

## Introduction to the Special Issue on “Parenthood and the Challenges of Contemporary Times”

Márcia Cristina Maesso <sup>1</sup>  & Didier Drieu <sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> *University of Brasília, DF, Brasil*

<sup>2</sup> *Université de Rouen-Normandie, France*

**ABSTRACT** – The Special Issue Parenting and Challenges of Contemporary Times brings together theoretical and clinical studies on parenthood in the face of contemporary challenges, integrating reflections on the psychological, social, and political dimensions that shape caregiving and parent–child relationships. The articles address topics such as the psychic constitution of parenthood, the impact of social and gender inequalities, new family configurations, and the forms of violence that affect parental bonds. Drawing on diverse theoretical perspectives, especially psychoanalytic approaches, the contributions emphasize the importance of public policies and support networks for strengthening parental functions and promoting mental health during childhood and adolescence. In summary, the Special Issue highlights how the focus on parenthood contributes to understanding broader issues related to emotional bonds, family relationships, and collective care, underscoring support networks as essential forms of resistance to idealized social structures that reproduce relations of power and control.

**KEYWORDS:** Parenthood; Parent-child relationships; Family relationships

## Introdução ao Número Especial sobre “Parentalidade e os desafios da contemporaneidade”

**RESUMO** – O Número *Especial Parentalidade e os Desafios da Contemporaneidade* reúne estudos teóricos e clínicos sobre a parentalidade diante dos desafios contemporâneos, articulando reflexões sobre as dimensões psíquicas, sociais e políticas que atravessam o cuidado e os vínculos entre pais e filhos. Os artigos abordam temas como a constituição psíquica da parentalidade, os impactos das desigualdades sociais e de gênero, as novas configurações familiares e as formas de violência que afetam os laços parentais. A partir de diferentes perspectivas teóricas, especialmente a psicanalítica, as contribuições destacam a importância das políticas públicas e das redes de apoio para o fortalecimento das funções parentais e a promoção da saúde mental na infância e na adolescência. Em síntese, o Número Especial evidencia como o foco na parentalidade contribui para compreender questões mais amplas relativas aos vínculos afetivos, às relações familiares e ao cuidado coletivo, ressaltando as redes de apoio como formas essenciais de resistência às estruturas idealizadas que reproduzem relações de poder e controle.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Parentalidade; Relações entre pais e filho; Relações familiares

This Special Issue of *Psicologia: Teoria e Pesquisa* Journal emerged from the interest in compiling theoretical and clinical studies addressing the topic of parenthood considering contemporary challenges, conducted in various settings and from diverse perspectives. These studies encompass the interweaving of the process of subjectivation, woven by social, historical, and political factors, that contribute to the production of defining

conceptions about how to care for future generations. Thus, the articles responding to this proposal address issues related to childhood, which are directly linked to the elements that structure parenthood. The articles derive from various research studies conducted within Brazilian and international institutions and universities, demonstrating that, despite cultural, legal, and historical differences, contemporary discourses on parenthood and the urgent need for treatment

for problems surrounding domestic and child violence span continents.

The term “parenthood” is apt because it diverges from the logic of kinship, shifts the historical emphasis from the biological process, and denotes a complex psychological construct permeated by prevailing social discourse (Houzel et al, 1999; Teperman et al., 2020). Parenthood is a neologism proposed in the psychological and sociological fields to describe the desire to care for a child, which can emerge from childhood and be consolidated with the arrival of a child (Alby & Vives, 2015). Indeed, one can read, through a thread that connects the articles, how parenthood is a construction and implies impactful changes for those who undertake this role, involving the creation of conditions that enable the establishment of a sufficiently good relationship between parents and children, for which the support of a network composed of several stakeholders is essential, understanding that, besides to family members, the participation of agents involved in public policy is of paramount importance.

Some situations generate psychological distress, which can hinder the facing of the challenges inherent to the parenthood role, such as various forms of violence, loss, grief, pandemics, war, etc., in which the construction of parenthood can be affected and impaired, requiring, even more, the support of a network that provides conditions to enable the parenthood institution. A complex set of factors surrounding parenthood is explored in the articles in this Special Issue, entitled “Parenting and Challenges of Contemporary Times” among which the demands imposed by neoliberalism stand out, resulting in a conception of individualized responsibilities about comprehensive childcare. In Western culture, these attributions primarily fall on women, who have been considered, throughout history, as naturally existing to generate and mother, as propagated by the myth of maternal love, as explained by Badinter (1985). This myth spans generations and intensifies feelings of blame and failure when facing challenges in fulfilling parental roles, as dictated by prevailing societal norms. Therefore, it is essential to deconstruct conceptions based on ideals that were not introduced purposelessly into Western culture but that serve to maintain neoliberal and capitalist functioning.

Therefore, by considering that parenthood configurations are not natural, ahistorical, and permeated by social discourse and transgenerational transmission, it is possible to embrace the heterogeneity of family formation, including multi-parenthood arrangements that can be single-parent, homosexual, or reconstituted, among others. This approach may facilitate the challenge of discourses that reinforce established patterns related to biopolitical control (Foucault, 2017). However, achieving this requires comprehensive and collective engagement, as well as the implementation of public policies and in-depth consideration of the various forms of violence affecting parents-children relationships.

Based on the formulations emerging from the field of psychoanalysis regarding the psychic constitution subordinated to relationships with others and with culture, several psychoanalysts have contributed to the training of health teams working on public policies aimed at parenthood and early childhood care, in the context of combating various forms of violence. This work is presented in the article “*Parenthood: Contributions from Psychoanalysis to Public Health Policies*,” tackling articulately the question-generating praxis and the theoretical foundations related to the construction of parenthood, which supported the proposal for training based on an active methodology made possible through mediating objects, especially photolanguage, enabling the circulation of knowledge. The authors Katia Tarouquella, Eliana Lazzarini, Daniela Scheinkman, Márcia Maesso, Sandra Baron, Viviane Legnani, and Didier Drieu underscore the importance of implementing public policies that support parenthood. They advocate for approaches that challenge prevailing social ideals and moral judgments associated with the complexities of parenting, and, importantly, recognize that supporting parenthood is a fundamental aspect of early childhood care and development.

Marion Feldman and Rhea Aoun Clavel pose a touching question: “How can we tell our story when we don’t know who we are, where we come from, and we barely know our family roots? Because it is precisely our history—past, present, and future—that is at stake, constituting the lever for our reconstruction...”. The issues highlighted by this question are examined in the article *Without parents: learning from journeys of children shipwrecked by history*. The authors underscore, using two excerpts from research involving children who experienced sudden separation from their parents, how these accounts can inform our understanding and guide current practices related to protective measures for children. The excerpts involve research with the Jewish children who survived Terezín, rescued from the concentration camp in 1945, and with children from Reunion Island, exiled in metropolitan France between 1962 and 1984, both experiences produce very current teachings regarding the function of filiation, affiliation and transmission among generations, and allow us to support the focus on the clinic of symbolization before experienced traumatic situations.

The importance of psychic work before trauma is addressed in the article *The subjective journey of motherhood in three moments: pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum* by Camila Taunay Ornelas, Deise Matos do Amparo and Rose-Angelique, which consists of a literature review on the complex psychological events surrounding motherhood during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period, and a warning about the idealized, naturalistic, and instinctive view of motherhood that is prevalent in culture, hindering the expression and processing of the ambivalent feelings that arise with a child’s birth. The authors emphasize that when

carrying a baby, not only does a woman's body transform, but also her psyche. The journey of preparing to raise another human being and the time spent constituting the role of mother encompasses important psychological work to repair emotional experiences and traumas, as well as preparation for welcoming a baby. The authors emphasize the importance of understanding the psychological process in the transition to motherhood, analyzing its consequences on the mental health of the mother and baby, to identify psychological disorders that arise postpartum and in child development, and to improve intervention practices.

Along the same lines, challenging the concept of innate parental instinct, the placement of children for adoption points out, in various contexts, that parenthood is not given by nature. Parents cannot always construct it. In Brazil, although the voluntary placement of children has changed, from the "Exposed Circles" (*Rodas dos Expostos*) to contemporary legal provisions under Law 13,509/2017 of the Child and Adolescent Statute (*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente* - ECA), several historical and social problems remain to be dealt with, as shown by authors Julia Matinato Salvagni, Regina Lúcia Sucupira Pedroza, and Shyrlene Nunes Brandão in their article *Family Separation and Parenthood: State, Reproductive Rights, Family Community Coexistence*. Despite the law, state intervention in some family situations can be tainted by stigmas and deep-rooted, romanticized beliefs surrounding parenthood. The questions raised in the article spark the authors' prolific reflections on the treatment of the right to voluntary adoption delivery, considering intersectionality: "How does the state's view of gestating bodies and how do the institutions that provide care for these individuals affect both parents and babies?"; "Are cis, trans, white, black, Indigenous women, trans men, white, black, and non-binary people treated in various institutions under the same lens?" The topic is discussed through two case studies, highlighting the need to strengthen and consolidate public policies capable of creating spaces for acceptance and listening to stem the violent practices of "re-victimization," "poverty punishment," and "naturalization of motherhood as the destiny of gestational carriers."

Building on the understanding that attention to parenthood entails caring for relationships and, by extension, for children, Miguel Terradas and Olivier Didier argue that diagnosing borderline personality disorder in childhood and adolescence carries a risk of stigmatization and is subject to change. They recommend that such diagnoses should consider the nature of the bonds formed with adult caregivers. This is the guiding principle of *Emergence of borderline personality features in the context of normative and traumatic parenthood: theoretical and clinical reflections* article, in which the authors present a path that articulates theoretical constructions with clinical cases, to address the emergence of borderline personality traits in children, in the context of different types of parenthood, considering that the bond between parents and children is crucial for early identification and intervention.

This principle underpins the article *Emergence of Borderline Personality Features in the Context of Normative and Traumatic Parenthood: Theoretical and Clinical Reflections*, where the authors systematically integrate theoretical concepts with clinical case studies to examine the development of borderline personality traits in children. The discussion is framed within the context of various parenting styles, emphasizing the importance of the parent-child relationship for early detection and intervention.

Multiple articles in this Special Issue cover various forms of violence, each examining these issues to some extent and from different perspectives. In the article *The fatherhood of perpetrators of domestic violence*, Anne Thevenot and Marie-José Grihom tackle the concerns of French public authorities regarding the phenomenon of domestic violence and its reflections in the political and sociological fields, reflected in research and support and prevention mechanisms aimed at direct victims, most often women, and indirect victims, children, resulting in the positioning of parental authority in a dependent relationship with domestic violence. Among the various questions posed in the development of the article, the connection between domestic violence and parenthood stands out, highlighting the importance of considering, besides social factors, the role of intergenerational and transgenerational bonds in the repetition of the violence cycle. To explore the psychological challenges of parenthood within violent marital relationships, the authors conducted interviews with thirty convicted men. The researchers analyzed two clinical cases, revealing how these fathers experience, or do not experience, parenthood, and its relationship with traumatic experiences such as neglect or abuse during their childhood.

Unaddressed domestic violence may result in significant and enduring impacts that span multiple generations. Consequently, comprehensive and collaborative interventions are crucial for effectively preventing its recurrence. Some possibilities for action against the violence cycle are outlined in the article, *Study of the Parenthood of Mothers Victims of Conjugal Violence: How to help?*, in which the authors, Daria Druzhinenko-Silhan, Anne Thevenot and Claire Metz, present the methodology and the first results of the research conducted by the team "Domestic Violence: Mothers' Parenthood and Court Decisions" (VIC PADEJ: *Violences Conjugales: Parentalité des mères et Décisions de Justice*). The authors defend the thesis that when witnessing domestic violence, children can suffer various effects on their development, with impacts on behavioral, psychosomatic, and cognitive aspects. Therefore, they support the importance of investigating how a mother, a domestic violence victim, uses the socio-legal framework to seek support, and explores the implications for the mother-child bond, using interviews, case studies, and projective methods. This multidisciplinary study brings together researchers from the fields of psychology, sociology, and law to develop programs that train professionals in dealing with the specificities of this supportive work.

The theoretical essay “*You Are on Your Own: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Motherhood in Brazil*” by Renata Garutti Rossafa and Carla Antloga portrays the context of contemporary culture, highlighting how parenthood serves a neoliberal ideology that individualizes and places the management of life in the hands of parents. By reconstructing a historical panorama that points out the social role of women, the authors suggest that discourses, particularly religious and scientific, disseminated throughout various eras, have contributed to the current perceptions that the responsibilities for “reproductive work” and caring for new generations primarily fall on women. To aggravate this situation, they emphasize that in Brazil, a country ravaged by social inequality, various forms of oppression that impact the lives of citizens, especially women, produce multiple realities, such that racism, sexism, and classism, as prevalent intersectional aspects, directly interfere with the exercise of parenthood. By pointing out that parenthood in Brazil reveals the field of tension in which historical oppressions intersect with neoliberal orders, the authors indicate that Psychoanalysis, referring to the unconscious, unclassifiable logic, can operate as a critical instrument to unveil these dynamics and rethink public policies that recognize motherhood as essential social work.

Considering the importance of psychic elaboration and team involvement in facing traumatic situations, the article “*From Perinatal Loss Trauma to Parenthood: Experience in a Maternity Hospital*,” by Gabriela Monteiro Simão and Sonia Alberti, demonstrates how psychoanalysis operates in a teamwork setting in a maternity hospital that treats high-risk pregnancies. This study examines a case of twin pregnancy resulting in the loss of both infants, necessitating psychological support for both parents that extends beyond the typical process of developing parental identity, as well as requiring comprehensive involvement from the supporting care team. The authors cover the notion of trauma in psychoanalysis, involving the encounter with reality that produces a remainder impossible to symbolize, to show that the team’s approach to the trauma of the death of their children, experienced by the parents, enabled the naming and registration of the deceased babies, granting them a symbolic place - an essential resource for performing the rites that pave the way for the mourning process.

The catastrophic situation of the pandemic, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, has aggravated the suffering of a

large portion of the population who were in conditions of economic, social, and other vulnerability. For pregnant and postpartum women, specifically, the pandemic has amplified the difficulties inherent in the perinatal period, as discussed in the article *Vulnerable parenthood: psychological prenatal care and reducing maternal psychological distress during the pandemic*, authored by Aleida Oliveira de Carvalho, Alessandra da Rocha Arrais, Yácará Ribeiro Pereira and Lizandra Moura Paravidine Sasaki. Several moments of action research are presented in the article, involving women who were experiencing their first period of parenthood during the unusual circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors demonstrate how the pandemic scenario highlighted the fragility of public policies regarding parenthood and impacted the mental health of pregnant and postpartum women, who were susceptible to the risk of infection, resulting in fear of death and depression. In response to these circumstances, online Psychological Prenatal Care was introduced, utilizing the expertise of a multidisciplinary team to address the multifaceted needs present during pregnancy and the postpartum period, while acknowledging the individual characteristics of each participant.

Parenthood and perinatality are not naturally articulated, as Cintia da Silva Lobato Borges, Aline Vidal Varela, and Ana Vitória Martins Mendes demonstrate through theory and clinical practice in the article “*Parenthood: From Maternal Myth to Possible Love*”. The clinical study involves the experience of a puerperal woman who faces difficulties in establishing herself as a mother and in feeling love for her newborn daughter, the conflict is not approached as insufficiency, failure or psychological fragility of this woman to exercise the maternal function, but related to the idealization of motherhood and social pressure for the woman to immediately assume the role of mother, as it highlights that becoming a mother is a symbolic act of naming and support that does not occur naturally or automatically.

In summary, each article makes a significant contribution by addressing varied contexts where the emphasis on parenthood becomes crucial for understanding broader themes such as childhood, adolescence, emotional bonds, and the development of support networks. These elements are highlighted as essential forms of resistance to rigidly idealized structures, serving as a strategy of power and control within both social institutions and daily life.

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**Conflict of interest**

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

**Editor-in-Chief**

Tiago Jessé Souza de Lima

**Associate Editor**

Tiago Jessé Souza de Lima

**Corresponding author**

Márcia Cristina Maesso

Email: maessomc@gmail.com

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