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EMDR Treatment of Complex Trauma and Dissociation Through the Lens of Attachment, AIP, and the Theory of Structural Dissociation of the Personality

When trauma is complex, the challenge is not only that memories may remain insufficiently processed, but that the personality may become structurally divided into dissociative parts with different roles and relationships to the trauma. Attachment theory offers a foundational lens here, clarifying why these memory networks and personality parts become organized as they do, rooted in early disruptions in the caregiving relationship. The Adaptive Information Processing (AIP) model has long served as the theoretical foundation for EMDR therapy, explaining how disturbing experiences become maladaptively encoded and how reprocessing facilitates adaptive integration. However, in cases of early, chronic, and severe traumatization, AIP alone may not fully capture the structural organization of dissociation and the relationships among parts of the personality.

The Theory of Structural Dissociation of the Personality (TSDP) offers an additional framework, describing how some parts remain oriented toward everyday life while others organize around traumatic memories, defensive responses, and threat. Together, the three models offer complementary lenses: attachment theory clarifies what underlies the organization of these networks and parts, TSDP addresses how the personality itself is organized, and AIP guides how the resulting memory networks are processed in EMDR therapy.

This presentation will show how the three models complement each other within a phase-oriented approach — establishing sufficient ("good enough") stabilization and internal cooperation, progressing to titrated trauma processing, and supporting increasing integration and adaptive functioning. Clinical videos and case discussion will illustrate how attachment-informed, AIP, and TSDP principles together guide assessment, treatment planning, and EMDR practice with complex dissociative presentations.