

Understanding Subjectivity, Gender, and Issues of Difference in Psychoanalytic Feminism

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Abstract—Using a modified, systematic literature review the paper will examine issues of subjectivity, gender, and difference in relation to psychoanalytic feminist theory. Psychoanalytic feminism evolved out of a reaction to classical psychoanalytic theory. Besides the literature review the paper will discuss the development of theoretical perspectives of Nancy Chodorow (1978), Julia Kristeva (1977, 1989), and Jessica Benjamin (1988), and the understanding of subjectivity, gender, and issues of difference in psychoanalytic feminism.

The aim of the paper would be to examine how the cultural construction of gender has been understood within feminist psychoanalysis. This paper shall further examine the acquisition of gender and issues of subjectivity, difference, and intersubjectivity, especially in relation to psychoanalysis, object relations, and feminist thought. The epistemological and ontological assumptions underpinning social science research has resulted in the female voice being greatly silenced in western discourse. Feminism opposes the traditional canons of grand social theory because the worldview began and ended with the male experience and definition of the world, this type of perspective, took little account of women's experience of the world and how this may differ from a male's experience of the world. In particular the absence of diverse female perspectives has resulted in women being denied the right to know from the perspectives of their own lives. The feminist worldview however begins with women's experience of the world and focuses on the relationship between gender-differentiated subjectivity and the structure of the external world. However, the feminist challenge and the insertion of diverse female voices into classical psychoanalyses have been important developments to have occurred. Women still identify with stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity and choose to structure their lives and create meaning in this way. This paper shall aim to understand how the acquisition of gender has developed across time by examining the gender debate and to understand the different identifications and contexts in which they have been constructed as a way of understanding the issues more fully.

Keywords: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Gender, Objects Relations, Postmodernism, Intersubjectivity.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research paper shall examine how the cultural construction of gender has been understood within feminist

psychoanalysis. The aim of literature review for the paper is to examine gendered differences in terms of how early developmental experiences culturally construct the identification of masculine and feminine identities. In the paper the impact of woman's knowledge of the female self is explored theoretically by critically evaluating the psychoanalytic works of Nancy Chodorow, Julia Kristeva, and Jessica Benjamin. Each theorist takes as their starting point the formative importance of the pre-oedipal period of development in the acquisition of gendered identities for both males and females.

The Oedipus complex has been considered a cornerstone of gender development in psychoanalytic thinking. Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex is a classic example of a child's journey to adulthood. According to Freud, everyone is born with a basic sex drive or instinctual energy called the libido. As a person develops, conflicting mental and psychological forces occur. Freud identified five psychosexual stages of development: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital, with the core phase of infantile sexuality occurring at the phallic stage. The phallic stage occurs between the years of three to six. During this phase a child seeks pleasure and libidinal gratification from his or her genitalia. Developmentally, sexual orientation and identification with the same sex parent occurs via an Oedipus complex. The developmental issues surrounding this stage comprise of sex-role identification, sexuality, and gender identity. For Freud, the impetus of a girl's Oedipal complex is signalled via the anatomical distinction between the presence or absence of a penis. On the basis of this distinction, Freud maintained children during this stage recognise the significance of the anatomical distinction between the sexes. Boys have a protruding sex organ, while girls, according to Freud, have a cavity. In recognising this difference a girl perceives herself as castrated and desires the male sex organ to substitute her lack. Freud termed this "penis envy", and viewed this element of female sexuality to be universal. The girl blames the dismembering upon her mother and attempts to compensate for this lack by substituting a child in the place of a penis. A shifting of libidinal desires

results in the girl redirecting her libidinal drive from her mother and towards her father. As a result of this distinction, issues of sexual difference and the emergence of the Oedipus complex is signalled.

Freud maintained that the development of a mature femininity requires a girl to give up her sexual attachment to her clitoris, her attachment to her mother, the wish for a penis and for her to compensate these renounced elements with a desire to have children, initially from her father and in subsequent years, her husband. During this phase murderous fantasies are directed towards the same sex parent, in this instance, the mother. Although, ambivalence is also prevalent, as the girl loves and depends on her mother, and also wishes to protect her mother from her destructive drives and desires. The redirection of the girl's libido, from mother to father, via penis envy, and the subsequent renunciation of the incestuous object-father, stems from the cultural demands of society, or what Freud termed the incest taboo. The girl feels guilty over her incestuous desire and murderous impulses and becomes locked into an interminable conflict. The girl escapes possible prosecution by interjecting societal and parental moral laws, thus repressing her identity's instinctual cravings and executing the super-ego's moral authority. Psychoanalytic feminism is based on Freud and his psychoanalytic theories. However, it maintains that gender is not biological but is centred on the psycho-sexual development of the individual.

For Nancy Chodorow, psychoanalysis is the method and theory directed toward the investigation of and understanding of how we develop and experience ourselves and other. Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, portrays the social construction of the individual psyche, the construction of heterosexuality, of femininity and masculinity as they are conventionally understood. Julia Kristeva's influential work, *Desire in Language: A semiotic approach to Literature and Art and Women's Time* emphasises the theoretical role of language in the construction of femininity. Kristeva draws from a Lacanian framework to revise Freud's theory of the Oedipal complex. She examines the semiotic, a pre-oedipal stage of development, prior to the acquisition of language and proposes a new maternal discourse from this period of development. Jessica Benjamin's (1988) *Shadow of the Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis* is important in this context, too.. She provides an alternative to gender hierarchies, masculine-feminine, subject-object, active-passive, by emphasising the significance of identification and the recognition of similarities and difference internally, and in relation to other. In conclusion, using a modified, systematic literature review the issues of subjectivity, gender, and difference in relation to psychoanalytic feminist theory will be examined. The literature review will discuss the development of Chodorow, Kristeva, and Benjamin's, perspectives to determine how heterosexual gender differentiation and gender roles are reproduced and what the impact is on women's lives and understanding of agency.

2. NANCY CHODOROW'S THE REPRODUCTION OF MOTHERING: PSYCHOANALYSIS AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF GENDER, (1978)

Chodorow examines the intrapsychic and intersubjective dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship, by focusing on how women create and recreate this relationship internally. Chodorow applies both an object relational and sociological framework to theorise the over-determined process by which women come to mother.

Chodorow revised Freud's theory by critically evaluating the formation of feminine and masculine identities. She examined how gendered subjects, boys and girls, are produced, not on the basis of anatomical distinction between the sexes, as reflected in Freud's theory of sexuality, but on the basis of object relationships and the cultural construction of family dynamics. Utilising data from anthropological case studies, Chodorow indiscriminately accepts, as a universal phenomenon, that women are the primary care-givers of children but she does not examine if the universal premise is valid. For Chodorow it is the social and cultural construction of the mother-infant relationship which is pivotal to gender development and the relations between the sexes. Chodorow's work is significant because she highlights the centrality of a mother's role in the cultural construction of women's gendered representation of themselves. It directs psychoanalysis to examine this relational constellation, as well as the nature of women's relationships with other women and to pay attention to a father's role within the family.

Chodorow wrote, "We cannot separate the sexual division of labour from sexual inequality. The sexual division of labour and women's responsibility for child-care are linked to and generate male dominance".¹ In effect, Chodorow saw the implications for social change in Freud's theory of how the psychodynamic is constructed by the social. If the social arrangements that relegated all child rearing to women could be altered, the psychological process creating gender identity, and the devaluing of women, she suggested might also be altered. According to Chodorow, girls continue to identify with relational issues and fulfil their maternal needs by becoming mothers. Heterosexual women seek men to fulfil their desire for physical and emotional union. Chodorow maintains, because men cannot satisfy women's emotional needs, women turn to children to recreate the emotional triangle they once experienced as children themselves. According to her, the only way out of this endless cycle is shared parenting, wherein women and men actively participate in early child-care. This would allow the male to develop parenting capacities, allow boys to identify with their father on the basis of a real tie and activate exclusive heterosexual love in the girl. The female would not be trapped in issues of separation and primary identification and will relinquish her

¹ Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1978. p. 77.

daughter more easily. Issues of differentiation would no longer be intertwined with sexual issues. Gender identity would be more stable, while both sexes would be free to choose what they want to do. Furthermore, a feminist object relations approach provides an opportunity for women to challenge pre-existing and supposedly “neutral” social roles by providing an opportunity for women to examine the ideologies and social structures that have enabled men to gain and “maintain domination” over women. Furthermore, the historical and universal accounts of psychoanalytic theory have been superseded and the focus of a feminist psychoanalytic framework is to understand the complexity and diversity of women’s “suppression”, both at a personal and structural level.

Chodorow’s work is also significant because she offered an alternative perspective to the classical psychoanalytic views of femininity. Chodorow challenged the tyranny of biological explanations of gender, which perceived the formation of gender identity in terms of genital difference and the presence or absence of a penis. However, she remained psychoanalytic and utilised the developmental stages from the same psychoanalytic theorists that she critiqued. Chodorow does not pay attention to the subjective experience of women’s reproductive and sexual bodies. Furthermore, Chodorow’s formulation implies a determinism, with an emphasis on childhood socialisation, in which men, in contrast to women, are not attributed care-giving traits. Empathy, nurturing and childcare are all learnt behaviours. Childcare is not mysterious, gender specific or part of early developmental psychology; they are characteristics learnt across a lifespan. Personally, I think if males do not develop these skills, it is because they have not chosen to, not because they are incapable of it.

The formulation of Chodorow’s theory is circular; inequality is the direct result of women having acquired the primary care-giving role. This system is perpetuated and reproduced via women adopting the necessary relational modes for parenting, which alternatively are omitted from the male pre-oedipal experience. Chodorow’s account explains the social and cultural reproduction of gender inequality and why such a system has been established but does not explain the underlying causes of such a system. Chodorow has emphasised subjectivity and the specific meanings that are co-created from any mother-daughter relationship when discussing gender. Chodorow maintains it is not culture and the hegemonic processes that are created on a societal level or from a specific cultural group that determine the personal meaning of gender. Instead, a mother’s unconscious fantasies about her daughter or the particular meaning that is constructed from a daughter’s understanding of her mother and the recreation of that role or identification with her mother’s gender are the intersubjective elements which shape a women’s understanding of gender.

In conclusion, a disagreement comes forth with Chodorow’s analysis that a child’s pre-oedipal relationship with its mother is the single causal factor in the acquisition of gender roles. By focusing upon the psychological and personality dimensions, Nancy Chodorow fails to address the intermeshing and interdependence of social and signifiatory practices. Chodorow needs to acknowledge that there are multiple factors that contribute to a person’s gendered identity and that these cannot be reduced to a single psychoanalytic explanation of women’s “subordination”. Alternatively, Chodorow’s analysis did allow me to see the importance of understanding gender, in particular, the significance of the maternal role in the construction of masculine and feminine personalities, not only to the social organisation of families, but also to self–other distinctions. However, it cannot be agreed that it shapes the basis for dominant and subordinate gender relations.

3. JULIA KRISTEVA’S DESIRE IN LANGUAGE: A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO LITERATURE AND ART AND WOMEN’S TIME, (1977)

Julia Kristeva proposes a maternal discourse constructed on “pre-symbolic” mental experience in relation to the development of the self. The important facet to be outlined here would be the “semiotic” which examines the pre-oedipal stage of development and the interplay of the bodily rhythms and pre-linguistic relational modes between an infant and his/her mother in the formation of male or female identity. In *Women’s Time* (1979), Kristeva identifies with a psychoanalytic perspective and develops Jacques Lacan’s belief – *the unconscious is structured like language*. Building on this premise, Kristeva defines subjectivity as shifting and multifaceted, in contrast to Chodorow’s understanding of an individual as defined as stable, solid, and fixed. According to Kristeva, it is the integration of the semiotic and symbolic processes that provide the potential to constitute an alternative stratum of gendered subjectivity which is different to modernists’ perception of “femininity”. For Kristeva it is the theoretical intersection of psychoanalysis and postmodernism that provides her with the means to focus on issues of subjectivity, to contextualise it as the site of difference, multiplicity, resistance, and otherness.

In the formation of female identity, Kristeva emphasises the theoretical and linguistic meanings of sexual difference, focusing particularly on the role of language in the construction of femininity. Her perception of culture is an extension of intrapsychic dynamics whereby subjectivity and meaning originate from intrapsychic interplay between semiotic and symbolic discourse. Developmentally, Kristeva believes the formation of gender occurs at an early pre-oedipal stage of development. She maintains the maternal semiotic chora informs an unconscious aspect of the psyche, whereby an interplay and disruption with established meaning structures of the symbolic order occur. The process is fluid, dynamic, and meaning shifts in contiguous and substitutive

patterns of signifiers. In addition, Kristeva's theory of the "semiotic" in language has opened up what Lacan and Freud had not theoretically considered in any substantive way, the significance of the maternal function. Her theory provides a basis from which to discuss the domains of signification that operate beyond the Oedipal structure. Kristeva's theory situates female subjectivity as more than man's subsidiary. It attempts to release women from the theoretical model of the hierarchical tyranny of the "symbolic order", which advocates to speak is to follow the "Law of the Father", and that to achieve mental space is to become subject to the structures of the male Oedipus complex. Kristeva's theory deconstructs the symbolic order, the cultural construction of sexual difference by highlighting the formation of language during the pre-oedipal stage of development.

Kristeva maintains language originates from the symbolic and the semiotic chora. The symbolic is a linear, conscious, and masculine realm whereby meaning is constructed according to "patriarchal" dynamics and to the benefit of men. The masculine "patriarchal" voice is coded through the rhetoric of grand speech and delivered in public spaces to form public life. Kristeva attributes the semiotic with feminine attributes. Language from this realm is constructed from the symbiotic experience between an infant and his/her mother. The communication is based on the rhythms and disruptions of sensory and tactile communication from the mother's body and mental containment. Semiotic language is indeterminate and shaped by creative textual practices. Masculine subjects can also experience and access semiotic language, as it originates from the chora, which is a platonic term for an intermediary space that is nourishing, unnameable, and prior to the development of an individuated subject. The semiotic reflects non-oedipal rhythm and pulses; its language structure is non-discursive and the texts deny fixity or closure when reading. Kristeva, who believes in the value of adult subjects, intrapsychically returns to the boundless and terrifying semiotic space of rhythms, melodies, and tone in an effort to reclaim what has been lost. It is only through the process of examining the repressed aspects of the self that a client can define themselves in a real, congruent, and authentic way. Instead of a subject feeling subjugated to laws of society and alienated from their early pre-oedipal experience, a client can begin to foster a more inclusive subjectivity.

In conclusion, Kristeva does not have a women-centred theory or even a conceptualisation of "women". In fact, there is very little in Kristeva's theory to challenge any existing definitions of feminine or masculine, even though there was such a challenge to understand how such definitions came about. What Kristeva's theory does provide, however, is a basis from which to discuss the domains of signification that operate beyond the symbolic structure of femininity. In this respect, Kristeva's theory does bring more of the feminine to the practice of therapy and the exploration of the self. Her writings have peeled away many of the entombed layers of female subjectivity. This allows Kristeva to theorise the

marginalised and unspoken aspect of linguistic practice, the feminine, though not necessarily female. She is able to account for the ways in which linear language is disrupted by semiotic forces, and replaces a normative masculine subject with a dissolved and decentred subject of language. Therefore, by Kristeva, injecting individual differences into language, subjectivity becomes more dynamic, complex, and perhaps to those with modernist agendas, problematical.

4. JESSICA BENJAMIN'S SHADOW OF THE OTHER: INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND GENDER IN PSYCHOANALYSIS, (1988)

Jessica Benjamin reformulated Freud's Oedipal complex, by her inclusion of the female struggle for independence. Benjamin draws on an intersubjective and feminist framework to examine issues of sexual difference and gender identity. In contrast to Freud's intrapsychic emphasis on the individual's internal psychological structure, that of id, ego, and super-ego, Benjamin maintains recognition is seminal to human existence. Her focus is on ascertaining the relational interaction between self and other. Benjamin moves away from one-person to a two-person psychology. Her approach does not negate the internal by choosing to examine the social, but instead considers the internal and external reality by acknowledging the interplay between the unconscious and the social. She maintains that the intrapsychic and intersubjective viewpoints are unified via recognition which entails "not only the others confirming response, but also how we find ourselves in that response" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 21).

Benjamin suggests that within a Freudian framework, subjectivity was defined by the binary opposition subject-object. When object relations are defined in this way, whichever polarity gains the recognition of subject the other position is perceived as object. Historically, women have been subjected to the basic binary opposition of other and have not been considered active subjects. Within this conceptualisation women could only assume a subject position via reversal, by displacing man into the position of object. Benjamin proposes an alternative perspective to the subject-object binary opposition. Gender identity is developed during the second year of life and is established by the third. She defines subjectivity as a continuous stream of consciousness informed by the phenomenology of experience and the cultural construction of meaning, creating a context and space between self and subject. For Freud, the most salient example of the subject-object paradigm is demonstrated in his polarity of activity-passivity, whereby activity was considered male and passivity was perceived female. Benjamin formulates the complementarity of the subject-object paradigm according to an intersubjective context, thus incorporating the complementary behaviours between two active participants and consequently altering the relationship between activity and passivity.

So far, the formation of gendered subjectivity and the idea of coming to terms with difference have been considered from a classical Freudian perspective, which conceived sexual difference in terms of anatomical difference. Chodorow's object relational perspective conceived the division of gender by examining the object relations to the mother. Kristeva's ideas are situated within a Lacanian perspective, whereby gender is perceived in terms of the structural relationship to the phallus. Benjamin reconstructs these Oedipal standpoints by offering an alternative analysis in her formulation of sexual difference. Masculinity and femininity are reconfigured and are no longer polar opposites, but are now considered as complementary. In contrast to Chodorow, she suggests masculine and feminine identifications are located internally within each subject. During the second year of life, an infant begins to develop the capacity for symbolic thought and this developmental milestone signifies gender role identity, the next phase of identification. Included in this phase is the separation-individuation process whereby there is a differentiation between masculine or feminine self-image rather than male and female categories.

In contrast to the classical Oedipal structure, Benjamin maintains the relational dynamics during this phase of development is dyadic, the father does not symbolise a figure that is rivalrous or forbidding. As the figure who exclusively loves the mother, he signifies a desiring outside, the identification with the father as a like subject allows the child to imaginatively represent this desire. The child's identification with the ideal father is considered defensive, as the identification veils the narcissistic loss of control over the mother. Benjamin's proposition does not aim to create a completely different gender representation, something that is outside of awareness or of culture as indicated in Kristeva's work. Rather, Benjamin situates her work in relation to the principle division of opposites, male-female. She maintains a psychoanalytic framework, but reworks the terms she proposes to disrupt the binary logic, by symbolically bridging the spilt polar opposites using symbolism to recognise, rather than manically deny the difference.

In conclusion, Benjamin's intersubjective perspective opens up a way of transcending the subject-object relationship and hence of a different relationship of activity and passivity, it may point a way toward overcoming that logic of exclusive polarized identities. In relation to identity, Benjamin perceives the formation of self to hold multiple positions; the various standpoints signify the attraction to difference in conjunction with the process of identification.

5. CONCLUSION

Within the past hundred years the female voice, the carrier of female subjectivity, has been greatly silenced in western discourse. The same difficulties have been reflected in psychoanalytic theory, in that male perspectives have skewed perspectives on women, women's development and

understanding of femininity. Central to Freud's Oedipal theory is the idea of castration anxiety for boys and the absence of a penis for girls. This recognition affects males and females differently; boys renounce their Oedipal wish for the mother while girls recognise their lack of a penis and reject their mother and identify with the father, who symbolically represents their desire to obtain the phallus. The girl recognises this is impossible and attempts to fulfil her "lack" with a baby. In response to these ideas, women began to write theory out of their own experience and gradually, different perspectives emerged about the nature of feminine subjectivity. They focused primarily on the relationship between gender-differentiated subjectivity and the structures of the external world. This literature review highlights how psychoanalytic feminism, in general, has to transform the gender hierarchy of Oedipal to pre-oedipal focus and revise Freud's perception of women as subordinate. In reaction, psychoanalysis loosened its allegiances to Freud's nineteenth century ideas about the role of biological forces, including its role in the making of sexual identity and what could be understood as masculine and feminine. Instead, a kaleidoscope of different perspectives was developed. Melanie Klein, a British object relations theorist during the 1930s, revised Freud's theory by examining the symbolic importance of the breast in the organisation of identity. She developed the concepts of introjection for taking in, and projective identification for expelling. British, American, and French schools of thought have subsequently sought to revise Freud's work. British object relations theorists, such as Klein, emphasise the connection between primary affective development and object relations. In the American school of object relations, theorists such as Chodorow, emphasise psychoanalysis as reproducing the patriarchal and examine gender in relation to the maternal. In the French school of thought, such as Kristeva, examine the unconscious and the role of language in relation to the paternal. Intersubjectivists, such as Benjamin, emphasise mutual recognition and acknowledge mother and father in the separation-individuation phase of development. Historically, women have been defined as other. Relatedness, empathy, and nurturance have traditionally been perceived as feminine traits; these traits have been devalued and considered passive. Chodorow, Kristeva, and Benjamin have each situated their ideas on gender, subjectivity, and difference by emphasising the maternal function as active, in contrast to the paternal framework, as reflected in Freud's Oedipal theory.

Each of the theorists have emphasised the pre-oedipal period of development as being significant in the formation of subjectivity, the recognition of difference and in the formation of gender identity. This is in contrast to Freud's emphasis on the Oedipal period of development. This shift has been significant within psychoanalysis, as it has created a greater focus on early developmental processes and the role of the maternal function. Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*

developed an object relations framework, to highlight the mother-infant relationship and the significance of women's mothering, identification, and holding during the pre-oedipal period of development and the impact this has on the formation of gendered identities. Nancy Chodorow's work has been historically significant in the articulation of a female voice and the examination of a masculine bias within psychoanalysis. In contrast, Chodorow's object relational emphasis is of the dyadic relationship between mother and child, and the different identification and relational attachments that are generated by this early relationship. Kristeva draws from a Lacanian and post-structural framework to propose a maternal discourse that is accessible to male and female. Kristeva's focus is on the role of maternal bodily rhythms and language in the formation of gender. Her emphasis on the body and idea of the semiotic chora and the understanding of maternal body, for example rhythms and pulses, have been significant when emphasising the importance of a maternal pre-oedipal discourse that is readily available to male and female. While Kristeva upholds the structures of the symbolic, she also highlights the impact to women, who must deny their primary identification in order to gain access to language. It is only through identifying with masculine values that women have access to discourse and culture. To refuse this course is to descend into psychosis.

In parts, some of Kristeva's analyses are too abstract. Kristeva makes few moves herself in the direction of developing a more fully articulated theory of gender. While she points us in that direction by proposing a new maternal discourse, she ultimately leaves the paternal relationship to semiotic chora and the infant unexamined. But why does she not acknowledge the father's or male's relationship to these aspects of relating. Benjamin maintains that the classical Freudian perspective reproduces patriarchal gender characteristics, which were characterised by traits of domination and submission. The father dominates the mother and has been perceived as an autonomous, separate agent, while the mother is his passive object. She challenges the way in which maternal identification has been presumed to circumvent a child's entry into the world and maintains the maternal function is active. While Benjamin acknowledges previous feminist psychoanalytic perspectives, such as, the work of Chodorow and her emphasis of the maternal to reverse the privileging of the Oedipal father, she also seeks to

transcend the split between male subject and female object, and the duality of active and passive in which separation and autonomy are privileged, more than connection. Historically, Freud perceived the achievement of autonomy as an ideal; an infant leaves the engulfing mother and identifies with the father who is perceived as separate and represents freedom. In contrast, Benjamin maintains that the child identifies and develops an ambivalent attachment to both parents during the separation-individuation phase of development.

In contrast to Chodorow's understanding of gender identity as stable, solid, and fixed, Kristeva draws on post-structural framework to privilege difference over identity. Within this perspective, there are multiple subject positions, rather than one fixed notion of identity. Benjamin also refutes that identity can be clearly defined and advocates multiple identifications as an intrapsychic process in the formation of identity. The classical Oedipal hierarchical gender relationship is replaced by two desiring interpenetrating subjects; two bisexual subjects of desire, both of whom are free to consult their own emotional responses in a knowing way. In conclusion, this literature review has sought to integrate different models of knowledge including Chodorow's object relational analysis of how women come to mother, which can be affirmed as gender specific. This analysis has been compared and contrasted with post-structural theories such as Kristeva's which asserts difference over identity and Benjamin's intersubjective perspective which maintains mutual intersubjectivity, recognising the "knowable in the other", in order to expose the tolerable paradoxes, the plural tendencies of gender and the significance of the maternal role as active.

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