

**FOCUS: THERE ARE NO LONGER THE CHILDREN (BUT ABOVE ALL THE PARENTS)
OF THE PAST: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL LOOK AT PARENTHOOD
AND PERINATAL PSYCHOLOGY**

Editorial

*Marcello Florita**

Choosing to dedicate our focus on perinatal psychology originated in the observation of transformations concerning society and clinical work. This field has witnessed the largest number of developments and changes in the course of the last fifteen years. Not too long ago, in 1990, the researchers working at Brescia University under Prof. Imbasciati were among the first to speak of ‘Perinatal Clinical Psychology’, indicating the study of the first one thousand days of life after conception.

The studies focused attention principally on the mothers and their babies, then moved to include the fathers, and at present they include reflections on how a human being develops in relation to his DNA, to the relations with the caregivers, and to the environment he grows up in.

After the ‘90s, however, the world truly changed. A banal concept like the neurological development of the child was turned upside down and re-examined in the perinatal studies, as well as in neuroscience. For example, it has been observed that neurological maturation, which was once thought to take place in pre-established stages or following ‘natural laws’, also depends above all on interaction with one’s caregivers from the time of gestation. The quality of the relationship with one’s parents is therefore just as important as the genetic make-up, and the basis of our becoming a subject is primarily affective rather than cognitive. As Dr. Cena, one of the national references in research in this field, suggests, the basis of what we are to become is affective rather than cognitive. Thus, what is learned and fixed in

*Psychotherapist and psychoanalyst of SIPRe is the author of two essays on psychoanalysis, ‘*L’intreccio*’ and ‘*Alice il porcospino e il fenicottero*’; he is also curator of the volume ‘*Benessere e cura nell’esperienza perinatale*’ edited by the Order of Psychologists in Lombardy. He has written a novel, ‘*Come respira una piuma*’. He has long been a collaborator of Punto Raf and member of SIPRe, referent for the Perinatal Area in SIPRe Milan, and scientific director of the Course on Perinatal Care.

E-mail: florita.marcello@hsr.it ; site: www.marcelloflorita.it

the child's memory is not content but mental functions which will form a matrix that, in turn, will condition the processing of subsequent learning. The theory of complexity is perfectly suited to this idea of development, where self- and eco-organisation are constituents of the subject (they cannot be distinguished, nor does one prevail over the other), and where cause and effect are conceived outside a linear logic, but within a feed-back circuit: effects produce causes and are interdependent.

At the same time as scientific progress, there have been changes in society and in procreative paths. Over time, extended families have been deprived of power, the sentimental couple has become increasingly central (and perhaps isolated) in the West, our society - described as a 'fatherless society' - has also seen fathers enter the doors of delivery rooms and birth classes with an assiduous and affective presence; parenthood has become less and less linked to the biological bond; couples with infertility problems are increasingly frequent and test-tube babies - which used to cause scandal - have become routine; homosexual couples have taken advantage of scientific progress to become parents; migrant women have arrived in Italy as mothers whose maternity is the result of the violence occurring during migration; and surrogate motherhood, despite being banned in Italy, has become a technique that is accessible thanks to a simple trip to a neighbouring European country.

Against this background, one can understand how cultural changes, scientific advances and research in this field need to be amalgamated and digested.

In the light of all this, it has become necessary to devote a focus to the perinatal period. The title chosen is '*There are no longer the children (but above all the parents) of the past: a psychoanalytical look at parenthood and perinatal psychology*', in order to describe the struggle of maternal and child care workers to keep up with the changes linked to the functioning of the child (in the uterus and after birth), and the new families and generative paths.

The first article '*One cannot touch without being touched: Why psychoanalysis needs to draw from the perinatal and vice versa*', of which I am the author, tries to focus on all the new challenges of perinatal psychology, in order to find a thin thread that links them to the challenges of psychoanalysis (Florita, 2021).

The second article '*Psychopathology in the perinatal period: beyond postpartum depression*' was written by Dr. Greta Petrilli, an esteemed colleague of Adlerian training but of SIPRe adoption, who, thanks to her long experience in the field, proposes a new perspective to reading psychopathology in the perinatal period, moving beyond the banal algorithm that associates maternal suffering with postpartum depression (Petrilli, 2021).

The third article, '*Technological storks: parents and children born of science!*', is an innovative and stimulating contribution on the subject of medically assisted procreation (MAP), written by my colleague, Alessandra Merisio, who has worked for many years in contact with couples accessing the pathway to parenthood, but which is also the result of a profound interdisciplinary reflection (Merisio, 2021).

The fourth article '*Migration, interculturality and parenthood*', by Valentina Stirone, Jolanda Spoto and Martina Trinchieri, proposes a psychoanalytical reading of the immigration phenomenon, and aims at highlighting the condition of particular vulnerability that characterises migrants when dealing with the complex transition to parenthood (Stirone, Spoto, & Trinchieri, 2021).

Finally, there is an article which is the fruit of the work of the whole Perinatal Area SIPRe Milan. During the first lockdown, just a few days after the total closure of Italy, Claudia Maspero, an evolutionary psychotherapist working in the Perinatal Area, reflected on the particular vulnerability linked to the perinatal period; she expressed the desire to create groups to accompany couples expecting a child, who were feeling isolated and frightened in the Lockdown, and disorientated by the loss of any hospital reference. The idea, which was greeted with great enthusiasm by the group, was implemented and led to the creation of the online groups, 'Almost parents at the time of COVID', and immediately reached out to a large number of members. The last article, '*We, the children of COVID. Pregnancy in the pandemic, as a pandemic*' (Lietti, Petrilli, Maspero, Pirro, & Florita, 2021), is the outcome of this experience and aims to share some reflections on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of people expecting a child. The authors, Licia Lietti, Greta Petrilli, Claudia Maspero, Valeria Pirro and Marcello Florita, have tried to answer some thorny questions: how has the pandemic affected expectant mothers, what were the effects, what were the opportunities, how did the subject deal with it.

The hope of this last article, as of the whole focus, is not so much to give you exhaustive answers, but to propose new readings and perspectives from which to look at the experience of becoming parents.

In my closing remarks I would like to thank the members of the Perinatal Area SIPRe of Milan: Licia Lietti, Maria Mallardi, Claudia Maspero, Alessandra Merisio, Greta Petrilli, Valeria Pirro, Claudia Proserpio, Cristina Sempio and Stefania Zanolini, who have actively contributed to the production of this focus and to the dissemination of reflections and initiatives.

REFERENCES

- Florita, M. (2021). One Cannot Touch Without Being Touched: Why Psychoanalysis Needs to Draw from the Perinatal, and *Vice Versa*. *Ricerca Psicoanalitica*, 32(1), 9-23.
- Petrilli, G. (2021). Psychopathology in the Perinatal Period: Beyond Postpartum Depression. *Ricerca Psicoanalitica*, 32(1), 41-56.
- Merisio, A. (2021). Technological Storks: Parents and Children Born Thanks to Science!. *Ricerca Psicoanalitica*, 32(1), 73-81.
- Stirone, V., Spoto, J., & Trinchieri, M. (2021). Migration, Interculturality and Parenthood. *Ricerca Psicoanalitica*, 32(1), 93-102.
- Lietti, L., Petrilli, G., Maspero, C., Pirro, V., & Florita, M. (2021). We, the Children of COVID. Pregnancy in the Pandemic, as a Pandemic. *Ricerca Psicoanalitica*, 32(1), 113-122.

Conflict of interests: the author declares no potential conflict of interests.

Ethics approval and consent to participate: not required.

Received for publication: 18 February 2021.

Accepted for publication: 21 February 2021.

©Copyright: the Author(s), 2021

Licensee PAGEPress, Italy

Ricerca Psicoanalitica 2021; XXXII:530

doi:10.4081/rp.2021.530

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial License (by-nc 4.0) which permits any noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are credited.