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▶ **To cite this version:**

Peggy Mclaughlin. Theories of Feminist Psychology & Feminist Organizing Principles : Building Bridges From Theory to Practice. Alizés : Revue angliciste de La Réunion, 1992, Images de Femmes, 04, pp.107-122. hal-02339396

HAL Id: hal-02339396

https://hal.univ-reunion.fr/hal-02339396

Submitted on 30 Oct 2019

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Theories of Feminist Psychology & Feminist Organizing Principles: Building Bridges From Theory to Practice

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'In The Beginning...'

The struggle of American women for liberation, social justice, and self-development has been led by women organizers for more than 150 years. As Marie Weil argues,[1]

> The entire history and development of feminism can be seen as a process of community organization — from development of critical consciousness regarding the status of women and the oppression of minorities, to demystifying and reclaiming history, through the development of social and political action movement, including the creation of specialized organizations and programs to serve the needs of women.[2]

Weil points out that many of the pioneers of social work and community organizing were women. She continues, "Major aspects of the development of Social Work from the social reform movements of the late nineteenth century were led by such women as Jane Addams, Dorothea Dix, Julia Lathrop... and Florence Kelley".[3] Despite this rich proud heritage of feminist reformers and

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1. Marie Weil, "Women, Community and Organizing" in *Feminist Visions for Social Work* by Nan Van Den Bugh and Lynn Cooper, 1986, National Association of Social Workers, Silver Spring, Maryland, p. 188.
2. Weil, Ibid..
3. Weil, Ibid..

leaders, men gradually came to dominate in this as in other fields.[4] But feminist organizing has continued to be a significant stream in the overall picture of community and personal development activities.

As Weil states, "The central issue in feminist organizing and organizations is how to embody and carry out feminist values and principles in action strategies."[5] Feminism adds an additional element to traditional political or organizing work. Charlotte Bunch maintains, "Feminism is Transformational Politics."[6] This means that the individual must empower herself as she struggles to bring about social change. Women historically have been among the exploited members of society. This is true even among rich women who may historically have had luxuries but few rights. It is still true today among the majority of women in the world, especially those in South America, India and Africa.

For women organizers to raise the banner and lead the oppressed they first had to escape from under the heels of their own oppressors. As one feminist stated, "It's like swimming in muddy water. You can't see clearly what has happened to you and how you are deformed by it."[7] For women there are often two changes occurring simultaneously while they work on projects. They are experiencing personal growth by consciousness-raising and discovering their own voice and issues while simultaneously attacking the problems of the larger society. An understanding of this dual endeavor is the reason for the feminist slogan, 'The personal is political.' As victims of exclusion and exploitation for thousands of years, we have often acquired a victim mentality. We must re-birth ourselves as we reform society.

Feminist thinking and writing has been undergoing a creative explosion since the second wave of our movement began in the 1970's. Fields as diverse as theology, history, and anthropology have been re-examined and a revisionist literature created. Progress has been particularly fruitful in the field of women's psychology. Since the 1970's a series of books has appeared that has debunked the founding fathers devaluation of women and celebrated women's different patterns of development and goals.

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4. Ruth Brandwein, "Toward Androgeny in Community & Organizational Practice" in Ann Weick & Susan Vandiver, eds. *Women, Power & Change*, National Association of Social Workers, 1981, Washington, DC.
5. Weil, op. cit., p. 194.
6. Interview with Charlotte Bunch, 4/20/88.
7. Interview with Joan Thorn, 4/11/88.

The founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, is notorious for his woman bashing. He argued that: "A woman's life is almost always second best."[8] He theorized that inadequacy begins when a young girl notices that she has no penis, and she continues to feel stunted and insufficient for life. She becomes passive and narcissistic. Freud maintained that envy of the penis is the predominant feature in a woman's mental life. Women bear children (especially boys) in an attempt to acquire a substitute penis. Freud stated that women are moral masochists who become self-sacrificing out of an underlying feeling of guilt. He said that women have little sense of justice, and that ambition in women is a neurotic symptom.

Most psychoanalysts, along with the mainstream of our society, have accepted Freud's negative view of women. Only a few early theorists disputed this: Karen Horney, Frieda Fromm-Reichman, and Melanie Klein are examples. A more recent seminal theorist, Eric Erikson, created a powerful scheina of the stages of life development totally without reference to women's experience. In his ground-breaking book,[9] Erikson postulates the stages of life as: first tackling the struggle for initiative, then industry, then identity, then intimacy, and finally, for a few in late life, generativity.

Many women realized instinctively that the pattern of most women's lives is almost the opposite of Erikson's plan. Women tend to marry in their twenties and concentrate most of their energy on the development of their husbands and children, not on themselves or their careers. Generativity is often the initial stage of their adult lives. Some women finally focus on their own development only after their children are raised and gone, but many women never become self-actualizing. The new feminist psychologists have begun to seek the roots and pattern of women's separate reality, and to resist the minimization and marginalization to which women have been historically subject.

Parallel to the growth of women's psychology there has been a smaller surge in writings on feminist community organizing. On the other hand, writers in the field of organizing rarely cite or integrate of the rich new psychological theories that can undergird and enrich their ideas. It is the intention of this work to join these parallel efforts so that further developments in organizing may be illuminated by the discoveries of our sister voyagers. The recent contributions of leading female psychological theorists and researchers will be summarized, and their theories then connected to the dynamics of feminist organizing.

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8. Sigmund Freud, "The Taboo of Virginity" in *Complete Works* - Standard Edition 11: 205, London, Hogarth Press, 1957.

9. Erik Erikson, *Childhood & Society*, 1950, New York, Norton, pp. 219-31.

Jean Baker Miller

The first pioneer of modern women's psychology is Jean Baker Miller of the Stone Center at Wellesley College. In her 1976 book[10] she laid the cornerstones of our field. She revealed how limited and distorted the mainstream vision of humanity is because only one aspect is noticed: the male model. This constricted vision has harmed dominant males, as well as, obviously, subordinated females.

Miller discusses two types of inequality in the world: temporary and permanent. In temporary inequality the lesser person is in a learning or growing stage and the goal is to remove the inequality by development. Examples are parent and child, teacher and student, and therapist and patient. After the apprenticeship stage, people may continue their relationship as friends or competitors, but not in a socially enforced 'superior'-to-'inferior' relationship.

In relationships that are sanctioned as permanently unequal, there are almost no paths available to make the journey from inferior to equal or superior. In such relationships people are defined as unequal by ascription and the criteria may be sex, race, class, or nationality. There is no rule that superiors should help inferiors, should share their knowledge and advantages, or should assist them to equality. On the contrary, once a group is labelled as permanently inferior, superiors tend to consider the group as defective in order to keep it at a lower status. That is why blacks are described as less intelligent, and women are supposed to be ruled by hormones and emotions. In every society subordinates are thought to be unable to perform the most valued roles because of innate incapacities which are impossible to change. Dominants are happy to believe this, and often subordinates accept it also. The myth of permanent inferiority is only challenged when a drastic event occurs, like World War II, when blacks fought courageously and women 'manned' our factories with great skill.

Miller points out that in all societies subordinates need to show characteristics that are pleasing to the dominant group in order to survive and thrive: submissiveness, dependency, and passivity are examples. Only when subordinates adopt these traits are they considered attractive and well-adjusted. Because of this women have always had to have a basis of self-worth different from the prized characteristics in their society, since becoming dynamic and self-actualizing was labelled as 'unfeminine'.

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10. Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, 1976, Boston, Beacon Press.

In a famous study by Broverman[11] therapists were asked to pick out the qualities of a healthy adult personality, and then to list typical qualities for men and for women. Both male and female clinicians listed the same ideals for 'healthy adults' as they cited for average men. But typical qualities for adult women were substantially different. Men were supposed to be independent and self-actualizing, whereas women with those characteristics were seen as maladjusted and unfeminine.

Miller describes the assignment of different roles and traits to men and women in each society as *asymmetrical* programming. This means that men are encouraged to become separate, active and rational so they can succeed in the public sphere. Women are rewarded for staying passive, emotional and connected to the domestic sphere. Men are trained for competition and women for co-operation and helping others. Men are encouraged to serve themselves and women to serve others (husband, children, family and the world-at-large). Typically men's egos are formed by making some compromise and integration between their innate drives and the world's requirements. Women are taught to repress their drives and focus on nurturing others.

Because of their socialization experiences as well as what they are taught, most women develop the ability to recognize and meet others' needs before their own. This creates two problems for women. First, the world only pays and applauds success in the public sphere, and, secondly, many women totally lose touch with their own needs and aspirations. Without acknowledging it many women assume that just serving others will keep them happy, loved, and 'safe'.[12] As millions of divorced, abandoned and impoverished women have discovered, focusing all their energy on serving a man is not always more secure than as the career they have rejected as 'unfeminine'.

One of Miller's brilliant insights is that many traits which are traditionally seen as women's weaknesses and actually affiliative strengths. Contemporary philosophers bemoan modern man's sense of alienation and his inability to organize society to effectively serve human needs. Miller believes we have reached the outer limits for a world built on 'macho' traits of "advance at any cost and eliminate competitors". She states that the seeds of a more evolved and advanced form of existence for all can be found in recognition of the importance of women's powerful desire for affiliation. The goal of an improved society would be to raise both men and women to develop traits that had been limited to

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11. Broverman & Broverman. "Sex-Role Stereotype & Clinical Judgments about Mental Health", *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology*, 1970, 34 # 1, pp. 1-7.
12. M. Norman, *The Total Woman*.

women in the past: sensitivity to emotions, and connections which could strengthen and protect society.

Miller's construct is echoed by writers on feminist organizing when they advocate egalitarianism instead of the traditional male hierarchical model. Feminists eschew the old power and dominance games and instead work to empower everyone. Many women refuse to compete or seek leadership that they see as acquired at the expense of the less fortunate. They fear the jealousy and isolation that 'stardom' requires and maintain that self-sacrifice and the liberation of all are their only goals. Women organizers tend to be more sensitive to the maintenance needs of the group and of each individual, and will often admit they are 'feeding' the formal leader and certain members to keep these workers involved in the task, while concealing their own contributions.

Carol Gilligan

Carol Gilligan's book[13] has largely defined liberal feminism in this country among academics. Many of us have had the exact reaction to it that Robin West describes:

> When I first read Carol Gilligan's book [...] I had an unequivocal shock of recognition. What she is saying, I thought, is important, transformative, empowering, exciting, enlivening, and most fundamentally, it is simply TRUE. It is true of me, and was true of my mother and my sisters. She has described the way I think, what I value, and what I fear [...] Her book captures what I know and have always known, but have never been able to claim as my own moral vision.[14]

Gilligan continues the postulation of a 'different' theory of women's personality development which was pioneered by Jean Baker Miller.[15] Gilligan's work, however, begins from the perspective of morality. She starts from the theories of her teacher Lawrence Kohlberg, who proposed six ascending stages of moral development.[16] Using a scale he developed on young men, he tested hundreds of people (men & women) to assay which stage of moral development they had reached. He postulated six stages which can be summarized into three:

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13. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory & Women's Development*, 1982, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
14. Robin West, "Jurisprudence & Gender", University of Chicago Law Review 55 #1, Winter 1988.
15. Miller, Ibid..
16. Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development*, 1981, San Francisco, Harper & Row.

INITIAL STAGE: (preconventional — conformity to avoid punishment)
MIDDLE: (conventional stage — moral decisions are based on relationships and social systems maintenance)
HIGHEST: (post-conventional level: decisions based on rights, justice and the social contract).

After hundreds of people had responded to his hypothetical dilemmas, Kohlberg announced that few people reached his highest 'principled' stages, and almost none of these were women. To him, as to Freud and Piaget, women seemed deficient and underdeveloped, since they rarely rose above the middle levels of moral reasoning — and continually based their decisions on an ethic of care for others rather than abstract principles of rights and justice.

Gilligan's revolutionary insight from her many studies on women's actual moral choices (rather than the hypothetical model questions Kohlberg used), is that women are not deficient but 'different' — hence the title of her book. She also found women clustering at the mid-point on the Kohlberg scale but in a brilliant re-interpretation of the data, she theorized that women's development and choices follow a contrasting curve which turns away from that of men she proposed that men (whose identity depends on leaving the mother and the home and setting up an independent existence)[17] design their life around an ethic of *separateness*, and their fear of other men. But women, whose focus is to 'replicate mothering' (as Nancy Chodorow describes it)[18] are trained to develop an ethic of *connection* and caring. Gilligan describes this:

> The moral imperative [...] for women is an injunction to care, a responsibility to discern and alleviate the real and recognizable troubles of this world. For men, the moral imperative appears rather as an injunction to respect the rights of others and thus to protect themselves from interference with their own rights to life and self-fulfilment.[19]

Gilligan's breathtaking insight is that any theory (philosophical, legal or psychological) built on 'separateness' as humankind's initial or primary state is not based in reality.[20] In conception, during intercourse, during development in the womb, during infancy and nursing, all people are connected. Although men seek *separation* as prerequisite to attaining manhood, women maintain *con-*

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17. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949.
18. Nancy Chodorow, *The Replication of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sexist Sociology of Adult Life*, Berkeley, Cal, Univ of California Press, 1978.
19. Gilligan, Ibid., p. 100.
20. Robin West, "Jurisprudence & Gender", Winter 1989.

nectedness as their primary state of being. Unfortunately the male ideal of separateness is the only mode that has been recognized and celebrated in western civilization. It has, in fact, been elevated as the keystone of Western philosophy, law and psychology.

Women perceive themselves and the world differently. But because they usually haven't been allowed to develop, or learn or teach, or write, women's alternative experience has been silenced and unknown to the world and sometimes to themselves until the recent feminist revolution.
Gilligan states:

> In response to the request to describe themselves [...] similarly, the standard of moral judgement that informs their assessment of self is a standard of relationship, an ethic of nurturing, responsibility and care [...] Morality is seen by these women as arising from the experience of connection and conceived of as a problem of inclusion rather than balancing claims.[21]

Gilligan noted that most women are forced or seduced by romantic notions to give up their self-development and use all their intellect and energy to care for others. Women deny they have any power, and speak of their sense of powerlessness. They are not prone to crime and violence like men are, but to depression and a sense of emptiness. They are trained to say 'yes' to everyone's needs and 'no' to their own for so long that they often lose sight of any personal desires or priorities. Like Miller, Gilligan boldly rejects the male rights hierarchy, and describes women's characteristics as essential for the survival of our warring and endangered planet.

> We need to show that a legal and economic system which values, protects and rewards nurturing labor in private life will make a better community. We need to show that community, nurturing, responsibility and the ethic of care are values at least as worthy of protection as autonomy, self-reliance and individualism [...] we need to show [...] how the refusal of the legal system to protect these values has weakened this community as it has impoverished our lives.[22]

Gilligan's work makes a critical contribution to our understanding how men and women organize communities differently. The two disparate poles of men's and women's orientations have been named the 'Ethics of Justice' versus the 'Ethics of Care' by Nona Lyon,[23] and they have many amplifications in

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21. Gilligan. Ibid., p. 159.
22. Gilligan, Ibid., p 65.
23. ***What's the Content?***

organizing theory. The dominant male-model style of community development argues for separation of issues and separation of self from the work. This style emphasizes focusing on abstract principles and objectivity and is based on conflict and competition. Feminist organizing, in contrast, is often described as holistic and subjective. It perceives rich connections between people and issues, and attempts to weave these together in an interdependent network of personal and political goals. Not surprisingly, our work is sometimes hobbled by women's fear of anger and competition, so that power and leadership become difficult to develop in a setting which is attempting to be strictly egalitarian.

Nancy Chodorow

Nancy Chodorow, in her book,[24] posits several basic differences between men's and women's early socialization that affects each of us both personally and the way our world is both structured and perceived. She states:

> All social scientists who have examined processes of gender role learning and the development of a sense of identification in boys and girls have argued that the asymmetrical organization of parenting in which women solely mother is the basic cause of significant contrasts between feminine and masculine identification processes.[25]

She argues that because women are trained for ensuring the reproduction of the species and child care they are socialized differently. Growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world; the basic masculine sense of self is separate.[26]

Because girls are usually raised to be mothers, they are allowed to stay connected to their mothers longer, thus fusing the notions of attachment and caring for others with the process of identity formation. The need to leave the mother as part of masculine identity formation is so powerful that Freud and others have written that masculinity can be defined negatively (rather than positively) as any trait that is not feminine. Therefore boys are cut off sooner by

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24. Chodorow, Ibid..
25. Chodorow, Ibid..
26. Chodorow, Ibid., p. 169.

their mothers, their weaknesses and emotionality are discouraged and they are pushed towards independence. Girls are usually allowed to remain enmeshed longer with the mother, since to achieve identity they do not have to leave and accomplish; their destiny usually is to 'replicate the mothering' they have received. Since girls are parented by a person of the same gender, they come to experience themselves as more connected and less independent than men.

Chodorow presages Gilligan's breakthroughs when she states that this type of training develops a greater capacity in girls for relationships and empathy. Since the emphasis is on connectedness and continuity, women seem to have more flexible and permeable ego boundaries and to retain the capacity to regress and merge with their children, and sometimes with other adults. Despite their more diffuse ego boundaries, Chodorow refutes the arguments of the founding fathers of psychology that women are somehow defective or deficient. Although women seek medical and psychiatric help more freely, they actually are less subject to psychosis, hospitalization and life-threatening illnesses than men.

Chodorow points out that relationships, especially issues of dependency, are experienced differently by men and women. Since masculinity is defined through separation, whereas femininity is proclaimed by attachment, males are often threatened by relationships and intimacy while females are frightened by separation and individuation. This embeddedeness in social relationships becomes a liability for women in the public world where milestones of achievement are measured by individuation and autonomy. Traditional organizing is seen as a lonely, courageous and conflict-ridden endeavor. The organizer rejects mainstream patterns and apathy in order to persuade people to create, through constructive conflict, an alternative world. When women engage in organizing they typically feel a need to create support groups to sustain themselves and the people they work with. Women tend to focus more on the process in their work rather than only on the product, as men are likely to do. The majority of women's efforts, even in the public arena, center around assistance for the family and community. Again, 'the personal is political.'

Dorothy Dinnerstein

In her 1976 book[27] Dorothy Dinnerstein illuminates uncharted territory. Dinnerstein, a psychologist and poet, postulates an alternative explanation for the ancient question, "Why do men suppress women in every culture and century?" She points out that this persecution of women deforms men as well as women. Dinnerstein argues that women's universal responsibility for mothering and early child care lies at the root of women's oppression. She notes that infants feel no distinction between themselves and their earliest caretaker. They feel merged with their mother in an ecstatic union that seems to meet their every desire. The mother appears to be an infinite 'mine' that can be turned to continually to satisfy all needs for food, warmth, and comfort. The mother seems like a part of nature, not a separate self-directed entity with her own needs. But it is this very separateness that creates the infant's first experience of pain and terror. The infant is totally helpless, but the mother is not always able or willing to meet its need. Raising children demands that you frustrate them sometimes. When this occurs the infant is overwhelmed with terror and rage at her/his own helplessness.

This experience is eventually different for men than for women because men's role, as described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*[28] is to leave the mother and the home. Men's programmed role is to separate and go off and establish themselves as adequate and 'manly' and to find a livelihood. This painful separation is the first test of manhood and in most cultures men must achieve this before they can 'win' another mother — a wife. Women, on the other hand, as Chodorow describes it,[29] have a different destiny. They are allowed to remain near home, 'connected' to their mothers and others, and are trained to continue their sense of reciprocal dependency by 'replicating mothering' for their new family.

Dinnerstein reflects that men all over the world seek to control and dominate women. Only the means vary. In some countries it is harems and purdah, in other it is foot-binding or clitorectomies. In our country it is rape, battering and limiting women's employment and salaries, so that many women have to marry to escape poverty. Dinnerstein theorizes that this is men's conscious or unconscious drive to retain possession of women. They need a woman to satisfy

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27. Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and the Human Malaise* , 1976, New York, Harper Books.
28. Campbell, Ibid..
29. Chodorow, Ibid..

the emotional needs they attempted to deny and separate from when they left home. Men usually deny their desire to regain their mother's nurturing by oppressing and trying to control all women. But statistics on battering show that many women are beaten for the first time when they are pregnant or seeking a job or an education; thereby ejecting for the second time their husband-child. Dinnerstein states that women are harmed when they are identified by men with the infinite richness of nature. Men create religions, or philosophies, or political systems, to exclude women from public life so they will always be available to their husbands who can endlessly revisit them for replenishment. But sadly, this oasis of women's richness is supposedly only designed for men. Women are the givers of nourishment and support and men are the takers; either by romance and seduction or by force and punishment.

Dinnerstein's poetic vision illuminates the experiences of women organizers. Women who seek to empower themselves or others are the most threatening to men's hegemony. If women gain power they might demand equality and refuse to remain subordinate to men's designs. Many women who have discovered feminism and their own needs have had to surrender their marriage or relationships as the price of becoming an "uppity" or actualized person. This price is never demanded of men. On the contrary those who are not independent and empowered are not thought "mature men". Men have to develop their self for success and women have to submerge themselves. Dominant males have programmed society to attack and ridicule women leaders. Many articles are devoted to women's "fear of success" and "fear of power." Women admit their real fear is of being called "unfeminine" and being attacked, envied, and isolated.

The recent ground-breaking book, *Women's Ways of Knowing*[30] was authored by four women who have been active in women's teaching and psychology since the 1970's: Mary Field Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. They use as their starting point the theory of moral development of Carol Gilligan and the scheme of cognitive stages discovered by William Perry in his work with Harvard students. The stages were Perry's attempt to illustrate the styles of thinking or organizing information that most people use; and the stages of intellectual development some people achieve as they become educated. Belenky and her co-authors interviewed only women

30. Mary Field Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, & Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing*, s.r.

about their ways of learning and thinking and their results led them to extend and modify Perry's original scheme.

Of particular value to feminist community organizers are some of the findings these women give on the ways women 'develop' their voices and minds and hold onto their values in a world which tends to devalue women and their ideas. Goldberger notes, "Many women falter, deny their potential and their values, accommodate to the views and expectations of others, and suffer from feelings of inauthenticity or powerlessness." The organizer's goal is to help women find their way out of this culturally imposed morass, and this book suggests several avenues. Their interviews with women revealed that "every woman, regardless of class or academic achievement, needs to know that she is capable of intelligent thought." Even women with a history of graduating from prestigious colleges and significant achievements were still unsure of their abilities.

The famous 'Impostor Phenomenon' which has been much discussed in the literature occurs in successful women of all classes. Despite their outstanding achievements many women persist in believing that they are really not bright or competent and have fooled anyone who thinks so. Goldberger reveals, "Most of the women that we interviewed, rich and poor, educated or not, made it clear that they did not wish to be told they had the 'capacity' to become knowledgeable or wise. They needed to know that they already knew something (though not everything); that there was something good inside them. They were worried that there wasn't." In a typical masculine myth, confirmation and the prize come after the journey and the completion of a successful struggle against dangers, either external or internal. For many women, if they do not experience confirmation and community at the beginning they may never begin their adventure of learning to know themselves and their desires. They may never succeed in individuating and taking control of their lives.

In the interviews undertaken for *Women's Ways of Knowing* the writers re-discovered what the women's movement has already taught us: "Most women say they learn best in groups and prefer working collaboratively." Women particularly are damaged by workers and teachers who play the 'doubting game;' that is, a person who responds to them by pointing out a contradiction, an error, or a loophole. Instead of rising to new heights of achievement, as men are trained to respond to challenges, many women tended to give up or go elsewhere. That is because many women are already consumed by self-doubt and pain at their socially imposed limitations.

Goldberger and her co-writers advise teachers and organizers to present material not centered primarily around what the instructor wants to reach but around what the women already know. "Most of the women we interviewed were drawn to the sort of knowledge that comes from first-hand observation, whereas most of the institutions [...] emphasized abstract out-of-context learning. For many women the most powerful learning experiences took place out of school. The mothers usually named child-bearing or child-rearing as their most important school." Although the women studied were not against abstraction per se, "they balked when the abstractions preceded the experience or pushed it out entirely. The courses most often mentioned as powerful learning experiences were those that helped them translate private experiences into a shared public language." This is a very important point for women organizers, for it is exactly what the organizer is striving to accomplish — moving people from their private problems and grievances into an understanding of the public policy issues and potentials for change.

Confirming the findings of other feminist researchers on 'the new women's psychology,' the writers found many women experiencing the greatest internal growth not in their 20's and 30's as postulated by Erik Erikson, for men, but in mid-life. Although the typical woman supposedly becomes independent of the family of her origin in her 20's, she then usually begins serving her husband and children's needs. It is not until mid-life (40's and 50's), when children are grown, that most women can free time and energy to focus on themselves and their individual development. Finally, the authors learned what many of us have already experienced, both in our own lives and those of our clients:

> Women's intellectual growth and shifts in self-concept and world-view are often tied to events beyond the classroom — such as child-bearing and rearing, crises of self-doubt and inauthenticity, value conflicts and failures in relationships, and the failure of the male authority on whom the woman has depended.

Eichenbaum & Orbach

Louise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach have developed a perspective that is partially in agreement with the previous thinkers, but is divergent in some aspects. These writers gained initial prominence by their work with female anorexics and bulimic; their book, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*,[31] has been a best seller.

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31. Louise Eichenbaum & Susie Orbach, *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, s.r.

They have gradually expanded their clinics and writings to focus on women's overall development and feminist psychotherapy.

Eichenbaum and Orbach disagree with the theory that women are excessively dependent. They maintain instead that all people are dependent on one another, but only women are encouraged by our society to acknowledge it and act on it. Men are trained to deny weakness and often their dependency only emerges in physical illness or destructiveness (men often beat women who are threatening to leave them, and 75% of battered women are first hit when they become pregnant). Eichenbaum and Orbach state that girls learn early that they can only rely on themselves for support. Women cannot assume, like men usually do, that there will always be someone there to care for them emotionally, because nurturing in a marriage is not usually reciprocal. In many cultures (India, Africa, and China) girls are deliberately raised in a harsher way, given less food and attention, to accustom them early to the fact that they are destined to be care givers and not receivers.

In their latest book, Eichenbaum and Orbach have once again adopted an innovative perspective. *Between Women*[32] discusses the joy and openness of women's friendships, but also points out certain problems that sometimes occur: specifically, anger, competitiveness, jealousy and abandonment. They begin by stating that some women's friendships are so totally involving and supportive that they are sometimes like the merger of two identities. Other therapists have noticed this, particularly Helena Deutsch, who called it regressive and destructive. Eichenbaum and Orbach, along with a few other recent writers (Rubin, Ehrenrich, and Besherov) celebrate women's ability to sometimes unite with others and thereby gain support and feelings of safety. Their psychoanalytic explanation is parallel to Chodorow's; since women do not need to separate from their family to achieve identity as men do, some of them are able to maintain the infant's magical quality of merging with the mother and a few can then transfer this union to friends, lovers or children.

Eichenbaum and Orbach disagree with the 'classical psychoanalytic' doctrine that this is a regressive, potentially destructive ability, although they do note difficulties that may arise. They believe that it is this desire for continuing merger that makes many women unable to express anger openly or to engage in conflict. They find women often paralyzed when it comes to solo achievement or competitiveness, and postulate that whatever the specific situation, certain women strive to maintain connection at any price. Eichenbaum and Orbach trace this to the importance of the early mother-daughter bond and women's fear of disrupting

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32. Louise Eichenbaum & Susie Orbach, *Between Women*, s.r.

the source of all early nurturing. In an earlier psychoanalytic article they described the dilemma: "It is as though the woman is unconsciously living in a state of 'twinship' with her mother. Every success of hers is equated with a failure for her mother [...] the very wish to separate and succeed becomes equated with [...] aggression toward the mother." Several works on women's organizing and administration concur that women tend to avoid separation, objectivization, competitiveness and aggressiveness. Eichenbaum and Orbach's formulation offers one possible explanation for those tendencies that have been noted as feminine throughout history. They propose that women who tend to 'merge' with others realize the basis and limitations of this position and strive to move further along the continuum to a more autonomous stage. The price of this magical unity is often paralysis and lack of development. Change, difference and leadership are feared because they are equated with isolation and danger.

This paper has attempted to abstract the key views and exciting psychological discoveries of the recent generation of feminist psychologists, in order to offer a bridge to women interested or engaged in community organizing. As a woman who has been actively engaged in organizing efforts for women, children and poor people for over 25 years, this writer has struggled to understand her difficulties with the masculine model of organizing in which she was trained and gained initial experience — it was always problematic and never seemed right. The masculine seizure of power; the lack of respect for the individuals allegedly being helped; the disinclination to seek a genuine consensus before proceeding to action: these were always problems to this writer. A great source of support and inspiration has come from reading the germinal, creative works of the feminist philosophers and psychologists cited in this paper. This paper is offered as a map to other woman who are travelling the same road.