

Panel Presentation
Cecilia Taiana and Nancy Winters
The Female Element in Primary Relations and the Emergence of the Sexual Self—
Towards Many, Towards None.

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Summary

Using Winnicott's and Laplanche's conceptualizations of early infancy, this panel presents two cases of intergenerational absence of primary maternal preoccupation, where a violent intromission of the enigmatic signifier 'orphanage' led to a psychic enclave. In attempting to establish a sexual self, desire was directed towards 'many' (polyamory) or 'towards none' (asexuality).

Abstract

In object-relating, for Winnicott, the infant and the object are one, and that oneness is being, a "pure female element" transmitted intergenerationally to females and males alike. This subject-object identity is at the basis of the capacity to be and characterizes the infant's unintegrated state. This panel presentation will provide a theoretical context for, and clinical illustrations of two cases of intergenerational absence of primary maternal preoccupation. The result was a psychic enclave in the conceptualization of Laplanche, the aftereffect of a violent intromission of the 'orphanage' as an enigmatic signifier of maternal absence.

The cases will illustrate the emergence of a psychic substitute organization to moor the subject-object identity in response to the formation of the psychic enclave. The presenters will examine the role of primary relations as described above in women for whom the emergence of desire and sexual subjectivity has been stymied, and for whom the violence of the enigmatic signifier has been registered in the psyche-soma. In the cases that will be discussed, there is an attempt at establishing a sexual self by directing desire towards ‘many’ (as in polyamory) or ‘towards none’ (lifelong asexuality except for the purpose of bearing children). The presenters are also interested in the female analyst’s role in helping to invite and vitalize the female patient’s capacity for desire, which includes the analyst’s ability to communicate and navigate a non-pathologizing language, and to work with the vicissitudes of the patient’s bi-sexual identifications and transferences.

One clinical discussion will particularize the stage of absolute dependence and the maternal failure to meet the earliest functioning of the female element that constitutes the foundation for the experience of being. When the capacity to be is crippled, the infant instead of identification (being like) resorts to action (do like) or to be done to, as in the example of a case of rope bondage of a polyamorous patient.

The second clinical discussion considers transgenerational maternal absence and death signified as the ‘orphanage’, a black hole of no-care and no-being. Here, not only was the capacity to be crippled but a sadistic quality of the violent intromission was translated into a prohibition against desire and sexual subjectivity. The search for the female element in the analyst, the patient’s bi-sexual transferences, and the nascence of her capacity to desire will be discussed.

Session objectives

1. Participants will become familiar with Winnicott’s and Laplanche’s conceptualizations of early infancy and the role of the female element in primary relations.
2. Participants will be able to discuss the role of primary maternal preoccupation in the infant’s capacity to be, and the development of sexual subjectivity.
3. Expand their ability to visualize and infer from clinical material the importance of internalized primary relationships and their function in the formation of the patient’s and analyst’s mind.