

The Origins of the Embodied Self: Parental Embodied Mentalising



Mentalisation

- perceiving, understanding, and interpreting actions/ behaviours in terms of intentional mental states
- Behaviour predictable and meaningful
- Affect regulation and self-organisation
- Constructed in the attachment relationship
- Promotes secure attachment

(Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target, 2002; Fonagy, Gergely, & Target, 2007)

Empirical Findings

- **Parental mentalising and attachment security**

Arnott & Meins, 2007; Fonagy, Steele, & Steele, 1991; Meins, Fernyhough, Fradley, & Tuckey, 2001; Slade, Bernbach, Grienberger, Wohlgemuth Levy, & Locker, 2005

- **Child's attachment security and mentalising**

Fonagy, 1997; Meins, Fernyhough, Russell, & Clark-Carter, 1998

- **Parental mentalising and child's socio-emotional development**

Fonagy et al., 1995, 2002; Katz & Windercker-Nelson, 2004; Meins et al., 2002, 2003; Sharp & Fonagy, 2008

Measuring Parental Mentalising

- **Parental RF - PDI** (Slade, 2002, 2005; Slade, Bernbach, Grienberger, Levy, & Locker, 2004)
- **Insightfulness Assessment** (Oppenheim, Koren-Karie, & Sagi, 2001)
- **Mind-Mindedness** (Meins 1997, 1999)

Verbal Parental Mentalising

- RF initially used interchangeably with mentalisation
- *“The term RF refers to the **operationalisation** of the psychological processes underlying the capacity to mentalise”* (Fonagy et al., 2002, p. 24)
- *“RF is an **overt manifestation, in narrative, of an individual’s mentalising capacity**”* (Slade, 2005, p. 269)

Intermediate Summary

1. By one year of age the infant has established an IWM of the attachment relationship with primary caregiver
2. Parental mentalising predicts this attachment security representation of the child and other developmental outcomes
3. Parental mentalising is measured to date solely via verbal assessments
4. We can comfortably assume that very young children cannot comprehend the subtleties of the content of speech of parents when talking to or about them

BUT...

- What is the preverbal child's *experience* of relationship with mother?
- What is the *mechanism* through which parental mental capacities come to shape those of infant?
- Evidence for independent neural mechanisms for explicit and implicit mentalising (e.g., Lieberman, 2007)
- Some other form of communication which makes sense to the infant, is likely to be taking place: **nonverbal interactive communication**

Nonverbal Developmental Research

- **Eye-contact/ gaze patterns**

(Beebe, 2000; Beebe & Lachmann, 1998; Fogel, 1993; Jaffe & Feldstein, 1970; Trevarthen, 1979)

- **Vocal rhythms**

(Beebe, Jaffe, Lachmann, Feldstein, Crown, & Jasnow, 2000; Papoušek & Papoušek, 1987)

- **Head movements** (Beebe & Stern, 1977, Beebe et al., 2010; Jaffe et al., 2001)

- **Where whole body – either categorical/discrete or not dyadic**

Parental Embodied Mentalising

- Reconceptualising parental mentalising
Non-declarative, implicit, out of awareness
A way of knowing through the body
- Investigation through the kinaesthetic lens
- Subtle movement qualities - '*how*' rather than '*what*'; the *shade*, not the *colour*
- Intentional mental states as whole-body kinaesthetic manifestations

Parental Embodied Mentalising (PEM): Definition

1. The capacity to implicitly conceive, comprehend, and extrapolate the infant's mental states from the infant's *whole-body kinaesthetic expressions*, and
2. Adjust one's own kinaesthetic patterns accordingly.

Theoretical Background of PEM

- **The bodily self** (Freud, 1923)
- **The indwelling of the psyche in the soma**
(Winnicott, 1956, 1960, 1962)
- **Mind = Psyche + Soma** (Winnicott, 1949, 1988)
- **Skin ego** → **Secondary skin**
(Bick, 1968; Anzieu, 1989; McDougall, 1989; Ogden, 1989; Tustin, 1992).
- **Motoric ego** → **Character Armour** (Lowen, 1958; Reich, 1933).

Relational approach to PEM

“There is no such thing as a body, there is only a body in relationship with another body”

(Orbach, 2004, p. 28)

- Relational dialectic bodily self (Aron, 1998; White, 2004; Winnicott, 1962)
- Systems theory (e.g., Fogel, 1993; Sander, 1977)
- The body as a bidirectional platform of relational experiences
- Embodied Attachment

Vitality Affects

*“Many qualities of feeling that occur do not fit into our existing lexicon or taxonomy of affects. These elusive qualities are better captured by **dynamic, kinetic** terms, such as ‘surging’, ‘fading away’, ‘fleeting’...we are never without their presence, **whether or not we are conscious of them...the infant is immersed in these ‘feelings of vitality’...the social world experienced by the infant is primarily one of vitality affects before it is a world of formal acts”** (Stern, 1985, pp. 54-57).*

PEM Construct- Premises

1. Mental states can, and are, expressed bodily and kinaesthetically
2. One's interpretation of the kinaesthetic incidents of another as expressions of mental states generates a change in the movement of the one observing or interacting with the mover
3. The degree to which a parent can interpret the infant's kinaesthetic occurrences as mentalistic incidents, and as a result respond to them kinesthetically, can serve as an assessment of parental mentalisation.

Measuring PEM

- Rooted in Movement Analysis paradigms

(e.g. Kestenberg, 1967, 1975; Laban & Rod, 1975; Shahar-Levi, 2004)

- An observational dyadic measure

- Focus on kinaesthetic and rhythmic expressions of intentionality

- Embodied circles of rupture and repair

(e.g., Benjamin, 1998; Greenspan & Wieder, 1997; Tronick, 1989)

PEM coding System

- Observational
- No verbal input = 'mute' mode
- Analysis unit – Embodied Circle of Communication (ECC):
- A multi-step nonverbal dialogue in which two active participants respond to the kinesthetically manifested mental states of each other in a reciprocal fashion (Greenspan & Wieder, 1997).
- Identifying temporal boundaries of ECCs
- Classifying ECC according to type and subtype
- Scoring a Global PEM score

Kinaesthetic Qualities

- **Tension Flow** (distress vs. comfort)
- **Tempo** (degree of excitation)
- **Directionality** (pleasure vs. displeasure)
- **Pathways** (executing intent)
- **Space** (self and interpersonal boundaries)
- **Shifting** (managing change)

PEM ECC Types

1. Embodied Support

- a. Holding
- b. Sculpting

2. Body Ownership

- a. Facilitating affect regulation
- b. Body manipulation
- c. Body stimulation

3. Transitions

4. Promoting Exploration

Study Design

- 150 dyads from the NICHD Study
- Longitudinal study – 6, 15, 54 months
- IV: PEM, maternal sensitivity
- DV: attachment security, social, academic, and behavioural outcomes

Main findings

- Global PEM scores correlated with HOME maternal sensitivity ($r_{(148)} = .33^{***}$)
- Global PEM scores predicted secure Vs. insecure attachment security $\chi^2_{(5, N=150)} = 4.07^*$
- Specifically secure Vs. avoidant infants $\chi^2_{(3, N=100)} = 5.89^{**}$

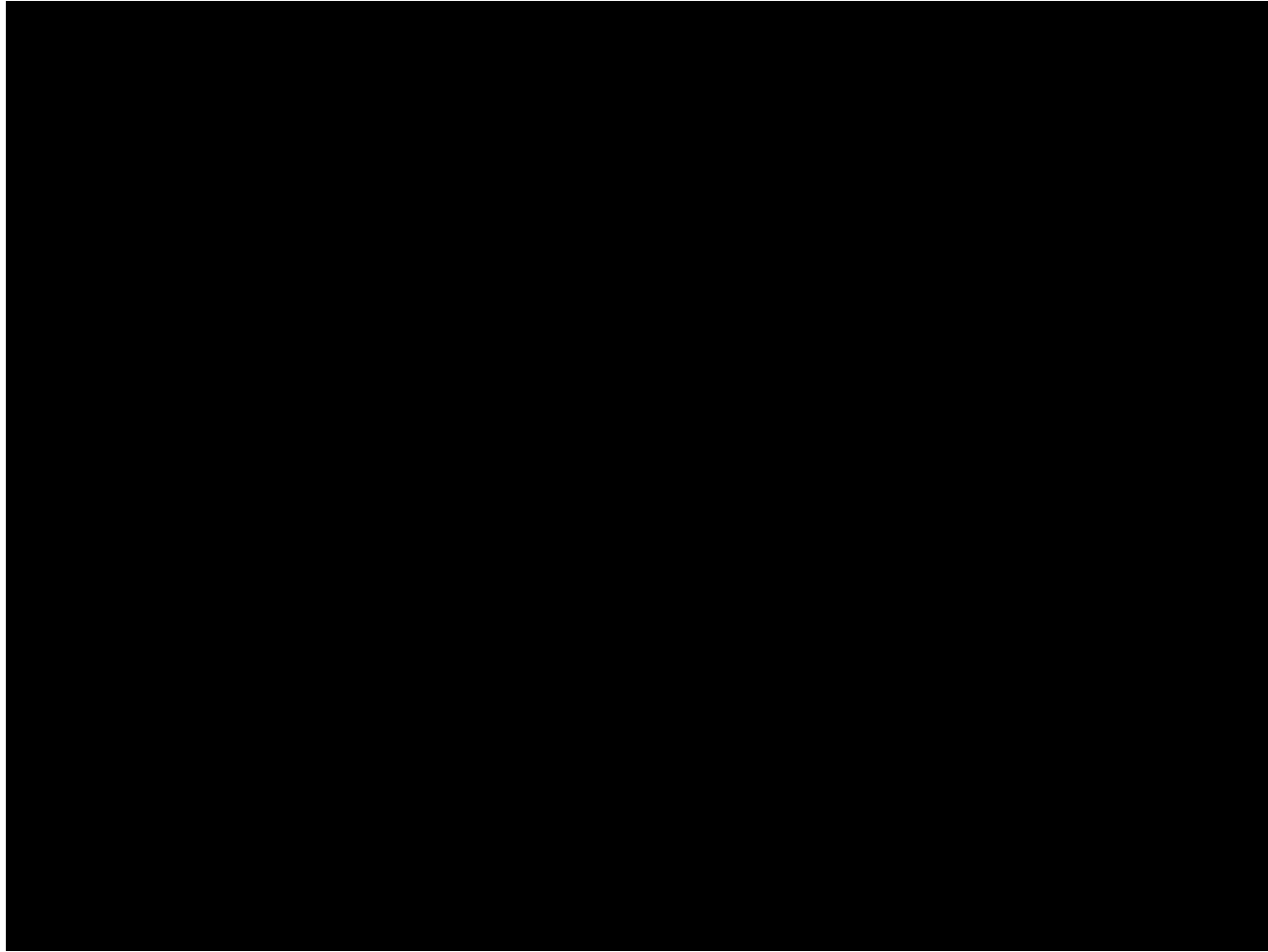
Main findings

- Global PEM Scores, ECC type, and ECC length each predicted attachment security over and above maternal sensitivity
- Maternal sensitivity was no longer predictive of attachment security

Main findings

Multinomial Logistic Regression Predicting Attachment from ECC Mean Length

	Avoidant (A)	Resistant (C)
Model and Predictor Variable		
Maternal Sensitivity Not Controlled		
ECC Type	1.06***	.17
ECC Length	1.19**	1.13
Global PEM	.41***	.59
Maternal Sensitivity Controlled		
ECC Type	.11***	.19**
ECC Length	1.18**	1.12†
Global PEM	.50*	.69
Maternal sensitivity	.84	.87





Thank you!