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The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Southern Italy and Spain

NANCY FREY BREUNER

The Virgin Mary has played a central role in the lives of people for centuries. Her qualities of intercession, purity, and all-encompassing nurturance have made her appeal broad and vast. This paper focuses on the cult that has come to be associated with her. The Mary cult consists of devotees who center their devotion on Mary, instead of Jesus or God. The paper attempts to explain how Mary has remained consistently a dominant figure in the southern Italian and Spanish religious systems.

Michael Carroll's *The Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1986) provides one explanation. He explores the question of why veneration to the Virgin Mary is especially intense in southern Italy and Spain and how this veneration is related to her complete disassociation from sexuality. Carroll's explanation of the Mary cult is, I argue, governed by a male-centered pattern of analysis. My paper critiques Carroll's central argument and presents a gynocentric analysis of the cult's presence in southern Italy and Spain. I review Carroll's conclusions, delve into female psychological development, and explore relevant cultural data.

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CARROLL'S THESIS

Carroll's major premise centers on three psychoanalytic hypotheses that suggest the Mary cult¹ plays a significant role in the lives of men and women because it allows the intensified Oedipal desires produced by the father-ineffective family to be vicariously gratified. Carroll uses Freud's belief that religious practices reflect "the disguised fulfillment of unconscious wishes" to present these hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Fervent devotion to the Mary cult on the part of males is a practice that allows males characterized by a strong but strongly repressed sexual desire for the mother to dissipate in an acceptable manner the excess sexual energy that is built up as a result of this desire. [Carroll 1986:56]

Carroll sees this hypothesis as self-evident and provides no qualification. He suggests that the corollary to this hypothesis may be less self-evident:

Hypothesis 2. The distinctive features of the Mary cult over the centuries have been shaped primarily by the son's strong but strongly repressed desire for his mother. [Carroll 1986:56]

Carroll realizes that this hypothesis implies that the content of the cult is formed "only by the desires from the male unconscious" (1986:57).²

The third hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 3. Identifying with the Virgin Mary allows women to experience vicariously the fulfillment of their desire for sexual contact with, and a baby from, their fathers. [Carroll 1986:59]

This third hypothesis, explaining female devotion,³ centers on the Freudian notion of genital inferiority. Freud, according to Carroll, argues that the female Oedipal process, similar to the boy's, starts with the girl's sexual attachment to the mother. When the girl realizes that she lacks a penis, she feels inferior. The girl turns to the father for the desired penis, but when she realizes she will not receive one, the desire changes to a wish for a baby from the father.

Carroll examines social structure, Mary's characteristics, and cultural aspects to shape his psychoanalytic argument for the cult's strength. He explores other scholars' work and makes two sociological points. First, societies that have patron-client relationships are also associated with supernatural mediators. Second, societies that rely on an agrarian economy tend to be associated with goddess

cults. Carroll postulates that a goddess such as Mary would tend to become popular in a society that relies heavily on agriculture and is associated with patronage (1986:48), and he claims this to be true of southern Italy and Spain.

Mary is peculiar among Mediterranean goddesses. While her simultaneous status as virgin and mother⁴ may not be unique among Mediterranean goddesses (Ashe 1976), Carroll claims that her *in partu* (i.e., hymen remained intact during the birth of Jesus) virginity and perpetual virginity make her distinctive. The Immaculate Conception and the Assumption are also important to the cult and further separate her from other goddesses.⁵

Southern Italy and Spain are emphasized by Carroll because he claims these two areas have the strongest, most consistent distribution of the cult. Strength of the cult is measured by the "number of religious rituals in an area that focus primarily on Mary, and the degree to which the community at large participates in these rituals" (1986:10). He further supports this conclusion with evidence that shows that southern Italy and Spain are the only two areas that "were never associated with a widespread anti-Marian Christian movement" (1986:16).

Given that the cult's distribution seems to favor southern Italy and Spain and that both of these countries stress patron-client relationships and rely heavily on agriculture, Carroll asks, what is it about these societies ("cultural traits" [1986:49]) that would promote such intense veneration to a virgin mother such as Mary?

The machismo complex and the "father-ineffective" family are significant to Carroll's analysis. Machismo, according to Carroll, is a "male centered ideology that encourages males to be sexually aggressive, to brag about sexual prowess and their genital attributes, and to dominate women sexually" (1986:49). Carroll describes the father-ineffective family as similar to the "father absent family," in which power is centered in mother's hands due to the "economic marginality of males" (1986:50). Machismo, he argues, appears in the father-ineffective family because it is believed that sons will first strongly identify with their mother. When they later realize that this identification is not accepted by larger society, the ensuing insecurity leads them to engage in exaggerated masculine behavior (1986:50). Carroll postulates that an early feminine identification is linked to the mother's authority, not the father's absence.

Carroll uses a simplified explanation of the male psychological process associated with what Freud termed the Oedipal crisis to describe the expected male response, in southern Italy and Spain, to an early feminine identification. He asserts that the father-ineffective family affects three areas of the Oedipal process: identification, sexual attachment, and castration anxiety. The father-ineffective family affects identification because the son identifies with the mother as the authority figure in the household. This strong early "feminine" identification, Carroll argues, ultimately leads to the acquisition of the machismo complex, because at some point the son must overidentify with the father to achieve a masculine identity. The father-ineffective family affects sexual attachment in that the son initially forms an extremely close bond with the mother, which facilitates the feminine identification and increased sexual desire for the mother. Finally, this family type affects castration anxiety because the rivalry between father and son is intensified (1986:54). The son's especially strong attachment to the mother and the father's sexual aggressiveness (machismo) intensify the son's fear of castration. These factors would heighten the father-son rivalry. Consequently, castration anxiety would increase, which "should in turn insure a stronger repression of the son's sexual desire for the mother than is usually the case" (1986:55). Carroll concludes, from the effect the father-ineffective family has on these factors, that the sexual desire of the son for the mother is "strong and strongly repressed" (1986:55).

APPLICATION OF HYPOTHESES TO THE CULT

Within a psychological framework, Carroll applies the three hypotheses to Mary's unique features. Hypotheses 1 and 2 explain Mary's complete disassociation from sexuality because, he argues, the father-ineffective family produces in sons "a strong, but strongly repressed desire for the mother." Mary is a safe (culturally sanctioned) and acceptable way to dissipate excess sexual desire for the mother.

Carroll argues that the father-ineffective family intensifies Oedipal desires in both males and females.⁶ The father-ineffective family intensifies the daughter's incestuous desires for the father because "an ideology (machismo) that emphasizes the male genitalia would presumably heighten a daughter's sense of genital inferiority and thereby intensify her attraction to the father" (Carroll 1986:61).

To support his conclusions about males, Carroll explores male masochism. He accepts masochism (from Freud) as a logical consequence of repressed sexual desire for the mother. Carroll postulates that there should be evidence of masochism in the Mary cult because it is likely that male followers experience guilt due to strongly repressed desire for the mother. Carroll uses Tentori's (1982) observation of a Marian festival, in which the male participants (until recently) engaged in self-flagellation. Carroll also examines instances of apparent male identification with Christ in Christ's Passion. Through identification with Christ, Carroll argues, the participants are able to feel vicariously Christ's pain and, thereby, assuage their guilt and repressed desire in a culturally accepted manner.

CRITIQUE

Within the confines of his theoretical assumptions and chosen data, Carroll presents a convincing case. There are, however, other theoretical considerations and data. We now move on to consider the import these may have on his argument. Perhaps the aspect that provokes the most concern is the male-centeredness of his argument. While Carroll does incorporate the feminine to some degree, it is through the eyes of orthodox Freudian psychology. Carroll uses this material with little qualification. Consequently, some important aspects, features, and possibilities of the cult and Mediterranean society are missing.

MALE FERVENT DEVOTION?

The first way to address the male-centeredness of Carroll's argument is to examine his most empirical hypothesis, hypothesis 1, that male fervent devotion is an expression of repressed sexual desire for the mother. Here I disagree with the empirical claim or, at least, with its implication, if not its logic. His use of "fervent devotion" is not well documented; moreover, he fails to define fervency. He seems to assume that males in Spain and southern Italy are fervently devoted simply because the cult is strong in those areas. However, this is not empirically borne out.⁷

By Carroll's own definition, the strength of the Mary cult can be measured by "the number of religious rituals in an area that focus primarily upon Mary, and the degree to which the community par-

ticipates in them" (1986:10). From this definition several assumptions seem reasonable. First, if males are fervently devoted in southern Italy and Spain, then one would expect there to be a number of religious rituals associated with Mary and a large proportion of male participation in those rituals. Next, one would expect the male participants to be from the father-ineffective family, since it is from this family type that the Mary cult, according to Carroll, is derived. Finally, if the males who participate are from a father-ineffective family, this further implies that they should be subject to economic marginality due to seasonal labor or scattered employment. Research of other scholars, however, suggests that male followers of the Mary cult do not meet these criteria and that, indeed, they are quite ambivalent about religion.

Brandes uses the participation in church ritual—attendance at Mass, taking Communion, and confession—as the criterion to “measure the religiosity” of the people in the community (Brandes 1980:182). He concludes that women, on the whole, are more religious than men. Women, Brandes says, are “considerably less likely than men to speak irreverently of the Church or the clergy” (1980:182). Men, on the other hand, seem to have a great deal of ambivalence toward religion (1980:182), and he even claims that in some areas of Spain men do not believe in Mary’s virginity (personal communication, 1990). There is, according to Brandes, an “undeniable tendency for men to attend Mass in fewer numbers and with less frequency than women” (1980:183). In fact, Gilmore has characterized men of southern Spain to be not only irreverent but, also, often “militantly atheistic” (1984:32). Christian argues that in northern Spain cultural practices account for male irreverence and female religiosity. He emphasizes that “religious virtuosity” is considered a feminine attribute by society as a whole (Christian 1972:28) and that the societal division of labor is such that women are in charge of the “spiritual well-being” (1972:134) of the family, whereas men are concerned with practical matters away from the home (1972:134; see Gilmore 1984; Dubisch 1986).

MEN AS ANTICLERICAL

The scholars highlighted above suggest that not only are women more fervent than men, but that men of all classes are distinctly anticlerical.⁸ The church, to some degree, is associated with femininity (“symbolic home,” Brandes 1980:184; see Christian 1972; Dubisch

1986). From the male perspective, priests serve as an “alternate model” of thought for the wife, and they potentially undermine domestic masculine authority (Christian 1972:152). While priests may not be a sexual threat, church doctrine and the priest’s role as confessor may inhibit male sexual gratification (Gilmore 1984:35).⁹

Hostility toward priests is manifested by disparaging comments and a reluctance to participate in religious activities (Christian 1972; Brandes 1980; Gilmore 1984). According to Gilmore, a priest is viewed as “a sexual wolf in sheep’s clothing, a moral hypocrite” (1984:34). Brandes argues that one way men express their negative feelings toward priests is through jokes, which take two major forms (1980:190). In the first, priests are uncaring of parishioners; in the second, they “are revealed not as stiflers of sexuality, but rather as the fully sexual beings they are actually thought to be” (Brandes 1980:191). One of these jokes follows:

There was a bride and groom who were in a car driving to their wedding, when suddenly they had a disastrous accident and died. When they arrived in heaven, they told St. Peter, “We want to get married.” Said St. Peter, “But that’s impossible!” “Why?” asked the couple incredulously. “Because there aren’t any priests here who can marry you!” [Brandes 1980:191]

Viewed as sexually active, priests are perceived by men as deserving no special status in heaven or on earth.

MALE RELIGIOSITY

Two relevant aspects of male religiosity emerge from Brandes’s Andalusian work: (1) there are social reasons (“status” centered) as well as religious motivations for participating in rituals, and (2) when men do participate, Jesus is the primary object of devotion. Brandes discusses male devotion in the form of deinstitutionalized *cofradías* (cofraternities) or lay brotherhoods (1980:192–194).¹⁰ The three brotherhoods that were present in the community he studied were the Señor del Consuelo (Lord of Consolation), the San Jose Obrero (Saint Joseph the Worker), and the Virgen de la Cabeza (Virgin of the Head). From Carroll’s argument we can make three assumptions. First, the Virgin brotherhood should have the greatest emphasis. Second, the marginal classes would be associated with her. Finally, if the Señor were the most popular brotherhood, you would expect masochism to be associated with rituals in his honor. However, none of these propositions appears to be supported.

What is clear is that the festival in honor of Señor del Consuelo is the most important celebration of the town, not that of the Virgin (Brandes 1980:17).¹¹ Brandes further says that the image of the Señor (Jesus), rather than Mary, “is the object of deep and widespread devotion in the town and surrounding countryside” (1980:118). Membership in this brotherhood has no class restriction, but you find all of the elite, those of high social rank and “men with money” in its membership. While Carroll argues that members of the father-ineffective family, not the elite of the community, would participate in the rituals, those of the father-ineffective family appear, in reality, to be only marginal participants.

In sum, Carroll’s emphasis on the father-ineffective family *de facto* argues that male Marian devotees are, for the most part, the product of economic marginality. Christian’s village shared this economic characterization, but not Carroll’s conclusion. Brandes claims that there is little variation among social classes in attitudes toward religion and that in all segments of society “men are the religious skeptics, women the religious supporters” (Brandes 1980:182).

Another area of contention surrounds the issue of male masochism. Carroll’s empirical claim implies that there should be some evidence of masochism associated with male religious rituals, a consequence of the father-ineffective family. The most important religious festival and procession, as noted previously, is that for Señor del Consuelo, or Jesus. Brandes (1980:198) explains that the procession for Señor del Consuelo is extremely important to the community and is well attended by men and women, and that there is a great amount of emotional fervor associated with it. All classes of society participate, and the atmosphere is solemn, full of humility and self-abnegation. The image of Jesus is carried by boys who Brandes claims “identify closely with the Son of God through their power and suffering” (1980:202). While there appears to be evidence of some male masochism, it is the boys, not the adult men, who actively participate. Consequently, it seems that those whom one would expect to participate fervently in the procession—men from the father-ineffective family—are again not significant participants.

Emphasis on male masochism seems misplaced when, in fact, it is women who visibly engage in masochistic religious behavior. Women also shout out the Señor’s name and carry candles. In ad-

dition, 25–30 percent of these women walk barefoot, process on their knees, and touch Christ's feet (Brandes 1980:198; see Christian 1972:133). Brandes points out that the only women who do walk on their knees are from the working class (1980:200). These behaviors appear to be evidence of female masochism in expressing religious devotion.

SUMMARY OF CARROLL

Neither Carroll's own definition of what makes the cult strong, nor other researchers' data, has confirmed his empirical claim. Males do not appear to participate heavily in Marian rituals, and those who do are not predominantly from the father-ineffective family. While it seems to be true that males have a tendency to participate in noninstitutionalized religion more than church-sanctioned rituals, it still does not seem that they can be characterized as being fervently devoted. It has been shown that men are anticlerical, resist church rituals, and do not participate to the same degree as women. Carroll's focus on male fervor does not provide a sense of intense female religiosity or male ambivalence.

Carroll's emphasis on the importance of the male's psychological conflict should be rethought, as well, considering the extent of female devotion in these societies.¹² We now turn to a consideration of Carroll's second hypothesis, which suggests that the content of the cult is shaped solely by the male psyche as a product of the father-ineffective family. Carroll's idea that the "Mary cult over the centuries has probably appealed more to males than to females" (Carroll 1986:111) is somewhat confusing. I make this statement not to suggest that men are inconsequential to the cult, but to point out that failure to acknowledge the role of women in the cult provides an incomplete solution to the mysteries of Marian devotion.

FEMALE DEVELOPMENT

Carroll's second and third hypotheses rely on a rather crude explanation of female psychological development. This section pinpoints Carroll's beliefs about female psychology, reviews Freud's views on the same issues, and reanalyzes these issues in light of Nancy Chodorow's *Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) and, to a lesser extent, Jessica Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love* (1988).

Carroll's discussion of the female devotees relies on his understanding of the Oedipus conflict, the crisis period in a three-year-old's life when she must renounce her intense desire for her mother and father and identify her gender, correctly, by identifying with her gender role. For Carroll, the salient issues of the female Oedipal crisis are genital inferiority and penis envy. He argues that when girls become cognizant of the anatomical differences between themselves and boys, they feel inferior (1986:58). In Carroll's reading of Freud, the daughter then turns to the father for a penis, which in turn becomes a wish for a baby. Moreover, this wish for a baby from the father implies a wish for close sexual contact with him as well.¹³ The Mary cult is powerful, he argues, because identification with the Virgin Mary allows women to vicariously experience the fulfillment of these Oedipal desires.¹⁴

My primary theoretical hesitation with regard to Carroll's model is that he ignores the role of the mother in female development. He emphasizes the female Oedipal crisis and the father-ineffective family's role in the heightening of Oedipal desires, genital inferiority, and penis envy. It seems from this account that the Oedipal girl acts only in relation to her father, that the mother is nonexistent. I present a different, female-centered model of female development. Because this model also derives from Freud, I would like to present his basic argument in an inevitably simplified form.

FREUD'S MODEL

Freud's model emphasizes the Oedipal period of development. Central to his discussion is penis envy. Freud presents female sexual development as more complicated than it is for males.¹⁵ Both boys and girls hold the mother as their first love object. Through the process of giving up this object, boys intensify their identification with the father. Little girls initially identify with their fathers as a means of giving up their mother, but must reidentify with the mother as the primary choice. In the phallic period, "the little girl is a little man" (1965[1933]:104), and the father is just a "troublesome rival" (1965[1933]:105) for contact with the mother. Freud accounts for the dropping of the mother and the shifting to the father as the girl's discovery that she has been castrated (1965[1933]:111), which results in "penis envy."

Freud explains that both boys and girls experience a castration complex (1965[1933]:110), but that these complexes are fundamen-

tally different.¹⁶ When the little girl discovers her “organic inferiority” (1963a[1931]:202) in comparison to the male organ, she feels “seriously wronged” (1965[1933]:110). Initially, after this discovery of “her own deficiency” (1963a[1931]:202), she believes that she will acquire a penis, too (1963a[1931]:202). This faith is then shattered. “When the universality of this negative character [lacking a penis] of her sex dawns upon her, womanhood, and with it also her mother, suffer a heavy loss of credit in her eyes” (1963a[1931]:202).

The penis-envy theory postulates that the girl turns from mother to father because she blames the mother for not giving her the “superior” male organ (1965[1933]:112).¹⁷ At some point, the little girl recognizes that she must remain female, and her desire for a penis is transformed into a desire for a baby. Freud’s important point is that the Oedipal crisis for girls does not end abruptly, as it does for boys.¹⁸

FREUDIAN MODEL AND THE MARY CULT

The existence of the Mary cult presents some immediate objections to the Freudian interpretation. If women and mothers are devalued because of their castrated state, how could any woman have value in a society in which genitals are stressed as so important? It seems incongruent that Mary could be valued so highly when, as a woman and mother, she is automatically seen as deficient and inferior. Freud says that the “turning away from the mother is accompanied by hostility; the attachment to the mother ends in hate. A hate of that kind may become very striking and last all through life” (1965[1933]:107). If, as Carroll claims, the father-ineffective family intensifies the Oedipal desires, does it not also follow that hostility toward the mother would also be intensified? These questions and those raised earlier lead me to explore a female-centered model of female development.

CHODOROW AND THE PRE-OEDIPAL PERIOD

The primary difference between Freud and Chodorow¹⁹ is that Chodorow stresses the pre-Oedipal period. It is in this period, she argues, that distinct differences between male and female personality arise (Chodorow 1978:169). She claims that the pre-Oedipal period affects the child’s sense of self, later object relations, and feelings about the mother and women in general (1978:77).

Because women mother and have close contact with children of both sexes, children have greater difficulty with separation and individuation from the pre-Oedipal mother than from the father. For girls, Chodorow stresses that issues of merging and separation continue to be a part of their relationship with the mother. Because boys are the opposite sex of the mother, they individuate more completely (1978:166–167). “Girls,” on the other hand, “emerge from this period with a basis for ‘empathy’ built into their primary definition of self in a way that boys do not” (1978:167). This pattern of mothering, Chodorow argues, produces “specific conscious and unconscious attitudes or expectations in children. Girls and boys expect and assume women’s unique capacities for sacrifice, caring, and mothering, and associate women with their own fears of regression and powerlessness. They fantasize more about men, and associate them with idealized virtues and growth” (Chodorow 1978:83). It is in relation to this model that girls identify and boys disidentify.

Chodorow stresses the lack of symmetry between male and female development in the transition from the pre-Oedipal to the Oedipal period. She agrees with Freud that the little girl’s task is more complex (1978:93), but she does not support the notion that a girl simply drops the pre-Oedipal mother (1978:92–93).

In Chodorow’s account, the little girl turns to the father because he stands outside of the pre-Oedipal mother; identification with the father produces a means to psychologically differentiate the self from the mother (1978:121). From this understanding, Chodorow provides two alternative views. The first postulates that the little girl wants a penis so she can free herself from the omnipotent mother, not because her own organ is inferior. In this view, the girl’s rejection of the mother is an attempt to draw clearer boundaries between her mother and herself (1978:123–124). The second view is that the little girl “comes to want a penis, then, in order to win her mother’s love” (1978:125) because mother loves people who have penises (1978:125). In this view the turn is a defensive response. Thus, according to these theories, girls do not just drop the mother; instead, the relationship to the father is a part of development and separation for the girl. The important point is that women end up living in a triadic world. “Girls cannot and do not ‘reject’ their mother and women in favor of father and men but remain in a bisexual triangle throughout childhood into puberty” (Chodorow 1978:140).

The idea that women live in a triadic world that is different from the dyadic world of men is helpful in understanding why the Mary cult holds different meanings in the lives of men and women in southern Italy and Spain. Early life experiences of the women may hold a greater clue to the cult's meaning for women than issues of genital inferiority. Women, it appears, retain the early sense of closeness and merging with the mother because of the nature of their maternal pre-Oedipal relationship. When the girl incorporates the father into her world, she never loses the deep mother attachment. In southern Italy and Spain, Mary and the role of the mother are highly valued. The Mary cult, then, allows women to continue a relationship with the warm, nurturant pre-Oedipal mother. The triadic world makes this incorporation and continuation possible and deeply pleasing.

BENJAMIN: DOMINATION AND SUBMISSION

Jessica Benjamin also stresses the importance of the pre-Oedipal period, but emphasizes identity acquisition and its relation to the psychology of domination and submission. Roles of domination and submission, according to Benjamin, have come to be associated with male and female, not because of an innate orientation to either, but from the pattern of women's mothering and the "polarization of gender identity" (1988:84). Historically, women have been primary caretakers. This pattern, she claims, creates notions of what is masculine and feminine. Women come to be seen as object and men as subject because a child's experience of women's mothering predisposes them to this conception. Benjamin claims that boys achieve their masculine identity by renouncing the feminine and that, consequently, the mother is viewed as object rather than subject (1988:76). For women, it is "not denial of the other, but the denial of the self" (1988:78) that poses a problem in individuation.

Benjamin argues that, for boys, the difficulty lies in the disidentification process but that, for girls, the conflict arises from a lack of differentiation. While the girl's identity is relatively easy to achieve, "it is a disadvantage in that she possesses no obvious way of disidentifying from her mother, no hallmark of separateness. The feminine tendency therefore is not to emphasize but to underplay independence" (1988:78). Benjamin asserts that "the girl's relationship to the mother, emphasizing merging and continuity at the expense of individuality and independence, provides fertile ground for

submission" (1988:78–79) and that the mother's model of self-denial inhibits the girl from asserting her own independence.

FEMALE MASOCHISM

In light of this analysis and Chodorow's sense of the feminine triadic world, the issue of female masochism is more explicable. As Benjamin theorizes, the masochist gains a sense of identity from denying the self (1988:61). If women view themselves as objects and live by an ideal of self-abnegation, then it seems likely that they would be susceptible to some form of masochism. The women of southern Italy and Spain seem particularly vulnerable to the female loss of self and objectification. Therefore, engaging in masochistic behavior in a religious context gives women a sense of self, identity, and oneness with the higher figure, Mary. Mary represents the ideal mother, the ultimate paragon, and she derives her power from the qualities of self-denial and nurturance. Women may respond to that image because they identify with these attributes, which are consonant with their own experience in society. Chodorow's conception of a woman's triadic world is also consonant with female masochism. If women conceive of themselves as continuous with others and maintain a strong identification with the mother, then identifying with Mary and her pain as Mother of Sorrows allows women to recreate a sense of closeness with the mother. The greatest piety in this identification with Mary is perceived to embrace the greatest self-sacrifice and denial. Through devotion to Mary, women maintain a feeling of continuation and merging with her that is reminiscent of the pre-Oedipal mother relationship.

RELEVANT CULTURAL DATA

The previous section outlines the importance of mothering and early childhood experiences. Early childhood experiences play a crucial role in personality formation, and I argue that these experiences may predispose individuals in certain cultural contexts to become devotees to the Virgin Mary. This section explores more fully Spanish and Italian society and what personality features are formed and developed therein.²⁰

Exploration of early childhood experience in Italy and Spain provides fertile ground to understand how personality traits might be shaped within them. The first part of the discussion focuses on the

male. Drawing on data from Gilmore and Gilmore (1979), who take a mother-centered view of this process, the importance of the pre-Oedipal relationship between son and mother in child rearing is stressed. They argue that child-rearing practices and the intense pre-Oedipal relationship found in these societies produce machismo in boys. They assert that the pre-Oedipal mother stands in sharp contrast to the unavailable, distant father and that disidentification with the pre-Oedipal mother is particularly complex when the boy must form a bond with a physically and emotionally removed father (Gilmore and Gilmore 1979:285–286). Consequently, the boy experiences identity confusion when he must disidentify with the mother and identify with the father. Therefore, machismo is “a compensatory attempt to resolve intrapsychic conflict between male and female identities” (Gilmore and Gilmore 1979:283).²¹

Saunders embraces a similar argument, though his focus differs. Saunders explores the importance of identification with the mother, as well as the behavior of women toward their children. He observes that children in southern Europe are raised with smothering attention that is often aggressive and inconsistent (Saunders 1981:457; see Gilmore 1986:228–229). He argues that this smothering creates a sense of anxiety in the mother-child relationship, which can produce a “sense of frustration and hostility in the child” (Saunders 1981:458). This ambivalence of dependency and hostility may be carried throughout life in relations with women. It is the relationship with the mother that is stressed by the Gilmores and by Saunders, and it seems that this relationship is the important variable for the machismo complex. The mother is the important variable because she is the person with whom her son initially identifies.²²

The female aspect of childhood experience is less documented. Saunders argues that girls do not experience conflict similar to boys. He suggests that the mother-daughter relationship is qualitatively different from the mother-son relationship (Saunders 1981:459; see Gilmore 1986) because of several key differences in socialization. Mother-daughter intimacy is strong and continuous throughout life (Gilmore 1986:237). Also, “girls are in certain ways given more opportunity to act independently and responsibly than are boys” and, from this difference, gain a feeling of “individual competence” that boys do not (Saunders 1981:459). Moreover, women’s roles are similar throughout life, “and these social roles are more consonant than

men's with psychological dependency" (1981:459). Finally, Saunders (1981:459) points to the unique benefit of child rearing, which is the gratification derived from the dependence of others on oneself.

This brief sketch can do no more than suggest the way child-rearing experiences may be related to personality characteristics. I now turn to a study of those characteristics in detail.

CENTRAL PARADOXES

I now introduce what I regard to be the two "paradoxes" of male and female perceptions of sexuality in these cultures.²³ The male paradox suggests that men, in practice, control female sexuality but feel powerless when confronted by women. The paradox for women is that they often have de facto power in both public and private spheres, yet allow themselves to appear to be controlled by men. At the core of these paradoxes are what appear to be contradictions in male perceptions of both female and male and the reality of these beliefs.

MALE AND FEMALE PROTOTYPES

Of the behavioral traits associated with sexual behavior, the most well known is machismo, the ideal of masculine behavior. Defined as "a virile, sexually potent stud" (Gilmore 1983:244), the macho expresses exaggerated male sexuality (Ingham 1964). Aggressive sexuality is exhibited at all times to all women and for the benefit of any proximate male (Dundes with Suarez-Orozco 1987).²⁴ It is said that ideal men are ruled by their *cojones* or testicles (Gilmore 1983:244).²⁵ Included in the machismo ideology is the expectation by men and women that men will occasionally be unfaithful in marriage. Thus, male sexuality is highly valued, encouraged, and visible. Machismo is apparent in all classes, but the Gilmores (1979:281) argue that it is more pronounced in the father-absent, working-class households.

Women are subject to two behavioral prototypes: the Virgin and the Whore (Parsons 1969:47; Saunders 1981:440; Dundes with Suarez-Orozco 1987). In the former, the behavioral ideal is embodied by the image of Mary. As the Virgin, women are expected to be chaste, faithful, and passive (Paz 1961:35–38; Saunders 1981:455). The most highly valued role for a woman is to be a mother, and, according to Gilmore (1986:238; see Parsons 1969:26), "both [men

and women] idealize sacrificial mothering.” Moreover, women continue to receive pressure from society to be asexual after marriage, except with their husbands (Stevens 1973a:96; Pitt-Rivers 1966). A woman is expected to behave “as passive bait or victim” (Gilmore 1983:242). Unlike men, women are not encouraged to freely express their sexuality.

The other prototype of women is the image of the whore, prostitute, or witch (Brandes 1980:82; Saunders 1981:440; Gilmore 1986; Dundes with Suarez-Orozco 1987). Instead of idealized in a positive manner, as sexual activity is for men, the behavior associated with this image is disparaged by society. “Prostitute” behavior might include dressing “provocatively,” being sexually active before marriage, or asserting sexual interest in a man. Some women (e.g., widows) are judged to be promiscuous regardless of their sexual activity (Pitt-Rivers 1966:69).

MALE PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALES

Men attribute to women an overactive sexuality similar to their own (Gilmore 1983). Men see women as “seductresses, possessed of insatiable, lustful appetites” (Brandes 1980:77; see Christian 1972:153) in spite of the virginal ideal and societal pressures for women to be chaste. Men view themselves as powerless to resist a woman who is determined to get her way (Brandes 1980:103; Gilmore 1986:230). Wives and mothers-in-law are often portrayed as being “sexually overactive and uncontrollable” in the Gilmores’ analysis of songs (1979:292). Besides being viewed as lustful, women are also seen by men to be evil. They compare women to Eve and see themselves as victims of an evil female nature (Brandes 1980:76; Christian 1972:154; Saunders 1981:440; Du Boulay 1986:140).²⁶ According to Brandes, “men believe themselves to be inherently more virtuous than women” (1980:76). Another part of the male belief system is that wives want to deceive and trick their husbands (Brandes 1980:88). As a result, a man must constantly be on guard, lest his wife ruin his reputation.

FAMILY HONOR AND FEMALE BEHAVIOR

We now have two contradictory images of women—one that expects women to embody the ideals of the Virgin and another that suggests that women are sexually insatiable and morally deficient.

Family honor, in part, rests upon female sexual behavior, but—crucially—it is the man's job to ensure the correctness of that behavior (Pitt-Rivers 1966:45; Brandes 1980:75). Because male honor depends upon female sexual behavior, women's relationships with both men and women are severely restricted by fathers and brothers (Stevens 1973b:59). Consequently, the most acceptable role open to women is that of mother, which ties them to the home and family (Dubisch 1986:18; Du Boulay 1986).²⁷

MALE PARADOX

The male paradox is that, while men have the responsibility and power to control women, they feel weak and vulnerable in relation to them. Men feel "powerless when confronted with women," and see them as "potentially dangerous" (Brandes 1980:76; see Stevens 1973b).

Women effectively dominate the household, which, consequently, leaves the working-class male ineffectual in both public and private domains (Gilmore and Gilmore 1979:289). This sense of helplessness can be attributed, in part, to the reality that women of the working class often have more economic power than their husbands (Gilmore and Gilmore 1979:281, 289). Men often experience not only economic marginality but, also, political marginality. It has been reported that the working-class males have little influence in local politics and, therefore, not much power over their lives (Gilmore and Gilmore 1979:281). Thus, in their sphere of influence, the public sphere, economically marginal men are ineffectual. Additionally, the female domain incorporates the home, which includes children and their upbringing. Thus, it seems that hypermasculinity and sexual dominance over women is a way for men to have a sense of moral and physical superiority and a sense of control though they feel powerless (Ingham 1964; Gilmore and Gilmore 1979; Brandes 1980).

These male paradoxical perceptions probably replicate the experience of early childhood. Saunders (1981:457) suggests that boys experience their mothers as inconsistent—all-giving, yet aggressive. This same pattern seems to have emerged in the adult male perception of women as well. Men are expected to have power over women sexually, have free sexual license, and move with ease in the public sphere, yet they still feel helpless and deceived by women who lack these freedoms. Machismo is an adaptive response to these feelings: it exaggerates a masculinity that men seem afraid of losing.

FEMALE PARADOX

Women appear to accept this male fantasy, for—and this is the female paradox—women of the father-ineffective family have de facto power in both the public and private spheres, yet allow themselves to be sexually dominated. The main difference from the male experience of this paradoxical conflict is that a woman's power comes from her lack of sexuality, not her sexual prowess.

Women's self-perceptions are paradoxical because women have power and authority in the public and private domains, yet according to the ideals of male and female in Mediterranean society, they should not. It is easy to see women's power in the private sphere—the mother runs the household, deals with children's authority figures, and is the intimate of the children. Because of male economic marginality, women also have power in the public sphere. Women often earn money doing work that their husbands often cannot or will not do (Gilmore and Gilmore 1979:289).²⁸ Consequently, it appears that women of the father-ineffective family wield power, even if it is not openly acknowledged or actualized.

Women appear to accept a position of submission. Christian (1972:153) argues that women maintain a position of submission because they internalize the church's label of female impurity.²⁹ Another way to understand the domination of women in Mediterranean society is to explore how women may use the system to their advantage (see Du Boulay 1986:165). Benjamin (1988:78) suggests that in relationships the individual is never simply dominated; the dominated individual is also willing to submit. Through *marianismo*, Stevens argues, women use asexuality to their advantage, in a process that has its roots in early experience.³⁰

MARIANISMO

Stevens (1973b:57) bases her theory of *marianismo*³¹ on behavior and attitudes of women that suggest that the women are not as discontent with their societal position as has been thought by outside observers. Stevens shows that women are the socializers of the society; they are responsible for raising both boys and girls and inculcating them with norms of male and female behavior (Stevens 1973a:97). Instead of taking the opportunity to teach boys to respect women, she argues, they perpetuate the myths of the society.

From research done specifically on female sexuality in the Mediterranean, it seems that men have a distorted picture of female sex-

ual behavior and desire. Contrary to the male image of female lustfulness, women claim that sex holds little interest for them. Saunders quotes Cornelisen's (1976) conclusions on Italian women: "Peasant women seldom see physical encounters as pleasant. As something necessary, as duty, as trial but not passion, which is a word associated with rage rather than love or sexual intercourse" (in Saunders 1981:446; see Campbell 1964; Du Boulay 1986:150). When women reach menopause and have stopped ovulating, they have, in a sense, returned to a virginal or pure state and resemble the Virgin more than at any other period in their lives. Stevens claims that menopause "becomes a sign of divine grace" (1973b:62).

Not only do menopausal women appear to be content and to eschew sexuality, but Stevens (1973b:61) further claims that women humor adult males and cooperate in maintaining male hypersexuality (see also Saunders 1981:445–447). Women contribute by fostering the idea that men have no control over their sexual impulses (Stevens 1973b:61), by making such statements as they "can't help the way they are" (Stevens 1973a:95), and by further rejecting their own sexuality (Du Boulay 1986; see Saunders 1981). According to Stevens, women need the injustices of male behavior to acquire a spiritually and morally superior status (1973b:57, 62; 1974:210).

The female paradox—the reality of power but the experience of submission—is more understandable now that female experience has been explicated. The sex-free woman is seen by society as semi-divine. Women also gain from this system in other ways. Stevens (1973b:62) contends that *marianismo* "enables women to bear the indignities inflicted on them by men and forgive those who bring pain." *Marianismo* also provides a "sense of identity and historical continuity," as well as the support of the community and society at large (Stevens 1973a:98). Without male hypersexuality, this strategy would not be accessible to women. Being thought of as spiritually and morally superior, women gain a respect that is not available to men (Stevens 1973a; Du Boulay 1986:167).

SUMMARY OF THE PARADOXES

When examined closely, both paradoxes become understandable. It is likely that, for both men and women, early childhood experiences greatly affect their later perceptions of themselves and each other. Machismo seems to be a compensatory response to an early

conflict between male and female identities. Furthermore, the male fantasy of female sexuality seems related to early male experience of their mothers. *Marianismo*, rather than the consequence of an identity conflict, seems to be a continuation of the identity experienced as children. Female children are encouraged to be more independent than boys and to be involved religiously. In adult life, women continue this pattern—humor men, run the household, maintain the spiritual well-being of the family, and often achieve economic superiority over their husbands. For women, the societal expectations that limit their sexual freedom benefit them later in menopause, which is when, according to Stevens, *marianismo* comes into “full bloom.” At this time women are “virginal”—no longer ovulate—and mothers. They achieve the Marian ideal. In any event, whether or not these gender expectations have their roots in childhood, the Marian religion serves them well.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus far I have reviewed Carroll's thesis, presented an alternative analysis of female psychology, and examined male and female behavior in southern Italy and Spain. The examination of female psychology and these societies focused on female identity acquisition and the paradoxes in male and female beliefs about females. The emphases of these two areas, combined with Carroll's main sociological points, provide a more female-centered analysis of the cult.

The Mary cult is present in southern Italy and Spain because it provides solutions to problems that these cultures have created.³² I argue that because men's and women's issues in these societies are different, the cult appeals to each for different reasons.

GENDER-BASED NEEDS FULFILLMENT

Carroll suggests that the cult allows men to release excess sexual energy produced by a strongly repressed desire for the mother in a culturally sanctioned manner. I do not disagree entirely with Carroll's psychological analysis (hypothesis 1), but I feel that it may be more complex than he suggests. While I have discussed my disagreement with the claim that men are fervently devoted, I do believe that, on some level, Mary is important to men because of the patterns of mothering in these societies.

Marian devotion enables men to justify their control over women and relieves them of their fear of female sexuality. Saunders's characterization of child rearing suggests that children experience an omnipotent mother who may be both aggressive and nurturant. The process of disidentification from the mother, when boys are thrust into the world of men and exorcise all that is "feminine," must be traumatic, confusing, and conflictual. Men, I argue, focusing on the sexual impurity of women, demand dominance out of an unconscious desire to repress the reproductive power of women³³ and an attempt to control the early dominating maternal image.³⁴ Threatened by feminine power, men may denigrate women and try to control their sexuality. Men channel their ambivalent and paradoxical feelings toward the mother and women into secular and nonsecular arenas. The reconciliation of the image of the pre-Oedipal mother with that of the adult male conception of females must be difficult to internalize. This may explain men's contradictory images of women.

Devotion to Mary allows men to be reengulfed in the nurturant, omnipotent mother without having to lose their carefully constructed hypermasculinity. Many of their positive feelings are placed onto this figure. The other set of feelings (e.g., anger, anxiety, dependence) is seen in the secular part of society (e.g., control of female sexuality and *piropos* [see Note 24]). It is also visible in the way men relate to institutional religion (e.g., anticlericalism, irreverence, irregular attendance at Mass, etc.). If Mary is nonsexual, there is no need to try to control her. Moreover, her nonsexuality may not promote the anxiety that is felt in the early relationship with the mother. The paradox, then, reconciles these two very different but real experiences men have with women and helps illustrate their devotion to Mary.

But what does the Mary cult do for women? The main puzzle seems to lie in issues of power and sexuality. Women in southern Italy and Spain seem to have the potential to wield a great deal of power domestically, economically, and, in some ways, sexually. The psychology of the devotees and the power of Marian symbolism are significant elements in considering why women accept an apparently subordinate role.

The Cult as a Coping Device. From an ethnocentric viewpoint, the cult would seem to provide little for women. The church hierarchy

is dominated by males, women are expected to emulate an unrealizable ideal, and some doctrine seems almost misogynistic (e.g., disallowance of female priesthood). When we understand more fully the dynamics of the societies in question, it becomes apparent that the cult and Mary do offer women a great deal. Mary provides a means of coping with the world. For many women, Mary is a confidant and a source of comfort. As explained by Christian (1972), Mary is a personal patron, a consistent figure who often takes the role of mother in the absence of a "real" one. Women's prayer and recitation of Hail Marys illustrate this comforting quality.

Mary also serves as a means of coping, in that she represents power. She is well respected and her veneration has often rivaled that of Jesus.³⁵ She is a role model and an image for women to admire. Rather than a weak, docile figure, Mary has great influence.

The emulation of Mary is the most accepted role for women. Ideal "feminine" behavior is linked to issues of virginity and motherhood. These qualities are also imposed on women by society. Success is equated with premarital chastity and motherhood in marriage. Men do not have similar societal constraints placed on their sexuality, except in the opposite extreme (i.e., machismo). In Mary, women have a socially accepted model whose power lies in her qualities of motherhood, self-abnegation, suffering, intercession, and virginity. Women who follow these ideals gain, according to Stevens, a sense of moral and spiritual superiority and are regarded as semidivine. While women have had to deal with the control of their sexuality, they have also used the image of Mary to gain a sense of control in other ways. One function of the Mary cult for women, then, is to provide a means of coping within the machismo society and to gain acceptance and power by living up to a model venerated by both men and women.

Psychological Fulfillment. The question now is: if women have great potential power and control, how do they exercise it? The answer to this question lies in the psychological fulfillment that Mary provides. Women do have the capability to wield a tremendous amount of power (economic, domestic, sexual), but not in an active and direct manner. I argue that women's power is connected to the denial of the self. Benjamin argues that the image of the maternal ideal (full of self-abnegation and denial) is a beautification of woman as object, subject to the desires and needs of those around

her. Mary is the “maternal ideal”—all-giving, all-nurturing, and all-loving. Girls have strong pre-Oedipal attachments with the mother. Benjamin further argues that in the identification with the mother, girls realize that self-sacrifice is her source of power. This occurs, she claims, because girls do not experience a process of dis-identification, as do boys. Daughters are apt to accept the image of Mary and societal proscriptions regarding their sexuality more readily, since the mother role is given such strong support in the religious system. Her power lies in her ability to tie her children close to her because of this self-denial. Women do not actively use their sexuality to gain power over men, because this would not be consonant with the Marian ideal. They can, however, wield power through the denial of sexuality (*marianismo*). Because Mary derives her power in the same way, it seems clear that women would strongly identify with a figure whose experience is consonant to their own.

The pattern of self-denial is heightened in these societies because of the exclusive and powerful role women have as mothers. If features of mothering are intensified, then the consequences will also be. If this is correct, then women will gain their identity from self-denial and men will denigrate women and deny that part of themselves that is feminine even more. This appears to be the pattern in southern Italy and Spain. Thus, when Chodorow emphasizes that women’s mothering creates expectations in girls and boys about women’s capacities for nurturance and self-sacrifice, it is understandable that in the extreme situation of these societies, women would be expected to follow an ideal such as Mary, the epitome of the maternal ideal.

The Virgin’s Power. The question of why Mary must also be a virgin has not yet been addressed. I will not delve into female psychological development for the answer but, instead, explore the power of the virgin image. Mitchell argues that Mary’s virginity is not only a symbol of purity but of “autonomy.” She is free of the passions and desires that dominate the human psyche (Mitchell 1990:131). For women, the Virgin Mary can also be seen as autonomous, powerful, and worthy of veneration because, in part, she has succeeded without needing men. The Virgin conceived without human male intervention and continued life without the constraints of male sexuality or dominance. She achieved motherhood without

male influence, which seems to insult ideas of male virility. This explanation further clarifies *marianismo* and why the “full blown” complex only occurs in menopausal women. It is these women who are mothers in a virginal (nonovulating) state that would have the most power in society. They most resemble Mary at this time in the women’s life cycle.³⁶

The combination of the virgin and mother images gives women great strength through coping, psychological fulfillment, and the knowledge that women, on some level, are independent of men. This unconscious attitude might explain the central female paradox, which keeps men at a distance and creates a sense of female superiority. By seeing men as children, women live in a world without adults. The son takes the important position where the husband cannot. Women keep both men and themselves on the periphery, but the motivations are different. Women do so because it allows them to maintain the fantasy that they are independent of men, and at the same time they gain their identity from nurturing others. Thus, the pattern continues.

In summary, for men the Mary cult justifies their sexual control of women and also helps to reconcile conflicting images of the mother created during early socialization. For women the Mary cult serves as a coping device, strikes a psychologically fulfilling chord, and through the image of the virgin provides a symbol that gives women both strength and tranquility. The image of the Virgin Mother corresponds to the feminine triadic world and provides women with a culturally sanctioned means of achieving power.

NOTES

¹Carroll uses Swatos’s (1981) definition of cult—“collectivity centering around a real or imaginary figure whose followers believe that their lives are made better through activities which honor or are proscribed by the leader” (quoted in Carroll 1986:xi)—for his argument.

²In support of this claim he asserts that nearly all psychoanalytic researchers (Freud, Malinowski, Dundes, Spiro, and himself [Carroll 1986:57]) have come to the same conclusion. He argues that this may be true because they are all male, but in rebuttal he points to one female investigator (Nadelson 1981) who comes to a similar conclusion. He also turns to empirical research. He examines one myth from a single society and develops two potential conclusions. The conclusion that seems to have the most support suggests that the myth comes from the male psyche (Carroll 1986:58).

³Carroll realizes that the Mary cult attracts a large number of female devotees, and he must explain why they identify with the cult when the cult’s content stems from the male psyche. He concedes that “the attitude of female devotees toward Mary is quite different from that of males” (1986:58).

⁴Mary is also associated with such roles as queen, mourner, and bride (Warner 1976).

⁵To illustrate Mary's unique qualities, Carroll examines the characteristics of other goddesses from the ancient Near East or Greco-Roman world who may have served as predecessors to Mary. He summarily discards goddesses from these areas because they fail to meet the criteria of being both mother and virgin. He claims that only one possibility exists: Cybele, the Magna Mater. I find his data compelling but unsatisfactory.

⁶Carroll claims that, according to Freud's general theory, the Mary cult will have some universal appeal for both males and females because we all unconsciously desire our mothers and fathers. However, the appeal will be especially great in societies with a father-ineffective family structure because such a family structure increases the Oedipal desires of sons for their mothers and daughters for their fathers. Following Parsons, Carroll claims that "the incestuous attraction between the daughter and the father . . . is both strong and overt" (1986:60).

⁷Gilmore (1984) has shown that there are religious differences between northern and southern Spain, which are not addressed by Carroll. Men lack religious fervency in both parts of the country and, according to Gilmore, in the south in particular.

⁸Carroll does not mention anticlericalism in his work, but it is highly relevant. Anticlericalism has strong political roots that vary in strength and composition between the north and south of Spain (Gilmore 1984).

⁹Women see sex as sinful (i.e., it contradicts the Marian ideal) and, therefore, it requires absolution through confession. Men, conversely, do not view intercourse in a similar manner and, consequently, they confess infrequently and with much resistance (Brandes 1980:186). Female concern with their sexual morality (which is in part a consequence of church and priestly messages) interferes with the satisfaction of male sexual needs. In this way, the church and its priests interfere with male ability to achieve the machismo ideal.

¹⁰See Mitchell (1990) for discussion of *cofradías* and other noninstitutionalized religious groups.

¹¹There is an exception to this pattern. The brotherhood associated with the Virgen de la Cabeza has a "widely distributed membership, including working class, many office employees . . . , owners of commercial enterprises . . . ," and "a handful of independent landowners, special devotees of the Virgin, who belong, but they are atypical" (Brandes 1980:194). Thus, it seems that those who do take part in the *cofradía* of the Virgin are not subject to economic marginality, since the jobs that Brandes lists are relatively consistent throughout the year. Even if the working-class members were seasonal employees and fit Carroll's description, his hypothesis cannot explain the other members, who are a significant part of the membership. Interestingly, women are allowed membership into this *cofradía* and not into any of the others.

¹²See De Vos and Suarez-Orozco (1987:332–334) for discussion of Oedipal reductionism.

¹³His is a universal argument: the Virgin Mary appeals to all women because devotion satisfies the Oedipal wishes all women must experience. However, Carroll argues that these feelings are especially intense in the father-ineffective family because the father is experienced as desirable, but particularly unattainable.

¹⁴There are several problems with the evidence to support this theory. We have seen that female masochism occupies a central position in the Mary cult. Carroll's model (1986:62–63) explains male masochism well, yet it cannot explain female masochism, because it demands (conceptually) that incestuous desires between father and daughter are strong and overt, rather than strongly repressed. If they are strong and overt, that implies that they are freely expressed. Carroll is implicitly arguing that male masochism arises from the guilt of repressed desires and female masochism from the guilt of expressed ones. This is not contradictory, but it seems weak. I suggest that the powerful expression of female religiosity must arise from some psychological wellspring that is not identified by Carroll.

¹⁵See Freud's "Female Sexuality" (1963a[1931]) and "Femininity" (1965[1933]).

¹⁶Whereas the castration complex annihilates the Oedipus complex in boys (Freud 1965[1933]:114), it prepares girls for the Oedipus conflict.

¹⁷When Carroll's discussion utilizes orthodox Freudian principles, he does not include the role of the mother in the girl's switch from mother to father. I do not necessarily agree with this formulation, but Carroll fails to mention the Freudian belief that the girl's intense hostility is produced because she is denied a penis, which motivates her to drop the mother.

¹⁸One must bear in mind Freud's self-proclaimed lack of understanding of women. He says at the end of his lecture on femininity: "That is all I had to say to you about femininity. It is certainly incomplete and fragmentary" (1965[1933]:119; see 1963b[1924]:181; 1965[1933]:204).

¹⁹In choosing a feminist critique of orthodox psychoanalysis, it seems important to employ one that carefully and objectively examines Freudian principles. Chodorow's text is helpful in examining the issues and consequences of maintaining traditionally held beliefs about orthodox psychoanalysis. I chose Chodorow rather than, for example, Deutsch or Mitchell because they seem to accept many of Freud's more controversial ideas unchallenged. Much work has been done since Deutsch's time, and this is incorporated into Chodorow's reevaluation.

²⁰This examination of southern Italian and Spanish society does not detail the obvious complexity of social relations, but it does attempt to detail some of the noted phenomena.

²¹The Gilmores argue that one way the conflict is expressed in adulthood is by male transvestism exhibited at Carnival. They interpret the transvestism as "an acting-out of underlying gender identity conflict in working class males" (1979:292).

²²The male paradox contains the societal ideal of female behavior with a male fantasy of female lustfulness. Moreover, men control female sexuality yet feel helpless when confronted with it. The paradox appears to be a consequence of child-rearing practices, which, Saunders (1981) argues, creates anxiety and dependence in children. Within the nurturant environment, there is an aggressiveness from the mother that creates anxiety. He suggests that these feelings are particularly strong in male children because they are not encouraged to be independent like girls, who are expected to assume domestic responsibilities while still quite young. De Vos and Suarez-Orozco (1990) argue that in societies with gender antagonism mothers may have unconscious harmful feelings toward their male children, which may be acted upon. This may explain the female aggressiveness noted by Parsons (1969) and highlighted by Saunders (1981).

²³For discussion of this paradox see Saunders (1981), Du Boulay (1986), and Gilmore (1986).

²⁴Machismo is also demonstrated in the cultural phenomenon of *piropos*. *Piropos* are "traditional verbal comment(s) addressed by a man (often in the company of other males) to one or more females (usually unknown to the *piropeadores*) in a public place such as a street, marketplace, plaza, beach, and the like" (Dundes with Suarez-Orozco 1987:120). *Piropos* can be merely flirtatious or crude and vulgar (1987:120). In the authors' words "*the piropo articulates a collectively held male fantasy on the nature of women*" (emphasis in original 1987:121). Their work is significant to Latin America. Please see Note 30. Mitchell (1990:31) has observed the use of *piropos* in Spain as well.

²⁵The following line exemplifies this attitude: "A 'macho', one man replied, 'is a man who would make love to a shovel if you put a dress on it. A macho is a man like the bull or the goat; he's a highly sexed animal: he conquers and ravishes the female'" (Gilmore and Gilmore 1979:290).

²⁶Du Boulay (1986) has observed similar patterns of male-female relations in her work in Greece.

²⁷See Pitt-Rivers (1966:21–77) for discussion of the Mediterranean “honor-shame” model.

²⁸Brandes (1980:144) notes that, during the olive harvest, machismo prevents men from collecting olives the way women do because being on one’s knees is a behavior associated with women.

²⁹Church doctrine emphasizes Eve, the importance of chastity, and that postpartum mothers require “churching”—a ritual cleansing to rid women of pollution—before they are readmitted to church.

³⁰Even though Stevens’s work is specific to Latin America, I feel that it can be used in conjunction with southern Italy and Spain. Many similarities between the two areas make comparison possible. The use of the Virgin as a cultural motif, the “ideals” of female behavior, the machismo complex, an emphasis on emotional and physical distance between the sexes, and the father-ineffective family have all been reported in both cultural areas. Though researchers claim that Mexican and Spanish machismo are different—Mexican machismo emphasizes both aggressive tones in male-male relationships and sexual aggressiveness in male-female relationships, while Spanish machismo only incorporates the latter (Gilmore and Gilmore 1979:282)—I believe that similarity in the male-female relationship is the significant factor. Thus, I do not see the difference as problematic.

³¹Stevens coined the term *marianismo* “[b]ecause inspiration for this secular cult of femininity is drawn from the adoration of the Virgin Mary” (1973b:62). Rather than seeing women as victims of a male-dominated society, she claims that women benefit from and use the image of the Virgin to gain societal power and the strength and support of community. Stevens describes *marianismo* as the “cult of feminine spiritual superiority which teaches that women are semidivine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men” (1974:210). This status is only achieved through motherhood and after middle age, “when grown children can render homage to the mother-cult object” (1974:210).

³²It seems that social structure needs to exist before religion is established—at least, from historical evidence, this seems to have happened in this case. Once religion is institutionalized, it may perpetuate and reinforce the social structure.

³³Examples of denial of female reproductive powers could be the practices of churching, baptism, and the exclusion of women from the church hierarchy. In the case of churching, see Note 29. The ritual of baptism implies that before a child is welcome in the community, a priest must “rebirth” the baby (Suarez-Orozco, personal communication, 1990), something no woman can do. Both rites suggest a denigration of female power, with males asserting their own form of reproductive, healing capacities—which leads, perforce, to excluding women from the church hierarchy and its ritual functions. Perhaps notions of female impurity and awe of female powers underlie the reasoning behind the purely male hierarchy.

³⁴See De Vos and Suarez-Orozco’s discussion of the association between female reproductive power and the unconscious wish for men to dominate women (1990:164–203).

³⁵There have been movements in the church trying to limit Mary’s role and persuade people to discontinue what has been termed “mariolatry” (Carroll 1986:220–221).

³⁶Additional evidence to support the concept of *marianismo* is the status of menopausal women who are virgins but not mothers (never married). These old virgins are dubbed church “cockroaches” “because their social life revolves around the church” (Arnold 1978:51). While women of *marianismo* gain their power in society through their status as mothers (especially during menopause), the “cockroaches” achieve a status of “spinster androgyny” (Arnold 1978:52) through their involvement with ritual. These androgynous women cannot use the image of the mother, and consequently it is apparent that their power is derived from another source. Therefore, it seems that *marianismo* is a distinct complex, not automatically associated with all older women.

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