Psychoanalytic infant observation

Tu-S-335
The role of attention and containment in infant development of mind and clinical intervention
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Babies can be a source of learning thanks to the specific kind of training in infant observation that Esther Bick’s method provides: weekly observation sessions in the infant’s home environment, from birth until 2 years of age. The three different phases of the procedure can be seen as a methodological model for the thought processes it involves: after the weekly home observation session with baby and family, the observer writes out an observation, which is then read to a seminar group led by an analyst trained in the method. This is a process that, in emphasizing and sustaining the observer’s attentiveness and containing function, also strengthens them. Unlike other observation methods, the principal aim of training in this instance is the development of the observer’s own capacity for attention, reflection and containment. We discuss how this method is a highly precious instrument for professionals in different field of mental health.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neurenf.2012.05.316

Tu-S-336
Negotiating anxieties in vulnerable parent–infant relationships: Psychoanalytic observation, early interactions and containment
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This paper draws on observations of vulnerable mother-infants, weekly, between birth and 2 years. Qualities of containment are characterised by parental containing “shape” and infants’ “grip relations”. The negotiation of experiences of intense anxiety contribute to early patterns of relatedness; particular consistencies up to the end of the second year are recognised as demonstrating the continuities of these patterns internalised to form an important aspect of the infant’s development. Examples from the observations illustrate some vivid manifestations of relational continuities. These include the internalisation of an aspect of the early relationship as a bodily quality, play which shows the baby’s preoccupation with characteristics of the early relationship and the baby’s relating to ordinary separations and absences of parents. Links between knowledge generated by the infant observation approach, emotion regulation and attachment theory will be discussed.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neurenf.2012.05.317

Tu-S-337
How soon a baby will recognize his parents as different?
The longitudinal development of specific relationships in an infant observation
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Infant observation with Esther Bick’s method can support research with a unique case and allows the study of longitudinal development of relational patterns within a family trough repeated observations every weeks. Theories about the beginnings of the father’s role within the mother-infant dyad are still submitted to discussions. Recent research shows the babies’ early aptitude to create a differentiated bond with each parent, at least at a phenomenological level in a research setting (McHale et Fivaz-Depeursinge, 2008). As psychoanalysts, we are also interested with the scaffolding of identity structure and trying to grasp at best the internalization processes including the contribution of both parents. Furthermore, we wish to understand the way the young child will differentiate and interpret caring as maternal or paternal.

Through short clinical vignettes, we will illustrate some theoretical arguments and insist on the clinical relevance of the active fathers’ inclusion in infant mental work with families.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neurenf.2012.05.318

Emotion regulation from infancy to adolescence

Tu-S-338
Emotion regulation in early infancy: Individual differences and their correlates
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Effective regulation of emotions has been viewed as an important developmental task that serves as a prerequisite for several other developmental tasks (Lewis, 1998). Children with deficits in emotion regulation have an increased risk for the development of emotional and behavioral problems (Briggs Gowan et al., 2001, Lengua 2002). Many studies show an inverse association between maternal psychological stress load and their children’s competence in emotion regulation. On the other hand, little is known about biological risk factors that influence infants’ adaptability. Therefore, the presented study examines to what extent emotion regulation in infancy is predicted by newborns bio-behavioral adaptability and if maternal biological stress reactivity as well as mental health status moderate this association. Infant self-regulation capacities, a precursor of the emotion regulation has been assessed between day 10 and 14 using the Neonatal intensive Care unit network Neurobehavioral Scale as well as at the age of 6 months during the Face of paradigm. Maternal stress reactivity has been assessed during a laboratory stress test (TSST). Maternal symptoms of depression have been measured by the Edinburgh Postnatal depression Scale. Regression analyses point out, that the emotion regulation in infancy can be predicted both by biological stress reactivity of the mother and behavioral adaptability of the newborn child. Furthermore, results suggest a mediating role of maternal mental health status. Based on the presented results, it can be derived that newborns self-regulation capacities (apart from given maternal resources) have an impact on emotion regulation in the early childhood.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.neurenf.2012.05.319

Emotional and behavioral adjustment in children: Associations to birth conditions and sleep patterns
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The aim of the study was to assess differences in sleep patterns in preterm born children and their relation to cognitive and socioemotional development. We hypothesized that preterm children show lower scores in cognitive tests, have more socioemotional problems, and lower sleep efficiency than term born children. We also expected that sleep efficiency is more strongly rela-