

A photograph of two young children, a boy and a girl, standing on a sandy beach. The boy is on the right, wearing a white t-shirt under a dark cardigan and patterned pants, with his arm around the girl's shoulder. The girl is on the left, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and patterned pants. They are both smiling. The background shows the ocean and a cloudy sky. The entire image is overlaid with a blue tint.

# SIBLINGS in DEVELOPMENT

A PSYCHOANALYTICAL VIEW

EDITED BY  
VIVIENNE LEWIN  
BELINDA SHARP

ROUTLEDGE  


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A PSYCHOANALYTIC VIEW

*edited by Vivienne Lewin and Belinda Sharp*

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## *INTRODUCTION*

Vivienne Lewin and Belinda Sharp

This book has emerged from four Conferences held at the London Centre for Psychotherapy in 2007, entitled “Siblings in Development”, focussed on the importance of sibling relationships in psychic development. The aim of the conferences was to explore the idea that siblings are not just 2nd editions in relation to the oedipal parents, but have a profound importance in their own right. Relationships with siblings are ineradicably fixed in our psyches. This may become particularly evident at times of stress within the family, when siblings may be especially supportive to each other, or alternately may fall out with intense and lasting bitterness. We may observe this when the parents die and the inheritance of parental valuables creates a powerful dynamic between the siblings. On the one hand, it seems that material inheritance from the parents represents something more than just the goods on offer, as if each child is vying for the favoured

place in the parental heart, the most valuable position in relation to the parent. But, in addition, the rivalry between the siblings is about who will inherit the birthright, the mantle of parental power and responsibility.

However, despite our recognition of the psychic importance of siblings, they have been rather neglected in both psychoanalytic theory as regards the metapsychology, and notably in the consulting room, particularly in relation to the transference relationship. Siblings seem to come in and out of focus without ever establishing their structural place in the unconscious dynamic world. As Juliet Mitchell says (Chapter Five), they are everywhere and nowhere, so it seems they cannot really be thought about. Psychoanalytic theory acknowledges the importance of the parental relationship and gives it pride of place in psychoanalytic work, in the many manifestations of the transference. Where, then, do siblings fit it?

We know they play an important part in the development of identity, even for only children. Melanie Klein (1932) wrote of the young child's wish to kill all the babies in mummy's tummy. We know about young children who attempt to smother their baby siblings with love or with hate. Stories about this abound, like a friend whose five-year-old sister set fire to his crib. Fortunately he was rescued in time, unscathed, except by her lifelong hatred of him. In another, a three-year-old boy who, despite not actually having been told that his mother was pregnant, told a visitor that **he** had a baby in his tummy and that because he was a boy, he would push it out through his bottom. He added after a pause, that when he got tired of it, he would push it back into his tummy again.

So, very young children know about what is growing, or potentially growing in mummy's tummy. Only children may long for a sibling, feeling very lonely on their own, or they may relish the superior position they feel themselves to be in, not having to share the parental attention with anyone. Or, as Ron Britton explores in this book (Chapter Five), they may believe they have murdered all the other babies, since there is no other sibling to reassure them that their murderous phantasies have not been enacted. Either way, children are supremely aware of the potential presence of siblings. So we may postulate that just as there is an expectation in the infant that it will have a mother, and a father, there is a parallel expectation that there are/will be siblings. There will be internal representations of siblings

in the infant's/child's'/individual's internal world, in the same way as there are internal representations of the parents. Furthermore, these internal siblings would become manifest in the transference relationships that get played out in psychoanalytic work.

The papers in this book are a compilation of the papers presented at the four conferences, and cover a range of approaches and subjects exploring the dynamics between siblings and in the relationships siblings have with others.

The first conference focussed on twins in various settings and circumstances. It began with a report of an observation of twin infants by Toby Etterley, undertaken as part of his clinical training. He observed the "good enough" development of twin girls in their family setting for the first two years of their lives. The twins were dizygotic and, following a difficult labour, were initially separated at birth. The paper illustrates how the parents coped with overwhelming emotions by each "appropriating" a twin for themselves, and cites the projections and over-compensations that they attributed to their infants in the process. He contemplates the idea of symbiotic merger in the relationship between the twins and in fantasy in the parental minds. He highlights the enactment of various twinning scenarios between the parents (and encompassing the observer) and cites the importance of the observation in helping the mother to scaffold the individual developments of her two daughters in her own mind.

Ellie Roberts then presented her work with a twin boy. She described the pre-formed transference and subsequent development of the transference of a five-year-old twin presenting with developmental delay. The work shows how the consulting room was used as an intrauterine place, showing an enmeshment with the twin inside his mother. The child demonstrated his worry of emerging into the world and how he developed an interest in God to help with the loneliness he began to feel. The material touched on Meltzer's concept of the aesthetic conflict.

We had planned that Professor Alessandra Piontelli would present her work on ultra-sound scans of twins in utero, but unfortunately she was unable to attend the conference due to personal circumstances. However, we were more than compensated for this disappointment by a presentation by Jeanne Magagna of an observation of conjoined twins and the emotional consequences of their sep-



aration. Conjoined twins are rare, and seldom survive long enough to be separated. So we were privileged to hear a detailed account of an observation of the twins both before and after separation. This proved to be a very emotive paper, in part because the material was sometimes very painful, but also, perhaps, indicating something about our deepest phantasies about personal and individual identity and aloneness.

Vivienne Lewin then followed with a reading of the introductory chapter of her book on twins and the twin relationship, focusing on the importance of the twin in the transference. An expanded version of this chapter is included in the book.

The second conference focused on all siblings, beginning with a discussion between Juliet Mitchell and Ron Britton about the place of siblings in psychoanalytic theory and practice. The discussion encompassed an exploration of the internal framework for individual development and the place for siblings in this, both in our own culture and that in others. They also considered what we might learn about our own psychical structure from the practices in other cultures. A report on this discussion appears in Chapter Five.

Prophecy Coles presented her work on the subject of sibling incest. She addressed the question as to the possible causes for sibling incest. She looked at the emotional consequences on both the perpetrator and the victim, and she finally speculated about the frequency of sibling incest and commented upon the dearth of papers in the psychoanalytic literature.

In Conference 3, two papers were presented: the first was by Jeanne Magagna on her work with an adolescent twin girl. This paper considers aspects of sibling relationships, explored in the course of both individual and family psychotherapy. The case material presented included various aspects of work with a twin emerging from a merged state with her twin sister towards the development of a sense of identity as an individual.

Margaret Rustin presented her paper on siblings from the point of view of child psychotherapy. This paper argues that child psychotherapy has a long tradition of interest in sibling relationships and she described the significant contributions in this tradition. She discussed possible sociological factors in the current psychoanalytic focus on siblings, and went on to review, briefly, psychoanalytic theorizing of siblinghood. The core of the paper uses observational

clinical and literary material to describe different forms of sibling relationship, both real and imagined. She also made brief reference to the issue of lost siblings. She argued that siblings are always part of our inner world whether we have actual siblings or not. Margaret also responded to the observational material in Jeanne Magagna's paper, to open up a dialogue. The conclusion of her paper draws attention to the complex mix of sibling ambivalence—siblings are likely to be the prototype of both our best friends and our worst enemies among peers—and raises the question of what to make of the traditional concept of "the brotherhood of man", a subject also discussed by Ron Britton and Juliet Mitchell in Chapter Five.

We were fortunate that Alessandra Piontelli was able to come to present her work at a separate morning conference. Chapter Nine is a report of this conference. Professor Piontelli began by describing the intrauterine behaviour of twin foetuses and dispelling some common myths attached to it. Subsequently birth, prematurity, and favouritism impact on the family, and the nascent link between the twins was described and illustrated by video material. Twins in other cultures were also discussed. Professor Piontelli suggested that twins are extremely taxing and family life is disrupted by their birth to an unusual degree. Mothers generally favour one and, due to ultrasound-graphic images, this choice is often made from before birth. Fathers may be overwhelmed. Siblings can be extremely jealous but a few take pride in the twins and help in their care. Twins seem to be aware of each other from birth and initially compete for their mother's attention. Professor Piontelli added that the first signs of mutual recognition start at around four months. From then on the co-twin becomes an increasingly important presence in each twin's life. Some twins, however, are more compatible than others who continue to manifest irritation, competition and jealousy towards each other. Twins illustrate the importance of siblings' relationships to an unusual degree.

We hope that as a result of both the conferences, and the publication of this book of papers from the conferences, siblings and the metapsychology relating to them will remain more in focus in psychoanalytic work. This will, of course, mean that more attention will be paid to the sibling transference, and we hope therefore that this book will make a significant contribution to understanding the depth and meaning of our relationship with our siblings.



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# CONFERENCE 1



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