

## Parenthood and Child Psychological Development<sup>1</sup>

Cássio Marcelo Batista Veludo<sup>2</sup>  
Terezinha de Camargo Viana

*Universidade de Brasília, Brasília-DF, Brazil*

**Abstract:** This paper presents an analysis of the concept of parenthood based on the psychoanalytical perspective, which allows the study of both the subjectivity of parents and children. The hypothesis is that parenthood, characteristically infiltrated by the narcissism of parents themselves, can be a source of tension. Based on this premise, it is possible to understand certain responses in the development of a child's ego and which signals success to a greater or lesser extent in the passage from the principle of pleasure to the principle of reality. We also stress the importance of studying effects of this narcissist infiltration of parental love on the subjectivity of parents. This study contributes both to investigations addressing psychoneurosis, based on a comparison provided between clinical practice and psychoanalytical theory, and to the investigation of more complex social phenomena such as violence and the disaggregation of human communities.

**Keywords:** Psychoanalysis, Narcissism, Parent Child Relations, Winnicott.

## Parentalidade e o Desenvolvimento Psíquico na Criança

**Resumo:** O artigo analisa o conceito de parentalidade, fundamentado na perspectiva psicanalítica, que permite o estudo tanto da subjetividade dos pais quanto dos filhos. A hipótese é de que a parentalidade, caracteristicamente infiltrada pelo narcisismo dos próprios pais, pode constituir-se como fonte de tensão a partir da qual é possível compreender certas reações que o eu da criança desenvolve e que sinalizam para o maior ou menor sucesso na passagem do princípio de prazer para o princípio de realidade. Ademais, defende-se a importância do estudo dos efeitos causados na subjetividade dos pais por essa infiltração narcisista no amor parental. Este estudo contribui tanto para investigações sobre as psiconeuroses, dado o cotejamento que proporciona entre a clínica e a teoria psicanalítica, como também para a investigação de fenômenos sociais mais complexos como a violência e a desagregação das comunidades humanas.

**Palavras-chave:** Psicanálise, Narcisismo, Relações pais-criança, Winnicott.

## Parentalidad y Desarrollo Psicológico de Niños

**Resumen:** Este artículo analiza un concepto de parentalidad, basado en la perspectiva psicoanalítica, que permite el estudio de la subjetividad de los padres y de los hijos. La hipótesis es que la parentalidad, característicamente enraizada por el narcisismo de los propios padres, puede constituirse como punto de partida para la comprensión de algunas reacciones que el yo de los niños desarrolla y que apuntan al mayor o menor éxito en la transición del principio de placer al principio de la realidad. Además, destacamos la importancia del estudio sobre los efectos que la subjetividad de los padres causan por esa marca narcisista en el amor parental. Este estudio puede contribuir al estudio de las psiconeurosis, por la comparación que ofrece entre la clínica y la teoría psicoanalítica, y también a la investigación de los fenómenos sociales más complejos como la violencia y la desintegración de las comunidades humanas.

**Palabras clave:** Psicoanálisis, Narcisismo, Relaciones Padres-niños, Winnicott.

This paper is the result of an investigation concerning the marks of narcissism on parenthood and relationships that can be established between such marks and a child's psychic development (Veludo, 2009). Our initial hypothesis is that parenthood marked by narcissism interferes in the passage from the principle of pleasure to the principle of reality, thus, influencing child development. We highlight the importance of the concept of a "good-enough environment" (Winnicott, 1975, 1977) and the freudian theories concerning drives and

the state of helplessness, characteristics of the first years of life, to support this study.

We present a concept of parental function developed by Algarvio, Leal, Maroco and Serra (2008) to initiate this discussion. The authors define parental function as a satisfactory balance between narcissistic and objectal investment in children. Such a definition has the merit of establishing a relationship between parenthood and narcissism, even if it does not allow us to, ultimately, state what function it would be. In other words, it indicates the libidinal basis of parenthood, without however, clearly defining what the terms "balance" and "satisfactory" mean. This impasse, however, will not create major difficulties for the reflection concerning the concept of parenthood, especially if we follow the direction of the authors concerning the theoretical references that guided them in the construction of their thesis. And, if we do, we will find an indication of how determinant some notions

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<sup>2</sup> Correspondence address:

Cássio Marcelo Batista Veludo. Setor de Mansões Park Way, Quadra 28, Conjunto 4 Lote 1 Casa D. CEP 71.745-804. Brasília-DF, Brazil. E-mail: cassioveludo@hotmail.com

proposed by Winnicott are for this concept, especially those that refer to the role of the family in child development.

#### Good-Enough Parenting

When Winnicott (1975) developed the theme of transitional phenomena, he proposed a thesis concerning the role of parents when he stated that:

In the early stages of the emotional development of the human infant, a vital part is played by the environment, which is in fact not yet separated-off from the infant by the infant. Gradually the separating-off of the not-me from the me takes place, and the pace varies according to the infant and according to the environment. The major changes take place in the separating-out of the mother as an objectively perceived environmental feature. If no one person is there to be mother, the infant's developmental task is infinitely complicated (p. 153).

Some points merit attention in this excerpt. First, we see a conception in which the human infant is clearly defined by his/her complete connection with the environment receiving him/her, which characterizes a state of total fusion with this means. It is based on this fusion at the beginning of life that, according to Winnicott (1975), something of unique importance to human development happens, that is, the baby starts to look around and sees the mother's face, a time when, "ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself" (p. 154). This mirror role, however, is not always performed by the mother, that is, babies do not always receive back what they are giving. When it occurs, what is reflected is the mother's own mood "or, worse still, the rigidity of her own defenses" (p. 154). Babies exposed for too long to such a situation would have their creative capacity atrophied and would look for other ways of "getting something of themselves back from the environment" (p. 155), such as aggressiveness, illness, or any other situation that may end up generating difficulties and annoyance for the parents.

This aspect of environmental function performed by the parents is extremely important for considerations concerning clinical practice. If we observe carefully, we will be able to notice a close connection, proposed by Winnicott (1975), between the performance of parental functions and certain problems that will lead the child to the clinic in the future. We mention parental functions, not maternal functions, because even though the mother receives special attention in winnicottian theory, the author himself always stresses the importance of the father in children's development. In this regard, it may be enough to remember Winnicott's own opinion, who at various times, includes the father in his thesis, though he asks their permission to continue using the term 'maternal' in the definition of the good-enough attitude in the care provided to babies:

The term "paternal" must necessarily come a little later than the "maternal". Gradually the father as male becomes a significant factor. And then follows the family, the basis of which is the union of fathers and mothers, sharing responsibility for what they did together, that we call a new human being, a baby (p. 191).

From this perspective, the roles of fathers and mothers, in terms of providing good-enough care to their babies should be so closely imbricated that it would be difficult to clearly define the boundaries of one and another and even more complicated to state who would be more important, mothers or fathers. Obviously, we usually observe that the mother plays a more prominent role in providing care to the baby in our society. This more prominent role is explained, in part, by the practice of breastfeeding and other basic care that usually are under the mother's responsibility. It does not seem so obvious, however, to assume that during this period of more intense interaction between mother and child, the father figure does not influence the child or does it in a very incipient way, or yet, only indirectly.

It is worth noting that we are not proposing that the father and mother functions are equivalent, saying that both would be the same, or that it would be indifferent for the baby if fathers and mothers exchanged functions with each other. We will also avoid a gender discussion, not because we consider it lacks utility, but simply because it would take us very far from our objectives.

If we agree with the position defended by Winnicott (1975), we will have to accept that the development of children is influenced primarily by what the mother has to offer, and then by what the father has to offer, and it would occur in such an adamant manner that the author categorically states that "there is no possibility whatever for an infant to proceed from the pleasure principle to the reality principle or towards and beyond primary identification, unless there is a good-enough mother" (p. 25).

In another work, however, Winnicott (1977) is less emphatic in announcing the role this (parental) influence exerts on a child's formation, because he states that "every baby is an *organization in motion*" (p. 29), possessed of an innate spark of life that drives forward his/her growth and development, regardless of the parents. He later concludes saying that if the mother accepts this perspective from her baby, she will be able to be free enough to observe the child's development "while deriving pleasure from satisfying his/her needs" (p. 30)

First, Winnicott (1975) is clear in considering motherhood to be an essential element in the constitution of the child's subjectivity. Then, Winnicott (1977) himself states something apparently different, that is, that the baby would not need his/her mother to the same degree because the

infant was born with the thrust needed to move forward, and motherhood would be merely a reactive function. In addition to the fact that his work from 1977 was reportedly directed to the lay public, a minor conceptual concern could arise if we ask, while the one published in 1975 would be more finished technically, how should we interpret this dubious direction Winnicott seems to give to the function of parents in the constitution of children?

Perhaps we find a way out of this ambiguity if we see both propositions as complementary and not exclusionary. By stating that the baby does not depend on the mother to grow and develop, Winnicott (1977) aims to circumscribe what he recognizes as innate to the human being, that is, a “tendency to life and development” (p. 29). This tendency by itself would be capable of producing the spark needed to boost growth, regardless of parental actions. A tendency, however, does not mean a guarantee of realization; perhaps it is in this sense that Winnicott (1975) states the indispensability of the good-enough mother for the baby to overcome the principle of pleasure.

On the one hand, we have the child with what would be innate to his/her biological and psychic apparatus, but on the other hand, we are faced with the early exposure of this apparatus to the outer and inner world. Such a configuration is the basis of the state of helplessness in which the organism is at the beginning of life: when “one cannot cause a specific action capable of putting an end to tension resulting from the influx of endogenous excitations (requiring) the aid of an outside person (food supply, for instance)” (Laplanche & Pontalis, 2001, p. 531). That is, the premature organism unable to provide for his/her own needs depends on the environment to play this role.

Can we accept that this vital innate spark indicated by Winnicott (1977) corresponds to instinctive drive, characteristic of the human species? Additionally, would it be correct to state that the infant psyche becomes susceptible to the subjective influence of an adult – parents, in particular – due to the effect of biological and psychological immaturity inherent to the state of hopelessness? We consider to be possible to answer both the questions affirmatively and, if we are not mistaken, we find an excellent opportunity to establish a dialogue concerning certain Freudian concepts – especially the theories concerning drives and the state of helplessness – and the Winnicottian thesis of the good-enough environment as a prototype of parenting capable of helping the child to pass from the principle of pleasure to that of reality.

### **Parenthood from a Freudian Perspective**

Laplanche and Pontalis (2001) highlight the importance of the state of helplessness for the Freudian theory of anguish, stating that this state would be the “prototype of a traumatic situation” (p. 112). It in fact seems to be a perspective made explicit by Freud (1915/2004b), when he postulated that “the

nervous system is an apparatus which has the function of getting rid of the stimuli that reach it, or of reducing them to the lowest possible level; or which, if it were feasible, would maintain itself in an altogether unstimulated condition” (p. 147). We have listed both the principle of zero or nirvana, which later will support the elaboration concerning drive death, and the principle of constancy, which is based on the definition of pleasure and displeasure, that is, a decrease or increase of stimulation, respectively, over the nervous system. From this meta-biological point of view, a trauma would be an event triggered by a stimulus, which due to “the long period of time during which the young of the human species is in a condition of helplessness and dependence” (Freud, 1926/1996d, p. 151), it does not find the means necessary for a motor discharge that generates a satisfying life.

Thus, the state of helplessness also seems to be a key concept in our reflection on parenting because it outlines an important foundation on which we will try to sustain the link between the child’s psychological functioning and parental subjectivity. Hence, we realize that the shortening of womb life causes a human baby to arrive in the world in a much less finished state when compared to other animals. As a result

the influence of the real external world upon it is intensified and an early differentiation between the ego and the id is promoted. Moreover, the dangers of the external world have a greater importance for it, so that the value of the object, which can alone protect it against them and take the place of its former intra-uterine life is enormously enhanced. The biological factor, then, establishes the earliest situations of danger and creates the need to be loved, which will accompany the child through the rest of its life (Freud, 1926/1996d, p. 151).

That is, we believe it to be possible to find in this passage a window through which we can grasp a relationship among the subjectivities of a child and her/his parents. The need to be loved, which emerges as a byproduct of biological factors, would force the child to accept the restrictions imposed on his/her sexual drives by the object capable of satisfying his/her needs. Thus, keeping the love of this object would become an essential task for this child. The foundations of this relationship would be established early on from the moment the baby realizes, from experience, that when his/her mother is present, she “satisfies all its needs without delay” (Freud, 1926/1996d, p. 136). Winnicott would perhaps add that it would occur only if the mother were good-enough for her baby, which, strictly speaking, does not seem to be any different from what is proposed by Freud.

It is important to note, however, that Freud does not issue a definitive opinion concerning this relational point we are now exploring. To be precise, there are times in his work in which he strongly positions himself in favor of the idea

that the development of psyche is driven by forces whose sources would reside inside the body, while external stimuli would influence little of this process. On the other hand, it is possible to find passages in which the relational aspect seems to emerge with much strength, being able even to determine the configuration of drives.

This duality is expressed, for instance, in *Instincts and their Vicissitudes*, even though at this point it is difficult not noticing the more determined position of Freud (1915/2004b) concerning the decreasing importance of external stimuli. At a certain point in the text, during a discussion of the development that drives require from the nervous system, he concludes that the true engines of progress that led the nervous system to its current level of development are drives and not external stimuli, though nothing prevent us from seeing drives as “precipitates of the effects of external stimulation, which in their course have brought about modifications in the living substance” (p. 148).

In this same text, however, when Freud describes how the beginning of life would be, he seems to abandon ambiguity and is more incisive concerning this issue as he presents us an ego taken by drives and capable of satisfying them, at least in part, within itself. In this narcissistic state of autoerotic satisfaction, the ego would not be interested in the external world, which would be irrelevant in terms of drive-satisfaction. Hence, Freud concludes that the self-subject coincides with everything that signals pleasure and the “outside world, with all that is irrelevant (and possibly as a source of stimuli, with what is unpleasant)” (Freud, 1915/2004b, p. 158).

In other words, the ego, at this point would not need the outside world, as it would obtain all the satisfaction it requires in an autoerotic manner. Hence, the relational issue becomes insignificant and it configures one of the interpretations, which, according to Laplanche (1998), permeates the entirety of psychoanalytical thinking, that is, the idea that narcissism is a “type of closed circuit, of self-sufficient monad, where a subject and an object are distinguished (primordial self-sufficient state, close on itself) (p. 304). There is, however, another interpretation within psychoanalytical thinking that defines narcissism as “love directed to the ego (therefore, already a kind of internal topical distinction) constituted in a direct relationship with another” (Laplanche, p. 304). The author suggests the need to imagine a type of original relationship that would be, at the same time, love and identification.

This second perspective, which Laplanche (1998) himself confirms having found in Freud, especially in the paper “Morning and Melancholia”, is essential for our discussion, considering that we seek foundations that allow us to talk about parenthood as a structure that influences child subjectivity. We see a certain limitation from the perspective of a closed and self-sufficient monad, at least on what aspects of such understanding are radical and exclusivist. Thus, it is not about a simple choice based on preference or convenience,

because it is essential to seek meaning and the importance of each of these interpretations. If on the one hand, treating psyche as this self-sufficient monad can limit the relational aspect highlighted by Laplanche, on the other hand, it can help us understand the importance of instinctive forces that are the basis of the phenomena studied here, enabling us to go beyond a merely phenomenological analysis, which would drive us away from understanding the psychological processes and structures already at work. Likewise, an excessive structural emphasis that does not seek the influences that contribute to the constitution of the subject in the historical and cultural context can also leave out elements that are important for the analysis.

As previously mentioned, Laplanche cites the paper “Mourning and Melancholia” as an important source of this Freudian perspective, less focused on the conception of human psyche as an independent monad. However, in his paper addressing narcissism published a few years before, Freud (1914/2004a) already manifested certain ideas that could strengthen this interpretation concerning an original relationship capable of influencing the child’s subjectivity. When discussing the genesis of the ego ideal, the author states that:

For what prompted the subject to form an ego ideal, on whose behalf his conscience acts as watchman, arose from the critical influence of his parents (conveyed to him by the medium of the voice), to whom were added, as time went on, those who trained and taught him and the innumerable and indefinable host of all the other people in his environment – his fellow-men – and public opinion. (p. 114).

The voice is the instrument emphasized by Freud. It is the voice of the parents, prior to any other influence, that appears as a critical and formative function of the ego ideal to which the narcissistic libido can then flow. The basis of this critical function is the child’s development of subjectivity, precisely the helplessness condition in which he/she is and that makes him/her hostage to parental love. Little remains but to try, in every possible way, to ensure such love, and therefore, fight against everything that may jeopardize this feeling so important for survival. Few things can pose more risk to the child at this point than the incessant stimuli of his/her own instinctive life, especially when they clash with what parents indicate as appropriate or proper. Hence, love imposes a barrier to infantile narcissism, acting as a civilizing factor (Freud, 1921/1996c) and since the consciousness of deserving this love, later experienced by the adult with great pride, refers us to very old childhood experiences concerning safety and satisfaction linked to instinct, it is abnegation for the love of parents (Freud, 1939/1996e).

Based on the valuable study of Freud on narcissism, we perceive how the development of ego is closed linked to the

narcissistic confrontation of libido during childhood, which perhaps enables us to talk about an innate human tendency to act in an egoistic and hostile manner, especially when one's desires and needs are not met. Fourteen years before the publication of *Editio princeps* on narcissism, Freud (1900/1987) was already attentive to this tendency to egoism, even stating that children "are completely egoistic (...) they feel their needs intensely and strive ruthlessly to satisfy them, especially against rivals, other children, and first and foremost as against their brothers and sisters" (p. 264).

This tendency can either be intensified or repressed and it seems possible to state that both are closely related to psychological processes based on parental subjectivity that are expressed with a greater or lesser desire on the part of parental figures, to restrict or nurture certain values and normal behavior in children. It is not uncommon to find clinical cases in which parents complain of certain behaviors of children, but which are at the same time, accepted and even encouraged by them, even if unconsciously. The analysis of these cases leads us to the issue of the narcissistic revival that characterizes the love dedicated to children (Freud, 1914/2004a), love that, from this perspective, is much more directed to oneself than to one's children.

### Narcissism Marks Parenthood

Let us now recall the concept of helplessness, the two principles of psychological functioning, and the good-enough environment, aiming to confront them with this idea of the critical influence of parents on the development of child subjectivity to classify parenthood, through a synthesis, as a factor determining the development of children in terms of the complex and almost always disturbing passage from the principle of pleasure to the principle of reality.

This derivation of the concept of parenting, however, should not refer us to an observable state of things or to a phenomenon that could be described from the characterization of parenthood styles. It seems more correct to treat this concept not as a fact of observation but as a structure, a theoretical construction based on which we can study the relationships existent between an "unavoidable event of development" (Green, 1988, p. 241), that is, the loss of the object and the instinctive excess that mark parental investment in children, an excess that refers to the parents' narcissistic wounds:

There cannot be much: much love, much pleasure, much joy, while on the other side, the parental function is over invested. However, this function is, for the most part, infiltrated by narcissism. Children are loved as long as they meet the narcissistic objectives their parents were unable to attain (p. 256).

This narcissistic infiltration, which according to Green is present in parenthood most of time, would emerge as a

disturbing factor against which the child's ego defense mechanisms need to fight. In this case, we could ask whether it is plausible to consider a relationship between parents and children in which the narcissistic objectives of the first would not be in the background boosting parental over investment. Probably not. If we agree with the concept of parental function proposed by Algarvio et al. (2008), we are not presented the option to conceive of the relationships between parents and children as exclusively composed of narcissistic or object investments, but rather as a function resulting from the tension between both types of investment.

That is, if on the one hand, the narcissistic mark of parental love can be the basis of a series of disturbances in the relationship between parents and children, on the other hand, it does not seem correct the attempt to characterize good-enough parenting as the field of object investment free of narcissistic marks, and which, acting this way, that is, loving children for themselves and not for the narcissistic objectives they satisfy, the parents would help the child to overcome helplessness and loss of object, and submit himself/herself to the designations of the principle of reality. Less correct would be seeking in this supposed parenthood that is free of narcissistic marks, the final solution to save the child from the suffering arising from his/her incompleteness and helplessness. In fact, few quests would be more marked by narcissism than this.

Put another way, parenthood, the way we are considering it, should not be treated as an ability to be developed by parents, to become apt at preventing the child from suffering that arises from the loss of object or as a way to avoid such suffering. Based on psychoanalytical theory, we know that this loss is "a time essential to structure human psyche during which a new relationship with reality takes place" (Green, 1988, p. 241). Hence, if we intend to defend a structuring function for parenthood, it would be an unacceptable expectation to use such a concept to predefine or judge the specific types of conduct parents should develop to help their children to experience this period in which their psyche is being structured.

On the other hand, the study of parental subjectivity can aid the clinician, case by case, by helping the parents to identify and perhaps develop narcissistic objectives they establish for their children and identify the extent to which these objectives can contribute to the configuration of conflicts experienced. If the loss of an object is inevitable, it does not mean we should abandon all and any effort to understand the factors that can disturb this already turbulent stage of development. In this context, parenthood could be seen as the manifestation of a parental psychic structure that is connected, from the beginning, to the child's development, a structure that is characterized, on one hand, by narcissistic objectives that parents seek to attain through their children and, on the other hand, by the object investment they also establish. It is very difficult to clearly define the boundaries of each of these two types of investment.

The idea of a good-enough environment, as defined by Winnicott (1975), seems to be in agreement with this conception, as opposed to a conception aimed to identify the parental posture capable of guessing and realizing all of a child's needs and desires. Such a posture would, by the way, be more coherent with the rationale of the principle of pleasure than with the implementation of the principle of reality. The parents would, in this transition between the principles of the functioning of the psychic system, occupy a prominent place due to the special investment, which from the beginning they are apt to receive from their children. The latter are helpless and still possess very rudimentary psychic constitutions, needing parental investment to help them to deal with lethal stimuli of endogenous and exogenous origin. However, this parental help will never be enough, especially in relation to the child's instinctive life, creating another problem for an already overloaded child psyche. Even if the parents are successful in protecting children from external dangers, little can be done about the instinctive demands that take by assault the child psyche, especially those of a sexual nature.

This situation is even more complex when we take into account the consequences the narcissistic mark of parenthood can imprint on the relationship between parents and children. Such a mark would point either to the existence of parental objectives of a narcissistic nature, such as the impossibility of achieving these objectives. In other words, the narcissistic mark of parenthood defines suffering that arises from the early experience of losing the primary object of parents. We can use the concept of the good-enough mother proposed by Winnicott (1975) to understand the insufficiency of parental postures infiltrated by narcissism as a result of reacting to the child's particular characteristics that seriously undermine the parents' narcissistic objectives, and thereby revive this primary experience of loss of the object of parents' love. What could occur in these cases is that the child becomes unable to be a good-enough object for her/his parents, or at least, not one that can be "put in place of the ego ideal" (Freud, 1921/1996c, p. 123).

We note the importance of sexuality as a traumatic factor. We previously discussed the tension experienced by the child in the attempt to reconcile instinctive life with the demands from the outside world, especially the parental voice. Now we see the conflicts that the experience of parenthood can generate in the parents' instinctive economy from another angle. It should be clarified at once, that such an emphasis on the disturbing nature of sexual drive is not our invention. We find this reference in Freud (1940/1996f), when he explains in *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, how delay in the development of ego promotes failure in the task of mastering certain sexual excitations in a primitive time of life:

It is in this lagging of ego development behind libidinal development that we see the essential precondition of neurosis; and we cannot escape the

conclusion that neuroses could be avoided if the childish ego were spared this task – if, that is to say, the child's sexual life were allowed free play, as happens among many primitive peoples (p. 214).

That is, of all the requirements a child's psyche faces without even having the best resources for such combat, the subject's own sexual drives are highlighted as well as repression experienced against these drives. Hence, it seems increasingly difficult to disregard the importance of understanding the factors that disturb parental subjectivity as a mechanism able to decisively influence the child's psychosexual development, especially if we take into account that the defensive reactions that are a way to deal with the tension generated by the experience of losing the object of love are marked so intensely for both the child's and the parental psyche, even if, in the latter we are talking about a revival of the primary loss of object updated and transferred to the relationship with their children.

One might question how a subject, repressed in her/his sexuality, narcissistically marked by his/her own instinctive life, thus, living in endless tension between the two principles of psychic functioning, can deal with the experience of having under his/her care, another psyche experiencing similar conflicts? A potential answer would be: passing repression on to their children. Close observation shows us how parents are the first individuals responsible for repressing the infant's already thriving sexuality and perhaps with such repression, they raise the first dikes against the free flow of the principle of pleasure. As previously discussed, the parents receive a valuable aid from the situation of helplessness as their children are to perform this task. The weak and immature self, especially in the first period of childhood, is constantly attacked by tensions against which his/her efforts are largely ineffective. Children are able to survive because "they are protected against the dangers that threaten them from the outside world by caring parents; they pay for such security with a fear of *loss of love* that would leave them helpless in the face of the outside world's dangers" (Freud, 1940/1996f, p. 213).

Therefore, parental figures function as a reference for the child to attempt to realize a great project, that is, to abnegate the principle of pleasure. Or better yet, not the parental figure, but love, or the fear of losing the love of this figure, without which the child would perish in her/his fight for life. Thus, we see a mechanism to repress sexuality, which from the beginning, ends up being exerted by the parents toward the child.

However, we may see parenting as a source of encouragement for the consolidation of the principle of pleasure and not for its abnegation. In this case, parenting would be a source of disturbance for child sexuality, not by repressing it, but by offering stimuli that can contribute to its fixation in early stages of the psychosexual development. Perhaps

we may state that certain narcissistic demands, created from parental subjectivity, find resonance in the child psyche and, through the psychic confrontation between parents and children, affects in the way children are treated, and consequently, the way the child's psychic development unfolds.

### Final Considerations

Our objective was to argue for a concept of parenthood, which from the psychoanalytical perspective, allows us to study the subjectivity of both parents and children. We understand that a concept of parenting conceived this way enables the study of infiltration of parental narcissism in the love dedicated to the children as well as the effect such an infiltration can cause on child subjectivity. The hypothesis we propose is that this configuration of the relationship between parents and children, notably marked by infiltrations of a narcissistic nature, can help us understand certain reactions that child's ego develop, reactions that demarcate greater or lesser success in the passage from the principle of pleasure to the principle of reality.

We seek support from Winnicott (1975) to define good-enough parenting such as that capable of helping the child consolidate the principle of reality. It is valid to note that we do not defend a dichotomy between the two principles of psychic functioning, because we agree with the idea that "the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle implies no deposing of pleasure principle, but only safeguarding of it. A momentary pleasure, uncertain in its results, is given up, but only in order to gain along the new path, an assured pleasure at a later time" (Freud, 1911/1996a, p. 242). Acting this way, the psyche attempts to protect itself from pressure arising from the instructor need and see itself compelled to abnegate immediate satisfaction:

The ego finds out that it is inevitable to abnegate immediate satisfaction, to postpone attainment of pleasure, bear a little displeasure and totally abandon certain sources of pleasure. An ego thus educated has become 'reasonable'; it no longer lets itself be governed by the pleasure principle, but obeys the reality principle, which also at bottom seeks to obtain pleasure, but pleasure which is assured through taking account of reality, even though it is pleasure postponed and diminished. (Freud, 1917/1996b, p. 360).

Therefore, if we defend good-enough parenthood, it is with the objective of producing a tool to allow us to look at the relationship between parents and children and research certain processes of subjectification in children and parents based on psychoanalysis, taking into account that this step

is identified by Freud as one of the most important in the development of ego, that is, in the passage from the principle of pleasure to the principle of reality. In this context, we try to show how the strength of certain narcissistic objectives in parental subjectivity can overshadow the ability of parents to provide a good-enough environment for the development of children. When we use the term *good-enough child*, we try to emphasize the potential conflict existing among the narcissistic idealizations the parents try to achieve through the love dedicated to their children and the outside needs presented daily by children.

It seems possible to suppose that the narcissistic mark of parenthood signals a more or less irresistible tendency to elect the inner child, the result of the idealization of parents, and consequently, the abandonment of the outside child under their care. The parents strive beyond limits for the idealized child to have better fortune and need not obey the same imperatives to which they were subject throughout life:

Illness, death, renunciation of enjoyment, restrictions on his own will, shall not touch him; the laws of nature, like those of society, are to be abrogated in his favor; he is in reality to be the center and heart of creation, "His Majesty the baby", as we fancied ourselves to be (Freud, 1914/2004a, p. 110).

In the meantime, we imagine a scenario of true abandonment of the external child, especially if his/her demands diverge from the parents' project of perfection, so dear to them. In clinical practice, we could describe how this desire to repeal the laws of nature and society can support an extreme permissive posture in relation to the child's behavior and desires. In other words, the parents would, in the attempt to preserve their narcissistic objectives, end up encouraging the principle of pleasure in the child's psychic apparatus.

The potential consequences of this type of family arrangement can lead us both to the study of a more clinical investigation of psychoneuroses and to broader investigations linked to social phenomena. After all, if on the one hand the understanding of psychic functioning reveals to us important components of psychic conflicts, on the other hand, we notice the possibility of using this very understanding to study broader phenomena such as social aggregation or disaggregation, delinquent behavior, urban violence, among other aspects of human life, which in our view, can be seen as expressions of the way subjects and communities position themselves in relation to attainment of pleasure. The forms of pleasure in question are those immediate forms of pleasure in which one disregards the consequences to oneself and others in the community, or mediate forms of pleasure, with significantly reduced satisfaction, though with a lasting gain for civilization.

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Cássio Marcelo Batista Veludo obtained his Master's Degree in Psychology at the Universidade de Brasília, Brasília (DF), Brazil, Psychology Institute, Graduate Program in Clinical Psychology and Culture.

Terezinha de Camargo Viana is Associate Professor at the Universidade de Brasília, Brasília (DF), Brazil, Psychology Institute, National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) Research Fellow.

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