

## ***Different Perspectives: A Review of Some Current Literature***

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**ABSTRACT:** Recent literature is contributing new ways of conceptualizing human development which will affect understanding and treating of clients. This paper compares some of the papers in the latest edition of the *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* with the work of Daniel N. Stern as presented in *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*.

In a review of the 1982 Volume of the *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* (Saari, 1984), I noted that the contents of that year's edition provided evidence that psychoanalytic theory was evolving in accordance with the rapid expansion of knowledge about the course of child development. At present, it appears likely that 1985 will prove to be a significant year in this theoretical evolution because of the publication of Stern's *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*. Stern's work is an integration of recent research with a new psychoanalytic perspective that is certain to provide strong competition for, if not actually to supplant, the now dominant Mahlerian model of separation-individuation. Stern, in fact, directly contradicts that model:

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

During the period from two to six months, infants consolidate the sense of a core 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 sense of a core self and a core other exists. Union experi-

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ences are thus viewed as the successful result of actively organizing the experience of self-being-with-another, rather than as the product of a passive failure of the ability to differentiate self from other (p. 10).

Stern's work is not mentioned in the 1985 *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* and it is too early to expect to see a reflected influence in this volume. Instead it should provide a picture of the similarities and differences in two perspectives prior to the full impact of Stern's book. The editors of the *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* hold views that are in accord with an ego psychological perspective. Thus, for example, Mahler's work is specifically cited in the bibliographies of six out of the seven articles in the section on Development and in ten of the total 24 articles in all of Volume 40. In contrast, Kohut, the leading theoretician of self psychology which is the point of view Stern finds most compatible with current infant research, is cited in only two articles in the entire annual and in neither of these are Kohut's clinical ideas central to the main focus of the article. In order to understand, in at least a little more depth, these apparently different approaches it is necessary to examine the ideas involved.

It would, however, be an error to assume that the contents of the *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* represent a unitary point of view. Indeed, this is far from the case. Erlich and Blatt, in their article on "Narcissism and Object Love: The Metapsychology of Experience," divide psychoanalytic theory into three periods—the instinctual, the structural, and object relations. Points of view normally considered representative of each of these periods can be found in articles within Volume 40. For example, "Both Sides of the Barrier: Some Reflections on Childhood Fantasy" by a series of authors from the Anna Freud Centre in London utilizes a rather orthodox economic point of view similar to very early ego psychology. Bergman's "The Effect of Role Reversal on Delayed Marriage," calls upon oedipal theory in a manner that clearly reflects the structural period. At the same time the annual's lead article and, in fact, most of the articles in the section on Development are representative of very current thinking within the object relations point of view. It can be argued, however, that self psychology has become a fourth period in psychoanalytic theory which is not represented in the *Study*.

Stern's social orientation is central to his work and indeed is highlighted by the word *interpersonal* in the title of his book. He says: "Another way to put all of this is that the infant's life is so thoroughly social that most of the things the infant does, feels and perceives occur in different kinds of relationships" (p. 118). In some sense object relations theory has always been interpersonal in its considerations of interactions between the self and the object, however, it has been ambivalently interper-

sonal. This is illustrated by Mahler's careful retention of the economic point of view in which the object was basically only a necessary external condition for the operation of a biologically determined drive (Greenberg and Mitchell, 1983). Yet, the fact that psychoanalytic theory as a whole has been moving in this direction is very apparent in the 1985 annual.

The lead article in the section on Development is "Internalization and Psychological Development Throughout the Life Cycle" by Rebecca Smith Behrends and Sidney J. Blatt. Internalization is a traditional psychoanalytic concept, originally a process associated with the oral stage. Even in orthodox conceptualizations, however, it became controversial since there appeared to be a need for differentiating qualitative aspects of the acquisition or modification of inner structures at the various levels of development. Thus, it became common to think of internalization as a more mature and specific process. As object relations became the dominant trend in psychoanalytic thinking, internalization frequently is utilized to relate to the build up of self and object representations, thus becoming somewhat divorced from the concept of the oral phase.

Behrends and Blatt in their article, however, note:

In this definition of internalization, the emphasis is upon the representation of aspects of *relationships*, not upon a conception of a representational world populated by fantasied objects or part objects which are replicas of people in the external world (pp. 22–23).

The lead article is by no means the only one in which the importance of relationships is evident. For example, Elizabeth Young-Bruell in her "Psychoanalysis and Biography" points out a similarity between these two fields as resting upon the fact that biographies are histories of relationships. She obviously must believe that psychoanalysis is also concerned with relationships.

Beatrice Priel in a brief report of a crosscultural study entitled, "On Mirror Image Anxiety," actually reports data and a conclusion very similar to some found in Stern's work. She indicates that the anxiety caused in children by first encounters with mirror images may be due to the fact that in these images there is a synchrony of movement which is not expected. What she supposes infants expect is the more *interactional* mode which occurs in normal human contact. As something of a sidelight, it is interesting that in this article which focuses so much on mirroring, there is no mention at all of Kohut's work.

Stern's work, like Mahler's, really focuses on mother-infant interactions. In some sense, therefore, it can be said that at least two of the articles in the 1985 *Psychoanalytic Study of the Child* attempt to take an interactional point of view further than either Stern or Mahler. Peter B.

Neubauer, in "Preoedipal Objects and Object Primacy," is critical of the basically dyadic model of interaction which focuses only on the mother and the child:

We still retain a dyadic model if we merely extend our studies of mother-child interactions to father-child or sibling interactions. In contrast, I wish to stress the impact of multiple relationships on the child's development (p. 169).

Martin Leichtman's "The Influence of an Older Sibling on the Separation-Individuation Process" is perhaps more valuable for his lovely detailed case history of a little girl's relationship with her older brother than for his theoretical contributions, but is also an attempt to move beyond dyadic formulations nevertheless.

Two other articles in the 1985 annual seem to be questioning the presumed implications of orthodox drive theory for interpersonal relationships. Richard Isay's "Analytic Therapy of Homosexual Men" questions generalizations about the pathology of homosexual men and Kyle Dean Pruett's "Oedipal Configurations in Young Father-Raised Children" notes that the capacity to play an adequate caretaking role is not gender determined. Neither of these two articles, however, makes any real attempt to consider the theoretical implications of the observations reported. Stern does not deal directly with issues re the oedipus complex as this occurs at an age older than is included in his study. He is, however, quite direct about his rejection of drive theory.

The classical view of instinct has proven unoperationalizable and has not been of great heuristic value for the observed infant. Also, while there is no question that we need a concept of motivation, it clearly will have to be reconceptualized in terms of many discrete, but interrelated, motivational systems such as attachment, competence-mastery, curiosity and others. It is of no help to imagine that all of these are derivatives of a simple unitary motivational system (p. 238).

It is undoubtedly true that the question of whether or not to retain the drive theory is an important issue in current theoretical debates. At the same time it is equally true that dichotomizing theories on the basis of this particular issue alone may mask other similarities underlying the direction of theory evolution. For example, in their article Behrends and Blatt note:

We are attempting to develop a *psychological* theory which deals with personal meaning. The *experience* of relatedness is the issue, not necessarily direct behavior or actual observable events (p. 28).

Stern similarly indicates:

Because we cannot know the subjective world that infants inhabit, we must invent it, so as to have a starting place for hypothesis-making. This book is such an invention. It is a working hypothesis about infants' subjective experience of their own social life (p. 4).

Thus, the movement away from a focus on an elaborate metapsychological theory and toward what Kohut called the "experience-near" would seem to be a common trend.

At the same time differences between the schools of thought within psychoanalysis, today, do exist. Brenner in his article "Some Contributions of Adult Analysis to Child Analysis," for example, claims that one of the things child analysts have learned over the years is that they should restrict themselves to interpreting rather than being "real" in their interactions. Brenner's emphasis on interpretation is indeed different from the focus on empathy amongst the self psychologists. In fact, however, Stern suggests a possible way of thinking about the differences between the therapeutic work in these two schools. He indicates that there are four 'domains' of the self which are 1) the emergent self, 2) the core self, 3) the subjective self, and 4) the verbal self. He suggests that the therapist approaching the patient from the point of view of an interpretive technique will first encounter the domain of the verbal self, while the therapist approaching the patient from the empathic point of view will first encounter the subjective self.

Stern's idea of domains is, in fact, worthy of additional attention. He conceptualizes these four domains as beginning at different ages in the child's development. However, they are not phases with each succeeding one supplanting the earlier domain. Instead all four remain as a part of the self throughout the life cycle. Furthermore, there is no need to assume that difficulties in any one domain must have roots at the period during which the domain was in its initial formative stage: "Because all senses of the self, once formed, remain active, growing, subjective processes throughout life, any one of them is vulnerable to deformations occurring at any life point" (p. 260). In addition Stern suggests that such issues as trust and dependency are life issues which have developmental lines for each individual that run through all four domains.

Recently many writers have been critical of the type of phase theory of which Mahler's is an example on the basis of its being too linear in conception. However, until Stern there seemed to be no alternative formulation that could offer the clinician a more satisfactory manner in which to interpret data from therapy. Stern's work, therefore, may not only prove to be a theory of child development that can support a self psychological

point of view, but it may also offer a framework which is actually more capable of encompassing the complexities encountered in attempting to treat people at various points in their lives. These considerations are a major part of the reason for believing that Stern's work will become a serious contender for becoming the basis of the foremost paradigm for clinical work.

The impact of Stern's work of psychoanalytic theory, then, is very much worth watching. In addition to the above there are at least three other important conceptualizations worth being alert to:

1. Stern approaches the realm of the interpersonal and the experiential through the notion of intersubjectivity. This is a concept which is becoming increasingly in use within the school of self psychology (see, for example, Atwood and Stolorow, 1984). This is an appealing concept which offers the promise of being able to bridge the gap that has previously seemed to exist between approaches dealing with the intrapsychic and those dealing with the interpersonal.
2. Stern calls the affects of which we are used to talking—mad, sad, glad, scared to death and some combination of these—the categorical affects. But he notes that these are not the central elements in what he describes as affect attunement in mother-infant relationships. Instead he indicates that the “vitality” affects such as intensity, shape, and rhythm are much more involved in these caretaking relationships. Perhaps a concept of vitality affects might greatly enhance our comprehension of therapeutic interactions.
3. Stern postulates that early memory is essentially recorded in episodic form. This concept could help the field make considerable progress toward undoing the artificial divisions that have been created by seeing perception, affect, and cognition as separate processes to be studied by different professions. It is, as Stern points out, clear that in the experience of the child these things occur all at the same time.

It seems likely that in the coming years a dialogue will occur, either overtly or covertly, between Stern and those who will support his work and the followers of an earlier Mahlerian theory. Whatever specific conflicts or resolutions occur, it is predictable that the clinician will benefit from the evolution of a broadened and more articulated range of viewpoints from which to comprehend clients. And social work clinicians should find this particularly beneficial since the movement toward the

interpersonal and the experiential have a particular affinity with traditional social work practice areas.

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