

‘The mothers have mercy for me’: Change in parent-infant relationships through group psychotherapy

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Abstract

Group parent-infant psychotherapy aims to increase parents' sensitivity to the communications of their infants and encourages normal attachment behaviours in infants. While it is significant that this kind of therapy has been found to be effective in randomised controlled trials, an understanding of the mechanisms through which it achieves these goals is essential. This paper explores the role of disruptions and their repair in the development of new implicit relational knowledge structures within the minds of both mothers and infants attending a group psychotherapy programme. The paper tracks the individual and group processes that facilitate increased affect tolerance and mentalisation abilities in the mothers and the disinhibition of the infants' capacities to seek comfort from their mothers and explore their worlds. Bion's notion of containment is discussed as an essential aspect of the normative process of relational disruption and repair.