
Preface

Years ago, when my writings about patients presenting borderline personality organization were stressing the importance of aggression in their psychodynamics, a colleague and good friend said to me, half jokingly: "Why don't you write about love? Everybody has the impression that you are concerned only with aggression!" I promised him I would do so when some of the puzzling questions in this area had become clearer to me. This book is the result, although I must admit that I have by no means found the answers to all those questions. Nevertheless, I believe I have come far enough in my thinking to share those answers I have found. I hope others will take the opportunity to illuminate what is still obscure.

Over the centuries the subject of love has received a great deal of attention from poets and philosophers. In more recent times it has been scrutinized by sociologists and psychologists. But surprisingly little about love can be found in the psychoanalytic literature.

Again and again, in my attempts to study the nature of love, the relation of the erotic to sexuality became inescapable. I discovered that, in contrast to the abundance of studies on the sexual response from a biological perspective, little had been written about it as a subjective experience. As I explored this subjective aspect with patients, I soon found myself dealing with unconscious fantasies and their roots in infantile sexuality—in short, back to Freud. Clinically I also found that it was through mutual projective identification that couples reenacted past "scenarios" (unconscious experiences and fantasies) in their relationships and that fantasied and real mutual "persecution" derived from the projection of the infantile superego—as well as the establishment of a joint ego ideal—powerfully influenced a couple's life.

I noticed that it was almost impossible to predict the destiny of a love

relation or marriage on the basis of a patient's particular psychopathology. Sometimes different types and degrees of psychopathology in the partners seem to result in a comfortable match; at other times the differences seem to be the source of incompatibility. The questions "What keeps couples together? What destroys their relationship?" haunted me and were the impetus for my studying the underlying dynamics of couples in intimate relationships.

My sources of data are the treatment of patients by psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy, the evaluation and treatment of couples suffering from marital conflict, and particularly the long-term follow-up study of couples through the window of the psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy of individual patients.

It did not take me long to discover that it was just as impossible to study the vicissitudes of love without the vicissitudes of aggression in the relationship of the couple as in the individual. Aggressive aspects of the couple's erotic relationship emerged as important in all intimate sexual relations, an area in which the pioneering work of Robert J. Stoller has provided significant clarification. But I found the aggressive components of the universal ambivalence of intimate object relations equally important, as well as the aggressive components of superego pressures unleashed in the couple's intimate life. A psychoanalytic object relations theory facilitated the study of the dynamics linking intrapsychic conflicts and interpersonal relations, the mutual influences of the couple and its surrounding social group, and the interplay of love and aggression in all these fields.

So, despite the best of intentions, the incontrovertible evidence forces me to focus sharply on aggression in this treatise on love. But, by the same token, the acknowledgment of the complex ways in which love and aggression merge and interact in the couple's life also highlights the mechanisms by which love can integrate and neutralize aggression and, under many circumstances, triumph over it.