

**AUTONOMY, RELATEDNESS
AND OEDIPUS**
Psychoanalytic Perspectives

Thijs de Wolf



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About the author

Thijs de Wolf is a clinical psychologist, psychotherapist, and psychoanalyst. He is a training and supervising psychoanalyst. His PhD project was about the process in short-term psychoanalytic psychotherapy. He was chairman of the board of the Dutch Psychoanalytical Institute. In addition, he has been the head of the postgraduate psychotherapeutic training of both universities in Amsterdam (the Netherlands) for many years. He has taught a lot, both in Eastern and Western Europe, and has several books to his name about the theory and practice of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy. In 2018 he was knighted in the Netherlands for his achievements.

Introduction

The shortest way to summarize this book is by saying that development is about being related to the other without losing yourself and being with yourself without losing the other. That is why this book is about the Oedipus complex. Faimberg (2005) emphasizes that Freud was developing a new theoretical perspective to understand mental functioning and a new way to intervene. He developed the concept of the unconscious and of sexuality. By those concepts an invisible world comes into being but it remains outside the intersubjective communication. You know it is there but you cannot see it. It is beyond the structure of language; by putting it into words it comes into consciousness and it becomes a part of our explicit communication. But putting it into words is not so easy. It creates a lot of resistance we have to work through. In our listening to the unconscious we need to listen in a specific way to “catch” the unconscious. It is about the process from thing-representations to word-representations, from things to symbols. From dyadic to triadic functioning. In our view psychoanalysis is not only about the inner psychic world but also about the outer world, as Faimberg shows us. No children without parents and vice versa. Relationships are circular and not linear. The analyst should listen to the unknown story of the patient.

He should, through listening and questioning, make the invisible visible. To explore the hidden perspectives which are steering the mental functioning of the patient without forgetting the importance of our own hidden stories. Psychoanalysis is about creating new perspectives, which were in a way already there but not visible. Psychoanalysis is developmental and intersubjective.

We are indebted, in our thinking, to authors such as Faimberg, Laplanche, Lacan, Fonagy, Target, and Blatt.

In the first chapter we will try to formulate and define the field and the status of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is no longer leading in the field and we will discuss some of the reasons for that. Our idea is that psychoanalysis is about facilitating trust and thereby undermining mistrust and deceit.

In the second chapter we will discuss some of the central concepts in psychoanalysis, by reading Freud's book about Leonardo (1910c). In this book Freud describes all the issues relevant for psychoanalysis: the importance of the primary relationships both with the mother and with the father, the dyadic and triadic ways of relating to each other, attachment, trauma, loss, separation. Issues related to autonomy and relatedness, the meaning of sexuality, love, hate, and sublimation. It shows that psychoanalysis is about issues such as internalization, identification with and projection of, about the external and the internal world.

In the third chapter we will discuss the relation between psychoanalysis and development, the normal but also the pathological development. We will discuss the difference between "the actual neurosis" and "the psychoneuroses" and its consequences for our thinking about the unconscious and about pathology.

In the fourth chapter we will explore more about the issue of being separate without losing the other or being intimate without losing yourself. It is also about dyadic or triadic. Psychoanalysis is a way of thinking about the personality, about normal and deviant functioning. Psychoanalysis examines how the mind works: how the human mind interprets reality, and the conditions under which interpretation takes place.

The fifth chapter is called "The Return of the Unconscious and Sexuality." Here we will discuss two central concepts within psychoanalysis: the unconscious and sexuality. While we will take Freud's views as a starting point, we will also discuss more recent formulations.

In the sixth chapter we will discuss the development of the psychoanalytic frame. Freud developed and positioned psychoanalysis at the interface of biology and psychology. Mental representations mark the boundary between biology and psychology. On one side of the boundary, the Self functions as the physical self, and on the other side, it functions as the psychological self. We will discuss the individual but also the object relational, group, and systemic aspects of the frame. We will end this chapter with discussing the theoretical pluralism.

Next to the drive model as the mainstream within psychoanalysis, where the focus on the autonomy or separateness was dominant, there always was a second road focusing upon relatedness and intimacy. The central figure in that area was Ferenczi. He focused on the external, real relationship. He was interested in how people could be related without losing themselves. That is what this seventh chapter is about.

In the eighth chapter we will discuss the issue of descriptive and structural diagnostics. Descriptive diagnostics focuses on the manifest behavior, while structural diagnostics is focusing on the structures underlying and explaining behavior. Traditionally, psychoanalysis focuses on structural diagnosis; nowadays it is looking for a balance between both.

In the ninth chapter we will discuss the different psychoanalytical forms of treatment and their aims. From short- to long-term, from using the couch to using the chair. From constructive to reconstructive forms of treatment.

Within the psychoanalytic frame of reference, the elaboration and analysis of dreams has, since the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, been seen as the royal road to the unconscious. That is why in this tenth chapter we will pay attention to working with dreams.

One of the aims of psychoanalysts is that psychoanalytical treatments will produce “structural change” in the patient. In this eleventh chapter we will elaborate this concept of change. Change in treatment is related to termination: that is why we will take termination into account in this chapter too.

In the last chapter we will discuss the oedipal constellation by reading the myth of Oedipus as told by Sophocles, in a different way from the usual (*Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*). From a clinical point of view, narcissism is a very important issue in the practice of psychoanalysis today. As is the issue of the relation between inner and outer

worlds, about concrete/“real” or “mental” traumatization, dyadic or triadic, about relation or interpretation. Our conclusion will be that the oedipal constellation is a developmental task through our whole life and it is transgenerational. That means it is about adults, their children, and their parents.

This book is written for those students who are looking for a psychoanalysis that is open for testing their hypotheses in an empirical way. And is open for findings from other scientific areas like developmental psychopathology, the neurosciences, attachment theories, and human infant research. This book is written for those analysts and students who are motivated to find their own “path” in psychoanalysis.