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Prenatal roots of attachment in Psychotherapy

Otto Rank, a well-known pioneer in the area of prenatal psychology, has emphasized the great importance of prenatal time and perinatal trauma for the psyche of an individual. If we understand “Urwiderstand” (or, Primary Resistance) as the deepest level of existential defence, then the confrontation with the trauma of existential change should have more significance as an important objective in psychotherapy.

This lecture outlines the draft of Prenatal and Perinatal oriented Psychotherapy focusing on the search for attachment as a basic tool of identity from the very beginning of life. Human development requires Self-Embodiment which cannot be achieved without relatedness. The function of primary resonance processes during prenatal life will be explained. The Self is to be unfolded on an interpersonal and essential level and I have specified its prenatal roots as Interpersonal and Essential Bonding. It will also be shown how the quality of prenatal attachment can influence the postnatal search for identity.

Interpersonal Bonding, which is established within the prenatal time, is dependent on the quality of the primary relationship. If this attachment fails, then the Self tries to protect itself against splitting by creating a sense of wholeness at the core level (potential of the Self named idiom, unique- or core identity).

This implies the thesis, that in this way, independent of the depth of early traumatising, each individual has the potential to transform the trauma of existential change.

Béla Grunberger and André Green have expanded on Freud's ideas of prenatal roots of narcissism. The concept of Bipolar Self (Jakel, 2001) is associated with these theories. It explains how prenatal trauma may cause “unborn” primary narcissistic states as isolated forms of relatedness. Furthermore, how this will be affected by the conflict of prenatal attachment- versus splitting processes. Therefore, the trauma of birth may result from the existential situation of the unborn within the prenatal bonding space.

The theory and practice of Pre- and Perinatal oriented Psychotherapy will be explained with the help of illustrations.

The goal of theory and practice of Pre- and Perinatal oriented Psychotherapy will be defined regarding the treatment concept, methodological approach, therapeutic implications and the role of the therapist; PPP postulates bonding-oriented therapeutic work based on the thesis of pre-traumatic wholeness in order to transform the prebirth and birth trauma. This integrative-analytical approach includes also the direct confrontation with the trauma on an implicit memory level when the bonding capacity of the client is already developed.

In summary, this question will be elaborated how prenatal and perinatal trauma can cause isolated stages of the Self as a dissociated part of the individual's personality indicating the prenatal origin of identity formation in the human development.