

# Attachment and Affect Regulation: Implications for Psychotherapy

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Sexual Abuse Consortium

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## Winnicott's famous quote

“I once said: ‘there is no such thing as an infant’, meaning, of course, that whenever one finds an infant one finds maternal care, and without maternal care, there would be no infant.”

- Donald Winnicott

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# The infant-caregiver system

“...stems from the recurrent interactions between a mother with her agenda, a father with his agenda, a generational family system with its agenda within a social system with its agenda. Into the midst of this comes a new infant with its agenda.

- Louis Sander

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# Nature/nurture

“The self-organization of the developing brain occurs within the context of a relationship with another self, another brain.”

- Alan Schore

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# Mutual regulation

“Mother-infant systems [involve] mutual regulation of cerebral, biochemical and autonomic process: through these ‘hidden’ mechanisms, the adult brain works as an external regulatory element, enhancing the development of the infant’s immature homeostatic system.”

- Massimo Ammaniti and Cristina Trentini  
referencing Hofer

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# Non verbal communication

“The sound, pitch and melody of the maternal voice indicate to the infant the maternal wish for engagement and the responses of approval, affective relatedness, prohibition and reprimand. The maternal voice also reveals the affective state of the mother.

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## Continued

“Communications between mother and child involve their entire bodily being; voice, posture, gestures, closeness of bodies, and ways in which their bodies fit into each other in moments of physical contact.”

- Ana-Maria Rizzuto

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# Mutuality

- “Bi-directional co-constructive process in which *both* the parent and the infant coordinate with each other, and organize each other’s behavior and experience.”
  - Emotions are regulators of interpersonal contact and relationships, not just state-regulators of the infant’s self.
- Beatrice Beebe

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## Not a blank slate

“The infant comes into the world with biological preparedness for participating in social interaction... [using] built-in capacities for initiating, maintaining, and terminating social interactions with others.”

- Robert Emde

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## Like-me

“Infants are launched on their career of interpersonal relations with the basic perception: ‘Here is something like me.’”

- Andrew Meltzoff

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# Elements of attachment

“An insistent interest in *maintaining proximity* to one or a very few selected persons (usually but by no means necessary biological relatives); the tendency to use these individuals as a *secure base* for exploration of unfamiliar environments; and *flight to attachment figure(s) as a haven of safety in times of alarm*”

- Mary Main

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# Creating secure attachment

“Psychobiologically regulated affect transactions that maximize positive and minimize negative affect co-create a secure attachment bond between mother and infant.”

- Allan Schore

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# Attachment enables self-regulation

“In the securely attached individual the representation of the attachment relationship with the primary caregiver encodes an implicit expectation that homeostatic disruptions will be set right, allowing the child to self-regulate functions which previously required the caregiver’s external regulation.”

- Allan Schore

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# Attachment builds the brain

“Repeated experiences of moving from regulation to dysregulation and back to a regulated state are stored in networks of sensory, motor and emotional memory. The participation of caretakers in this process and their repeated assistance in moving an infant back to regulated states build and reinforce these circuits.”

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## Continued

“The experience, memory, and control of transition states become encoded as implicit memories of positive state transitions. From a psychoanalytic perspective, these implicit memories are our autoregulatory ‘good inner objects’ that bias us toward restoring regulation when we are challenged.”

- Louis Cozolino

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# Brain-building

“Thus caretakers do more than regulate the psychobiological state of an infant: *they activate the growth of the brain through emotional and reciprocal interactions.*”

-Louis Cozolino referencing Robert Emde

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# Secure attachment

“Positive expectations toward others and a sense of connectedness to them, as well as self-confidence and a sense of worth, are all logical outcomes of receiving routinely responsive care.”

- Alan Sroufe

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# Early Childhood Mental Health

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# Elements of ECMH

- **Lineage** (Delma Fraiberg; Alicia Lieberman and Patricia Van Horn; Marian Birch)
- **Home visiting** (psychotherapy in the kitchen)
- **Cultural sensitivity**
- **Relationship-based** (no such thing as an infant)
- **Nondidactic development guidance**
- **Concrete assistance with problems of living** (a.k.a. case management)
- **Dyadic therapy**
- **Awareness of intergenerational transmission** (ghosts in the nursery)
- **Enhancing the positive**
- **Controversial elements**

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# Infant-parent psychotherapy: ghosts in the nursery

“When our therapy has brought the parent to remember and re-experience his childhood anxiety and suffering, the ghosts depart, and the afflicted parents become the protectors of their children against the repetition of their own conflicted past.

- Fraiberg, Adelson and Shapiro

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# Home visiting

“With home visits, therapists are routinely exposed to extreme chaotic, unpredictable, and often terribly painful environments, behavior, emotions, and narratives.

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# Continued

“They have none of the props that provide a containment function for office practice...a room with a door...; the structure provided by charging or collecting fees; or the necessity for the patient to come to the therapist’s office, guaranteeing some minimal level of willingness and commitment to our therapeutic work.”

- Marian Birch

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# Other ghosts in the nursery

“Whether the White participant is thoughtless or thoughtful, unaware or conscious, a lifelong battler against racism of someone proud of their prejudices, the ghosts of the victims and perpetrators of the Middle Passage, slavery and segregation are right there with us.”

- Richard Ruth

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# Watch, Wait and Wonder

“Together [mother and infant] renegotiated their relationship, using the attentive, facilitating presence and engagement of the clinician as a secure base from which they explored their relationship.”

- Cohen, Muir, Lojkasek, et al.

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# Implications for Psychotherapy

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# Clinical question

“How much of adaptive change can be mobilized by pre-reflective, automatic empathic processes (that are evoked and modeled) and how much adaptive change requires reflective conscious processing.”

- Robert Emde

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# Therapist and patient have:

“mutually regulated interactions of affect, mood, arousal and rhythm. Nonverbal interactions at the microlevel of rhythm matching, modulation of vocal contour, pausing, postural matching and gaze regulation are usually not given adequate recognition in the treatment process.”

- Beebe and Lachman

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# Attachment processes, not categories

“The clinical application of attachment theory lies in sensitizing clinicians to observe and recognize attachment phenomena at multiple levels of behavior and discourse and to understand how the attachment system works rather than to formally administer attachment assessments or assign formal attachment categories.”

- Arietta Slade

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# Attachment Styles

“It is important not to consider attachment styles as necessarily rigid classifications but to see them as psychological positions that are available and are more or less habitually taken up, fallen into, or refused... An individual has a number of internal working models for attachment, one of which is usually dominant.”

- James Pollard

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# Schema aka transference

“We never experience a person as totally new but as some blend of our expectations, implicit schema and who he or she really is [because] implicit memory processes are faster, automatic, and guide explicit memory and conscious experience.”

- Louis Cozolino

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# Mirror neurons

- “Premotor neurons that fire both when an action is executed and when it is observed being performed by someone else
  - Translating the results of visual analysis of an observed movement...into something that the observer is able to understand”
- Vittoria Gallese

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# Recognition of intention

“I understand your intention by understanding what my own intention would be, if I were doing what you are doing”

- Pally quoted by Beatrice Beebe, et al.

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# Mirroring and theory of mind

- “Our own internal state, generated via mirroring, becomes our theory of what others are feeling”
  - Enhancing the survival of an individual through anticipation of the behavior of others
  - Enhancing the individual’s desirability as a collaborative member of the group and reproductive mate”
- Louis Cozolino

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# Embodied simulation

“Map others’ actions onto our own motor representations, as well as others’ emotions and sensations onto our own visceromotor and somatosensory representations...a crucial functional mechanism for empathy”

- Vittoria Gallese

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