

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE AND FEMINIST CONSTRUCTIONS OF SELFHOOD

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Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred" (Girard 1977, 31). René Girard reaches this shocking conclusion by tracing the dynamics of the generation of violence in history, and the ingenious ways in which humanity has learned to funnel violence into ritual sacrifice to avoid apocalypse. His argument pivots upon his understanding of humanity as inherently flawed, as fated to conflict in the struggle to survive. If the sacred mechanism of ritual sacrifice is not deployed, violence takes on a power and personality all its own: "If left unappeased, violence will accumulate until it overflows its confines and floods the surrounding area. The role of sacrifice is to stem this rising tide . . . and redirect violence into 'proper' channels" (10).

Girard's theory about the violent origins of the sacred institutions of ritual sacrifice, law, and myth highlights perhaps the chief paradox of religion: it has been used to promote as much as to oppose violence. Today, as feminists explore how women in particular have been the objects of such violence, they too have turned to Girard to understand this paradox, and yet most have ended up criticizing Girard for falsely universalizing typically Eurocentric and androcentric conceptions of humanity, violence, and religion (Shea, Kirk-Duggan, Nowak 24-6).¹ While they may be right on certain points, it is also possible that the rush of feminist scholars to charge

¹ Nancy Jay has also criticized Girard for androcentrism, in particular because "he still grounds all community and culture on male control of male violence" (130).

Girard with androcentrism reflects their own refusals to confront how the dark face of violence appears in women as well as in men. Rather than evaluating specific feminist criticisms of Girard in this regard, I propose a more global approach—to delineate in greater detail how feminist constructions of selfhood need to be informed by Girard's theory of the violent origins of the sacred in order for feminism to achieve its own goals. In Girard's view, the ritual of sacrifice and the law are generated out of the socio-psychological mechanisms of acquisitive mimesis and scapegoating as the sacred's way of controlling violence. In ways he leaves largely implicit, these mechanisms reflect the devastating cyclical effects of violence upon its victims. Girard stops short of reflecting on the roles gender plays in the cyclical processes of violence, and yet, as my subsequent analyses shall demonstrate, there can be little doubt that women participate in these processes in ways both like and unlike men.

Women have been scapegoated throughout history, but not all women end up as victims of violence and the rituals constructed to appease it. Nor do many women remain simply victims of the tides of violence: many repeat the cycle of victimization and themselves become perpetrators. Moreover, some escape the cycle of violence by a variety of means whose patterns are well worth scrutinizing. My point is that women's modes of participation in the processes through which violence makes and remakes itself are far more complex than has been recognized, and merit our full attention. From the perspective of feminist constructions of selfhood, the question then becomes, how does gender affect one's experience of acquisitive mimesis and scapegoating, victimage and perpetration? To claim that only women are victims and only men—and the women they have co-opted—are perpetrators may be politically correct, but that claim ignores some hard but ultimately helpful truths about what women must do to bring about the changes necessary for revolutionizing our society by transforming its violent ways into peaceful ones.

My plan, then, is to suggest how Girard might be used to advance the theory and praxis of feminism further by delving into the psychological mechanisms underlying acquisitive mimesis and scapegoating. I shall argue that using object relations theory to understand the ways in which violence splits the human psyche complements Girard's conception of acquisitive mimesis and scapegoating to disclose the complete dynamics of the cycle of violence. Such understanding is essential to feminist reconstructions of selfhood, because it makes the defeat of sexism and violence possible by exposing them at their roots.

My project has four steps. First, I discuss the current identity crisis in the feminist movement and in feminist critical theory and method, and suggest that another, heretofore neglected, approach might resolve some dimensions of that crisis. Second, I review Girard's model of the generation of the sacred by violence, to prepare to place it within the broader context of current theories of identity formation. Third, I demonstrate how acquisitive mimesis and scapegoating themselves express the cyclical dynamics of violence and their splitting effects upon human consciousness in the identity formation process. In this, I advance mimetic theory beyond Girard's understanding of the interpersonal and collective dynamics of violence by focusing on its intrapsychic dynamics as they interact with its interpersonal forces. I conclude by suggesting some implications of this approach to Girard's thought for feminist reconstructions of selfhood.

The current identity crisis in feminism

To talk about "feminism" instead of "feminisms" is a dicey thing these days. Even the October 1993 issue of *the Atlantic Monthly* announced in its cover story that feminism was in the midst of an identity crisis as more and more women refuse to use the term to describe themselves—even though these same women are reaping the rewards of the feminist movement over the past three decades. There Wendy Kaminer, citing Karlyn Keene, notes that more than three quarters of American women support efforts to "strengthen and change women's status in society," and yet no more than a third willingly identify themselves as feminists (52). The reasons for this resistance are manifold, and manifest tremendous confusion about what it means to be feminist, both by those who eschew the term and by those who embrace it (Wolf 57-76).

But in spite of the wide divergence in contemporary feminisms, we can say this much about all of them: first, feminists believe that social and historical reality has been organized according to a "gender-sex" system; second, this system informs and structures the symbolic and institutional contexts in which persons work out their destinies; and finally, the system creates or reinforces various modes of violence towards women. From this perspective, the twin tasks of feminist theory are to diagnose these sexist dynamics, and to articulate a vision that combats and overcomes them, one that helps women envision the desired transformations (Benhabib 80-1). In fact, those who would call themselves "feminist" usually believe that it is morally incumbent upon them to engage in the tasks of diagnosing and curing sexist oppression.

The current identity crisis in the feminist movement extends into academia as feminists attempt to develop a critical theory adequate to these tasks. This is evident in its split between two major camps: cultural feminism and poststructuralist feminism. Simply stated, cultural feminists seek to define some "essence of femininity, while poststructuralists deny that there is any such essence and insist instead that all gender differences are social constructions, and that the terms "woman" and "feminine" are meaningless. While poststructuralist feminists accuse cultural feminists of falling prey to an historically naive essentialism, cultural feminists accuse poststructuralists of suffering from the illusion that their female modes of embodiment make no significant difference in the formation of their subjectivity (Alcoff 412-20). Happily feminists themselves are recognizing the shortcomings of these polar options and seeking a way out of the impasse.

One proposed way out is called positionalism. Susan Nowak has argued that thus far feminists have tended to criticize Girard from cultural and poststructuralist perspectives deriving from the false oppositionalism of binary world-views (27). Girard's conception of difference is not constrained by such oppositionalism; rather, it is shaped by "the model of the exception. . . in the process of emerging, the single trait that stands out against a confused mass or still unsorted multiplicity" (Girard 1987, 100; Williams 20-2). From this perspective Nowak—and I with her—support Linda Alcoff's positionalist alternative to cultural feminist and post-structural methodologies to guide feminist appropriations of Girard.

The positionalist option follows poststructuralism's lead by proposing to explore the experience of subjectivity, but refuses to sacrifice the meaning of "woman" and the power of human subjectivity on the post-structuralist altar of infinite difference and historical determinism. A positionalist analysis of subjectivity recognizes gender not by invoking some generalized understanding of female as opposed to male subjectivity, but by developing an understanding of the "complex of habits, dispositions, associations, and perceptions which en-genders one as female" (Alcoff 424). This complex of habits, dispositions, associations, and perceptions is wrought in the forge of women's long experience of the dynamic interaction between the interior of the gendered self with the exterior of the world. The development of consciousness as en-gendered arises out of specific and continual encounters with historical realities in which one's gender is one, very significant and constant component among others. It is of particular importance that positionalism allows for discussion of the

internalized mechanisms by which women learn to undermine themselves, by becoming caught up in the cycle of violence, not just as victims but as perpetrators. It is for a deeper understanding of these internal mechanisms and their way of being perpetuated and surcharged by the collective that we turn to Girard.

Girard on violence and the sacred

Girard's complex account of acquisitive mimesis and scapegoating elaborates the ambivalent value of the disciple imitating the model: such imitation can inform desire in positive ways, but through rivalry it deforms desire and creates conflict. The refusal of either the disciple/rival or the model to take responsibility for the conflict between them gives rise to the scapegoating through which they project the source of their hostilities upon another.

This mutual refusal of responsibility gives rise to a polarization of similarity and difference: that is, in struggling to attain or retain the same things and in refusing to acknowledge that the true source of hostility lies within them themselves, the disciple/rival and the model become more and more like one another, while polarizing themselves over against the scapegoat who is different (or at least thought to be). When this occurs in groups, everyone begins to resemble everyone else. As Girard puts it, mimetic rivalry "undifferentiates" all relationships (1987, 302). As the tensions of rivalry build, the differences and order essential to a stable society threaten to dissolve into a free-for-all of reciprocal violence. At this point the scapegoat mechanism intercedes to save the social order from the imminent onslaught of reciprocal violence in the "sacrificial crisis." In effect, the community seeks to escape the violence which threatens to tear it asunder by denying its own responsibility for its unhappy state, and projecting responsibility for the violence upon a single innocent other against whom the community becomes polarized: all against one (1977, 39-67).

At this point Girard the literary critic turns theologian: the Bible distinguishes itself from all other mythologies by being the record of the slow disclosure of the God beyond all difference who supports all difference, the God who sides with the victim. This revelation climaxes in Jesus of Nazareth whose life and death disclose the scapegoat mechanism for what it is—the condemnation of an innocent victim by those unwilling to face their own violence and guilt. Christianity, at least in principle, puts an end to all scapegoating. By exposing the lie behind scapegoating—by

disclosing that the community and not the scapegoat is guilty—it defuses and disperses the force of the violence behind scapegoating. Then a good mode of mimesis emerges out of the bad: "Following Christ means giving up mimetic desire" (1987, 431) and becoming nonviolent like Christ was.

How does this refusal to engage in rivalry and scapegoating open up a way to overcome the false polarization of gender difference and the violence it spawns? We have noted that Girard's conception of difference depends upon "the model of the exception in the process of emerging, the single trait that stands out against a confused mass of still unsorted multiplicity." Still, in his concept of difference, opposition among differences is not held captive by opposition to the victim. Such oppositionalism is the unfortunate polarity around which societies construct their meanings, but the processes of differentiation do not remain locked into it. In the Girardian vision of a peaceful society, differences are necessary to order and stabilize society, but the dynamic processes of identity and differentiation resist simply polarizing around a victim and instead dynamically order a vast multiplicity of individual similarities and differences. In a certain sense, in the context of nonviolence, all individuals are "exceptions emerging" and so none are. And yet Girard's vision does not spin off into an infinite variety of subjectivities. There remain true similarities and differences—including gender similarities and differences. In a Girardian eschaton, God stands beyond all difference while supporting all difference, and these similarities and differences abound through the processes of separation and individualization without provoking the polarizations which oppress.

A feminist appropriation of Girard's thought must clarify how, through violence or the threat of it, acquisitive mimesis spawns false oppositionalisms in individual subjectivity and society, while peace encourages the playful emergence of a wide variety of ordered similarities and differences among them. But first it must elaborate how women also get caught up in the cycle of violence spawned by acquisitive mimesis and scapegoating. To this we now turn.

Mimesis and scapegoating in the cycle of violence

Girard's account of scapegoating and acquisitive mimesis reflects the cyclical nature of violence: violence reproduces more violence. Our question is, precisely how? Girard suggests that acquisitive mimesis fuels violence until violence takes on a power and reality of its own. When the destructive forces of mimeticism are intensified between individuals and

personified within one of them, it becomes demon possession; when its personification signifies its ultimate source, a source external to the individual, it becomes Satan (1986, 165-97). Perhaps discerning the intrapsychic processes which lead to such communal violence discloses a way to cut off power to these forces, whatever their ontological status. Girard simply enjoins giving up the acquisitiveness which engenders violence, but our locating its dynamics within the context of identity formation will clarify further what will finally end the devastating cycle of violence.

My task, then, is to elaborate the intrapsychic and interpersonal processes that deform healthy desire into the acquisitiveness that engenders violence in order to elaborate the full cycle of violence. By drawing upon contemporary object relations theory, we can discern how the collective dynamics of bad mimesis and scapegoating reflect prior experiences of interpersonal violence and fuel the cycle. Simply put, acquisitive mimesis and scapegoating manifest the personality splits caused by various modes of violence—particularly the violence to which manipulative, narcissistic parents subject their children.

To achieve psychic cohesion and autonomous interdependence in realizing their personal identities, children need benign models who support the child's burgeoning selfhood and modes of affectivity by mirroring their positive qualities and soothing them when they get frustrated. When the parent is not benign and supportive but indifferent or malevolent, children's psyches become fragmented or split and their ability to act with integrity—that is, out of a developing consciousness of all dimensions of their selves—is destroyed (Capps, Kohut, Muslin). There are a number of different ways in which fragmentation and splitting can occur, sometimes even in the same person, and a correlative number of theories about them. Alice Miller, in developing her theory of narcissism, has explored a kind of splitting that will prove especially helpful when we return to our feminist concerns, a splitting of both affect and model into true and false selves.

According to Miller, the child has certain natural narcissistic needs—for attention, understanding, comfort, respect, admiration, *love*. When parents are either unwilling or unable to meet these needs by responding to the unique individuality and needs of their child, the child will learn to split off and repress his own feelings and needs, and to become especially sensitive and responsive to those of his parents instead. He will be incapable of allowing into consciousness the feelings and desires which

his parents censor in more or less subtle ways, and of harnessing them as forces energizing his life and guiding him through its dangers and promise. Moreover, all of the feelings of hurt, anger, abandonment, and hatred which he could not permit himself to express to his neglectful and abusive parents will be scuttled away into his unconscious.

Thus, splitting occurs and acquisitive mimesis emerges. Instead of taking possession of his own thoughts, feelings, and desires, he will take possession of his parents'. Instead of developing an identity out of his own innermost self, he develops a false self to present to his "world," mummy and daddy. This false self will, all too often, be the mirror image of the manipulative parent's demands and expectations of the child. The development of a false self in place of a true one is the little one's ingenious survival mechanism geared to ensure the continuance of the child's love, for to lose that love is to endanger the child's survival.

Unfortunately, persons whose early narcissistic needs were neglected or frustrated will later find themselves unable to respond appropriately to others. Unless they are led to remember and recognize the abuse they experienced from their parents, they will forever demand from the rest of the world (especially from their own children) the nurturing love and support denied them as children, and become thoroughly enraged when it is denied. Moreover, they will *remain* split: they will present their false selves to the world, while keeping their true selves repressed and undeveloped. Under stress, their split off and repressed rage and hatred for the abusive parents will re-emerge, this time projected onto others whom they scapegoat for their own dis-ease.

This scenario of parental neglect and abuse sets up the cyclical character of violence in which, more often than not, the abused become the abusers. The abusers (in this case, the parents) demand that others want what they want, but then feel hostile that others threaten to take away what they have. Unable to admit that the true dynamics of the relationship constitute a threat to them, they will surreptitiously obstruct the child's attempts to gain what they have. Girard himself notes the special twist that the double bind has on children: mummy and daddy, speaking for all the world, enjoin the child to imitate them since they know the secret of life, but then, all too often, the parents' own insecurities take over. They become jealous and wary of the child's accomplishments which threaten their own ascendancy, and in subtle, insidious ways, sabotage their children's efforts (1977, 147-8; 1987, 417). The splitting of the child's

psyche is thus the result of the cumulative, negative effects of the neglect, manipulation, and sabotaging of the child by narcissistic parents.

The splitting process of repression and projection expresses itself in scapegoating. The children who, upon reaching maturity, remain unwilling and unable to recognize that their own repressed and deformed desires constitute the real source of hostilities in the present situation will project the source of conflict onto an "other" upon which they unleash all of their previously repressed venom. Any real or imagined threat to their own security will precipitate the release into consciousness of the repressed introjections of their bad parents and the projection of them upon the supposed source of threat. Simply put, scapegoating occurs as a result of projection. Girard emphasizes that the hatred for the scapegoat is without cause (1986, 103), but our perspective suggests that his claim requires further qualification: the scapegoat himself has not caused the conflict and hatred; the neglectful and abusive parents have.

Such considerations raise the issue of the responsibility of the victims for their victimization and emergent perpetration. Why is one person selected for scapegoating rather than others? It is commonly recognized that trauma victims unconsciously re-enact various aspects of their trauma in more or less disguised ways by attracting violence. Ironically, this re-enactment soothes victims by placing them back in familiar territory without forcing them to face the terror and helplessness experienced during the original trauma or to do things differently. The original memory remains split off and repressed. But to understand such repetition as simply the victim's act of recreating the original trauma ascribes too much control to the victim: many childhood victims have not learned the usual skills of establishing and maintaining boundaries and patterns of self-protective behavior to escape further traumatization in a dangerous world (Hermann 1992,40-1,110-2). And yet to heal from such splitting requires that victims learn to recognize such splits in themselves and to exercise appropriate patterns of self-protective behavior. We shall return to this issue in our conclusions.

When intrafamilial dynamics are reinforced and surcharged by the collective, the scapegoating of groups and individuals representative of groups becomes endemic. The highly competitive and individualistic character of capitalistic society serves as a fertile breeding ground for parental narcissism and the violence that results, because the insecurities that socio-economic forces intensify make it increasingly difficult to focus on and give to the other in the way that both good parenting and healthy

personal relationships require. And so the sacrificial crisis emerges, surcharged by the struggle to survive and thrive. As Girard emphasizes, the crisis repeats itself over and over again: when the pacific, cathartic, and integrating effects of the ritual sacrifice of the scapegoat wane, the old conflicts re-emerge in force, demanding yet another lamb for the slaughter. In other words, violence becomes narcotic: to escape the pain of one's own violence, one seeks more violence—only to need yet more as the cathartic effect of its release wears off.

Thus Girard's conception of the cyclical generation of the sacred out of violence expresses the dynamic psychological aftereffects of neglect, abuse, and violence upon its victims. But locating Girard's views within the context of object relations theory adds another dimension to his view of what cures violence: if violence causes psychic splitting, then healing requires re-integrating the repressed and split off parts of the self back into consciousness. This requires, first of all, taking responsibility for them: recognizing and releasing the introjected and split-off dimensions of the self which remain, in the final analysis, unacceptable, and re-integrating what is acceptable back into the whole. It also requires nurturing the repressed and underdeveloped dimensions of one's unique self back into strength. Once one learns to understand and redirect the compulsion to imitate others, one is able to re-establish contact with one's true self and nurture it into health and wholeness.

Clearly Girard's focus upon what he calls the "interdividual" psychological dynamics of violence in bad mimesis and scapegoating (1987,281), apart from their connection with the intrapsychic dynamics of the entire development process, cuts out part of the picture. Some would say that this focus manifests androcentrism, but such a view holds only if women are themselves incapable of becoming perpetrators of violence—a position which this analysis contradicts since clearly both girls and boys suffer from bad parenting. We turn now to elaborating how this model of the splitting aftereffects of violence effective in mimesis and scapegoating must inform feminist constructions of selfhood if we are to create a peaceful egalitarian society.

Feminist reconstructions of selfhood

Today few people doubt that women have been scapegoated for society's ills throughout history.² If we reflect upon the implications for women of the entire cycle of violence using positionalist methodology, new questions arise: what effects have the false promises of acquisitive mimesis had in distorting women's desires? And what effects has scapegoating had upon the subjectivities—the complex of habits, dispositions, associations, and perceptions—of women? If we take seriously the claim that women are not only victims but perpetrators of violence, then the questions become: how do women actively choose to deform their own desires by wanting what the other wants? How does their inner splitting express itself in manipulating the desires of others or in scapegoating them? We must consider these issues in light of the heightened consciousness of women in the first world: women are increasingly aware of their vulnerability to the scapegoat process, and of the distortions of their desires and identities by both the prevailing ideologies about the meaning of their "femininity" and their own efforts to be accepted. To answer these questions fully is far beyond our purview here, but we can plot some paths to their resolution.

The scapegoat is, by definition, a fundamentally ambiguous reality: it is both bad because it supposedly causes the trouble, and good because it supposedly fixes it. Notably, this dynamic reflects the most severe splitting that occurs in response to egregious violence. The child needs a good parent to survive, both psychically and physically. Consequently, when the parent is not good but fundamentally bad, the child will split to avoid facing the truth. She will divide the parent into good and bad, swallow the bad whole and project the good into its superego and the world until stressful circumstances precipitate the reverse: the good child/adult confronts the terror of its bad objects by releasing them into the world, populating the latter with demons, while she maintains the illusion of its own (now dubious) total innocence (Fairbairn). Feminist literature abounds

² A few frightening statistics are cited by Naomi Wolf: "Domestic violence is the number one reason women seek medical attention; one third of all female murder victims are killed by husbands or boyfriends; up to 45 percent of abused women are battered during pregnancy; 60 percent of battered women are beaten when pregnant; half of all homeless women and children are fleeing domestic violence. Women are victims of violent intimates at a rate three times that of men" (141). Susan Faludi cites government statistics that, between 1976 and 1984, homicides declined but sex-related murders rose 160 percent (xvii). While such statistics do not suffice to prove the existence of scapegoating, they do suggest that far more than chance is at work here.

with analyses of how women, conceived as "other," have been both idealized and devalued: she has been idealized as the protector of morality, religion, and the home in Western society; she has been devalued as less than fully human, as seductress and whore.

These idealizations and devaluations have permeated women's self-images and understandings, and distorted their desires in subtle and insidious ways. They have become effective through the manipulations of acquisitive mimesis in gender-specific patterns of parenting, as well as through the seductive promotion of certain "appropriate" modes of behavior for women by prevailing social, political, and religious ideologies. Accompanying the various pressures for appropriate appearance and behavior is the underlying threat that if a woman is different, if she refuses to conform to prevailing expectations, she renders herself even more vulnerable to being scapegoated than her given status as "other" in a male-dominated society already makes her.

The promised rewards for conforming to expectations are, however, reputed to be great. Many middle- and upper-class women experience how the system can protect them if they play out their "proper" roles within it—provided they are willing to pay the price that conformity and denial of significant dimensions of their true selves exact. Many learn that if they accept their given roles, they will be allowed at least opportunities to seek equality of social, political, and economic power with men. Still others learn that even conformity is no final protection, for patriarchy is constructed primarily to protect men—as older women cast off for younger wives, as younger women struggling to support children without child support, and as women hitting glass ceilings in their professions soon learn. Even in America where equal opportunity is touted for all, women are learning first-hand how elusive actual equality is, how the scandalous forces of resistance kick in to undermine them just when success seems within their grasp (Faludi).

Women have been very carefully, sometimes cruelly, taught what it means to be a woman by a variety of ideologies calculated to keep them weak and, above all, under control. Feminists surely cannot be credited with having discovered the value of wholeness, and yet their struggle to become whole has distinguished the feminist movement from the beginning. Women have been led—some would say forced—to develop false selves, to chase after distorted idealizations of womanhood in order to survive in a male-dominated world. Feminists have explored countless ways in which such deformations have cheated women out of the healthy

self-realizations only rendered possible by being able to act out of a reflective consciousness of all dimensions of their true selves with all of the energy which comes from such integration. How has the process of victimization and scapegoating affected women's perspectives and practices, particularly in various forms of psychic splitting?

The "essentialists" are right in one sense: determining how women's desires have been distorted through the manipulations of patriarchal ideology would surely be easier if we knew what difference being engendered female might make in the first place. Many portray women as more relational in their ways of thinking and being (Chodorow, Gilligan, Noddings),³ but our analysis suggests that even this trait manifests prior distortions. Consider psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller's classic attempt to reconceive women's character traits as strengths, not weaknesses. Women, she argues, are constantly encouraged by Western child-rearing practices and its ideology of womanhood "to 'form' themselves into the person who will be of benefit to others. They thus see their own actions only as these actions are mediated through others" (72). But in light of the above analysis, she is effectively arguing that society sets women up to become narcissistic. Miller tries to address this issue by arguing that women's psychic structure is different from men's, so that, in effect, such a category declares deviant what is really natural to women. But clearly this argument fails at its most crucial juncture, since women themselves proclaim that they suffer enormously from such conditioning and this suffering runs far deeper than society's refusal to accept women's ways as natural and good.

Narcissism is a clinical term for a complex psychological dynamic that can express itself in a range of splitting behaviors, from a basic detachment and inability to connect with their true selves or with others, to the capacity for enraged attacks upon others. It is rarely, if ever, benign, since it is the result of repressing consciousness of evil in the other and results in repressing consciousness of evil in the self and then enacting it upon others. Once I believed a common generalization of the difference between men

³ Many have criticized Chodorow's and Gilligan's methodologies for their ethnocentricity (Kliman). Since, in accordance with our positionalist methodology, we acknowledge our ethnocentrism by seeking to analyze the habits, associations, perspectives and practices of not all women, but first-world, Western women, this criticism is moot. The helpfulness of universalizing a given model of women's experience should, however, still be explored by extending it to other contexts and determining how it might function to illuminate and positively transform them.

and women: women tend to express their inner splitting in more passive, subtle, and less openly violent ways than men, and this has encouraged us to overlook them. But as reports of extreme violence perpetrated by women increasingly hit the media, I now wonder whether the violence of women has been too often ignored, repressed and, as a result, underreported.

Unfortunately, virtually no psychologist, philosopher or theologian has explored the ways in which women themselves become perpetrators of evil.⁴ Feminist theologians have been careful not to identify patriarchy with men, recognizing that even women can participate in its presuppositions and modes of violence while even men can refuse to do so. And yet many implicitly suggest that women are especially adept at the empathic modes of mutuality essential to healthy relationships, while men are endemically resistant to them. In this way, patriarchy remains the bad guy—or in the context of this essay, the bad parent. The work of the moral philosopher Nel Noddings is a classic example. The title of her recent book *Women and Evil* suggests that she might at some point discuss the distinctive ways in which women commit evil. Instead, she develops a phenomenology of evil from the perspective of women's experiences of relationality (evil is whatever promotes pain, separation or helplessness), and in doing so, commits the crime she most bemoans in men—she scapegoats the other. Although Noddings acknowledges that men can be as caring as women (96) and that both men and women possess tendencies to commit evil (227), the rest of her analyses overwhelm these concessions. She discusses scapegoating only in terms of men's scapegoating women (36, 37, 38, 43, 63, 223, 224), agrees with Chodorow that "women do not construct distorted relations" except insofar as they are trying to establish "positive relations to men" (202-4), and analyzes the worst instances of moral evil—war, terrorism, and torture—as the activities of men (179-81, 202).

One exception to this blindness to moral evil in women is Valerie Saiving's seminal argument about feminine modes of sin (37-9), but even she portrays women as relatively passive and weak, not malicious or violent. Too often women remain embarrassed by exceptions, like Jean

⁴ Ben Bursten has developed a model of four typical types of narcissism: craving, paranoid, manipulative and phallic. Although he suggests that both genders can become any form of narcissist, his own research was conducted among men and stops there. Still, careful reading of his analyses suggests that some forms are more common to one gender than others or achieve variant expressions in the different genders (Capps 25-7). Still, no research has been done to how narcissism might express itself in gender-specific ways.

Harris, Lorena Bobbitt, or lesbian couples who batter one another, whom they are anxious to portray simply as victims of violent men. Indeed, these apparent exceptions may be seen as victims in a certain sense, but they are also responsible adults who chose to remain in self-destructive relationships until they felt justified in responding with violence. But how can anyone justify their original choices? What drew them into those relationships and kept them there long past the points when their self-destructiveness became evident? We should not be too quick to accept these women's excuses, but should also call them to take responsibility for their actions if we wish to curb such violent scenarios and effect true structural change.⁵

To deny violence in women by seeing them simply as its victims is to see them as powerless. This is, in effect, the heart of the victim mentality, for the victim's world is split between a few safe places and the evil forces lurking everywhere else, forces against whom she is virtually powerless without special protection. Some women, realizing that they were once victims, continue to proclaim their victimization without recognizing or admitting their complicity in remaining in that role. They remain locked in a reactive posture, angry and unreconciled to the patriarchal principalities and powers whom they blame for all of their woes.⁶

In her recent book *Fire with Fire*, Naomi Wolf ruthlessly exposes the self-defeating, splitting, and scapegoating mentality of the victim feminists in the feminist movement, and contrasts them with those of her alternative model, power feminism. Victim feminists develop their identity around their victim status and deny their own power. They tend to project aggression, competitiveness, and violence onto men as a group, while they remain blind to those qualities in themselves. Correlatively, they insist with self-righteous fury on the innate purity and superiority of women. They also encourage a group-mentality which suspects any exercise of leadership as an egotistical attempt at self-aggrandizement, while they promote anonymity among themselves.

⁵ Perhaps only those child/adults who were so brutalized in their youth that virtually no freedom or cohesive sense of selfhood remains can properly claim the status of victim. Chief among these are survivors of such egregious violence that they have developed multiple personalities. The consciousnesses of many persons with multiple personalities shift from one alter to the next so uncontrollably that they cannot remember, much less assume responsibility, for those selves (Glass; Hermann 1992, 125-9).

⁶ For an example of a similar view, see Pasewark.

... the current split, fashionable in parts of the progressive community, into male-evil-sexually-exploitative-rational-linear-dominating-combative-tyrannical on one hand, and female-natural-nurturing-consensus-building-healing-intuitive-aggressionless-egoless-spirit of the glades on the other hand, belies the evidence of history and contemporary statistical reality. (148)⁷

In contrast, women with the mentality of power feminism take care to assess the forces arrayed against women, and work hard to discover and express their own voices and powers in the ways most effective at combating those forces. They identify sexism and not men per se as the enemy, and work collaboratively with men to change the system (Wolf 135-41). Power feminists are willing to face and take responsibility for ambiguities in their exercise of power.

Neither Wolf nor I wish to deny that women are engendered within symbolic and institutional structures organized according to a gender-sex system that gives men advantages in ways which cause women immeasurable suffering. Their outrage and defiance at the system is warranted. But this is not to say that men do not also suffer from that system or from women's scapegoating them, or that women are thereby excused for their abuses of power.

Today, many Western women, particularly in the middle and upper classes, struggle to determine the limits of their responsibility and to

⁷ This tendency to split and polarize recurs among feminists even outside of academia. Consider the recent polarization between Camilla Paglia and Gloria Steinern. I agree with Paglia when she accuses women of playing the victim, for instance, in many cases of date rape when the woman foolishly enters a highly risky situation and then fails to take responsibility for setting up a situation potentially dangerous to herself. Still, Paglia herself polarizes gender differences: she claims to be feminist simply because she idealizes women's differences and the special power they putatively give women, but fails to recognize that the resulting distortions in representing women render them even more vulnerable to the various sorts of devaluations, even violence, that women have suffered throughout history. This polarization in feminist camps is also manifest in the recent debates regarding pornography. For instance, Nadine Strossen castigates Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin for insisting that anything remotely pornographic be censored while herself arguing for completely unrestrained freedom of speech. Surely there must be some mediating position which is more than a compromise, one which stands on principles drawn from what promotes the wholeness and humanity of both men and women, by which to adjudicate the issues surrounding pornography.

resolve the guilt they feel over their failures to be fully responsible. On the one hand, they understand better than ever before how not just their bodies but their psyches have been violated, how they too have succumbed to the seductions of acquisitive mimesis and allowed their desires to be deformed by patriarchal powers and principalities. They feel guilty, ashamed, and enraged that they have participated in their own betrayals. But first-world women today also understand that they, perhaps more than any group of women before, have had choices and the freedom to make them. They realize that to continue to blame their state on patriarchy without taking responsibility for what they might make of themselves today is to fall prey to the self-defeating victim mentality. The absorption of some feminists in a victim mentality has indeed led many women to dissociate themselves from the feminist movement. The dissenters perceive feminists to be too absorbed in determining how they have been victimized to recognize that they have the power to be themselves, too filled with rage to be reconciled, too filled with hate to know love.

The focus of much feminist analysis upon defining women's beings as engendered has tended to emphasize the ways in which they have been socially determined—deformed by the effects of acquisitive mimesis and scapegoating, and served up as ritual sacrifices to patriarchal society. Too often it has overlooked the ways in which women have transcended—and retain the power to transcend—these determinations and deformations. Hegel was right: to know a limit is already to transcend it, and women today are transcending the constraints which patriarchy has placed upon them with increasing effectiveness. Many women achieve this transcendence better than their own "victims of oppression" rhetoric suggests. The ability to do so will be strengthened as we incorporate the dynamics of such free, self-transcending subjectivity into feminist constructions of selfhood.

In conclusion, I would like to elaborate what we must do to realize ourselves as subjects of responsibility, both on the level of personal praxis and on the level of intellectual and academic inquiry.

First, women must refuse to remain split. Instead, they must reintegrate back into their self-images, -understandings, and -realizations that which they have repressed and projected upon the other. This requires that they stop seeing themselves as totally innocent victims entitled to hate and seek revenge for the various modes of violence they have suffered, and accept their complicity in their oppression. Only then will they be able to change not only themselves but the social institutions in which they live. At the November 1993 meeting of the Colloquium on Violence & Religion,

Martha Reineke argued that gender is socially constructed in such a way that women are forced to carry the burden of men's inner lack of being. We might add that men are sometimes forced to carry the burden of women's inner lack of being as well: like men, women not only split off the evil in themselves and project it onto the other; they also avoid responsibility for expressing the good and powerful in themselves by projecting it onto the other, and rely on men to exercise these powers on their behalf. But only by recognizing and expressing ourselves as powerful can we effect the changes we desire.

I have argued that the cognitive and psychic structures and dynamics of women are the same as men, the way they split and heal is basically the same as men. But because their modes of embodiment and their positions in the social, economic, and political spheres are different, the content of their cognitive analyses and psychic splits, as well as their ways of acting out those splits might be different. We need to study the ways in which women's personal experiences of violence within their specific positions in space and time, and class and race affect their experiences and exercise of their innate cognitive capacities, desires, and emotions, as well as their modes of perpetrating violence. We really know far too little about this, and yet the more we know, the better able we will be to stop the cycle by which violence creates more violence.⁸

Needless to say, we cannot stop with confronting the darker side of women in their distinctive ways of splitting and seeking release through violence. To fulfill our feminist mandate to end violence against women we must also seek to understand how women have exercised their innate

⁸ Current statistics and clinical evidence suggest, for instance, that men tend to try to resolve their inner conflicts by force, using hard-core weapons of violence against others. In a society in which one of the worst charges against a woman is that she does not care, women are far more likely to vent their anger and hatred by turning their destructive forces upon themselves than upon others, or they do hateful things while claiming they are good, particularly to those most dependent upon them. Men murder more often and end up in the criminal justice system. Women tend to become withdrawn, depressed, and self-destructive, and end up in psychotherapy and psychiatric wards (Jack). These differences are probably influenced by women's tendency to be physically weaker than men, but I also suspect that women's tendency to be isolated in the private sphere of the home makes her acts of violence against those weaker than herself—indeed, even against those stronger than herself—more hidden. In fact, although we tend to think of spousal abuse in terms of men beating women, we must acknowledge that women also beat men, while men are often more ashamed than women and so report it less.

abilities and creativity to free themselves to be themselves, and we must develop engendered models of emergent selfhood on that basis. These models will conceptualize how women can exercise their innate capacities for thinking, feeling, and acting in ways that promote wholeness in themselves and others. These models will include, but not be limited to, the capacities women share with men. These models must explicate the processes by which women move from being psychically and cognitively split by various modes of violence, through the struggle to heal those splits, to self-realizing persons experiencing the serenity and strength acting with integrity alone yields. Knowing the dynamics of the processes of moving from victim to survivor to victor over violence will help other women find their ways by offering them both an understanding of how it has been done and a vision of wholeness to inspire them.

This project is not just an empirical enterprise, for more than descriptive accounts of the nature and development of selfhood are needed. It is a metaphysical one, for it demands that we abstract out of women's concrete experiences of subjugation to formulate the recurrent patterns and dynamics of consciousness and behavior which mark the move to wholeness and integrated selfhood.⁹ While much good work on the concrete experiences of survivors of violence has been done by women (e.g. Hermann, Blume), far too little theorizing has followed. This is largely because women fear distorting experience by moving away from it into abstractions and falsely universalizing their own context-dependent perspectives in ways oppressive to others.¹⁰ And yet it is precisely this

⁹ I use the term "metaphysical" in the neo-Kantian sense of exploring the conditions of the possibility of our knowing and being at all, a sense which has been clarified by such transcendental Thomists as Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan.

¹⁰ A superb example of what feminist theorists need to do and how they too often stop short of completing the task is the recent study *Women's Ways of Knowing. The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule. These four psychologists developed models of five distinct epistemological positions that women hold but, remaining true to their social-scientific methodology, refrained from drawing any normative conclusions or developing a model of women's cognitional processes. Yet, if one attends to their descriptions of the lives of the women in each of the five positions and the dynamics of moving from one position to the next, it becomes obvious that some of the women moved from positions of near total victimization as silent knowers—in which their own ability to know remained almost entirely repressed and undeveloped in response to their violent social environments—through levels of increasing integration and autonomous interdependence as they shifted from one stage to the next. That is, they slowly learned to appropriate their cognitive capacities for themselves, rather than splitting off these powers

theorizing that women need to do as one moment in the long-term process of liberating themselves from their internalized self-defeating behavior. We must discover and envision constructive, whole-making alternatives, and muster the courage and perseverance to realize them.

These models of emergent selfhood must recognize that demons populate not the world out-there, so much as the worlds in-here. To exorcize our worlds of the demonic powers of sexist oppression, we must first exorcize ourselves: we must refuse to remain accomplices in our own oppression by participating in the tides of mimeticism and scapegoating; we must refuse to be seduced and scandalized by false promises of greater life through others. We must persist in finding and expressing our own true selves. Only then shall we free ourselves of Satan's power over us and become whole again.

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and allowing men to carry them instead. In fact, the fifth or "constructivist" stage serves as a vivid model of what happens when modes of cognitive splitting are virtually eliminated, and the knower has integrated the many dimensions of herself and her experience into a differentiated whole.

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