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## **TRIANGULATION, THE ROLE OF THE FATHER AND THE ORIGINS OF CORE GENDER IDENTITY DURING THE RAPPROCHEMENT SUBPHASE**

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This paper is an expanded version of a paper read at a special scientific meeting of the New York Society of Freudian Psychologists on the occasion of Dr. Margaret S. Mahler's 80th birthday, April 24, 1977 in New York City. Different versions were read at the Fall Symposium of the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute, Extension Division, on October 24, 1976 (Abelin 1977); and for the Panel on the Role of the Father in the Preoedipal Years at the 66th Annual Meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association in Quebec, on April 29, 1977 (Prall 1978). I wish gratefully to acknowledge the critical suggestions from Drs. Margaret S. Mahler, Otto F. Kernberg, and William I. Grossman, as well as Ms. Elsa First's invaluable editorial help. [*Early condensed formulations of the final model of the Berne lectures.*]

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### **Introduction: The Evolution of the "Early Triangulation" Model**

In this paper, I will summarize the current, fourth phase of my investigation of the earliest role of the father, dealing with gender differences in "early triangulation." Unfortunately, within the format of a paper, I can give no more than the most schematic overview of a complex new theoretical model. For any details or elaborations, I must refer to my forthcoming book on the subject.

For over twenty years, *Mahler* has insisted on the early importance of the father: "beyond the eighteen-months mark and even earlier, [152](#) the stable image of a father ... is perhaps ... necessary to ... counteract ... the threat of reengulfment by the mother" (*Mahler and Gosliner 1955, p. 209*).

"The inner image of the father has never drawn to itself so much of the unneutralized drive cathexis as has the mother's" (*p. 200*); the father is an "uncontaminated" mother substitute (*p. 210*). In 1966 she explained the "comparative immunity against contamination of the father image" by the fact that the mother image evolves by being first differentiated within the symbiotic dual unity complex and then separated out from it; ... the father image comes towards the child ... from outer space as it were ... as something gloriously

new and exciting, at just the time when the toddler is experiencing a feverish quest for expansion" (pp. 8-9). He thus becomes the "knight in shining armor" during the practicing subphase.

In the process of writing my dissertation on families of schizophrenic children, while still in Switzerland, I developed my "early triangulation" model. This model led me independently to predict a similar early role of the father (Abelin 1971a).

What is "early triangulation?" I hypothesized the existence of this process as part of normal development to integrate all the scattered data on the origin and nature of the schizophrenias. This construct also served to unify the developmental models of Spitz and Piaget. The reasoning ran something like this: In the last analysis, schizophrenia consists of a breakdown of symbolic functioning and of the mental image of the self. In normal development, these two achievements appear jointly around 18 months (Piaget 1937, Piaget and Inhelder 1966). What is the mechanism of their appearance? They presuppose a satisfactory relationship not only with each parent but also *between* father and mother, to judge from the family dynamics of schizophrenia. This suggests that in normal development, some kind of internalization of the relationship between the parents takes place around the age of 18 months (Abelin 1971a, p. 125, quoting Bateson). This internalization somehow leads to the formation of the self-image and of symbolic mental representations in general.

To understand why this should be so and how it comes about, we must try to recreate the experience of Piaget's sensorimotor world, which he described as "egocentric without an ego." While being at the center of his own world, the child before 18 months knows only about the world and not about himself. Indeed, before the child is able to construct symbolic mental images of absent objects, he experiences only a succession of scenes ("tableaux") in front of him. He has no concept of himself as a subject like others. His world has only one focus at any one time-prototypically his libidinal attachment object. Even his own motivation is perceived as a quality of the outside object: the child does not desire the object; he sees the object as desirable.

According to Piaget, a Copernican revolution of the mind is achieved around 18 months (1937, my translation): "In order to situate himself within space -which is the only way to construct a homogeneous and relative space-the child must ... imagine himself as though he saw himself from the outside" (p. 177); "because imitation has been internalized and transmuted into symbolic mental images, the child is now able to picture in his mind his very own body .... This will enable him to view himself as just one cause and one effect among many others" (p. 76). In this quotation, Piaget refers to his rather convincing theory that a mental image of an object derives from imitation of that object. As a first step, the child learns to defer imitation. A few weeks later, action is dispensed with altogether; imitation of the object has been internalized into the image of that object (Piaget and Inhelder 1966, p. 56). However, what brings about this crucial step-this transmutation from an action in time into an image in space? How could this theory apply to the child's image of himself, since he cannot possibly see and imitate that self? And most of all, how does the toddler learn "to view himself as just one cause ... among ... others?"

It is my contention that the toddler cannot construct a true image of the self as long as he does not realize that he is the origin of the "desirability" of the object. Selfhood is the acknowledgement of one's core wish. But this core wish is always a wish for the libidinal object. It can only be seen and imitated, and therefore represented, in a triangular constellation such that the toddler perceives his one object desiring his other object. Faced with this excruciating experience of ultimate exclusion, the toddler recognizes for the first time in the rival's wish for the object his own frustrated wish for the same object. His action being suspended (because all his familiar attachment schemata are blocked), what he can do is actively to *imagine* himself as being like his rival - indeed, as a being like his rival: "There must be an I, like him, wanting her." Early triangulation is this identification with the rival.

By the same token, the first mental representation of the self is also the first symbolic image; it is the bridge between sensorimotor and symbolic functioning. After this, objects can be evoked in their absence; the signifier is now distinguished from the signified. However, the model implies that the first symbolic representation is at once a total wish-constellation, including the object and the [154](#) separate self, desperately yearning for that object: "I want mommy." This, I believe, is the origin of the rapprochement wish. The first self-and-object image constellation is the intrapsychic structure (in the contemporary structuralist sense of that term). underlying the rapprochement crisis. Because of the schizophrenia data mentioned above, I assumed during that first phase of my research that the prototypical object of early triangulation was the mother and that the prototypical rival was the father - an assumption I was later to question. Early triangulation, then, would be triggered when the toddler perceives his father loving his mother-perhaps holding her in his arms or any related gesture. I will call this the *primal constellation*.

The first mental image constellation also constitutes the foundation of the mental representation of space. *Piaget* has shown that although the toddler has already constructed a well-organized sensorimotor or practical space, he must then reconstruct space from scratch on the level of internal representations. This will take several years. More generally, development of symbolic images recapitulates sensorimotor development, step by step, with a type of lag that *Piaget* has termed "vertical décalage."

The first core self-and-object image constellation is a very rudimentary representation. In particular, it does not include the image of the rival; indeed, the memory of the rival is obliterated in this symbolic representation. It has fused into the self-image, energizing it, as it were. It will take two to three years before the complete father/mother/self triangle can be represented on the level of the mental images. Thus, oedipal triangulation recapitulates early triangulation on the level of symbolic representations, in "vertical décalage." I will try to demonstrate elsewhere that the earlier stages of mental image constellations coincide with the oral, anal, and phallic stages of psychosexual development. As we know, instinctual drives comprise an origin, an aim, and an object. Their structure *presupposes* the first image constellation, consisting of the self, the wish, and the object. Thus, instinctual drives, too, are symbolic representations.

Now it is also more evident why my model predicted an early role for the father: he must be cathected as a second specific attachment object before early triangulation can take place, that is, before the rapprochement crisis around 18 months of age.

For the second phase of my investigations, I had the good fortune to work under the guidance of Dr. *Margaret Mahler* and to observe these processes directly at Masters Children's Center. In a substudy, (Abelin 1975) I confirmed the early salience of the father as a second attachment object (Abelin 1971b).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the father is never a stranger to the infant in average expectable circumstances. He soon becomes a second specific attachment object. However, the father is a different kind of parent, particularly tuned into the wild exuberance of the toddler during the practicing subphase. In times of distress or fatigue, the toddler will more likely turn to the mother for comfort. This seems to be due to the unique symbiotic roots of the mother relationship (Mahler 1966). During the rapprochement subphase, the father continues to represent a stable island of practicing reality, whereas the mother becomes contaminated by feelings of intense longing and frustration. The father may thus play an indispensable role in the resolution of that ambivalence.

In that study, I also began to gather indirect evidence for my hypothesis that "early triangulation" is the mechanism underlying the phenomena of rapprochement. In this respect, however, I found more than I had bargained for. Although the father emerged so clearly as an object of deep and specific attachment during the first two years of life, so did siblings and other children, grandparents, and various other familiar adults. Moreover, I observed that during the weeks preceding rapprochement and my hypothetical early triangulation, toddlers became sensitive to situations of triangular rivalry with other children more than with their fathers. Was early triangulation perhaps normally not an identification with the rival father but rather with the rival baby? Did it take place not in the primal constellation, but in what we might call the *Madonna constellation* - the toddler faced with another baby in his mother's arms? Come to think of it, this constellation (or its derivatives) might well represent an even more universal experience than the primal constellation.

I could not answer this question during the third phase of my investigation, which centered on the longitudinal study of a little boy whom I had had the chance to observe within his family (Abelin 1975). In that particular case, the full "identification with the rival father" seemed to be barely observable, but could be inferred from various derivatives.

In the current phase of my research, I have begun investigating the differences between boys and girls in regard to early triangulation (Abelin 1977, Prall 1978). In the present paper, I will postulate that in actual development the early triangulation process involves three separate steps. The last step differs in girls and boys. I will call this more developed model the *tripartite model of early triangulation* to distinguish it from the earlier *general early*

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to acknowledge again Dr. Mahler's invaluable and inspiring mentorship; in addition, that study was indebted to the observations and ideas of all the other members of the staff of the Masters Children's Center. The research was supported by N.I.M.H. Grant MH-08238. My particular substudy was made possible by my research training fellowship grant from the Medizinisch-Biologische Stipendienstiftung, Basel, Switzerland.

*triangulation model*. The former does not invalidate the latter, however; it only gives it a more specific content, related to gender differences.

Again, *Mahler* has adumbrated such gender differences when she commented on "the different flavor of the girl's reinvolvement with mother as compared to the boy's" during the rapprochement subphase (*Mahler, Pine and Bergman 1975, p. 214*). Along with this greater reinvolvement with mother, the little girl shows a heightened ambivalence to her, and her basic mood takes on a depressive tinge. By contrast, "identification with the father ... facilitates a rather early beginning of the boy's gender identity", By the same token, "the boy seems better able to cope with 'symbiosis anxiety,' and to disidentify from mother (*Greenson 1968*)" (p. 215). "Identificatory and disidentificatory mechanisms ... must be ... different in boys and girls" during the rapprochement subphase (p. 216). Similarly, *Stoller (1975, p. 294)* now feels that "the process of the development of core gender identity is not the same in males as in females. " He too thinks that masculine core gender identity must be preceded by "disidentification" from mother. To quote *Greenson (1968)*: "The boy must renounce the closeness that identification with the mothering person affords, and he must form an identification with the less accessible father" (p. 372).

My original data consist of a comparison of the development of a little boy with that of his younger sister, within the family setting. Of course, a single comparison can only be paradigmatic; however, in my conclusions, I also draw on innumerable observations at Masters Children's Center, as well as on a growing research literature.

## The Observational Comparison

Like Michael, Kathy developed an affectionate attachment to her father during the first months of life. Unlike Michael, however, she [157](#) always remained clearly more attached to her mother than to her father during the subphases of differentiation and practicing. At 9 months, her "flirtatiousness" with her father was noted for the first time. Later, when she was able to toddle, she would excitedly run away from her father so that he would chase her. Like *Kleeman (1967, 1973)*, I feel that such patterns reveal an early erotization of stranger anxiety. By the same token, all through the practicing subphase Kathy experienced her father as a "knight in shining armor" (*Mahler 1966*), beckoning from outside the symbiotic orbit. Typically, she would be in her mother's arms, making coy overtures to her father. By contrast, Michael seemed to be as close to his father as to his mother during the practicing subphase, and, in his father's absence, he would playfully begin to imitate some of his father's patterns. He had disidentified from his mother (*Greenson 1968*). Kathy, after imitating Michael's more masculine games for a few weeks, began to play more and more at imitating her mother at about 17½ months.

My observations of Kathy and Michael also confirmed the emergence of masturbation and of the awareness of genital differences in the late practicing subphase. Both children began to integrate genital sensations into the mother-and-father relationships. For



example, Kathy loved to ride horseback on Father's lap. She also showed some evidence of early penis envy. However, this did not seem to be a crucial issue at the onset of the rapprochement crisis, around age 18 months.

Both children went through a clear-cut rapprochement crisis, just on schedule. Kathy developed a brief but passionate love affair with her father. Eventually, however, these feelings were drowned in the overwhelming separation struggle with mother. For both children, there were many times when the father, too, became "contaminated" with rapprochement ambivalence; but he was no match for mother in this respect.

During the months following the rapprochement crisis, both children seemed to experiment with various solutions to the basic rapprochement conflicts. But most consistently, Michael would seek out his father; he also preferred to play with boys, especially older boys. He seemed very conscious and proud of being a boy. He was keenly aware of gender differences among family members. During the corresponding age span, Kathy was almost exclusively involved with her mother. This attachment now had an ambivalent, clinging [158](#) tinge. Kathy seemed to have traded off her father to Michael in order to have mother to herself. She saw herself most consistently as "mommy's baby," and there was evidence that this self-image was neutral in regard to gender. As an extension, Kathy saw family members mostly on a generational or power scale throughout her third year of life. Only around age 3 did an *oedipal* triangulation gradually emerge, and only then could she begin to accept seeing herself as having two sexually differentiated love objects, and as being herself different in gender from boys.

## The Tripartite Model of Early Triangulation

A comparison of Kathy and Michael tends to confirm my previous hunch that around 18 months, *gender identity* emerges more readily in boys, *generational identity* in girls (Abelin 1975, p. 295). Generational identity establishes the self "between" two objects, along one linear dimension. "I am smaller than mother, but bigger than baby," or rather in terms of wishes: "I wish to be taken care of by mother and I wish to take care of baby." By contrast, gender identity classifies the self in relation to the dichotomy male/female (or perhaps at first only to the dichotomy male/nonmale). Thus in the girls' first self-and-object image constellation, the self would not be explicitly represented as being different in gender from her object(s). We may thus derive the following tentative generalization from the comparison of Michael and Kathy.

Before rapprochement, the father remains a peripheral, if exciting, object for the girl, tinged with eroticized stranger anxiety. By contrast, he has become the primary attachment object for the boy. The rapprochement wish - the first longing of the separate self - is the same in boys as in girls: "I want mommy." However, the underlying core self-image constellation may be gender-specific for boys only: "I (male) want mommy (female)." In girls, the corresponding core self-image constellation would be "I (a child) want mommy (big)," alternating with "I (a child) want baby (small.)"

How can we account for these gender differences? To organize the following review of data, I will anticipate here the postulates of the new *tripartite model of early triangulation*.

In boys as well as in girls, early triangulation occurs around 18 [159](#) months of age and leads to the formation of the first core self - Image, separate from and desperately longing for mother. However, only boys approach "early triangulation" after a change of primary attachment object: only boys have "disidentified" from mother during the practicing subphase. Consequently, the core self-image is the result of a full-blown identification with the rival father only in boys; and this is why core gender self-classification is achieved only by boys at that age, Psychoanalytic evidence suggests that this early triangular identification with the father confers an irreversible *phallic* attribute to the boy's core self-image, His longing is for a *different kind* of object, no longer mirroring his body. By contrast, in the girl, the father is not yet metabolized into the mental image system around 18 months of age. Her *generational* self-image derives from two identifications within the mother / baby / self triangle, the "Madonna constellation:" the girl identifies with the wishes of both the passive rival baby and of the active mother.<sup>2</sup>

In girls as well as in boys, core gender self-classification must derive from an identification within the mother / father / self triangle, the "primal constellation." I will call this a *sexual triangulation*. But in the girl, this sexual triangulation will take place later, on the classical oedipal level. Only in the boy is there an *early sexual triangulation*, which is then replicated by the oedipal triangulation on the higher level of symbolic images. On the other hand, boys are exposed to the tensions of the "Madonna constellation" just as girls are. But they touch base only briefly at the levels of "identification with the rival baby" and of "identification with the active mother"; by age 18 months, these levels have been superseded in boys by "identification with the rival father."

Incidentally, it is not clear to me at this point to what degree the girl's generational identification and her disregard for sexual differences represent a defensive retreat, because of early penis envy. There can be no doubt about the existence of such penis envy (*e.g., Mahler, Pine, and Bergman 1975, p. 214; Galenson and Roiphe 1976*). This penis envy is based on a sensorimotor, here-and-now perception, like all the other situations of envy that herald the rapprochement subphase. As such, the discovery of the genital difference may well contribute to preventing early core identification with the rival [160](#) father in the girl. At any rate, this early penis envy must be distinguished from that of the phallic phase, which corresponds to the later symbolic representation of the phallus.

There is another, cognitive dimension to this new model, which can only be mentioned here in passing. Indeed, a lot of data would fall into place if we assume that sexual self-classification, which implies the highest degree of spatial organization of the mental image, is also the best foundation for the development of spatial ability. But this is only achieved by a triangulation within the primal constellation; it presupposes a triangular metabolization of the father, as it were. By contrast, generational identification, which has

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<sup>2</sup> In this "pregenital" triangle, , the opposition of active versus passive takes precedence over the wish-vector, This will be expanded on elsewhere.

a greater affinity with the linear dimension of time, would constitute the foundation of grammatical language. Therefore, language would be enhanced by a triangular identification within the Madonna constellation. In either case, the establishment of a symbolic function (*Piaget and Inhelder 1966*), that is, of mental representations, would be contingent on a triangulation. This theory would explain, among other things, why girls are more advanced in language skills, whereas most boys will eventually be superior in mechanical and spatial abilities. The tripartite model of early triangulation would even allow for the considerable overlap in these abilities, and for their ultimate convergence on the adult level - *Piaget's* formal level.

A word on narcissism. *Mahler* has, of course, described the loss of the illusion of narcissistic omnipotence in the rapprochement subphase (*Mahler, Pine, and Bergman 1975*). In my model, narcissism is a quality derived from the mirroring one-to-one nature of all relationships before rapprochement. Narcissism can only be reduced through the formation of symbolic mental images of the self and its objects by way of early triangular identifications. But the comparison between Michael and Kathy suggests that in addition there are gender differences in this process. In Michael, identification with the rival father led to an image of himself and of his mother in which the generational or power gradient between himself and his father was obliterated. Indeed, he arrogated to himself some rather incredible capabilities, as if he shared implicitly in his father's powers. His smallness and helplessness did not seem to be included as yet in his newly formed self-image. By contrast, a generational gradient did differentiate Kathy's earliest self-image from its first two represented objects; but she behaved as if she was of the only kind there is. Her first self-image was neutral in regard to gender; it was feminine <sup>161</sup> only implicitly, because of the persistence of the mirroring with mother. Thus, it was as if a different part of the illusory prerapprochement narcissism had been preserved in each sex: the illusion of uniqueness in the girl, and the illusion of omnipotence in the boy. And these were also the aspects of narcissism that were yet to be transmuted onto the level of symbolic representation by way of the subsequent oedipal triangulations.

## Review of Data

There are large clusters of data that tend to buttress various aspects of this model; they also contributed to its construction. They pertain to such disparate fields as biological and psychological gender differences and their origins, ethology, social affinities of infants, the corticalization of the extrapyramidal system, the early genital stage, early language development; self-recognition in the mirror, *Piaget's* findings, psychoanalytic reconstruction, family dynamics, or systems theory. Even in the book, that I am preparing, some of these areas will only be covered cursorily; and here, I can give no more than a few essential references.

The early role of the father as a second attachment object has been abundantly confirmed (*Lamb 1976a*). Moreover, during the second year of life, boys tend to become as comfortable



with their fathers as with their mothers, or even to prefer their fathers (Lamb 1977); for girls, fathers remain literally more peripheral, that is, they tend to relate to their fathers through distal sensory modalities, to their mothers through proximal modalities (Ban and Lewis 1974). Generally, babies are attracted by similarities and are afraid of differences; thus, they are attracted by other babies and by persons of the same sex, but are most wary of male adult strangers. However, this preference for redundancy would seem to be more pronounced in girls than in boys (Lewis and Brooks 1974, 1975). Such factors may prime the boy toward identification with the rival father at 18 months of age, and may derive in turn from the priming of the male brain with androgen hormones at an early critical stage of intrauterine development. The self-image has been shown to appear rather suddenly, anytime between 18 and 22 months of age (Piaget 1937, Amsterdam 1972, Lewis and Brooks 1974). Studies of transsexualism (Stoller 1968) or of hermaphroditism and other sexual disorders (Money and Ehrhardt 1972) have shown that core gender identity becomes almost irreversible after 18 months; its major determinants are the conscious and unconscious attitudes of the parents. Statistics confirm that preschool boys tend to make sex-typed discriminations much more often than little girls do; on the other hand, girls tend to identify more often with the mother's adult characteristics and to learn more age-graded aspects of social role (Emmerich 1959).

Finally, *absence* of a father during the first two years of life has, been found to be much more detrimental to boys than to girls (Biller 1974); it irreversibly leaves boys with a feminine core gender identity, although from latency on, this is covered up in most cases by masculine overcompensation (Burton 1972). In addition, these boys are less aggressive, less competitive and more dependent than boys who lost their father after the age of 2 to 4 years (Hetherington 1966 Santrock 1970, 1972, Biller 1974). These boys resemble girls even in that they stress parent-child rather than sexual differences (Sears 1951)! At the same time their mechanical interests are affected. They develop field-dependent perceptions and a cognitive profile resembling that of girls, with verbal abilities higher than spatial abilities (Barclay and Cusumano 1967, Carlsmith 1964). A well-structured mother-child relationship has been shown to promote verbal ability (Levy 1943); in this case, fatherless boys may compensate linguistically for their handicap in spatial skills.

Although father-absent girls do develop a feminine core gender identity, and although their ego development is less seriously affected, they will have difficulties in their social and sexual relationships with males (Hetherington 1972, Jacobson and Ryder 1969). Their nonverbal intellectual abilities will be affected as in father-absent boys, but mostly when the loss of the father occurs at a later age, between 3 to 7 years (Landy, Rosenberg, and Sutton-Smith 1969; see Biller 1974, p. 129). Similarly, there is some evidence that the father does contribute to the girl's core femininity, but at a later age, namely, around 5 to 6 years (Lynn 1974, p. 162).

Most of these data, however, could be accounted for by any kind of early internalization of the father, and not specifically by a triangular one. On the other hand, there does exist a growing set of data suggesting that the effects of early father absence are duplicated or even surpassed by the effects of maternal dominance in the parental couple. This must be

understood in the light of a large set of data suggesting that children tend to imitate that parent who dominates in the parental couple (Lynn 1974, pp. 122-130). Obviously, then, early triangulation in the boy consists of an identification with the father's *actively* loving mother. Maternal dominance prevents this process and therefore has the same effects as father-absence. Only an early triangulation model can account for these data.

Moreover, some research suggests that early mother-absent boys raised by their fathers also develop a feminine cognitive profile (Gregory 1965, Nelsen and Maccoby 1966). These data, too, can be explained only if the early core identification of boys with their father is a triangular one.

## Conclusions

More generally, I suggest that an early triangulation model may account for all of the data just reviewed. In particular, we may safely assume that the first core self-and-object image constellation in the boy contains a higher degree of simultaneous information in space than the corresponding core images in the girl, namely, the information that people come in two shapes, with or without a phallus. This would explain the parallelism between the cognitive and the psycho-sexual effects of father absence. In my model, the core wishes and fantasies described by psychoanalysis coincide with the deep structures discovered by cognitive psychology and by linguistics although their surface effects may secondarily become distorted and dissociated in some cases.

The model may also help to clarify certain points of psychoanalytic theory. I can mention here only a few of its implications. For example, there can be no doubt that there is a specific early attachment not only to mother but also typically to father, and perhaps to other familiar adults, too. Therefore, as Lamb (1976b) or Kotelchuck (1976) have pointed out, Bowlby (1958) was certainly wrong in postulating the monotropy of early human attachment. But is this what Freud was talking about when he inferred by the psychoanalytic method that the earliest libidinal tie of an infant is to his mother?

On close scrutiny, what analysts have reconstructed as exclusive attachment to "mother" or to the "breast" could refer quite correctly to one of three different things: (1) It could refer to the dyadic structure of the sensorimotor world itself, which allows only for one-to-one relationships *at any one time*. Incidentally, this mode of functioning may persist and take on the defensive function that we call splitting. (2) It could refer to the symbiotic mother, who is indeed the infant's first and (for a while) foremost mirroring object within that world, although by no means an exclusive one. (3) Finally, "mother" refers most often to the earliest *mental image*, namely, the image of the longed-for rapprochement mother. In this case, the psychoanalytic reconstruction of an exclusive object cathexis is valid, but only as far back as there was a *symbolic level*.

By contrast, because it is presymbolic, the *father's role before the rapprochement subphase* and in early triangulation *cannot be reconstructed* by the psychoanalytic method. The memory of the primordial rival is obliterated after early triangulation. This is probably

why our science has not discovered early father attachment, although it is readily observable, and indeed "known" to everyone. Within the symbolic level, it is quite true that the core image of the father does enter the scene as late as during the phallic-oedipal stage. This is the level on which *Freud* reconstructed, for example, the prolonged involvement of the girl with her mother, and her turning to father because of a sense of castration. *Freud's* reconstructions always pertained to the level of unconscious wish-vectors.

Thus, the following two levels must be clearly distinguished: on one hand, the *level* of interactional, *mirroring relationships* within the family, which is rooted in the sensorimotor mode of functioning; and, on the other hand, the *symbolic level*, on which these relationships become represented with more or less distortion. Confusion between these two levels pervades the psychoanalytic literature. This confusion is all the easier to make as the symbolic level represents an isomorphic recapitulation of the mirror level. From behind the couch - and through the smokescreen of language - these two levels of the Unconscious are bound to be telescoped. Whatever we may think of his technical innovations and of his one-sided exaltation of linguistic structure, *Lacan's* great merit has been to introduce the distinction between the mirror stage (1949) and the symbolic level; he also adumbrated the role of the father ("name of the father") in the transition from one level to the other (1959), and the symbolic nature of the self (*sujet*) and the core wish (*désir*; *Lacan 1958*).

Another implication of my model relates to the controversy about *determinants* of *gender identity*. According to *Kohlberg's* (1966) "cognitive-developmental" theory, "sex-role development" depends on the child's discovery of being a boy or a girl. Incidentally, *Freud* [165] has attributed a similar role to the "discovery" of the anatomical difference between the sexes. According to my model, however, girls are feminine and boys are masculine much before they could possibly make such a discovery. The early triangulations are the foundation of gender identity precisely because they represent an acknowledgment and a transmutation of already existing feminine or masculine mirror object choices. Later, when the implications of these early triangulations have unfolded so as to constitute the phallic stage of development, the ensuing representation of the anatomical difference is attributed to some fortuitous external discovery. But the latter only serves to rationalize instinctual premonition, as it were. The core "discoveries" are always recognitions.

More generally, it should be obvious that my model represents a radical departure from any naive empiricism. In this, I believe, I am true to the spirit of *Freud*. I believe that there is an inner blueprint for epigenetic development. For example, there are maturational factors and laws of integration and equilibration that constitute, in effect, a "mother attachment system" and a "father attachment system." In the average expectable "primal constellation," these two systems, in turn, will combine around 18 months of age to constitute a preordained "early triangulation system."

In conclusion, I wish to mention briefly some evolutionary vistas opened up by the new model. Early triangulation is a "critical period" par excellence. I think that *Spitz* (1957) was

literally right in comparing his critical periods to the "organizers" of fetal development: they represent a recapitulation on the psychological level of the intrauterine sexual differentiation of the brain. This differentiation depends on the presence or absence of androgen hormones at an early critical period in utero. In all other mammal species, however, this recapitulation is incomplete; it is arrested prematurely, perhaps by the hormonal flooding of sexual maturity. By the same token, the developmental potential of the central nervous system is never actualized in animals (*cf. Hutt 1972, p. 22-25 and p. 41-44*). Their hereditary instinctual behaviors can be viewed as premature closures of sensorimotor development. Only in man is maturational timing such that even the initial priming of the brain with androgens is recapitulated on the experiential level. Indeed, on the level of early sexual triangulation, it is the psychological internalization of the father that adds masculinity to an otherwise feminine core gender identity—just as at a critical period in fetal development, androgens had irreversibly primed an otherwise feminine brain into a masculine track; and this, in turn, must be a recapitulation of the fundamental asymmetry of the Y chromosome, which adds the message "male" to an otherwise feminine chromosomal blueprint. Each level replicates that one additional bit of information that makes all the difference between male and female. On the symbolic level, of course, this difference is represented by the phallus. Thus, the different timing and mode of sexual triangulation in boys and in girls ultimately reflects the difference of the chromosomal messages. As postulated earlier in this paper, this difference might be mediated by the greater responsiveness of the male brain to discrepancy, and the greater responsiveness of the female brain to redundancy.

Intrapsychic triangulation thus represents a specifically human achievement. In this process, all the mirroring instinctual, energetic currents and all the sensorimotor resources are funneled to master one "primal constellation," which lies just beyond the reach of any of the sensorimotor schemata. Only in man does this Copernican revolution of the mind take place. In other words, only in man is the father internalized into psychic structure. To be more precise, it is the truth of the father-mother relationship that is internalized, the truth about one's origin - the forbidden fruit of knowledge. In sexual triangulation, the Self is engendered by father and mother—and with it the explosion of symbolic thought. This indeed is an important step toward the psychological birth of the human infant.

Thus, in addition to providing an explanatory framework for the phenomena of the rapprochement subphase, the early triangulation model, which was partly based on *Piaget*, may serve as a conceptual bridge to span the gap between psychology and psychoanalysis.

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