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PhD in Social Health Sciences
2020-2021

INVITATION to the Public defence of

Lara VESENTINI

To obtain the academic degree of

DOCTOR OF SOCIAL HEALTH SCIENCES

Intimacy and Sexuality in the Psychotherapeutic Relationship.

The defence will take place on Friday, **25 June 2021 at 2 p.m.**

and will be organised **online**, accessible through the following link:

[Access online defence](#)

Summary of the dissertation

It is not uncommon for psychotherapists to have intimate and sexual feelings for a client. Despite this, experiencing these feelings remains a rather silenced topic. This is unfortunate because talking about such feelings might be very helpful for therapists who encounter these feelings. It might help therapists to (further) reflect on their intimate and sexual feelings, and manage them well, which is beneficial for the wellbeing of the therapist and ultimately the psychotherapeutic relationship with the client. Scientific studies on this topic were mainly conducted outside Europe, decades ago, without follow-up. In Belgium, this topic has never been thoroughly investigated on a large scale. However, recent empirical data might fuel the debate about intimate and sexual feelings, which is desirable to evaluate and improve the way these feelings are currently dealt with. Therefore, this dissertation aims 1) to estimate the occurrence of intimate and sexual feelings and behaviors of therapists, and therapists' attitudes in this respect, 2) to gain more in-depth information about how therapists address such intimate and sexual feelings, and 3) to explore how educational programs of therapists, and mental health care institutions deal with intimate and sexual feelings and behavior. In accordance with these aims, we conducted a large scale quantitative survey and a qualitative focus group study among therapists, and a survey study among the executives of mental health care institutions.

Curriculum Vitae

Lara Vesentini (°1976) completed in 2000 her study 'Health Sciences' at the Maastricht University in the Netherlands. She started her career as a manager in the Reinaert Kliniek in Maastricht (Aug 2000 – Jan 2002) and proceeded to work ever since in the academic field. First at the Hogeschool PXL doing research about traffic safety and sexuality of elderly (Feb 2002 – Dec 2009), afterwards at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven about elderly care (Jan 2010 – Dec 2011). In 2013, she started as assistant of Professor Johan Bilsen, with her PhD project on 'Intimacy and Sexuality in the Psychotherapeutic Relationship' at the Mental Health and Wellbeing Research Group of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). Besides her PHD, Lara had a teaching assignment at the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, mainly consisting of guiding a group of students in doing a scientific quantitative research (Epistat), guidance of master-theses, exercises in epidemiology, and an introduction in qualitative research. Furthermore, she was for the VUB the administrative coordinator for the interuniversity Manama-educations regarding Public Health. During her PhD she was member of the steering committee for the Manama-education Occupational Medicine and the Manama-education Youth Health and Adolescent Medicine, member of the education council of Medicine and the Manama-education Global Health, member of the Faculty Council of Medicine and Pharmacy, and member and secretary of the department of Public Health.