Meanings and Senses Apprehension of the Parenthood on ART (Assisted Reproductive Therapy)

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This study tried to understand how the process of subjectivity production is constituted on the transition to parenthood of men and women that had their children through ART (Assisted Reproductive Therapy) with the purpose of learning its meaning and senses. It was adopted a socio-historical perspective to discuss the parenthood denaturalizing. “Floating readings” were done from the collected material, aggregation of 66 pre-indicators (by its repetition or reiteration), by the emphasized importance of the informants’ lines, by the emotional aspect and by the indecisions or contradictions. After this process there, it can be agglutinated in 29 indicators from the reverse speed-reading material, considering the agglutination result in five signification nucleus. Based on the genre concept that denaturalizes hierarchy of powers based on the sex differences, looking for the deconstruction of the components of natural social relationship, and that the “productive natural body” was built socio-historical, not giving birth to a child is not accomplishing what was social expected (to be a mother and a father). Therefore, this reflection construction allowed to denaturalize the feminine/maternity and masculine/paternity concepts, put the maternity/paternity as a human existence option and not as an essential identity of men and women.

Keywords: ART (assisted reproductive therapy), parenthood, denaturalization of the maternity and paternity

Parenthood Meanings and Significances Apprehension on ART (Assisted Reproduction Therapy)

In order to counteract the naturalizing psychological perspective of the human being related to maternity and paternity, it was adopted in this research the theoretical methodological concept. This concept was based on the socio-historical psychology developed by Vygotsky (2007/1984), explaining the fact that this concept allows us to denaturalize and work on a historicity side which has a methodology that identifies meanings and significances to access a subjective experience, offering thus a support to discuss the parenthood denaturalization¹.

This perspective tried to bring up some questions about the conception that naturally considers the maternity and paternity wish, considering that these wishes are usually delightful and it belongs to men and women that internalize—interpersonal to intrapersonal process—the willing of having their own biological children.

It is possible to assert that it makes sense to heterosexual couples the searching process of ART, because

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¹ The word “parenting” was first used by the psychiatrist called Recamier (1961) and after by Lebovici (2003) to designate of being a mother and a father for the first time, and so it was used in this research (*apud* Solis-Ponton, 2004).

the feeling of “having their duty done” is internalized. This “duty” refers to the act of giving birth to a biological child and it is linked to the social and family matters. Additionally, this process proves women’s femininity through pregnancy and manliness through its partner conception (virility).

Based on the fact described above, we understand that it is internalized in modern men and women that the heterosexual couple, among various duties, they must get out from their parents’ house, get married, build up a family, have biological children to continue the family genetic heritage, raise their children and have a professional fulfillment (man and woman). Specific for women: be a good mother, good daughter and good wife (permeated through the dichotomy of being the mother and the husband’s lover), stand the responsibility that the number of children is always related to the maternal duty (physical/psychological) and above all else, there is the expectation that the woman must be pleased and fulfilled.

Confronting this naturalizing perspective related to maternity and paternity, there is a concept called “fossilized behavior problem”, in which a lot of psychological process went on a long historical development and therefore these processes were fossilized (automated) and incorporated into ways, values, attitudes and behaviors that cannot be realized.

It seems that infertile women’s and men’s persistence on having a child, through the invasive ART treatment and the lack of critical sense shows us a fossilized behavior in the internalized idea of having a biological child with the proposal of having their gender identity preserved.

As a result, they remain as cultural and social meaning apprehended and accepted as naturals, not have being transformed into personal senses through emotion and action, and not helping the current infertility reality and to the married life without children or to adoption.

As a conclusion, we understand that the adopted perspective, from Vygotsky’s (2007/1984) central presupposition, was a suitable theoretical pattern to analyze the meanings and significances (re)built by the ones related to maternity and paternity, as a collective production order from the social process (social-historical).

Justify

Considering that the human nature conception is linked to the vision of autonomous individual regardless the social relationship, it can be explored that the idea of men and women desire of having a child is natural. Then, it can be understood that the parenting process from children born through ART process is closed related to the male and female gender confirmation, where it is natural that men’s and women’s want to have their own biological children. This sentence can be explained, because men’s and women’s body were made by nature in order to beget and that their body must be naturally fertile.

It can be considered that the infertility is something not natural and that the ART denaturalizes the infertility, because it turns an infertile nature into something temporary fertile.

General Objective

The general objective of the paper is to apprehend the meanings and significances from the conjugality to the parenting transition between men and women that had their children through ART.

Specific Objective

The specific objective of the paper is to denaturalize: feminine/maternity and masculine/paternity

meanings; the desire of becoming a mother and a father; and infertility and ART.

Methodology

Method

The method of this paper is the qualitative research.

Technique

The technique is data swab—opened interview in depth (language production, therefore dialogical). Through guided questions: How do you feel about being... mother's/father's?; What you dreamed to be a mother/father was what exactly happened?; and In your opinion, what is the mother's/father's role?

Procedures

The procedures of the research are that the participants were three married heterosexual couples, who were selected through a human reproduction clinic medical record in a city near São Paulo, Brazil. These people passed through an ART/VIF (in vitro fertilization) treatment, got pregnant and had their child. The number and timing of interviews were spontaneous, depending on each couple's needs and respecting their privacy. The interviews occurred in the couples' residences. There was also a big concern about giving the participants a guarantee of secret and respect. The audio program lasted 12 hours as a total.

Data Analysis

After the collected and gathered data, the steps were:

- (1) Data assemble audio tape transcription, material reading and reporting assembling in a determined order;
- (2) Data classification: exhaustive lateral and transversal text reading (process from the interviews cutting into "themes").

After the "floating readings", varied themes appeared mostly characterized (by repetition and reiteration), by the most emphasized informants' speeches, by the emotional burdens, by the mixed feelings or contradictions, by the non-concreted overtones, etc..

After new reading processes, 66 pre-indicators agglutination processes were allowed. Right after these processes, a smaller number of varied themes were obtained that could be agglutinated into 29 indicators. From the material reading, five meaning nucleus, which had the similar, complement or contradictory contents articulation as a criterion, were assembled.

Signification Nucleus 1: "We Decided to Do VIF and Got Pregnant"

This signification nucleus refers to the long and heartbreaking feelings process from the infertility discovery, the confrontation and decisions about the ART treatment, the pregnancy, and the birth and postpartum. The raised emotional content showed that, during the last reports for at least three years, remained current, appearing that the suffering is timeless. It can be identified that the feelings related to the infertility hold the same considerable weight even after having children, they are after all infertile couples, so if they will to have another child, they need to appeal to the ART treatment again.

Signification Nucleus 2: "The Couple Can Not Only Dedicate Themselves to Their Children"

From the historical socio-cultural contextualization, we tried to understand the relations between

contemporaneous conjugality and subjectivity from the established relation by the interviewed couples. Considering that conjugality is defined as a psychological dimension shared of equalitarian ideas and values built by the intimacy feeling, the aspect that called our attention was the one that gathers these double dimensions a third one to contextualize a family nucleus.

Signification Nucleus 3: “God Gave Us a Gift”

Looking for respecting the different religious doctrines of each participant and also trying to keep out of tendencies, judgments and pragmatisms, we understand that the name “spirituality” which we gave this next nucleus had the proposal to identify meanings of an extremely personal subjectivity. Considering that Brazil is a country that most people are catholic and according to the bibliography review, we could identify the historical and socio-cultural influences of this doctrine in our population. The proposal was to do a reading relating the word “God” to nature (the divine creator).

Signification Nucleus 4: “Our Families Do Not Know That We Know How to Be Parents”

ART meaning was mediated by the other inter-subjectivity, circumscribed in the family inter-relationship: whereas individuals looked for resources to deal with their new needs. Another important point of this analysis was to understand that conjugality refers to a conjugal dyad (man and woman), and the parenthood a triad concept, because it includes at least one child, however they are not excluding, actually they are complementary. As a conclusion, it was understood that the family concept in this research is that the biological childbirth means the familiar heritage perpetuation and the parentage connection.

Signification Nucleus 5: “First the Child, Then Us”

The meaning of parenthood is mediated by the scientific method and the married men and women common sense that they “must have children”, and by the individuals history of life that includes the life experiences already lived, their present expressions and their future perspectives. These mediations not only happen by the events’ totality or by the social representations of the speeches that come to the individuals, but also a part of a parenthood setting process, which is part of their own history of life development.

Discussion

This study tried to denaturalize the woman’s/mother’s and man’s/father’s preconceptions, and left from the principle that conjugality to parenthood transition would bring genre relationship changing. Nevertheless, what we verified through the interviewers’ report was completely the opposite, because they presented fossilized behaviors recognized by their socio-historical instituted genre identities that remain “stuck on time” clearly observed by these men and women to confirm their masculinity and femininity through the biological maternity and paternity confirmation. In our opinion, the reflection was necessary towards the “painful” search for a child that maybe it is not necessary.

Conclusions

In this research, meanings and significances to the parenthood of couples that had their children through ART were analyzed and identified, based on Vygotsky’s perspective, with the intention to denaturalize the historical construction that the feminine asserts through maternity and masculine through paternity. We can also add that there was an intention to denaturalize the desire of being a father/mother, of having children, the

infertility and the ART. Towards to new subjective productions, it believes that it is not natural that all men and women desire to have children.

Hence, it is possible to assume that the ART treatment last many years in Brazil considers the natural maternity and paternity desire and denaturalize the infertility turning the infertile couple into temporary fertile with the “excuse” of fulfilling the couple’s desire. It is also possible to justify all the medical interventions that produce the personal sense construction and resize the meanings transition to parenthood. Since these couples keep on being infertile despite, they have children. The infertile condition still exists, “They have not recovered from their disease yet”, because if they wish to have another child, they still cannot have this child naturally, remaining their inferiority feeling and stigma.

The meaning of parenthood sets on the emotional constitution course of individuals and its experiences restructuring its subjectivity and the reality they live. The central motivation of this significance is to have a biological child in order to confirm the masculine and feminine genres related to virility and the ability of being pregnant and giving birth.

We believe that the construction of this reflection supported the gender concepts that denaturalize power hierarchies based on gender differences. Therefore, this construction allowed us to open changing possibilities and expansions, deconstruct the natural component into social relationships. Where it is possible to say that the “natural fertile body” was socio-historical built to conceive a child and fulfill what is socially expected (to become a father/mother)—putting the maternity and paternity as an option of human existence and not as something that belongs to men and women’s identity.

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