

The Psychoanalysis of Children (Book Review)

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In this book review, the authors of this article intend to explore Klein's views regarding obsessive neurosis and her theory about the early formation of the superego. It is possible, in 1932, to notice Klein's affiliation with Abraham's theory about the development of the libido. By emphasizing the sadism presented in early object relations, Klein also demonstrates the importance of the introjection of objects to whom the baby's aggressiveness was projected. Therefore, the early infancy is characterized by a state of intense anxiety, which may lead to the employment of obsessive mechanisms by the ego, with the objective of modifying those anxiety states. In this article, the authors explore the links between the primitive superego and obsessive neurosis, exhibiting a standpoint of obsessive neurosis as a defense from early anxieties, which can be associated with psychosis. It is possible to conclude that the introjection of good objects is decisive to the overcoming of psychotic anxieties and defense mechanisms that inhibit the ego.

Keywords: obsessive neurosis, primitive superego, psychosis

This book review aims to convey Klein's theory about the formation of the primitive superego, as well as her understanding about obsessional neurosis, as displayed in 1932, in "The psycho-analysis of children".

In conformity with Abraham's theory of the existence of a sucking stage and a cannibalistic stage, Klein (1932) intends to demonstrate the ambivalence featured in the oral phase of the development of the libido.

She also exhibits the importance of oral frustrations to the intensification of the sadistic instincts. Since weaning represents the utmost increase of the baby's frustration, it is related with the peak of oral sadism.

Side by side with the increase of oral sadism, urethral sadism also plays an important role: "These urethral-sadistic phantasies have a fundamental share in giving the penis the unconscious significance of an instrument of cruelty (...)" (Klein, 1932, p. 129).

Due to the projection of the baby's aggressiveness into the mother's body, the baby fears retaliatory attacks and therefore feels anxious. Alongside with the hate towards the mother, represented by the bad breast, there is also love and pleasure, represented by the good breast. This ambivalence is also an expression of the death and the life instincts.

Klein (1932) demonstrates the importance of the primary scene as a source of the baby's anger and hate, which leads to sadistic attacks. The child imagines that the mother incorporates the penis by oral copulation, during the primary scene, which awakens her jealousy. As a response, the child desires to excavate the maternal body to attack it. Those attacks lead to a fear of the mother and a "fear of the paternal penis incorporated by the

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mother (which) is (...) overwhelming (...)" (Klein, 1932, p. 132).

The desires of death, targeted to the primary scene, "are associated with sadistic phantasies which are extraordinarily rich in content and which involve the sadistic destruction of his parents both singly and together" (Klein, 1932, p. 132). These primary fantasies denote the child aggressiveness, a time when the paternal and maternal genitals become bad objects.

About the formation of the superego, Klein (1932) associates it with early oral frustrations and with an early appearance of the Oedipus complex. She states that "the early stages of the Oedipus conflict and of the formation of the super-ego extend, roughly, from the middle of the first year to the third year of the child's life" (p. 123).

According to Klein (1932),

the phase of life in which the child's phantasies of sadistically attacking the inside of its mother's body are predominant, is initiated by the oral-sadistic stage of development and comes to an end with the decline of the earlier anal-sadistic stage (...). (p. 130)

In the middle of the oral and anal sadism, the early superego is constituted from pre-genital instincts. This primitive superego is a consequence of the first cathexis of object and identifications. Since the archaic stages of the libido are associated with the destructive instincts, the primitive superego is characterized by the aggressive instincts. Therefore, the "aggressive" core of this superego can be found in the incorporation of partial objects during the oral cannibalistic stage.

We can say that the formation of the superego and object relations is the result of an interaction between the projection of sadistic instincts and the introjection of its objects. As Klein (1932) points out,

[...] the nature of the child's object-relations and character-formations is very strongly determined by whether its predominant fixations are situated in the oral-sucking stage or in the oral-sadistic one. In my opinion this factor is decisive for the formation of the super-ego as well. (p. 151)

Through the progressive development of libido, the sadism and anxiety can be overcome and the supremacy of sadistic-oral and sadistic-urethral instincts are replaced. In this period, the obsessive defenses against the anxieties of earlier periods arise.

It would be in this remote childhood that the mechanism of introjection plays a role of utmost relevance, since the internalization of the good breast and the good mother influences the formation of a good paternal imago. The positive attitude towards the father penis can be considered the pillar of a good relation with the male gender itself, allowing the boy to complete the heterosexual development.

For Klein (1932), "in the construction of the super-ego, too, fixations in the oral-sucking stage will counteract the anxiety-provoking identifications which are made under the sway of oral-sadistic impulses" (p. 152). Over time, when the sadistic tendencies decrease, the demands of the superego diminish and the ego reactions change. During the sadistic-anal stage, the ego acknowledges the superego power, recognizing the need to respect its commands. Therefore, in Klein's view, the ego cohesion increases, there is an intensification of the libidinal components, leading to a decrease of the destructive elements.

However, psychotic anxieties may appear in adulthood, unveiling psychotic traits. Based on this, Klein (1932) says: "infantile neuroses present a composite picture made up of the various psychotic and neurotic traits and mechanisms which we find singly and in more or less pure form in adults" (p. 156). This means that, in many infantile neuroses, including obsessive neurosis, there are defenses applied against these more archaic

anxieties, which could cause a disorder to the impoverished ego. An example would be the phobias that contain the anxieties that emerged in the archaic stages of the superego formation. These archaic anxieties appear in the first half of the first year, caused by the rise of sadism.

Klein (1932) also revisits the phobic passage of the Little Hans and the Wolf Man, while Hans shows a very good relationship with his parents and with the environment, demonstrating the overcoming of the sadistic-anal stage and the achievement of the genital stage, successfully outlining the most archaic anxiety. On the other hand, the obsessional neurosis of the Wolf Man is portrayed by a passive desire that goes back to the archaic stages of his libidinal development. The Wolf Man did not overcome the archaic anxiety of his pre-genitality, since the wolves fear would symbolically represent his fear of his father.

Klein (1932) points out,

In this phase when sadism is at its height, ushered in by the oral-sadistic instincts, the child's desire to introject his father's penis, together with his intense oral-sadistic hostile impulses, give rise to fears of a dangerous, devouring animal which he equates with his father's penis. (p. 159)

The father penis can become a good object, if the pre-genital anxiety has decreased its intensity. Otherwise, this incorporation gives room to the most archaic fears, as the case of the Wolf Man, whose neurosis kept its paranoid core.

For Klein (1932), all obsessional neurosis shelters these more archaic anxieties, once "if obsessional features appear strongly and too early in an infantile neurosis, we must infer that very serious disturbances are going on" (p. 160). The core of the obsessional neurosis shelters the more archaic anxieties. The stronger the intensity of these archaic anxieties, the more the ego will need to rely on obsessional defenses.

In this context, there is a statement that fits like a glove for this research. By associating the obsessional neurosis to the superego, Klein (1932) points out that the obsessional mechanisms can become "active" since the remote childhood. During the most archaic stages of the child's life, the superego is "first felt by the ego as anxiety and then, as the early anal-sadistic stage gradually comes to a close, as a sense of guilt as well" (Klein, 1932, p. 164). Here Klein (1932) associates the defenses that the ego establishes due to the anxiety generated by the superego intensity and which, in the course of the anal-sadistic stage completion, is associated with a sense of guilt. This feeling, so discussed related to the depressive position, in the 40s and 50s, begins to gain prominence due to the superego action.

The severe action of this instance, so common in the adult obsessional neurosis, refers to the early harshness of this instance in the remote childhood, as she said: "the severe super-ego in the obsessional neurosis is no other than the unmodified, terrifying super-ego belonging to early stages of the child's development (...)" (Klein, 1932, p. 164).

In Klein's point of view, feelings of guilt are already present since the remote childhood, although had not been associated with the depressive position at this point of her work, but mainly related to the severity of the superego, due to its derivation from the sadistic-urethral and sadistic-anal tendencies.

Since even small children associate the excrements to hazardous and poisoning substances, so, in their fantasies, they may represent "the deepest causes of the child feelings of anxiety and guilt in connection with its training in cleanliness" (Klein, 1932, p. 165). There active formations present in the ego, along with the sense of order and cleaning, would have their origin in the more archaic anxiety. These anxieties are originated in the danger situations which obsessions and obsessional symptoms are associated to, such as the uncertainties.

These anxieties would be a consequence of attacks directed to the inside of the mother's body, which leads later to the realization that a "restitution has to be made" (Klein, 1932, p. 165). Here I highlight the term restitution, which later, in my understanding, will give rise to the term reparation. Thus, the intensification of the anxieties causes an impulse to put the defensive mechanisms into practice, leading the child to clean up what was dirty, to fix what was broken. Therefore, she tries to restore the damaged object.

Klein (1932) reported that "The pressure exerted by this early super-ego increases the sadistic fixations of the child, with the result that he has constantly to be repeating his original destructive acts in a compulsive way" (1932, p. 169). Due to the presence of this overwhelmingly powerful superego, the anxiety intensity increases, being experienced as a feeling of guilt to the ego and this noble creature needs to resort to obsessional defensive mechanisms to handle this situation. On the other hand, while the anxiety decreases, the reactive trends weaken, losing its violence and compulsive character.

The Archaic Anxieties and the Projection and Introjection Mechanisms

In children, the restitution trends are proportionally associated with the primary sadism intensity experienced in remote childhood, when there is a feeling of omnipotence regarding their bladder and intestine functions, as a belief in the omnipotence of their thoughts. Thus, the child may feel guilty because of the numerous attacks on the parents' bodies.

This would be the stage, in which the sadism is in its peak, when we can establish close links between the instinct of knowledge and sadism, since this instinct is activated by the emerging Oedipus conflict and which, at the beginning, is put at the service of sadistic-oral instincts, in which the child wants to know the maternal body, extolling her fantasies; but in the course of the child libidinal instincts development, the aggressive tendencies tend to weaken, providing qualitative changes in her superego, being experienced by the ego as influences of warnings.

According to Klein (1932),

The genital stage would be (...) characterized by the fact that in the interactions that take place between the projection and introjection and between the superego formation and the object relation—interactions that govern all of child archaic development—the positive element has achieved the predominance. (1932, p. 195)

At this point, the anxiety decreases its intensity directly interfering in the frequency of the obsessional mechanisms, since the reparatory mechanisms begin to gain its proper influence.

In the primordium of the psychic constitution, the fragile ego is developing between a voracious superego and an instinctive, aggressive id. Here come to scene the two essential mechanisms for its development and which Klein (1932) will resume in the subsequent articles: the projection and introjection. The first (highlighted by Freud in 1920 in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*) is resumed by Klein (1932) specifically in the chapter X titled "The Importance of the Archaic Situations in the Ego Development".

When analyzing the play and its archaic anxieties, Klein (1932) points out that "the displacement of hazards, instinctive and inside, to the outside world allows the child not only to better dominate the anxiety, but also to become more prepared for it" (p. 197). The projection is a mechanism that allows the displacement of the anxiety related to internal hazards to the outside world. This projection may contain evidences of the knowledge instinct, intended to the maternal body, interlaced to the child sadism, in which the child may introject and form the basis of her fantasies. So, in this relation between projecting the fantasies, the archaic

anxieties and fears and introjecting the objects, it is possible to think about the formation basis of superego.

The projection allows dissipating the archaic anxiety, promoting the internalization of a good object that comes to strengthen the child superego. These archaic anxieties would be linked to the “fears that the little child has of internalized and external hazardous objects” (Klein, 1932, p. 198). These objects would be contaminated by the fear of the maternal loss due to the imaginary attacks to her body. With the psychic development, this fear gives room to the fear of loss, provided by the attenuation of the anxiety that stimulates the ego development. And how is the superego at this conjuncture?

For Klein (1932), “the development of superego ends, along the libido development, at the beginning of the latency period” (p. 201). In the latency period, the child ego and the superego share the objective of adapting to the environment. In the latency stage, raise typical ceremonies against the masturbation of the remote childhood allows the emergence of reactive formations that cause obsessional reactions.

The Bad Breast/Penis

As Klein (1932) discusses the more archaic relations, we cannot forget the symbolic equation of feces, breast, baby and penis. In the sliding of the bad breast in the schizo-paranoid position, we find the bad penis present in the remote childhood, sheltered inside the mother body. Klein (1932) states: “it is the father’ penis, supposedly inside the mother, that in an even greater degree attracts to himself the aggressive trends against him” (p. 259). The boy targets his direct aggressive instincts regarding this partial object inside the maternal body, resulting in a proportional fear reinforced by his hatred and the desire to destroy it.

If, on one hand, by the projection, the mother body is a place full of dangers, by the introjection the child body itself now becomes full of dangerous and threatening objects, and her penis becomes full of “destructive powers” (Klein, 1932, p. 261). This means that her penis becomes the executing organ of her sadistic tendencies, making the urine a dangerous substance, such as her feces and her excrements.

This means that, with the development of the ego, the breast (partial object) gives room to the maternal body full of bad, sadistic objects. By investing the sadism in this partial object—in the penis—this evokes a sadistic omnipotence of this organ that is fundamental to the boy psychic constitution and his male position. For Klein (1932) “if he has a strong primary belief in the omnipotence of his penis, he can oppose it to the omnipotence of his father, and assume the right against that feared and admired organ” (p. 262).

If, on one hand, the boy penis should be invested by his sadistic instincts, on the other, the boy now develops restitution measures “to the extent that the mother should be saved from the ‘bad’ penis of the father inside her” (Klein, 1932, p. 263). That is, to the extent that the object relations are developing and the ego becomes more cohesive, the anxiety decreases and this fear, of the father’s penis inside the mother, decreases, relieving his anxiety and reducing the severity of his superego.

This bibliographic review highlights that partial objects are relevance for the understanding of superego etiology, since these are present in the process of incorporation from the beginning of life. Introjection mechanisms are of utmost relevance to the etiology of this instance, once the superego then exists during the oral stage.

Reference

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