

# Thinking and Considering Self Harm in the Therapeutic Community

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# Contents

- Social systems
- Attachment
- Neuroscience
- Childhood Interrupted - S.E.A.
- Complex PTSD
- Deliberate Self Harm
- Mentalisation

# Non Mentalising Social Systems

- Social systems that create FEAR ----
- Destroy thinking
- Shatter thinking capacity
- Force the system back to **pre-mentalistic modes** of social thinking
- Autocratic social systems are **self-reinforcing** and therefore **highly stable**. They **undermine** the social mechanism that can alter their character : **collaboration**

# Therapeutic Community

- A TC is a MENTALISING social system
- TCs encourage
- **Thinking about feelings**
- Feeling
- Verbalisation - about thought and feelings
- Interaction
- Creativity

# On line forums for DSH

- Engage people in networks which support attacking the body to neutralise the mind

# Normal Psychic Development

- Affect Attunement of caregiver: (Stern, D. *The interpersonal world of the infant.* 1995)
- Creates biological framework for dealing with future stress: (Schore, A. *Affect regulation and the origin of the self: the neurobiology of emotional development.* 1994)
- Formation of attachment behaviors: (Ainsworth, M. Patterns of mother infant attachment: antecedents and effects on development. *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 1985)

# Attachment Theory

- John Bowlby: (1988) A Secure Base: Clinical Applications of Attachment Theory.
- The child learns to tolerate frustration
- Develops a secure sense of self
- Learns that the world is good enough
- People seen as whole: good and bad can coexist in one

# Attachment figure/care giver

“A child forsaken, waking suddenly,  
Whose gaze afeared on all things around  
doth rove,  
And seeth only that it cannot see  
The meeting eyes of love.”

- G. Elliot in Attachment: by John Bowlby



# Attunement

- The attunement between caregiver and baby forms the basis of attachments throughout life.
- Through 'good enough' caregiving the child learns resilience.

# Harlow's Monkeys

- H. and M. Harlow, in H. D. Kimmel, ed. *Experimental Psychopathology: Recent Research and Theory* (New York 1971)
- Monkeys separated from birth from mothers engaged in self mutilation.
- Monkeys raised in partial isolation ignored offspring

# Panic

- Activation of the autonomic nervous system
- Fight or flight or freeze
- The body is flooded with adrenalin
- The amygdala is activated
- The frontal lobes are disengaged

# The monkey and the grape

- Numerous interpretations possible
- Close proximity
- The monkey is activated by what he can not have
- The monkey destroys what he has

# Types of Trauma

- Loss of care giver
- Childhood sexual abuse
- Emotional/neglect abuse
- Physical abuse
- Repeated invasive surgery during childhood

# The Impact of Early Trauma

- Stable instability
- Who am I?
- The loss of a sense of self
- Primitive defenses: hold the brittle structure together
- Reality Testing intact but fluctuating
- Identity diffusion: who am I/ who are you?

# Activation of Attachment Systems

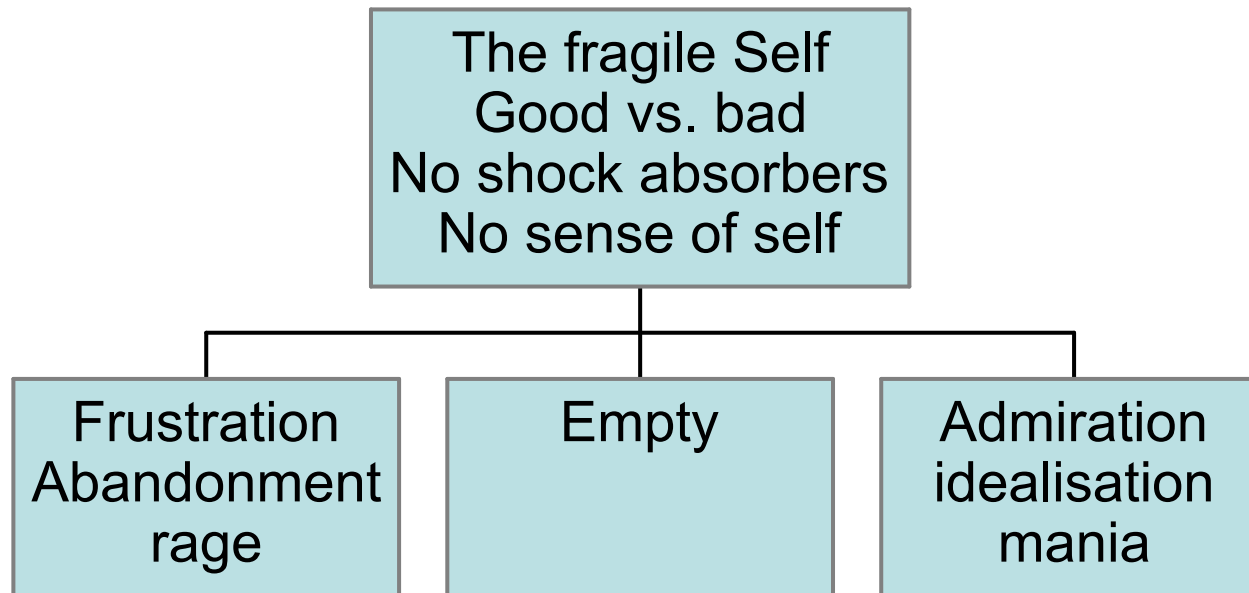
- Complex PTSD
- Words, gestures, smells can activate unprocessed traumatic memories which
- In turn activate behaviours associated with the neutralisation of these fragments
- DSH restores equilibrium

# Bessel van der Kolk

- 'The body holds the score'



# The Fragile Self



# Psychic Structure

- You meant to build a house
- The project is interrupted You have to make do with a
- Garage
- Air Conditioning... too cold
- Furnace blasting... too hot

# Behavioral Manifestation of Early Trauma

- Extreme difficulty with transitions
- Intense unstable interpersonal relationships
- Impulsivity
- Repeated **DELIBERATE SELF HARM**

# Affective Manifestations of Early Trauma

- Identity disturbance
- Affective instability
- Chronic feelings of emptiness
- Inappropriate intense anger
- Transient paranoid and dissociative  
symptoms psychotic paranoid regressions

# Why Self Harm ?

## **To Reduce panic**

- **To establish existence**
- To support **body existence** when mental existence is in doubt
- To halt feeling numb and empty
- To become a human be-ing

# Paradox

## The **Paroxysm** of self harm

People do not self harm

- In order to harm themselves
- They want peace - to cosy up
- To get back into the bubble - to exist
- To halt feeling restless, irritable and discontent
- To start thinking straight

# Unintended Consequences of Deliberate Self Harm

Staff and residents become activated

- We feel what the other can not say
- We panic
- We fail to mentalise

# HURT

I hurt myself today to see if I still feel.

I focus on the pain, the only thing that's real,

The needle tears a hole the old familiar sting.

I wear this crown of thorns upon my liars chair,

Full of broken thoughts I can not repair.

I tried to kill it all away but I remember everything



# HURT

What have I become, my sweetest friend.  
Everyone I know goes away in the end And you  
could have it all,  
My empire of dirt.  
I will let you down, I will make you hurt.  
If I could start again a million miles away, I  
would keep myself I would find a way.

*Nine Inch Nails*

# Mentalisation

- Mentalizing whilst remaining in the emotional state
- Labeling basic emotions
- Identifying feelings
- Being aware of conflicting emotions
- Giving meaning to emotions
- Modulating emotions
- Expressing emotion in words

# Vicious cycles of non mentalising

- Poor mentalising - That is -
- Inability to understand or even pay attention to feelings of others
- Others seem - incomprehensible frightening, undermining, frustrating.
- Distressing or coercive interactions.
- To control or change others-make them safe

# Desired Responses

- Stabilise
- Detailed description of events leading to DSH
- Titration of dose exposure to traumatic memory activated
- Stop rewind

# Mind Reading

- Ask what the resident is feeling
- YOU DON'T KNOW
- Help them stabilise their feelings
- Help them think - mentalise
- With thoughtful words and empathy
- He doesn't know what you are feeling/thinking
- You have to ask you have to be curious
- You need to be brave

# The L.O.V.E. Model

*Guards against the acting out of hate in  
the counter transference*

- L isten
- O bserve
- V erbalise
- E mpathise - explore

# Aims of intervention in Mentalisation

- To help to establish
- Adult
- Intentionalised
- Model
- Of Self
- A.I.M.S.

# More Reading and Viewing

- Look up Antony Bateman video role plays of Mentalisation on YouTube.
- Look up Professor Bateman and Professor Fonegay's video Lectures on YouTube.
- '*Bright Red Scream: Self Mutilation and the Language of Pain.* Marlilee Strong.
- '*Cutting: Understanding and overcoming self mutilation.*' J. S. Levenkron