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CHILD DEVELOPMENT

"The unrememberable and unforgettable" ... Doug Watt

Sue Gehardt: "Why love matters"? A readable key book on child development, drawing together material from other sources, such as Allan Schore's more difficult but equally important book; "Affect regulation and the development of the self"

Quotes:

- "The foundations are built during pregnancy and in the first two years of life... This is when the social brain is shaped, the emotional style and emotional resources established"
- "Small differences in the foundations make huge differences in the outcome"
- "The poorly handled baby develops a more reactive stress response and different biochemical patterns from a well handled baby... our minds emerge and emotions are organised in engagement with others, not in isolation"
- "Babies of agitated mothers may stay over aroused and have a sense that feelings explode out of you, there is nothing to be done about it. Well managed babies come to expect a responsive world"
- "Researchers have found that the most difficult and irritable babies do fine when with responsive parents, no such thing as a difficult baby which is largely the perception of the parent."

Difficult parents:

- 1) Neglectful; the child develops a depressed way of interacting, less positive feelings and their left brains are less active, perform less well on cognitive tasks and are insecurely attached.
- 2) Intrusive; mother may be depressed but is also angry even if covertly, and is hostile to the baby, but is also overly involved with the baby. The child is insecurely attached in an avoidant or chaotic way.

Parents ... bring the baby into the emotional world by identifying feelings and labelling them. Children of depressed parents are 6 times more likely to be depressed themselves as adults.

The Brain; Neuro-science and psychotherapy:

The brain more than doubles in weight in the first year of life, this growth is experience dependent: As are the emotional, cognitive and verbal development and their related growth and development areas within the brain.

Schore describes how the most important and vital aspect of relationship is in looking at faces, the open eyes, including the large pupil size, large dilated pupils are signs of pleasure and interest and invite a positive response. The baby smiles more, and the mothers care more: "The reciprocal and sustained, face to face gaze transactions" this directly effects the development of the brain and the release of neuroendocrine, which bring pleasure and directly stimulates the growth and development of the brain. However a negative look and interactions stimulates the production of cortisol which in turn prevents the development of the brain.

"The volume of the brain in general and in particular the size of the prefrontal cortex (which is so important in controlling and self calming) is directly affected by abuse or neglect, the earlier the abuse or neglect the smaller the brain volume"

The prefrontal part of the cortex has a unique role; linking the sensory areas of the cortex; thoughtful responses to emotions, within the emotional and survival areas of the sub-cortex, which are responsible for our emotional intelligence. This area, the orbito-frontal cortex develops after birth and does not mature until toddler-hood... this development is directly related to the baby's experience of his / her interaction with people... i.e. it is experience dependent. The first area to develop is the social brain and is highly responsive to social experience.

Experience with the Romanian orphans who were left without contact with adults has shown that they have a virtual black hole where this area of their brains should be. There is little hope of full recovery or of developing this part of the brain.

"**Mentalising**... The capacity to recognise others minds, develops as a result of healthy attachments, people who have a borderline disorder grow up avoiding his because it would involve recognising the parent's lack of love or hatred"

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Schore: “Affect regulation and the development of the self” Drawing on research in neurobiology and infant research Schore proposes that an infants affective interactions with the early human social environment directly and indelibly influence the post natal maturation of brain structures the will then regulate all future socio emotional functioning... the first relationship, with one’s mother acts as a template as it permanently shapes the individuals capacity to enter all later relationships. Early postnatal development represents an experiential shaping of the infants genetic potential. ... 70% of the cerebral cortex’s genetic content is added after birth.”

The Interpersonal World of the Infant: Daniel Stern: In this significant contribution Stern proposes a model of child development based on an assumption that the child has a sense of self at birth. This fits well with what we experience as Transactional (Script) Analysts. This is a radical shift from traditional views such as Mahler’s. Stern came to this view as a psychoanalyst from ongoing research and observations of infants.

Infants begin to experience a sense of an emergent self from birth. They are pre-designed to be aware of self – organising processes. They never experience a period of total self / other undifferentiation. There is no confusion of self and other in the beginning or at any point during infancy. They are pre-designed to be selectively responsive to external social events and never experience an autistic like phase.

During the period of 2 – 6 months the infant consolidates the core sense of self as a separate, cohesive, bounded, physical unit with a sense of their own agency, affectivity and continuity in time. There is no symbiotic like phase. In fact the subjective experiences of union with another can occur only after a core self and a core other exists.”_

The four senses of the self. Each one defines a different domain of self-experience and social relatedness.

- 1) **The emergent self 0 – 2 months.** In which the infant responds to the environment, and develops their sense of self.
- 2) **The core self 2-6 months.** The infant appears in social interaction to be an integrated whole. They are controlling their own actions, own their own affectivity, with a sense of continuity and a sense of others versus others.
- 3) **The subjective self 7-15 months.** In this phase the infant develops a sense of themselves with others. including attachment.
- 4) **The verbal self 16 months +.** During the 2nd year language emerges. A new medium to exchange with others and create shared meanings. Language causes a split, an alienation, in the self between the verbal self and the emergent, core, and inter-subjective relatedness, all of which continue to have experiences.

Mahlers Developmental Theory (From Object relations In Psychoanalytic theory Greenberg & Mitchell 1983) Mahler’s (very different) model was evolved from the Freudian drive theory and ideas regarding development, which saw the need for the child to gain genital primacy in overcoming the Oedipus complex, and also built upon object relations theory. Mahler saw the primary need as coming to terms with the human environment, with success as being the completion of the separation / individuation process, which based upon her ideas of the relationship between the self and its objects.

Mahler stressed the importance of both the conscious and unconscious attitudes of parents towards children as the key factor in their development.

1. The normal autistic phase:

The neonate appears to be oblivious to all stimulation; the infant is operating as a closed system, removed from external reality. The new born lacks the capacity to be aware of the world, or to relate to it. Limited experience of maintenance or disruption of homeostasis.

2. The Normal symbiotic Phase:

After 3 – 4 weeks the infant starts to respond to the environment. This brings with it the “dim awareness of the mother as an external object”. Cathexis is now directed towards the periphery as well as inwards. From the infants perspective there is no distinction between the self and the other object, the mother and baby form a symbiotic & omnipotent unit. The baby starts to organise experience. Initially this is categorised as good (pleasurable) or bad (painful). These are

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related to the maintenance of homeostasis. "Islands of good and bad begin to form in the as yet undifferentiated matrix of Id and Ego." Early precursors of the sense of self and others are laid down during this phase. Both the autistic and symbiotic phase fall within Freud's primary narcissism epoch.

Mahler describes Narcissism as the cathexis of a still merged image of self and object.

3. The Differentiation sub phase.

From 4 – 10 months the first phase of separation / individuation begins. (Mahler called this hatching!). Initially the child explores the mother then further a field, scanning the world then back to mother. The child develops the capacity to differentiate between outside and internal sensations, between external objects.

4. The Practising Sub phase

There are two parts to this phase: Early practising and the practising sub phase proper (From the time of walking upright). The baby can now move some way from the mother, although mother is still home base! Inanimate objects may become transitional objects (Winnicott 1965). There is an increasing differentiating from mother. The Child perceives himself as omnipotent. The mother must be willing to relinquish ownership of the child's body and respond with the child at the child's pace.

5. The Rapprochement sub phase.

The continued development and expansion of the child's world has a price. Between 15 – 18 months the child comes to a realisation that contrary to his earlier narcissistic view of himself he is in fact a very small person in a very big world. There follows a loss of the idealised self, and an increase in separation anxiety. There is also a new realisation is also that mother is a separate person. There is at 18 – 24 months a rapprochement crises, a difficult time, the manner of resolution determines many features of later personality development. During this phase the child experiences a need for help from outside, simultaneously he in the service of individuation and separation the child needs to deny that it actually comes from another person. This ambivalence leads to intense neediness often rapidly alternating with intense battles. The very intense fear of loss of mother's love, and the re-engulfment in the symbiosis is central to the splitting of good and bad objects in the transference process involved with a Borderline personality disorder. Successful resolution of this splitting process is seen as central to healthy development. (In Freudian terms the child is moving from oral to anal phase of development.)

6. The phase of Libidinal object constancy

This is an open ended phase, with the results variable throughout life. The two principle tasks are to find a stable sense of the self and others. The child attains a sense of individuated self with a sense of the other as a positively cathected presence. This permits adequate functioning in the absence of the other. (Psychological constancy similar to Piaget's object constancy).

- Separation = emergence from the symbiosis with mother.
- Individuation = achievements marking the child's own characteristics

Attachment theory: Bowlby 1951 wrote that mother love in infancy is as important for mental health as vitamins and proteins are for physical health. Individuals with any kind of psychiatric disorder always show a disturbance in their social relationships.... This has been caused by disturbed bonding in childhood. There is a general tendency in infancy to seek attachments. The strength of attachment refers to the intensity of the behaviours, the security to confidence the child has in the attachment figure being there when needed. (Nb. Famous experiments with monkeys by Harlow and Zimmerman 1959, the warm cloth mother was more important than the wire but feeding mother)

There are 3 types of attachment in infants in the "strange situation" experiment designed by Ainsworth

- (15%) Anxious – avoidant. (Indifference to relationships, the mother is largely ignored)
- (70%) Securely attached.
- (15%) Anxious – resistant. (Ambivalent re relationships, the baby is wary and unsettled in mothers presence)
- Main et al. (1991) describe a 4th attachment type... Chaotic: unorganised / traumatic unresolved grief is a category used in the Adult attachment interview... This is where the parent is feared, as fear normally creates and increases proximity seeking behaviour however when the parent is feared the child faces internal conflict and becomes chaotic.