

*Alienation and the Longing for Nurturing*

In linking projection and the archetype of the mother, Jung (1951/1959, p. 11) refers to the projection-making factor as “The Spinning Woman” or the Eastern, Maya, setting in motion the illusory fashion of perception. Whereas the Great Mother or archetypal mother figure offers containment and nourishment, the mother imago reflects the idealized manifestation of the hope for complete nurturing and acceptance, held within the allure offered by the real mother. Due to the disappointment and insecurity suffered at the failure of the real mother to meet these expectations, the mother imago replaces her, holding within her all the qualities longed for by the child. The archetypal mother, together with the real mother in the form of the mother imago, symbolizes everything that functions as “mother” for the individual. In associating happiness and fulfilled longing for life with the mother imago, the individual is unable to support his own initiative as well as his own abilities to break through the challenges of the world. Instead, “he is crippled by the memory that the world and happiness may be had as a gift from the mother. The fragment of world which he must encounter again and again is never quite the right one, since it does not fall into his lap, does not meet him half way, but remains resistant, has to be conquered, and submits only to force” (p. 12). His initiative and staying power become immobilized through his belief that everything is attainable through the mother. In wanting to be enveloped and held by the mother, in staying loyal to her, he seeks the protection and nourishment that are unattainable in the world. This remains an illusion that he is forever seeking as he lives regressively from a

psychological viewpoint, despite his desire to organize his world and live within it in a satisfying way. The imperfections of real life cannot compete with the state of inviolable fulfillment offered by the lure of the mother-imago, taken to be the real mother (p. 12). He becomes more removed from the real world while at the same time longing for engagement with it. The school child who encounters challenges within the school environment that he or she feels unable to meet, seeks protection from the real mother, who on failing to provide the succor that is sought for by the child, exacerbates the child's attempt to hide within the folds of the mother imago's skirts. This further alienates the child from the reality of the world he or she is facing at school, as well as from his or her own capacity to overcome the obstacles presented, resulting in disappointment, self-hatred, anger, and revenge.

This dynamic has been clearly illustrated by Moore et al. (2003), previously mentioned, where in many cases school shooters showed increased social withdrawal with fearful, angry, or depressed mood becoming more evident. School shooters were generally viewed as being on the margins of social groups and saw themselves as either being "loners" or not quite belonging or fitting in anywhere within the social fabric, despite their intense concern about their social standing in their school and among their peers. Shooters easily gave up trying to affiliate with social groups when not included. A common factor was found among the shooters indicating school grades falling in months prior to the attack and a resultant change in school status.

*Gary had flunked all his classes in the prior school year and had been referred to a special program at his high school. He had also been reported to the school principal on a number of occasions for fighting with other boys during recess, and had been caught stealing a couple of times. He had been offered the opportunity to become part of a sports team when noticed for his natural ability and talent at this sport, but had dropped out of that about a year prior to joining*

*the group. In group he is generally apart from most of the other children, in a depressed mood, and often complaining about the work load and the quality of teaching. He is also down on himself for not being smart enough to get through school. In our group meetings he will often lie on the couch nestling his head into the lap of one of the girl participants who is his one close friend. He tends to gravitate toward her each week in the group and will often find a spot close to her, either on the couch or sitting side-by-side with her in chairs. He always makes physical contact of some kind with her, usually in a posture that allows him to receive some kind of nurturing contact. Gary idealizes his mother, who is rather enmeshed with him, identifies as Gary's buddy and idolizes him, at the same time trying to "fix" his life. Gary's mother though has problems of her own.*

Winnicott refers to the phenomenon of the mother *imago* somewhat differently to Jung. In referring to children and adolescents who engage in the activity of stealing, he maintains that the child is looking for the sweetness that can be provided by the good mother. Without this loving sweetness, he becomes "more and more inhibited in love, and consequently more and more depressed and depersonalized, and eventually unable to feel the reality of things at all, except the reality of violence" (p. 116). Winnicott differentiates love from sentimentality, which he refers to as the tendency to sacrifice everything for the "happiness" of the child (p. 33), or the condition of indulgence (p. 71), leading the child to direct destructiveness, although in a less sentimental milieu destructiveness evidences as a desire to be constructive (p. 91). According to Winnicott, an unsentimental attitude reflects the appreciation "not so much of talent, as of the struggle behind all achievement, however small" (p. 91). In not receiving the "happiness" offered through the indulgence of the mother, when searching for it in the world, the child falls into a regressive state unable to construct an alternative way of encountering life. Destructiveness on inner or outer levels then occurs.

It is apparent that when the imperfections of the real mother fall short, children who attempt to cling to the idealized mother image in the hope of being able to deal with the world may become disillusioned and angry. Their inability to "make it through" in ways

expected of them lead to tendencies to hold on even more tightly to the longing to be held by the mother imago. In a repetitive cycle of recrimination, bitterness and disappointment lead to a diminishment of the individual's ability to function. This in turn results in increased hostility toward the environment and all within it, who are unable to provide the support, nourishment, and recognition desired. Acts such as stealing, fighting, and aggression towards teachers and other students may become common and cause concern to others within the school system