

Editorial

Aspects of love, loss, and development

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Introduction

In this issue we have a few articles covering varying contemporary topics. Within them emerges some themes within which I would like to expand upon in this part of the editorial. They are as follows: love, loss, and development, and they interact with each other in various ways. These articles invite us to think about how these profound themes mutually influence experience from an educational and personal perspective.

What is love?

This is a question that is age-old, meaning different things to different people and cultures. As such it makes it a broad and varied topic. Various motivational models from Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) to Heard, Lake, and McCluskey's extension of attachment theory (2009) recognise how fundamental it is in the development of the self.

How that motivation is developed, nurtured, and expressed has various nuances and differences. In particular, when thinking of couples, can we ask how much of our biological instinct to love is programmed to be with just one person? How significant are social and cultural engineering and the interaction with other motivational systems in fostering relational security? Stephen Mitchell (2002) asks in the title of his book, *Can Love Last?*. These questions point to the notion that romantic relationships require work and can be fragile. In this issue Anne Power explores this further in a follow-up to her previous article in *Attachment* (Power, 2018). She looks at and questions contented couples, their contrasting cultural modes of union, and what has made their relationships work.

What role does the subject of love have within the clinical arena and how is that thought about and reflected on as it arises whether explicitly or implicitly? There is a strong sense and understanding that this can be a thorny subject when thinking of transference and countertransference love. There are associated difficulties of boundaries being blurred, misunderstandings, misattunements, to disclose or not disclose, to self-reveal or to close oneself off.

The International Association of Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy (IARPP) hold online colloquiums on psychoanalytic articles. The two for last year were a chapter by Philip Bromberg (2006) and an article by Matt Aibel (2021). Both articles, very relational in nature, reflect on the need for self-revelation as a means to enhance and explain what is going on in the intersubjective space. The feel and bravery of these practitioners is very apparent with the essence of the revelation being based on the struggle the therapist was having with their respective clients. As a therapist the idea of revealing something negative about a client feels uncomfortable, particularly with feelings of annoyance, disdain, and maybe even pity. Nonetheless, from a relational perspective, it seems easier to go there than if the emotion or the feeling is one of love. How do we think about or go there, does one take a more classical interpretive stance relying on technique or does one explore what is happening from the relational perspective? In the countertransference, the type of love that can be evoked can range from familial to sexual. It is important, however, to reflect that this is in response to a client's need for recognition. So, the demands a client can make to be loved may well stem from a lack of acknowledgement, being misattuned to, not being seen. To meet that need there can, at times, be a crushing pressure to acknowledge it. A projective identification so powerful that it is all-consuming. Orbach's "Vampire Casanova" (Orbach, 1999) is an example of this. Her description of the feelings evoked by her client Adam are extremely powerful and leave a strong imprint of how this client impacted her with his demands to have sex with her. It was interesting that whilst she acknowledged to colleagues and in her supervision the strength of this impact this wasn't disclosed to the client explicitly. Should she have done so? She demonstrated that, through the use of good psychoanalytic technique, she was able to get Adam to face the empty space he was using eroticism to fill. I remember very early on in my psychotherapeutic career being put on the spot by a client wanting to know if I found them attractive. The feeling of being trapped was powerful and I said I needed time to think about my response. I was subsequently let off the hook as they felt it wasn't fair to put me in that position, but was it? I wonder how I would answer that question now? I feel that as a male therapist an acknowledgement of the erotic is fraught with danger and challenges, but also recognise that with careful judicious disclosure there can be an opportunity for relational growth for analyst and analysand.

Aspects of loss

When I think of loss, my mind strangely goes to the theoretical construct of it. A key component of attachment theory and which formed the third book of Bowlby's *Attachment* trilogy. Maybe I am avoiding the pain associated with the loss of loved ones and those not so loved. So, when thinking in more depth, the rationale at times can be stripped away and old wounds resurface. Regret at things not said, unresolved feelings of angst and frustration. However, these can be mitigated against

by positive memories of lost ones and has me wondering to what extent is loss and grief ever fully resolved. In this issue articles from Sue Wright, Christiaan Rhodius, and Carol Morrison Straforini examine loss from different aspects. Loneliness as a response to loss, loss in a palliative care setting, and loss from the perspective of therapeutic endings. All highlighting the conflicting emotions that loss and impending loss evoke. The thought of loneliness as a void is something I find particularly intriguing and from a clinical perspective have at times found extremely challenging. The thought of “an abyss”, a “black hole” at the centre of the psyche is often terrifying and as such is actively avoided. To hark back to Orbach’s *Vampire Casanova* that was at the core of his relational patterns. A focus on something else that kept the analytic dyad away from something unpalatable, being seen as nothing. As such, disclosure can help here but discerning the nature of the avoidance, coping strategy, or defence can prove difficult. The sense of feeling bored in the countertransference is an example of this. Aibel’s (2008) article which I referred to earlier dealt with sleepiness and this may well be familiar to a lot of therapists but also to clients as well. It is something I reflect on often—the notion of being in joint dissociative stances and within that the conflict to keep the therapy alive.

Straforini’s article on forced therapeutic endings made me think of how my therapies have finished and the kind of loss associated with them. For full transparency I cannot recall at any stage ending a therapy myself unless it has been in a time-limited setting. Whilst that can be challenging the frame of the setting dictates the ending. However, in open-ended therapy that isn’t the case and I have always had my clients end the therapeutic relationship. The way it is done varies, there is a shared understanding and recognition of the process coming to a natural end, which I find very satisfying. There are, of course, others which are not, very sudden unexplained withdrawals that I genuinely didn’t see coming. I do recognise as a therapist I am there “to be left” and that is as it should be. However, when it is sudden it represents a kind of loss that nicks at the “ego”, was it a sudden misattunement, an external factor such as pressure from a partner? The global pandemic of Covid and subsequent lockdowns ended a significant amount of my therapies as some clients didn’t want to pursue therapy virtually. As such, some never resumed and left us being unable to say goodbye to one another. I feel very fortunate and owe a great deal to my supervisor for helping me work through the various nuances of these endings.

Development and cultural nuance?

When reflecting on what it is to be seen and to see, one can think about the development of the selves that form a personality. Attachment theory as a model of development can direct us to various formulations and inner working models established as a result of parental attachment styles, trauma, environment, and epigenetics. We have in this issue articles by Sylvia Solinski and Candace Orcutt that examine and contrast attachment theory with other models of development

that describe the pathway to severe pathology and personality disorders. They highlight the importance of attachment theory as a framework within which to understand various pathologies. It is timely that I am able to briefly reflect on the 26th John Bowlby Memorial Conference, which on this occasion was in partnership with the Clinic for Dissociative Studies. The focus was on the development of dissociative identity disorder (DID) and how it is worked with clinically from an attachment perspective. The presentations and case studies were excellent, and Solinski's part two article is very much in keeping with the conference theme. A strong perspective, which, among many things, has remained with me from the conference was that the development of DID is a logical response to extreme abuse and trauma. This was referenced throughout and represents an excellent way to turn the at times negative perception of this coping strategy on its head.

Another aspect of attachment in development which I feel is important to reference is the extent to which cultural factors at times lack adequate consideration. Particularly in its application by care institutions. Indeed, in the 2022 special edition of *Attachment* on "Fathers", Afuape examines this when reflecting on the model for a secure base being based upon observations of white middle class mothers who were able to stay at home. A lot of black mothers weren't affluent enough to do this, but it didn't necessarily mean their children lacked security as there were other caregivers who could fulfil that role. The expression it takes a village to raise a child is well known, but within Western-oriented modes of caregiving at times isn't acknowledged. Bowlby did pivot away from that initial Western-oriented view recognising that there are other sources of caregiving that can provide security. However, as pointed out in the *Handbook of Attachment* by Rutter (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008), it is quite complex to marry up attachment theory in areas such as social care policy. Zanetta, in *Intercultural Therapy Challenges* (Ababio & Littlewood, 2019), described her experience of working with a child called Anna. The social workers observations of the child's lack of affect were attributed to separation from her mother. It was, however, a response to the social workers intervention, that she must miss her mother that caused the child's sadness. For me it is a powerful reminder that whilst theory and models are very important, they should serve as a framework for thinking. I remember the work I did with a client who felt that they were on the wrong end of social care judgements due to cultural bias. Their distress and frustration were painful to witness but easy to understand. When the system is against you it is a heavy weight to bear. Ultimately, it is the individual or individuals before us with their history, culture, economic, and social status interacting with our own that we must recognise and see.

Conclusion

In thinking about these themes there is a wide scope for reflection in our clinical and social encounters. My hope is that the readers will find something within this issue that chimes with their experience or piques their interest to explore further. For me

the importance of recognition not only in the consulting room but also in the application of theory is fundamental. That extends to ways of working and thinking whether from a more classical perspective or a relational one.

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