Verbal and non-verbal parental mentalizing profiles: Distinct profiles, different effects on infant attachment

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Recent research in child developmental psychology has shed light on the key role played by parents’ capacity to make sense and interpret accurately child’s mental states (i.e., cognition, emotions) – namely parental mentalizing – on the quality of parent-infant relationships. Despite this increasing interest, previous research has examined parental mentalizing as a unidimensional construct focusing on verbal and explicit processes (i.e., mind-mindedness, parental reflective functioning, PRF). A recent tendency to consider the multidimensional nature of parental mentalizing is observed in current research, particularly by considering the verbal and non-verbal (i.e., parental embodied mentalizing, PEM) dimensions of parental mentalizing (Gagné et al., 2021; Shai et al., 2017; Shai & Meins, 2018). Consistent with these recent developments, this symposium includes three presentations that highlights the unique and complementary roles of verbal and non-verbal parental mentalizing for the parent-infant relationship. First presentation identifies the unique contribution of PEM to the longitudinal prediction of toddlers’ cognitive and linguistic development above and beyond sensitivity and PRF. Based on data collected in three different countries (Canada, England, and Israel), the second presentation shows four distinct profiles of verbal and non-verbal parental mentalizing: Low, High, Good Enough, and Non-Attuned. When compared to the Low profiles, Good Enough, High, and Non-Attuned profiles were associated with distinct infant attachment security and disorganized patterns. The last presentation reveals that exposure to attachment-based intervention was linked to a greater level of parental mind-mindedness and sensitivity. Together, these presentations shed light on how parent ability to mentalize verbally and non-verbally contributes to parent-infant interaction.