Also by Jean Baker Miller and Irene Pierce Stiver:

WOMEN'S GROWTH IN CONNECTION
(written with Judith Jordan, Alexandra Kaplan, and Janet S. Surrey)

Also by Jean Baker Miller:

TOWARD A NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF WOMEN

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND WOMEN (editor)

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THE HEALING CONNECTION

HOW WOMEN FORM RELATIONSHIPS IN THERAPY AND IN LIFE

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RELATIONSHIPS REVISITED

We begin with a set of stories that offer examples of significant moments in common relationships.

Susan, who is in her late thirties, is about to visit her father in the hospital. He is eighty years old and seriously ill. Susan is one of her father's few remaining relatives, and she is concerned over his failing health, but she lives 1,800 miles away, and has found it hard to make arrangements to visit him regularly. She and her father have had a difficult relationship over the years; he was often critical of her, expressing disappointment, for instance, over her choices of job and husband. Susan has not often felt close to her father, but on this occasion she has made a special effort to be with him — paying an expensive plane fare and juggling her job responsibilities, her two

school-age children's schedules, and her husband's needs. Before going to the hospital, she goes out of her way to find a box of the special cookies she knows her father likes. Susan is eager to talk with her father, though she dreads seeing him ill and unhappy.

When Susan arrives at the hospital she is shocked by how fragile her father looks, but she puts on a cheerful demeanor and greets him enthusiastically as she hands him the cookies. He takes the box, hurls it across the bed, and says angrily, "Don't you know I can't eat these anymore?!" Susan is mortified and tells herself she should have realized about the cookies. She recognizes that her father is irritable because he is ill and tries to think of other ways to cheer him up, but she finds herself growing increasingly silent for the rest of the visit, at a loss for what to say or do next.

What happened between Susan and her father? Susan had wanted the visit to go well and to get closer to her aging father. But in the end, she and her father are both upset and just as far apart as ever. A similar gulf exists in the next story, between Debbie and her mother.

Debbie, a high school junior, bursts through the door of her house after school and tells her mother that her boyfriend of six months has just broken up with her so he can date other people. Debbie is distraught and weeping. Through her tears, she tells her mother that she feels ugly, that she hates her former boyfriend, that she also loves him, that she wants to die. Debbie's mother, who had not been very fond of the boyfriend, is relieved that the relationship is over, but she is disturbed to see her daughter so obviously heartbroken and unhappy. Debbie is inconsolable as her mother tries to cheer her by telling her how pretty she is and how she will attract new boyfriends. She also tells Debbie that she never really liked the boyfriend but didn't say anything while they were dating because Debbie cared for him so much. The more her mother talks, the more upset Debbie becomes. "You don't understand!" she screams. "Leave me alone! I don't want to talk to you! You don't understand anything!" Debbie withdraws and refuses to talk to her mother at all. Debbie is miserable and her mother feels terrible.

How have Debbie and her mother reached this impasse? Clearly, Debbie was seeking comfort from her mother, and just as clearly, her mother thought that she could reassure her daughter and ease her pain. Yet the more her mother tried to help Debbie "get over it," the more antagonistic their relationship became. Such a dissonance also arises in our third story, between Claudia and Lydia, two women who work together in the same office.

Claudia and Lydia, two secretaries, work for the same boss. They take pride in the fact that they work for a person who occupies one of the most powerful positions in the company. They are also pleased that they manage to work well together, despite their boss's reputation for being demanding and unpredictable, and the high pressure of their work environment.

One day Claudia returns to the office she shares with Lydia after a meeting with their boss. She is in tears and has a difficult time telling Lydia what has happened. Haltingly, she tells Lydia that the boss has exploded about a project Claudia was working on, criticizing most of what she has done. Lydia interrupts, reminding Claudia that it's their boss's manner to be critical and contemptuous. Claudia says that this time she feels particularly stupid and undervalued. Lydia responds with irritation: "How could you let him talk to you that way? You should stand up for yourself. I would never give him the satisfaction of seeing me cry." Claudia grows even more distressed and flees the office quickly, feeling even more inadequate.

What happened between these two friends that caused divisiveness? Why was Lydia unable to empathize with Claudia's distress?

Each of these stories ends abruptly with a critical *disconnection*, a moment when the people involved experience the pain of not being understood and of not understanding the other person. Disconnections are what we experience when we feel cut off from those with whom we share a relationship.

To begin to better understand how disconnections occur, let us briefly imagine our three stories with some key differences.

What if Susan had not fallen silent but had said, "Dad, I really wanted this to be a good visit. I know you feel bad and I wanted to cheer you up. But whenever I try to show you that I care, you do

something that makes me feel awful"? What if Susan's father had been able to express his feelings about being ill, and about seeing his daughter again for what might be the last time?

What if Debbie's mother had set aside her own anxiety over her daughter's unhappiness and said, "I may know how awful you feel. I had an experience like this once, and it was terrible"? What if she was also able to admit to Debbie that it was painful to see her so sad? What if Debbie had spoken up and told her mother that it hurt to have her feelings minimized, that what she really needed was her mother's understanding?

What if Lydia had acknowledged Claudia's humiliation and admitted that she had felt it too? What if Claudia had responded to Lydia's irritation by telling her that the pep talk only made her feel worse? What if Lydia and Claudia had taken the opportunity to talk about how they could work together to find ways of countering the power their boss held over them?

If any one of these "what ifs" had occurred, a painful moment of disconnection might have been transformed into a powerful moment of connection. But we all know how extraordinarily hard it can sometimes be to connect with another person, and this is especially true when there are differences in power between individuals within a relationship.

We all live in a world in which some people, or groups of people, hold power over others based on differences in age, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or other factors. When power inequities — whether real or assumed — are present, disconnections can readily occur. Furthermore, the experience of growing up and living within such a "power-over" framework influences all of our actions, even in the most personal situations and even when there is no power differential present.

For both Susan and Debbie, a history of power inequities and the disconnections caused by power-over relationships pervades their thinking, permeates their feelings, and restricts their vision of what changes might be possible in their significant relationships. Even the relationship between Claudia and Lydia, two equals, is seriously affected by the power-over context in which they work.

These notions about connections, disconnections, and power move us away from traditional psychological concerns. To illustrate the kind of encounter that has led us to explore another path, we will relate a story from clinical experience.

Some time ago, Irene was responsible for supervising a psychology trainee at McLean Hospital, near Boston. This trainee, a woman, held an initial interview with a young working-class woman we'll call Jane. Jane reported that she wanted therapy to help her with recent difficulties in concentrating and the subsequent problems she was having at her job. She thought her problems had something to do with the death of her mother, with whom she had been very close, over a year before. As the trainee explored Jane's thoughts about her mother's death, Jane became increasingly distraught and tearful. The trainee was very moved by Jane's story. At the end of the hour Jane asked if it would be possible for her to come to therapy twice a week.

In Irene's initial supervisory meeting with the trainee, she praised her interaction with Jane. In Irene's view, Jane's request for two therapy sessions a week reflected how sensitive and responsive the trainee had been.

As part of her educational program, the trainee also presented this interview to a team headed by a male psychoanalyst. He was concerned with what he felt was an "escalation of affect" (that is, of emotion) in the interview, which he believed suggested that Jane was a "hysterical personality," easily "stimulated" to express intense emotions. He criticized the trainee for being "too seductive" in encouraging Jane to "pour out" her feelings and to "depend too much" on the trainee. He saw Jane as an overly dependent person whose dependency needs should be discouraged; rather than seeing Jane twice a week, which according to him would only intensify her "neediness" or even lead to a "regression" to childish behavior, he recommended that the trainee see Jane only every other week, to set limits on her "demandingness." Finally, he speculated on the meanings of Jane's intense feelings about her mother; he wondered whether her difficulties in separating from her mother may have resulted in an "enmeshed" relationship, which contributed to her difficulties in adjusting to her mother's death.

Irene was very troubled by this evaluation. To Irene, Jane did not seem overly dependent, rather she seemed impressive in her ability to connect with the trainee so quickly, as well as genuinely caring in her relationships with colleagues and friends. Jane's sadness over her mother's death seemed appropriate to the significant loss she had experienced. While not unmindful of the complexities of the mother-daughter relationship, Irene and her trainee thought that for Jane therapy twice a week was a good idea.

Irene brought Jane's story to our "Monday Night Group," the group of female colleagues we describe in the introduction. At the time we were using our meetings to examine differences between our own understandings of the women we were treating and the traditional clinical perspectives that surrounded us. When we listened carefully to what Jane had said, it became clear that her sadness had little to do with being enmeshed or too dependent. Rather, she was suffering from the loss of a critical connection in her life.

Our observations about Jane matched certain conclusions we had reached about other women's stories we had discussed together. We had begun to see how frequently women patients were labeled as being hysterical when they expressed strong emotions. In Jane's story we saw yet another instance in which a woman's experience was pathologized; what we saw as women's valid close connections to others were frequently dismissed as "masochistic," "dependent," or "engulfing" by a mental health profession dominated by male views of development. Independence, controlled emotional expression, and separation — particularly from one's mother — were considered signs of psychological health.

Our group discussions enabled all of us to be more confident in challenging typical traditional psychological assessments of the women we encountered. Rather than labeling Jane's relationship with her mother problematic, Irene urged her trainee to honor that connection. Over time, Jane progressed very well on two therapy sessions a week. Dependency never became an issue in these sessions. What the analyst had seen as dependency between the trainee and Jane was, in our view, the trainee's appropriate expression of

caring and Jane's response to this caring. In fact, as her therapy came to an end, Jane reported that what had helped her most was her therapist's responsiveness to her strong feelings.

In the view of standard theory, then, Jane was seen as not having achieved the required separation from her mother; thus she was considered overly dependent and unable to cope with life's problems on her own. Our experience with Jane, and hundreds of other women whom we have met over the years, has led us away from this view, toward a profound shift in our fundamental understanding of human psychological development. It has not been an easy shift to make.

We were moving away from certain basic assumptions of both professional and popular wisdom. A glance at contemporary bookstore shelves confirms how widely accepted these assumptions are. A veritable industry has emerged in recent years to produce and promote books that urge women to separate, to become independent. Women "love too much," they are "addicted to relationships," or, to quote an earlier pop phrase, they suffer from a "Cinderella complex" (that is, they want to be saved by a man). If a women remains strongly connected — to her mother, her family, her spouse or partner — she is deemed dependent. She must "grow beyond dependence" in order to thrive. In short, these books often blame women for not "doing it right" (for choosing the wrong men, for being codependent, etc.).

But the fact is, women do do it right in many ways. The fault lies elsewhere, as we hope to demonstrate.

Many popular psychology books suffer from a central problem: like traditional psychoanalytic theories, they rest on a limited understanding of women's lives. They aim to offer new possibilities and opportunities for women's growth, but their interpretations rely on an old framework of unquestioned assumptions about the value of separation and autonomy. While some of these books have helped some women (ironically, often by helping them feel less alone and more connected to others), at bottom they pathologize women's actual experience.

If we observe women's lives carefully, without attempting to force our observations into preexisting patterns, we discover that an inner sense of connection to others is *the* central organizing feature of women's development. By listening to the stories women tell about their lives and examining these stories seriously, we have found that, quite contrary to what one would expect based on the governing models of development emphasizing separation, women's sense of self and of worth is most often grounded in the ability to make and maintain relationships. As Jean wrote in her book *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (1976), "Women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of connections with others."[1]

If we explore the context of connections in which they function, we find a central concern in the lives of most women that can be described as "the active participation in the development of other people," certainly in the development of children but also in that of adults.[2] To define this participation more clearly, let us stress first what it is not. It is not simply "nurturing," "serving others," a "maternal instinct," or the ability to "fulfill others' needs." These words do not adequately describe the complex activity involved when a person engages others in such a manner as to foster their psychological development. While words like "nurturing" and the like may convey a part of what it means to participate in this way in relationships with others, our language does not yet contain a word or phrase that captures the fullness of this activity. We call it participating in growth-fostering relationships.

Such phrases sound strange. They are. We are trying to name a basic human activity that has not been well recognized or described in ways that portray its importance, complexity, and creativity. But it is activity that is going on all the time. Another word we use in discussing this kind of participation in relationships — power — may sound even stranger at first; yet an individual can exert enormous power in the role of fostering the growth of others: "Women use their power . . . to increase the other person's resources and strengths in many dimensions — emotional, intellectual, psychological, and more."[3] This is not a power over others, directing and controlling them; it is "power with," a power that grows as it is used to empower others.

Of course, no human develops in isolation; most theorists have long agreed that people develop only in interaction with others. But in these interactions all of us are always either participating in ways that foster the growth of a relationship and the people involved in it, or we are not participating in growth-fostering ways.

To talk of participating in others' psychological development, then, is to talk about a form of activity that is essential to human life. In general, our society has assigned this fundamental activity — and the distinctive knowledge it entails — to women. It is significant that this knowledge had long been ignored in our psychological theories and demeaned in our larger culture, yet it is from this perspective that a new vision of psychological and emotional health for all people may be glimpsed. In reclaiming the knowledge about relationships that women in particular hold, we can begin to form a new model of psychological development *within relationships*, in which everyone participates in ways that foster the development of all the people involved, something we might call "mutual psychological development." This vision of mutual development includes not only individuals and families, but also workplaces, schools, and other institutions — in other words, all of life.

We do not mean to falsely idealize women. We do not believe that a knowledge of how to create and sustain growth-fostering relationships has to be limited by gender. Nor do we think that this knowledge is linked to something innate or biological. Certainly individual women can be coercive, destructive, or abusive, exhibiting the most violating aspects of power-over relationships with others. We also recognize that many women may find it impossible to develop mutually empathic relationships in a society that sees qualities such as empathy as deficiencies and is characterized by so much woman- and mother-blaming. As a general fact, though, in our culture it is women who have long done much of the work of building growth-fostering relationships for the society as a whole, and so we believe that it is from women's lives and experience that we can best learn about the potential power of a relational approach toward all of human development.

When we talk of women, we recognize that we have the expertise to talk only about women in the current dominant white cul-

ture in the United States. We do not mean to imply that all women in all times and places are covered by our generalizations. We know that within our own society there are variations among women, especially on the bases of race, ethnicity, class, and sexual preference. We would like to suggest, however, that our general propositions may be relevant. Significant additions and alterations must be added in talking of women of marginalized groups. As described in the introduction, members of several Stone Center study groups are working on the possible integration of the relational approach with the experience of marginalized groups.[4]

An eloquent example of the power of a mutually growth-fostering relationship exists in the following exchange between two women friends, Rachel Carson, the author of *Silent Spring*, and her summer neighbor in Maine, Dorothy Freeman. In 1953, Carson, already a very successful writer, and Freeman, who lived most of the time with her husband in Massachusetts, began a correspondence that would flourish over the next dozen years. Early in 1954, Carson wrote to her friend:

> All I am certain of is this; that it is quite necessary for me to know that there is someone who is deeply devoted to me as a person, and who also has the capacity and the depth of understanding to share, vicariously, the crushing burden of creative effort, recognizing the heartache, the great weariness of mind and body, the occasional black depair it may involve — someone who cherishes me and what I am trying to create, as well. Last summer I was feeling as never before, that there was no one who combined all of that. . . . And then . . . you came into my life! . . . Very early in our correspondence last fall I began to sense that capacity to enter so fully into the intellectual and creative parts of my life as well as to be a dearly loved friend.

Years later, Freeman wrote to Carson about that 1954 letter, which had come to represent something central to their relationship.

> I have read again [the 1954 letter]. How very, very precious it is. . . . Can you *now*, did you *ever* understand what all that meant to me? Remember that then you were the Famous Author, on a pedestal, with that gulf between us. In that letter the gulf was bridged . . . altho' it took a long time to destroy that pedestal. Its destruction came when I grew to know you as a person who had worldly cares and burdens and heartaches as I had.
>
> . . . In the going-on-eight years in which I've known you, my life has been enriched, broadened, sweetened, smoothed, softened, and enlarged beyond expressing.[5]

While these letters contain the words of two very eloquent women, they also express an experience vital to us all — the necessity of being heard and understood as well as hearing and understanding another.

Our point about women's way of being may sound familiar, especially to those who follow the field of women's psychology. The vision of mutually growth-fostering relationships we hold in this book emerges from earlier work that has also taken women's lives as a starting point. Over the last three decades, women writers have created an extensive body of work about women's experience. In the field of psychology, these writings can be divided into two groups. Some writers have worked on modifications of existing formulations such as Freudian, Jungian, or object relations theories. Others — and we count ourselves among this group — have proposed that the close study of women's experience leads to the creation of new frameworks based on new assumptions.

Jean was among the very first writers in our field to observe that women's relational strengths have typically been demeaned as weaknesses, devalued by a mental health profession that echoes the surrounding patriarchal culture. With its insistence that women's specific life experiences must be the starting point from which to understand women's psychology, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* challenged major assumptions that had long guided standard theories of psychological development. It also laid the groundwork for the analysis of connections carried out in this book. As Jean put it then,

> In many ways, women have "filled in" [the essential activities of caring for and fostering human growth] all along. Precisely be-

cause they have done so, women have developed the foundations of extremely valuable psychological qualities, which we are only beginning to understand. I hope that soon knowledge gained from several areas of study will help us to delineate these strengths and their dynamic operation in richer and more precise terms.[6]

The papers in *Women's Growth in Connection*, by all the members of our Monday Night Group, and other Stone Center Working Papers explicate further the ideas that led us to this book.[7]

An early paper by Carol Gilligan, and the book that followed, *In a Different Voice* (1982), attended specifically to women's experience.[8] Previous research on moral development had concluded that boys and men reach higher levels of moral development than girls and women. Gilligan noted, however, that the standards by which moral development was evaluated were based on responses of boys and men only; women were not represented at all in the process of establishing these standards. As she listened to women in her own study, Gilligan heard how often the responses of women, when making choices or in situations of conflict, were informed by a relational perspective and a complex appreciation of context, yet their decisions — their "voices" — were heard as deficient and underdeveloped in the existing research. Gilligan's incisive findings led her on to ask new questions and to open up a different perspective on what had been a limited notion of psychological development. Since then, Gilligan and her group have explored this relational approach in a variety of contexts.[9]

The present book has roots in Jean's earlier work and owes a large debt to the research of Carol Gilligan. We have benefited as well from the work of sociologist Nancy Chodorow, whose book *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) offered an analysis of gender differences within the context of psychoanalytic object relations theory. Chodorow noted that when growing up, little girls were not encouraged toward separate strivings nor were they pushed to achieve a separate identity from their mothers in the way that little boys were. In doing this work, however, she did not move beyond traditional psychoanalytic assumptions.[10] The work of Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule in their book *Women's Way of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (1986) extended a relational approach to cognitive development by exploring how women's relational way of being is linked to their thinking and learning, thereby creating an enlarged conception of what thinking and learning are.[11] And there have been many other women in a variety of fields, such as Phyllis Chesler, Audre Lorde, and Adrienne Rich, from whom we have learned an enormous amount.[12]

In the present book we are not talking about the question of sex or gender differences *per se*. Our concern is not how different, or how similar, men and women are. Instead, we have set out to accurately describe women's experience — a still-neglected realm — so as to highlight the fact that certain psychological activities that are vital to the health of all human beings occur in growth-fostering relationships.

For brevity we call our endeavor a relational approach to understanding psychological development and psychotherapy. (It would be more accurate to call it a growth-fostering relational approach, but that phrase is too cumbersome.) However, we depart from the relational approaches to psychodynamics and psychotherapy that a number of other writers have been developing since we have been working on our model. While we have learned a great deal from earlier relational theorists,[13] and also from the recent work of "self psychologists," the relational theorists at New York University's Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis, and Robert Stolorow and his associates,[14] and others, our work has some major differences.

Most importantly, these writers do not emphasize how our culture influences relationships in general in negative ways, or how relationships might change if approached from a view arising out of women's experience. In particular, they do not take into account the issue of differences of power, nor has their work evolved from an analysis of gender. This last point is particularly important since it can be argued that women have been the "carriers" of relationships for our culture. Even though these theorists emphasize the importance of relationships in an individual's psychological development,

they have not paid sufficient attention to the very people who, for the most part, create and sustain growth-fostering relationships. At root, these theorists retain the basic notion that relationships are the means to the development of the separate self.

In our view, the goal of development is not forming a separated self or finding gratification, but something else altogether — the ability to participate actively in relationships that foster the well-being of everyone involved. Our fundamental notions of who we are are not formed in the process of separation from others, but within the mutual interplay of relationships with others. In short, the goal is not for the individual to grow out of relationships, but to grow into them. As the relationships grow, so grows the individual. Participating in growth-fostering relationships is both the source and the goal of development.

In sum, our book seeks to go beyond earlier approaches. A full-fledged theory of women's psychological development does not yet exist; our work pursues that goal. Moreover, we believe that the insights we have gleaned from women's experience about how growth-fostering relationships can be created, or stymied, are relevant not only to theories of women's psychological development but to the human condition in general.

We have outlined some bold claims that need to be explained. In the chapters to come, we will look closely at the definition and implications of connections, disconnections, and relationships, relying upon examples gathered from our individual practices and on our work at the Stone Center at Wellesley College and elsewhere.

Our focus on the significance of disconnections and connections has led us to interact differently with the people we treat. Instead of stressing the importance of the therapist's neutrality, we believe the therapist must be authentically present and participating in the therapy relationship. We will illustrate this change with examples from our practices.

Therapy is only one kind of relationship that can be revolutionized by an understanding of how disconnections and connections work. We believe all of our relationships — in families, workplaces, and schools; between parent and child, sibling and sibling, teacher

and student, colleague and colleague — can be renewed by restoring the pathways to connection. As we move into authentic connections with the people in our lives, we will find more common ground with them, leading us toward an enlarged sense of community and of possibilities for social change. Making connections has implications for the world, not only for our individual lives.

Before moving on, we want to state one major caveat. We will be talking in the next chapter and in other places about optimal human connections. These are ideal types that we set forth in order to explain a theory. In reality, most of us struggle with various mixtures of connection and disconnection. We hope to explain why, but we are not intending to propose yet another impossible standard for judging women — or men.