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CHAPTER 3

Women Who Work and Love: Caught Between Cultures

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It is especially unpleasant irony to discern the depths of co-optation circulating through the apparent channels of liberation.

Catherine Keller, *From
a Broken Web*

Theologian Catherine Keller's words inspire me. She captures the core of my struggle to sit happily in my professional job as seminary professor and pastoral therapist *and* to live and love as wife and mother. This tension reflects a radical transfiguration of an ancient conflict of loyalties not unlike that faced by the three women, Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah, in the hills of Moab. Traditionally, however, the church has idealized and admired Ruth's decision to follow Naomi, her late husband's mother, and virtually ignored the courage of Orpah in her painful choice "to return to her mother's house" (Ruth 1:8). More significantly, it has passed quickly over the cries of anguish of all three women as they tried to reconceive themselves in a world suddenly bereft of men. Cultural mores that made women dependent upon men divided them from one another and sent them searching.

The story of Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah paradigmatically raises questions that continue to plague humankind, women in particular. These three women suddenly found themselves adrift, outside the classical social mores that defined the position of men and women. They were no man's property. To whom were they bound? Where were their loyalties? What should they become? Today many such social norms no longer hold. Women face the dilemma of "being pulled between two poles," as Berenice Fisher remarks: "the biological and psychological

nurturing of the mothers who bore us and the moral and political nurturing of the women we, so often, hope to be." We each need to "make a life that is different from that of our mothers, perhaps also at odds with that of many of our contemporaries."¹ Yet, we need lives that do not deny the inherent value of our connections to both.

Finding images of support and validation that do not feel like betrayals of either original nurturance or forthcoming aspirations is painfully difficult. Many working women face the same questions of child care, work schedule, housework, and marital arrangements. Few resolve them in the same way. The variation in domestic and vocational patterns among women stands in contrast to the more formulaic career patterns of most men.² As with Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah, each woman finds her way. Perhaps the significant moment comes with the blessing in the wilderness—the embrace between Orpah, her mother-in-law, and Ruth and the affirmation of all three amidst the grief and loss.

Women have, of course, traveled a long way from the absolute requirement of men for self-definition and well-being of Naomi's time. Yet contemporary, American, middle-class, white women³ stand before a troubling turning point in gender role definitions: We no longer know what being a woman means.⁴ Feminist criticism rests squarely on dismantling conventional images of women's lives. Because we stand in the very midst of this meltdown, we overlook the revolutionary transformations in relations between the sexes that have occurred in the past two decades. Old ways of relating and of becoming a self as defined in the patriarchal society of Naomi hold considerably less sway.

Yet a new sense of self that moves beyond dependence upon men and the restricting patriarchal definitions of adulthood has only begun to take shape. Thanks to women who have gone before them, white, middle-class, "late second wave" women in the 1990s⁵ who have choices far beyond following Naomi or returning to the "mother's house" face this conflict in their search for self. Although freed from some oppressive models of femininity, they face a "new form of seduction," as Keller describes it—the danger of co-optation that infiltrates the apparent channels of liberation.⁶ Patriarchy, although crumbling, still stands. Women who enter its structures in pursuit of new freedoms may find themselves restricted in subtle ways.

Resolution of the conflicts between work, family, and self leads inevitably to contradictions, frustrations, ambiguous solutions, and hard choices. My efforts here reflect my own beleaguered answer to the very questions of working and loving that I have raised: As I revise for publication between the nursery school schedule of my first son and

the naps of my second, I feel torn between my desire for total uninterrupted silence and my horror at my fantasy that a capricious god might grant me my perverted wish and I would lose both children forever. My situation illustrates the dilemma I seek to portray: the difficulties of "conceiving" in professional and familial ways at the same time. One moment I want to drop my whole project to turn to household matters of great importance; the next I want to see it through for its own value and for the love of my work. No matter how a woman designs her life, whether she chooses to stay home, work at home, or work outside the home, conflicts plague her resolution to questions of working and loving.

Beyond battles over inclusive language and ordination of women, however, most mainline churches have all but ignored these struggles and the deeper implications of the women's movement. A wide gulf separates the raised consciousness of women and a typical Sunday morning service. Many women, I believe, seriously question their current engagement with church; they come wanting nourishment and leave empty. In a letter to the editor of the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, one woman expresses her concern about the co-optation that "is nowhere more poignantly experienced than in the institutional churches." She wrestles constantly with whether "it is even worth it to attempt to work from the inside."⁷ Whereas more conservative churches adopt a clear stance that demands a return to the "traditional" family concept, mainline churches remain aloof, caught in the crossfire between feminism and conservative trends. When all is said and done, they have paid little attention to the transformations brought about by the former and to the retrenchment of the latter.

Yet to ignore the radical changes in models of adulthood and family and the intense role strain for both men and women is to miss the cries of anguish in the midst of their congregations. Most women under fifty now work; most continue to take the major responsibility for their families. Yet church expectations of women have not adapted to the changes in women's and men's lives. Women still fix the funeral meals, staff the nursery, cook the potlucks, clean up, teach Sunday school, run rummage sales, and now, in addition, take on new roles of leadership.⁸ Women struggle to realize what they value. Men absent themselves. When will these traditional arrangements and, more importantly, the undergirding dynamic receive fresh consideration by mainline churches?

This chapter remains at a different level of abstraction than others in this section, and for specific reasons. These problems of work and love stand at a distinct point in history: Like the conflicts that Priscilla

L. Denham portrays in her chapter on the new woman on her own ("divorced/never married/widowed/lesbian"), the problem here of many white, middle-class, North American women is peculiar to our era and our era alone. Mainline churches have yet to respond in any clear way. Whereas depression, incest, and abuse have existed for a very long time, the struggle of so many women to work and love is relatively new. Like the intense strain of labor, time stands still; we attend a birth that will have a radical impact in the next few decades. At such a juncture, I have no concrete steps, no strategies of intervention, no new support group to suggest. Instead, I call for closer listening and more critical reflection, and I demand careful, thoughtful response. Without this, churches have much to lose in both vitality and members.

Caught Between Cultures

The conflict has moved from its initial form as a *debate about* radical ideologies and principles that inevitably remained ideals to an *enactment* of these dreams—an embodied, lived state. Women today avoid some of the basic restrictions and political battles over equal rights that faced the first feminist wave. In a way distinct from their forerunners, nevertheless, they must find ways to work out personal and professional identities with integrity in the midst of two explicit models—the standards and images of a patriarchal society that continue to control social structures *and* the standards and images of the liberated first wave that have begun to exert new kinds of pressures.

Women influenced by the second feminist wave can no longer simply talk about the necessary transformations; they must live and breathe them, sometimes without explicitly espousing feminist beliefs and hopes. The options are no longer simply ideals; they are known, stated, and popularized. We see them, albeit trivialized and stereotyped, in the plethora of articles in women's magazines that declare a standoff between working mothers and those who stay at home. Today even the woman who chooses the so-called traditional role of housekeeper and childraiser knows her role is in tension with other possibilities and implications.

Women in the late second wave tend not to demand social justice and equality with the fervor of the first or early second wave. Naively forgetting history, women now take these notions for granted and reap the benefits while they bear the consequences. Yet as a further result of where they stand in history, late-second-wave feminists almost unavoidably live out justice in their own lives in a slightly different way than their senior feminist sisters. They may refuse to prepare all the meals or to bear sole responsibility for toilet training the children.

Simultaneously more willing to reembody their mothers' characteristics, they may find themselves less willing to meet some of the patriarchal standards of the work world and its definitions of success: Long work hours deprive one of time with family and time for oneself; the demand for productivity and upward mobility ignores the different rhythms of a life that includes childbirth or simply more abundant daily existence. Yet women struggle to do so in a materialistic, product-oriented public world still unsympathetic to such values.

At the same time the conflicts have become more explicit, sexism has become more subtle. A few examples from the popular culture illustrate this situation. By 1978 the feminist movement had exerted enough pressure on Breck hair products to force them to suspend their "Breck *girl*" competition and magazine portraits. A decade later, by popular demand—"in response to hundreds of requests . . . and the public's desire for nostalgia," said Breck product manager Gerard Matthews—Breck brought back the beauty campaign but now with the cosmetic concession of a new name, "Breck *woman*." The heroine of the recent movie *Baby Boom* portrays the comic side of the struggle to integrate corporate success with alternative home and family values. In a scene over dinner to discuss the time-honored invitation to become a partner, her senior in the firm must finally recognize the problem that her womanhood still poses for him and for patriarchy: "Do you understand the sacrifices you're going to have to make?" he asks her. "What if you get married and he expects a wife?" He draws an intriguing distinction: "A man can be a success and *still have a personal life, a full personal life*" (even though he clearly does not have one and doesn't even know how many grandchildren he has); a man has a wife who "takes care of things . . . raises the children, decorates." In essence, he cannot think of her "as a woman" and as a capable adult at the same time, at least not according to traditional definitions. He does not know how to integrate the full meaning of "woman/partner." He never questions his ideal of "success." Nor does a much ballyhooed article in a recent issue of *Harvard Business Review*. While feigning a concern for "career-and-family women," and advocating their suitability for middle management positions—now dubbed the "mommy track"—author and corporate manager Felice Schwartz never challenges the "masculine rules of career development." Maximum productivity and the bottom line remain the chief criteria for measuring worth and success.¹⁰ In a culture with such values, children and "family women" do not count.

These examples demonstrate the dangers of believing that women have made progress just because we use inclusive language, hire women without certain discriminating practices, or let women occupy roles

previously guarded by men. Despite the importance of such ideological and structural changes, people deceive themselves when they believe these changes suffice. The problems run deeper. In contrast to the blatant sex discrimination and harassment that led to court cases filed since Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, sexism now wears a screen of sensitivity and even deference, making it harder to recognize and name when it does occur.

Voices in the Wilderness

The decade of the 1980s, with its superficial solutions to serious problems and its nostalgic desire to return to the good old days, challenged the stability of the women's movement. In the midst of change, women now face the danger of compromise from within and subversion from without. Psychotherapist Anne Wilson Schaeff and theologian Catherine Keller exemplify two prominent voices in the wilderness.¹¹ Both struggle to keep women on the proper path toward greater selfhood and depict the temptations and dangers of our times.

"Queen Bee" and the "Supercompetent Woman." The popularity of Schaeff's book *Women's Reality* invites reflection. Her appeal lies in her ability to voice the elusive problems of what being a woman means today. According to Schaeff, women grow up in a culture dominated by the "White Male System": White men hold all essential power and influence. Within this system women see themselves as "tainted." Schaeff calls this the "original sin of being born female" or innately inferior.¹² When women find their perceptions at odds with those of men, they discount their own as "sick, bad, crazy, stupid, ugly, or incompetent."¹³ As an extension, women project their loathing for themselves and for femaleness onto other women, view them with distrust, and view men as godlike.

Schaeff refers to the conflicts of late-second-wave women only indirectly. She warns us of the "Queen Bee" syndrome: Fearful that the room at the top is limited, "successful 'token' women" dissociate themselves from the women's movement. They neither give credit to the women who have gone before them nor feel empathy for those who come after. They then can claim a superiority to women who have not made it and absolve the sin of femaleness. Schaeff also talks about the "supercompetent woman" who uses competence as a weapon to rise above other women and similarly detaches herself from the women's movement.¹⁴

The feminist movement itself can become a "house divided against itself." The distrust of women is simply more abstruse and hidden.¹⁵ When the ideals of liberation are used against women as new standards for condemnation, they are worse than the dogmas of the White Male System. To be told "You are not a true feminist," as radical feminist and theologian Mary Daly, among others, tends to tell women, can debilitate a woman just beginning to voice her own perceptions.¹⁶

Complicity and "Co-optation." Using the classical dyad from the Greek myth of Odysseus and Penelope as a model for depicting the dilemmas of the modern woman's search for self, Keller spins out a thesis that threatens to change the way people construe themselves.¹⁷ The dynamic of the warrior-hero and the woman-in-waiting repeats itself in religious story, popular culture (for example, Daniel Boone, the Lone Ranger), and every particular relationship between man and woman. Odysseus represents the dominant Western image of being a man—as psychologist Jean Baker Miller puts it, the "totally strong, self-sufficient person . . . freed forever from weakness or neediness, and, most of all, *from the effects of other people.*"¹⁸ Penelope exists solely because she complements Odysseus. In contrast to his "separative self"—Keller's replacement for the term *separate self* to indicate the fallacy of the latter¹⁹—she becomes a "soluble self" or what developmental psychologist Daniel J. Levinson and his colleagues call a "transitional figure" or a mere "component" of the man's self-structure.²⁰ Like Naomi without her husband and sons, she is artist Shel Silverstein's "missing piece"—not much by herself, useful only as she resolves the man's incompleteness, and dependent upon the selfhood of man (husband or son) for her very being.²¹ Her work in maintaining the web of relation permits men the illusion that people can actually develop "separate" selves. Keller suggests that hidden within this insistence on the ideal of a purely separate, monolithic ego lurks a profound fear and hatred of the chaotic connections that women embody.²²

Recognizing how these mythic dimensions subtly pervade life, Keller gains greater insight than Schaefer into the problems of late-second-wave women. Modern women fall prey to two impulses: not only collusion with limited definitions of womanhood but also imitation of the patriarchal ideals of adulthood. Complicity with male dominance has been a key aspect of women's struggles since Ruth and Naomi. It results from the threat of covert and overt violence if resisted and even from the very commitment of women "to the value of relation itself."²³

The danger for late-second-wave women is not purely that of complying with patriarchal definitions of what being a woman means. Today

we face a more complicated temptation toward co-optation into patriarchal definitions of what being a fulfilled person means—separative selfhood. We must now ask not only the old question of female complicity but also the new question of co-optation—a “new form of seduction by the sovereign structures.”²⁴

The path to mature adulthood and the male-defined workplace as well seem to require the path of separation. Women deceive themselves if they believe that they can enter these worlds without both obvious and subtle co-optation. As middle-class, white career women find themselves achieving a new level of economic self-sufficiency, the separative urge becomes harder to resist.²⁵ If they wish “success,” the only avenue seems to be further imitation of the oppressor and the values of the dominant system. Moving into roles once occupied only by men, the knot tightens: To the problems of their already restrictive, self-denying feminine selves, women add the anxieties of the traditionally masculine separative self.²⁶

Like Athena who disdains her female origins, working women quickly learn to repress qualities that threaten their advancement. Many messages about what it means to be a woman, subtly conveyed by mothers and society—to consider the needs of others, to take care of men, to care for children, and so forth—threaten to paralyze “success” in the public realm, as the *Harvard Business Review* article indicates. Even the conventional male-dominated education that women endure to acquire a job requires a similar sacrifice.²⁷ The skills of care and nurture may possess more integrity and promise for human survival, but, as Miller notes, they “will not . . . ‘get you to the top at General Motors.’” Indeed, these characteristics are “*the* very characteristics that are specifically dysfunctional for success in the world as it is.”²⁸ In defense we turn against other women and usually against ourselves; we become our own accomplices to matricide. In the workplace still defined by male values and in homes run almost solely on women’s energies and ingenuity, how can we then truly both work and love?

The Search for Self

How then do late-second-wave women move, as Miller says, from “outside the ‘real world’” to inside without succumbing to its misogynistic infrastructures? Schaeff and Keller offer similar suggestions. Both recognize the dangers of a self that remains secondary and symbiotically submerged in a primary, dominant self—Schaeff’s “tainted self,” dependent upon men for self-definition, and Keller’s “soluble self,” dissolving into the other. Both bear the onus of rescuing a female system.

In spite of these apparent affinities, important distinctions exist. Schaeff sees the problem as one in which the self stands over against oppressive culture; her solution entrusts women with the task of claiming a divergent system. For Keller, the problem is woven into the very fabric of society, and the remedy requires transforming basic definitions of self and even our metaphysics. At least two identifiable options for dealing with the dangers of the wilderness stand before us then: the singular self against patriarchal culture and the connective self transforming patriarchal culture. Both suggest far more than a simple exchange of roles, but they are radically different. The self against culture opts out of the White Male System. The self transforming culture dives deeper to alter the very metaphysics and anthropology of sexism. I will argue that the option of self transforming culture, although at times more difficult and more likely to bring suffering and failure, is a more worthy response to our modern-day version of the ancient decision in the wilderness.

Singular self against patriarchal culture. Schaeff's solution remains at the level of consciousness-raising. Many people found in her book a radically new way of seeing reality; women saw their own reality as being as valid as men's, perhaps for the first time. Schaeff concludes that women must come to recognize and believe that the White Male System is "*only a system. It is not reality. It is not the way the world is.*"²⁹ We can see the superiority of men and their system as sheer nonsense; then we can live within the Female System, which means trusting the perceptions of women. This attitude shift—a confirmation of " 'female experience,' whatever that may be"—will finally save us.³⁰

Schaeff offers rudimentary steps for such a shift, each of which entails emoting or facilitating feelings—blame, pity, rage, love of self, and femaleness—and leads to increased self-reliance and eventually a "humanistic" concern for men as well as women.³¹ She describes a movement from "childlike innocence" to a turning point of rage and bitterness and on to " 'innocence with wisdom' "—that is, an anger and awareness that does not turn to cynicism or diminish personal happiness.³² She acknowledges that we have to "pass through the stage of having to 'make it' in the White Male System" to get beyond it.³³ True liberation then requires a three-step movement from (1) oppression in the White Male System to (2) success within it to (3) the Female System.

Schaeff calls this progression a theological transformation. Theology itself supports a male-dominated hierarchy. Religion makes women dependent upon omnipotent male godheads—men and a masculine God both. Only a religious change can break the bonds of perhaps the most

powerful ideology of dominance and submission in the White Male System. In her last few pages, she suggests that living according to the Female System means "living in tune" with a god internal to oneself. Sin then means a denial of one's own "internal process."³⁴ Nothing should undercut personal growth and change. Women must take care of themselves; care for others flows naturally from self-care.

These contentions reflect problems akin to the problems of a group of humanistic psychologists that practical theologian Don S. Browning classifies as promoting the "culture of joy."³⁵ Once again, psychology becomes culture: Prominent psychologists, intending to remain value-free descriptive scientists, implicitly and sometimes explicitly begin to suggest values and promote orienting metaphors for how people should live. Schaeff's theological reflection shows little awareness of the differences between her work as psychologist and the work of theology. She claims in her scientific voice that "all I do here is to describe"³⁶ and that she makes no value judgments, yet at the same time she wants to present "philosophical, . . . political, and theological" concepts.³⁷

Like many of the psychologists in the culture of joy, Schaeff advocates an individualistic, situational ethic that is insufficient for the problems of late-second-wave women and at odds with Christian ethics. She assumes a covert ethic of ethical egoism—that one ought to act so as to promote one's own welfare and advantage.³⁸ Rules make sense only when they "facilitate personal growth"; rules must serve the needs of the individual, not those of the system.³⁹ A woman's success depends upon a strong, albeit implicit, moral imperative toward individuation and preservation of the separative self. She makes the dubious assumption that, as each woman realizes her own individual good, she will have a congenial social balance of needs met and desires gratified.

Humanistic psychologists, such as Fritz Perls, Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and others, locate problems outside the individual in the social system. They contend that given a warm, accepting environment, an individual quite naturally obtains the joy of a deep sense of personal fulfillment. Schaeff narrows the boundaries of the oppressive environment from society as a whole to male-dominated society. She also assumes an inherent goodness in human nature but limits this quality to the nature of women. With such faith in the Female System, she does not believe that women who gain power will misuse it as men have or in other ways. The problem of external control and dominance has no place in this system. Should women oust the male system and the traditional reactive female system, they will naturally and effortlessly evolve healthier, more satisfactory ways of living and working. The "solar plexus experience"—the experience of inferiority that women

feel—is not a basic characteristic of essential human nature. Rather, were it not for the White Male System, women would feel good about themselves.

This premise rings shallow and ignores the complex dynamics of human duplicity. Schaeff ignores, I believe, the depth and complexity of human nature and its capacity for both greatness and corruption, goodness and evil. The “solar plexus experience” possesses a certain universality that reaches beyond the oppressions of gender discrimination. As psychoanalytic theory and much of traditional theology reveal and as our own conflictual experience confirms, we are almost unavoidably divided against ourselves and against others. We ought not allow ourselves the presumptuous, even prideful temptation of blaming the subtle divisiveness of human nature on men alone. Problems of inappropriate control and dominance would and do creep into the Female System.

Although Schaeff outlines steps toward change, in the end she fails to construct a new model for selfhood. Despite her awareness of the inappropriate blame placed on mothers as women move beyond the sphere of their mothers, she perpetuates it rather than reclaiming the best of what women have gained from their “mother’s house.” She warns us of our self-hatred, but does she finally offer us an image to love? Ironically, her model of development remains covertly male-identified—shaped by dominant images of the life cycle defined primarily from the perspective of men.

According to Levinson and his colleagues in *Seasons of a Man’s Life*, the typical pattern of development for “normal” people, that is, for men, involves “becoming one’s own man,” climbing the “ladder” of success in the hierarchical public world of labor and productivity.⁴⁰ Maturity means productivity and has “individuation” as the ultimate goal.⁴¹ Although Schaeff challenges much in the White Male System, she does not ultimately question this ideal. Not much in the original or traditional female system that might undercut the male model of development merits salvaging. Women’s desire to be empathic, their dislike of aggression, their “peacekeeping talk,” their fear of breaking away from mother and fear of abandonment and isolation—she names all these “stoppers.”⁴² They all hinder genuine development and success in the work world. Similarly, connections to mothers contain almost entirely negative elements: They confer a state of inferiority; they breed resentment, depression, suffering, and conflict. Given the choice between, on the one hand, a relationship with mother that may bring depression and, on the other hand, personal gratification that requires a forfeiture of “the life-sustaining bond,” she encourages the latter—

destroying the bond to save oneself.⁴³ The traditional female system and her new Female System—which “emerges when women . . . feel free to express their values”⁴⁴—mutually oppose each other. From Schaeff’s perspective, we can move from one to the other with few strings attached to our mothers, sisters, friends, and even those parts of ourselves so strongly formed by the White Male System. Mature women who wish to succeed must depart from home and traditional mothers.

Schaeff ignores the experience of many women: the ambiguities of making work and self the vehicle for fulfillment; the strong affinities with mothers; the emotional desire and moral commitment to care for others. As women struggle to find places in the public domain, they cannot so easily discount such formative emotional and moral factors of selfhood, but Schaeff gives few suggestions about how to reintegrate them into a professional self and world. For her, the desire to preserve them signals compliance with the White Male System and, ultimately, denial of a woman’s autonomous power of self-definition. Her writing implicitly stirs up animosity toward women who try in any way to return to their mother’s house or follow Naomi and who, in her view, remain caught up in the addictive system of men as a result.

In addition, Schaeff assumes that the White Male System and the Female System form cohesive, singular wholes, completely separate and at odds with one another. She fails to address how these two systems come together or how to integrate one’s Female System qualities into a world still ruled by the White Male System. In a society that continues to sanction, protect, and prioritize the White Male System, what ultimate rationale will finally tempt men and, indeed, even liberated working women away from the White Male System? To honor the Female System still means forsaking security, status, and significance. How can we weather such trials?

Can we move in and out of systems this way without peril? In a real sense, we must live in both, no matter how radical our ideologies of separatism. Professional women, in particular, must move from “outside the ‘real world’” to inside, crossing and moving the strict boundaries of male and female systems. Merely exchanging systems or, perhaps more accurately, venturing off into the wilderness of Moab on our own does not adequately resolve our struggles. “To promote independence and autonomy, with no ontological interconnectedness,” argues Keller, “risks co-optation by masculine models of separatism.”⁴⁵ We cannot so easily discount our connections with our mothers. We cannot discount traits that we have acquired—giving and meeting others’ needs, participating in others’ development, cooperating, being vulnerable, being emotional. In fact, we might consider the possibility that “male-led

society" has "delegated to women not humanity's 'lowest needs' but its 'highest necessities.'" ⁴⁶ A genuinely woman-identified model sees these traits as inherently valuable qualities of the total human experience.

Connective self transforming patriarchal culture. "The crisis," Keller contends, "demands more than a few considerate shifts of rhetoric and lifestyle. What is required is nothing less than our lives."⁴⁷ The logical escape route—"achievement of the separate individuality heretofore expected only of men"—ultimately disappoints.⁴⁸ Women who have reached the top of the corporate ladder quit; others do so after childbirth. Knowing what we know about the meaningfulness of conversation, of intimacy, of caring for children, and of bonds that do not bind, do we really want what men fashion for themselves? I think not. Indeed, as Keller claims, women must not "emulate the . . . style of the traditional male."⁴⁹ The implications of emulation extend far beyond the individual.

What is required is nothing less than a realignment of perceptions at the deepest level. Keller challenges the assumption that "selfhood requires separation" and argues that it is inextricably linked to another fallacious sexist assumption, "that men, by nature and by right, exercise the primary prerogatives of civilization."⁵⁰ In her constructive response, she states that we must (1) deconstruct the structures of the separative self that hold us so tightly within their grip; (2) reclaim the power of our mothers, femininity, and women—the repressed "monsters of the Deep" that mark the repression of connection itself—and (3) ultimately begin to live out a new kind of selfhood. Selfhood must not become entrapped in the dichotomy of self versus relation or the divisive complementarities of Odysseus and Penelope. Instead, by moving toward a "connective" selfhood for women and for men, we may begin to mend the web broken by the deification of a separative self that depends upon the web of connection yet ignores its care.

Keller's idea of a connective self reweaving the web comes as a relief to many women who have intuited its moral and psychological appropriateness. "I had never before heard a challenge to the notion that separation and independence are the primary developmental tasks for all persons," wrote one of my students. "I certainly had internalized the primacy of separation; and yet, in my shadowself had struggled quite painfully to at least appear well differentiated and deny and resist my own needs for nurturing. To hear from Keller a call back to the pre-Oedipal stage and a valuing of the experience of the oceanic was like hearing permission to seek and find that which I had been missing in my life, but that which I had been led to believe was regressive, not

o.k., and bad." Keller's ideas speak directly to the struggles of women wanting both to salvage something from their mother's house and yet to venture into new territory, both by Naomi's side and on their own. Only a fluid, interpermeable self can travel in these many directions with any sense of cohesion and assurance.

Others have glimpsed the repression of this vision of selfhood but more successfully articulated the psychological and moral components of its recovery than Keller. Psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut, founder of the American movement of self-psychology, departs from Freudian interpretations of the self which sanction separation; he proposes a second line of development that respects attachments. Healthy persons not only develop from a narcissistic love of self to a mature object love or love of others as Freud contends. They also develop from a primitive love of self to a mature narcissism.⁵¹ As part of the latter, attachments to and dependencies upon others are not necessarily unhealthy infantile addictions that people must outgrow. Rather, in order to retain a cohesive sense of self, people depend on others—what he calls "mature self-objects"—for empathy and idealization throughout life. Based upon observations of children, psychiatrist Daniel N. Stern disputes the pervasive interpretation that the child develops from an undifferentiated, hazardous enmeshment with the mother through separation to ever-increasing heights of individuation. Infants differentiate themselves from birth. Growth then entails learning more and more sophisticated modes of relating. Development, in Stern's words, "is not primarily devoted to . . . independence or autonomy or individuation—that is, getting away and free from the primary caregiver. It is equally devoted to the seeking and creating of intersubjective union with another."⁵² Attachment and dependency are issues throughout life.

Despite their theoretical emphasis on connection and on alternative models of maturity, however, Kohut, Stern, and those who use their theories still have trouble breaking free from the values of "separative man." Kohut and Stern ignore gender issues. Their focus on early intrapsychic changes prevents them from exploring adult concerns or social implications. Granted, they affirm that we have ignored a particularly critical line of development, the development of intimacy, relationships, and care. However, perhaps the heart of the problem lies in masculine perceptions of success and a devaluation of women's development. Whereas men's moral understandings parallel a development from aggression to separation through achievements, as Carol Gilligan has established, women's moral reasoning reflects growth from differentiation to interdependence through attachments.⁵³ Women's immature and mature moral understandings of success center around intimacy,

relationships, and care and not around individuation and actualization of increasingly objective, universal, and distant material results. When a sense of self distinct from others appears in the most mature phase of development, this separateness stands in necessary relationship to others. Maturity now means an awareness of the web of interconnection at all stages and an increasing ability over time to negotiate ever more complex relationships.

These theories force us to stop and think. For far too long we have taken for granted the ideal of success in the public workaday world as an increase in self-sufficiency and productivity. These theories represent an underside of human nature which has surfaced as women feel, think, and talk. The truth as we have known it is unsettled once again, and the assumptions that undergird our world stand before us for review.

Nevertheless, the social sciences alone do not have the resources to begin to construct a fully adequate conception of selfhood. We need a theoretical foundation wider than psychology can provide to answer moral and religious questions. We need to move beyond an examination of the models of psychology to a metaphysic that as Keller says, "drives beyond the sphere of the interpersonal" and seeks "a broader context" in which to ground its argument.⁵⁴ This necessarily entails uncovering the deeper metaphors that shape culture and the self.

Next to Keller, Schaeff's ethic of joy and faith in the goodness of the Female System seem misplaced and naive. From a broader vantage point, Keller recognizes the complexities of human fallibility and perversion. She more self-consciously asserts the necessity of an ethic of reciprocity between self and other in an ongoing chain of multiple events and actions. Her position has affinities with what Browning describes as an ethic of care that promotes a positive attitude of "active care and concern . . . not only for oneself and one's progeny but for the wider community," even "possible future communities which may extend beyond the limits of one's individual life."⁵⁵ Keller backs this ethical position with a metaphysic. Not only should we consider such connections imperative but also essential, in spite of our intense fears of what such connections might mean for us. Our choices and actions are interconnected in the very process of being. We cannot avoid considering the larger web of relationships with the communities and societies to which people belong.⁵⁶

Keller further supports such an ethic by attempting to transform certain grounding images of God. Religion has heretofore persisted in upholding misogynist presuppositions about separation: The God of classical Western Christian theology embodies the supreme case of an

ultimately separate, self-sufficient object, safe from change and influence in his ("this God could only take the pronoun *he*") complete omnipotence.⁵⁷ Religion and a God "true to its name," argues Keller, "activates connection." A God who cares for communal and cross-cultural webs contrasts sharply with a corporate godhead who models climbing ladders to success. Is not our God a God of work and love in quite a different sense?

We must avoid a danger in Keller's position. She acknowledges superficially but does not fully comprehend the developmental dangers of merger, symbiosis, and collapse of boundaries between self and other that Kohut, Stern, and others point out. Her ethic of multiple commitments in an ever-widening circle of connections threatens to demand of women more than they can or should contribute. To return to a connective self may lead only to less clarity and self-definition than ever. Valerie Saiving has talked about women's particular sin of self-dispersion. Men have traditionally defined *sin* as pride or self-assertion, which is not generally the problem for women; women struggle with a contrasting tendency toward self-abnegation or loss of self in distractibility, diffuseness, and "dependence upon others for one's own self-definition."⁵⁸ Where does a woman's commitment and connection to others begin and end? Women have struggled with this question, and, as Saiving and others demonstrate, they have sacrificed themselves and their needs in their efforts to remain connected to others for too long.

Our intellectual triumphs and even the increase of women in professional occupations lure us into false optimism. Keller speaks for an upper strata of white women and alludes only casually to the blights of racism and classism.⁵⁹ She avoids the pragmatic questions of how structural, institutional, socioeconomic change might occur, given her new constructions of the self. Enormous changes in current social structures must occur if women and men are to work and love humanely.⁶⁰ Society's work institutions function as if workers have no domestic needs. Indeed, women stand at risk in a society that does not reward affiliations and interconnections but instead sanctions separation and material achievements. Over and over, society communicates its disregard for all helping professions that do take care of the interconnected family of humanity (for example, nurse, mental health worker, nursing home aide, schoolteacher). By comparison with other jobs and considering the value of their work, these and other caregivers receive less monetary reward, security, or status; local and state government and private employers continue to ignore the crying need for adequate childcare; criteria for promotion seldom build in, much less honor, maternal and paternal time off for children, flexible work time, and equal perquisites. Given

these current conditions and the large proportion of wage-earning women who continue to carry the major load of household tasks, how much longer can we expect women to make the sacrifices necessary to maintain connections and sustain family life?

A more inclusive enactment of connection means new language to describe maturity—language other than “autonomy,” for example, to describe the growing capacity for self-assertion that comes with “a fuller not less ability to encompass relationships to others.”⁶¹ We need words that describe an ability to function independently and responsibly that is intricately linked to an ability to sustain healthy dependence upon others.

If we cannot find new language, we may want to reconsider the limiting definitions of the words we do use, such as *autonomy*, *altruism*, and *dependence*. Why do we automatically suppose that autonomy and self-concern stand opposite concern for others? Might mature autonomy include a free state of being concerned for oneself *as one is concerned for others*? Similarly, the word *altruism* assumes an overt disregard for oneself; yet when we adopt this term for all forms of doing good for others, we imply that we can do good for others only at our own expense. Should we begin to admit that mature altruism—authentic giving to others—remains inextricably linked to the capacity to take care of oneself or else risks disintegration into a well-disguised form of manipulation?⁶² When we say someone is “dependent,” we instantly perceive this as a negative comment. Yet Gilligan has shown that for many women dependence can sometimes mean a healthy reliance upon others. “Being dependent, then, no longer means being helpless, powerless, and without control; rather, it signifies a conviction that one is able to have an effect on others. . . . In this active construction, dependence, rather than signifying a failure of individuation, denotes a decision on the part of the individual to enact a vision of love.”⁶³ Keller talks about interdependence;⁶⁴ Miller describes a mature affiliation,⁶⁵ and Kohut names the ability to sustain contact with “mature self-objects,” not greater ego control, as the essence of successful psychoanalytic cure.⁶⁶ As of yet, none of these depictions of maturity carries the same weight as claims to autonomy and independence. Rethinking these words or finding new language that actually compels us will not happen easily.

Ultimately, a more adequate enactment of connection will require new social structures that honor alternative values. Among other things, we must find better ways to allow people to work and to care for children and home—to work and love. We now need to reevaluate society’s ideals of success and personal qualities in light of values that women have long upheld. Our social structures and our church institutions need to

support these values. Only by revisioning the structural possibilities and responsibilities for a more inclusive enactment of connection for women and men can we reach satisfying solutions to the many current dilemmas that make it difficult for all of us to work and to love.

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NOTES

1. Berenice Fisher, "Wandering in the Wilderness: The Search for Women Role Models," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 13 (1988):216.

2. See, for example, the details of men's life stages in Daniel J. Levinson, with Charlotte N. Darrow, Edward B. Klein, Maria H. Levinson, and Braxton McKee, *Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1978). There is some indication that men have begun to experience the strain of their career paths. Levinson talks about a midlife crisis when men abruptly question the emptiness of the path they have chosen. Others such as James E. Dittes (*The Male Predicament: On Being a Man Today* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985]) and Jan Halper (*Quiet Desperation: The Truth About Successful Men* [New York: Warner Books, 1988]) reveal that men are questioning their roles, disillusioned by the "fruits" of their "success."

3. I write from the perspective of a white, middle-class, professional woman. Throughout, when I use the term *women*, I refer primarily to this specific population. Much more could and needs to be said about the particular problems of work and love of other populations—women of color, blue-collar women, third-world women—that I do not presume to touch upon here.

4. Christine Downing developed this idea in a lecture presented to the American Association of Pastoral Counselors in New Orleans, Spring 1987. A version of this appears under the title "Gender Anxiety," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 43 (Summer 1989): 152. See also her book, *Journey Through Menopause: A Personal Rite of Passage* (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

5. Martha Weinman Lear coined the term *second wave* in reference to the period of feminism dating from approximately 1966 ("The Second Feminist Wave," *New York Times Magazine*, 10 March 1968). When I say "late" second wave, I mean primarily the experience of white, middle-class women beginning careers in the 1980s after years of education shaped in part by both patriarchy and feminism. Rather than restricting it chronologically, I leave the term open to include any person who experiences a conflict between at least two explicit images of womanhood, adulthood, and their related value systems.

6. Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 16.

7. Mary J. Gennuso, "Letter to the Editors," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1989):101.

8. One minister reporting the changes in his suburban upper-middle-class congregation in the last thirteen years notes that feminism has had little impact on liturgical language or women's groups but that the women's movement has dramatically eroded the amount of "volunteer participation" and made church attendance on Sundays difficult for families. Indeed, he uses "the changing role of women" as his "point of entry" into his discussion of the significant changes in parish life (Robert G. Kemper, "Where Have All the Assumptions Gone?" *The Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 77, no. 1 (Winter 1987):5.

9. *Chicago Tribune*, 17 July 1988, Tempo Woman.

10. Felice N. Schwartz, "Management Women and the New Facts of Life," *Harvard Business Review* (Jan.-Feb. 1989):66.

11. Anne Wilson Schaeff, *Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in the White Male Society* (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1981) and Keller, *Broken Web*.

Schaeff has also written *Co-Dependence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986) and *When Society Becomes an Addict* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). Both books mark a shift in her original theses or at least a sharp development; she emphasizes the addictive society as the enemy against which women and men struggle. Here, I restrict my remarks to *Women's Reality*.

12. Schaeff, *Women's Reality*, 27.

13. *Ibid.*, 38.

14. *Ibid.*, 44.

15. *Ibid.*, 23.

16. *Ibid.*, 77.

17. Schaeff also acknowledges the metaphor of women's responsive "waiting"; she calls men "gypsies" and women "nesters" (*Women's Reality*, 64).

18. Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976), 103; see also p. 23.

19. Keller, *Broken Web*, 13.

20. Levinson, *Seasons*, 109.

21. Shel Silverstein, *The Missing Piece* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976). Schaeff talks about this in graphic terms: When a man swallows a woman, like an amoeba absorbs its food, "he literally does not perceive that she is separate being" (*Women's Reality*, 56-62).

22. Keller, *Broken Web*, 3.

23. *Ibid.*, 17.

24. *Ibid.*, 16.

25. *Ibid.*, 11.

26. *Ibid.*, 16.

27. Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Goddesses in Everywoman* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 82 (cited by Keller, *Broken Web*, 57).

28. Miller, *Toward a New Psychology*, 124.

29. Schaeff, *Women's Reality*, 7. Emphasis added. See also pp. 19, 145.

30. *Ibid.*, 89.

31. *Ibid.*, 91f.

32. *Ibid.*, 79.

33. *Ibid.*, 58; see also p. 111.

34. *Ibid.*, 168.

35. Don S. Browning, *Pluralism and Personality: William James and Some Contemporary Cultures of Psychology* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 1980), 20-22, 195; see also *idem*, *Religious Thought and the Modern Psychologies* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 5-6, 29-31. Browning's general theory here is that psychology, narrowly conceived as a science that merely charts material causes and consequences of human actions and feelings, easily becomes inflated into a broadly conceived project that shapes culture.

36. Schaeff, *Women's Reality*, xvi.

37. *Ibid.*, xx.

38. William K. Frankena, *Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 14-16.

39. Schaef, *Women's Reality*, 129.

40. Levinson, *Seasons*, 9, 59, 60, 144.

41. *Ibid.*, 239. It is "separation" that "fosters growth"; attachments hinder it. Growth through dependence seems fraught with danger. As Carol Gilligan, author of the pivotal study of women's moral development, verifies, for men ambivalence about intimacy prevails (*In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982], 8, 42, 62).

42. Schaef, *Women's Reality*, 71-80, 99.

43. *Ibid.*, 80-85.

44. *Ibid.*, xix. She deems the system that challenges the White Male System "The Female System" (xix). By so naming it, she gives it an exclusivity that she earlier protested in the White Male System. To claim that it includes "women from other ethnic systems" defines their reality for them from a *white* female perspective (3, 145). This "reality" hierarchically rates racial discrimination as secondary to the oppressions of gender and ignores important differences within the respective "systems" themselves.

45. Keller, *Broken Web*, 209.

46. Miller, *Toward a New Psychology*, 22-23, 25-26.

47. Keller, *Broken Web*, 4.

48. *Ibid.*, 3-4.

49. *Ibid.*, 8, 22, 46.

50. *Ibid.*, 2.

51. Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1971), 220; *idem*, "Introspection, Empathy, and the Semi-Circle of Mental Health," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 63 (1982):402; *idem*, *How Does Analysis Cure?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 65-66.

52. Daniel N. Stern, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant: A View from Psychoanalysis and Developmental Psychology* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 10.

53. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*; see also Carol Gilligan, "Why Should a Woman Be More Like a Man?" *Psychology Today*, June 1982, 68-77; and "Women's Place in Man's Life Cycle," *Harvard Educational Review* 49 (1979):431-36.

54. Keller, *Broken Web*, 155, 158.

55. Browning, *Pluralism and Personality*, 41.

56. Gilligan, *Different Voice*, 149.

57. Keller, *Broken Web*, 35.

58. Valerie Saiving, "The Human Situation: A Feminine View," *Journal of Religion* 40 (April 1960):109. See also Judith Plaskow, *Sex, Sin and Grace: Women's Experience and the Theologies of Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Tillich* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1980); Celia Allison Hahn, "Sexual Paradox: Pride and Hiding," *Spice* (Washington, D.C.: The Alban Institute), 9-11; Dorothee Soelle, "Sin Is When Life Freezes," *Christian Century*, (12 May 1982).

59. See Susan B. Thistlethwaite, *Sex, Racism and God: Christian Feminism in Black and White* (New York: Crossroad, 1989). She argues that white feminist attention to connection overlooks the different struggles of women of color and ignores racial differences.

60. See Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, "A Woman's Work is Never Done." In *Women's Consciousness, Women's Conscience: A Reader in Feminist Ethics*, ed. Barbara Hilkert Andolsen, Christine E. Gudorf, and Mary D. Pellauer (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 3-18.

61. Miller, *Toward a New Psychology*, 94.

62. Larry Blum, et al. "Altruism and Women's Oppression." In *Women and Philosophy: Toward a Theory of Liberation*, ed. Carol C. Gould and Marx W. Wartofsky (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), 223-24.

63. Carol Gilligan, "Remapping the Moral Domain: New Images of Self in Relationship." In *Mapping the Moral Domain: A Contribution of Women's Thinking to Psychological Theory and Education*, ed. Carol Gilligan, Janie Victoria Ward, and Jill McLean Taylor with Betty Bardige (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 15.

64. Keller, *Broken Web*, 154.

65. Miller, *Toward a New Psychology*, 95-96.

66. Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?* 66, 77.