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Editorial

Editorial Note on Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology

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EDITORIAL NOTE

While traditionally, prenatal psychology was founded in the heterogeneous field of psychoanalysis, it can be considered a part of developmental psychology. Its scope includes the definition and interpretation of an individual's prenatal experience and behavior, as well as postnatal consequences. This perinatal psychology can be considered in terms of the actual birth process. Prenatal and perinatal psychology investigates the psychological and psychophysiological consequences and implications of an individual's earliest interactions, both before birth (prenatal) and during and immediately after childbirth (perinatal). Prenatal psychology places a premium on physiological growth, especially that of the brain, during the prenatal period. The unborn infant is referred to as an embryo for the first eight weeks after insemination. It is called a fetus after the inner organs have matured.

The brain is the foundation of thought, experience, and behavior. A massive neuronal network develops during pregnancy, laying the groundwork for any mental operation. Because of "programmed cell death," about half of the developing neurons are killed again during brain development (apoptosis). The embryo transfers his rump from the eighth week onwards, followed by his extremities. Using sonography, it was possible to show that these were not only reflexes, but also endogenously induced gestures. According to Alessandra Piontelli, the fetus exhibits all movement patterns that are later seen in the newborn. The fetus begins to take amniotic fluid into his lungs about the 19th week, and breath movements can be observed. From the 18th week onwards, eye movements are observed, and from the 23rd week onwards, fast eye movements are observed (REM-phases). They have to do with sleeping habits and dreams. Fetuses drink and urinate in amniotic fluid.

Development of perception and prenatal learning

The fetus' sense modalities mature during pregnancy and are fully functional at birth. The investigation of such abilities is linked to the experimental investigation of stimuli-induced behavior. Ray studied human fetus' vibro-acoustic conditioning. It was unclear, according to Hepper, whether such conditioning was effective.

Hepper appears to have successfully replicated such conditioning trials, with the earliest vibro-acoustic conditioning occurring in the 32nd week of pregnancy. The habituation model is often used to investigate prenatal learning. A stimulus, such as an auditory stimulus, is presented to the fetus. After that, the experimenter observes the reaction's extinction by repeatedly using the same stimulus.

When the fetus recognizes a new stimulus as distinct from the old one, it initiates a new pattern of response, such as increased heart frequency. If this does not occur, the current stimulus would be difficult to differentiate from the previous focal stimulus. As W. Ernest Freud, Sigmund Freud's grandson, could show, babies recall musical patterns they learned in the womb. The registration of heart frequency and motorical activity was used in the empirical evidence.

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