

Weaving Voices Article (Aug-Nov 2000)

Contributions of the Members of the C. G. Jung Society of Sydney

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Post Jungian Thought, Feminism and Women's Aggressive Fantasies

BY SUE AUSTIN

Jung comments that “...women often pick up tremendously when they are allowed to think all the disagreeable things which they had denied themselves before” (Douglas, 1990, p.77)

This quote seems to run in quite a different plane to many of Jung's simpler, culture and period bound formulations of his thoughts on women's psychology. While I cannot accept the way Jung's female followers have theorized these phenomena (in terms of animus, etc.), the work of the first generation Jungian women has offered me access to a notion of women's aggression which is important for women's psychological development.

Furthermore, a particular comment, which I have heard in many forms from women in various walks of life, has convinced me that women's aggressive fantasies are potentially significant. It occurs while women are describing their darker thoughts and is usually expressed as something like “...of course I wouldn't tell my therapist about this stuff...they'd lock me up!” The apparent ‘undiscussability’ of such thoughts set me wondering: what are the disagreeable thoughts which women deny themselves? What are the possibilities for movement and change inherent in such thoughts? Why is it so hard or frightening to engage with such thoughts?

By aggressive fantasy I mean not only women's fantasies about being aggressors (although these are very important, albeit rarely disclosed), but also the more accessible fantasies of being the object of aggression, as well-known example of the latter being the ‘inner critic’ which berates a woman, telling her she is useless, ugly, stupid, hopeless and so on.

Usually, feminist analysis of this kind of material is given in terms of it being a result of women growing up in a patriarchy. The common (feminist and non-feminist) assumption is that a woman needs to learn to ‘love herself enough’, develop ‘good internal objects’, or come to terms with her ‘inner masculine’. I would argue, however, that these experiences are complex and say something important about women's experiences of, and fantasies around power, aggression, visibility, potency and agency.

Perhaps such fantasies could be regarded as aspects of women's resistance to identity, which, as Jacqueline Rose points out, lies at the core of psychic life. This idea provides a potential link between Leo Bersani's insight that only the decentred subject is available to desire and Sabina Spielrein's argument that aggression, sexuality, destructiveness and desire are inextricably linked. Considering this lineage between desire, resistance to identity and aggression, we encounter the transgressive pleasure which is implied by the Lacanian term *jouissance*, a pleasure which post-Jungian thinker David Miller describes as imposing a state of loss, discomfiting, unsettling assumptions, leaving nothing the same. In gender terms, this state is probably to be found more in aggression for woman than (as it is for men) in sexuality. By way of illustration we can question

whether the tearing apart of Dionysus (*the loosener*) by his female followers is an illustration of female jouissance. Alternatively, given the extent to which Classical myth circulates patriarchal interests, we could reframe this myth as telling us something about male fears of female jouissance.

Women's experiences of living with these kinds of entwinings and experiences of desire are poorly documented and the dissociationist heritage which runs through Jung's work, provides a vehicle for exploring them, since it offers a means of reading the products (dreams, fantasies, images, actions) which arise from struggles to live with a core resistance to identity. The French Dissociationist view of the psyche is inherently plural is also a central idea in much post-Jungian thought, for example, Samuels' plural psyche and Redfearn's Self that is many Selves.

Furthermore, we can also question whether Lacan's comment can be taken to imply that elements of women's fantasies about impotence, omnipotence and aggression (with its associations with jouissance), coincide with what have traditionally been regarded as experiences of God, or, at the very least, of love.

Thus, aggressive fantasy and the anxiety it produces has the potential to provide women with a means of exploring the edges of identity, the places where resistance to coherent identity are most visible. It is here that fantasies of being destroyed and of destroying oneself and/or others can lay the foundations for a sense of agency and the responsibilities entailed in exercising agency. Through post-Jungian insights into the creative potential of psychic dissociability, this realm could also provide a breakthrough point for feminist thought and ways of thinking about women's experience of interiority in general.