Work In Progress

Connections, Disconnections and Violations

Jean Baker Miller, M.D.

Work in Progress

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About the Author

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Abstract

After reviewing formulations from prior Stone Center Working Papers about the characteristics of growth-fostering relationships, this paper begins a description of nongrowth-promoting relationships, that is, relationships which lead to a sense of disconnection from other people. It traces the process by which these experiences of disconnection lead (in compli- cated ways) to what is labeled psychopathology. Experiences of disconnection inevitably do violence to the individual's experience. Direct sexual and physical violence represent the extreme forms of the violations which occur in all unequal relationships.

Over the last two decades women have created an extensive body of literature in psychology as well as other fields. However, a new, fully developed theory of women's psychological development does not yet exist. Several of these writers have worked on modifications of existing theories such as Freudian, Jungian, object relations and others. Other writers have proposed that the close study of women's experience leads to the creation of new values, categories and terms; and that these necessitate assumptions different from those which underlie prior theories, e.g., Belenky et al. (l986); Gilligan (l982, l987); Jordan (l986, l987); Miller (l976, l986) and Surrey (l984, l987). This paper is part of the attempt to carry on the latter kind of work.

I'll begin by reviewing some of the Stone Center's work on the centrality of the sense of connection in women's lives, and then try to suggest how psychological troubles — or what are called "pathologies" — follow from the disconnections and violations that women experience.

Connections

Several groups of workers have suggested that if we study women's experience closely without attempting to force our observations into prior categories, we find that an inner sense of connection to others is a central organizing feature of women's development (Gilligan, 1986; Jordan, 1986, 1987; Miller, 1976,1986 and Surrey, 1984, 1987). As I would summarize it briefly: women's sense of self and of worth is grounded in the ability to make and maintain relationships (Miller, l976). Most women find a sense of value and effectiveness if they experience all of their life activity as arising from a context of relation-ships and as leading on into a greater sense of connection rather than a sense of separation.

Once we take this observation seriously, however, we have to re-examine what we mean by relationships. What kinds of relationships exist or should exist? Again, if we stay close to women's lives, and if we examine the kinds of connections in which women have been functioning, we find that a large part of women's life activity can be described as "the active participation in the development of other people" (Miller, l976), certainly that of children but also adults. This activity has been characterized by such terms as "nurturing", "mothering", "satisfying others' needs" and the like. However, these words do not describe adequately the complex activity involved, that is: engaging with another person(s) in such a manner that you foster the psychological development of both (all) people involved in the interaction.

Another way to describe this activity is to say that traditionally, women have used their powers to increase the powers of others, i.e. to increase the other person(s)' resources and strengths in many dimensions — emotional, intellectual, etc. (Miller, l982).

Almost all theorists agree that people develop by interaction with other people. No one develops in isolation. In these interactions, if women or men are not acting in ways that foster others' development, they inevitably are doing the reverse, that is, participating in interactions in ways that do not further other people's development.

To talk of participating in psychological development is to talk about a form of activity which is essential for all societies. In general, this is essential activity which has been assigned to women. Thus, women have particular knowledge about it (but this knowledge has not entered into prior theories). From this knowledge, I believe we can begin to propose a form of development *within relationships* in which everyone interacts in ways that foster the psychological development of all of the people involved, that is, mutual psychological development.

Historically, our central formative relationships have not been founded on the basis of mutuality. This condition has led to many complicated ramifications. For example, growth-fostering interactions have been going mainly in one direction; women have been fostering other people's growth. This is a societal situation, but our major theories reflect the societal situation. Criteria for maturity, for example, have not included characteristics such as the ability to engage in interactions which foster the development of all the people involved; nor do descriptions of development delineate how children would "learn" to engage in

such relationships. Instead, pychological theories, in general, have focused on a line of development which is cast in terms of a series of psychological separations from others.

Thus, as we have not had a societal situation based on the search for full mutuality, we have not had theories about the kind of relationships which foster mutual development through childhood and adult life. Workers at the Stone Center have begun to sketch the outlines of such an approach. Surrey has proposed three underlying processes: mutual engagement (I would prefer the word "interest" or "attention"), mutual empathy and mutual empowerment (l984). Jordan has described some of the characteristics of mutuality as relationships develop over time (l986) and suggested the redefinition of knowledge of self (and other) and of desire which would follow from an "empathic-love" mode of development as contrasted with a "power-control" mode (l987). Kaplan has suggested that the basic human motive can be better understood as the motive to *participate* in connections, rather than the need for "gratification" by others, a premise basic to prevalent developmental theories (l984). [Cf. Fairbairn stated that the human being is basically "object-seeking" (l946), but he meant that the human being was seeking to obtain gratification from the "object".]

Mutual growth

As Surrey suggests, then, the goal of development is the increasing ability to build and enlarge mutually enhancing relationships (l987). These are relationships which foster the continuing development of all the people involved in them. As the quality of the relationships grow, the individual grows. Each individual can develop a larger and more complex repertoire and can contribute to, and grow from, more complex relationships. The goal is not an increasing sense of separation but of enhanced connection — and, in turn, this connection leads to more growth.

But exactly how do connections lead to psychological development? And what do mutual engagement (or attention), mutual empathy and mutual empowerment look like? I don't think that anyone has laid out a fully developed description yet, but we can begin with some proposals. To talk of these complicated topics briefly, I'll use an example between two adults. [This example is taken from an earlier working paper (Miller, l986).] I think the same basic features apply to children's development, but an example from children's development would require

greater length because of the different levels of ability at each age in childhood.

A woman, Ann, has just heard from her friend and co-worker, Emily, that Emily may have a serious disease. Ann is telling her friend Beth about this. (Let us say that Beth knows Emily but is not as close a friend as Ann.) Tears are in Ann's eyes and her voice sounds sad and fearful. Beth says, "Oh, how sad." Beth's voice and expression are sad, and there is also some fear in them.

Ann then says, "Yes, sad, but I have this other awful feeling — like fear. Like I'm scared — as if it could happen to me." Beth replies, "Me, too. It is frightening to hear this. Maybe we all feel as if it's happening to us."

This exchange goes on, and Ann eventually says that she sees that she had been feeling that "it wasn't right to feel afraid". She had felt it would be "selfish" to be afraid, as if "feeling the fear meant that she was feeling and thinking about herself when she should be thinking only about Emily when Emily is facing such a bad prospect." Both Ann and Beth talk further about their sadness and other feelings. As they continue, they both feel more in touch with what they suspect Emily may be feeling, and they come to feel more able to be with Emily in those feelings; although, of course, they don't know exactly what Emily is feeling. Ann then also feels much more of a desire to be with Emily at this time.

To suggest a contrast, we can look at a different kind of interaction. Suppose Ann began this conversation with a different friend or a family member, or with her husband,Tom. After Ann's first statement with tears in her eyes and a sad and fearful voice, Tom says, "Well, it's a terrible thing. In the end, she'll have to do the best she can. She should get a second opinion. I hear the Sloan Clinic is very good on these kinds of cases. Have you called her back yet? Did you call my sister Helen about the birthday party she's trying to arrange for my mother next week? We should really do something about that if it's going to come off." As the conversation continues, Tom's greatest emotional interest seems to center on the birthday party, or what Ann should do about the party.

Ann goes on with the conversation about the party because that seems to be Tom's emotional focus, and she tends to think automatically that he's right about what's important. She does this because she is trying to stay in connection with him, to be in relationship with him. However, Ann now feels worse than she did before this interchange began. She dreads phoning Emily.

The first example may sound ordinary — as if many of you do it all the time. I think it's true that many people do it all the time, especially women. But I do not think it is ordinary in terms of its value. And the valuable actions Ann and Beth demonstrate are not ordinarily recognized. I believe they contain the key features which make for psychological development in children and adults.

First, in regard to the process of psychological growth: I think it's apparent that the key process is that both participants are responding empathically to each other. This is mutual empathy. Because they feel this empathic response, each is able to "take off" from this empathic base and add further feelings and thoughts as they arise for her. These additions create the interaction, the flow. This mutually empathic interplay is created by both and builds new psychological experience — growth — for both.

The results of this process are that both people develop psychologically in at least five important ways. Both women feel an initial connection with the other which gives them both a sense of increased "zest" or energy. Both are active right in the relationship itself, and they feel more empowered to act beyond the relationship, in this example, with Emily. Ann and Beth both have more knowledge of self and other, more clarity about their thoughts and feelings; and these feelings and thoughts now further provide a stronger and more knowledgeable feeling-thinking base which motivates actions. Because these processes have occurred, both feel a greater sense of worth. Both desire more connection as a result. (The earlier paper provides more explanation about why and how both Ann and Beth experience these results, but I hope this summary conveys some of the general idea.) In this interaction, it is not a question of giving and getting, nor helping and being helped, nor being depended upon and dependent. It is an interaction in which both people enlarge and therefore want more of the same — and want the connections that make for such enlargement.

I want to emphasize the point that each person has what I'll call for the moment "feeling-thoughts", i.e. thoughts and their attendant feel-ings. Ann's feeling-thoughts are not identical to Beth's, but she can be empathic to Beth's feeling-thoughts. She is also able to receive Beth's feeling-thoughts and allow them to be different. Indeed, she welcomes and enjoys the different feeling-thoughts. She "feels" them as the necess- ary new factors which make both her and the relationship more than they were a few moments ago.

Disconnections

Now, I'd like to turn to disconnections — or the sense of disconnection which occurs when a child or adult is prevented from participating in mutually responsive and mutually enhancing relationships. Clearly, these disconnections occur when the child or adult is grossly abused or attacked, when the surrounding relational context is unresponsive to the child or adult's expression of her experience, or, as is usually the case, when both of these occur simultaneously. Many minor disconnections occur all through childhood and adult life. They do not lead to serious trouble, especially if there are also many enlarging connections. Children and adults can withstand and even grow from these small disconnections.

I think the key factors making for growth when there is a threat of disconnection are the possibility that the child or adult can take action within the relationship to represent her experience, and that the others in the relationship can respond to it in a way that leads back toward a reconnection.

To take a frequent kind of example, suppose a one-year-old child is playing along and then for some reason feels distressed and starts to scream and cry. For their own reasons, her parents can't deal with this well at the moment, and they respond with angry rebukes. Let us say that the child now feels startled and afraid, in addition to the distress she felt in the first place. She may also feel angry in reaction to her parents' anger and their lack of responsiveness to her. Most important, she now experiences a much more complex mixture of feelings, and she probably feels confused.

However, if the child can turn to her parents and then experience some acceptance of her distress and some responsiveness, she will be able to play a part in turning the interaction around. So will the parents.

The results of this interplay are many. One is that the child will "learn" that she can experience these difficult feelings with others. They are then less frightening because they do not have to be experienced alone, walled off from others (where they take on more terrifying connotations). Most important, as emphasized above, the child feels an increase in her ability to have an effect on the relationship between herself and others, that is, to build empowering connections. So, of course, do the parents. Several infant researchers recently documented this ability — even in very young infants, for example, Stern (l985), Gianino and Tronick (l985).

Both the child and the parents have learned a little more about their feelings. Obviously, this clarification occurs at a different level for the child than for the adults. Let us say without spelling out the details, that all have learned a little more about how the relationship can encompass fear, anger and other feelings; and how they can all move the relationship along in the feelings to a better sense of connection.

Serious Disconnection

To suggest a more serious disconnection we can consider the example of Ann and Tom. Again, we could use a similar sort of example with a child at each age in life. The story of Ann and Tom can serve, too, to suggest that the processes which lead to troubles are not always so noticeable, especially if seen from only one point of view. They can occur in multiple, daily disconnections extending over the course of life, as well as in more gross and obviously destructive situations.

Looking at Ann and Tom's interaction, I think we can see that these kinds of disconnections can lead to serious consequences if they continue over time without a change in direction. We can talk about the consequences in two dimensions: first, the immediate effects of this kind of interaction, and second, what an individual does about it over the course of time — and why.

In the immediate interaction, in addition to the initial fear and sadness Ann felt, she may now feel some shock and additional fear at Tom's response. She also feels angry now. She feels out of touch with Tom — or out of connection — and confused about how to get back into it.

For the sake of example, let us say we know that this topic aroused sadness and fear in Tom, but he has not learned much about how to handle these feelings within connections with others. He becomes angry if someone threatens to evoke these feelings in him. (We could add that there are several possible reasons for Tom's responses. For example, he mentions his mother. She is getting older, is ill and he may be concerned about her. Another possibility is that he becomes worried about Ann when he hears of an illness in Ann's friend.) While Ann may sense Tom's feelings, she is not clear about them in the face of what Tom is expressing — and what he's not expressing.

Here again, Ann (and any child or adult) begins to experience not only bad feelings, but a confusion of feelings. Ann probably is picking up all of Tom's mixture of feelings, including his sadness and fear. But Tom is not saying he's sad or afraid. By contrast with the example of Ann and Beth, Tom and Ann's feelings and thoughts can't be "between them" or

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"with both of them"; so it feels to Ann as if they are all hers.

Like the child in the first example, she now also feels angry. First, she "picks up" Tom's anger. In addition, she becomes angry in response to Tom's actions. This anger becomes tied to and confused with the other feelings.

Ann is now in greater distress — a child would be in even more. Just because she feels in more distress, her basic reaction would be to want even more to try to connect with the other person(s). Suppose, again for the sake of example, she tries to express some of this to Tom. In response he becomes only more angry and attacking, and then withdrawn — or withdrawn without overt anger and attack. Now Ann's mixture of confusing feelings and their intensity increase vastly. And a child's would escalate even more.

To emphasize the point, Ann experiences a compounded reversal of the sense that her "feeling-thoughts" help to create a better connection — which would in turn lead to more action and empowerment. Instead she may begin to believe that something is deeply wrong with her important feelings if they lead to such troubles. And if her important feelings are so wrong and bad, she must be wrong and bad. For Ann, as for all of us, her feeling-thoughts are her. As Janet Surrey has commented, Ann feels, "If there seems to be such a problem, I must be the problem". Ann feels the problem must be in her.

To add to Ann's tendency to believe that the problem is in her, she now feels angry but is confused about the anger. This kind of confused anger will augment her feeling that she is wrong and bad. Thus, Ann's initial feelings of sadness and fear mix with her confusion about anger. All of these feelings confuse Ann's sense of what happens when you try to connect with others about important feelings.

To summarize Ann's immediate reactions to disconnection, they are the opposites — not simple opposites, but intensely confounded opposites — of the "good things" that flow from growth-enhancing, mutually empowering connections. That is, Ann feels less able to take action, but, more than that, she feels that her actions, based in her experience, lead to great trouble. (Note — I use the word "action" here to mean expression of experience with a relationship, that is, action within the relationship.) She has less clarity, i.e., knowledge about herself and the other person(s). She feels a diminished sense of her own worth. She experiences a decrease in "zest" or energy and a diminution of her sense of well-being. Most important, she feels that her actions, feelings and thoughts lead to less connection with the important other person(s) — and not only less connection, but a confusing sense of disconnection and isolation.

I want to call attention to this kind of disconnection. I believe that the most terrifying and destructive feeling that a person can experience is isolation. This is not the same as "being alone" in the more straightforward sense. It is feeling locked out of the possibility of human connection. This feeling of desperate loneliness is usually accom-panied by the feeling that you, yourself, are the reason for the exclusion. It is because of who you are. And you feel helpless, powerless, unable to act to change the situation. People will do almost anything to escape this combination of condemned isolation and powerlessness.

Long-term consequences

As would anyone in the face of the terror of condemned isolation and powerlessness, Ann wishes even more to make connection with the other people in her life because she now experiences more threatening and complex "feeling-thoughts". She longs for connections with others to try to deal with these feeling-thoughts. This leads to the second major area of consequences.

Before going on to that, I want to make a distinction between certain kinds of feelings. If we continue to talk about Ann, for example, we can say that Ann now has an increasingly difficult and confused mixture of feeling-thoughts. For the sake of illustration, I've said that her initial feelings were sadness and fear. While these are difficult feelings, they represent an inevitable response to what's really happening. They can be borne and borne best in connection with other people who can engage with them. Now, however, the original sadness and fear are — let us say, again for the sake of example — combined with hurt, humiliation, disappointment, anger and greatly increased fear. These are all mixed up with her feeling that all of this is bad, and she is bad to have all of these feeling-thoughts. Thus, she has moved from feeling sad and fearful to a much more complex, confused mixture of feelings. This is different. It is also a mixture of feelings she need never have had in the first place. These feelings are not necessary (or appropriate) responses to the original event. They are responses to the forces operating within the relational context in which the event occurred.

Added to this picture is a most important point that I haven't developed here. For the sake of simplicity, I've used an event occurring outside of Ann and Tom's relationship, i.e., Emily's illness, as an example in the development of the dynamics of

disconnection. However, in the development of serious troubles, it is usually the actions of family members, themselves, that lead to problems. Not friends of the family, but members of the family evoke the sadness, fear or other feelings in the first place. And these same family members will have the most trouble allowing the child or adult to express her reactions to their actions. The adults who bring about serious disconnections and violations of the child (or other adults) also will have the most trouble engaging in growth enhancing in-teractions about the results of their own behavior. All of us do this to varying degrees. But whenever one person or group has more power than the other(s) in a relationship, the danger of harm increases; the less powerful person or group has much greater difficulty in altering the course of the interaction.

To return to the main thread, when children and adults feel the threat of condemned isolation, they try to make connection with those closest to them in any way that appears possible. This attempt leads to the next set of consequences, consequences which often proceed over a long time, for many people throughout their development. That is, if a person cannot find ways to change the relationships available to her, she will take the only possible step: attempt to change the person possible to change, herself. Specifically, she tries to alter her internal image of herself and others, her internal image of the nature of the connections between herself and others. She must attempt this alteration alone, since the available relationships preclude doing it in interaction with others. In essence, the child or adult tries to construct some kind of an image of herself and others, and of the relationships between herself and others, which will allow her entry into relationships with the people available. This is a complicated process. In order to twist herself into a person acceptable in "unaccepting" relationships, she will have to move away from and redefine a large part of her experience — those parts of experience that she has determined are not allowed.

(An important addition is that the girl often attempts not only to be allowed into relationships, but often feels that she can be allowed in only if she finds a way to "fix up" or heal the relationships for everyone, solve everyone's problems and relieve everyone's pain.)

The attempt to alter her conception of relationships is complex and can take various forms. For simplicity, we can talk about the example of Ann and Tom, but we can think of this process occurring in children within a family, and occurring with added complexity because of the level of psychological resources available at each of the younger ages. Ann could assume that the only way to find connection with Tom is to act on what she thinks he seems to desire. Thus, she tries to act on his wishes — or what she construes as his wishes — and she could be wrong about those. She has "learned" that only a bad person has feelings such as sadness, fear, and anger; so she tries to become a person who never has such feelings. She has only good, pleasant and positive feelings — such as wanting to love Tom and to do what Tom wants.

When events occur which would likely cause sadness, fear, anger or any of the "unacceptable" feelings, she feels great upset but cannot be certain what she is experiencing, except that she shouldn't be feeling what she is feeling. It means she is bad.

It is important to emphasize that while there is initial confusion about many feelings in non-mutual relationships, certain feelings become especially prominent over time. One is fear (or anxiety). Ann has to become increasingly afraid of other people because any other person is always likely to evoke some of the "forbidden thoughts and feelings". Further, she has to become afraid of large portions of her own experience because she inevitably will experience many feelings which threaten to disrupt narrowly constructed images of self and others. One particularly prominent feeling which threatens such disruption is anger. Anger certainly would threaten Ann's image of herself as a person who must have only good and loving feelings. Simultaneously, no one can undergo violations of her own experience and long-term threats to connection without serious anger (in addition to the common everyday causes for anger).

Over time, a large part of what Ann does and says does not arise from her experience within rela-tionships. Her actions come from what she believes she must be in order to be allowed into connection with others. Thus, much of what she actually does in the world, often very worthy action, does not connect fully with her own experience. Ann's actions emerge out of inner constructions of what she believes she must do and be. To the extent that these thoughts, feelings and actions are not originating from her perceptions and desires, nor connecting with her experience, they cannot build her image of herself as worthy. Moreover, they cannot alter the inner, increasingly walled-off portion of herself which consists of all the "bad" feelings and thoughts.

Here, I want to mention one major paradox. In order to connect in the only relationships available, Ann will be keeping more and more of herself out of

her relationships. She is maintaining relationships at the price of not representing her own experience in them. To this extent, she cannot be relating fully in the ways which lead to growth. Moreover, the parts of herself which she has excluded are unable to change from experience. Her continuous construction of a sense of self and others cannot benefit from the interchange within connections — precisely the source of clarity and knowledge needed for the development of an increasingly accurate image of self and others (as suggested in the illustration of Ann and Beth). Ann is constructing inner images of relational possibilities — and impossibilities — with less and less actual learning from action within relationships. These inner constructions guide — and limit — her behavior and feelings, thoughts and action in all realms.

Eventually, Ann can allow only certain kinds of relationships. She can tolerate only certain feelings from others and from herself. Others must see her as only good and loving, not angry, fearful or sad; and she must see herself this way, too. To be otherwise is to feel cast out and condemned.

Perhaps it is obvious that I've sketched some (though not all) parts of a path toward anxious, depressive immobilization and disconnection. I think that this immobilizing path underlies many of women's problems, including depression itself, phobias, eating problems and others; also the destructiveness of disconnection is evident in the so-called personality disorders such as "borderline disorders".

In each of these situations, the woman elaborates specific images of herself and others and specific forms of action which come to seem the only possible forms of action within the framework of the relational images she has contructed. Each of these problems has its particular constructions. However, they all have grown out of attempts to find a possibility of acting within connections when the only connections available present impossibilities — when the people in available relational contexts have threatened or actually carried out disconnections and violations of the girl's or woman's experience.

A most extreme impossibility — disconnection and violation — occurs when a woman, and even worse, a young girl is sexually abused. The girl or woman is violated physically and psychologically; and she usually has been unable to represent the truth of her experience both within her immediate relational context and on the larger scene.

This violence represents the most severe form of the psychological violation and disconnection which can occur whenever one person (or group of people) in a relationship has greater power in society. A central part of this power is the power to define what can and cannot occur within relationships. These uneven relationships certainly are not based on the search for mutually empowering connections. It is obvious that in our historical tradition our formative relationships have not been based on this search for mutual empowerment. Thus, adults have not yet been able to act within relationships in ways which fully engage with the issues in their lives, and which allow them to flourish. Because adults have not had this possibility, we all have difficulty in providing an optimal relational context for children.

Conclusion

To summarize, drawing on the work of the Stone Center and others, I've tried to review quickly some of the major characteristics of mutually empowering relationships. I've suggested that a relational context which does not allow the developing girl or adult woman to act within relationships to represent her experience toward building mutually empathic and mutually empowering relationships leads the girl or woman to construct restricted and distorted images of the possibilities of relationships between herself and others. These constructions further limit her ability to act within connections, to know her own experience and to build a sense of worthiness.

I've suggested that girls and women who are sexually violated experience the most extreme form of a process that occurs for all women. Women who are sexually violated and the women who work with them are teaching us, perhaps, the most important things we need to learn at this time in order to fathom the hidden aspects of psychological development, not only of girls and women, but of boys and men who are developing within a context which allows such widespread violence.

It's apparent that I've drawn on, but not acknowledged along the way, the thinking of many people including Freudians, object-relations theorists, Kohutians and earlier workers such as Horney and Sullivan; although I have not used such terms as "good objects", "bad objects", "part objects" or "self objects", nor self systems, false selves or true selves. (I don't think that the hidden, disconnected parts of a person's experience which have not grown in the course of interchange with others can compose a "true self", as some writers seem to suggest.)

Using language common to all of us, I've tried to explore what happens when all the good, bad, part and self objects come to life because — although

obvious, it's rarely stated — it is women who are made into these "objects" in all the theories. Women enter the theories to supply the material by which the "subjects" build systems of "selves" and the like. When women enter the picture as persons, we move inevitably to different assumptions. I don't think we can then proceed on the premise of a self which is using the "objects" in order to develop more of a self. Instead, I think we find different premises and questions. A central question is the one with which I began: How do we create connections from the first moment of life in which all the people involved are learning to build mutually empowering relationships? In working on such questions, we can draw on the still insufficiently recognized strengths of women.

To put this another way, the more important work on both the personal and the global scene today is not the concentration on how the individual develops a sense of an individuated, separate self, but on how people can build empowering relationships, which, in turn, empower all of the people in those relationships.

In this sense, I believe women have an urgent and historic mission: to examine still more accurately the very realm of growth-fostering relationships which women have been trying to provide all along; to raise these to their full value, and thus, to move to redefine public visions and goals; to provide the leadership to move all of our societal structures away from systems based on violence and toward systems based on mutual empowerment.

Discussion Summary
After each colloquium presentation, a discussion is held. Selected portions of the discussion are summarized here. At this session Drs. Judith Jordan, Janet Surrey and Carolyn Swift joined Dr. Miller in leading the discussion.

Question: Do you believe that there is more probability of mutuality in relationships between women?

Miller: Yes, at this time in history. I don't believe it has to be true forever. One reason is that, historically, women have carried this part of life for everyone in society. Therefore women have learned to be empathic and to empower others. However, this does not mean that all women do this fully and well. Most of us have various kinds of troubles with it because of the disconnections in our own development.

I believe that all men have the potential, and that many men have developed some of these abilities. However, society actively discourages men from developing these qualities. This is the big problem.

Surrey: There can be many good aspects of a male-female relationship. It can be loving, protective, kind, etc. But this is about a specific process which leads to psychological development.

Swift: Jean said this, but I think it's worth repeating. In relationships between women, there is not the power differential. It is not there to reduce the likelihood of mutuality. Of course, in certain specific situations there may be a power differential based on other factors, as in the example of a woman boss and a woman employee.

Comment: Something had happened to Ann as a child that she couldn't stand back and say, "Tom, please listen to me. This is important to me . . ."?

Miller: Yes, you could say that. However, I would ask you to assume that there is nothing wrong or lacking in Ann at the beginning of the story. I am trying to suggest that so-called psychopathology develops when such experiences occur repeatedly over time without a change in course — and that there is a likelihood that they will occur whenever one or more persons have the power to determine the nature of a relationship with others.

Comment: One of the things that concerns me with what you're saying is that it can reinforce the idea that women should have the burden of childrearing if women have the greater potential for connectedness and empowerment. It can seem like going backward from the 70's when many people felt there was a great advance in bringing men into childrearing.

Miller: It's good that you bring up this point. I believe that men can learn. But I think that the first factor making for the child's good development is that the parents have a mutually empowering relationship with each other. (This is assuming a two-parent family.) Then, men can learn a great deal by trying to relate to children in a way which empowers them. In individual families many men are doing so.

Jordan: There is evidence to suggest that boys who are taking care of babies become much more affective and empathic just from doing that.

Comment: Maybe women should train ourselves to stay with our own experience longer. Many of us still give in to others in the environment so readily.

Miller: Yes, and in that way we may comply with constrictions on us even more than we have to. It's important not to deny the conditions which still restrict women in many ways, but over time we may lose sight of the possibilities that there are better, more

empowered ways we can act.

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