

Borderline Functioning and Life Trauma

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Introduction

Borderline Organisation of the Personality during Adolescence. Diagnostic and Therapeutic Considerations. Application to Persons Suffering from Lack of a Life Project. (Project R and D 2003-11-02)

2. Conceptual Specifications

2.1 Borderline States

- Categorical psychopathology → Borderline Personality Disorder (DSMIV, ICD-10)
- Structural psychopathology → Borderline functioning

Bergeret, 1996: Assumption of three structural basic organizations

Dulz & Schneider, 1996: Primary defense mechanism of splitting subjacent to all the pathological personalities of the B group of DSM-IV

Kernberg, 1967: The compensating Grandiose Self

Kohut, 1977: The importance of mature narcissism

- Dimensional approach → Continuity between normal behaviour and pathology

Table 1: Comparison between structural roots

	Commanding instance in the organization	Nature of the conflict	Nature of the anxiety	Main defences	Object relations
Neurotic structures	Superego	Superego with That	Castration	Repression	Genital
Psychotic structures	That	That with reality	Fragmentation	Denial of the reality Split of the Self	Fusional
Borderline structures	Ideal Self	Ideal Self with: -That - Reality	Loss of object	Split of objects Preclusion	Anaclitic

According to Bergeret, 1996, p.62

2.2. Post-Traumatic Functioning

- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**
- **Adaptation disorder with anxiety (PTA)**
- **Complex post-traumatic disorders (Vermetten & al., 2007)**
- **Post-traumatic embitterment (Linden & al. 2007)**

3. Research Questions

- Support for the Traumatogenic Hypothesis of Borderline Functioning and Psychotic Break-Down

According to the current traumatising hypothesis, early repeated traumas could be an aetiological factor of borderline functioning (Gunderson & Gabbard, 2002). Subsequently, the latter would be maintained with unfavourable biographic events encountered later in his existence by the patient. Borderline functioning would entail unadjusted behaviour and dysfunctional adjustment strategies vis-à-vis stressors and anxiety, so that a retroactive loop between the profound organisation of the personality and the reaction to external stressors would exist (Kovess-Masfety, 2001).

- Analogy Between Borderline Functioning and Complex Post-Traumatic Disorders ; Proximity of Dissociation and Splitting

4. Methodological Considerations

- Sequential structural approach :
Exploratory Study (N=206) → Confirmatory Study (N=195).
- Cross-sectional studies combining a semi-structured biographic interview, psychometric tests (HADS, Index of well-being) and a projective test (Rotter Sentences Completion Test), interpreted in a new manner.
- Follow-up studies focused on the evaluation of arts psychotherapies combining psychometric tests (HADS, Index of well-being, MDBF, Stressverarbeitungsfragebogen), projective tests (Rotter, TAT, Rorschach) and expressive tests (rating scales for stories written under musical induction, pictorial productions, productions of modelling and collage, observation schemes for sessions of arts psychotherapies).

5. Results of the Confirmatory Analysis

- **5.1. Frequency of the Traumatising Biographic Events with the Different Analysed Populations**

5.2. Typological Approach

→ Uncovering Two Distinct Types of Functioning

Table 2: Factor analysis. Results of the Varimax rotation

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2
Repeated ruptures	.748	
Suffering childhood	.742	
Single rupture	-.703	
Entire family	-.656	
Suffering adolescence	.646	
Neglect	.612	
External catastrophe	-.538	.443
Single-parent family	.532	
Violence	.503	
Continuity	-.349	.340
Isolation		-.853
Social support		.830
Support by the family	-.319	.556

Denomination proposal of the dimensions

Dimension 1: repeated traumas since childhood / single trauma at adult age

Dimension 2: social integration / isolation

5.3 Comparative Structural Analysis: Uncovering Latent Dimensions of the Rotter Test Third and First Dimension

Table 3: Homals Rotter He

Variable	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Dimension 3
Distress	.208		
Guilt		.188	
Resignation			.459
Hatred	.687		
Pessimism			.355
Hypertrophied Ideal Self	.606		
Underdeveloped Ideal Self	.196		.249
Professional aims		.208	
Aims love affairs		.247	
Conflicts friends	.575		
Isolation			.179

Denomination proposal of the dimensions

Dimension 1: Pathology of the Ideal Self and conflictual relationships with others

Dimension 2: Desire to take life into one's own hands

Dimension 3: Sideration and retreat

5.3 Comparative Structural Analysis: Uncovering Latent Dimensions of the Rotter Test Third and First Dimension

Table 3: Homals Rotter I

Variable	Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Dimension 3
Distress	.207		
Guilt		.439	
Resignation		.170	
Hatred	.597		
Regret of the past		.246	
Nostalgia		.370	
Hypertrophied Ideal Self	.584		
Underdeveloped Ideal Self			.281
Professional aims			.323
Aims family		.350	.
Conflicts friends	.509		
Conflicts at work			.307

Denomination proposal of the dimensions

Dimension 1: Hypertrophy of the Ideal Self and conflictual relationships with others

Dimension 2: Passivity and need for affiliation

Dimension 3: Ambivalence regarding professional placement

5.4. Analysing the Links between Traumatic Biographic Events and the Current Functioning of Personality

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5.5. Exploration of the Dissociative Experiences

5.5.1. At the HADS Level

The types 2 3 and 3 2 occur with a frequency that is higher than the theoretical size.

5.5.2. At the Rotter Level

Table 7: Comparison between the answers Rotter-I / Rotter-He, Wilcoxon test

Variable	Z	Sum negative ranks	Sum positive ranks	P	Direction of the difference
Separation anxiety	-4.596a	49.50	478.50	.000	I < He
Guilt	-3.157b	345.00	90.00	.002	I > He
Hatred	-4.226b	540.00	90.00	.000	I > He
Nostalgia	-1.667a	240.50	425.50	.096 (t)	I < He
Underdeveloped Ideal Self	-3.772a	80.00	416.00	.000	I < He
Professional aims	-3.795a	164.00	656.00	.000	I < He
Aims friendship	-2.000a	222.00	444.00	.046	I < He
Aims family	-3.087a	378.00	483.00	.002	I < He
Conflicts with friends	-1.671b	285.00	150.00	.095(t)	I > He
Isolation	-1.976a	160.00	336.00	.048	I < He

5.6. Connections between the Pathology of the Ideal Self and the Self-Representation at the Level of the Subgroups

Table 8: Contingency coefficient between the representation of the Ideal Self and Self-representation in the prisoners subgroup (N = 73)

Variable 1	Variable 2	Contingency coefficient	P
Hypertrophy He	Distress I	.343	.002
Hypertrophy He	Hatred I	.495	.000
Hypertrophy He	Desire I	.356	.001
Hypertrophy He	Professional aims I	.344	.002
Hypertrophy He	Aims friendship I	.367	.001
Hypertrophy He	Aims love affairs I	.191	.097
Hypertrophy He	Conflicts friends I	.350	.001
Hypertrophy He	Isolation I	.360	.001
Underdevelopment He	Separation anxiety I	.286	.001
Underdevelopment He	Distress I	.246	.033
Underdevelopment He	Guilt I	.442	.000
Underdevelopment He	Underdevelopment I	.612	.000
Underdevelopment He	Aims friendship I	.376	.001

5.6. Connections between the Pathology of the Ideal Self and the Self-Representation at the Level of the Subgroups

Table 9: Contingency coefficient between selected variables of the representation of the Ideal Self and Self-representation in the subgroup of destitute people (N = 93)

Variable 1	Variable 2	Contingency coefficient	P
Hypertrophy He	Hatred I	.581	.000
Hypertrophy He	Conflicts family I	.307	.002
Hypertrophy He	Conflicts friends I	.456	.000
Hypertrophy He	Conflicts work I	.320	.001
Underdevelopment He	Distress I	.171	.094
Underdevelopment He	Aims love affair I	.198	.051
Underdevelopment He	Conflicts friends	.347	.000

6. Meta-Analysis

We had convergent results, in both the exploratory and confirmatory study, on the following items:

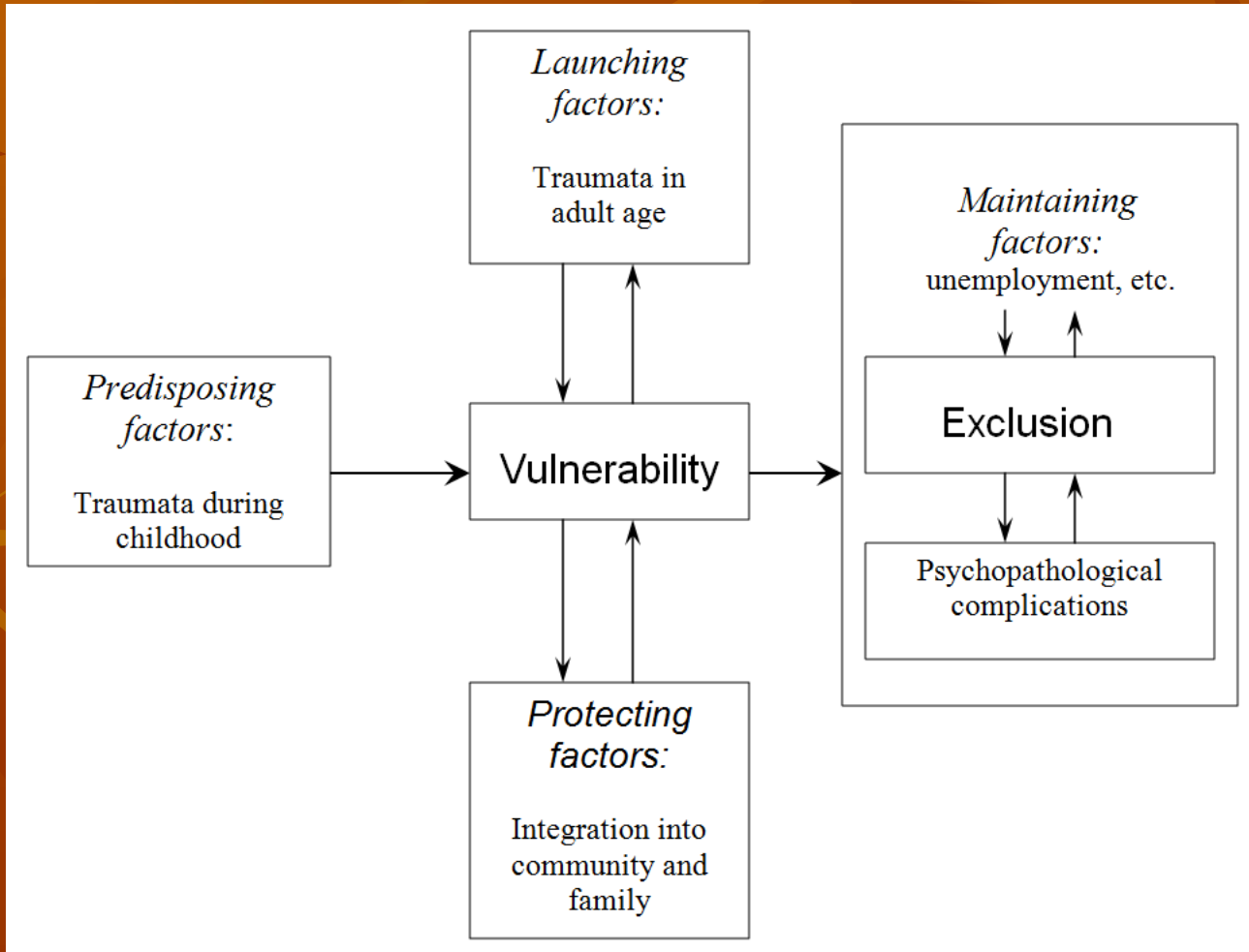
- prevalence of early traumatic events
- prevalence of borderline functioning
- frequency of pathological status of Ego Ideal
- splitting or dissociation between the expression of negative feelings like hatred and envy and the expression of affective needs like longing for tenderness and nostalgia
- splitting between conscious and unconscious expression of emotions
- detection of two basic personality profiles
- presence of an enlarged family functioning as a protective factor against vulnerability to stress and trauma

7. Synthesis

- **Support for the traumatogenic Hypothesis of borderline functioning**
- **Proximity between the concepts of split and dissociation**
- **Different Personality Profiles**
- **Confirmation of the theoretical modelisation emerging from the exploratory study**

7. Synthesis

Figure 2: Theoretical modelisation of the links between biographic traumatic events and exclusion and marginalisation



8. Conclusion and Prospects

- Question of the reversibility of the borderline functioning and of the complex post-traumatic disorders
- Support for the modifications designated in the DSM IV:
Inclusion of the complex post-traumatic disorders having a distinct dissociative component
Redefinition of the criteria of the borderline personality in terms of the dimensional psychopathology
- Indication for arts psychotherapies that allow a progressive integration of the splitted parts of personality
- Perspectives for future research
By means of longitudinal studies of projective and expressive tests, to uncover criteria showing the gradual retreat of the dissociation and the reintegration of the splitted parts of the personality

Thank you for your attention.

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