

## **The Psychoanalytic Observation of Children**

**Origins and Recent Developments -- Training and Research**

**Its Significance for Psychotherapy and other Fields of Psychosocial Work**

**An International Conference at the University of Vienna, April 19-21, 2024**

**Susanna Wiedermann (AUT)**

**The observed mother – the observing mother: reflections on anxiety, ambivalence, concern and guilt of the observer in a psychoanalytic research project**

***Saturday, April 20, 2:30 p.m. / Hörsaal 29 / Parallel session B2***

### **Abstract:**

When conducting an observation using the Tavistock approach, the observer may be exposed to feelings of fear, anger, aggression, compassion, guilt, etc. This issue is often discussed with special reference to the process of finding and performing the role and tasks of the observer. In this regard, the presentation will focus on a particularly challenging constellation.

In the course of the research project “Vienna Parent-Toddler Group Study”, experienced students undertake observations of children at risk both in the weekly parent-toddler group meetings and in the families’ everyday life at home. Observing young children at risk in their families’ homes requires the presence of a caregiver – usually the mother – who is often struggling with numerous problems by herself, which affect the relationship between parents and children. The paper explores the observer’s emotions that were at work during an observation within the scope of the research project when the observer was a mother herself. Ambivalent feelings of both guilt and concern as well as love and hate were experienced as a result of the observing mother’s identification with the observed mother. This had an impact not only on the way in which the observer performed her role as an observer, but also on the way the observed child and the mother-child relation were perceived by the observer and discussed in the observation seminar. The paper will discuss risks and options concerning the research project as well as the observer’s learning and professionalization process.

### **Keywords:**

Vienna Parent-Toddler Group Study, mothers as observers, countertransference of observers, Young Child Observation as a research tool

### **Biographical details:**

Mag. Susanna Wiedermann, BA, is a member of the research team of the “Vienna Parent-Toddler Group Study” which is run by the Child Guidance Clinic in Vienna, the Department of Education of the University of Vienna and the Austrian Association of Individual Psychology (ÖVIP). She is student assistant of the Research Unit “Psychoanalysis and Education”, Department of Education, University of Vienna and training candidate for the Austrian Association of Individual Psychology (ÖVIP). She also works as family assistance with children with disabilities.

### **E-mail:**

susanna.wiedermann@univie.ac.at