Bringing up baby: The psychoanalytic infant comes of age

FOREWORD

Studying and understanding infancy has always been a major challenge. Daniel Stern (1985), in his book, *The Interpersonal World of the Infant*, expresses this concern thus:

> *Since we can never crawl inside an infant's mind, it may seem pointless to imagine what an infant might experience. Yet that is at the heart of what we really want and need to know. What we imagine infant experience to be like shapes our notions of who the infant is. These notions make up our working hypotheses about infancy* (p. 4)*.*

Professor Kenny has taken on an immense and daunting task - to attempt, through multiple kaleidoscopic lenses, to articulate infant experience. She states at the beginning of Chapter 1 that the two central constructs in her text are 'infancy and psychoanalysis'. Yet this remarkable book offers so much more than that, covering as it does the major theories and ideas from the past century or more that have informed our thinking and behaviour concerning infants: how they should be known, understood and cared for so that they set off on the best possible trajectory for the rest of their lives. The intention is to promote high quality care for infants by setting out, for inspection and debate, the diverse views, sometimes influential despite the lack of quality evidence, in this vast and controversial field. Parents know only too well what strong emotions issues related to infant care elicit and how everyone around them, including total strangers, will forcefully offer advice and instructions. Many readers of this book will, just as I did, want to argue about some of the author's contentions, but will then pause and re-examine their own views and identify implicit cherished, yet anachronistic beliefs that are no longer supported by the evidence.

A book that encourages and nourishes informed discussion at all levels of society is welcome but rarely found. I was particularly pleased that this text is not aimed at an academic readership alone, but is clearly accessible to interested readers in the community and all relevant professions. It provides information and guidance about bringing up babies to all those who have infants, study infants, teach about infancy, make policy with respect to infant welfare, or who work medically or therapeutically with parents.

The author demonstrates not only an impressive intellectual capacity and excellent communication skills, but a breadth and depth of knowledge about infant development that she pours into this volume. There are few, if any texts to my knowledge that have so eruditely spanned and integrated the psychological, psychoanalytic, psychiatric and developmental neuroscience literatures to bring us such a rich and varied, but always coherent perspective on infant development. The comprehensiveness of the treatment and the erudition in the argumentation will ensure an enduring and useful life for this volume.

A flexible, creative, sustainable society has to be based on – and will indeed be measurable by – the way it ensures that children are provided with a physically and psychosocially healthy environment in which to develop both before and after birth. The foundation for lifelong health and wellbeing is laid down very early, with our experiences at those stages

being indelibly inscribed into our bodies and brains. In the last decade or two, much has been researched and written on this topic.

I believe that this text will promote lively discussion and debate on this critical theme – what is an infant and what should the optimal environment provide – and will thus enhance our knowledge and competence in the field. This can only be a good thing for infants and their many caregivers.

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