) situates the ethics of psychoanalysis in what he calls the “the tragic sense of life” (p. 313). According to Lacan, tragedy has the cathartic aim of purging the passionate emotions of “fear” and “pity” (p. 247). Lacan emphatically opposes the term “ethics” to other terms, such as the “sovereign good” and “morality,” in order to emphasize the idea that, in psychoanalysis, we are not dealing with moral prohibitions and legal codes, but with the ethos of a living person who has habits, affects, and unrealized desires in relation to the Other. Lacan opposes his notion of ethics to the traditional notion of morality. Lacan does not conceptualize the ethics of psychoanalysis in the same way as we understand the law in terms of its coerciveness and oppressiveness. Ethics does not refer to prohibitions, taboos, discursive practices, and legal codes. For Lacan, the ethical subject is the subject of the drive, the subject who trespasses the mandates of the Law and is no longer captured by the Other’s desire (by the Other’s enigmatic desire) in assuming its own cause. The ethical subject is the analyzed subject who is able to assume its own cause without being decentred by the Other’s desire. It no longer looks for anOther’s desire to guarantee its own existence. The subject who does not act ethically is the one who fears the experience of finding him- or herself in an entirely different territory—a territory which involves his or her realization of his or her pure desire (Zupančič, 2000).

Lacan tells us that psychoanalytic practice is not just the practice of uncovering the unconscious, but is also the practice of transforming the analysand’s desire in relation to the Law. Lacan (1997) writes,

What the subject achieves in analysis is not just that access, even if it is repeated and always available, but something else that through the transference gives everything living its form—the subject, so to speak, counts the vote relative to his own law. This law is in the first place
always the acceptance of something that began to be articulated before him in previous generations, and which is strictly speaking Atè. Although this Atè does not always reach the tragic level of Antigone’s Atè, it is nevertheless closely related to misfortune. (p. 300)

This Atè, this misfortune, that Lacan talks about is the subject’s second death—a kind of death that results in a loss, not the loss of the individual, but the loss of the individual’s lack-of-being. The ethical subject gives up her pathos by suspending her castration anxiety (¬φ) and undergoing positivization of her castration (Φ). Positivization of castration implies that the subject recognizes that the Other has nothing more to give, that the Other is lacking and has its own desire. The subject thus no longer covers over her own lack and the Other’s lack, no longer becomes the object of the Other’s desire. The subject instead sacrifices her own being, the being which is experienced as jouissance in suffering, and ends the repetitions which revolve around her past traumas.

Following Žižek (2002), a subject acts ethically when she is not spoken by the Other. The Other no longer speaks through the subject. The subject does not relate to the Other’s hole, lacuna, or failure to represent her traumas, her being. The ethical subject “is the Thing directly, thus excluding herself from the community regulated by the intermediate agency of symbolic regulations” (p. 70). The ethical subject, in other words, comes to be the real on her own. She becomes the subject of affect, the subject of jouissance, whose desire no longer works against her own satisfaction and creativity.

By taking Sophocles’ Antigone as an example, Lacan (1997) conceptualizes the ethics of desire as distinct from the ethics of traditional morality. Lacan’s admires Antigone’s act, an act which “both attracts us and startles us, in the sense of intimidates us; this terrible, self-willed victim disturbs us” (p. 247). Her ethical act is her uncompromised willingness to deviate from the cause of her own desire—a kind of desire which reveals that she values her own existence or life. Her desire
comes into being against the normative order of her community. Her desire, however, is not just to do whatever she wants or simply to act against the rules and the norms of her community. It is also not an act of submission out of fear that she will be punished by the superego. Her desire reveals instead her subjective truth. She comes to be what she is. She acts on and pursues her desire.

Following Zupančič (2000), the tragedy of pursuing desire and having access to jouissance (satisfaction) is to pay the price. This price involves giving up the very thing that gives the subject happiness and accepting instead the risk of castration. This acceptance situates the subject at the point where she feels that she has nothing to lose in realizing her desire even at the expense of sacrificing the goods and the happiness which captivated her beforehand. The ethical subject as such is not the subject who demands satisfaction from the Other but the subject whose desire is no longer compromised by the Other’s demands.

One could thus end this chapter with Irigaray’s words about speaking as a woman:

[The issue is not one of elaborating a new theory of which a woman would be the subject of the object but of jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of the truth and of a meaning that is excessively univocal .... a disruptive excess is possible on the feminine side. (1985b, pp. 77-78)]

To speak as a woman, and not to be spoken by the Other, not to mime the Other’s deficiencies and disorders, means to evoke, not to designate; it means to exceed and overflow boundaries, restrictions, and oppositions. It means to discover one’s plurality, to blur the borders between science, philosophy, poetry, and fiction. It means for a woman to be self-determined as regards her pleasures and definitions. It means to be able to create new pleasures, new representations, and new knowledge, to explore new realities and go beyond the dichotomous structures of knowledge.
Chapter 3

Lacan’s Subversions of Neo-Freudian Theories of Hysteria

In the contemporary dominant psychoanalytic milieu in the United States, Lacanian psychoanalysis has been left out of clinical practice and theory. Most clinicians today make a diagnosis on the basis of what they consider to be socially desirable and adaptive behaviors. Hysteria has been reduced to negative characterological traits. Neo-Freudian psychoanalysts claim that they reject trait theories and the static attributes that one finds in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), because their attempt is to theorize hysteria on the basis of the more complex and interpersonal dynamics behind the symptoms. However, neo-Freudian psychoanalytic theories provide many unclear explanations and constructs that give us the sense that they do not differ much from the psychiatric nomenclatures. In mainstream psychoanalysis, hysteria is theorized based on the analysis of defenses. Unconscious desire is reduced to the analyst’s own demands, ego-identifications, and interpretations of what is real and unreal.

Reading, for example, the chapter on hysteria in Gabbard’s (2000) well-known book, Psychodynamic Psychiatry in Clinical Practice, published by the American Psychiatric Press, we see how hysteria has been theorized by the logic of current trends in psychoanalysis and psychiatry. Even when neo-Freudians explain hysteria on the basis of the interpersonal dynamics behind what one sees in the patient’s symptoms, their explanations do not differ from the DSM’s “atheoretical”
listing of overt symptoms and behaviors, when they conclude that hysterics are orally fixated,\(^\text{23}\) primitive, demanding, attention-seeking, flirtatious, and manipulative by exhibiting acting-out behaviors\(^\text{24}\) with narcissistic, masochistic, and borderline features (Gabbard, 2000). Consequently, psychotherapists focus solely on the elimination of symptoms without taking into much consideration how these

\(^{23}\) Gabbard concentrates on Freud’s theory of fixation. In Freud’s theory, fixation is tied to a particular developmental sexual stage, because its instinctual component is more powerful than the corresponding instincts of other sexual stages. In fixation, the individual’s libido continues to derive satisfaction from that particular instinct and this satisfaction evolves into a symptom (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). Lacan (1998a), on the other hand, reinterprets Freud’s theory of the drive. For Lacan, the drive is determined in part by the function of the signifier and refers “to a strong, or even overwhelming want or requirement that feels like a necessity, but that is in fact not a matter of survival” (Jaanus, 1995, p. 120). Lacan states that the function of drive is jouissance (satisfaction). It seeks jouissance without moderation. However, the drive has nothing to do with reproduction, instincts, and biological needs, e.g., hunger and thirst, because satisfaction of need does not satisfy the drive. Whereas satisfaction of need produces homeostasis in the organism, the drive, which is a constant force towards jouissance, alters this homeostasis. In \textit{Écrits}, Lacan refers to the drive with the notation, \(\mathbb{S}^{\alpha}\mathbb{D}\), and states that it is the result of the Other’s demand when the subject vanishes in that demand (692/817). Any demand that comes from the Other makes the subject experience a lack of full satisfaction. The subject fades in the Other’s signifiers. It has to consider the Other’s demands in order to become satisfied. The aim of the drive is to rectify an absolute state of satisfaction, which, of course, always falls short. Lacan (1998a) argues that the drive’s aim of satisfaction is paradoxical. When satisfaction is defined by the field of the Other, the subject suffers from symptoms and renounces pleasure.

Gabbard conceptualizes the histrionic subject, who suffers from symptoms of dependency, helplessness, and separation anxiety, as the one who has not managed to attain “mature whole-object relations” from both parents (p. 521). For Gabbard, the histrionic’s mother failed to provide enough nurturance and the patient failed to resolve the Oedipal complex. In her unconscious mind, the histrionic substitutes the maternal breast for the paternal penis, but this substitution is not satisfying, because she longs for the maternal breast. For Lacan, the oral drive, the mouth rim, is an erogenous zone, but there is no specific object that satisfies it. The hysteric, as a desiring split subject, is dependent on the Other’s demands and desires. The hysteric confuses object a—the residue of symbolization—with the object that she assumes the Other desires and demands. In the case of hysteria, when the drive is connected to the symbolic Other and the subject desires a representation of the maternal Thing, the subject’s drive is not erotogenic, but is linked to dissatisfaction and disgust. When the drive is limited to the symbolic order, in other words to an unconscious unsatisfied desire, it loses its ergogenicity and correlates with death (Brousse, 1995, p. 114).

Lacan differentiates the subject as drive from the subject as demand and as desire (\textit{Écrits}, 722-725/851-854; Miller, 1996; Fink, 1997, pp. 207-217). Lacan (1998a) explains that, in hysteria, the oral drive links to the economy of desire. The hysteric derives jouissance from desexualized digestive zones, as we see, for example, in reactions of disgust and vomiting. In hysteria, the eroticization of the mouth is excluded and other desexualized zones become prominent sources of jouissance (pp. 172-173).

\(^{24}\) According to Gabbard (2000), hysterical patients often act-out in transference. For Gabbard, acting-out is a defense mechanism that describes hysterics’ inability to verbalize anxiety and unconscious wishes towards their therapists. Hysterics act out by engaging in self-destructive behaviors. Lacan (1962-1963) differs from Gabbard by formulating acting out in relation to the symbolic Other and not to the imaginary concrete otherness of the therapist, parent, and any other authority figure. Lacan describes acting out as wild transference but addressed to the Other’s desire. He points out that if the analyst interprets the acting out, the analyst then has very little effect on the analysand. The analysand knows what he/she is doing and resists the analyst’s interpretation. The analysand questions the remainder of the analyst’s interpretation and exposes its impasse. If the analyst prohibits the analysand’s acting out, the analysand acts out even more. In reality, the subject does not want to act out, but continues to do so when the analyst reinforces strengthening the ego in their therapeutic relationship. Lacan suggests that the analyst needs to occupy the position of the Other and listen to the analysand’s unconscious desire. Lacan (1992) also argues that when the analyst interprets on the basis of what is real or unreal for the analysand and provides a “premature interpretation,” without inquiring further as to the analysand’s desire, the analysand is more likely to act out (pp. 79-80). Acting out is not exclusive to hysteria. All patients, regardless of their diagnostic structure, may act out (see Fink’s discussion of Kris’s case of an obsessive man who acted out by craving fresh brains, 2004, pp. 52-62).
symptoms correspond to the relation to the symbolic Other—a relation which is
dissymmetrical—and to the gap between language and jouissance. Whereas in
Lacan’s theory, manifest symptoms are slippery and have a multiplicity of meanings,
Gabbard’s descriptions of symptoms, analyses of defenses, and interpersonal
dynamics propagate a form of psychoanalysis that tends to catalogue censored and
marginalized personality traits. It is as if these traits reside inside hysterics or are
parts of their psychological make-up, which determine what they do, think, and say.
It is obviously not surprising to find this banal simplicity in the descriptions of all
personality disorders. We frequently find the same symptoms, patterns, and even
etiological explanations across all diagnostic categories.

Furthermore, psychoanalysts and feminists, who combine British object
relations with Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory in order to explain hysteria, fail to
conceptualize the substantial differences between these two theories. These authors
provide incoherent and inaccurate structural descriptions of hysteria and reach
theoretical impasses.

An example of this impasse can be observed in Bollas’ (2000) descriptions of
a hysterical patient who was a transference addict and stayed in a state of
entrenchment—a state in which she remained in limbo with her symptoms. Bollas
finds that she was untreatable for the reason that her symptoms were expressions of
her erotic life. Based on his reflections on Lacan’s theory, the author explains that
this patient idealized her analyst by positioning herself as incomplete and the analyst
as powerful, but when the analyst failed to maintain that power, she chose another
one to sustain her entrenchment and eroticism. Based on his reflections on object
relations theory, Bollas interprets the hysteric’s transference as a repetition of the
internalized maternal object. The general principle of object relations theory is that
the maternal object is construed either as good or bad and is thus experienced as
satisfying or persecutory. Bollas describes the maternal object’s function in hysteria
as a split between genital dissatisfaction and performative excitation. According to Bollas, the hysteric’s embodied self is sexually deprived and her performative/narrative self is ecstatic. In other words, the patient behaved in the same ways towards her analysts as her mother did towards her at an early age. The patient eroticized the exchanges of gazes, performances, and narratives with her analysts and refused satisfaction by genital intercourse with partners. Similarly, Gabbard describes hysterical and borderline patients as lacking self-continuity and as exhibiting a fragmented and incomplete sense of self which is projected onto others. Gabbard suggests that “the therapist’s task is to connect these fragmented aspects of the patient’s self and interpret the underlying anxieties connected with re-owning and integrating the disparate self-representations into a coherent whole” (p. 445).

A number of points can be made to show how Lacan subverts the above theories considerably. Although Bollas’ and Gabbard’s observations may describe some of the overt symptoms of hysteria, we should keep in mind that they diverge from Lacan’s formulation of hysteria in relation to the Other. For Lacan, the hysteric is a split subject. Lacan’s description of splitting, however, is not the same as Bollas’ descriptions of the hysteric’s dissociation between the performative and the sexual self or the same as Gabbard’s descriptions of fragmentations with his goal to transform these patients into whole persons. Instead, the splitting that Lacan refers to is essentially the splitting between the signer and the signified. One’s pronunciation of a signifier does not make us understand its signified (meaning) in a

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25 Bollas (2000) suggests that the borderline person is different from the hysteric. He argues that the borderline has experienced the mother as causing excessive turbulence to the self by arousing feelings of anxiety, rage, shock, and loss. The borderline projects turbulent states of mind onto others (p. 9). The hysteric, on the other hand, experiences intense maternal love, but “[w]hat is missing … is an unconscious sense of maternal desire for the child’s sexual body—especially the genitals” (p. 12). In Lacanian theory, however, there is no differentiation between hysteria and borderline personality disorder. As Fink (2007) points out, in Lacan’s theory, “neurosis is defined by repression whereas psychosis is defined by foreclosure … there can be no genuine borderland between neurosis and psychosis” (p. 260). Thus, from a Lacanian perspective, one is diagnosed as either psychotic or neurotic. In Lacan’s oeuvre, diagnoses are not limited to descriptions of manifest symptoms but are rather structural and far more rigorous in theory than the diagnoses we find in contemporary psychiatry and psychoanalysis.
clear manner. Patients who display various behaviors which are not clear to us at first become clearer only after they have the opportunity to decipher signifiers which have been kept out of their consciousness. The symptom is thus articulated by the signifiers and fixes the subject to a certain mode of jouissance. These signifiers shift meanings when the patient interacts with a symbolic Other (the analyst) and when the patient has the opportunity to dialectize them. As Lacan shows in his Écrits (pp. 428-429/515), when the signifier is dialectized, it shows that it is not fixed to a single representation but rather condenses one configuration of meanings within another by its metaphoric function and instates “lack of being [le manque de l’être] in the object relation” by its metonymic function (p. 428/515). There is thus a structural disjunction between the conscious meaning of one’s discourse and the unconscious desire that is formulated in signifiers (Fink, 2004). One’s designation of a referent—that is, of a specific object—that could satisfy one’s desire is never clear or constant in one’s speech. Desire is thus structurally unsatisfiable, because the subject is always left to desire something more and something else as soon as one satisfies one’s needs.

Following Fink (2004), whereas patients are defensive and transference addicts, the manifestations of these overt symptoms should not be the pivotal focuses in analysis. Defenses are designed to keep the unconscious under the surface. In speech, the subject fails to show that he or she is coherent, and eventually produces various forms of slips, ambiguous idiomatic expressions, and double entendres. The surface signifiers in one’s discourse have nothing to do with one’s overall personality, and thus when the analyst and the analysand decipher signifiers, they are not engaged in interpretations of personality characteristics or of the self. The analyst is instead interested in the analysand’s discourse, which employs “well-known rhetorical figures to keep from saying certain things and to keep certain ideas from surfacing” (p. 72). The subject dialectizes unconscious
signifiers when the analyst adopts a symbolic position and listens from that position. The analyst thus listens neither from the position of his or her own ego nor from the position of the analysand’s ego, but from the vantage point of the subject’s symbolic Other. In other words, the analyst does not take it personally how he or she is being treated by the analysand, for example, “as a good object or a bad object, as a punitive parental figure or as a loving one, and so on” (Fink, 2004, p. 10). The meanings that the subjects produce are not clear, but they become clearer in the process of deciphering unconscious signifiers, desires, and jouissances (Fink, 1999, 2004, 2007).

Reflecting further on Bollas’ formulations of the subject’s internalization of the maternal—I should note here that Bollas’ notion of maternal internalization implies identification and does not have the same meaning as Irigaray’s notion of maternal internalization, as described in chapters 1 and 2—one should mention that whereas the parent may be experienced as good or bad and the subject may identify with good or bad traits of that parent, identification is partial. It does not imply unification, but is rather discreet.26 By identifying with a specific trait of someone, the subject does not become identical with the other (Lacan, 1961-1962, chapter 4). The trait that is identified with is a signifier of desire and has different meanings for each individual. In addition, the meaning of the trait identified with is more likely to change for the subject over time. Whereas Bollas describes the internalized object as temporal, constant, and fixed, Lacan formulates it in terms of the subject’s relationship to the signifier of desire, which points not to a full meaning but to a cut and a hole. The trait that is identified with exposes the discontinuity and

26 Similarly, Freud (1921) writes, the “identification is a partial and extremely limited one and only borrows a single trait from the person who is its object” (p. 107). Freud provides an example of a little girl who identified with her mother’s cough. Her identification signified her love for her father, but because she felt guilty for having the desire to take her mother’s place, she imitated her mother’s symptom. In Dora’s case, however, Dora’s identification with her father’s cough signified her admiration of her father and sympathy with his physical ailment. In later years, her loss of voice and coughing related to her admiration of her father’s mistress, Frau K. In Lacan’s reinterpretation of Freud, identification is conflictual and partial. The ego copies either the beloved or the unloved object. Symbolic identification is the unconscious desire of putting oneself in the same situation as the Other’s desire.
differentiation between subjects. By identifying with someone’s trait, the split subject also identifies with the Other’s lack and desires to be the Other’s precious object so as to fill the Other’s lack.

Hence, identification involves not only an imaginary but also a symbolic dimension. The object in itself—breast, parent, or transitional object—cannot fully satisfy the subject. Unconscious desire reveals the gap between the subject’s aim for satisfaction and the subject’s attachment to a particular object. In other words, Lacan rejects the dominant formulation that the hysteric fails to attain “mature whole-object relations” (Gabbard, 2000, p. 521), because no object can give total satisfaction to any subject. Paradoxically, subjects may experience objects as good and bad at the same time. For example, the “good enough parent” may be experienced as devouring by the child when that parent is always on the child’s back and does not leave space for its own desire. The bad parent may petrify the child with the master signifier of being a bad child and this master signifier may have certain effects on the child’s sexuality and identity. However, Lacan (1962-1963) argues that even when the subject is inscribed in the field of the Other by this master signifier, she is still something more than what that signifier describes her as. The unconscious subject “cuts the Other into slices” (chapter 2) and situates the Other not as absolute but as lacking. As Soler (1995) says, the unconscious subject

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27 In Seminar IX, Lacan argues that identification is not unification and that there is no such thing as the equivalence of two signifiers, e.g., A=A. The signifier A has fecundity and cannot be identical to itself. For example, we cannot say my mother is my mother, because the signifier, “mother,” cannot have a tautological value. Tautology makes a false signified, because it signifies nothing. A signifier has a value only insofar as it is what other signifiers are not. The function of the signifier is difference. In Écrits (pp. 424-435/509-523), Lacan elucidates that the functioning of signifiers in the subject’s unconscious takes place by means of metaphorical and metonymical processes. Signifiers are irreducible to the elements of language we use consciously. The functions of metaphor and metonymy show that there is not any real resemblance between signifiers, but that two or more signifiers link together through a third term. The third term is the signifier of desire and links words together by constituting them as similar. For example, if we say, “Melina is a workaholic like her mother,” we situate the signifier, “workaholic,” as the mediator between Melina and her mother in order to understand Melina as similar to her mother. Nevertheless, the signifier, “workaholic,” which combines two other signifiers, “work” and “alcoholic,” is understood in the chain of many other signifiers and does not have the same meaning in Melina’s unconscious as in her mother’s unconscious. When Melina identifies with her mother’s trait, she situates her mother as the Other of authority. Her mOther is not simply understood in terms of her personality qualities but rather as the bearer of a message. Melina is constituted by that message and the content of this signifier forms her personality in various possible ways.
who asks about the cause of her symptoms vacillates “between petrification and indeterminacy, petrification by the signifier and indeterminacy within the slippage of meaning. That’s what we might call the impasse of the subject of the signifier” (p. 48).

The hysteric’s vacillation between petrification and indeterminacy vis-à-vis the Other is clearly shown in Irigaray’s (2002) research study on hysterical grammar of enunciation. Irigaray concludes her analysis of hysterical discourse with the following findings:

a) The hysteric often utters I and you as if both were equal. She pronounces you more frequently. She relies on you in order for her to make a choice or take action. The subject in her discourse is always you.

b) She pronounces action verbs, the active voice, and the present and future tenses more frequently than the passive voice and the past tense. Her enunciation is ongoing and not complete.

c) She continually questions the addressee’s message regarding its incompleteness and ambiguity.

It is obvious that Irigaray’s findings support Lacan’s theory of hysterical discourse (Lacan, 2007). From Irigaray’s findings, we see that the hysteric is alienated in the Other’s enunciations but also brings forth the real of these enunciations. She identifies with the rem(a)inder of the Other’s signifiers and constructs the Other not as a closed system but rather as an open and incomplete one.

Whereas the subject seeks to understand its identity fully and identifies with socially acceptable ideologies, the subject stumbles upon alienation and lack. Lacan’s main thesis is that the subject is what one signifier represents to another signifier. As Lacan (1961-1962) writes, “The signifier, as opposed to the sign, is not what represents something to someone; it is what represents the subject [to] another signifier” (chapter 4). Although we consciously associate subjectivity with
fixed and stable meanings, Lacan tells us that the psychoanalyst’s main task is to go beyond this conscious lure and redirect him- or herself to the logic of the signifier—to the logic that the subject is caused and divided by the signifier. For Lacan, subjects derive meanings and coherence from the network of signifiers. The signifier has primacy over the signified and the subject is captured by the signifier’s play of successive substitutions. In the “Seminar on the Purloined Letter” (Écrits, pp. 6-48), Lacan describes the signifier as preeminent over the subject and says that its displacements and substitutions determine the subject’s acts and destiny. In his analysis of Poe’s (1912) famous story of the “Purloined Letter,” all of the characters—some of whom did not know how to find the letter, others of whom did not know the letter’s content, and still others of whom did not know how to act upon the consequences if the letter was revealed—were mobilized and kept in suspense by the signifier, which took the form of a letter.28

Lacan’s analysis of Poe’s story teaches us that the unconscious is manifested by the displacement and substitution of the signifier, which nevertheless the speaker and the listener may find unimportant. In order for the analyst and analysand to decipher the encoded message of a symptom, they will have to see how the signifier

28 In Poe’s story, the Minister, who stole a letter from the Queen and replaced it with a fake one and had the power to jeopardize the Queen’s status, ended up not using it in any significant way. The letter constituted him as a personage. As Lacan states, the Minister was constituted as an “absolute master” by the Queen, because the Queen knew that the Minister was the robber of that letter and knew that he was capable of abusing his power by having it in his possession (Écrits, p. 24/33). The Minister did not have control over that letter, but, instead, the letter inhabited, superimposed, and inscribed the topography of his unconscious. Lacan also reminds us that “the letter which the Minister address[ed] to himself, ultimately [was] a letter from a woman” (Écrits, p. 25/35). The Queen, who was powerless to act, was forced to accept the Minister’s authority over her own destiny. Lacan writes, “ladies, as we know, detest it when principles are called into question, for their charms owe much to the mystery of the signifier” (Écrits, p. 29/40). The Queen, as a woman, was caught in the desire of the Minister and entrapped in his phallic personage of omnipotence, only to prove later on, that by being totally inscribed within the symbolic function, she was in some sense outside it. By yielding the signifier of desire to the Minister, her subjectivity was mediated by the male Other, but she also situated her existence as indeterminate within the symbolic order. In fantasy, the Minister existed in the finitudes and pretentions of his powerful personage, only to find out to his surprise that the signifier represented his limits and inconsistencies. The Minister became the addressee of that letter, because it concealed a truth: it concealed the flaws of the meaning which it intended to deliver. The Minister was consciously blinded by the way that letter maintained his desire and jouissance. He unconsciously turned the letter over to the Queen, in the same way as the Queen turned the letter over to him, in order to continue having access to the image that was lacking in him and the jouissance which supplemented that lack.
constitutes the analysand’s personage and how its encoded message reveals the analysand’s unsatisfied unconscious desire. In Poe’s story, for example, we read that the police used ingenious and mechanical tactics to search for the letter in the Minister’s apartment without realizing how the Minister maintained an unconscious desire in relation to the Queen. When the Minister was gone from his apartment, the police used objective methods to investigate where the Minister hid the letter, but the police did not succeed in finding the letter by using these ingenious investigative methods. The police failed to understand the Minister’s logic: they failed to realize how the Minister maintained his unconscious desire in relation to the Queen and how he did not use the letter as it was commonly expected. The letter rather inscribed a unique message to the Minister’s unconscious and incarnated a particular form of jouissance, and so certainly the letter could not be deciphered when one used “objective” or imaginary techniques without looking at his own symbolic relationship with the Other.

Lacan also uses mathematics and set theory to show readers that even in the logic of rigorous and conscious calculations one encounters conclusive impossibilities and manifestations of the real. As Fink (1995a, 1995b) explains with clarity, in the Postface to the “Seminar on ‘The Purloined Letter,’” by using the example of coin tosses and grouping them by threes, Lacan demonstrates the linguistic structure of the unconscious and shows how “the real manifests itself within the symbolic, and thus point[s] to the limits of ‘literalization’” (Fink, 1995a, p. 153). Using the coin toss combinations as an analogy, Lacan shows that the syntax of the signifying chain allows certain combinations to occur but excludes others (see Fink, 1995a, pp. 153-164).

What we learn from this analogy is that, when a subject repeats a symptom, the subject itself is not only a construction of the Other’s signs, but also a failure to represent the object of a “lost satisfaction” (Fink, 1995b, p. 228) and, thus, to
represent what remains as an unsatisfying desire. The subject repeats an automatic and law-like chain of signifiers, but also circles around the cause of its symptoms. The signifier that describes that cause is excluded from consciousness. The subject aims to get at an early trauma, but it cannot find the words to say it. In Fink’s (1995b) words, “Repetition thus involves the ‘impossible to think’ and the ‘impossible to say’” (p. 225). Lacan (1998a) shows the difference between tuche (τυχή) (the real cause of repetition) and automaton (αυτόματο) (the automatic return of signs) by arguing that behind the endless automatic repetitions of a symptom, which situate the subject in “alienation of its meaning” (p. 61), there is the real, which presents itself in the form of an “unassimilable … trauma” (p. 55). This “unassimilable … trauma” is gotten at in analysis by the analysand’s free associations to dreams and fantasies. Dreams and the fundamental fantasy unveil an unrepresentable desire for the primal object, which is imagined by the subject as the source of total satisfaction. In dreams and fantasies, the subject situates the Other as the one who has inhibited its pursuit of satisfaction. The subject repeats a symptom compulsively, because it aims to maintain the desire to articulate this unassimilable thought.

Lacan has his own logic. By using mathemes to demonstrate his psychoanalytic logic, he shows that the real, as it manifests itself in the metonyms of desire and as jouissance, precedes language and that it stands apart, ex-sists with respect to our common understanding of reality. The real is the disharmony, the anomaly that leads to the impossibility of complete symbolization. It is that which is not yet represented by signifiers but what remains to be represented when the subject dialectizes the metaphors and metonyms of the unconscious. It is for that reason that Lacan writes,

Mathematization alone reaches a real—and it is in that respect that it is compatible with our discourse, analytic discourse—a real that has nothing to do with what traditional knowledge has served as a basis
for, which is not what the latter believes it to be—namely reality—but rather fantasy. The real, I will say, is the mystery of the speaking body, the mystery of the unconscious. (Lacan, 1998, p. 131)

Signs and symbols have limits. There is something above and beyond the realm of meaning, something outside and in excess of language. The real imposes discontinuities and impasses in the signifying chain and accounts for the impossibility of having pre-existing sets of laws and grammatical rules.

In his discussions of Frege’s logic and Russell’s paradox, for example, Lacan (1961-1962) discusses how logicians arrive at an impasse when they reduce signifiers to unambiguous representations and homogeneity. Lacan’s logic radically differs from the logic we find in analytic philosophy. In Seminar IX, Lacan (1961-1962) tells us that Russell’s question about the set of all the sets which do not include themselves, more particularly, his question whether or not that set includes itself, misses the point because a set functions as a signifier (chapter 9). Just as no signifier can signify itself, a set cannot signify itself. In fact, Lacan tells us, in order for a signifier to signify something, it has to “be pos[it]ed as different [from] itself” (chapter 17). He shows that the impasse that arises from the logic of self-reference is the result of the signifier’s metonymic function. As Lacan (1998b) writes, “the references or things the signifier serves to approach remain approximate—

29 Bertrand Russell, who was an analytical mathematician in the early 1900’s, disproved Gottlob Frege’s ambitious efforts to establish a law of non-contradiction. Frege attempted to establish a mathematical propositional law that would ensure that the knowledge one could derive from it was an indisputable certainty. His infamous Basic Law V expressed the following: If all Fs are Gs then the class of F is identical to the class of G. Frege’s Basic Law V was translated mathematically in the following way: \((\forall a (Fa = Ga)) \iff (\{x/F(x)\} = \{y/G(y)\})\). In other words, the set of Fs is the same as the set of Gs if every F is a G and every G is an F. If we take, for example, the proposition, “Something is a tree and is in this garden,” the “something” is an indeterminate x. We can substitute the x with an object that is associated with the concept, “tree in this garden.” Russell disproved Frege on the notion of set theory by identifying a paradoxical problem. He showed that not all objects behave in accordance with this equation. Although we can identify a collection of “trees in this garden,” it would be problematic to identify objectively a set of “good books in this library.” Russell also showed a paradox that was similar to Epimenides’ liar’s paradox. Epimenides’ statement, “All Cretans are liars,” was paradoxical. Being Cretan himself, the question that arose from that statement was, “Is what he says true or false?” Russell’s paradox recognized the problem of self-reference and showed that arguments and functions are not as clear and non-contradictory as Frege intended to prove. The statement, for example, A = “the set of all sets that don’t contain themselves as elements,” raises the question, “Is set A an element of itself?” This question is similar to the Liar’s paradox. If set A is an element of itself, then it isn’t an element of itself by definition. However, if set A is not an element of itself, then it is an element of itself by definition (Roberts, 1992, pp. 78-79).
macroscopic .... [T]he signified misses the referent” (p. 20). The signifier cannot represent fully what it intends to represent and, consequently, the subject cannot say fully what he intends to say.

§

Reflecting further on Lacan’s anti-essentialist approach to his theories of symptoms and identifications, and his substantial deviations from the neo-Freudian understandings of "wholeness" and the "self," one should be clear that the Lacanian subject comes to be as a failure to be inscribed as a stable meaning within language. The subject’s discursive positions and identifications overlap with the metaphorical and metonymical functions of words and meanings. When Lacan (1998b) says that the "signifier ... is characterized by the fact that it represents a subject to another signifier" and that “a sign is not the sign of some thing, but of an effect that is what is presumed as such by a functioning of the signifier” (p. 49), he is saying that the subject is not reducible to representations and meanings. Meaning is unstable because it is not found in any one single signifier, but in the play between signifiers. The notion that the subject acquires an identity from the Other is not different from contemporary psychological theories. But Lacan subverts these theories by locating the Other as the locus of signifiers and not of signs. For Lacan, the subject is caused by the splitting between the signifier and the signified.

The desiring subject and the Other are involved in a dialectical relationship. They both ask each other the question: “Chè vuoi?" "What do you want?" (Écrits, p. 690/815). The Other, therefore, calls the subject’s existence into question. The subject encounters the trauma of being questioned whether it is legitimate enough for the Other and, hence, whether or not its identifications with external images and social ideals are justifiable. The unconscious subject thwart the possibility of coherence and the subject never gets an ultimate confirmation from the Other about
the unity of its identity. The unconscious subject wants to be the signifier of the Other’s desire. The Other, as the locus of speech, cannot point to a single signifier of his desire and so the unconscious subject is in conflict with its ego and with the external discourses and images that promise self-coherence, unity, and satisfaction.

In the same vein, the subject questions the validity and power of the Law. When the desiring subject situates itself in the interrogative dialectics of Chè vuoi?, it prevents the Other’s signifying system from being complete. After all, as is often the case, one can have all kinds of phallic gratifications, from social recognition to wealth, and still experience a profound discontentment and dissatisfaction with life.

In Seminar IX, Lacan (1961-1962) further elucidates that when the subject identifies with the Other’s trait, that trait constructs the subject’s singular identity. The trait that the subject identifies with is initially marked as an image, but is then “effaced” from its status as an image and becomes transformed into a signifier. Lacan goes so far as to say that the paradox of the unary trait is that “the more it resembles” the Other whom the subject identifies with, the more this resemblance is effaced and supports “difference as such” (chapter 10). When the subject identifies with the Other’s trait, the subject is not fused, merged, or amalgamated with the Other; needless to say, the subject is not even in harmony or allied with the Other. On the contrary, the subject who identifies with the Other’s unique trait, whose value is arbitrary but yet significant for the subject, fades in his or her unconscious displacements of signifiers.

The unary trait is a unique value for the subject and thus functions as a One. By identifying with a trait of a loved object, the subject initially covers up his or her own emptiness and acquires a sense of being. The unary trait also inscribes particular conditions of jouissance which involve the loved object. What remains as a leftover from the symbolization of the trait is experienced by the subject as a particular corporal tension. The unary trait marks the body as “an enjoying
substance”—in other words, it corporizes, it transforms “the body in a signifying way” (Lacan, 1998b, p. 23).

Regardless of the subject’s identification with the Other’s single trait, the subject attempts to enunciate its own wholeness and unity and demands absolute love from the Other. In its attempts to construct a whole, the subject finds itself at odds with what remains failing, unrepresentable, incomplete, and unsymbolizable. Language fails the subject. The Other as language is fundamentally flawed and thus the subject finds out that there is no ultimate guarantor for its own completeness and consistency.

The split subject, Lacan (1961-1962) tells us, desires to know. It desires to know the trace which has appeared and has disappeared and has thus not been structured as whole and fulfilling. Through the automatism of repetition (repetition compulsion), the subject insists on something which is nothing other in its essence than a signifier, as it is rooted in an original unary trait (chapter 13). The subject fades in the function of the signifier and makes the same cycle of repetitions. The subject circles around a torus-like ring in a repetitive attempt to master the hole at its center (the real, jouissance), repeating the same symptoms over and over again. As Lacan says, “something happened at the origin which is the whole system of the trauma ... something which took on from that time the form” of the unary trait. The subject repeats the same symptom by attempting to re-emerge from that trait and the lost object of satisfaction.30 The subject becomes a pure sufferer and is sucked

30 Freud’s case of Emma, a case study of a female hysteric, is a good example with which to demonstrate how the unary trait gets transformed into a signifier. Emma was an anxious girl who was afraid of going into stores alone because she thought that people were making fun of her clothes. Her anxieties were related to two early memories. At age twelve, Emma went into a store alone and thought that the store assistants laughed at her clothes. Emma became attracted to one of them. At a younger age, a shopkeeper pinched her under her dress and thus Emma had a memory trace of someone who experienced sexual attraction towards her for the first time. Emma’s anxiety about going into stores alone was retroactively related to the mark that the Other stamped onto her body for the first time, inscribing her sexuality through the intervention of the signifier, which was the signifier of his desire for her (see Lacan, 1997, pp. 73-74). Emma thus identified with the shopkeeper’s sexual attraction towards her, which elicited sexual jouissance, and was transformed into a signifier of desire (into a symptom) that gave
in by that which "it speaks" (ça parle). Its living being is caught up in the mechanisms of the signifier (chapter 6).

The nature of the unary trait is to be lacking. As Lacan states, only in the absence of the mother’s breast is the subject able to identify the breast as a partial love object and substitute for its absence with words. The subject’s memory trace of the mother’s breast is elevated to an unattainable object a—object cause of desire—when it changes its status from that which supplies milk and satisfies the need of hunger to that which brings forth an unsatisfied desire for absolute love and wholeness. Oral demand thus situates the memory trace of the mother’s breast as an exclusive possibility of unity and wholeness. At the level of demand, the subject poses the implicit question, “What do I want?” when it speaks to the Other, but at the level of desire, the subject wants "nothing maybe" (chapter 14). The enunciated “nothing” poses the initial question of the impossibility of determining how the subject can really be satisfied by the object’s partial nature. Lacan, however, specifies that this is the difference between enunciation and the enunciated. At the level of enunciation, the subject reproduces the sign, the meaning of something the subject wants, but at the level of the enunciated (i.e., what is stated), the sign shifts to the level of the signifier where the subject is articulated in an indefinite sliding of meanings.

Is the subject a sign? Since the Other is impotent to provide ultimate answers to the subject, the subject is “the sign of nothing” (chapter 14). The subject is thus dependent on the Other for its desire. It desires the Other for its impossibility to say it all and for its possibility that the Other is hiding a precious object that could supposedly be given to the subject to achieve a sublime satisfaction. As Lacan writes, “The object of desire exists as this very nothing which

an account of that original mark from the Other (S₁). One could argue that her anxiety to go into a store reenacted her anxiety of losing the object that was the source of a supplementary jouissance.
the Other cannot know to be all it consists in” (chapter 14). The Other’s incapacity
to provide this precious object leads the desiring subject to exclude the Other for not
knowing. The neurotic, Lacan tells us, excludes the Other’s ignorance by designating
him- or herself as a victim and by telling the Other, “It is absolutely necessary that
you should know” (chapter 14). The desiring subject posits itself as a real, as
impossible, in the face of the Other. More particularly, the hysteric posits herself as
the sign that could possibly complete the Other—a sign that marks the Other but is
of course constituted as impossible.

In Encore, Lacan (1998b) asks the question, “To be hysterical or not—that is
truly the question. Is there One or not?” (p. 102). The hysterical desires the One
from the Other—the One which is “the function of desire” (Lacan, 1961-1962,
chapter 10). By identifying with the Other’s single traits, the hysteric aims at the
Other’s castration and not at the Other’s jouissance, though she contemplates what
this Other jouissance is, what makes the Other not-wholly inscribed within the phallic
function, and how the Other jouissance escapes the symbolic. In Seminar XVII,
Lacan (2007) maintains that the hysteric identifies with the Other because she wants
the Other to be a master. She wants the Other to be the master of knowledge, “but
at the same time she doesn’t want him to know so much that he does not believe
she is the supreme price of all his knowledge” (p. 129). The One that the hysteric
identifies with is what counts to her as a phallic being, as an object of desire, as the
one who is valued as precious but yet an impossible individual. By wanting to be the
phallus, she demands love; she demands to be the one who can plug up the lack in
the Other. Yet she refuses to give her body as a sexual body and withholds pleasure
from the Other. In the case of Dora, for example, Dora’s identification with Frau K’s
adorable white body, her embodied trait, and her subsequent recourse to meditating
before the Madonna, constructed particular conditions of jouissance in regard to her
sexual being. Dora played the part of a man by adoring Frau K’s body at the
symbolic level and the part of a woman by identifying with a man's interests in her. In both sexual identifications, Dora examined her father's cause of desire in order to acquire knowledge of the true essence of femininity.

The hysteric plays the parts of a man and a woman in a masquerade in her attempts to incite the Other's desire for her. Her sexual masquerade camouflages her desire to be the phallus for the Other and conceals her feminine jouissance. In Écrits, Lacan (2006) maintains that "in order to be the phallus—that is, the signifier of the Other's desire—... a woman rejects an essential part of femininity, namely, all its attributes, in the masquerade" (p. 583/694). The phallic function of her masquerade entails a loss of being. In her relationship with a man, the hysteric becomes the object cause of his desire and, by the means of triangular and at times quadrilateral identifications, maintains her desire dissatisfied. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the hysteric conforms to what she imagines the masculine Other desires her to be for him.

In this chapter, I glossed over some fundamental differences between Lacan and neo-Freudians on theories of hysteria. I argued that Lacan's theory of hysteria is neither a description of characterological traits and fixations nor a list of symptoms. Hysteria is a structure in relation to the Other. When the hysteric complains about a symptom in analysis, the hysteric is then asked to decipher this symptom at two levels: At the level of its etiological meaning—a meaning that is construed from the analysand's historical context, s(A)—and at the level of unconscious desire in relation to the Other, S(A), as it is deciphered from the place where the hysteric situates the Other in her fundamental fantasy. In the following chapter, I discuss a case study of one of my own patients, who was a female hysteric, and provide a Lacanian psychoanalytic interpretation in order to show how the hysteric structures her desire in relation to an overbearing/oppressive male Other.
Chapter 4

A Lacanian Case Formulation of a Female Hysteric

The case of hysteria that I am going to describe is that of a woman in her late 20’s whom I saw for therapy for 30 sessions. I refer to this patient with the pseudonym of Sofia. Prior to working with me, Sofia had been in therapy with two other therapists for approximately two years. By reflecting on this case, I elaborate on Sofia’s relationship to the symbolic Other and issues of femininity. Regardless of the patient’s overt cooperation with her therapists, Sofia’s case has much to teach us about the complexities of providing an effective treatment of hysterical symptoms. This case also provokes us to raise and reflect on the following questions:

What kind of sexual jouissance did Sofia fantasize about as a substitute for her unpleasurable sexual experiences with boyfriends? What was love for Sofia and what did she want from men? How can we understand Sofia’s resistance to male perceptions of the female body? How did Sofia resist the hegemonic discourses of gender and how did she identify with femininity and masculinity? How did Sofia’s suffering become a site of resistance to patriarchal discourses of femininity? How did Sofia’s symptoms signify a longing for the lost relationship with the maternal?

31 The patient whom I describe here was far from being cured of her symptoms during my therapeutic work with her. Sofia saw three doctoral clinicians in training for therapy for approximately three years. Due to the therapists’ end of practicum training, Sofia had to transfer to a new therapist each year. None of her therapists practiced Lacanian analysis. Sofia’s first therapist intervened based on the eclectic theoretical approach; the second therapist was influenced by the object-relational approach; and I was influenced by the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan, but did not practice Lacanian psychoanalytic techniques, as they are described by Fink (2007, 1997), for example, scansion and punctuation. I encouraged the patient to free associate to childhood memories, dreams, fantasies, and fleeting thoughts. Whereas I interpreted some of the latent contents of her dreams and fantasies, more work needed to be done for Sofia to realize her unconscious desires and transverse her fundamental fantasy.
I first provide a description of the case and then respond to the above questions by formulating the case from a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective. My purpose is to show readers that Lacan provides different answers to the above questions than feminists do. In order to build a bridge between feminism and Lacan, it is necessary to analyze a case of female hysteria in Lacanian terms so as to reflect on the feminist interrogations of his theory.

4.1 Description of the Case

4.11 Presenting Problems

Sofia was a Caucasian female of American descent. During the time of therapy with me, Sofia was 28 years of age and a single mother of an 8 year-old daughter. She was a graduate student in business and worked part-time as an assistant at a research center.

She sought therapy to discuss problems maintaining good relationships with friends and boyfriends. She avoided those friends who were more intelligent than her because of her feelings of inadequacy during conversations. She maintained relationships with few friends, “less intelligent” than her, but she often felt “annoyed by them” for not understanding her views on art, politics, and gender issues. Sofia fervently wished to discuss issues related to the inequalities between the sexes. She believed that women should feel more comfortable with their bodies and should not wear Victoria’s Secret products, e.g., “sexy” underwear and sleepwear. Sofia was against Victoria’s Secret advertisements, because, as she said, they portrayed women as “very thin” and “sex slaves of men.” When she was an adolescent, Sofia received Victoria’s Secret catalogues and other women’s magazines but, after her
pregnancy, she stopped buying them because she realized that she should not support their advertisements.

Sofia dated a man who was six years older than her, whom I refer to as Gerald. Sofia had already been involved with Gerald for approximately three years when she began therapy with me. Sofia described herself as being deeply in love with him. Gerald, however, did not identify himself as her boyfriend and did not commit himself exclusively to her. Sofia and Gerald often met and had sexual relations, but soon after their intimate encounters, they argued over “small issues” and separated for short periods of time. Sofia described him as a “controlling man” who showed little affection or consideration for her and was insensitive to her feelings. Gerald used to take care of Sofia’s daughter or wash her dishes when he wanted to have sex with her, but he also used to tell her that he dated other women. Sofia was attracted to his “knowledge, skills, and aloofness.” She longed for his affection, but Gerald never told her that he loved her. Although she had numerous verbal conflicts with him, she also made many efforts to maintain their relationship. Sofia was both submissive to him and defiant regarding the limited nature of their relationship.

Gerald asked Sofia once to shave her pubic hair before he would give her oral sex. Gerald found that she had “too much hair” around her genitalia. Gerald also complained to Sofia that she did not dress up in as feminine a manner as he liked. When I asked her what she thought of Gerald’s requests, Sofia said she was against Sports’ Illustrated issues, which portrayed women as shaved and thin, and which influenced men to desire these sorts of women. Sofia became infuriated with Gerald, explaining that she found his demands offensive. Sofia complained that, as a single and working mother, she did not have the time to do extra shaving or dress up in a more feminine way. Sofia added that she perceived herself as dressing in a feminine manner, but did not have time to make herself look “sexy.” Sofia sometimes
complied with his demands after an argument, because she was fearful that if she failed to satisfy his demands, Gerald would leave her for another woman. When Gerald was more available, Sofia refused to be submissive and had arguments with him.

Sofia expressed ambivalence about maintaining long-lived and steady relationships with men due to her concern with losing her “independence” and with being “easily bored.” Sofia found Gerald’s aloofness seductive. When he was inaccessible to her, she wished she was married and had a “normal romantic life.” After an argument with Gerald, Sofia was tearful and wished to have a married life with him. When both were intimate, Sofia found herself resisting the constraints of their relationship. Sofia believed that men oppress women by placing high expectations on their appearances and roles in the family.

Sofia had had many boyfriends over the years. Since the age of 13, she had had casual sex even with those who did not identify themselves as her boyfriends. During her high school years, Sofia used to smoke marijuana, drink alcohol, skip school, and associate with friends and boyfriends who behaved in similar ways.

After she gave birth to her daughter in her early 20’s, she drank alcohol and smoked cigarettes at night by herself in order to overcome feelings of intense sadness, boredom, and psychological emptiness. While she was drunk on her own, Sofia cried, listened to “depressive” music, wrote poems and stories, and played solitaire for hours. Although she often regretted spending long hours engaged in those activities, she found herself as if she was able to take away her “social mask” and be herself while drunk. Sofia associated her playing solitaire with her tendency to be alone for hours and lament her loneliness and social limitations.

When Sofia was around other people, she felt as if she was “wearing a mask” for them. Sofia’s use of the word “mask” was a metaphor to describe the dissatisfactions and disappointments in her life, especially in being a single mother,
working in a monotonous job environment, feeling misunderstood by others, and
being involved with an inconsiderate boyfriend. When she was with others, Sofia felt
she had to pretend that she was happy. In reality, Sofia was depressed and angry at
others. Sofia masked her own desires and portrayed an image of a woman who was
in control and met the expectations of others. In therapy, she was often tearful
when she discussed her relationships with Gerald, friends, and parents, as well as
her failure to be a good mother to her daughter.

4.12 Family History

Sofia grew up with both of her biological parents and three siblings. Sofia
was the first-born. She had a sister who was one year younger, a brother who was
two years younger, and another brother who was ten years younger than her.
Before her marriage, Sofia’s mother had been a nun. After marriage, the mother
stayed at home as a housewife and the father worked at an auto-body shop and
fixed cars. Her father owned his own business, but when Sofia was 11 years old, he
lost his business. Since then, her father had to work for someone else. He was not
happy with his work and complained that he was not successful. At the loss of the
father’s private business, the family had to move into a smaller house and Sofia had
to change from private to public school. Sofia explained that this was one of the
reasons why she had friends who were bad influences on her and started to drink
alcohol and smoke marijuana.

Sofia grew up in a house in which there were several conventional rules. She
was brought up in a strictly religious Catholic home and both parents were critical of
her and her siblings. All family members had to go to church every Sunday,
regardless of whether they wanted to or not. Sofia reported that her mother’s
dedication to religion impacted the family in such a way that her father and the children passively obeyed her and went to church to make her happy. Sofia recalled that, at the age of eight, her father called her to get ready to go to church with him, which she did but felt “empty and hollow.” She found church “depressing.” Sofia sensed that her father’s choice to go to church was artificial; he was simply complying with her mother’s expectations, because he was, as she knew, not a very religious man. Since then, Sofia regarded religious beliefs as “meaningless,” “useless,” and oppressive for enjoying one’s life.

Sofia described both parents as the “kind of people who would push and pull.” Sometimes they would be warm and understanding and other times angry and demanding. Many times, her mother would try to pull Sofia close to her, but when Sofia was affectionate to her, her mother criticized Sofia about her way of dressing, lifestyle, and mothering skills. Although Sofia found her father to be easier going and more fun than her mother, she was disappointed with him many times. Her father often failed to grant Sofia’s demands. For example, when Sofia asked him a question about how to fix her car, he responded in a detached way, “I don’t know.” Sofia understood his response as “ironic”—since he repaired cars for a living—and her father as “indifferent.” When Sofia did not ask for help, her father offered it. Sofia felt confused about whether or not her father loved her.

Sofia viewed her mother as “cold” and as the kind of woman who had a strong impact on her father. In her associations to her mother’s coldness and influence on her father, Sofia recalled that when she was 4 years old, she had the mental image of standing in front of the refrigerator, seeing the door of the freezer open, and finding her parents in there. This mental image was transient and it was associated with finding her mother “cold,” “fake,” “critical,” not genuinely affectionate, overpowering, and controlling with her father.
Sofia gave many examples of her mother being fake, critical, and cold: One example was that her mother cooked meals for the family, but never served them on the table. Each family member was expected to make his/her own plate from food that was prepared on the stove. Her father often raised it as an issue and demanded that she serve him; his daughters ended up doing the serving for him. Another example was that her mother always gave her ambiguous and contradictory criticism. Her mother made her feel even more worthless when she was compared with her sister, who was the most compliant and obedient child in the family. As a young child, Sofia was organized, like her mother, but she felt confused and disappointed when her mother compared her with her sister and told her, “disorganized people are more intelligent.” When Sofia misbehaved, her mother told her, “I expected this from you.” When she received compliments and hugs from her mother, she felt that her mother was being insincere. Her mother’s hugs were unusual for Sofia and when she squeezed her, Sofia felt discomfort, “weird,” and anxious at finding her unpredictably affectionate. Sofia was used to seeing her mother having outbursts for small issues. The mother occasionally used to threaten her children that she would throw them out of the house when they misbehaved.

After the birth of Sofia’s daughter, the mother told Sofia that Sofia was “80% of a good mother” towards her daughter, especially because Sofia did not take her to church more. On one occasion, the mother gave her an article to read about how to become a good parent and, on another occasion, she blamed her children for her inability to connect with them. She often told Sofia that if Sofia did not have sex with so many men, she would not have personal problems and would have better relations with her mother. Sofia expressed feelings of anger and hurt about her mother in the sessions, especially because Sofia never discussed with her their issues but just “gossiped about superficial things.” She also expressed feelings of
guilt for being too harsh in her descriptions of her mother and for not succeeding to connect well with her.

At age 16, Sofia did something wrong and her parents told her that from then on she would have to do her own laundry. At that time, Sofia felt alienated and hurt as she thought that she did not belong to them anymore.

Sofia reported that her parents did not argue with each other, but that they were not very intimate either. Sofia described her mother as being sexually reserved. When her father wanted to kiss her, she expressed distaste. At age 10, Sofia overheard her parents arguing about sex. She recalled that her father wanted sex and her mother was critical of him. When Sofia was an adolescent, her mother used to complain to Sofia about her father wanting sex and Sofia used to interrupt her, telling her that she did not want to hear that.

Sofia described her father as being “a more normal person” than her mother was before he got married. Unlike her mother, her father “lived his life by smoking, drinking alcohol, and having sex with other women.” Sofia found her father happier and more loving. However, she also said that her father criticized her just as her mother did. Sofia felt that she was not good enough or intelligent enough for either parent and complained that she never had an intelligent conversation with them. They shared nothing but “small talk.”

When Sofia was an adolescent, she heard from her sister that their father had sexually abused Sofia’s sister at a young age. Sofia reported that her sister never told her the details of the abuse and that she never asked her for them. Sofia expressed disbelief and uncertainty as to whether or not this actually happened or whether her sister misinterpreted their father’s intentions. Sofia, however, recalled that when she was young, she used to take baths with him naked. When Sofia was eight years old, her father got angry with her for misbehaving and he pulled her pants down. He did not spank her but, when Sofia had her pants down, left. Sofia
talked about being confused as to why her father had pulled her pants down. Sofia conjectured that he wanted to either abuse her or spank her, but left because he changed his mind.

Sofia reported that her father never “really punished” her. When Sofia was in high school, she skipped classes and slept in. Her father was “fed up” with her and, one morning, he grabbed her by her ankles and dragged her out of bed, leading to her hitting her head on the floor. Sofia was very upset with the way her father treated her. She complained that he criticized her without inquiring as to what might be going on.

Sofia said that both parents gave more attention to her brothers. Her youngest brother suffered from asthma and was treated better than anyone else. When Sofia was 12, the other brother got hospitalized for a suicide threat and was diagnosed with severe depression. When he had a tantrum towards his parents, her brother grabbed a razor and threatened to kill himself. The family was forced to go for family therapy. Sofia was resentful and angry towards her whole family. She skipped “these meaningless meetings” and chose to go see a boyfriend instead.

4.13 Personal History

Sofia had been depressed since she was a child. She was pessimistic about her life and felt empty. When she went to high school, Sofia lied a lot to her parents, missed school, drank alcohol, used street drugs, and had relationships with boys. Sofia associated with girlfriends who referred to themselves as “tomboy hippie chicks.” Several times, the principal of the school called her mother to inform her of his concerns about Sofia.

Sofia lost control of her drinking and drug use at age 14. At that time, she also had her first sexual experience. She became promiscuous and found herself
“losing control.” Like with her parents, Sofia got involved with boyfriends who would “pull” her toward them and then “push” her away inconsistently. Sofia was confused about what her boyfriends expected from her. She often gave in to their demands, but she also felt frustrated and hostile and argued with them. Most of her boyfriends got her into “trouble,” especially with drugs and alcohol. They were verbally abusive, which led her to be dependent on them and resentful.

At age 20, Sofia became pregnant from an “irresponsible boyfriend” who asked her to have an abortion. Although she did not want the baby, she kept it, because she decided to follow her family’s religious beliefs for that decision. Sofia then separated from her boyfriend, became depressed and lonely, and had constant difficulties in rearing her daughter.

In sessions, Sofia discussed how she looked at sex as a control issue in relationships. She felt obligated to have sex with her boyfriends, since she was involved with them, but also experienced difficulty reaching orgasm. Sofia felt abused by most of her boyfriends because they were drug addicts. She often slept with boys without having intimate feelings for them.

When Sofia got involved with Gerald, she thought that she would finally have a more mature and intimate relationship with a man. Gerald, however, did not want to commit to her and often seemed to be domineering and irresponsible. Sofia also described him as attractive and found that behind his domineering character he had low self-esteem. At times, when Gerald was vulnerable to low self-esteem, he was more considerate toward Sofia. Sofia wanted Gerald to love her. On one occasion, she was surprised to hear from Gerald that he thought she only wanted him for sex. Sofia reported that she was the one who simply gave in to his sexual requests. Sofia was tearful when Gerald did not want to make an exclusive commitment to her.

Unlike her previous boyfriends, who were alcoholics, drug addicts, and dropouts from school, Sofia found Gerald different. Sofia never really loved her
previous boyfriends, including the one with whom she had her child, but was in love with Gerald. Sofia found Gerald to be more affectionate and intelligent than her parents were. Her love for him and struggle to maintain a meaningful relationship with him were the main reasons Sofia came to therapy.

4.14 A Fantasy, a Dream, and a Tale

An important turning point in Sofia's therapy came when she was willing to talk with me about a fantasy that she had had since she was 15 years old. The fantasy was about having a relationship with the singer Vince Neil. Vince Neil was a popular singer of heavy metal music. Sofia adored the singer’s appearance, music, and lyrics. In the early 1980’s, although he identified as heterosexual, Vince Neil looked like a woman with his long blond hair, slim body, form-fitting clothing, necklaces, and make-up. Vince Neil sang about the enjoyment of life, the struggle to enjoy one’s life, and man’s love for a woman. In one of his CD’s, there was a painting of a split face, one half of which was happy and the other half sad. This duality was related to Sofia’s psychological state and to her statements, “I seem to adore my powerlessness and helplessness….I am more creative when I am depressed.”

Sofia fantasized that the singer had a brother and that his brother abducted her. His brother beat her up, was verbally abusive, and then raped her. When Sofia had sex with his brother, Vince showed up and saved her from him. Other times, her masturbation fantasy involved having consensual sex with Vince’s brother and Vince caught them in the act. Vince watched them having sex and was disappointed with Sofia. Sofia then begged Vince in tears to take her back. Sofia said, “When I am harmed by his brother I know that I should fantasize about my pain more, but it is blurry how I feel.”
Similar versions of that fantasy also involved Gerald. Sofia fantasized that she was having sex with a man while Gerald watched them. Sofia then told Gerald that she loved him but Gerald did not want to listen. Sofia followed him and begged him to come back. Sometimes Gerald came back and had sex with her and other times Gerald refused to come back to her. Sofia viewed Gerald as masculine, like her dad, and unlike Vince Neil, but she also associated Gerald with her mom because of his contradictory and inconsistent personality characteristics.

In one of her dreams, Sofia was possessed by the devil. Sofia was down in a basement with a laundry machine and blacked out. She passed out in the arms of the actress Glenn Close. Sofia asked Glenn, “What is going on with me?” Glenn did not respond. Sofia asked again, “Tell me, what is going on with me, am I possessed? I know I am.” Glenn responded, “I recorded a CD for you!” Sofia panicked and woke up.

Sofia described her dream as a nightmare and portrayed Glenn Close as a “devilish woman.” Sofia was not sure if Glenn was also possessed in that dream as she was. She associated Glenn with obscure depictions of the feminine and the masculine in her movies. She described her as playing the “seductive and clever woman” as well as the very “active, aggressive, and practical” one. Sofia associated the basement and the laundry area with her memory of being asked by her parents to do her own laundry at the age of 16. She also associated it with a couple with whom she was friendly and whose daughter used to play with Sofia’s daughter down in their basement. Sofia’s daughter sometimes had tantrums in that basement and Sofia had difficulties calming her daughter down. The couple criticized Sofia’s parenting skills, telling her that she needed to have stricter rules and set boundaries with her daughter.

Finally, Sofia’s loneliness and emotional pain were also associated with one of the stories she wrote. In the story, the main character, called Ann, was anguished.
and hopeless because she had cancer. She was dying. She had kids and was not able to take care of them. Ann had an independent personality and refused to accept her husband’s help, even though he was a loving and affectionate man. Sofia admired Ann’s strength but also envied her for being able to cope with her despair without the help of her husband. Sofia identified with Ann’s pain, hopelessness, and despair, but also looked up to Ann for her strength and independence from her husband. Sofia felt she was not strong enough to be independent from others.

4.2 A Lacanian Case Formulation

4.21 The Paradoxes of Speech

Sofia presented vague statements of who she was. She found inconsiderate and uncommitted boyfriends to be both hurtful and attractive. She hated the idea of men’s control over women, but was involved with men. She complied with men’s requests for sex, but did not find sex enjoyable. When her boyfriend, Gerald, was “aloof” and “inconsiderate,” she loved him more. She fantasized about being raped
by a stranger and gazed at by her boyfriend. By making these contradictory enunciations in therapy, Sofia wondered about her identity. Whereas she consciously believed she knew who she was, by exploring the unconscious, she realized that the sign that described her was an ambiguous question mark. In other words, the sign was raised to the function of the signifier, which disconnected her from her conscious representations of her identity.

The signifiers in Sofia’s unconscious made her enunciations incomprehensible. They made holes in the meaning that was determinant of her discourse (Écrits, 678/801). Her unconscious signifiers insisted and interfered in the cuts of her actual discourse. In dreams and fantasies, Sofia was possessed by the devil; Glenn Close, the actress, was transformed into a devilish bisexual figure; Vince Neil, the singer, was transformed into a gaze; Sofia’s fictional character of Ann, who suffered from cancer, was transformed into a sublime woman; and Sofia loved Gerald when she positioned herself at the specific distance from him that allowed her to maintain her desire for him.

These were some of the unconscious signifiers in Sofia’s mind. These signifiers could only become comprehensible and subvert Sofia’s conscious understandings of her identity by being engaged in the process of deciphering her unconscious and of tying these signifiers together to create a new button tie. The button tie that arose during therapy sealed a new kind of symbolic meaning by its retroactive effect from the Other to Sofia. Each signifier represented Sofia’s subjectivity for another signifier. For example, as I will discuss shortly, the signifier S₄, “devil,” represented Sofia for the signifier S₃, “lived,” and the signifier S₃ retroactively gave meaning to the signifier S₂, “feeling alive in the same way as her father lived before his marriage to his cold wife,” and so on. Sofia was involved in the process of dialectizing isolated and opaque signifiers—signifiers such as the devil which froze, subjugated, and annihilated her as a subject—in order to separate
herself from their alienating effects and create new metaphors and assume “a new position in relation to the cause” (Fink, 1995, p. 79).

Sofia’s certainty about her identity provided a meaning in the imaginary realm. The imaginary meaning stemmed from times when domineering others and the patriarchal Other supplied answers or reasons about her existence. Being engulfed by the Other’s capricious desires and dependent on the Other’s provision of signs, Sofia was alienated in the Other (Écrits, 690/815; Fink, 2004, p. 123).

Listening to Sofia’s description of her story of Ann—a story she shared with me after she discussed her associations to dreams and fantasies—one can discern that Sofia imagined the possibility of being independent from the Other’s demands and desires. Whereas in Sofia’s experience the Other was patriarchal, overpowering, cold, inconsiderate, and unloving, through the story of Ann, Sofia told us that she wished to be an independent woman, even when the Other was loving and considerate. However, Sofia also informed us that she did not have the strength to be such a woman. She created instead the fictional character of Ann and wondered about what it was like for a woman to suffer an unbearable disease, cope with pain on her own, and be free from social expectations without relying on her husband’s help and approval or disapproval of her decisions. Ann’s husband was loving and desirous of his sublime and strong wife. Sofia wondered, what was it to be a sublime and independent woman? What made a man desire a woman?

As I show in Figure 4.1, Sofia was implicated in a quadrangular “circuit of desire” (Fink, 1997, p. 127). Sofia desired to know what aroused her father’s desire for her mother and what made her father satisfied. She identified with her father’s desire for her mother by identifying with his lack of knowledge about feminine jouissance that was beyond the jouissance of the organ. Whereas the mother was the object of her father’s desire, her rival sister was the object of her father’s sexual
satisfaction. In other words, her father sustained desire vis-à-vis her mother and derived *jouissance* from her sister.

At the level of the symbolic, Sofia identified with her father’s desire for his wife and, subsequently, with masculine desire for a woman. At the level of the imaginary, Sofia identified with her sister, who was used and abused by their father. Sofia thought her sister was more loved by their father than she was, and wished to take her sister’s place. In her rape fantasy, Sofia retroactively returned to the thought that she was raped by her father and that her father loved her more than her sister. At the level of the real, Sofia enjoyed being the used and abused *objet a* for a man. In other words, she was the real and unspeakable cause of desire for a man whose *jouissance* was obscene.

§

Sofia presented the following signifiers and memories in therapy:

*Alcohol:* Sofia consumed alcohol to fight off depression. She recalled that her father used to drink alcohol and be happy before he married her mother. Sofia engaged in masturbatory fantasies and felt warmth and *jouissance* when drunk. Through alcohol, she escaped from memories of cold and unloving relationships with significant others.

*Devil:* In one of her dreams, Sofia was possessed by the devil and was offered a CD by the actress, Glenn Close. If one reads the signifier *devil* backwards, it reads *lived*. Sofia *lived* when drunk, alone, and free from the tyranny of the superego. She felt alive in the same way her father was alive before marriage and as opposed to her mother’s restrictions and conservative religious lifestyle.

*Glenn Close:* To Sofia’s mind, the actress embodied masculinity and femininity in obscure ways. She enjoyed like a man but was seductive and desired like a woman. Sofia dreamt of an Other who seemed to have the final word about
enjoyment and femininity. Sofia’s dream was a nightmare because she came close to an Other whose jouissance was still alien to her.³²

**Be beaten and be raped:** Sofia fantasized of being both beaten and raped by a man. She recalled that her father sexually abused her sister. Sofia wondered if her father loved her less than he loved her sister. In her associations to her father being an indifferent man and a passive follower of her mother, Sofia recalled that he never disciplined her when she was a child and only beat her once when she was an adolescent. Sofia constructed fantasies of being both beaten and raped, indicating her wish to receive attention and love from an active male figure. Rape signified having sex with an aggressive and active man without her consent or sexual satisfaction. In real life, Sofia had sex with men without satisfaction. Sofia allowed herself to have fun with boyfriends, revolted against the norms of family and school, got in trouble for deviating from rules, and situated herself as an insignificant individual in relation to boyfriends.

In Sofia’s unconscious, her symptom of being dissatisfied with having sexual intercourse with boyfriends was a substitute for the symbolic prohibition of incest between Sofia and her father. We may recall here that when Sofia was a young child she took baths with him naked. We might conjecture that she imagined seducing and being seduced by him. Sofia wished her father was an active and fun-loving man, different from her mother, who was cold and religious.

The signifiers, being beaten and being raped, implied Sofia’s initial wish for seduction with her father—a wish which related to her thought of taking her sister’s place and a wish which ran counter to her mother’s religious dogmatism. Yet we also know from Sofia’s history that, regardless of her mother’s religiosity, her mother desired her father even though he did not hold the same religious views as her. Her

³² Lacan (1962-1963) writes, “the anxiety of the nightmare is experienced properly speaking as that of the jouissance of the Other … it is this being who weighs with his whole opaque weight of alien jouissance on your chest, who crushes you under his jouissance” (chapter 5, italics mine).
mother’s desire was thus a phallic signifier. Even though Sofia consciously hated her mother, she was unconsciously pulled back to the enigma of her mother’s desire. The question— “What does my mother want?” — elicited phallic responses. In Sofia’s words, her mother was the one who “pull[ed]” Sofia close to her and showed affection, but when Sofia was close to her, her mother “push[ed]” her away with criticism. Sofia received the message from her mother that she was not a good enough child; she was not a good enough woman. By experiencing her mother as cold and unloving, Sofia constructed this fantasy as a way to compensate herself for the loss of her preoedipal jouissance.

Sofia fantasized that her male seducers beat, raped, and gave pleasure without her will. Her mother’s religiosity and unloving personality as well as her father’s obscene jouissance and passivity embodied Sofia’s void and lack of being in the signifying system. In order for Sofia to have access to this veiled phallic signifier, Sofia became the object of men’s desires and sexual demands. Sofia allowed herself to have sexual intercourse with inconsiderate and abusive boyfriends, but also asked—who am I in relation to them? Is it right to allow myself to be satisfied by them?

Lacan writes, “The demand for love can only suffer from a desire whose signifier is foreign to it” (Écrits, p. 582/693). Lacan (1960-1961) makes clear to us that we should not confuse the phallic object with the sign. The phallic object is the desiring Other, “what the Other is missing in order to be the noetic A [Autre, Other], the full-fledged A, the Other insofar as one can have faith in his response to demand” (chapter 15). Whereas Sofia refused to comply with the Other’s explicit demands on her—for example, she did exactly the opposite of what her parents and other authority figures told her to be or do—she maintained an ambivalent

33 The difference between the sign, s(A), and the phallic signifier, S(A), is also discussed in Écrits (pp. 806-807/682-683) and Fink (2004, pp. 122-124).
relationship with the Other as a phallic object. The Other’s desire petrified her. Sofia defied the Other in order to get her to desire her. Hence, Sofia’s own desire was determined by the Other’s desire.

*Be gazed at:* Sofia fantasized about Vince Neil, the singer who looked like a woman, and Gerald, the boyfriend who had similar personality traits to her mother, imagining them gazing at her while she had sex with another man. For Sofia, the moOther was masked by those men whom she declared she was in love with—Vince Neil and Gerald. That of course did not mean that her boyfriend, Gerald, and the singer, Vince Neil, were pure semblances of her mother in character. Rather, they shared particular traits with Sofia’s mother.

They rescued her from the abuser. They got disappointed and rejected her when Sofia consented to get off with that man. In Sofia’s unconscious mind, as in any hysteric’s unconscious mind, the Other was split between desire and *jouissance* (Soler, 2006). In her fantasy, Sofia consented to get off with the Other of *jouissance*; she was gazed at by the Other of desire; and she preferred to be with the Other of desire.

Sofia situated Gerald as the Other of desire and positioned herself as the one who wanted both to fill the Other’s lack and preserve it. As it was with her moOther, in her relationship with Gerald, Sofia went back and forth between having him present in and absent from her life. Sofia was interested in being a precious object for the Other so as to fill the Other’s lack and compensate for the Other’s limitations.

Sofia discussed the limitations of both of her parents. Her moOther’s lack was skewed, however, when Sofia told us that her father desired her mother. Her father complied with her mother’s rules and wanted her mother even more when she refused to have sex with him. Sofia emphasized her moOther’s lack when she saw her father as a passive follower of her mother without him having a good reason for it. In Sofia’s unconscious mind, her moOther was the one who was both powerful and
inadequate; her father was the one whose sexual *jouissance* was dangerous who had to restrain that *jouissance*.

Sofia’s repetitive masturbation fantasy of having sex with an active, aggressive male while being gazed at by a male who had female traits, was a re-enactment of her childhood primal scene and Oedipal fantasy. Sofia’s childhood memory of hearing her parents argue about sex—more particularly, her father wanting sex and her mother being critical of him—played a significant role in Sofia’s construction of her fantasy. We can decipher Sofia’s fantasy in the following ways: a) Sofia thought her father should have forced her mother to have sex; b) Sofia identified with her mother who was forced by her father to have sex; c) Sofia thought her father should have abused her (made love to her forcefully) instead of her sister; d) Sofia thought her mother should have caught them in the act, which would have been a punishment to her mother; e) Sofia thought her mother should have rescued Sofia from her Oedipal wishes.

There were two versions of Sofia’s fantasy. In one version, the Other who gazed at Sofia rescued Sofia from the man who raped her and, after the rescuing, the Other left her because he was disappointed in her. In another version, the Other rescued Sofia and had sex with her. If we think of the Other primarily as the mOther, we may deduce here that Sofia had an ambivalent relationship with her mOther. She saw the mOther as split between the desiring Other and the maternal and Sofia fluctuated between separation from and symbiosis with her.

Thinking of the Other as split between desire and *jouissance*, Sofia fantasized about the desiring Other stopping her from having sexual satisfaction with the male Other whose *jouissance* was obscene. In other words, by fantasizing about the desiring Other stopping her from getting off with the rapist, Sofia sustained an unsatisfied desire in the man whom she loved but enjoyed being the used and abused *objet a* for another man. As I explained earlier, we can deduce here that
Sofia identified with her mother’s phallic desire for her father—a desire which ran counter to her religious beliefs—and her father’s splitting of desire and jouissance which did not converge on a single woman. Her mother’s desire for her father played a significant role in how her father also sustained his desire and lack of sexual satisfaction. Sofia questioned her mother’s religious beliefs and her awry desire for her father. Sofia became interested in her father’s awry desire for his critical and serious wife and in her father’s sexual jouissance with her sister and other women.

Sofia fantasized that she was gazed at by a desiring male. Under the domain of his gaze, Sofia vanished in the phallic ghost of his desire and was reduced to an object. Her boyfriend’s gaze—the boyfriend here is her mother’s substitute—provoked Sofia’s lack of being and transformed Sofia into a desired object. It killed off Sofia’s living sexual jouissance. Concurrently, Sofia fantasized about being a perverse masochistic objet a for another man—a man who was her father’s substitute. In other words, in fantasy, Sofia made her mother lay down the law effectively—the law that required her to give up her Oedipal jouissance. By positioning herself as masochistic and as being gazed at by the desiring mother in fantasy, Sofia transformed her indifferent and detached mother and boyfriend into active enunciators of the law and constituted herself as the object cause of their desires. Sofia imagined that her mother desired to have a more active and dynamic husband and that her father desired to have a wife who was sexually submissive. Like Dora—I am referring specifically to Lacan’s interpretation of Dora as being the copula between Frau K and her father—Sofia was the copula between her parents. She constituted herself as the precious object who could sustain the Other’s desire and fill up the Other’s lack.

34 Lacan (1962-1963) writes that the mother’s desire “is identical to the function of the law. It is insofar as the law prohibits her that it imposes desiring her: for after all the mother is not in herself the most desirable object.” (chapter 8)
Female Genitalia: Sofia got frustrated with Gerald when he asked her to shave her pubic hair. Regardless of her frustration, she complied with his demand. When Sofia was an adolescent, she looked at female models in magazines. Her positive attitude towards these magazines changed when the father of her child abandoned her and when Sofia had to bear the parental responsibilities on her own. From Sofia’s discourse, however, we can decipher that even though she expressed anger at the status quo notion that women should look a certain way, she continued to be fascinated (seduced) by the images of these models. In Sofia’s mind, these models were masquerades of femininity, but Sofia wanted men to adore her without her being reduced to a feminine image.

According to Lacan, the hysteric grapples with the question, what is it to be a woman? The hysteric asks this question at the symbolic and not at the imaginary level. Lacan (1993) says that the hysteric wonders about the essence of femininity at the unconscious level, and more specifically, asks herself the question, what is a feminine organ? She seeks out the fundamental signifier that would describe her being—what am I? Am I a man or a woman? Lacan states that the question of the feminine organ concerns its possibility of being either empty or full. The feminine organ is a fabricated signifier with no particular signified. In one’s unconscious mind, to fill the feminine organ with a signified would mean that, in its essence, it is empty.

The biological feminine organ, the organ in the real, does not lack anything. In Lacan’s theory, there is no lack in the real, only in the symbolic. In contradistinction to feminist views, Lacan encourages us to distinguish between the social biases regarding the vagina and the cause of those biases (Écrits, p. 614/729). In order to examine fantasies about the feminine organ, its possibility of a minus or a plus value, we need to understand Lacan’s theory of the phallus. One’s realization of his/her sex depends on the symbolic phallus, on the signifier of desire that
separates the subject from a symbiotic relationship with the maternal. The symbolic phallus is destined to have meaning effects on the subject’s being and instate sexual difference.

We can now turn to a discussion of the functions of the imaginary and the symbolic phallus in Sofia’s subjectivity. Sofia’s father castrated Sofia symbolically when he refused to desire Sofia and when he insisted on desiring her mother regardless of her coldness and disgust for his sexuality. Sofia knew that her father was a man who used to enjoy his life before marriage. As I also mentioned earlier, Sofia’s mother also played a significant role in Sofia’s castration with her criticism. Thus, Sofia identified with lack-in-being in relation to her parents and responded to that lack in particular ways.

Lacan conceptualizes imaginary castration, symbolized as negativized small phi (−φ), to represent the loss of something essential in an image. By seeing her father’s penis at a young age, his penis that represented a source of precious but prohibited jouissance, Sofia grew up with ambivalent thoughts about the nature of her feminine organ. For Lacan, unlike Freud, Sofia’s unconscious question about her female genitalia was not about whether or not she was deprived of a real male organ. Rather, Sofia’s unconscious question concerned the mutilation and prohibition of jouissance. To Sofia’s mind, the feminine organ was a minus-value, but it was a minus-value only insofar as its jouissance was concerned. Her feminine organ was anaesthetized in her sexual involvements with men. By looking at her

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35 In Écrits, Lacan underscores the feminist view that the mother plays the most important role in the birth of the subject. Lacan does not reduce his concepts of symbolic Father and imaginary Mother to biological parents. Lacan rather refers to the symbolic Father as “the effect of a pure signifier, of a recognition, not of a real father, but of what religion has taught us to invoke as the Name-of-the-Father.” The symbolic Father interrupts the child’s symbiotic relationship with the devouring maternal object. Christianity teaches us that in order for the subject to bind itself “for life to the Law,” “the symbolic Father, insofar as he signifies this Law,” must be “the dead Father” (p. 556/464). As Lacan elaborates further in the Seminar, Book VII, the murder of God in the Christian belief system signifies the prohibition of jouissance (satisfaction of the drive). The dead God is the one who provokes the subject to desire his Law. The symbolic Father is thus the signifier of desire which instates lack between the subject and the Other. In order for the subject to desire and submit to the Law, he/she has to give up some of its autistic living jouissance.
father's erectile organ, “not as itself, or even as an image, but as a part that [was] missing in the desired image” (Écrits, p. 697/822), Sofia identified with her mother’s disgust at her father’s sexual jouissance. In the locus of the Other, she identified with the missing signifier that named genital pleasure as the ultimate goal of a sexual relationship between a man and a woman.

In the Seminar, Book VIII, Lacan provides the following matheme to describe the hysteric’s fundamental fantasy:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{a} \\
\text{◊ A} \\
(\neg\varphi)
\end{array}
\]

**Figure 4.2** Hysterical Fundamental Fantasy

In this formula, we see that objet a is over the imaginary castration complex (the negativized lowercase phallus, -φ) which indicates that the hysteric veils her castration complex in fantasy; she covers up what is missing in her sexed image. Sofia’s experience of being offended by Gerald’s request to shave her pubic hair when Sofia and Gerald were involved in lovemaking showed that Sofia felt the threat of castration—the threat of coming closer to the realization that her organ as a sexual entity was lacking. In Sofia’s mind, the pubic hair covered up the feminine organ that had already disappeared from the real and had been transformed into a signifier.\(^\text{36}\)

Sofia was numb to sexual pleasure. She gave up her own sexual jouissance and identified instead with the signifier of the Other’s lack. Sofia was more interested in the mother who deprived a man of sexual satisfaction than in the father who was able to satisfy a woman sexually. The function of the mOther occupied

\(^36\) Cf. a similar discussion in Lacan’s (1961-1962) analysis of Zucchi’s painting on Psyche casting her little lamp onto Eros (chapter 16).
Sofia’s mind so much that it deprived her of potential satisfaction with a man. Sofia was interested in the enigmatic desire of her father for her mother, especially when she knew that he usually liked having sex with women. In other words, Sofia was not interested in what her father enjoyed but rather in what he desired. She was interested in what her father lacked, because she wanted to be the phallic signifier of his desire (Φ) and not the object of his *jouissance*.

Sofia phallicized herself; she embodied the phallus of the Other’s desire. In her own eyes, Sofia wanted to be desirable and not sexually available. By being the phallus for the Other—by identifying with what the Other wanted but could not have or, in other words, by identifying with her mother’s depriving her father of sex and with her father’s desire for her mother—Sofia attempted to answer the question of what a man desired from a woman. Sofia thus identified with her father’s desire and her father’s lack-of-being. Sofia desired as if she were in his position, as if she were a man who desired this other mysterious woman who did not give in to his sexual demands easily. In order to maintain her phallic role in her relationship with the man she loved, Sofia ensured that man’s desire remained unsatisfied and that she remained a permanent object of his desire.

It is clear to us by now that Sofia’s fascination with models embodied masculine desire for women. Although she was angry with men who were seduced by the looks of those models, Sofia embodied the pain of sexual dissatisfaction in her ego in order to castrate the masculine Other. She was interested in showing the masculine Other that his fascination with the image of a woman was superficial and that he needed to produce adequate signifiers to describe femininity with its mysteries. Sofia identified with the object of Gerald’s desire. In her mind, the image of a female model occupied the place of the Other’s desire and not the place of the Other’s *jouissance*. Sofia nourished Gerald’s desire so she could be someone
special for him and Gerald could continue to desire her without leaving her as her previous boyfriend—the father of her child—did.

4.22 Metaphorical and Metonymic Functions in the Dream

We can further elucidate Sofia’s unconscious desire by discussing the metaphorical and metonymical functions in her dream. Lacan shows the functions of metaphor and metonymy in *Écrits* (pp. 428-429/515-516). The metonymic structure combines signifiers without engendering a new meaning. It instates the subject’s lack of being and denotes its irreducible nature at the level of the signified. The metaphoric structure substitutes one signifier for another and engenders a new meaning by constituting the substituted signifier at the level of the signified.

Sofia’s dream of being possessed by the devil and being given a CD by the possessed actress Glenn Close showed the following:

- The manifest signifier, *devil*, as it appeared in the dream (S₁), was the metaphoric result of the latent signifier, *lived* (S₂). The signifier, *lived* (S₂), was fixed under the bar of the signified—fixed in a symptom—that was inaccessible to Sofia’s consciousness. Therefore, the thought of being possessed by the devil was a substitute for the repressed thought of living without guilt and dissatisfaction in the same way as her father lived before his marriage to his religious wife.

- The actress Glenn Close embodied metonymic combinations of masculine and feminine traits. For Sofia, Glenn Close embodied the unspeakable, mysterious, admirable, irreducible, and unrepresentable woman. She was the desired woman, the woman in control, the independent woman, the
woman of jouissance, and the woman who was unbounded by oppressive norms.

- Sofia’s dream revealed her lack of being, the metonymic structure of her subjectivity, in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At the manifest level, Sofia was preoccupied with the thought:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( S_3 \rightarrow I \text{ am possessed by the devil} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( s_3 \rightarrow \text{Glenn Close is possessed by the devil} )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>At the latent level, Sofia unconscious thought was:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( S_2 \rightarrow I \text{ am alive} )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( s_2 \rightarrow \text{A Woman reassures my ability to live} )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sofia’s metonymical structure was:

\[ f(S_2 \rightarrow S_3) \ S_2 \cong S_2 (\neg) s_2 \]

**Figure 4.3** The Metonymical Structure

In the logic of combinatory structures of representations among the signifiers devil and Glenn, Sofia slipped into a metonymical desire that sustained itself by her want-to-be. Her desire to know a woman who could reassure her own living existence was located as a “minus” at the level of the signified. As we saw earlier, Sofia constituted her desire not in a couple but in a quandrangle. Sofia was interested in the man’s desire for a woman because she wanted to sustain the Other’s symptom. Sofia wanted to be the cause of knowledge, inspire the Other to produce knowledge, and sustain the Other’s desire for knowledge (Fink, 1997; Soler, 2006). Sofia wanted to know if such a woman existed and if she could embody the possibility of being the woman she was not in relation to her beloved boyfriend.
4.23  Being Sad, Being the Phallus, and Seeking Love

Sofia felt Gerald’s desertion and unfaithfulness as a castration of her being. Her fear of castration resonated in the annihilation of her embodied integrity—body image and psyche. With Gerald’s rejections, her entire being was threatened. She felt empty and hollow. Sofia was in the darkness of despair, humiliation, pain, indignity, and trauma. When she was alive, it was as if she was possessed by the devil. In order to feel alive, she had to be intoxicated. In Sofia’s symbolic world, the Other was overbearing with its dissatisfied desires. In order for her to escape from the Other’s monotonous, empty, and judgmental discourse, she got involved with various men. Sofia had had impulsive sexual intercourse with them since the time of her adolescent years. Her relationship with the symbolic Other was stagnant with painful dissatisfactions.

Sofia’s dream and fantasies revealed her fragmented states of embodiment. Her dream of being possessed and passing out and her fantasy of being beaten and raped indicated how Sofia did not know who she was and how she felt when someone hurt or harmed her. In waking life, Sofia felt numb when she had sex with a man. She felt as if she was a scrap in men’s hands. Her fragmented body was exposed beyond the mirror image in which Sofia recognized herself. The mirror image founded her embodied unity, equilibrium, and balance. As opposed to her alienating ego, which was the sedimentation of idealized images, Sofia experienced the fragmentations of her body. For Lacan, the fragmented body, as it is “regularly manifested in dreams when the movement of an analysis reaches a certain level of aggressive disintegration of the individual” (Écrits, p. 78/97), and as it is well depicted in Hieronymus Bosch’s paintings, is the fantasmatic body of disconnected organs and limbs; it is the disjointed, anaesthetic, and spasmodic body.
In the Seminar, Book X, in chapters 3 and 4, Lacan states that when the split subject identifies with the specular image of another, the subject is captivated in an imaginary unity and wholeness. The subject has a sense of unity when the mirror image is recognized by the symbolic Other. The symbolic Other authenticates the subject with a unary trait. That authenticated image is assumed or assimilated by the subject, but the assumed image does not remain stable or fixed over time. By relating to the symbolic Other, the subject engages in a dialectic of having a particular image and not having it. As Lacan (1962-1963) writes,

> [A]t the locus of the Other, authenticated by the Other, there is profiled an image of ourselves that is simply reflected, already problematic, even fallacious; that it is at a place that is situated with respect to an image which is characterized by a lack, that there is profoundly orientated and polarized the function of this image itself, that desire is there, not simply veiled, but essentially placed in relation to an absence. (chapter 4)

The subject, who comes close to the realization of unconscious desire, looks for what he could really be. The more the subject has access to his desire, the more he deviates from his assumed image. According to Lacan, this deviation is often experienced as bodily fragmentation.

Sofia experienced the fragmentation of her body when she came close to realization of her Oedipal desires. She also experienced this fragmentation when she felt unloved by the Other. Sofia’s desires were unconscious and not articulated. When Sofia avoided realizing her unconscious desires or when Sofia did not have an adequate relationship with a responsive symbolic Other— with an Other who was able to understand, listen, and respond to Sofia’s unconscious desires and wants—she became depressed. To Lacan’s mind, depression results from moral cowardice to explore the unconscious (Soler, 2006). The sad subject gives up the search for knowledge of the unconscious and gives into the *jouissance* of depressive symptoms.

Sofia clinged to her fantasy of being beaten, raped, and gazed at, which is as if her desire was directed toward a trace or shadow of an unattainable object. Lacan
(1997) refers to this unattainable object as *das Ding* (the Thing), which is “characterized by primary affect, prior to any repression” (p. 54). *Das Ding* is the unforgettable maternal, the maternal beyond the phallus (Φ), who is lost forever. The function of *das Ding* is the “beyond-of-the-signified” and “what remains silent.” It tears out and opens a gap between the sign and the subject. *Das Ding* refers to the fact that language is tainted by the real. As Lacan further writes,

> It is to the extent that the function of the pleasure principle is to make man always search for what he has to find again, but which he will never attain, that one reaches the essence, namely, the sphere or relationship which is known as the law of the prohibition of incest. (p. 88)

*Das Ding* is the remainder of a cut between desire and demand. It shows that part of our experience is unrepresentable and therefore a part of the subject escapes through the cutting effects of the signifier. It denies fantasies of unity, harmony, and simplicity; it rather introduces impossibilities, faults, mistakes, and failures. By being possessed by a gap and empty space, *das Ding* threatens to break our illusions of having harmonious sexual relationships.

Following the Thing that was part of herself, Sofia was lost in depression. Her own desire was not voiced enough and the Thing within herself incarnated the threats of her own bodily fragmentation. Her relationship with the Other could not make her life more fulfilling. Object a—the object cause of the Other’s desire, the object that the Other lacked, and that could never be obtained—was Sofia’s position of truth. By situating herself as an abject object in relation to parents and boyfriends—and when she situated herself as an abject object in relation to boyfriends, she did it in the name of love—Sofia realized the real absence of object a. As Fink (1995) puts it, “object (a) appears in the position of truth...the truth of the hysteric’s discourse, its hidden motor force, is the real” (p. 134). The hysteric is
commanded by the real, “by that which does not work, by that which does not fit.”
Her discourse “does not set out to carefully cover over paradoxes and
contradictions...but rather to take such paradoxes and contradictions as far as they
can go” (p. 134-135).

Sofia longed to fill the lack in the Other by situating herself as the phallus for
the Other’s desire. By identifying with the Other’s lack, Sofia annihilated herself and
such annihilation was felt as a gaze coming from the Other. In her fantasy, Sofia got
herself seen by Gerald while she had sex with another man. She ended up being
reduced to an object of his desire. Sofia incited the Other’s gaze and disappeared in
the Other’s whims regarding her. The Other’s gaze altered Sofia’s sense of
satisfaction about her image. By being the object of the Other’s desire—the object
that motivated a man to desire knowledge about the true essence of femininity—
Sofia tried to obtain absolute, complete, and total love from the Other. Yet, by
getting herself seen, Sofia also provoked disruptions in her relationship with Gerald
(Copjec, 1994). She incited Gerald’s lack. In fantasy and real life, she made it clear
to Gerald that he could not concretize her, own her, or confine her to patriarchal
social ideals.

Paradoxically though, by desiring a man’s desire, by “playing the part of a
man” (Morel, 2002, p. 89), and by being alienated in feminine masquerade in order
to be the phallus for a man, Sofia’s jouissance was restricted to patriarchal
ownership. Sofia’s jouissance, which was tied to her hysterical symptom of
maintaining an unsatisfied desire in her relationships with others, was restricted to
the limits of patriarchal discourses. In the field of the Other, Sofia’s libido lost its
living and animated state. She remained in a passive position without expecting to
receive fulfilling satisfaction from her loved ones. Sofia situated herself in the
miseries of structural impotence, castration, and death.
By desiring to plug the lack in the Other, without her wanting to be what the Other lacked but only wanting to motivate the Other to desire feminine love beyond the limits of the phallic One, Sofia’s drive was restricted to the symbolic Other. Sofia attempted to master libidinal excesses and identified with her mother’s phallicization of her real body. Sofia’s real body became a site of suffering by being phallic. Sofia’s drive was limited to the symbolic order and lost its erogenicity. Her jouissance tied to her hysterical symptoms was sustained by the fantasy of a boyfriend who gazed at her from a distance and desired her. Sofia was thus caught up in the logic of an internal contradiction between wanting to be the object of Gerald’s desire, in order to obtain a sense of phallic potency in relation to him, and not really wanting to be his object of jouissance, in order to liberate herself from a vicious circle of dissatisfaction. Sofia sought and desired to find love to solve the problem of her inadequacy and become a living Woman beyond castration.

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37 Lacan differentiates the subject as drive from the subject as demand and as desire (Écrits, 722-725/851-854; Miller, 1996; Fink, 1997, pp. 207-217). Lacan (1998a) explains that, in hysteria, the oral drive links to the economy of desire. The hysteric derives jouissance from desexualized digestive zones, as we see, for example, in reactions of disgust and vomiting. In hysteria, the eroticization of the mouth is excluded and other desexualized zones become prominent sources of jouissance (pp. 172-173).
Chapter 5

Feminist-Lacan Dialogues

The feminist tradition explores women’s lived experiences of distress within patriarchal norms. Anglophone feminists challenge the psychoanalytic theory of gender, claiming that it empowers patriarchy and reinforces norms which position women so as to be dominated by masculine ideals. Whereas feminists challenge traditional assumptions about subjectivity and make an important contribution to changing the roles of women in relation to men, they fall short of achieving their emancipatory potential because of their inadequate theorization of what constitutes subjectivity. As I discussed in chapter 1, Anglophone feminists misread Lacan’s theory of the symbolic Other and underestimate the importance of unconscious desire in the constitution of subjectivity. With their misreading of Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory, feminists promote a view of identity that is consciously understood within sociopolitical and patriarchal discourses. Thus, in feminist theories, the unconscious is understood superficially. Insofar as Anglophone feminism commits to an epistemology that undervalues the unconscious, it makes it difficult to see how neurotics sustain their dependence on and domination by the patriarchal Other.

In this chapter, I will describe the reason why feminists cannot use the Lacanian psychoanalytic model in their epistemology. In other words, I will describe what it means to say that Lacanian psychoanalytic knowledge derives from analytic
practice and not from the analysis of sociopolitical discourses. Whereas analysts, on
the one hand, listen to the effects of retroactive signifiers on a given discourse—
effects which relate to the subject’s unconscious desires, fixations in symptoms, and
particular modes of *jouissance*—feminists, on the other hand, rely on the subject’s
use of conscious speech and see symptoms as resulting from sociopolitical
discourses. Feminists expose the Other’s lack and transform the Other by naming its
discursive practices. When they name a discourse, they bring something new into
the signifying order. Throughout this dissertation, however, I have shown that
naming and rearranging the signifying chain do not change the relationship between
the subject and the Other. Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory indicates that by producing
new meanings in the subject’s own existence, we still have not understood how the
subject’s structure of desire remains the same and how we end up destroying one
oppressive Master in order to raise up a new one. Lacan (2007) makes this clear to
us when he argues,

> Psychoanalysis is not something that can be transmitted like other
forms of knowledge. The psychoanalyst has a position that sometimes
manages to be that of a discourse. He doesn’t thereby transmit a
body of knowledge, not that there is nothing for him to know, contrary
to what is foolishly asserted. This is what is called into question—the
function in society of a certain form of knowledge, the one that is
conveyed to you. (p. 198)

One way to approach the question of why Lacanian theory cannot be situated in the
political—or to reframe this question, why when we change discourses, we are still
not liberated from oppression—is to go back to the work of Ferdinand de Saussure
(1959) and see more closely how Lacan takes up Saussure’s cardinal distinction
between language and speech—a distinction which is similar to that between
empirical psychology and metapsychology.

Saussure distinguishes language from speech by saying that language
consists of the normative grammar and is, thus, concrete, homogenous, self-
contained, and unified, and that speech is the individual’s execution of language, the act of the individual’s utterance. Unlike language, speech is heterogeneous. The individual passively learns to speak the signs of language, which consist of “the union of meanings and sound-images” (p. 15). The individual’s act of speaking, however, is differential. In speech, the signified (word-image) stands apart from the signifier (word-sound) (p. 12). The sign, as it is defined in the dictionary, is fixed. In speaking, the individual alters the relationship between the concept and the sound-image of that concept, because this relationship is dependent on the individual’s *psychophysiology*. Speech is not reduced to “a simple naming-process” (p. 114). For example, Saussure tells us that the speaker’s enunciated word of “Gentlemen” changes its substance and meaning every time it is intonated at different times and in different contexts. As Saussure writes, “Each time I say the word *Gentlemen!* I renew its substance; each utterance is a new phonic act and a new psychological act” (p. 109). The word expresses different ideas “without compromising its identity” (p. 108). Saussure concludes that, in the act of speaking, the bond between the concept (signified) and the word-image (signifier) is arbitrary (p. 67). He also provides various examples to show the multitude of different languages that express the same concept with different words.

Saussure, however, contends that even though the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary in the individual’s act of speaking, the system of language is “unchangeable” (p. 84). If, for example, we were to rebuild a city by using new materials, we would still find ourselves in a familiar context, which is that of a city. Thus, Saussure argues that the conditions of language are distinct from the word entities (pp. 108-109). “Changes affect only isolated elements,” not the whole system of language (p. 88). Saussure explains that the linguistic system is always the same as regards the establishing of the value of a sign. A sign has a value when it is situated in a chain of signification. In other words, we establish the
value of a sign when we compare it with other similar signs and contrast it with dissimilar signs (p. 115). In that respect, Saussure understands the value of a sign as purely differential and negative. The sign, as a fixed entity, has a positive value. When we look up a word in the dictionary, for example, we get a definition. In speech, however, a concept is not understood by its positive content but by its relation with other terms in the signifying system. We understand a term by what it is not. As I mentioned earlier, a signifier does not have a single signified. Each speaker forms his or her own “associative relations” of a sign based on his or her memory and history (p. 123). Thus, whereas a sign may acquire a fixed value at the social level, it nevertheless generates diverse associative relations in the speaker’s own mind. Thus, each speaker makes his or her own associative relations to a given concept.

Lacan was influenced by Saussure’s theory but also deviated from it and extended it when he described the signifier as autonomous in relation to the sign and as dominating over the signified. For Lacan, the signifier is not an element of a unified sign and cannot be studied by linguists or sociopolitical discourse analysts. Unlike Saussure, Lacan (1998b) argues that the signifier cannot be limited to phonemes and cannot be collectivized (p. 18). Lacan also dissociates the primacy of the signifier from the speaker’s own physiological and neurological functions, arguing that the signifier exists “apart from any given set of human subjects” (Fink, 2004, p. 76). Lacan (1998b), thus, explains that Saussure incorrectly viewed the relationship between the signifier and signified as arbitrary and incorrectly assumed that it can be studied by linguists (pp. 18-19). One, for example, cannot study what causes a signifier to have a particular meaning effect. As Lacan (1998b) further writes, “Meaning effects seem to bear no relation to what causes them” (p. 20). Whereas the signifier stuffs the signified, the signified always “misses the referent” that it is supposed to represent (p. 20). The signified itself then also functions as a signifier
as soon as it is dialectized with other signifiers. Lacan, thus, tells us that between the signifier and the meaning effect “there is something barred that must be crossed over” (p. 18). This bar, as Fink (2004) explains, is the phallus, which, as I described in chapter 2, is the signifier of desire—the signifier that designates the gap between a word and the desired image that the word represents. The phallus does not depict positive and visible properties. It rather represents a reason for the subject to desire. As a signifier, the phallus generates meaning and fixes the subject to an imaginary identification. The image associated with a word, however, only partly represents what it is supposed to represent, because there is always something lacking in that image.

Whereas Saussure understood that there is not a close bond between the signifier and the signified in the act of speaking, he nevertheless conceptualized the speaker’s enunciation of a word as generating a kind of meaning that can easily be understood by the listener. Lacan, however, is neither a structuralist nor a poststructuralist theorist. He does not study how a word evolves over time and in different social contexts or how the Other must name and rearrange its signifying chain. The Lacanian approach to analysis involves a kind of listening which defers understanding of conscious meanings from the analysand’s speech and diverts the analysand from producing stories that make too much sense but are indeed meaningless and empty. For Lacan, the subject comes to be an effect of the signifier—the signifier structures the subject’s desire and jouissance—and generates meaning effects that are not statically determined by the Other’s discourse.

For example, as I laid out my case formulation of Sofia in chapter 4, Sofia was represented by the signifier “devil,” which retroactively gave meaning to another signifier, “feeling alive in the same way as her father lived before his marriage to his cold wife,” and the alienating meaning effects of that signifier were not determinant by the Other’s fixed descriptions of devil, but, rather, by the Other’s desire—in this
case, by her father’s desire for her mother, the mother refusing to give in to his requests to have sex with him. As I also discussed in chapter 2, the reason why subjects repeat symptoms and do not radically go beyond the Other is because their symptoms mask an unrepresentable desire. Neurotics, whose desires remain unsatisfied, desire only in relation to prohibition (i.e., the law). Their desires transgress prohibitions but not for the sake of radically altering those prohibitions. Transgression makes neurotics even less autonomous in relation to the Other. This is because they situate the Other as irreducible and have the fantasy that there is an unfailing, harmonious, fulfilling, and satisfying Other.

Going back to Saussure’s point that the conditions of language are distinct from the word entities and that “[c]hanges affect only isolated elements,” not the whole system of language (p. 88), Lacan agrees with Saussure’s argument that the conditions of language remain the same, no matter how many times we change the meaning of words or ideologies of a given concept. It is for that reason that Lacan’s psychoanalytic techniques, which intend to shift the analysand’s structural relationship in relation to the symbolic Other, do not focus on the analysand’s communication of meanings, but rather, on how the subject is affected by the metaphorical and metonymical consequences of the relations between his or her unconscious signifiers.

Because Lacanian psychoanalytic theory is not an analysis of meanings but rather an analysis of metaphors and metonymies in the subject’s unconscious, one may also see why Anglophone and some Francophone feminists are still not sure whether the hysterical woman contests or conserves patriarchy. Feminists leave this question open without providing a rigorous response to it. In fact, feminists keep on criticizing Freud’s theoretical errors and reductionism, but when it comes to answering the question they themselves raise, they cannot respond. When one, however, concentrates on Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory and rereads Irigaray’s ethics
of difference from a Lacanian psychoanalytic perspective—in other words, when one realizes that Irigaray’s notion of an ethics of sexual difference can be more clearly understood when one is familiar with Lacan’s theories of sexuation and hysteria—one recognizes that the female hysterical both contests and conserves patriarchy, and that the feminine subject, on the other hand, is she who is not spoken by the Other, does not mime the Other’s deficiencies and disorders, but is able to go beyond boundaries, restrictions, and oppositions; she is able create and discover her own plurality and infinity.

Lacan makes a fundamental distinction between desire and jouissance, and hence, a fundamental distinction between the hysterical and the feminine. The hysterical position aims at the endless circle of desire and dissatisfaction and preserves masculine desire for an unfailing (m)Other. The hysteric’s symptoms enunciate the Other’s failure to represent femininity sufficiently. Her desire to be feminine remains unsatisfied. The feminine position, on the contrary, aims at the domain of the impossible, which is beyond the phallic signifier and the masculine Other, and which celebrates the dimension of enjoyment. By being not wholly in the phallic function, the feminine subject supersedes the Other’s finite and dichotomous logic and desires that which gives her satisfaction and that which effaces the phallic void. She is able to be constituted in relation to her pure desire—not the Other’s desire—and derive from that a pure form of surplus jouissance. The feminine subject, who is the analyzed subject, understands how she was spoken by the effects of the Other’s speech. Her understanding, however, is not a matter of conscious understanding but a kind of analytic working through.

Lacan has repeatedly shown us that the hysteric is notorious for calling the masculine Other’s discourse into question and exposing its lack and incompleteness. The hysterical positions herself primarily as a dissatisfied subject and situates the Other’s knowledge as deficient. As Cixous and Clément (1986) indicate, the hysteric
is able to destabilize the patriarchal system and expose its powerlessness and lack. The hysteric becomes a “heroine” in exposing the limitations of the Other’s knowledge and resisting masculine theories and masculine representations of women. Lacanian psychoanalysts have also pointed out that the hysteric has facilitated the evolution of psychoanalysis and science by challenging their representations of truths. The hysteric thus contests and disrupts fixed discourses because she desires more knowledge about her own existence. The knowledge, however, that she desires is the knowledge that the Other does not have and cannot give her. As I pointed out in chapter 3, Irigaray’s (2002) research study of hysterical enunciations has shown that although the hysteric produces a discourse which interrogates the Other’s message regarding its incompleteness and ambiguity, she is still alienated in the Other’s enunciations and still constructs the Other as a closed and finite system rather than as an open and incomplete one. She thus always constructs herself in relation to a more powerful and more knowledgeable Master. She becomes alienated in her own demand that this masterful Other provide the ideal sign (the phallus) that can explain how she can be a cause of desire for others. As Irigaray explains, the hysteric is the one who mimes masculine language and masculine ideals.

The question for feminists that remains is how they can use Lacan in their epistemology. As I also mentioned earlier, Lacan’s theory is above all a psychoanalytic discourse and not a sociopolitical one. Lacan’s analytic discourse cannot simply be used by other discourses, since it has its own specificity and structure. Before I answer this question, even insufficiently, the major step that feminists need to make is to read Lacan more closely and stop misinterpreting his logic. To my mind, it is more important and productive for feminists to ask how they can use this theoretical paradigm, which is substantially different from their own, than to go on interrogating its premises and nomenclatures. As far as feminist
commentaries on Lacan’s work are concerned, we can say that they are still backwards. Feminists keep on criticizing Lacan for being patriarchal, because he uses the word phallus, and for being essentialist, because he uses the word jouissance. The result of this backwardness is that we now have a proliferation of feminist literature against Freud and Lacan and an ambivalent attitude towards psychoanalytic theory. Feminists desire to use and know Lacan’s theory. They use him when they attempt to formulate the dialectical relationship between the subject and the Other. They end up, however, misinterpreting some of his most important concepts, including the phallus, the real, and the symbolic Other. Thus, they use Lacan’s theory in the same way as they use Foucault’s theory. For Lacan, discourse always produces a rem(a)inder, which represents that which it excludes. Lacan teaches us that no matter how many signifiers we add to our signifying chain, the chain is always incomplete. As I discussed in chapters 2, 3, and 4, the subject thus structures its identity around this lack in the signifying order. As Copjec (1994) says, the subject is “the effect of the inherent failure of discourse” (p. 211).

Because feminists desire to use Lacan in their epistemology, and because they don’t do the hard work required to read Lacan closely, feminists end up calling Lacan’s discourse into question and demand that he provide them adequate answers about what it means for a woman to have certain desires and jouissance. Feminists express dissatisfaction with Lacan’s theoretical explanations without making substantial arguments why they want to deviate from it. They protest against Lacan’s terms and, at the same time, they use his concepts superficially to explain female sexuality. The kind of protesting they do ends up retaining Lacan and neo-Lacanians as Masters who should provide a better theory with which to explain femininity and the subject’s liberation from the Other’s domination.

If feminists, however, engage with Lacanian theory more rigorously, there will be an evolution in both epistemologies. If feminists were to speak the Irigararian
feminine language—the language that is similar to Lacan’s concept of the analyst’s discourse—they will succeed in questioning subjects’ enunciations, and they will not locate truth at the level of the ego. Anglophone feminists criticize psychoanalytic theory in a passive way and speak instead the hysteric’s discourse. Speaking a feminine language on issues related to oppression is the same technique that Lacanian psychoanalysts use with their analysands to question their unconscious desire and the etiologies of their symptoms. If feminists use Lacanian theory, they will succeed in motivating subjects to ask more questions about themselves. It is well known that the oppressed live and act without asking etiological questions about themselves and are, thus, stuck rebelling against and complying with the Other’s demands and desires without realizing their own paradoxical and conflictual desires in relation to the Other. They suffer by being represented by the Other’s alienating effects of language.

Furthermore, if feminists engage with Lacanian psychoanalytic theory rigorously, neo-Lacanian psychoanalysts will also be incited by feminists to further elaborate Lacan’s own concepts, which at times seem to be treated as pre-given and theoretically static. Neo-Lacanians will provide deeper theoretical clarifications to questions, including the question that is often raised by feminists in regard to how the subject relates to the Other in various sociopolitical settings.

Feminists, as I said earlier, do expose the Other’s lacking nature. What they fail, however, to do is to speak a feminine language. I conjecture that feminine language has the same structure as Lacan’s analytic discourse. When one shifts to the analyst’s discourse—and again, one makes this shift after one undergoes an analytic working through and realizes that the Other is lacking and does not have a final answer to give to the subject about how he or she can be happy—one becomes the subject of the drive, a pure desiring subject who is not inhibited by the Other’s demands and desires.
The feminine subject is not spoken by a symptom and is not in a state of suffering. When, again, I say that she is not spoken by the symptom, I mean that she is not castrated or represented through the retroactive effects of master signifiers. The feminine subject is the one who has dialectized master signifiers and is no longer inhibited from pursuing her satisfaction. She enjoys and seeks out her satisfaction without being inhibited by an unsatisfied desire. Her whole body enjoys. The feminine subject loves and enjoys by her act of speaking. Instead of being pinned down by the castrating effects of signifiers, she speaks of love and enjoys.

Thus, in order to speak a feminine language, one also has to be positioned as the cause of desire, as objet petit a. To be the cause the desire, and not the effect of the Other’s desire, means that the subject does not have a fixed structure in discourse. It means that the subject has managed to symbolize its own lack and goes beyond the repetitions, fixations, and closures of discourses. Feminine subjects might ask: what if there is no representation to describe the desires and aims of men and women? What if there are no correct representations for femininity? What if all the representations we have for sexual difference are correct and incorrect at the same time? What kinds of desires and fantasies do subjects maintain when they identify strongly with one ideological discourse? What if we simply punctuate the paradox of having a desire for an unsatisfied desire when subjects identify with fixed discourses? What if we then call the subject’s own fantasies and desires into question?

Feminists need to realize that the Lacanian Other is not the same as the Foucauldian Other. Lacan is not a deconstructionist. With Lacan, we learn that the Other is both powerful and deficient. For Lacan, the Other is powerful and persevering because its discourse revolves around an unnamable hole; the Other shows us that something true still remains to be said. As Stavrakakis (1999) points out, the subject’s desire is then inhabited by the Other’s desire to master meaning.
and become a full and meaningful identity. The subject and the Other cover over their irreducible negativity with utopian fantasies that the dialectic of desire in which they are both involved will someday bear fruit by giving them the sign of absolute meaning, unity, and harmony. Stavrakakis (1999) thus suggests that one needs “to locate the exact points within linguistic or discursive representation in which the real is surfacing” (p. 84).

In order to locate the real of a certain discursive representation and encourage subjects to identify with that real to constitute their own pure desire, Žižek (1989) and Stavrakakis (1999) point out that we need to call into question ideological discourse and elevate it to the level of the signifier, which means to interrogate utopian and idealistic fantasies that come with it; it means to expose its dystopia and lacking nature, to make subjects ask questions when they are represented by a discursive image, so that they put their desire for knowledge about their unconscious into motion.

One of the limitations of this dissertation is that I have not said exactly how feminists can use Lacan to further their own epistemological purposes. Feminists, however, need to read Lacan so they can see for themselves where Lacan’s own epistemology will take them. In this dissertation, I have responded to the most important questions that feminists have raised about Lacan. Much more could, no doubt, be said in response to Lacan’s feminist critics had I been able to work from the whole of Lacan’s opus, but much of it is still not even available in English. This too, then, constitutes one of the limitations of my dissertation.
Appendix A:

A Brief History of Hysteria

The concept of hysteria has a very rich history. It is the oldest category in medical, psychological, and social history. Historians, such as Veith (1965) and Micale (1995), have described the shifting descriptive and explanatory paradigms of hysteria and the ways in which the concept has entailed a series of dramatic images and treatment modalities. These paradigms shifted from the gynecological, demonological, and neurological theoretical models to psychological theory. Hysteria took its name, around the 5th century B.C., from the Greek word *hystera*, which means uterus. For millennia, hysteria has been associated primarily with women.

An Egyptian medical papyrus, which is believed to date back to around 1900 B.C., recorded that the female womb sometimes became dislocated and independent from other parts of the body. Egyptian doctors developed treatment methods to fight the disease, including the placement of aromatic substances on the vulva so as “to entice the womb back down into its correct position” (Micale, 1995, p. 19). The Greeks adopted the same notion, but they also explained it with the theory of “an unsatisfactory sexual life.” When a woman was deprived of sexual relations, her uterus was capable of destroying her body, causing symptoms of “dizziness, motor paralyses, sensory losses, and respiratory distress” (p. 19). The Greek remedies included the placement of aromatic substances on the vulva, but also the recommendation of immediate marriage. Ancient Roman doctors also understood hysteria as a disease of the womb, which caused “disruptions in female reproductive
biology, including amenorrhea, miscarriages, premature births, and menopause” (p. 20). They identified their most frequent cases of hysteria in widows and virgins and they recommended marriage as treatment.

The above ideas were enormously influential in medical history for millennia. A paradigm shift happened during the rise of Christian civilization. In St. Augustine’s writings, we find human suffering explained as a manifestation of evil and punishment from God. Explanations of hysteria shifted from medical to religious discourses. Women with hysterical symptoms were called witches. In the historical record, we find numerous attempts to detect such women, and evidence that they were tortured and executed.

During the Renaissance, the French physician Charles Lepois argued that the cause of hysteria is neither related to the womb nor the soul but to the influence of passions on the mind. Lepois also argued that the words and actions of the physician had a profound influence on the hysteric. In the late 17th and 18th centuries, British physicians developed a neurological model of disease based on the notions of “humors” and chemistry. They proposed the theory that in hysteria an excess of “animal spirits,” released from the brain, entered the blood stream and circulated through the body (p. 22).

In the late 18th and 19th centuries, we see the reintroduction of the uterine theories. Physicians explained hysterical symptoms as caused by female sexual deprivation as well as sexual overindulgence. The reasons for this shift are unclear. It is also significant that the Parisian psychiatric humanitarian, Philippe Pinel, classified hysteria under the heading of “Genital Neuroses of Women.” This period was marked by “a great multiplications of texts, theories, and therapies” (p. 23); previous theoretical paradigms were discussed in light of new medical discoveries regarding the role of the brain and the role of the womb.
Mesmer, an Austrian physician, hypothesized the existence of a magnetic fluid in the body and argued that hysteria resulted from disequilibrium of this fluid. His treatment of the disease was based on the idea that the physician’s hands had the power to redirect the fluid within the body and bring equilibrium. Mesmer’s patients were mostly salon ladies and some men. Although the medical academicians accused Mesmer of charlatanism, his theory influenced the discovery of the therapeutic effects of hypnosis.

After Mesmer, the most important medical figure in the 19th century for hysteria was the French clinical neurologist Charcot. Charcot rejected the genital etiology of hysteria and insisted that men were also susceptible to the disease, though less frequently than women. In his theory, hysteria was caused by a dysfunction of the central nervous system based on hereditary predisposition and environmental factors. The descriptions of this dysfunction involved symptoms of epilepsy and syphilis. Charcot held out little hope for its cure and “his therapeutics was limited to the alleviation of symptoms” (p. 25). At the famous hospital of Salpêtrière, he experimented with the use of hypnosis to treat patients, especially women, who manifested symptoms of fainting, paralysis, convulsions, and wild screaming. Another therapeutic technique that he employed was to ignore the hysterical behavior and concentrate instead on the present circumstances of these patients. Charcot found that his patients were suffering from many forms of stress, including sexual feelings, religious conflicts, and traumas from exploitation or neglect by their families. As hysterics seemed to be easily suggestible to explanations and hypnotic effects, several other doctors challenged Charcot’s experiments and characterized him as the “sinister” doctor “who manipulated his patients like puppeteers” (Showalter, 1997, p. 37). Although Charcot did not limit hysteria to women in his diagnostic schema, it seemed that he equated it with stereotypes of female personality. With his assistants, he saw hysterics as vain, preoccupied with
their appearance, deceitful, and self-dramatizing. These traits were seen by one of Charcot’s assistants as “varieties of female character ... One might even say that hysteric are more womanly than other women” (Showalter, 1997, p. 34).

Charcot’s theories and experiments on hysteria gave rise to psychoanalytic theory. In Studies on Hysteria, Freud and Breuer challenged the nineteenth-century theories of hysteria as an organic physical illness and argued instead that it needed to be understood as a psychic disorder. They proposed that hysteria was the product of a traumatic event, the memory of which got repressed and transformed into bodily symptoms (such as coughs, convulsions, and paralysis). In other words, trauma was converted into somatic symptoms. In 1896, Freud developed the seduction theory, in which he contended that infantile sexual abuse caused hysteria. As such, “hysterical symptoms were the derivatives of memories which are operating unconsciously” (Showalter, 1997, p. 40). By late 1897, however, Freud abandoned the seduction theory and contended instead that “hysterical patients were expressing fantasies based on their unconscious Oedipal desires” (p. 40).

The rise of the psychological paradigm of hysteria led to a sequence of publications that elaborated the idea of the hysterical neurotic character. Hysteria was defined by a set of highly negative character traits, mostly including “eccentricity, impulsiveness, emotionality, coquettishness, deceitfulness, and hypersexuality” (Micale, 1995, p. 24). Various researchers and psychoanalysts elaborated the characteristics of hysterical character and attributed it to pre-Oedipal dependence on the mother and Oedipal conflicts. For example, in the 1950’s, the

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38 Drawing the formulations of hysteria from psychodynamic theories, there is an elusive, disparate, and, at times, very confusing distinction among the terms hysterical personality, hysterical neurosis, hysterical character, hysteroid personality, conversion hysteria, anxiety hysteria, hysterical psychosis, etc. These distinctions are generally based on the level of specific symptoms as well as on the severity of the pre-genital and genital fixations that intervene in the patient’s daily functioning. In the journal Psychological Issues, Alan Krohn (1978) wrote a monograph on hysteria and traced past formulations from object-relational, self, ego, and other theories, which have either been more faithful to Freudian theory or less faithful to it. McWilliams (1994) also draws her description of hysteria from various analytic traditions, including from drive, ego, object-relational, and self theories.
researchers Chodoff and Lyons investigated the hysterical traits that were agreed upon by many authors, and listed seven major characteristics:

1) egoism, vanity, etc.; 2) exhibitionism, dramatization, lying, exaggeration; 3) unbridled display of affects, labile affect, inconsistency of reactions, etc.; 4) emotional shallowness; 5) sexualization of nonsexual situations; 6) intense fear of sexuality, frigidity; 7) demandingness and dependence (Krohn, 1978, p. 64).

Several theorists started to develop new approaches to define hysteria, relying on conversion reactions (psychosomatic symptoms) and characterological traits. Because, however, conversion symptoms were considered to be common in some eras and cultures, theorists believed that the definition of personality traits was more reliable. Some sporadic studies showed the remarkable “unsatisfactoriness of basing a diagnosis of hysteria on symptoms,” which challenged not only the conversion manifestations of hysteria but also the appearance of personality traits (Krohn, 1978, p. 68). Krohn (1978) cites a study by Purcell, Robins, and Cohen that was conducted in 1951, which intended to investigate further the nature of hysterical symptoms. Their participants were 21 female patients who at the beginning of their study were diagnosed with hysteria. Their symptoms included psychosomatic complaints, childishness, and self-dramatization. During the research study, however, it emerged that 14 of the 22 patients showed some signs of psychotic symptoms (hallucinations and delusions).

The confusion of hysterical symptoms with psychotic symptoms raised several doubts about the existence of hysteria. When, in the 1950’s, the diagnosis of schizophrenia became popular, some psychiatrists proposed that “all five cases in the Studies of Hysteria were actually misdiagnosed schizophrenic illnesses” (Micale, 1995, p. 60). Some also hypothesized that in Breuer’s famous case of Anna O, the patient suffered from toxic psychosis, probably because of her use of morphine.
Libbrecht (1995), in her book, *Hysterical Psychosis: A Historical Survey*, explores in detail the history of clinical psychiatry with its struggle to diagnostically differentiate hysteria from psychosis as well as to theorize the mix of hysterical and psychotic symptoms, which may emerge at different periods in the life of a patient. These symptoms include hysterical personality traits, somatic conversion, delusions, and hallucinations. Libbrecht cites several theorists who struggled with the classification system. Some patients were classified as "hysterical in the end," although many of them were once "diagnosed as schizophrenic over the course of their lengthy history as residential patients" (p. 197). In the 1960's, there was a proliferation of articles in Europe and America on the study of *hysterical psychosis*, in the attempt to include both hysterical and psychotic phenomena. A common description of hysterical psychosis was that "hallucinations, delusions, depersonalization, and grossly unusual behavior" were "sharply circumscribed and very transient" in patients with hysterical characters. It was hypothesized that the so-called psychotic symptoms in hysteria were pseudo-psychotic, in which the delusions seemed to be rectifiable and the hallucinations were thoughts rather than perceptions; these experiences occurred as a mechanism for coping with certain unbearable living conditions. Other theorists also noted that while hysterical psychotics "can be hypnotized, schizophrenics cannot" (p. 191). In time, the diagnosis of hysterical psychosis was replaced with the DSM's classifications of reactive psychosis and borderline personality disorder. Libbrecht (1995) points out that eventually psychiatrists, and subsequently the DSM committees, gave some attention to hysterical phenomena only within the psychosis paradigm. Several

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39 The shared psychotic disorder (*folie à deux*) may also be included here. It refers to the patient who develops delusions and/or odd beliefs as a result of a close relationship with a delusional individual. The content and nature of these beliefs depend on the beliefs of the partner. The phenomenon of *folie à deux* has also been termed "mass hysteria," which is most observable in large groups (or crowds), and is characterized by outbreaks of inexplicable and strange behaviors. This phenomenon was prevalent in the Middle Ages and was explained by the notion of possession. Groups of people were afflicted by a compulsion to run out in the streets, dance, shout, and rave. Mass hysterical reactions have existed even in modern times. One common example is sports or rock band fans, who yell, scream, and become very aggressive when they congregate in mobs.
authors/clinicians reported that they felt uncomfortable making a rigid distinction between neurosis and psychosis (p. 196) and had difficulty phenomenologically describing the manifestations of severe hysteria.

As Micale (1993) argues, since hysteria was broken down “into its constituent symptomatological parts” and lacked a strong theoretical and etiological theory to hold it together, it failed to retain its basic clinical unity in the predominant psychiatric paradigm. The symptoms of hysteria became “reassembled in new combinations and distributed to many other medical categories” and “more nuanced psychiatric classifications” (p. 525). The major problem that exists in contemporary medical epistemology seems to be that the disappearance of hysteria is mainly due to the failure to understand it through the lens of analytic discourse. Whereas Freud theorized hysteria by making the effort to decipher the unconscious and allowing his patients to free associate and speak about their memories, not only by his observations of their manifest symptoms, the DSM-IV fails to give us a clear differentiation of the diagnostic categories, resulting in the assignment of patients to one or more specific disorders based on ambiguous and arbitrary values.

The dominant psychodiagnostic epistemology today is problematic and inadequate. The current DSM’s medico-psychological paradigm leads us to understand patients’ symptoms superficially and to attempt to fix their “abnormal” behaviors/thoughts and lessen their most observable symptoms as quickly as possible. Most clinicians today make a diagnosis on the basis of socially desirable and adaptive behaviors. Consequently, psychotherapists are solely focused on the elimination of symptoms, without taking into much consideration how these symptoms correspond to a deeper structure.

It is thus evident that the category of borderline personality disorder has not been conceptualized thoroughly, since the diagnosticians have located it on the border of neurosis and psychosis (I provide Freud’s psychoanalytic distinction of
hysteria and psychosis in Appendix B). Failing to theorize the patient’s relational structure to the Other, we also fail to connect his or her manifested symptoms (such as self-mutilation, suicide threats, intense anger, unstable self-image, and alternation between extremes of idealization and devaluation of others) with signifiers and with deeper theoretical formulations of his or her positions in regard to trauma and the fundamental fantasy.
Appendix B:

The Freudian Theory of Bisexuality and Femininity

Among these is a suspicion that this phase of attachment to the mother is especially intimately related to the aetiology of hysteria, which is not surprising when we reflect that both the phase and the neurosis are characteristically feminine, and further, that in this dependence on the mother we have the germ of later paranoia in women (Freud, 1990d, p. 324).

Some portion of what we men call 'the enigma of women' may perhaps be derived from this expression of bisexuality in women's lives (Freud, 1990e, p. 359).

In "Femininity," Freud (1990e) asserts that the sexual development of women is enigmatic. In approaching this riddle, Freud warns that the theory of female sexuality is far from clear. Freud vacillates between two contradictory arguments: one argument is that women are predominantly passive and more likely to be bisexual or have masochistic tendencies than men; the other argument is that the truly feminine is heterosexual and normally active. Both arguments relate to women's mothering role and partnership with men.

With Freud, one finds a starting point from which to distinguish between the two sexes from a structural and socio-political perspective. Since Freud’s inquiry on the enigma of women, however, the problem of femininity has remained in feminism

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40 In his 1932 essay, Freud examined the issue of the girl’s preoedipal phase and the effects that this phase has on her sexuality. He was encouraged to undertake this task by the work of women psychoanalysts, such as Lampl-de Groot, Deutsch, Brunswick, and others, who served as mother substitutes in the transference. For more information about how Freud was influenced by these women psychoanalysts, see Hamon (2000).

41 Freud (1990e) adds that masochistic men also exhibit "very plain feminine traits" (p. 345).
to this day. Feminists protest against the Freudian theory of women’s wish for a penis, which leads them to question whether or not psychoanalysis is valid. We can argue, however, that protesting against the phallus is not proof that women do not have a masculinity complex. Following Soler’s (2006) argument, although Anglophone feminists protest against the psychoanalytic notion of the phallus, they fail to provide an alternative theory that would elucidate the distinction between the sexes. Although feminists challenge the biological and social reductionisms of what a woman is or should be, the enigmatic question that still remains in Anglophone feminist texts is what Hamon (2000) asks, “Why do women love men?” If women feel abused by male power and maternal responsibilities, why then do they love men sexually and look forward to assuming maternal responsibilities? The subsequent question that arises in feminist and neo-Freudian texts is whether or not the essence of femininity is linked to masochism insofar as women give into men’s desires.

In this section, I intend to discuss Freud’s conceptualization of femininity and women’s possible inclinations to hysteria, paranoia, and masochism. I will survey some of his earlier and later essays, so that the reader better understands the development of Freud’s thinking on femininity in relation to the preoedipal and Oedipal positions. I will also briefly describe Freud’s case formulations of Schreber and Dora, as well as Brunswick’s case of female paranoia, in order to elucidate the psychoanalytic differences among the terms normal femininity, hysterical neurosis, and psychosis.

§

Freud formulates sexual difference and clinical diagnostics based on the Oedipal configuration. In Freud’s view, femininity is understood as a succession of events in a little girl’s development, including penis envy and change of love-object (from the mother to the father). Femininity is understood in accordance with the Oedipal position. Freud (1990d) considers the Oedipal phase as more significant
than the preoedipal when he argues that the Oedipal relation is “the nucleus of the neuroses”—whether obsession or hysteria (p. 323). Depending on the Oedipal configuration, one becomes normal or neurotic and one develops a certain sexual identity.\(^{42}\)

In his 1931 essay, Freud (1990d) recognizes the significance of the pre-Oedipal phase in girls and gives credit to women analysts—Lampl-de Groot, Deutsch, and Brunswick—for serving as mother substitutes in the analytic transference and exploring the pre-Oedipus. Nevertheless, Freud does not go into many details about the pre-Oedipal phase. Freud considers the failure to resolve the Oedipal complex to be the cause of a wide range of clinical problems and psychopathology: penis envy, inhibition, masculinity complex, inferiority, perversion, obsession, and psychosomatic symptoms.

Freud (1990d) hypothesizes that the child’s unresolved dependence on the mother early in life situates it either as hysteric or paranoiac later in life. In regard to the child’s fixations on the mother, he gives credit to Ruth Mack Brunswick’s analysis of a case of female paranoia. Brunswick formulates this case in terms of the patient’s preoedipal fixations and failure to achieve the Oedipal position (see Hamon, 2000, pp. 179-215; Freud, 1990d, p. 324).

Freud and Brunswick conceptualize the preoedipal phase as the child’s attachment to an omnipotent (phallic) maternal figure, who is seductive toward and active with her child. Freud (1990d) observes that the child is sexually passive insofar as it is suckled, fed, cleaned, or dressed by the mother, but the child also strives to turn these sexual satisfactions into activity. The child wants to master the

\(^{42}\) Freud (1990e) asserts that, because girls do not have a penis, they envy the penis. In the absence of castration anxiety, girls do not form a strong superego as boys do. Girls take refuge in the Oedipal situation to resolve their penis envy and “remain in it for an indeterminate length of time” (p. 357). Girls realize they are castrated by seeing the genitals of boys, but their recognition that they do not have a penis does not necessarily mean that they accept their castration as a fact. They long for the penis unconsciously. They resolve their Oedipal complex when they accept that their wish for a penis can be replaced by giving birth to a baby.
mother’s omnipotence and identifies with the mother’s activity. For example, when the little girl plays with dolls, she identifies “with the active side of femininity,” with the active mothering role (p. 334). The mother does everything for the child and possesses everything that is desirable. Conversely, the child views the mother as devouring and hostile. The child sees the omnipotent mother not only as nurturing but also as threatening because of all the demands and prohibitions she places on it.

A child’s early experiences with the phallic mother determine whether the child achieves the Oedipal position and becomes differentiated and autonomous from the mother. The passage from the preoedipal to the Oedipal phase is a passage from dependency and passivity vis-à-vis the omnipotent-phallic-active mother to independence and activity thanks to identification with the mother (Brunswick, 1990; as cited in Hamon, 2000, pp. 219-220). In normal cases, when the child gradually accepts its mother’s castration and takes care of itself in the same way as her mother had taken care of it, the child substitutes activity for passivity. Based on this theory, one might conclude that in psychosis this substitution does not occur, and that in hysteria it does not reach its full course.

In Brunswick’s case of female paranoia, for example, we see that the patient, in adulthood, maintained an undifferentiating, symbiotic, and dependent relationship with her neglectful, abusive, and threatening sister. The sister was the predominant maternal figure for this patient. The patient came to see Brunswick for analysis to complain that she suspected her husband of being sexually involved with her stepmother (her father’s second wife). Overwhelmed by her stepmother’s voice, she was hearing buzzing noises in her head and was convinced that neighbors and strangers that she passed on the street were laughing and glancing at her.

In her associations to delusions, dreams, and childhood memories, Brunswick’s patient situated her sister as both omnipotent (phallic) and devouring. The patient recalled that when she was 2 years old she was fascinated by her sister’s
Brunswick interprets that the patient was fascinated because she thought that there was a penis hidden behind it. It was also apparent in one of her dreams, in which she saw herself possessing a penis and urinating like a man, that the patient had the impression that she and her sister lacked nothing. Her sister's sexual pleasure was also overwhelming when the patient realized that she was not able to give her sister everything her sister wanted. When the patient was young, she engaged in masturbatory activities with her sister, by which they both experienced sexual pleasure each time. In this memory, the patient was positioned as a special partner for her sister. Her sister, however, was promiscuous and had many male lovers. At a later age, the patient felt that her sister neglected her as a love-object. The patient found herself helpless to win back her sister’s love, but she continued to long for the female object and to believe that neither she nor her sister were castrated.

The experience of being a helpless, traumatized, and passive child in relation to her sister was repeated in her transferences to others, including her analyst and stepmother, who were positioned by the patient as taking her sister's omnipotent place. The patient was envious of her analyst’s male patients and of her husband who received more affection from her stepmother than she did. The therapist and stepmother were objects of jealousy and substitutes for her sister (Hamon, 2000, pp. 179-215).

At first glance, her relationship with her husband might seem to be a “normal” love relationship between a man and a woman. But when we study her delusional jealousies in detail, as Brunswick did, we see that the patient’s jealousy regarding her husband’s infidelity had its source in feelings of hatred toward men, especially of those men who had stolen her sister’s love from her. Brunswick’s patient imagined that these men had something better to offer her sister than she did. In the same vein, the patient imagined that her husband was better able than
her to seduce her stepmother and other women whom she loved, including her therapist.

Was Brunswick’s paranoid patient feminine? To give an answer from a Freudian perspective, we have to examine some of Freud’s contradictory statements. Freud makes statements here and there in his writings that dependency on the maternal situates the subject in a truly feminine position—a position that is characteristic of hysteria and paranoia. In his 1932 essay, however, Freud is clearer about what constitutes true or normal femininity. For Freud (1990e), the castration complex is the linchpin of becoming a woman. To become a woman, a little girl has to accept the idea that she and her mother do not have penises. The little girl has to turn to a man’s love with the expectation of getting the penis from him. As Freud states, a woman’s wish for a penis is replaced by having a baby with the man she loves. The baby symbolically takes the place of a penis. Since Brunswick’s patient did not accede to the Oedipal position and did not perceive herself or her mother-object as castrated, she was not feminine.

Freud, however, argues that the paranoiac is fixated on the preoedipal mother and becomes both feminized (veiled feminine) and homosexual. He understands paranoid outbreaks as defenses against homosexuality. Homosexuality in the paranoiac originates from a symbiotic love-hate relationship with the preoedipal phallic mother.43

In Schreber’s case, for example, a case of male paranoia, Freud (1956a) asserts that Schreber’s emasculation wish at the age of 51—his wish to be transformed into a woman and submit to the act of copulation—was delusional. Schreber had the delusion that if he were a woman, he would redeem and save the

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43 Freud does not consider homosexuality to be the cause of paranoia. Rather, he understands paranoia as a defense against homosexuality. It seems to me that Freud (1990b) considers homosexuality normal when the subject achieves the Oedipal position at his or her early ages and is not neurotically conflictual about his or her sexual orientation. Freud (1990e), however, also describes women’s homosexuality as involving a masculinity complex, when these women are neurotics. Women with a masculinity complex are defiantly rebellious regarding the idea that they are castrated.
world. His delusion was an outburst of his homosexual feelings towards his physician, Flechsig, who in turn was associated by him with God. Freud argues that the manifestation of homosexuality later in life presumes the "condition that the object of their choice must possess genitals like their own" (p. 446). Since some paranoids oscillate between homosexual and heterosexual fantasies, paranoids perceive both sexes as having male genitals.

Freud argues that Schreber’s homosexual love for Flechsig was a repetition of an infantile transference love—a love that was first directed to the mother and then shifted to the father. In his 1922 essay, Freud (1956b) explains further that homosexuality for the paranoiac has its origin in a preoedipal fixation on the maternal object. Because of this fixation, the paranoiac cannot tolerate feelings of jealousy toward rivals, e.g., siblings or the father, and so the paranoiac transforms rivals into love-objects. The development of persecutory paranoia comes from a primal relationship, which is mixed with love-hate feelings. The paranoiac transforms the loved ones into hated persecutors and the hated rivals into love-objects. The transformation of hated rivals into love-objects is a way to avoid rivalry. Hence, Schreber’s feminization was due to “an indignant repudiation—a true masculine protest” (Freud, 1956a, p. 426). Schreber’s emasculation wish and homosexual love for Flechsig were caused by his fear that Flechsig, a powerful divine man, might persecute and abuse him. As Schreber writes in his autobiography, “Flechsig ... tried to commit soul-murder upon [me]” (p. 428). As we will see shortly, this form of masculine protest is different from what we find in hysteria.

The paranoiac’s fixation on the mother is a narcissistic fixation. This fixation makes it difficult to love another woman because he cannot get beyond the autoerotic stage. For the paranoiac, other love-objects must love him in the same way.

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44 Freud (1956a) explains further how the paranoiac negates and projects in various ways. The paranoiac’s statement, for example, "I (a man) love him," is contradicted by a delusion of persecution that asserts, "I do not love him—I hate him." The persecutor here is someone who was once loved by the paranoiac (p. 449).
way as his mother loved him. Therefore, the paranoiac’s attachment to the preoedipal mother is a symbiotic love. Schreber’s aversion for other women also belied the fact that when he discovered that women were castrated, he feared that women might castrate him as well. He also feared his father. By renouncing women, he avoided rivalry with his father and the possibility of castration by his mother. It was for that reason that he transformed his male rivals into love objects and identified with the feminine, preoedipal, maternal object. We need to keep in mind here that Schreber’s emasculation fantasy was not a fantasy of castration but rather a delusion of re-creating a whole humanity with his physician, Flechsig. In other words, with his emasculation delusion, Schreber still maintained the idea that he was not castrated and that he was all-powerful.

As I mentioned earlier, feminization is not only a symptom of paranoia but also of hysteria. In the case of Dora, a case of female hysteria written in 1905, Freud did not discuss the effects of Dora’s attachment to her mother. As I said earlier, throughout his work, Freud considered the Oedipal phase, and not the preoedipal, to be the nucleus of the neuroses (hysteria and obsession). In the early 1930’s, regardless of his conjecture that a daughter’s unresolved dependence on her mother has an effect on her relation to her father as a love-object, Freud elaborated more on how the daughter relates to her father when he discussed the little girl’s different possible paths of sexual development. In the case of Dora, we read that Dora was more attached to her father than she was to her mother and that Dora presented her mother as “an uncultivated woman and above all as a foolish one” (Freud, 1997a, p. 13). In analysis, Freud focused on Dora’s Oedipal complex. At the end of the analysis, Freud discovered that Dora was not heterosexual but bisexual; Dora was not only in love with men but also with women. Hence, she identified with both femininity and masculinity.
I will describe the case briefly: Dora was 18 years old and she was brought to Freud for treatment by her father. Since the age of 8, Dora suffered from a variety of psychological and psychosomatic symptoms: chronic asthma, migraines, nervous coughing, catarrh, aphonia, depression, suicidal ideation, irritability, and loss of consciousness. There was no evidence of organic cause for her physical ailments.

Dora’s symptoms were connected with the circumstances of her life: Her father had formed a close relationship with a married couple, Herr K and Frau K. Dora was convinced that her father was having an affair with Frau K and complained to both her parents that Herr K had made sexual advances towards her. Both parents, however, were unsupportive and suspicious of Dora’s accusations against Herr K. In turn, they accused Dora of having sexual fantasies and making up stories. Dora disclosed to Freud that Herr K had “suddenly clasped [her] to him and pressed a kiss upon her lips.” Freud also tells us that “Dora had at that moment a violent feeling of disgust, tore herself free from the man,” and left him (p. 21). This event occurred when Dora was 14 years old. Up until the age of 18, Dora was secretive about this incident and maintained her friendship with Herr K. Whereas Dora reproached her father for having an affair with Frau K, she was protective of their affair. For example, Dora did not visit Frau K when she knew that her father was there with her. She also was devoted to Frau K and took care of the K’s children as if she were their mother.

Freud interpreted Dora’s symptoms symbolically. During the treatment, Freud insisted that Dora was in love with Herr K as she had been in love with her father during the Oedipal phase. But because Dora had not resolved her Oedipal conflicts, she was not able to free herself from these conflicts and situate herself as a woman in relation to a man. In Freud’s words, Dora was not able to free herself from disease (masculinity complex) and turn to life (normal femininity). Freud
noticed, for example, that during Herr K’s absences, Dora experienced loss of voice and frequent attacks of coughing. This was an indication to Freud that Dora gave up speaking because “speech had lost its value since she could not speak to him” (p. 33). For Freud, Dora’s physical symptoms signified her struggle between her love for men and her repudiation of sexuality. This was clear to Freud when he analyzed her hysterical appendicitis attacks—attacks that had no organic basis and involved the symptoms of abdominal pain and foot numbness. Dora told Freud that she experienced her first appendicitis attack nine months after Herr K’s sexual advances towards her. Before Herr K tried to kiss her by the lake at age 18, he told her, “You know I get nothing out of my wife” (p. 90). Freud’s interpretation was that Dora fantasized both childbirth and making a false step with Herr K. Freud also insisted to Dora that she was unconsciously in love with him.

Only when Dora broke off the analysis did Freud realize that Dora was also in love with Frau K. Dora used to praise Frau K’s “adorable white body” and never spoke “a harsh or angry word against the lady” (p. 54). Dora started to complain about her father’s affair when she felt that Frau K had betrayed her. After the termination, Freud admitted that the fault lay in his failure “to discover in time and to inform the patient that her homosexual (gynaecophilic) love for Frau K was the strongest unconscious current in her mental life” (p. 110). Freud arrived at another interpretation on how she derived secondary gains from her symptoms: Dora wanted to frighten and punish her father in order to make him give up Frau K. Some of the symbolic connotations of her symptoms were that Dora was attached to her father and identified with masculinity. In addition, she also felt vengeful toward her father and was fascinated with femininity. Dora’s fascination with femininity became even more manifest when Dora shared with Freud her experience of going to a gallery alone and looking at the pictures that appealed to her. Dora was “rapt in
silent admiration” for two hours in front of the Sistine Madonna, the virgin mother (p. 88). In other words, the divine beauty of that feminine statue fascinated her.

In 1908, Freud (1997b) added a new section to his case history, entitled “Hysterical Phantasies and their Relation to Bisexuality.” In that essay, Freud established the thesis that a “hysterical symptom is the expression of both a masculine and a feminine unconscious sexual” fantasy (p. 118). Hysterical symptoms are bisexual in nature and serve the fulfillment of unconscious masculine and feminine sexual wishes. Freud mentioned the example of a woman who pressed her dress to her body with one hand (identification with femininity) while she also tried to tear her dress off with the other hand (identification with masculinity). This woman was torn in her fantasies between yielding to a man sexually and rebelling against her sexual feelings.

Returning to Dora’s case, Dora’s identification with masculinity was apparent to Freud when she adopted her father’s physical symptoms from the age of eight onward, e.g., coughing, hoarseness, catarrh, and so on. These symptoms expressed several meanings in succession. For example, they expressed her love and sympathy for his chronic illnesses, identification with his high socioeconomic status regardless of his poor health, and revenge for his unwillingness to give up his affair with Frau K for the sake of his daughter. Her oral conversion symptoms were also related to her father’s oral sexual techniques. Dora repressed the idea that to satisfy Frau K her father resorted to oral sex, because of his impotence (Lacan, 2006, p. 180/221). Dora recognized her female body in an alienating way by identifying with her father’s bodily image and desire for Frau K. By taking her father’s desire as her own desire, Dora’s oral zone lost its erogenicity and became a site of conversion. Her psychical conflicts were transformed into somatic symptoms, e.g. coughing, hoarseness, and aphonia. Dora was subjected to bodily fragmentations caused by her father’s disparate desires and conflictual wishes.
When Herr K expressed his passionate affection for Dora and declared that he got nothing out of his wife, Dora changed position in relation to the K’s. From then on, Dora wanted to stop all relations with the K’s and demanded that her father also stop his affair. She resented her father for offering her to Herr K in exchange for his affair with Frau K. She also resented Herr K for telling her that his wife meant nothing to him. Herr K had once previously repeated the exact same words to a governess. Dora hated Herr K when she realized that Herr K treated her just like a governess. Here, of course, Dora identified with being a woman mistreated by a man.

Since Frau K was the object of her father’s desire, Dora became fascinated with what a man desires in a woman. Following Lacan (2006), Dora realized the impasse ”of accepting herself as a man’s object of desire” and, for that reason, Dora idolized Frau K’s femininity and the Madonna. Her solution was to offer herself as an object of an irreducible, transcendent, and divine desire and not as an object of a man’s desire (p. 181/222). Dora did not consent to Herr K’s sexual advances. In other words, Dora identified with femininity not in relation to sexuality with a man but in relation to her inability to understand the enigmatic nature of femininity. Her unconscious wish to understand her father’s desire led to passivity in her relations with others and to psychosomatic symptoms.45

The expressions of bisexuality and passivity in hysteria differ from those in paranoia. What Brunswick’s paranoid patient and Freud’s hysterical Dora had in common were their conscious love for men but their unacknowledged homosexual love for women and aversion toward men. However, both patients’ symptoms were structured in different ways.

45 Lacan (2006) assures us that Dora’s pregnancy fantasy after Herr K’s sexual advances functioned as an identification with masculinity (p. 183/224). We can deduce that Dora identified with masculinity by identifying with her father’s desire to have genital sex, instead of oral sex, with Frau K and procreate. Hence, her pregnancy fantasy, converted to appendicitis, was her father’s unfulfilled desire for a baby with Frau K.
According to Freud, the underlying mechanism that operates in psychosis is repudiation, also called foreclosure (Verwerfung). Foreclosure occurs when the ego rejects an “incompatible idea together with its affect and behaves as if the idea had never occurred to the ego at all” (Freud, as cited in Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p. 166). Any idea that is abolished internally returns from without. The psychotic simultaneously repudiates unpleasant ideas with their affects. In Brunswick’s case, for example, the patient, as a child, foreclosed the idea that her sister was castrated. Instead, her sister remained in her mind as an intact whole just like her. When Brunswick’s patient was confronted with her sister’s overwhelming sexual jouissance, she situated her sister as all powerful. Brunswick’s patient foreclosed the idea that her sister was lacking and the idea that she herself could not give her sister the sexual jouissance she wanted.

We see the same mechanism functioning in Schreber’s case. Schreber situated himself and Flechsig as omnipotent in order to repudiate the idea of castration and rivalry. Schreber’s love for Flechsig was transferred onto Flechsig from Schreber’s father, who was also positioned as omnipotent when Schreber, as a child, was not able to signify his separation from his mother. Schreber maintained an undifferentiated relation with his mother by foreclosing the idea that his father was able to castrate him and frustrate his symbiotic relation with his mother. His avoidance of rivalry with Flechsig, as with his father, forced Schreber to assume a feminized, passive position in relation to him.

In contrast, the mechanism that operates in the neuroses (hysteria and obsession) is repression. Repression involves keeping something it at some distance from consciousness. Whereas in foreclosure, ideas that are abolished internally return from without, in repression, incompatible ideas return from within in the form of slips of the tongue, bungled actions, psychosomatic symptoms, and so on (Fink, 1997). In Dora’s case, for example, we see that Dora had fallen in love with her
father at first and Frau K afterwards without knowing it. The idea that she loved her father and Frau K was kept unconscious. In consequence, Dora replaced her bisexual love feelings with symptoms that affected her whole life.

In order for a child to be neurotic/normal and not psychotic later in life, the child needs to signify its body and sense of self as different from the body of the mother and as different from the mother’s conception of herself. Freud (1990d) remarks that a neurotic woman represses her original relation to her mother; she pushes her conflictual relation to her mother into her unconscious. With the discovery of castration and the realization of her organic inferiority, the little girl is more inclined to repress the conflict between the first sexual experiences she had in relation to her mother and her frustrations with her castrated mother. Her attachment to her father reflects her relation to her mother. In other words, her attachment to her father is built on her original relation to her mother. A woman’s husband, Freud (1990d) writes, is “meant to be the inheritor of her relation to her father, but in reality he [becomes] the inheritor of her relation to her mother” (p. 328). Hence, a woman’s neurotic struggle with her husband or with men in general reflects her struggle with her mother. For this reason, a woman is more inclined to develop a masculinity complex, renounce her whole sexual life, and defiantly overemphasize her clitoral masculinity in her unconscious.

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A crucial question that arises in Freud’s writings is whether or not the essence of femininity is linked to masochism/passivity. Freud (1990c) vacillates between two conflicting ideas on masochism. First, he argues that masochistic males and females are situated in a “characteristically feminine position” (p. 286). The manifest content of their masochistic fantasies involves mistreatment, while the latent content includes castration, copulation, and giving birth. Their masochistic behaviors are
child-like, i.e., helpless and naughty. From this point of view, masochism is understood as giving expression to “feminine nature.” Second, Freud conceptualizes masochism as a symptomatic expression of all patients regardless of their sexuality. Patients take pleasure in pain and for that reason they repeat their symptoms.

The Freudian psychoanalytic interrelationship between femininity and masochism remains questionable to this day, especially when we come across Freud’s developmental theory of female sexuality. Freud’s (1990e) postulation that the essence of femininity is to have “a preference for passive behavior and passive aims” connects with his theory of the libido. For Freud (1990a), although men and women are bisexual (active and passive in nature), their libido is “of a masculine nature.” The clitoris, the leading erotogenic zone in female children, “is homologous to the masculine zone of the glans penis” (p. 136). The clitoris is a penis-equivalent. When the little girl derives masturbatory pleasure from her clitoris, she is like a little man. Freud defines the libido as masculine, because in a biological and sociological sense, it is associated with activity, aggressiveness, intensity, and muscular power.

When the little girl realizes that her mother possesses neither the penis nor the masculine character-traits that are associated with the possession of penis, i.e., privilege and power, she reaches the conclusion that her mother is castrated. She understands that neither she nor her mother has the phallus but, instead, her father has it. In order for the little girl “to pass from her masculine phase to the feminine one,” she has to accomplish a double task: the switch of erotogenic zone—from the clitoris to the vagina—and the change of love-object—from the mother to the father (1990e, pp. 347-8). In other words, the little girl has to drop her initial love that was directed toward her phallic mother and has to renounce the pleasure associated with her mother from stimulation of the clitoris. In order for the little girl to desire

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46 Freud (1990a) argues that pure masculinity and pure femininity cannot be found in the psycho-physiological sense.
the paternal phallus she needs to recognize both that she is castrated (she does not have the male genital) and that her mother had deprived her of a penis. Her shift to femininity is a shift from an active and virile phase to a passive phase. The little girl acknowledges her own lack and expects to get the phallus from her father. As Freud (1990e) writes, “The turning-away from her mother is an extremely important step in the course of a little girl’s development .... [T]here is to be observed a marked lowering of the active sexual impulses and a rise of the passive ones” (p. 336). With this statement, we are left to assume that the feminine subject is predominantly passive and tolerates the dominance of the masculine in masochistic ways.

On the issue of activity-passivity, however, there are also other psychoanalytic interpretations that underscore the idea that femininity is associated only with passivity. In collaboration with Freud, Brunswick (1990)47 wrote an article called, “The Preoedipal Phase of the Libido Development,” which seems to more clearly describe Freud’s theory of psychosexual development in relation to the activity-passivity binary. In that article, Brunswick informs us that Freud retracted “the statement that the Oedipus complex contains the nucleus of the neuroses” (p. 43). It seems to me that the reason why Freud changed his mind (about his previous assertion that the Oedipal predominates over the preoedipal in the etiological explanations of neuroses) was because Freud was not clear how the conversion of activity into passivity, and vice versa, in the Oedipal and preoedipal phases works, especially during the 1920’s.

Brunswick explains that certain developmental strivings are passive whereas other strivings are active and therefore there is not a clear distinction between activity and passivity at any given stage of development. Brunswick states that, in normal development, as the child gets older, his/her active strivings increase in number and intensity. This, however, does not mean that all passive strivings are

47 Brunswick began to write this article in 1930 in collaboration with Freud.
converted to active ones. The child identifies with the mother’s activity gradually. For example, the child learns to role play his/her mother’s activity toward other children, toys, and animals. Unlike Freud’s early theory that the child’s libido in the pre-oedipal phase is active, Brunswick asserts that the infant is primarily passive and that activity gradually takes precedence over passivity gradually. Brunswick also states that every time the child successfully identifies with the mother’s activity, the child finds its mother less necessary. The active child, regardless of its biological sex, begins to increasingly resent its mother’s demands and prohibitions. The child’s resentment and aggression towards the mother are by-products of protecting its own activity.

Following Freud (1990d, 1990e) and Brunswick (1990), there is no neat parallelism between male and female sexual development. Both theorists argue that sexual development in girls is more complex than in boys. The main reason for this complexity is that when a girl realizes that her mother is castrated, she feels doomed and that she will ever acquire a penis. Both theorists assert that the girl’s identification with the mother’s castration positions the girl in a passive relation to her father, since the girl passively expects passively the phallus from her father.

However, the distinctions between activity and passivity are unclear. As we have already learned from Brunswick’s case of female paranoia, the patient’s fixation on her phallic maternal substitute (her sister) and her failure to achieve the Oedipal position situated her as passive in relation to her omnipotent sister. Therefore, in “normal” development, the girl’s shift from her mother to her father as love-object also implies that the girl resents her mother’s overpowering activity in relation to her, since the mother is the primary caregiver. She seeks to actively differentiate

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48 To demonstrate the significance of the Oedipus complex that has for the girls more than for the boys, Freud (1990d) rejected Jung’s term, Electra complex. Freud stated that Jung’s terminology implies that the girl’s position is analogous to the boy’s position in relation to the parents. Freud did not see why the term Oedipal in girls should change to Electra; instead, he wanted to emphasize that there is a qualitative difference of the Oedipal complex between the sexes and that the phallus is predominant in both sexes and in both phases, pre-oedipal and Oedipal (Freud, 1990d, p. 326; Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p. 152).
herself from her mother. Therefore, the girl’s passive expectation of the phallus from her father requires an active differentiation from her mother.

In my reading of Freud (1990e), the girl’s active differentiation from her omnipotent preoedipal mother does not necessarily mean that the girl hates or reproaches her mother. Instead, in order for a girl to differentiate from the mother and substitute activity for passivity, she has to identify with the active mother. In other words, from a Freudian perspective, when the girl accepts that she lacks the penis and realizes that her mother is not the one who can give it to her, the girl plays the part of her mother, becomes feminine, identifies with her mother’s activities in order herself to become an active mother and an active individual inside and outside the context of the family.49

On the contrary, Freud (1990e) states that if the little girl regards her castration as a misfortune, to the point that she becomes envious because she does not have a penis, she becomes entirely dissatisfied with her sexuality and becomes contemptuous and hostile towards her mother. Envy for the penis leads her to a struggle about her sexuality as well as to passive dynamic relationships with men and women, which is characteristic of the clinical structure of hysteria. In Freud’s mind, ego identification with either parent always comes down “in the end to a refusal of castration” (Hamon, 2000, p. 109). A woman’s recognition of her castration makes the father into a love object, because he has the phallus, but also makes the castrated mother into a love object, because she is loved by the father.

To look at the issues of activity-passivity more closely, we may briefly turn to Freud’s theory of masochism. Freud (1990f) explains that sexual excitations and aggression are turned inward after the individual has suffered painful experiences.

49 Freud (1990e) writes, “[Playing with dolls] served as an identification with her mother with the intention of substituting activity for passivity” (p. 356). “Women can display great activity in various directions, men are not able to live in company with their own kind unless they develop a large amount of passive adaptability .... I shall conclude that you have decided in your own minds to make ‘active’ coincide with ‘masculine’ and ‘passive’ with ‘feminine’” (p. 344-345).
and these experiences are reflected in the fantasies at each developmental stage. Freud states that, in “eroticogenic masochism,” “the libido meets the instinct of death” and a portion of the death instinct remains inside the individual (Freud, 1990f, p. 287). Eroticogenic masochism is present in all of the developmental phases for both sexes: the oral stage, as manifested in the “fear of being eaten up by the totem-animal (father)”; the sadistic-anal stage, as manifested in the “wish to be beaten by the father”; the phallic stage, as shown by fantasies of castration; and the genital phase, as shown by fantasies of “being copulated with and of giving birth, which are characteristic of femaleness” (p. 288). We should note here that Freud mentions only the father as the cause of these masochistic fantasies. We may infer that Freud considers the differentiation of the child from its primary caregiver (mother) to be traumatic and the mediator (the father, who has the phallus) between the child and the mother to be a castrator. We may also infer that the child’s love for the father during the Oedipal phase is ambivalent.

For Freud, the differentiation between the mother and the child occurs only when the child experiences its mother as defective, as lacking the phallus, and its father as a threat and as more privileged than its mother. Although activity and passivity are not as clear as one may think—since for Freud, both sexes have a combination of active and passive qualities—we are often left to conclude that in order for a girl to become feminine, she has to acknowledge her castration, the superiority of the male, and her sexual drive as having passive aims. She has to acknowledge that her vagina is to be penetrated by the male organ. With Freud, one may infer that a woman’s passive pursuit of sexual pleasure situates her as having low self-esteem and difficulty separating from the maternal. A woman is someone who endures pain in the service of others and gives preference to passive aims (Freud, 1990e, p. 345).
According to Freud, it is crucial to clarify, however, that the essence of femininity is not masochistic. Freud (1990f) refers to feminine masochism to describe men’s regression to infantile behaviors, dependency on the mother, and helplessness. In her reflections on Freud, Soler (2006) points out that a masochist’s regressive behaviors are not the same as a woman’s relationship with a man. The masochist’s desire to suffer and make himself into a piece of trash is not the same as a woman’s desire to impress a man and make herself loveable to him. For Freud, the true masochist, who has a need for punishment and a need for pain in order to feel erotic excitation is associated with the death instinct (the return of the living being to the inorganic state).
References


