Trauma and Entanglement

How constellations can help

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Classifikation of mental illnesses

- anxieties
- depressions
- personality disorders
- schizophrenia and psychosis

hyperarousal or numbness
Our primitive reactions dealing with our sufferings are

- denying the symptoms
- focusing directly on the symptoms
- trying to eliminate the symptoms
- consuming something to cure the symptoms (eating, drinking, smoking ...)

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The alternative to struggle with the symptoms is to understand their causes.
My basic assumption:
The background of mental illnesses in most of the cases is trauma and/or the entanglement with traumatized persons.

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A trauma is

“... a vital experience of discrepancy between threatening situational factors and the individual’s coping capacities, that is associated with feelings of helplessness and lack of any protection, thus creating a permanent instability of the self-concept and perception of the world.”

(Fischer und Riedesser, 1999, S. 79)
Two “classical” types of trauma

- caused by life threatening events (e.g. war, accidents, rape, natural catastrophies)
- caused by loss of a person (e.g. early death of parents, loss of children, adoption)
Important distinction:

**Stress means fight or flight.**

**Trauma means freeze or fragment.**
Trauma-Scheme
(van der Kolk 2000, S. 175)

- hyperarousal, being overwhelmed by panic, rage and pain
- avoidance behavior
- numbing
- attempts to overcome numbing
Split in the personality structure after a traumatic experience

- Traumatized part
- Surviving part
- Healthy part

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Characteristics of the healthy parts of our personality

- capable of regulating feelings
- genuine empathy
- ability to make safe bonds
- resolving bonds if necessary
- ability of self-reflection
- self-responsibility
- love of truth
- realism
- optimism and basic confidence
- strong enough to confront traumatic experiences

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Characteristics of the traumatised parts

- store the memory of the trauma
- are always the same age as they were, when the trauma occurred
- are still engaged with the traumatic experience
- can unpredictably and suddenly be triggered
Surviving parts protect the organism and the soul and help to survive a traumatic experience.
Characteristics of the surviving-parts

- constructing and guarding the split
- denying and suppressing the trauma experience
- avoiding
- controlling
- compensating
- producing illusions
- producing new splits
Surviving parts are a mirror of the traumatised parts.

The more extreme the trauma experience, the more extreme is the development of the personality structures that help to survive.

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In the long run surviving parts increase the risk to suffer another trauma.
The entanglement with traumatized persons produces two new types of trauma

- Trauma of bonding (being rejected by the person one needs to bond to)
- Trauma of confusion in a bonding system (caused by murder, sexual abuse, incestuous relations)
For children „safe bonding“ (J. Bowlby) to their parents are fundamental for self confidence, confidence in human relations and mental health.
Reactions to the loss of a bonding figure

1. fear and panic
2. protest and rage
3. grief and resignation
Transgenerational aspects of trauma

- Traumatisation destroys the bonding capacity of parents.
- The contact with a child triggers their traumatized parts or activates their surviving parts.
- In his symbiotic state the child cannot distinguish between his own identity and the trauma of his parents.

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Mental illnesses in many cases are „bonding disorders“. The splits in the personality structure of parents perpetuate in the personality structure of their children.

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**Trauma of bonding part 1**

**Traumatized Parts of the child**
- rage
- anxiety

**Traumatized part or the mother**

**Mothers surviving part**
- healthy part

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symbiotic surviving part of the child

- pain
- grief
- shame
- feeling guilty
- illusionary love

Adaption to mother
Compassion with her

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Trauma of bonding

Childs traumatized parts

anxiety, rage, pain,
grief, love, shame,
feeling guilty

symbiotic
Surviving part with the father
compassion

Split of the father

Surviving part after sexual abuse
healthy part

idealising the father

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Traumatized part after sexual abuse
pain, disgust, shame

Surviving part after sexual abuse
Principles of my psychotherapy also applied in constellations

- Focusing on trauma and bonding processes
- Having a multigenerational perspective
- Acknowledging the surviving mechanisms.
- Strengthening the healthy parts to help them in the confrontation with own traumata
- Leading the symbiotic parts out of entanglement
Constellation work needs

- Trust in a group of people
- Confidence in one own’s healthy parts
- Trust in the facilitator