

Holding and Containment

The International Psychotherapy Institute

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Psychological Birth & Psychic Development

- The individual cannot develop in isolation
- Initially:
 - “*There is no baby without a mother*” (Winnicott)
 - “*There is no such thing as infant ‘thought’ without maternal alpha-function*” (Bion)
- Later: Baby becomes a going concern

Psychic Development

The mother has a delicate task to accomplish in her primitive communication with her baby...

Not only must she represent all the valuable qualities of the 'breast-universe' –
food, warmth, tenderness, liveliness and so on –

She must at the same time be the one who helps her infant get rid of the persecuting and hated breast that the baby cannot eject alone without great psychic damage.

(McDougall, 1986)

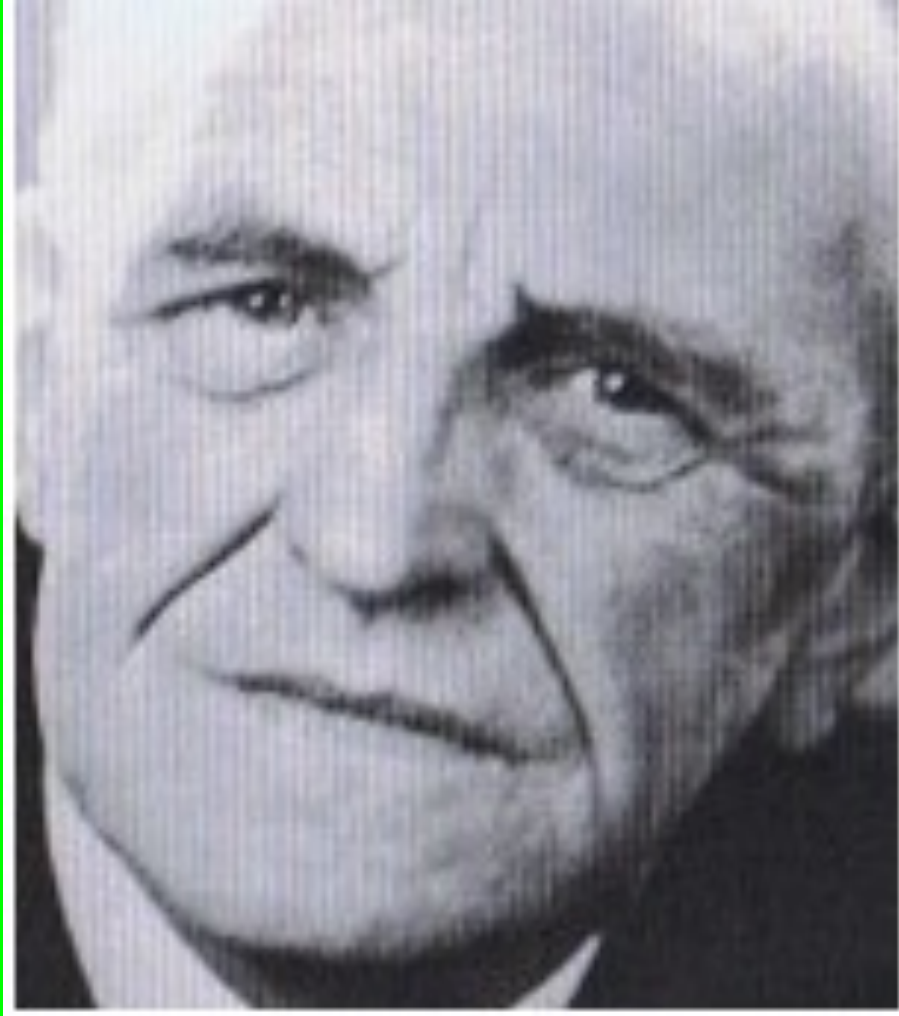
Psychological Holding

- The contextual relationship
 - An envelope of safety
 - The “holding environment” (Winnicott)
- The focused relationship

Containment

- Maternal Reverie: Mother unconsciously receives baby's projective identifications & unthought anxieties
- Transformation - Mother uses her alpha function (dreams, symbolizes, thinks about, contains) & feeds back altered mental contents to baby
- Mental growth: Continuous cycles of PI and II leading to *alpha function* in baby

Donald Woods Winnicott (1896-1971)



Donald Woods Winnicott (1896-1971)

- Born in Plymouth, Devon, England
- Raised in a middle-class Methodist family
- Married Alice Taylor (27), and Elsie Britton (62) (a psychoanalyst)
- WWI, surgeon on a British destroyer
- Undergrad. Education at Univ. of Cambridge
- Medical School at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London
- Pediatrician, child psychiatrist, adult psychoanalyst, child psychoanalyst
- Analysed by Stracey, and later by Joan Riviere (disciple of Klein)
- Belonged to "Middle" group (or Independent group)

Winnicott, the cartographer of infancy

"Although Winnicott worked with adults, adolescents, and children of all ages as well as with various psychopathological configurations, I regard his work on the psychology of infancy as Winnicott's most breathtaking and substantial contribution to Western civilization....."

"I have come to regard Donald Winnicott as the veritable cartographer of infancy."

Kahr, B. (1993)

Winnicott's view of Psychic Transformation

"Whereas classical technique focused on the value of interpretations, Winnicott pointed to the value of not interpreting."

Goldman, D. (2002)

Reflections of Robert Langs

Viewed the facilitating environment & the holding environment as "*Winnicott's most important contributions to the technique and theory of the therapeutic process*"

Robert Langs

(2002)

Reflections of Robert Langs(cont'd)

"The analyst's management of the setting is a way of holding and even healing the patient – that the setting is a dynamic force, and its management is a way of caring for the patient in a therapeutic sense, and also of interacting with that patient, a means by which the analyst intervenes in ways other than making interpretations, efforts that strongly influence the patient both consciously and unconsciously, and which may well be fateful to the outcome of the analysis."

Robert Langs (2002)

Therapy as a developmentally facilitating process

1. Holding Environment: safety
2. Autonomous fn: demand

Fred Pine (1998)

Reflections of Fred Pine

"Both the holding environment and autonomous functioning (like when the patient is working at her analytic task when not necessarily achieving any insight) embody an analysis as having the core features of a developmentally facilitating process: safety and demand, holding and autonomy."

Fred Pine (1998)

Therapeutic Action

1. Holding

External Interaction (primarily)

Internal Containment

2. Containment

Internal states of both partners

Stadter, M. (2012)

“Holding” (Winnicott, 1958)

Mother-Child Context

- Literal, manifest, caregiving relationship
- Implicit emotional holding
- Physical environment fosters child’s development

Therapeutic Context

- Therapist holds the patient by providing physical environment, respectful attitude, secure frame, and interpretations

"Containment" (Bion, 1967)

- An internal state
- A special state of being – reverie

Stadter, M. (2012)

Other perspectives on Holding

Winnicott (1960)

- '*Continuity of being*' vs. 'environmental impingements'

Bick (1968)

- 1st psychological need: to be held together physically
- a baby develops a sense of having a skin
- when mother's holding is unavailable: non-human environment

Miller et al. (2002)



Clinical Vignettes

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