

PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE DYNAMICS OF ABUSE

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OUR DISCUSSION TODAY...

1. Foundations of healthy relationships and how these foundations may be disrupted or altered
2. General overview of types of abuse.
3. Dynamics of abusive relationships.
4. Understanding the Trauma Bond
5. Treating the Trauma Bond
6. One last challenging thought

FOUNDATIONS OF RELATIONSHIP

- **Psychosocial Perspective
by Erik Erikson**
 - Trust vs Mistrust
 - Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt
 - Initiative vs Guilt
 - Industry vs Inferiority
 - Identity vs Role Confusion





FOUNDATIONS OF RELATIONSHIP

- **Attachment**
 - Secure vs Insecure Attachment
 - Oxytocin- ***stranger anxiety and attachment
 - Interpersonal Emotional Regulation
 - social referencing, synchrony, & empathy

DISRUPTED FOUNDATIONS OF RELATIONSHIP

Problems with trust, autonomy, cooperation, internal motivation (altruistic vs reward driven behaviors)

May have a fragile sense of identity. They need others to confirm who they are for them.

Difficulty with empathy, connecting emotionally, affect and emotional communication.

- Still has human need for attachment but has not established a repertoire of behaviors for healthy attachment.
- Still has a human need to feel competent, industrious, and relevant but perceives anything less than “superior” as inferior.
- Still has a human need to exist in a safe, predictable environment but hyper-controls to in response to disrupted autonomy, trust, and self-efficacy.

DISRUPTED FOUNDATIONS OF RELATIONSHIP

- **Personality Disorders in Abusers**
 - Narcissistic Personalities
 - Borderline Personalities
 - Antisocial Personalities (sociopathic)



TYPES OF ABUSE

Emotional

Physical

Sexual

Masochism – Often reflects the power and control dynamics of interactional abuse. May develop as a coping mechanism. (cutting, eating disorders, substance abuse)



COMMON DYNAMICS IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

- Power Differential
- Defensive, usually angry assertion of will
- Driven by a sense of inferiority, shame, or humiliation
- Deeply and self-consciously concerned with relative position, rank, and measure

POWER AND CONTROL

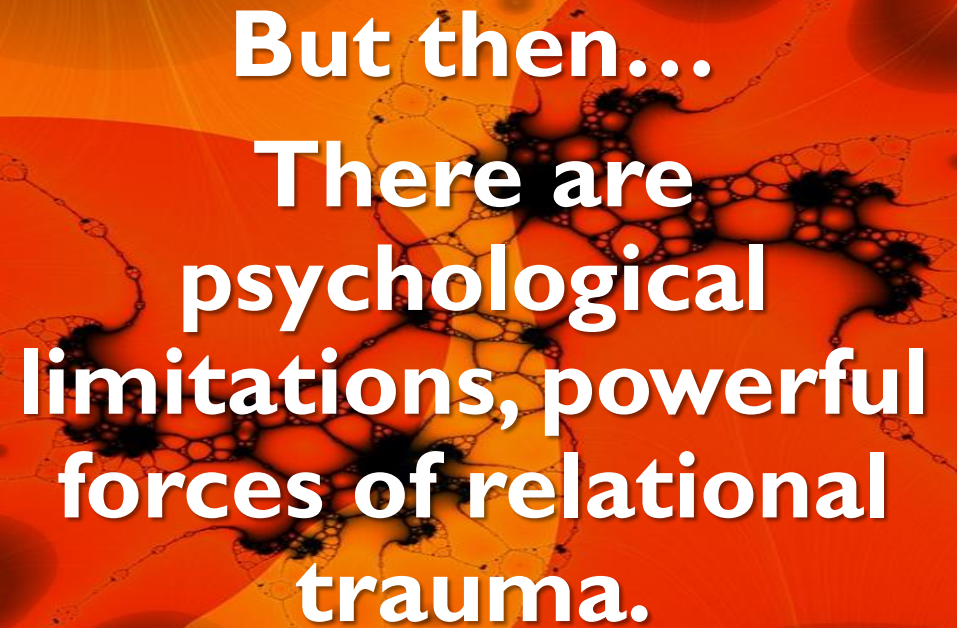
Tactics to maintain “stability” of power and control

Cycle of violence perpetuates the use of Power and Control tactics

Gradually increase in intensity

THERE ARE MANY REASONS THAT VICTIMS STAY

Logistical
Biding their time
Fear for their safety
Lack of physical or
financial resources
Children
Etc.



**But then...
There are
psychological
limitations, powerful
forces of relational
trauma.**

WHAT IS A TRAUMA BOND?

A strong emotional tie exists
between two individuals who have
a **clear imbalance of power.**

CONDITIONS THAT CREATE TRAUMA BONDS

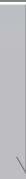
1. perceived threat
2. lack of protective factors
3. sporadic in nature (intermittent reinforcement)
4. perceived inability to escape
5. severity of abuse slowly increases (frog in the frying pan)

PHYSIOLOGY OF TRAUMA- BONDS

- Dopamine – reward, craving, urge, motivation, drive
- Endogenous opioids – Decreasing physical and/or emotional pain
- Corticotropin releasing factor – related to stress, increases during withdrawal
- Oxytocin – Both a hormone and neuropeptide, related to social interactions, influences feelings of bonding or feelings of avoidance, receptors in 2 areas of the brain

SIGNS OF TRAUMA BONDS

The victim
changes from fear
and anger to
attachment easily.



“They might kill
me. They love me
too much.”

SIGNS OF TRAUMA BONDS

- Feeling “he or she needs me”.
- Identifying with the brokenness of the abuser
- Seeing the abuse as evidence that the abuser is sick and then wanting to be the healer of that sickness.

Issues by Julia Michaels

You do sh*t on purpose
You get mad and you break
things
Feel bad, try to fix things
But you're perfect
Poorly wired circuit
And got hands like an ocean
Push you out, pull you back in
'Cause you don't judge me
'Cause if you did, baby, I would
judge you too
No, you don't judge me
'Cause you see it from same
point of view

'Cause I got issues
but you got 'em too
so give 'em all to me
and i'll give mine to you
bask in the glory
of all our problems
'cause we got the kind of love
it takes to solve 'em

Yeah, I got issues
and one of them is how bad I
need you





MORE SIGNS OF TRAUMA BONDS

- The victim desires affection from the person that abuses them.
- Feeling indebted or loyal to the abuser.
 - taking the blame for the abuse,
 - Protecting the abuser,
 - Tolerating the abuser to “please” the abuser

MORE SIGNS OF TRAUMA BONDS

- Feeling a sense of “Us against the World.”
- Feeling that nobody outside the relationship could understand the complexity of your relationship.
- The victim may change previous relationships or isolate themselves.



MORE SIGNS OF TRAUMA BONDS

- The victim's identity changes to suit the abuser's needs and moods.
- Sometimes the therapist, other times the parent, or the child, or the sex-slave, etc.



CHARACTERISTICS THAT MAINTAIN TRAUMA BONDS

- Problems with identity
 - Enmeshment
- Cognitive dissonance
- Learned helplessness

IDENTITY

- Abusers need a victim with a fluid and fragile sense of identity.
- Many of the P&C tactics are specific to undermining identity.
- Make her question her core values and beliefs.
- Make her feel different from people she once related to.
- Make her second guess her understanding of right and wrong.



Shin KwangHo, Deviant Art

ENMESHMENT

Once they have dismantled her identity, she can become part of theirs.

- Individuals with incomplete and fragile egos attempt to be completed by others.
- They claim ownership over the others' thoughts, feelings and behaviors and place responsibility for their own thoughts, feelings and behaviors on the other.
- Enmeshed relationships almost always settle into a power differential with the empowered individual deciding what the enmeshed identity (values, traditions, routines, etc) will look like.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

- Makes it easier for a victim to “*survive*” within the relationship.
 - Relieves the distress of holding two opposing beliefs.
 - Requires some energy and investment, therefore, false beliefs are survival mechanisms and difficult to dismantle.
 - Makes it difficult to feel relatable or understood by others who are outside the situation, and don’t agree with the distorted beliefs.
- Case Example from Rhonda Freeman, PhD <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/neurosagacity/201701/the-brain-can-work-against-abuse-victims>

LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

- Severely undermines the victims sense of self and autonomy
- Impairs their ability to think of alternatives to the situations
- Undermines their ability to accurately evaluate danger resulting in suspicion of non-threatening people, or a sense of predictability in dangerous situations

**RECLAIMING YOU...
BREAKING THE TRAUMA
BOND**





NO CONTACT

- Victims of abuse are used to chaos and drama so it can be hard to resist the urge to return to it if the opportunity presents itself.
- This means more than just no communication.
- No manipulative intentions (The Silent Treatment)
- No investment in future visions of the relationship

A person with long blonde hair, wearing a red and white horizontally striped long-sleeved shirt, stands in a grassy field with their arms raised towards a bright, hazy sunset sky. The background features a line of evergreen trees and rolling hills under a warm, golden light.

LISTEN TO AND RESPECT YOUR BODY.

- **What is the story your body wants to tell?**
- **How does your body tell you something is not right?**
- **In what ways does your body want to heal?**

A person is sitting in a grassy field, looking out at a blue ocean under a blue sky with white clouds. The person is seen from behind, wearing a blue shirt and jeans. The field is green and the ocean is a deep blue. The sky is filled with soft white clouds.

GRIEVING IS OK AND CAN BE VERY COMPLICATED. GET SUPPORT FROM A THERAPIST OR FRIEND.

- **You grieve the loss of the person.**
- **You grieve the loss of yourself with that person.**
- **You grieve the loss of what you did for that person (dealing with your sense of disloyalty).**
- **You grieve the loss of the stories, fantasies, hopes and promises you became attached to in order to survive the abuse.**

FILL YOUR MIND WITH ENGAGING AND POSITIVE INFORMATION.



- **Read books about recovery and healing, empowerment, and kindness.**
- **Speak to people who respect you and challenge your perspectives at the same time.**
- **Listen to joyful and uplifting music.**
- **Avoid negativity, gossip, and nay-sayers.**

REBUILD A HEALTHY SUPPORT SYSTEM

- **Learn to recognize power differentials and whether they are healthy or not.**
- **Deal with inferiority or superiority scripts**
- **Become self-aware of trust and distrust issues**
- **Recognize logical and intuitive processes when building relationships**

ONE LAST CHALLENGING THOUGHT

- Professional Cognitive Dissonance
- A Just World perspective
- Used to cope with not always being able to help
- People get what they deserve, so I tried to help and failed, there must be an valid explanation (She didn't really want help.)
- Results in “coping” with the status quo
- Undermines reevaluating and changing intervention strategies

THANK YOU

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