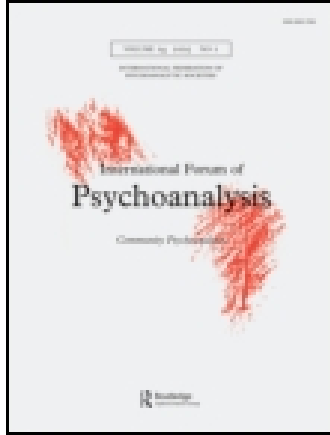




International Forum of Psychoanalysis

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/spsy20>

Nurturance and self-sabotage: Psychoanalytic perspectives on women's fear of success

Ellen G. Ruderman^a

^a The Postgraduate Psychoanalytic Society, New York, USA

Published online: 18 Aug 2006.

To cite this article: Ellen G. Ruderman (2006) Nurturance and self-sabotage: Psychoanalytic perspectives on women's fear of success, International Forum of Psychoanalysis, 15:02, 85-95, DOI: [10.1080/08037060600621779](https://doi.org/10.1080/08037060600621779)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08037060600621779>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Nurturance and self-sabotage: Psychoanalytic perspectives on women's fear of success

ELLEN G. RUDERMAN

The Postgraduate Psychoanalytic Society, New York, USA

Abstract

The relational approach to psychotherapy, furthered by the analyst's use of the transference-countertransference paradigm, can create the gateway to explore and understand patients' internal barriers to growth. The analysis can then help patients to achieve a more integrated self-view that allows them to enjoy success and fulfillment in both their private and their public lives. Even as they strive for their own self-definition, women hold onto old relational ties. In this paper, two case examples are used to elucidate the complex relationships that women have with their earliest caregivers. The cases demonstrate how women remain fixed in early familial internalizations and identifications, and find themselves repeating patterns of self-sabotage that impede their success.

Key words: *Women's fear of success, countertransference, identifications and internalizations of women patients, ambition, assertion and aggressivity in women*

Introduction

How will history record women's roles in the twenty-first century: primarily as caretakers, as Chief Executive Officers, or as both. More than three decades after the feminist movement began, political, economic, and sociological strides have changed the USA's gender landscape. The awareness and recognition of women have increased in all areas of our society. We now see women in positions of power at major movie studios, medical and legal practices, and software companies, and, unfortunately, shipping out for combat duty with their male colleagues.

At the same time, however, much has remained unchanged: the glass ceiling in most corporations remains impenetrable; the far-right and conservative religious organizations pose an ongoing threat to the United States Supreme Court Case of *Roe versus Wade* and pro-choice; and societal microcosms and certain cultural groups reinforce old roles of female subservience. Even more troubling are women like the two I will present in this work, who

are ambivalent toward, or unable to embrace, their success in the outside world.

Let us look at a few contrasting pictures. In 1983, having completed my doctorate, I called a well-known restaurant to arrange for a dinner to celebrate my PhD. Flushed with my achievement, I proudly said, "This is Dr R, and I want to arrange for twenty people for dinner at your restaurant at 6:00 tomorrow evening." The *maitre d'hôtel* at the other end of the phone was very polite: "Just one moment please, I will try to arrange it." After a brief pause, he returned to the phone. "Yes, I have been able to arrange for twenty people at 6:00; you may tell the Doctor *his* reservations have been accepted." And yet another example of ingrained attitudes: In Los Angeles, I and two other women petitioned the Los Angeles Opera League to install an additional rest room. We were consistently late for the second act owing to huge, circuitous lines of women waiting to use the one existent facility. The response to our request was amazing! Out of ten women, two agreed with the request, two did not think the request

warranted that kind of funding, and six felt women should take care of their business more rapidly!

This is the essence of what I will discuss. The carrying forth of ingrained attitudes of self-devaluation, even self-disdain, in women continues. In my paper, "Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose: Women's 'masochism' and ambivalence about ambition and success" (Ruderman, 2003), I contend that women, from time immemorial, carry forth identifications and internalizations derived from their earliest caregivers. These early messages, when unearthed in analysis, may help us to understand why women may change in some ways, but remain the same in others. It is my conviction that as we continue to free women in analysis and therapy to attain their own self-definitions and pursue their convictions, the more things will change rather than remain the same.

The contrasting picture may be the fairy tale we should have been reading as little girls and perhaps can pass onto our own children:

Once upon a time, in a land far away, a beautiful, independent, self-assured princess happened upon a frog as she sat, contemplating ecological issues, on the shores of an unpolluted pond in a verdant meadow near her castle.

The frog hopped into the princess's lap and said: "Elegant Lady, I was once a handsome prince, until an evil witch cast a spell upon me. One kiss from you, however, and I will turn back into the dapper, young prince that I am and then, my sweet, we can marry and set up housekeeping in your castle with my mother, where you can prepare my meals, clean my clothes, bear my children, and forever feel grateful and happy doing so."

That night, as the princess dined sumptuously on lightly sautéed frogs legs seasoned in a white wine and onion cream sauce, she chuckled and thought to herself:

"Not on your life, froggie! Not with this lady!"

Both of the women in my case examples below were prone to self-sabotage, often at critical junctures in their professional lives. They came to treatment to understand what drove them to "shoot themselves in the foot." What was revealed throughout their analyses was a pattern curiously prevalent in our culture. One phenomenon we are frequently seeing in the twenty-first century is that, once they cross the home threshold at the end of their work day, too many career women are tied to traditional roles, or assume deferent or secondary positions of inequality despite their obvious intelligence and competence. How can one explain these seeming contradictions in women's lives? How is it that

women manage to competently carry out job and career responsibilities, and then revert to traditional, even repressed, roles once they cross the home threshold at the end of their work day?

Younger women whom I am seeing in my practice seem to reflect a new kind of self-demeaning criticism because they are not doing the "important" work of earning money. They feel they have lost something by crossing the threshold into the world of parenting and running the household. These women devalue and "trivialize" their functioning. Yet, if you followed the course of their days and converted into dollars what they bring to their home worlds, they could well be the Chief Executive Officers of a few larger corporations. While their peers may be out achieving status in the board room, these women still do not receive the support of society for their important (and demanding) jobs of raising children and being the stay-at-home spouse. We will know that progress has truly occurred when all women, no matter what their "work," feel a sense of empowerment and success at having achieved an internal, positive self-definition.

How do we explain these seeming contradictions in women's lives? It is important for us as analysts to examine why, in this so-called age of increased liberation for women, so many women struggle with these complications. The subject of women's motivation and mastery opens the floodgates to innumerable theories, ideas, and attitudes. Women have been socialized from time immemorial to tend to others and to regard taking good care of themselves as "selfish." By focusing on the interplay between females and their earliest relationships to their caregivers, it is possible to reveal the identifications and internalizations that govern their later perceptions and self-representations. Any discussion of the subject of women's fear of success must include a focus on "masochism" in women and must begin with the premise that the interface between women's earliest interpersonal and intrapsychic development, the social and cultural context in which they exist, and the political forces around them, have been prime determinants in keeping women unempowered.

I have placed quotation marks around "masochism" because of doubt as to the true meaning of the term. As used here, "masochism" is not based on Freud's definitions in "Instincts and their vicissitudes" (that is, self-directed sadism; Freud, 1915) nor on any of the three forms of masochism spelled out in "The economic problem of masochism" (Freud, 1924). Freud was a product of his Victorian time and context just as contemporary women are a product of their own. Rather, I am defining masochism as the interplay between the woman, her

concepts of herself as a total person, the derivatives of her earliest infant-caregiver relationship, and a sociocultural and political milieu that imposes distinctively negative, ingrained attitudes that still, to this day, label ambition, aggression, active mastery, and success as shameful, unfeminine, and inappropriate for “ladies.” It is as if the words of Horner and Hoffman from the late 1960s and early 1970s are echoing into the twenty-first century. By expanding the meaning of masochism, I hope to shed light upon the complex set of interrelationships, both societal and personal, that contribute to women’s ambivalence towards and fears of success.

I began my own journey toward shedding some light on these questions early in 1983 in a dissertation study entitled “Gender related themes of women psychotherapists in their treatment of women patients: The creative and reparative use of countertransference as a mutual growth experience” (Ruderman, 1986a). All of my subsequent papers in this work in progress focus primarily on women’s ambivalence about success, their retreat from mastery and ambition, and the “masochistic bond” that acts as the primary internal roadblock forcing their detour from the avenue of success.

Gender-related themes: Female analyst and female patient

In my 1983 study, I defined countertransference as reflecting the therapist as a total person: her age and stage of life development; her life experience in multiple roles; and her experience of acute life crises, separations, and losses. It is the sum total of what she feels toward the patient and within herself in the context of the treatment process. From that, I derived the excitement of analysis and psychotherapy in seeing it as a process of mutuality, wherein patient and analyst bring differing meanings and contexts to bear as they bring their relational energies together to mutually engage in a process of discovery and growth in the analytic situation.

Several interlocking themes were uncovered in my study, four of which refer directly to the issues in this paper. They include: (1) the therapist’s relationship with her mother, especially with respect to separation-individuation and identity; (2) fear of success, as manifested by the therapist’s empathic identification with her patient’s inhibitions, conflicts over ambition, and devaluation of self-worth; (3) role conflicts, with respect to family and relationship needs versus career pursuits, and conflicts over feminine-masculine stereotypes in professional roles; and (4) envy in the countertransference. The fifth theme, “The life stage of the analyst,” was

elaborated upon in a journal edition of *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* on which I had the pleasure of working with Estelle Shane.

In addition to the essential themes presented by the twenty-five analytically oriented female analysts and therapists in the study, there were several interesting findings. From this early study (1983), through my own continued research on the subject (Ruderman, 1984, 1986b), the advances of other analysts, and first-hand analytic and clinical experience, it became apparent that the fear of losing the internal tie to the significant other is the “missing link” connecting the seemingly paradoxical roles played by women in this new millennium. The deep fear of loss of significant relational and affiliative connections haunts many women, including those who excel or who are able to actualize their intellectual and creative potential in the outside world. Rather than face the disquietude and chaos of certain affiliative losses, many women marry it or enter into partnerships that replicate the same phenomenon.

Another finding of importance emerging from the study was that every woman needs a female champion—a woman of substance who can offer encouragement and a validation of assertive strivings and achievements. From this finding, I began to focus on and explore not only the role of the analyst as mentor, but also the inestimable contribution of female friends as integral parts of encouraging a woman to move forward. This will be further elaborated upon in the case presentations.

At the completion of my dissertation study, I wrote:

Women in contemporary American society cannot avoid internalizing the negative attitudes toward women which have been part of the sociocultural and political milieu in which they were raised. These attitudes are transmitted and internalized during the earliest phases of a woman’s development, and within her most intimate framework of object relations. They are then reinforced by the prevailing culture. Like all women, female psychotherapists are shaped by the current sociocultural and political milieu. They must deal as best as they can with unresolved issues and conflicting attitudes about their femininity and their attempts to balance the social, familial, and professional aspects of their lives.

The woman therapist is confronted with a paradox. While she may intellectually agree with expanding notions of woman’s role in society, she may not have sufficiently integrated her new attitudes with the residue of her earliest experience.

In this fashion, the therapist who encourages her female patient to assert the same needs and wants and entitlements to creative pursuits, productivity, and strivings that men enjoy, may become caught in her own unresolved conflicts about familial and professional roles, competitive anxiety, and fears of success. This paradox cannot avoid becoming part of the dynamic interplay between patient and therapist. (Ruderman, 1983) pp. 6–8.

This holds true even in the twenty-first century!

To get to the true roots of women's ambivalence toward and fear of success, analysts must be prepared to plumb the deepest waters of a woman's earliest history. They must also be willing to plumb their own. It is important that, within the context of a genuinely trusting relationship, the archaic internal echoes and messages of both helper and helpee be illuminated, allowing them to guide their patients, and maybe themselves, through barriers that have created impasses in their lives.

By probing the depths of women patients' earliest relationships and by revealing and understanding their earliest identifications and internalizations, analysts will help their patients to discover what I am calling in this work the "early internal definer," which can be an "internal saboteur" and which governs their later perceptions and self-representations. This "internal definer," which may or may not be related to the "internal saboteur," prevents them from making choices that will enhance their lives, both relationally and professionally.

In this current work, I also elaborate on the complex relationship of women to their earliest caregivers to demonstrate the conundrum created by aspects of unresolved competition and envy (of mother toward daughter, and of daughter toward mother), and how life-long patterns of self-defeat can emanate from this phenomenon. Once again, however, the fear of losing the internal tie is the most pressing concern.

Of course, the genesis of women's fears of, and ambivalence toward, success is a multifaceted phenomenon. In this current work, two women from my analytic practice illustrate how we cannot separate women's most archaic influences from the way they will experience their reception in their adult worlds. If women perceive from their earliest encounters that it is "selfishly wrong" to wish to be central, and to crave recognition, it is understandable that they may come to loathe their feelings and needs and, in the relational repetitions of their lives, re-enact a similar subservience, withdrawing or shrinking from their vital strivings and centrality in their lives.

Women's fear of success: Challenges for patients and analysts

Knowledge of the origins of "masochism" and fear of success in women must begin by studying the earliest stages of infant development and by focusing on the preoedipal stages. The works of Ainsworth (1989), Beebe and Lachman (1992), Bowlby (1988), Fairbairn (1940), Main and Solomon (1990), Stern (1973), and Tustin (1990) reach into the earliest primal phases of a person's life.

Freud (1915) linked fear of success with guilt reactions engendered during the oedipal period: the child experiences growth and development as marked by rivalries and fraught with violence. Appelgarth's (1977) study of women analysts suggests that the conflict in women reflects guilt and fear at surpassing their mother. Horner (1972) wrote of women's motive to avoid success. Hoffman (1972) suggested that females have strong needs for affiliation that influence, and sometimes block, their achievement motives and behavior. Girls, she believes, are more protected by their mothers than are boys, and receive less encouragement to develop separate identities and explore their environments.

In 1980, Benjamin focused on self/other differentiation, arguing that the common gender positions of male domination and female submission derive from the opposite positions adopted by each sex toward the mother in the early differentiation process. Later, Benjamin (1986) suggests that fathers who do not help their daughters separate from their mothers during rapprochement may contribute to their daughter's masochism. In 1988, she contended that a revision of Freudian metapsychology to integrate infant and gender development was crucial to understanding the dynamics of women's subjugation, and to a reinterpretation of Freud's views on masochism.

Person (1982) delineates major sources of work inhibition in women, three of which are fear of success, fear of public exposure, and a sense of fraudulence. Person views women's work inhibitions as related to the fear that, should they become successful, they will lose affiliative ties.

Clinically, we observe that the fear of success manifests itself in the conflicts that female patients such as Dana and Carlotta experience when, for example, the option of choosing a career runs counter to that of building or losing a significant love relationship. Many young women patients complain that their choices are becoming more polarized. One twenty-nine-year-old patient, a law student, commented, "If a woman wants to succeed,

she has to be prepared to give up a lot. We wind up career-bound but alone. Men are simply uncomfortable at the least, threatened at the most, and where does that leave us?"

For those caught in the constraints of unresolved and early bonds, separating or moving forward represents the feeling of destruction of a needed attachment and the threat of disintegration of the self. Emblematic of this picture are many of our female patients who, in order to hold onto the original caregiver, choose a spouse or partner who, in so many ways, embodies the caregiver mother's earlier behaviors. Dana and Carlotta were examples of this kind of women.

Dana and Carlotta—when loss becomes gain: Transforming women's "internal saboteur"

Two vibrant and intelligent women, two very different childhoods. And yet, as my case examples in this paper will illustrate, for Dana and Carlotta their earliest caregiver relationships resulted in the inability to disentangle their own identities from their attachments to mothers who gave them conflicting messages. Dana's and Carlotta's experiences are emblematic of conflicts manifested by many women in our society, who are torn between defining themselves and remaining fixed in early familial internalizations and identifications.

Dana: Taking center stage

The fear of success, and the women who reveal it in their anxieties related to what I call the "five As" (ambition, aggression, assertion, achievement, advancement), takes on a new complication in the treatment situation of the 1990s. The media is replete with stories of successful career women, yet many of them revert to feeling like "handmaidens" when they return to family and home. Internally, a part of them still exist within a more traditional value set. They often feel imprisoned by it and unable to break out of the yoke imposed by messages inculcated from their earliest infant caregiver relationship and throughout their early development. The conflicts experienced in their struggle for internal and external freedom not only become a challenge for the analytic treatment, but also bring an equally pressing challenge to the women analysts' countertransference feelings. Dana is an example of the kind of patient I have been describing.

Dana was an uncommonly beautiful woman from an uncommonly wealthy upper-crust New England family. People stopped on the street to stare at her, often asking her mother why she did not take Dana for a screen test. Everything about Dana was

beautiful...face (like an angel), body (to die for), manners (impeccable). Thus, no one could understand Dana's chronically depressed state because, they said, anyone who was that beautiful had no right to be depressed. In her analytic treatment, Dana revealed a history of extreme repression, especially at the hands of her mother in a wealthy New England home. Dana recalled so many discordant memories that did not seem to match with her parents' view of the glittering childhood she was supposed to have had. For years, Dana questioned whether she was either "crazy" or "distortive" because she had existed, she thought, as an appendage. She was not supposed to freely pursue anything other than what was proscribed by her industrious parents.

One particularly poignant recovered memory was of her mother punishing her in the form of her mother's stony silence (which lasted for days) when she was five years old for having dirtied her pinafore minutes before a scheduled magazine modeling interview. The other was her sadness at having to move from one middle school to another because her mother felt she was becoming too "unruly"—unruly, she came to realize, meant anything that did not fit mother's designs for her. Yet another memory was of sitting for hours in her mother's office—Dana's mother ran the family corporation—and, after school, Dana was not to be with those "scruffy girls or boy friends" but was to come immediately to her mother's office and wait for her to return home. Goodness and compliance were the orders of the day.

Dana rarely if ever thought about who she was, what her ambitions were, or what she needed. Her enormous deprivation, she later realized in her analysis, was that of never having been seen or heard as her real self—a self that began to have glimmers in the middle school she was yanked away from. In that school, the threat to her parents came in the form of progressive and liberal-minded young men and women whose independence of thought was mind-blowing to Dana and anathema to her parents.

After being submerged in cotillions and debutante events, Dana married Groton III, a man carefully selected by her parents, who represented the same type of disapproving, repressive person as her mother. As had many women I have treated in my analytic practice, she had married her "mother," an overbearing, overtraditional, archaic husband who continued to tyrannize her. His dominance over the household was complete, and Dana was regarded—as she was throughout her childhood—as a mindless ornament. Paradoxical to this picture, however, was that Dana's internalizations and identifications with her matriarchal parent were to hold onto the image

of a female corporation executive. Dana could exhibit the effective, managerial and agentive part of her—but only when out of the household. From some deeper part of herself, she had refused to merge her family's corporation with Groton's, her husband's, holdings. He, as Dana's mother had, reacted in stony silence when Dana "dared" to maintain what she felt was "hers." Thus, although she maintained a sense of freedom in controlling the family corporation after her parents' untimely deaths, within the household she became the beautiful but helpless Dana of her childhood.

Dana's conflicts had hampered her ability to realize her ambitions and define herself in any way she chose. We may recognize women like Dana in the text by Harris (1997), who addressed the role of ambition in women's development and proposed that "the obstacles to and dangers of aggression, ambition, and assertion in women's development rest with the negotiation of separation and rapprochement, anxieties about aggression's meanings, and the power of envy in identifications and object ties (particularly with one's mother), all impact on women's experience of their own aggression" (p. 291). The emotional posture of Dana's mother, coupled with her father's absences, posed a critical obstacle to her development as a self-defined and self-realized woman.

Chodorow (1978) found that how we raise girls and boys also influences the way the sexes relate to ambition, power, and success. She found that even contemporary childrearing practices emphasize the importance of emotional, relational bonding in young females, while placing value on abstract, work-oriented ties to the social world in the rearing of male children. She argues that girls have more difficulty separating from their mothers than do boys because mothers tend to regard their daughters as narcissistic extensions of themselves.

According to Gilligan (1982a), male development entails a growing separation from others in the pursuit of autonomy and independence. In contrast, female development involves a continuing struggle to balance responsibilities to others with a commitment to the integrity of self. Whereas men view morality as a matter of impartial justice, women view morality as based on the care and preservation of essential relationships.

Carlotta: Leaving is losing

Carlotta was always feisty. She was what was called a "street fighter." She was proud of and emulated her mother, who struggled to keep her part-Latino, part African-American family together by going to work in a factory after their father's untimely death in an

automobile accident. Carlotta's mother refused to accept welfare, or help from others for that matter, insisting that all of her children abide by two rules: go to school and do well, and find meaningful employment. Carlotta took on the role of a parent when she was seven years old, enjoined to care for three younger sisters, all two years apart.

Carlotta was bright, outgoing, and very relational—but suffered deep bouts of depression. Whenever she had to move beyond the "barrio," going to parochial schools that her mother had insisted upon so she could get a "proper" education, Carlotta would suffer severe bouts of anxiety and depression. Also, although she got on well with young men, she always felt awkward and shy around them as she had grown up with three sisters and a mother in a fatherless home. Further, the idea of emancipating and leaving home left her riddled with feelings she could barely understand. Later in her analysis, Carlotta would begin to understand these as she spoke of the "incorporated mother" inside her who was leaving her flock; she would recall sitting with her mother, the latter with her head in her hands, at the kitchen table and pondering how they were going to live. Their poverty was always a looming threat to their existence.

Despite her obvious intelligence, Carlotta experienced severe difficulties whenever she had to take an exam. Years later, when Carlotta received her first academic degree and was acclaimed as one of the innovative contributors on a prestigious academic faculty, she realized that she suffered bodily symptoms and depression whenever she achieved. This is reminiscent of a study by Galenson (1978), in which young, ambitious women experienced "examination anxiety" (fear of object loss, guilt and self-reproach, deep concerns about bodily integrity, feelings of intellectual imperfection) during exams and a relief from symptoms when exams ended.

In some strange and unique way, Carlotta, like Dana—who was from a markedly different background—was not supposed to enjoy anything for herself. Her ability to take in positives was limited by her deep-seated connection to a mother who, while so admirable and very loved by Carlotta, taught her that "we" was more important than "I." She was raised within what Steger (2000) calls a "we-ness" culture, wherein the concepts of separation from the family of origin and their internal and external influences are viewed as shameful or bad. Further, Carlotta felt that her success in the form of her multiple academic achievements "betrayed" her mother's ordained message to Carlotta—that she was first and foremost a "mother" and caregiver for her family.

Carlotta's problems began as her relationships with men intensified; she was confronted by a dilemma:

very few of the men she dated could tolerate her intelligence, her wit, and her fierce independence. Many of them felt insulted and demeaned by her outspoken and forthright intelligence. She married Armando, a young philosophy student, when she was twenty, moving next door to her family so she could continue to help her mother by caring for her three sisters while also attending the university. She found that, at the university, Armando was a fierce radical, and she joined him in urging rights for Latinos and Latinas. At home, however, Armando reverted to a rigid traditional posture, insisting that Carlotta do everything while he studied or read the evening paper. The marriage lasted only two years. It was at this point that Carlotta came to analysis, finally questioning the innumerable feelings of guilt, depression, and anxiety that haunted her. Why could she not leave? Why could she not give herself anything better? After many years in analysis deeply exploring these questions, and two years before she terminated her analysis, she married James, a psychologist, and together they provided a modeling for their two children of a new kind of sharing and equality.

Role conflicts, mentorship, and friendship

Dana's experience exemplifies the conflicts experienced by many women in our society who are torn, as she was, between defining themselves and remaining fixed in early familial internalizations and identifications. The conflicts are generated by multiple forces, all of which conspire to dampen women's ambitions. From her earliest experience with her mother, Dana inculcated messages that approval depended upon her being good, sweet, deferent, and accommodating. Her father's disdain and eventual emotional distancing when she attained puberty served to reinforce the notion that "staying a little girl and being non-sexual" were the only safe ingredients to hold on to love and approval.

Evolving out of her analysis, where a safer and stronger mentoring stance was experienced by Dana from her analyst, Dana turned to her more active and independent friends—the same friends she had felt threatened by years before because they were too assertive. As she emerged from the constraints, through exploration of the early tie to her mother—and father—Dana began to make her world more consistent. She not only ran her family corporation with ease, but now also began to take a more active and aggressive role in her home. Groton III and Dana were referred to marital therapy and are *en route* to exploring and resolving their differences. Dana manifested, as she continued her analysis, how much she was repairing what had happened to her with her mother by encouraging a

fierce "pro-choice" philosophy in raising her daughter Erika. The latter was encouraged to speak her mind and express her opinions, and was applauded for her independence of action and mind.

Through the course of treatment, both Dana and Carlotta were gradually able to move beyond the constraints of the internalized messages from their earliest caregiver relationships to more self-empowered foci in their careers and relationships. It is here that the juncture between female analysts, countertransference, and our cultural milieu offer an additional elucidation of my theme.

During Dana's analytic treatment, I was aware that, in order to properly understand and address her masochism, I had to understand its role in her development. There were many incidents of, in Dana's words, "shooting myself in the foot" in her role as corporation head, which were analyzed.

In terms of her "masochism," I referred back to the work of Menaker (1953), for example, who shifted the emphasis from drive theory to an appreciation of object relations, patterns of internalization, and self-preservative functions of the ego as motives for moral masochism. Viewed from the perspective of the ego, the masochistic position serves a self-protective function. A needed love relationship with a punishing and cruel object is preserved, thus defending the ego against feelings of abandonment and loss, but resulting in self-depreciation. To preserve the needed object, the woman surrenders her own identity, experiencing a paralysis of the will in the service of avoiding separation. This certainly fits the description of Dana.

Following this line of thought, it becomes clear that a woman's fear of and ambivalence towards success is linked to her deepest fear of object loss. Even successful women are apprehensive lest, by moving forward and succeeding as separated or individuated selves, they risk a form of internal dissolution. In this scenario, a daughter may unconsciously perceive her own potential success as a threat to the primary dyadic bond with her mother. Separating or moving forward threatens the attachment and could result in what is felt to be disintegration of the self.

Many have written about the loss of the internal object. Drawing on Fairbairn's (1940) concept of the "moral defence," Hamilton (1994) emphasizes the intense fear and anxiety that are commonly associated with the release of the "bad internal object." As repression, through the moral defense, lifts or loosens, the patient experiences a loss and terror of traumatic proportions. The child, after all, prefers a tie to a bad object to no object at all.

To Carlotta, the gain would be the loss. She would achieve what she had always wanted but lose a

cherished relationship at the same time. She had also experienced considerable anxiety in revealing to me that it was when she first saw my PhD degree certificate on the wall that she had glimmerings of competitive feelings, even envious ones. I commented with positive emotion how pleased I was that Carlotta had this goal, and that Carlotta's competitive feelings and urges were natural—not dangerous. I also commented that envy had many sides, and that one side of it was awe and admiration. When Carlotta was able to feel confident that I, as her analyst, felt sincere pleasure about her successes, and heard me say, even when the termination time of her analysis approached, that she would always be able to return if she needed or wished to, her relief was palpable (see work on termination; Ruderman, 1999). The awareness that her success would not spell a finite ending to our relationship was crucial. It transcended the original anxiety she had experienced with her mother and enabled her to move on in a confident and self-realized direction.

When we examine the importance of a woman's earliest attachments, as clearly exemplified by the cases of Dana and Carlotta, the issues of separation and individuation, aggression, and moral development come into play. We might hear echoes of Mahler (1981), who, commenting on the uses of aggression in the service of separation-individuation, pointed to the difficulties of resolving mother-daughter conflicts in the preoedipal, oedipal, and postoedipal realms.

Carlotta's experience is shared by many women and by many of my female patients. Her experience highlights the references to the link between fear of success and masochism in women. Schechter (1981) saw masochism as a self-protective defense of the ego aimed at warding off a dangerous conflictual situation. The central conflict is fear of success, which is unconsciously perceived as a threat to the primary dyadic bond with the mother. The daughter unconsciously fears that attaining success will result in retaliation, in the form of her mother's abandonment. Masochistic defenses function as reparations to the mother by token submission, thus undoing the fear of object loss and ensuring survival.

Through the course of their analytic treatment, both Dana and Carlotta were able to gradually move beyond the constraints of the internalized messages from their earliest caregiver relationships to more self-defined, and thus self-empowered, foci, both in their careers and in their relationships.

Countertransference issues

As conflicts about female autonomy and achievement are rooted in the earliest separation-individua-

tion experiences, so too will core countertransference themes experienced by women therapists treating women patients often be associated with separation-individuation and object loss, especially regarding the maternal relationship, fear of success, and feminine/masculine role conflict.

Chodorow (1989) stated that gender and sexuality must be considered in the context of a gendered and sexualized social and cultural world, and that our theoretical assumptions always influence and shape our evidential understandings. In analytic treatment or supervision, threads of "masochism" may be amplified by female analysts or analytic supervisors who have not worked through their own ambivalence toward assertiveness and success.

The awareness and exploration of one's countertransference can enhance and enrich learning in the analytic experience for both patient and analyst. In working with female patients who present conflicts leading to creative inhibition, the woman analyst may thus be offered the chance to rework similar aspects of her own identity. During my work with Dana and Carlotta, there were times when I felt oppressed by their impassivity and outraged about their self-devaluation. In joining with Dana's avoidant humor, and Carlotta's vagueness and confusion in the face of forward movement, I became acutely aware of my own issues and realized that I was viewing them as part my mother and part myself. I saw in them elements of my own conflicts about success, and recalled my own mother's experience of being oppressed by her internal and external circumstances, and by role proscriptions of her time that made no allowances for her intelligence and talent.

Working with women patients who are conflicted in this way may offer the analyst an opportunity to rework similar aspects of her own identity. This can contribute to forging new visions of a woman's role in society, helped by a number of other contributing factors. One of these factors I mentioned earlier is the way in which we, as analysts, inevitably become significant mentors for many of our patients. My definition of the analyst-mentor is that individual who "lends" to the patient a more benign superego, who allows for the expression of needs and desires, and who models a capacity to adapt to and impact society in a vital way.

Dana and Carlotta both wished to break free of their internal constrictions. As they worked through the earliest messages of their childhood and freed themselves from the constraints of their early identifications and internalizations, they found in their analyst a person whom they could internalize: a different kind of object and role model. As their analyses progressed, they began to align themselves with other women who were not inhibited in their drive to succeed. Dana

affiliated with different kinds of friends who supported her aims, and Carlotta with many female faculty members who encouraged her in her academic pursuits. I supported them in these endeavors.

Comments on the changing American scene for women

Dinnerstein (1977), in exploring the psychological motives for both love and the relationship between the sexes, felt that deep psychological motives have maintained traditional arrangements that are devoid of egalitarianism and compromise both sexes. She recommends that equal responsibility of the sexes for early infant care could change the common destructive psychological confusion between closeness to women, and one's infantile experiences. Likewise, Chodorow (1978) foresaw that equality between the sexes will come about only as men assume their proper egalitarian role in child-rearing and future generations of children thus experience the involvement of two parents. In addition, it seems critical that women's needs for balancing affiliation and autonomy be carefully explored, in both the transference and the countertransference process.

Chodorow and Dinnerstein's predictions may well have begun to bear fruit in the new millennium. It appears that many younger men—new fathers—are more nurturant. They are becoming involved in the process of sharing the rearing of their developing child from birth. Many of these younger fathers are more attentive, more involved, more aware. They seem to have moved in our society from the characterizations imposed by John Wayne in the movie *True Grit*, to those exemplified in *Four Men and a Baby* or *The Family Man*. They are open enough and secure enough to have a more egalitarian experience and share more with their partners—to understand the needs and yearnings of their babies, and more likely to get in touch with their own needs.

The implications for these kinds of change are multifold. Couples can be more in tune with each other's needs, and the equitable sharing of responsibilities for the child leads to changing concepts of roles. Neither is confined to the traditional experience exemplified in the case of Dana—where “ladies do this” and “men are like this.” They are more likely to fit into the case of Carlotta, who, with her second husband, James, degenderized in their household the whole concept of “established role definitions.” Carlotta and James are two loving parents, each of whom is available to their children when time and freedom permit, and they are able to afford each other needed time and space from the daily demands of child-rearing by being available to each other as well as to their children. Neither relies on the more

traditional proscriptions; both value the individuality and needs of their children and of themselves.

This is similar and can be seen also in the rising number of same-sex partners who are having or adopting children. The focus is more on providing love, acceptance, safety, and trust for their children than on behaving along any kind of traditional gender-role lines.

The flux and ferment of the last two decades have led to major changes for both men and women in and out of the mental health field. These political and sociological strides have already changed the gender landscape and may result in whole new generations of healthier women, as more and more mothers become models for daughters who believe in their own intrinsic worth and ability to succeed.

In the case illustrations of Dana and Carlotta, there were many differences. However, a marked similarity was there as well. The old adage that a person must “kill off the parents in order to achieve separation and individuation” is, I feel, a misstatement and possibly not an apt metaphor for what truly occurs within the analytic situation. A woman does not kill off her parents; she changes her internal relationship to them. She may experience, as her therapy or analysis unfolds, a relearning about herself that may result in a new self-view; she may then experience a new awareness and learning about her parents, which contributes to a transformative experience in relation to not only the internal parent, but also to the world around her.

Dana and Carlotta's personal evolution highlights the need for revised definitions of not only the concept of “masochism”, but also that of power. In my view, the achievement of power should not be solely defined as the climb to the top of the 20th Century Fox movie company, nor the ability to compete with one's male counterparts on the corporate board of directors. True power resides in the conviction that a woman attains about her own self-definition, one that gives her permission to make vital choices and then empowers her to realize her goals.

The cases of Dana and Carlotta also illustrate, among other things, that through the attentive use of countertransference, the analyst can create a secure therapeutic context within which the earliest caregiver attachments may be better understood and eventually disentangled and redefined. This careful work can become not only growth-producing for the patient, but also a mutually reparative and enriching experience for the woman patient as well as her analyst. In the dynamic process of analysis, as we respond inwardly to the patient's words, dreams, fantasies, and body language, we are also in touch with images of our own world. Growth and learning occur for all!

References

- Ainsworth, M. (1989). Attachments beyond infancy. *American Psychologist*, 4, 709–716.
- Appelgarth, A. (1977). Some observations on work inhibitions in women. In H.P. Blum (Ed.), *Female psychology: contemporary psychoanalytic views*. New York: International Universities Press, Inc.
- Beebe, B., & Lachmann, F. (1992). The contribution of mother infant mutual influence to the origins of self and object representations. In N. Skolnick, & S. Warshaw (Eds.), *Relational perspectives in psychoanalysis* (pp. 83–119). Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.
- Benjamin, J. (1980). The bonds of love: Rational violence and erotic domination. *Feminist Studies*, 6, 144–175.
- Benjamin, J. (1986). The alienation of desire: Women's masochism and ideal love. In J. L. Alpert (Ed.), *Psychoanalysis and women: Contemporary reappraisals* (pp. 113–138). Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.
- Benjamin, J. (1988). *The bonds of love*. New York: Pantheon.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base*. London: Routledge.
- Chodorow, N. (1978). *The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the society of gender*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Chodorow, N. (1989). Psychoanalytic feminism and the psychoanalytic psychology of women. In *Feminism and psychoanalytic theory* (pp. 178–198). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Dinnerstein, D. (1977). *The mermaid and the minotaur: Sexual arrangement*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Fairbairn, W. (1940). The repression and the return of bad objects (with special reference to the "war neurosis"). In J. Grotstein, & D. Rinsley (Eds.), *Psychoanalytic studies of the personality* (pp. 59–81). New York: International Universities Press.
- Freud, S. (1915). *Instincts and their vicissitudes*. London: Hogarth Press; 1957 SE 14. pp. 109–140.
- Freud, S. (1924). *The economic problem of masochism*. London: Hogarth Press; 1961 SE 19. pp. 155–170.
- Galenson, E. (1978). Examination anxiety in women. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 266, 163–177.
- Gilligan, C. (1982a). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hamilton, V. (1994). Resistance to the release of the bad object in the psychotherapy of a refugee. In J. Grotstein, & D. Rinsley (Eds.), *Fairbairn and the origins of object relations* (pp. 244–259). New York: Guilford Press.
- Harris, A. (1997). Aggression, envy, and ambition: Circulating tensions in women's psychic life. *Gender and Psychoanalysis*, 2, 291–299.
- Hoffman, L. (1972). Early childhood experiences and women's achievement motives. *Journal of Social Issues*, 28, 129–155.
- Horner, M. (1972). *The motive to avoid success and changing aspirations of college women*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Mahler, M. (1981). Aggression in the service of separation-individuation: Case study of a mother daughter relationship. *Psychoanalysis Quarterly*, 50, 625–637.
- Main, M., & Solomon, L. (1990). Procedures for identifying infants as disorganized/disoriented during the Ainsworth Strange situation. In M. Greenberg, & D. Cicchetti (Eds.), *Attachment in the pre-school years*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (pp. 121–160).
- Menaker, E. (1953). Masochism: A defense reaction of the ego. *Psychoanalysis Quarterly*, 22, 205–220.
- Person, E. (1982). Woman working: fears of failure, deviance and success. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 10, pp. 67–80.
- Ruderman, E. G. (1984) Shaping women's destinies. Unpublished manuscript. Presented to Division 39, Women in Psychoanalysis, Los Angeles, California, April, 1986.
- Ruderman, E. G. (1986a). Gender related themes of women psychotherapists in their treatment of women patients: The creative and reparative use of countertransference as a mutual growth experience. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 14, 103–126.
- Ruderman, E. G. (1986b). Creative and reparative uses of countertransference by women psychotherapists treating women patients: A clinical research study. In T. Bernay, & D. Cantor (Eds.), *The psychology of today's woman: New psychoanalytic visions* (pp. 339–363). Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.
- Ruderman, E. G. (1999). The patient, the analyst, the termination phase: Transference and countertransference considerations. In J. Edward, & E. Rose (Eds.), *The social work psychoanalyst's casebook*. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press.
- Ruderman, E. G. (2003). Plus ça change, plus c'est le meme chose: Women's "masochism" and ambivalence about success. In *Therapies with women in transition: Toward relational perspectives with today's woman* (pp. 1–25). Madison, CT: International Universities Press.
- Schecter, D. (1981). Masochism in women: A psychodynamic analysis. In S. Klebanow (Ed.), *Changing concepts in psychoanalysis* (pp. 169–181). New York: Gardner Press.
- Steger, G. (2000). The symmetry and asymmetry of cultures: A point of departure for bicultural psychotherapy. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 28.
- Stern, D. (1973). *The interpersonal world of the infant*. New York: Basic Books.
- Tustin, F. (1990). *The protective shell in children and adults*. London: Karnac Books.

Summarise in German and Spanish

Ellen G. Ruderman. Angst vor Erfolg. Selbstpflege und Selbstsabotage: Psychoanalytische Perspektiven zur weiblichen Angst vor Erfolg.

Der relationale Zugang zur Psychotherapie, ergänzt durch die Verwendung der Übertragung und Gegenübertragung, eröffnet einen Zugang zur Erforschung und zum Verständnis der internalisierten Barrieren, die das psychische Wachstum der Patientin behindern. Die Psychoanalyse kann der Patientin helfen, ein integrierteres Selbstverständnis zu entwickeln, das ihr ermöglicht, sich am Erfolg und der Erfüllung im privaten und öffentlichen Leben zu erfreuen. Obwohl auf der Suche nach einem eigenen Selbstverständnis, halten Frauen oft an den frühen Bindungs- und Beziehungsmustern fest. Anhand zweier Fallbeispiele wird die komplexe Beziehung zweier Frauen zu den frühen Pflegepersonen beleuchtet. Die Fälle zeigen, wie die Frauen an die frühen familiären Internalisierungen und Identifikationen fixiert bleiben und mit sich wiederholenden Mustern von Selbstsabotage ihren Erfolg behindern.

Ellen G. Ruderman. Crianza y autosabotaje: Perspectivas psicoanalíticas acerca del miedo al éxito en las mujeres.

La aproximación relacional en psicoterapia, favorecida por el uso del paradigma de la transferencia-contratransferencia por el analista, puede crear el camino para explorar y comprender las barreras internas del paciente para crecer. El análisis puede entonces ayudar a los pacientes a lograr una visión de sí-mismo más integrada que les permita disfrutar del éxito y la realización en su vida tanto pública como privada. A pesar de que luchan por una auto-definición, las mujeres se mantienen dentro de viejas ligas relacionales. En este trabajo, se usaran dos ejemplos de casos para elucidar las relaciones complejas que las mujeres tienen con sus más tempranos cuidadores principales. Los casos ilustran como las mujeres se mantienen fijadas a tempranas figuras interiorizadas ó a identificaciones familiares, y se encuentran a sí mismas repitiendo patrones de autosabotaje que les impide su éxito.