

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND WOMEN SERIES



The Desire and Passion for a Child

Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Reproductive Techniques

Patricia Alkolombre



The Desire and Passion for a Child

In this book, Patricia Alkolombre explores the desire for a child from a contemporary psychoanalytic perspective, and covers the questions raised in the face of new resources offered by reproductive medicine.

This volume reviews traditional psychoanalytic conceptualisations from the perspective of gender theories and analyses theoretical hegemonies related to the desire and passion for a child. Alkolombre discusses how the ‘passion to have a child’ is a key aspect of motherhood, characterised by emotional intensity, persistence, and self-sacrificial aspects.

The book is divided into three sections: Part One deals with the desire and passion to have a child, while Part Two focuses on the impact of reproductive techniques, as well as the ever-changing role of parenthood in the modern day. Throughout these fascinating chapters, clinical vignettes of both individual and couple analyses span topics such as mourning, the use of reproductive technology, the anonymity of gamete donors, enigmatic infertility, surrogacy, and abortion from an interdisciplinary perspective. The historical and cultural contexts of infertility are reviewed from a psychoanalytic angle in Part Three with the view of transcending the former androcentric perspective that has deeply influenced the maternal ideal and expectations of men. Alkolombre also proposes a new analysis of the Oedipus myth.

This book is vital reading for psychoanalysts, mental health professionals, teachers and students interested in contemporary parenting, motherhood, and infertility, as well as the theoretical analysis of the desire for a child.

Patricia Alkolombre, PhD, is Overall Chair of the IPA Committee on Women and Psychoanalysis. She is Training and Supervising Analyst of the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association (APA), a Postgraduate Professor at the APA-UBA master's degree and at other institutions in Argentina and abroad. She has written on infertility, the female body, femininity, masculinity, parenthood, psychoanalysis, and gender. She is a co-author of *Changing Sexualities and Parental Function in the Twenty First Century* (Karnac, 2017) and *Psychoanalytic Explorations of What Women Want Today: Femininity, Desire, and Agency* (Routledge, 2022).

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Psychoanalysis and Contemporary
Reproductive Techniques

Patricia Alkolombre

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Contents

<i>Preface</i>	viii
Introduction	1
PART I	
About the Desire and the Passion for a Child	5
1 Revisiting Desire for a Child	7
<i>About women's desire</i>	7
<i>Looking into Freud's theory</i>	9
<i>New perspectives: Post-Freudian authors</i>	13
<i>From a single to a plural desire</i>	17
<i>Some notes on female infertility</i>	20
<i>Fertile/infertile: A new symbolic equation?</i>	21
<i>The child's prehistory</i>	22
<i>A predictable body</i>	23
<i>Temporality: Living (through) the wait</i>	25
<i>About men's desire</i>	27
<i>A new dark continent: Male infertility</i>	32
<i>Notes</i>	36
<i>References</i>	37
2 When Desire for a Child becomes Passion for a Child	41
<i>On the frontiers of motherhood</i>	41
<i>Destinies of motherhood: Passion for a child</i>	48
<i>Understanding passion: The narcissistic axis</i>	53

Attachment and sacrifice in passion 55

Notes 57

References 57

PART II

Techniques in the Light of Psychoanalysis 61

3 Into Psychoanalytic Clinical Work 63

About the erogenous body in infertility 63

The woman's body 64

The man's body 66

The couple's body 67

Transparent bodies into technology 71

The body in transference 73

The child that has not arrived: Clinical cases of mourning 74

Unresolved mourning 76

Permanent infertility 79

Transitory infertility 80

Enigmatic infertility 83

The lost pregnancy: Miscarriage and abortion 91

An urgent decision 92

When the memory of an abortion arises 94

An uncanny dream 96

Notes 100

References 102

4 Psychoanalysis and Reproductive Techniques 105

The historical and scientific context 105

Parenthood today: What's new? 107

Dilemmas about new origins 108

The doubling out of maternity 109

An imposed paternity 109

A being from another planet 110

Where do they come from? 111

An ultrasound of the mind 112

What do I desire? From what child? 113

Undergoing fertility treatments 114

An individual treatment 117

Notes on the ICSI 118

<i>Gamete donation</i>	119
<i>Egg donation</i>	120
<i>Egg donation by a relative</i>	122
<i>Sperm donation</i>	123
<i>Sperm donation by a relative</i>	124
<i>Donor "sister"</i>	124
<i>Surrogate motherhood</i>	125
<i>A case of surrogacy</i>	127
<i>Notes</i>	129
<i>References</i>	130

PART III

Historical (In) Fertility 133

5 First Conceptions 135

<i>Greece and Rome</i>	135
<i>The androcentric perspective</i>	136
<i>The Judeo-Christian heritage</i>	138
<i>The human embryo</i>	139
<i>References</i>	140

6 Fertility Myths and Rituals 141

<i>Some notes on fertility rituals and myths</i>	141
<i>The myth of maternal love</i>	143
<i>Infanticide, incest, and infertility in the Oedipus myth</i>	146
<i>References</i>	147

<i>Index</i>	149
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Preface

The *Women and Psychoanalysis Book Series* developed from the work of the International Psychoanalytical Association Committee on Women and Psychoanalysis (COWAP). The IPA-Routledge series furthers global perspectives and different creativities on topics related to women, gender and sexuality, and psychoanalysis, considering intersections with diversity and cross-cultural experience.

In the present volume, Alkolombre presents an important contemporary discussion about motherhood and its vicissitudes, focusing on what happens when the desire to have a child becomes, as the author calls it, a passion. Alkolombre differentiates passion from desire while she proposes a more robust and complex understanding of the narcissistic axis present in the experience of motherhood and its particular attachment to sacrifice. The clinical vignettes move us from the theoretical to the practical, tracing the author's thinking about how these issues manifest in the analytic dyad.

Alkolombre reviews the different authors who have studied the theme of motherhood in the psychoanalytic field and beyond, inviting a broader understanding of how social expectations of motherhood have been transformed, even as the mandate that falls on women as mothers continues to prevail. By addressing the problematic of "passion," the author brings her readers to the centrality of the tension between the desire of the woman as a subject (with her own intrapsychic life, fantasies, and longings) and the social demand (installed also at an unconscious level). Perhaps one of the most central contributions that Alkolombre offers is the interwoven relationship between social and intrapsychic, and between clinic and theory when we work with mothers and mothers-to-be. The distinctions between the intrapsychic and the social, and between theory and practice are revealed as arbitrary constructions that she tries to unravel while differentiating the specificity of motherhood in opposition to fatherhood.

Alkolombre describes the impossibility of mourning for a child that one could not have, and links this mourning to the development of a passion for a child, which is imbued with passivity, contrary to what "passion" suggests. The clinical examples greatly enrich the understanding of this complex issue

and invite us to reconsider culturally communicated prejudices and stereotypes. Current technological advances now allow women to actualise, while creating the perfect stage for women to display those inner conflicts. As she accompanies mothers traversing their journey of passion, Alkolombre hopes to transform passion into ordinary desire with a capacity for language and for fulfilling its aim. Alkolombre's *Desire for a Child. Passion for a Child: Reproductive Techniques in the Light of Psychoanalysis* is a brilliant and necessary book for all professionals working with women navigating the complex transition into motherhood.

The Women and Psychoanalysis Book Series Editorial Board represents all regions of the IPA with six editors collaborating as a team from Goa (India); London; Lima; Milan; San Francisco, CA; and Washington, DC. We are women writers and editors active in psychoanalysis both regionally and in the IPA. We encourage single author and multiple author book proposal submissions to our IPA-Routledge Book Series on topics of women, gender, femininity, and masculinity. We offer our close-up consultation and guidance in the crafting of the book proposals and throughout the writing and publishing process.

The Women and Psychoanalysis Book Series Editorial Board

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Introduction

The Desire and Passion for a Child brings psychoanalytic work into the field of reproductive techniques. It chronicles the questions provoked by different clinical presentations as a guide to provide thoughts and hypotheses on a topic linking bodies and desires through the longing for parenthood.

The *new order* of sexuality and procreation has modified the vicissitudes of the desire to have a child. We know that traditional ways of being born, that is to say, in the intimacy of a sexual relation, are over 2,000 years old, whereas those initiated by medical and technological intervention began in 1978.

New forms of cohabitation between genders also became legal, and power relations between men and women changed. Diverse filiation projects share a context of sexual diversity, including single parenthoods and homo-parentalities. These transformations upset symbolic references and affect the structures of symbolic systems governing the identification of subjects in relation to sexual and gender identity and procreation.

We are living in a unique historical period, a transition between generations born before and after the implementation of reproductive technologies. In the “pre-test-tube” era, men and women accepted natural fertility and adoption as the only means possible for having children. In contrast, current generations are immersed in changes brought about by the use of contraceptives and assisted reproduction. As witnesses of this historical transition, we have the privilege of exploring and explaining its repercussions on subjectivity.

To be born formerly meant to be born from the body of a woman who was that child’s biological mother. Historically, women were always “in” their pregnancy. Today, the anchor point is not the woman’s own body since a woman may now paradoxically be “watching” her pregnancy and her child’s birth if she rents a womb. All these changes in parenting raise many questions in our clinical practice and our theories.

The place of the desire to have a child is the starting point of this book. This desire is linked to parental desires, the child’s identity, and its origins.

Clinical work in this field is characterised by a significant absence: the child to come. It involves both disappointment and the promise of life.

The desire for a child has been addressed by different Freudian and post-Freudian perspectives and by gender theories. This topic raises questions concerning the vicissitudes of female and male infertility, living through the wait, the place of bodies, maternal and paternal roles, and women's plural desires with their clinical scenarios.

Technology enables us to explore the internal body and its secrets. Hence, the *predictable* body and the *transparent body* emerge through reproductive techniques which reveal their depth, their secrets, and the universe of meanings they acquire in each singular history.

The *passion for a child* is a certain type of maternity marked by emotional intensity and insistence on seeking pregnancy even at the cost of self-destruction. The distinction between desire for a child and passion for a child enables us to define clinical cases with self-sacrificial and thanatic aspects. Passion for a child is a desire that has become a need. It is the search for a child *at any cost*.

In our consulting rooms, we see patients who are undergoing assisted reproduction treatments. We analyse their conflicts, which involve the influence of what is foreign vis-à-vis the self in gamete donation, the issue of the anonymity of donors, and the psychic status of embryos, as well as the splitting of bodies in surrogate maternity, the problems underlying enigmatic infertility, and the effects of abortion on women's and men's lives. The psychic effects of these experiences observed in clinical work are described in clinical vignettes.

In this context, technology has introduced a *new order* in procreation, leading in turn to new filiation projects. At the beginning, the discovery of the contraceptive pill in the 1960s radically dissociated sexual activity from the arrival of children. Twenty years later, this equation was inverted by the implementation of assisted fertilisation techniques: it became possible to have children without having sexual relations.

At this point, we may ask ourselves whether the old can explain the new, and whether clinical work can be understood with the resources we have now or whether we are facing new representations in the reproductive field. What is certain is that maternity and paternity are no longer something well-known and familiar and have become a new alchemy in which bodies, fluids, and cells may be combined, substituted, and modified.

Therefore, it is very important for us to update and review these topics, which lead us to think and continue to question ourselves about what remains the same and what is changing in this field. The implementation of reproductive techniques has opened up new possibilities for access to parenthood, but has also led to new debates and questions about origins.

Cultural changes throughout history reveal androcentric and patriarchal perspectives on conceptions of maternity and paternity. Since the middle of

the last century, the critical revision of sexuality, gender, and procreation has changed clinical practice and the way we may think about it.

These problems not only present theoretical-clinical challenges, but also touch on the analyst's theories and prejudices which may operate as obstacles. These experiences affect subjects' bodies and are intertwined not only in representations of the new and varied ways of being born today, but also in the extra-scientific field, such as children born as a result of techniques. In this regard, it is clinical work containing novel elements which exceed what was known until only 1978, confronting us with what is different in a field that unites bodies and desires in different kinds of parenting projects.

This book, like everything else, has a history, and in the course of its writing and rereading, it preserves, intact, the author's desire to transmit an experience, a personal perspective, and questions, to share them with others.



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Part I

About the Desire and the Passion for a Child



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