

Title: 'What Do Women Want?' To *Be* or to *Have* (Property)

Author: Ann Davis, Marist College

ABSTRACT

There is a long-standing philosophical and political discourse in the Western tradition (Locke, Hegel, Marx) about the capacities and privileges which are necessary for full humanity, often expressed in relation to property. Throughout the canon (Aristotle, Rousseau) it is often observed that the proper role of women is to provide the opportunities for others to develop their capacities, rather than have access to those conditions themselves. Women are often the instruments, or objects, by which their fathers, husbands, and sons achieve their satisfaction and actualize their full potential for development. According to the common law of England, women were explicitly treated *as* property, up to the mid-19th century, and only gradually were allowed to *own* property.

Using a gendered (material/institutional) construction of property, rather than a biological or linguistic discourse (like Freud or Lacan), a rereading of Freud's concept of "penis envy" is offered. Freud's case study Dora is used to illustrate the ways in which both the patient and the analyst employed the discourse of property to describe the position of women in Victorian Europe.

Given the construction of the modern liberal state (Okin, Pateman, MacPherson), a new concept of property rights would be required to allow women opportunities for full participation in personhood and citizenship, as well as equitable participation in labor markets. Such a new concept of property would also help to resolve the contradiction of the form of "property in the person," and is within view as a new representation of the knowledge worker (or "human capital") in the 21st century.