

wished for) condition of early maternal omnipotence? In keeping with this theme, Chasseguet-Smirgel (1970) has related religious mythology to the difficulties that maternal dominance and omnipotence present to both sexes.

Man and woman are born of woman: before all else we are our mother's child. Yet all our desires seem designed to deny this fact, so full of conflicts and reminiscent of our primitive dependence. The myth of Genesis seems to express this desire to free ourselves from our mother: man is born of God, an idealized paternal figure. . . . Woman is born from man's body. If this myth expresses the victory of man over his mother and over woman, who thereby becomes his own child, it also provides a certain solution for woman inasmuch as she also is her mother's daughter: she chooses to belong to man, to be created *for* him, and not for herself, to be a part of him—Adam's rib—rather than to prolong her "attachment" to her mother. [pp. 133-134]

### SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPES

At the cost of oversimplifying, I believe it may be worthwhile to examine how the values and mores of traditional male-female relationships in this country can be understood within the stated theoretical framework. The fact that the nurturant functions of the good mother (e.g., feeding, cleaning, providing emotional comfort and support) are retained by women in marriage hardly requires description or elaboration. The following points are offered to support the notion that the cultural stereotypes of adult gender interactions (apart from nurturant functions) involve a reversal for males of their early helplessness and dependency on a powerful female object.

1. Women are encouraged to be dependent and are frequently portrayed as lost and helpless without a male partner. "Little girl" qualities typically make women more attractive, and

it is of significance that women are affectionately referred to as "girls," "chicks," "baby," and "doll." Mothers tend to foster dependency to a greater degree in female children (Lynn 1972), and research indicates that adult men and women tend to equate assertive, independent strivings in girls and women with a loss of femininity (Baumrind 1972).

Expressions of dependency needs in men are considered unattractive, weak or effeminate, and are more frequently denied than cultivated. For males, the notion of men's greater independence is a reversal of the infant-mother paradigm, in which it is the child who is helplessly dependent on the powerful maternal figure.

2. In male-female relationships, intellectual ability and competence are frequently seen as the man's domain. A girl's sense of intellectual mastery and skill is progressively discouraged as she is trained to be "feminine"; she is encouraged to be smart enough to catch a man but never to outsmart him (Baumrind 1972, Lerner 1974). In the media, wives are often portrayed as silly, capricious, gossipy, illogical, and intellectually helpless; and mockery of a female's ability to think logically and critically is an extremely popular form of humor. Although women are acknowledged to have a type of wisdom that goes by the name of "feminine intuition," there is a persistent insinuation that for females, organized and sustained logical thinking is not critically involved. Research findings indicate that both sexes regard intellectual achievement as "unfeminine" and that college women tend to equate academic success with detrimental social consequences (Baumrind 1972).

Although many men do not value the "dumb blonde" stereotype, few seek love relationships with a female partner who is comfortably acknowledged to be an intellectual equal or superior. Similarly, a woman who assumes an intellectually aggressive, critical, or dominant stance is often labeled "masculine" or "castrating." Again, this social situation appears to be a reversal of the male's position as an infant, in which the intellectually helpless child is slowly taught to master his environment by a maternal figure who is expe-

rienced as infinitely capable and wise. The role of early teacher (and frustrator) moves systematically from mother to a continuing series of figures (governesses, babysitters, elementary-school teachers) who are predominantly female.

3. Physical strength and prowess, which are glorified and cultivated in men, are considered unattractive in women; the strong, athletic female or gymnast is generally not thought to be the most attractive of mates. Although men may be encouraged to go to painful extremes in body building, women are taught to exaggerate, and even feign, weakness in the interest of "femininity." Men enjoy treating women as weak and delicate creatures who cannot open their own doors or carry their own packages. Similarly, it is typically important for men to be physically taller than their mates. Short or small men are devalued. Again, for men, this paradigm reverses the infant's experiences of the small and weak child who is carried about with ease in the arms of the powerful mother. Horney (1932) emphasized the small boy's feeling of distress and humiliation at being small and weak in comparison with mother.
4. In love relationships, men are typically older than their female partner. While there is nothing unusual about a match between a 35-year-old man and a 23-year-old woman, the reversed situation is evaluated as eccentric, if not pathological. Similarly, when a man marries a woman "young enough to be his daughter," the match may be either criticized or condoned by society, but the desires of both parties are considered understandable. Were a woman to marry a man young enough to be her son, society tends to respond with scorn and shock. Again, for males, this situation reverses the infant-mother relationship, in which the "older woman" is the sole object of the young child's libidinal desires. One might further speculate that the intense pressures on women to look eternally like adolescent girls (rather than like "mothers") stems in part from the matronly woman's capacity to arouse infantile envy of the inexhaustible feeding breast as well as to stimulate anxiety-laden wishes for returning to a helpless state of dependency.

5. The perpetuation of personality characteristics and traits associated with infancy and childhood is encouraged in the female sex only. For example, crying, whining, and seductively manipulative and petulant behavior are all acceptable ways for women to make their demands felt and are portrayed in the media as typical feminine qualities. Such behaviors are unacceptable in men, who are encouraged to assert themselves in a more "manly" fashion. Similarly, females are most frequently portrayed as emotional and males as intellectual. The stereotype is of the "hysterical," overemotional wife who is kept in check by her husband, who allegedly makes decisions by the laws of logic and cool reason. Again, males experience a reversal of the infant's situation, in which it is the mother who supplies the intellectual controls to the child who has considerable affective lability and emotionality.
6. In courtship and sexual relations, women stereotypically assume a passive stance and men an overly active one. Men are taught to actively pursue what they want; women are taught to make themselves pretty enough to be sought after. Although females may learn "feminine wiles" to attract the men of their choice, they are discouraged from openly and directly pursuing a male figure. This state of affairs for males is again the reversal of the infant's situation, in which the baby is unable to actively determine whether it will get the breast or the mother's affection. The baby may actively attempt to "court" her in a number of ways (such as by crying or being cute), but it is the active mother who initiates or fails to initiate contact with the child.
7. Stereotyped notions of feminine sexuality tend to glorify naiveté and "innocence," whereas for males, "experience" tends to enhance their sexual attractiveness. (One might consider the difference between an "experienced man" and a "loose woman.") Similarly, in regard to the expression of aggressive impulses, Symonds (1971-1972) notes that what is called "strength of character" in boys is called "unfeminine" in girls. Stereotypes that have encouraged the stifling of sexual and aggressive expression in women and the frank

expression of impulse life in men are also for men a reversal of the infant-mother paradigm: It is the mother who inhibits the expression of "unacceptable" impulses early in the child's life. Many psychoanalytic writers, including Horney, Klein, and Freud, have stressed that mothers are experienced as punitive because they are the first to forbid a child instinctual activities.

It is, of course, naive to assume that the devaluation of women and the establishment and maintenance of traditional sex role stereotypes can be entirely understood according to the stated theoretical framework that emphasizes the early oral dyadic relationship between mother and child without regard for the complexities inherent in the oedipal triangle. Additional socioeconomic, biological, and psychodynamic factors are relevant to the present discussion, and the speculations offered here are to be considered partial rather than exhaustive explanations of complicated phenomena.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPES

I anticipate the objection that the generalizations presented here are oversimplified clichés that fail to account for the richness of individual differences in our culture. Clearly, both clinical knowledge and human experience reveal that there are varied bases for successful male-female relationships and that many stable and gratifying marriages involve variations if not thoroughgoing modifications of these general themes. Sydney Smith<sup>3</sup> points out that a common American cliché holds that the woman is the real decision maker in the family, despite the man's belief that he is the boss. This understanding of power relationships between the sexes is familiar and is well illustrated by the European saying "The man is the head of the family but the woman is the neck that carries the head and determines the direction." Underlying the notion that the woman gets her way despite the husband's stated authority as

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<sup>3</sup>Personal communication.