



Supporting Relationships following Acquired Brain Injury

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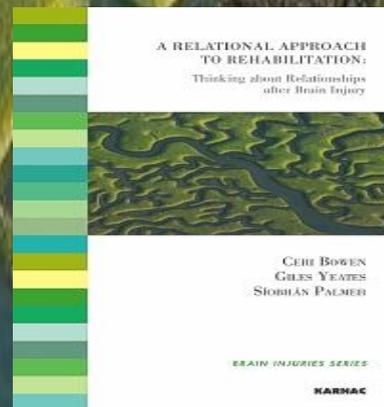


Overview

- Brain injury as a simultaneous attack on relationships and self (“I am because we are” *Ubuntu* – Croetzer et al., submitted)
- An eroding ripple that passes through all relationships in a survivor’s social network, and proceeds over time through closer relationships:
 - Couples & Family Intervention
 - Friendships
 - Challenges and opportunities within the therapeutic relationship
 - *See Yeates et al (2016) for work relationships post-injury*



Bowen, Yeates & Palmer (2010). "A Relational Approach to Rehabilitation" London: Karnac





Headway launches new relationships after brain injury pack

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Headway is proud to announce the launch of a brand new range of publications on the topic of relationships after brain injury.

The pack, which comprises two new booklets and five new factsheets, offers information on how different aspects of relationships can be affected after brain injury. Information and guidance is aimed towards brain injury survivors themselves, relatives, friends and colleagues. A separate new booklet addresses the sensitive topic of sex and sexuality after brain injury.

"We have known for a long time, from anecdotal evidence and research, that brain injury affects not just the survivor themselves, but often those around the survivor too," says Tamsin Ahmad, Publications and Research Manager at Headway. "Our own research conducted for our campaign A New Me found that many brain injury survivors feel that their friends, family and colleagues don't understand the nature of brain injury and how it has affected them – but they wish that they did.

"We also often speak to families and friends wishing to learn more about brain injury, as unfortunately, information and guidance is not routinely offered to them despite the impact that a brain injury can have on their lives too.

"We hope that these new publications are a step towards addressing these issues and raising awareness and understanding of brain injury."

The following publications are now all available to download for free from the [Information Library](#), or in the related resources section below:

- [Relationships after brain injury \(PDF\)](#)
- [Sex and sexuality after brain injury \(PDF\)](#)
- [Brain injury: a guide for friends \(PDF\)](#)
- [Brain injury: a guide for partners \(PDF\)](#)
- [Brain injury: a guide for grandparents \(PDF\)](#)
- [Brain injury: a guide for siblings \(PDF\)](#)
- [Brain injury: a guide for colleagues \(PDF\)](#)

They add to our existing publications on [Parenting after brain injury \(PDF\)](#), [Supporting children when a parent has had a brain injury \(PDF\)](#) and [Caring for someone with a brain injury](#)

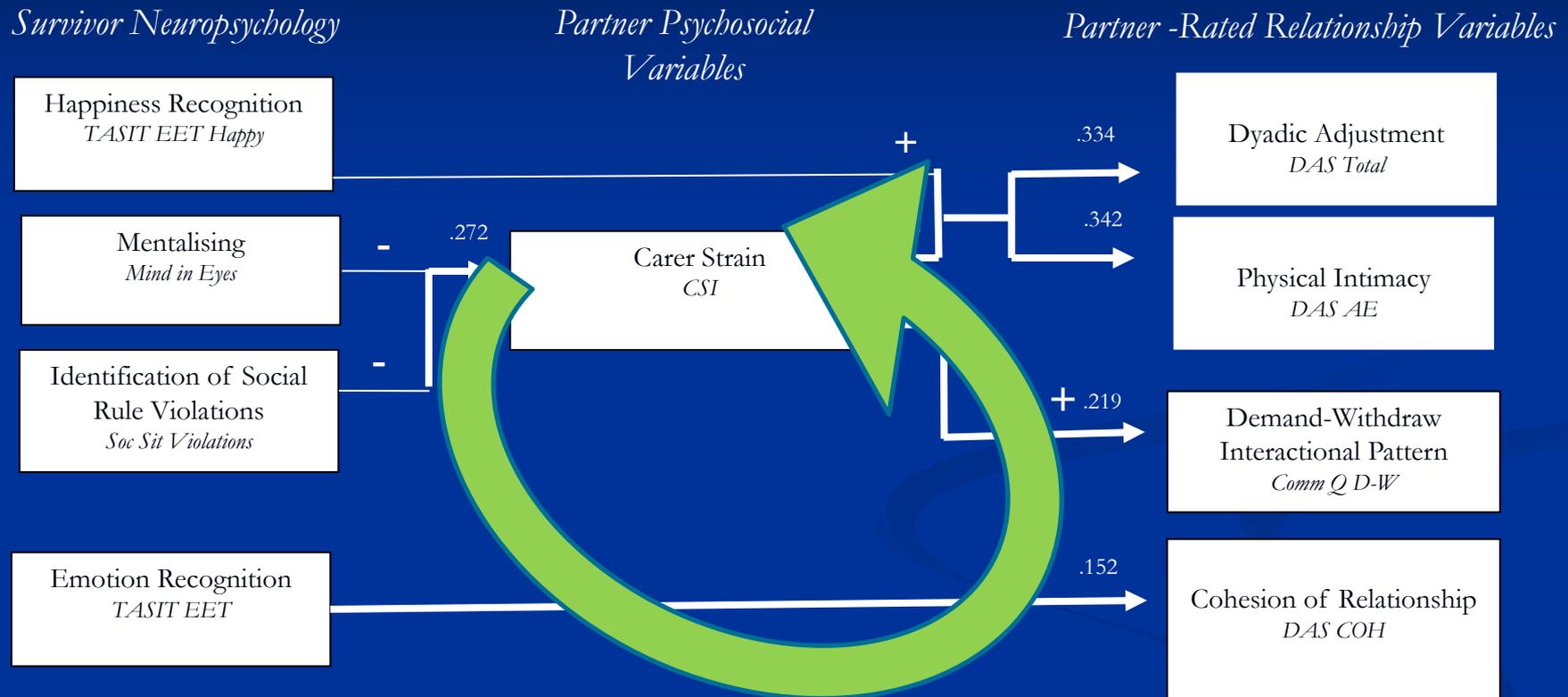


Supporting Couples Relationships

- “Do you know what it feels like for me to wake up every morning, look at the man in bed next to me, and wish it was the man I married, not the monster I live with now?” She wanted her real husband back....living with Jekyll & Hyde (Wood, 2005)
- “Waking up next to a stranger” (Wood, 2005)
- Married without a husband (Maus Clum & Ryan, 1981)
- The relationship and intimacy now... “feels wrong” (Gosling & Oddy, 1999)
- “The emotional side feels badly damaged. I really miss the intimacy and closeness” (Oddy 2001)
- A piece of grit wearing away at our hearts from the inside (Yeates, Whitehouse-Hart & Balfour, in preparation)



Social Cognition Predictors of Couple Relationship Functioning (preliminary findings, n= 55)



Couples Intervention:

Reduce Partner Withdrawal, Amplification of Social Cues & Triggering Pro-Social Autonomic Response of Survivor

Neuro-Disability & Psychotherapy 1(2) 151–197 (2013)

The Use of Emotionally-focused Couples Therapy (EFT) for Survivors of Acquired Brain Injury With Social Cognition and Executive Functioning Impairments, and Their Partners: a Case Series Analysis

Giles Yeates, Adrian Edwards, Clara Murray, Nicola Zapiain Creamer, and Mythreyi Mahadevan*

Abstract

A breakdown of intimacy and familiarity in close romantic relationships is common and characteristic of life following acquired brain injury (ABI), yet is not commonly addressed in neuro-rehabilitation services. Recent conceptual, qualitative, and quantitative studies highlight the role of emotional and intentional misattunement in relationship breakdown and associated psychological distress of both partners, alongside the emotional withdrawal and/or critical responses of the non-injured partner. Emotionally-focused couples therapy (EFT) is an evidenced-based couples therapy that is widely used around the world for similar themes in couples' relationships unaffected by brain injury. Its use in ABI has only been reported anecdotally to date. This paper presents four couples' cases post-ABI, with both qualitative therapy process description and single case quantitative pre-post therapy comparison on a range of relationship and individual psychological distress measures. Every survivor of ABI was eighteen months post-injury or more, and identified to have an enduring mixture of social cognition and executive functioning impairments upon neuropsychological assessment, among other difficulties. The couples are presented as three therapeutic successes, contrasted with a case characterised by mixed outcomes. The applications, contributions, and limitations of EFT in brain injury services is considered.

Key words: Brain injury; stroke; social cognition; executive functioning; relationships; couples therapy.

Case Example

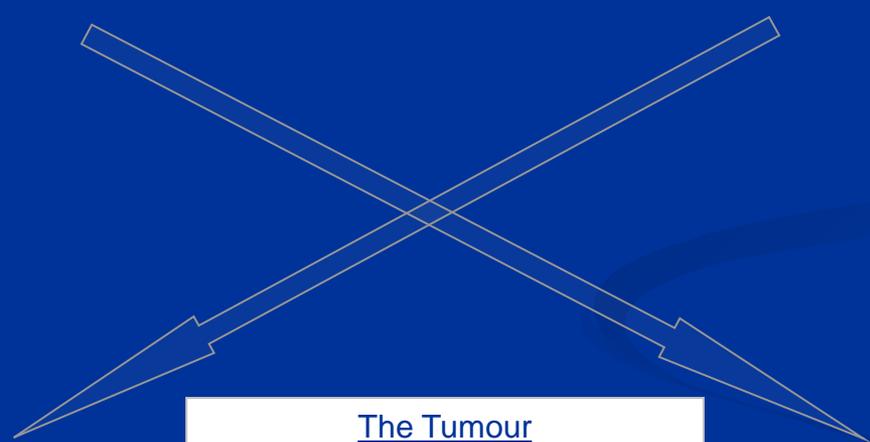
Clive

- Take myself under the stairs away from Susie (computer memory exercises as punishment)
- Berate myself, try harder
- Exasperated outburst
- Take the hurt for Susie

“Self-Banishment & Holding Back”

Susie

- Take myself away, hold my feelings back (but hesitate)
- Put his needs before mine
- Distract myself
- Take the hurt for Clive



- I'm useless and helpless
- Overwhelmed
- Shame
- Alone and abandoned, scared

The Tumour

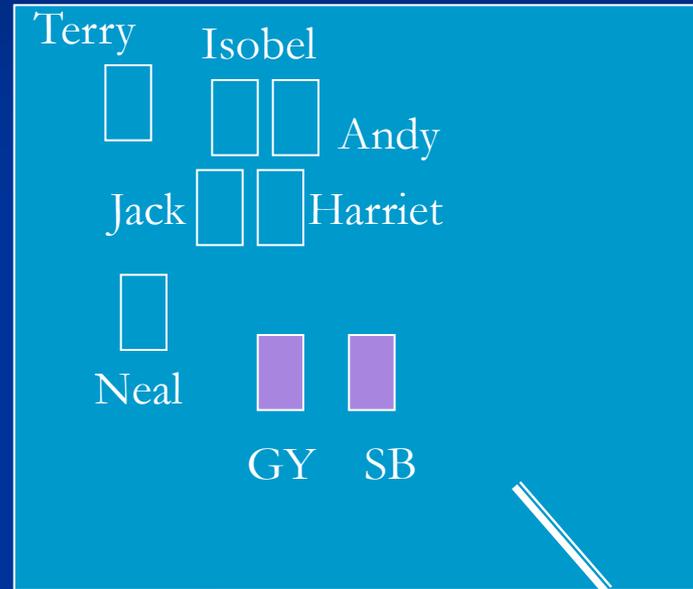
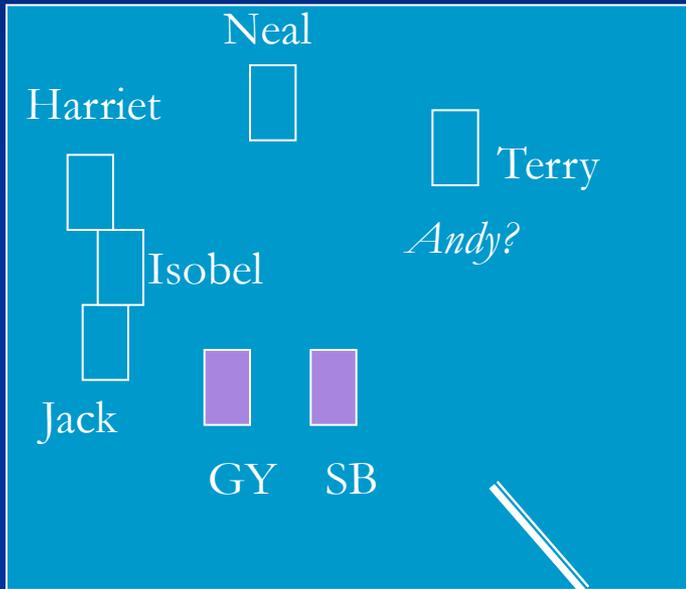
- Reduced hearing and auditory spatial location
- Non-verbal reasoning
- Visual selective attention
- Attentional switching
- New learning of auditory-verbal information
- Non-verbal initiation

- Critical and frustrated with self (the least I could have done is remember x, y, z..)
- I'm not a complete woman, I'm lacking
- Fear of being left alone

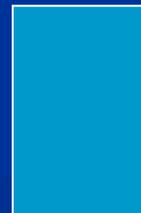


Working with Families

Spatial Sculpting (Minuchin, 1974)



Initially....



Following Parental Role renegotiation, family problem solving, child rel ABI education, activity resumption

Narrative Externalisations of Brain Injury

(Bowen, Yeates & Palmer, 2010; Weatherhead et al., 2013; Yeates et al., 2007)

■ Brain injury as

- A thief
- An intruder
- An unwanted guest
- Existing in the spaces between people, opening these up and distancing
- Disagreement separating us as a family, we need to combine forces to prevent disagreement ruining our lives



Friendships

Four main themes identified:

- Cognitive and behavioural challenges
- Loss of old friends
- New friends
 - *“... It’s like a fence, you can look in over the fence or, if you’re in it, you’re looking out.... This is what is really happening, people outside the fence only think they know... they don’t get what living with it is like.”*
- Relating through sameness



Challenges and Opportunities in Therapeutic Relationships

Therapeutic Working Alliance (TWA) in Neuro-Rehabilitation

- Survivor- and clinician-rated TWA differentially shown to predict:
 - clinicians' ratings of survivor awareness
 - compliance in rehabilitation
 - reduction in depression symptoms during rehabilitation*post-rehabilitation outcomes...*
 - employment (not physical activity)
 - family discord
 - Productivity
 - incongruity between family- and clinician-ratings of survivor functioning

Schönberger et al., 2006a,b,c; Sherer et al., 2007
- Tests of survivor attention, memory and higher cognitive functions yielded weak predictive associations with survivor & therapist-rated TA (Schönberger et al., 2007)



Schönberger , Yeates & Hobbs (in preparation) Relationships between survivor social cognition and therapists' retrospective working alliance ratings

NP test	WAI task	WAI bond	WAI goal	WAI total
TASIT 1 Emotion Recognition total	X		X	X
TASIT 1 total negative emotions	X		(X)	(X)
TASIT 3 sarcasm	(X)		(X)	(X)
Social situation appropriateness score	X		X	
BADS 6 elements raw (Executive Functioning)	(X)			(X)

(X) = close-to sig. ($p < .1$)

Responses of Therapists

■ Lewis (1999): Countertransference



Summary

- Acquired Brain Injury challenges all types of relationships, internal and external
- Rehabilitation goals for supporting *inter*-dependence and connection with others should be a routine priority
- Alongside individual, couples, family and community interventions, caring for therapeutic relationships within services should benefit equally from our thinking
- Therapeutic relationships and the therapeutic space can offer continual points of safety and exploration as survivors and their significant others negotiate their lives in the years post-injury



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