

HISTORICIZING THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF KLEINIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS AT THE BRITISH PSYCHO-ANALYTICAL SOCIETY: 1914-1960

Joseph Aguayo

Summary

Aims

To historicize the psychological work of Melanie Klein in a comparative psychoanalytic context, I have written about both Klein's fruitful collaborations and controversial clashes with colleagues at the British Psycho-Analytical Society: At stake were the attempts to understand the earliest stages of infant development and who should be the rightful 'heir' to Sigmund Freud's analytic legacy. It was Klein who claimed to extend his theoretical and clinical reach and once her theoretical paradigm was formally recognized in 1944, she faced challenges from other rival theorists.

Methods

The distinctiveness of the comparative-historical method stresses reading Klein's unpublished manuscripts, which has shed some new light on the nature of how her psychoanalytical theorizing specifically evolved. In my 'Reassessing the Clinical Affinity between Klein and Winnicott' paper, for instance, I illustrated how a reading of one of Klein's unpublished works ('Notes on baby') throws light on less well known aspects of her work, specifically her sensitivity to the impact of the familial environment on the development of the young infant.

Results

I summarize the main findings from three chapters of the proposed Klein monograph (Aguayo, 1997, 2000, 2002). In 'Historicizing the Origins of Kleinian Psychoanalysis,' I set out how Klein commenced her initial analytic theorizing (Aguayo, 1997) and how she made the most of her sporadic analysis with Ferenczi, augmenting this work with self-analysis in the days before the institution of the training analysis. Arriving in Berlin at the end of 1920, Klein gradually built on Karl Abraham's reasoning that if psychotic patients were fixated at earlier oral and anal psychosexual stages, perhaps psychosis could also be linked with early infantile states of mind. If neurotic character formation is in place by the age of six, would not the analyst do well to study the birth sites of neurosis in the earliest years? The fruitful hypotheses generated by Freud's genetic reconstructions with his adult patients now served as an orienting guide in the direct study of children and their mothers and in effect pushed back the origins of neuroses into the earliest years.

Klein extended the conceptual reach of analysis by now using toys with children ages three and four. This innovation was a distinct counterpoint to the child work of other classical analysts insofar as play therapy now became less dependent on the child's direct verbalized fantasy and more reliant on the younger child's expressive behavioral play with toys. Klein now counted as legitimate psychoanalytic evidence the play behavior of young children, allowing analysts an opportunity to watch how the intrapsychic processes of the young child unfolded in relationship to the child analyst. But Klein's work could not have flourished had it not been supported by influential analytic patrons like Ernest Jones. Through his active, behind the scenes support, Klein re-located to London to live and practice, and there she found an active and receptive audience for her ideas. By 1927, her work became a focal point of heated controversy when Anna Freud, who was separately involved in establishing her reputation in the nascent field of child analysis, published a rather negative critique of Klein's work.

In 'Patronage in the dispute over child analysis,' the question was addressed as to how Klein faced her first real controversy with a rival child theorist, Anna Freud. (Aguayo, 2000) The specific historical question addressed was the relation of patronage between Klein and Ernest Jones, as well as Anna Freud's multi-faceted relationship with her patron/father, Sigmund Freud. In the increasingly polarized atmosphere between the London and Vienna Societies, the differences between Klein's advocacy of analysis with pre-latency children and Anna Freud's more verbalized analyses of latency-age children was exacerbated by the role of their respective patrons.

I also argued a specific revisionist thesis regarding one of Klein's main supporters, Edward Glover. In his Congress papers and publications between 1927 and 1932, Glover took a role of strident advocacy for Klein's ideas. It was in this context that his subsequent repudiation of Klein's notions led him into an organizational and theoretical 'no man's land' during the later Controversial Discussions period. In other words, while Glover had early on advocated for a rapprochement between the rival claims of Klein and Freud, there was to be no 'middle ground' until the Controversial Discussions in a more definitive way reconciled the rival claims of Klein and Anna Freud in 1944, when the British Society instituted the three tiered training 'track' system. As such, I argued that Glover was hopelessly caught in the middle between Melanie Klein and Anna Freud: his repudiation of Klein's ideas would make him unwelcome in her camp, while Anna Freud never fully trusted someone who had previously been so vocal in support of Klein's ideas. In this way, he became the first victim of the 'Controversial Discussions' when he resigned his membership in the British Society in 1944.

In my next paper, 'Reassessing the Clinical Affinity between Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott, 1935-1951,' I investigated their early, less well-known collaborative relationship as a way to situate historically how they later fell out with one another's work. A number of factors led to the end of their collaboration: (1) the changed atmosphere of the British Psycho-Analytical Society after the 'Controversial Discussions' in 1944. The creation of a new 'third' group, the 'non-aligned, middle group' led British analysts like Winnicott to adopt a pick and choose attitude among existing analytic theories, allowing him to demonstrate a difference of opinion in emphasizing the maternal environment of provision after his wartime evacuation experiences with London children. (2) By delineating the impact and shaping role of the mother herself, Winnicott eventually favored leaning more heavily on the maternal environment of provision as crucial and central to the infant's unfolding development.

A widening theoretical gap existed between Klein and Winnicott by 1951, when he wrote the 'Transitional Objects' paper. While Klein and her followers became more interested in exploring and understanding psychosis, an interest similar to Winnicott's, his consuming interest in delineating the earliest stages of normal infant development. More significantly, as a 'non-aligned' middle grouper, Winnicott's increasing accent on the maternal environment of provision simultaneously represented his marginalization of Klein's emphasis on the direct analysis of the patient's infantile anxiety in relation to aggression and destructiveness and their vicissitudes in psychoanalytic practice. One result of Winnicott's new theories was a central and different view of aggression, where he now accentuated the consequences of faulty early maternal provision for the infant's innate aggression. Since Winnicott was explicit in his post-war publications about his theories and techniques, it simply put him at odds with Klein's views, such as the direct and immediate interpretation of the patient's negative transference. So he ultimately could not consider himself part of the Klein group any more than his new work could be accepted as 'Kleinian' any longer.

This research program includes three component studies.

[Component Study 1: Historicizing the origins of Kleinian psychoanalysis: Klein's analytic and patronal relationships with Ferenczi, Abraham and Jones--1914-1927](#)

[Component Study 2: Patronage in the dispute over child analysis between Melanie Klein and Anna Freud, 1927-1931](#)

[Component Study 3: Reassessing the clinical affinity between Melanie Klein and D.W. Winnicott \(1935-1951\): Klein's unpublished 'Notes on Baby' in historical context](#)

Implications for psychoanalysis

While the International Journal of Psychoanalysis has formally recognized the importance of interdisciplinary studies, historians of psychoanalysis (in my view) have struggled to attract much attention to their work in various publications and professional conference forums. In an era where many analysts read articles primarily in the areas of theory and practice, it has proven a bit of a challenge to attract larger audiences of analysts to historically-based presentations. Some of the leading analytic theorists in our field have argued that the future of psychoanalysis lies in strengthening its research efforts in areas which are of interest to university researchers. Towards that end, I have participated in a number of interdisciplinary conferences, both at the local and national level. In one recent conference held at the Psychoanalytic Center of California on 18 September 2004, ('Oedipus, Past and Present') I organized a conference where an historian of ancient Greece lectured on the Sophocles play, 'Oedipus Rex,' while I contextualized its importance in terms of how Sigmund Freud, an assimilating Viennese bourgeois Jewish intellectual, appropriated some of its themes within the contemporary interest in the 'cult of antiquity' to formulate some of his central ideas. While the conference itself had a clinical component, its overall arc was interdisciplinary, so that analytic practitioners could be stimulated by reading original sources and come to their own conclusions.

I also participated in a national conference held at the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute with Otto Kernberg and Robert Wallerstein in October, 2003. Again, its arc was interdisciplinary and dealt with the discontents of institutional psychoanalysis. Why is it that psychoanalysis has attracted fewer and fewer candidates in recent years? Using Douglas Kirsner's monograph, 'Unfree Associations' as a way to understand the malaise of psychoanalysis in the United States, I gave a paper on how the psychoanalytic establishment in the United States missed numerous opportunities to respond to Freud-bashers and critics alike who have found much fault with Freud, his analytic theories and the practices of his devotees. By tending to ignore the criticisms of such vocal critics, such as Frank Sulloway, Peter Swales and Jeffrey Masson, Freud's critics have gained the upper hand in elite print media, giving the impression that organized psychoanalysis is moribund and facing its institutional demise.

In one sense, my interdisciplinary research on Klein is one response to the critics of psychoanalysis. By continuing to read Klein's unpublished papers and correspondence at the Wellcome Institute and British Psychoanalytical Society in London, I will continue to examine the evolving differences between Klein and her antagonists as well as collaborators. One of the long-term goals is to look at the evolution of post-Kleinian thought in London after Klein's death in 1960. Since I regard the historical investigations already conducted as essential to setting a context for understanding the post-Kleinian development, I see history and psychoanalysis as essential to understanding both the Kleinian and post-Kleinian evolution.

Keywords

Anna Freud, British Psycho-Analytical Society, comparative psychoanalysis, D.W. Winnicott, Klein, child analysis, infant, history, history of psychoanalytic ideas

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COMPONENT STUDY 1: HISTORICIZING THE ORIGINS OF KLEINIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS: KLEIN'S ANALYTIC AND PATRONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH FERENCZI, ABRAHAM AND JONES--1914-1927

Joseph Aguayo

International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 78, 1165-1182.

Aims

To examine the origins of Klein's contributions to psychoanalysis through an examination of three key analytic and patronal relationships-with Sandor Ferenczi, Karl Abraham and Ernest Jones.

Methods

An historical method was used to contextualize how Klein evolved her distinctive 'child play technique,' a method which factored in a new kind of clinical evidence, which augmented the verbal, free association techniques of Sigmund Freud. Through a detailed examination of Klein's relationships with both her analysts, Sandor Ferenczi and Karl Abraham, as well as her patronal supporter and colleague, Ernest Jones, a context evolved which helps to explicate how it was that Klein's play technique captured the clinical imagination of analysts at the British Psycho-Analytical Society.

Results and Conclusions

In working with Ferenczi, Klein was encouraged to make observations as a mother and pedagogue to her own children. The analysis with Abraham led to new thoughts about the origins of neurosis in children, in which Klein followed her analyst's emphasis on linking severe disturbance with infantile states of mind. Once Klein's innovative work led to a clash with the other pioneer in the nascent field of child analysis, Anna Freud, Ernest Jones proved invaluable to Klein by inviting her to settle and practice in London in 1926, providing her with referrals as well as publication space in the pages of the International Journal of Psychoanalysis. There are also two distinctive historical arguments made in this study: (1) Klein's initial clinical cohort of young German children during her Berlin days, (1921-1925) existed in a German ravaged by a post-war climate of starvation and absent/maimed fathers, which figured as a backdrop to the distinctive emergence of the mother-child relationship. (2) This contextual factor is also linked to Sigmund Freud's lack of emphasis on the importance of mothering in his explications of neurosis. Melanie Klein's approach and understanding of child analysis also led to a clash with Anna Freud, who was attempting to establish hegemony in the nascent field of psychoanalysis and simultaneously emerge as the new and pre-eminent Freud, as her father's health had deteriorated amidst his concerns about who might best succeed him as the standard bearer of classical psychoanalytic theory.

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COMPONENT STUDY 2: PATRONAGE IN THE DISPUTE OVER CHILD ANALYSIS BETWEEN MELANIE KLEIN AND ANNA FREUD, 1927-1931

Joseph Aguayo

International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 81, 734-752

Aims

To detail Klein's first controversy with a rival child theorist, Anna Freud.

Methods

An historical, comparative method was used to set out the early theories of Melanie Klein and Anna Freud. Insofar as Anna Freud (1926) first criticized Klein's approach, it prompted a response, where Klein set out her own argument for the analysis of both pre-latency and latency-age children.

Results and Conclusions

In differentiating her own method, Klein thought that analysis began with the first encounter between analyst and child patient: there would be no 'preparatory period,' and the child's reactions, both co-operative and hostile, would be immediately taken up in the form of transference interpretations made by the analyst. More importantly, Klein offered her young patients play materials in the form of small toys, pencil and paper, so that they might express what she had come to regard as 'unconscious phantasy' in the sessions. Toy figures allowed the child a freer and at the same time, a more complicated mode of expression in words and play actions. For example: the child could enact phantasies of being the more powerful 'parental' figure in the analytic setting via play enactments with the small figures provided by Klein. All in all, there was fertile ground for power and size reversals, where the child could be the parent and project its unwanted child states of mind into the analyst. Klein also increasingly focused her interpretations on the child's psychical or subjective relationship to the maternal body.

The specific historical question addressed was the relation of patronage between Klein and Ernest Jones, as well as Anna Freud's multi-faceted relationship with her patron/father, Sigmund Freud. I argued that Jones maneuvered behind the scenes out of both genuine conviction regarding the theoretical advances made by Klein, as well as politicized enthusiasm for a theorist whom he thought could bring honor and a sense of 'focal identity' to the young British Psycho-Analytical Society. Yet in the increasingly polarized atmosphere between the London and Vienna Institutes, the differences between Klein's advocacy of analysis with pre-latency children and Anna Freud's more strictly verbal analyses of latency-age children, was exacerbated by the role of their respective patrons. While Freud himself took up a campaign on behalf of his daughter's child analytic theories through letters he wrote to colleagues, Jones took up a more muscular advocacy by publishing Klein's views (as well as those of supportive colleagues such as Joan Riviere and Edward Glover) in the pages of the International Journal of Psychoanalysis.

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COMPONENT STUDY 3: REASSESSING THE CLINICAL AFFINITY BETWEEN MELANIE KLEIN AND D.W. WINNICOTT (1935-1951): KLEIN'S UNPUBLISHED 'NOTES ON BABY' IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Joseph Aguayo

International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 83, 1133-1152

Aims

To investigate the early, less well-known collaborative relationship between Klein and Winnicott. How was it that Winnicott eventually concluded that Klein was 'temperamentally' incapable of understanding the impact of the environment on the infant's development?

Methods

An historical method contextualized the initial clinical enthusiasm which led Winnicott to collaborate with Klein's work during the 1930s and 1940s.

Results and Conclusions

Winnicott's early papers were both derivative and supportive of Klein's ideas, while Klein was interested in the role of the environment but never factored it in formally in her published work. By examining Klein's unpublished manuscripts from 1937, 'Notes on Baby,' I argued that Klein was interested however in the role of the environment in infant development. She was aware of the importance of care-giver's providing comforting toys as well as the toddler's intense reactions of grief and sadness over brief separations from his parents.

So how was it that Winnicott eventually differed in both his theoretical and clinical outlook from Klein? I argued that the changed atmosphere of the British Psycho-Analytical Society after the resolution of the 'Controversial Discussions' in 1944, with its creation of a new 'third' group, the 'non-aligned, middle group' led British analysts like Winnicott to adopt a pick and choose attitude among existing analytic theories. After 1945, Winnicott demonstrated a difference of opinion in emphasizing the maternal environment of provision, eventually favoring this factor as crucial and central to the infant's unfolding development.

A widening theoretical gap existed between Klein and Winnicott by 1951, when he wrote the 'Transitional Objects' paper. I also emphasized the growing clinical divide between these two analytic pioneers. By emphasizing such points as the objective hatred mothers must feel for their infants, which paralleled Winnicott's accent of the analyst's objective hatred for his patients, he gradually instigated new parameters in the treatment of very disturbed patients, which was a sort of behavioral permissiveness that allowed for enactments within the session.

Klein and her followers (e.g. Segal, Rosenfeld, Bion) in the meanwhile became more interested in exploring and writing about primitive states of mind underlying psychosis, an interest similar to Winnicott's but which he subordinated to his consuming interest in delineating the earliest stages of normal infant development. More significantly, as a 'non-aligned' middle grouper, Winnicott's increasing accent on the maternal environment of provision *simultaneously represented his marginalization of Klein's emphasis on the direct analysis of the patient's infantile anxiety in relation*

to aggression and destructiveness and their vicissitudes in psychoanalytic practice. One result of Winnicott's new theories was a central and different view of aggression, where he now accentuated the consequences of faulty early maternal provision for the infant's innate aggression. Since Winnicott was explicit in his post-war publications about his theories and techniques, it simply put him at odds with Klein's views, such as the direct and immediate interpretation of the patient's negative transference. So he ultimately could not consider himself part of the Klein group any more than his new work could be accepted as 'Kleinian' any longer.

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