

Mother and Daughter Prisoners of Guilt: A Discussion of Freudian and Kleinian Theory

Lília Simões, Maria Consuelo Passos

Department of Postgraduate in Clinical Psychology, Pontifical Catholic University of Pernambuco, Recife, Brazil
Email: liliasbf@gmail.com

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Abstract

The present article starts from questions raised about the discussion of the feeling of guilt in the mother and daughter relation, mainly from the theories of Freud on the importance of the fault of the emotional development of the individuals and Melanie Klein's on the fundamental paper in the fault on the capacity to make repairs. Our objective is to investigate how possible flaws in the processes of elaboration of ambivalent conflicts may bring guilt, rather than becoming a conductive device to this development, to become an obstacle. Finally, still based on Freud and Klein, we will address the specificities of guilt in this relationship and how it can make it difficult to construct and separate this bond.

Keywords

Guilt, Relationship, Freudian and Kleinian Theory

1. Introduction

Like Freud, Melanie Klein attached great importance to guilt in his most significant works. For both, guilt advocates an anguished mental state and arises from an internal conflict in which the ego finds itself in constant struggle with the demands of the superego and censures for transgressing the standards that are incorporated by it. Klein took a step forward by proposing that this conflict is inherent in the mind, having innate roots, that is, gifts from birth. He linked this idea to Freud's drive theory, more precisely to the conflict between the drives of life and death. It reinforces that from birth, a still fragile ego must strive to control conflict and achieve the dominance of love over hatred.

This dynamic depends on the child's psychic development, the intrinsic nature of their relationships, on how the child will sustain the drive conflict and deal with their archaic fantasies. The consequences of this development will even

change the character of guilt, and may become a persecution if the ego fails to account for the conflict or motivate reparations in case the ego is able to cope with the demands of the superego.

According to Klein (1945), the struggle between the drives of life and death is already in full activity from birth and some processes such as fear, frustrations or even unpleasant physiological sensations result in the displacement of the death drive outward influencing anxieties relative to external and internal situations. This experiment has the effect of transforming parts of the environment and the first object with which the child relates to as hostile. If frustrations come to be felt as retaliation, the aggressiveness is then thrown by the ego, creating a suffering that accentuates the persecutory anxieties. These anxieties also relate to the bad parts of that object, with which the child will also identify with. This introjected bad object feeds the inner feelings of anguish and fear and gives the superego hostile qualities that have affected the essence of guilt.

On the other hand, the opposite movement causes the life drive to cling to the world and the external objects favoring the introjection of the good object, thus the quality and quantity of the drives will influence the psychic development of the individual. For Klein (1945), the internalized good and bad object will form the nucleus of the superego and it is these aspects that internally will represent the struggle between the drives. The composition of the superego will have influence in this internal dynamic that will reflect in the character of the guilt, which can be persecutory or depressive, linked to the anxieties referring to the fear of possible damages done to the good object.

Later Grinberg (1983) develops the concept of persecutory and depressive guilt in more depth, which we will discuss later. The first is conditioned by primary situations where feelings of distress, fear, despair and helplessness intervene. The second would be indispensably the capacity to love, to elaborate the mourning and desire to repair the damaged object. We know that relations with internal and external objects are, from the beginning, influenced by frustrations and gratifications that take place during life through the interaction between the inner and outer world.

The conflicts between fantasies and what happens out there are according to our emotions and experiences. During the development process, identifying with these good objects tends to make people experience security. If the inner world is filled with bad objects, the individual experiences persecution and suspicion. These qualities also affect the emergence and the aspect of guilt.

At first this guilt is persecutory and punitive, taking its coloring from the preceding paranoid state of persecution. However, by accumulating good experiences with the total object and its tendency to survive, guilt is modified by the impulse to repair the good object and contribute to its survival. At this point, guilt is permeated by reparative desires and contributes to the strength of the constructive and creative effort that derives from it (Hinschelwood, 1992: p. 283).

The motivation to perform reparations depends on the elaboration of the feeling of guilt, it is necessary that the criticisms of the superego are reflected in the ego and this is taken to the movement to repair the object attacked and damaged as a way to appease the anxiety caused by the feeling of guilt. On the other hand, if guilt remains unconscious it can be a constraining factor. For Freud (1916, 1924) unconscious guilt can make life difficult for subjects, as in the obsessive symptom that cannot get rid of rituals affecting their daily lives, or become a motivating force for self-punishment or a motivated type of failure.

When in *Guilty Criminals* (1916) he calls attention to behaviors motivated by unconscious guilt, the subject who commits a crime unconsciously seeks a way to be punished in order to alleviate the guilt. In 1923 in *Ego and Id*, he corroborates the hypothesis by introducing the concept of superego, making guilt a central element of character development, in 1924, in the text *the economic problem of masochism*, the direct connection of unconscious guilt with the need for punishment and maintenance of suffering.

Klein follows Freud's position on unconscious guilt and need for punishment. A cruel conscience sustained by a primitive superego who remained in his severely cruel state, impels crime under pressure from fear and guilt. In 1927, he shares Freud's theory of the relation of guilt to criminal tendencies and associates these tendencies with aggressive and sadistic object relations resulting in guilt in infantile behavior:

“The compulsion to repetition is derived from various causes, but greatly influenced by the guilty feeling that requires punishment. Here we can already see some differences between the normal and the neurotic child: the intensity of the fixations, the manner and the time in which these fixations are linked to the experiences, the severity and the type of development of the superego, which also depends on external causes and finally, the child's ability to withstand anxiety and conflict are some of the most important factors that determine whether there will be normal, neurotic development.” (Klein, 1927).

She writes about how external situations reflect the form of the violent internal attacks on the ego by a severe superego, represented by hostile internal objects, confirming the substitution of unconscious guilt for punishment in order to alleviate the sadistic and dreadful inner states that cause distress. When repressing these sadistic fantasies does not allow them to be sublimated or that lead the child to make reparations, the guilt, also repressed, does not become lighter forcing the child to repeat his actions, substituting fantasies through the constant search for external punishments. For Klein (1927), the desire for punishment becomes a vicious cycle since repression does not end the process.

2. Guilt and Need for Punishment

The repetition compulsion can be motivated by several forms, one of which is the feeling of repressed or unconscious guilt that requires punishment. This re-

pression is inevitably linked to the superego and its intensity is synchronized the severity of this instance. In psychoanalysis of children of 1932 she then corroborates the difference of the primitive superego (infantile) and the developed superego. The first is perceived in the psyche as anxiety and fear while during its development it becomes able to awaken the feeling of guilt.

Concept that she begins to construct in the attempt to decipher the experiences of remorse and guilt of her infantile patients. At the time of writing about one of his most significant cases, that of Rita (1923), she calls attention to the importance of guilt in the neuroses of children who are still very young. According to Klein, Rita was disturbed by her own aggression and affected by remorse and guilt in her play. In the same year Freud wrote about guilt as a reflection of the internal conflict of the drives and demands of the superego, developing more clearly the relation with unconscious guilt and need for punishment.

At the same time that Freud confirms his hypotheses about sadism, superego and guilt, Klein questions the moment in which the superego develops. Freud disagrees on the formation of the superego only with the dissolution of the Oedipus complex. Much later than she had witnessed during Rita's analysis for example and other cases even before the second year of life. For her the analysis of children shows a more primitive process of formation of the superego and can be accurately described, what she tries to do when developing her theory of the early stages of the Oedipus conflict (1928).

Although Klein insisted that he did not disagree with Freud as to his description of the superego, he claimed only to bring some contributions as to the origin of this instance which, for him, happened much earlier as consisting of manifold and varied elements, objects and fantasies with which the baby relates. Finally, because of the much longer evolutionary course, the superego would not establish itself as a fusion of the parental superego, but as a process in the construction of these identifications and projections.

Because it is a little longer development process it would undergo processes of transforming its hardness into smoothing and integration of its contradictory parts. Klein (1928) understood the archaic superego as much more rigid by connecting its emergence to the pregenital stages of development, oral and anal sadism. The analysis of young children under the age of four and five showed evidence of remorse and guilt as a consequence of these sadistic fantasies and also the rigor of the superego at that stage.

In spite of the superego correspond the real people of the external world it is also characterized by the images of the mind, that is, all the factors that influence in the daily life of the child has participation in the construction of the superego. Relationships with the mother would therefore be the basis of the formation of this instance, of the most important characteristics, whether of a protective or destructive nature, therefore, the first feelings of guilt or the motivation to repress them have their origin in this relation.

In all situations where he encounters the intensity of hatred, characteristic of the initial sadistic stages of development, he also ends up in conflict when he

realizes that the objects he hates are the same as he loves. Aggressive attacks soon become an unbearable burden for an ego still fragile, where a possible defense tool is repression and thus every conflicting situation is never resolved.

Staying in the unconscious, the force of these repressions establishes the prevailing fixations in the later Oedipal conflict and can form the prototype of frustrations for the rest of life. For Klein (1928), the anxieties and guilts related to the beginning of this relationship are one of the main sources for future inhibitions at work, possibly because of the weakening of the creative capacity of both boy and girl.

3. Love and Hate. The Guilt in the Mother and Daughter Relationship

Like Freud, she also speaks of different characteristics in the development of the superego of men and women. Both derive from the femininity phase of interactions with the maternal imago, both of which develop primitive cruel identifications at once of the good and comforting ones. But it is in rivalry and identification with the mother that the superego differentiates itself in qualities. The girl recognizes in the mother's body her own, so the anxieties about the attacks directed at the maternal object and her creative capacity find in this similarity the possibility that her own body is also damaged.

Here too we can find an explanation for women's constant (often excessive) concern with their own beauty, for they fear that it too will be destroyed by their mother. Behind the urge to constantly beautify themselves there is the attempt to restore the destroyed grace, the original notion of their anxiety and guilt (Klein, 1928: p. 224).

She considers that the initial bond between mother and daughter is impregnated with ambivalence and guilt. For Klein (1932), the appearance of oedipal tendencies in girls appears with weaning, the resentment that the mother arouses with the withdrawal of the breast intensifies with the interest of a third party. This double injustice inflates the deepest feelings of hatred that the girl feels for her mother. The girl's desire for the maternal attributes she refuses her daughter is much stronger for the author than the desire to possess and envy a penis, as Freud suggested.

Just as guilt and envy would also come at a very primordial stage of relations with the mother's womb, the one still split up into good or evil. The object to be envied is the nurturing bosom which possesses all that the girl desires and which possesses a stream of gratification and love. This feeling adds to resentment and hatred (Klein, 1945) causing a disturbed relationship with the mother. The intense envy of the nursing mother interferes with the capacity for complete satisfaction, making it difficult to develop a feeling of gratitude towards the maternal object.

In the girl these feelings, desires and fantasies are accompanied by a rivalry, aggression and hatred against the mother and her properties as a woman, as well

as the ability to have other babies, which also provokes envy, so man the resentment that feels against her from frustrations. Despite the hostility the girl's desire for the maternal object remain active. The individuality of the daughter is the result of a partial and infinite work of elaborating this conflict. We were born in an early oedipal situation, as Klein (1928) wrote, and we never cease to be implicated in this too human territory.

The ambivalences intensify as the Oedipal conflict is being elaborated and the girl once again carries the weight of the conflict between love and hatred for the mother. Added to the most archaic sadistic attacks are now a more elaborate internal conflict due to the maturing of the ego and superego. The girl is afraid of not being loved, but fear of the loss of love is secondary to anxiety about the already internalized image of a castrating mother and having her interior attacked by this primitive hostile maternal object. This fantasy originated in the birth of a severe, accusatory, archaic superego, which leaves behind an avalanche of contradictory feelings including primitive guilt.

Among mothers and daughters, hostility possibly carries a distant memory of the pain of losing the illusion of an omnipotent love, a missing place. But as Freud (1933) argued, hostility is necessary to maintain the cycle of illusion and disappointment necessary for psychic development and for the movement of individuation between mother and daughter. Hostility is what remains of the voracity and desire for the completeness of maternal love (Ribeiro, 2011). We find that this trajectory is somewhat more ambiguous and that guilt is possibly more present in girls than in boys. They need to identify with the archaic mother, the one who was attacked and destroyed by the sadistic fantasies. Melanie Klein leaves us the legacy that the love in the beginnings is cruel and barbarous. This love is needed to repair the maternal object with which the girl identifies herself, first of all it is necessary a dosage of guilt to wish to repair, because in case of excess it can be imprisoning.

The intensity of guilt in this relationship tends to be more overloaded, it was with this primary object that the melee was consequently impregnated with the more archaic hostile fantasies. We have seen that repression is a way of alleviating the conflicts arising from these feelings, yet it only stabilizes the struggle without ever ending. The guilt is tied to the conflict and also repressed so little succumbs. Instead of getting the child to make repairs, she is stuck trying to alleviate those anxieties, which eventually causes inhibitions and corrupts the creative process that is part of building healing ideas. On the other hand, the repressed guilt keeps fed the necessity of punishment.

When speaking of the depressive position Klein (1948), it will refer to two possible combinations of aggressiveness and guilt that vary in intensity over time. One of character and punitive and another of depressive character, the first giving gradually place to another as a way to reinforce the real efforts of repair. Depressive guilt connects with the child's ability to go through conflicting processes at the junction of the good and bad object into a total object.

The child in this position is already emotionally mature to absorb the conflu-

ence of love and hate that drives the mother. In the depressive position efforts are mobilized to enhance the good internalized aspect of the object, source of generous feelings that will help in the experiences of ambivalent relationships. The difficulties in internalizing a good internal object are linked to the external object, absence, helplessness, repulsion or deprivation of someone, also threatens the fantasies of the good internal object that nourished the person as internal psychological support. If the object tends to not be good enough the defenses related to the conflicts may be insufficient or have a rancorous and aggressive quality inflating the guilt and anxieties coming from it. The bad enough object corroborates the aggressive and destructive fantasies.

The repairing experience works as a mechanism to help tolerate anxiety and guilt, this is grounded in an inner world capable of suggesting some hope and a feeling that something good exists, whatever the accumulations of aggressive feelings. The guilt, if conscious, causes the subject to try to organize what has possibly been spoiled, in which case the reparation devoted to the maternal object has, as a corresponding aspect, the effect of restoring the internal state of the subject. This movement, according to Klein (1927), provides the possibility of sublimation and fantasies can be liberated for creative activities.

The way in which the child handles guilt depends on his ability to construct and maintain a sense of his own balanced love against hatred (Klein, 1927). This means being able to sustain a loving feeling for an object that is good and felt to be part of the inner world as well, being part of your personality. This potential for concern is also what leads the subject to be more social, to have an easier relationship with other people. For Klein (1935) concern and interest are unfoldings of the archaic superego, unlike the genuine concern for the introjection of the good qualities of the object, the archaic superego brings the subject to social considerations through the threat of punishment.

If the external object responds to the aggressive fantasies of the child, that is, an aggressive, demanding or authoritarian mother, for example, will actually offer elements that will contribute to nourishing a persecuting superego by increasing internal anxieties. When guilt has too persecutory a tone it will require punishment, need for punishment, self-sacrifice, and penitent behavior. According to Klein (1948), the feeling of frustration and the lack of satisfaction of the desires for the maternal object increases the guilt, because the impediment of a satisfaction awakens a certain amount of aggressiveness that, in turn, has to be suppressed.

She also writes (1948) about how these conflicts between love and hate profoundly affect the adult's development and emotional life, for the effects of these archaic fantasies are enduring and profoundly influence the minds of individuals. These conflicts are to some extent responsible for the interaction between the child and the external world, there is a constant fluctuation between the fears of internal and external objects, between the death instinct that acts within and that which acts outside. This interaction continues throughout life.

The findings of psychoanalysis show that sensations of this sort have roots deeper than assumed and are always tied to the unconscious feeling of guilt. The reason some people need both praise and general approval is the need to have proof that they are worthy of love. This feeling arises from the unconscious fear of being unable to truly or sufficiently love others, and especially of not being able to master their own aggressive impulses (Klein, 1937: p. 350).

4. Conclusion

This inability to feel good about herself, can cause social inhibitions that we spoke about earlier. It is also a consequence of the creative incapacity of the subject who spends a great deal of energy in a cyclical martyrdom. While guilt, if it is conscious, can be an incentive for creativity along with the repairing efforts of the damaged object, it can be a limitation of creative resources. If it is too intense, it can inhibit interests and productive activities by imprisoning the subject in the dimension of their conflicts.

When the child lives in an environment where he or she finds it difficult to get satisfaction and in addition to it, they have little capacity to withstand frustrations, their aggression and guilt can become unbearable. Aggressiveness itself tends to create frightening and rigorous figures of parents, and these conflicts to a greater or lesser extent are part of psychic life, so we can see that aggressive impulses and guilt influence the mental attitudes we develop.

We have seen that the question of ambivalence and specifically hate in this relationship is pertinent. Consequently, the need rescues certain aspects of the theory of these authors to understand the connection of this conflict and guilt as an element of embarrassment of this separation. In the next point, we will specifically address guilt and inevitably, we will return to talk about ambivalences, in the sense that hostility is, for psychoanalysis, directly linked to guilt. Both Freud and Klein dealt with the affective ambivalence of mother and daughter from the Oedipus complex, but Klein (1932) later expanded his theory of aggressiveness, guilt, and how the ability to make amends can help the individual to develop.

In addition, she was quite forceful in disagreeing with Freud on the idyll, proposed by him, lived by mother and daughter in the first moments of life and comments that his clinical experience already shows that from a very early moment, the conflict permeates the relation. In this sense, we can think that Klein implies the presence of the mother in the game of identification and disidentification of the daughter, considering also that a frustrating reality can reinforce hostile feelings, guilt and fears. It dialogues with the hate/guilt relationship and thinks it is such a sophisticated feeling that it can be a key element to the capacity for satisfying subjectivation. The feeling of guilt is anxiety linked to ambivalence, because the aggressive-destructive impulse belongs to a primitive kind of relationship in which love involves destruction. The ability to deal with these

experiences is what makes the emergence of concern possible.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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