

The elusive paternal function: Clinicians' perspectives

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Abstract

Although the term 'paternal function' is frequently employed in the psychoanalytic literature, a common understanding of what it constitutes cannot be assumed. In the context of changing constructions of gender and family structure, and in the relative absence of clarity around the concept of the paternal function, this article seeks to ascertain how South African psychoanalytically oriented therapists might conceptualize and think about this important function. Drawing on material from individual interviews the author highlights areas of concurrence as well as areas of tension in how therapists grapple with this elusive concept. Comparisons are also made with existing literature in the area. The relationship between gender and the paternal function, as articulated by participants, is explored.