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A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY OF WORK INHIBITION

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A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY OF WORK INHIBITION

by

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Freud described work and love as the aims or functions in a life well-lived, and the capacity for them as the goal in a therapeutic psychoanalysis. In many ways the history of psychoanalytic thought can be seen as theorizing about the capacity for satisfying, loving contact with others. Object relations theory and theories of narcissism are focused in part on the capacity for pleasurable, stable relationships and the sources of impairments in this ability. Since mature sexuality and love are so much linked and the sexual instinct itself so central in Freud's thinking, his views on development, character, and neurosis are often concerned with love, or, with the satisfying exercise of sexual impulses _in_ a relation of love. Neurosis is the disruption of love, in part, and while sexual inhibitions _per se_ receive attention in only a few places in Freud (especially in _Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety_), the impairment of instinctual gratification and the disruption of love are at the heart of Freud and later psychoanalysis.

By contrast, the capacity for _work_ has generally not been so directly linked to an instinct, although the "self-preservative" instinct in early Freud was perhaps close, and one analyst, Ives Hendrick, has posited a "work instinct" (1943). Impairments in work functions have

received substantially less attention than has love in Freud and in most psychoanalytic thought. Discussions of sublimation are relevant for work, of course, and ego psychology has been concerned with many of the elements and functions important for work. Likewise, discussions of narcissism, such as Kernberg's and Kohut's, often consider sublimatory failures affecting work. Nevertheless, work habits, work inhibitions, and other aspects of work have not been treated in detail, and as topics in their own right to the extent one might have expected given the importance Freud ascribed to work.

One reason for the limited discussion of work inhibition per se may be, as Fenichel (1945) suggests, that

> "occupational inhibition" is not . . . psychologically a unit. It occurs whenever a person's occupation requires the performance of actions that have become inhibited. Thus all types of inhibitions may form the basis of occupational inhibitions.

Still, Fenichel himself mentions several prevalent themes in cases of "occupational inhibition": conflicts about independence; conflicts over authority; work falling prey to an upsurge of instincts, if the work was undertaken as a rather mechanical reaction used to suppress them; and "neurotic disturbances of concentration."

Lapses in concentration, bouts of procrastination and of laziness, intentions to work that do not yield work, and the like are in a way so familiar to many people doing work, particularly creative or scholarly work, that I think we risk regarding the phenomena as somehow well-

known, hence understandable, hence self-explanatory, and so not in need of description and of theories. Of course some description of these problems is in fact common in psychoanalytic case studies, which often mention the feelings of ineffectiveness or the real, self-imposed limits on progress in work that make up part of the symptom picture for a given patient. Success in a case is often described in terms of changes in work. But the clinical prevalence of work-related problems gives even more justification, I think, for theoretical and clinical studies that go beyond brief comments like Fenichel's and attempt to describe work inhibitions and find underlying themes, looking to psychoanalytic and other psychological theory for ways to characterize and to explain, as well as to treat, the problems.

This dissertation is an attempt to explore themes and explanations of work inhibition and to consider various conceptualizations, some compatible and some rival, that might enhance our understanding. I will use case studies to illustrate and support my conceptualizations. By such a method no statistical generalizations can be established, of course, but it is hoped that my examples and discussion capture <u>some</u> of the important dynamics from among the variety of work problems. While there may be many sources of work difficulty, just as there must be many motives for the myriad kinds of productive activity and work that persons undertake, nonetheless one of the most interesting reasons for looking into specific dynam-

ics of work difficulties--and for expecting to find some--comes from the important fact that work problems do not covary simply with overall degree of emotional disturbance or illness. Productive work can be performed by certain otherwise deeply disturbed, stressed, or unhappy people. Similarly, some people from highly disordered backgrounds can emerge with something, some identification or inner wellspring, intact and inspiring work. Much creative work is experienced by its creators as coming, not simply from a "conflict-free" zone of function, but partly from pain or conflict itself. Students of the matter have debated whether creativity stems from conflict, or even from mania, or emerges in spite of difficulties (cf. Kubie, 1958), but for my purposes what matters is that work strivings and ambition in a sufficiently healthy person can survive other difficulties, and thus may to some extent have their own specific underpinnings and developmental requisites. The great variety in degrees and types of creativity, and of ordinary ambition and productivity, are only partly explicable in dynamic terms, I imagine. But those dynamics may tend to follow definite patterns, and inhibition of the ability to work surely has some typical dynamics and pathologies.

This study was conducted from a generally psychoanalytic perspective. Two important and related debates in current psychoanalytic thinking have stayed on my mind as I developed the views that follow. The first of these

concerns the role of early developmental stages in forming, and correlating to, specific forms of disturbance in the experience of self, of identity, and in the reaction to the separate status, attributes, and needs of other human beings. I began my study by wondering how developmental themes might also influence the perception of the work object and might influence the ability to work.

The second, related controversy was the much-debated splitting of pathologies into two kinds (borderline vs. neurotic, object-related vs. self-object or part-object related, preoedipal vs. oedipal, narcissistic vs. conflictual). I wondered whether work inhibitions might divide into two groups: one, where work cannot be accomplished because it is taken up for inherently flawed, or insufficiently motivating reasons--specifically, narcissistic reasons. Such work would have inadequate intrinsic meaning, or would not be pursued for satisfactions "intrinsic" to it. A second group, I speculated, comprised inhibitions of work whose accomplishment was, in its unconscious meaning, too frightening, dangerous, or illicit--that is, whose meaning stirred conflict, especially oedipal conflict. Could work, then, fail for reasons well-characterized as narcissistic or else oedipal?

My study has to some degree affirmed the developmental and disjunctive (narcissistic vs. oedipal) points of view, although the latter has been qualified substantially. Freudian explanation is my point of departure in the pages

to follow, in the sense that the next chapter is concerned with how traditional explanations of inhibition in terms of oedipal conflict and breakdowns of sublimation can be supplemented or supplanted by an explanation based in psychoanalytic self-psychology. In the following chapter I will then re-examine Freudian conceptions and their merits, and develop a model cast more (though not wholly) in such terms.

CHAPTER 2

A SELF-PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON WORK INHIBITION

Kohut's ideas, which are the focus of this chapter, are relevant for a study of work inhibition both because Kohut was explicitly concerned with work, ambition, ideals, and creative activity, and because any account of work problems must consider the role of narcissism. Narcissism presents certain important puzzles for a study of the dynamics of work inhibition, in that narcissistic individuals are often highly creative and accomplished, and yet narcissistic traits are also frequently seen as impeding the individual. In particular, the extraction of pleasure primarily from admiration of one's work and from feelings of superiority over others, rather than from the more intrinsic pleasures of one's activity itself, is seen as limiting, and as likely to end up depleting ambition and sustained interest (cf. Kernberg, 1975).[1] A related puzzle is that grandiosity of aims and aspirations can seem to inspire and spur achievement in some cases, while inhibiting, making anxious, or reducing tolerance for necessary, gradual, intermediary work in other cases.

In this chapter I will examine and then elaborate on some of the concepts of Kohut's self psychology, extending his theories in a way that helps suggest possible answers to the above puzzles and that may account for various aspects of work inhibition. Presumably work inhibition is,

as Fenichel says, not a single, discrete event with a single dynamic root. Nevertheless, through the use of clinical material and theoretical inquiry (and without resort to definitions), I hope I will convey a reasonably clear image or impression of my subject, work inhibitions, and of ways of thinking about the subject. While there may be a range of work problems and dynamic sources, I do hope to portray some of the more likely forms and sources of the phenomenon. In this chapter, I hope to show that self psychology can offer a way of explaining important features in many work problems, and offers an array of concepts for thinking about such problems that supplements previous dynamic models.

In that vein, I am not interested solely in narcissism as a strict clinical diagnosis but as an aspect of character for every individual. This matches Kohut's view, although he is also concerned, especially in The Analysis of the Self and early papers, with the more strict narcissistic personality disorder. In his later work he applies his notions of the grandiose self-image, the idealizing of parental images, and the search for cohesion of the self, to the explanation of most if not all difficulties and psychopathology short of psychosis.

Kohut's concern is with a group of interconnecting notions: disintegration experiences and threats to "self-cohesion"; grandiosity; idealization of select others; and identificatory failures through disrupted mirroring by and idealizing of parents. The last notion--

two types of identificatory failures--is Kohut's later, direct translation of the observed mirroring and idealizing transference trends of patients (see 1971) into a two-stage developmental theory (1977). At least one critic, Morris Eagle (1984), has argued that Kohut delineated ideas about disruptions in development and cohesion of the sense of self, on the one hand, and about grandiosity and idealizing traits of narcissists, on the other, but then fashioned a "theory" by arbitrarily connecting the two and insisting that the self-disruptions lead causally to narcissism and unconscious omnipotence. Theorists who believe that infants develop a self initially by casting out the "bad" and agglomerating all "good" (be it baby or mother), and then gradually becoming more realistic, have offered a development theory that may be used to explain why Kohut connects disruption of self-development with heightened stridency of grandiose claims and a fixated need to merge with all-good objects. Pine (1985) in particular sees his own and Mahler's developmental ideas as supporting Kohut's connections.

I mention this issue because the present chapter makes use of a range of Kohutian ideas, first looking at two instances of work inhibition as based in threats to self-cohesion, and then at how inhibition is produced by grandiosity and perfectionism. I will not provide any proof for the developmental theory, as Eagle has requested, but I will try to show how Kohut's ideas about self-cohesion, identifications, and grandiose and idealizing trends all

provide important angles, in a sense, from which to understand my subject, and how these ideas are parts of an overall self-psychological approach that illuminates work inhibition.

One way to describe the difference in Kohutian and classical Freudian theories as applied to work may be that a Freudian approach would see inhibition as deriving from conflict over what work represents, whereas the Kohutian sees inhibition arising from fears of the threatening experience of work. For a Freudian, the re-instinctualized meaning of the work product or work activity as aggressive or sexual would undermine the sublimating work activity. However the principal Freudian dynamic, the oedipal conflict, fundamentally concerns tension over what success (or failure) in the work activity would represent. Likewise, Fenichel's ideas of conflicts concerning authority and independence are conflicts over the consequences of working. The classical view, I think, would be that work is inhibited, perhaps when it is conflict-ridden instinctual activity, but principally when anxiety over the consequence (in particular, the success) of the work, ambitions, career, and so forth is prominent due to conflict.

The self-psychological view, as I see it, would draw our attention more to the fears attached to the experience of working rather than to conflict over its consequences. The fear of immersion in work, as somehow threatening to the cohesion of the self, would be the principal fear. Kohut makes just such a distinction, between anxiety

specific to a drive and the fear of disintegration (1977, pp. 102ff).

Through two clinical examples I want now to portray the type of emphasis and approach that a self-psychological theory, with its attention to certain largely preoedipal themes, may give in understanding work inhibition. These cases are meant to illustrate and raise themes for the following discussion, and not as full, well-rounded clinical case studies.

"Alan" entered therapy with me at age 22 and attended twice-weekly sessions for two years. He had been in therapy during college for problems in writing papers and completing course work, and for "shyness". He had since graduated, and when I began seeing Alan he had been out of school four months, was beginning to look for work in journalism, and was moving out of his parents' apartment, where he had lived during college. He entered treatment complaining of problems in his "motivation" in meeting people, and in pursuing a job and career.

Alan was the youngest of three children of a middle-class Jewish family. The father was described as working in "middle-level management" of a technical firm and the mother as "an executive in the garment industry." The mother also lectured on fashion in a technical college. Alan had a brother 5 years older who had driven a taxi and travelled since college, and a sister 3 years older who had also not settled into a definite career.

Alan regarded his father as sarcastic and condescend-

ing, but also as having never gotten as far himself as he might have: "He went to law school for a year, but decided he'd rather do something easier, I guess." Alan's mother was usually described as critical of Alan and concerned that he was neither courteous nor ambitious enough. One of Alan's earliest memories was of standing on a subway platform with his mother as she complained that his father "'was happy doing less than he might have with his life.'"

Alan's capacity for relations with others had clearly been stunted in some fashion. Although ostensibly heterosexual, Alan had been on an occasional date but had had no real involvements or friendships with females, and his male friends were primarily acquaintances with whom he played bridge at tournaments. Bridge was a central interest and outlet.

His relations with his bridge playing friends were often highly charged and conflicted. He selected men who were slightly older and who were usually better players. He cherished signs of their affection and approval and was pleased by their support of his competitive wishes. While overtly concerned that he not hinder their success when he joined them, he often felt angry and resentful at "needing to feel so submissive." In part, his admiration of them masked more rivalrous feelings.

Alan also had seemingly rivalrous feelings about his brother. He had many fantasies of helping his brother become a better guitar player--"famous someday"--although also secretly fantasizing that as his manager, Alan could

then control him ("I'd put him on an allowance"), guide him, and win his gratitude. When his brother traveled abroad, Alan worried aloud that his brother might be "kidnapped or hurt by terrorists or something frightening." These fearful ideas inevitably also turned out to be rather exciting for Alan.

In some respects, Alan's feelings seemed to be rivlrous, competitive, and object-related--in other words, oedipal. He also had many fantasies of obtaining older women, and of winning the affections of the girlfriend of one older male friend in particular. And yet the wish to be close to his brother and his older friends, to be a part of their success, to be like them and admired by them, seemed far stronger than any wish to compete with them. And the wish to attach himself to these men (and even to certain couples) seemed a way of feeling alive, whole, and meaningful, without which he felt depleted and lost. When Alan spoke of becoming a success, he virtually never articulated any realistic goal; it was either to become "the best bridge player in the world," admired by all, or else to be a part of some successful figure, like a guitar-playing brother.

The wish for merger and the persisting feelings of non-identity were even clearer in his contacts with women. In the course of treatment Alan began to date more and had two brief sexual relationships. While in the company of one woman whom he felt suddenly "very into," he would often feel he should be dressed differently, more in her style,

and he would also hope (but doubt) that she would see him as just like her. The moment he doubted he was like her, he would have a strong feeling of disgust for himself, on one occasion feeling suddenly that he smelled and that his entire apartment (where they were talking) smelled "of cockroaches" (!).

Alan's object relations, in other words, had oedipal elements, but his perception of other persons was overwhelmingly colored, not by the individuals' attributes, which he rarely spoke of or seemed to reflect on, but by his need to feel a part of the others. Not surprisingly, Alan was torn: he needed to be a part of the other, and thinking of rejection brought the sudden massive depletion in self-esteem (e.g. "smelly and repulsive") Kohut describes (1971, passim); but closeness also signified devouring or being devoured ("I feel I'd end up trapped, like lost--not know who I was anymore"). I am using the incorporative metaphors of Klein, Guntrip, and the British school here, and Alan's imagery was indeed suggestive of parts and merger. Kohut's language, however, is also especially apt: Alan wished to find an idealizable, perfect mentor to attach to, or else, in sporadic, giddy moments, he imagined being powerful and admired.[2]

The point of describing his object relations is that Alan's stance toward <u>work</u> as an object can be seen as similar. As mentioned, Alan had sought previous treatment for blocks in school work, and he complained in our sessions of not really feeling like pursuing a career or being

"forced" to take "all the little steps" to a top position. He balked just thinking of working all day and felt others must be "submissive" to join a legal or business firm, although law and business seemed interesting to him. In our sessions he came to describe how "compliant" he would feel when doing school work, and that he rebelled against submission through not studying, or ("possibly," he said) by not talking and associating in therapy.

Alan's work problems can be viewed from a number of perspectives. In psychosexual terms, he seemed involved in replications of an anal struggle during many rather silent sessions and in refusing to "give in" to teachers, employers (he held a newspaper job briefly) and would-be employers. His goal, to be a great bridge player or great sports columnist, was envisaged in terms of the admiration it would bring. This magical wish to be well-received and loved might reasonably be seen as phallic narcissism. The rivalrous feelings for friends, and difficulties he had succeeding at working and thereby surpassing his "lazy" father, also bore an oedipal cast.

These developmental colorings of his motivation (and inhibitions thereof) were real, I believe, but they do not fully capture Alan's stance toward work. Alan approached work, and fantasized about it, much as he did regarding people. He would think of a possible career or job in fantasy, attributing it idealized, perfect qualities, but without imagining any of the real work or drawbacks involved. The job was not contemplated in terms of its

intrinsic, real attributes; that is, it appealed to him as a fantasized way of his feeling differently--more alive, admired, appreciated. He fantasized that he could be defined by the career--a great sportswriter or lawyer--and he would then know who he was. I regarded this as akin to a merger fantasy, and he indeed had the corresponding merger fear--that, by becoming the work, he would be devoured, disintegrated, or annihilated ("I'd be nothing but that job if I worked 60 hours a week at it--I can't imagine even working 9 to 5.").[3] One can see Alan as wishing to take the career in (incorporative) or to attach himself to the great career or great person (idealizing a self-object): they are both ways of describing a filling-in of the depleted, empty sense of identity. Alan used fantasies of work to feel hope, but the fantasies, and even moreso actual work, also made Alan feel he was losing a subjective feeling of identity, and losing feelings of volition and control. By Kohut's definition, work experience therefore constituted a threat to the cohesion of his self.[4]

While Alan himself often described his problems in finishing school work, keeping the one job he held awhile, and seeking a career, in terms of struggles with and rebellion against authority, I believe that fears of disintegrating--pathology of the experience of self--were at least as crucial. Alan's idealized images of work and career--remote, fantasied goals--often had the power to bring him to the point of starting work, bridge classes,

and so on--but both the remoteness, the felt unrealizability of his goals, and the capacity of his own goals to stir fears of fragmentation or destruction, blocked him. Together these forces of push and pull left him in the typical procrastinator's position--always approaching working, never forgetting it, but not plunging in. Alan was forever beginning bridge books, for instance, then anxiously stopping. Presumably not all procrastination is produced by merger fantasies and fears of disintegration and loss of identity, but Alan's spells of procrastination, laziness, and hesitancy did seem to arise from these powerful wishes and fears, and were best explained in terms of them.

I will draw some further conclusions after briefly describing relevant aspects of the case of "Ronald", a graduate student in the humanities seen by another therapist.[5] Ronald presented complaints of anxiety and unsatisfying relationships, as well as chronic lapses in concentration while studying (in spite of which he had always achieved high grades). He also complained of a habit of re-reading some passages several times in response to anxieties about having "missed something" and about "just plowing into it further." Ronald himself offered consciously sexualized descriptions of his study problems: "I really feel I'm pulling back from sort of penetrating the text further." On one occasion the therapist commented that, while the sexual metaphors seemed important, the therapist also had the image of a very small child feeling

too anxious to engage in un-self-conscious play. Although the anxieties disrupting childhood play may themselves have to do with sexual instincts (e.g., anxiety produced by disruptions or chastisements of childhood masturbation), this comment led to a different kind of material from earlier ones. Ronald began to describe vague fears of being immersed and the sense that he would be lost, "not intact," and "dissolved into the work" if he did immerse himself in his work.

Of course, first, these last-mentioned phrases of Ronald's are rather vague, although perhaps the best he could manage. Second, the phrases are really not so unlike sexual metaphors, especially of fears of castration and of losing control during sex. Kohut describes the difficulties and importance of distinguishing the vague, inarticulate fears of disintegration stemming from preoedipal stages of development from fears that prove more definable as analysis proceeds and that derive from conflicts.[6] Given the otherwise neurotic, rather well-functioning picture Ronald presented, I cannot show conclusively here that a conflict model would not have adequately explained his vague fears. Perhaps one idea this brief case example does support is that experience of work is particularly able to evoke fears with a conflictual, oedipal cast--fears of asserting, of consummating (and of succeeding?)--and that these fears seem to lead to, evoke, or be accompanied by what look like fears of being lost, abandoned, disintegrated, or annihilated; and these later fears can be

hypothesized as developmentally earlier in onset.

In his second book, Kohut asserted less of a dichotomy of oedipal and self disorders, and suggested more that these earlier fears are present in all psychopathology. Likewise, I am not suggesting the oedipal or sexual metaphors were inapposite, but that work, and the goals of work, may serve to stimulate conflicts and fears of several kinds. In particular, Ronald's case may suggest that the experience of sitting down, working alone, may produce drive-related conflicts but another sort of tension better described as disintegration fear, and then, second, that the goal of such work, to wit a success that usually spells greater independence and authority, may rouse oedipal fears of replacing or surpassing the parent, but may also then signifiy becoming more separate or separated (where these two are psychologically different: for Mahler they relate roughly to differentiation and practicing/rapprochement stages). In resonance with such childood separation-individuation experiences, work therefore can evoke fears of being alone, abandoned, or in danger of annihilation. In Ronald's case, the power of the interpretation regarding his anxiety in "un-self-conscious play" seemed to come not only from its appeal to fears of being lost but also to fears of immersion as a vulnerability to being intruded on or disrupted. Kohut (1971) suggests that this fear too disturbs the felt cohesion of the self and confidence about one's initiative and control.

At this point I have tried to convey some of the

complexity of work inhibitions and particular issues raised by them. I have suggested the role of preoedipal factors, but have not offered a careful description of these factors nor carefully distinguished the self-psychological perspective from other ways of discussing merger, self-object differentiation, and separation issues. In what follows, I will attempt to elaborate more on a Kohutian-influenced perspective. First, though, I want to mention some of the ideas the case illustrations may have supported. The cases may both depict what Kohut describes as disintegration fears and threats to self cohesion. Obviously the two cases are not equatable: Alan's difficulties ranged far beyond work blocks; Ronald's treatment gravitated toward more strictly neurotic themes than did Kohut's usual narcissistic case. Both cases, however, concerned tensions that did inhibit work by inducing a need to hold back (i.e. inhibit) and reassure intactness. Ronald's fears may have had to do primarily with oedipal conflict; nonetheless, both cases do point at tensions arising from the experience of working or its prospect. Admittedly, it would be hard to say why Ronald's anxiety in the experience of sitting down and working might not also constitute or arise from a conflict <u>about</u> the consequences of successful (or failed) work.

The cases are meant to suggest how a variety of levels and types of disturbance may be at work in work inhibition: elements from various psychosexual stages; problems bearing on identity or self cohesion; and difficulties with the

work-object paralleling problems engaging in relations with human objects. This last parallel was pronounced for Alan, and his work ideals were as unrealistically viewed, and felt as unattainable, as the idealized others he sought after. I underline this point since Kohut is so concerned with ideals and ambitions, and because Ronald also set up goals in a striking and perhaps inhibiting way. He described, for example, reading biographical sketches of "famous humanists" while on study breaks. His dream, he felt, was to become such a person. And yet on further scrutiny in sessions he saw that he not only did not fully believe he was on his way to becoming such a figure, but a part of him, it seemed, could not really feel he was about to become anything or grow up. The goal bore an idealized, remote, and unattainable quality. Positing such a remote goal, if not itself inhibiting, was a reflection of his lack of an integrated, meaningful sense that he was becoming something. These cases raise the question then of how ideals, goals, and ambitions function, and how they seemingly can serve to stimulate achievement but may also inhibit or fail to spur it.

The role of ideals and idealized objects and aims is a useful starting point as I now attempt a fuller fleshing out of a self-psychological perspective. I have already depicted the threats to self-cohesion, the felt depletion of initiative and control and the fears of fragmentation, that would be central in a Kohutian-influenced theory about the phenomenology and explanation of work inhibition. The

narcissistically wounded child who fails to develop an integrated group of ambitions and feelings of initiative and competence reacts, according to Kohut, precisely with an idealization of selected objects and a grandiosity, either conscious or unconscious, that somehow fails to fuel realistic strivings. The idealized others are used as self-objects; I believe this notion can be applied to important persons who figure in the work setting, and, as I shall suggest later, the work project or object can itself become an idealized self-object in an inhibiting fashion.

A self-psychological perspective, and in particular certain elaborations I will propose on Kohut's ideas about self-objects, ideals, and ambitions, may help illuminate cases like Alan's and Ronald's, where it would be wrong to say they simply lack motivation or ambitions or ideals, yet something inhibits work. Where do the defects lie when work is aspired to but not fully accomplished? Obviously Alan and Ronald had unrealistic aspects to their strivings, but exactly how and why?

I will start by discussing the Kohutian concept of a self-object. Kohut describes the earliest stages of psychological development in ways that he correctly feels are quite close to Freud's brief remarks on primary narcissism and the purified pleasure-ego. Kohut describes a stage where the infant regards the self as having absolute perfection ("I am perfect . . [this is] the original experience of narcissistic perfection." Kohut, 1971, p. 27). Freud seemed to break this period into two stages:

the first, where the autoerotic infant "hates" the world (1915,p. 139) and repudiates all objects, and then the purified pleasure-ego, where the developing mental concept of self is initially experienced as containing all good objects and part-objects, hence extending to include the satisfying moments and parts of the mother ("incorporation into the ego," 1915, p. 136).

Freud then suggests that the ordinary frustrations of infant needs combine with evolving mental representations of self and others to lead, in a presumably gradual way, from an "identification" of the mother as part of self to cathexis of loved objects as objects. The intermediate stage is what Freud called "homosexual love" (1915, p.101)--a narcissistic attachment in which the infant feels a part of the mother's (no longer his own) omnipotence, and sees the mother as joined with and then, perhaps a bit later, as somewhat separate but "like" himself.

Kohut focuses, in a similar way, on how "the psyche saves a part of the lost experience of global narcissistic perfection by assigning it to an archaic, rudimentary (transitional) self-object, the idealized parent imago" (1971, p. 37). For Freud the differentiation of self and object leads quickly away from the narcissistic, rather merged experiences of others to oedipal, differentiated loves and rivalries. For Kohut, the idealization and merger with the self-objects persists rather longer, involving not only mother but also father, and perhaps even alongside other, more fully differentiated relations (say

with other children). It is only gradually transformed by "transmuting internalizations." These internalizations are pivotal for the child's development of ambition, initiative, ideals, and self-esteem. Kohut suggests that narcissism does not disappear as objects are recognized: it is a "separate line of development" in that grandiosity and idealization continue to be toned down gradually and to some extent independently of how related or involved with others the person may become.

In Kohut's work, as in Freud's and many other psychoanalytic theorists', there is always the question of just how distorting their adultomorphic labels (e.g., "perfect" or "grandiose") are for infant experience. Kohut grants the difficulty (1971, p. 27), but does suggest that his depictions of infant pre-linguistic "grandiosity" and "idealization" can both be followed along a continuous developmental line as they become more clearly parts of representational mental life and are either toned down, or else persist in matured form in "bipolar" tendenceies toward self-aggrandizement and attachment to idealized others.

The self-object persists, first, through uses of others to obtain admiration or receive mirroring of grandiosity without acknowledging others' own attributes and needs, and second, through the use of others as idealized objects, again not realistically perceived but rather used in fantasies of merger that shore up feelings of identity, hope, and power. The crucial idea, for my purposes, is

that the continued tie to self-objects means a continued lack of realistic perception of the other, combined with a dependency on others. Thus it is a distorted but persistent tie to object. Alan's work fantasies were tied to self-objects in this sense. The appeal of his grandiose work goals was in the response their attainment would bring from others. They were, furthermore, unrealistically vague and remote goals, useful only insofar as they created a feeling of identity in the same way merger fantasies regarding people served Alan.

The self-object is used to compensate for a lack of internalized, self-esteem producing self-representations and aims. Work thus becomes linked to others in a special way. Kohut describes the link as consisting in the need for merger with and admiration from idealized others, without which work efforts will lack motivation. The other is needed by the narcissistically inclined worker because goals and ideals are, in some important respect, not integrated. The impossibility of realizing these goals and ideals on one's own is both the cause and, I would contend, the reinforced effect of striving to attach oneself to another person who embodies values and with whom one seeks feelings of merger.

The need for another, a "dependen[cy] on certain objects in what seems to be an intense form of object hunger" (Kohut, 1971, p. 45) is a replacement, Kohut says, for a missing inner, mental function. The result is a pursuit of goals, but a need to locate the ideals and feel

ambitions through attachments; there is a felt remoteness of the goals and a depleted feeling of unattainability to them when one is alone. The feelings of remoteness of the goals, and the often genuinely unrealistic nature of them, is explained by Kohut partly in terms of the idealization of others and attachment to them, but also in what he posits as a second type of "distance from self." The second type comprises horizontal and vertical splits of the grandiose self. Kohut describes the horizontal split in terms of a "submerged archaic structure" of "specific repressed ideas and fantasies concerning the self" (1977, pp. 241-2) which can deplete the mature person of realistic aims, and the "vertical splits" as allowing for a sort of compromise formation in which grandiosity can be openly expressed at times but is also "disavowed" (Kohut, 1971, p. 249) or left unreconciled with other depleted, inferior feelings.

Kohut states that idealizing and grandiose trends, each of which inhibits strivings, can be present in varying degree and combination in any character. I want to explore the issue of idealization a bit further now, since it seems an important trait of the two patients described here, and since we need more clarity on how it works. For one thing, Alan and Ronald seemed to idealize work as much as they idealized other <u>persons</u>.

I will return to this idealizing of work itself. For Kohut, though, the idealized self-object is primarily a person who represents the parent imago. The person is

required "for the maintenance of narcissistic homeostasis" (1971, p. 28). One phenomenon that may exemplify such a dynamic is delayed work. Delay or procrastination on work owed to a teacher, employer, or other superior is often seen as merely oppositional, retentive, or rebellious. I suspect, however, that work is delayed for various reasons, including a wish for approval and a wish for a feeling of contact. Such delays may actually be a form of engagement with the other and of preserving the tie to this idealized object.

In Ronald's therapy, for example, he gradually came to speak of the feeling that doing school papers early would be particularly lonely, would make him feel he was working for himself and by himself. The teacher would not be engaged as a presence in the same way as when work was owed. Lateness seemed to be experienced as a dyadic relation, it created a tension and aliveness that did not exist before the deadline. Kohut speaks of a related theme, the narcissistic poverty of initiative and the need or wish to respond to cues and demands.

Of course delay is hardly a proven method for garnering admiration or approval, but it may, paradoxically, create a feeling of engagement that, for all its tension and pain, motivates in a way the work project itself does not, or that helps reduce inhibiting loneliness. The motivator, therefore, may turn out not to be simply the anxiety of "now it's due or overdue, I better do it," but rather the feeling of doing it for, an increased sense of aliveness

and of a presence (the one to whom work is due) and the ensuing reduction of loneliness and lethargy. Moreover, the need for engagement with the other need not be the same as an unequivocal wish for admiration. Kohut stresses the dependent feelings of seeking admiration to the exclusion of other, more conflicted and masochistic bases for contact and especially for repetitive patterns of contact with others. Furthermore, while Kohut discusses the wish for admiration from the idealized object, I believe he misses the paradox that may be inherent at times in this quest. While one can also seek admiration of those one views as equal or even as inferior in some respect, the wish for approval and "union with" an idealized object (see 1971, p. 55) may be incompatible with a striving to do truly original work that, spelling greater independence and status, would rival the other and reduce the ability to idealize. In this sense, seeking admiration of an idealized other may be an intrinsically conflictual aim, leading to loss of the ideal or else to wishing but not to making realistic efforts matching the aspirations. One may wish but not truly strive, or may strive in self-defeating ways.

Schafer, in "The Pursuit of Failure and the Idealization of Unhappiness" (1984), suggests how complex the motivation for failing efforts can be. In particular, his illustrations reveal that Kohut's depiction of a wish to idealize and gain admiration may often be oversimple. As Schafer had suggested earlier (1968), identifications are ambivalent and can in part aim to consume the object and

repudiate its independent existence. In the later article, Schafer points out how identifying can carry over into a mockery of the other. Identifications with self-destructive habits can also be a way, through the destroying of one's self, of retaliating: one retaliates by identfiying with the worst traits of the parental object.[7]

Of course Kohut never contends that the wish to merge or gain admiration is a prescription for success. On the contrary, he says it depletes the self of integrated, realizable-feeling ambitions and ideals. Although not addressing Kohut per se, Schafer makes the point, though, that objective failure need not signify a lack of motivation, or ambition: failure may be pursued and represent a genuine striving that confers its own perverse experience of success and subjective efficacy. However, it needs to be mentioned that the wish for merger and admiration, unlike these other, conflictual motivations toward rather differentiated others, is possibly a correct description of narcissistically-colored behavior that stems from the developmentally earlier stages Kohut has primarily in mind.

Many ways of characterizing inhibited strivings may be possible, including attributing to the person perversely negative ambitions and ideals rather than simply empty, remote ideals. And it is not as if all descriptions will be equally valid stories or "narratives." The concept of an idealized self-object does, still, seem to me to have some real applications. The application I want to suggest now is one Kohut does not himself offer, namely that the

work project or product may become a self-object in a way that resembles an idealized parent imago.

The inhibited worker does not necessarily lack ambitions or ideals, although something may be defective in these or other elements of motivation. If anything, the inhibited worker may tend to be too ambitious or too fixed on attaining ideals, although this would need to be spelled out. What Alan and Ronald, for all their differences, had in common was a tendency to imagine something they would like to <u>be</u> and this imagining generated a feeling. I have said that for Alan the experience was like a merger with another person, bringing a feeling of identity and a particularly giddy sense of power. What the aims or fantasies of Alan and Ronald did not do was to confer a sense of realizability of their ambition or stimulate concrete actions. For Ronald, the dreams of great achievement in the arts co-existed with a feeling, at the start of each paper, that the work would not get done and certainly not be worth having others read. (This in spite of his record of always completing work eventually and nearly always feeling like showing it to others.) I believe that, like the idealized parent imago, the work project, product, or ultimate aim is idealized in a way that permits certain merged feelings of greatness or perfection but that is intrinsically, like the search for idealized others, a way of setting up the work goal as unintegrated, remote, and not something that feels within one's own grasp. And the ambition can then co-exist, as it did for Ronald, with

a defective feeling about basic competence or ability to achieve. The inability to attain the goal seems virtually fated since the goal is set up as something beyond oneself, designed to fill one with identity, so to speak, but an identity that is beyond one's present self-representation and more than what one can truly imagine becoming.

Of course many accomplishments are made in the pursuit of becoming something beyond what one already is (though what occupies the minds of those who do accomplish more may be primarily <u>doing</u> the work, not getting a feeling of being great or changed). But the use of one's work as an idealized self-object, particularly work planned but not yet achieved (e.g., a paper, book, dissertation, painting, etc.) may be characterized by imagining the work will be great or perfect, basking in the feelings produced, but then not feeling one is able to take the incremental steps to accomplish the work. Setting up the (fantasied) work in an idealized way may make one feel anxious about proceeding or inadequate to do so, since what one envisages, thinking of the final product, is not a concrete work attained by steps one is presently capable of making, but rather a perfect object that one <u>merges with</u> in fantasy. What I am talking about in this somewhat abstract, theoretical way is, I believe, a very concrete difference in the states of mind leading to work versus inhibition. What preoccupies at least some inhibited workers, or all workers perhaps at times, is a fantasy that confers a feeling of completion and perfection. It may be that a severely

inhibited worker like Alan suffers from having such distant ideals take a role that is more properly served by concrete plans and ambitions.

The procrastinator is often instructed to scale down his goals, concretize them, and strive to set a few realizable aims each hour, day, or week.[8] The failure to do so probably does not stem simply from not thinking of doing so, but from the resistance to doing so. And this resistance may stem from the feelings of risk and imperfection (in addition to earlier-mentioned fears of immersion) in actual work when the goal of completed perfection is also in mind. The fantasied work is, like the parent imago, imagined as idealized and to be aspired to, but as different from self; hence it may feel remote and unattainable by one's own efforts. One sets it up in a self-defeating way, as distant and removed from specific, concrete steps one can take in working.

It is a familiar observation that dissertation writers either can fail to progress, or can progress but not expeditiously, as a result of their idea that they should produce the "magnum opus". The wish to forestall separation from school, along with a grandiosity of aims, may explain much. However the view of work as idealized self-object may offer advantages. The use of the "magnum opus" fantasy may be a way not just of stalling but of <u>responding</u> to the separation fears by planning an accomplishment that will enable the self to feel completed and whole (through merger with the idealized image) rather than

abandoned and alone. And this view is also superior to an explanation strictly in terms of grandiosity, since grandiosity can often spur achievement. The idealized work object is a grandiose fantasy that exists unintegrated with the basic subjective sense of competence (or perhaps alongside a defective sense of competence), and that seems to inhibit execution much as the wish for merger with an "omnipotent and perfect" idealized parental figure does not, according to Kohut, spur the integration of the imago's virtues into one's own character and self-representation. Rather, the felt distance from the idealized self-object is as fundamental as is the wish for merger. In fact, as I have suggested, this wish for merger and admiration is a paradox, and creates an inherent tension in which self-defeating or inhibiting tendencies may flourish.

This way of characterizing the dynamics of work inhibition as involving idealized, fantasied work self-objects will presumably be more accurate for some cases than others, and may best apply in more narcissistic characters. The explanatory value of connecting work behavior with other idealizing habits in this way is the virtue common to scientific theories, of grouping phenomena under a unifying concept through the positing of theoretical entities (here, idealized imagoes and grandiose self). One question left unresolved, I think, is whether the idealizing of the (imagined) work product inhibits execution of the work (and is thus the inhibition's cause) or is itself another effect

of a cause common to both the idealizing and the inhibitedness. The seeking of an external idealized object to replace an inner function (here, the self-conferring of self-esteem) may not (in reality or even for Kohut) be responsible for the inner lack; the seeking and the feeling of lack are both outgrowths for Kohut of the narcissistic traumata in mirroring, idealizing, or graduated frustration of the child, and are then mutually reinforcing in presumably complicated, varied ways.

I have suggested that inhibition may stem from thinking of one's future work products as potentially perfect and ideal but feeling them concomitantly as distant and not realizable. And I have linked this particular idealizing to other acts of idealizing typical in narcissism. One could rasonably ask why I connect the fantasied work product to the idealizing of others rather than to the other trend in Kohut's "bipolar self," namely as part of the grandiose self. Ronald's wish to be a grat humanist, for instance, might be viewed as the "vertically" split-off grandiose self. I have no argument with this approach, except that it may miss the striking feeling of merger which, for instance, Alan's work fantasies produced in common with his merger fantasies about people. Obviously the work is in a sense part of oneself and also is an object and likely susceptible to some of the feelings and distortions that typically adhere to one's self, and on the other hand to one's objects. My point has been, though, that the "idealized" work product is not merely grandiose

in fantasy, it also has a sense of remoteness that is related to that failure of integration that takes the form of locating values and perfection in idealized other people in compensation for an inner lack of self-esteem conferring ideals.

In cases of work-inhibition is the idea of a perfect work-product really so common? Wouldn't inhibited workers often be content to produce a decent product, or perhaps any product at all? Perhaps some would, and even more might say so. But for Kohut, a depleted ability to develop or act vigorously on realistic ambitions, along with defects in self-esteem and pleasure from work, often signal narcissistic problems and are among the most common results of narcissistic difficulties; and these symptoms frequently do flow from perfectionism and grandiosity, unconscious as well as conscious. The unconscious grandiosity occurs in a "horizontal split," that is, a repression of some ideas and fantasies concerning the self, a repression comparable to the neurotic's repression of archaic wishes regarding childhood objects. Kohut refers to "archaic self-representations" that often originate in childhood as feelings of being special or fantasies of having secret control or destructive power over others (1971, p. 150) and that then persist in the unconscious. Kohut claims the repressed or else conscious but disavowed ideas drain the person of realistic ambition, vigor, self-esteem and pleasure in real endeavors. Kohut is never entirely clear on whether he believes these childhood fantasies about the

self persist in the same way that repressed incestuous ideas do, exerting a continuing cast on wishes and perceptions. He says repressed grandiose ideas often begin with these ideas in childhood; in what sense these fantastical beliefs persist is not completely clear. (For example, does the person still in some way believe his childhood fantasy that, say, others are secretly his slaves?--cf. Kohut, 1971, p. 150.)

In spite of some unclarity about just what is unconscious in cases of unconscious grandiosity, I believe inhibitions often do stem not merely from feeling inadequate to a task, but from aggrandizing and idealizing distortions of self and self-objects which affect ways the task or product is then set up in the mind. I doubt, however, that the unconscious or conscious aim of perfection which may inhibit the feeling of efficacy, is always or necessarily a fantasy that one's product will be, say great or world-famous. The fantasied "perfection" which inhibits strivings may be more just a sense of "completedness" and "finished-ness" of the fantasied product which then feels beyond the finite, incomplete steps one could take in actual work.

I have been speaking as if grandiosity and perfectionism are related or even interchangeable notions. Kohut himself does not offer rigorous definitions, though he does point at a distinction. I should note that Kohut speaks of the idealized "perfection" of self-objects moreso than of perfectionism. He seems to say that grandiosity is a

feeling about one's self, whereas perfection is a feeling or fantasy about the self-object or idealized other. So grandiosity is a feeling of or a wish for one's own greatness and of admiration, perfection refers in a sense to a grandiosity about the self-object which one admires. But can't one be perfectionistic, wishing to do flawless work, without necessarily being grandiose, that is, exhibitionistic and claiming greatness or superiority? It would seem a common observation that obsessionally-inclined workers can be perfectionistic without explicitly articulating grandiose ideas. I think, though, that Kohut's view implicitly suggests an hypothesis, namely that perfectionism is not merely obsessional but narcissistic, and that underlying the wish to be flawless one will find certain repressed or disavowed grandiose, exhibitionistic fantasies. On my own view, perfectionism may also be connected to grandiosity as follows: the wish to produce something flawless is the fear or anxiety of imperfection. This anxiety comes from the distorted narcissistic fear that a defect spells utter degradation. And that fear is, in turn, either what the grandiose self-image is also developed to defend against, or alternatively, is an anxiety stimulated by the excitingly exhibitionistic grandiose fantasy itself. This last distinction in turn calls to mind two alternative emphases or views, one that aggressive, narcissistically haughty grandiosity defends against wounded, inferior feelings, the other view that this grandiose, often rageful self is itself bedrock in

narcissism and must be confronted directly in therapy (which Kernberg believes).

Understanding perfectionism and ideas of perfection as representing anxiety either over defects or over exhibitionistic impulses, and as defensive, may offer a further insight into work inhibition. Seeing the wish for perfection as an ambition may turn out to misleading, since the wish for a perfect accomplishment may not mean "perfect" in the sense of great but in the sense of avoiding something defective, or catastrophically humiliating or degrading. The fantasy of perfection, and the aim of perfectionism, may have as much to do with avoiding frustration, escaping tension, reducing fears of frustration, fragmentation, or annihilation as with any positive, constructive targets. Wanting perfection may, almost paradoxically, be wanting stasis, no risk. Hence the perfectionist who is forever "polishing" up his work and not publishing or auditioning or whatever, may be suffering the miseries of his present, less fruitful than possible life because the fixity (real or fantasied) of it is a stasis, at least on a level of fantasy. Perhaps, alternatively, one might say that <u>not</u> doing resonates with fantasies of perfection or of stasis. The perfectionist may be motivated by a striving not so much to do something constructive and perfect, as to avoid doing anything risky and imperfect. If perfectionism's most general aim is not so much to <u>do</u> and accomplish as, one way or another, to get into or stay in a state of invulnerable, impingement-free non-tension, then <u>not</u> doing

may gratify the same wish that doing perfectly is meant to gratify. Hence the perfection that the perfectionist seeks may be, not really in the work project but in the sought-after state of freedom from defect or attack, and oddly, the perfectionist may inhibit his strivings because he retains a kind of perfection by not doing, by indulging a fantasy that nothing will change.

The source of the perfection fantasy or its power probably lies in infantile experience. Kohut traces feelings of narcissistic perfection to the purified pleasure ego, and to the casting out of all bad objects and agglomeration of all good as part of the self (1971, pp. 26, 106). He describes the grandiose self as growing out of this experience, given a less than optimally gradual frustration of infant needs and development of sensed boundaries. And likewise, I am suggesting that seeing the striving after perfection as compatible with inertia or work inhibition, indeed connected to it in fantasy, makes sense in light of the infant's experience of reduced tension when, believing the maternal object is part of him, the infant is able to cast out all impingements, relax, and not feel needy, finite, or incomplete.[9]

Thus far I have been attempting to describe the threats to self-cohesion, the idealizing trends, and other possible sources of work inhibition. A self-psychological perspective suggests how at least some inhibition can be explained as more than a mere lack of ambition, more than simply separation anxiety, and something more specific than sheer

depression. I have also attempted to begin answering the question of how grandiosity can fuel realistic ambition in some cases, while inhibiting it in others--an answer concerning the role in inhibition of a felt unrealizability of the goal, the idealized function of the fantasied work product, and the reliance on ties to self-objects. However, in response to this last question--about grandiosity--an important issue is whether realistic strivings are genuinely motivated by grandiosity, or whether the person who can meet his goals is, perhaps highly ambitious, but by definition realistic and not grandiose. From Kohut's perspective, the normal grandiosity of infancy is gradually toned down but retains a psychic importance. Even realistic ambitions gain their vitality from their resonance with early experience and from the continuing effects of early experience and early fantasies of omnipotence.

I would offer, as explication or comparison, Kernberg's remarks on the productivity of working groups and of organizations (1979). Kernberg argues that, while a decline in a work-group's or organization's functioning often stems from the irrational--from projection, projective identifications, and behavior whose source is pre-oedipal experience of part-objects--still, the source of vitality of the most effective working groups also is the irrational, namely the invigorating satisfactions of identity diffusion, casting out of difference, and so forth. Another familiar analogy might be to love, whose at times irrational feel has been attributed (cf. M. Balint,

1968) to its regressiveness or resonance with merger fantasies of infancy.

The successful worker is inspired unconsciously by grandiosity in some sense, and some success may even be a gifted worker's anxious attempt to live up to rather un-toned-down grandiosity (see Kohut, 1971, pp. 108-9). The inhibited worker's problem lies in the form of his grandiosity, and in the felt unrealizability of his ambitions, their distance from self-representations. I have offered several ways of describing what may distinguish the inhibited from successful worker (or else the worker when he is inhibited from when successful). One is that the inhibited worker idealizes the work aim in a way that inhibits his strivings. A second is that the inhibited worker has grandiose ambitions in place of, or in a role suited to specific, concrete goals. Finally, I have suggested that in some cases the grandiosity is perhpas not inhibiting per se, not so different from the successful worker's, but it exists alongside a defective basic sense of competence. This last description is perhaps the same as what I have called distance from self or self-representations.

I wish to conclude by considering the perpective of self-psychology on the etiology of work inhibition. Kohut's theory is partly a developmental theory holding that real traumas produce warps or fixations in "narcissistic development" and prevent cohesive, positively felt self-representations. I think a self-psychological theory

about work would primarily ground its etiology in conceptions of internalization and identification. For Kohut, the child can suffer preoedipal identificatory failures affecting the "basic fabric of the ego," "drive-channeling" and "drive-neutralizing" functions (1971, 1977 passim), as opposed to oedipal identificatory failures affecting superego development.

The ability of a person to work will reflect identifications with parents and with other role models. The attitude of these models toward their own ability to work, and toward their child's ability, may hold special power in shaping the child's capacity for achievement. When identificatory difficulties occur, two primary ways are the parent's disparagement of the child, or the parent's disparagement of his own idenity or abilities. For Kohut, healthy self-esteem, zest in work, and initiative come from the mirroring and then idealizing phases of preoedipal identification. And whether or not these two phases are as separate and discrete as Kohut argues, they do capture the two identificatory processes: one in which the parent helps the child feel power and competence, and the other in which the parent allows the child to feel confidence in the parent's competence. The distance of idealized goals from self-representations may reflect the distance the child comes to feel separates him from becoming like his parent, or, should the parent denigrate himself or prevent this idealization, from the more alien figures whom the child may then come to feel, or be told, are truly powerful and

effective.

CHAPTER 3

CONFLICT AND IDENTIFICATORY STRUGGLE

Choices of work and career are deeply meaningful, often representing the culmination of long years of study and training as well as psychological development. Such choices must balance various preoedipal and oedipal wishes and concerns, conscious and unconscious. The choices also aim to balance various identifications, and to balance between wishes to identify and wishes to feel distinct. The nature and success of these choices reflect the history of identifications and history of conflicts. Consider one patient I saw in therapy, "Cheryl", who had grown up, as she described it, as the thin athletic girl in a house with her father, her obese, depressed, and often frazzled mother, and a "fat, sluggish," older sister. The mother was described as having been preoccupied with her obese daughter, and as having worried that the patient's gifts, energy and charm would be overly praised by others and the compliments go to her head. Cheryl grew to gain a doctorate in education, only to switch fields and become a publicist and organizer for a weight-loss concern. She spent her days organizing programs and garnering considerable praise and admiration from the overweight women who enrolled. This career choice represented an important compromise formation,

allowing the patient to feel superior to the clients, yet appreciated and recognized by them. It also allowed her to help them, alleviating her considerable sense of guilt. The patient usually found the work rewarding, though occasionally quite barren of meaning. She also fell into nasty struggles with superiors. In therapy Cheryl complained of feeling blocked at times in devising new programs, and unable to feel her performance was as creative or effective as it should be. She felt at such times that she was getting "old and haggard" and might somehow lose her vitality, or had already lost it without even realizing it.

The work was not a perfect resolution of her various unconscious goals and conflicts. Using the terms of previous psychoanalytic discussions of work, like Wilhelm Reich's (1945), we might debate whether the patient's work was enough of a sublimation or too much of a reaction formation (e.g. to her wish to defeat or hurt obese females), or whether her self-described creative inhibitions were the result of reinstinctualized meaning of the work (cf. Menninger (1942) and Oberndorf (1951)) . These conceptions have much merit, although the energy-based idea of sublimation as an energic conversion and modification of libido may seem to simplify the complex dynamic character of work choice and work inhibition as compromise formations among many wishes, defensive trends, and struggles to resolve identifications.

For Cheryl, the choice of work clearly was shaped by

its libidinal and aggressive, defensive, and guilty or self-punitive meanings. Through her work choice she attempted to obtain gratification while resolving long-standing conflicts. Cheryl found herself inhibited in various ways in this work. The very conflicts which propelled her into the work as an attractive compromise formation may also have prevented its full success. Cheryl was also haunted by an image of becoming haggard, a clear though unacknowledged identification with her depressed mother. Cheryl struggled against the feeling she could become or already was damaged and inert. She seemed to have made an identification with mother and was now striving to fend it off. Work, through its powerful meanings for identity and its potential in yielding sublimated gratifications, becomes a way of attempting to overcome conflicts and resolve difficulties in identity and identifications, and it served these roles for Cheryl.

In this chapter I will explore the two themes of conflict and identificatory struggle, and will look at their roles in work choice and work inhibition. I will be suggesting, then, that inhibition can derive not only from disintegration fears produced by the experience of immersion in work, as defined in the previous chapter, but also from conflict over what work and its consequences--successful or otherwise--come to represent. I will also give some attention to the relation of these two themes, since "struggling with identifications" may be just a different way of describing the attempt to resolve con-

flicts over drives.

I will not restrict my discussion, however, to oedipal conflict alone as a source of work inhibition. Some cases of inhibition may be describable largely in such terms, but I will attempt to show how preoedipal and oedipal themes and conflicts can mix to produce instances of inhibition. I will attempt, though, to distinguish such cases from those discussed best in the terms employed in the previous chapter. In the one case I will discuss in detail ("Natalie"), work inhibition did not seem to derive from the sort of wish/fear of merger, or from the use of merger fantasies and fantasies of perfection, in the same fashion as for Alan. "Natalie" had attained a firmer, more stable sense of herself and had needs for closeness that did not stem as fully from wishes for incorporation or absorption into the other. It seemed that unresolved conflicts over preoedipal closeness and sexual identity (of a developmentally more advanced kind than Alan's, with psychic separation into self and object being less tenuous) joined with oedipal themes to drive the patient into attempts at both self-definition and drive gratification through her choice of work, as well as through her inhibition of that work. In the earlier chapter I tried to show the particular importance of work as an object of merger fantasies in the attempt to accrue a sense of self, and how the work experience could in turn become subject to the <u>fears</u> of merger and annihilation, and thus become the source of fragmentation. In this chapter I will try to

show how work becomes intensely significant, its consequences and meanings highly conflictual, and how work becomes highly vulnerable to inhibition in the event of oedipal conflict and especially when preoedipal difficulties have disrupted identifications with parents and have impeded subsequent oedipal resolution. Work then becomes a way of attempting to overcome or resolve troubling identifications, but the work can also itself become vulnerable. The work is susceptible of inhibition when it attempts to override identifications that, first, bring their own gratifications; second, that may be problematic but are important for identity nonetheless (e.g. identifications with a difficult same-sex parent); or, third, when the identifications give the person a sense of defect that becomes more acute precisely when the work performance is attempted.

I have briefly addressed how the self-psychological perspective sketched earlier may fit with the present chapter, by concerning itself with inhibitions that derive from developmentally earlier pathology involving psychic differentiation. A second way the two views fit may be that the fear of immersion is a phenomenological description, whereas "conflict" constitutes a theoretical term in the explanation of inhibition. The person who sits down to work may feel fear, anxiety, or a wish to avoid, but not feel conflict (though perhaps sometimes "conflict" also has a phenomenological reference). A third point, though, is that the failure to concentrate, discussed

earlier, is only one form or focus of work inhibition. Another is the overall failure to prosecute one's career as assertively as one might, for which moment-to-moment anxieties and lapses of concentration may be only partly to blame. Self-doubts and other characterologic impediments may operate in other ways, ways better explained by a conflict hypothesis.

While, as suggested, some inhibited workers may suffer the self pathology described earlier, and others suffer conflict, I have also argued that work seems especially able to stimulate fears of aloneness, abandonment, and disintegration, and to stir oedipal difficulties in a way that also taps the same individual's separation fears and merger fantasies. I do not adhere to a complete dichotomizing of individuals into those suffering work inhibition of self-disordered versus conflict-based types. Still, the kinds of difficulty described in Chapter 2 can be seen as forming one extreme. The idealization and merger fantasies of that subtype are extreme in terms of the polarized valence given select objects, in the lack of differentiated perception--accurate, detailed perception--of the objects, and in the (related) lack of self-object differentiation.[1]

Although I am suggesting that oedipal conflict may often be alloyed, especially in work inhibitions, with the phenomena of self, I do believe the struggle that produces work inhibition in the essentially neurotic personality, even when it contains some preoedipal themes (as in the

case about to be presented), is discernibly more an attempt to resolve inner conflicts. Such a patient's inhibition has less to do with feelings of emptiness, wholesale self-loathing, yearnings to be completely like someone else, and by a general lack of realistic, balanced perceptions of others. Moreover, conflict-based inhibition, to call it that, seems to occur in a personality that can perform work well in other ways or at other times. The inhibition does not afflict all areas of function, and does not as nearly cause nothing to be followed through on as, say, with Alan. At this point it may be most helpful to describe in some detail the case of Natalie, which contrasts well with Alan's and illustrates the points stated abstractly thus far.

Natalie[2] enterered therapy with me when she was in her second year of college. She attended twice-weekly sessions until I left the clinic fifteen months later. (She resumed therapy later with another staff member.) Natalie had moved to this country from her native France at the start of college along with her boyfriend, who had been located here by his company. She entered treatment feeling distressed at "failing at what I came here for." She had failed a course in her major, architecture, and felt unable to work: "It's gotten so I can't complete any assignments and I'm doing miserably. I could do the work fine before and always got A's, but now I'm just unable to do it. I'll work and then I'll start shaking or get really jumpy." Natalie could work on courses outside

architecture somewhat more easily, "but after reading even 20 minutes I'll get anxious and have to get up." Natalie also described being sick two to three days each week or two with headaches, pains, and fatigue. She visited doctors often, and while some of the episodes were diagnosed as viral, no internist had found any explanation for her overall debility. Meanwhile, Natalie did not seem to suffer vegetative signs or any psychomotor slowing.

Natalie was living with her boyfriend, and felt alternately enraged and guilty. Their sex life had ground to a halt months earlier. She felt she should return to France since it was "unfair" being here ("I'm not doing anything."), and she was being supported by her father and boyfriend. She also felt she should stay, though, since it would be "selfish to throw away a relationship of six years." Natalie had remarkable reserves of stubbornness and resolve and also felt she should "stay and accomplish something."

Activity, "doing things," was so filled with unconscious meanings and the source of such great conflict that inactivity, inhibition, and paralysis were solutions. In early sessions when I would comment on her anger at others, Natalie would retreat to impotence and despair. (Th.: "You're angry at your boyfriend." Pt.: "I feel like I'm just tied up in knots inside. I can't do anything" (cries).) Within the first several months thoughts of doing came to lead invariably to thoughts of "doing something wrong" or having done something wrong ("but I

have no idea what"), and later of being wrong somehow. Taking to bed with illness had its own historical meanings associated with having been cared for by mother, but also visited by father (exciting, and done to her, not of her doing). A review of Natalie's history will help me develop these points further.

Natalie grew up with her parents and a sister six years younger. A boy had been the first born, but had died in infancy two years before Natalie's birth. Natalie's mother was described as an exceedingly suspicious and difficult woman. Memories from Natalie's childhood were of mother's constantly performing housework, and being available after school and interested in helping on homework. However Natalie had conflicting (and perhaps historically later) memories of her mother in bed, habitually ill with undiagnosed maladies. (This continued into the present.) The mother had stayed in her bedroom increasingly, even when well. She warned Natalie to beware of people outside the family; they might wish to steal, or "use things against us." Natalie recalled feeling she was the only member of their extended family not wholly at odds with her mother.

The father was a reasonably successful architect whom Natalie described as excited and encouraging when she chose to study architecture. In Natalie's childhood, the father had apparently taken over for the over-taxed mother in many ways. Natalie recalled especially his caring for her in illness. The father had, by Natalie's account,

always used her as a confidante about his sexual estrangement from his wife. He had also taken baths with Natalie on weekends until she was seven (Natalie noted, "I was the one who stopped it then."). Natalie recalled her father changing when she reached puberty. She felt he became distant and was inconsistent abut her dating, setting strict rules but then not objecting even when he found her under bedcovers with one boyfriend.

In such a household the dangers associated with ordinary childhood desires and conflicts were intensified. Preoedipal closeness to mother had seemingly been disrupted, and the oedipal connection to father was especially frightening because of his stimulating indiscretions and also because sexuality put at risk the early closeness father had been able to offer.

Some of Natalie's description of her wishes may sound like Alan's merger fantasies and fears--of being filled up, yet also destroyed or lost. She stated: "Being close is what makes me feel whole, not empty. Of course it's dangerous being so close--one person could destroy the other." And, "I seem to need to do something for someone else, as if I don't exist alone. That's how I feel--if I lose Pierre [(the boyfriend)] I'll disappear too." And months later, "When I lost my father's attention around fifteen or earlier, I felt like I didn't exist. . . . I feel I'd be nothing alone--I would dissolve, I wouldn't exist."

In some ways these remarks are reminiscent of Alan,

and of typical formulations about patients with "emptiness" and of problems traced back to separation or to differentiation of self from other. Although some of Natalie's problems may well date to preoedipal development, several points need to be made. For one, the self-observation going into Natalie's statements was wholly different from Alan's; Alan would not have described his dissolving or not existing, since part of living it as he did involved lacking that organizing, evaluating self-judgment. It was I who tendered such formulations to him, in part to enhance and organize the ego.

What, then, was Natalie's experience? After stating she feared dissolving, she continued: "Something's missing. I need someone to fill up a big hole in me--I'm only half a person, I need someone. . . . It's not a very attractive image." This combination of damaged feelings and sexual feelings did not produce the fragmentation so typical of Alan's experience. Natalie did not wish to be like someone else, did not become panicky, did not lose the ability to reflect. Instead, as she associated, she kept returning to a feeling that she would do or had done something wrong. For Natalie, schoolwork was a conflictual act: "I can read a book in a week, but if it's assigned, it's as long as eight books." One might take this as rebellion against school or authority, but for Natalie it was more like defending against an impulse: "You know I notice it's exactly now that the school year's

beginning again that I feel so anxious--afraid I'll do something wrong, about being wrong somehow. I feel like the sicknesses" (which had abated) "are coming back too." In the transference Natalie became upset and fearful as she found herself fantasizing about me and intensely preoccupied with me. She would describe a feeling that came over her: "I'm afraid I'm going to find that there's something that happened here [in therapy] that shouldn't have."

The wish to return to a safe place was not primarily a fleeing from fears of disintegration, but from guilt-laden acts and wishes: "I feel I'm betraying someone by all that I do. I'm overrun by memories and feeling guilty. I'm getting headaches. I just wish I could be home and have my mother care for me." This is not to deny, however, that the wish to draw back from working and asserting herself may have derived also from fears attendant on her mother's instability during Natalie's preoedipal years. Working and striking out on her own, especially as (among other meanings) a replacement for father (becoming an architect herself), revived intense fears of being abandoned: "I'm terrified all the time that being all on my own, I'll be unable to cope." But even this statement expresses difficulty, as Pine (1985,ch. 15) would put it, not with psychic differentiation but with real separation from differentiated others.

Although her wishes to attach to others and avoid being "dissolved" sound like difficulties with her sense

of self and with her feeling safe as an individuated person, the degree of consistent, reflective self-awareness, the nature of her anxieties as responses to impulses, and the regressive, defensive nature of the dependency on "merger" fantasies all suggest Natalie's struggle was a result of conflicts.

Still, the feelings expressed by Natalie do echo some preoedipal abandonment and attachment themes, without the sense of emptiness Alan expressed. And while I have contended that Natalie retained greater reflective capacity, she did often fall into long, intensely vague ramblings. These long patches of vagueness at times seemed to reflect an attempt to discuss early, confusing experiences and, in particular, to describe her genuinely vague sense that she was wrong, needed to change, or should have been different somehow. Her early experiences may have been shaped by the mother's disturbance, the father's closeness, and the grief ensuing on the son's prior death. This vagueness seemed also to arise following sexual fantasies about me. The sequence seemed to be: sexual feelings, then a pressing sense that I was not the right therapist for her ("perhaps because you're male"), that she must not allow herself to depend on me, and that I was not listening to her and had lost interest in her. She would become vague in her narrative, think of leaving therapy, and occasionally would then miss or skip a session.

While the oedipal conflict was clearly one major component in this pattern, that conflict was made harder

to resolve by the wish for closeness (which had been preoedipally lost with mother, then hard-won but difficult to maintain with father) that became so important whenever Natalie felt sexually attracted. In relationships the result was that Natalie would make a sexually excited approach or response to a man, then lose sexual interest, become riveted on the need to retain closeness and stay together with him--usually asexually--at all costs. She would also lose her own feelings of femininity and would feel a dislike for women. As for father, Natalie was able to feel happy with him when she was at a geographical distance from him. When he visited (or offered to), she became confused, felt needier, and was often angry. In the transference, a similar pattern has been described, with skipped sessions restoring Natalie's equilibrium by allowing her to feel she could live without me and by dampening the wish/fear of dependence and the fantasy of becoming close to me by becoming male, by becoming me.

Natalie's oedipal wishes, then, seemed to arouse her need for closeness and fear of separation, and to arouse vague, confusing feelings that she should not <u>be</u> a female, did not like females, and that, despite trying, she could not be enough like the man or interesting enough to him, to retain his concern. Through her choice of architecture Natalie seemed to attempt both to win father and to be like or to be father. And in her architecture work, just as in the transference, Natalie was initially excited and approached the work; like the transference object, this

work appealed both to oedipal fantasies and stimulated the fantasy of becoming like a male, of being one with the man. She then distanced herself to calm herself (by inhibiting her own studies) after she felt frightened and enraged. The source of fear and rage was the sense that, in trying to be so close, any sexuality would be dangerous, and that to remain close she needed to be like father, to be a male. This approach to the work and to males make her feel confused, as if she were losing or attacking her identity as a female.[3] She seemed to recreate the pain of searching to be like father and like the (dead) brother, only to discover that she was not really male and was hoping for something that could not be. And this made her enraged at and envious of men.

The wish to stay close to a male by being like him was stimulated by, but also in conflict with, Natalie's oedipal sexual fantasies. The father's seductiveness had stimulated Natalie, but through her femaleness Natalie was also reminded of the inadequacy she saw in her mother, as well as the impossibility of becoming the son that (in her fantasy, and perhaps in reality) her father had really wanted. Natalie wanted, as a girl, to win father, but also wanted to please father by being like him as a boy would be, and, crucially, as the missing, dead son might have been. As a child, Natalie had wished to be father's wife, but also to become her missing brother, his missing son. The confusion Natalie must have felt at these cross-currents was reflected in her vague, amorphous, but

real feeling of turmoil. Becoming an architect was a way of eliminating some of the difficulty by replacing the father, by resolving desires toward him by "consuming" him through the identification (cf. Schafer, 1968), thus freeing herself.

Natalie's decision to be an architect (which I later learned was abandoned in the year after therapy in favor of a mental health profession) was both a continuation of her struggle and an attempt at resolution. Consciously, Natalie pursued her studies out of intrinsic interest and to please her father. No doubt being an architect meant being like him, hence not a female, but also meant the opposite, being his equal, and thus possibly his mate; and lastly, it meant overcoming her conflict by replacing her father through an identificatory incorporation. Natalie also had said, "I'm in architecture because I like the idea of design and of creating things. But I sit at my drawing board and cry now, and think, 'I might fail, I might not be able to work.'" Becoming an architect served many functions, not least of which may have been an attempt at "creating things" which, like her frequent wish to "bear loads of baby boys," was a way of coping with a feeling that she had replaced a (dead) boy, should be a boy, but should also produce males, serve males and partner males. The wish to be an architect was both an attempt to overcome her struggles, and a product of those struggles and of various conflicting wishes and defensive trends.

Natalie's difficult oedipal situation grew partly out of the distorted, conflicted relationship with a nurturant but seductive father. The turn to father and difficulty in entering and then resolving the oedipal configuration with a secure sexual identity, however, was a result in large part of the problematic mothering and of the troubling, limited, and in some sense unresolved identification with the mother. Natalie struggled not only when she sought to be like father (in becoming an architect), but also when she thus sought to be unlike, or to feel she was unlike, the rather disturbed mother. In fact Natalie often found herself cooking and busily nurturing her boyfriend, and not studying, when school deadlines approached. She gradually perceived how this style of somewhat frenzied busy-ness was like her mother. Natalie noted, "When I'm doing housework I'll be fine. If I go to do my schooolwork or something else, though, I begin to feel sick." Natalie tearfullly agreed with an interpretation that by doing housework she felt loyal to her mother, close to her mother, and like her mother. Natalie was surprised to see how involved she was in remaining like the mother she openly disdained. Later she remarked, "I think sometimes I'll never be able to be more than she is--I wanted her to be a good person and I see now that she can't be. If she's not great how can I become great?"

Naturally the disdain itself, even if justified, was colored by oedipal rivalry. There was, on the one hand, the aim or tendency to be like mother, and perhaps a wish

to feel better about mother by not outdoing her, by remaking mother's image in identifying with her, a way in which Natalie attempted to restore the image of mother by becoming like her. On the other hand Natalie was also attempting through housework to outdo mother, to be a better wife, to win the father's and boyfriend's affections. Natalie's amorphous fear of "betraying" was revealed as oedipal, as related to competition with mother.

The struggle to be both like mother and not like her had run throughout Natalie's life, representing oedipal themes but also an attempt to cope with the underlying preoedipal difficulties. Natalie struggled to feel unlike a devalued mother; however she had also needed to identify in order to feel female, in order to defend against her oedipal competitiveness, and perhaps also to defend against a preoedipal rage at a frustrating, unstable aggressor-mother. Consider Natalie's comment, "I'd be happy in a way if my parents would just disappear, and my mother in particular. For her to be gone, that would be great." Here Natalie is speaking of an oedipal wish to replace mother and feel free to be an adult woman, conflated with the wish to be free from an identification--a repudiated but real pull--to be like a devalued mother, and from the fear of being both abandoned and guilty if unlike mother. The wish to be rid of mother, and indeed of both parents (reportedly a frequent conscious feeling for Natalie in childhood), was a wish to resolve identifi-

catory dilemmas that had complicated Natalie's oedipal struggle and shaped her conflicts. This admixture of preoedipal and oedipal issues had then shaped Natalie's work choice, and produced an inhibition.

But if work choice, productiveness in work, and inhibition all can stem from the meanings of work and of its consequences, then what determined whether creativity or inhibition prevailed on the basis of these meanings? The notion that fruitful work stems from sublimation correctly suggests that productive work does not steer clear of unconscious wishes or conflicts, but manages to tap them constructively. For Natalie, the work appealed to her wish to be like father, and also to win him. It also, however, roused feelings of confusion and rage that may have existed preoedipally as she developed a sense that she had "replaced" a boy and yet could not become one. I have speculated that Natalie needed to distance herself from work to recover from a feeling she was attacking her own female identity, and also to recover from the anxiety that sexually (i.e. oedipally) assertive behavior (or here, an equivalent in the work) produced by risking loss of the preoedipal closeness she needed with the father and risking the further wrath or abandonment of the mother.

In attempting to work, Natalie felt frustrated, anxious, and defective. Dynamically the anxiety may be explained at least partly in terms of the meanings represented in her work and her potential success at it. In

Natalie's experience, however, she was not choosing to feel incapable--rather she could not escape it. It seemed that precisely as she aspired and tried to work, the feelings of defectiveness became more acute. These feelings, which I believe stemmed partly from an identification with mother, were intensified just as she strove to achieve. One source of this tendency to feel hopeless as she worked may have been the way Natalie perceived her father, as exhorting her to lofty goals but implying, in Natalie's mind at least, that to be a success she must become something else, something more than she already was. Given her wish to be a boy and her identification with a mother viewed as defective, Natalie experienced goals she then set up as wishes to be more than she could become. She got up from her drawing board or desk out of agony, out of a wish to escape the tension between her aspirations and her acute feeling of incompetence. Work inhibition may be a product of the heightening of both wishful aspirations and fantasies or fears of defectiveness that can occur when work is undertaken.

Natalie's work was stifled not only because she was so torn by the gratifications in being like but also unlike both mother and father; in addition there were the positive meanings which lay in inhibition. For Natalie, not working was a compromise formation with its own significance; and being sick, taking to bed, or staying home to perform housework obsessively (by which I do not intend to imply housework cannot be performed as meaningful, grati-

fying labor) served to affirm an identification with mother while also secretly breaking it by outdoing her. Both taking to bed and outdoing mother at housework had incestuous meanings. They also stunted other strivings in unconscious response to the more overt competitive meaning of such ambitions.

This case study of Natalie has offered ideas that I now want to develop in a more general way. My themes in this chapter have been the role of oedipal conflict and of preoedipal identificatory and separation difficulties as contributors to work inhibition. Presumably not every instance of inhibited work involves a person with internalized high standards and aspirations from one parent, a sense of defect or ineffectualness from the other. Such a description would probably be far too simplistic in most cases. Still, if work inhibition can be taken--as I do take it--to be a genuine inhibition, not an indifference to work, not simply conscious or unconscious rebellion against an unwanted sense of obligation to work, then implied is some notion of conflict, tension, or constraint upon a motive.[4] It is not evident to me that merely having two rather different parents, or having rather divergent models for identification, is enough to cause inhibition or difficulty in an offspring's strivings. A greater tension may develop between an identificatory piece that grows out of perceptions of the preoedipal object as omnipotent, and a piece that comes from later perceptions of the same object as highly imperfect,

ineffectual, and despairing about himself or herself. Of course one often finds drive-related competition and some disparagement of the same-sex parent, but accurate perception of severe parental weakness seems to have a rather different effect. Another source of inhibition may be the tension between the high standards and aspirations internalized from parents, and the defective self-image acquired by way of these parents if they despair, not of their own, but of the child's efficacy. There may be rewards or gratification within a family, as Schafer (1983) has suggested, for accepting a prescribed role as helpless or a failure. I am trying to suggest how inhibition--a form of tension--and not indifference may result from the relation between internalized ambition--the "wished-for self-image" (Milrod, 1982) or ideal self--and the damaged subjective sense of efficacy, the self-representation.

The notion that devalued or negatively-toned identifications or parts of identifications can contribute to a person's self-representation should be contrasted with Kohut's view, in which lack of zest or energy to fulfill ambitions is seen as a depletion stemming from "lack of transmuting internalizations." Admittedly many of Kohut's cases are intended as depictions of patients who rely on primitive merger fantasies and merged self-object idealizations in place of more selective identifications with more realistically perceived traits of others. Nonetheless, in cases where Kohut views the unempathic, ineffec-

tual, and disappointing parents of his patients as not allowing the patients to make internalizations, I tend rather to see some of these patients (and certainly several of my own, including Cheryl and Natalie) as having made real identifications, but destructive, inhibiting identifications with which they then struggle.

Consider briefly one of Kohut's cases. "Mr. A.," (Kohut, 1971, pp. 57-73) was a creative, intelligent research chemist who became periodically depressed and less creative at his work, particularly in response to disapproval of him or his work. Kohut states that Mr. A. had often, in childhood, "felt abruptly and traumatically disappointed in the power and efficacy of his father" (58). The father was an ambitious entrepreneur who had prospered at times, but had often suffered losses and responded with panic, despair, and hypochondriasis (59). Mr. A. had idealized the father during much of childhood but just before latency had seen the father fare badly. As a result, Kohut argues (62), "no transmuting internalization" occurred at this critical moment, and the patient remained forever in search of external, idealized figures. I would offer a somewhat different account based on the facts Kohut presents. The patient identified with the ideals, ambition, and power of the father. However, he also made an identification with (an internalization of) an impotent, frustrated man unable to attain those very ideals. Thus the patient was left with a sense of inner aims and standards and a concomitant sense of inherent

defect in becoming what he felt he should become. He then sought external others who could help him overcome this inner conflict and rectify his self-representation. Internalization does not halt, development is warped but not simply arrested, in the face of troubled rearing. Even while enraged or depressed by it, the child also makes an identification with this impotence, as Mr. A. did. Mr. A. struggled to resolve the tension between his high ambitions--his high estimate of what he should expect himself to become--and the easily evoked, unreconciled sense of himself as incompetent.

I think this distinction I draw can make a difference, especially in therapy. The therapist will be guided to look, not just for feelings of inefficacy, emptiness, or depression, but for the highly specific traits and self-representations formed by identifying with a specific individual, the disappointing parent. My view also suggests one should anticipate a patient's unwillingness to give up this self-defeating identification since it represents a tie to an original object and has many drive-related and defensive meanings. Such a distinction obviously bears on Natalie's case, and might easily pertain in another case of Kohut's, that of Miss V. (1977, pp. 58-62). The case is only sketched, but Kohut cites Miss V.'s depression as an adult "re-enactment of her deep sense of failure at relieving her mother's depression" (61). The patient's depression is seen as reflecting her childhood frustrations. No mention is made, however, of

ways in which the depressive traits reflect an identification forged with the disturbed mother, and not just a revival of Miss V.'s childhood despair.

Kohut is not alone, however, in viewing the internalizations occuring in reaction to "good" objects (primarily parents) as fundamentally different from those occurring in cases of narcissistic, psychotic, or otherwise difficult objects. Kohut described the difference in terms of a failure to internalize from pathological objects. Guntrip (1969) insisted that only good objects yield identifications, bad objects always being introjected and experienced as alien, commanding presences. From a fairly classical Freudian structural perspective, Rothstein (1982) has asserted a similar view of internalization for at least some cases. In certain cases of pathological narcissism in men, he says the superego lacks "internalizations derived from identification with a loving, respected father." Instead, "the subject contends with fears of submission to and attack by a paternal representation that exists as an introject, tenuously internalized within self-as-place . . . ." On the other hand, other traditional Freudians (Abend and Porder, 1986) have questioned the idea of "different psychic processes or mechanisms" such as introjection versus identification. Rather, they claim all cases of internalization consist in identification fantasies of becoming or becoming like, and the differences lie not in the type or form of the fantasy but only in the overall quality of a person's ego

functioning, particularly reality testing and synthetic functions.

In contrast with the various above views, Greenson (1954) has described cases where he views patients as having made clear-cut identifications with a helpful, "good" parent, only to be plagued by their unrecognized identification with the hated other parent. Greenson argues that identification, not just introjection, has occurred because "the self has become similar to the external object," with resulting changes in "behavior, attitudes, feeling, posture, etc." (p. 201). He asserts that while identification is an unconscious process, there can be varying degrees of self-awareness of identifications, and the identifications can be ego-syntonic or ego-alien. Schafer (1968, p. 168) has also suggested the possibility of ego-alien identifications and identifications with negatively-toned objects, and in cases I have discussed here--in particular Cheryl and Natalie--it has been precisely the conflict between identification with admired and debilitated images or aspects of a single object, that has seemed to allow for genuine but inhibited ambition.

In Cheryl's case, she often alluded, with tears of apparent gratitude, to her mother's and grandmother's great strength as immigrants facing adversity, and how confident, competent, and successful they had both managed to be. Cheryl wept describing how her grandmother had refused to put her children up for adoption as was

demanded when the grandmother found her first employment, as a nanny. But the weeping turned out to be more a reflection of a contrasting memory--of Cheryl's mother, exhausted and at loose ends, threatening to place Cheryl for adoption if she did not behave. Cheryl strove to keep such memories from affecting her positive portrayal of her mother. She often insisted to me that her mother was enormously devoted ("there was nothing she wouldn't do for me"), only to fall at other times into bitter indictment of her mother's jealousy and refusal to respect and praise Cheryl's many accomplishments.

Cheryl made a similar effort constantly to assure me (and herself) that although she had been through a divorce and career change, she herself was proving enormously capable, productive, and independent. Cheryl would often enumerate these strengths as if making a list. But in her daily life Cheryl would suffer moments of great depletion, haunted by an image of becoming haggard and inert. Cheryl panicked at such thoughts, while not consciously relating them to her depressed mother; she rejected for a long time my comments in this regard. Cheryl would also fall into jealous fits in other sessions; she recognized them and even labelled them for us, but again essentially refused to think of a connection to her mother.

Cheryl had made an unconscious and largely unacknowledged identification with a part of her mother that she did not even wish to recognize, that it was too painful to stay aware of consistently. Cheryl was not depressed

only: she was also ambitious, energetic at times, and highly competitive. And these features also grew out of internalizations. But the gap between Cheryl's ideals and ambitions, and the underlying depressed self-representation, made Cheryl often feel hopeless. She defended against this feeling through her frequent proclamations of her strength and through obsessional, abstract ruminations in many sessions. The depressed and futile side of her mother was kept out of awareness but formed a part of Cheryl's identification with her mother nonetheless.

In both Cheryl and Natalie's cases, it seemed that depletion, distractibility, or inhibition of work became most acute at points where they were conscious of their aspirations, but felt, not just that particular actions of theirs might not be fully adequate, but that in a deeper way they could not be the kinds of persons who could ever meet such aspirations. Natalie described this feeling in saying: "It's not like I lack energy or ability . . . I would like to be successful, be independent, have a family. But I also feel sometimes it doesn't matter what I do. So I procrastinate, even on courses I really wanted to take. It feels like it couldn't possibly matter to do anything." At certain moments both of these patients were paralyzed by a feeling that they simply could not become <u>anything</u>, that their actions meant nothing. At such moments, I believe activity feels frustrating, useless, and even undesirable due to an inability to escape identi-

fication with a failing parent and, secondly, due quite possibly to a history of some gratifications in being like the parent even in the defective respect. Inhibition is then a consequence, and a type of solution, in that it provides escape from the inevitable moments of frustration in all work. It is at these moments of frustration that a fantasy of ineffectuality based in identification feels painfully confirmed, and inhibition, as avoidance, dulls the pain.

I wish now to turn to some of the theoretical questions that may be raised by the foregoing discussion. I have discussed at some length the tension between "identificatory pieces" or between parts of the self-representation. This would appear to be a conflict hypothesis of sorts, though without explicit description in traditional intersystemic (drive-defense) or intrasystemic terms. Furthermore, in discussing Natalie's case I have spoken of a wish to be like father and how this conflicted, in a sense, with Natalie's need to preserve her female identity and a sense of self. I suggested that Natalie also wanted to be unlike mother, but tried to affirm a problematic feminine identification. Such a way of speaking may seem to posit conflicts between wishes to identify and wishes to fend off identifications, whereas wishes are traditionally viewed as instruments of the drives and identifications as psychic structure acquired as an outcome of drive-defense development. What is the model of explanation in this chapter, then, and how does

it fit with the traditional Freudian model?

Speaking in terms of wishes to identify, wishes to be like, is not foreign to traditional psychoanalytic theory. For most thinkers, though, the wishes are formed on the basis of the drive-defense compromises and the gratification that they furnish (e.g. Abend and Porder, 1986). A few writers have suggested otherwise, that a wish to identify is not merely an outgrowth of other drive derivatives (e.g., Etchegoyen, 1985); Kohut is perhaps the foremost proponent of a view that internalization cannot be said to occur in order to obtain instinct gratification. In some sense, the long debate over whether object-relations or drives are the basic motivators of behavior concerns the same question.

As for my own view in this chapter, several points can be made. I do not feel my formulation need be seen as opposing the view that identifications develop on the basis of, and as structuralization of, drive gratifying trends. What I did highlight were the preoedipal issues that affect the shape of oedipal wishes and their resolution, and I have spoken to some extent in terms of "preoedipal wishes" for closeness and like-ness rather than in terms of strictly sexual and aggressive impulses. When preoedipal development is disrupted, these wishes can color the nature of oedipal wishes and make drive gratification more conflictual and difficult.

Speaking of an ongoing adult struggle over identifying with father and mother may also seem peculiar if such

identifications are viewed as psychic structure acquired in early years. Naturally the ego is built on early identifications, but I have attempted to show that what might be viewed, in Natalie's case, as insufficient identification with the female parent or else as "unresolved" identifications with both parents can be at the heart of conflicts over work. "Insufficient" identification may not be quite accurate since, while there was something tenuous or lacking in her female identity, Natalie was not in conflict over whether to identify with the mother: she had already made an identification that she was attempting to some degree to abandon out of pain, though also to retain out of guilt, fear, and its importance for her identity. (Likewise for Cheryl, the attempt was to fend off an unconscious identification with mother.) As for the identifications being "unresolved", the meaning of work for identity is always significant and is employed in shaping adult identity and compromise formations. I am not certain whether a tendency to inhibit work can be ascribed to identifications that are unresolved in the sense of being particularly malleable or still in flux, or rather, in those identifications being simply less helpful, more painful, and less capable of allowing for highly gratifying compromise formations through work.

I have described inhibitions as a potential consequence of a worker feeling the frustration of internalized demands on the self clashing with an inner image

of defect. This picture is consonant with Freud's view that both sublimation and mature sexuality depend on the strength of identifications, especially with an admired same-sex parent. The notion of demands on the self clashing with an "image of defect" may seem to offer a causal explanation cast in terms of a conflict between images or representations rather than between drives, defenses and superego injunctions. While I believe my description is phenomenologically accurate and will illuminate some cases, and does also have some causal explanatory power, still I am not opposed to the view that such images are self-representations generated by the compromise formations they yield; that is, that wishes are the motivators, not images. This raises the question, though, of whether every part of an identification is necessarily internalized because it is gratifying, or if some aspects are passively acquired by the sheer power of the presence (whether harmful or benign) of a given parent or as one part of an identification that may gratify more through its other parts. I tend to credit passive "osmosis" with some significance, though I cannot pursue the matter further here. In any case, I have suggested how work can be pursued to alter or repair identity, and how the attempt to override the gratifications, meaning, and self-image in an identification, even in a negatively-toned one, can haunt and inhibit the pursuit.

I have been speaking of the problems posed by problematic identifications for work. But what is the overall

significance of identification of all types, and as both process and product, in work and its inhibition? Is productive work a matter of useful, strong identifications? Clearly there are offspring who become very productive and self-possessed while developing into people rather similar to one or both parents, and children who flourish based on repudiating or varying widely from parental values. It seems unlikely that degree of identification with parents would directly yield an index of productivity or creativity. Perhaps success does not depend very directly on degree or fidelity of identification, though it must depend on taking something helpful even from caregivers who are themselves not functioning well. David Shapiro (1981, pp. 62-64) has stressed the importance of integrating traits, taking ideals fully for oneself, and in fact toning down the sense of emulating and identifying if one is to avoid schisms between one's ambitions and one's sense of what one can achieve. Shapiro contends that the prominence, beyond childhood, of "images or ideas of what one should be"--as used by the adult to measure himself--represents an intensified form of childhood identification (62). This intensification can create a feeling of futility, since it reinforces a sense of inferiority to the model. When the ideals thus adopted feel like an authority imposed on oneself, what one "should" strive to be like, then one's own strivings feel like compliance rather than autonomous acts. Even if the ideals are embraced, a sense of trying to become like a

superior model enforces a feeling of smallness. So it is not only the difficult identifications that can produce conflict and inhibition. Too great a stress on what one should become or be like--even when the identificatory object is virtuous--can create high standards but a potentially inhibiting feeling of inadequacy. When the parent or parents put such a stress on emulation, the child can receive a mixed message: that much is expected, but that he or she needs to become something else, something greater than he or she presently is Such a message can serve as implicit criticism, making achievement an escape from possible failure and present inadequacy rather than a pleasure. This was the case for Natalie, who heard her father's encouragement of her to become an architect as a wish that she be or become something she was not. Even when achieving the specific goal became possible, Natalie had also internalized a vague feeling that she needed to be more than she was, to measure up and compare herself to superiors. Her self-respect always suffered.

In Natalie's case, in Cheryl's to some degree, and in several I reviewed while preparing this work, an interesting pattern emerged. These cases concerned patients who regarded their same-sex parents as disappointing, lacking, or defective, while opposite-sex parents were viewed as demanding, as interested in their children's work, and as critical of failure--but not as confident of their children's prospective success. While these perceptions are naturally colored by drive derivatives, there was also

truth in them. The children felt like, and may have been, oedipal victors to some extent. The opposite-sex parent's attitude--of hoping for achievement but conveying doubt--may have been related to that parent's attitude toward his or her mate (e.g., in Alan's case, an ambitious but devaluing mother conveyed her disappointment in her husband's perceived flaws and hoped--although even then conveying some pessimism--for more from her sons). The theme of oedipal victory suggests one final reason that work inhibition may be arrived at as a compromise formation: by holding back, and not equalling or surpassing superiors, the person may seek to remain linked to other, stronger figures who satisfy the previously frustrated negative oedipal wish.[5]

CHAPTER 4

CLOSING REMARKS

My sympathy in Chapter 2 for a self-psychological perspective was substantial, although I questioned whether a lack of conventional, "positive" ideals and ambitions meant one was "empty of ideals," as Kohut assumes, or might mean rather that one was filled with one's own zealously pursued, perverse aims, for example, to be childlike or a failure. In the next chapter I expanded on this objection, in effect, by showing the lasting, internalized effects of preoedipal disturbance upon later conflict, and by showing how identifications with negatively-viewed objects enter into conflict-based work inhibition. In concluding, I will attempt to suggest where all this leaves us.

My self-psychological formulations grew in part out of two impressions. The first was that traditional ideas of work difficulty (e.g., being "wrecked by success" (Freud, 1916); fears of competing) were too focused on the consequences or meaning of ambition and too little focused on actual moments of working, on describing and understanding the anxiety or avoidance as it occurred in the moment. My second notion was that work projects are not simply conceived or held in mind before and during work. Rather, it is fantasies and images of the work process and work project that are employed as the worker sets out. The image may be highly realistic and focused on detail,

or may be a vague, fanciful notion employed to generate some feeling. My notion, then was that work is represented just as human objects are, and inhibition may be a pathology of work representations akin to narcissistic or schizoid distortions of human objects or of relations to objects.

These two notions essentially came together, since I discovered persons (perhaps all of us at some times) whose moment-to-moment avoidance seemed to derive from fears of immersion, and these fears were in turn generated because the work was employed in merger fantasies of gaining identity through unity with a perfect object. The defect of such motivation lay not simply in the grandiose wish for perfection, but in its existing alongside an empty feeling that propelled one into merger wishes, made one need to attach to others to feel self-esteem, and made the work object also seem outside the potential of the self. Grandiose ambition appeared to co-exist with defects in the feeling of competence.

In Chapter 3, I diagnosed a similar juxtaposition of ambition and feelings of defectiveness in cases I chose to describe more as internalized conflict. And I suggested that Kohut ignored the internalizations that do occur with disappointing models and that make later conflict more intense and more difficult to overcome by making identity, especially sexual identity, less secure, and by creating inner feelings of damage and defect. Nevertheless, I believe that important virtues in the self-psychological

view remain. First, that view illuminates the phenomenology of certain experiences of attempting work. Second, even neurotic conflict over the oedipal meaning of work or success may stimulate other fears, fears of annihilation or merger, as was suggested earlier. Finally, there are, after all, individuals whose difficulties seems to include a subjective sense of emptiness and need to merge, rather than just a self-defeating or self-punishing identification with a devalued or disappointing object. Whether all of Kohut's published cases truly lack internalized conflict and identificatory structure is another question.

In concluding, it is worthwhile stating that, even in offering alternative views, my own study has stuck to a psychodynamic approach. Work and work problems can be, and have been, approached from a variety of perspectives. This dissertation could be usefully complemented, for instance, by studies of the capacity <u>for</u> work. A number of authors have addressed the impetus to master (especially White, 1959; Hendrick, 1943), to achieve (see Atkinson & Feathers, 1966), and the development of objective competence as well as subjective confidence in one's efficacy (Canavan-Gumpert et al, 1978; Bandura, 1977). A psychodynamic study, this time of highly <u>productive</u> work, with case examples suggesting the dynamics that fuel and enable work, would be a useful counterpoint to the present inquiry. The dynamics of successful work are no doubt enormously complex, and any study would need to account, among other things, for the differences in work motivation

among successful workers, some of whom seem able to work, while others seem driven to work, and some of whom seem able to enjoy their productivity, others not. Successful work is not only a matter of psychodynamics, of course. A good deal of cognitive development underlies the acquisition of interests, ideas, and ambition. The constitutional differences among people are also impressive, and I have been tempted on occasion to think that perhaps differences in the capacity to accomplish or work are largely "just" a matter of innate tempo, hence to some degree bedrock, and not to be further explained dynamically. The most productive and creative people seem to work and produce as a part of their most basic function. When one probes the history of individuals, though, one must be impressed by how much of the sense of purpose and confidence necessary for work seems to come from identifications, and how disturbances and conflict can diminish, not the skill, but the will to do and to create.

NOTES

Notes for Chapter 2

1. The concept of "intrinsic" versus "extrinsic" pleasures as motivators of differing value has been explored by social and educational psychologists in their experiments with "intrinsic motivation" and with its disruption through rewards for achievement (Deci,1975 offers a thorough review). This literature offers a non-psychoanalytic approach to the idea of work inhibition as a defect in the motivation of the worker that stems from the source of pleasure in working.

2. Alan did not, however, seem to fit Kohut's definition of narcissistic personality. He rarely was arrogant and was overtly grandiose only in fantasies that he himself regarded as improbable. Further, he did not overtly idealize me at any point, and he was usually guarded and subtly hostile.

3. At this point I may be running together Kohutian and British school terminology. I will define the Kohutian perspective more strictly in later pages, but I believe there is indeed a commonality in Fairbairn (1952) and Guntrip's (1969) description of incorporative fantasy and Kohut's description of the use of an idealized other as self-object.

In the psychoanalytic literature on work and creative inhibitions themselves, Jaques (1966) and Bergler (1952) stand out as discussions exploring relevant preoedipal themes. Jaques takes a Kleinian perspective on incorporation and mentions the sense of loss of parts of one's self and of one's inner objects into work, and the sense of parts of work getting stuck "inside" the immersed worker. Bergler has offered a theory of writing as an attempt to create and thereby to defend against a masochistic wish to regress into the infantile passivity suffered with the original creator (mother). Writer's block is then the failure of the defense and emergence of the wish. Bergler's account suffers from his bruising tendentiousness and also from the fact that although he does investigate preoedipal themes, he has no theory of development that allows for how a child's mental representations and consciousness of objects may change and develop. He is thus unable to conceptualize self-objects or part-objects.

4. Eagle (1984) has correctly asked whether "loss of cohesion of the self" describes a subjective experience or some non-subjectively defined reality about some structure. Eagle's distinction is thus in the tradition of Roy Schafer, and also Edith Jacobson (1964), among others. In my own discussion I think a strictly subjective meaning is

all I need or would support.

5. I was able to follow this case closely through discussions with the therapist.

6. Kohut (1971), pp. 16,22, and especially 154; Kohut (1977), p. 104.

7. Schafer's article (1984) helps to suggest how overly simple it may be to speak of inhibition in terms of fear of failure or fear of success, given the many possible intrapsychic meanings of what appears objectively as success or failure.

Nonetheless, the fear of success and fear of failure literature (see Canavan-Gumpert et al., 1978 for both a review and some interesting empirical and experimental research on "the success-fearing personality") are clearly relevant to my topic. I have preferred to offer dynamic conceptualizations such as oedipal conflict (see next chapter). "Fear of success" tends to be a rather vague and theoretically ill-defined notion if left to float on its own, without mooring in a psychodynamics or in a personality theory such as trait theory. When operationalized (in Canavan-Gumpert), the concept becomes more interesting but overly behavioristic in the way that Schafer's article challenges so well. Still, while I have not given much place to fear of success or failure conceptualizations in this dissertation, I would not completely discount their utility nor their evocativeness.

8. See, for example, the interesting suggestions in Burka and Yuen (1983).

9. This point about perfectionism perhaps needn't be seen as supporting self-psychology. A Freudian, Arnold Rothstein (1983), also describes narcissism as stemming from experiences of merger or infantile perfection. He, however, believes the problem is not an arrest at the stage of individuation but a regression to the satisfying perfection fantasy of early experience in the face of conflicts, oedipal or otherwise.

Notes for Chapter 3

1. "Lack of self-object differentiation" deserves more rigorous definition than I will attempt. I view it as typified by wishes to be completely the same as, and never apart from, others, as well as fears at being lost in such merger. I believe such incorporative activity is not best described as just fantasy or wish (cf. Abend and Porder, 1986) but also as a process of being or becoming taken over by the feeling and traits of another person, in therapy or outside. Pine (1985, Chapter 15) presents a view of such

matters quite like the one suggested in this dissertation.

2. In this case I have changed the patient's name and also some details to guard confidences.

3. I have attempted to consider whether statements about "feeling like a male by being an architect" are sexist. If a male studied law like his aggressive lawyer mother, would we say he was in danger of feeling like a female? Perhaps less likely. Given the sex-role asymmetries in the culture, though, implying such an asymmetry does not necessarily indicate this writer's bias: it may be a real cultural disparity that does yield psychological asymmetries in patients.

For an outstanding essay surveying distinctive themes in inhibited female workers, see Applegarth (1976). Moulton (1985) discusses the difficulty in assertiveness among career women and its relation to the nature of the identifications and ongoing relationships of these women with their mothers. Person (1982) argues that women do not suffer intrapsychic conflicts over success so much as fears of real ostracism, especially by other women. Schecter (1979) argues that much female envy and fear of men is a displacement from the internalized "omnipotent preoedipal mother" which is the real source of inhibition in the daughter's assertiveness.

4. Although I have spoken of Natalie's conflict over oedipal wishes, I have not attempted to suggest a general profile of the most typical conflictual content in cases of "conflict-based" inhibitions of work. Oedipal wishes would clearly be one typical source of conflict. Applegarth (1976) has suggested that conflicts over aggression are a primary source of work inhibition, and Field (1957) has described conflicts over anal-sadistic and anal-expulsive pleasures as crucial in creative inhibition.

5. For a discussion of the effects on self-esteem and future object-relations of disappointment in the negative oedipal object, see A. Reich (1960), a clear precursor to Kohut (1971, 1977).

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