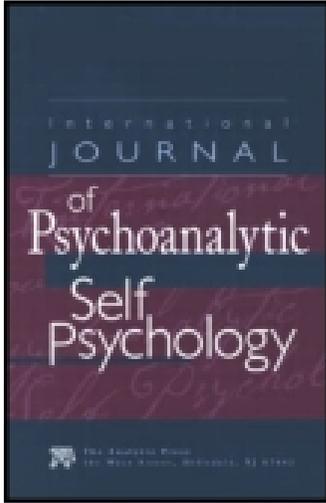


This article was downloaded by: [75.161.174.203]

On: 18 October 2014, At: 09:45

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954  
Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH,  
UK



## International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology

Publication details, including instructions for  
authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/hpsp20>

### The Dissociation of Lived Experience: A Relational Psychoanalytic Analysis of the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma

Bruce Bradfield M.A. <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Independent Practice , Cape Town, South Africa

Published online: 21 Sep 2011.

To cite this article: Bruce Bradfield M.A. (2011) The Dissociation of Lived Experience: A Relational Psychoanalytic Analysis of the Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma, *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology*, 6:4, 531-550, DOI: [10.1080/15551024.2011.606953](https://doi.org/10.1080/15551024.2011.606953)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15551024.2011.606953>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or

indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

# THE DISSOCIATION OF LIVED EXPERIENCE: A RELATIONAL PSYCHOANALYTIC ANALYSIS OF THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMA

BRUCE BRADFIELD, M.A.

The history of psychic trauma and consequences is diverse and rich, and attempts to make meaning out of a phenomenon that resists knowing. This article, through an analysis of the relationship between a mother and her adult child, investigates the transmission of trauma from the survivor generation to the children of that generation. I emphasize the role of attachment relationships and dissociation in this process of transmission. In addition, the article clarifies dissociation as a primarily relational process, which keeps traumatic experience unformulated and ambiguously signified in both the mother and her child. The consequences are noted in terms of how they reflect links between the mother's and the child's intrapsychic and relational experience. A methodology involving triangulation of phenomenological hermeneutic, narrative, and psychoanalytic case study methodologies was applied to the analysis of data collected.

Keywords: attachment theory; dissociation; intergenerational transmission; relational psychoanalysis; trauma

---

Bruce Bradfield, M.A., is a psychoanalytically-oriented Psychotherapist working in independent practice in Cape Town, South Africa. This article is drawn from the author's doctoral degree conducted through the University of Cape Town.

This article has been NetLinked. Please visit [www.iapsp.org/netlink](http://www.iapsp.org/netlink) to view or post comments or questions to the author about this article.

This article is grounded in psychoanalytic contributions made to the theory of the intergenerational transmission of trauma, which have been criticised for focusing too explicitly on intrapsychic explanations. There is a conceptual and explanatory gap in the literature on intergenerational transmission regarding analysis of how trauma is re-experienced relationally in the lived world of the survivor. The impact of trauma on relationships emerges primarily through enduring and potentially problematic defenses. In this article, I am highlighting dissociation as a defense against intolerably painful affective states, which manifests in the mother's intrapsychic experience, and in the relationship between mother and child. This relationship is posited as the location of the intergenerational transmission of traumatic themes.

Relational psychoanalysis frames traumatic experience in a phenomenologically meaningful way, seeking out the ways in which trauma-related affective states are experienced in an intersubjective, emotionally contextualized space (Stolorow, 2007). Relational theorists, notably Bromberg (1998), have emphasized the unspeakable and inarticulable quality of trauma. Bromberg (2003), like the classical analysts, speaks of trauma as an experience that overwhelms the individual with inassimilable affects. The consequence is a defensive dissociation of traumatic affects, such that the individual is not consciously aware of these feelings.

### THE INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF TRAUMA

The concept of the intergenerational transmission of trauma refers to the process by which elements of parental traumatic experiences are passed on to their children. The literature concludes that aspects of the effects of massive trauma experienced by survivor groups have been observed to occur in their children and in subsequent generations. In addition, there is a clear mechanism through which the traumatic memory of the past is communicated to the children of survivors of trauma. Studies in the intergenerational transmission of trauma provide compelling evidence linking the effects of trauma on survivor parents with the later development of similar effects in their children. A growing theme of intergenerational trauma studies has been the study of the relation between parental trauma and traumatic outcomes in children in the care of parents who have a history of trauma (Liotti, 1992, 1995; Main, 1995; Fonagy, 1998, 2001; Pearlman and Courtois, 2005). This aspect of the literature has important relevance

for this article as it moves the focus toward traumatic processes occurring within the attachment relationship.

An observation in the literature on parent–child traumatic transmission concerns some limitations in the manner in which scholars have theorized about traumatic memories and their transmission from parents to their children. With few exceptions (Fonagy, 1999), most of these studies focus only on intrapsychic manifestations of the dissociative consequences of trauma. It is suggested that dissociation is a consequence of a disruption of the parent’s caregiving capacity. What this means is the following: A parent whose trauma has negatively influenced her or his parenting capacity may exhibit tendencies such as child neglect, abandonment, and a disrupted capacity to be emotionally attuned to the child. This pattern of relating to the child may impact on the child’s expectations regarding being cared for, so that they know to expect the absence of an empathically attuned parent. In relation to this, it seems that what may be dissociated are not only the emotions associated with the parent’s trauma, but also the child’s needs for relationship with the parent. This way of conceptualizing the intergenerational transmission of trauma draws from relational psychoanalytic theory and forms the basis for understanding how a child’s needs for empathic attunement are frustrated in the child’s relationship with the parent as a consequence of their history of trauma.

It is important to clarify trauma as being communicated through patterns of relationship, rather than being directly formulated into a narrative. I emphasize the work of Donnel Stern (1997), who developed the notion of unformulated experience as a state of reduced awareness of a personal experience. An unformulated experience is one that has not been fully integrated into consciousness, and is relatively unknown by the self. I am highlighting the link between unformulated experience and the defensive dissociation of traumatic experience. To the extent that traumatic affects and memories become defensively dissociated, these experiences are not integrated as sequential representations of a linear experience. As a result, they do not enter the interpersonal encounter between self and other in the form of a coherent and communicable narrative. Instead, these unformulated experiences enter the relationship in the form of behaviors and through the body. Rowland-Klein and Dunlop (1997), exploring the intergenerational transmission of trauma from an object-relations perspective, examined parent–child interactions. The authors observed the complete silences, intermittent explosions, and mysterious secrecies that shaped patterns of the relationships in the families of Holocaust survivors.

This article explores the meaningfulness of such demonstrations in terms of their impact on the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Perspectives from relational psychoanalysis and attachment theory are central to this exploration.

I now outline relational psychoanalytic and attachment theories in terms of their joint applicability to research centered on the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Childhood trauma is developmentally significant in terms of its impact on the particular quality of attachment relationships that develop between mother and child and in terms of the child's consequent capacity for relationship with others. Central to the notion of trauma occurring in an intersubjective space is the idea that the dissociation of traumatic affect is a relational process. In relation to this, intersubjectivity is defined as the condition in which self-experience is grounded in terms of the relationship with the other. This concept is central to the premises of intersubjectivity theory, and is the basis of relational psychoanalysis. The blending of intersubjectivity theory with classical psychoanalysis has been formulated by a variety of theorists. Kohut (1977) spoke of the *self–selfobject relationship*, Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) articulated the *relational matrix*, and Stolorow and Atwood (1994) spoke of the *intersubjective context*. These conceptualizations recognize the intrapsychic as developmentally and phenomenologically bound to the interpersonal, echoing the notion that childhood interpersonal trauma has implications for the development of a particular disruption in lived experience, affecting attachment relationships directly.

The literature on relational psychoanalytic theory presents a sundry collective of systems, all describing the central principles differently. Greenberg and Mitchell (1983) developed a model that emphasized an object relationship structure as opposed to drive structure. This model moved away from the Freudian vision of self as structured by a discrete conscious/unconscious division. Instead, consciousness was described as infused with unconscious processes and co-created in the relationship between interacting subjectivities. Along with the movement away from viewing conscious and unconscious as separate, relational theory described the intrapsychic and the interpersonal as undivided domains. Gerhardt and Sweetnam (2001), following Bollas (1987), described interaction between individuals as a reciprocal experience through which conscious and unconscious contents become manifest. Bollas described the intersubjective process as shaped by the object relational templates manifesting in the individual's conscious and unconscious experience. I reiterate the link

between trauma and the dissociative defense, and suggest that dissociation, as an intrapsychic process, finds expression through relational patterns that endure into adulthood. In light of this phenomenon, the analysis of the relationship between traumatized mothers and their children could enrich our understandings of the ways in which trauma enters the relationship through the mechanisms of dissociation, and is transmitted to the next generation.

Attachment theory has entered a dialogue with contemporary psychoanalysis through the concepts drawn from object relations theory in which psychic development is seen to occur within an interpersonal matrix (Fonagy, 2001; Blatt and Levy, 2003; Sandler, 2003). Bowlby (1980) envisaged a biologically based link between child and primary caregiver, which secures the child's safety needs. Any expression of distress from the child should consistently elicit a protective engagement on the part of the caregiver. If the child's needs for protection are met with rejection or abandonment, the child will need to adopt strategies to cope with the resultant intolerable anxiety. Such strategies are the developmental origins of a self–other relational organization arising out of the traumatic, intolerable anxiety occurring when the child's needs are met with parental disregard.

Fonagy (1998, 2001) described the relational strategies that children adopt in response to the deprivation of their needs. Disorganized attachment is said to shape the intersubjective dynamics of survivors of childhood trauma. Liotti (1992, 1995), Main (1995), and Fonagy (1998, 2001) identified a pattern of disorganized attachment in survivors of trauma primarily constituted by dissociation as a defensive reaction to traumatic experience. The authors described the intergenerational transmission of trauma occurring in the following dynamic: Parents who experience unresolved loss or trauma often respond to their children's need for containment in a frightened or frightening manner. Such parents may demonstrate incoherence, inconsistency, disintegration, and fragmented expressions of intense and contradictory affects (Fonagy, 1998). Thus, it is of interest and relevance to explore how this pattern of attachment manifests in relationships and how this enables the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

#### **DISSOCIATION AND THE INTERSUBJECTIVE FIELD: A RELATIONAL PSYCHOANALYTIC DESCRIPTION**

The work of Muller, Sicoli, and Lemieux (2000) contributed to key research into the relation between attachment style and posttraumatic

responses. These authors commented on the lack of systematic research into the connection between insecure adult attachment patterns and trauma. Scott (2003) suggested that research into traumatic rupture requires greater integration with insights drawn from attachment theory. I emphasize the traumatizing potential of attachment relationships, particularly experiences such as abandonment, abuse, or frightening and ambivalent relational patterns in relationships with primary caregivers. I am interested in exploring these experiences in terms of their impact on the mother, and their implications for the mother's later relationship with her children.

Philip Bromberg's (1998, 2003) work has been particularly useful in formulating my understanding of dissociation as relational or intersubjective. Bromberg gave clinical accounts of dissociation in which he narrated pathological and non-pathological dissociative process. Bromberg described dissociated states as inaccessible to the conscious self. Dissociation renders a subjectively unknowable part of the self inaccessible to self-reflection and awareness. Bromberg spoke of dissociation as impairing dialogue between conscious and unconscious self-states. This notion is important in the context of a relational exploration of trauma for the following reasons: First, just as certain states are prohibited from self-awareness through a lack of dialogue between conscious and unconscious, so are these states foreclosed in the traumatized self's relationship with others. Dissociation renders parts of the self inaccessible to others in the individual's relational world. Second, to the extent that dissociated memories and affects connected with trauma influence and disrupt the conscious life of the traumatized self, so, too, do these states enter into that person's relationships with others.

Robert Stolorow (2002, 2007) proposed emotional life as bound to a dynamic system of relational contexts. Echoing attachment theory, Stolorow suggested that attunement within the relationship between mother and child facilitates the development of a capacity to integrate and contain painful emotions. Emotional disruption is mediated in a context of relational attunement or malattunement. To the degree that the primary object is malattuned to the developing child's affective states, the child's capacity to experience and integrate painful emotions will be compromised (Stolorow, 2002). Stolorow noted, as a consequence of this affective malattunement, the potential for derailment in the form of dissociation. I emphasize this in relation to the description of dissociation as an experience of disruption of the one's capacity to integrate painful affective experiences.

In this sense, Stolorow proposed a view of dissociative experience that is grounded in an intersubjective context.

In my conceptualization of the dissociative process, I am highlighting the inarticulable and inexpressible quality of dissociated affects and mental representations. In the context of attachment theory, Edwards (2005) articulated the process by which painful affects and experiences in the life of the developing infant may become integrated through the attentive presence of an emotionally attuned other. For Edwards, the traumatic experience is initially held as an unformulated cognitive representation of experience; it is not integrated into a coherent narrative. In the context of a secure attachment, the infant receives an invitation from an attuned object to formulate the experience; to tell the story of the experience. This invitation is followed by an attempt by the child to formulate the experience through narrative. If this formulation of painful experience is met with an empathically attuned response, it can then become integrated (Edwards, 2005). Should this invitation and supportive response be absent, the experience remains unformulated, and becomes dissociated. It is in this process that we see the origins of dissociative process in the context of malattunement in attachment relationships. I am stressing the notion that relational psychoanalysis articulates dissociation as borne out of an atmosphere of malattunement in early attachment relationships. Further, relational psychoanalysis views dissociation as manifesting in future interpersonal relationships; a premise on which this analysis of the intergenerational transmission of trauma is based.

By way of conclusion, I comment on two points drawing attention to the necessity of this work. First, psychoanalytic and attachment theory holds an important place in current psychological research, yet it has been insufficiently applied to research into the link between dissociation and traumatic experience. Second, research into the generational transmission of trauma has moved steadily toward a relationally oriented analytic stance. This trend reveals a need to explain and describe the intersubjective dynamics that manifest in the process of generational transmission. I am emphasizing dissociation in this context because it connects with patterns of relationships between mother and child. Dissociation reflects the incommunicability of traumatic histories, with trauma being held in familial and individual narratives as something nameless and unformulated. In relation to this, I emphasize Bromberg's (1998) expression of dissociation as a primarily relational process. The connection between dissociated traumatic memory and affects, on the one hand, and their emergence inside

mother–child relationships, on the other, has been revealed as a psychological dynamic in need of considered exploration and explanation. Such explanation could serve to enrich psychoanalytic understandings of how intergenerational transmission occurs, as a function of patterns of attachment relationship.

### METHOD

The aims of this study were met through combining phenomenological hermeneutics and narrative research methods. Concepts drawn from relational psychoanalysis and attachment theory formed the hermeneutic framework through which the data were analyzed. Data collection involved a series of unstructured interviews, working with Giorgi's (1997) broad and open-ended questioning style. The interviews aimed to invite participants to describe their experience of trauma as that experience impacted on their relationships with their adult children. Adopting broad, open-ended questioning through an unstructured interviewing technique was motivated by the following considerations: The questioning style was invitational, and aimed at inviting participants to give subjectively rich narratives of personal experience. Such narratives of experience are focused on deepening our understanding of the complexities of lived experience. Willis (2001) suggested that such an approach to the collection of data is applicable to interpretivist, qualitative research.

The doctoral study upon which this article was based engaged with six women and four adult children. The analysis was conceptualized as a case study approach. Case study methodology, defined as an ideographic research method, involves intensive research with single individuals. Such an approach fits well within the phenomenological and narrative methodological framework, as it locates human subjectivity; and the expression of that subjectivity through narrative, as the primary source of information. The study of a personal narrative is fundamentally a form of case-centered research (Mishler, 1999). The intensive nature of the case study approach provides the necessary space for a deep and thorough exploration of the historical experiences of one person. As a psychoanalytically oriented work, the research was guided by an intent toward adopting an "empathic introspective observational stance" (Kohut, 1977, p. 309); an approach with a rich history in the psychoanalysis of trauma (Ulman and Brothers, 1988).

## DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis involved an integration of hermeneutic phenomenological and narrative approaches within a broadly defined case-study methodological triangulation. Analysis partially occurred in the interviews, in the exchange between researcher and participant. I reflected on the participants' descriptions in the interviews, sharing my interpretations with the participant as they arose. I then asked the participants to state whether they felt that their experience was accurately described. This was structured as a shared process, aimed toward refined interpretations. Moustakas (1994) described this process of intersubjective validation as an interchange of ideas, perceptions, feelings, and judgments between researcher and participant. This interchange is an analytic process occurring in the interviews. It aims to clarify the participant's lived experience, and fits well with phenomenology's fidelity to eliciting the essence of experience. The dialogue between researcher and participant is structured as a search for the essential features of the participant's lived experience, and is a tool that resembles psychoanalytic and phenomenological praxis (Tubert-Oklander, 2006).

Beyond interpretations occurring in the interviews, data collected during the interviews, as well as written narratives, were analyzed as follows: First, narratives of the participants' interpersonal experiences were analyzed. Interpretations were informed by concepts drawn from relational psychoanalytic, object relations, attachment theory, and theories of dissociative process. I analyzed descriptions of participants' relational experiences, targeting specific experiences such as feeling abandoned, abused, isolated, and fearful of the other. These experiences were explored in terms of the mother's history, the child's current experience, and the ways in which the mother's history shaped her parenting and relationship with her child. Psychoanalytic concepts that clarify defense mechanisms were used in the process of interpreting the relational narrative (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). The authors proposed a basic hermeneutic approach that accounts for the relationship between different elements of the narrative. This is to say that the collective of each participant's narratives was holistically approached, attending to the ways in which the various elements relate to one another, and to the broader relational context.

Second, I examined narratives that expressed participants' reflections on the traumatic experience. I explored these narratives in terms of their chronology and structure. The ways in which language was used

by the participant was given particular attention, emphasizing how trauma was symbolically represented by the individual. Principles of hermeneutic phenomenology shaped the analysis of narratives of experience. This process was structured by, on the one hand, bracketing off the assumptions that may misshape the reading of the data and, on the other hand, creating an interpretive context in which to locate the information (Willis, 2001). The goal of hermeneutic phenomenological exploration is to communicate accurately, through narrative, the participant's lived experience. Hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry investigates lived experience as it is structured through language, and views written or spoken text as analogous to human action (Packer, 1985). Analysis occurs as an interplay between the following activities: being committed to a pervading concern for the research process, investigating the experience as it is immediately lived, constantly reflecting on emerging themes, describing the experience through repetitious readings and writings, maintaining a strong orientation toward the research question, and balancing the research context by considering relationships between themes and the narrative as a whole (Hein and Austin, 2001). This process occurs in relation to the researcher's gradually moving from full immersion in the data, to a more theoretically informed position. Immersion in the data, through repeated reading and writing about the data, allows the researcher to come to know fully, and imagine empathically, the nature of the experience (Cohen, Kahn, and Steeves, 2000).

Finally, I analyzed nonverbal, embodied expressions in terms of their relation to the verbal narrative. The focus was to articulate the affective messages spoken through the participants' bodies—that is, to articulate the unformulated experience. The position of reflexive embodied empathy (Finlay, 2005, 2006) informed my interpretations of the participants' nonverbal expression. I reflected on participants' gestures, postures, and facial expressions, attempting to elicit what is being communicated through the body.

### THE STORY OF RAHEL AND SOFIE

I present here the single case of a mother–daughter dyad, which encapsulates the results gleaned throughout the analysis. I name the mother Rahel, and her daughter Sofie. Rahel's narrative was perhaps the most pivotal in its contributions to the analysis. Rahel communicated through the interviews, her own writing, journals, written responses to the researcher, as

well as letters written to her by family members, describing their experience of her.

Rahel is a 50-year-old Muslim woman. She has been married for 24 years. During this time, she has been an extremely active mother and wife. Highly intelligent and highly educated, Rahel describes herself as a woman who has focused her powers on the development of her family. Rahel described herself as someone who had always restricted her emotions and needs, focusing on meeting the needs of others. In relation to this, she described being quite controlled, having to function consistently well, so as to constantly meet the needs of her family, extended family, and community. She presented asymptotically in the beginning of the interview process, but slowly became more and more aware of a deep conflict, sadness, and anger in herself. This increasing awareness precipitated a mild depression, which led to my suggestion that Rahel seek psychotherapeutic support. Sofie is Rahel's middle child.

Rahel's traumatic narrative centrally relates to her relationship with her mother and her experience of verbal; emotional; and, at times, physical abuse by her mother. Rahel felt that her mother disliked her; felt emotionally abandoned by her; and, to the extent that she was able to acknowledge this, hated by her. Rahel's mother punished her by isolating her from her family members. Many of Rahel's memories are those that have been told to her by her siblings. Memories emerged of being kicked in her stomach, kicked when she was ill, and having fainted. These memories were not a part of Rahel's own narrative, and in our interview process, she showed me her struggle to accept the truth of these moments of abuse. Prior to any analysis of Rahel's narrative, I was struck by the unformulated quality of Rahel's story. This experience led to a sense of confusion in my hearing of the story, and my difficulty with developing a sense of emotional knowing. The unformulated quality generated a sense of mystery with respect to the narrative, and rendered certain parts of the story un-interpretable. This created a distance between the listener and the narrator, and a sense of seeing the narrative through a foggy lens. Questions remain unanswered concerning why it was that she was the only one of her siblings who suffered abuse. The understanding of the abuse is absent, and it remains mysterious and confounding. Added to this, the facts of the abuse were presented as a complicated collective narrative, with the details of the abuse being provided by siblings, who witnessed it, as opposed to Rahel, who experienced it. To a strong extent, it remains as an unknowable space in Rahel's knowledge of her history.

Rahel's memories around the experience of her mother's rejection of her, and the abuse that she suffered at her mother's hand and mouth, are vague; but the more she penetrated them, as the narrative deepened, the more gruesome they became. Rahel's telling of the story was clinical, almost cold. She was merely stating facts that seemed distant in terms of her grasp of them. Her story was told in a rush; swiftly spoken without pause, in a voice that sometimes broke into a high-pitched shriek, and then returned to softness. This quality in Rahel's tone evoked an awareness in me of her anxieties in the telling. I felt alarmed by Rahel's telling of her story, and by the jarring sense of her determination to voice her story, even if she had to force it out. In the early part of the interview process, Rahel's emotionally disconnected narrative style affected my capacity to feel into her experience. As researcher/psychotherapist, I became aware that my capacity to develop an emotional knowing of Rahel's story was quite limited in the first part of the analysis. As Rahel began to engage more openly and authentically with her emotional experience, I found that I was able to draw closer to her and to know her lived experience at a deeper level. In relation to Rahel's initially anxious relational posture, her taut frame, and somewhat frenetic manner of story-telling, I experienced myself as tensely watching as she revealed herself to me. I became uncomfortable, as I felt that the act of story-telling to be creating an almost voyeuristic relationship in which I was gazing at an object being constructed before me, as opposed to being present as an emotionally attuned other.

An important theme in the analysis of Rahel's narrative was that of silence, secrecy, and mystery in relation to her history of abuse. In Rahel's family, there was a powerful ban on telling, which continues to operate in her relationships with her daughters, her friends, and family. However, in the research interviews, there was a dramatic outpouring of hidden stories:

And then the other thing was that you could never, communication-wise, you could never, you were told whatever happens in this house never gets out. I was extremely scared of her, I remember that too. And I would never, none of my friends, nobody ever knew in my life, with respect to what I was going to domestically.

In relation to the imperative of concealment as an intersubjectively grounded mechanism of defense against knowing, Rahel's engagement with the research process, together with her simultaneous entry into

psychotherapy, represents a movement away from dissociation and toward internal dialogue and conflict.

Central to Rahel's expression of her traumatic history is the relationship between finding herself silenced in terms of communicating her distress and her body's own expression of pain and disintegration. As an adolescent, and into her early 20s, Rahel suffered with hypothyroidism. This manifested in physical weakness, fainting spells, and fatigue:

I became hypothyroid . . . and everything just collapsed. I displayed all the symptoms of hypothyroidism. It's quite a surreptitious disease, and you could almost think it's sort of depression or stress. Anyway I reached a point where one day I, there was obviously some problem with my mother, because I just never communicated. I just used to keep quiet and do what I had to.

We see in this the entry of traumatic rupture into Rahel's flesh; we see her calling out to those around her, that they see her in the act of falling to her knees in exhaustion and pain, that they witness her collapse. This invitation to witnessing is an important theme emerging as a relational leitmotif moving throughout Rahel's story.

A dominating theme in Rahel's narrative is the experience of isolation. The sense of isolation in childhood and motherhood reflects the transposition of a relational theme, and is important in terms of how it is witnessed by the other:

I met my husband on campus. And it was okay, it's been a very difficult twenty four years. I would have just fallen into anyone's arms; anyone who just cared. 'Cause I just felt very alone. From a very young age I just felt alone, like I didn't have anybody. I still am to a certain extent like that. I'm on my own.

I sensed little emotion in her telling of this isolation, and experienced Rahel as dissociating from the emotional impact of the memory while speaking it out. Rahel herself suggested:

What concerns me a little bit is also the lack of emotion, you know. I felt angry last week, and so on, and nothing really. I played the piano and tried to read, and nothing really helped. Just to get me to feel a

bit more, because I feel that I need to feel, and I struggle to get myself to feel deeply.

The style of narrative, which Rahel simultaneously begs witness and disallows, disconnects her and keeps her sealed off. Connected with the theme of isolation, in terms of its manifestation in Rahel's relational experiences, is the theme of withdrawal and retreat. Rahel and Sofie described this consistently; the sense of Rahel absenting herself in an attempt to avoid conflict, to extract her own distress from the relational atmosphere in the family, such that it is not felt and not known. Retreat also functions to provide Rahel with a space in which she can feel what needs to be felt without experiencing the presence of the other, which may, in some way, inhibit her feeling. Feeling, in this sense, can only happen in isolation. In relation to this there is a need in her to avoid Rahel, and a powerful feeling of tension in relation to Rahel's emotional experience, which is generally quite mysterious, unknown, and unsafe. Through this it seems that when Rahel begins to feel intense or painful emotion, she enacts a version of herself that others want to move away from; she opens herself up to a potential abandonment by the other when in a distressful state. In this sense, we can see Rahel creating a relational atmosphere that enables her own movement toward isolation, withdrawal, and disconnection both intrapsychically and intersubjectively.

Sofie's narrative unfolds, like her mother's, as a clinical account of experience, which seems drained of emotion, and conveys a quality of concealment or hiddenness. I felt in relation to Sofie an ambivalent sense of care for the preservation of her seemingly fragile emotional state, and a simultaneous feeling of distance and disconnection in relation to a person who seemed hidden and, to a degree, inaccessible. In the narrative parallel existing between Sofie and Rahel, we can see the intergenerational transmission of a particular expressive style or relational texture, which is, to a degree, emotionless and functions to disengage emotional experience from the overall narrative. Generally, Rahel's emotional experience needs to be fathomed by the family; it is never self-evident, and seldom clarified. Sofie struggles to cope with the notion that her mother endures painful experience, and so avoids the experience. This struggle is shown in the following line drawn from Sofie's interview:

I think I would probably find it difficult to deal with. I suppose you don't really want to see your parents being vulnerable? Um, like you

see your parents as being really strong. Like when you're younger. Like all-powerful and stuff. And it's still kind of there.

In this avoidance of Rahel's emotional experience, we see an intersubjective dissociative process in which both members of the relational dyad collude to disallow the emergence of emotion. A shared behavior that corresponds with this is Rahel's and Sofie's tendency toward retreat. Sofie, in times of emotional upheaval, prefers to retire to her own space until she feels settled; in this sense, she removes herself from others, preventing her emotional unrest from entering the intersubjective space. Sofie's experience reflects Rahel's, demonstrating a relational re-enactment of Rahel's painful traumatogenic relationship with her mother.

A connection drawn in relation to Sofie's experience is that she experiences conflict as frightening and acutely unsettling. Conflict evokes bodily sensations of anxiety and tension in Sofie. Sofie shows us this manifesting in her relationship with her mother, when the two are in conflict: "I feel extremely guilty. I get nauseous. Like a pit in my stomach."

In response to this experience, she retreats as a mechanism of self-protection. In this, we can see Sofie's attempts to foreclose the negative emotions associated with conflict before they arise. In terms of a relational intersubjective theme, we see Sofie's attempts to preserve her psychic integrity by avoiding conflict, which she experiences as damaging. Through this, it can be seen how she preserves integrity of self in exactly the same contexts as framed by her mother's traumatic destabilization as a child. What is transmitted seems to be a process of dissociative defense against injuries to the self, which could be caused by being present to a painful or conflicted relational encounter.

We see how the relationship between mother and daughter is partially structured around Sofie's collusion with her mother's dissociative defense. There is a silent, intersubjectively grounded collaboration aimed at enabling in Rahel a movement away from experiencing distressful emotions. What we can understand from this, in terms of trauma theory and theories surrounding the intergenerational transmission of trauma, is the notion of trauma as held in silence; trauma as an experience that cannot be spoken, and is dissociated from conscious awareness of lived experience. Rahel's intrapsychic processing of her traumatogenic memories and affects was arranged around disconnection from these memories and affects, and disallowance of the expression of these through language. In her late adulthood, she is beginning to engage with a contradictory impulse, which is

to give voice to her traumatic narrative. Sofie, however, as we see in the stark and poorly detailed accounts of the family's relational processes, is as yet unwilling to relinquish the dissociative defense. It has become hers, first as an intersubjective mechanism used to protect her mother; and, as a consequence, as an intrapsychic mechanism used in her own processing of negative emotion. My own experience of Sofie was influenced by a felt need in me to collude with her dissociative process, largely through feeling compelled to avoid questions that may threaten her emotional quiescence. I struggled to engage with Sofie in a manner that was adequately confrontative of the deeper anxieties or conflicts that she may experience. My response was, in this sense, an intersubjectively manifested instinct toward the protection of Sofie's need to disconnect from the intensity of emotional experience.

I inferred from Sofie's narrative the notion that her relationship with her own emotional experience is one of disconnection and uncertainty. She described knowing of the presence of feeling, but expressed uncertainty about the nature and quality of these experiences. She does not have a language for her own feelings. In this, I see the unformulated texture of Sofie's experience, and interpret this as reflecting a link between her own experience and her mother's.

The links that I have drawn represent subtle transmissions of intrapsychic and intersubjective themes, which can be seen as aetiologically linked with Rahel's initial traumatic injury and which unfold as broadly dissociative in their quality and description. This transmission, as can be seen through the exploration of the unique expressive mechanisms employed by mother and daughter, is grounded in the relationship between mother and child, as that relationship is mediated by the language of emotion and emotionlessness.

## CONCLUSION

The doctoral thesis from which this case study was drawn was framed as an attempt to demonstrate the processes by which relational and affective themes in mothers who have survived childhood traumatic experience are transmitted to their children. The idea that the attachment relationship between mother and child is the location of the child's own traumatic experience is an important theme being considered. The case study presented has aimed to reveal the centrality of dissociative process to the

intergenerational transmission of trauma. In relation to this, we see that it is the condition of unformulated experience, in mother and child, which keeps painful experience housed in an unspeakable space. The consequence of this is the transmission of secrecy, isolation, and disconnection from intense affective experience as the predominant themes shared by mother and child.

## REFERENCES

- Blatt, S. & Levy, K. (2003), Attachment theory, psychoanalysis, personality development, and psychopathology. *Psychoanal. Inq.*, 23:102–150.
- Bollas, C. (1987), *The Shadow of the Object*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bowlby, J. (1980), *Attachment and Loss: Vol. 3. Loss*. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis.
- Bromberg, P. (1998), *Standing in the Spaces: Essays on Clinical Process, Trauma, and Dissociation*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press.
- Bromberg, P. (2003), One need not be a house to be haunted: On enactment, dissociation, and the dread of “not-me”—A case study. *Psychoanal. Dial.*, 13:689–709.
- Cohen, M., Kahn, D. & Steeves, R. (2000), *Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research: A Practical Guide for Nurse Researchers*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Edwards, D. (2005), Unconscious influences on discourses about consciousness: Ideology, state-specific science and unformulated experience. *Indo-Pacific J. Phenomenol.*, 5:1–20.
- Finlay, L. (2005), “Reflexive embodied empathy”: A phenomenology of participant–researcher intersubjectivity. *Human. Psychol.*, 33:271–292.
- Finlay, L. (2006), Dancing between embodied empathy and phenomenological reflection. *Indo-Pacific J. Phenomenol.*, 6:1–11.
- Fonagy, P. (1998), An attachment theory approach to treatment of the difficult patient. *Bull. Mem. Clin.*, 62:259–284.
- Fonagy, P. (1999), Attachment, the Holocaust and the outcome of child psychoanalysis: An attachment based model of intergenerational transmission of trauma. Paper presented at the Sophia Mirviss Memorial Lecture, February, San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute and Society, San Francisco.
- Fonagy, P. (2001), *Attachment Theory and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Other Press.
- Gerhardt, J. & Sweetnam, A. (2001), The intersubjective turn in psychoanalysis: A comparison of contemporary theorists: Part 2—Christopher Bollas. *Psychoanal. Dial.*, 11:43–92.
- Giorgi, A. (1997), The theory, practice, and evaluation of the phenomenological method as a qualitative research procedure. *J. Phenomenol. Psychol.*, 28:235–260.
- Greenberg, J. & Mitchell, S. (1983), *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hein, S. & Austin, W. (2001), Empirical and hermeneutic approaches to phenomenological research in psychology: A comparison. *Psychol. Meth.*, 6:3–17.
- Hollway, W. & Jefferson, T. (2000), *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: Free Association, Narrative and Method*. London: Sage.

- Kohut, H. (1977), *The Restoration of the Self*. Madison, CT: International Universities Press.
- Liotti, G. (1992), Disorganised/disoriented attachment in the etiology of the dissociative disorders. *Dissoc.*, 5:196–204.
- Liotti, G. (1995), Disorganised/disoriented attachment in the psychotherapy of the dissociative disorders. In *Attachment Theory: Social, Developmental and Clinical Perspectives*, eds. S. Goldberg, R. Muir & J. Kerr. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, pp. 343–363.
- Main, M. (1995), Recent studies in attachment: Overview, with selected implications for clinical work. In *Attachment Theory: Social, Development, and Clinical Perspectives*, eds. S. Goldberg, R. Muir & J. Kerr. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, pp. 407–474.
- Mishler, E. G. (1999), *Craftartists' Narratives of Identity*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Moustakas, C. (1994), *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Muller, R., Sicoli, L. & Lemieux, K. (2000), Relationship between attachment style and posttraumatic stress symptomology among adults who report the experience of child abuse. *J. Traum. Stress*, 13:321–332.
- Packer, M. J. (1985), Hermeneutic inquiry in the study of human conduct. *Amer. Psychol.*, 40:1081–1093.
- Pearlman, L. & Courtois, C. (2005), Clinical applications of the attachment framework: Relational treatment of complex trauma. *J. Traum. Stress*, 18:449–459.
- Rowland-Klein, D. & Dunlop, R. (1997), The transmission of trauma across generations: Identification with parental trauma in children of Holocaust survivors. *Aust. New Zeal. J. Psychiat.*, 31:358–369.
- Sandler, J. (2003), On attachment to internal objects. *Psychoanal. Inq.*, 23:12–26.
- Scott, S. (2003), Integration of attachment theory with other approaches to developmental psychopathology. *Attach. Human Devel.*, 5:307–312.
- Stern, D. (1997), *Unformulated Experience*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press.
- Stolorow, R. (2002), From drive to affectivity: Contextualizing psychological life. *Psychoanal. Inq.*, 22:678–686.
- Stolorow, R. (2007), *Trauma and Human Existence: Autobiographical, Psychoanalytic and Philosophical Reflections*. New York: The Analytic Press.
- Stolorow, R. & Atwood, G. (1994), Toward a science of human experience. In *The Intersubjective Perspective*, eds. R. Stolorow & G. Atwood. New York: Jason Aronson, pp. 15–30.
- Tubert-Oklender, J. (2006), On the inherent relationality of the unconscious: Reply to commentary. *Psychoanal. Dial.*, 16:227–239.
- Ulman, R. B. & Brothers, D. (1988), *The Shattered Self*. Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press.
- Willis, P. (2001), The “things themselves” in phenomenology. *Indo-Pacific J. Phenomenol.*, 1:1–14.

Bruce Bradfield, M.A.

44 Three Anchor House, Three Anchor Bay Rd.

Seapoint, Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa 8005

+27216711204

bc.bradfield@gmail.com

## TRANSLATIONS OF ABSTRACT

La historia del trauma psíquico y sus consecuencias es diversa y rica, e intenta encontrar el significado de un fenómeno que se resiste a ser conocido. Este artículo, a través del análisis de la relación entre una madre y su hijo adulto, investiga la transmisión del trauma desde la generación superviviente a los hijos de esta generación. Enfatizo el papel de las relaciones de apego y de la disociación en este proceso de transmisión. Además, el artículo clarifica que la disociación es un proceso relacional primario que mantiene la experiencia traumática no formulada y con significados ambiguos tanto en la madre como en el hijo. Se describen las consecuencias en cuanto reflejan los vínculos entre la experiencia intrapsíquica y relacional entre de madre e hijo. Una metodología (que implica la triangulación de las metodologías hermenéutica-fenomenológica, narrativa y del estudio psicoanalítico de un caso) se aplica para el análisis de los datos del caso.

La storia del trauma psichico e delle relative conseguenze è alquanto ricca e varia, e tenta di costruire un significato a partire da un fenomeno che oppone resistenza alla comprensione. Attraverso l'analisi del rapporto tra una madre e il figlio adulto, questo lavoro esamina la trasmissione di un trauma dalla generazione dei superstiti ai figli di quella stessa generazione. Di questo processo di trasmissione vengono sottolineati il ruolo dei legami di attaccamento e della dissociazione. Inoltre, il lavoro descrive la dissociazione come un processo principalmente relazionale che mantiene l'esperienza traumatica inespressa e ambiguamente manifesta sia nella madre che nel bambino. Si osserva come le conseguenze di tali dinamiche si riflettono nel legame tra l'esperienza intrapsichica e relazionale della madre e del figlio. All'analisi dei dati raccolti è stato applicato un metodo di studio che implica la triangolazione tra l'ermeneutica fenomenologica, la narrativa e lo studio di caso in chiave psicoanalitica.

L'histoire du traumatisme psychique et de ses conséquences est diversifiée et riche, et elle tente de trouver des significations à un phénomène qui résiste à être connu. Cet article, à travers une analyse de la relation entre une mère et son enfant adulte, explore la transmission du traumatisme par la génération des survivants du traumatisme aux enfants de cette génération. Je mets l'accent sur le rôle des relations d'attachement et sur la dissociation dans ce processus de transmission. En plus, l'article clarifie la dissociation comme un processus fondamentalement relationnel, lequel maintient l'expérience traumatique non-formulée et signifiée de manière ambiguë à la fois chez la mère et son enfant. Les conséquences sont identifiées en termes des liens entre l'expérience relationnelle et intrapsychique de l'enfant et celle de la mère. Une méthodologie impliquant la triangulation de l'herméneutique phénoménologique, et des méthodologies de narration et d'étude de cas psychanalytiques a été appliquée à l'analyse des données colligées.

Die Geschichte des psychischen Traumas und seiner Folgen ist äußerst vielfältig und sie versucht ein Phänomen zu verstehen, das sich dem Bewußtsein entzieht. Diese Arbeit untersucht mithilfe einer Analyse der Beziehung zwischen einer Mutter und ihrem erwachsenen Kind die Weitergabe des Traumas von der Generation der Überlebenden auf die Generation der Kinder. Ich hebe die Rolle der Bindungsbeziehungen und der Dissoziation

in diesem Transmissionsprozess hervor. Zusätzlich wird in dieser Arbeit die Dissoziation als ein primär relationaler Prozess beschrieben, welcher die traumatische Erfahrung unausgesprochen und doppeldeutig in beiden, Mutter und Kind, erhält. Die Konsequenzen werden in Begriffen beschrieben, die die Verbindungen zwischen der intrapsychischen und der relationalen Erfahrungen zwischen Mutter und Kind widerspiegeln. Eine Methode, die die phänomenologisch - hermeneutische, narrative und die Methodologie psychoanalytischer Fallstudien trianguliert, wurde angewendet, um die gesammelten Daten zu analysieren.