

RESEARCH REPORT
RELATO DE PESQUISA

Health Psychology
Psicologia da Saúde

Editor

Raquel Souza Lobo Guzzo

Support

Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de
Pessoal de Nível Superior (Process n°
88887.148372/2017-00).

Conflict of interest

The authors declare they have no
conflicts of interest.

Received

July 7, 2021

Final version

October 1, 2022

Approved

November 25, 2022

“The one who takes care is the mother”: Legal mediators’ child care imaginary

“Quem cuida é a mãe”: imaginário de mediadores judiciais sobre cuidado infantil

Gisele Meirelles Fonseca-Inacarato¹ , Sueli Regina Gallo-Belluzzo² , Tânia Maria
José Aiello-Vaisberg¹ 

¹ Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Campinas (Puc-Campinas), Escola de Ciências da Vida, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Psicologia. Campinas, SP, Brasil. Correspondence to: G. M. FONSECA-INACARATO. E-mail: <giseleinacarato@gmail.com>.

² Universidade de São Paulo, Instituto de Psicologia, Departamento de Psicologia Clínica. São Paulo, SP, Brasil.

Article based on the thesis of G. M. FONSECA-INACARATO, entitled “*Quem cuida é a mãe: imaginário coletivo de mediadores judiciais sobre cuidado dos filhos*”. Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Campinas, 2021.

How to cite this article: Fonseca-Inacarato, G. M., Gallo-Belluzzo, S. R., & Aiello-Vaisberg, T. M. J. (2023). “The one who takes care is the mother”: Legal mediators’ child care imaginary. *Estudos de Psicologia* (Campinas), 40, e210126. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1982-0275202340e210126>

Abstract

Objective

Investigate child care collective imaginaries, a focus justified by the social and family transformations resulting from the massive insertion of women into the labor market.

Method

The study is organized methodologically from the perspective of concrete psychoanalytic psychology, articulating the use of the psychoanalytic method with relational theorizations. The research involves collective psychological interviews, in which 12 judicial mediators were interviewed through the Thematic Drawing and Story Procedure.

Results

The psychoanalytical consideration of the material allowed the interpretative production of four affective–emotional meaning fields.

Conclusion

The general picture indicates that a conservative imaginary prevails in which the best child care is provided by the biological mother in the contexts of both the nuclear family and the matrifocal family while also maintaining a friendly bond with the father.

Keywords: Child care; Gender-based division of labor; Parenting; Psychoanalysis; Resolution, conflict.



Resumo

Objetivo

Investigar imaginários coletivos sobre cuidado infantil, justificando-se face a transformações sociais e familiares decorrentes da maciça inserção da mulher no mundo laboral.

Método

Organizou-se metodologicamente na perspectiva da psicologia psicanalítica concreta, referencial que articula o uso do método psicanalítico com teorizações relacionais. Concretizou-se pela realização de entrevistas psicológicas coletivas, durante as quais 12 mediadores judiciais foram abordados por meio do uso do Procedimento de Desenhos-Estórias com Tema.

Resultado

A consideração do material permitiu a produção interpretativa de quatro campos de sentido afetivo-emocional.

Conclusão

O quadro geral indica o predomínio de um imaginário conservador, conforme o qual o melhor cuidado infantil é aquele proporcionado pela mãe biológica no contexto da família nuclear ou da família matrifocal que mantém vínculo amistoso com o pai.

Palavras-chave: *Cuidado da criança; Divisão do trabalho baseado no gênero; Poder familiar; Psicanálise; Resolução de conflitos.*

A human being is born in a biological state, dependent on and in need of attentive, continuous and lasting care, which makes it necessary to establish care practices that favor the child's survival and development. Anthropological studies indicate that such practices have varied according to historical and/or cultural conditions (Gottlieb & DeLoache, 2016); this variance has been used as an argument by scholars who adhere to dialectical thought to defend these practices as comprising phenomena that belong to the sphere of social being (Lukács, 1978/2013). Nevertheless, the idea that child care obeys the biological determinations that prepare women for this task still persists (Querrien & Delphy, 2020). Therein lies the foundation for the sexual division of labor, in force since the industrial revolution, according to which it is up to men to engage in gainful productive activity and to women to perform unpaid reproductive activity, reflecting the creation of the home as distinct from the workplace; thus, life is supported by the man in the factory, while the woman takes care of the house as a space for male rest and restoration as well as the production of future workers (Abreu, 2018; Federici, 2018).

However, starting in the middle of the last century, crises typical of the capitalist system, as well as the achievements of the feminist movement (Federici, 2018; Querrien & Delphy, 2020), have caused the entry of women into the labor market. Financially independent and able to contribute to family support, women began to position themselves in a new way, which impacted their conjugal and family relationships. Ceasing to be entirely dedicated to reproductive work, women began to seek education and professional qualifications, turn toward the development of projects beyond the domestic space and decrease their number of children (Bernardi et al., 2019). Marriage itself lost its previous stability, which was apparently based on female confinement to the condition of wife and mother; hence, separations became more frequent, favoring the emergence of matrifocal families (Campana & Gomes, 2019).

However, it is important to note that in the vast majority of cases, the entry of women into the labor market and their contribution to the support of their families did not translate into a waiver of their responsibility for housework, giving rise to a situation known as the double female journey. In fact, most women not only face this accumulation of activities but also experience feelings of guilt and anguish because they are not continuously available to their children (Schulte et al., 2019;

Visintin & Aiello-Vaisberg, 2017). It is therefore appropriate to suggest that the current condition of mothers, involving a double shift or pressures for not being involved in a double shift, produces social suffering that affects the family ties and affective-emotional conditions of new generations. Thus, it is rational to propose the production of comprehensive psychological knowledge through which we can detail this complex situation with as much precision as possible to 1) enhance the performance of psychologists in the social clinic and 2) provide support for debates on social movements to combat oppression, humiliation and gender inequality in the search for real and concrete respect for human rights.

Clearly, we are interested in a highly complex phenomenon that can be approached from different disciplinary perspectives that characterize the various human sciences as well as through various theoretical-methodological frameworks. Our proposal uses a psychological approach that is organized around a reference known as concrete psychoanalytic psychology (Bleger, 1963/2007), which is defined by the use of the psychoanalytic method and relational theorizations. This specific focus will help us establish, as the objective of this investigation, the study of the relationship between the collective imaginary and child care practices, a proposal that we hope to make sufficiently clear in the next section of this article.

Method

The study of the collective imaginary, in light of concrete psychoanalytic psychology (Bleger, 1963/2007), is a path that is admittedly promising when we seek to produce comprehensive knowledge about the affective-emotional senses of human acts (Rosa et al., 2019). In this theoretical context, which is established through the use of the psychoanalytic method to understand the experiential senses of human acts as events that are inscribed in linked fields and within macrosocial contexts. There is a conception according to which the individual psyche is a sophisticated social production that takes place across a prolonged temporality through processes of singularization and differentiation. For this reason, individual existence never occurs in isolation from interhuman conditions but is always inserted into environments that are collectively produced by human acts, which end up being configured as the substrates from which new acts emerge.

Concrete psychoanalytic psychology is a branch derived from the psychoanalytic field and developed with the critical detection of epistemological incoherence – in other words, Freudian thought is crossed with two otherwise incompatible discourses, the metapsychological and the dramatic, resulting in the proposed substitution of metapsychology with psychoanalytic psychology, which focuses on lived experience (Politzer, 1928/2004). This view fostered important developments in Latin America in the thought of Rioplatian psychoanalysts, including Bleger (1963/2007), a dedicated reader of Politzer (1928/2004). Although Politzerian research was translated into English in the 1990s, it does not seem to have attracted the attention of psychoanalysts. Even so, several American authors have reached, independently, the same conclusions as this philosopher, resulting in the so-called relational psychoanalytic revolution led by Mitchell (1988), who understood that the suppression of the concept of drive and, consequently, of metapsychology was necessary (Kuchuck, 2021). Thus, we can affirm that the concrete psychoanalytic psychology that we, as Latin Americans, have directly inherited from Bleger (1963/2007) can now be included among the approaches to contemporary relational psychoanalysis, as Liberman (2014) correctly states.

If we understand that the use of the psychoanalytic method always seeks to reach the unconscious, we have no difficulty in finding that from relational perspectives, the unconscious ceases

to be thought of as an individual psychic instance to be considered in fields of affective-emotional meaning, that is, as a set of experientially inhabited intersubjective psychic regions in which a set of beliefs, values and feelings are considered valid and true, thereby conferring logical-emotional meanings upon acts and practices. The psychoanalytic interpretation thus is the search for the underlying “truths” that make human behavior understandable.

It is fitting, therefore, to suggest that these fields would be, at first, environments that concrete human beings create in the material world based on their actions. Once constituted, such environments become a type of fund or place from which new acts emerge that have the “truths” of this fund as their reference, often unconscious, and may thus favor the reproduction or transformation of relational life. Thus, racist conduct, for example, produces racist environments, which both facilitate the emergence of new racist acts by those who are interested in this way of perceiving and organizing social reality and drive the fight against racism by those who suffer from and/or consider it ethically politically unacceptable violence.

Participants

Since the objective of the present study concerns the child care collective imaginary, we searched for a group of participants who were professionally close to situations in which there was differentiated attention given to children or adolescents. Working with teachers or pediatricians, for example, were valid options. However, because Brazilian society strongly tends to believe that the best childhood is that spent within the family, we chose to invite as participants judicial mediators who deal directly with a problem focusing on the care of children and adolescents by acting together in cases involving the separation of couples with common children. Thus, we approached 12 trained professionals, of both sexes, recognized by the *Conselho Nacional de Justiça* (National Council of Justice) – eight women and four men, aged between 36 and 65 years, with 10 law graduates and two completed High School. These judicial mediators are staff members at the *Centro Extrajudicial de Solução de Conflitos e Cidadania* (CEJUSC, Extrajudicial Center for the Resolution of Conflicts and Citizenship) in a city in the interior of the state of São Paulo. They were previously informed of and invited to participate in the study by the service coordinator. When the researcher went to CEJUSC to conduct the study, she explained that it was a doctoral study. All participants agreed to participate in the study, which was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the *Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Campinas* (Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas) (CAAE: 69085717.6.0000.5481), under opinion number 2.251.372.

Instrument

The collective psychological interviews were based on the Thematic Drawing and Story Procedure (PDE-T) (Aiello-Vaisberg & Ambrosio, 2019), a mediating resource that facilitates emotional communication. Typically, the PDE-T involves requesting a drawing with a specific theme – defined a priori based on the focal interests – accompanied by the creation of a story about the drawn figure.

In the present study, after providing bond paper and a graphite pencil, we requested a drawing of “a family that arrives for mediation amid the dissolution of the marriage and a child custody dispute”, followed by a story about the drawing. The proposed theme was intended to draw the participant’s attention to two issues: the way in which the relationship between ex-spouses who have children in common develops and the relationship of the separated mother and father

with their children. Adopting a modified version of the PDE-T, we added a second request, inviting each participant to write another story taking place five years later on another sheet of paper. This request for a new future story was proposed because divorce is a process that implies changes over time in the relationships among the people involved. It is a period of transition from a conjugal life to a new organization of interparental relationships. We believe that requesting a future story could bring to light important elements in the mediators' imagination of the topic of parenting after this specified period.

Procedures

Here, we explain how we operationalized the psychoanalytic method in three distinct investigative procedures: (a) configuration of the encounter with the participants; (b) record of the material produced during the meeting; and (c) psychoanalytic interpretation of the recorded material.

The *investigative procedure involving the participant meetings* was carried out through collective psychological interviews based on the PDE-T and conducted on the premises of the CEJUSC. We conducted five interviews, gathering two to three participants per meeting, to accommodate the dynamics of the process.

The *investigative procedure for recording the material* occurred in two ways: the preservation of the participants' drawings and accompanying stories and the preparation of the transferential narratives from the interviews. The first involved the organization of the material produced by the 12 participants through scanning the drawings and transcribing the stories. The set of materials produced by each participant was identified with the letter P followed by a numeral from 1 to 12. The second step entailed writing narrative texts, performed in a state of floating attention and free association of ideas after the meetings, in which we recorded the occurrences and affective-emotional impacts experienced during the collective interviews.

The *investigative procedure for the interpretation of clinical material* comprised the study of the drawings-stories and transferential narratives in search of the interpretative production of fields of affective-emotional sense according to which the collective imaginary is organized. This phase of the research was performed collectively; the material was presented to members of the research group, who adhered to the following methodological imperatives of Herrmann (1979/1991): "let it arise", "take into consideration" and "complete the configuration of meaning". Thus, it was necessary that we cultivate, at this time, a phenomenological stance of theoretical detachment so that we could let ourselves be impressed cognitively and emotionally by the material.

After completing the steps in each of the three investigative procedures, we moved on to a discussion of the interpretative results, suspending the psychoanalytic method in favor of conducting theoretical-conceptual reflective work. The interpretations produced/found were shared at this time and examined in light of the theories and ideas of different scholars, whether psychoanalysts or not.

Results

In this section, we elaborate our results, which correspond to four fields of affective-emotional meaning, produced interpretatively via the psychoanalytic method: "The one who takes care is the mother", "Mother transgressor", "Father present" and "Parents friends/enemies, children preserved/harmed".

We present, first, a table that contains the fields and the productions that emerged from them, reiterating that some drawings–stories emerged from more than one field. Second, we define the fields of affective-emotional sense according to a minimalist approach, through which we focus on essential points (Table 1).

Table 1

Fields and the productions that emerged from them

Fields	Productions
The one who takes care is the mother	P1, P3, P5, P7, P10, P11, P12
Mother transgressor	P6
Father present	P2, P4
Parents friends/enemies, children preserved/harmed	P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12

The field we identify as “The one who takes care is the mother”, from which seven drawings–stories emerged, is organized around the belief that truly good childcare is performed by the biological mother. Thus, in cases of separation, it is up to the mother to take her children into her home and assume full care, even when she also performs professional activities.

We observed several drawings configuring the position of the children next to or much closer to the mother, often reinforced through stories in which the child lives under maternal responsibility. Here, we present two stories that emerged from this first field:

She went to the forum for an audience, happy, because she would resolve the issue of custody of her children (there were three, one teenager and two small children). She felt great on this day, enlightened. In addition, they defined the amount of the pension that the ex-spouse (father of the children) would pay. He was frowning, concerned more with the amounts that would be paid to the children (his children) than with the guardian (who would stay).

The absent father does not want to pay for or live with his children. The affective mother does everything for the children in search of financial aid to improve their lives. The father does not want to pay, seeking to get rid of the obligation to live and enjoy the best of his life. Many fights and discussions (...).

The field of affective-emotional meaning called the “Mother transgressor”, which could be considered the inverse of the first field, is organized around the belief that the mother who refuses to take care of her children is breaking with social expectations:

Couple with 2 children, in which one party wants to separate and the other does not, and so, one thinks about the children’s well-being and the other only about finding ways to “hurt” or “win back” the partner. [After 5 years:] Now, adolescent children aged between 13 and 16 years have been in the company of the father since the separation of the couple and the mother (...) visits and participates in the children’s lives.

The third field of affective-emotional sense, “Father present”, was defined as organized around the belief that truly good child care requires contact with the father. However, it seems that the validity of this field does not entail continuous and effective participation in the care process, although it may include occasional assistance. The following story offers a clear example of what can emerge from this field:

The mother, after 5 years, is working and needs the help of the father to raise the child. There are no hidden constraints or feelings that prevent her from asking the father for help – to take the child to the doctor or stay with the child when the daycare center is not open – in short, for unpredictable emergencies that arise.

Finally, we defined the field “Parents friends/enemies, children preserved/harmed”, from which 11 drawings-stories emerged, as one that concerns the belief/fantasy that the well-being of children depends on parents being cordial and friendly to each other. Here, we present two excerpts emerging from this field:

Without an adequate structure, the family disintegrates and seeks justice to solve the issue – collaborative justice (...) Minor children, in despair and insecurity, are discouraged, waiting for a negotiated solution and do not know what will come of a resolution (...) Parents, in disagreement, seek and look only at their individuality and particular interests.

[5 years later:] Children grew up with psychological imbalance due to the lack of separated/divorced parents (...) Need psychological treatment.

In this story, there is the belief that a couple or ex-couple who lives amid fights and disputes exerts an inevitably negative impact on the affective and relational development of their children:

The adolescent son, now an adult, [he became] older and more responsible due to the affection and attention he received. The children, now adolescents, felt safe and loved. In this period, both parents (mother and father) agreed to ask for shared custody, and in a conciliation hearing, it was agreed that this would be better for both. With this, they began to manage the lives of their three children, and their living conditions improved considerably. The older son’s mandatory child support had already ceased, but the father wanted to continue paying and helping the son. Each day is a learning process; living is like that (...) and many stories are yet to come!

In this last story, the belief that a couple or ex-couple who cultivates friendly and collaborative relationships provides a favorable environment for the proper development of the children prevails. We can observe that the posture of relative proximity and dialog allowed the children to feel the affective and protective presence of both parents, generating a sense of security.

Discussion

In what we produced interpretatively through the psychoanalytic method, we found that our participants move within a conservative imaginary based on 1) the biologizing view of maternal care, 2) the sexual division of labor and 3) the idealization of the nuclear family. These are important elements in the debate on contemporary feminism (Abreu, 2018; Federici, 2018).

Our interpretive results indicate that the following belief prevails: The biological mother is the best caregiver and has full responsibility for her children’s well-being. The logic underlying this fantasy is that it is the mother who is best prepared to fully meet the needs of her children. Thus, child care and mothering become synonymous, the latter being understood as the natural way to solve the problem of extreme dependence presented by human beings in the early beginning of their lives.

Viewing motherhood as something natural corresponds, in light of the ontology of the social being of Lukács (1978/2013), to the transposition of a phenomenon from the appropriate sociohuman sphere to the organic sphere, thereby generating the expectation that biology determines human behavior. This perspective disregards the fact that a mother’s responsibilities to her children are culturally and historically produced in various societies (Gottlieb & DeLoache, 2016). From our point of view, the idea that motherhood is a purely natural phenomenon is an ideological maneuver aimed at maintaining the status quo through weakening innovative initiatives in the human way of life. However, this imaginative conception is exactly that found in the manifestations of the participants in the present study, who state that “The one who takes care is the mother”. In this

imaginary, fathers are practically released from this responsibility and, therefore, free to be more distant from their children and even to avoid assuming responsibility for their livelihood. Thus, they can dedicate themselves to other activities with greater freedom, including more easily experiencing novel opportunities to form a new family (Rocha & Fensterseifer, 2019). When a mother does not take on the task of caring for her children because she resents the separation or for other reasons, the imaginary that prevails is that the children's emotional development will inevitably be harmed.

Currently, one of the main consequences of the dissolution of marriage is the formation of single-parent families headed by women. When the opposite occurs – the woman/mother is the one who leaves, not the father – the mother is seen as a transgressor who resists what is understood to be the natural order. Interestingly, however, Bueskens (2002) conducted a study that addresses situations where the mother leaves the house after the couple's separation, leaving her children in their father's care. Investigating the trajectory of 12 women who left their homes, the author found that all eventually returned to live with and care for their children after an initial period of separation. He concluded, then, that leaving the house was used as a strategy to ensure the sharing of child care-related responsibilities with their father, not as a gesture of breaking ties.

Although the sexual division of labor predominates – clearly demonstrated by the fields “The one who takes care is the mother” and “Mother transgressor” – some participant productions also suggest the possibility of cultivating a closer relationship with the father after marital separation. In this context, the father is more present but does not seem to be continuously involved directly in the provision of care; that is, he is, at best, someone who helps his ex-wife, who remains the caregiver effectively in charge of the care and well-being of their children. In our view, while the coexistence of a father with his children is a relevant and appreciable issue (Bernardi, 2017), it does not fully resolve an imaginary that is ruled by the belief that “The one who takes care is the mother” and thus remains distant from egalitarian parental care (Santos et al., 2019).

Since the insertion of mothers into the labor market was not considered relevant by the participants, we can conjecture, given the first three fields – “The one who takes care is the mother”, “Mother transgressor” and “Father present” – that the mediators deem the so-called double-shift arrangement that is prevalent in our society to be correct, according to which professional activities are a simple addition to maternal obligations. Moreover, by opposing the total detachment of the father, which is still widely practiced, the maintenance of a coexistence with children indicates that a woman should feel satisfied even though she sees herself as significantly and objectively overloaded because she is caring for her children's well-being.

Regarding the field of emotional affective meaning called “Parent friends/enemies, children preserved/harmed”, we observe that the naturalization of maternal function and the sexual division of labor are closely related to the belief that the nuclear family remains the most suitable arrangement for the healthy development of new generations. According to Porreca (2019), this model is based on the exaltation of conjugal love, based on the expectation that the couple bond is the means through which to experience passion, sexuality and happiness in a monogamous and indissoluble way. We know that this form of bonding is not sustained in everyday life, instead engendering conflicts and deterioration that can lead to a rupture in a relationship. Such ruptures can, in turn, occur in a sufficiently healthy way or in more or less destructive and violent ways, which shape how ex-spouses relate.

We have perceived, in the imaginations of the participants, how when there was a more divalent positioning of a couple via constant fights and disagreements, a lack of dialog and legal disputes, the consequences for the children were always more disastrous. In contrast, the possibility

of minimally cultivating dialog between ex-spouses and maintaining a more constructive relationship to meet the children's needs seemed to be associated with the healthy development of children and adolescents. We can therefore suggest that among these mediators, the belief prevails that a couple should maintain friendly relations for the sake of their children.

This imaginary coincides with a discourse that currently prevails in the psycholegal sphere asserting that the end of conjugality should not imply the end of parenting (Silva et al., 2019). This apparently rational formula has a highly problematic aspect; it exerts a high demand on people who are experiencing difficulties for which they feel somehow responsible. In addition, in the imaginary relative to the nuclear family, the intertwining of conjugality and parenting occurs according to the sexual division of labor; thus, it is not surprising to find that parenting is reconstructed through gender stereotypes after marital dissolution.

Considering the influences of the patriarchal model, which still prevails in the social imaginary, women tend to be much more burdened following separation, since they tend to remain the guardian of and takes the most care of their children. Animosity resulting from the causes of separation and the breaking of the marital bond are common, which may contribute to the separation or limited participation of the father in his children's lives. In addition, women need to work to support themselves; once they are considered free to act in the labor market, they do not receive a pension as an ex-wife. Sometimes, women must accept help from family members because their salary is usually lower than that of the ex-husband (Pereira & Leitão, 2020). This arrangement not only clearly burdens women but affects the entire bonding network. Such overload and frustration do not contribute to the serenity and maturation of the relationships between ex-spouses or of fathers and mothers with their children.

Thus, the equation parents-friends/children preserved or parents-enemies/children harmed seems limited to expressing the drama in question and to guiding the practice of these professionals. The simple quest to promote more cordial ties between ex-spouses is another requirement for a parental couple that can often imply a demand for greater submission from the woman, who is already in a situation of profound inequality. In fact, this expectation among the mediators seems to be considered simple advice to be followed given that the children's well-being is at stake. Nevertheless, if a marital relationship breaks, the maintenance of cordial bonds presents a major challenge. As this imaginary does not favor the acceptance of conflicting aspects in a relationship, if couples are not embraced in their suffering by professionals and society, there is little room for the effective resolution of marital and parental conflicts.

Since women tend to suffer from great social pressures that associate personal fulfillment with marriage and motherhood, Biroli (2018) decries that many girls and women are forced to conform to this model established in our culture. Thus, despite being harmed and exploited, under the influence of the imaginary that idealizes marriage and motherhood, women yearn for their place of value and recognition as wives and mothers; that is, they ultimately accept and collaborate in the perpetuation of this arrangement. Due to the suffering of women and children, we suggest that the fields that we have created/found in this study are merely apparently protective of the child; following detailed analysis, we find that they are harmful to all.

Conclusion

We have found that a conservative imaginary prevails in childcare practices, dictated by patriarchal values that overload women, who are considered the main caregivers for children even

when they engage in a professional activity and share financial responsibilities with their spouse. Under this condition, a woman is expected to have a more submissive attitude; she should be content with the ongoing presence of her ex-husband in her children's lives, even without any shared responsibilities regarding care. This equation, according to which productive work belongs to men and reproductive work is a female competence, remains, in a very peculiar way, in the imaginary of the focal mediators. That is, what is objectively a relief from the responsibility attributed to men is intersubjectively considered the advantage of only the woman who ceases to be financially dependent on her husband.

Accordingly, how our society is organized in relation to the provision of childcare should be discussed and rethought because it penalizes the women who perform this activity, which is considered unproductive and invisible, and harms children, whose needs remain unmet. Moreover, it impoverishes the experiences of men who are removed from care practices. While less apparent, such male impairment deserves to be highlighted, thereby driving our conclusion of this article with an observation that we believe to be relevant.

According to emotional maturation from the humanist ethical-political perspective, which characterizes concrete psychoanalytic psychology, human nature finds its fullness in generosity and altruistic concern toward other human beings. As such a fundamental dimension in the human way of being, this element obviously does not depend on sex/gender but rather on the sociocultural conditions that favor the maturation of human capacities. Caring for a child is thus, in this line of thought, an important concrete opportunity in the promotion of humanization processes.

Human dependence at the beginning of life is a culturally resolved fact, allowing us to propose that child care practices should be rethought in light of the ontological consideration that they are phenomena in the sphere of social being and not the sphere of organic being. Hence, these practices can be transformed to better fit current social realities, which have profoundly questioned sexual binarism. Notably, this binarism is associated with a series of misconceptions that have heavy consequences due to the suffering they entail.

Despite the limitations inherent to empirical research, this study sheds some light on the unconscious affective-emotional fields that underlie the behaviors that prevail in our society regarding childcare. We suggest that future studies explore other groups that are directly involved in the care of those who represent the future of our society by evaluating their perceptions of the accomplishment of this task. We believe that society as a whole should be more directly involved in care activities, which are essential for the development of a more just community and happier people.

References

- Abreu, M. (2018). Materialist Feminism in France: Socio-history of a Reflection. *Revista Estudos Feministas* (Florianópolis), 26(3), e54237. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1806-9584-2018v26n354237>
- Aiello-Vaisberg, T. M. J., & Ambrosio, F. F. (2019). Gribouillages de Dessins-Histoires avec Thème: l'approche psychanalytique d'imaginaires collectifs. In W. Trinca (Org.), *Investigation Psychodynamique de la Personnalité – Procédé de Dessins-Histoires & Procédé de Dessins de la Famille* (pp. 313-332). Mardaga.
- Bernardi, D. (2017). Fatherhood and care: "new concepts", old speeches. *Psicologia Revista*, 26(1), 59-80. <https://doi.org/10.23925/2594-3871.2017v26i1p.59-80>
- Bernardi, D., Mello, R., & Féres-Carneiro, T. (2019). Ambivalence towards the parental project: vicissitudes of contemporary conjugality. *Revista da SPAGESP*, 20(1), 9-23.
- Biroli, F. (2018). *Gênero e desigualdades: limites da democracia no Brasil*. Boitempo.

- Bleger, J. (2007). *Psicologia de la Conducta*. Paidós. (Original work published 1963)
- Bueskens, P. (2002). From perfect housewife to fishnet stockings and not quite back again: one mother's story of leaving home. *Journal of Association for Research on Mothering*, 4(1), 33-45.
- Campana, N. T. C., & Gomes, I. C. (2019). A study about the characteristics of the contemporary parental exercise and care network. *Estudos de Psicologia (Campinas)*, 36, e190028. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/1982-0275201936e190028>
- Federici, S. (2018). On reproduction as an interpretative framework for social/gender relations. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 25(9), 1391-1396. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2018.1552404>
- Gottlieb A., & DeLoache, J. S. (2016). *A world of babies: imagined childcare guides for eight societies*. Cambridge University Press.
- Herrmann, F. (1991). *Andaimes do real: o método da psicanálise*. Brasiliense. (Original work published 1979)
- Kuchuck, S. (2021). *The relational revolution in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy*. Confer Books.
- Lieberman, A. (2014). Stephen A. Mitchell y el psicoanálisis rioplatense "clásico" (Bleger): algunas convergencias. *Clínica e Investigación Relacional*, 8(1), 51-60.
- Lukács, G. (2013). *Ontologia do Ser Social*. Boitempo. (Original work published 1978)
- Mitchell, S. A. (1988). *Relational concepts in psychoanalysis: an integration*. Harvard University Press.
- Pereira, V. B., & Leitão, H. A. L. (2020). Overload and support network: the motherhood experience after marital separation. *Pesquisas e Práticas Psicossociais*, 15(1), 1-12.
- Politzer, G. (2004). *Crítica dos fundamentos da psicologia: a psicologia e a psicanálise*. Unimep. (Original work published 1928)
- Porreca, W. (2019). Conjugal relationship: challenges and possibilities of the "we". *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa*, 35, e35nspe7. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0102.3772e35nspe7>
- Querrien, A., & Delphy, C. (2020). La longue durée de l'exploitation domestique. *Multitudes*, 79(2), 205-210.
- Rocha, F. A., & Fensterseifer, L. (2019). The role of sexual intercourse for couples at different stages of family life cycle. *Contextos Clínicos*, 12(2), 560-583. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4013/ctc.2019.122.08>
- Rosa, D. C. J., Lima, D. M., Peres, R. S., & Santos, M. A. (2019). The concept of collective imaginary in its psychoanalytic sense: an integrative review. *Psicologia Clínica*, 31(3), 577-595. <http://dx.doi.org/10.33208/PC1980-5438v0031n03A09>
- Santos, C. V. M., Campana, N. T. C., & Gomes, I. C. (2019). Egalitarian parental care: literature review and conceptual construction. *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa*, 35, e35311. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1590/0102.3772e35311>
- Schulte, A. A., Gallo-Belluzzo, S. R., & Aiello-Vaisberg, T. M. J. (2019). The emotional experience from mommy bloggers' authors. *Estudos Interdisciplinares em Psicologia*, 10(1), 107-130. <https://doi.org/10.5433/2236-6407.2019v10n1p107>
- Silva, L. D. L., Chapadeiro, C. A., & Assumpção, M. C. (2019). Parenthood after marital dissolution: an integrative review. *Pensando Famílias*, 23(1), 105-120.
- Visintin, C. D. N., & Aiello-Vaisberg, T. M. J. (2017). Motherhood and social suffering in Brazilian mommy blogs. *Revista Psicologia: Teoria e Prática*, 19(2), 98-107. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5935/1980-6906/psicologia.v19n2p98-107>

Contributors

G. M. FONSECA-INACARATO participated in the conception and design of the study, material collection, analysis and interpretation, and discussion of results. S. R. GALLO-BELLUZZO participated in the material analysis and interpretation and discussion of the results. T. M. J. AIELLO-VAISBERG participated in the conception and design of the study, material analysis and interpretation, and discussion of the results. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.