

# Freud's Case of Dora: Wellspring of Discovery and Discourse

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## Abstract

After 60 years of non-critical silence, Freud's Dora became the target of a surge of publications in the 1970s and 1980s that criticized his mismanagement of his adolescent patient. Jennings (1986) showed how this "Dora revival" was fueled by a revolutionary change in attitude toward countertransference and new understanding of adolescent development. In retrospect, the "revival" was just the start of a "Dora Wellspring" of over 200 publications about the case. Further, the most dominant and enduring theme in Dora literature has become the question of feminine psychosexual development and identity. This article reveals the crucial, albeit indirect and delayed, impact of Jacques Lacan's "return to Freud" in the 1950s, which brought Dora and hysteria to the attention of the early French feminists, who transformed Dora into a case exemplar for their deconstruction of male patriarchy. In turn, Dora was re-examined by dozens of psychoanalysts and writers, mostly female, seeking to develop a viable theory of feminine psychosexual development in the 1980s and 1990s. This discourse stimulated another surge of publications in the new century that have sought new insights by re-examining Freud's thinking in the Dora period and by directly applying Lacanian concepts to contemporary thinking about gender and trauma.

## Keywords

Dora, Freud, Lacan, Female Psychology, History of Psychotherapy, Psychoanalysis

## 1. Introduction

*The history of psychoanalysis can be seen entirely as a struggle with the question of feminine sexuality. (Lacan, 1952: *Ecrits*, p. 28)*

Jennings (1986) identified a surge of over 30 psychoanalytic publications in

the 1970s and early 1980s, which were critical of how Freud had mishandled his famous case of Dora. Even more remarkable was the fact that this legendary analysis and seminal clinical text had remained untouched by critical comment for nearly 60 years prior to this “Dora Revival.” Jennings concluded that two major theoretical currents created the conditions for this abrupt outpouring of critical studies. The first was the revolutionary change in attitude toward **countertransference** in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy. At the time of the Dora case in 1900, and for many decades to come, countertransference was seen as a negative and disruptive interference that revealed the neurotic failings of the analyst and was decidedly shameful to admit. In Freud’s case, he was blind to his negative countertransference to Dora, which persisted and influenced his writing, rewriting, and decisions to delay publication of his failed “fragment” of analysis for almost five years. By the 1960s, however, countertransference was appreciated as a natural and pervasive process in the dyadic relationship of therapy that should be used to understand the dynamics of unconscious conflicts and defenses.

The second major contributor to the Dora Revival was the emergence of a psychoanalytic theory of **adolescent development** and its treatment. Erikson (1962) was only the second analyst to openly criticize Freud’s mistakes with Dora in an English-language publication<sup>1</sup>. Erikson showed how Freud misunderstood and over-reacted to Dora’s expressions of the normal developmental stage-specific concerns and behaviors of adolescence. Freud did not understand Dora’s pre-eminent adolescent plea for “fidelity” in reaction to the gross infidelities and hypocritical deceits of her father, mother, Herr K and Frau K. Freud was singularly insensitive to Dora’s adolescent outrage at being used as an object of sexual barter in a conspiracy of adults. Moreover, Freud treated Dora like an adult, pummeling her with explicit sexual interpretations. His counter-transferential frustration with Dora rose as she exercised adolescent autonomy in rejecting his authority and interpretations.

In his efforts to validate his new prized theory of the Oedipus complex, Freud made insistent interpretations that Dora was repressing her natural (Oedipal) sexual attraction to Herr K. But 17-year old Dora wanted nothing to do with the seductions of an older, lecherous, married man and was seeking validation of her own truth—that she was being manipulated and abused by this circle of deceitful adults. Fifteen months after terminating the analysis, Dora returned to Freud on April 1<sup>st</sup> with vindicating confessions from the adults, but Freud showed his lasting countertransference by rejecting her request to resume analysis as an April fool’s joke.

While Jennings (1986) was correct in explaining how these two major theoretical changes opened the floodgate of the Dora Revival, he entirely missed a third major development in psychoanalysis that contributed to the resurgence of interest in the case of Dora: the *question of feminine psychosexual develop-*

<sup>1</sup>Wolstein (1954) was first to reproach Freud’s failure to attend to Dora’s loveless relationship with her mother.

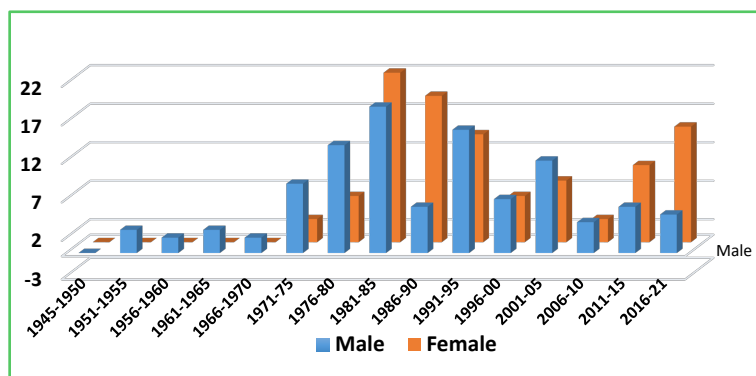
**ment and identity.** At the time of his pre-publication research in 1984, Jennings could not have known that the initial outpouring of 30+ Dora articles, most of which were written by male analysts, was merely the first wave of serious and sustained interest in the case of Dora—one in which female writers would dominate for several decades of vigorous commentary, discussion, and discourse (see **Figure 1**).

In retrospect, the question of feminine sexuality and identity has outpaced the “Dora Revival” literature and transfigured Freud’s case of Dora into an iconic cultural landmark in both psychoanalytic and broader feminist, literary, and intellectual history. In total, as of 2021, the Dora literature has swelled to a total of 113 journal articles, 67 book chapters, 6 books, 4 anthologies, 2 dedicated journal issues, 4 produced plays, a musical, 2 films, 3 novels, a *CliffsNotes*-like study-guide, 12 book reviews, and 4 theses (**Figure 1**).

This article will argue that the Dora case has had a powerful and uniquely singular impact on the history and development of psychoanalytic thinking—centered most importantly on the formulation of a cogent theory of feminine psychosexual development—and it has continued to be a Wellspring of discourse and discovery. Organized in a historical chronology, the article will cover the following seven epochs:

- 1) Dora and Freud’s early Oedipal theory (1895-1910);
- 2) Dissension against the castration complex and penis envy (1920-1940);
- 3) Lacan’s “return to Freud” and a revolutionary reconception of Dora (1950s);
- 4) Dora becomes a feminist heroine (1960s and 1970s);
- 5) Dora and the reconstruction of feminine psychosexuality (1970s to 1980s);
- 6) Psychoanalysis “reclaims” Dora in a new era of rediscovery (1990 to 2005);
- 7) Dora in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century—New ideas on trauma and gender identity (2006 to present).

The historical review begins with the seeds of the Dora Wellspring as found in Freud’s early Oedipal theory and the subsequent dissension and schism in the psychoanalytic movement in response to his castration complex and penis envy in the 1920s and 1930s. The review then moves to the reconceptualization of Dora by French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in 1952, which excited interest in Dora and feminine psychosexuality and ultimately transformed Dora into a feminist case exemplar by the early French feminists in the late 1970s. In turn, by using the Dora case of hysteria to explicate and attack patriarchy and the suppression of women, the feminist movement popularized Dora, while challenging psychoanalysis to reconstruct its own understanding of feminine sexuality in the 1980s and 1990s. This period was dominated by female analysts and feminist writers and much of the Dora literature spread to non-psychoanalytic forums, such as feminist and literary explorations of feminine psychosexuality. But, starting in the 1990s, psychoanalysis reclaimed Dora in a big way. There was a surge of studies that focused on the crucial historical period of theoretical development surrounding the Dora case (i.e., especially seduction theory and



**Figure 1.** Dora publications by gender.

Oedipal theory) as well as direct efforts to apply Lacanian and feminist concepts in mainstream psychoanalysis. This high level of psychoanalytic activity continues in the new century with a focus on sexual trauma and gender identification.

## 2. Dora and Her Discontents: The Question of Feminine Psychosexuality

### 1) Dora and Freud's early Oedipal theory (1895 to 1910)

Four years after the ground-breaking publication of *Studies on Hysteria* (Freud, 1895), Freud was bursting with creativity and ambitious to establish his new and fertile theories of the unconscious mind, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Freud, 1900), infantile sexuality, and the Oedipus complex. At the age of 44.5, Freud was eager to demonstrate his ideas when a 17.9-year old girl, Dora (Ida Bauer), entered his Vienna consulting room in early October 1900. Ultimately, to the displeasure and annoyance of both doctor and patient, Dora was a poor match for validating his newly developing Oedipal theory, which, at that time, was based almost entirely on the male model: Dora was neither male nor adult; she was the victim of traumatic child sexual abuse by a middle-aged man from age 13 to 15 (rather than “seduction” by a father-representing Oedipal male), and she had a predominant attraction and identification with an older woman (rather than the presumed primary Oedipal father figure).

Given this mismatch of patient and theory, Freud's persistent and frank interpretations would eventually drive Dora from her daily treatment (six days per week) in three months. But through its publication, Freud's (1905a) *Fragment of an Analysis* would expose the contradictions and inconsistencies of his Oedipal theory to criticism. Although Freud stopped everything to write the case within 25 days of its conclusion, and even though the paper was initially accepted for publication in 1901 (Tanner, 2005), Freud delayed publication for five years until it was published in two parts in October and November of 1905. Clearly, Freud recognized and admitted that he had error in many ways and he considered the case to be an incomplete “fragment” and “failure”. As revealed in his subsequent revisions and additions to the text, Freud must have also struggled with the fact that Dora did not “fit” his prized Oedipal theory of psychosexual

development<sup>2</sup>. Even more importantly, there was the problem that women, in general, did not fit his male-oriented model for the Oedipus complex.

In retrospect, Freud's Oedipal theory was in its first years of development when Dora came for treatment in 1900. As a foundational theory of psychoanalysis, the Oedipus complex is the universal crucible in which polymorphous infantile sexuality (which directs desires toward both parents) is, through the impetus of external event(s), "shocked" into becoming organized as a masculine- or feminine-gendered personality, which then directs desires toward the opposite-gendered parent. Since both boys and girls enter the Oedipus complex as incestuously desiring the mother, Freud needed to identify and explain how the same psychological mechanism—yet to be determined—could trigger the split into the two gender personalities that both identify with the same sex parent and both desire the opposite sex parent.

Freud hypothesized that the external psychological event was the child's discovery of the anatomical difference between the sexes. Freud began exploring the idea that this universal developmental discovery of the missing penis would elicit thoughts and fears about castration in both genders. From the beginning, however, his Oedipal theory was developed on the model of the little boy and its application to female development was neglected and secondary. In his 1908 article "On the Sexual Theories of Children", Freud introduced his theory of penis envy to explain how the same early-life event could account for the gender development of females. By 1915, Freud was confident that the explanatory mechanism was the Castration Complex, which he added to a later edition of *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud, 1905b) in 1915.

## **2) Dissension against the castration complex and penis envy (1920 to 1940)**

In Freud's final schema, the boy and girl share the same "masculine" sexual history of desiring the mother as the first object, and both come to realize, in fantasy, that having the phallus is the desired status because the phallus is the target of the mother's desire. For the boy, the castration complex *ends* the Oedipus complex. Out of his fear of castration (i.e., loss of his penis), the boy gives up his primary object love for the mother and identifies instead with the father. For the girl, the castration complex *begins* the Oedipal complex. She must transfer her object love to the father (who has the phallus that she envies) and identifies with the mother who (to the girl's disappointment) does not have a phallus.

Freud (1920) continued to develop the castration complex and, had full confidence in his theory. But he had still not resolved the inherent contradiction of positing a normative heterosexual attraction for both genders, while asserting that the unconscious has no natural or automatic opposite-gender object for the

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<sup>2</sup>Blass (1992) was first to propose that Freud's Oedipal theory was so insufficiently developed at the time of Dora's analysis that Freud did not conceptualize the case in Oedipal terms and did not make Oedipal interpretations. Her thesis disavows the frequent assertion by Dora critics that Freud's rigid adherence to the Oedipus complex prevented him from a more nuanced understanding of Dora's adolescent dynamics.

sexual drive. Instead unconscious desires are polymorphous and can be variably directed at objects of both genders and with variable aims and results. Until 1920, Freud tried to solve the contradiction of innate sexual differences with the concept of bi-sexuality in which both sexes partly identify with the opposite-sexed parent. But bi-sexuality is itself an indefinite and variable process that begs the question. Nevertheless, despite the murkiness of bi-sexuality, Freud believed that the castration complex provided the universal mechanism for how the same external event (threat of castration) triggered the sexual differentiation of both genders.

Ultimately, as Freud pushed harder for the primacy of the castration complex, along with its essential corollary of female penis envy, he encountered growing resistance from his followers, which precipitated a major schism in the psychoanalytic movement. As summarized by Juliette Mitchell (Mitchell & Rose, 1983, p. 15), the dissension began in 1921:

Lou Andreas-Salome, Johan von Ophuijsen, then Karl Abraham and Auguste Starke in 1921 initiate the response to the [castration complex]. Franz Alexander, Otto Rank, Carl Muller-Braunschweig, and Josine Muller continue it until the names that are more famous in this context—Karen Horney, Melanie Klein, Jeanne Lampl-de Groot, Helene Deutsch, Ernest Jones—are added in the mid-1920s and 1930s. Others join in: Otto Fenichel, Sandor Rado, Marjorie Brierly, Joan Riviere, Ruth Mark Brunswick, but by 1935 the positions have clarified... (first names added)

It is no coincidence that half of the dissenters in this list were female analysts, all of whom intuited that penis envy did not “fit” their life experience as females. In the mid-1920s in a historical period collectively called “the Jones-Freud debate”, Ernest Jones aligned with these dissenting female analysts, who included Klein, Horney, Deutsch, and Lampl-de Groot. The dissenters rejected Freud’s assertion that penis envy arose directly from recognition of biological difference and argued instead for primary femininity in which penis envy was demoted to a secondary defensive formation. In rejecting penis envy as a primary causal process for girls, however, the dissenters needed to develop a viable alternative process. Thus, for example, Klein (1928) and Horney (1926) hypothesized an equal, but very different Oedipal mechanism in which the girl has a natural valuation of her vagina (in the same way that the boy naturally values his penis) and the girl fears injury and violation through rape by the father. Whereas Freud remained focused on establishing the castration complex as the all-important universal mechanism that precipitated and caused gender-specific heterosexual identification, the dissenters pursued a more viable theory of female psychosexual development and identity.

As a group, the major neo-Freudian contributors in this period found the explanation in a presumption of *inherent biological dispositions*. But any explanation that allowed biological differences was anathema to Freud. His foundational conception of the unconscious requires that desire is polymorphous and variable

to object and aims—which is absolutely independent of the actual gender of the child. He was adamant that “we must keep psychoanalysis separate from biology, just as we have kept it separate from anatomy and physiology” (Freud, 1935: p. 329). Although the Object Relations group and others might try to downplay biological differences by emphasizing the psychological aspects of the gender-identification, Freud knew that they were still trapped by the problem of inherent biological differences.

In his final years, Freud continued to face strong opposition and endeavored to salvage his theory. In his 1933 essay “Femininity”, Freud (1933) acknowledged the need to establish a mechanism that is specific to girls (and not present for boys) that could explain how girls terminate their attachments to their mothers. Perhaps Freud’s most important reformulation of the theory was to replace the genital emphasis on “the penis” with an emphasis on its symbolic meaning as “the phallus.” He recognized that the presence or absence of the penis is what gives full meaning to the perception of difference. It could be argued that the construction of feminine psychosexual development was Freud’s foremost concern at the end of his life. His final paper, *Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defense*, published posthumously in 1940, expanded the role of castration anxiety in the construction of personality. In his final formulation, the threatened loss of the phallus precipitates the fracture of the primordial unity of child/mother and self/object for both boys and girls and this division then creates the subject, the individuated ego, along normative heterosexual Oedipal lines. Compared to boys, however, girls have two extra developmental tasks of changing their love-object from mother to father and their erogenous zone from the clitoris to the vagina.

### **3) Lacan’s “return to Freud” and a revolutionary reconception of Dora (1950s)**

Although Freud’s final work on the castration theory was largely ignored or disregarded as an irrelevant effort by the aging master, an unlikely supporter would emerge to take up the flag for Freud’s theories. Trained as a psychiatrist, Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) abandoned his profession in favor of psychoanalysis in the early 1930s. In 1949, he contributed his original idea of “the Mirror Stage”, for which he is probably best known. Lacan argued that the object and the subject shift and change places in the polymorphous unconscious of the infant and young child. The child can only conceptualize itself as a separate being when it is “mirrored” back to itself from the position of another’s desire. For Lacan, the all-important and essential mechanism for this differentiation of the “I”—must be *language*. Through language, the polymorphous chaos and variability of the unconscious becomes signified and differentiated as you and I, she and he, self and other(s), and this is where sexuality becomes conceptualized as male and female.

Lacan’s central idea was that humans are born into language through the speech of others, and that the subject, the self, and one’s sexual identity are constructed from the primordial unconscious through the significations and dis-

tinctions of language. In his call for a “return to Freud”, Lacan ceased upon Freud’s (1940) final reformulation of the castration complex, which emphasized the *meaning* of the absence or presence of the *phallus* (rather than the anatomical penis), which is the realm of symbolic language. By applying Saussure’s linguistic theory and Levi-Strauss’s structuralist anthropology, Lacan believed that Freud’s seminal theories could be saved from the misunderstandings and revisions of the post-Freudians and restored to their proper primacy in psychoanalysis. In 1951, at the age of 51, Lacan began holding private weekly seminars in Paris devoted to the re-articulation and salvation of Freud’s doctrines. A year later, Lacan inaugurated a yearly series of psychoanalytic seminars devoted to this mission. In 1953, the seminars were opened to the public. Extending over the course of 27 years, Lacan’s psychoanalytic seminars had an important influence on Parisian intellectual and cultural life, including the rise of French feminist theory.

Fatefully, Lacan chose Dora as the first published demonstration of his linguistic re-articulation of Freud’s theories. Lacan (1952/1983: p. 63) asserted that psychoanalysis is a “dialectical experience” that “deals solely with words.” Lacan re-analyzed the case as a sequence of three “dialectical reversals” of Dora’s “truths” and Freud’s “reversing” interpretations.

In the “first truth”, Dora enters analysis in outrage over the duplicitous and odious behavior of the quadrille of adults in her life. She complains that her father and Frau K are having an affair (which is unchallenged by her mother) and that her father has turned a blind eye to her seduction by Herr K. Rather than affirm Dora’s victimization, however, Freud makes the “first reversal” of Dora’s truth by emphasizing that Dora is obsessed with her father’s affair and that she should, “Look at your own involvement in the disorder which you bemoan.” In the “second truth”, Dora acknowledges that, by enjoying her secret intimate confidences with Frau K, she has been complicit in allowing the affair to continue and enabling Herr K’s plot to seduce her. In the “second reversal”, Freud interprets Dora’s jealousy of her father’s love affair as a revelation of her infatuation with Frau K as her (Oedipal) rival for her father’s love.

In the “third truth”, Dora acknowledges her enchantment with Frau K’s “adorable white body” and the pleasure of her intimacy with Frau K (e.g., sleeping together in same room, sharing sexual knowledge and the details of Frau K’s sex life). In the third and final “reversal”, Freud asserts that Dora is bitter over losing her bond with Frau K and emphasizes her lack of anger at Frau K, who betrayed Dora by joining the quadrille in calling Dora a liar.

Although Freud later admitted his failure to pursue his own interpretation of homosexual attraction, Lacan argued that Freud’s greatest error was failing to make the connection between the mystery of femininity that Dora found in the painting of the Madonna and the adorable white body of Frau K. For Dora, Frau K was the representation of the mystery of her own femininity. Instead, disastrously, due to his negative countertransference and determination to apply his new Oedipal theory, Freud continued to press Dora into openly accepting her

love attraction to Herr K (as the Oedipal substitute for her father). Lacan argued that “the problem of Dora’s condition is fundamentally that of accepting herself as a man’s object of desire, and this is the mystery that motivates Dora’s idolization of Frau K” (Lacan, 1952/1983: p. 222).

For Lacan, it is better for interpretations to be enigmatic and polyvalent, open to exploration and further questioning by the analysand. Thus, Freud’s greatest failure was to cease asking questions of Dora’s desire after the third reversal. Instead, Freud was too precise and authoritative in telling Dora the (Oedipal) answer to the question of her femininity (Breidenthal, 2010). Given Freud’s masculine over-identification with Herr K (whom he knew and described as “still quite young and of prepossessing appearance”), Freud could not get past his heterosexual prejudice in affirming a heteronormative Oedipal complex that posited paternal predominance as natural rather than normative. Lacan argued that Dora’s driving question was not “who do I love?”, but “what am I?” and “what sort of woman will I become?” This was a complicated matter given Dora’s history as a “wild” tomboy, her trauma of being sexually objectified by men while still a girl, her alienation from a mother who modeled total revulsion toward sex, and her frustration with the societal restrictions against advanced female education and a meaningful career like her beloved brother Otto (Decker, 1992). As a female confidant and adult role-model, Frau K was crucial and cherished in Dora’s search for her own sexual and personal identity. This is why Dora remained loyal<sup>3</sup> to Frau K despite her betrayal and deception.

The brilliance of Lacan’s reconceptualization was that he “saved” Freud’s Oedipal theory (along with the castration complex) by showing that Dora needed to safeguard her father’s affair in order to preserve her own intimate bond with Frau K and thereby continue to explore her (Oedipally-driven) curiosity about what her father loved in this other woman. Most importantly, Lacan’s analysis opened the doors to the exploration of the mystery of feminine sexuality itself. By pursuing an understanding how *language* signifies and differentiates the chaotic polymorphous multiplicity of desires of the unconscious, Lacan saved Freud’s most essential presumption that *there is no biological predetermination of gendered sexuality*. Gender identity is, in this sense, completely random. Masculinity and femininity are entirely constructed through language. As Lacan and his French analytic colleagues<sup>4</sup> continued to develop this central idea of constructed gender identity and femininity, it became part of French intellectual discourse and resonated with the early French feminists who formed the “second wave” of feminist theory<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>Dora’s bond with Frau K (Peppina Zellenka) was lifelong. They became accomplished partners in contract bridge and Frau K helped Dora to escape from the Nazis in Vienna in 1938, the same year as Freud. Frau K, along with four of Freud’s sisters, was later deported to Theresienstadt concentration camp in September 1942 (Ellis et al., 2015).

<sup>4</sup>Four of the first 12 published criticisms of Freud were published by French psychoanalysts in *Revue Française de Psychanalyse* (Lacan, 1952; Marty et al., 1968; Moscovitz, 1973; Schimmel, 1973).

<sup>5</sup>Historically, the “second wave” of feminism began in France with the momentous publication of *The Second Sex* by Simone De Beauvoir (1949) (first translated into English in 1953).

#### 4) Dora becomes a feminist heroine (1968 to 1978)

As a professor of English literature and fiction writer, Helene Cixous moved to Paris in 1968 and became intrigued by the ideas of Freud and Lacan, which focused her thinking on the relationship between sexuality (femininity) and language (writing). She was electrified by the case of Dora and wrote *Le Portrait de Dora*, which was first produced as a radio play in 1972. A year later, Cixous wrote further about Dora in her novel, *Le Portrait du Soleil*. In 1974, she founded the first university center for women's studies in Europe, and in 1975, Cixous joined with Catherine Clement to publish *La Jeune Née* (*The Newly Born Woman*, Cixous and Clement, 1975a). The centerpiece of this major work of feminist theory was "The Untenable" debate between Cixous and Clement (1975b) as to whether Dora was a hero or victim. Cixous argued that Dora's hysteric symptoms were a heroic effort to break the patriarchal structures that oppressed her—by using the only power available to her—her hysteric symptoms. In contradiction, Clement held that Dora was a victim because she capitulated and remained a hysteric, and her act of resistance changed nothing.

Cixous further explored these ideas in *Le Rire de la Medusa* (*The Laugh of the Medusa*) in 1975. She cast the Medusa from Greek mythology as a hysteric like Dora, but Cixous transformed the negative image of the snake-haired monster into a positive one: Medusa is exuberant, laughing, uninhibited, unpredictable, mysterious, and incomprehensible in her multiplicity (like her snake-swirling hair), which opposes and triumphs over the patriarchal strictures on women's body and voice. Cixous' transformative image captured women's multiplicity and called for women to pursue a new kind of writing called "*écriture féminine*." Through Lacan's ideas of the symbolic and Oedipal in the case of Dora, Cixous argued that female sexuality could now be embraced as something indeterminate, plural, multiplicitous, flexible, and mysterious, no longer constrained by a phallus-centered, male-defined Oedipal construction. Contrary to penis envy, women are not singularly focused on the penis and their sexuality is not categorically defined. Instead feminine sexuality is plural and presents as territory to be explored and female writing (*écriture féminine*) should flow out like an ecstatic torrent of words. *Écriture féminine* serves as a disruptive and deconstructive force, disrupting the established phallogentric symbolic world in which writing, thought, and language are already engendered toward the masculine. Even male writers (such as James Joyce, the subject of Cixous' dissertation in 1969) can write in the flexible and open fashion of *écriture féminine*.

In 1976, Cixous' rejuvenated her play *Le Portrait de Dora*, which became a popular hit in Paris that ran for a year (Cixous, 1976/2004). The combination of Cixous' Dora debate in *La Jeune Née* (1975) and successful play pushed Dora to the forefront of French intellectual and feminist thinking. In 1977, the play was first translated into English, and then re-translated, revised and produced in London, which brought Dora to the attention of the English-speaking world. Ultimately, Cixous' popularization of Freud's case of Dora would elevate Dora to

the status of “an event in women’s history” and a woman “hailed as an exemplary feminist heroine” (Shah, 2016: p. 558).

### 5) Dora and the reconstruction of feminine psychosexuality (1970s to 1980s)

Along with fellow Parisians Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, Cixous is one of the creators of poststructuralist feminist theory, which focused on elaborating and deconstructing gender in language. Both Irigaray and Kristeva were psychoanalysts steeped in Lacan’s language-based reformulations of Freud’s theories. This means that the question of the development and character of feminine sexuality—and its relevance to Freud’s failed analysis of Dora—was explored by psychoanalytically-sophisticated feminist thinkers using psychoanalytic terms and theory. The first major effort to directly meld feminism with mainstream psychoanalysis was Juliet Mitchell’s (1974) landmark book, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*. At the height of the Women’s Movement, Mitchell surprised her fellow feminists by showing that classical psychoanalytic theory was not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but rather a useful tool for studying the formation of gender identity and sexuality within patriarchal culture.

Historically, Lacan’s thinking failed to make any direct impact on mainstream English-speaking psychoanalysis—mainly because his work remained untranslated from French until 1982, but also because his writing itself is difficult to comprehend<sup>6</sup>. Instead, Lacan’s influence was delayed and indirect—making its impact through the work of psychoanalytically-informed feminist writers and psychoanalysts who were predominantly female. Beginning with the popularization of Dora through the success of Cixous’ two books and her play *Portrait of Dora* in the years 1975-1979, there was an outpouring of feminist critiques of the inadequacy of the classic psychoanalytic theory of femininity:

Rose (1978) applied the work of Lacan and feminists Cixous, Montrelay, Irigaray, and Kristeva to argue that Freud’s concept of the feminine was incomplete and contradictory. Gearhart (1979) applied Lacan’s ideas and Irigaray’s discussion of “the symbolic status of the father” to show that paternal privilege is the central problem in the Dora case, as manifested in Freud’s countertransference anger at Dora over her rejection of his paternal interpretive authority. Ramas (1980) applied the psychoanalytic work of Mitchell, the Lacanian theories of LaPlanche, and historical details of the case to show that Dora was repulsed by sexuality and Herr K’s advances because her conception of femininity was synonymous with the bondage and debasement embedded in the patriarchal culture of her time. Wenzel (1981) described Irigaray’s theory that the female oedipal complex is precipitated by the daughter’s rejection of the smothering love of her mother, which drives her toward the father. Moi (1981) applied the Cixous and Lacan to show how Freud’s oppressive mistreatment of Dora was not just coun-

<sup>6</sup>As an index of the American lack of awareness or interest in Lacan, the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* did not publish a single Lacan-focused article until 1988, followed by one in 1991, two in 1994, and one in 1999. Similarly, *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, the journal of APA’s psychoanalytic division, did not publish its first Lacan article until 1992, followed by none until 2003.

tertransference, but grounded in his sexist and patriarchal attitudes of male authority and mastery of knowledge. His over-identification with Herr K's masculinity caused Freud to consistently disregard the importance of Dora's female relationships (e.g., with Frau K, her mother, her governess) in favor of male ones. Evans (1982: p. 64) applied Cixous to show that Dora was "sickened" by the hypocrisy of the "sordid network of illicit sexual activity...involving not only Dora's father and Mrs. K, but Mr. K and numerous governesses", all hidden beneath "the stiff rind of propriety." Gallop (1982) applied Lacan's ideas to the Dora debate between Cixous and Clement in *La Jeune Née* (Cixous & Clement, 1975a). While both viewed Dora's hysteric symptoms as a protest against male suppression, Clement saw Dora as a victim because her contestations failed to disturb the patriarchal status quo and she remained weak. Cixous saw Dora as a heroine because she was effective in causing a crisis, raising a ruckus, and upsetting family relations in a way that could not be re-assimilated.

In 1982, Mitchell and Rose translated and published the first English translations of Lacan (1952)'s analysis of Dora and several other essays in their book, *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the École Freudienne*. In 1983, the literary journal, *Diacritics*, dedicated an issue to publishing Cixous' *Dora* play and the following three articles: Collins et al. (1983) showed how Freud's patriarchal bias caused him to dismiss Dora's mother as too "uncultured and foolish" to be psychologically important. Willis (1983) focused on the feminine sexual imagery of the jewel box and jewels in Dora's dream and her hysteric symptoms. Hertz (1983) described how Freud, like a fiction writer, assembled the fragmented information of Dora's dreams, symptoms, and narrative to fit his Oedipal theory and tell the story he wanted to tell.

McCaffrey (1984) devoted an entire book to show that Dora's dream text could be analyzed in the same way as one would analyze a work of literature. Bernheimer and Kahane (1985) published their anthology, *In Dora's Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism*, which was described a "mini-tradition" of feminist critiques of Dora "within the context of contemporary French writing on psychoanalysis and feminism" (p. vii). The book included Lacan's original 1952 Dora analysis, along with reprints of the articles by Rose, Gearhart, Gallop, Ramas, Moi, Cixous and Clement, Hertz, and Collins et al. as listed above. A new chapter by Sprengnether (1985) showed how Freud's male sympathies with Herr K and determination to apply his new male-centered heteronormative Oedipal theory caused him to neglect the bisexual and homosexual currents in Dora's case. In 1990, a second edition of the *In Dora's Case* anthology added literary analyses by Malcolm (1987) and Van den Berg (1986, 1987). Van den Berg focused on the frequency and psychosexual importance of the theme of reading in the Dora case, including Dora reading books on sexuality, reading a letter and reading "the big book" in her second dream, and reading erotic material with her governess and Frau K.

In the years from 1985-1994, 14 more publications about Dora, 13 by women,

focused on its broader literary and cultural importance. Among these, Boyman (1989) credited Lacan's redefinition of Freud's constrictive male-focused Oedipal theory of hysteria for enabling the exploration of a truly feminine understanding of women in the late 1970s. Others continued to apply concepts from Lacan and Cixous, including hysteria as feminist protest (Dane, 1994), patriarchal exchange of women (Findlay, 1994), patriarchy (Hengehold, 1993), and Lacan's (1958/2017) theory of the structure of hysteria per Dora (Ragland-Sullivan, 1989). Dora's primary role in the establishment of "hysteric narrative" in literary criticism was also cemented in the 1990s in eight additional articles, seven by women.

#### **6) Psychoanalysis "reclaims" Dora in a new era of rediscovery (1990 to 2005)**

Following the intensive discourse between psychoanalysis and feminism in the 1980s, and the continuing prominence of Dora in the rise of "hysterical narrative" and feminist literary criticism in the 1990s, the field of mainstream psychoanalysis showed its own resurgence of interest in Freud's case of Dora in two forms: 1) a surge of historical studies that focused on the crucial period of theoretical development surrounding the Dora case (i.e., especially seduction theory and Oedipal theory) and 2) efforts to directly apply Lacanian and feminist concepts in psychoanalysis.

**a) *New historical perspectives on Dora:*** At least nine historical studies of Dora were published in the period 1990-2005. Foremost was Decker's (1992) landmark book, *Freud, Dora and Vienna: 1900*, which added rich biographical details about Dora, her brother Otto, her parents, Frau and Herr K, and Freud himself in the social historical context of Jews and anti-Semitism in turn-of-the-century Vienna. In describing the sexual mores, patriarchy, and medical treatment of hysteria, Decker revealed that Dora had already endured many years of exasperating and painful treatments by multiple doctors using electrotherapy and hydrotherapy *before* she reluctantly began treatment with Freud. Although six days a week of Freud's novel "talking therapy" would be less physically aversive, Dora entered analysis with the lowest expectations and intense distrust and skepticism toward physicians. Decker identified the misalliance between Dora's needs and Freud's goals of validating his theories about hysteric symptoms, dreams, infantile sexuality, masturbation, bisexuality, and secondary gain.

Blass (1992) argued that Freud's Oedipal theory was so insufficiently developed at the time he treated Dora that he did not conceptualize the case in Oedipal terms and made no Oedipal interpretations. Makari (1997, 1998) argued that, having abandoned seduction theory in 1897, Freud had a two-stage developmental hypothesis that Dora's hysteria was initially caused by early oral zone autoerotic overstimulation and later activated by her object-directed genital masturbation. Robins (1991) showed how Strachey's faulty translations of Freud's original text distorted the meaning of Dora's dreams and impacted Anglo-American studies of the case.

Thompson (1990) revisited Felix Deutsch's (1957) famously disparaging assessment of 40-year old Ida Bauer in 1923 as "one of the most repulsive hysterics he had ever met." As Freud's personal physician and husband of Freud's friend, psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch, his loyalty fueled his harsh assessment of middle-aged Dora's character, judgement, and mental health. Roazen (2001) added historical details about Deutsch and his treatment of Dora. Larsen and Karlsen (2011) agreed that Deutsch "bent over backwards" to align his clinical impressions of Dora with Freud's.

Tolpin (2004) focused on two critical periods in Freud's search to understand feminine sexuality. During the first period of 1900-1905, Freud delayed publishing the Dora case [see Tanner (2005) for details] because he was trying to correct his "mistaken" seduction etiology with a rudimentary theory based on the female anatomy. During the extended second period of 1906-1940, Freud struggled to formulate a "normal female castration complex" and sought female corroboration from experienced analysts, such as Maria Bonaparte and Lou Andreas-Salomé, and aspiring analysts-in-training, including Anna Freud, Helene Deutsch, Jeanne Lampl-de Groot, and Ruth Mack Brunswick.

**b) *Psychoanalysis incorporates Lacanian and feminist concepts.*** During the same period from 1990-2005, more than 20 mainstream psychoanalytic studies of Dora tried to directly incorporate either feminist and/or Lacanian concepts into contemporary psychoanalytic thinking. Loewenstein (1992, 1993) applied Lacan's "dialectical" reconceptualization of Dora to show that psychoanalytic life histories are multivocal, dialectical, ever-unfolding, and nonpositivistic—rather than linear, detective-like investigations leading to a single solution (e.g., Spence, 1986). Lacanian concepts were also reflected in psychoanalytic articles by Banks (1991) and Gonchar (1993), who applied the incest taboo and the exchange of women, and by Thompson (1994), who argued that the key to the revelation of truth was not what Dora said, but what she omitted and tried to keep hidden—which, was only revealed by Freud's skills of observation and interpretation. Ornstein (1993) focused on Dora's desperate need for "holding" by a self-object because she was raised by an unempathic mother who was incapable of (Lacanian) mirroring and because her idealizations of her father, Herr K and Frau K were destroyed by their exploitative behavior.

The influence of feminist thinking is further shown in psychoanalytic publications in the 1990s and early 2000s that emphasized *the importance of sexual abuse* in the Dora case. Lakoff and Coyne (1993) devoted an entire book to the Dora case to show that psychoanalytic interpretations are inherently oppressive acts of social power inequities, such as Dora's status as younger, female, disabled, less educated, and less scientifically knowledgeable. Mahony (1996) also devoted an entire book to the Dora case and concluded that the overriding quality of Freud's treatment was "inexcusable" coercion of a girl by three adult men: Herr K forced himself on Dora at age 13 and 15; Dora's father forced Dora into treatment with Freud to silence her revelations of abuse; and Freud forced his

sexual interpretations and new theories on Dora. Dora, in turn, was far more than a rebellious teen or submissive patient. She exercised an intelligence, bisexual complexity, and strength of will that resisted, challenged, and frustrated Freud.

Gladwell (1997) showed how Freud “re-abused” Dora by not acknowledging the reality of her sexual abuse trauma because he did not yet understand how childhood traumas disrupt normal oedipal-phase changes through the inhibition of ordinary developmental fantasies. Shopper (2002) argued that Dora’s overstimulating involvement in the sexual affairs of her parents and Frau and Herr K prevented her from developing the normal “illusion of celibacy” that facilitates separation from the parents in pursuit of non-incestuous sexual outlets. Hollander (2004) found similarities between Dora’s paradoxical response to her sexual trauma and her own adolescent paradoxical “pleasure” and dissociative responses to sexual abuse by her father. Waugaman (2004) showed that Dora was traumatized by the collusion of her own father and Freud, who identified with Herr K’s virility and tried to induce her to submit to his unwanted sexual advances. Like the feminist debate about hysteria, Akavia (2005) argued that Dora was seeking differentiation from a family system in which disease, hysteria, and shared symptoms defined their identifications and relations.

Benvenuto (2005) argued that, in 1952, Lacan “corrected” Freud’s single component, heteronormative Oedipal view of Dora by positing two components of her predominantly male identifications and her struggle with the complex mystery of her own (corporeal) femininity. Benvenuto then “corrected” Lacan by adding a third component in which the hysteric female also has female identifications. Thus, the crux of hysteria is an oscillation between female and male identifications (and their correlative real-life objects), which inhibits the capacity to commit to a decisive gender identity and path of action in life.

In 2005, an entire issue of *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* was devoted to eight new commentaries on the case of Dora. Levine (2005) asserted that Dora was “perhaps more important in the academic and literary worlds than in the clinical one”, while Weissberg (2005) placed Freud’s book firmly in the tradition of Viennese fin de siècle drama and prose. Mahony (2005) identified nine inconsistencies in the case that reveal how Freud was overwhelmed by the intense transference and countertransference. Sachs (2005) asserted that Dora was a victim of sexual trauma and there was no repression of Oedipal libidinal desires. Bornstein (2005) argued that Freud’s lack of detail about his actual interactive experiences with Dora is responsible for a century of confusion and ambiguity about what really happened in treatment. Kuriloff (2005) asserted that Dora’s symptoms were the primary expression of her bewilderment and outrage over the hypocritical behavior of her parents and Frau and Herr K rather than a mere displacement of conflictual fantasies and affects. Imagining a middle-aged Dora as his own patient, Ornstein (2005) would have listened to her experience of the trauma of sexual abuse and how she felt betrayed and used by everyone she

loved—then, as a girl, and now with her own husband and son.

Rabaté (2005) revisited Lacan’s “second” reanalysis of Dora in 1958, in which Lacan (1958/2017) discussed the structure of hysteria and applied Levi-Strauss’ concept of the patriarchal exchange of women outside the clan. In the famous traumatic scene by the lake, Dora realized she was just another sexual object to be used and thrown aside like her mother, the two governesses, and Frau K. Worse yet, Dora saw that her father had “gifted” her to Herr K in exchange for taking his wife (Rabaté, 2005: p. 90). Dora’s disillusionment was evidenced in her second dream, with its negative signifiers for femininity and metaphor of being trapped. Thus, to the extent that her father had failed her, Dora had to love him all the more to resolve her Oedipal complex.

#### 7) Dora in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century—New ideas on trauma and gender identity (2006 to present)

As shown in figure two, the predominant source of Dora publications has shifted back to mainstream psychoanalytic forums, while feminist and literary articles have declined to less than 20% in the new century. Unlike the intense, but brief controversy raised by Masson’s (1984) exaggerated claim that Freud suppressed his seduction theory and the actual truth of child sexual abuse, more recent psychoanalysts have returned to the Dora case for a more thoughtful reexamination of sexual trauma and Freud’s seduction theory in its historical context.

Ahbel-Rappe (2009) argued that the Dora case is “the actual site” of Freud’s abandonment of his seduction theory and that remnants of trauma and seduction in the text suggest that Freud was unconsciously conflicted about not applying seduction theory to Dora. Colombo (2010) joined seven previous analytic studies of the theme of nursemaids and governesses, which figure prominently in most of Freud’s case studies, particularly Dora (e.g., Kanzer & Glenn, 1980). Colombo (2010) claimed that Freud’s strong identification with his own surrogate mother (his nursemaid Monika) explained his ongoing difficulties with maternal transferences and why he continued writing about the reality of child seduction by governesses even after abandoning his seduction theory (Figure 2).

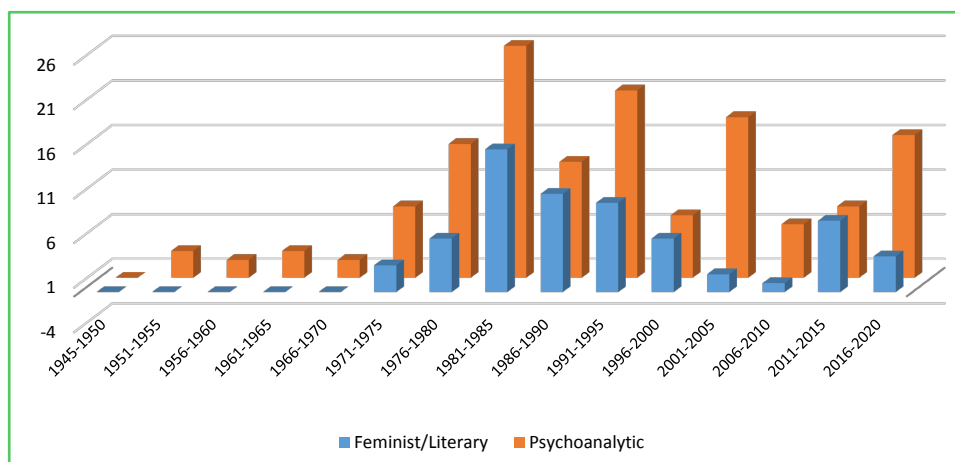


Figure 2. Dora publications in psychoanalytic vs. other forums.

In his book-length analysis, [Romano \(2015\)](#) argued that Dora's treatment was ruined by Freud's emotional distress over his probable affair with his sister-in-law, Minna Bernays, and his painful split with Wilhelm Fliess over the primary authorship of the theory of bisexuality (which figured so prominently in the Dora case). Having recently abandoned his infantile seduction theory, Freud no longer wanted to acknowledge the fault of fathers (including his own father), and reversed Dora's accusations of her father and Herr K into self-accusations. Asserting that Dora was a probable victim of sexual abuse by her father, Romano asserted that Dora was re-abused by Freud's overbearing and intrusive sexual interpretations.

[Balsam \(2015\)](#) challenged Freud's dismissal of Dora's mother by reaffirming the mother's importance as the primary source of any daughter's first and continuing model of womanliness, femininity, and female behavior. This was especially true for Dora in her historical era as a well-bred, well-educated, young Austrian Jewish woman. Whereas Freud focused entirely on the death of the father in Dora's second dream, Balsam showed the equally strong imagery of a vulnerable girl longing for her mother's love and protection from three adult men: the lecherous Herr K; the self-serving father who had given her to Herr K; and Freud, who suggested that she yield to Herr K's seduction.

[Van Haute & Geyskens \(2012\)](#) argued that Freud's medical familiarity with Dora's father, mother, aunt, and uncle caused him to favor a theory of hereditary or constitutional predisposition to hysteria when he treated Dora. Instead they asserted that Dora's bisexuality, not her Oedipal problem, was the key to her hysteria. [Pearl \(2013\)](#) traced the chronological connections between Freud's clinical conceptualizations, interpretations, and Dora's narrative. [Paul \(2006\)](#) hypothesized that Dora used a suicide letter to induce her parents to take her to Freud and wanted him to publish her case as a means of revenge for her victimization.

[Dobson \(2017\)](#) reviewed the concept of the hysterical personality from the time of [Freud \(1895\)](#) to its eventual historical/cultural disappearance, making the feminist argument that Dora's symptoms were not pathological, but healthy attempts to bolster an enfeebled self. [Bach \(2018\)](#) described how Freud and other male physicians of his time disliked and was frustrated with what they perceived as "lying" by Dora and other female hysteric patients.

Exploration of these same themes of seduction theory, sexual trauma, and Oedipal development are prominent in *Dora, Hysteria, and Gender*, an anthology by [Finzi and Westerink \(2018\)](#), in which six psychoanalysts applied an historical lens to the Dora case. [Blass \(2018\)](#) argued that, at the time he treated Dora, Freud considered the retention of infantile sexual affection for the father to be a manifestation of hysteric pathology rather than a feature of normal Oedipal development. [Santos \(2018\)](#) argued that, from 1897 to 1905, Freud was still struggling with whether hysteria was caused by an external trauma or a hereditary predisposition, as well as the role of sexual phantasies in infantile sexuality. Like

Blass, she asserted that Freud's Oedipal theory was not developed to a point that could have been applied to Dora and that Freud favored hereditary predisposition as the cause. Van Haute (2018) observed that, far from abandoning seduction theory, Freud referred to it frequently in the case of Dora and admitted that the theory was still "incomplete." Since his seduction theory required an interaction between an external trauma and a predisposed sexual constitution, Freud emphasized masturbation as the cause of Dora's hysteria and perhaps for hysteria in general.

Westerink (2018) asserted that Dora's oral focus pointed Freud to the oral zone rather than the genital zone as the primal erotogenic zone, which became the very model of infantile sexuality that he presented in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905). Bernstein (2018) argued that Freud (1920) gained insight into the case of Dora from his subsequent analysis of Margarethe von Trautenegg (the third of his three adolescent hysteric patients), who was comfortable with being lesbian and complained of Freud's relentless heterosexual Oedipal interpretations.

Finally, Kadi (2018) emphasized two historical/cultural changes that enabled Lacan and other critics to see the weaknesses in classic Oedipal theory as applied to Dora. First, the patriarchal hegemony of the father was already declining during this historical period, which reduced the perceived importance of a powerful, castrating father in the oedipal drama. Second, Freud could not sufficiently consider Dora's lesbian desire in a time before women's liberation and increasing social acceptance of homosexuality. As shown by Kadi, Lacan's (1952) original Oedipal understanding of Dora emphasized a powerful father who possessed the phallus in the symbolic order. Lacan later developed a new conception of the ineffable feminine "*jouissance*" of the body, which goes beyond the phallus and signifiers in the symbolic realm. Lacan refused to translate his French term "*jouissance*" which, like much of his work, is ill-defined and confusing. But Lacan's purpose was to retain the multiplicity of femininity and feminine desire which transcends, even defies, clear definition or signification. Thus *jouissance* is an incomprehensive meld of pleasure, excitement, impulsiveness, anxiety, satisfaction, love, and eros, and, notably, pain.

The Lacanian idea of *jouissance* brings us back to the qualities of femininity that Helene Cixous first found in Freud's Dora and hysteria in the early 1970s, which inspired her call for *écriture féminine*—a new kind of female writing that was exuberant, uninhibited, unpredictable, mysterious, and disruptive. Paradoxically, Lacan's original structural critique of the Dora case in terms of the significations of language, as well as his subsequent conception of *jouissance*, both resonated with the postmodern feminists because both ideas destroy the rigid binary model of male and female sexuality. Instead both Lacanian ideas allow for a more flexible and ambiguous understanding of gender and sexual identity. Gender does not need to be rigidly binary or heteronormative.

Indeed, a non-normative ambiguous conception of gender may be the new

frontier in feminism, psychology and psychoanalysis. Queer theory (e.g., [Quindeau, 2018](#); [Hutfless, 2018](#)) challenges the patriarchal, the heteronormative, and the hegemonial (i.e., the dominance of one social group over another) by questioning all of the predominant expectations of femininity, masculinity, identity and sexuality. Instead, theorists now appear to be rethinking the binary biases of male vs. female and hetero- vs. homosexual in search of a theory that, like Lacan's *jouissance*, is fluid and embraces ambiguity and multiplicity, while explicitly rejecting certainty.

### 3. Conclusion

Clearly, Freud struggled greatly with Dora. Ida Bauer was Freud's most personally challenging case, but she also yielded the core question that most greatly challenged him as a scientist and psychoanalyst. Dora embodied the mysteries of pre- and post-Oedipal psychosexual development and gender identity, as well as the stages of the primary erotogenic zones and the adolescent/adult eruption of genitally focused desire and gender identity. In short, young Dora embodied the enigma of femininity that Freud could never understand, as he famously admitted to psychoanalyst Marie Bonaparte in a letter on December 8, 1925:

The great question that has never been answered, and which I have not yet been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is "What does a woman want?" ([Jones, 1953: p. 421](#)).

Freud was agonized by the question of "What does Dora want?" Ultimately, by sharing his encounter with Ida Bauer, Freud presented a case that struck a chord so deep and resonant with women that "Dora" became a heroine exemplar in the rise of feminism and she has served as a central point of discourse in the critique of patriarchal suppression and the deconstruction of gender identity and heteronormativity in psychoanalytic theory and society at large.

Influenced by [Lacan's \(1952\)](#) critique of Dora as a linguistic construction of gender/sexuality, the French feminists exposed and attacked the patriarchal biases in Oedipal theory. The feminist critique challenged psychoanalysis to accommodate the need for a new, "separate but equal" understanding of feminine psychosexual development and identity. In the wake of the feminist and Lacanian reconstruction of female sexual identity, a major new surge of mainstream psychoanalytic publications in the new century focused anew on the Dora case in what can be seen as an effort to process and incorporate Lacanian and feminist ideas into contemporary psychoanalysis. In brief, these contributions include the following:

- 1) Elucidating how Freud's sexist and patriarchal attitudes, devaluation of femininity, and heteronormative bias were expressed in his negative countertransference to Dora, specifically, and how patriarchy, sexism, and phallogocentric thinking had infested psychoanalysis, generally.
- 2) Emphasizing the importance of pre-Oedipal psychosexual development,

and the need for a “separate, but equal” theory of female psychosexual development.

3) Contributing to the devaluation and diminished role of the Oedipal conflict as the predominant universal principle in psychoanalytic psychology.

4) Promoting the international popularization of Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic ideas in cultural, literary, feminist and psychoanalytic thought.

5) Elevating the importance of the mother’s pre-Oedipal role and feminine identification with the mother—in contradiction to Freud’s devaluation of Dora’s mother as a foolish, uncultivated and ineffectual parent.

6) Expanding the application of Lacan’s concept of language in the construction of gender identity by exploring an open and fluid conceptualization of femininity and transcending binary heteronormative thinking.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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