

Title Abstract and Outline Presentation for Bowlby Centre Conference
26 February 2022

'Attachment, Identity, Community and Food'

'Closer than hands and feet; food my frenemy.'

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Abstract: Identity, sense of self, is forged in the crucible of relationships in early life, attachment experiences. A viable identity will enable intellectual and emotional development so that we become capable of loving and working. Attachment that is significantly inadequate will leave a child struggling for safety and identity. An eating disorder may provide a way of life that can substitute for an absent or unduly hostile self-definition., However painful, it is pre-occupying and can provide some relief from 'I don't know who I am' or 'I hate myself'. As a solution it is expensive, since time for development passes by.

Outline for presentation:

- The formation of a viable sense of self within the crucible of a secure attachment
 - Mirroring/enjoyment – eye contact.
 - Responsiveness – blank face experiments
 - Interest/curiosity
 - Affection – cuddling, touching, caressing, consolidating the body self
 - Validation/appreciation/noticing

- Likely to produce a person who is at home 'in their own skin'
 - With a developed capacity for emotional regulation via self-soothing and the use of others
 - Able to form friendship and relationship
 - Able to 'work' (in whatever context and according to capacity)
 - With an accepting, stable and trusting sense of their own physicality
 - With an appropriate sense of their own capacity – self-esteem that is realistic, neither grandiose nor derogatory

- And if that doesn't happen, or doesn't happen sufficiently?

What happens? A thousand ways to compensate for insecure attachment but one way is to develop a 'caretaker' self. Rest of this presentation an exploration of how an eating disorder can provide a way of being when the necessary foundations for a more 'mainstream' way of being are lacking or insufficient. A series of illustrative case studies.

- When adolescence is a bridge too far: 'Jane', 'Nina'
- When it seems the only way to win (the thinnest girl in the world)
- When trauma from the past erupts into everyday life, 'Amanda'.
- When all hope has gone, so that self-care and social interaction is impossible 'Alison'
- When day to day life is a trap from which there's no escape: 'Mary', 'Stephanie', 'Lauren'
- When a chaotic history and lifestyle are too exhausting and confusing: 'Fiona', 'James', 'David'

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