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## SIBLINGS: NEW PERSPECTIVES

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# An Introduction

CLAUDIA LAMENT, PH.D.

FOR MANY YEARS, JULIET MITCHELL HAS BEEN HUNTING DOWN THE elements of a mystery: Why has there been no place for the topic of siblings in the psychoanalytic superstructure? Historically, the lateral dimension in psychic life was seen largely as a displacement from the more-important vertical, or parent-child, relation. The sibling relationship taken on its own merit has been a long time in the making. Notwithstanding the publication of numerous papers that address this imbalance, the subject of siblings sticks to the margins of theory. Mitchell's 2003 volume, with the fittingly direct title *Siblings*, demonstrated the fruits of her quest to parse this conundrum, and succeed she did. She extracted her central thesis from this book in her presentation at the Western New England Psychoanalytic Society Symposium in 2011. The paper, "Siblings: Thinking Theory," which stands as the centerpiece of this section, is an author-edited version of her presentation.

Her work uncovered several unanticipated interlocking clues: the penetrating and abiding structures of phallocentrism in Western societies, and psychoanalytic theories concerning the origins of hysteria. Her perusal of early psychoanalytic explanations placed its "truths" about hysteria within the parent-child dimension in pre-oedipal and oedipal iterations. Mitchell provides the following account: The hysterical girl—though true too of the rarer example of the hysterical boy—flaunts a fantasised position of owning the phallus to captivate the mother. This kindles a seductive intensity in the child in the hope that the arrival of

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a real penis will be forthcoming. All the while, the child also cleaves to an unconscious belief that it has been stolen away from her/him, leaving in its wake a profound sense of emptiness.

The late-nineteenth-century world-renowned neurologist Jean-Marie Charcot, having numerous male hysterics in his Parisian clinic, theorized an additional point of view: for him, the appearance of an environmental trauma was the designated culprit. Following his lead, Mitchell became curious about the idea of trauma in the hysteric and assembled the hysteric's symptomatology of always being both "too much there and insufficiently present—moving between grandiosity and psychic collapse" (2003, p. 7). Was there an unidentified trauma inherent in this outward picture? She cited King (1993) as noting the universal component of an "imitation of death," or annihilation in addition to the well-documented feature of the breakthrough of incestuous oedipal desire as typifying the hysteric's behavior. At this, the detective was as if struck by lightning: Mitchell drew together these two aspects—the fear of annihilation and the taboo of incest—and saw in them what she deemed fitting as the natural response to the arrival of a sibling. As she put it, for her, the oedipal rock shifted and behind it she found so many dancing and squabbling siblings. The imagistic vision of "dancing siblings" is intriguing as it summons up scenes of play, charming exuberance, and mutual loving exchange; yet, a closer look at Mitchell's thesis shows that the dance is more code for squabbling. Whimsical interlude is a veil for a darker psychic drama.

Through this vector, she not only argued that sibling arrival is a "trauma" that underpins the hysteric's disorder, but she also expanded the idea of sibling trauma as universal in its reach and inclusive of the only child's expectation that the sibling arrival is just around the corner. This awaited sibling engenders in its brother or sister profound love for someone who is "just like me" but who, at the same time, threatens the very uniqueness of the child and thus, is a replacement of oneself. Consequently, the child feels that his or her very being is not only under siege but, in fact, is annihilated. It is the task of humankind, Mitchell admonished, to surmount this developmental trauma or else remain mired in the seductive, provocative, self-aggrandizing, and histrionic displays that one observes in the toddler who must manage the fateful birth of the one who obliterates his or her personhood. If this is the case, namely, that sibling "trauma" is generalizable over all civilization, why has the role of siblings been occluded from its rightful place in psychoanalytic theory?

In the pages of this collection, readers will also discover an alternate perspective on Mitchell's view of siblingships as necessarily universally

traumatic. Informing this difference in approach will be a conceptual overview of the developmental process and its continuous and discontinuous dimensions, as well as the roles of dispositional influences and gender biases as impacting the child's unique experience of this relationship.

Mitchell cited her second clue, phallocentrism and its deeply structured coordinates in the larger sociocultural context, as an important reason for the omission of the siblings vector from the psychoanalytic superstructure. The argument follows thusly: The ideal of fraternity is encoded in Western society as the brotherhood of men. Mitchell then charted the logic that holds that ideologies spawned by "brotherhood" structures are inextricably tied to patriarchies. She paused at this juncture to acknowledge how this privileged position of the patriarchy has exerted a deep and penetrating inflection on the social polity. Where taboos regarding incest and violence by parents toward children in vertically structured societies will naturally initiate the conditions for the creation of a social contract that binds and protects the biological relationship between parent and child, such societies also tend to fail to create a place where taboos form in like manner with their attendant social structures that care for the health of the sibling relationship. In effect, the hegemony of patriarchy—if blindly adhered to—will result in an abiding neglect of the vagaries of love and hate in siblinghood: The result of such a blinkered society is an unwitting *carte blanche* on incest and violence. Mitchell warned that the omission of the place of siblings in our cultural superstructure is a significant driving force that fuels our ignorance of the rampant extent of sibling abuse—and its displaced forms in love relationships and war—in Western society.

From here, it is hardly a stretch of the imagination to extend the argument that such phallocentric precipitates in our cultural milieu have created and perpetuated the vertical dimension of parent-child relations in psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice. Mitchell's sleuthing uncovered that conceptualizations surrounding femininity in analytic theory can be mapped easily onto those that surround siblingships. For example, sibling experiences reference emotions such as anxieties that are typically associated with females: annihilation, fears of loss of love, leaning on the other for confirmation, tendencies toward being the object of love as opposed to the active position as subject of loving relations. The feminine in psychoanalytic theory is cast as that which is different or as other: patriarchal matrices equate the normative with male and tend to expel that which is identified outside this grouping as feminine. The stability of the vertical ladder in theory substantiates

this system of thinking by taking up all the space, leaving the sibling (as feminine) dimension at the corners.

In her 2003 volume, Mitchell brought some of these ideas to life in her example of the society of the Trobrianders in Melanesia, wherein the sibling dimension took precedence. Here, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1927; 1929) discovered in the 1920s that theirs was a community highly sensitive to brother/sister incest and where, by Western standards, the usual parent-child axis was of secondary import: instead of its place on the promontory of the preferred social contract, the vertical dimension was situated in the lowlands, characterized only by its bond of affection in which any whiff of sexualized feeling was absent. The taboo against passions was located laterally. To uphold its tenets, young children were divided into sets wherein blood brothers and sisters were not allowed in the same group. In this “republic of children,” as Malinowski referred to it, the children’s social groupings were not adjudicated by adults but by themselves. Sexual exploration (in the absence of the biological siblings), experimentation of regulating violent feelings through play, and creating social bonds became the foundational fabric of their childhood experience. Thus, the taboo against sibling sex and violence found a natural buttress of support in the society’s creation of social structures and community that were child-managed, without a trace of adult intervention!

As stated above, the topic of siblings has been addressed in the psychoanalytic canon, but in a manner best characterized as scattershot. Consequently, the drawing up of a cohesive, constellated perspective on the subject never came to fruition, which, had it happened, might have ensured its due place and integration within the metapsychology. Readers who wish to study the ebb and flow of this current will relish the introductory section of Rosemary Balsam’s paper, which provides a flush and comprehensive compendium of contributions to this topic.

Of particular interest to the readership is her citation of this annual’s publication of a section on “Siblings” in volume 38 (1983), which highlighted aspects of sibships that facilitated forward growth. The selection of this particular focus was the relative absence, at that time period, of a perspective that tracked the components of healthy and progressive development within the sibling experience. Two dynamic forces drew special attention: the nature of the relationships between parent and child, and, within the children themselves, the developmental capacities and preferences that helped shape the sibling experience. My own contribution in the present collection will accent and update this point of view.

## SUMMARIES OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS

The contributions in this section approach Mitchell's paper from contrasting contextual paradigms that open up the play of meaning across the contemporary psychoanalytic spectrum: Balsam's accent on intersecting vectors of both vertical and lateral axes and the use of the transference-countertransference matrix; Gilmore's attention to continuous features of growth and the consequence of the failure of discontinuities; Vivona's focus on issues of identity within siblingships along with its intersubjective dimension and its attendance to the ways siblings recognize and value similarities and differences between them; my contribution positioning siblings within the framework of nonlinear thinking, dispositional aspects of personality formation, and phallogentrism.

Rosemary Balsam acknowledges the clamorous petitions within our field that call for a postmodernist credo. Such tracts espouse the dimming down of the patriarchal Freudian parent-child axis, a fitting reflection of the tenor of our times: They cast a suspicious eye upon authority and rally the brothers and sisters toward alliance or war. Yet Balsam (as do our other contributors) refrains from stepping onto this bandwagon without looking back to its predecessor: She invokes both vertical and lateral dimensions in her report of her analysis of a woman with a sister. In so doing, she illuminates her position that juggling both dimensions provides rich and textured meanings to her patient's interior life. Balsam finds another anchor in her discussion of her patient in Mitchell's "Law of the Mother"—an ironic coinage that winks at Lacan's "Law of the Father." For Mitchell, the mother's law as writ upon the domestic scene is that she adjudicate the terms of sibling relationships with a fair and compassionate hand: mother's decision making is blinded to favoritism. One highlighted feature of mother's law is that she softens the sibling relationship by regulating emotional storms that flare among the sibling tribe and regulates bonds and fissures. Thus, it falls to mother to teach seriality to her brood: that is, that there is room for more than "me": there is "you" too and others as well. The matters that require arbitration in their base forms are incest and murder, but in daily life, they cover everything big and small in a child's domain. Should the mother consistently blink at her task or largely abandon it, the result can work serious consequences for children. The inevitable lack of assistance for unbridled emotion among siblings can promote problems along a spectrum inclusive of dysregulation and behavioral disorders. At worst, such neglect may result in covert or flagrant abuse.

In her presentation of the clinical data, Balsam draws upon Hans Loewald's use of the metaphor of theater as he sees helices of transferences superimposed one upon the other onto the analyst. Siblings make their appearances as do others, and Balsam maximizes this perspective. She takes us with her "onstage" as a player in her patient's drama; she shares her view of her patient's transferences and her own countertransferences as overlapping transparencies that, she proposes, reveal her patient's, her patient's sister's, and their mother's interior lives and their mutual interrelationships. For Balsam, the analyst's countertransference holds up a mirror to the past "as it really happened," both in terms of the external realities and the individuals' intrapsychic lives.

She takes the view that she discovered the mother's disturbance in her own countertransference reactions—here examined as the mother's failure to fairly parse the law that was hers to administer. Balsam holds the mother's perceived failing as the critical feature that accounts for the troubled sibling relations. This is a presentation that will undoubtedly elicit lively interest from our readership on several counts. First, its forward-looking interpretation in the clinical situation of the intersection between parent/child and sibling/sibling axes takes seriously Mitchell's invitation to widen our clinical viewfinder to include the world of those that reside beside one. At the same time, her clinical perspicacity succeeds in persuading that it does not make sense to throw the Freudian "vertical ladder" baby out with the bathwater. Secondly, her rich accounts from the workbench will tantalize interested parties toward further explorations in the area of constructions and reconstructions in the analytic field.

Karen Gilmore greets Mitchell's proposals with enthusiasm all around. Not only is it high time that the sibling dimension come into its own right as a profoundly shaping force in psychic life, but in particular, Gilmore gives special honors to Mitchell for the critical measure she has taken toward its integration into our overarching theoretical framework. Mitchell's quest to uncover why siblings have been omitted from theoretical discourse finds Gilmore pondering her own intriguing hypothesis: Perhaps it is the particularized "painful and powerful affects" linked to the sibling experience that has leveraged our preoccupation with the vertical, parent-child axis. Readers cannot be but taken by her further reflections on brutality and violence that typify sibships, more raw in their native qualities than what is structuralized into the vertical dimension. She concurs with Mitchell that "trauma" is an apt description for the child's experience of a sibling's birth.

Following Mitchell's focus on the toddler's experience of the newborn, Gilmore attends to the aspects of cognitive and psychological

shifts that characterize developmental advance in this age group. The new baby's presence on the domestic scene may serve to upend the toddler's newly flourishing cognitive transformations and even flare her sensitivities to anger, hurt, and feelings of displacement. Gilmore thoughtfully wonders if such a congruence of external and internal pressures may propel the child toward pretend play at an accelerated clip. Gilmore then shifts the scene and situates the reader in a later epoch of growth; she brings to the reader's view the older youngster, one emerging into puberty and adolescence. Here she presents two cases of teenagers who carry with them the burdens of a continuous legacy of sibling trauma.

Adolescence retraces some of the same components that had emerged in early childhood, but at another level of organization: separation, identity, gender, differentiation, among others. Experimentation with fitting into the peer group and finding one's own place underscores sibling-associated issues. Perhaps even more important, Gilmore frames the physical transformations of adolescence, which demand that the young persons face their biological capacity for procreation with the possibility that they may repeat their own sibling trauma. Extending the point further, Gilmore alerts the reader to the parents' "re-edition" of their own sibling experience by identifying with one child as a former version of themselves while seeing in another child a version of a sibling. From this point of view, the transgenerational transmission of sibling trauma is a legacy destined for repetition in future generations.

Gilmore presents the reader with a view of disturbance that is housed inside a conceptual framework of linearity: The sibling "trauma" is destined for repetition. Readers will discover that the two adolescent patients Gilmore presents are also studied within this framework. The press of an experiential component from early childhood—in this case, sibling birth felt as "traumatic"—is tracked throughout sequential growth for both girls. Readers will find this perspective a valuable one. It highlights the continuous or linear aspect of the developmental process—the discontinuous or nonlinear aspect being the other coordinate—in one strand of the girls' forward trajectory and forces us to consider growth that has been hobbled by failures in discontinuity and change. Following in the footsteps of Mitchell's detective work, our readership may feel inspired to search for clues within the presenting data that point to factors that hijacked nonlinear growth and occluded transformative possibilities of reassembly of the girls' earlier perceptions of their siblings.

Jeanine Vivona takes the reader down another road, which highlights identity configuration within the sibling matrix, a fresh and innovative



turn on this topic. She privileges a close examination of differentiation processes. As she defines them, they center on how one develops or even favors certain features or desires that are in contradistinction to a sibling's way of being and simultaneously how one suppresses those facets that are seen as similar. Using Jessica Benjamin's theory of "mutual recognition," Vivona expands the field of relationships within the sibship to investigate how children position themselves vis-à-vis one another and within the family itself. The interpersonal and intersubjective resonances of these will have their impact.

For Vivona, the central challenge for most children along the lateral axis is the problem of identity. She presents her thesis that processes of differentiation are a crucial means for a child to find her value, identity, and place with regard to her siblings and parents. For example, if a child perceives a sibling to have one particular characteristic, she may wish to distinguish herself from that sibling by putting forth to others a contrasting feature. How she is received in the world of her siblings—and *perceives* how she is received—will have reverberations upon her expectations of relationships with others outside the immediate family domain. Thus, Vivona warns, it is necessary to the child's sense of self to feel validated through her sibling's recognition of her difference and the means by which she carves out her place. Vivona takes it one step further: Another's recognition of one's self verifies a multiplicity of features facilitating the ownership of these within one's self. This has special relevance for the others who are beside one, because feeling legitimized or not by one's siblings will have particularized meaning for the position one has created on the lateral spectrum.

It is the stewardship of handling the rivalry and love for one's sister or brother that is at issue in finding one's place; namely, the child both wants to be victorious over her sibling and wants *not* to be victorious over her sibling. To tackle this paradoxical task is to embark on an ingenious strategy: Enlarge the scope of one's differences from the sibling and simultaneously play down one's similarities from that same sibling. In so doing, the child creates a unique position within the sibling relationship that ensures a singularity all her own while safeguarding that position from the other's aggression or envy. Not surprisingly, such a strategy is not uncommon in managing similar puzzles that appear with mother and father.

However, this game plan's long-term success is more apparent than real. If the child does not feel that the other—for the purpose of our primary focus, one's sibling—recognizes her differences along with her similarities, which Vivona remarks is a natural and inevitable occurrence, mutual recognition breaks down. In order to initiate a process of

repair, it is necessary for one party to *surrender* (italics Vivona's) to the other's point of view in such a way that registers a valorization of the difference. The establishment of something new occurs, which is not owned by either individual but which becomes a shared perspective, or according to Benjamin, a *shared third* (Benjamin 2006). Readers will feel especially rewarded by Vivona's meticulous discussion in her bringing these proposals to the context of the consulting room by way of two striking case illustrations. Finally, the layeredness of Vivona's presentation gifts the reader with challenging ideas and questions about identity formation: To what degree must the support of the object (in this case, that of the sibling) be present as a requisite condition for one's feeling of legitimacy and wholeness? Apart from the role played by the environmental surround, by way of one's parents and siblings, are there other features that reside within the child herself—certain dispositional variants, strengths, or vulnerabilities, for instance—that strain or facilitate identity formation? The range of therapeutic strategies to address this issue are necessarily broadened by identifying influences that arise from internal as well as external sources. For example, promoting the transformational shifts that accompany new organizational growth within the setting of the child-analyst exchange can provide unexpected assistance to healthy identity development when the environmental surround fails to provide nurturing support.

My contribution takes the reader on an altogether different excursion. I place Mitchell's proposals as they are refracted through three lenses: nonlinear thinking, disposition, and an expansion of Mitchell's own interest in phallogentrism. I also locate the experience of sibling arrival within a developmental context that includes features of timing, birth order, and disposition as crucial variables in shaping children's reactions. In so doing, I bring another perspective to Mitchell's proposition of sibling birth as necessarily "traumatic" for all children. My alternative view does not delegitimize her argument that the sibling "experience," as I prefer to describe it, is generalizable to the population (including the only child) and should have a proper and integrated position within the metapsychological paradigm.

The nonlinear perspective considers the progressive hierarchical organizational changes that occur in the developmental trajectory. Yet there is a propensity in our field to place an accent on tracing the linear features of development and to reduce later forms into their earliest features. Such leanings and activities obscure how we assess the sibling experience as the child moves forward toward new platforms of growth. The progressive forces of development transform intrapsychic and cognitive structures, which produce discontinuities that cannot be

reconfigured into their antecedent forms. I am interested in demonstrating how the sibling experience for any child will undergo profound changes over sequential stages of forward movement; otherwise, one observes a failure of discontinuous growth, a troubling occurrence.

Secondly, the role of dispositional features has been largely undervalued in psychoanalytic theorizing and clinical practice as an important source of influence in how children grow. Early on in our psychoanalytic history, Freud himself observed that this domain attracted few interested parties in favor of the more-popular focus on dynamically propelled components of intrapsychic life and their link with environmental forces. I take the position that particulars in disposition, such as differences and disharmonies in rate and timing of strands of growth, capacities in weighing love and hate, separateness and closeness, and regulation of affect states, will exert their press upon the nature of sibling interactions. Braided within such interactions is the question of how the intricacies of sibling interrelatedness exert a mutual effect upon each child's shifts into new organizational hierarchies. Finally, the experience of sibling arrival will be touched by these very features and at the same time will actively participate in the determination of a child's status on a continuum that spans trauma on one end and healthy adaptation on the other.

Thirdly, Western society's leanings toward phallocentrism have inflected psychoanalytic paradigms and theory, as Mitchell has described. Siblingship is treated as an aggressivized-male experience, as exemplified in the term "sibling rivalry." I take the view that such a linguistic form has become an embedded structure in culture that colors how we build meaning in favor of other perspectives that highlight affection or caring, for instance. On a sub-rosa register of awareness, such forms become structured in culture as "truths" that continuously recycle down through the generations.

Mitchell's far-ranging sleuthing among numerous domains—psychoanalysis, anthropology, sociology, psychology, literature, and her own personal reflections deserves our applause and high praise. She has created a space where dancing and squabbling siblings have become a legitimized faction all their own. She has also shown how a culturally encoded, gender-based bias has foregrounded the parent-child dimension at the cost of minimizing the effects of the sibling dimension and how each interacts with and affects the other. That all five papers in this section are written by women will not be lost on our readership. Among other narratives, perhaps the essays that follow will be understood by future psychoanalytic historians as the feminine voice within our sphere of influence that finally reevaluated the lateral dimension and its proper

place in our psychoanalytic superstructure. In the pages that follow, readers will discover some of the reasons for the tight embrace of the vertical axis in our field. This steadfastness can be likened to the old and irrelevant costumes of a theater's lumber room that cannot be cast off for the draw of sentiment and the stubborn refusal to move forward. Herein these essays is a plea to create fresh interpretations.

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# Siblings

## Thinking Theory

JULIET MITCHELL, M.A.

*The paper argues for the development of a theoretical understanding of lateral relations, starting with siblings, along a horizontal axis. This would be autonomous but interactive with the vertical axis of parent-child.*

THIS TALK IS FIRST AND FOREMOST A PLEA THAT WE MAKE SPACE for an analytical understanding of lateral relations along a horizontal axis, not instead of but in addition to the vertical, whose perspective is almost synonymous with so many of our disciplines. I start with sisters and brothers, “siblings,” because they bear what anthropologists designate the “minimal difference from each other” and can be considered from a psychoanalytical point of view (though this is contested) to be the symbolic source of those that follow or succeed them: cousins, partners, wives, husbands, friends, and foe . . . I believe that this “minimal difference” is crucial also in psychoanalytical theory and therapy.<sup>1</sup>

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Earlier versions of this talk were given at University College London, University of the Witwatersrand, and Cambridge University, and one of these was published as “Psychoanalysis, Siblings and the Social Group” in *Psycho-Analytic Psychotherapy in South Africa* 19 (1), 2011. This is the only author-edited text of the talk as it was given in New Haven, Connecticut, at the Western New England Psychoanalytic Society Symposium in April 2011.

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1. Freud’s notion of “the narcissism of minor differences” can be seen as one psychological effect that results from this “minimal difference”: Social amity is preserved through hostility to the closest neighboring group.

Here, my framework is the need to develop a place for siblings along a horizontal axis in our theoretical superstructure. A “sibling trauma” is the concept I propose as a starting point for the construction of such a position. There are many implications of a sibling trauma; here, after trying to establish its importance, I introduce its impact on both gendering and socialization.

#### THE THEORETICAL SUPERSTRUCTURE

When I came across sisters and brothers, “siblings,” I had an experience common to many researchers in the field: One moment I hadn’t noticed them; the next, they were everywhere. Why this surprise, why this sense of revelation of the obvious? This “then you didn’t see them, now you do” is reflected in the way they are regularly presented as first found, and only then to have been previously missing—like reclaimed property you didn’t know was lost. Looking back through the annals of psychoanalytic writings, they seem to have come up, been excitedly noticed with pleas for more exploration, and gone underground again. The good work has been dropped and later picked up once again rather than embraced and developed.

I argue that it is the effective absence of siblings in the theoretical superstructure that accounts for why the many observations of them go unnoticed by commentators. When this eventually does happen, it is as though they were a first-time discovery, because there has been no theoretical place where they could have been held in the meantime.

Freud (1893; 1905a; 1925) was fond of quoting his early mentor, Jean-Marie Charcot, to the effect that “theory is good; but it doesn’t prevent things from existing” (1893, p. 13), thus apparently privileging observation over theory. However, Freud’s work was also a notable example of the importance of the role of a possible theory, much as other scientists have addressed the issue. The astrophysicist Sir Arthur Eddington declared, “I hope it will not shock experimental physicists too much if I say that we do not accept their observations unless they are confirmed by theory.”<sup>2</sup> One can, after all, observe different things from one week to the next without being able to make a relevant generalization. And this, I suggest, for psychoanalysis but also perhaps more generally, takes us to the heart of the matter: The obstacle to thinking about sisters and brothers is not in the observations but in the theory. Thus Freud wrote, “The great event of Hans’ life was the birth of his

2. *Address to the Annual Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science*, 11 September 1933 (in Kaempffert 1933, p. 13).

sister when he was exactly three and a half" (1909, p. 10), and then from this observation about a sister, Freud proceeded to develop his emerging theory of the vertical castration complex—not without reason—but without taking on board what might be a distinct meaning of the little sister, the object of Hans' agonizing jealousy and the threat to his sense of his own existence.

In suggesting that siblings need to be an autonomous aspect of the theory, I do not have anything very grandiose in mind. A theoretical construct will need to find that the experience of them is generalizable—something we all experience—if it is to play a role in the construction of the unconscious aspect of the human psyche. In the clinical context, psychoanalysis works through the particular case of an individual patient with his or her own unique history. The various individual histories are "accidental" in the sense of what happens to fall to one's lot. Where these varied and specific histories touch down on the general, we have the raw material of what can come to constitute the theory of psychoanalysis.

Freud (1905b) first believed that the many stories of paternal seduction had caused the widespread hysteria of his nineteenth-century patients, male as well as female, himself as well as others. He then realized that however extensive such abuse was (and is), it was not everybody's lot. Actual abuse is accidental, an aspect of one's particular history. Distinct from this was the clinical observation that *everybody* desires incest with the mother. Unlike the stories of abuse that the patient could recollect, this observation of a general situation was not at first possible, because everybody has to repress this desire to such a degree that we have no knowledge of ever having wanted it; both the desire and the prohibition on it are unconscious. Unconscious processes are general: Everybody dreams; everybody, that is to say, manifests processes that are or have been unconscious, whether at one end as dreams, slips of tongue or pen, or as puns and jokes, or at the other end, as the symptoms of hysteria, obsessionality, paranoia, or schizophrenia.

If a horizontal axis is to have interactive but relative autonomy, then, within psychoanalytical theory it must address unconscious processes that are not simply derivative on the established vertical axis. My suggestion places a sibling trauma and the desires and prohibitions it unleashes as occurring between the stage of narcissism and the Oedipal stage. The defenses the individual produces will be distinctive—not the predominant projective identification of the pre-Oedipal nor the repression of the Oedipal, but productive nevertheless of unconscious processes. Making use of the work of Donald Winnicott, I would argue that these defenses are likely to be splitting and dissociation. If sibling

relations do *not* independently produce unconscious processes, then no case can be made for their inclusion in the theoretical superstructure.

After he had split from psychoanalysis, Alfred Adler (1964) made sibling birth order a determinate of all psychic conditions. There is no doubt that birth order can be very important for one's psychic state, but it too is particular, accidental—what has fallen to one's lot. There can be general tendencies for the middle, eldest, or youngest child, but by definition, each of these cannot be generalizable to the human condition, only perhaps to many people in that particular position. Recovering a mass of individual stories will produce commonalities, but these, though forgotten, are not unconscious and therefore are not characterized by a different thought process—the “primary process” most easily perceived in the distortions of dream thinking. Ilse Grubrich-Simitis' elegant explanation of Freud's shift from the so-called “seduction theory” of trauma to the universal Oedipus complex, applies likewise to siblings' accounts: “Whereas the more conventional trauma model applied to the *pathogenesis* of a comparatively small number who had been sexually violated in childhood, the revolutionary drive model is concerned with the *psychogenesis* of everyone” (1994, p. 63).

As with most people, my own “discovery” of the importance of siblings came as a surprise. In retrospect, the context was this question of universality. For an unconscionable number of years I had puzzled about hysteria, in particular male hysteria. If everyone can be hysterical (as would seem to be the case), here again, the symptoms must be referring to a common, generic experience. Yet unlike other pathologies, hysteria was and is seen to have a gendered, hence specific, not generic population—women. It was male hysteria, therefore, that was the founding illness of psychoanalysis. But is this generic condition only the Oedipus complex or the pre-Oedipal relationship to the mother—the vertical axis? Hysteria is always a social relationship relying on the presence of others; these others are frequently peers rather than parents; mass hysteria is a peer phenomenon. Late in life Anna Freud had stated that there was something incomplete about our understanding of hysteria. One day pondering for the thousandth time this question and in particular the fact that the hysteric always claims an initiating trauma, the rock of Oedipus shifted slightly, and behind it were all these dancing and squabbling children. I went back and reread the case material: Sisters and brothers turned out to be everywhere. What were these siblings doing?

In Freud's theoretical superstructure, sisters and brothers are placed in the same category as mothers and fathers, and this amalgamation of parents and siblings is usually followed without concern. However, this



is extremely problematic. It is true that sometimes sisters and mothers, brothers and fathers do stand in the same place—but by no means always. Being made to when they do not can lead to contortions as here in this account from Melanie Klein:

[Gunther] vented his sadistic impulses towards the “bad” penis upon his brother, with whom he had also had sexual relations in early childhood, and at the same time he regarded him as the dangerous mother in whom were contained his father’s penises. His brothers, it will be seen, were substitutes for both parents, to be more precise for the phantastic parent-imagos and it was towards them that he activated his relations to those imagos; for whereas he was devoted to his mother in real life and loved her much more than his father, he was possessed in phantasy, as we know, by imagos of the magical “good” penis (his father) and of the terrifying mother. (Klein 1932/1975, p. 268)

What we see here in Melanie Klein’s account is a transposition from acute clinical observation into a theory that does not fit it or that ignores the most obvious element. Or again from Klein:

I now made a venture and told Ruth that the balls in the tumbler, the coins in the purse and the contents of the bag all meant children in her Mummy’s inside, and that she wanted to keep them safely shut up so as not to have any more brothers and sisters. The effect of my interpretation was astonishing. For the first time Ruth turned her attention to me and began to play in a different, less constrained, way. (Klein 1932/1975, p. 27)

If analyzing something is effective in therapy, it demands a place in the theory.

## THE SIBLING TRAUMA

### THE CASE AGAINST: THE “LONELY ONLY”

Infantile neuroses, particularly what was once known as infantile hysteria, are so regular as to be normative to the degree that they are often forgotten, even entirely overlooked. The “terrible twos” and the “dreadful threes” illustrate this contention. Looking again at these infantile illnesses, I realized that there was hardly an account of a child in psychoanalytical treatment in which the childhood illness had not originated with the birth of a sibling. The sibling prototypically arrives when the child is a toddler; it is the toddler who has the sibling trauma. However, there are of course large, indeed increasing numbers of children for whom the sibling does not arrive. If, as I claim, psychoanalytic theory is about the generic—what all humans have in common—then

the “only,” or for that matter, the “last” child must disqualify the notion of a universal sibling trauma. In fact, I want to argue that the toddler who does not have an actual baby following him or her proves rather than disproves the rule.<sup>3</sup>

The “only” child—the *fille* or *fils unique*, without a sister or brother—is the most obvious and always mentioned objection to a generic place for the sibling experience. In fact, from the psychoanalytic point of view, the “only” child is likely to have *more*, not fewer sisters and brothers than the child with siblings. They are more active in the thoughts and feelings, the unconscious and conscious fantasies, in the inner world of the “only” child than they are in those of its siblinging peers. The “only” child will ask What has happened? The “expected” one has not arrived. What have I done wrong? Six-year-old Erna was a patient of Melanie Klein’s:

Erna, who was an only child, was much occupied in her imagination with the arrival of brothers and sisters. *Her phantasies in this context deserve special attention, since, so far as my observations show, they have a general application.* Judging from them and from those of other children similarly situated, it would appear that an only child suffers to a far greater extent than other children from the anxiety it feels in regard to the brother or sister whom it is forever expecting, and from the feelings of guilt it has towards them on account of its unconscious impulses of aggression against them in their assumed existence inside its mother’s body, because it has no opportunity of developing a positive relation to them in reality. This fact often makes it difficult for an only child to adapt itself to society. For a long time Erna used to have attacks of rage and anxiety at the beginning and end of her analytic session with me, and these were partly precipitated by her meeting the child who came to me for treatment immediately before or after her and who stood to her for the brother or sister whose arrival she was always awaiting. (1932/1975, p. 42; my italics)

The “only” child is concerned about its missing siblings because so far in human history everyone expects—yearns for and dreads—a sibling

3. Prophecy Coles asserts the opposite viewpoint: “What is different between an only child and a child with siblings is the *texture* of their inner world. By that I mean, there is much more ‘noise’ in the inner world of someone who has several siblings. In my experience, the inner world of an only child is quieter, their dreams are less populated by events with a lot of people and the transference experience is different” (2003, p. 6). If this is so, then I think that Coles is listening to the preconscious, “secondary process” story. Compare Klein’s footnote to “Erna”: “As Erna had no brothers or sisters in real life, her unconscious fear and jealousy of them which played such an important part in her mental life were only revealed through the analysis. This is once more an example of the importance of the transference-situation in child analysis” (1932/1975, p.42, n. 1).

to arrive after them. This is quite in spite of the fact of recent policies of one-child families in rapidly developing countries such as China, or of facts such as the demographic transition to nonreproductive populations of the economically wealthy Western countries or among the wealthy classes of the world (in India, Brazil, Ghana); the unconscious psyche takes a long time to change. And if we don't have blood siblings, some other kith or kin takes their place. Furthermore, the "only" child's experience is repeated to some degree in every "last" child who, though he or she may very well be preoccupied with its older kin, will wonder too and probably worry no less than the "only" child.

In her autobiography, Yvonne Kapp describes her experience when, at the age of ten, without explanation, her mother was mysteriously ill (in fact with appendicitis). Yvonne thinks her mother is having a baby and has not told her this:

All this time some unborn brother or sister of mine had been lying under my mother's heart and she had never told me. I felt betrayed and, at the same time, a feeling I had never before experienced, an emotion so powerful and so violent swept over me that I thought it must destroy me. There was a strange tightening in my belly and a dreadful weight or terror and hatred of I knew not what.

This anguish, now fastened upon me like some gnawing animal, was intensified by the blazing heat of those days from which, like the pain, there was no escape. *What I went through then, concentrated into little more than a few days, was a lifetime's savage and ungovernable jealousy of a younger sibling.* That torment remains in essence indescribable, but it poisoned every waking moment. I did not know, of course, that it was jealousy, but I did know that in some horrible way my feelings were shameful and this added an overwhelming sense of guilt to my burdened spirit. (2003, pp. 38–39; my italics)

Even when she has learned the true state of affairs, that her mother is not pregnant, she still cannot bring herself to say the word *baby*.

The nonarrival of a sibling for the "only" or "last" child is an "accidental" variation on the general theme. If something is general, then what does not happen is as significant as what does; it is merely its other side. Thus the arrival or expected but nonarrival of a sister or brother is what I call the sibling trauma.<sup>4</sup> It happens at the same time—is indeed another but very different aspect of what Winnicott (1971), with his enormous clinical experience above all with children, called the "trauma of separation."

4. For the sake of simplicity, in the next section I mainly write as though there is an actual sibling, as indeed there was in the case material I use.

THE CASE FOR: THE VERTICAL “SEPARATION TRAUMA”  
AND THE HORIZONTAL “SIBLING TRAUMA”

Infancy is full of trauma—some generic, such as weaning or the various comings and goings of mothers. In traditional societies, weaning and hence renewed sexuality for the mother and a new conception would take place around the age of two, thus conflating the loss of the breast and the advent of the sibling. Until this very moment, the toddler has been the baby. The arrival of a new sibling means that the toddler instantly has its own identity obliterated. The new baby now lying in the place it occupied will be both narcissistically loved, as more of the toddler’s self, and hated, as a replacement for itself. Speaking, eating, toilet training, walking are often abandoned; in order to get back its place, the toddler regresses to the babyhood that developmentally it was beginning to leave behind.

Joan was brought to the clinic of Donald Winnicott, who was then a pediatrician in training as a psychoanalyst:

Joan aged two years five months, was an only child till thirteen months ago, when her brother was born.

Joan had been in perfect health till this event. *She then became very jealous. She lost her appetite, and consequently got thin. When left for a week without being forced to eat, she ate practically nothing and lost weight. She has remained like this, is very irritable, and her mother cannot leave her without producing in her an anxiety attack.* She will not speak to anyone, and in the night she wakes screaming, even four times in a night—the actual dream material not being very clear . . .

She pinches and even bites the baby, and will not allow him things to play with. She will not allow anyone to speak about the baby, but frowns and ultimately intervenes. When she was put in a welfare centre she worried a great deal, and, having no one to bite, bit herself, so that she had to be taken home again after three days.

She is scared of animals.

“If she sees the boy on the chamber she heaves until she is sick.” If given chocolate she puts it in her mouth and keeps it there till she gets home, then she spits it all out again.

She constantly prefers men to women.

*The parents are exceptionally nice people, and the child is a perfectly healthy and loveable child.* (1931/1975, pp. 3–4; my italics)

Utterly normal or not, something traumatic is going on here. It is the new baby who turns what was an assisted development into a traumatic occurrence. In his later work, Winnicott (1971) refers to this occurrence as the “separation trauma,” which indicates separation from the

pre-Oedipal mother. There certainly is this separation, but it is a separation because another person who occupies what was the toddler's place preoccupies her: There is a new baby who, I argue, needs to feature in its own right. Without the new baby, the separation would be developmental; it is traumatic because of this actual (or expected) baby.

Despite all the preparation and the nine month's gestation, the new baby erupts onto the scene with a paradigmatic too-muchness that is traumatic. The toddler who was the baby one moment has to be the child the next. It is important to my argument that the sibling trauma, which occurs prototypically when a newcomer arrives or should arrive—that is, when the toddler is roughly two and a half, is indeed a “trauma” not just a “difficulty” of varying degrees.<sup>5</sup> A trauma has important psychic implications which a “difficulty” does not. Any trauma (an earthquake, a tsunami) is an excessive excitation coming from without, but in the case of a psychological trauma, the external impingement will be joined by a disturbing stimulus coming from within. The nature of the stimulus from within differentiates a trauma precipitated by natural causes from one that is brought about through other human beings. A psychological trauma will be urgently or compulsively repeated, often phobically avoided; it sets up an unconscious as well as a conscious response.

The traumatic experience of any sort is by definition violent. The quantitative strength of the excitation overloads the psyche. The protective barrier, a kind of psychological skin, is too weak to resist the blast. This weakness is particularly evident in the baby's early months, when the ego is only just coming into formation. The extreme helplessness of the human infant is a crucial factor. However, the experience of being filled with an overwhelming, unbounded, violent energy and an annihilated ego will be the same at whatever age the trauma occurs. Gradually with help, the ego is able to bind most of the raging energy—never entirely and sometimes not very well at all. There remains some identification with the violence of the traumatic experience, so that throughout life, rages that echo or repeat the experience will be added to already existent aggression and may erupt in personal violence or be channeled into socially legitimated killing. There can also be reaction formations against this violence.

The symptoms and expressions of trauma include nightmares, flashbacks, amnesia, disoriented personality, and prolonged irritability. There are rapid and unstable but near-total identifications with other people who substitute for the annihilated ego. The ability to form sym-

5. Volkan and Ast (1997), in their excellent *Siblings in the Unconscious*, refer to the experience as sometimes “difficult,” sometimes “traumatic.”

bols may collapse and speech become uncertain. Clinically, trauma is undoubtedly recognizable. How far does the sibling trauma accord with these accounts?

The external event is the arrival of the sister or brother; the internal stimuli are the illegitimate desires that are provoked by this external shock. These desires can be categorized as the wish for sibling incest and for sibling killing. My argument is that these cannot be assimilated only to the vertical axis of intergenerational incest and murder (the Oedipus complex). They are different and have different effects.

As well as the typical behavioral regression, with the toddler acting the babyhood that, cataclysmically, it has had to leave behind, the symptoms that occur at this juncture confirm that this is a trauma. Three that seem characteristic of the toddler are inarticulacy, identification, and what would seem to be an effect of its obverse—the irritability that arises if someone is excessively close. Prototypically, the sibling arrives when the toddler is mastering speech; it is a time when the frustrations of inarticulacy and inexpressibility occasion rage and despair. Loss of symbol formation characterizes trauma in general. Of the small child and its traumas, Freud (1939, p. 74) writes, “Impressions from the time at which a child is beginning to talk stand out as being of particular interest; the periods between the ages of two and four seem to be the most important. . . . (These traumas) relate to impressions of a sexual and aggressive nature, and no doubt also to early injuries to the ego (narcissistic mortifications).” The particular type of identification that is a response to trauma in general, I would argue, is inherent in the sibling trauma. This identification with the other person is made when the ego feels annihilated: The toddler is no longer who it was yesterday, no longer the family’s or the mother’s baby. Disorientated, where can the toddler locate itself?

The mother said that there had been a great change toward ill health in the Piggie recently. She was not naughty and she was nice to the baby. It was difficult to put into words what the matter was. But *she was not herself*. In fact she refused to be herself and said so: “I’m the mummy. I’m the baby.” She was not to be addressed as herself. She had developed a high-voiced chatter which was not hers. (Winnicott 1978, p. 13; Winnicott’s italics)

The identification the toddler makes with the baby as opposed to the identification it makes with its mother develops into what the child analyst Charlotte Buhler (1935) called “transitivism,” which characterizes children’s relationships with each other: At this age a child will hit the right cheek of its playmate and instantly feel the blow on its own

left cheek. There is thus a body mirroring that is echoed experientially: When the aggressor child says of the victim “He hit me,” Jacques Lacan (1981), adopting Buhler’s notion, claims therefore that he is telling a truth. In any case, this is an interchild relationship and thus on a horizontal axis. Transitivity indicates two are one; irritability protests against this excess proximity. Irritability, like an irritation on the skin, can be a response to the too-close presence of another person—later maybe in mind; here in actuality.

The new baby is who the old baby still is. If the new baby comes earlier, as with so-called “Irish twins” (within eleven months of each other) or later as with three-and-a-half-year-old “Little Hans,” in Freud’s famous case history of infantile phobia (1909), or in the fantasy-expectations of ten-year-old Yvonne (Kapp 2003), then there will be some age-appropriate behavior as well as regression, such as Yvonne’s devastating sense of shame at her feelings of the jealousy that didn’t know its name. However, the traumatic nucleus of the experience will be referred to the typical time of two to two and a half years, through deferred or referred action. Unconscious processes do not know chronological time. The new baby will be the “same” but also the “other.” Jealousy is the *modus vivendi* for the arrival of the “other,” the one who is different but who should have been the “same.”

The traumatic shock coming from outside is the advent of the new baby; the inner stimulus that joins it is the wish for narcissistic sexual union with one who is the same, and the simultaneous wish to murder one who is different. These desires have traumatic effects because the toddler will have been prohibited from carrying them out. The prohibition I call the “Law of the Mother” (Mitchell 2003). The toddler has to be prevented from trying to carry out its incestuous and murderous wishes, which need to be curtailed and transformed in some way or displaced into new and different forms. Later they will, for instance, be normatively transformed into conjugal love and fighting the enemy—one the province of women, the other of men.

#### THE SIBLING TRAUMA: GENDERING

I speak as a psychoanalyst, but the questions I bring to psychoanalysis always include thinking about gender in whatever field is being considered. So for instance we can ask: Does analyzing siblings tell us something important about the gendering of war or about psychological illness, social behavior, or creativity? In her empirical study in the U.K. of what she calls “sistering,” the sociologist Melanie Mauthner (2002) claims to have found that a girl’s femininity is constructed as much

or more from her sister-sister relations as from her mother-daughter identification. If that is so here as elsewhere, where would I map it in the theory of psychoanalysis or any of the related disciplines?

The Oedipus complex, with its vertical before and after (the pre-Oedipal mother and the father of the castration complex), is the shibboleth around which the theory revolves. Does the dominance of verticality hide the horizontal? Does this skew our understanding of gendering? An interesting instance comes from a debate between the psychoanalyst Ernest Jones (1925) and the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1927; 1929) in the 1920s over Malinowski's ethnography in the Trobriand Islands.

The main incest taboo in the Trobriand matrilineage was an extreme prohibition of sister-brother relations. However, Jones and Malinowski conducted a lively, indeed somewhat acrimonious debate over whether or not there was either no or several Oedipus complexes. The issue hinged on the nonacknowledgment/nonknowledge of the biological father and the paternal role of the "mother's brother." It thus omitted the main sister-brother incest taboo. Furthermore, the prevalent term the "mother's brother" stresses the vertical "mother" but ignores the horizontal "sister." The sibling relationship gives the sister some entitlement whether or not she is a mother. I would argue that wherever we are situated, this sister demands our attention.

In brief, my suggestion for the gendering of sibling relations is twofold. First, for the purposes of analysis, we need to distinguish lateral "gender" from vertical "sexual difference" (Mitchell 2007). Freud's still-radical theory of infantile sexuality (1905b) proposed that we separate sexuality and reproduction. Sexuality does not necessarily aim toward reproduction; the two are distinct. I have argued that Freud's concept of "sexual difference" should be kept to describe the later sexed reproductive position and our new concept of "gender" applied, as "gender diversity," to sexuality where sexed reproduction is not the psychological aim. The division is artificial; of course we are all both "gendered" laterally and "sexually differentiated" vertically. However, I think that a confusion of the two as "categories of analysis" (J. Scott 1986) has been a besetting problem since the introduction of the gender category at the inception of second-wave feminism.

For humanity, what is important is not a biological instinct that makes straight for its object. The human sexual drive is just a drive without an innate direction. Sexual difference (not my concern here) is enjoined as a nonnegotiable division following on the resolution of the castration complex; its subsequent identifications are modeled on the vertical axis—becoming parents. Sexual difference is about the child's future



reproductive position; prefigured with the asymmetry of penis envy for girls and castration anxiety for boys, its realization is in puberty with the arrival of fertility. Except in matrilineages, it has nothing to do with siblings or with the horizontal axis.

The term *gender* should be applied to the lateral sibling position. Under gender, sisters and brothers are in identical positions, as both have the same murderous and incestuous wishes toward each other. Murder and incest are prohibited and potentially punished for both genders in identical ways—not differentiating the two, as does the castration complex.

Gender does not constitute the same problematic as sexual difference does. Where the trauma of the possibility of castration follows the “Law of the Father,” forbidding maternal incest and patricide, the sibling trauma precedes the mother’s prohibition on sibling incest and murder. We could say that in the first case, the law has priority, and in the second, the trauma. Where the father’s law insists on sexual difference, the mother’s focuses on the socialization of both children, in which gendering is an intrinsic part. One gender is not the condition of the other; although the girl/boy distinction is a universal, here there is more flexibility.

At birth, as far as we know, all cultures make their first distinction a categorical one that has been lying in wait for the newborn: It is a girl / it is a boy. This is what we can now call a “gender distinction.” My suggestion is that this splitting into girl/boy at birth only acquires subjective meaning for the infant at the time of the sibling trauma when the next baby—the interloper the toddler observes and reacts to—is instantly assigned a gender; this new baby is not just a baby; it is a sister or a brother, a girl or a boy. I suggest the toddler gains access to its own gendered self through this “other.” The baby whom the toddler thinks it is, or whom it wants to be, is gendered—thus the toddler itself gets an objective perspective on itself: It too must be girl or boy, unlike in its babyhood. Its own subjectivity as a child will always be acquired with this gendered meaning.

Freud claimed that there are two major questions that set the infant’s mind to work under pressure from its need to get rid of the intruder. Both are the first and foremost questions in the quest for knowledge. They are: Where do babies come from? And: What is the difference between the sexes? Both questions refer to the new sibling. Perhaps rather anxiously, the toddler continues to hope that everyone can do and have everything: As babies come from people’s tummies, the boy can give birth; the girl has a penis which is hidden or will grow. Despite the fact that privileges mostly accrue to one and not the other sex, in

itself gender sexuality does not discriminate; the position of girl and boy is on a level.

Up the vertical ladder, to both the boy's and the girl's dismay, the "Law of the Mother" establishes that only mothers can give birth, and children of either gender cannot. One wants what the other has or will have, so this leaves the boy with womb envy and the girl wishing she could urinate so spectacularly or have the many social advantages enjoyed by boys; neither sex yet experiences the threat of castration. Neither is traumatized into gender acquisition. There is no absolute distinction, and it is not by chance that feminism got the concept of gender from the field of transgenering; unlike with reproduction, here lines can be crossed. Although for both genders there is the fantasy of parthenogenesis, which plays, I believe, a large part in creativity, this is the realm of sexuality, not reproduction—relatively fluid gender, not rigid sexual difference.

However, despite this continuing sameness and the bisexuality of gender, within the realm of gender there is also a distinction between the sexes. In order not to implode endogamously, societies enter into many and various modes of exchange. Within kinship systems, it is predominantly rights in girls not in boys that are exchanged between social groups; through this, sisters will have an additional position as wives. Rights in girls are exchanged so that they become wives as well as, but also independently from, their becoming mothers: You cannot have your brother sexually; you must have an outside husband (who will be, or become, a symbolic brother) instead. Differently, boys as a category are exchanged not so much in kinship rights as through labor contracts, which will include fighting. This gender differentiation happens to the people concerned in a lateral manner, on the horizontal, not on the vertical axis. It is fathers, however, who authorize exchange on a vertical dimension—giving away a daughter in marriage or a son to an apprenticeship with another man, but the people whose rights are thus exchanged are sisters and brothers. Of course women work and men become husbands. But it is not sexually differentiated mothers but gendered girls, not sexually differentiated fathers but gendered boys, who are moved in the contracts and circuits of kinship and labor. The separation of sexuality and reproduction that contributes to making Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905b) still so revolutionary a treatise can be seen even more clearly when we consider the illegitimate underside of kinship exchange: It is sisters, not mothers, who are sex-trafficked as slaves or sex slaves.

The response to this sibling trauma is then an important aspect of the social world that is constructed from the sibling relationship, and

with it the sameness and the difference between brothers and sisters within the framework of gender. We have here a ground plan for an aspect of the psyche and a place where we can add intersibling relations into the larger theory. What does adding horizontality bring to the theory? I shall focus on the effects on the theory of this new place for the transition from the narcissistic, omnipotent baby-infant—“His majesty the baby” (Freud 1914, p. 91)—to the gendered, social child, girl or boy.

This sibling trauma is (to my mind) absolutely necessary. It is a trauma that must be resolved by socialization, for it marks a break between presocial infancy and social childhood and necessitates a rite of passage between the two (Mitchell 2006). Developmentally, the transition takes place, but to become someone new means losing the former position: This is invariably traumatic.

#### THE SIBLING TRAUMA: THE SOCIAL WORLD

Siblings are omnipresent in the observational material of psychoanalysis, particularly in child analysis. Where they are missing is in the theory, in the metapsychological superstructure. However, their putative position in the social world is accorded a place in the theory—and it is one that is distinct from the vertical axis of descent. Both at the micro level of “the nursery” and the macro level of human prehistory, siblings feature in their own right. Brothers can be found in the mythological explanation first offered by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1913) and favorably repeated by him at the end of his life in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939) (although no one else much liked *Totem and Taboo*, it is said to have remained Freud’s favorite book). Having ganged up to kill the tyrannical *primal* father who had monopolized all the women, the brothers realized they must make a contract among themselves, not to kill each other and to share out the women among themselves. This fraternal alliance is considered to be the first *social* relationship.<sup>6</sup>

The emphasis of the social is on the contract among brothers; nothing is said of the relationship between the “contracted” sisters. Even if this is in some way a correct contention (as analyzing the castration complex was correct for Hans), it clearly must be a partial picture. The absence of women from the position of making the contract has

6. Above, I have suggested that fathers exchange their children; Freud makes brothers do their own exchanging. Below I suggest that both happen. The question is one for anthropology—but it is not likely to be answered, as in that discipline too, brothers are potential fathers. The work of Annette Weiner (1992) initiated for anthropology the kind of analytical distinction I am trying to draw for psychoanalysis.

to be as significant as the presence of brothers in making it (Mitchell 1974/2000).

Because for Freud the model for the social is the family, the horizontal relationship between the contracting brothers is subordinate to the vertical relationship to the father. Omitting the horizontal axis also limits our understanding of the vertical. The vertical affects the horizontal, but so too, the horizontal inflects the vertical. So, for instance, crucial to my thesis is a transposition of the vertical "Pre-Oedipal Mother" into a different vertical position occasioned by her role in socializing siblings; in a teasing reference to Jacques Lacan's (1981) "Law of the Father," I called this the "Law of the Mother," a law that emanates from a position rather than a person, one that above all acts on and between siblings. But also, as with brothers in Freud's myth *Totem and Taboo*, siblings can act and adjudicate between themselves without vertical interference, as is demonstrated by Anna Freud and Sophie Dann's (1951) pathbreaking account of a quasi-sibling group of concentration-camp children.

So instead of or as well as, Freud's gang of brothers and the social contract they make as a response to their murder of the father (*Totem and Taboo*), we can see the relationship of brotherhood and sisterhood as a response to the loss of the mother to the new baby. This loss is emblemized by the prohibitions against sibling murder and incest, the law that she institutes. This is a vertical law. But as well as vertical prohibitions, there is evidence that, as in the myth of *Totem and Taboo*, the brothers organize themselves. Here, however, we must add sisters and both identify them with and differentiate them from their brothers. Siblings, or brothers, do not just play a part in a social world; as with parents, they too are interactive in forging that social world.

When the sibling trauma occurs, the toddler's expectation is that the new baby will be an extension of him- or herself, the former baby. Traumatized by the fact that the toddler is not now the only baby (or even a "baby" at all), he or she makes an identification with the mother and with the new baby—both temporarily (and latently for all time); the ego of the toddler is nowhere. After trying for the impossibility of being in two places at the same time, hopefully helped to find a new position, the toddler's ego splits: he or she will be both baby and big girl / big boy—one moment regressed, the next the adult the child plans to be. The individual splitting of the ego in the response to the sibling trauma is necessary and normative and looks forward to the diverse and manifold splittings that characterize the social world: friend/enemy, young/old, white/black, child/baby, boy/girl . . . superior/inferior.

The new baby introduces the toddler to a threefold relationship, a triangulation of mother, baby, and toddler, as later, with the Oedipus

complex, it will be mother, father, and child. Once it starts to disidentify with the mother, the mother can become the toddler's "object"; as such she is ripe for the child's Oedipal love. Once the toddler starts to disidentify with the baby, the baby will become the "other." The sibling relation, as it is transformed into a social one, does so on the cusp of this narcissistic identification of the baby as the same and then the discovery of the baby as "other-object."

Finding an object in psychoanalytic understanding is always a refinding of an object, someone who was there before in the preobject state of babyhood. In the case of the sibling, at first the object can only be the toddler's self as discovered in the transitive mirror image. In Freud's (1920, pp. 14–17) famous observation of his eighteen-month-old grandson, the baby mastered his mother's absence by throwing and retrieving a cotton-reel and then tried this on himself, appearing and then vanishing from a mirror. Looking at the baby sibling, the toddler sees the baby he or she was. Identification with the baby and then re-finding him- or herself as the object in the baby is a double narcissistic whammy. At the same time, the toddler traumatically finds that this "other" is not the self. Caught in this impossible situation, the response to the baby as "other-object" is overwhelming jealousy. Unlikely as it sounds, I think it is this jealousy that facilitates the next stage, following the mother's law. Jealousy enables the move toward the psychic exchange of sociality—new friend for old baby?

Since Melanie Klein (1957), envy has had a good inning but somewhat at the expense of jealousy, with which it is often confused in our feelings but should not therefore be confused in our argument. Envy is binary; jealousy, triangular: One is envious of what someone has, jealous of the position that they are in or of where they stand. Acknowledging this other as "other" turns on jealousy: The baby stands where I want to be with the mother. I may be envious that the mother has a baby; I want one too. But it is the baby sibling of whom I am jealous. The hatred that just wants the baby out of the world—not to exist—can also be used in the key social institution of war. However, when it is recognized that the baby as "other" has come to stay, hatred can be replaced by jealousy; jealousy is a confirmation that this baby is another, an object to be rivaled. Jealousy is the repository for part of the murderous wish to get rid of the sibling; it is important to recognize both its normality and its energy. If recognized, jealousy can open the way to positive rivalry, competition, and creative struggle (Mitchell 2012); left unrecognized and unused, it will lurk as the green-eyed monster.

The narcissistic identificatory love for the baby who is the self can, via the transitivity of childhood, become the "we are as one" of adult

couples. The splitting that is the response to the sibling trauma is a normative process and constitutive of social life. However, at its pathological end it characterizes psychosis rather than neurosis. The toddler has been called “mad” rather than “psychotic.” Wilfred Bion claimed the baby really was mad; Donald Winnicott, that the baby was allowed madness. The trauma makes the toddler mad, but increasingly this is not allowed. The toddler is in transition: He or she has not yet fully taken on board what Lacan (1997) calls the “Symbolic,” the full order of language that is human culture. It uses a “transitional” language, which is characterized by the search for understanding without as yet having grasped metaphor; it is not quite the same as what has been described as making “symbolic equations” (Segal 1957).

When Freud’s grandson represented the comings and goings of his mother and then himself, he uttered his first pair of phonemes, which became contrasting words: *ooo/aahh*; *fort/da*, “gone”/“there.” By the time the sibling arrives, these pairs have multiplied like the doubling of the toddler’s self, which it saw in the baby that it had been. At the pathological end of the process we speak of the concrete language of the psychotic: Here in the verbal joy of the small child, I prefer to think of it as “literal” language. Bion (1974) describes a mother reentering a room to find her little daughter with her profiled face tenderly but firmly on the supine baby’s tummy. The mother’s inquiry elicits that, being a good girl, the daughter was doing as she had been asked and “keeping an eye” on the baby. To the adult this literal language is a source of new pleasure in the child, and children themselves seem to find their verbal similitudes comical. At the other end of the scale, we have schizophrenic puns; the deluded paranoiac jokes through his pain. But for the small child, the comical words or identificatory acts are early manifestations of sociability; small children produce pantomimes and play word games with each other; verbal teasers start and expand into latency. For the toddler, if there are other playmates, more children, the baby can be left to be a baby till another day.

The trauma of the sibling trauma is the invasion of something unknowable, psychically unprocessable. Only a rite of passage to a new state of being is possible. It is argued that, after his disillusion with the hysteric’s story of abuse, Freud dismissed trauma from the metapsychology. In fact, never having entirely abandoned it, he brought it back into prominence when Nazism threatened. Ilse Grubrich-Simitis (1994) calls *Moses and Monotheism* “the book of the trauma.” As the light went out, Freud argued (1937) that we must always remember a present pathology-producing conflict that replays in the infantile past, which had itself prefigured the later event. He argues too for a grain of “historical truth” in this earlier

conflict. This is where I would place the sibling trauma, glimpsing in Freud's late insistence on historical truth, a part for the trauma's siblings to play in the theoretical superstructure. Arguing that we should make a "construction" in our therapies, a construction that needs to be part of a theory, Freud gave a pertinent illustration:

If in accounts of analytic technique, so little is said about "constructions," that is because "interpretations" and their effects are spoken of instead. But I think that "construction" is by far the more appropriate description. "Interpretation" applies to something that one does to some single element of the material, such as an association or a parapraxis. But it is a "construction" when one lays before the subject of the analysis a piece of his early history that he has forgotten, in some such way as this: "Up to your nth year you regarded yourself as the sole and unlimited possessor of your mother; then came another baby and brought you grave disillusionment." (Freud 1937, p. 261)

Constructing, deconstructing, and constructing again a patient's plausible early history has been crucial to psychoanalysis. This construction has weighted vertical parent-child relations. Yet sibling relations are absent neither from psychoanalytic writings nor from the consulting room. Indeed, Freud's articulation of an emblematic analytic construction includes both mother and sibling: "*Then came another baby and brought you grave disillusionment.*" This talk offers clinical practice a lateral lens through which to understand our patients both as children and as siblings. I suggest that the concept of a sibling trauma opens a place where we may place lateral relations along a horizontal axis within an expanded metapsychology. In its turn a theoretical habitus could contain the clinical observations and give them staying power.

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# Sibling Interaction

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*Sibling interactions traditionally were conceived psychoanalytically in “vertical” and parentified oedipal terms and overlooked in their own right, for complicated reasons (Colonna and Newman 1983). Important work has been done to right this, from the 1980s and onward, with conferences and writings. Juliet Mitchell’s 2000 and, in particular, her 2003 books, for example, have brought “lateral” sibling relations forcefully to the forefront of insights, especially about sex and violence, with the added interdisciplinary impact of illuminating upheaval in global community interactions as well as having implications for clinicians.*

*A clinical example from the analysis of an adult woman with a ten-years-younger sister will show here how we need both concepts to help us understand complex individual psychic life. The newer “lateral” sibling emphasis, including Mitchell’s “Law of the Mother” and “seriality,” can be used to inform the older “vertical” take, to enrich the full dimensions of intersubjective oedipal and preoedipal reciprocities that have been foundational in shaping that particular analysand’s inner landscape. Some technical recommendations for heightening sensitivity to the import of these dynamics will be offered along the way here, by invoking Hans Loewald’s useful metaphor of the analytic situation as theater.*

## INTRODUCTION

FROM 1900 ONWARD, FREUD INTRODUCED THE CUTTING-EDGE IDEA that the oedipal situation ruled family psychosexual relations, governed

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incest taboos, and—if unstable and unreliable—was in place in mental life to protect civilization and the propagation of the species. Parental relations to each child were patterned in that scheme as “vertical.” Sibling “lateral” relations were seen more or less as a displacement of these vertical arrangements. In the new insights to the lateral sibling relations that Juliet Mitchell brings forward, destruction of the species becomes equally marked by these biopsychosocial forces. She says, “Why have we not considered that lateral relations in love and sexuality or in hate and war have needed a theoretical paradigm with which we might analyse, consider, and seek to influence them?” (2003, p. 1).

The historical pendulum of theory in psychoanalysis itself seems to swing between either stressing Eros as an instinct (Freud 1910) or some kind of preservation, or its classic opposer, the death instinct (Freud 1920) or some kind of destruction. Freud’s portrait of the mind majestically, of course, calls for both forces of nature in conflict, in terms of the dual instinct theory. But Freud began chronologically with sex and procreation, and added by 1920, through life passages of war, frustration, and violence, the darkly seductive sway of the death instinct. As Elizabeth Young-Bruehl (2011) has noted about his followers:

All Freudians were impressed with the emphasis that Freud put after 1920 on aggression, because everyone who survived the First World War realized that aggression and aggression against the self (masochism) had been underemphasized and undertheorized in psychoanalytic theory. But there agreement ended. And most subsequent psychoanalysts have either followed Klein and Lacan in elaborating the death instinct theory in various ways, or followed Hartman and Fenichel and others among the Ego Psychologists in repudiating the biological theory while accepting the idea that sex and aggression are fundamental drives. (Anna Freud stood diplomatically aside: speaking of sex and aggression as fundamental drives, but neither embracing nor rejecting the biological death instinct theory, which she felt called for confirming or disconfirming by empirical research.) (2011, p. 256)

The theoretical divide between vertical and lateral sibling dynamics could be seen as an echo of these theoretical debates and as a division of loyalties over the death instinct.

It is interesting that the recent emphasis on the lateral dimension has come from those not particularly involved with Freud’s ego psychological structural theory, either theoretically or clinically. Juliet Mitchell, an academic and professor of psychoanalysis from the United Kingdom, whose feminist history includes very important Lacanian and Marxist rereadings of Freud, is a case in point. One of the first works that drew psychodynamic attention to siblings in the United States was coauthored

by a research psychiatrist, Stephen Bank, and an academic professor of psychology, Michael Kahn (Bank and Kahn 1983). Other North American academic psychologists have seen recent value in the “laterality” dimension more than the vertical, such as Jeanine Vivona (2007; 2010), on its role in sibling differentiation, or Sue Kuba, whose 2011 book on sisters’ roles in female development, surveys many analytic theories’ deficits and then offers the solution of returning to the clinical drawing board of close listening to women’s personal stories. Other recent work includes Joyce Edward’s 2011 clinical and theoretically integrative account of sibling relations that comes out of her orientation to psychoanalytic psychotherapy from a social-work background. Prophecy Coles (2003), an English psychoanalytic psychotherapist, also writes on siblings but advances a rather dismissive notion that *all* psychoanalytic theory is predominantly autobiographical.

North American mainstream psychoanalysts who had a more vertical ego psychological orientation, in the 1980s nevertheless began to blend the lateral and vertical dimension of sibling dynamics (for example, Leichtman 1985). Volume 38 (1983) of this journal contained six articles about siblings. Pointing out that “To some extent, as in most clinical research, the attention has been given to what is ‘noisy,’ that is, what is associated with deprivation, conflict, or distortion,” Solnit and his colleagues wished to use “data and theoretical propositions formulated during the Yale Longitudinal Study and the Psychoanalytic Study of a Family . . . [and] propose in these reports to examine the sibling experience with an emphasis on those aspects that promote growth and development” (Solnit 1983, p. 281). These child analysts were mainly influenced by Anna Freud (Solnit 1983; Neubauer 1982; Colonna and Newman 1983; Kris and Ritvo 1983; Provence and Solnit 1983). Later, Philadelphia child analytic colleagues of Mahler, Akhtar and Kramer in 1999, gathered contributors to their edited book from their Thirtieth Margaret Mahler Symposium, “Brothers and Sisters.” Attention had been given to twins at least since the 1950s onward (for example, Burlingham 1952; Ainslie 1999; Levin 2010), the siblings of twins, and the siblings of sick or handicapped children (for example, Kennedy 1985; Lament and Wineman 1984; Safer 2003). Recent articles by other child analysts include Kieffer (2008), who reconciles aspects of Mitchell with Benjamin (1988). She sees a parallel between the unique condition of sibship that Mitchell points to in recognizing with agony that there are more individuals like oneself in the world and Benjamin’s ideas about the establishment of “mutual recognition.”

Social upheavals and academic postmodern outlooks have disrupted a mid-twentieth-century idealization of a “normal” heterosexual nuclear

family that had continued aspects of Freud's day. Professional practice has altered also. Many articles have been written on how psychoanalytic practice has changed (for economic and psychiatric reasons), toward a "wider scope" of patients, people whose backgrounds and inner lives can prove markedly chaotic and fraught with aggression, boundarylessness, and sexual behavioral impulsivity. The psychoanalytic theories that have thus become popularized at the turn of the twenty-first century by lecturers, writings, conferences and journals in the United States have shifted away from the so-called "golden era" of a more-orderly, strictly "internal" ego psychology structuring of Hartmann, Kris, and Lowenstein (theoreticians who abhorred the death instinct), to a plurality of theory of mind that importantly includes much rage and explications of archaic and verbally unrepresentable mental states (for example, Bion, many South American and Italian theoreticians), at the forefront of which is Melanie Klein and her contemporary followers. Their stress on the persistence of early archaic aggression and forms of cannibalistic voracity have been appreciated as apt for the times and more-disturbed patients, as well as Klein's "de-scientific" (in contrast with Freud) views of an inner world organization that are less jarring to antibiological postmodernists, as expressing only two very simple (but intense) mentalized "positions," where if one is not in the paranoid lower register, the very best one can do is to exhibit a "depressive position" (linguistically, little to do with "depression"). The latter raw terminology today in our field, though, garners much more success than any talk of "attaining the genital stage," which suggested more practitioner interest in sex and procreation—in the older structural theory terminology, a name for the very best one could hope for psychologically, developmentally, and behaviorally.<sup>1</sup> To turn around an aphorism, human beings making war and *not* love seems closer to the tenor of contemporary analytic theory in 2013. The social times are favorable now to talk as much of vituperative "lateral relations" as "vertical relations," because they deemphasize the powerful and domineering internalized parents of Freud as the crucial dynamic in our postmodern world of suspicion toward authority. The replacement emphasis then is an inter- and intrapsychic interactional vigor that encodes fantasies like the wild grandiosity, violent behavioral hurtfulness, and brutal, loving competition in a vision of unbridled, overly powerful sibling strivings lacking steadying parental input. As Ju-

1. These two concepts, the depressive position and the genital stage, however, when studied closely, are not all that far from each other, partly because of Freud's and Klein's agreements about some kind of oedipal situation in internal life, and maturing capabilities of accessing preferably higher and less desirably lower levels of psychic integration (but for a good, detailed consideration, see Ellman 2010).

liet Mitchell said of the origins of her current interest in siblings, which she feels she had previously overlooked, in an Internet YouTube video recording, “. . . I had been studying hysteria . . . and there was something that wasn’t explained for me . . . and one day . . . suddenly . . . the central thing [in psychoanalysis] is the Oedipus complex, like a big rock in the middle of the theory, and suddenly this rock sort of shifted slightly, and there were these dancing, squabbling children behind it! And . . . ‘Wait a minute, what are they doing?’ And I went back and read not only my own notes . . .” and reread many other texts too, where she found that “siblings were just everywhere. . . . There is hardly a case history where the birth of a sibling, and the birth of a sibling after that isn’t a major event which triggers some kind of dramatic reaction. . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Agger, who also appreciated siblings as overlooked, agreed earlier, “Commitment to traditional theoretical concepts inclines us to focus on parental transference figures within the oedipal helix” (1988, p. 7). Agger sees the problem of obscuring siblings in less-grand and sweeping terms than Mitchell and in more local theoretical and technical terms as countertransference avoidance in clinical psychoanalysis: “For some therapists, deviations from a psychoanalytic locus of concern . . . prevent the emergence of more obscure, drive-cathected layers of transference personae. Countertransference issues, inhibitions and anxiety regarding competition and incest, and lack of exposure in both training and personal analyses may cause therapists to overlook sibling interaction . . . in personality formation, neurosis, and treatment” (1988, p. 7). Another problem she pointed to is the sheer difficulty in teasing out overlapping and/or overdetermined mental representations. Kieffer (2008) suggests clinically that “sibling phenomena in the analytic encounter may be mutually disavowed because their acknowledgment and examination would threaten the hierarchical power structure that remains inherent in dyadic treatment.” Szalita (1968) noted that postanalysis dissatisfaction was often linked to the person’s first analyst having ignored sibling conflicts. Dent (2009a) experienced a kind of epiphany in hearing about the impact of siblings during discussions about the relevance of Mitchell’s insights to A. S. Byatt’s short story “The Chinese Lobster.” Dent goes on to wonder interestingly about paranoia:

Recognizing the depth and consequences of this [intersibling] fear has proved invaluable clinically. I’ve been struck by how many patients given to paranoid reactions grew up with a bullying or even brutal sibling. Further, I’ve noticed how often paranoid transference/countertransference dynamics seem to emerge out of lateral concerns—a fear that I’m

2. Mini-lecture: “Dr Juliet Mitchell on Siblings and Hysteria,” UCL, May 26, 2010.

making demands not out of any legitimate authority or purpose, but just because I can (I'm bigger; the patient is needier, etc.). Interpreting my role as that of an older sibling *pretending* to be a parent, whether out of insecurity or despotism, has proved quite useful. (Dent 2009a, p. 172)

Using Loewald's metaphor of theater for the analytic situation (Loewald 1975/1980; Balsam 1997) allows readily for the analytic development of sibling transferences, hence the news of laterality is telling but less startling to those exposed to his teaching. In addition to Loewald, as a candidate I was taught by those who contributed to the 1983 issue of *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* on the topic of siblings. Multiple transferences in the course of the analysis are played out and staged imaginatively, now externalized upon the pluripotential analyst, from the staging of scenarios within the patient's innermost life. Siblings are certainly players in this—as well as nannies, aunts, uncles, and teachers. But I agree with Mitchell and others that siblings have their own very special meanings indeed.

In the following case material I am particularly interested in the relationship of two sisters, born ten years apart, and in thinking about what Mitchell calls—with ironic apologies to Lacan's "Law of the Father" (1981)—the "Law of the Mother." Mitchell's "mother" regulates the severity of the original child trauma of being displaced by another sibling, by introducing the notion of family "seriality"—"there is room for you and me, a law which allows for one who is the same and different" (Mitchell 2003, p. 52). For Mitchell the mother is key to sibling bonding and subjectivity. Seriality is fostered by the mother who arranges for enough room for each child, in Mitchell's view. Thus, she concludes that the original sibling birth trauma that she perceives, of not just rivalry but of the older sibling's identity annihilation and hatred—resulting in, "I hate you, you are not me"—is actually a *precondition* for seriality. This is an interesting formulation and way of looking at what, from an ego psychological developmental perspective, or from a self psychological motivational systems theory perspective (Lichtenberg, Lachmann, and Fosshage 2010), might be considered one of the most important executive tasks of mothering. A father will also play a part in a child's individuation process in becoming a separate entity within the family, according to, say, Herzog (2001), who views the father's role even more significantly than the mother's role in helping the child separate not from the younger child, as Mitchell adds, but from the infantile aspects of the mother. I think that Mitchell's is an addition to the existent theory in considering the special (but I would not say exclusive) role of the mother in aiding the older child to separate from the baby as well

as from the mother herself. The “Law of the Mother” as a theoretical abstract is naturally therefore an unconscious ideal. It *ought* to work that way, so that people could become perfectly individuated and be able to differentiate themselves from others clearly. In practice, of course, they often do not manage this state of separation so well.

#### CLINICAL ILLUSTRATION

Ms. Arlene A, a fifty-year-old married college professor, who had two grown children, initially told me how much, as an adult, she loved her ten-years-younger, divorced, childless sister, Lauren. There were just the two of them, and she was grateful for all Lauren, as a special aunt, did for her own children—presents at Hanukkah, gifts at Passover, family picnics in the mountains, sleepovers for the kids while Arlene and her husband went off for romantic weekends. She was a “roaring success,” she said, as an aunt. (At the time my ears caught “roaring” with a question mark.) Her mother, she stated baldly, “was nuts.” It was too bad, but that’s the way it was. Her friends all agreed that their mother was “big trouble.” It was so good to have at least her sister emerge as close, surviving this family mess. (Again my ears caught “this mess.”)

Mother had never supported the patient’s professional ambitions. All she wanted seemed to be for her to stay nearby and be her servant. Arlene had gone across the country to be educated to get far away from her. But the poor woman was limited, Arlene added, by her lack of education, and Arlene had totally forgiven her. (It is interesting, I thought, how some at the beginning of a possible analytic treatment wish they were at its end! This “forgiveness” is likely a forced foreconclusion, I thought. Arlene seemed a little too jocular and dismissive of the subject matter as she talked in these introductory sessions.) Father had not been much involved. He was always preoccupied by his successful importing business, but he had a bad temper. The mother loved doing crafts and painting, which the patient despised and could never get the hang of, being not at all artistic. Mother had said, “You’re no good with your hands. You’re all brain, so why bother?”

Lauren, the younger sister, these days owned a small art gallery. “So she liked painting, then?” I asked.

“I guess, but it was because she was no good in school,” Arlene snapped irritably. (Had she not noticed this connection between Lauren’s and Mother’s shared interests? Or, I wondered, is it that she doesn’t want me to have noticed? I noted her brief irritability.) She continued about how Lauren had done so poorly in school that she was very sorry for her, because her mean mother had always contrasted her negatively



with Arlene, the brilliant scholar. Tearfully then, she confessed to me that she was far and away the favorite of both of her parents. Once into the four-times-per-week analysis, which she eagerly accepted, as she felt her problems were deeper than she had been able to reach in several psychotherapies she had tried, we had a chance to dwell with these family scenes.

We spoke at length of her guilt about this success and her guilt about outshining Lauren. I had transferential evidence to back up this internalization, due to her reactions to crossing paths in the waiting room with a student of her own who was doing poorly in school, and who was seeing a colleague in our suite. My patient was guilty about this student, comparing her own analysis favorably with this poor student's assumed once-per-week therapy. She was guilty that I favored her by offering analysis, whereas my colleague clearly had deemed this student not worthy of analysis. Many associations about Lauren emerged. Arlene had felt protective of and lovingly close to Lauren in this iteration.

Much material emerged about the birth of Lauren when my patient was just going into adolescence. She stressed the positive and empowering executive maternal stirrings of adolescence in herself toward her little sister. Mother had been delighted with her helpfulness with the new baby and had even said, "You'll be a wonderful mother someday." Arlene had glowed in the shining light of Mother's eye and the height of Mother's approbation for the very task that Mother prided herself on. These moments were all important within their relationship matrices, but not the whole story. So far, Arlene would seem to be suffering from a mild form of survivor guilt, comparing herself to Lauren, as the one who was picked for accolade for her superior "brains," and her potential as a "wonderful mother" . . . even if she had "bad hands."

I had noted to myself that Arlene's presenting complaint to me was that she was currently in subtle professional trouble, as she was complaining about a lack of ideas for writing, very late in giving editors promised assignments, and feeling ignored as a voice on her faculty. Her teacher evaluations were poor as well. Her mothering of her teenage girls was the most satisfying part of her life, and her marriage, she consistently said, was fine, with many incidental portraits of feeling supported by her husband. *So what had happened to the originally joyful schoolgirl in Arlene?* I thought. *Or what in the story did not yet add up?*

In among the loving positives of this sibling bond were my first clues that there were too sharply perceived contrasts in this family between these sibs. Because Arlene had dismissed the mother's psyche as "nutty" and denigrated her consistently, I wondered privately if she were dismissing Lauren's intellect, too, and that her stress on how good she

herself was at school might be defending her against a more-complex view of her relations with her sister. According to Arlene, in this first version of the family tale, she was the clear favorite. But how did young Lauren end up sharing the same interests as the mother, if she had been, indeed, so lowly in her eyes? The story about how favored Arlene was in her mother's imagined eyes became more textured.

#### THE RHYTHM OF SIBLING INTIMACY

Lauren had had an early childless divorce, and Arlene had been much more sympathetic than the parents about it. It was at that time she felt especially close to her—but the “closeness” and its quality were relative states of mind about Lauren when the longer-term trajectory unfolded. The rhythm of sibling intimacy was actually one of extreme closeness followed by extreme distance. On further analysis, aspects of this sisterly sympathy over the divorce involved also *schadenfreude*—a hidden triumph, the malicious pleasure in another's failure, which is particularly characteristic of sibling rivalry encoded into ambitious strivings. The ambivalent threads within this sibship relation came into view.

As the analysis progressed over a few years, other issues in Arlene's life and associations took precedence. One day I drew to her attention that she talked little about Lauren again, after initially talking of how important she was. Arlene tearfully now revised the story, saying that she often had felt alienated from her. Lauren had a terrible temper, just like Father, and by keeping their conversation “light” she could manage to keep anger at bay. To an analyst's ear, the relationship sounded as if Arlene were walking on eggshells most of the time, alert to minimizing tension in case Lauren would “lose her cool” or “yell.” She could “get crazy,” Arlene said. “I don't talk to her much anymore, especially since I've been so preoccupied here with the problems in my own life and struggling with my lack of creativity in work.”

#### THE DRAMA AND STAGING OF SCENES FROM THE “LAW OF THE MOTHER”

I started working with her on the sharp contrast in the opening and mid-phase accounts of her relations with her sister.<sup>3</sup> It emerged how angry Arlene had been in our opening phase, when I had said that “*she*” (Lauren) liked painting. Arlene was still angry. (Now this was familiar from other scenarios.) My patient was characterologically devoted to “being and looking cool.” It usually took her at least a month to realize

3. Transferentially here, I was moving back and forth in the roles of each sister, as well as occupying maternal space (where the “Law of the Mother” fits in).

she had been angry, hurt, disappointed, or let down. “Never forgive and never forget”—but above all, “look like it doesn’t matter” was a central part of her style of hoarding insults.

More deeply into this “family dinner table” scene of her anger with me, I began to take on the cloak of her mother to her. It was “clear,” she whimpered, that I preferred Lauren, otherwise why would I have emphasized that *she* liked painting? It was also “clear” from the watercolors on the walls of my office that I myself was an artist. That meant to Arlene that I had *really* said in the consultation sessions several years ago, “You don’t like doing creative things,” and between those hurtful lines, “What’s *wrong* with you, anyway?” The latter interaction became an important pivot in the negative transference. Gradually there emerged the absolute certainty that I disliked her. Always there was a direct comparison with someone else—mostly my other patients. She would ingeniously twist a question into an accusation, and an interpretation into a hurtful exposure of her lacks.

A few vivid contemporary stories of Lauren emerged. The parents, now growing old, wanted to move out of their large house. Suddenly the two siblings seemed to be at each other’s throats, with my patient giving pained accounts of Lauren’s “yelling” at her about how greedy she was, while she was tearfully convincing me that all she’d done was to ask whether this or that beautiful vase was appropriate for their new small home.

Arlene was representing herself to me as a victim of young Lauren’s aggression in this pained interaction about who wanted the beautiful parental vase more, in much the same way as I experienced myself as a victim when earlier she had been railing against my maternal “accusation” that Lauren was more talented artistically than she. As many of these conversations were in detail, I was persuaded that in her awareness of herself in the original family home, in asking her sister about the vase, Arlene may have no more felt *consciously* accusatory than I had when making my statement about how Lauren must “like to paint.”

As I viewed this transference experience and many similar interactions as involvement in Arlene’s projective identifications, I told the patient that I could see how she felt like a victim and misunderstood by Lauren when they were around their parents, as her reaction bore a similarity to my own reaction when she surprised me with telling about how hurt she’d been when I noted that Lauren liked to paint, in contrast to her. I too had felt “innocent,” but it had had so much more meaning to her. Arlene was interested in this and recognized the pattern. Could it be, she wondered suddenly, if Lauren *felt* similar to her, and hurt by implied criticism, when I had seemed to accuse her of having no paint-

ing talent? Maybe Lauren felt hurt, and imagined she had no right to want the vase, for example? Arlene spoke of the possibility of a role reversal, where I was like her, and she like Lauren. At that point she shed further light by bringing in much more material about the mother and how she managed their frequent fights in childhood—and even now. These materials are the substance of what Loewald has called “the fantasy character of the analytic situation” (1975/1980, p. 352). Mother would say to Arlene in the aftermath of observing (and participating in) Arlene fighting with Lauren, “Your sister’s so crazy. Don’t believe a word she says; I don’t.” The gratification of virtue in Arlene’s victimhood was thus enhanced. Arlene illuminated that even as she’d raged at me, there was a part of her from time to time that was observing herself with amazement. It was as if she were several people in fantasy joining in argument and counterargument. One voice was saying, “You’re *accusing* me, you crazy woman!” Another said, “You’re nuts; she’s only asking a question!” Another said, “But you know she (Mother/analyst) doesn’t say what she means; she *really* means you’ve got poor taste and aren’t at all artistic or creative!” Invoking the mother between the two sisters in my own fantasy of this impassioned back-and-forth filled in the missing links. Sometimes I was the mother, letting Arlene know subtly how much I preferred Lauren—the painter just like me—to her. Other times in the scene I was the mother who was supposed to play my appointed part in this drama by making amends, cozying up to Arlene, sympathizing with how victimized she was by her wicked sister, who should be dismissed as “nuts.” When I was in the drama as if in maternal position of playing out a strong preference for young Lauren (the painter just like me, as Arlene had designated me earlier in the analysis), Arlene would feel compelled to seek far under the surface of my mind to find “the *real* truth” in this battle among Mother and both siblings. If only that truth were out in the open, and expectedly and especially hateful of her, because of all her aggression, fantasied destructiveness, and guilt, only then she thought she could feel “safe.”

How myriad are the ways to seek out individual forms of imagined “safety”! It is as necessary to analyze a patient’s conception of inner “safety” as it is to attend to the more-obvious routes of inner rage or destructiveness. It seemed that in that analytic encounter, for Arlene at times, nothing was what it seemed, and words and tonality could not be trusted. Verbal interchange was a kind of “Alice Through the Looking Glass” communication experience. At times, her insistence on my malignant motives was so strong, and she was so insistent that she *knew* without a doubt that I thought her not to have an ounce of special writing talent (as a displacement from painting, which was closer to

her heart) that I once had a fantasy that I myself had gone “nuts” and must be unaware of my hatred toward and despising of her. I realized then that I was angry about how helpless I felt to analyze her shaky self-esteem while she was so sure I held her in contempt.

ROLE OF CONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTIVE  
FANTASY IN THERAPEUTIC ACTION

We now reached a potential reconstruction of the inner world of Arlene as including her possible versions of the inner world of her mother. My part in this co-construction was based on the shifting transferences to me and my reactive countertransferences in the sessions. For Mother, when one girl was “in” her good graces the other was “out.” Mother’s “out” was so utter and complete that each little girl filled up the gaping emotional space with agonizing fantasies or familial spoken criticisms of her own deficits. Each child individually interpreted in her own terms the reasons for Mother’s exclusion and banishment of each of them. Neither, of course, attributed her exclusion outside her own narcissistic enclosure of self-importance. Such a position keeps Mother perfect and filled with only “good reasons” for her actions and speech. Mother’s glittering night moon could shine on Arlene when she felt “the favorite”—hence her opening story and convictions of being the favorite early in the analysis. That was the more consciously available and acceptable version of the family relations. The dark side of Mother’s moon could make her disappear into a frightening and empty universe.

INTERNALIZED GENDERED FAMILY DISCOURSE

Arlene’s focus on writing (in her professional world as an adult) and creativity was linked to sensitivity around her femaleness and stereotypic notions of “femininity.” She was fearful of being sterile—not manly in her family—but *not fully womanly*. After all, the mother is always the gold standard of childbearing creativity, especially for a female child (Balsam 1996; 2012), and even though Arlene already had given birth twice, internally she was still wavering about the self-estimate of her own gender-role success. She feared that Lauren had retained more connection with some essence of maternal creativity (as if it were biologically inbuilt), even though, in adult life, Lauren in fact was childless. These were painful explorations for Arlene. Refusal to paint with Mother had once protected her from being swallowed up by dyadic intensity and Mother’s possessiveness and insistence of “sameness.” Her resistance had allowed her to make more school relationships and identify with women teachers who promised attachment with more freedom. But

her refusal to have “good hands” also produced a profound uneasiness about Mother’s slanted and narrow reading of her behavior, which was the *real* truth in her own estimate, that is, that she was refusing, she said, to become a “feminine” woman. The “good hands” also held more associative links to her own “bad hands” of masturbation, and a body exploration that she was sure Mother disapproved of and that, for Arlene, was associated with wishful fantasies of peeing like a boy with naughty “bad hands.” (Perhaps Mother did disapprove, perhaps not. No one will ever know.) Arlene became convinced that Mother was dead set against her body’s female procreativity (for example, Mayer 1985). But Arlene’s own ambivalence about owning fully this same female body became greatly intensified in adolescence by her graphic fears of carrying a child and experiencing childbirth, fears that accompanied her mother’s giving birth to Lauren when Arlene was ten and prepubertal.

The analytic listener can appreciate how much more texture can keep unfolding in such a deepening analytic process. The role of the father has not been included here but was complex.

Arlene’s early attempt to free herself from her mother by denying her sameness and loudly insisting on her otherness was a gendered constellation. She tried mightily to enlist her father, and tried to tie herself tightly to him instead, to escape from Mother’s “handcrafting” ambiance. (I have found that the mother-to-daughter’s comparisons of hands carries special significance for the tone of their comfort or discomfort in the inevitable blending and separating rhythms that proceed between them, as the daughter grows by comparison to each feature of the mother’s body [Balsam 2001; 2012].) The accusation of Arlene’s “bad hands” had a special hurt. The mother’s hands are the enablers of the child’s welfare, and the child is deeply familiar with their touch. This insult represented the mother damning her daughter’s capacities to be like her, as she had known intimate caretaking . . . also the basis for sensuality and lovemaking. The girl of course partially welcomed this, as it meant freedom to her—freedom to try to be close to Father as her preferred parent, and to be like him. Arlene was attracted by the freedom that boys had, as she thought, and was more of a “tomgirl” than Lauren. In Arlene’s view, then, Lauren stayed close to her mother as “the girly baby,” while Arlene was pushed out of any semblance of babyhood by the birth of Lauren. Juliet Mitchell (2003) would see clearly here Arlene’s rage and loss of identity as “the unique baby.” If we consider that she was ten years old at the time, I will add Arlene’s burgeoning acute teenage gender trouble, which becomes easy to imagine. I also think that her “unique baby” identity as the solo child was blended with her repudiated female body identity. This was one

route to become stirred up with the birth of Lauren. After all, she had tried to reject Mother early from her inner pantheon. The tomgirl with “bad hands” became good at sports and tried to get Father to take her to games. Of course, there was a heterosexual oedipal thread in these dynamics, too. One can appreciate gradually the weaving together in Arlene’s growth, the vertical and the lateral dynamic dimensions of parental and sibling relationships.

The mother grew large and pregnant before Arlene’s eyes, and suddenly, it seemed, in a triumph of her oedipal competition for her father, and in awe and admiration of Mother’s “creativity,” Arlene allowed herself to become envious of her mother’s new splendor. The pregnancy newly enhanced the vision of her previously rejected Mother. (This does not at all always happen to a young preteen when her mother becomes pregnant!) Such are the surprising paths and vicissitudes of development. At the juncture when Lauren was born, Mother reciprocally started to appreciate Arlene, and thus the path to maternal child caretaking (and also angry overcontrol) of Lauren began for Arlene, with Mother’s blessing and accolade, “You’ll be a wonderful mother some day!” The latter praise too became a pleasurable voice in her mind, and a thread to the actuality of her enjoyment and pride in the mothering of her own two children.

But the interfemale matrix of interaction among Mother, Arlene, and Lauren also became fraught here with ambitious strivings, jealousies, envies, and with renewed anger for Arlene, this time complicated by her displacement by the baby Lauren, now perceived as Mother’s favorite. Mitchell’s view of this complicated love and hate is: “I suggest loving one’s sibling like oneself is neither exactly narcissism nor object-love. It is narcissism transmuted by a hatred that has been overcome” (2003, pp. 35–36). Young Lauren meanwhile grew up liking her mother more than did Arlene. She had her own jealousy of Arlene’s sports and relative closeness with her father. But she eagerly compensated for this and shared her “good hands” with Mother’s artistic gifts.

In the tussles that I described above, how could Juliet Mitchell’s “Law of the Mother” help us understand and sort out some of these dynamics? Theoretically, Mother should have been able to help Arlene feel secure as “herself,” safe with her own offerings within the family to be the older sister. She should theoretically have been able to see Lauren as separate, with her own distinct personality. That would be the task of facilitating seriality and effecting the “Law of the Mother.” However, the complication here was that Mother herself was not skilled in triadic dynamics. She herself was fixated in a dyadic state, which tends to exaggerate all competition to ferocious heights and insists on “sameness”

at the same time as rebelling, because it is too voracious a position for comfort. She thus pulled in Arlene, cast out Lauren, or alternately pulled in Lauren and locked out Arlene emotionally. That was her version of seriality . . . but not the position of an individuated mother. As I often say in transference comments to patients like Arlene, concerning their dubiety about this tenuous state of object connectedness, “You believe that I have no room in my heart for more than one person.”

During the course of a successful analysis of this kind of sibling bond, the siblings as adults often begin to newly discover one another. A shared critical perspective develops on their joint experience with a mother for whom each seemed able to secure more psychological separateness, and results in their healing interactions as adults. These sisters eventually shared their fears of being accused individually of failing to glorify sufficiently Mother’s capabilities by her mirroring of same-gendered “virtues”—in Arlene’s case, her pained inability to paint, and in Lauren’s case, her pained inability to have a successful marriage and the pain of remaining childless.

#### WORKING WITH REGRESSION IN THE ANALYTIC SITUATION

Neubauer (1982) had noted that when adult patients give accounts of reuniting with their families, it often seems that the original sibling hierarchies quickly become reestablished, as if sibling interactions can have a tendency to remain “static”—“even though the vicissitudes of life may substantially have altered the circumstances of individuals.” He wonders if “the inability . . . to change the relationship to siblings and to find new ways of coexistence is an indication of partly unresolved preoedipal and oedipal conflicts” (p. 127). Neubauer was here implying a preoedipal and oedipal scenario that includes the “early role of multiple objects and their relationship to each other” (p. 122). (He questions an exclusive emphasis on the mother as the sole important figure who achieves eminence in the child’s inner world.) A phenomenon he calls the “static sibling” may be observed in ongoing analytic work. “Examining sibling experience and rivalry, we become increasingly aware of the additional role of objects other than the mother in early life” (p. 130). These will later naturally be reflected in multiple transferences to an analyst during adult treatment. Thus by sheer logic, Neubauer demonstrates his 1982 struggles away from the exclusive oedipal paradigm that Mitchell, Agger, and others have noticed as restrictive, working out that siblings created separate transferences.

Eloise Agger (1988) offered the following clinical help about working in the *dramatis personae* of the family stage: “Attention to sibling issues



within the therapeutic relationship will often forge new pathways to unconscious material. The therapist must speed up his or her reaction time in perceiving how rapidly his or her transference meaning for the patient is shifting. At times, an hour might seem like a slide show with lights and sound effects. The slides are projected one after another in wild succession; now the therapist is seen as mother, now father, now sibling, now subject, now the whole crowd, and so forth. *It's like a night back at the family dinner table. Or the aftermath of a family crisis*" (p. 27; italics mine). The "Law of the Mother" can thus also become restored to "the night back at the family dinner table" in the course of some analyses, through the vicissitudes and the "good enough" working-through of the transference. Arlene became "creative" again in this treatment and once more began to write. And this may have suggested the resolution put forth in Mitchell's overarching theory, that acceptance of seriality by the child (who is also obeying the vertical maternal prohibition of that child's lost ambitions to have competed with Mother's generation of procreation) will play a role in her mind developing freely, and hence her creativity.

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# The Theory of Sibling Trauma and the Lateral Dimension

KAREN GILMORE, M.D.

*Juliet Mitchell has made an invaluable contribution to psychoanalytic developmental theory with her elucidation of sibling trauma. She suggests that this is a universal experience of the preoedipal child who becomes aware of the world of similar others through the birth of a sibling or the dawning recognition of the ubiquitous peer group. Suddenly no longer unique, the child is in dread of displacement and confronted with the loss of the special status of "the baby." Two examples from adolescent analyses are offered to illustrate the power of the lateral dimension.*

JULIET MITCHELL'S CONTRIBUTION TO PSYCHOANALYTIC DEVELOPMENTAL theory has been hugely significant, not only due to her persistent focus on the role of siblings in mental life but also because she has taken the critical step toward theory making. In general, the problem of siblings constitutes the bread and butter of child clinicians, but it has never been acknowledged for its profound role in human development and psychopathology. In my experience as a child analyst and a teacher of development, I am repeatedly confronted with the power of the "lateral dimension," the trauma attendant on the birth of the actual sibling and the shocklike experience of the multitude of similar others, the metaphoric siblings.

Mitchell raises the crucial question: Why should such a pervasive phenomenon have been, from its inception, underappreciated in psychoanalytic thinking? And, luckily for psychoanalysis, she not only points out the problem but also offers an answer and a solution. She reminds

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us that observations without theory to crystallize them remain relevant but unintegrated. Her assertion that, like the experience of parents, the sibling experience is both infinitely variable but also invariable, and her subsequent explication of its meaning have been revolutionary despite her protestations to the contrary. Psychoanalytic theory today is not unitary, but there are no schools of thought that differ on this point; none, until Mitchell, has developed a theory of sibling trauma.

Stimulated by her ideas, I too have pondered the dearth of sibling theory, which is noteworthy even in the developmental literature. In 1988, Ian Graham observed that psychoanalysis has treated siblings with the “contempt of familiarity” (p. 88). Clearly, such dismissal serves a defensive purpose, since the “fraternal complex” has been a powerful, divisive force within our field over the course of our history and the world is, tragically, full of examples of tribal conflict where the “siblings” are split into good and bad, unleashing massive destructive aggression. Moreover, the presence of the fraternal complex in all aspects of our daily work is both undeniable and unacknowledged and so suggests that there is powerful unconscious motivation in our inattention. Perhaps one reason why, beyond the rationalization of variability of the sibling experience, is that the painful and powerful affects associated with siblings may be more difficult for us to manage than our preferred formulations in our professional institutions and in our consulting rooms. It is more comfortable, as Mitchell suggests, to retreat behind the vertical formulation, where the power hierarchy and incest taboo feel secure. Indeed, the intensity of impulses directed toward siblings and triggered in the context of sibling transference and countertransference is (1) less modulated by dependency and ambivalence; (2) less subject to the incest taboo; (3) less dampened by the power differential, the original status hierarchy, and the typical anxieties of childhood; and (4) therefore, more brutal and violent than the vertical dimension. The lateral dimension is of course inevitably woven into the vertical one, and the number of triangular dynamics is infinite. To again quote Graham:

The sibling is both a developmental companion and a transference shaper. This shifts the model of the patient’s internal psychic organization from a single planetary one that has the primary parental objects at the center and the sibling objects in orbit around them to that of a miniature universe of great complexity. To Winnicott’s aphorism that there is no infant, but only a mother/infant dyad, I would add that there is usually no mother/child dyad in a multisib family, but, rather, environmental and orbiting triads impacting from the earliest mother/infant symbiosis to the epigenesis of the adult neurosis. (1988, p. 91)

To this, Mitchell has added two crucial dimensions: The child need not have siblings to have the sibling experience, and this is one of the central and inevitable traumas of childhood.

Mitchell insists that the sibling trauma, the trauma of the lateral dimension, is a universal experience that is responsible for much of the neurotic psychopathology of early childhood. Most of my own practice illuminates the intensity of the sibling dynamic, including my patients without siblings. The latter often see all or selected other children as rivals and enact the sibling struggle there. Unfortunately, the tendency to link pathogenic sibling relationships to problems both within the parental relationship and in the parent-child relationship is still ubiquitous. And while disturbances in these relationships, as experienced by the children, no doubt have far-reaching impact on their conflicts and development, including their notions about adult relationships and their place within them, I agree with Mitchell's idea that sibling trauma and its repercussions are a *separate complex system*. Of course, this system interfaces with the vertical one but also interfaces with all other aspects of personality development and must be recognized as both a universal trauma of childhood and an ongoing influence on personality development. Indeed Mitchell's emphasis on this issue of sibling trauma supports ideas that emerge in all discussions of childhood development, but without a convincing theoretical frame.

In terms of the developmental sequence, Mitchell suggests that the lateral dimension explodes on the mental scene of the late toddler preceding the Oedipus. The toddler is sufficiently separated from the maternal orbit to take in the reality of the other: He may be directly experiencing the birth of a sibling, surrounded in various settings by pregnant women, becoming cognizant of his own interest in babies, awakening to intrusions of various types into his own dyadic unit, or beginning to pursue sexual researches about the mysteries of parental activity and how babies are made. Moreover, the toddler is facing a new demand to self-regulate in regard to his aggression; indeed, "no" is the repeating refrain of parental communication to the two-to-three-year-old child. The shock of displacement, without the cushioning of verticality, is a trauma beyond imagining for the young child, and in my experience it is linked inevitably to recognition of the world of similar others, the arrival of babies, and their dreaded appearance in his own dyadic paradise (whether or not it materializes). This is nowhere better immortalized than in the early life of Peter Pan, when he tries to go back to his mother after his infant flight to Kensington Gardens and habitation among the fairies:

He went in a hurry . . . because he had dreamt that his mother was crying, and he knew what was the great thing she cried for, and that a hug from her splendid Peter would quickly make her to smile. Oh, he felt sure of it, and so eager was he to be nestling in her arms that this time he flew straight to the window, which was always to be open for him. But the window was closed and there were iron bars on it, and peering inside he saw his mother sleeping peacefully with her arm round another little boy. (Barrie 1906, pp. 75–76)

This passage also underscores a profoundly underappreciated aspect of the birth of a sibling; even before the child turns his attention fully to oedipal matters, he is unrelentingly exposed to a different and perhaps more personally galling primal scene, that of mother and baby in passionate intimate connection, a connection from which he has only recently been ousted and whose pleasures he understands completely. The stimulus for aggression and the narcissistic mortification of exclusion is not softened by promises for compensation in the very distant future, but rather poignantly highlights the permanent loss of the very recent past. Being the beloved and pampered little one is now gone forever, even though the toddler remains painfully little in all other ways. Mitchell's discussion of the loss of identity that the sibling entails incorporates this mortification; the adorable baby is now big brother or big sister, an identity that holds few gratifications and multiplies the demand for self-control. Becoming a grown-up is an interminable wait, with dimly perceived pleasures about which the toddler vaguely imagines but has no experience, but at least there are promises of future pleasure. What compensates a child for the birth of a sibling? Most children consider the event to be, conclusively, a permanent and irrevocable loss of the splendid baby-place in their mother's arms. Peter's answer is a familiar one to all of us who treat children: "I won't grow up!"

The developmental juxtaposition of this crushing trauma of displacement with the oedipal drama is, of course, nowhere more in evidence than in the story of Peter Pan and his subsequent withdrawal into Neverland, where his rage is absorbed by the vertical dimension, as he is compelled to join forces with similar others to combat the oedipal threat, Captain Hook. Mitchell makes a point of placing the sibling trauma prior to the Oedipus and fully evolved mental representation. This resonates with an observation in one of the handful of useful papers about siblings in our literature: *Oedipal Sibling Triangles* by Sharpe and Rosenblatt (1994). In it, they differentiate oedipal and preoedipal sibling triangles, but Mitchell takes this a step further, saying that the actual moment of the sibling trauma is always preoedipal. Sharpe and Rosenblatt's idea of the preoedipal sibling configuration, correspond-

ing to Mitchell's idea of the universal sibling trauma, has the qualities of unmodulated aggression, primitive splitting of mental representations impervious to subsequent integrative mental capacity, and overall rigidity typical of traumatic experiences. They suggest an alternative configuration, the "twinning reaction," which in my experience, even with twins, is a massive defensive denial of difference and an attempt to annihilate by merger. I'll come back to this reaction a little later.

The other juxtaposition of this particular trauma and ongoing development that Mitchell points out is that it occurs simultaneous with the first flowering of semiotic capacity and imagination. The third year of life is momentous because it marks the explosion of the child's capacity to symbolically represent and to pretend. The introduction to make-believe begins much earlier in infancy, when the mother uses marked affect to introduce play and pretending. Miraculously, a child as young as six months old knows when her mother is pretending to be sad or surprised, and she is able to demonstrate his awareness by her playful response. This is a very different picture when the mother is really experiencing difficult emotions, a circumstance that elicits distress in her preverbal offspring. Of course, this early form of make-believe requires the active participation of the parent to carry the child over the threshold into play. The child's own capacity to initiate make-believe occurs later, and the full flowering of her imaginative world is just taking off in the late toddler.

I believe the capacity to pretend is crucial for subsequent development but, for the late toddler, not yet fully secure; psychic equivalence, that is, the tendency to confuse mental contents with reality, is still prominent until three or four years old. In Mitchell's timeline, the early efforts to manage the nature of thought and reality through the pretend mode are thus inevitably intruded upon by the trauma of the sibling. Perhaps the appropriation of pretending by the child is accelerated by the need to cope with the trauma of displacement and the threatened eruption of overwhelming aggression from within, which take on a concreteness consistent with psychic equivalence. The pretend mode, as elaborated in the series of papers by Fonagy and Target (1996; 1998; 2000; Target and Fonagy 1996), offers the child a clearly delineated arena to differentiate thought from reality, even while this differentiation is not fully established. Thought is still in grave danger of being confused with reality, and the parameters of pretending must be underscored by the oft-repeated statement "Let's pretend. . . ."

As mentioned earlier, Mitchell describes the role of the sibling trauma in the evolution of sense of self, a very thought-provoking idea that resonates with my clinical experience. It is the baby-self that is



now appropriated by the newborn; the toddler's regression is an identification with this usurper baby as well as a struggle to recapture that coveted identity. The toddler, formerly the beloved baby, is now just an ordinary child, who is still littler and less capable than everybody else and yet expected to do all kinds of ungratifying things, like be nice to the new baby and control his own body and emotions. This is particularly problematic vis-à-vis aggression, because the toddler's aggression is powerfully stimulated by the littleness, helplessness, and intrusiveness of the new baby. The sequence of triggers for aggression, described so well by Mayes and Cohen (1993), describes the earliest form as aggression in regard to possession; the sibling is a profound challenge to the child's possession of place (the baby role), person (the mother), and eventually objects (toys). The second wave of aggression will be discussed a little later.

Mitchell notes that it is the gendered self that bursts on the scene with the arrival of the gendered sibling, thereby dispelling the presumption of omnipotentiality. Her idea is that for the child, gender is not personally meaningful until the sibling trauma, when the "similar other," who is strongly identified as having a gender, intrudes and the child is forced into a comparison. A correlation from a different vantage point is provided by de Marneffe (1997), whose study of toddlers' understanding of gender and its chronology is consistent with Mitchell's position. Using clinical play interviews, de Marneffe presented very young children with anatomically correct dolls, also bearing other conventions of gender difference, such as hair length, and asked the toddlers to explain which one was like themselves. Those under thirty-six months chose the doll with superficial features that placed them in a girl or boy category—like hairstyle and clothing. It was only at thirty-six months that they made the link to a fixed body part, the genital. While I believe that toddlers know that they are boys and girls before thirty-six months, they do not understand the relationship of that fact to their bodies, they do not see the connection between gender and genital, and, in fact, they struggle to accept the fixity of gender up until latency (Senet 2004). The toddler, with ample opportunity to observe genital difference or sameness in a similar person, is faced with the birth of a sibling or is anticipating such a displacement. He is now neither baby nor grown-up, but, according to everyone, definitely boy or girl. Moreover, he is burdened by an exquisite sense of deficiency, of not being sufficient or the best, due to his growing awareness of other children and the looming potential for displacement that is the dark cloud of his childhood. He is permanently gendered, without any say in the matter, and has the impossible task of protecting his fragile ego from assaults of various types, from

various places, including his own beloved parents, because he is little. This constitutes the second key trigger for aggression in the older child: Narcissistic injury takes ascendance over the struggle for possession in the course of early childhood (Mayes and Cohen 1993). The child loses his bearings and is now neither “his majesty the baby” nor the partner of his desired parent; everyone is cuter and more babied or smarter, bigger, and more capable.

I would like to describe some clinical material to further illustrate the reverberations of the sibling trauma and its interactions with subsequent developmental challenges, especially in regard to adolescence. It seems to me that puberty and adolescence are especially primed to reawaken this traumatic constellation, because one central task of adolescence is the integration of all childhood trauma (Blos 1968) and especially because this developmental period puts pressure on the very same fault lines: separation, identity, impulse control—both sexual and aggressive—gender, and a heightened requirement to compete and distinguish oneself from similar others (Vivona 2007). In fact, the hugely increased importance of the peer group in adolescence and the dual demands of fitting in and standing out (for example, as an excellent student, the popular girl, the star athlete) make this a time fraught with sibling-related conflict. In addition, adolescents must rework the relationship to the parents and embrace a new level of autonomy. These changes are powerfully affected by the unmistakable physical transformation, as the child becomes even more gendered, so to speak, and becomes a young man or woman with sexual desires that require further distancing from the oedipal objects. Suddenly (to paraphrase one of the patients I will describe, who frequently experienced transformations as explosions), there is the real possibility of creating children themselves and of repeating their own sibling trauma. This last point refers to another sibling issue that is frequently observed but never raised to the level of theory: Parents regularly experience a reedition of their childhood sibling experience with their own children, identifying with one offspring and seeing another as an important loved or hated sibling. Thus, the next generation is burdened with their traumatic legacy.

#### CLINICAL EXAMPLES

My clinical vignettes, which on the surface bear very little resemblance to each other, are distinguished by the struggle of each patient to manage the impact of the sibling trauma on the sense of self during its most crucial unfolding through adolescence. The first is Sonia, a girl of eleven, whose parents never married over many years of cohabitation

and were in the midst of a painful but nonetheless relatively amicable separation. Her father, a charismatic figure in a glamorous industry, was also father to a much older child from a prior relationship, and already had moved on to a third partner. Sonia presented as an odd girl, with poor eye contact, impulsivity, and dysregulated affect. She was whiny, rambunctious, rude, and imperious. Raised bilingual, she was idiosyncratic in her syntax, often using phrases in a way that suggested she didn't understand the meaning of the words but treated them like objects to be hurled. For example, she often said to me, "You're spoiled!" in a singsong way that made no sense in the given moment and seemed like a parental admonition (which, incidentally, both parents denied using). Her behavior at school was described as peculiar and even bizarre at times; she seemed to be in her own world, talking to herself and unengaged in learning. Her relationships were typically threesomes formed with younger boys, in which someone was routinely hurt and excluded. After about six months of treatment, noteworthy for regressed behavior and childish play in sessions but overall improvement elsewhere, her father informed me that his new girlfriend was pregnant, and he asked for guidance as to how to address this with Sonia. Sonia's relationship to her father was already problematic; she was especially immature and provocative with him, frequently stating baldly, "I don't like him." She maintained this unmodulated stance despite her repeating play stories, enacted with a range of figurative toys, that focused on a paternal figure with longing, idealization, and anger. Her father's conversation with her about the expected baby was met by an unanticipated eruption. Sonia refused to go away on a planned trip with her father, his new partner, and her older half sibling. She was violently angry, refused to see the father's girlfriend, referred to her contemptuously as *Monkeyface*, and called the expected baby "the thing." What is interesting about this case in regard to our discussion is the dramatic impact of the mental representation of the baby, well in advance of its appearance. Mitchell's ideas shed new light on Sonia's repetition of exclusionary triangles, suggesting that sibling trauma may have been operating throughout this girl's development. I had addressed her need to triangulate and exclude as an enactment of her experience of her parents' former intense intimacy and her attempts to rupture it or intrude upon it. There is certainly evidence for the oedipal layer; Sonia slept in her parents' bed until at least age five. She utterly ignored and excluded her father by speaking in her mother's mother tongue, which he did not speak nor understand. In general, the layering of oedipal and sibling trauma is quite difficult to sort out when observed in older children and in adults, since development progresses and reorganizes

prior experience. Interestingly, Sonia vigorously disavowed her oedipal wishes but was highly vocal in her rage about the father's imminent newborn. Sonia's lack of modulation allowed her to express directly what Mitchell describes. She said with grief, "I want to be the littlest one. Now he will never take care of me." This, of course, also confirms the unmentionable intensity of the oedipal layer.

The juxtaposition of these events with Sonia's pubescence is particularly interesting in regard to the interplay between sibling and oedipal dynamics. Sonia was decidedly unfeminine and even slightly disheveled when I met her, but she was already beginning to develop. Her resistance to her adolescent transformation was pervasive. Her attitude toward becoming a teenager—a stage that is frequently the source of excitement and dread for children—was colored by fear and denial; indeed, she continued to deny that the time had arrived even after menarche, pointing out that there was no "teen" in age twelve. The full throttle rage about the new sibling no doubt heavily recruited her sibling trauma from toddlerhood but also served to defend against her interest, excitement, and fear about her own imminent womanhood and capacity to make babies.

Another case where the sibling trauma persisted well into adolescence is a girl I treated for several years from puberty into late adolescence. This girl, whom I will call Becca, had a younger brother, Nick, four years her junior, and was acutely aware of her mother's obstetrical history, including miscarriages and a subsequent hysterectomy that occurred when Becca first began treatment. Becca was highly symptomatic when we first met; she was very anxious, irritable, and enmeshed in a hostile dependent relationship with her mother, whom she both idolized and rejected. Her own immediate concern was a rupture in her relationship with an idealized classmate, the quintessential "popular girl," who ended their friendship because (I inferred from the evidence) Becca was too possessive. Becca's separation anxiety came into full flower in the early phase of the analysis, triggered by a failed attempt to attend sleepaway camp, the very one her mother had attended for almost a decade. From the outset, Becca was insomniac, clingy, and (she later disclosed) determined to suffer even when she began to feel a little better. Thereafter, separation anxiety became a constant feature of her life and our extratransferential work; within our relationship, she steadfastly maintained an unwillingness to "have feelings" about me. She needed to be in control, and she was not going to think about my life, my family, or my other patients.

Becca was very focused on her brother, Nick, whose birth was associated with two "sudden" disappearances by her mother: the first for the

actual birth, when Becca awoke to find her parents gone and herself in the care of her grandmother, and the second, about two weeks later, when the mother was admitted to hospital once again in the middle of the night for obstetrical complications. In this case, a neighbor stepped in to “suddenly” stand in for her parents. Nick was an especially troubling sibling early in his life, since he was discovered to have life-threatening allergies, which completely absorbed their mother’s anxious attention. Moreover, he was an outgoing and attention-seeking child with noteworthy athletic talent.

Through many years of analytic work, it became clear that Becca recreated her family experience by positioning herself as a self-determined outsider, either explicitly or implicitly in conflict with the popular crowd or other iterations of threatening peers. Her relationship to competition was all-consuming but entirely disavowed; she held herself above others, for example becoming the leader of the “unpops” (the unpopular girls) in middle school and declining every opportunity to reconcile with her popular former friend. Becca was very close to a next-door neighbor, Sally, almost exactly her age, who appeared to be the model for the idealized peer. This was heightened by the fact that Sally’s father is a local celebrity. The two girls were raised together, with Becca rigidly claiming seniority by virtue of six weeks, while simultaneously exalting Sally and their bond in a way intended to make everyone feel left out, including both mothers. Their favorite movie, which they reenacted regularly, was *The Parent Trap*, in which one young actress plays a set of twins who try to reconcile their estranged parents. Sally was Becca’s ultimate secret weapon in her battle with other girls, and the two also established a pattern of twinning, whereby Becca sought out a “soul mate” and, often intrusively and possessively, demanded an exclusive relationship. The other side of this coin was also established early, when the two girls excitedly excluded other girls of the same age, particularly those drawn to the celebrity of Sally’s family. Becca went on to recreate this as she allowed girls she considered needy and “annoying” to become dependent on her and then brutally ditched them.

Becca entered adolescence with enormous anxiety. Despite her bravado and sophistication she was frightened of any kind of loss of control, including sex and openly competitive aggression. She was effortlessly capable academically, but only rarely did she really push herself. When she entered a large and rigorous high school, these traits emerged in sharp relief. She did brilliantly but did not really strive to take the most challenging curriculum. She was disdainful of other girls who were focused on college early on, as was typical for that environment. She managed to mentally obliterate the popular girls and all the boys,

because of the various threats they represented. The way she managed boys is especially of interest because, despite her full control of Nick at home by relentless provocation and overstimulation, she was unable to form friendly or even friendly/fighting (that is, sadomasochistic) relationships with boys. They rarely came up in her thoughts with me and when they did, she spoke of them in one of three ways: first, fondly supercilious—an attitude she developed briefly toward some younger boys who were in a class with her; second, intensely and coldly competitive; or third, and most commonly, as objects to be gotten and used to outdo other girls. She was desperate to “keep up” with the girls who were having adolescent experiences, like hooking up and experimenting with alcohol, and to not let anyone “get ahead.” However, it became clear that her anxiety and inhibitions were so great and her conflicts so intense that she could not engage with boys in a way that might lead to an actual relationship. Invariably, in typical adolescent settings where she might engage with boys (or for that matter other girls), she would complain of feeling “bored and left out,” which became the catchphrase for her quasi-dissociated state of mind when surrounded by the horde of similar others interacting in exciting but terrifying ways.

At heart, she preferred, like Peter Pan, to declare, “I won’t grow up,” and she tried to hold back any others who would move forward. She even suggested that she was preventing her own physical development because of her deep discomfort with her sexuality. At home, up to the moment of her admission to a prestigious college, she was querulous and childish, continuing to burst into tears over separations and arguments.

Here we have all the earmarks of a sibling trauma, with impact on separation anxiety, competition, gender and sexuality, and management of aggression. Becca’s analysis can be discussed from many angles, and certainly the vertical dimension is hugely important, but the lateral lens illuminates a pervasive aspect of her psychopathology and addresses a core defect in her sense of her own identity and her discrete existence. One especially poignant manifestation of this is her difficulty valuing her own life and experience and her preoccupation with the possibility that something more exciting is happening elsewhere, especially among others in her family. It is as if she is constantly reliving the experience of waking up and discovering that her mother has disappeared into the embrace a new baby and she is locked out. Another manifestation is the recurrent theme in her dream life of “suddenly” discovering that she has an additional sibling, the product of a past liaison of her mother, who has been kept secret from her. Even as she considered the possibility of attending the accepted students’ weekend

event at the terrific college where she will likely go, she worried about the overnight separation from home and the fact that it required that she not attend the wedding of a distant paternal cousin with whom she had no significant relationship: “I am afraid,” she said, “that I’ll miss out on something.” Her own experience and her own opportunities for stimulation, excitement, and intimacy pale in comparison to what “the others” are doing.

These are fragments of very full and complex adolescent treatments that have many other important facets and thematic conflicts. Especially in the latter case of Becca, when the clinical picture is unfolding far from the original sibling trauma, the complexity of subsequent development is of course a confounding distortion of that early event. However, I choose these cases to show how the sibling trauma lives on in the unconscious (and indeed, the conscious) mind and shapes experience throughout life. Mitchell has done our field a huge service by pointing out the reality that siblings are a force to be reckoned with in mental life, and that the trauma of the sibling is a mental experience of early childhood that does not require the birth of a sibling. It is the dawning awareness of the world of similar others that deals a crushing blow to infantile narcissism at a very young age, even before the child has ready access to pretending, which helps to soften the disappointments of the oedipal period (Gilmore 2011).

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# Sibling Recognition and the Development of Identity

## Intersubjective Consequences of Sibling Differentiation in the Sister Relationship

JEANINE M. VIVONA, PH.D.

*Identity is, among other things, a means to adapt to the others around whom one must fit. Psychoanalytic theory has highlighted ways in which the child fits in by emulating important others, especially through identification. Alternately, the child may fit into the family and around important others through differentiation, an unconscious process that involves developing or accentuating qualities and desires in oneself that are expressly different from the perceived qualities of another person and simultaneously suppressing qualities and desires that are perceived as similar. With two clinical vignettes centered on the sister relationship, the author demonstrates that recognition of identity differences that result from sibling differentiation carries special significance in the sibling relationship and simultaneously poses particular intersubjective challenges. To the extent that the spotlight of sibling recognition delimits the lateral space one may occupy, repeatedly frustrated desires for sibling recognition may have enduring consequences for one's sense of self-worth and expectations of relationships with peers and partners.*

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WE HAVE NOT HAD A PLACE WITHIN PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY TO house our knowledge of sibling relationships and dynamics. Lacking a home for our observations, we have tried to fit them into a theory that privileges the parent-child relationship, yielding our various useful but incomplete understandings of siblings as parental substitutes and displacements. With her theory of the lateral dimension of psychic life and the sibling trauma from which it is born, Juliet Mitchell has given us a place from which to develop our understanding of sibling relationships and dynamics. Once disparate, misrecognized, and fleeting, our insights about siblings can now be more effectively integrated, expanded, and used.

My interest is in using Mitchell's framework of intersecting lateral and vertical dimensions of psychic life for conceptualizing the entwined yet distinct roles of siblings and parents in the inner world of the individual and for understanding unique sibling influences on identity development. Previously, I have explored ways in which children position themselves within the family constellation via their identities, specifically their identifications with and differentiations from both parents and siblings (Vivona 2007; 2010). Here I focus on the interpersonal and intersubjective reverberations of such positioning, bringing together Mitchell's theory of the *lateral dimension of psychic life* and Jessica Benjamin's theory of *mutual recognition* to consider the importance of mutual recognition of identity differences within sibling relationships.

#### THE LATERAL DIMENSION AND THE SIBLING TRAUMA

According to Mitchell (2000; 2003; this volume), all children experience themselves initially as the only child of their parents and thus at the center of the familial universe. Eventually, however, children realize the presence of their siblings, who threaten the assumed precious position at the familial center. When the child realizes she has siblings, she experiences a shocking sense of displacement, which Mitchell terms the *sibling trauma* (formerly, the crisis of nonuniqueness). The child now understands: I am *not* my parents' one and only; I am not at the center; my position in the family is not unique. This experience of dethronement, often noted in the experience of the firstborn child on the birth of the second child (for example, Adler 1927; Kris and Ritvo 1983; Sharpe and Rosenblatt 1994), is not specific to elder children but is universal. That is, because the sibling trauma is precipitated by the *awareness* or the *possibility* of siblings, not only by actual sibling birth, it is experienced by all children, regardless of birth order.

Although the sibling trauma is universal, it is shaped by the particulars of the family to which the siblings belong. Mitchell (“Siblings,” in this volume) has elaborated the sibling trauma through the experience of the prototypical toddler who is displaced by the new baby, describing the trauma as involving “the arrival of . . . the one who is different but who should have been the ‘same’” (see the section “The Case For . . .”). From this point on, the child must contend with difference as well as otherness, particularly the “minimal difference” of the baby, who is as the toddler was but no longer is. For the baby, on the other hand, the trauma of displacement may occur insidiously, as the baby comes to realize the presence of siblings who were undeniably already there. Whether the baby expects the older sibling to be the same or different, we do not know.

The sibling trauma compels the child to attempt to reclaim a unique position in the family and simultaneously to avert recurrence of the original catastrophe by fending off potential rivals. This struggle to regain a position of uniqueness and worth in the family propels development along the lateral dimension of psychic life. For Mitchell, the developmental challenge is to master the sibling trauma by finding a position or place of worth among the similar others of the world. For example, she has elaborated the ways in which familial trauma and autism may deny a sense of lateral place to the child (2000). Her concern is primarily an existential one, with a focus on how the child deals with and defends against the sense of annihilation that is wrought by the presence of the sibling who occludes the mother’s view, thus hindering the mother’s full recognition of the child.

Barring such atypical situations as trauma and autism, and departing from Mitchell (2000) on this point, I believe many children do find a place in their families and among their siblings. For such children, the predominant developmental challenge of the lateral dimension is not primarily existential but centers instead on identity: Who does my position among my siblings allow me to be? What is the shape of my place in the family and in the world? What is the value of my place?

Identity, in this sense, is the psychological manifestation of position, a way to know where you are in relation to someone else. Indeed, we can and do position ourselves with respect to others with and through our identities: You are the smart one, so I will be the funny one. Identity then records the child’s attempts to resolve the sibling trauma, to regain a unique, valued place in the world, and perhaps to minimize harm to the sibling. In this way, the original sibling trauma leaves its mark on identity. Thus, identity comprises compromises, which imbue

lateral relationships throughout life, including, at least potentially, the transference.

#### SIBLING DIFFERENTIATION

Identity is, among other things, a means to adapt to the others around whom one must fit. Psychoanalytic theory has highlighted ways in which the child fits in by emulating important others, especially through identification. With respect to the lateral dimension, for instance, the child can reclaim a sense of place in the family by identifying with a parent (Mitchell 2000). I have proposed that the child may also fit into the family and around important others through a process of differentiation (Vivona 2007). Differentiation is an unconscious process that involves developing or accentuating qualities and desires in oneself that are expressly different from the perceived qualities of another person and simultaneously suppressing qualities and desires that are perceived as similar.

I believe differentiation is a common strategy for managing the demands of development along the lateral dimension and its inherent conflicts over sibling rivalry. That is, because the child both loves and hates her siblings, she both does and does not want to defeat them in the battle for a favored position in the family. Differentiation enables the child to obviate the sibling rivalry by amplifying aspects of self that are perceived as different from those of the sibling and disowning aspects of self that are perceived as similar, effectively carving out a unique territory for oneself while eliminating or minimizing the common grounds for sibling competition. As a consequence of differentiation, siblings may appear to be quite different from one another because their similarities have been suppressed or denied by one or both. Such a strategy may be particularly likely when a child perceives a sibling to be too strong or too weak to fight, or when a familial climate is intolerant of overt sibling competition. Parenthetically, differentiation may also operate with respect to parents, for instance, toward the parent of the other sex during oedipal development; however, because such differentiation is complementary to the identification with the same-sex parent, it often goes unrecognized (see Vivona 2010).

Differentiation, like identification, is an internal process with relational consequences. The perceived and actual responses of others to the qualities one puts forth in the world, to the place one claims as one's own, inform one's expectations and experiences of lateral relationships. The child looks to others for validation of the place she wishes to take

among them, a place characterized by difference as well as similarities, which the siblings must recognize (Mitchell 2003). Through mutual recognition, siblings mark the position that each may occupy; the spotlight of sibling recognition delimits the space within which the child may be or, perhaps, must be.

#### MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF SAMENESS AND DIFFERENCE

The profound importance and inherent difficulty of mutual recognition has been most fully articulated, I believe, by Jessica Benjamin. Benjamin (1988; 1998) describes recognition as the accurate perception and acceptance of the other as a subject who exists independently of the self, outside its fantasies and projections. Development of both subjectivity and intersubjectivity depends on recognition.

Benjamin's concept of recognition is an intersubjective extension of Winnicott's (1969) insight about the importance of the mother's survival of the infant's aggression. Both Benjamin's recognition and Winnicott's survival require that the other validate one's actual self, one's desires, feelings, or qualities, without either denying or repudiating them. In Winnicott's view, once the infant finds that the mother survives his aggression, the child can experience a world beyond his control, a world inhabited by separate others to whom he can then relate. In Benjamin's intersubjective extension, the child also recognizes that the mother, like the self, is a separate subject with her own desires and autonomy. Like Winnicott, Benjamin believes that a genuine interpersonal connection requires this kind of separation; by contrast, when one relates to the other as if part of the self, complementarity rather than true relatedness is the result. In this type of relatedness, the other is seen as the complement to the self in a zero-sum game between an aggressor and a victim, a doer or a done to.

It turns out to be surprisingly difficult for mother and child to recognize one another as autonomous desiring subjects, especially if the child is a girl. One obstacle to mutual recognition is the infant's ardent fantasy of an all-giving selfless mother, a mother who is an object and not a subject. This fantasy both undermines the infant's ability to appreciate the autonomous subjectivity of the mother and, because it imbues cultural ideals of mothering, complicates the mother's acknowledgment of her own desires as well as the desires of her daughters (see also Chodorow 1978). Benjamin (1995) notes that because the father is outside both the relational tangle of the mother-infant dyad and the cultural sanctions against maternal desire, he can more simply serve as

the parent who recognizes the child's desiring self. In the case Benjamin (1995) uses to illustrate this point, the adult brother is a crucial source of recognition.

Benjamin's original focus was on the mutual recognition of desire and autonomy, qualities shared by mother and infant, indeed shared by all. More recently, she has elaborated the importance of negotiation of difference, in particular the challenge of clashing subjectivities, which occurs when the needs or wishes of the one are different from those of the other (Benjamin 2004; 2006). Because such clashes are unavoidable in a relationship between two separate, different people, mutual recognition inevitably breaks down. At such times, the maintenance of a relationship that fully comprises both selves requires that such failures in recognition can themselves be recognized so that they can be repaired or mourned. Such moments challenge the one (the parent, sibling, or analyst) to *surrender* to the other's way or desire or experience, to enter into it without relinquishing one's own way, such as with a feeling that one's own way is wrong, and without submitting, such as out of a sense of duty or a need to comply. This surrender requires more than tolerance of the other; it requires participation that implies acceptance of a legitimate, if different, way of doing or being. Such surrender is difficult indeed, yet it creates the potential for mutual participation in something new, something that is not *your way* or *my way* but *our way*; Benjamin calls this the "shared third" (2006) or the "one in the third" (2004).

Recognition, then, must be specific; it matters who the other is and what the other does and does not recognize. Recognition as a desiring subject by the father does not meet the need for recognition by the mother (Benjamin 1995). Recognition of sameness does not obviate the need for recognition of difference. Indeed, because identity is not unitary but comprises multiple qualities or aspects, any of which may be expressed or hidden depending on particular relational contexts (Benjamin 1998), it seems likely that recognition by the other of specific qualities, differences as well as similarities, is necessary for one to feel accepted and whole within relationships. It seems likely, too, that recognition may bolster one's ability to tolerate multiplicity within the self, a goal of development and treatment; that is, recognition potentiates the ability to own the aspects, qualities, desires, and feelings that constitute one's identity while also allowing that no single aspect, quality, or desire is ever the whole story. Recognition by the other facilitates the process of knowing and owning one's self.

## SIBLING RECOGNITION OF DIFFERENTIATED IDENTITY

Weaving together Mitchell's insights about the lateral dimension, Benjamin's about recognition, and my own about differentiation, I can now make the argument that sibling recognition of differences, particularly differentiated aspects of identity, plays an important role in the development of both identity and the capacity for lateral relatedness.

Difference, I believe, may become the particular testing ground for recognition of identity. That is, when the child wants to know whether she is loved for who she *really* is, she may pose the challenge in terms of difference between self and other. By contrast, recognition of sameness of self and other can be construed as a reflection of the other's self-love (that is, she loves me because or when I am like her) and, if so, does not satisfy the desire for recognition and validation of one's own unique self. Consequently, more than the other's otherness, it is her difference from oneself that makes her recognition important in the identity development process. Yet Benjamin (2004; 2006) implies that recognition of difference may be an even greater intersubjective challenge than recognition of sameness. Moreover, if Mitchell (this volume) is correct that the toddler expects the new baby to be similar to the self, the older sibling's willingness to recognize differences in the younger may be further attenuated.

Recognition of differences that result from sibling differentiation carries special significance in the sibling relationship and simultaneously poses particular intersubjective challenges. The child undertakes the differentiation from the sibling with an unconscious hope to quell contentious rivalry and facilitate a more harmonious sibling relationship. The very differences the child has foregrounded in order to protect the relationship with the sibling, differences that are experienced as profound or even necessary, are those the child wishes and perhaps even needs the sibling to recognize in order to feel known and loved. Yet when differences are amplified and similarities suppressed, when one's identity is defined in opposition to the other, intersubjective clashes may be frequent; failures of mutual recognition are inevitable.

Sibling recognition serves a different developmental purpose than parental recognition and therefore leaves a different mark on subsequent relationships. Recognition by the one who is beside, whose differences from oneself are "minimal" yet consequential, who is a rival for the treasured place at the center of the family, acknowledges the shape of the position one has attempted to forge. Because that position is relative to the others who are beside and is meant to accommodate

or to displace them, the validation of those accommodated or displaced others will secure that place, for good or for ill, and the invalidation of those same others will unsettle it.

#### TWO CLINICAL VIGNETTES

Each of the two cases that follow illustrates a woman's yearning for the recognition of her elder sister. Although different in many respects, each woman articulated a persistently painful sense of being different from and thus unacceptable to her sister. Aspects of each woman's identity and sense of self-worth were organized around the sister. Moreover, each woman's poignant childhood longing for her sister's acceptance and validation reverberated into adulthood and through the transference. In the presentations that follow, I focus on each woman's relationship with her sister, particularly frustrated wishes for recognition from her sister and the implications for developing identity and lateral relationships. To preserve anonymity, I have omitted most of the biographical details.

#### ANN

Ann's entry into psychotherapy was prompted by concerns about changes in her responsibilities at work, which she knew would require her to be more interpersonally and emotionally available to others. This activated Ann's anxieties over interpersonal intimacy, particularly those prompted by interactions that required her to reveal aspects of her self. Her three siblings, and especially her only sister, Nancy, figured prominently from the start, as did an acutely mixed experience of the relationship with me, which she described early on as akin to "the anguish of being in love." Ann's guarded hopes that I would value the differences between us were often expressed in the context of thoughts about her relationship with Nancy.

Ann was the third of four children born to devout religious parents; the church played a central role in the life of her extended family, which included many missionaries. Nancy was the eldest and four years older than Ann. Ann also had two brothers, one older and one younger; all of the children were about two years apart in age.

In Ann's recollections of childhood, Nancy was the paragon of perfection. She was an outstanding student and deeply religious, an organized and orderly child who regularly exceeded the expectations of their parents. Ann both idealized Nancy and saw Nancy as fundamentally



different from herself. Nancy was the personification of an unreachable ideal, the kind of person Ann felt she should be but never would. Their similarities, for instance the athletic skill that made both of them star athletes, did not preoccupy her in the ways that their differences did. Ann's longing to feel accepted and loved by Nancy was palpable into adulthood; the disappointment of that longing was a recurrent pain.

Toward the beginning of our work, Ann recounted a childhood incident that represented her present struggles with Nancy and foretold the transference. During childhood, Ann and Nancy shared a bedroom. Their differences made the sharing difficult. Ann was "very messy," with belongings cascading from drawers and strewn about the room; by contrast, Nancy was neat and tidy, keeping everything in its place. Nancy prodded Ann to be neater, more like her. On one memorable occasion, Nancy offered Ann a "surprise" if she could keep her dresser drawers closed for a full week. With considerable effort, Ann succeeded; it was difficult for her to acquiesce to her sister's way and to forego her own, but the promised prize made the sacrifice seem worth the trouble. At the end of the week, with pleasure and fanfare, Nancy presented the surprise reward: a "popcorn party."

But Ann hated popcorn and thought Nancy must know this about her. Ann was stunned, disappointed, and hurt. The ill-chosen prize confirmed Ann's sense that Nancy did not deem worthy the ways in which Ann differed from her, that she recognized and validated only sameness. Indeed, both the challenge to keep her drawers closed and the popcorn reward were designed to change Ann, to make her more like Nancy, rather than designed *for* her as she was. In the tension of difference that infused their shared room, it seemed to Ann that Nancy would accept and love her if Ann were similar to her, and would ignore, reject, or try to change her if she were different. Yet Ann longed for Nancy to recognize her as unique, not as a replica of someone else.

The context for recounting the memory of the popcorn party was Ann's upcoming trip to visit Nancy. Although Ann longed to renew her connection with Nancy, which had been relatively dormant for a few years, she dreaded the visit. She felt caught in an impossible bind: If she played it safe and kept things superficial with Nancy, she would regret the lost opportunity to reconnect with the sister she loved; yet if she talked with Nancy about the important things in her life, she would once again evoke Nancy's refusal to accept her for who she was, aspects of which Nancy viewed as sinful. Nancy's religion instructed her to change the sin while loving the sinner, both of which Nancy strived to do. Ann felt as though Nancy had always seen her as the sinner she must

love, even while she prayed that Ann would eventually choose goodness over sin, neatness over messiness, compliance over uniqueness, even while she prayed that Ann would keep her drawers closed. Despite Ann's efforts and Nancy's obvious love of her younger sister, Nancy did not recognize the legitimacy of fundamental aspects of Ann's identity.

Ann's concern with Nancy's acceptance was striking, as was her sadness and longing. What made this elder sister so important to the younger's sense of self and self-worth? It is tempting to answer this question in terms of parental displacement: Ann's conflicts in relation to her mother had been displaced onto Nancy. Indeed, Ann depicted Nancy as like their mother, only more so; compared to their mother, Nancy was more perfectionistic, more devoutly religious, more self-critical and self-denying, and, in adulthood, more openly rejecting of some aspects of Ann's identity. In contrast to Nancy's explicit condemnation, Ann's mother expressed concern and confusion about Ann, but not rejection. Nonetheless, Ann also saw herself as very different from her mother and wished for greater closeness with her; by contrast, she felt closer to her father and more comfortably similar to him in ways she cherished. Perhaps, given this particular set of familial dynamics, the sister provided a clearer standard of acceptability, whereas the mother was more inscrutable. Perhaps this sister, as caretaker of her younger siblings, was the omnipresent version of a mother who sometimes disappeared into bouts of depression and self-doubt.

I believe these maternal dynamics did infuse Ann's inner relation to Nancy to an important degree, that the internalized sister was in some sense a version of the mother. Yet that was not all. There was also a longing to be loved and known as both unique and equal, which was associated particularly with the sister alongside her, with the lateral dimension. Even Ann's closest friendships tended to be unsettled by her striving for such recognition and, alongside, the expectation that she would not receive it. This was for her the "anguish of being in love," the painful simultaneous activation of specific desire, fragile hope, and palpable fear.

In the therapy, we experienced the sisterly struggles. Ann often noticed our differences, and there were many: She would never dress as I did, use a pink phone, or write an academic paper. She saw me as a decidedly different kind of girl than she was. She remarked lightly on these differences, but I had a sense she was weighing their importance. Could someone like me understand and accept her? By contrast, Ann enjoyed the ways we were similar, for instance, the similar aspects of our work.

An early interaction was emblematic of the negotiation of difference in our relationship. Ann decided she did not want to call me “Doctor,” this being too formal and distancing, she said, yet she was uncomfortable using my first name. So she gave me a nickname, as she often did with those she liked, which had a similar sound to her own name. She knew this was a bold move and outside the rules; she carefully watched my reactions while declining my invitations to discuss it. I understood Ann’s naming me in this way as reflecting her desire to forge a connection with me that felt intimate and unique rather than compliant and rule-bound; following others’ rules and going “by the book” (which for her conjured thoughts of the Bible) did not tell her what she felt she needed to know about how I “really” felt about her or about the kind of connection I would allow her to have with me. More specifically, through this nickname, she positioned me in a particular lateral way with respect to herself: similar and different yet close.

Then she watched me to see if I would allow her to have this kind of connection to me, if I would accept her recognition of me as someone close and important to her and also unlike her in crucial ways, if I would tolerate a name and thus a connection that was uniquely ours. She was relieved that I did not reject the nickname, but the real joy came, she told me, when I started to refer to myself by the name she gave me. This acceptance through participation requires the kind of surrender to the other that is intrinsic to mutual recognition. I had a feeling of giving something up in doing this, relinquishing a bit of my comfortable authority, allowing little sister to have a say in how we would do things in our shared room.

#### BETHANY

Bethany, like Ann, was born when her sister was four years old. From the start of her psychotherapy with me, Bethany described a powerful sense that her true self was invisible to the world, a sense that was, particularly in our early days, associated with memories of her sister, Julie. Bethany felt that Julie had resented her birth and viewed her primarily as an unwelcome and unnecessary intruder onto the family scene. In Bethany’s eyes, Julie was the prototypical firstborn who refused to be interested in the baby, and Bethany was the adoring younger sister, repeatedly rebuffed.

Bethany described Julie as a child who was easily upset and quick to anger and who required considerable attention and support from their parents. Thus, Julie took up a large space in the family, and Bethany saw no choice but to fit into the small space left for her. Consequently,

Bethany became “the easy one,” who was responsible, did well in school, and did not make or cause a fuss for anyone, including Julie.

But Bethany sensed that her ease and accomplishments, and the parental praise she received for them, did tend to upset Julie. Indeed, Julie seemed to bristle at the role Bethany had adopted in differentiation from her. For instance, Julie protested when Bethany received “special treatment” from their parents, as seemed to happen frequently; even in adulthood, Julie sometimes referred to Bethany as “the princess in the ivory tower,” who seemed to get whatever she wanted, although as an adult Bethany felt the love and humor in this characterization of her more than the criticism and resentment she felt as a child. In childhood, Bethany recalled that when she looked to Julie for validation of her accomplishments, for instance when she began to read, Julie tended to respond with a roll of her eyes and a sarcastic “Nice.” Julie did not share in her enjoyment of Bethany’s new abilities as Bethany wished she would.

Faced with the difficult choice of upstaging and upsetting her sister or remaining in the wings, Bethany chose the latter. She tried to stay within Julie’s image of her, to stay consistent with Julie’s projections rather than to move outside the spotlight of her sister’s recognition. This eventually became Bethany’s general interpersonal strategy with her peers, which she called “the conspiracy of cooperation.” She complied with her understanding of who the other wanted or needed her to be; when she experienced tension or disagreement with another person, she interpreted this to mean that she had ceased or failed to cooperate, and she expected outrage and rejection to follow.

In a strategy similar to “cooperation,” Bethany followed her mother’s adage “stay under the radar” as a way to get what she wanted without calling attention to herself. Bethany saw herself as like her mother in important ways, and she appreciated the power and competence her mother showed without an apparent need for fanfare or applause. Similarly, Bethany quietly went about being a strong student and a helpful daughter. But, perhaps unlike her mother, Bethany did want attention and recognition; she became tired of being overlooked and wanted the spotlight, at least some of the time.

I wondered, then, about the roles of sister and mother in motivating the strategies of “cooperation” and “under the radar.” Bethany described a childhood memory that suggested she viewed her sister as an important protagonist: When the sisters and their mother would go for rides in the car, Julie insisted on taking the front seat, leaving Bethany always in the rear. Consistent with her cooperative stance, Bethany did not recall protesting this arrangement, but she did recall that her mother

instituted a policy they called “a month in the front,” whereby the girls would take turns in the front seat, each for a predetermined length of time. Bethany recalled the mixed feelings she had during her turns in the front, enjoying the better view and the privileged position next to her mother while feeling guilt and discomfort that her sister was in the back. Thus, although her mother advocated “staying under the radar,” Bethany perceived her mother as recognizing and validating her desire to be in the privileged position, in particular to have something more than Julie had, whereas Julie always seemed to protest.

As with Ann, I was struck by the importance of this older sister to the younger’s sense of self and self-worth. The sisterly influence on Bethany was particularly striking for two reasons. First, the sister dynamics did not seem to mirror the parental dynamics. Bethany felt close to both parents and was recognized in different ways by each. Her longing to be recognized was expressed specifically with respect to Julie. Second, in her relationships beyond the family, Bethany struggled to a greater degree with her acceptance and worth in lateral relationships than in hierarchical ones. For instance, she described many experiences with co-workers when she adopted a cooperative attitude and felt invisible or when she allowed herself to take the front seat by moving outside her perception of the other’s image of her and subsequently anticipated and sometimes experienced painful rejection. This dilemma became particularly pronounced after she received a promotion at work, which catapulted her from the wings into the spotlight. She recounted the “month in the front” memory in the context of exploring her intense discomfort in her relationships with her co-workers following her promotion. Her relationships with her immediate supervisors were particularly fraught, marked by competitiveness, tension, and misunderstanding. By contrast, with those higher up in the organization, Bethany was concerned about measuring up and struggled to meet expectations she perceived as contradictory, inscrutable, and ever changing. In important ways, then, Bethany’s sense of what her peers in particular would and would not tolerate in her bore the stamp of her struggles for her older sister’s recognition.

In contrast to the world of work, Bethany’s lateral struggles were more subtle than pronounced in the transference. Bethany tended to avoid challenging my authority or expertise too vigorously, assuming perhaps that I, like Julie, wished her not to encroach on my territory. At times, she would share her enthusiastic psychological insights about others, such as her co-workers, and then watch for signs that I was “rolling my eyes” at her attempts to do “my job.” When she had reason to believe she had greater knowledge or skill than I had, she tended to believe instead

that I was hiding my greater expertise from her, in this way denying the possibility that she had equaled or exceeded me.

DISCUSSION: WILL SHE ACCEPT ME AS I AM?

Ann and Bethany each viewed herself as fundamentally different from her only sister, each longed for her sister's recognition and acceptance of the ways that they were different, and both despaired receiving that recognition. For both Ann and Bethany, the early sister relationship was carried forward into adult peer relationships in the form of expectations that unique aspects of self would either be ignored or repudiated; that is, both expected that they would not be recognized by peers as they had not been by their sisters. Both women believed that revealing aspects of themselves threatened their peer relationships and thus felt they gained closeness with others only if they hid aspects of themselves. For both Ann and Bethany, struggles for recognition were voiced most powerfully in the context of sibling relationships and appeared to shape lateral relationships in particular, although the influences of sibling and parent relationships and lateral and vertical dimensions must certainly be entwined.

The similar longing for sisterly recognition is perhaps all the more intriguing in light of the many obvious differences between Ann and Bethany. To name a few: Bethany felt close to her mother, saw herself as similar to her mother, and often felt recognized and understood by her; by contrast, Ann felt more distant and different from her mother. Bethany felt capable of surpassing her sister, whereas Ann felt unable to match or surpass hers; consequently, acknowledging differences between self and sister tended to evoke guilt in Bethany and shame in Ann. Bethany attempted to manage her struggles for sister and peer recognition with a strategy of "cooperation" and acquiescence, as she tried to stay within the other's image of her; by contrast, Ann mobilized opposition and, in childhood, disobedience in her struggles for recognition, more openly challenging the other to accept her way.

A final difference between Ann and Bethany concerns the way they understood the positions they believed their sisters would allow them to occupy. Ann believed her sister wanted her to be similar to herself, whereas Bethany believed her sister wanted her to remain the dissimilar baby rather than to grow up and become more like her. Thus, Ann's sister is reminiscent of the prototypical older child who expects the new baby to be the same (Mitchell, this volume). Relatedly, Ann enjoyed the many qualities and interests she shared with her only younger sibling, a brother who was her closest ally in the family; their differences did

not disrupt her feelings of closeness to him the way they did with her sister. By contrast, Bethany's sister is described as one who amplifies and invests in the differences between the self and the new baby, as the older child sometimes does, and expects the baby to be and to remain different. Thus, we may speculate (remembering that we are seeing each of them through her sister's eyes) that these older sisters present two ways that the older sibling attempts to contend with the new baby: amplifying sameness and amplifying difference.

Turning to identity, the clinical material suggests that one influence on the development of identity may be the perceived acceptability to siblings of one's qualities or ways of being. What place, the child seems to ask, will my sibling make for me? Who must I be to fit into that place? Some aspects of this perceived place may fit well, as did the athleticism Ann shared with her sister. Other aspects of self, those that appear to elicit sibling rejection or ridicule, may become the danger zones of identity, the aspects of self one believes peers will not accept and whose expression threatens peer relationships. For Ann, these danger zones were defined by her differences from the obedient Nancy; her tests of others' love of her were designed to determine their tolerance and even enjoyment of her playing outside the rules. For Bethany, the danger was in exceeding her sister in their similar pursuits, so that she expected her talents and accomplishments, such as her promotion at work, to be interpersonally costly.

What accounts for the similar powerful influence of the *sister* on the sense of self and self-worth of these two different women? It cannot be explained by unusual features of the sister relationship; to the contrary, these sister relationships appear quite typical, and neither Ann nor Bethany viewed her sister's behavior as particularly surprising or untoward. In fact, much of the psychoanalytic literature on siblings addresses unusual experiences, such as having a disabled sibling or surviving a sibling's death, leaving common experiences such as these relatively unexplored.

Can the influence of the sister be understood as displacement of a parental dynamic? Indeed, it may be that the importance of recognition for identity development is rooted in parental dynamics but can be expressed with respect to siblings; perhaps a deeper analytic process would have revealed the parental foundations of the manifest sisterly dynamics. Although both treatments lasted several years, the session frequency never exceeded twice weekly. Alternately, perhaps recognition by sibling and parent shapes identity development similarly, despite the fact that sisters figured prominently in these particular cases.

Yet for both women, the danger zones defined by the sister relationship did not map onto those defined by the parental relationships, suggesting that the internalized sister was not only a parental displacement. Moreover, not only do parent and sibling recognition sometimes diverge, as in these cases; they may also conflict, as when an adolescent's popularity among friends is founded on characteristics and behaviors that parents do not abide, and when parents treasure those very qualities, such as studiousness or sweetness, that provoke ridicule from siblings and peers. The latter was true for Bethany, whose parents praised the very goodness and accomplishments her sister tried to ignore and sometimes disdained. Indeed, sibling rivalry works against the possibility that sibling and parent recognition will coincide, as siblings tease each other about the very qualities their parents praise; by extension to the world of parent and sibling substitutes, we can understand the universal unpopularity of the teacher's pet.

Recognition is an acknowledgment as well as an invitation. It implies that one can move into a particular position or role, that one can be a certain kind of person. An invitation is valid only if given by one who has the authority to extend it. Parent recognition in the vertical dimension confers acceptance to a *desiring subject* because parents have authority over how much autonomous initiative one can take over one's own desires; parents delimit what can be desired and in what ways. Sibling recognition confers acceptance to an *individual* because siblings have authority over the size and shape of the space one can take up in the lateral world; siblings delimit who one can be. Of course, the desiring subject of the vertical dimension and the individual of the lateral dimension are one and the same person; identity reflects desire, and desire reflects identity. The person cannot be fully understood through a single lens, whether that be the vertical or the lateral.

It is important to note that we have examples here only of the sister relationship. Although there seems to be no theoretical reason for expecting gender differences in the importance of sibling recognition, it may be that the recognition of a same-sex sibling takes on particular importance to the extent that shared gender implies sameness, as it so often does, against which identity differences take on greater importance to a sense of personal uniqueness. Indeed, I have suggested (2007) that sibling differentiation of identity may be either more common or more apparent in same-sex sibling pairs, whereas mixed-sex sibling pairs may use gender as the axis around which both to organize their differences and to attenuate sibling rivalry. In addition, it may be that the *longing* for the sibling, the powerful feeling in these cases that ultimately revealed



the desire for recognition, is more likely to be expressed by women than men, given cultural expectations about women's emotional expressiveness and close personal relationships, sister relationships in particular. Perhaps a man's longing for his brother's recognition would typically be disguised or defensively repudiated. Clearly, such questions about gender warrant further consideration.

#### CONCLUSION

The belief that there is but a single vertical axis around which all development revolves has been unshakable, despite the fact that it is supported by little more than conviction and convention. If we assume that development is organized exclusively around the vertical axis of parental relationships, then we need particularly striking evidence to convince us that there are developmental processes and dynamics that center uniquely on siblings. Instead, such processes are likely to remain unseen or misjudged as fundamentally parent-related. Alternately, if we envision the developmental terrain as mapped by two intersecting axes, even with the vertical predominating much of the time, then we have made room for considering the presence of sibling-related processes, including sibling differentiation and recognition.

Like Mitchell, I found that once I began to envision the psychic landscape as comprising two dimensions, I saw the concerns of the lateral dimension lurking everywhere, including in important aspects of identity development and ongoing peer relationships. Moreover, I began to see new aspects of the vertical dimension, in particular, the importance of difference between self and other, as distinct from otherness. Indeed, difference and differentiation are not only crucial to developments and relationships associated with the lateral dimension, and thus to some extent revealed by them, but also to those of the vertical dimension, although there we have been focused primarily on sameness and identification.

To understand identity fully, it turns out, we must consider the way one is positioned with respect to the siblings who are beside as well as to the parents who are above. We must take account of difference and similarity simultaneously. We must consider both intrapsychic mechanisms, such as differentiation, and intersubjective ones, such as recognition. Identity is not a point on the matrix but a pattern, unique for each person; the coordinates are not fixed for all, but relative to the important others in relationship to whom one finds a place of uniqueness and value in the world and at the same time shifted and shaped by the mutual recognition of that place attained with those others.

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# Three Contextual Frameworks for Siblingships

## Nonlinear Thinking, Disposition, and Phallocentrism

CLAUDIA LAMENT, PH.D.

*This discussion of Juliet Mitchell's paper "Siblings: Thinking Theory" places her work within the context of three frameworks: nonlinear thinking, disposition, and phallocentrism. The nonlinear dimension of the developmental process demonstrates how the sibling experience is not static, but rather is subject to a natural transmogrification toward new adaptive forms and meanings that occur over the sequential progress of organizational growth. Secondly, dispositional variables tend to be overlooked in their role in how brothers and sisters engage one another, titrate closeness and separateness, and creatively live out their love, admiration, hate, envy, and rivalry with each other. Sensitivities in dispositional leanings, such as special empathic qualities, may even serve to mitigate sibling turbulence. Lastly, the phallocentricity in Western societies privileges an implicitly male perspective that envisions sibling relationships in terms of threatening competitors, as the common linguistic phrase sibling rivalry suggests. This inflection in culture disregards more-expanding qualities*

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*in object relationships and aim-giving strategies that are exchanged in sibling play.*

*These variables are not the sole contributors to the sibling experience, but a sampling of influences both from within and outside the child that affect that experience.*

#### INTRODUCTION

JULIET MITCHELL'S PAPER PROVIDES A RICH STIMULANT FOR REVITALIZING the psychoanalytic view of siblingships. In this discussion, I wish to place this topic within three contextual frameworks: that of nonlinear development, dispositional variations, and gender.

There is a tendency in psychoanalytic developmental theory to view growth as exclusively continuous, namely, this present is the heir to that past, and that past leads to this present. This psychogenic fallacy (Hartmann 1955; Hendrick 1942; Lampl-De Groot 1939; Westen 1989), or what might also be referred to as the "continuity fallacy," can be observed in the idea that straight through-lines can be drawn between psychological disorders and their beginnings in specific developmental periods. Other versions of such beliefs can be seen in the predilection to link findings from early childhood research and apply them directly to features of adult behavior, relationship dynamics, and transference-countertransference paradigms (Gilmore 2008). Such misconceptions oversimplify the inordinately complex network of variables in perpetual interaction that comprise forward movement. Such biases obscure those influences arising from both linear and nonlinear domains that mark developmental passage. For the purpose of this discussion, they also interfere with how we evaluate the sibling experience, as it too will be subject to the multiple discontinuous shifts that happen over the sequential progress of organizational growth.

Secondly, there is a troubling ease with which the impact of dispositional variants is dismissed in our appraisals of health and disorder. This leads to greater attention to outer stimuli, such as the overprivileging of parental caregiving styles, or the above-mentioned penchant to locate disturbance in phase-specific organizations. Freud (1913; 1933; 1937) spoke of this domain as a significant feature in the formation of pathology, such as obsessional neurosis, but also as one that was insufficiently studied as to its role in why some individuals are rooted to their disturbances.

Innate endowment will affect the rate of progress of the flowering of maturational processes—such as affect regulation, frustration tolerance,

structure building, the development of symbolic thinking—and the nature of the course they follow (A. Freud 1976; Hartmann 1964). Variations in basic equipment and dispositional trends will impact the development of these processes as they follow a relatively smooth trajectory or are burdened by delays or detours (A. Freud 1965; 1974; 1978). Even the quality of phase organization is impacted by disposition, such as its overall coherency and range of integrity (Abrams 1986). Such dispositional features will be in concert throughout phase sequencing with the environment and the intersubjective exchange (A. Freud 1978; Gergely and Watson 1996; Gilmore 2005). Their effects cannot be actualized until they are brought into contact with outside forces. This state of affairs sets the stage whereby a mutually influential exchange takes shape. Indeed, disposition may be shaped and influenced by environmental forces, although some disorders show a stasis that resists influence from external sources. Gifts, talents, and dispositional advantages are also part of the package of disposition and may be harnessed to work against aberrations or anomalies in other areas of the personality (Abrams 2001). These innate givens will skew the sibling experience by tilting it in the direction of pleasure-seeking or more-aggressive engagements. Sensitivities in dispositional leanings, such as special empathic qualities, may even serve to mitigate expectable sibling turbulence.

My third contextual framework is that of gender. A phallogocentric bias in psychoanalytic theory (Balsam 1991; 2008; Bassin 1996) informs the sibling experience and privileges a male-centered perspective that is especially sensitive to aggressive narratives. Consequently, the reading of the arrival of a sibling leans toward its being perceived by outside observers as an inherent assault to which the older child reacts with strategies of violence. The term *sibling rivalry* has become a tradition-bound aphorism or cliché treated as an objective fact and reified truth that takes precedence over other interpretations. Its prevalence as an embedded structure tells its own story about how culture builds meaning and inflects the narrative of family. Rangell (1965) signaled this development in what he called “falsifying trends.” People intuitively associate values that are felt to belong together. Such automatic linkages abet an unfortunate cycling and recycling of belief systems that are reinforced through language and eventually result in abiding structures as in truisms. Thus, informed primarily by a male oriented lens, the term *sibling rivalry* has an unquestioned and stalwart place in our lexicon. It has the effect of valorizing what has become normative in culture and turning a blind eye to how meaning is subsequently reorganized with the advent of new hierarchical progressive developmental shifts that affect all spheres of cognitive and intrapsychic life.

SETTING THE CONTEXTS: NONLINEAR PERSPECTIVE,  
DISPOSITION, AND PHALLOCENTRISM

By looking at clinical settings from different points of view, sibling interactions may also be recognized as instrumental in enriching relationships and shaping more-felicitous psychological structures—potential facilitators of the developmental progression rather than simply pathogens waiting to be realized. Mitchell too recognized this feature in her book (Mitchell 2003), wherein she remarked on the possibility of “a new form” of love when the desire to murder is resisted (p. 30). This is followed later in the close of her book by her reflections upon the hoped-for transformation of narcissism into love for others, and murderousness into an “objective hatred for what is wrong or evil in the self and other: these are the building blocks of a lateral not a vertical paradigm” (p. 225).

Inherent in Mitchell’s formulation is the strand of discontinuity that, in addition to continuity, is a foundational feature of the developmental process. Freud’s discoveries clarify this position. His work that resulted in a mapping of unconscious forces within the mind and an epigenetic psychosexual sequence defined what was and still is considered normative in the developmental process. It detonated an explosive reaction in the early part of the twentieth century that culminated in the psychoanalytic movement. Freud’s revolutionary theory of development contained both continuous and discontinuous features. He saw that certain psychological features rooted in childhood could press forward unchanged and distort the adult’s perception of her contemporary world. He also detected that the developmental process was marked by nonlinear, discontinuous features that startled the observer with the dizzying shifts in cognition and psychology that appear in succession. He was struck by the recognition (1905) that development moves in a sequential hierarchical series of reorganizations. The observer could track epigenetic growth—the remarkable transformations that occur in the child’s developmental trajectory as one looks backward toward the past or forward into the future.

One need only to eavesdrop on conversations between parents on the playground, in which they exchange narratives about the seemingly miraculous changes in their children’s advance steps to new psychological and cognitive levels of achievement, to acknowledge its ubiquity in the day-to-day experience of watching children grow up (Piaget 1952). Interacting features of maturational processes, brain functioning, disposition, and constitution, as well as the intersecting vectors of environment and sociocultural factors combine in unpredictable fashion to

create the unique individual (A. Freud 1965; Neubauer 1996; Abrams and Solnit 1998; Mayes 2001; Mayes and Cohen 1996). The child will also create adaptive or maladaptive resolutions to the new conflicts that accompany them as she moves forward into each new organization. How she manages the fresh dilemmas of an oedipal threesome may show little resemblance to how she dealt with the same threesome as a toddler. Memory too undergoes transformative restructuring and reorganization (Tuch 1999; Weinstein 1998). This is not to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater, but to say that memory along with other functions are subject to continuous revision.

The study and application of this feature of development to clinical work has been largely at the edges of the psychoanalyst's viewfinder (Abrams 2001); she may see it with her peripheral vision and take for granted its theoretical validity, but it has been largely eclipsed by the linear, reductionistic perspective that took precedence in clinical practice and its translation into therapeutic action (Abrams 1977; Hartmann and Kris 1945). The dazzling import of Freud's rearward gaze rendered a new brand of semiotics to childhood fantasy: The genetic point of view had a staying power that foregrounded continuity and backgrounded the discontinuous feature of Freud's theory. Yet, both perspectives were always present; a different lens was necessary to recognize them. Why the perspective of discontinuities and nonlinearity has been marginalized may become a study in itself. Certainly, juggling the complexities of linearity and nonlinearity produces unknowns—uncertainties and conjectures that confront our field with serious challenges to the quest for "objective truths" (Spence 1980; Abrams 2011). Perhaps for some psychoanalysts, this is felt as a threat to their identities as truth seekers of histories.

Freud contended with the power of dispositional variants, or constitutional factors, throughout his writings, but in "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" (Freud 1937; Strachey 1937) he placed particular emphasis on their place as impediments to the psychoanalytic process. Here he spoke of the strength of instincts versus a restricted ego as one set of determinants that augur poorly for a favorable analytic outcome. He also states with clarity his view that analysts were headed in the wrong direction with respect to their continued efforts in grasping how an analytic cure happens. Instead, he felt that the correct track to follow was in studying the domain of *obstacles* (italics mine) that impeded cure. For him in this paper, the impact of constitutional variables was well deserving of investigation, and their selection as a serious topic of study had been overlooked. Despite Freud's urging that analysts take this route in their future explorations, the leaning toward avoidance of

systematic scrutiny of inborn traits, equipment failures, or precocities has been a perpetual ellipsis in psychoanalytic theory and clinical work. Abrams (1986) took note of this prevailing current and proffered an explanation that environmental influences wield a broad and mighty force that overshadows internally driven variables such as disposition. He suggested that disposition and endowment may be undervalued or rationalized in our field as exerting a small quota of impact upon personality formation because it seems that little can be done about them. This notion defies Freud's own opinion on the topic and admits defeat a priori. Therapeutic techniques that take into account such inborn qualities have been considered (Lament 2008; 2011; Olesker and Lament 2008; Knight 2008) and proven successful. Neubauer (1996) also remarked on the significance of inborn aspects and noted their contextual placement within the variations of each child's timetable of growth. He underscored the proclivity among analysts toward explaining a child's departures from normative expectations as rooted in environmental failures instead of weighing the influences from endowment and disposition.

This challenge was taken up most vigorously by Anna Freud (1965; 1974). In her study of childhood disturbance, she pinpointed the importance of dispositional features in their interactivity with other factors as contributing to areas of healthy engagement as well as to features of pathology. Disturbances in affect regulation, excessive states of anxiety or passivity, rigidities in managing transition and separation, porous structure formation that lacks vitality, aberrations in integration and synthesis, a propensity toward concretism, disrupted growth in symbolic processes, difficulties in how children internalize outside influences, and imbalance between hate and love are particularized aspects of disposition that often exert a continuous press upon growth. With regard to sibling interactions and relationships, dispositional variables play a part in how brothers and sisters engage one another, regulate closeness and separateness, and creatively live out their love, admiration, hate, envy, and rivalry with each other. Differences and similarities in dispositional features will also impact on how siblings assist or hinder each other's forward growth. Finally, how sibling birth is experienced by the older child, that is, whether it is experienced as a "trauma," will have much to do with dispositional traits and managing emotional separateness from internalized objects.

The context of gender role identity (Benjamin 1991; Stoller and Wagonfeld 1982; Tyson and Tyson 1990) provides another vantage point from which to view the traditional understanding of siblingships. It pivots our attention to how males and females experience themselves



and the world and how they live and behave within society. The socio-cultural environment is an important factor (Kramer and Prall 1978; Meissner 2005; Layton 2011) in how a child's growing perception of himself as a gendered self develops. A child's same and cross-gendered identifications with significant familial and external figures is another influence in how the growing child establishes this aspect of identity (Balsam 2001; Bassin 1996; Benjamin 1995; Chodorow 1996). Finally, from within the matrix of the child's psychobiologically propelled transformations over the course of the developmental process, the child's self and other representational structures are subject to continuous and profound shifts that include reconfigurations of gender roles. Knight's (2011) research is a vivid case in point that demonstrates that fragmentation and fluidity of such percepts are normative features of growth during the middle years.

How mothers influence the ways that a child adopts stylistic relational attitudes and behavior has been explored by researchers in early childhood (Olesker 1984; Biringen, Robinson, and Emde 1994). For example, mothers lean toward encouraging their sons to exhibit autonomous, independent behaviors, while abetting their daughters to focus on interactivity with others and the promotion of positive relating and relatedness. The false axiom that a boy has a relative lack of emotionalism compared with his female cohort is taken up by Galasinski (2004) as reported in Balsam (2008). Galasinski states that in contemporary sociogender and sociological literature studies, men's so-called emotional backwardness is put forward at the level of truth that requires no supporting evidence; it is baldly presented as *de facto*. Cultural mores in Western civilization overtly embrace the traditional stereotypic perception of male strength as embodying emotional suppression, as opposed to one of open expressiveness and receptivity of feelings. How these pressures stimulate certain male-oriented, sociocultural proclivities in sibling relations and the origins and maintenance of fixed views on lateral relations should be given proper weight. Mitchell's discussion of the phallogcentrically based exclusion of this dimension in theory and culture has a broadening reach by its extension to common linguistic forms, most notably the epithet *rivalry* that accompanies the term *sibling*. What might be categorized as feminine-based adjectival descriptors to the word *sibling*, such as *love*, *attachment*, *concern*, or even *bond*, are nonexistent and appear to go unnoticed and uncontested. The implicitly male perspective that envisions siblings as threatening rivals also tramples on expanding object-relationships and aim-giving strategies that are exchanged in sibling play. These offer a multilayered view of

siblings that would heighten the value of the emerging developmental potential.

WHY HAS THE LATERAL AXIS OF SIBLINGS  
ELUDED A COMPREHENSIVE THEORY?

Mitchell's view of the sibling arrival as "traumatic" and the accompanying unconscious fantasies of incest and murder is the cornerstone of lateral relationships in her conceptualization of what must be added to the theoretical superstructure. She states that the recognition of the significance of siblings (including fantasied siblings in the case of the only child) challenges the tradition-bound privileging of the child-parent matrix. This is troubling to our sociocultural surround because both "social and individual psychology has always been understood from the side of the man" (Mitchell 2003, p. 3). Mitchell draws a parallel between psychological states of mind that are typically associated with femininity and sibling relations, such as fears of annihilation, loss of love, and an excessive narcissism, which seek validation by the positioning of the female in the object/receiver role in love relationships. She suggests that siblings and femininity have been burdened by "overlooked destinies" (2003, p. 4).

Drawing upon such gender-based connotations, I would add that particular qualities of feminine-informing features in relationships in general and in siblingships in particular have been minimized and undervalued. As previously mentioned, even the scaffolding for sibling relationships observed in the embedded linguistic aphorism *sibling rivalry* derives from phallogocentric stereotypes of male styles of relating that punctuate aggressivity. Elements that incorporate more feminine informing aspects of sibling relationships are inclusive of a readiness for empathic attunement and the movement toward the pleasure of relating to persons as opposed to things or activities (Abrams and Neubauer 1976).

Cast in this light, Mitchell's notion of the sibling arrival as always "traumatic," which carries a phallogocentric, aggressivized meaning, can be argued. Importantly, omitting the idea of "trauma" as inherent within the sibling experience does not dismiss the inclusion of the lateral axis within the overarching theory. As Mitchell notes, generalizability<sup>1</sup> to the entire population is a requisite criterion in the creation of a new

1. A theoretical construct must be generalizable—something we all experience—if it is to play a role in the construction of the unconscious aspect of the human psyche.

addition to the theoretical superstructure. For me, what is universal about the sibling experience is not its traumatic nature; rather, it is its existence for all children. It is the presence of the only child that has been a sticking point in this regard. But Mitchell's enlightening note that the only child has a multitude of fantasied siblings remedies the problem: That all children feel a quality of "trauma" is not required to prove the universality of the sibling experience.

In addition to these sociologically based obstacles concerning gender biases, I would postulate additional barriers that are endemic to the psychology of the sibling experience that have interfered with theory-building efforts. In that light, the following factors may have burdened this criterion.

The factor of *timing*: The parent-child vertical axis is a constant pillar in a child's familial relationships. Looking diachronically through the vertical scree of development moving in a forward direction, a child will shape her views of her parents in ever-increasingly sophisticated ways (cognition, the architecture of mental structure, memory, ego functions, and unconscious fantasy all undergo transformational or nonlinear shifts) as she passes through the progressive hierarchical organizations.

The child will do the same for her siblings, with the important difference that siblings are not ever-present for the child as are parents; they arrive on the scene at different organizational time zones on the child's developmental continuum (with the notable exception of twinships). Unconscious or conscious fantasies of incest and murder target every child in Mitchell's superstructure, but their inflections will occur on different levels of cognitive and psychological maturation. For instance, a six-year-old who experiences a new sibling may have to struggle with the tasks of mourning oedipal defeat but will transform this experience into new abiding structures. These will provide him with the necessary leverage to assist in the achievement of unheralded capacities in grasping the complexities of relationships on a triadic level. This child will have undergone radical cognitive changes, representational shifts, new ego capacities in delaying gratification, and greater affect tolerance while also moving toward the outer world of the peer group and activities beyond the home. This circumstance is in marked contrast to what she might have experienced several years previous, when the second child was born and she was three.

Thus, the matter of *birth order* and its concurrence with developmental transformations will inflect the sibling experience with those meanings and affective reactivity that attend the child's developmental organization. The experience of having older siblings versus younger siblings

and *how many years* between them is not generalizable to the entire population and will result in different outcomes. For instance, Mitchell speaks of the experience of the older toddler viewing the newborn with jealousy, death wishes, and perhaps incestuous feelings. The toddler also readily identifies with both baby and mother. Such fluid identifications fit the structural features of the young child where porousness of self/object boundaries are normative. But looking at a sibling coupling from the viewpoint of the younger one, I postulate that this child may *use* the older sibling to actualize the developmental thrust forward that pulls the younger child along to a new organizational level via identificatory processes and experiential exchanges. The younger sibling is rehearsing for his debut on the new stage through play and fantasy with his older sibling. This is a decidedly positive aspect of the sibling relationship, one that comingles with developmental processes. That is, the older child provides a natural, in-house developmental assist, along with the aspects of jealousy that Mitchell describes and differentiates from envy. (Although here, I believe the younger child will also envy the elder.)

What about the child in the middle? Traditionally, this child is dubbed as “lost,” sandwiched between elder and younger: The accident of birth order that holds the bookended children in place fails to provide a secure identity for the middle child. Or, do his multiple identifications provide him with a greater variety of creative solutions with regard to murder, incest, or jealousy? And, to further the phallogocentric argument in this regard, a female-centric culture would honor object-seeking and engagement of others in its foundation, foregrounding these elements in favor of the masculine ones. What about the “only child” who must identify in fantasy and, as Mitchell points out, may have a far more active fantasy life than those peers who are siblinged? Perhaps the parents double in the child’s mind as siblings.

*Disposition and constitutional variables* will also inflect sibling theory building. When considering development from the viewpoint of the unfolding of dispositional and maturational processes, as Anna Freud did with her developmental lines (1965), one sees incremental, non-linear shifts that have transformational consequences (Neubauer 1984; Abrams 2007; Abrams 2001). This synchronic mapping may be loosely coordinated with the diachronic mapping of the newly emergent, progressive, hierarchically ordered organizations. These maturational processes, such as structure formation, self-object differentiation, cognitive processes, symbolic functioning, motoric advances, and so forth are subject to wide variations. Anna Freud theorized and demonstrated empirically that the rate at which these processes developed varied

within the child; further, one typically observes disharmonies when tracking growth along these continuums. Not only the organizational component of where she is on her developmental trajectory must be considered (and how the sibling relationship may transmogrify over the course of her development), but the dispositional aspects that she brings from her biologically inspired program will play a part as well. The progressive-regressive balance may be useful to apply to this domain as well: The stronger the innate pull forward toward the next organization, the more likely the child will discover persons in her milieu to engage and advance that progressive surge. The sibling experience then, is coincidental with an organizational “set” (on the diachronic level) and the complex array of maturational processes (on the synchronic level) that the child is experiencing at any given moment. The idea that sibling arrival is “traumatic” for the older child is not a ubiquitous structure. Placing the child on a continuum of reactivity in regard to the experience of sibling birth allows more room for individual variation.

For instance, the two-year-old is moving through her own extraordinary transformations that are partially informed by disposition, constitutional variables and their interaction with the environment. Mitchell’s inclusion of Winnicott’s notes concerning Joan, a two-year-old with volatile and violent reactions to her sibling’s birth is a pertinent illustration. What if little Joan’s responses to her newborn brother are a manifestation of certain dispositional vulnerabilities—despite Winnicott’s observation that attests to her overall health and love-ability? Can we fairly attribute her extreme reactivity and “violent reactions” to the birth of the sibling alone? Anna Freud might conjecture that Joan brings to the experience of her brother’s birth a whole set of interacting systems and subsystems: fragilities, precocities, and disharmonies among newly emergent capacities within her. In turn, how do these systems respond to environmental factors in the world outside her?

#### ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The familial and larger societal-cultural environments are significant shaping systems that affect the features mentioned above: timing of the sibling’s birth in terms of the older child’s psychological and cognitive organization, the baby’s arrival with respect to birth order, and the child’s dispositional features. When a baby arrives to the family surround, whether and how the adults in the household are sensitive to the older child’s reactions can be critical to the freshness of experiencing this new being. The adults may either assist or hinder the child’s hurt, anger, or pleas to welcome the new infant into the fold.

The child's dispositional strengths and vulnerabilities may be ignored or accurately understood or intuited by the parents and extended family members. A critical factor to consider is how these features of the child can be enlisted or mitigated by an adult's timely and thoughtful interventions to help in the expression of feeling. A fearful or shaming reaction from a beloved adult can intensify a young child's embarrassment about the natural and expectable feelings of anger or hurt. Or the young child's excitement "to help" may be overlooked by the hubbub of activity and visitors that threaten to shut out the wide-eyed expectancy to be a part of the new family configuration. A three-year-old whose capacity for affect tolerance is immature may be especially upset by such responses. Or, a five-year-old with speech and language delays may require additional assistance in finding ways to express her reactions. A child whose sense of agency seemed lacking might be spurred to stretch this aspect of ownership of self and identity by the very presence of another being who is closer in age than the adults in the family.

A parent may overemphasize a loving attitude toward the baby or may dismiss the possibility that the child's demandingness or tantrums can be soothed by finding a way to include her in the family's newly emerging structure and dynamics: She can now be cast as a "big sister" whose position is unique and valued.

The wider social and cultural surround can emit a generative response to the family's new addition. Teachers, parents of a child's friends, grandparents, and neighbors can provide a needed respite from the cascade of feelings that the arrival of the newborn may engender in the older child. She may locate new ways of refinding what might be felt as her "lost self" prior to the baby's entry on the scene. As well, the child may learn from her playmates' strategies of interacting with siblings. A sibling can be helpful or fun or a nuisance. Now, her playmates may function as identificatory models for discovering the world of siblings.

The sibling experience may be understood as inclusive of a catalogue of interweaving considerations: the age of the child when the sibling arrives, birth order, how many other siblings has the child experienced and at what organizational level, dispositional features and how these react to forces within the child's local environment and larger sociocultural context. How will these inform and shape fantasy formation for later sibling arrivals, for better or worse?

#### SUMMARY

Mitchell has provided us with a rich legacy in her groundbreaking position: the universality of lateral relationships and their formidable

imprint in psychic life. What I attempted to demonstrate in this paper are three perspectives through which to view siblingships: first, the non-linear point of view, by which the sibling experience undergoes a natural transmogrification toward new adaptive forms throughout the developmental process; second, the dispositional aspect of a child's character formation and its interaction with environmental features that will influence the sibling relationship; and, last, the propensity of socioculturally influenced maxims to recruit phallogocentric biases that distort the nature of the sibling experience and its unfolding process. These perspectives locate the sibling experience in narrative forms that are multicontextual and that obviate the need to structure it as traumatic. That it is a universal feature of the human experience can be proved for the only child who populates his fantasy life with imaginary brothers and sisters.

These variables are not the sole contributors to the sibling experience but are a sampling of influences that affect the child both from within and outside. The mutual interactivity of these and other factors combine and recombine to produce expressions of siblingships that change not only over the developmental sequences but will also persist over the course of adult life. It is only when there are *failures* of progressive, discontinuous shifts that one may observe in pure culture the starkness of aggressivity and murderousness that exist in fantasies about the sibling. These may arise from dispositional variants, environmental forces within and outside the family milieu—and, as highlighted in this paper, abiding male-oriented proclivities in Western societal structures. The latter have privileged the moment of sibling birth in an aggressivized and threatening contextual narrative that has been transmitted and re-cycled through the generations. Such a bias is overturned by the underlying dynamism that is continuously operating in human growth and that informs the sibling experience, even at its inception. This ever-present synergy is a necessary reminder of the place of uncertainty as we consider the mercurial nature of unconscious fantasy and its impact upon the child's unfolding narrative of her life.

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