

# JEALOUSY PROTESTS IN INFANTS OF DEPRESSED MOTHERS

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Twelve-month-old infants of ( $N = 97$ ) mothers reporting depressed and nondepressed symptoms were videotaped while their mothers and a stranger directed positive attention toward a book or a doll while they ignored the infant. During conditions of unresponsiveness in which the object of attention was a doll, infants of depressed versus nondepressed mothers demonstrated less protest behavior, less proximity to their mothers, less disturbed exploratory activity and greater proximity to a stranger.

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emotion   jealousy protest   attachment   mother-infant interaction   maternal depression

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## INTRODUCTION

A recent study by this investigative team examined 12-month-old infants' reactions to situations in which they were ignored while their mothers and a stranger chatted together while directing positive attention toward a picture book or a doll (Hart, Del Valle, Letourneau, 1994; Hart, Field, Del Valle, Letourneau, 1998). Results revealed that infants demonstrated more protest, negative

vocalizations and inhibited play when their mothers attended to a doll. In situations where a mother's positive attention is directed toward a social object, an infant's negative response may represent an objection to inequalities in the distribution of attention. This type of objection, demonstrated particularly by older infants and siblings, has been considered an indication of jealousy or rivalry (Bridges, 1932; Case, Hayward, Lewis & Hurst, 1988; Kendrick & Dunn, 1980) and

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was similarly interpreted in the context of younger infants. The present investigation grew from questions pertaining to the origins of this response and how it may be related to maternal depression.

Corroborating findings of research on adult jealousy (Bringle & Williams, 1979; Clanton & Kosins, 1991), our previous study also revealed that infant jealousy protests are not predicted by sibling status, suggesting that direct experience in triadic contexts is not a necessary precondition for the emergence of jealousy. Dyadic interaction may be more predictive, especially that occurring with mothers. Infants protested more when their mothers held a doll than when a stranger held a doll. This distinction reflects links between infant jealousy and the attachment relationship, suggesting that infant jealousy, like adult jealousy, occurs in contexts that include a valued object or relationship (Salovey, 1991; White & Mullen, 1989). Links between jealousy and relationships would also predict that manifestations of jealousy protests may vary with the quality of dyadic interactions with parents (Clanton & Kosins, 1991). The present study asked how infants' emotional responses might be related to disrupted mother-infant interactions by assessing protest behaviors in infants of mothers reporting depressed symptoms. A number of studies have shown that infants of depressed mothers are exposed to disrupted mother-infant interactions characterized by maternal disengagement, consisting of flat affect, unresponsiveness and insufficient stimulation (Field, 1984; Field, et al. 1985) as well as intrusiveness (Cohn, Matias, Tronick, Connell, & Lyons-Ruth, 1986). Disruptions such as these may predispose infants to demonstrate altered patterns of protest responses.

Although infants' emotional responses may be differentiated according to mothers' depression status, the direction of effects is not easily predicted. Maternal depression may be associated with intensified or diminished levels of protest. Some empirical research on childhood jealousy in sibling contexts, or sibling rivalry, has found associations between

disrupted family relationships and intensified jealousy. Teti and Ablard (1989) found that when mothers attended to an older sibling, younger siblings with secure attachment relationships protested less than insecurely attached infants, suggesting that parental warmth and sensitivity may inhibit rivalry. In a similar vein, Gottlieb and Mendelson (1990) found that 2- to 4-year-olds' adjustment to the arrival of a newborn was facilitated by parental supportiveness and nurturance. Similar patterns of response have been documented in studies using children and adolescents (Brody, Stoneman, & Mackinnon, 1988; Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980; Tarullo, DeMulder, Ron-saville, Brown, & Radke-Yarrow, 1995). In contrast with these reports, a few studies have yielded results suggesting an association between disrupted infant-maternal interactions and diminished protests. For example, the arrival of a newborn was found more stressful to firstborn infants of highly-involved mothers than to those of less-involved mothers (Dunn & Kendrick, 1982; Dunn, Kendrick, & Mac-Namee, 1981). Also, infants of depressed mothers have shown less distress than those of nondepressed mothers during other conditions of maternal unresponsiveness (Field, 1984).

In addition to eliciting increased protest behaviors, the jealousy-inducing situation in our earlier study was associated with infants demonstrating increased proximal contacts with their mothers. Having a depressed mother may inhibit this response. Maternal depression may also impact on infants' sociability toward strangers. Early infancy studies have shown that interactions with strangers are influenced by maternal depression. Compared with infants of nondepressed mothers, infants of depressed mothers have shown more "depressed" behaviors, including less positive affect and lower activity levels, during interaction with strangers (Field et al., 1988). Patterns of sociability toward mothers and strangers may be affected by variations in contextual features, such as the objects of maternal attention.

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