

Chapter Thirteen - Early Affect-Confusion: The “Borderline” between Despair and Rage

Loc: 3893	CHAPTER THIRTEEN
<b>Loc: 3894</b>	<b>Early affect-confusion: the “borderline” between despair and rage</b>
Loc: 3895	First impressions and uncertainties
Loc: 3896	The woman's voice on the phone was brusque. She launched into saying
Loc: 3896	she was “depressed over relational difficulties” with her lover and she was searching for a new psychotherapist.
Loc: 3898	told me that she had previously seen four psychotherapists; she shouted, “None of them were any good. They did not understand me.”
Loc: 3899	I tried to slow down the rush of information by asking her name
Loc: 3900	She was urgent to tell me more
Loc: 3900	the “cold” male psychoanalyst
Loc: 3900	other female psychotherapists who were always criticizing her
Loc: 3901	she was unconsciously communicating the relational qualities she needed
Loc: 3909	Theresa was going to require a sensitive and firm therapeutic relationship—a
Loc: 3910	relationship would take a considerable amount of time to develop if I was going to be therapeutically effective.
Loc: 3930	She described how each relationship ended because of “incompatibility.”
Loc: 3932	she perceived the men in her life as not understanding her and/or not respecting her needs.
Loc: 3935	she is often feeling depressed
Loc: 3935	fearing abandonment;
Loc: 3935	in emotional pain
Loc: 3935	no one understands her;
Loc: 3935	either self-critical or critical of others;
Loc: 3936	destructive in most relationships;
Loc: 3936	behavior oscillates between being extremely needy of others and hating them for failing her.
Loc: 3937	My tasks would be to
Loc: 3938	resolve
Loc: 3938	her hyper-vulnerability and early affective confusion;
Loc: 3938	relational needs that had been thwarted in the process of growing-up;
Loc: 3939	her style of compensation and self-regulation

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- Loc: 3969 The story of her relationship with Joan led Theresa into talking about other experiences of emotional abandonment.
- Loc: 3971 Each of these affairs ended in a “big fight”
- Loc: 3976 On several occasions we discussed how kindness, acceptance, or caring gestures stimulated her memories of painful, rejecting experiences.
- Loc: 3977 returned to these themes again and again until she clearly grasped how kindness and loving gestures were an integral part of intimate connection and belonging.
- Loc: 3978 the possibility of an intimate connection and belonging that stimulated a psychological “borderline” between terror and longing—terror
- Loc: 3980 She could not comprehend that the purpose in “fighting and pushing people away” was to avoid her emerging terror, pain, and grief.
- Loc: 3981 was more focused on the desperate emptiness
- Loc: 3982 She was suffering from affect-confusion.
- Loc: 3988 I kept bringing her focus to the reactions, conclusions, and decisions she may have made as a way to compensate for the relational loss.
- Loc: 3990 during her school age years she concluded, “No one is there for me.”
- Loc: 3991 telling herself, “I’m unlovable.”
- Loc: 3999 As Theresa became increasingly aware of the intense loneliness, she also began to feel a seething anger at her father that she had disavowed for years.
- Loc: 4000 asked Theresa to look me in the eye and tell me about the intensity of her anger.
- Loc: 4000 important that she look me in the eye so
- Loc: 4001 could see that I was taking her anger seriously.
- Loc: 4001 still lacked an internal sense of relational security so I avoided having her express her anger at a fantasized father in an empty chair.
- Loc: 4002 needed to see that she could make an impact on a man, an impact on me.
- Loc: 4031 Resolving confusion between behavior, feelings, and needs
- Loc: 4032 many sessions during these first several months
- Loc: 4032 behavior toward me alternated
- Loc: 4032 coquettish and aggressive, dependent and distrusting, self-sufficient and helpless.
- Loc: 4033 complain about being lonely, empty, and depressed and then would become elated about the future,

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Loc: 4036	Theresa frequently anticipated or perceived me as being critical of her when we talked about how she could modulate her accusations and anger
Loc: 4038	work. I requested that we think together about the reasons underlying her own behaviors when she expressed despair, flirtatiousness, criticism, or aggression with me or other people.
Loc: 4058	a behavioral pattern emerging:
Loc: 4058	following an expression of vulnerability,
Loc: 4059	find some reason to criticize me,
Loc: 4060	announced that I was "not doing the therapy right."
Loc: 4061	I responded by calmly asking three important questions
Loc: 4062	"How do you expect me to respond when you shout at me?"; "What were you feeling just before you shouted at me?"; "How do you need me to respond to you?"
Loc: 4077	During this early phase of the therapy, Theresa was often angry at me.
Loc: 4082	Theresa was engendering in me an aggressive and rejecting response similar to what her lovers and the women at work must have experienced.
Loc: 4084	These transference/countertransference dynamics were an unconscious demonstration of Theresa's past, her developmental needs that had been thwarted, and her management in compensating and regulating herself.
Loc: 4086	I too walk on a tightrope, the "borderline," between my keeping the transference just active enough so her unconscious story could unfold within the healing responsiveness of our therapeutic relationship and, at the same time, take the responsibility to protect her from my becoming defensive or self-explanatory, a reactive countertransference,
Loc: 4102	I explained to Theresa that, while being a competent, professional woman, she was also internally influenced by a confused, neglected, and angry little girl—a
Loc: 4104	that little girl in Theresa who needed a consistent, dependable, and reliable therapeutic presence
Loc: 4106	I explained to Theresa that she could bring her troubled inner child to the therapy sessions rather than having her "helpless crying spells" or getting into fights with her boyfriend.
Loc: 4116	there was a tremendous amount of psychotherapy ahead of us if Theresa was going to get off the "borderline" of affect-confusion and have meaningful and satisfying relationships in her life.
Location 4119	<b>CHAPTER FOURTEEN</b> <b>Chapter Fourteen - Balancing on the "Borderline" of Early Affect-Confusion</b>
Location 4135	Balancing on the "borderline" of early affect-confusion

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Location 4135	For many sessions
Location 4136	reluctant (and at times unable) to talk about her childhood.
Location 4137	As she told me of each current relational crisis, I helped Theresa trace her feelings to previous experiences in her life.
Location 4138	was beginning to tolerate my phenomenological inquiry. Historical inquiry about her early life stimulated a lot of anxiety
Location 4153	was now able to talk about her teenage years—years
Location 4154	In response to my phenomenological inquiry she was having explicit memories in each session.
Location 4155	was increasingly reporting feeling “empty,” “depressed,”
Location 4155	She was worried about
Location 4156	With each worry I inquired about how her mother would have treated her
Location 4159	combination of both historical and phenomenological inquiry into the quality of her maternal relationship opened many new memories
Location 4162	validating and normalizing her anger at her mother's criticisms and continually inquiring about her internal sensations, I provided a forum for Theresa to express her anger directly to me about her mother's ridiculing behavior.
Location 4163	Deconfusing both the child and adult
Location 4163	I regularly inquired about her body sensations and what she had been feeling just a second before the anger.
Location 4165	these phenomenological inquiries, Theresa began to describe “penetrating body pains”—pains that we eventually identified as both sadness and shame
Location 4166	experienced as body pains, I chose to focus on Theresa's shame before attending fully to her sadness.
Location 4179	her sadness represented a much earlier, and perhaps more profound, grief.
Location 4195	Inquiring about how she perceived the intricacies of our relationship was a practice that I continued to do at those potentially transforming points in almost every session.
Location 4197	Early in our sessions she had said that she could not trust me when I said “something kind” to her. She added that I was probably “being seductive.” She could trust me more if I was criticizing her.

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Location 4198	we explored how these attempts to create a distance in our relationship,
Location 4201	juxtaposition reactions, reflected an attempt to maintain both a sense of continuity and predictability in her life.
Location 4210	I would say something in a caring way that both validated and normalized her needs-in-relationship and, in response, she would belittle my comment.
Location 4210	Theresa often asked such explicit personal questions.
Location 4212	some sessions I chose to give her a direct answer such as, "Yes, I mean what I just said."
Location 4212	In some sessions
Location 4213	I would answer by asking her two questions.
Location 4213	asked me if I believed her story.
Location 4218	answered with a bifurcated question, "What does it mean if I don't believe your story about your mother hitting you, and what does it mean if I do believe you?"
Location 4231	I would give a summarizing response similar to: "It seems that in either situation, if I do believe you or if I don't, in the end, you experience that you are 'shit' and that you will neither be understood nor will anyone really be there for you. That must hurt."
Location 4232	We were now able to talk together about Theresa's "borderline" between neediness and rage, despair and self-reliance, impulsivity and manipulation.
Location 4232	psychotherapy was still not complete.
Location 4234	relationship with her mother was still marked by Theresa's sense of "hate" and disavowal of a profound painful abandonment.  so much in the life of that little girl that she had not yet remembered and resolved.
	Chapter Fifteen - Relational Healing of Early Affect-Confusion
Loc: 4236	CHAPTER FIFTEEN
Loc: 4237	<b>Relational healing of early affect-confusion</b>
Loc: 4243	When Theresa would lead a session into complaints
Loc: 4244	I would return to that neglected and emotionally abused little girl by inquiring about Theresa's physiological and affective reactions in living with an angry and confrontational mother.

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- Loc: 4248 getting to her childhood experiences of feeling helpless and worthless.
- Loc: 4252 We talked at length about the difference in acting helpless in life today (her crying spells and demands on her boyfriend) and actually needing to depend on her parents when she was a child.
- Loc: 4254 We were no longer talking about crises or Theresa's self-destructive behaviors; we were talking about her needs as a child and her self-worth today.
- Loc: 4267 had two clear focal points for our continuing psychotherapy:
- Loc: 4268 important to address the relational needs and survival reactions of a neglected and verbally abused child;
- Loc: 4269 eventually be beneficial to therapeutically engage with the internalized mother who was influencing Theresa's current life.
- Loc: 4270 extremely useful to decommission the influence of the introjected other, but only after a secure therapeutic relationship with the distraught “child” is well established.
- Loc: 4272 continued to address the previously untold experiences of that little girl while also acknowledging and normalizing her aspirations.
- Loc: 4275 therapeutic dialogue included my frequent inquiry into how she coped and regulated herself when her mother was critical, aggressive, or rejecting.
- Loc: 4278 I continued to remember that she had said, “I am being just like my mother.” I started to impose myself between Theresa and her internalized mother by telling Theresa what I would have said to her mother if I had been visiting in their home
- Loc: 4284 It was too soon to provide actual therapy for the introjection of her mother's personality.
- Loc: 4286 Before
- Loc: 4286 any therapy with her parental introjects, more time was needed to support Theresa's self-definition,
- Loc: 4287 need to make an impact,
- Loc: 4287 need for security and validation.
- Loc: 4287 Acknowledging and normalizing these relational needs seemed to be essential to her psychological growth.
- Loc: 4288 was now depending on our therapeutic relationship for her internal support.
- Loc: 4290 Verbalizing implicit memory
- Loc: 4291 early childhood relational experiences—experiences
- Loc: 4292 now coming to consciousness because we had co-created a safe place to talk about her childhood feelings, desires, needs, and bodily sensations.

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- Loc: 4294 | phenomenological inquiry, curiosity, concerns, and personal presence stimulated Theresa's awareness of memories that she was unable to recall on her own.
- Loc: 4301 | She could remember being criticized for getting dirty or being late but she was unable to recall any dialogue that acknowledged her experiences, feelings, or wishes.
- Loc: 4303 | In several sessions I continued this type of historical inquiry with the focus of my inquiry shifting to the qualities of her maternal relationship at an ever-younger age.
- Loc: 4304 | inquiring about her bedtime routine and the quality of possible conversations with her parents at that relationally crucial hour.
- Loc: 4309 | As I focused my inquiry on bedtime for the preschool child, Theresa had no memory of being cuddled, read to, or having any pre-sleep conversations with either parent. Now I fully understood the cumulative neglect, over many years, that led to Theresa's conclusion: "No one is there for me."
- Loc: 4312 | these historical inquiries was followed by many phenomenological inquiries about her sensations, feelings, associations, thought processes, and desires.
- Loc: 4313 | often led to an inquiry into how she survived, accommodated, and stabilized herself when no one was emotionally or conversationally there for her.
- Loc: 4315 | inquiry was always focused on her inner experiences and subjective processes in response
- Loc: 4319 | I continued to focus my inquiries on a younger and then even younger child.
- Loc: 4320 | eventually asked what she knew about her infancy and toddler years.
- Loc: 4322 | first answer to many of my questions was, "I don't know."
- Loc: 4323 | I would ask her to close her eyes and imagine herself as a preschool child.
- Loc: 4328 | Much of this period of time was spent attending to Theresa's profound sense of loneliness—an
- Loc: 4329 | She needed a consistent therapeutic presence and compassionate attunement to her loneliness and fear even though she sometimes angrily complained, "My loneliness and fears did not exist before this therapy."
- Loc: 4333 | I listened to Theresa's phenomenological experience of her early childhood,
- Loc: 4334 | attended to my own sensations and impressions, my own affective pull to comfort and protect her,
- Loc: 4335 | my knowledge of child development
- Loc: 4335 | what any child needs in a parental relationship
- Loc: 4335 | to form a secure attachment.
- Loc: 4336 | all that I had learned

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- Loc: 4336 | became the data in forming many inferences about her affective/relational life.
- Loc: 4339 | Although Theresa lacked a coherent narrative of her life's experiences, her sub-symbolic memories were expressed in body sensations, emotional reactions, and self-regulating patterns.
- Loc: 4341 | unconscious attachment patterns were disorganized, often on an oscillating borderline between avoidant and anxious. Theresa lived on a "borderline" of intense neediness and rage, despair and self-reliance, impulsivity and manipulation.
- Loc: 4344 | My attunement to her affect, rhythm, and developmental levels, as well as my physiological resonance, were essential in forming an involved connection that facilitated a communication of her sub-symbolic experiences and implicit memories.
- Loc: 4347 | to make use of all of this information to create a healing relationship for this distressed infant and toddler.
- Loc: 4348 | asked Theresa to imagine being a child about sixteen or eighteen months
- Loc: 4349 | sitting in a high chair and being fed
- Loc: 4349 | I inquired
- Loc: 4349 | the look she imagined
- Loc: 4350 | on her mother's face,
- Loc: 4350 | how her mother would have reacted if she disliked the food,
- Loc: 4350 | mother's tempo in feeding
- Loc: 4350 | mother's joy or disapproval,
- Loc: 4351 | all the body sensations that went with each inquiry.
- Loc: 4353 | and provided both of us with a plethora of information about Theresa's early affect-confusion:
- Loc: 4367 | Dispelling early affect-confusion
- Loc: 4371 | Theresa now had less and less of an urge to regress to earlier periods of relational neglect.
- Loc: 4372 | able to make many associations and connections to her adult life behaviors and emotional reactions.
- Loc: 4373 | good understanding of her habit of pushing people away, her fear of intimacy, her rage (particularly at women), and her "tremendous longing for someone to be there for me."
- Loc: 4379 | In these previous two years, while I attended almost exclusively to Theresa's experience as an infant and very young child, I kept in mind her words, "I'm just like my mother."



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Loc: 4380	Previously I had postponed doing any psychotherapy with her introjected mother;
Loc: 4385	first two priorities had been
Loc: 4385	establish a greater sense of relational security
Loc: 4385	facilitate her expression of her own relational desires,
Loc: 4386	I was primarily focused on the child's unrequited need for self-definition and the need to make an impact-in-relationship while always keeping in mind Theresa's needs for security and validation.
Loc: 4408	For the past couple
Loc: 4408	of years Theresa was no longer acting helpless
Loc: 4409	was no longer getting into conflicts at home or work;
Loc: 4410	self-regulated her affect-confusion
Loc: 4411	she now had a satisfying sense of self-worth and aspirations.

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