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Changing Sexualities and Parental Functions in the Twenty-First Century

Edited by
Candida Se Holovko
and **Frances Thomson-Salo**

FOR THE COMMITTEE ON WOMEN AND PSYCHOANALYSIS



CHANGING SEXUALITIES AND
PARENTAL FUNCTIONS IN THE
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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edited by

*Cândida Sé Holovko and
Frances Thomson-Salo*

A volume in the Psychoanalysis & Women Series
for the Committee on Women and Psychoanalysis
of the International Psychoanalytical Association

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2017 by Karnac Books Ltd.

Published 2018 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A C.I.P. for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 9781782204947 (pbk)

Edited, designed and produced by The Studio Publishing Services Ltd
www.publishingservicesuk.co.uk
email: studio@publishingservicesuk.co.uk

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND PERMISSIONS

We acknowledge the permission given by patients to use their material, either suitably de-identified or in composite vignettes.

We thank the publishers, Letra Viva, for permission to print an English translation of Alizade, M. (2010). “La liberación de la de la parentalidad en el Siglo XXI”, in *Revista Imago Agenda*, 140, Buenos Aires; Teresa Rocha Leite Haudenschild, *Parentalidad y género en un caso de intersexualidad* (pp. 119–130); Teresa Lartigue, María Arrieta, and Teresa del Bosque and Dolores Montilla, *Parentalidad interrumpida. Un caso de muerte neonatal* (pp. 213–220), Ema Ponce de León Leiras, “Maternidad en la Adolescencia: perspectiva social y psicoanalítica” (2013) in *Cuadernos de Psiquiatría y Psicoterapia del Niño y del Adolescente*, 56, Madrid (pp. 67–76), and María Alejandra Rey, “¿Estamos embarazados? Fantasías desplegadas en el proceso de transferencia de embriones” (pp. 73–78).

We also thank the publishers of *Revista Brasileira de Psicanálise* for permission to include a translated version of Susana Muszkat’s paper, “As neossexualidades e a discussão do modelo binário”, *Revista Brasileira de Psicanálise*, 48: 106–114.



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SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD

Frances Thomson-Salo

I am pleased, as the former overall chair of the International Psychoanalytical Association's Committee on Women and Psychoanalysis (COWAP), for this book to be included in the growing library of the Karnac series "Psychoanalysis and Women", which presents revisions to current understandings. Otto Kernberg, when he was President of the IPA, set up COWAP in 1998 to explore scientific and political issues about the differences between women and men, with Joan Raphael-Leff as the foundational overall chair. A hallmark of COWAP is always being interested in engaging with other organisations and ideas, and opening up a reciprocal discussion. This book also extends the legacy of Mariam Alizade, who did so much to build up COWAP and the resulting output of books.

This book is based on the COWAP Latin American XI Dialogue on "Parenthoods and gender. Their influence on subjectivity", Buenos Aires, 2014. We thank the individual authors who have contributed so generously to this book, representing a range of work by a number of psychoanalysts from Latin America (FEPAL); they have furthered the debate in a way that will be felt to be respectful.

The chapters in this book offer a depth, breadth, and vibrancy of creative and scientific interest. The writing is often poignantly

evocative and powerful, and, as psychoanalytic thinking and work become more complex, our understanding of the analytic process is deepened, with a greater awareness of broader ways of understanding the field. Much creativity has emerged from what has been studied, which we hope, in turn, will lead to a new therapeutic synthesis.

Last, we thank the International Psychoanalytical Association for their ongoing commitment to the work of the Committee on Women and Psychoanalysis.

Introduction

Cândida Sé Holovko and Frances Thomson-Salo

With the inauguration of psychoanalytic writing, Freud bequeathed a priceless heritage that each publication aims to expand, enlarge, and question. The Bionian expression, “public-action” (separated by a hyphen, the word has its meaning of a public and wide ranging action) comprises not only the moment of the interpretative process, when a mental phenomenon becomes a shared action, but equally so an important commitment involving any psychoanalyst with his or her analytic group. We now undertake the challenge—with joy and enthusiasm—to present to English-speaking readers a judicious and innovative work of renowned authors in Latin America. They have contributed to expand clinical-theoretical reflection in the field of psychoanalysis and to try to surmount the language barrier that has previously prevented access for a larger number of readers.

We have currently several theoretical models in psychoanalysis and bringing these models into a creative dialogue can be a way of not staying adrift. The sexual revolution of the 1960s, with the increased release of expressions of sexuality, combined with women’s emancipation reinforced by the advent of contraceptives, have definitively separated sexuality from reproduction, and later, in the 1980s, the emergence of new reproductive technologies contributed to the emergence

of new ways of forming families. All these changes observed in the contemporary society challenge long-established concepts in psychoanalysis, such as the Oedipus complex, parental functions, male and female psychosexuality, primal scene, affiliation, and so on. Roudinesco (2003), in her book, *A família em desordem*, points out the evolution that the family institution has achieved over the years: from the patriarchal family with marriages of convenience for the maintenance and development of the family patrimony, followed by the modern family, inspired by marriage as a romantic liaison and a way of ensuring the love–sex relationship and the parents’ responsibility in the education of the children, up to postmodern families from the 1960s onwards after the sexual revolution. In these families, based on finding sexual and emotional exchanges independent of the gender of its members, we find homoerotic couples who adopt children or who create them through assisted fertilisation; we also find single parent families, blended families, and so on. These postmodern families, in the words of Roudinesco, are the ones that most specifically have aroused controversy in the psychoanalytic or wider socio-cultural milieu.

For several years now, Latin American psychoanalysts have been discussing and writing about the urgency of revising theoretical and clinical concepts in the light of these new scenarios. In this sense we can say that the chapters of this book cover a wide range of concepts that show the uncertainty of contemporary clinical work. They revisit notions of parental functions that can broaden perspectives; they describe the neo-sexualities that require an innovative approach; they present the psychic consequences found in studies of and experiences with patients who make use of the technology of assisted fertilisation.

The longer first section of the book revisits psychoanalytic theories in the light of current thinking and societal developments in the area of sexuality and gender.

Leticia Glocer Fiorini, in the first chapter, proposes a rethinking of the Oedipus complex, a central concept to psychoanalysis, from the deconstruction of the concept of paternal function reviewing this function in contemporary families. Starting from the idea that the construction of sexual subjectivity is directly linked to the symbolic function, Glocer Fiorini aims to establish the difference between paternal function and “third party function”. This is a terminology that she considers more accurate and comprehensive to avoid any relation with parental figures or real and imaginary substitutes that

better describe symbolic operations. She decentralises the logic of binary thinking supported by power relationships (male–female, father–mother . . .) towards a vision that includes increasing heterogeneity and the logic of complexity, as its notion of plural and multi-centric motherhoods. Glocer Fiorini shows, from a careful examination and innovative approach, the cultural–historical influences that have marked the conceptualisation of the paternal function and the need to recognise the symbolic subjectivity of the subjects that contribute to the emergence of the psyche within family ties, regardless of the gender of its participants. That a mother may exercise a third-party function can be seen in much infant–parent psychotherapy and infant research, matched by a desire for a child, is in line with Glocer Fiorini’s suggestion that we need to work on where psychoanalysis abuts other disciplines.

Juan-Eduardo Tesone, in a thought-provoking chapter, “When a symbolic lack of parental functions produces pain without a subject”, plunges us into the field of the not represented but psychically inscribed. With literary metaphors and clinical vignettes of cases of incest, he reveals the possibility of having psychic marks without a subject and gives us clues in this universe of the unremembered but marked. He states that, in traumatic situations, non-figuration is a defence against an unspeakable pain which is fixed and unable to be integrated and included in the network of representational associations. He proposes that the clinical work of the psychoanalyst is half way to a “conjectural science and a poesis in which the subject appears increasingly . . .”. In an original way, he explains how the production of dreams can function as memories of traumatic situations.

Emilce Dio Bleichmar, in her chapter examines aspects of the subjective world of mothers towards their children from theoretical and clinical psychoanalytic links and longitudinal studies of the dyadic mother-child relationship during the first five years. She observes patterns of early mother/baby interaction, and asks whether women are “prone to developing a severe superego when they become mothers”. In an original approach she reveals her finding of increased persecutory anxiety in mothers’ relationship with their babies in contemporary clinical work. About motherhood she says: “Motherhood becomes one of the early cores of the female ego ideal and one of the contents and objectives of her narcissistic system, providing self-esteem and efficacy to her representation of being

female". She believes that the increase of information and demands of cultural ideas about maternal functions have generated more fantasies of the "bad internal mother" as opposed to the ideal mother who is always praised. Dio Bleichmar emphasises that the unconscious fantasy of being a bad mother predisposes mothers to develop more severe and primitive forms of superego, creating psychic defences to maintain the ideal of a good mother which ends up hurting and affecting the capacity for reflection in intersubjective exchanges with their babies, thus creating a vicious cycle.

Cândida Sé Holovko, in her chapter, "Secrets and revelations: vicissitudes of the maternal function", revisits the notion of "maternal function" proposed by the psychosomatic school of Paris, emphasising its usefulness in addressing the object introjection distortions with maternal function and of the transgenerational transmissions often found in eating disorders. From clinical vignettes of a young analysand with serious bulimic symptoms, she shows the transformation of compulsive bulimic acting towards a communication enriched by the expanded symbolic universe.

Teresa Lartigue, drawing on her long experience of care of, and research with, bereaved families after neonatal death emphasises, in her chapter, "Bereaved families after neonatal death", the importance of work with the countertransference in these situations of unspeakable pain from traumatic loss. In the moving and sensitive approach of a psychotherapeutic process offered over several years and with several interruptions to a young woman who lost her daughter soon after delivery, Lartigue shows in detail the vicissitudes of this particular analysis and what can be expected in similar situations: pain that can persist for many years; a reduction in the capacity for mentalisation; attacks to the immune system; difficulties in regulating affection; severe superego inducing self-punishment, and difficulties in interpersonal relations jeopardising the family structure. She emphasises the need for psychotherapeutic treatment for at least three years to enable the working through of the situations described.

Ema Ponce de León Leiras, in her chapter, "Adolescent maternity in a critical social context: a perspective from the psychoanalyst's *hilflosigkeit*", enables us to engage in psychoanalytic listening to adolescents in a context of total social, economic, and psychic privation, so that we reflect on the establishment of new clinical work. She emphasises that motherhood and adolescence, while having a unique

subjective dimension, are also simultaneously social constructs. In a touching description of an analytic experience in a non-government organisation in Uruguay for teenage parents, Ponce de León Leiras wonders whether the search for pregnancy in a case she describes could be a way of making sexual aspects of life predominate over violence and death, promoting pulsional fusion of the erotic with Thanatos, the latter so prevalent in marginalised social sectors. Ponce de León Leiras affirms that every motherhood situation must be considered unique and it cannot be predicted that teenage motherhood will have negative consequences; on the contrary in many situations like this, motherhood is seen as an opportunity for social integration through a culturally valued role as a search for a certain kind of narcissistic balance. Ponce de León Leiras touches on the challenges psychoanalysts face in the twenty-first century: the opportunity to create clinical interventions favouring a real psychoanalytic interface with the demands of social reality in an exceptionally fruitful encounter.

We then move to the next section, which discusses some of the new family configurations that are seen worldwide. Patricia Alkolombre, building on clinical observations that have been researched for several years, develops innovative ideas about the place and the vicissitudes of the desire to have a child in men and women in relation to new parenthoods. Affected by the sacrificial aspect observed in several psychotherapies with people seeking assisted fertilisation, Alkolombre discusses the idea of having a child at any cost in an obsessive manner. Thus, she highlights the notion of the excess of pulsionality linked to reproductive functions and proposes the term “passion for children” as opposed to the desire for a child. To the extent that sex life is divorced from procreation, Alkolombre reminds us that different affiliation projects share the context of sexual diversity and she loosens the symbolic references that govern the identification of subjects. She discusses the introduction of the third, technical-medical element in this context of fertilisation and how it radically changes births and the impact of this on subjectivities.

On the same issue of assisted fertilisation treatments, Silvia Jadur and her colleagues—also with extensive experience in this matter—discuss in their chapter, “The role of ‘donor’ in assisted fertilisation treatments”, the inevitable grief of the lost genetic illusion that the effect on subjectivity presses towards a libidinal reorganisation for reinvestment not only in the body image, but also of the psyche in the acceptance of

a foreign gamete, both in women and men. They state that “the ghosts of the oedipal drama act out the castration anxieties in the face of the reality of the failed procreative function”. They propose replacing the term “donor” by “contributor” for those men and women who supply the necessary reproductive cells. They indicate some effects of donor anonymity and their place in the medical discourse and subjectivity of individuals. They present some considerations about the desire to be a father and fantasies about infertility in men. Supported by research with families who used these techniques, they do not find differences between families conceived with gamete donors and families who have children as a result of natural conception.

Eva Rotenberg and Beatriz Agrest, in their chapter, “Parenthood for same-sex couples and gender definition in children”, consider that the notion of parental function allows us to question the myth that the heterosexuality of the parents permits identification of children with their own biological sex or mental health. They believe that, in same-sex couples, one member can exercise the function of the third while the other would take care of the nurturing function—and both functions can be shared or even exchanged. They propose the term “parental true self” to refer to the function that allows the child to integrate the soma–psyche experience and subjectivation. The authors postulate that it is necessary to review the concept of affiliation owing to the enormous changes in consanguineous relationships and that it is affection that rules the desire to conceive or adopt children in same-sex couples. They emphasise the importance of the analyst’s ethics and of science in these single-sex parenthood contexts and that there is not one single position on this subject in psychoanalysis. Different theories coexist which give different values to the anatomical sex differences and express different views of the Oedipus complex that should be reviewed in the light of contemporary practice.

Maria Alejandra Rey, in her chapter, “Are we pregnant? Fantasies displayed in the embryo transfer process”, emphasises how technology has transformed relationships: egg and semen can be bought, embryos frozen, biological parents chosen, sex changed, bellies rented, a gay friend can donate semen to a lesbian couple, and so on, and she wonders how we perceive ourselves as parents in the present context. She considers that parental roles are continuously built and do not necessarily depend on the differences of sex, and that there is a difference drawn between parent and gamete donor according to the