

12.10.18, München IoPT Congress, Sissel Bru Reksten

Trauma of Identity and Burn out.

I will start by explaining the main concepts “burn out” and “trauma of identity.”

Burn out is understood to be a consequence of life stress. It is a diagnosis, but not an illness. Usually it is concerned with stress in the work situation. A situation with too much work and not enough resources to manage the requirements.

Burn out is characterized by

- Emotional exhaustion
- Emotional distancing or lack of empathy
- Reduced accomplishments at work

The common steps towards burn out are

1. Enthusiasm
2. Frustration in the work situation
3. Disillusion and apathy
4. Psychosomatic illnesses
5. Aggression or depression
6. Risk of addiction
7. Suicidal tendencies

The symptoms of burn out are:

- Feeling powerless, unmotivated and exhausted
- Irritable and indifferent towards clients and customers
- Work gets more and more issue-oriented

There is also a strong tendency towards perfection and a drive to sacrifice one self.

The self-talk goes: Hurry up! ““Be perfect! ““Be strong! ““Work harder for others! ““Do not care about yourself!”

And as time goes on issues with concentration, reduced self-esteem, self-harming behavior and sleep difficulties emerges.

Symptoms of burn out has high similarity with trauma reactions and can be have its origin in early trauma and Identity trauma.

So, what is a trauma?

A trauma happens when all our stress mechanisms to handle a situation are exhausted, and you end up in a helpless state with no power at all. In this overwhelming situation a split in the psyche can occur. Remember Dr. Ruppert’s model of splitting?

In IoPT we work from the premise that our identity starts with the conception. When we are conceived we are already one whole, living organism. A child is from the start an entity and has value on its own.

An Identity trauma is trauma that happens very early in life.

As when a child is not wanted by its mother, it may be

- Mother gets pregnant at an inconvenient time,
- With a father that is not a loved one,
- Or even was a result of rape.

The mother may be indifferent, disgusted by the pregnancy, reject the child or even hate it.

In trauma therapy we see that the unborn child can feel that is not welcome. From early on in life it is a fight for survival. It should not exist at all.

The child may be a survivor of an abortion attempt. This is also part of my personal story.

- The unwanted child suffers pain of rejection, loneliness and hopelessness
- Its symbiotic needs are not met.
- It must give up its's identity and feeling of self, its own will.
- It must adjust and identify with others to survive.
- Life becomes a struggle from the start.

This is how an Identity trauma can be caused. And after the Identity trauma, the love trauma, re-traumatization in different forms, and then the trauma of being a perpetrator towards one self and other.

As an adult this early trauma is hard to remember. It shows up mostly as sensations, moods and instinctive reactions, as relational problems and self-sabotage.

With no own identity and with unmet symbiotic needs as a child an adult always look for something to connect to, to survive, to ensure the right to live and self-worth. The next step is to identify with other – the mother, the nation or the work - to ensure a feeling of belonging and survival.

With Dr. Ruppert's model of splitting we can see the connection between Identity trauma and burn out.

To survive one sacrifices oneself for other and will be a loyal, hardworking, employee. This I have done. I have my own personal history of burn out.

Looking back, I know that I have always been an enthusiastic and hard-working person as a student and as an employee. I always wanted to learn more, to do a better job, to get better results and deliver better quality.

In a work place the trauma feelings easily get triggered and survival patterns kick in. My self-talk went: Hurry up! ""Be perfect! ""Be strong! ""Work harder for others! ""Do not care about yourself!" I could shine as our business goals were attained and celebrated. I felt important and needed. My life was filled with direction and meaning.

As my life progressed I became more and more driven. More and more I acted like a machine: "Wake up, go to work, come home, sleep, wake up." On and on.

Over time I experienced problems with concentration, reduced self-esteem and self-confidence, self-harming behavior, sleep difficulties and aggression.

And the symptoms of autoimmune diseases appeared:

Psoriasis, Lichen planus, Graves' disease, allergies and food sensitivities. And Lyme disease. Strangely the best medicine I always could get was rest.

My husband and children have suffered from my stress reactions, my aggressivity and my fatigue. The process accelerated, and the end was physical and emotional burn out.

Remember the characteristics of burn out? I was there!

So, you understand why the theme of Identity trauma and Burn out is interesting for me?

When I started working with constellations and IoPT I dissociated every time somebody worked on the time before birth. And as therapy progressed I have had to accept my start in life as a child that was not wanted, not loved and not cared for. The shame and hopelessness of not being wanted, the feeling of being monstrous has made me develop a mask of being successful strong and capable. My healing path has been long. And it is still a work in progress.

Now I better understand my patterns, my reactivity and my sensitivities. My health is good, I sleep well. But I know that I am sensitive to triggers, especially in the work arena.

It takes time and courage to accept the truth of the original trauma. Stop being a victim or a perpetrator, understand that there are symbiotic needs I will have to take care of on my own and stand by myself.

Today I also work with clients with burn out symptoms. Usually they come to me with the traumatic situation they are currently in. But the Identity trauma is at the core.