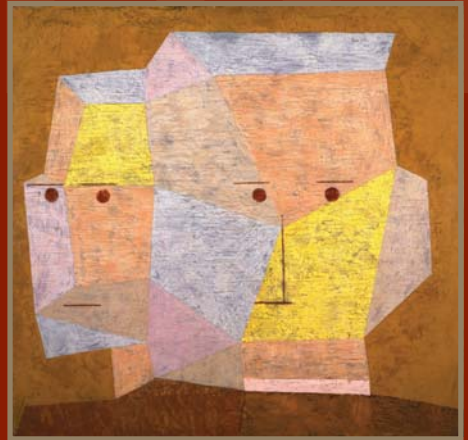


risking difference

identification, race, and community



in
contemporary
fiction
and
feminism



jean wyatt

Risking Difference

SUNY series in Psychoanalysis and Culture
Henry Sussman, editor

and

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Risking Difference

*Identification, Race, and Community
in Contemporary Fiction and Feminism*

Jean Wyatt

State University of New York Press

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*In the individual's mental life
someone else is invariably involved,
as a model, as an object, as a helper, as an opponent;
and so from the very first,
individual psychology, in this extended but
entirely justifiable sense of the words,
is at the same time social psychology.*

—Sigmund Freud
Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego

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Introduction

I Want to Be You

“Don’t you mean, ‘I Want to Be *Like* You?’” a rational friend asked when she read the title of this introduction. No: identification as I use the term in these pages is less deliberate, less conscious, less discriminating than the selective imitation of the other implied by the modest phrasing of “I want to be like you.” “I want to be you,” in its grammatical and logical impossibility, captures the global nature of the desire to become the other, to replace the other—a desire that, I will argue, undergirds everyday structures of feeling like envy and idealization. By identification I mean a confusion of self and other, impelled by the (usually) unconscious desire to be the other. For example, a spectator who watches an iceskater or a basketball player tenses his or her muscles in sympathy with the athlete’s moves, losing for a moment the distinction between his or her own body and that of the other (Sandler 25).¹ A woman who looks at a catalog and sees a beautiful dress clothing a perfect body experiences a momentary confusion of her own image with that of the model—and, of course, buys the dress in an effort to make that momentary specular confusion a reality. In this book I analyze common interpersonal emotional dynamics that I claim are founded on such identifications. The quality of the totalizing identifications in part I is suggested by the spectator’s holistic identification with the athlete’s body in the example cited above; in part I’s three chapters on envy and primary identification, the subject takes in the other as a whole, according to the wish to be her: no fine distinctions, no halfway measures, no selective discriminations here. Part II involves identifications based on a visual negotiation suggested by the second example above, in which the catalog shopper confuses her own self-representation with that of the

model. Idealization and interpellation involve a visual appropriation of the other's image, as in Lacan's model of imaginary identification. The identifications in parts I and II cause trouble, both psychic and social, immobilizing desire and/or preventing the recognition of the other as subject. Part III focuses on the ways that the same problematic dynamics operate unacknowledged in multiethnic communities. Picking up the analysis of how power and identification work in community from earlier chapters, I argue in part III that a psychoanalytic understanding of such processes can not only uncover some of the sources of these unexamined tensions, but also suggest political correctives to them.

I would not wish to remain long with the impression produced by my introductory examples that identification is always temporary, fleeting. Rather, adults easily fall into such global identifications with the other because of a long habit of identification. Identifications with others prove both deep and lasting, causing changes in one's behavior, motivations, and self-representation as one molds oneself to resemble the admired model. Summing up the current psychoanalytic consensus, Laplanche and Pontalis state without qualification that "it is by means of a series of identifications that the personality is constituted and specified" (205). If identification is thus constitutive, and if earlier wishes and modes of thinking persist in the unconscious, as psychoanalysis tells us they do, then, I argue, the desire to be the other remains a motivating force in human relations throughout life.

It is of course Freud who gave us our basic understanding of identification as the primary relation to the other. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* he claims that identification is the first emotional tie: a baby wants to "be" the parent initially; only later does she or he develop the desire to "have" the parent as a love object (105). And, operating on the basis of an oral logic, the infant imagines becoming the parent by devouring him or her. To deal with adult versions of primary identification I expand Freud's insights past the infantile model by consulting various Lacanian theories of identification. Because Lacan's thinking is marked, as Jacques Alain-Miller said of him in a recent talk, by the conviction that "the subjective link with the Other is originary . . . [that there is] an essential connectedness to the Other, a fundamental dependency on the Other" (ALL), Lacan seems to have worked and reworked the model of primary identification proposed by Freud.² In chapter 1 I adopt Lacan's model of envy as the desire to be

an other who appears to possess a fullness of being and heightened vitality that the subject lacks. Two Lacanian paradigms of parent-child relations, the parental structure of demand and the hysterical structure of identification with the desire of the Other, enable me to explore the origins of damaging identifications in the family (chapters 2 and 3). I claim that these concepts represent Lacan's transformations of Freud's primary identification between family members into fully articulated psychic and intersubjective structures. It is my own private speculation that Lacan—like me, like all of us who try to theorize identification—was fascinated by the mystery of how the other can be internal to the self, by the puzzle that we appear to be free-standing, self-enclosed autonomous individuals, yet the other is always already imbricated in us.

It is Lacan's more widely recognized paradigm of imaginary identification that founds my theories of idealization and interpellation in part II. As a transaction in the visual field only, imaginary identification differs from the totalizing, prespecular merger of self and other in primary identification. Imaginary identification, Lacan says, is "the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (*Écrits* 2). The first identification takes place at the mirror: the child sees in the mirror image an ideal of bodily unity and assumes identity with it; and this process "will be the source of secondary identifications" (*Écrits* 2). Having seen "his form materialized, whole, [only in] a mirage of himself, outside himself" (S I 140), the subject will ever after seek an idealized image "outside himself," in the form of the other and strive to assimilate it to his own image. At first glance, this visual style of identification would seem to be less invasive, less a violation of the other's autonomy than the Freudian model of primary identification. But this form of identification blocks recognition of the other as a separate subject, too. In order to shore up the illusion of a coherent, unified identity, Lacan writes, the subject identifies with "the empty form of the other's body" (S I 170). To reduce the other to an empty form is to denude him or her of subjectivity.³

Part III examines the play of identification within multicultural feminist communities. I argue that the often unconscious desire to identify with, to *be*, the racialized other, produces a number of the misrecognitions that complicate race relations among feminists. Contemporary feminist theorists of identification like Diana Fuss and Doris Sommer, seizing on the seemingly inescapable conclusion to be drawn from both Freudian and Lacanian paradigms that identification involves

an assimilation of the other to the self and thus a violation of the other's autonomous subjectivity, have warned against any attempt to use identification as a political tool for bridging race or class difference. Thus Fuss points out "the imperializing character of many cross-cultural identifications" and Sommer warns that "identification is a murderous trope that reduces two to one, . . . the calamitous dismissal of politics by feeling" (Fuss 8; Sommer 22). Yet a psychoanalytic rethinking of feminist community such as I attempt in chapters 1, 4, and 7 has to start from a recognition that pointing out the dangers of identification may not be enough. Making identifications with admired others is an inevitable consequence of the discrepancy between the desire of the subject for fullness of being and the inevitable gaps and instabilities of identity that Lacan describes so well. "What we have then," as Jannis Stavrakakis elegantly puts it, 'is not identities but identifications, . . . a play between identity and its failure, a deeply political play. . . . Instead of identity politics we should speak of identification politics' (29, 30).⁴

It is most often white feminists who voice admiring identifications with feminists of color: here identification carries with it the convenient, though unintentional, effect of erasing the power differential between whites and women of color. That can have real-world political consequences, as an example drawn from the classroom will illustrate. In her women's studies classes, Sonia Kruks writes, white students often identify so strongly with the experiences of women of color in the texts they read that they overlook their own structural implication in racist systems. "It is as if they were personally exonerated from white racism by virtue of the depth of their empathy" and the intensity of their outrage at racism. In this situation, "vicariously 'becoming' women of color" replaces the need to examine the realities of their own positions in a social structure organized by race privilege and oppression (158)—or to think of giving up the benefits they derive from that structure. I argue that in feminist communities cross-race identification can have similar political effects.

Then, too, as Iris Marion Young has argued, communities, like individuals, tend to strive toward unity and identification, toward a solidarity that eclipses difference. In part III I cross disciplinary boundaries to invoke the theories of standpoint epistemologists Sandra Harding and Paula Moya and feminist political theorists Seyla Benhabib and Iris Marion Young to help me explore two competing needs of a pluralistic community: on the one hand, hearing what the other says in her own

terms requires temporarily adopting her perspective; on the other hand, hearing what the other says in her own terms requires some corrective to the imaginary tendency to draw the other into identification and so confuse her perspective (and interests) with one's own. Chapter 7 explores a range of identificatory modes in social groups in order to theorize policies and institutional structures that might correct for the tendency to reduce difference to the same, yet allow for a temporary and partial identification with the other's standpoint.

IDENTIFICATION AND CULTURE: GENDER, RACE, AND INTERPELLATION IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION

As a psychological process, identification functions as a conduit of values from culture to individual; as a conceptual tool, therefore, identification theory mediates between the fields of psychoanalysis and cultural studies. Identification processes may be largely unconscious, but that does not mean they are outside the reach of culture. One identifies with what one wants to be, and what one wants to be is inevitably influenced by cultural definitions of desirability. My chapter 5 is devoted to interpellation, to exploring answers to the question that feminists since Simone de Beauvoir have often asked: What makes a woman actively desire to embrace the culture's gender definition as her own? And the literary texts in each chapter dramatize the ways that race, class, and culture shape women's identifications, making a mockery of the supposed antinomy between psychoanalysis and cultural studies: For how can desire and identification be separated from power relations, or the individual psyche from cultural formations?

The figures one chooses for identification are "already framed and constituted in a broader sociality," as Sara Ahmed has said (31). So, for example, Jadine in Morrison's *Tar Baby*, an African-American woman trying to succeed in the world of fashion, identifies both with a white Western model of beauty and with a figure who embodies an African ideal of womanliness; that contradiction reflects her social position, torn between two cultures. And Denver in Morrison's *Beloved* not only identifies with her mother's traumatic past, but also identifies at the level of the body with the collective trauma of slavery. Her hysterical deaf-muteness would seem to enclose her within the confines of her own body and disconnect her from the social world, but I argue that her exile from language is a symptom of

history, that it enacts the damage inflicted on her ancestors by the culture of slavery.

Identification in the fictions I study here often traps women in cultural stereotypes of femininity. In chapter 5 I theorize interpellation, “the process whereby a social representation is accepted and absorbed by an individual as her (or his) own representation,” to borrow Teresa de Lauretis’s definition (12). I extrapolate three forms of interpellation from Lacan’s notions of the mirror, the screen, and the gaze. First, I analyze female viewers’ mirror identifications with culturally endorsed figures of femininity on the cinematic screen (a form of interpellation that feminist film theorists of spectatorship have discussed extensively).⁵ The screen comes into play in Angela Carter’s *The Magic Toyshop* and Anne Tyler’s *Saint Maybe*: the characters regard themselves and each other through a superimposed screen of cultural stereotypes. Last, through a reading of Margaret’s Drabble’s *Jerusalem the Golden* I trace the effects of desire for a gaze that is forever elusive—effects that include the reproduction of feminine glamour.

While these fictions portray identification as a tool of gender interpellation, identification can also provide inspiration for breaking free of conventional gender ideology. Given the logic of identification, it is not surprising that women would embrace identification as a way to shed the constraints of femininity. Gender identifications are always imbricated in power relations and, I want to argue, in the desire for power. Either a woman can believe a patriarchal culture’s false promise that if she successfully parades her desirability she will attract a man and thus gain the only power that counts—power over the man who loves her—and therefore adopt the current version of attractive femininity as her own. Or, restive with the lack of power imposed on her by conventional definitions of femininity, she might identify in order to experience firsthand a stronger, more liberated identity. The desire to be Zenia, a figure who seemingly escapes social constraints altogether, drives the actions of the three protagonists in Atwood’s *The Robber Bride*. On the one hand, identification with Zenia arrests all three in fantasies of absolute power and jouissance. On the other hand, dealing with the envy and aggressivity that their primitive identifications with Zenia arouse in them teaches all three to accept a range of feelings previously outlawed by their own “good girl” ideology. And confronting those unruly emotions leads them to question the costs to community of subscribing to the ideal of sisterhood and

to formulate a broader ethic of care, one that makes room for envy and ambivalence between women.

Some of Sandra Cisneros's short stories offer an optimistic vision of identification as a means toward individual growth and change. For example, Cleófilas, a Mexican woman in "Woman Hollering Creek," identifies with Felice, a Chicana whose stance on the border between Mexican and American culture gives her the flexibility to play with and recombine various cultures' gender roles. Identification here provides a short-cut to difference, allowing Cleófilas to experience, if only for a moment, how it feels to be another kind of woman and so break the hold of (what Cisneros presents as) the Mexican cultural imperative to be one kind of woman only. Yet such is the slippery nature of identification that conscious, voluntaristic identifications with a subversive gender model can be undermined by unconscious identifications. In Cisneros's "Never Marry a Mexican" the protagonist Clemencia throws all her conscious energy into resisting the cultural pressures to be a mother, disidentifying with her cultural mothers, La Virgen de Guadalupe and La Malinche as well as disidentifying with her blood mother; she chooses to identify instead with an icon of aggressive masculinity. Yet she identifies unconsciously and involuntarily but decisively with, precisely, a mother—the wife of her lover Drew.

RACE, IDENTIFICATION, AND COMMUNITY: EXTENDING LACAN'S THREE REGISTERS TO THE POLITICAL

Whether psychoanalysis is capable of expanding to deal with issues of race—and with social issues generally—has been the subject of recent debate. Because Lacanian psychoanalysis operates by means of universalizing structures, it has been accused, with some justice, of "imagin[ing] subjectivity hermetically sealed off from other informing discourses and practices" such as race (Spillers, "All the Things" 142). Since Lacanian "discourse collapses the social into a symbolic register that is always everywhere the same" (Abel, "Race" 185), it tends to exclude the influence of specific cultures and specific historical moments on subjects.⁶ Yet I find Lacanian psychoanalysis to be most useful when it is joined to specific cultural discourses, such as discourses of race in the United States.

In parts II and III of this book, I adapt Lacan's three registers—the imaginary, the symbolic and the real—to social and political uses, including an analysis of race relations between feminists. Briefly stated,

the imaginary is the realm of the visual and of dual relations. Imaginary experience is rooted in the subject's relation to images, in the first instance the image of his or her own body and the image of the other; imaginary relations with the other are governed by dual structures like identification, envy, and aggressivity, which rest on the assumption of a fundamental interchangeability of self and other. The symbolic is the dimension of language and social order; it is the categories and structures of the symbolic that organize our experience and our understanding of the world. The Lacanian real is not the material world, but rather that which is excluded from the symbolic order: it is there, in the external world, but it escapes symbolic categories and so cannot be explained, cannot be made to yield meaning. In human experience, real, symbolic, and imaginary processes are of course always intertwined; I separate them artificially for purposes of analysis.

Race is discursively produced, a function of socially determined categories that "shape human difference in certain seemingly predetermined ways," as Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks says (4). Race belongs, then, to the symbolic order of language and social structure. But the discourse of race imprints its meanings on bodies; racial hierarchies work themselves out in a field of corporeal visibility. As a regime of visual imaging, the system of racial difference depends for its effects on the imaginary.⁷ In chapter 4, I explore the nature of imaginary identification across race lines.⁸ The comments of some prominent white feminist critics—Elizabeth Abel, Jane Gallop, Tania Modleski, and Jane Stembridge—attribute to certain black women a liberated self-containment and authority that they seem to wish they possessed. Because of their emphasis on the visualized corporeal aspects of the other woman's presence, these admiring identifications seem to me to be founded on the imaginary processes that Lacan traces back to the mirror stage. The hallmark of imaginary identification is the perception of the other as a coherent whole, self-complete and self-possessed. As can be seen in the passages I cite from these white women's texts, the process of identifying with the seeming wholeness of the other woman reduces her to an illusory self-consistency, obscuring the actuality of her complex, multifaceted subjectivity. Black feminist theorists Ann duCille, Deborah McDowell, and Valerie Smith speak back from their own texts, thus refusing to be reified as icons of personal strength and self-possession and reestablishing their complexity as subjects. So there is the beginning of a dialogue—but less a dialogue than a

sequence of “scripts of confession” on the part of the white women and “scripts of accusation” on the part of the black women.⁹

Chapter 7 extends the discussion of feminist politics begun in chapters 1 and 4 to explore how imaginary, symbolic and real modes of identification play out in feminist multicultural communities. How does the real function in community? How could community structures effectively mobilize symbolic processes? I approach the answers to these questions through readings of Cherrie Moraga’s “From a Long Line of *Vendidas*” and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*. I argue that a conscious acceptance of the real as it functions in a multicultural community to thwart identification, and the deliberate institution of procedures to encourage dialogues governed by the symbolic, could work against the imaginary tendency to see in the other a replica of oneself or to assign to her an idealized difference. It might then be possible to make a partial identification with the cultural other that would enable one to perceive things from her point of view while continuing to respect her differences.

What is at stake here is the hope for a functional multicultural community, a subject explored in chapter 7. For if one does not identify with the cultural other to some degree, how can one be in a position to hear her point of view, to perceive things from her perspective, to see how things look if one stands in her shoes? The trick is to modulate the totalizing tendency of identification, to put into practice the idea of identifying “to a degree.” As Abdul JanMohamed articulates such a nuanced identification, “a greater awareness of *potential* identity” could produce an “openness to the Other” while preserving “a heightened sense of the concrete socio-politico-cultural differences between self and other” (93). In rethinking community, and in particular feminist multicultural community, the emphasis has to remain on the cautionary terms—on the “potential” for identification, on a “partial” identification with the other.

CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSIONS OF IDENTIFICATION

Since identification is central to human development, the literature on identification is enormous.¹⁰ For purposes of locating the present text in the contemporary critical conversation, I will sort current theories of identification into two lines of descent from Freud’s two major paradigms of identification: primary identification and identification as a melancholy compensation for object loss. Some of the confusion around

identification—but perhaps also the fruitfulness of the concept—stems from Freud's own vacillation between these two models. In "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) Freud defines identification as a process that preserves in the internal world a love object lost in external reality. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) however, Freud argues that identification is primary: the desire to be the parent precedes object love—and thus necessarily the loss of the object. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923) the reader can see Freud wobbling between the two paradigms. He begins chapter 3 with a definition of identification as the introjection into the ego of a lost object (28) and then, on pages 29 and 30, teeters back and forth several times between a definition of identification as the first emotional tie to an other and a definition of identification as a compensation for object loss—hence a sequel to object love rather than its predecessor. (See Mitchell *Relational* 48–51; also Borch-Jacobsen, *Freudian* 215–16.) Freud ends this vacillation with an endorsement of identification as primary: identification with the parent "is not the consequence or outcome of an object-cathexis; it is a direct and immediate identification and takes place earlier than any object-cathexis" (31).¹¹

What Freud was trying to protect or preserve by worrying this problem, why it mattered to him which comes first—identification or desire—is not of concern here. What is relevant is that those contemporary theorists who take as their point of departure the idea of identification as a melancholic compensation for lost love arrive at a very different place from those who begin with the concept of identification as primary. Recently, feminist theorists and queer theorists—perhaps following the lead of French theorists Julia Kristeva and Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok—have focused on the second Freudian explanation of identification as a process that preserves a loved and lost object by making it part of the ego. Julia Kristeva theorizes melancholy as the result of a subject's unwillingness to give up the originary relation with a parent who is still undifferentiated from the self—the maternal "Thing," in Kristeva's words, not yet distinct as "mother"; the melancholic inscribes that primary preobject within, focusing her or his hatred and love on it. Abraham and Torok distinguish between introjection, which acknowledges the object as lost and deals with the loss through a modified identification, and incorporation, in which the lost object is "encrypted" within, preserved within an (imagined) space set aside for it in the body.¹² In the texts of both Kristeva and Abraham and Torok, the refusal to acknowledge loss results in the failure to enter

language fully—for words originate in the child's need to substitute a symbol for the maternal body, and in the case of encryption the mother is not lost.

Judith Butler and Diana Fuss creatively use the notion of melancholic identification to undergird a series of psychological processes. In *The Psychic Life of Power* Butler theorizes “gender identification [as] a kind of melancholy” based on the ego's incorporation of the forbidden love object, the same-sex parent (132). Because of the cultural taboo on homosexuality, the prohibited love for the same-sex parent cannot be recognized and therefore cannot be properly mourned; rather, the same-sex object is incorporated. Identification then replaces object love, as in Freud's theory of melancholia; and normative gender identity is established on a melancholic base—a base fraught, then, with the pathologies described by Abraham and Torok and Kristeva. Butler also analyzes political identifications. She questions identity politics by urging us to examine what is excluded when an identification is formed: any gender identification or political identification is constituted and secured by excluding other identities that return to haunt it; every insistence on a disidentification—I am not that—may hide an identification that has already been made and so must be disavowed (*Bodies That Matter* 111–19). While Butler does not advocate the resurrection of all excluded identifications, the complexity and resulting instability of identifications that she emphasizes opens up the possibility of “innovative dissonances” within the subject that can contest the fixity of gender and political positions (*Gender Trouble* 67).

In *Identification Papers* Diana Fuss states categorically that “all identification begins in an experience of traumatic loss and in the subject's tentative attempts to manage this loss” (38). But the range of identificatory paradigms covered by her book belies that emphatic closure: successive chapters deal with hysterical identification, oral incorporation, and the political uses of identification as a colonizing tool. Throughout, Fuss critiques Freud's repeated insistence that desire and identification “are structurally independent of each other” as a defense against allowing homosexuality legitimacy. At every turn, she says, Freud twisted theory to guard against “the possibility for new forms of identification to generate ever proliferating and socially unmanageable forms of desire” (67, 72).¹³

In the 1990s spokespersons for various marginalized groups sought to redeem melancholia from the standard pathological model of a

“desperate” alternative that prevents healing (Schafer, 154–55) and reclaim it as an effective political weapon. Philip Novak, for example, argues that the losses sustained by African-American culture warrant a grieving that never ends, a constant memorialization of losses that keeps faith with the past. Writing on *Sula*, Novak says, “[Toni] Morrison’s efforts to transform mourning into melancholia are paradoxically therapeutic” (191). Michael Moon recommends that gay men respond to the catastrophes of AIDS by preserving the dead and their erotic attachments to them. As José Muñoz sums it up, “For blacks and queers . . . melancholia [is] not a pathology or a self-absorbed mood that inhibits activism, but . . . a mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead to the various battles we must wage in their names” (355–56). In an even-handed assessment of such adaptations of melancholia to political ends, Greg Forter comments: “These authors help remind us that to establish a universal pattern of mourning and enjoin all victims of loss to follow it is to erase the particularities of lived experience, and often to delegitimize continued attachment to what a dominant culture deems unimportant or pernicious.” On the other hand, Forter points out that melancholia is by definition an unconscious process that actually blocks the conscious memory of the lost person, not least “because it confuses self and other and so makes it hard for the other to become an object of memory or consciousness”; it is mourning rather than melancholy identification that would allow a full articulation of “what racism or homophobia or sexism has destroyed [so] that we can build a collective memory of it and seek to do battle in its name” (138–39).

Anne Cheng’s innovative *Melancholy of Race* plots the intersections of race and several models of identification. The race melancholia that gives the book its title originates in the contradictory mandate of assimilation. Racialized subjects are enjoined to assimilate to “Americanness,” but since after all “Americanness” means whiteness, bodies marked Asian are denied assimilation. “Because of the built-in impediment of racial difference, the prospect of assimilation for the ‘Asian’ is fraught with potential failure, shame, and humiliation, not to mention the threatening indictments of self-denial and self-beratement” (69). Those subjected to the pathogenic doctrine of assimilation encrypt not a lost beloved, as in the Freudian model, but “an impossible ideal” together with “a denigrated self” (72).¹⁴

Those critics who make their point of departure primary identification tend to emphasize, as I do, identification as an end in itself and the desire to identify as an ongoing motive force.¹⁵ Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen argues that identification is the subject's primary desire. Elaborating Freud's argument in *Group Psychology* that identification is the first emotional tie to the other, Borch-Jacobsen contends that "the ego . . . is born" through mimesis—a formation of the self as a copy of the other, as an incarnation of the other. And "the 'other' whose identity is incorporated . . . sinks into an oblivion that precedes memory and representation, . . . and it is 'myself'" (*Emotional Tie* 60). Borch-Jacobsen thus answers in the most radical way the enigma that I posed earlier: How is it that the other is always already imbricated in, internal to, the self? According to him, the self is from the beginning radically other to itself. If the other is the foundation of the self, human beings can no longer be thought to be coherent and self-identical.¹⁶

Most useful to my study of adult identifications is Borch-Jacobsen's point that this primal fantasy—I am the other—leaves a legacy of desire for identification. "Desire . . . does not aim essentially at acquiring, possessing, or enjoying an object; it aims . . . at a subjective identity. Its basic verb is 'to be,' not 'to have'" (*Freudian* 28). While Borch-Jacobsen's view of desire may be incomplete (for surely the desire "to have" also generates fantasies? Otherwise how would the business of marrying and having children get on? to say nothing of consumer capitalism) his emphasis on the desire for identification explains the basis of many adult fantasies. As I will argue, envy, idealization, and interpellation are based on the desire to be the one "whom one wishes to equal, to replace, to be" (*Freudian* 28).¹⁷

Theorists who consider identification to be motivated by a primary desire to be the other rather than by loss tend to see identification as part of ongoing relationships within the family. Thus Roy Schafer understands identifications with parental figures as both an essential element of a child's development and a means of enriching parent-child love relationships.¹⁸ Jessica Benjamin continues this tradition of understanding identification as a relational process linked to other relational processes: "Identification is not merely an internal process, it is also a kind of relationship"; "to 'be' something, to act it in one's own body, is . . . a crucial mechanism of maintaining closeness" (*Like Subjects* 124, 65). Defying Freud's vigilant separation of identification and object love,

Benjamin posits the existence of identificatory love: for the son, identification with the father is a means not just of securing recognition and gender identity; it is also “a special erotic relationship,” a love relationship with his ideal (*Like Subjects* 124). And daughters yearn to have their identificatory love for the father affirmed and encouraged. In *Like Subjects, Love Objects* Benjamin addresses some of the same questions of identification and difference as the present work, albeit from an object relations rather than a Lacanian perspective.¹⁹

While the theorists surveyed above focus primarily on Freudian models of identification, my analytic framework is Lacanian. Kaja Silverman also theorizes from a Lacanian perspective and her work, like mine, focuses on the social implications of identificatory processes. Silverman’s development of “heteropathic identification” in *Threshold of the Visible World* is a welcome reminder that identification can have positive effects. Following Max Scheler, Silverman labels heteropathic an identification through which one goes over to the other’s position rather than assimilating the other to the self. My theory of partial identification has affinities with that model. Yet when Silverman suggests that idealization can provide the vehicle for such a heteropathic identification, I disagree. Starting from the same Lacanian assumption that I do in chapter 4—that idealization is a process conditioned by the original idealization and appropriation of the mirror image—Silverman arrives at a conclusion diametrically opposed to mine. While Silverman wants to encourage the idealization of African-American bodies in order to reverse their abjection in contemporary culture, I try to demonstrate through example how white idealizations of black women unintentionally erase them as subjects, arousing interracial resentment and misunderstanding.

Like Benjamin and Schafer, I take as my point of departure the notion that identification occurs with someone who is there and loved rather than with someone who is loved and lost; and with Borch-Jacobsen, I assert that identification is desired as an end in itself rather than as a compensation for loss. But while these three theorists’ concern with disputing, developing, or revising Freud’s theories leads them to focus on infancy and early childhood, I am more interested in following the workings of identification in adult relationships. I argue that if identification is the primary means by which the ego is constituted, then identification likely continues as the unconscious ground of many adult dynamics, such as those involved in envy and idealization. Because all of us live in communities—and increasingly in multicultural communi-

ties—it is important to recognize how identification figures in interpersonal processes where it has not been recognized, in particular how it distorts cross-race communications and how it plays out in the complex interactions between women in multicultural feminist communities.

THE SEQUENCE OF CHAPTERS

The three chapters of part I explore some of the complex ways that identification tangles with, enhances, blocks or reroutes desire. Chapter 1 discusses the dynamics of envy in feminist community, drawing on studies of contemporary academic feminists and the portrayal of a female support group in Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*. Lacan's model of envy as an identification with a figure who appears to be complete, to preserve the object intact, enables me to analyze both academic feminists' (muffled) envy of female superstars who appear to possess fame and the three protagonists' envy of Zenia in *The Robber Bride*. The novel dramatizes the force of envy: Tony's, Charis's, and Roz's desire to be Zenia is more powerful even than sexual desire, romantic love, and self-preservation. I argue that the feminist ethic of mutual support would serve women better, more realistically, if it were expanded to acknowledge feelings of envy and ambivalence between women.

Chapter 2 formulates a Lacanian structure for understanding how parental demand perpetuates primary identification between parent and child. In Seminar X Lacan describes the "structure of demand" that creates a neurotic subject: the parent takes the child as his or her object *a*, as an extension of self that will complete him or her. D. H. Lawrence's classic *The Rainbow* illustrates the Lacanian paradigm of demand, showing how the parental need for identification immobilizes a child's desire at the point of the parent's desire. In Carolyn Kay Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman* class loyalty cements a daughter's primary identification with her mother. And the text itself vividly dramatizes the effects of excessive parent-child identification on the grown-up child's consciousness: this is Carolyn Steedman's autobiography, but it foregrounds her mother's desires and needs, to the exclusion of the autobiographer's own.

Race complicates a similar structure of primary identification in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, discussed in chapter 3: Sethe's maternal bond with her one surviving daughter Denver is "too thick" largely as the result of a perverse social system, slavery. Denver's hysterical symptom,

deaf-muteness, literalizes and reifies Lacan's notion that "man's desire is the desire of the Other": the paralysis of mouth and ear express not Denver's own desire (which is for language), but her mother's desire that the family story of suffering and murder not be told, not be heard. Denver's hysteria "transforms the body into a textual utterance" (Fuss 116), as does any hysterical symptom: the symptom tells a story that is barred from language. But Denver's body, in thus confusing the linguistic and the corporeal, also tells a larger story: the unarticulated—and unarticulatable—history of slavery. Like Denver, the narrative itself exhibits some of the symptoms of trauma survivors: gaps in chronology, failed metaphors and silences testify to Morrison's own identification with the collective trauma of her slave ancestors.

The models of idealization and interpellation I construct in part II are derived from Lacan's notion of identification as an appropriation of the other's visual form. Idealization, I propose in chapter 4, functions largely through the ideal ego; formed through the assimilation of an idealized image of coherence external to the subject, the ideal ego continues to function throughout adult life as it did during the mirror stage, idealizing a human form external to itself and "assuming [that] image" as a part of itself (*Écrits* 2). The African-American woman Jadine in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* is fixated on the ideal ego and is prone to identifications with idealized figures, including an African woman who appears to Jadine to be a model of self-completion and racial authenticity. I juxtapose her idealization of a black woman with several white feminists' idealizations of black women, arguing that race makes a difference in idealization: white women can idealize black women with impunity, ignoring the material conditions that attach to being black in the United States and so feeling no pressure to change the way they themselves live. Jadine's idealizing identification with a black woman, on the other hand, threatens the material and psychic benefits she receives from her successful assimilation to whiteness. The white feminists whose comments I cite appear to be idealizing in Lacanian fashion, seeing in the other an idealized fullness of being that they lack. The misrecognitions and misunderstandings that result demonstrate the dangers to feminist community posed by the impulse to perceive the other in terms of one's own need for an ideal self-possession.

Chapter 5, on interpellation, focuses on the various ways that identifications in the visual field lure women into embracing femininity. The chapter theorizes three kinds of interpellation which persuade a

woman to assume the cultural representation of woman as her own self-representation. First, the imaginary: the construction of the ego in the mirror stage, through a process of identifying with an externalized corporal image, makes the subject susceptible to mirroring identifications with the idealized figures of masculinity and femininity on the screens of television and cinema. A second model, which foregrounds symbolic identifications in the visual field, builds on Kaja Silverman's premise (in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*) that the screen Lacan introduces in Seminar XI, the screen through which others gaze at the subject, is a cultural screen. The third and largest section of chapter 5 considers the paradoxical effects of the subject's desire for the real in the form of the gaze. The desire to captivate a forever elusive gaze inspires various poses that, inevitably, mimic the version of glamour that has cultural currency. My analysis of fictions by Sandra Cisneros, Anne Tyler, Angela Carter, and Margaret Drabble ties the identificatory processes associated with mirror, screen and gaze to the specific gender discourses of Britain, Mexico, and the United States.

Chapter 6 deals with three short stories by Sandra Cisneros which try out three different strategies for disemboweling deeply embedded gender identifications. In "Never Marry a Mexican" Clemencia tries to free herself from limiting identifications with both her mother and her cultural mothers, La Malinche and La Virgen de Guadalupe, through disidentification—and that strategy does not work. A better liberatory method, according to Cisneros's "Little Miracles, Kept Promises," is to reconstruct gender icons so you can live with them: Rosario uses the flexibility of a border perspective to understand La Virgen de Guadalupe as herself multiple and contradictory; and that allows her to identify with a redefined Guadalupe, a model of various disparate womanly strengths. In "Woman Hollering Creek," identification itself provides escape from gender constraints.

Chapter 7 picks up the discussion of feminist politics begun in chapters 1 and 4 to speculate on how dialogues across race lines might become more fruitful. My readerly "dialogues" with texts by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa are meant to suggest how the real and the symbolic might function in the more embodied conversations of a multicultural feminist community. Through my own (Anglo) reading of Cherríe Moraga's autobiographical text, "From a Long Line of *Vendidas*," I model a cross-cultural conversation where the symbolic dominates, foregrounding difference. While imaginary identification depends on a

visual perception of the other as a perfect whole that one appropriates in order to be whole oneself, it is more difficult to see the other as a unified entity when two persons speak—or, as in the present case, when I register my responses to a self-revealing autobiographical text—because new and different aspects of the speaker are revealed over time. Extrapolating from individual exchange to community, I explore the question: Are there ways to institute formal procedures in a community that would enhance the symbolic dimension of communication and thus mitigate—if never completely control—the totalizing tendencies of imaginary identification?

And I argue that certain passages in Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*—those in dense and difficult Spanish—resist the non-Spanish-speaking reader's attempt to understand, making an implicit statement that there are limits to what Anzaldúa cares to reveal about her own culture. To the non-Spanish speaker these passages function as the real: they remain opaque to meaning; they resist absolutely integration into the monolingual reader's symbolic system. The "real," understood as a resistance like Anzaldúa's to being completely known, could function in community as a reminder that social differences cannot be completely understood, that difference must be acknowledged and respected (Sommer 4, 27). Were such protections against the takeover of identification to be instituted in cross-race alliances, perhaps identification could be modulated so that one could identify temporarily with the other's perspective without usurping or distorting it.

In an appendix, I shift perspective altogether to view identification from the vantage point of relational psychoanalysis and more particularly from the standpoint of infant research. Responding to the claim of infant researchers like Daniel Stern that primary identification between mother and baby does not exist and that internalization is irrelevant to psychic development, I map out how identification processes would function within the neurobiological framework of infant research analysis. Provisionally adopting the notion of neuronal networks as the basis of subject formation, I argue that identification remains a useful conceptual tool even within the infant research model of early development.

Part I

Totalizing Identifications

The identifications in part I are based on the totalizing confusion of self and other that Freud called primary identification; but each chapter extends Freud's model by incorporating Lacanian theories of the complex interconnections between desire and identification. Chapter 1 theorizes envy; comments by contemporary academic feminists, together with Margaret Atwood's *The Robber Bride*, enable me to focus especially on the problematics of envy in feminist communities. Chapters 2 and 3 analyze the origins of identification in the family; they follow the workings of primary identification in a family stressed by the inequities of class (Carolyn Kay Steedman's *Landscape for a Good Woman*) and in a family where the primary bond between mother and child is distorted by the pressures of racial oppression (Toni Morrison's *Beloved*).