Trauma, Attachment & Relational Parameters in Treating Suicidality

The interface between trauma, attachment, psychic structure, and character pathology has been largely ignored in the clinical literature until recent years, and when discussed, it has been generally relegated to the domain of child psychopathology. Because human attachment is such a basic aspect to motivation and adjustment, attachment disruptions in childhood color psychic development and often leave deep and enduring deficits in personality and adaptive functioning.

What is especially germane is how qualitative deficiencies in early object relationships due to developmental trauma deleteriously affect personality development and the rudiments of psychic structure. As a result, attachment disordered patients tend to present with differential forms of suffering accompanied by diverse complaints and multiply-determined clinical symptoms. Therefore, it is understandable why many clinicians are often confused and even lost when attempting to conceptualize or diagnose patients that present with sundry psychiatric profiles. Based upon my work as practicing clinician, I will attempt to show that those with attachment deficiencies and associated characterological vulnerabilities have fundamental structural deficits in personality organization that lie at the heart of our current understanding of disorders of the self.

In this colloquium, I wish to highlight the nature of attachment related trauma on psychic structure and explore how this process manifests across many clinical syndromes. I will also introduce a relational framework in how to approach these patients in treatment focusing on the clinical parameters of therapeutic action, the working alliance, efficacies, and limitations based upon my personal experience. The treatment of a suicidal patient will be discussed.

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