Object Relations Psychotherapy

- Balance of cognitive & emotional factors
- Unconscious organization of mental experience
- Emotional communication is largely unconscious
- Unconscious resonance with self of therapist is most fundamental tool of therapy

Right Brain
The Seat of the Unconscious

- Primed to read other’s minds
- Ten times faster than left brain
- For instance in analytic empathy
- Tune the unconscious
- Verbalize the messages
- Bridge the cross-brain gap
Mirror Neurons

Mirror neurons in the motor cortex fire in association:
- To an action that is done by oneself
- To an action done by another
- In association to sounds or smells that signify an action

Mirror Neurons

Mirror neurons create:
A mirror image inside the self that echoes the inside of the other

Mirror neurons provide:
the neurological basis for “a shared manifold of intersubjectivity”

(Gallese 2005)

Mirror Neurons

- Transfer of emotional states from one mind to another is ubiquitous process
- Facial expression is universal component of emotional states (Tompkins)
- Mirror neurons for facial muscles (Ferrari)
Mirror Neurons

- Perception of emotion in the other person creates a resonant psychological state
- In long term relationships, each person affects the other's state of brain organization (Tronick 1996; Schore 2003)

Mirror Neurons in Couples & Families

- Intimate partners’ mirror neurons fire in mutual response to each other
  - Fire more in familiar relationships
- New pathways etched in all minds
- Basic foundation of unconscious transmission in psychotherapy

Fairbairn (Before brain scans)

- Pristine ego at birth eager to relate
- Mother-Infant collaborate on construction and deconstruction
- Other minds infuse the infant’s
  - brain structure
  - mental architecture
Development of Mind

- Infant brain responds to parental affect
- Muscular activity, neuronal activity
- Reaches out for & receives signals
- Increasing connectivity and pruning
- Mind matures and differentiates
- A disseminated, dynamic system

Neurological growth and Affect Regulation

- Right brain grows
  - in playful interaction
  - emotional exchange
- Left brain grows in verbal interaction
- Both require positive relationship context
- Progression
  - from parental soothing
  - to co-regulation of affect
  - to autonomous regulation

Effects of Anxious Relationship, Neglect and Trauma

- Smaller brains
- Right brain impoverished
  - Constrained connectedness
- Emotional brain
  - Little flexibility
  - Little modulation
  - Reactivity
Impaired Capacity to delay, process, review

- Stimulation of right amygdala
  - Danger center of brain
- No right fronto-orbital cortex inhibition
- Automatic defensiveness
- Blocking incoming information
  - In case it will be overwhelming
  - Cannot learn from experience

The Link (El Vinculó)
(Pichon-Rivière 1950s)

- Drew on Fairbairn, Klein, others
- Intermediate area between internal world & external world of interaction
- Construct shared organization
- Link organized by persons in group
- Link then organizes these individuals

Link: definition and visualization

- Intermediate area between two subjects
- Shared interactional patterns
- Organizing the individual
- Think not of a link between thought and feeling, male and female elements as in Freud and Klein
- Think not of a bond or link in a chain
- But think of the whole chain link fence
We are born into links and we live in links
Links exist in the spaces in-between
They are in the air we move in
We breathe them in,
As fish breathe the water they swim in

Two Axes
- Vertical: Between Generations
  - Previous generation and succeeding generations
- Horizontal: Between Individuals & within Groups
  - Connected to
    - Family
    - Institutions, Schools
    - Village
    - Wider Society
    - Culture
Each person is born into and lives in links:

- Ongoing bond
- What is interpersonal becomes intrapsychic
- What is intrapsychic becomes interpsychic

(Bolognini)

The link is expressed individually in:

- Dreams
- Individual actions
- Symptoms
- Bodily experiences

Transference and Countertransference Psychodynamic Therapy
The Therapeutic Relationship

- Therapist brings capacity for holding, tolerating anxiety & loss through joining individual’s or family’s experience & providing space for understanding
- Analogy to mother’s reverie
- Allows individual patient or family members to confront individual & shared defenses, & face anxiety.

The Therapeutic Relationship Offers

- An environment similar enough for unconscious patterns to emerge
- But different enough for identification and reworking

Transference

- Behavior in therapeutic setting that repeats old behaviors in old relationships
- Brings the internal world of patient, couple or family into therapeutic setting
- Acts on the therapist
- Gets into the therapist’s internal world
Countertransference

- The other arm of interaction
- Experienced in the inner world of therapist
- Transference experience resonates with therapist’s inner structure of aspects of self and of internal objects

Cycle of Transference and Countertransference

- Mutual and continuous cycle of projection and introjection of affective experience
- Affective communication is 10 times faster than verbal communication

Transference/Countertransference Exchange Matches Patient’s Internal Objects with Therapist’s Internal Objects

- Organizes the experience beyond what makes intellectual or conscious sense through the link between patient & therapist
- Unconscious communication occurs through resonance with therapist’s internal objects
- Action of projective & introjective identification in therapeutic setting informs therapist about patient, couple or family’s unconscious organization and dynamics
**Fairbairn**

- Fundamental need for relationships
- Introjection
- Schizoid Process – Splitting
- The self is made of multiple parts of ego and object in dynamic interaction

**Melanie Klein**

**Projective Identification**

- Splitting off & repression of painful parts of mind
  Thoughts, fantasies, affects, internal objects and relationships
- Repression inside the self
Melanie Klein

Projective Identification

• Projection into other person
  – for communication
  – for help in dealing with pain
  – for safe-keeping

Melanie Klein

Introjective Identification

• Taking in of projective material of other person’s mind
• Being influenced by and identifying with mental contents that have been introjected

Projective and Introjective Identification

• Basis of empathy, alliance, transference and countertransference
• Sexual resonance
• Intimacy
• Problems when
  – projections fit
  – projections are refused
  – introjections are alien
**Container/Contained**  
(Bion, 1962/1967)

- The baby’s unthought anxieties
- Projected into the mother’s mind
- Mother unconsciously holds in mind
- Transformation through mother’s *reverie*
- Child’s mind structured through interaction with parent minds

**Winnicott**

- The Holding Relationship
- Playing in the Gap between Mother and Child
Dicks 1967

**Projective Identification in Marriage**

Perceptions of the spouse occur “as if the spouse were part of oneself. The partner is then treated according to how this aspect of oneself was valued: spoilt and cherished, or denigrated and persecuted.”

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**Projective Identification in Families & Couples**

Projective and Introjective Identification: modes of unconscious family communication

Aspects of personality and difficulty divided between family members

Magnification of aspects of individual personality on behalf of the whole family

Unconscious assignment through: scapegoating, anxiety, kindness, heroic or loving qualities
Countertransference in Therapy

- Reflects therapist’s role as providing holding context to individual, couple or family
- Resonates with therapist’s internal objects
- Arises as therapist meets patient, couple or family at boundary, taking in shared projective identifications

The Interpersonal Unconscious

- Constructed Interpersonally
  - Via non-verbal communication in family
- Expressed Interpersonally
  - Via interpersonal interaction
- Experienced Interpersonally
  - In intimate relationships
  - In therapy
- Actively growing in social environment

References