

**Reaching for Relationship:
Exploring the use of an
attachment paradigm in the
assessment and repair of the
dissociative internal world**

Sue Richardson

**Attachment-based psychoanalytic
psychotherapist**

**Theme of paper:
Reaching for relationship**

*What starts bitter
Becomes the soul's homecoming
Carried on ocean waves
To simple breath
As we reach out for relationship*

Kate Evans (2006)

Reaching for relationship: Hypothesis

- **Existence of an internal attachment system (Lamagna and Gleiser, 2007)**
- **Patterns of internal careseeking & caregiving a key target for intervention**
- **Interactions between ANP(s) and EP's characterised by ineffective care-seeking and caregiving**

Consequences of ineffective internal careseeking and caregiving

- Threats to well being managed by dissociation and problematic forms of self-regulation
- Reinforcement of fear, despair and non-relational strategies
- The ‘soul’s homecoming’ (i.e. reparative interactions) stay out of reach

Exploring the use of a new attachment paradigm

- The dynamics of attachment and interest-sharing (Heard, Lake and McCluskey, publication pending)
- 7 systems which interact to maintain well-being (**careseeking; caregiving; exploratory interest-sharing; sexuality; self-defense; external and **internal supportive/unsupportive environments****)

Impact of inter-personal trauma

- **Disruption of dynamic interaction of the 7 systems**
- **Chronic activation, immobilisation or confusion of systems designed to ‘reach out’ (and ‘in’) for relationship**
- **Failure to reach goals/maintain well-being**

Extreme abuse:

Some additional considerations

- **Deliberate disruption of dynamics of attachment e.g. targeting and confusion of careseeking and caregiving systems**
- **Increased vulnerability via pre-natal stress? (Thompson, 2007)**
- **Task of repair complex**

Reaching for Relationship: Overall task of repair

Restore smooth, inter-related function of the 7 systems in order to:

- **meet inter and intra-personal goals**
- **act as a regulatory and relational process v. dysregulation and dissociation**
- **repair neuronal deficits (Schore, 2003)**

Clinical example: The girl with red shoes

**Confusion of careseeking, caregiving and
sexual systems in a client suffering from
secondary dissociation (DDNOS)**

Assessment using an attachment paradigm 1 (summary)

- *any* attachment experiences which might be 'lit up' again in therapy
- functioning of 7 systems e.g. sexual system as a source of well-being or part of a problematic narrative
- Supportive/unsupportive quality of external and internal environments

Assessment using an attachment paradigm 2: The ‘internal attachment interview’

- Informal, uncodified conceptual framework
- Explores narrative coherence of *internal* attachment relationships
- Identifies patterns of internal careseeking and caregiving

The internal attachment interview

- Choose 5 adjectives to describe what world feels like inside.
- Illustrate choices with examples
- Would any parts of you make different choices? If so, what? Why?

The internal attachment interview (continued)

- **What happens if any part of you feels distressed? Who could this part turn to inside? What happens next? Does any part respond? If so, how?**
- **Do you ever feel mistreated by any parts of you?**
- **What do you think makes parts of you behave the way they do ?**

**Clinical example:
An 'obscure' internal world**

'You picked up on me - I'm not listening'

Outcomes of assessment:

1. A map of the internal attachment- system

- **Internal relational configurations e.g. pairings & groupings**
- **Modes of internal communication (e.g. coercive, behavioural, somatic)**
- **Styles of internal relating (secure v. insecure)**
- **Patterns of internal careseeking and caregiving (effective v. ineffective)**



Outcomes of assessment: 2. Identifying tasks of repair

- 1. Cycles of affective rupture, dysregulation and failures of affective repair**
- 2. Skills deficits and areas where psycho-education can be helpful in reshaping care-seeking / care-giving strategies**
- 3. Replacing battle grounds with a compassionate exchange and an internal supportive environment.**

Extreme abuse: Some additional considerations

Two forms of dissociation to consider:

- 1. Clinical: sequelae of disorganised attachment & trauma**
- 2. Deliberately induced : sequelae of terror**
 - mind control v. biological systems**
 - poly-fragmentation & unusual EP's**
 - possible absence of attachment representations (Koren-Karie et al, 2003)**

Reaching for relationship: the therapist's role

- **Acting as a 'relational bridge'**
(Blizard, 2003)
- **'Sitting patiently by'** (Richardson, 2002)
- **Goal-corrected empathic attunement**
(McCluskey, 2005)

Repair through relationship: Goal-corrected empathic attunement

(McCluskey, 2005)

A complex interaction with the feeling state of careseeker which regulates the attachment system and restores well – being.

Some challenges for the therapist

- **Goal –corrected empathic attunement to multiple feeling states, attachment styles and developmental stages**
- **Bearing witness to atrocity**
- **Arousal of therapist’s own care-seeking**
- **Dysregulated professional networks and need for peer support (Richardson and Bacon, 2001; Richardson, 2007)**

Additional considerations for survivors of extreme abuse

- **Dilemma of ‘knowing what you are not supposed to know and feeling what you are not supposed to feel’ (Bowlby, 1988)**
- **Vulnerability to severe disorganisation**
- **Maintaining hope for healing**

Maintaining hope for healing: An attachment perspective

- **Undoing belief in the perpetrators as the sole source of care & seeing their limitations as caregivers**
- **Seeing all parts of self as worthy of care**
- **Co-creating a ‘methodology of healing’ which can ‘reach out for relationship’**

Repair after extreme abuse: an internal dialogue

Female (adolescent) EP: *Now all you children. You have a home now and someone to look after you - I think you understand emotionally even if you can't speak or understand.*

Male (child) EP: *I can understand.*

Female (adolescent) EP: *Well, good, that's excellent. Is there communication among you ?*

Repair after extreme abuse : an internal dialogue (continued)

Male (child) EP: *A lot of us talk- we learnt.*

Female (adolescent) EP: *Do you understand that its not good to hurt people, kidnap people?*

Male (child) EP: *Yes, but we have to do it.*

Female (adolescent) EP: *You don't anymore. The people who told you to do it are gone - either into the past or into secure units*

Repair after extreme abuse: an internal dialogue (continued)

Male (child) EP: *Men can do whatever they like.*

Female (adolescent) EP: *No. Here everyone is equal. We will teach you - it may take time. It is kinder here.*

Conclusion

- **Clients can restructure their internal careseeking and caregiving and move from an insecure internal environment to one which is more secure.**
- **An understanding of the dynamics of internal attachment can enable both client and therapist to ‘reach out for relationship’.**