



A critical study of two cases of female homosexuality: one analysed by Sigmund Freud and the other by Helene Deutsch

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The case analysed by S. Freud

In 1920 Freud published a paper, „The psychogenesis of a case of homosexuality in a woman”¹, that describes „the narration of a single case, not too pronounced in type....” of female homosexuality².

„A beautiful and clever girl of 18, belonging to a family of good standing, had aroused displeasure and concern in her parents by the devoted adoration with which she pursued a certain ‘society lady’ who was about ten years older than herself. The parents asserted that, in spite of her distinguished name, this lady was nothing but a cocotte. It was well known, they said, that she lived with a friend, a married woman, and had intimate relations with her, while at the same time she carried on promiscuous affairs with a number of men. (...) No prohibitions and no supervision hindered the girl from seizing every one of her rare opportunities of being together with her beloved, of ascertaining all her habits, of waiting for her for hours outside her door or at a tram-halt, or sending her gifts of flowers, and so on. It was evident that this one interest had swallowed up all others in the girl’s mind. She (...) kept up relations only with a few girl friends who could help her in the matter or serve as confidants. The parents could

not say to what lengths their daughter had gone in her relations with the questionable lady, whether the limits of devoted admiration had already been exceeded or not. They had never remarked in their daughter any interest in young men, nor pleasure in their attentions, while, on the other hand, they were sure that her present attachment to a woman was only a continuation, in a more marked degree, of a feeling she had displayed of recent years for other members of her own sex which had already aroused her father’s suspicion and anger”.

„There were two details of her behavior, in apparent contrast with each other, that most especially vexed her parents. On the one hand, she did not scruple to appear in the most frequented streets in the company of her undesirable friend, being thus quite neglectful of her own reputation; while on the other hand, she disdained no means of deception, no excuses and no lies that would make meetings with her possible and cover them... One day it happened, indeed, as was sooner or later inevitable in the circumstances...³ „She went for a walk with her one day in a part of the town and at an hour at which she was not unlikely to meet her father on his way from his office. So it turned out. Her father passed them in the street and cast a furious look at her and her companion, about whom he had by that time come to know. (In page 148 it adds: „an angry glance which boded no

¹ Freud, Sigmund. „The psychogenesis of case of homosexuality in a woman”. The Standard edition of the complete psychological Works of S. Freud, the Hogarth Press, London. 1955. Vol. XVIII pp. 147-172.

² Ibid, p. 147. (underscore mine).

³ Ibid, p. 147f.



good"). A few moments later she flung herself into the railway cutting. The explanation she gave of the immediate reasons determining her decision sounded quite plausible. She had confessed to the lady that the man who had given them such an irate glance was her father, and that he had absolutely forbidden their friendship. The lady became incensed at this and ordered the girl to leave her then and there, and never again to wait for her or to address her—the affair must now come to an end. In her despair at having thus lost her loved one for ever, she wanted to put an end to herself".⁴ „She paid for this undoubtedly serious attempt at suicide with a considerable time on her back in bed, though fortunately little permanent damage was done. After her recovery she found it easier to get her own way than before. The parents did not dare to oppose her with so much determination, and the lady, who up till then had received her advances coldly, was moved by such an unmistakable proof of serious passion and began to treat her in a more friendly manner".⁵

The parents consulted Freud six months after this incident and asked him to psychoanalyse their daughter. Freud considered the converting of a homosexual quite a problem, particularly if she had lived her passion fully, so he is quite clear in the following statement:

„I had made the prognosis partly dependent on how far the girl had succeeded in satisfying her passion.... *With none of the objects of her adoration had the patient enjoyed anything beyond a few kisses and embraces; her genital chastity, if one may use such a phrase, had remained intact.* As for the *demi-mondaine* who had roused her most recent and by far her strongest emotions, she had always been treated coldly by her and never been allowed any greater favor than to kiss her hand. *She was probably making a virtue of necessity, when she kept insisting on the purity of her love and*

her physical repulsion against the idea of any sexual intercourse".⁶

Why does Freud state that the girl was „making a virtue of necessity"? Why must he doubt her *conscious* „physical repulsion against the idea of any sexual intercourse"? The girl is quite frank and straightforward. As to her unconscious strivings, could it not be that, so far, she is out to provoke her father and that he only longs for maternal love? In truth we see here an adolescent who finds herself in that transitory stage so common to young people of both sexes, who feel a conscious repulsion to everything sexual, due to a repression of their natural sexual longings, and not because they make a virtue of a necessity. At this stage, the repression of sexual impulses is motivated by several factors: problem of identity; strong primary ties to mother; fear of adulthood, and a profound resentment against her father and all men. Why this rage?

The only situation where one „makes virtue of necessity" is when the sexual impulse is suppressed (not repressed) out of fear; when the subject recognizes the desire and the fear and this is not mentioned by Freud in this case.

The following quotations emphasize the asexual nature of her love affair:

„As a school-girl she had been for a long time *in love with a strict and unapproachable mistress*, obviously a substitute mother...⁷„ She was, after all, a well-brought-up and modest girl, *who had avoided sexual adventures for herself, and who regarded herself sensual satisfactions as unaesthetic.* But already her first passions had been for women who were not celebrated for specially strict propriety... *Moreover, in all these affairs it had never been a question of women who had any reputation for homosexuality, and who might therefore have offered her some prospect of homosexual satisfaction;* on the contrary, he illogically (?) courted women who were coquettes in the ordinary sense of the word *and she rejected without hesitation the will-*

⁴ Ibid, p. 161f.

⁵ Ibid, p. 148.

⁶ Ibid, p. 153. (underscore mine).

⁷ Ibid, p. 168. (underscore mine).



ing advances made by a homosexual friend of her own age".⁸

So far everything seems to show an adolescent's open rebellion against her parents and her social group, searching desperately for the non-genital love (or pregenital) of a mother substitute, which one sees frequently in youngsters deprived of maternal love. But, for Freud, her homosexuality is self-evident: „She did not try to deceive me by saying that she self-evidently felt any urgent need to be freed from her homosexuality. On the contrary, she said she could not conceive of any other way of being in love...”⁹

Did she really understand what Freud thought of her? If so, her answer can be understood as another manifestation of her rebelliousness. Freud was always honest and truthful, and although he continues his own trail, he has doubts and he expresses them, but at the same time he affirms matters which are very debatable:

„The beautiful and well-made girl had, it is true, her father's tall figure, and her facial features were sharp rather than soft and girlish, traits *which might* be regarded as indicating a physical masculinity. Some of her intellectual attributes also *could be* connected with masculinity: for instance her acuteness of comprehension and her lucid objectivity”. He clarifies this by adding: „But these distinctions are conventional rather than scientific.”

But he never emphasizes that these qualities pertain both to women and men, and are not exclusive of the male, unless one has the viewpoint of patriarchal-chauvinism. Freud adds:

„What is certainly of greater importance is that in her behavior towards her love-object she had throughout assumed the masculine part: that is to say, she displayed the humility and the sublime overvaluation of the sexual object so characteristic of the male lover, the renunciation of all narcissistic satisfaction, and the preference for being the lover, rather than the beloved. *She had*

thus not only chosen a feminine love-object, but had also developed a masculine attitude towards that object”.¹⁰

We shall discuss these assertions later. We can criticize Freud, we can disagree with his interpretations, but we cannot but admire his intense concern to understand and explain the actions of human beings:

„At the age of thirteen to fourteen she displayed a tender and, according to general opinion, exaggeratedly strong affection for a small boy, not quite three years old... However, after a short time she grew indifferent to the boy and began to take an interest in mature, but still youthful women.... It was established beyond all doubt that this change occurred simultaneously with a certain event in the family, and one may therefore look to this for some explanation of the change. Before it happened, her libido was concentrated on a maternal attitude, while afterward *she became a homosexual attracted to mature women, and remained so ever since*. The event which is so significant for our understanding of the case was a new pregnancy of her mother's and the birth of a third brother when she was about sixteen”.¹¹

Forcefully, without appeal nor further discussion, the patient has been diagnosed a homosexual, but this diagnosis *must be discussed*. There is not one single conclusive fact to uphold the alleged homosexuality of our subject, so far; quite the contrary, we have witnessed a series of over-evaluated speculations based on the defiant and restless search of this patient for maternal love. Freud himself understood it when he states:

„*The analysis revealed beyond all shadow of doubt that the lady-love was a substitute for her mother...* The first objects of her affection after the birth of her youngest brother were really mothers, women between thirty and thirtyfive”... with the added characteristics of being „still youth-

⁸ Ibid, p. 161. (underscore mine).

⁹ Ibid, p. 153.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 154. (underscore mine).

¹¹ Ibid, p. 155f. (underscore mine).



ful”¹² and „coquettes in the ordinary sense of the word”.¹³

It must be stated that Freud was incapable of criticizing his bourgeois society, he did not consider interpersonal relations and only followed the patriarchal prejudices of his time; he inferred from the data obtained and speculated, but never made the obvious interpretations. He put aside what was clear and emphasized what was debatable. Let us clarify: at the time Freud decided to interrupt the analysis, the case history material speaks of a young woman mocking angrily the adult world she lives in and trapped in a narcissistic world of women, because of a pre-genital fixation to her mother. In this world there is no room for men, and least of all is there a possibility to respond lovingly to them. One could say, at most, that this is a typical case of „latent homosexuality”, but not one of an overt, manifest homosexuality. But if we should believe in the term *latent*, we fall into an old trap: since all humans are bisexual, all or a vast majority could be considered potential homosexuals, for we know that under outer situations that limit the possibility of heterosexual experiences (for example prison, concentration camps, unisex boarding school, army, navy), the sexual drive can find an outlet in homosexuality. With well-known frequency, this type of circumstantial sexual experience does not leave, of necessity, lasting consequence. Also, the term latent homosexuality, although it may have a certain dynamic significance is one of those terms difficult to prove, because it does happen that one can psychoanalyze a „latent” homosexual *in extenso* without ever showing convincing objective material. Kolb and Johnson have shown how dangerous the term „latent homosexuality” can be, if the therapist lacks experience, because the patient’s submission to his authority leads him into unnecessary or prejudicial homosexual activity.¹⁴ Psychoanalysis can never be only mere speculation, it must be the understanding and interpretation of facts that hold to a logical pat-

¹² Ibid, p. 156. (underscore mine).

¹³ Ibid, p. 161.

¹⁴ Kolb, Lawrence C; and Johnson, Adelaide M; „Etymology and therapy of overt homosexuality”. The Psychoanalytic Quarterly, Vol. XXIV. pp. 506-515.

tern within the context of present knowledge; this does not mean that a psychoanalyst may not formulate working hypotheses subject to ratification or rectification. Freud’s presentation, as it stands, shows the patient’s homosexuality, if at all, only as a possibility but not as a fact. What we are trying to prove is that *it is only possible* that the patient, *at some later date, might become* an overt homosexual; if so, our understanding of the clinical material ill also explains this possibility.

On page 154 Freud classifies the girl’s behavior toward her beloved as *masculine*, and nothing could be further from the truth: her courtship is at all times that of any timid, indecisive youngster of either sex; in fact, such an attitude in a male is in reality, passive and suppliant, evincing a lack of manliness.

On the basis of the intra-family dynamic, let us try to explain the behavior of this young woman. This should allow us to understand her defiance at the time of the birth of her third male sibling, the fourth and last offspring of this family where our patient was the only girl.

Freud’s brief comments on the patient’s mother begin to show us the family dynamic:

„The girl we are considering had in any case altogether little cause to feel affection for her mother. The latter, still *youthful* herself, *saw in her rapidly developing daughter an inconvenient competitor*, she favored the sons at her expense, limited her independence as much as possible, and *kept an especially strict watch against any close relation between the girl and her father*.

A yearning from the beginning for a kinder mother would, therefore, have been quite intelligible, but why it should have flared up just then, and in the form of a consuming passion is hard to understand”.¹⁵ Elsewhere Freud states. The mother’s attitude toward the girl was not so easy to grasp. *She was till a youngish woman, who was evidently unwilling, to give up her own claims to attractiveness*. All that was clear was that *she did not take her daughter’s infatuation so tragically* as did the father, nor was she so incensed at it. *She had even for some time en-*

¹⁵ Freud, S. Op. Cit. p 157 (underscore mine).



joyed her daughter's confidence concerning her passion. Her opposition to it seemed to have been aroused mainly by the harmful publicity with which the girl displayed her feelings. She had herself suffered for some year from neurotic troubles and enjoyed a great deal of consideration from her husband; *she treated her children in quite different ways, being decidedly harsh towards her daughter and over-indulgent to her three sons...*, the patient was always reserved in that she aid about her mother, whereas in regard to her father there was no question of this".¹⁶ „The mother, herself *still attached great value to the attentions and the admiration of men*".¹⁷

This type of manipulative receptive-exploitative mother is often seen in the clinic: they interfere in the father-daughter relationship by becoming an accomplice of the latter; some stimulate, consciously or unconsciously, the homosexual tendencies of their daughters; others stimulate their own rejection and aversion toward men, that may also manifest itself as sexual frigidity. We see their provocative 'queen bee' display seeking the admiration of men other than their husbands, whom they attack, devalue and even destroy or attempt to destroy; we see them hover about, attracting the friends or fiancé's of their daughters and becoming so astonished when confronted with their malicious behavior, which they justify as only the desire to be courteous and attentive; we see them incapable of a truly great love, although they live the phantasy of a great passion. This type of seductive woman (for there are other types and level of seduction) is only a mother in the biological sense that she has given birth to offspring, but who see in their „beautiful and well-made" daughters, rivals that must be annulled by every possible means.

They are like the step-mother of the fairy tale who ask the mirror on the wall who is the fairest of them all, and when she finds out it is the stepdaughter, she does not hesitate in having her killed. They cannot tolerate the eclipse of their autumnal charm by the fresh beauty of youth: The narcissistic wound is unbearable.

¹⁶ Freud, S. Op. Cit. p 157. (underscore mine).

¹⁷ Ibid, p 158. (underscore mine).

This mother was initially the happy accomplice of her daughter who had withdrawn, leaving her the sole claimant of men's admiration, and only later became, apparently, critical of her, when she is the subject of the open gossip of their bourgeois society. It is comprehensible yet sad, that these mothers are ready for any conscious or unconscious duplicity, deceit or hypocrisy to maintain their privileged position. Freud who was so concerned in defending the adults of this society saw, generally, only the problems of the children.

Let us now have a look at the father. Freud tells us the following:

„The father was an earnest, worthy man, at bottom very tender-hearted, but he had to some extent estranged his children by the sternness he had adopted towards them. *His treatment of his only daughter was too much influenced by consideration for his wife.* When he first came to know of his daughter's homosexual tendencies he flew into a rage and tried to suppress them by threats. At that time perhaps he hesitated between different though equally distressing views--regarding her as vicious, as degenerate, or as mentally afflicted. There was something about his daughter's homosexuality that aroused the deepest bitterness in him. If this way failed, he refers to psychoanalysis, he still had in reserve his strongest counter-measure: a speedy marriage as to awaken the natural instincts of the girl and stifle her unnatural tendencies".¹⁸

This type of father is also frequently seen in the clinic: a serious, respectable man, concerned for his family, „at bottom vary tender-hearted"; but Freud does not tell us he is a weak man, although he states that he is stern certainly a an overcompensation or as a reaction-formation for his weakness. We are told that the father's „*treatment of his only daughter was too much influenced by consideration for his wife*"; but we are not presented with any objective criticism of this remarkable detail. In truth, one cannot but remark on the unmanliness of this father who is not at all conscious that *he has no right*

¹⁸ Ibid, p 149 (underscore mine).



to determine his daughter's behavior. Thus, we deal here with a man submissive to the whim of a wife who is insecure, receptive, childish, manipulative, exploitative, coquetish, flirtatious and very vain. Undoubtedly this type of men are well known to us all; quite frequently they are the subject of concern and commiseration, or the butt of many jokes. One can imagine his intense jealousy at his wife's behavior in front of her admirers, but Freud does not mention this.

We are told that the father has punished his daughter severely (but we are not told what specific punishment was meted out) when his attention is drawn to her so-called first homosexual inclination with mothers from 30 to 35 years old. Could this have been her own mother's age? Why was he so severe in his daughter? Clinical experience has shown us that fathers invested as official executioners by the mothers, are not infrequent,¹⁹ specially in those instances, like the present, where the father's behavior toward his children is determined by his wife. One must also consider his rage when he realizes that not even his daughter takes him seriously, nor loves him; *but he can vent his anger on her*. Weak men such as he, do not relate to their spouse as comrades nor equals; they maintain a type of submissive relationship reminiscent of that which they had to their own mothers.

One cannot but consider what would have happened if Freud had confronted his patient with the fact that she could not really be thought of a homosexual; that there was a possibility that she might eventually become one, but this was not at all a certainty; that she was searching for a maternal love in women who presented certain characteristic similar to her mother such as: „still youthful” and „not celebrated for specially strict propriety”; that she felt repudiated and rejected by her own mother; that she resented the weakness, passivity and submissiveness of her father. Freud overvalued his material and compounded his error by being caught in the impossible web of his libido theory; all he could do was interpret a „feminine

Oedipus complex”.²⁰

Let us continue our search for facts in the clinical material: How does the patient socialize? She sought her mother's understanding, confided her passion to her and became her accomplice, despite the fact that her mother was „overindulgent to her three sons” and „limited her independence as much as possible”. Toward her girl friends: „She... kept up relations only with a few...who could help her in the matter or serve a confidant”. Thus one characteristic of her relationship toward women is one of dependency and complicity. Why is this so? We have no answer, we can only point that these characteristics were reinforced by the mother and that they represent negative aspects of the young woman's receptive-exploitative character. If the mother-daughter relationship had been one of love and understanding, the positive aspects of her character would have been stimulated. One could add that if she became conscious, aware of the parental attitudes and the conflicts posited on her by them, she might want to change her character orientation towards its positive aspects. But Freud never gave her a chance.

Her relations to women show other facets: Freud tells us that „she had been for a long time in love with a strict and unapproachable mistress.” „As for the demimondaine who had roused her most recent and by far her strongest emotions, she had always been treated coldly by her and never been allowed any greater favor than to kiss her hand”. These two episodes are evidence that wanting maternal-love, she seeks it where it is unobtainable, she smocks her social group and her family and actually rejects a gladly proffered homosexual love. Everything seems to point to her unconscious fixation to her own mother and the need to be loved precisely by her, so a pattern has been set up where she shows us by the choice of her loved-subjects, what she really thinks of her mother: they are women of questionable ethics, coquettish and who still wish to call men's attention to their vanishing attraction. This is nothing new in our clinics, where we often find how the primary incestuous tie to mother determines, that certain of her qualities be looked for in the loved ones.

¹⁹ Silva G. Jorge „El temor del hombre a la mujer”. *Revista de Psicoanálisis, Psiquiatría y Psicología*. Fondo de cultura económica. México. 1966. Num. 2 p. 20.

²⁰ Freud, S. Op. cit. p. 155-157.



Freud says nothing of the possible unconscious connection between the *coquette* of a mother and the loved *cocotte* nor did he verbalize this obvious similarity to his patient.

This patient's relation to her father and to men in general is charged with antagonism, resentment, disappointment and above all, provocation. The reader can realize that this was unavoidable: with such a weak father, submitted passively to her mother and to a certain level of social opinion; who overcompensates his weakness by outbursts of intense rage and dire threats that impress no one, least of all this girl who carries on merrily and does as she pleases. She actually defies him to the extent of promenading with her friend „in a part of the town and at an hour at which she was not unlikely to meet her father on his way from his office“;²¹ the only major step lacking was to have gone to his place of work and beard the lion in his own den. Also, if the mother-accomplice does not respect him, why should she? All of which does not mean that deep inside her she may not have longed to have a „real“ father: firm, strong, understanding, loving, one who would win-over her respect. Freud never understood this and so failed to overcome her antagonism.

The case history does not describe any relationship to the two brothers closest in age to her; the text merely mentions an unsupported speculation,²² and irrelevant facts.²³

It is a pity that in this case material Freud did not include any of the patient's dreams and limited himself to give us his interpretations to the one elicited;²⁴ it would be most illustrative and interesting to have been able to catch a glimpse of her nocturnal perceptions. Nevertheless the facts seem sufficiently eloquent to explain what happened to this young woman.

Let us imagine the family atmosphere: a receptive-exploitive manipulative mother, immature, vain and coquettish. A serious father, kind but weak, who compensates his weakness with choleric outbursts, sternness and severity. The mother has had three children (two boys and one girl); pregnancies and child births have not

diminished her personal charms which so preoccupy her. The family has integrated and everything seems to go along more or less alright and the girl seems to have shown some interest in one day becoming a mother (her „exaggeratedly strong affection for a small boy, not quite three years old“;²⁵ is suggestive of this). The flirtatiousness of the wife does not seem to evoke any evidence of jealousy in her husband and perhaps he is not even conscious of this trait in his wife. She displays her charms unabashed in front of her admirers while she pampers (and perhaps seduces) her sons. *En fin* a rather common family life. Suddenly the catastrophe of a new pregnancy. Are we not familiar with the disgust such women show with a belated pregnancy? The patient was about 16 years old, a slightly elder brother and another one five years her junior; so, eleven years had passed without mishap. There are women, of course, for whom such an event would be welcomed, but not for those who hold their physical charms so dear as this patient's mother. Are not the resentment, and even the hatred these women feel towards their 'guilty' husband's, well known to us? Have we not heard them complain bitterly and incessantly and how they tell their daughters how dirty, evil and inconsiderate all men are? Have we not witnessed the rejection of these fathers by their daughters and even their sons? Are not these offspring often ashamed of their mother's pregnancy, and for that matter, consider disgusting the vision of a pregnant woman and of the sexual act?²⁶

The central theme of the drama of this patient was precipitated by the birth of a third male sibling which increased the frustration of her basic need for maternal love. There were already to many men in her life, and now one more. This was further increased for she could not turn to her father, he had disappointed her

²¹ Ibid. p. 161.

²² Ibid. p. 156.

²³ Ibid. p. 155.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 164f.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 155.

²⁶ It is noteworthy to indicate that one of many signs of maturity is the capacity of offspring to conceive the sexual union of their parents and to envision it, if so warranted, as a pleasurable act of love. The inability to conceive both parents as capable of coitus, or to consider it, warranted or not, as obscene or sadistic will always indicate that such an individual has problems in his sexual sphere.



and she learned to resent and despise him, and thus all men. She is trapped in the net of her narcissism: she is the rejected rival of her mother who's sole wish is to obtain the submissive admiration of all men, including her husband and tree sons. This patient can only become a child-woman and live in a world of coquettish women trying, uselessly, to obtain the maternal love she has never had. It is probable that this mechanism may one day lead her to overt homosexuality; but, as the clinical material stands, this is not yet so.

Because of the libido theory and the Oedipus, Freud only sees the negative relation of the girl to her father and never understands the evidently negative mother-daughter relationship. He was unable to understand his patient's need for her mother's love, or a mother's love; nor could he have conceived that the very last thing this young woman could possibly desire, was to have a son by such a father. She was so deeply disappointed by this so fearful a father and she resented so much his weakness that it is quite understandable that she should repudiate any idea of a heterosexual relationship. She also rejected a full homosexual relation, since this woman-child only wanted love, maternal pre-genital love, not sexual love.

The Case Analysed by Helene Deutsch

This author is a very well known Freudian who has contributed extensively to the study of women; amongst others, she has written a two volume „Psychology of women“. When one studies her publications one is struck by the fact that we really find two authors: the clinician endowed with great sensitivity, talent and very observant; the other, a theoretician alien to the former when she tries to adjust her findings to an impossible theory: that the libido is never feminine („There is only one libido which serves both the masculine and the feminine sexual function, nevertheless the juxtaposition 'feminine libido' is without any justification").²⁷

²⁷ Freud, Sigmund. „New Introductory Lectures“ The Standard Edition. The Hogarth Press London. 1964. Vol. XXII, p. 131.

She relates the clinical history²⁸ of a young married woman, „blond and very feminine“, the mother of „several children“. She „submitted to psychoanalytic treatment“ because „She was perfectly aware of the fact that her erotic capacity and sexual fantasy were homosexual in character;... Her relation to these women was monogamous and faithful, but purely platonic, even when she knew that these women had perverted tendencies like her own“.²⁹ „She could trace her love feelings for women back to puberty.“³⁰ She also suffered periods of depression and anxiety; the former „had become more and more frequent in recent years and were intimately associated with the danger of suicide. She had already made a number of unsuccessful suicidal attempts; the last one had brought her to the verge of death. ...After her mother's death (which occurred several years before the analysis began), the patient had a severe depression, during which she made one of her attempts at suicide.“

„During her treatment she had several attacks of depression... Our patient repeatedly asserted that had it not been for her confidence in psychoanalysis, nothing could have kept her from committing suicide.“³¹ „Gradually there came to the surface childhood memories that gave access to the patient's hitherto repressed murderous hate toward her mother. These memories went back to the time between her fourth and sixth years when she was masturbating to an alarming extent, at least from her mother's point of view. Whether her masturbation really exceeded the normal amount we could not determine, nor could we get at the content of the fantasies that presumably had accompanied her masturbation. But it is a fact, according to the patient's statement, that the mother resorted to the following method. She tied the girl's hands and feet, strapped them with a belt to the railing of her bed, stood beside her and said: „Now play if you can!“

„This aroused two reactions in the little girl:

²⁸ Deutsch, Helene. „The psychology of women“. Grune and Stratton. New York 1944. Vol. I, pp. 341-348.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 341.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 342.

³¹ Ibid. p. 343.



one was ungovernable rage against her mother, which was restrained by the fetters from discharge in motor activity. The other was intense sexual excitement, which she tried to satisfy by rubbing her buttocks against the bedding, regardless of her mother's presence, or perhaps in order to vent her spite against her mother."

„*The most dreadful element in this scene was for her the fact that her father, summoned by her mother, was a passive witness and did not offer to help his little daughter despite his tender affection for her*". „After this incident our patient stopped masturbating and with this renunciation or a long while repressed her sexuality. At the same time she repressed her hatred for her mother, to which she had in reality never given full expression".³²

„The hate reaction against her mother, in accordance with the patient's aggressive constitution, was also to be seen in other childhood situations as well as the reproach that her father did not protect her from her mother".³³ As Helene Deutsch states, we cannot take this traumatic experience as a sole motivating force of all her later symptom; but the scene is very much the prototype or symbol of the predominant intra-family dynamics: a dominating mother, arbitrary, with lack of respect and with contempt for the child; her father's manifest weakness and submissiveness to his spouse. And *the utter helplessness of the patient*. „From this time on 'but buried deep in the unconscious of our subject,' all sexual excitement was bound up with the mother's prohibition and with the most intense aggressive impulses toward the mother. Our patient's entire psychic personality resisted these hate impulses, and, as a reaction to them, there awakened in her an intense sense of guilt toward her mother, which led to a transformation of the hate into masochistic love for her"³⁴ It is not infrequent that intense passions such as rage, hate or violence, which in themselves are non-sexual, can become unconsciously intimately linked to normal sexual desires and both are inhibited simultaneously. Our subject not only submitted masochistically to her mother,

but became *helpless* to assert herself. Now, let us go a step further, *the basic dynamic element would be her fear of this powerful, domineering mother*; her struggle when fettered, became her last overt protest and self-assertion. So when H. Deutsch states: „This accounted for the patient's fear of 'enlaement,' by which she explained her failure to have homosexual love affairs. She was indeed afraid of being masochistically attached to her mother."³⁵ She is wrong. What inhibits this patient so thoroughly, is her fear of her mother's ruthless domination and her rejection, and she has repressed the capacity to assert herself.

Insofar as the psychoanalytic work, as a first step, could not make her aware of her deep-rooted resentment towards her mother, all overt homosexual activity was impossible. Her various suicidal attempts have the two dynamic element mentioned: one, in the process of self-destruction she reveals her hatred for her mother (hatred turned inwards); and the second, is the fear of being herself, of living alone without the mother's approval, or if you will, of confronting her fear of her mother and then really becoming independent of her. Deutsch saw only the first of two dynamic forces, so it is natural that he should become conscious only of her hatred and then realize that it was a valid, a realistic response to her mother's arbitrary and contemptuous domination; then, an only then, could she seek the 'good mother' in a mistress.

The father's weakness that led him to abandon her to her mother's tender mercy, fortified her homosexuality. His and her husband's frailty not only disappointed her, but must have aroused also, deeply repressed rage. One cannot know what the outcome of this case would have been if the patient had transcended not only the hatred towards her parents, but also the fear of her mother. Would she have remained a homosexual?

In her experience only women were strong. If she had found a strong, firm, loving man she might have remained heterosexual.

Dr. Deutsch is right when he point out that her father, with his characteristic, modeled her future relations to men. But she does not tell us

³² Ibid. p. 344. (underscore mine).

³³ Ibid. p. 345.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 345.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 345.



that since the hatred for her father was jointly repressed with that towards her mother and towards sexuality, the patient retained some possibility of consorting with men. „She felt no hostility toward men, had a number of male friends, and did not object to being liked and courted by men. Out of sympathy, she married a man of outspoken masculine appearance and had several children by him,³⁶ and she adds further: „She was never really in love with a man; she had first been attracted to her husband because she had found in him a particularly active and masculine personality. But she had been disappointed in him from the start, because as she said, he had failed to come up to her expectations. He lacked sexual passion; he also remained passive in situations in which she had expected him to be master”.³⁷ She expected him to „reprove” her maids which she could not do, how could he when she was so helpless and feared her mother so?

Helene Deutsch is right when she states: „many women, even women who are not homosexuals have such difficulties with their women servants.”³⁸ Of course, not all women afraid of their mother’s are homosexual. The fear of the mother, is one important dynamic factor in the lack of self-affirmation and authority.

„As a result of the treatment, the patient was liberated from her anxiety and her condemnation of her disposition, which she herself had regarded as ‘sinful’; she was also able to overcome her grave neurosis. Her states of depression ceased completely and she became a happy person. The longing for death that had always accompanied her constant feeling of solitude and unsatisfied desire disappeared. She found happiness in a now uninhibited love relation with woman... with conscious understanding of their situation, the two women enacted a mother-child relation, in which sometimes one, sometimes the other played the mother... In this case, analytic treatment did not lead to the patient’s renouncing homosexuality and turning toward men; thus its real task was not fulfilled.”³⁹

filled.”³⁹

She continues: „The form that homosexual activity assumes in cases like that of our patient depends on the stage of development in which the relationship to the mother is determined.”⁴⁰ This is not the place to discuss the humanistic concept of character (which Fromm has developed so ably) *versus* the libido theory. What is significant is that Helene Deutsch understands that the homosexual behavior is different in the instances of oral-passivity (receptive character), oral aggressive (exploitative character) and anal (hoarding character), all of them *pregenital* in the classical mode.

She states further on: „While we ascribe a *primary character to this mother* tie and support the view that in a large percentage of homosexual women the urge to union with the mother is predominant, analytic experience teaches us that this *primary* tie must be experience strengthened by other elements in order to infringe so powerfully and directly upon the woman’s adult life... the biological demand of heterosexuality”.⁴¹ This is all too true: it is notorious that the clinic teaches us that there is never only one determining factor that can explain the life course of a concrete, specific human being.

Another significant factor in our subject’s homosexuality: „We understood the course of the patient’s development: after a phase of sexual irresolution during which she was still willing to love a man if he proved strong enough to save her from the danger represented by her mother; she gave up this hope. All men would prove as weak as her father...” During puberty, the favorable or unfavorable role of the father is always of marked significance; Rose Spiegel has signaled the crucial importance of the girl’s need for her father’s love.⁴² It is quite clear that a distant father be it because of his weakness, his powerlessness or his absence, leave the children at the exclusive mercy of the mother, with all the possible negative consequences. We are here

³⁶ Ibid. p. 341.

³⁷ Ibid. p. 342.

³⁸ Ibid. p. 342.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 347.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 347.

⁴¹ Ibid. p. 352f. (underscore mine).

⁴² Spiegel, Rose. „Papel de las relaciones padre-hija en mujeres deprimidas”. *Revista de Psicoanálisis, Psiquiatría y Psicología*, Num. 7. Sept-Dic; 1967. pp. 53-66.



only speaking of negative mother-children relationships.

The studies of Ruth Mack Brunswick in 1928, and of Helene Deutsch in 1932 led Freud to consider seriously what he termed „*pre-Oedipus phase*” and „*pre-Oedipus fixation*” in girls, which can interfere with the advent of the Oedipus. But not even this concept of the pre-genital primary tie to mother (pre-Oedipus fixation) nor the fact that he was aware that he knew so little about female psychology could dissuade Freud from considering women as castrated males, who could only become free of their mother, by hating them for having been born without a penis.⁴³

In this, H. Deutsch completely disagrees with Freud: „more extensive experience *has discredited* the view frequently advanced by psychoanalyst that the girl’s childish relation to her mother end up in hatred and that the later attachment consists of a little remnant of love and overcompensated hate”. The autheress considers that non-regressive love for the mother (rational love) „is a blessing in woman’s life”.⁴⁴ But, unfortunately her disagreement was never radical, so she never rejected the Freudian concept of women as castrated males.

Although Helene Deutsch did not take a radical departure from the libido theory, we have seen that her dynamic understanding of her patient is quite different from the case, cited at the beginning of this paper, published by Freud. Deutsch criticized the roles of the father and of the mother; in fact she made no mention of an Oedipus complex and simply stated that her patient’s homosexuality was due to the primary pre-Oedipal tie to mother, strengthened by the weakness of her father and her husband.

The above data points to the incalculable value of the mother-father *binomium* in the psychological development of the offspring. It is a serious mistake to consider only the psychopathogenicity of the mother or the father. One

must add that even this is not enough, for although it is true that mother, father and the siblings constitute our first contact with reality, they are not the sum total of it. Our psychological development is also influenced by our genetical endowment, the impact of our society and the social character prevalent in our milieu, the geographical site, the historical moment and the ever present possibility of self-determination.

The incestuous tie to mother in its pregenital sense is of significant value in homosexuality, female or male; but it is also one of the fundamental passions of all human beings, for it involves our need to feel protected, the gratification of our narcissism, our deep rooted longings to be free from risks, responsibilities freedom for and knowledge; it is our desire for an unconditional love. It is true that these needs exist normally in children and the mother is the one who could satisfy them. Yet one cannot stop here, it is necessary to go a step further with Fromm when he states: „The more obvious act (that the infant needs a mothering person) has obscured the fact that not only the infant is helpless and craves certainty; the adult is in many ways no less helpless... he is also more aware than the infant of the dangers and risks of life... What could be more natural, under the circumstances than man’s frantic longing for a power which gives him certainty, protection and love? This desire is not only a ‘repetition’ of his longing for mother; it is generated because the very condition which make the infant long for mother’s love continue to exist, although on a different level”.⁴⁵

A second factor of importance in homosexuality is the intensity of their narcissism. We can describe narcissism as that need of the newborn who is not ‘interested’ (*inter-esse* = to be in) in the world outside. The only reality that exists for the infant is itself: its body, its physical sensations of cold and warmth, thirst, hunger, need for sleep and bodily contact”.⁴⁶ Fromm adds: „Narcissism is a passion...which...has an important biological function... from the stand-

⁴³ Freud, Sigmund. „Female Sexuality” (1931). The Standard Edition. Vol. XXI pp. 223-243. And Freud, Sigmund. „New Introductory Lectures. Femininity”. (1932-33). The Standard Edition. Vol. XXII, pp. 112-135.

⁴⁴ Deutsch, Helene. Op. Cit. p. 353. (underscore mine)

⁴⁵ Fromm, Erich. „The heart of man”. Harper and Row, Publishers N.Y. Evanston, London 1964, p. 97 f. Those interested in this theme can read chapter V of this book pp. 95-113

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 65.



point of survival, man must attribute to himself an importance far above what he gives to anybody else. If he did not do so, from where would he take the energy and interest to defend himself against others, to work for his subsistence, to fight for his survival, to press his claim against those of others?"⁴⁷

We shall not dwell on the subject which has been so well described by Fromm, we will only use segments of it here. Malignant narcissism impedes contact with reality and in its less malignant form (far from an assumption of psychosis), the homosexual, female or male, lives in a world of people of the same sex; their genital intimacy is limited to them and their psychological relatedness to the opposite sex is variable; but in their dreams, an orgasm is only possible with humans of their same sex. Early in life we learn to distinguish female from male; homosexuals usually repress this knowledge though, in a symbolic sense, the opposite sex is always present: in mannerisms, dress or by the use of certain adjectives.

Sometimes, female homosexuals may have heterosexual relations. It holds that the more a man is accepted in the sexual life of a lesbian the lesser will be her narcissism in this area; so a bisexual woman is less so than an exclusive homosexual; and the facultative homosexual is even less narcissistic than the bisexual, for she is only homosexual under duress and if able to have an orgasm in her sexual relations with men. This does not mean to say that heterosexuality is all significant as the sole determinant of the degree of malignant narcissism; what is meant is that within this limited comparative sense of homosexuality, it is indicative. It is well known by all that malignant narcissism is also found in heterosexuals.

Therefore, in homosexuality, both the pre-genital incestuous tie to mother and the degree of malignant narcissism are of significant importance. This does not hold true for the dichotomy passivity-activity Helene Deutsch favors; unless one accepts, as she does, that passivity, masochism and narcissism are normal determining characteristics of femininity. The relative intensity of the first two factors mentioned is deci-

sive of the benignancy or malignancy of a homosexual relationship. Such a relation can be one of love and creativity when the incestuous tie to mother has been transcended and when narcissism is benign and when there is evidence of strong biophilic trends.

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⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 72.



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