

INTRODUCTION

This seminar has been designed in the light of accruing research evidence of the importance of very early experiences in the development of a core sense of self that is present throughout life. We now have much clearer understanding about how the emotional development of a baby is influenced by parental states of mind and emotional histories. The baby-self that develops during pregnancy and the first year of life resides deeply within us throughout adulthood, and emerges in intimate relationships and challenging situations throughout the life span.

This seminar will trace the reciprocal parent and baby co-constructions of this core self from a psychodynamic perspective, exploring how it is possible to work psychotherapeutically with people who are both traumatised by becoming a parent and those who have troubled object-relational worlds because of experiences in infancy. We will begin by exploring why becoming a parent can lead to a serious emotional breakdown and the impact this can have on a baby's developing sense of self as she or he strives to elicit a caring response to their complete dependency and primitive neediness.

We will go on to consider some of the tensions and risks involved in working with the parents of unloved or feared babies, and look at therapeutic approaches that can help to dissolve projections onto the infant. Finally, we will explore how repetition compulsion can manifest in the parent-infant relationship and the parent-therapist relationship.

This seminar has been designed to demonstrate a therapeutic strategy for psychotherapists working with parents, either as adults who have come into the consulting room to seek help because they are struggling with difficult feelings towards their infant(s), or those who come into therapy as a mother-and-baby dyad or family group. It will also be of importance to therapists working with adults who had traumatic infancies.

AMANDA JONES

AMANDA JONES PhD, is an Honorary Associate Professor of Warwick Medical School and head of North East London NHS Foundation Trust's Tier 3 Perinatal Parent Infant Mental Health Service. She trained as a family therapist and then did her doctoral research at the Tavistock/UCL, which investigated how the maternal use of 'projective identification' can derail a baby's development. In collaboration with the Anna Freud Centre, Amanda was involved in the Channel Four documentaries 'Help me love my baby', winner of the 2007 Royal Society of Television's best factual programmes award. She speaks at national and international conferences on psychodynamic parent-infant treatment and teaches on the clinical psychology programmes at UCL and UEL.

PROGRAMME

9.30 Registration and coffee

10.00 Psychodynamic, systemically sensitive therapeutic treatment for parents and babies

In this presentation, Amanda Jones will consider why, for many parents, pregnancy and the first year of their baby's life can lead to a serious emotional breakdown. Research has demonstrated how a parent's disturbance can derail a baby's development and begin the construction of an insecure and frightening object relational world. With the help of video material Amanda will introduce a way of working therapeutically with the parent-baby relationship.

11.15 Coffee

11.45 Primitive anxieties and risk

In this presentation Amanda will explore the tension for a therapist working with high levels of risk in relation to the baby. Some mothers see hated aspects of themselves in their babies and then can feel overwhelmingly hostile towards their baby. This work has a particular impact on the therapist who may have to bear knowing for some time that a baby isn't loved. As the therapy progresses these projections may be lifted from the baby but need then to be located for some time in the therapist, who then becomes the repository of hateful feelings.

13.15 Lunch

14.15 "Remembering, Repeating and Working Through": revisiting Freud's concept of repetition compulsion in perinatal breakdown.

In this presentation Amanda will revisit Freud's concept of repetition compulsion and explore how it can manifest in both the parent infant dyad and the parent-therapist relationship. Amanda will show how a mother's motivation to do better for her baby can be a powerful ally to the therapeutic process and enable her to face and resolve previously buried early experiences.