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**Faces Of Abuse: Portrait Of A Couple A Psychoanalytic Study Of
The Film: *A Woman Under The Influence***

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The ground-breaking film *A Woman Under the Influence*, written and directed by John Cassavetes, came out in 1974, long before domestic abuse became a prominent issue. It portrays a woman and man struggling with inner and outer demons for psychic survival, for connectedness and separateness, as well as for love, gratification, and recognition. In a 1996 *Filmmaker* magazine poll of people in the film industry, the 50 most important American independent films were chosen. *A Woman Under the Influence* was placed in the number 1 slot.

My focus is on the intrapsychic and interpersonal issues, conflicts, and processes that contribute to understanding domestic violence. At the opening of the film, the lens zooms in on a vulnerable couple, Mabel and Nick. Mabel is a homemaker who is very attractive, intense, and animated. She is devoted to her husband and three children. Nick is an attractive, appealing man who works as the head of a city construction crew. He is devoted to his wife and children. The cast includes Mabel's mother and father, Nick's mother, Nick's buddies at work, and a psychiatrist. The detailed synopsis that follows is the data from which my clinical understanding is derived.

Synopsis Of The Film

The film begins with the children being picked up by their maternal grandmother so that Mabel and Nick can spend an evening and the next day alone with each other. Mabel worries that her mother won't call her if one of them “is bleeding.”

An emergency at Nick's work requires his team to work all night. His vigorous protests to his supervisor are dismissed. His date with Mabel cannot be kept. He avoids calling her for several hours, afraid of her reaction. When Eddy, his friend, understands Nick's reluctance as his fear of the storm of Mabel's emotions, Nick protests: "Mabel's not crazy. She cleans the bathroom, and takes care of the kids, like a normal person. I think I know what's wrong with her, she's mad at me." But the next moment, he says, "She's wacko."

The scene shifts back to Mabel, at home alone. She takes a dress out of a box, lays it on the bed, and turns on opera music. She drinks; she smokes. When Nick finally calls her, she grimaces and reassures him that it's fine.

After this conversation, Mabel goes to a bar. She picks up a good-looking stranger. She says: "Nick stood me up after my mother took the kids," wanting to be heard, soothed, and recognized. Instead, the stranger takes her home and rapes her.

Upon awakening in her bed the next morning, she addresses the stranger who raped her as "Nick!" He replies "No, Garson Cross. I am the one who brought you home last night." *She opens a door marked "PRIVATE," and goes into the bathroom.* She comes out of the bathroom, and spunkily asserts, "I'm not in the mood for games, Nick." Pointing to him—"Nick Longetti," and then pointing to herself, "Mabel Longetti." He leaves, ironically feeling rejected and used by her.

Nick then walks in flanked by 12 buddies from work. He innocently jollies her: "Whatsamatter?" Instead of answering him, she playfully pulls his hat down over his eyes. She sweetly asks if he is hungry. Neither mention the night before. *She goes into the bathroom,* and when she comes out she warmly welcomes the 12 men. Some warmly hug her; some flirt with her. She prepares spaghetti, sits down with them, and tries to make conversation. Nick, competing for attention, observes that there are periods when no babies are born, and then all of a sudden periods when lots of babies are born. He is convinced it has to do with "something in the air." His friends are uneasy and try to humor him, but he holds on to his theory.

Mabel is intrigued when one of the men beautifully sings "Celeste Ai'da." She gets up to stand next to him. Gazing at him, she listens enraptured. Nick is fixed on her from his place at the opposite

end of the table. She tells a Chinese man: "I love this face," and asks him to sing. When he says he can't sing, she asks him to dance, "everybody can dance." He refuses her invitation, but she continues relentlessly. Nick gently says: "That's enough, Mabel; you've had your fun." She ignores Nick's repeated urging to stop and to sit down. Finally Nick screams: "Get your ass down!" She sits down grimacing, silenced. At that moment, his mother calls complaining of a stomach ache, and Nick is very concerned and caring.

The men leave. Mabel and Nick sit down at opposite ends of the table. Mabel gesticulates and makes faces and noises. Nick calls her "wacko." She mimics him—"Get your ass down! I was trying to be nice; I'm a warm person. I love those guys. I know how to make them feel comfortable." Nick says "What the hell you talking about! You didn't do anything wrong." She, again mimicking, spews: "Sit down Mabel!" He: "I know—but he [the Chinese man] didn't know. He thought you meant something by it. I don't mind you being a lunatic." She pleads "I didn't do anything wrong." Nick throws her a kiss. In her confusion, she transforms, shifting from rage and hurt to sweetness, saying: "Nick, don't be afraid to hurt my feelings. Tell me what you want me to be. [magically gesturing] I can be that. I can be anything!"

We then hear opera music, and they go to bed. Nick kisses her; she averts her face; he continues affectionately. She neither objects nor actively participates. Later on, while they are still in bed, her mother barges in, returning the children six hours early because one of them had forgotten a book for school. Mabel upon seeing her mother angrily screams "What are you doing here?" She jumps out of bed and *goes into the bathroom*. Her mother ignores her, and cozies up to Nick. Nick invites the kids to jump into bed with him and play—and then drags his mother-in-law into bed as well—meanwhile ignoring Mabel's words of concern about the children needing to get to school on time. Her entreaties to her mother to go promptly and to Nick to stop playing with the kids are ignored. Nick opposes Mabel's urging the kids to leave, addressing her plaintively as "Ma." She is furious. "Don't call me Ma, Nick; My name is Mabel. I don't like to be called 'Ma'." Nick enjoys playing with the kids. Mabel sits apart from them on the bed, silently grimacing and gesticulating. After a few minutes she jumps out of bed, and says with enthusiasm: "I've got a great idea, kids; we're gonna have a party when you come

home from school. But you've got to leave now.” At this they all jump out of bed and run out of the house with grandma trailing behind.

After Mabel's triumph, she passionately jumps into bed on top of Nick. He immediately asks “Are you all right? Are you gonna be all right?” thereby killing the love connection initiated by her. She finally says “What do you think, I'm wacko or something?” She jumps out of bed, and says “I can't wait until my kids come home. All of a sudden I miss everybody.”

In the next scene, Mabel is impatiently waiting for her kids at the bus stop. Aggressively demanding the time from several well-dressed passing women, who recoil. She responds with hostile name-calling.

We then see Mabel joyously greeting her children. “I hope you kids never grow up—never. I never did anything in my life that was anything except I made you guys.” She asks them, “Tell the truth, do you ever think of me as dopey or mean?” Her son answers, “Oh no, you're smart and pretty—and nervous.” She feels known and accepted, and thanks him. She tells her children, “You see, we know how to talk to each other.”

In the next scene, her children are visited by three friends who are dropped off by their father, Mr. Jenkins. Mabel insists on the father staying to join the fun, i.e., dancing, playing. Aware of his discomfort, she hopes to make him comfortable. When her efforts fail, she gets nasty with him, ridiculing his stiffness and his name. He abruptly leaves with his kids, but not before a physical confrontation with Nick, who has just come home with his mother and finds Mr. Jenkins in the upstairs bedroom where all the kids and Mabel are gathered. He screams “What are you doing in my room? Get out!” Mabel tries to intervene; he slaps her and blames Mr. Jenkins “You see what you made me do? Get out!” Mr. Jenkins yells: “I'm tired of you, your wife, and your whole family!” Nick lunges for him, and he knocks Nick on the couch. Nick's mother jumps on top of him to keep him from fighting, afraid he will “kill” Mr. Jenkins. His mother is appalled at the chaos.

In the next scene, Nick and his mother are anxiously awaiting the arrival of the psychiatrist. They have planned Mabel's commitment to a psychiatric hospital. They all agree that Mabel is crazy.

She suspects their conspiracy to imprison her. She tries to reason with Nick, to reassure him that he loves her, that he didn't even hurt her when he hit her, and she loves him. "I said it [the marriage] is gonna work because I'm already pregnant." Nick tries to shut her up. Mabel won't let him shut her up. "They can't pull us apart.... We're supposed to be on the inside and them on the outside," desperately pleading with him not to abandon her. At that moment the doctor enters, blows her a kiss and says "Gee, Mabel, you're beautiful." She poignantly pleads her case: "Nobody here needs a doctor" and humorously interjects "I had the hiccups a while ago, but they're gone now.... I know I sometimes drink; I do have anxieties, but I'm a good mother, a good person—not bad nor crazy." The psychiatrist tells her there's nothing to worry about, asking Mabel if he could have a drink. Magically, Mabel's face lights up delighted, suddenly believing the unbelievable—that he is making a social call, and that he's her ally.

Nick's mother cruelly lashes out at her, screeching, "You give him nothing; you're empty inside." Mabel screams back at her. Nick's mother screams at the doctor to calm Mabel. Nick slaps his hands together violently in front of Mabel's face, and she goes into a trance. Nick holds her, frightened, and tells her he loves her. They all talk at her—"this is for your good [i.e., hospitalization]—you're sick and need it." They ignore her pleas to let her stay, to be with her children, to protect the children, and as a last resort to take her children with her. She snarls and gesticulates like a trapped wild animal, knowing she doesn't have a chance. The psychiatrist penetrates her with a hypodermic needle, and she is sedated and committed to a hospital.

Nick can't talk to his buddies about having hospitalized Mabel. He tries to stand in for her with the children, but he's not very tuned into them as children, nor as to what is appropriate for them. He screams at the kids' teacher at school; she backs off scared. He tells his kids, "I'm sorry I had to send your mother away. I'm sorry for everything."

Home from the Hospital—Six Months Later

Nick invites a crowd of friends and family to a party to celebrate Mabel's homecoming from the hospital. His mother, using the same shrill voice used to accuse Mabel six months earlier, tells him it is

wrong for him to have invited all these people. He finally agrees she is right, but can't himself tell them to leave, asking his mother to do so.

Mabel arrives in the rain, escorted by her mother and father. She looks subdued and cautious. The doctor is there and advises her, “*Don't talk about the past.*” She asks permission to see the children. Nick tells her to wait —“they'll cry ... you'll get too emotional.”

Her father out of the blue screams at Nick: “I will not stay for supper! All you ever serve is spaghetti. I hate spaghetti!” Mabel then snuggles into her father, sitting on his lap and kissing him. He reassures her in a warm and loving way. Nick watches, fearful and jealous. Her father also gets anxious and urges her to sit with her mother, saying “She needs you.” But before this can happen, Nick grabs her and leads her upstairs, trying to connect with her, which he had not done spontaneously upon her arrival. “I love you. I'm with you; there's nothing you can do wrong. Just be yourself.” He makes childish sounds, and asks her to play with him, “Give me a beh, beh.” She is hesitant, and he urges, “Give me a real beh, beh.” Here we see Nick encouraging her to be childish and playful with him, as they had been before the hospitalization.

At dinner they ask how it was for her in the hospital, but when she tells them about the daily shots and the shock treatments, and how awful it was for her, they shut her up, telling her, “*There's no sense talking about the past. Things will get better and better.*”

Mabel says kindly and innocently, “I wish you'd all go home. Nick and I want to go to bed together.” Someone says “Not in front of the children.” They ignore her request for privacy, not taking her seriously. She tries again, “Hello everyone. I wish you would all go home. Nick and I want to go to bed and talk.” Again she is dismissed. Someone says “You're tired.” She escalates to be recognized. She tells jokes. The children join in excitedly, and Nick screams, “end of jokes—end of conversations.” Chaos ensues. His mother takes a pot shot at Nick, “Look who's talking about conversation. He doesn't know how to put two words together.” Mabel tries to talk seriously about her hospital experience, and Nick shouts “stop it, stop it.” Mabel, feeling lonely and squashed by Nick, implores her father, “Dad will you stand up for me?” He, unable to understand what she's asking for, concretely interprets her request and stands

up. Although her mother understands what Mabel is asking for, she only berates her husband, and gives Mabel nothing.

All is utter chaos. Mabel stands on the couch swaying, and starts humming and gesticulating. Nick screams at her, “Get off the couch or I’ll pull you down.” Her father for one brief moment is outraged, yelling at Nick, “Leave my daughter alone, you!” but when Nick ignores him, and tells everyone to go, he leaves along with the others. One of the kids says “Leave my mother alone.” Nick threatens Mabel; she gets off the couch, gesticulates like a wild, trapped animal, and *runs into the bathroom*. Nick barges in; her hand is bleeding. Everyone is screaming. Mabel gets on the couch again and resumes her strange ballet. Nick screams, “If you don’t get off the couch, I’ll knock you down, and I don’t want to do it.” He slaps her in the face hard and knocks her down onto the floor. “I’ll kill you” he screams. He tells the kids, “Your mother is all right. She’s just resting here. Tell the kids you’re just resting” and she obeys him, echoing his words.

They all go upstairs to put the kids to bed. Mabel now calm tells her daughter, “You know you look just like your father. You’re Daddy’s girl.” Mabel then spends time with each son. The first says, “I’m worried about you, Mom.” She says, “Don’t worry about me. I’m a grown up.” He tells her “I love you, Mom,” and she replies, “I believe that,” and they kiss each other tenderly. She has a similar tender exchange of words and kisses with her second son. Nick is shown looking on apprehensive.

They are alone at last; Mabel now blames herself for all the chaos that occurred since she got home. “You know, I’m really nuts. I don’t know how this whole thing got started. I think I just got tired, you know.” He cleans and bandages her cut. She asks, “Do you love me?” He looks at her, unable or unwilling to speak. She asks again, and he responds “Let’s clean up.”

Discussion

This film exquisitely highlights domestic emotional and physical violence in the portraits of Mabel and Nick. Through the director’s lens, the process or sequence of their marriage is dramatized with nightmarlike clarity. It is evident how naive and trusting Mabel is,

even when she instinctively knows better; how starved she is for love, acceptance, and recognition; and how terrified she is of abandonment. She is narcissistically vulnerable. She is passionate in her expressions of love and of hate. She turns to men as the source of strength, security, and gratification; and expects women to be withholding and rejecting. Mother was cold and inattentive; father was warm and supportive, but inadequate to protect her from her mother.

She tells her husband what she thinks are the five most important things: love, friendship, comfort, “I’m a good mother,” and “I belong to you [Nick].” It is through her marriage to Nick that she hoped she would find the acceptance, recognition, support, and gratification that she was unable to get from her mother. It was through her marriage that she hoped to repair her damaged self and gain self-esteem as a woman. She is intensely animated, desperately longing to be seen, to be heard, to be validated.

She is unable to verbalize her anger at Nick, but gesticulates in a crazy, bizarre way, perhaps regressing to a preverbal experience of mother's lack of attunement. She believes it is her badness that causes him to act abusively. She tries very hard to be “nice” and nondemanding. She believes if she is not selfish, this will be the key to love and attachment (**Katz, 1990**). She unconsciously blames herself for her caregivers’ parenting failures and for her husband's failures.

We see that she has been prepared by her parents for a kind of sadomasochistic dance with her husband. Her mother is frightened of her, and cold to her. Her father is loving, but concrete and passive—not able to understand or respond to his daughter's need for protection from mother or from abuse by Nick. Mabel adores and idolizes her father, clinging to him as a source of power, just as she clings to Nick. Both her father and Nick oscillate between adoring and idealizing her, and rejecting, dismissing, and abandoning her. She reacts to what she is immediately presented with, not enlightened by both repeatedly disappointing her, nor able to reflect and appropriately protect herself.

Mabel doesn't trust her mother to competently care for either her children or herself. She expects that her mother will be oblivious to the pain of her children as she feels her mother was and still is dead to her pain. She unconsciously expects that the women walking

on the street will be new editions of her mother, and as such would not give her the time she is asking for. Mabel's rage at her internalized bad mother and at her real mother are projected onto these women. She demonizes them, demanding the time rather than appropriately asking them for what she needs. She treats them as extensions of herself, not as separate people. When they self-protectively ignore her, she curses them. In this very brief scene, there is a clear enactment of a pathological mother/child relationship. Mabel expects to be deprived of her needs, but feels addicted to depending on the frustrating mother. Her manner of trying to get her needs met alienates the person whom she hopes will nurture her. Her unconscious belief that no one will give her the "right time," that no one will tune into her and meet her needs, is validated.

Mabel desperately needs her children. They represent herself as a child and provide a chance for her to mother them and care for them in a way she was deprived of. She needs them to recognize, admire, love her in a way that her own mother was incapable of doing. She wants her children never to grow up. Then they will never abandon her; they are the only ones who forgive her when she's mean; they do not abuse her. Nonetheless she is attuned to their needs, and is able to access her inner strength to do what's best for them. She is able to see them as separate. Likewise, she is intent on being recognized as a person in her own right—a person who is heard and whose privacy is respected. When Nick addresses her as "Ma," she is furious, both because she is more than a mother, and because she is not Nick's "Ma."

Nick loves Mabel, but when he feels overwhelmed and confused by her he defends himself by not listening or by calling her crazy. He loves his children, but is unable to see them in terms of their own needs. He too has been deprived of good enough mothering, and longs for his wife to give him the acceptance and validation he did not get from his mother. He too is extremely vulnerable and fragile; is driven by impulse storms; thinks in childish, naive modes; and often acts on whim rather than with sound judgment. He quickly switches from love to hate, from compassion to anger and fear in relation to Mabel. For him, causes are external—"in the air." Desire is not within him nor within his lover; it is impersonal and mysterious. He is not an agent in his own life, but a victim of external forces and people.

He cannot reflect or understand that there are two worlds, two perspectives—his and hers. **Bach (1994)** discusses the ability to entertain multiple perspectives as a developmental achievement marking the transition from a primarily narcissistic orientation to an object-related one. This achievement results in a cohesive self in which good and bad parts are integrated and form part of the whole sense of one's self. Loved ones are also understood as whole persons who are both good and bad, loving and hating. Nick's inability to understand this is evidenced by his inability to deal with Mabel's anger without feeling totally trashed himself.

According to Bach (1994, p. 4) “somasochistic relations may be seen as a kind of denied or pathological mourning, a repetitive attempt to disclaim the loss or to repair it in fantasy, but an attempt that does not lead to resolution because in some dissociated part of the psyche that loss remains disavowed.” In order to have an integrated sense of self and other, the past must be remembered. When there is no past, as well as no acknowledgment of loss, there is no mourning. Without mourning there is no forgiveness of self and other, and no mastery of loss (**Klein, 1975; Loewald, 1980**).

Nick is often unable to stay separate yet empathically attuned to either himself or Mabel, especially when she expresses strong feelings of love or hatred. In his conversation with his friend, Eddy, he expresses his love, sensitivity, and understanding of her at one moment, and at the next he abruptly distances himself from her and her feelings by cruelly judging her as crazy.

The couple react to each other both as parts of themselves and as new editions of old internal objects. They engage in a somasochistic dance, representing the past internalized drama between self and mother. They struggle to gain power, gratification, and autonomy by oscillating between submitting and withdrawing; between loving playfulness and hateful threats and punishments. Nick and Mabel play out, through projective identification, their past experiences with mother, and their inner scenarios of self-mother relationship, getting the other to alternate between being the abusive mother and the abused child. So, although they both desperately seek a more nurturing replacement of the mother within, they tragically repeat over and over again with each other the familiar destructive somasochistic patterns. Yet they both pretend “all is fine no matter what,” reminiscent of Voltaire's *Candide*. As in *Candide*, disaster

is inevitable; massive denial and projection result in escalating pain and suffering for both Mabel and Nick, as well as for the children.

When Mabel does try to physically and emotionally be close to Nick, he pushes her away, in many different ways. This is his attempt to regain control and shore up his own narcissistic need to be powerful. His inability to trust Mabel and feel safe with her has roots in his experience with his harshly controlling and demanding mother from whom he has not psychically separated. Nick is impulsive and given to externalization of his own motivations, desires, and fears. He tries to please his mother, yet she sometimes unexpectedly and viciously turns on him. He loves and hates her, and transfers these split images onto his wife. He wants to be loved by Mabel, but cannot bear feeling vulnerable or guilty, emotions she frequently arouses in him. When she doesn't listen to him, he feels diminished and impotent, and at risk of being annihilated. When she doesn't submit to him but seeks the attention of other men (his co-workers, her father, her sons), he feels emasculated and becomes enraged. In both these situations, he loses control and attacks her emotionally and/or physically, thereby reaffirming his selfhood and masculinity.

Mabel's addictive inclination clues the viewer into her addictive relationship to Nick, an addiction representing a craving for what she has missed in her childhood. She craves for fulfillment from substances or persons who are seductively wonderful and promise she will experience herself as wonderful as well. These substances or people are used as substitutes for defective internalized self-soothing, self-screening, and self-regulating functions (**Joseph, 1989; McDougall, 1995**).

She creatively tries to protect, soothe, and enliven herself in other ways as well. Opera music is one way that she does this. It enlivens her, filling the emptiness within. The singing represents the emotionally attuned mother she never had, a mother alive to her. The song "Celeste Aida" moves her deeply. It is a tribute to a princess, Heavenly Aida, whose father passionately does "stand up" for his daughter, recognizing and supporting her as a woman. It is the essence of what she longs for and has never had. In addition, it is possible that opera music organizes her, temporarily quieting the chaotic "noises" and feelings inside her (**Winnicott, 1971**).

Mabel's punctuated visits to the bathroom, a room that is marked "PRIVATE," represent a safe retreat, a creative space which she uses to find herself, and to try to destroy the self she hates. It is perhaps an attempt to regress to an earlier stage, the anal stage, in which separation-individuation first occurs, along with the development of symbolization, mastery over loss, and the beginning awareness of self and other as whole, continuous people. She goes into the bathroom in order to regain a sense of control and balance, as well as a self she can live with.

Perhaps most important, it is a man that she turns to in the hope of being heard, recognized, soothed, and enlivened. Mabel is desperate to be loved and admired. She longs to be empathically heard and recognized; instead the stranger, Garson Cross, wants her to recognize and gratify him, a repetition of her relationship with Nick and her mother. She renders herself defenseless through drink—a masochistic submission to the man. Although she fights when he tries to rape her, she is no match for him, and she is overtaken and raped. Her inability to face what has happened results in a delusion that this man is Nick, her husband. Garson takes no responsibility for his abuse of Mabel and her resulting delusional state. Mabel, as well as Nick, disavows. For example, the past events and experiences with Garson as well as with Nick are either disavowed or denied. She is unable to discuss her feelings about what had happened with either of them. The refrain Mabel hears inwardly and outwardly is: "Forget the past."

After the trauma of being stood up by Nick, raped by Garson Cross, and bombarded in the morning by Nick and his 12 buddies, she provokes and receives Nick's jealous rage. She then asks Nick to tell her what he wants her to be, and she'll be it. This is her manic defense warding off feelings of helplessness and worthlessness. Mabel doesn't have the appropriate internal signal anxiety to tune into danger and effectively deal with it, and because of this she is at times flooded with annihilation anxiety (Hurvich, 1989). Nor is she always able to tune into signals from others. And even when she senses she is on a disastrous course, she continues her addictive behavior, compulsively searching for her dream of realizing narcissistic comfort and self esteem. She is naive and childlike in some ways, yet very nurturing and motherly in others. She is kind and gentle,

empathizing with anyone among the guests whom she perceives as vulnerable or abused, teased or ridiculed.

Mabel doesn't allow herself to know consciously what she unconsciously knows; her facial and vocal expressions, body movements, gestures, and words are exquisitely eloquent. They are the signs of her abuse—not yet digested nor symbolized. Under stress, she emotes, unable to reflect and register. The crazy-making behavior by her husband is never acknowledged in the equation of her crazy behavior, and he is constantly switching his reactions to her. She allows herself to be talked out of her own experience by him.

The abuse of Mabel is not limited to her family. She also suffers at the hands of the psychiatrist, a mental-health professional who is manipulative and collusive. She doesn't trust him, but the moment he asks her for a drink, she transforms, becoming the gracious, fun-loving hostess, wanting to believe he wants to have fun with her, not hurt her. He carries out an agenda based on reports from Nick and Nick's mother. He prejudices Mabel, knowing her not at all. His treatment of her is at least as cruel and abusive as the rape.

Her unconscious fantasy that her mother doesn't cherish and understand her because she is a girl is revealed in her expectation that her own daughter will be daddy's girl. She remembers her mother's rejection of her choice of husband, in terms of “I know—you can't like him because he's not your son.” I believe this can be translated to mean: “you can't like and recognize me because I'm not your son.” The oedipal implications of this are obvious, but I understand this as an oedipal rationalization for a preoedipal failure. Her passionate love of her father may then be seen as turning to father for the acceptance, recognition, and protection she lacked from mother.

Thus, although pre-oedipal issues are the primary sources of difficulty, oedipal themes also play a role in the portraits of Mabel and Nick. Mabel needs the attention, love, and recognition of men: Nick and strangers, her father and her sons. Nick becomes fearful and suspicious, even insanely jealous. He longs for his mother's love and admiration, but instead is spurned by her. His jealousy and narcissistic injury by mother result in sadistic control of Mabel. She then fragments, withdraws, and physically reacts with grimaces, noises, and gestures. He knows then that he has reached her. He is

now again powerful and manly; he sees the emotional welts he has created. Now, feeling stronger, he tries to reassure her that she is good and has done nothing wrong. Mabel is also jealous and enraged by Nick's attachment to his mother, as well as to her mother, expressed in both instances nonverbally by grimaces, gestures, and sometimes noises.

Mabel cannot accept her own aggressive, hateful side. She has chosen a husband upon whom to project her own unacceptable parts. She provokes him to get angry; he then abuses her and she can feel the victim and enjoy the nobility of that position (**Valenstein, 1973**). She trusted him—they married because she was pregnant—and she naively believed and still believes he will give her what she wants and needs, even though he repeatedly disappoints her.

When the internal good mother is not well developed, as with Mabel, she then may know she makes poor choices in her mate. Yet, there is something compelling about continuing the destructive pattern. In most cases the woman feels “if she just holds onto the old pattern a little longer, why surely the paradisiacal feeling she seeks will appear in the next heartbeat” (**Estes, 1992**).

Mabel's addictions to men, drinking, and smoking are unsuccessful efforts to nurture and comfort herself, to feel good, acceptable, and whole. She does not have a stable or clear sense of herself, her inner conflicts, or her feelings and thoughts. Much of the time she takes on the masochistic role of accepting abuse in order to maintain her attachment and avoid abandonment (**Katz, 1990**). The tyranny of silence or of condemnation (by her mother, Nick's mother, Nick, and the psychiatrist) leads her to fragment, make faces, gesticulate, mimic—all desperate attempts to find a self that is felt and responded to, not treated as invisible. When this fails, she tries to gain some sense of relief by cutting herself—a suicidal gesture. Through pain she can feel herself as someone. And through cutting or killing herself, she hopes to realize the unconscious fantasy of separating from and destroying the internal bad, destructive object—whether that be the “dead, unresponsive mother” (**Green, 1986**) or the “demon father-lover” (**Kavaler-Adler, 1993**). It is tragic that the psychiatrist was unaware of his own anxieties about women; he participates with Mabel's husband in an action rather than engaging in a reflection that could have helped. The husband's phallic

mother and the psychiatrist protect the husband. It is Nick's fear of being engulfed and tyrannized by his mother that is projected onto Mabel; she then must be controlled. The fantasy shared by Nick, his mother, and the psychiatrist is that Mabel is the dangerous, feminine woman who could engulf and destroy. She must be put away.

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