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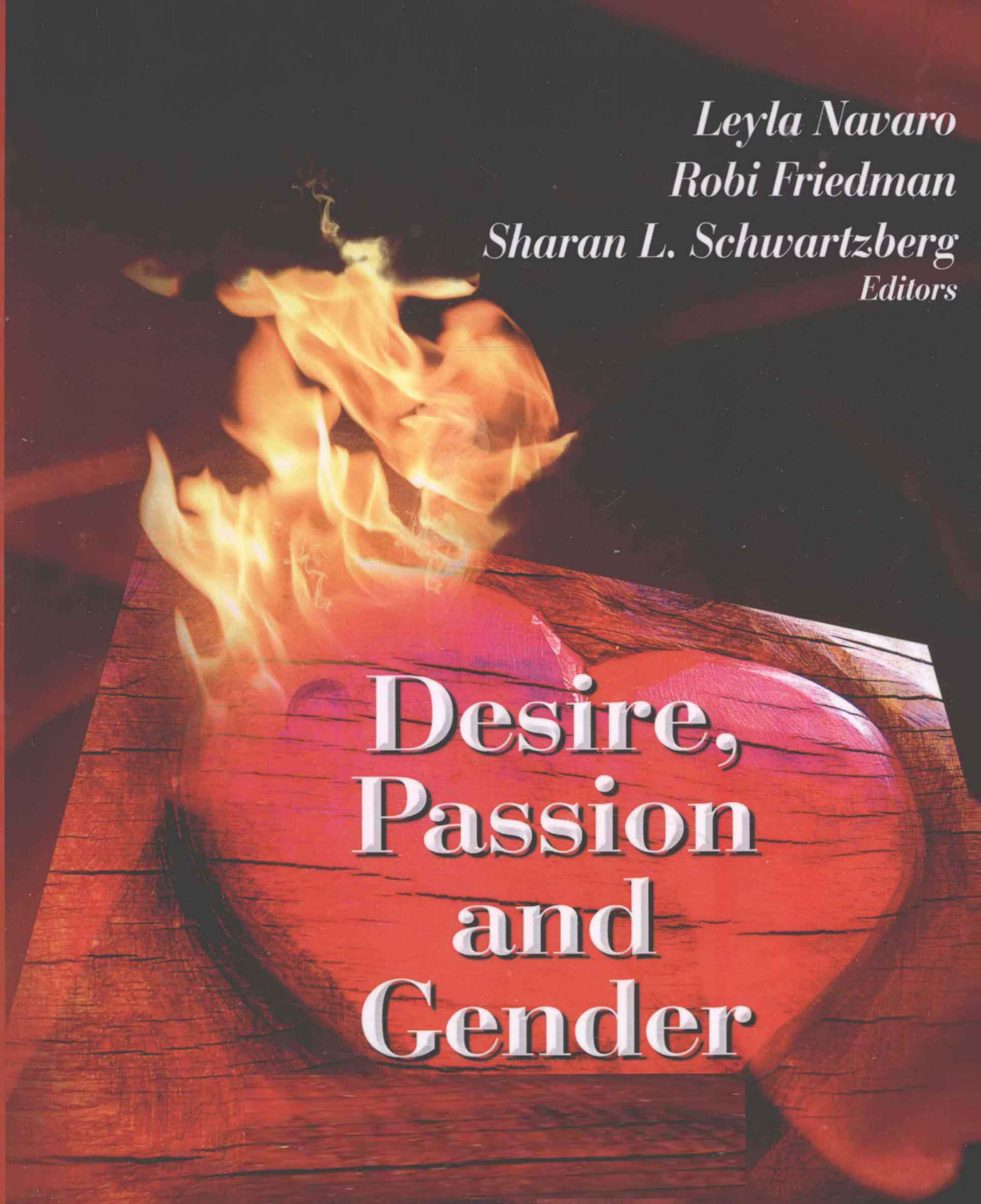

Desire, Passion and Gender

Clinical Implications

Psychology of Emotions, Motivations and Actions

NOVA

PSYCHOLOGY OF EMOTIONS, MOTIVATIONS AND ACTIONS

DESIRE, PASSION AND GENDER: CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

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PREFACE

Desire and passion are one of the most challenging forces as powerful and power-inducing emotions. The vitality they induce may be both enhancing and devastating. Despite that, following one's desire or passion is a modern day dream; both men and women suffer from either hindrance or obstruction of their desires in the course of social roles and daily life chores. The resulting frustration may turn into overt or covert forms of depression and somatization that are differently experienced, externalized, or internalized by each gender. Men tend to externalize this suffering in forms of aggression, use of alcohol, drugs, reckless driving, distancing, or estranged sexual relationships. Women more often feel inclined to internalize pain in several forms of depression, eating disorders, internalized anger, and tormenting themselves in self-defeating acts.

Our book focuses on challenges and difficulties of gender roles in acknowledging and following one's own desires and passions. Further, we attempt to explain whether and how these powerful emotions are understood and interpreted in their own right in clinical settings. The work takes into consideration that clinical approaches and interpretations of these processes may be heavily gendered. We work through these issues in several layers, illuminating the concerns through cases of individual, groups, couples, dreams, and transference and counter-transference issues. For the first time, desire and passion is discussed through a contemporary gender perspective and by an international group of male and female practitioners, based on established theoretical approaches and clinical interpretations that are evaluated and synthesized by the editors. The book follows Leyla and Sharan's 2007 co-edited book *Envy, Competition and Gender: Theory, Clinical Applications and Group Work* (Routledge, London). Robi's joint editorship brings not only his force in intellectual and clinical expertise but also a truly balanced gender perspective.

We believe you will find the book contains both stimulating and contemporary articles challenging what has been written to date on desire and passion. Existing books address gender issues through much narrower perspectives. Our book aims to cover both male and female perspectives with an international and inter-gender scale, illuminating patients' and therapists' interpersonal and intrapersonal struggles, as well as transference and countertransference issues regarding desire and passion. The blend of male and female writers with their gender-sensitive perspectives provides a unique opportunity to understand and work through those powerful emotions of desire and passion for clinicians as well as readers eager to learn, develop, and grow in synchronization with their inner passions. Our experience as co-editors in producing this work is testimony to the energizing forces of gender, desire and passion at their best. Bon Appétit!

Leyla Navaro, Istanbul, Turkey
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November 2010

FOREWORD

Stephen Frosh

It is exceptionally difficult to trace the workings of desire. Most of us make a simple error: we see desire as the property of a person. We know it as a thing, as "my" desire or "yours." We relate to it as something a person has, my desire or your desire; or as an action, a verb. I desire you, you (do not) desire me. We see it as the same as "wanting," or as arising as a response to "want:" I desire you because I do not, or cannot, have you, I lack therefore, I desire. We make desire that which reaches across a gap, signifying the space where something is missing, so specifying an absence. We desire something, and that act constitutes the subject. Desire indicates a kind of pursuit, something we lack and chase after.

But this misses the point. No one owns desire, it is not a possession, it does not belong "to" a person. Nor is it a signal, flagging up a gap. Desire, as the editors of this book make clear, is a *force*. If desire is a force, then it *comes first*; that is, the force is there before the subject, the subject arises from the activities of the force. The force is "first cause," one might say; which means, simply, that desire constructs the subject. The subject belongs to desire, not the other way around. The subject exists as a nodal point in the meeting of desire and other forces, or perhaps as a contingency that just happens to come into being because of the way desire operates. So if we are going to theorize desire, we should not start with persons; we start with force, with patterns of attraction and repulsion, with moments of meeting, with violence and love. As Freud might, in the latter stage of his career, has had it: we start with the forces of love and darkness, with Eros and death.

If desire is a force that flows through subjects, it is not constituted in lack, but rather in a kind of fullness. This is a contentious point, one of the differentiations between, for example, Lacan and Deleuze; but the theory does not need to be labored here. It is also a point of difference between Lacanians and feminist Lacanian-manqués; and between masculine and feminine images of desire. The men go on about lack, because they fear castration and are terrified by women; women, on the other hand, know that their bodies produce ebullience, that it is excess rather than lack that characterizes life. Even Lacanians sometimes agree with this. Žižek's (2006, p.62) comment is that, "The ultimate lesson of psychoanalysis is that human life is never "just life:" humans are not simply alive, they are possessed by the strange drive to enjoy life in excess, passionately attached to a surplus which sticks out and derails the ordinary run of things." The point is a general one: the human subject does not only get moved to act (I desire you) when in a state of lack; it acts all the time, irredeemably, as a

function of the state of being a human subject. Its cup overflows, it wants, it needs, it desires not because it does not have something, but simply because that is what living means. If desire is a force, it operates in and through the subject, carrying us along with it as servants of its unbounded energy. Desire is material, it is life.

This makes passion an unruly affair. The authors suggest, "The difference between passion and desire rests in the *continuity of passion*." Perhaps this is a matter of semantics, but one could turn this on its head quite easily. They claim, "passion is more stable and continuous since the flame of the desired object or activity is tenacious and persistent." But if desire is a force, it may wax and wane, but it does not go away. If subjects are formed by desire running through them, then it has continuity; it is not dependent on how desirous an individual might feel. Desire does not, after all, fade, if it is part of an excessive presence; it only fades if one thinks about it as belonging to someone, who might indeed give up on desire or turn away from it. It is perhaps a mistake to see passion as the domesticated version of desire, attached to one object, though that may be how it presents itself. Sometimes, passion is momentary, flaring up and then dispersed; sometimes, it references a kind of obsessional fixation on an object, which is tenaciously clung to as if it could ever fulfill desire—the Lacanian Imaginary comes to mind here. Certainly passion suggests the loss of conscious control and an investment in desire that is absolute, that embraces the small deaths and exiles from selfhood that Catherine Clément (1994) calls "syncope," "this eclipse of thought, this game of following death" (p.20). The moments of absence here are moments of rapture; they are indeed passionate, as the subject gives way to the force that runs through it. For Lacan, too, passion is this moment of being without the ego. Translating Freud's vision of an unconscious full of physical energy into linguistic terms, Lacan (1958) manages to convey both a sexual and a religious impulse in one romantic image. "The signifier," he writes, "has an active function in determining the effects in which the signifable appears as submitting to its mark, becoming through that passion the signified" (p.78). And then, immediately, "This passion of the signifier then becomes a new dimension of the human condition, in that it is not only man who speaks, but in man and through man that it speaks, that his nature is woven by effects in which we can find the structure of language, whose material he becomes..." Passion has become imbued both with the notion of active force and of bowing to something, of a certain transportation of subjectivity in which agency is given up and made subject to something else. This is akin to the religious sense of "passion," the process whereby one succumbs to the Other, to that "dimension of the human condition" in which one is a tool and not a subject, in which the Other speaks in one's place. We can call this many things, but mostly it means the loss of anything resembling the person and its replacement by a subject overwhelmed by some other force.

Gender is an essential aspect of all this, as this book constantly attests. Gender is the social division around which the subject circulates; sexual difference is the structuring of sexuality around the drive, and hence around the pulsations of desire. Are these categories in some way fixed, despite the obvious variations in masculinities and femininities? Is masculine desire phallic desire, striving for order, control and domination, and does feminine desire take the form of overflowing, of multiplicity, of the famous "this sex which is not one" (Irigaray, 1977)? It seems unlikely, but there is also something obviously recalcitrant here that never goes away. Gender continues to structure us, and the traps of gender are those into which we constantly fall; at a "psychic" level, sexual difference seems inescapable. So power winds its way through, constructing sexed subjects who fall into some kind of alliance with

gendered positions, which we then mistake for human nature; a sad story that has been told many times over and is well told here.

Finally, this book deals with psychotherapy, both psychoanalysis and group analysis. People are possessed by desire, that is the state of things; but sometimes this possession is too much, and the space that therapy offers for reflection and refusal is a necessary space of continued being. A book of this sort also offers such a space; it is a kind of psychotherapy in itself, a working-through, in which thoughtfulness becomes attached to the drive, to desire, translating it into a useable form. It is, of course, an act of sublimation, as Freudians have always known; but such books do some of the civilizational work of contesting the randomness of desire, of humanizing, it, and this is in itself an important, ethical move.

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Leyla Navaro, Istanbul
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November, 2010

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Robi Friedman, Leyla Navaro, and Sharan L. Schwartzberg (with Commentary by Vanessa Vega)

What attracts us to another human being? How do we fall in a passionate love? What is the motivating force that drives us to get into action and to strive to obtain what we want? How is our desire being shaped? Do men and women have differing desires and differing attitudes on the way to attain them? Those are some of the questions that this book proposes and attempts to explore.

SOME DEFINITIONS: DESIRE

Often borne out of our conscious or unconscious needs, our desires can be seen as life torches illuminating our innermost wishes. The need creates the desire to get it, such as hunger leading to the desire of food and the drive of searching it. Thus, desire represents the wanted object as well as the drive or motion to reach for it. It leaps from the target object to action, as it becomes the striving power of getting what we need or want. Quite often, desire is represented by its target (desired object, person, sex, food, etc.) when actually; it is the *driving force* to get it that identifies desire.

Need creates the fantasy of the desired object or action. We fantasize and dream of persons, objects or actions that will fulfill our needs. Quite often, fantasy becomes more attractive than the real object, and the pleasure of fantasizing might replace the very drive of getting it. As such, reality may become unsatisfactory or dull when compared with fantasy. For some, indulging in fantasies can replace the action of pursuing their desire. Differences in self-doubt, fear of disappointment, and fear of success are important factors in the pursuit, repression or fantasized state of desire. Thus we may state that desire is the motivational force (drive?) leading to strive for what is wanted, coveted. As such, it is the flame of life, the motor force urging to exist, to thrive, and strive. As stated in Robert Louis Stevenson's (1850-94) poetry: "It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive." True contentment derives from the doing of something, not its end point. Anticipation is often more exciting than the event itself. It seems as if *being in a state of desire* is more attractive than the acquisition or possession of what is desired.

It is the *use of the driving force* that depicts our personal and gender differences in the pursuit of our desires. Some people are more prone to actively pursue their desires, while some are rather slow, delaying or repressing them. Those differences stem both from our personal psychodynamics as much as our cultural, religious and familial values. They are equally affected by gender roles. The driving force leading to the pursuit and acquisition of the object of desire requires a certain amount of aggression, assertion, forcefulness, decisiveness, competitiveness—all those forceful and power-inducing attitudes that depict major personal and gender differences. For centuries, those forceful attitudes have been in the sole domain of masculinity, while the feminine was described—or prescribed—as lacking them. This dualistic attribution has unconsciously affected the attitudes of both genders vis-a-vis desire and passion. The aim of this book is to explore the impact of those differences affecting our attitudes in the pursuit of desire and passion.

PASSION

Passion requires an established pursuit of desire. It is a step further than desire when the desired object and the pursuit of it hold an indisputable place in our lives. While relational passion targets the desired person, activity or object, passion refers to the pursuit and cultivation of the cherished activity as a way of being. Ardor, fervor, zeal and enthusiasm are the forceful companions of passion, thus loading power, energy, agency and capability of taking action. Similar to desire, the pursuit of passion shows personal differences. Our passions contribute to our sense of identity while describing who we are and how we proceed with life. The difference between passion and desire rests in the *continuity of passion*. The paradox with desire is that once fulfilled, it can fade out. Once satisfied, we may no longer desire the same person or the same object. There is an important trap in this pattern, as it shows in the way that some people chase members of the opposite sex, only to dump them when they have captured their affections. What they are looking for is the state of being in enflamed desire more than the targeted object itself. As such, passion is more stable and continuous, since the flame of the desired object or activity is tenacious and persistent.

GENDER (COMMENTARY BY VANESSA VEGA)

Gender construction has been the focus of many works by sociologists, psychologists, and anthropologists. It brings to light questions such as: What is the difference between men and women? Are their differences intrinsic or extrinsic? Where do these differences come from? The concept of gender construction presupposes that masculinity and femininity are culturally produced characteristics that are mapped onto the biological differences between males and females, making them appear to be a product of biological "nature" rather than cultural "nurture." Second wave feminists of the 1960s and '70s rejected "feminine" identities as limiting and espoused this rejection as essential to producing new identities and a new consciousness. The movement of feminism into the mainstream forced many individuals to question their own assumptions about that which was nature and that which was nurture. Gender roles were in flux. If all men were not naturally "masculine" and women were not naturally "feminine," then what roles and characteristics were men and women to adopt?

These questions evolved into cultural discussions that concluded that men and women should be free to define themselves as they choose: gender became dynamic, a spectrum to be explored.

This conclusion, however, did not offer a solution to the vacuum created by dissociating femininity and masculinity from their respective sexes. The power of cultural construction persisted deep in the psyches of men and women for generations to come and would assert itself less outwardly and more psychologically. Manifestations of the vestiges of introjected cultural norms would reappear in psychiatric sessions around the globe. The rejection of prescribed gender roles would cause cultural identity crises, crises that would result in ruthlessness—against others and against the self—passion seeking a new and as of yet unknown form of expression. These norms would have deleterious psychological effects on individuals and entire generations struggling to create new identities with new desires and new passions. This book endeavors to illuminate the depth of these introjections with contributors hailing from around the world.

As represented in this book, heterosexual men and women represent a set of desires informed to them by their sexualities, their biology and their psyches. This distinction is not to say that bisexual, homosexual and transgender men and women have not internalized gender roles but rather, that gender and sexuality are in contemporary theory dealt with as more individual concepts than is expressed in the book. Writings on queer theory and gendered passions have seriously challenged the validity and consistency of heteronormative discourse and focused to a large degree on non-heteronormative sexualities and sexual practices. Practitioners' experiences in the therapy room make real the mythic intrapsychic foes presented and shed light upon the reconciliation process between individuals, groups, culture, and values. By elucidating the connections between gender construction and gendered passions and desires, we have presented powerful accounts for readers to ruminate on: what are the effects of gender in the psyches of patients in therapy? How deeply introjected are their roles, and how do their performances of these roles affect their functioning—specifically, their abilities to love and be loved; to desire and to share passion? Although this collection of contributions to the literature does not seek to address issues of femininity and masculinity explicitly, it does so by showing that when individuals reject social roles, they mirror the feminist movement: they are left with the responsibility of creating new identities. If we are not "that way," then what way are we? Therapists around the world are confronted with the task of not only helping individuals and groups work through this reconciliation process, but also of finding themselves in the equation. (Personal Communication, Vanessa Vega, December 15, 2009).

Desire and Passion in Ancient Philosophical Thinking

As powerful driving forces, both desire and passion have been addressed throughout the ages by prominent thinkers and philosophers. In ancient Western philosophies, Greek or Roman, the primary teaching was around life rules: how to manage to desire within moral and politic ideals. In the goal of marking both moral and political ideals, antique philosophers were eager to set community and life rules while producing a taxonomy of desire. Desire was an emotion to be tamed and ruled.

According to Plato, who formulated the first complex theory of desire (B.C.428-348), it is possible to simultaneously desire contradictory objects, i.e., one can be thirsty but does not wish to drink. In his *Republic IV*, Plato distinguishes diverse parts of the soul at the origin of different forms of desire: a rational part (*logistikon*), source of judgments and truth-oriented reflections; an irrational part (*alogiston*), leading to feed, to dream, to delight in spectacles and language games; an affective zone (*thumos*), representing the desire of self-affirmation while leading to violent affects. The *thumos* tends to converge with rational choices. According to Plato, human virtues such as courage, temperance or justice are the sum of a balance of the three parts of the soul. When reason does not win over the irrational and the affect, Plato proposes an abdication of the senses (Cordier, 2006). Temperance, or moderation, will mean the limitation of desires such as abstention from alcohol, excess of food, etc. For Plato, the three parts of the soul correspond to places in the body: reason to the head, spirit to the heart, and desire to the organs of desire, mostly in the abdomen.

Aristotle developed a different view from his teacher by refusing to distinguish the three different parts of the soul. He viewed desires, whether rational or not, as the unique source of life, and the only true motor of human action. For Aristotle, intellect was the representation of the goal to be reached. He discussed the incontinency of the will (*akrasia*) when action follows desire instead of reasoning, which is the possibility of acting bad while knowing what is good.

Spinoza, a much-quoted influential thinker of the seventeenth century, has addressed desire and passion within his particular perspective. Spinoza is known for the control of affect and emotion through reasoning. According to Spinoza (1632-1677), virtue is defined as acting in compliance with reason. The guiding goal of man is self-preservation, an instinct that we particularly feel in desire. Spinoza argues that satisfying desire will be conducive to self-preservation, allowing joy or pleasure. He believes that anything to the contrary brings sorrow or pain. Spinoza claims that reason serves to override passions, distinguishing humans from the "lower" brutes. (http://www.blupete.com/Literature/Biographies/Philosophy/Spinoza.htm).

Spinoza's thinking concentrated more on passion than on desire. Desire, for Spinoza is a positive principle, yet a passion is bad if it remains passive. Passion becomes good if it is the active manifestation of the person. Thus for Spinoza, passions cannot be classified either as good or bad as long as they remain free and active affects.

DESIRE AND PASSION IN PSYCHOANALYSIS

Freud

Freud believed in a theory basically connected to desire and passion by energetic concepts like "libido," "drives." From the beginning, the childhood origin of neuroses was posited in sex—either as sexual abuse or later, shifting his explanatory model, as imaginary sexuality towards parental figures. During the late 1890s, Freud, who never abandoned his belief in the sexual etiology of neuroses, began to emphasize desire through (often unconscious) fantasies built around the Oedipus complex as the primary cause of hysteria and other neurotic symptoms. Interestingly, Freud also believed that libido, meaning the energy behind desire and passion, has the ability to change its object, or its mode in general, in a