

**BROTHERS AND SISTERS:
Developmental, Dynamic,
and Technical Aspects of
the Sibling Relationship**

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SIBLING RIVALRY:
A PHENOMENON OF
CONSTRUCTION AND
DESTRUCTION

*Discussion of Volkan's Chapter
"Childhood Sibling Rivalry and
Unconscious Womb Fantasies
in Adults"*

Barbara Shapiro, M.D.

Dr. Volkan thoughtfully describes some of the ways in which normal, average, and expectable human feelings of sibling rivalry can take on malignant properties, transformed into hatred, overwhelming jealousy, spiteful envy, omnipotent possession, and unmitigated contempt. He points out the clinical and theoretical lacunae that occur when psychoanalysts consider parents but not siblings. His discussion illustrates the genetic and developmental significance of sibling rivalry as an entity in its own right. To this end, he focuses in general on pathologic sibling-derived material and in particular certain unconscious womb fantasies. This focus is necessary for heuristic purposes. However, just as Winnicott's baby cannot be understood without a mother—although we certainly can discuss the baby and the mother separately—so also the developmental course of sibling rivalry and the resulting endopsychic representations cannot be understood without considering the parents and the family.

Also, the sheer "noisiness" (Kris and Ritvo 1983) of malignant rivalry may eclipse the more quiet ways in which sibling rivalry contributes to adaptation. In this discussion I would like to put womb fantasies and sibling rivalries into a larger context: the family cradle-crucible.

OEDIPUS AND SIBLINGS

The Oedipus legend is an illustration of the crucible within which destructive object relations with both parents and siblings are forged. We tend to think of the Oedipus legend as pertaining to children and parents, and not to siblings. Freud saw the relevance of the analysis of the psyche, as contained within literature and myth, for his clinical observations, and masterfully integrated these spheres. The significance of his synthesis of literature and observation can be extended, as the Oedipus saga powerfully depicts hostility and destructiveness in sibling relationships. As my source, I use Sophocles' version of the Oedipus legend as found in his Theban plays: *Oedipus Rex* (442 BC), *Oedipus at Colonus* (435 BC), and *Antigone* (446 BC).

Oedipus and his wife-mother Jocasta had four children—two boys, Polyneices and Eteocles, and two girls, Antigone and Ismene. After Oedipus discovers that he has murdered his father and married his mother, without conscious intent, he blinds himself and becomes a wandering outcast. His daughter Antigone accompanies him and attends to his needs as a non-sexual mother-wife. Antigone's sister Ismene plays a lesser role in the triangle of father and two daughters. Meanwhile the two brothers fiercely battle over which one is to rule the city. Eteocles, the younger, defeats his older brother Polyneices. The older furiously plots to regain power. Oedipus, in a fit of fury, renounces both his sons and dies. The two brothers then murder each other. The story gets more complicated. Creon, the brother of Jocasta and now the king, decrees that Polyneices is

to be denied a proper burial by the state. Since this means that he will never be with the gods, his sister Antigone, who loves her brother as she did their father, Oedipus, decides she will bury her brother's corpse, knowing that if she does so she herself will be executed for this act of treason. She asks Ismene for help, but Ismene declines, saying that the act is futile. Antigone hates her sister for this perceived betrayal, even though what she asked of her would surely result in death for both. In a heated exchange between the two sisters, Antigone dismisses Ismene: "if now you wished to act, you wouldn't please me as a partner." Ismene, however, proclaims love for Antigone, and urges her to at least bury Polyneices secretly, to avoid execution by the state. Ismene then vows her own silence to protect her sister. Antigone erupts with fury. "Dear God! Denounce me. I shall hate you more if silent. . . ." Antigone buries Polyneices and is condemned to death by Creon, despite the fact that his own son loves Antigone and pleads with his father for his beloved's life. Here the father effectively murders his son (who kills himself after Antigone's death). After Antigone's burial of Polyneices is publicly exposed, Ismene offers to share responsibility for the act, knowing that she too will be executed, but with her sister. Antigone bars her from this, saying, "I cannot love a friend whose love is words." Ismene pleads, "Sister, I pray, don't fence me out from honor. . . ." We start to wonder if Ismene is motivated by guilt and shame rather than by love for her sister, and whether protestations of love disguise cowardice at the loss of honor. Antigone hates her sister for first not helping her and then having the nerve to try to claim some of the responsibility for what was Antigone's act. Antigone declares, "Don't . . . make your own that which you did not do." Ismene sees her sister's hatred and says, "Why hurt me, when it does yourself no good?" Antigone's reply shows that the victory of sibling estrangement brings no peace. She says, "I also suffer, when I laugh at you." Ismene ends up killing herself, as does just about everyone else.

I think most of us would agree that Oedipus' family is riddled with problems, multifaceted and spanning several generations. The parents of Oedipus, Jocasta and Laius, try to bypass fate by piercing their own baby son's ankles with thongs, binding his legs, and telling a servant to "make away with him." Oedipus himself is abused and abandoned. This dooms him to the unconscious fate of murdering the father and marrying the mother of whom he had no conscious awareness. We see ghosts of the past as Antigone sacrifices herself for her father and then for her brother (Lacan 1959-1960). Antigone speaks of her own soul murder: "My life died long ago" (Vestin 1997). It is within this family context of multigenerational trauma, denial, and unconscious oedipal victories within shifting triangles of siblings and parents that sibling rivalry and conflicts of ambivalence are forged into hatred, murder, and suicide. Malignant sibling hatred and destructive repetitions of the past do not spring up in a vacuum. Yet this tragedy illustrates that no one person or generation is to blame. Who is responsible for "fate," a word I might translate into the vicissitudes of development when unconscious fantasies, conflicts, and self and object role representations are hidden, denied, or split off, as happened to baby Oedipus. His parents attempted to deny his very existence. Yet even their actions can be understood as trying to escape a terrible fate for themselves and for their son.

SIBLING RIVALRY: THE DEVELOPMENTAL COURSE

Dr. Volkan describes how sibling relationships may be intertwined with developmental and conflictual impasses. His descriptions are in accord with other reports in the literature (Bank and Kahn 1982, Shapiro et al. 1976, Sharpe and Rosenblatt 1994). We do not always encounter the extremes of sibling murder and suicide described by Sophocles. However, we all see patients

with similar conflicts, usually, although unfortunately not always, on a smaller scale. A key question is: What keeps normal and expected sibling rivalry from becoming structured into malignant hatred?

Dr. Volkan describes three patients, all of whom are oldest children, with the younger siblings born during the first six years of their lives. Some authors have proposed schemata for understanding the effects of birth order (Sulloway 1996). Such formulaic descriptions ignore the complex, overdetermined, and multifaceted ways in which any event becomes woven into psychic structure (Agger 1997). However, without making reductionistic predictions, we can examine how sibling relationships develop for older and younger siblings.

Freud (1900) commented on older and younger siblings in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. "The elder child ill-treats the younger, maligns him and robs him of his toys; while the younger is consumed with impotent rage against the elder, envies and fears him, or meets his oppressor with the first stirrings of a love of liberty and a sense of justice" (p. 202).

Provence and Solnit (1983) and Parens (1988) describe observational sequences of sibling relationships. For older siblings the baby is a new object, and has not always been present. As such, the baby intrudes on preexisting relationship patterns. The quality and content of the intrusion and potential rivalry are influenced by many factors, such as the older child's age and psychic structure, the family dynamics and structure, and external events and stressors. However, we can say that in general children, especially those who have not yet adequately resolved separation, individuation, and oedipal issues (either due to age or due to developmental variations or impasses), usually regard the new baby as an intruder, a rival.

Conversely, for the younger child, the older sibling has always been present (Provence and Solnit 1983). Thus, by definition, the older child is not initially an intruder and becomes a rival in the younger one's eyes only after some differentiation

of self and other has been achieved. Sometime during the middle of the first year babies respond to their older siblings as objects of attachment, cooing, smiling, and reaching out their arms when the older sibling enters the room (Parens 1988). With the development of locomotion, the baby takes the older sibling's toys, much to the exasperation of the sibling. In part the taking of the toys is exploration: the love affair with the world. However, Parens also describes the phenomenon of "wanting what the other kid has" developing toward the end of the first year of life (Parens, this volume). This phenomenon does not go away. We often see ourselves and others wanting what the other person has. We hope, however, that this wanting will undergo ego modification and sublimation, rather than evolve into destructive envy and compensatory entitlement.

An example of the interaction of rivalry and "wanting what the other kid has" is contained in the following clinical vignette:

A 15-year-old patient was musing in her analytic session about her relationship with her sister, five years older. She described her living room. "We have a three-seater sofa and a chair, and there are four of us. I have always been the one who has to sit in the middle. The better seats are on the outside of the sofa—that way you get more room and the arm of the sofa—or on the chair, but the chair belongs to my father. The person in the middle gets squished, but that's what happens when you're the little sister. I always get the middle and my sister gets an arm. But now my sister wants the middle, and I don't want her to have it. It's my place and I'm used to it—and anyway in the middle I can be close to people even if I am squished. Why does she want to take my place? It's my space, my territory. It's not as good as she has, and she wants it."

By the second year the squabbles start, and the younger child more and more actively competes with the older for things as well as for the parents' time, attention, affection, and preference.

As the self develops and becomes differentiated from the object (often marked by the toddler's declaring that everything is "mine"), rivalry becomes more intense, and we begin to see differential development of rivalry, envy, and jealousy (Neubauer 1982, 1983). However, this is often mixed with adoration, imitation, and wanting to be like the older sibling. The older child usually does not view the younger child in this way (Neubauer 1983).

SIBLING RIVALRY AND ADAPTATION

The arrival of a new baby and sibling rivalry are normal and expected events in the lives of children (Bank and Kahn 1982, Hartmann 1939, Parens 1988). However, average and expected events are not necessarily easy. In reality the presence of a new baby usually means less time for the older child. (Kris and Ritvo 1983) The parents are tired, deprived of sleep, and preoccupied. Given this reality, we can wonder why sibling rivalry does not usually become malignant. I would like to discuss four modifiers of sibling rivalry for the older child: (1) the adequacy of libidinal supplies, (2) parental love for all the children, (3) continuing parental relationships, and (4) the attachment of the baby for the older sibling.

The Adequacy of Libidinal Supplies

First let us consider the adequacy of libidinal supplies for all members of the family. The birth of a child represents a nodal point, a potential crisis, in adult development. As with most nodal points, some regression is necessary to promote progression. Inherent in the mother's ability to mother is regression in the service of bearing and nurturing a baby (Kestenberg 1976). In this process the mother herself needs a mother. If a father is present, he (it is hoped) fills that role. Alternatively, other family members, friends, community supports, or groups (such as new mothers' groups) may support and nurture the mother. A removed

or detached father is not only of no help to an overwhelmed mother, but may actually interfere with the possibility of obtaining help through other spheres. For example, friends and community supports are more readily available for single mothers than for depressed mothers in apparently intact families. Sometimes no resources are available. In that case, if the inner world of the mother is exceptionally rich in libidinal supplies, she may be able to care adequately for herself, the baby, and any older children. This process would be similar to the resilient child capable of extracting libido from impoverished sources (Mahler et al. 1975). However, one expects that most mothers require adequate external libidinal supports. These external supports act as a psychosomatic selfobject—psychosomatic because intrapsychic workings are reflected in somatic processes during pregnancy, childbirth, and care of the baby. For example, Kennell and his co-workers (1991) documented that the presence of a support person during labor decreased both the length of the labor and the complications. Child bearing and child care inherently involve both the psyche and the soma.

Additionally, the mother must be psychically able to accept and benefit from external libidinal supplies. Maternal depression, internal conflicts, or overwhelming external stressors may preclude the ability to take in, and thus to give. In at least two of the three cases cited by Volkan, the mothers were depressed and the fathers unavailable.

When libidinal supplies are adequate, and if other problems do not interfere, parents can tolerate the older child's usual regression without belittlement, while at the same time reinforcing to the child that she has wonderful abilities that the baby does not. Thus the child can regress and progress at the same time, without either action risking actual loss of the object or the object's love. The child can reexperience being a baby as she watches the baby—a regression of sorts—and at the same time progress as the parents tell stories about "when you were a baby" (Provence and Solnit 1983). In this way regressive identification is put into words, enabling mastery and ego growth.

In contrast, regressed and depleted parents may project their own self hatred onto the child when the child regresses.

Parental Love for All the Children

The older child must see that the parents are able to love the new baby while continuing to love the older child despite her entreaties to "send it back" or some other such variation. An attuned and nondepleted parent responds to the child's fervent wishes for the baby's disappearance or demise with empathy (Kris and Ritvo 1983). Such empathy is not possible if the new baby is unwanted or hated by the parents, consciously or unconsciously, or if the new mother is significantly depressed. When the child sees that her wishes for the baby's destruction are not actualized, the push toward the reality principle and away from omnipotence is reinforced. The child is less likely to become terrified of her own aggression (Provence and Solnit 1983), which in turn reinforces object constancy and the growing ability to distinguish reality from fantasy, thought from deed. The demonstration that libidinal supplies are ample and can be shared without being diminished provides a lesson in the nature of love, allowing the child to free her love objects to pursuits of their own. Obviously, if libidinal supplies are not adequate, external reality reinforces fears of loss of the object and of the object's love. Rivalry then is rooted in reality and becomes entrenched. When the parents visibly love the baby, the child can also begin to love the baby in identification with the parents. All this assumes that the older sibling is not excluded or ignored, and that the parents keep the younger child from intruding into the older one's territory.

Continuing Parental Relationships

If the family consists of two parents, the child ideally sees that the parents continue their relationship. This balances oedipal fantasies that the baby is the child's own, or that the child's mur-

derous and incestuous wishes have been actualized. The child can be aware of her own wish to have a baby (Parens 1988) without the danger of a fantasied oedipal victory becoming too real.

Attachment of the Baby for the Older Sibling

As the baby grows and begins to smile and respond to the older sibling, cooing and reaching out her arms when the older child enters the room, the older child begins to feel herself as the object of love and can respond in kind. Feeling loved is a powerful inducement to love. Also, the older child's sense of mastery is augmented as she has the opportunity to act as an auxiliary ego for the younger (Parens 1988). Here parental reactions are important. A jealous or hostile parent may not encourage sibling love, and a depleted parent may overuse the older child as a substitute parent.

Even the most optimal environment coupled with the most temperamentally mellow child does not prevent rivalry, jealousy, and envy, nor would we wish it to do so. These emotions are part of the substrate of our everyday lives as adults if we live in proximity to others and not in isolation. We can see the adaptive force of rivalry by examining the derivation of the word. The word *rival* comes from the Latin *rivalis*, meaning "one living near or using the same stream as another" (Neubauer 1982, Webster 1962). Rivalrous struggles force proximity and block isolation. Isolation occurs only when a child retreats from the fray. As children we can learn major ego functions such as mutual cooperation, coordination, and sharing, so that everyone has access to clean water. Alternatively we can pollute the water, block access, or engage in open warfare. Obviously, if the water supply is inadequate or already contaminated, rivalry becomes a fight for either one or the other to survive.

For both the older and younger child, rivalry provides a powerful push toward separation and individuation (Abelin 1971) if it is not forced into destructive aggression or crystallized into rigid hatred. For example, with the birth of a new

baby, frequently the father or his substitute becomes closer to the older child, taking her for walks, providing daily care, discussing difficulties, and so forth. Such activities, with the resulting closeness, help with separation from the mother (Mahler et al. 1975), and take advantage of the potentially maturing aspects of a developmental nodal point. Kernberg (Kernberg and Richards 1988) cites the example of Little Hans. In an example of what in modern times we might call male bonding, Hans's father was the one to seek the counsel of another man, Professor Freud, to help his troubled son. Little Hans's problems were not just derived from classic oedipal struggles. Hans was 3½ years old when his sister was born. At the time of Freud's intervention, Hans "frankly confessed to a wish that his mother might drop the baby into the bath so that she would die" (Freud 1900, p 203). The process of drawing closer to others in order to separate from the mother and tolerate the new baby can also occur among siblings. An older sibling may band with or even nurture a slightly younger sibling, providing support for coping with the intrusion of the baby (Leichtman 1985). When the developmental space is closer, there may be more synchrony of interests (Solnit 1983). Conversely, with wide age ranges, the older sibling is more likely to act as a parent. Sibling bonds and support are unique and may be of particular help, as children often find each other more understandable than do the adults in their lives (Agger 1988, Provence and Solnit 1983). Overall, rivalry, envy, and jealousy force children to seek differences and niches, while engaging in an intimate rough and tumble with others of their own size. The intimacy and aggression together provide force for identifications, while the awareness of differences coalesces self identity.

At the same time, recurring humiliating sibling defeats can cause severe narcissistic blows. Rivalry exists with both parents and siblings. However, competitive losses with the same-sex parent can be tempered by the difference in generations, assuming good-enough parenting and an adequate fit between parent and child. The child is consoled that one day she too will be an

adult and be able to do grown-up activities, but right now she is actually little and inexperienced. In the rivalry between siblings, particularly those close in age, there is no consolation prize for repeated losses or sustained experiences of inadequacy (Sharpe and Rosenblatt 1994), except by finding another arena for competition and success.

DISCUSSION OF CASES

The Case of Jack: The Metaphors of the Analyst

The first case, Jack, is a 16-year-old poet who reads about psychoanalysis while making his body disappear under baggy and formless clothes. Dr. Volkan hears this as a possible “womb fantasy.” Obviously, as Dr. Volkan points out, there are many possible explanations for Jack’s appearance and symptoms. To me Jack sounds like an intellectually precocious youngster with a libidinal cathexis of the mind, and a denial, dismissal, turning away from the body. Winnicott (1988) describes this process as the *mind-psyche*, where “the mind . . . has a false function and a life of its own, and it dominates the psyche-soma instead of being a special function of the psyche-soma” (p. 140). Perhaps these are two different but equally valid metaphors or paradigms to explain the same phenomenon. I speak here of how the irreducible subjectivity of the analyst, including her or his favorite metaphors and theories, inevitably influences the way material is heard, understood, and interpreted, and in turn the manner in which the analysis unfolds.

The Case of Steve: Boundary Violations, Ghosts, Siblings, and the Superego

Steve, the psychologist, was haunted by hateful intrapsychic representations of his younger sister. As a mental health professional, I read with horror that the professional board made a “relatively mild”

decision for this psychologist who slept with eighteen of his female patients. Of course I do not know what “relatively mild” means. I would hope that the flagrant and repeated boundary violations would prompt the removal of Steve’s license to practice.

Whatever the actions of this particular professional board, we know that all too often significant boundary violations elude adequate professional intervention. Obviously this is a multifaceted phenomenon. However, dynamics in professional groups often partake of aspects of sibling relationships, including conflicts of loyalty and betrayal. We are all familiar with the situation in which we allow ourselves to criticize our own siblings, but woe befall the outsider who ventures the same observations. Especially in difficult circumstances, groups of siblings or sibling substitutes can band together very powerfully, providing mutual protection and support. One dramatic example is the group of children described by Anna Freud—the orphans of Terezin—who grew up together in the concentration camps without caring adults. These children loved one another, hated and distrusted outsiders, and rarely squabbled (A. Freud and Dann 1951). Such sibling protection, however, is often not the case. In the absence of a parental base, siblings may not be able to integrate at all (Solnit 1983). They may isolate themselves from one another, and/or engage in fierce warfare. The rivalrous struggles can become physically and verbally abusive.

Sibling love is only one force underlying sibling loyalty, although certainly a most important one. Siblings are usually acutely aware of one another’s crimes and misdemeanors, especially if they are close in age. They have the ability to unmask each other, to get the other sibling into trouble with the older generation if they choose to do so (Bank and Kahn 1982). In *King Lear*, Cordelia says to her sisters, “I know what you are, and like a sister am most loath to call your faults as they are named” (Shakespeare 1594, I:2). Often there is an implicit agreement: I won’t tell about you if you don’t tell about me. In school, kids make faces behind the teacher’s back and keep the knowledge as a group secret. The kid who tells is not well liked,

especially if the telling is to curry favor with the teacher. Rivalry has its rules. This process of group loyalty helps a group pull together, to define its separate identity. However, a tension exists. Crimes and misdemeanors vary. A cookie snatched from the jar is not equivalent to a gun under the mattress. Some problems require intervention across generational or group boundaries. We frequently hear children, adolescents, and adults struggle with what is major and what is minor; what, when, and whom to tell. When do concerns about a larger good outweigh sibling or group loyalties? In professional groups—in all groups—collective unconscious sibling loyalty and conflicts over betrayal may undermine individual ego and superego functions, with defensive rationalizations and projections. Returning to the tragedy of Antigone, Ismene was caught in a loyalty conflict between the state and her sister.

Steve primarily chose patients as his love objects. Here Dr. Volkan's case contributes to our understanding of the role of sibling relationships in boundary violations. Dr. Volkan describes a man with a weak observing ego and a punitive superego, with projection and negation as primary defenses. He did not experience the people in his life as separate objects with their own motivations and feelings, precluding empathy for the effects of his actions on them. The capacity for an observing ego (or reflective function) and mature empathy rests on the development of mentalization. The capacity for mentalization is also necessary to develop the verbal symbolization surrounding thoughts, wishes, and feelings necessary to prevent an immediate discharge of drive-affect. (Lecours and Bouchard 1997). I would hypothesize that Steve had deficits in mentalization, and therefore was capable of empathy only as a toddler experiences it, which is as concordance or complementarity (Bolognini 1997). Thus, although he may have recognized feeling states in others, as does the toddler who soothes her crying mother, this function was based on primitive identifications. This is the constellation of a preoedipal morality, ego structure, and object relations. For Steve with his own patients, the subtly nuanced

"as-if" nature of the psychotherapeutic experience would become "is." Because he lacks the superego and ego structures necessary for impulse control, his aggressive and sexual feelings for his mother and sister were actualized.

In a longer and unpublished report of this case, Volkan (1998, personal communication) speculated on Steve's moral masochism. Moral masochism is also discussed by Gabbard (1995) in his work on boundary violations. The moral masochist seeks punishment for unconscious incestuous and murderous fantasies, but not out of a fully developed sense of morality. What is sought is punishment, not reparation and change. Steve's superego was preoedipal, with the professional board and the analyst functioning as externalized superegos.

One can wonder about the aggressive nature of Steve's sexual transgressions with his patients, as well as the implicit aggression in having sex in front of his daughter. No matter how egalitarian a therapist tries to be, there is always a power differential in the relationship. Steve seems to have been drawn to relationships in which he would have power and the illusion of control. At the same time that Steve was having sex with the longed-for mother devoted exclusively to him, entering her womb, was he also omnipotently dominating and hurting the despised and potentially rejecting bad mother and siblings?

This brings us to the sexual aspects of Steve's involvements. Steve had sex with his patients, and also in front of his daughter. He was 6 when his sister was born. We can assume he had both dependent and genital sexual longings for his mother. What about his sister and his daughter? Sexual fantasies about siblings can be as charged as oedipal fantasies (Bank and Kahn 1982, Freud 1908). The instinctual danger may be powerful because of the lack of generational boundaries, the high access of siblings to one another, and the closeness in age and size (Agger 1997, Sharpe and Rosenblatt 1994). We know that these fantasies often lead to actual incest among siblings—heterosexual and homosexual—with potential deleterious impact on development (Bank and Kahn 1982). Additionally, when parents are emotion-

ally unavailable, sexual fantasies toward siblings may become even more urgent, fueled by the need for libidinal supplies.

Steve's daughter was directly involved in the acting out of his conflicts. He called his daughter by his sister's name, and had sex in front of her. The story poignantly illustrates Selma Fraiberg's (Fraiberg et al. 1975) lasting and evocative concept of ghosts in the nursery. "Ghosts," as unresolved, rigid, and lasting endopsychic role representations, are projected from the parent onto the child. Steve's deficits in superego and ego structures necessary for impulse control and self observation enabled him to invoke his aggressive and sexual ghosts with his patients and his daughter. In this way, the unresolved and rigid sibling conflicts of one generation are recapitulated in the next (Sharpe and Rosenblatt 1994).

I think the words *unresolved* and *rigid* are key in describing these ghosts, because of course the inner worlds of all parents affect their children. In normal development the child assimilates and metabolizes a multitude of self- and object-derived introjections, projections, and projective identifications. The reflecting mirror of the parents' eyes gives back to the child an amalgamation of the child and the parents. The child's own constitutional, psychic, and somatic characteristics affect the way these early experiences with the minds of their parents and siblings are internalized. This process may actually help the child find a niche different from that of other siblings. However, when parental projections do not flexibly yield to the inner world of the child and to environmental realities, the process of individuation is undermined. The "niches" become jail cells rather than jumping-off points for individuation. Although it is not uncommon for people to revert to their assigned niches when reunited with siblings, as at family gatherings (Bank and Kahn 1982), one hopes that in the rest of life continued separation and individuation have provided flexible alternatives.

The concept of "ghosts in the nursery" is echoed in the findings of attachment theory. The attachment style of the child can

be predicted by assessing, before the child's birth, the attachment style of the mother—not in all cases, but in the majority (Fonagy et al. 1995). Although to my knowledge the attachment theorists have not investigated sibling attachments, we can hypothesize from clinical psychoanalytic data that certain children may be especially vulnerable to these transferences because of birth order, gender, basic core, temperament, appearance, and other characteristics.

The Case of Lisa: A Womb Is Many Things

Dr. Volkan describes the unfolding of a "therapeutic story," in which Lisa's unconscious fantasies unfold in action outside the analytic room, but inside the analytic space. This case beautifully illustrates the many modes of communication between analyst and analysand, and reinforces the importance of listening and watching for derivatives of malignant and unresolved sibling rivalry. Lisa's womb fantasy, as it unfolded into consciously perceived analytic space, was of a particular kind—that of entering the womb, destroying the rival, and being the only occupant. This womb is a place of exclusive possession and bloody murder. Underlying this conception is her image of another kind of womb, in which "the walls were pink, soft and puffy, like cotton" (p. 132, this volume). There are many kinds of wombs, in metaphor and in derivatives, conscious and unconscious, with as many variations as there are people on the earth. The womb could represent merger, symbiosis, engulfment, a trap, retreat from separation and individuation, privacy, exclusive possession, sexual triumph, pregenital or genital erotic longings, timelessness, twinship, togetherness, primary female identification, reunion, eternal life, and so forth. The possessive and murderous womb is dramatic and may eclipse our awareness of other, quieter wombs, just as stories of murder and mayhem dominate the headlines.

Perhaps we cannot assume that "womb fantasies" exist *per se*. Rather they may be amalgamations of protosymbolic, psy-

chosomatic, preverbal, and symbolic derivatives, emerging from all phases of life, and constantly reworked and reshaped through all phases of development. The form in which these fantasies then emerge in analysis would be structured by the analytic relationship, the person of the analyst and the analysand, the shared metaphors and symbols, and the nature of the transitional space between the two.

CONCLUSIONS: WOMB FANTASIES AND SIBLINGS IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

We certainly have much to learn by understanding how and why sibling rivalry runs amuck. Dr. Volkan clearly helps his analysands by being aware of sibling object relationships as important in their own right, and not just as representing displacements from the oedipal situation (Agger 1988, Bank and Kahn 1982, Graham 1988, Sharpe and Rosenblatt 1994). He discusses the relative neglect of sibling relationships in psychoanalytic thinking. We have to wonder why psychoanalysts, as aware as they are of the importance of early object relationships, have tended to focus on parents, with a relative neglect of siblings, or to regard conflicts around sibling relationships as a displacement from the parents. It is ironic that even in object relations and attachment theories, the role of siblings is minimized. Clearly this is multifaceted. Freud himself was an oldest sibling, favored by his mother, entitled within the family, and burdened by the death of a younger sibling occurring toward the end of his first year of life. His sister Anna, whom he disliked, was then born when he was about 2. Self analysis can go only so far. However, Freud himself has references to siblings. An example from "The Interpretation of Dreams" (1900) is: "Many people, therefore, who love their brothers and sisters, and would feel bereaved if they were to die, harbour evil wishes against them in their unconscious, dating from earlier times; and these are capable of being realized in dreams" (p. 203). The theoretical scotomata about siblings may lie with later psy-

choanalysts, as yet another example of how theory is shaped by intrapsychic and interpersonal conflict.

Intergenerational ghosts do not affect just families. They also haunt professional groups and disciplines. In psychoanalysis ancestral introjects and identifications are passed through training analyses and supervisions. Lacunae regarding siblings, and the defensive posture of minimizing or denying their influence, are perpetuated. After all, not acknowledging or talking about one's siblings is one way of getting rid of them. We frequently see this occurring in family life, when siblings isolate themselves with their own friends, ignore each other, or give the silent treatment. If not confronted and analyzed, this passive murder and denial will persist.

The very nature of the psychoanalytic situation may reinforce the tendency to minimize sibling issues or to reduce those issues to conflicts with parents. No matter how open and nonauthoritarian the analyst, the analytic encounter is asymmetric. Implicit power and authority differentials may favor, at least initially, the emergence of parental transferences. Using an example from another sphere, the gender of the analyst may influence the order in which the transferences emerge and evolve. At times patients are selectively referred to male or female analysts with the thought that immediate transferences may be specific to the analyst's gender. If, for example, the immediate paternal transferences may be so negative as to interfere with the development of a therapeutic alliance, that patient may do better with a female analyst. Eventually the negative paternal transferences will evolve, but after the formation of a solid working relationship.

Sibling transferences may be enacted outside the actual analysis. This may be with friends, colleagues, the actual siblings (Balsam 1998), or groups. Alternatively, sibling issues may emerge vis-à-vis fantasies (or the absence of fantasies) about other patients. Finally, in training analyses, other analysands are usually known to one another. It is very common for candidate analysands to refer to themselves as "analytic siblings." All these relationships may reflect intrapsychic sibling representations.

Child analysts may be especially aware of the importance of sibling relationships, at least for their child patients. Often the siblings are in the waiting room, frequently making noise or knocking at the door, and at times coming (invited or uninvited) into the treatment room. The child analyst may open her office door to call in the next child patient, to be granted by a screaming sibling fight and an overwhelmed parent. Parents often ask for guidance in handling sibling conflicts. The immediacy and power of sibling relationships in child analysis bring to mind a clinical vignette.

A 12-year-old girl with an eating disorder was beginning treatment with me. A colleague was to see the family for family therapy. The initial evaluation included a meeting with the parents, the patient, her 9-year-old sister, my colleague, and me. The mother sat on the couch with the two siblings on either side. My patient announced that she would readily participate in individual therapy, but wanted nothing to do with family therapy. I asked why. She stiffened, her usually neutral face tightened into a mask of disgust and rage, and she pointed her finger in the direction of her sister without looking at her. "Because of that!" she spat out. Her parents later emphasized that this was the first time they realized the extent of her rage and hatred.

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