

*Attachment and the Road to Intimacy:
The Healing Journey for Post Abortive Men, Women and the
World*

After Choice Symposium

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Video

The Waiting Room

Lucy by Skillet

"The so-called right to abortion has pitted mothers against their children and women against men. It has sown violence and discord at the heart of the most intimate human relationships. It has aggravated the derogation of the father's role in an increasingly fatherless society."

Mother Teresa

Learning Objectives

- *Explore the research of abortion's impact on relationships*
- *Understand abortion's effect on different couple types*
- *Understand the main issues that are unique to post abortion couples and what to do about it as a therapist and those in the helping*

profession

- Understand a model of healing in working with post abortion couples
- To understand how this model can effectively prevent relationship failure after abortion

Learning Objectives

- Application of this model to a real life example from counseling
- To understand how trauma and attachment issues drive the abortion debate in our culture and the world
- To provide a framework of healing using attachment theory on a macro level in our culture and the world, that has worked on a micro level with couples

Preservation or Death of Relationship?

- Referring back to the influence a male has over the abortion decision, most believe that having an abortion will preserve their relationship but that is often not the case, and the relationship often dies quickly.

What does the Research say About Relationship Failure After Abortion?

- Milling, 1975, failure rate of 70%

- Shostak 1984, failure rate 25%
- Barrett et al., 1992, 22% of German women's relationships with their partners had ended a year later
- Lauzon Study (2000) 12 % of women and 18% of men that an abortion performed up to 3 weeks earlier had impacted their relationship
- Rue and colleagues (2004) reported that 6.8% of Russian women and 26.7% of American women indicated relationship problems caused by an abortion experience
- Turnaway 2010, study 1 in 3 involved in with same person 2 years later

Bound by Grief

"Many relationships between couples come a part shortly after an abortion. Others survive only because their partners are bound together by grief. These relationships often turn into prolonged mutually destructive mourning rituals."

Teresa Burke, Ph.D.

The Impact Pregnancy Loss in General has on Relationships

Presenting Couple Types

What's Unique and the Same for Each?

- Female who has abortion history with different partner
- Male who has abortion history with different partner
- Couple who have shared abortion history
 - Prior to marriage
 - During marriage
 - Ripple Effects: The Impact on the Nuclear and Extended Family
- Unacknowledged participants and their grief

"Families are only sick as their secrets" John Bradshaw

Post abortion families often carry these secrets to the detriment of the health of the marriage and the family and at times the next generation

Areas of Impact

- Both may be experiencing trauma and or current or past PTSD
- Communication and conflict, anger out
- Mood and anxiety disorders, anger in
- Shame and blame
- Unresolved grief
- Sexual relationship
- Attachment and bonding

- Risk of sex addiction and affairs
- Risk of Intimate Partner Violence

PTSD Studies Among Vets

- Research that has examined the effect of PTSD on intimate relationships reveals severe and pervasive negative effects on marital adjustment, general family functioning, and the mental health of partners. These negative effects result in such problems as compromised parenting, family violence, divorce, sexual problems, aggression, and caregiver burden.
- Nearly 20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans report symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder or major depression.
- Approximately 38% of Vietnam veteran marriages failed within six months of the veteran's return from Southeast Asia.
US Dept of Veteran Affairs

Good Resource

Healing Together: A Couple's Guide to Coping with Trauma and Post
Traumatic Stress
Intimate Partner Violence

- "Simpson said he didn't know why Nicole had decided to abort what would have been their third child. Petrocelli pressed Simpson on whether she had decided to abort a pregnancy after that incident

because she feared being struck or abused by him. Simpson replied that Nicole never told him that."

The "Crazy Cycle" of Trauma as Seen in the Counseling Office Working With Couples

- Symptom or behavior
- Triggers past trauma of spouse
- Spouse reacts in hurt and anger
- Defensive reaction to being attacked and can also react in anger and shame
- Invalidation of trauma trigger
- Trauma at the root of the original symptom or behavior get invalidated
- Reliving of the original trauma for spouse
- Reliving of the original shame/trauma for person who presents with the symptom or behavior

Lessons Learned from Trauma Counseling with Couples

- Subconsciously/unconsciously whoever triggers the trauma memory becomes the abuser on that subconscious/unconscious level

- Many couples who have trauma in their history have cycles that maintain the trauma in the relationship
- Triggers happen at a subconscious or unconscious level and create a limbic response often rooted in fear. Most people are not able to see or admit to the trigger because the thoughts and projections they are having seem real
- If triggers and the cycle of trauma happen too often one or both people may shut down and numb their feelings toward their partner who triggered them
- The problem is not the problem. It is not the toilet paper roll!
What I have learned in working with hundreds of couples
Key to breaking the "Crazy cycle"

The symptoms and behaviors that start the cycle need to be reframed to be viewed from their etiology which is often rooted in trauma to include validation

Reframing men in the abortion decision can help break the cycle

What would you do if I told you I believe I hold the missing piece of the puzzle from a psycho/social perspective of ending abortion in this country and it involves validation of trauma for both men and

women and breaking the "crazy cycle" between genders?

Emotionally Focused Therapy

- Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples is the fastest growing evidenced-based approach to treating relational distress in couples in the world. Developed by Dr. Sue Johnson, EFT provides a well researched road map for helping couples grow closer and resolve relational problems.

Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)

- Couples work
- Couples in trauma

Anger: A Man's Way of Grieving?

Research on the Impact of the Sexual Relationship

- Bradshaw and Slade (2003) concluded that 10-20% of women experience abortion related sexual problems in the early months after abortion, while 5-20% report difficulties a year later

The Impact on the Sexual Relationship

- Possible dissociation during intimacy
- The impact of depression and anxiety/fear of happening again
- Male impotency
- What was meant for bonding now disconnected
- Partner unconsciously becomes abuser and abandoner, trauma

reenactment or repetition

- Sex becomes associated with death and pain, not unlike a sex abuse survivor associating sex with pain

Ghosts in the Bedroom

- There are often ghosts in the bedroom as a result of having an abortion. These ghosts combined with often having past ghosts the result of sex abuse, sex addiction history, create more trauma in a room that was supposed to be for bonding. The chemical reaction that was supposed to create bonding, now creates disconnection and aloneness. Often the only way to survive this is through disassociation.

The importance of Stopping the Sexual Relationship

- If the female has sex abuse in her history, the dynamics after abortion can be the same
- Trauma to the body just happen like a rape
- Attachment beliefs are shattered
- Partner *unconsciously can become the abuser* "The person that was supposed to love me, abandoned me and abused me"
- Female may disassociate from her emotions like in previous sex abuse
- Fear abandonment often drives this behavior for men and women, but more often men

- If this isn't stopped permanent damage can happen
- Trauma and attachment wounds need to heal first before any slow reintegration of the sexual relationship

A Few Reasons Why Couples Will Resist Stopping the Sexual Relationship

- Codependency history
- Fear of abandonment especially for the male is soothed
- Medicating the pain of the loss
- Sex addiction history
- History of dissociation
- Theology or religious beliefs

Shame

I Wasn't There

By Steve Siler and Scott Kirppayne

Shame to Blame

- How can I ever trust you again!

Shame Based Grid

Shame to Grace

Resources

Naked Without Shame

The Theology of the Body
The Risk of Sexual Addiction and Affairs for Men and Women

- *Current and previous trauma*
- *Avoidant attachment and bonding problems*
- *Disassociation and survival coping*
- *Trauma reenactment or repetition (sex addicts often marry sex abuse survivors)*
- *Fear of abandonment in current triggers past and the need to soothe, Unconscious projection onto a "mother" figure*

Statistics on Sex Addiction

- *6% to 8% of Americans are sex addicts. 24 million people*
National Counsel on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity. 1999
The internet was a significant factor in 2 out of 3 divorces
American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, 2003
29% of those with internet access at work view porn
Nielson Company, 2010
4.2 million porn sites, 12% of total websites
Sex is the number one topic searched on the internet
Hard to get accurate and up to date research due to the challenge of the legitimacy of the disorder

The Etiology of Sexual Addiction

The Sex Addiction Cycle

Trauma Bonds

- Patrick Carnes developed the term to describe "the misuse of fear, excitement, sexual feelings, and sexual physiology to entangle another person." A simpler and more encompassing definition is that traumatic bonding is: "a strong emotional attachment between an abused person and his or her abuser, formed as a result of the cycle of violence."

- Normalized for those that grow up in abusive households

Individual, Couple Grief

"To spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness."

Erich Fromm

The Grief Cycle

Revisiting of Defense Mechanisms

- Rationalization
- Repression
- Denial
- Minimization
- Avoidance

Treatment Stages Using
Sound Psychological Theory

- *Person Centered Theory*
- *Psychodynamic Theory*
- *Behaviorism*
- *Social learning and social psychology*
- *Attachment Theory*
- *Cognitive Behavioral Theory*
- *Family Systems Theory*
- *Emotionally Focused Couples Theory*
- *Mindfulness and Neurobiology*
- *Psychodrama*
- *Somatic Experiencing*

Family Systems Theory in Working with Post Abortion Men and Women

- *The person who has the symptom is not the problem*
- *The system that produced the symptom is the problem to address*
- *Wounded in relationships, one must heal in relationships*
- *Trauma and addiction symptoms can just get worse if you only address the individual*

Specialized Training in Systemic Treatment of PTSD

- Treatment of PTSD symptoms in the context of the system or couple relationship
- Integration of emotions with suppressed/repressed memories, with the partner being a safe attachment to walk through the process with
- Using emotionally focused couple's therapy to change the trauma cycle
- Using mindfulness to create greater control over limbic system responses in the couples' interaction
- Moving from reaction to reflection as a couple

Additional Evidenced Based Practice Models/Theory that are Currently Accepted for Treating PTSD

- The International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies has developed a grading system of models that meet the accepted criteria. The models that made the A list are:
 - Prolonged Exposure Therapy
 - Cognitive Processing Therapy, CPT
 - Eye-movement desensitization and reprocessing, EMDR
 - Stress-inoculation training
 - Medications

Old Model vs New Model Pre and Post Abortion

- *Symptoms*
 - *Rapport*
 - *Reduction in defenses*
 - *Connection to the loss*
 - *Treatment*
 - *Reduction in symptoms*
-
- *Forced connection to the loss*
 - *Increase in defenses and creates more trauma*
 - *People avoid treatment*
 - *No symptom reduction*

Approach Has to Change

- *Most people who have abortions don't come to counseling for that issue especially men*
- *Similarities to how people end up in counseling addressing the issue of sex abuse in their history*

- More people will be reached by taking a symptom approach to counseling that requires a healthy attachment to be established first before trauma work!
- Most people, especially men, come to counseling when there is a crisis caused by symptoms
- Treating the actual abortion or abuse issue can take 1-2 years after counseling has begun

Reaching the Post Abortive: Moving from a Front Door Approach to a Back Door Approach

"If it normally takes one to two years in counseling for most clients to want to address traumatic issues at a deeper level, then the approach to getting people in the door with the "A" word will only have limited results. This fact alone provides distorted evidence to those who defend that the "relative risks of mental health problems are no greater than the risks among women who deliver an unplanned pregnancy"

Greg Hasek

* APA Task Force on Mental Health and Abortion, 2008

Treatment Approach for Men or Women using Emotionally Focused Therapy and Attachment Theory

Soothing the threatened brain video

By Susan Johnson EFT

Most Common Couple Dynamic in the Abortion Decision
Seen through Attachment Theory

- Male is avoidant in attachment
- Female is insecure in attachment, lack of strong sense of self
- Female looks to the man for support
- Denial of self again if lack of support
- Female fears abandonment prior to decision, reliving the etiology of the insecure attachment

Most Common Couple Dynamic in the Abortion Decision Seen through Attachment Theory

- Male fears abandonment after the decision for his failure to provide and protect leading to a reliving of original shame from childhood
- Attachment styles often reverse at this point, leading the male to be anxious and the female to be avoidant. Both now feel what their partner felt in childhood
- Unfortunately the male presents often as more worried about the potential to lose their partner than the loss of the child at this point

Unconscious Attachment Belief Systems at the time of the Abortion Decision

- Am I lovable?
- Can I trust you to be there for me?

- Shattered
- Can retrigger old trauma and confirm attachment belief systems
- Unconsciously the partner can become the abuser
- Breeds trauma between genders with abortion at the forefront

The Unconscious

"The security of attachment is often determined in the first few years of a child's life. This is often before words. What this means is attachment responses are often not conscious. The reactions in the brain come from a place prior to memory. This is why it is so critical to understand the effect of early attachment trauma and its effect on the choice to abort, the effect on the relationship, the attachment trauma between the genders in our culture, and the healing process that will need to take place on an attachment level in relationships and the world."

Greg Hasek

Treatment Model Based on Attachment Theory

- For men/women
- For couples
- For the world

Stages of Treatment Using Attachment Theory

- Attachment to the therapist

- Attachment with self and emotions
- Attachment to one's spouse and couple's grief work together
- Attachment to father-loss/mother loss/ previous abuse etc
- Attachment to lost fatherhood/ motherhood
- Attachment to children and others

Attachment to the Therapist

Point #1

Building rapport and establishing a safe trusting relationship is critical before doing any trauma work.

Attachment to the Therapist

- Structure
- Attunement
- Empathy
- Positive affect
- Support
- Reciprocity
- Nurturance

- "Safe haven and secure base"

"The preciousness of the interpersonal safety that the person feels in your office right now. It's those moments right now that they feel deeply understood and seen by another person. They can have a "here and now" experience of being deeply understood. The content of a person's trauma is secondary to that."

Bessel van der Kolk M.D.

The Need for Assessment

- Intake assessment to include reproductive loss in general
- When to refer to a therapist
- Screening tools

PTSD

Mood Disorders

Anxiety Disorders

Suicide Ideation

Substance or Process Addictions

**Sobriety is the first goal to work on with a client prior to any trauma work.*

- Motivational Interviewing

Attachment to Emotions

Point # 2

Men and women need to be able to identify, connect and regulate emotions first before any other work moves forward.

Attachment to Emotions

- *Dialectical Behavioral Therapy*
Marsha Linehan, 1991
- *Identifying emotions*
- *Emotional regulation*
- *Self soothing*
- *Greater impulse control*
- *Developmental growth*

Attachment to Spouse

Point # 3

It is best to work on attachment in the marriage relationship first in order to break any trauma cycles of interaction. In addition, the spouse can be part of the healing process.

Attachment to Spouse

- *Assessment of attachment styles*
- *Emotionally Focused Trauma Therapy With Couples*
S. Johnson, 2002

- *Changing the cycle of relating*
- *Imago Therapy: The Couple's Dialogue*
Harville Hendrix, 2001
- *Working through grief/PTSD together is huge!*

The Couple's Dialogue

- *From Imago Therapy by Harville Hendrix*
- *The "medicine" used in therapy*
- *Mirroring*
- *Validation*
- *Empathy*
- *Helps with attachment trauma and the brain*
- *Neuroplasticity*
Treatment Stages Using Attachment Theory with Couples
- *Begin to teach coping skills for PTSD together as a couple*
- *Calming the arousal of the nervous system*
- *Triggers*
- *Projections*
- *Intrusive thoughts*
- *Preventing the numbing of emotions*

- Use of mindfulness skills

Attachment to father-loss

Point #4

If you want to work with men and women who have been wounded by abortion, then it is best to start with Father-Loss/Mother-Loss/Abuse issues etc.

Treatment Stages Using Attachment Theory with Couples

Couple attachment to father-loss/ mother-loss abuse issues

- Assess for other traumas such as sex abuse, father wounds etc.
- Begin to address those traumas with PTSD treatment

Attachment to Lost

Fatherhood/Motherhood

Point # 5

Now that a man and woman are able to be attached with their emotions and their partners in a safe, and worked through father-loss, mother-loss and abuse issues, They are better able to attach to the emotions connected to the child they didn't have in a healthy way.

Attachment to Father-Loss and Lost Fatherhood

- Denial to connecting/reattachment
- Story
- Unfinished business
- Inner Child work
- Integration
- Grief and loss
- Psychodrama and *action*
- Denial to connecting/reattachment
- Story
- Unfinished business
- Outer Child Work
- Integration
- Grief and Loss
- Psychodrama and *action*

Treatment Stages Using Attachment Theory with Couples

Couple attachment to the loss of child

- Use of PTSD treatment in addressing the trauma of the choice *and* the abortion
- Remember both might have PTSD symptoms, male from the choice, female from the choice and body experience

- Grieving as a couple together
- Creating a ritual as a couple

Attachment to Children and others

Point # 6

Men and women who have father loss, mother-loss and fatherhood and motherhood loss issues often struggle with attaching to their current children. This is a time to begin to work on that relationship.

Treatment Stages Using Attachment Theory with Couples

Couple attachment to children and others

- Couple begins to apply all that was learned in their work together with their children and others.

Unconscious Attachment Belief Systems From The Abortion Decision Begin to Change

- Healing begins to take place at an unconscious attachment level
- Maybe I am lovable?
- Maybe I can trust you to be there for me?
- Can help heal old trauma and create new attachment belief systems
- *Unconsciously the partner is no longer the abuser!*

Additional Tools used in Counseling

The Movie Theatre Technique of Dealing with Traumatic Memories Through

Progressive Exposure

- Slow progressive exposure to traumatic memories
- Generally 3 stages
- Important to reinforce emotional regulation skills learned earlier combined with deep breathing and mindfulness work
- Psychodrama can be part of the process
- Voice and body movement in the here and now
- Knowing when to stop and use the pause button is important

Somatic Experiencing

Psychodrama

- Psychodrama is an action method, often used as a psychotherapy, in which clients use spontaneous dramatization, role playing and dramatic self presentation to investigate and gain insight into their lives. Developed by Jacob L. Moreno, M.D. (1889-1974)
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychodrama>

"Traumatized people need to learn to move in response to things that previously made them feel paralyzed. They need to be able to take action to then make them now feel confident and powerful when previously felt powerless during the trauma."

Bessel van der Kolk

Mindfulness in Reintegration of the Sexual Relationship

- Mindfulness is the gentle effort to be continuously present with experience

<http://www.wildmind.org/applied/daily-life/what-is-mindfulness>

The Moral Molecule

- New Book by Paul Zak
- Attachment and the effect oxytocin has on moral behavior, empathy and relationships
- Released during breast feeding and the sexual relationship
- Key to understanding why people choose freedom and choice despite their moral beliefs!

Case Study

The Key to Freedom and Choice

Taking the Back Seat to What is Moral and Ethical in culture

- Healing unresolved sexual abuse/abortion trauma between the genders that is often subconscious or unconscious
- Healing attachment trauma between the genders where chemicals like oxytocin are released. The healing process that happens will create empathy for each other's pain and our culture and world can move from a place where *freedom* or choice locked in a limbic place of pain heals, and the prefrontal cortex of the brain can be *free* to choose what existed prior to early or later trauma, that greater value being *LIFE*.

How Can Attachment Theory Be Applied to the Culture and the World?

- We need to stop triggering people's trauma in unhealthy ways
- Create attachment opportunities between people on both sides of the abortion issue where trusting relationships can be established
- Both sides can *connect* and express emotions and be validated
- Real issues such as trauma and attachment issues can begin to be addressed
- Memories can be integrated using effective evidenced based treatment for PTSD

How Can Attachment Theory Be Applied to the Culture and the World?

- The cycle of trauma between the genders in our culture can be reduced through understanding the *trauma* behind the choice which can then lead to forgiveness
- A new cycle can be created that is grounded in reflection not reaction and validation and empathy provide the keys for healing
- The unconscious belief systems can be healed
- Men *and* women are no longer unconsciously projecting onto each other as the abusers or the one who abandoned them in the abortion decision
- Men *and* women can heal from previous sex abuse and abortion

related trauma and the affected attachment issues *together*

Therapists and Lay Counselors Now What?

- Include pregnancy loss at intake for both men and women
- Normalize any responses to pregnancy loss with psycho education about perinatal grief and loss
- Use the client's lens, not your own
- Therapeutic alliance is the key and it takes time
- Best treatment will result from being Curious about the abortion decision, never assume
- Know your local resources

The persistent human cry is to hold me tight."

Donald Joy

Taking This Treatment Approach to Culture and The World Using Attachment Theory Closing and Final Challenge

"We can help men *and* women integrate their brains, connect with emotions, restore pathways and have empathy for the unborn by modeling empathy for *each other's pain* both in the choice and the aftermath. Without culture providing for *both of them* a different experience, men *and* women will remain stuck in the very same

behaviors that each gender complains about with each other. The cycle of emotional reactions from early trauma and cultural conditioning will not only deepen the chasm of unspoken/unresolved pain between the genders but also feed the very thing that got us here in the first place. Healing attachment trauma between the genders appears to be our greatest chance to stop what drives the abortion issue in the first place"

Greg Hasek