

# Treating Attachment Pathology:

## *Borderlineopathy, Developmental Trauma, and Polysymptomatic Challenges*

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### **About the Presenter:**

JON MILLS, Psy.D., Ph.D., ABPP is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Ajax, Ontario and specializes in the treatment of personality disorders, trauma, and severe co-morbid disturbances. He is a Diplomate in clinical psychology and psychoanalysis, President of the Section on Psychoanalysis of the Canadian Psychological Association, and is Director of Training at the Adler School of Graduate Studies in Toronto. He is the author of ten books including *Treating Attachment Pathology* (Aronson/Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), and has lectured widely throughout the United States and Canada. Known for his dynamic teaching style and ability to wed sound clinical theory to technical practice, Dr. Mills' approach to attachment therapy is one of the first systematic attempts to treat adult and adolescent populations with entrenched attachment disruptions.

### **Program Description:**

Attachment is the most fundamental organizing principle of the infant's mind that subsequently influences future psychic development. Attachment does not begin and end in childhood, but rather is a contiguous developmental trajectory that informs adolescent and adult relations throughout the lifespan. Early attachment experiences become the bedrock of the emergent self, which furthermore conditions unconscious organization, ego development, object relations, adaptation and defense, fantasy formation, the experiential processes of identification, internalization, and representation, self-identity, and the overall evolution of personality structure. Attachment related pathologies constitute a disorder of the self in response to deficient, faulty, or failed attachments with significant caregivers early in life. As a result, patients who present with complex and variegated clinical profiles, psychiatric symptomatology, personality disorders, and co-morbidity have fundamental deficits in the capacity to form and sustain healthy relationships with others.

Contemporary attachment research offers substantial empirical evidence to support how attachment-related processes and their disturbances affect a broad array of clinical conditions including anxiety and panic symptoms, affect regulation, mood disorders, dissociation, negative affect style, alexithymia, paranoia, substance abuse and

addictions, obsessive-compulsiveness, eating disorders, agoraphobia, psychosomatic illness, suicidality, and relationship violence. Many of these patients suffer from debilitating affective states due to unresolved trauma, which subsequently generates personality disorders and co-morbidity that manifest on several dimensions of borderline organization. As a result, they are often seen as being treatment resistant or incurable.

Using a relational approach to therapy, Dr. Mills demonstrates innovative and effective attachment-based clinical strategies that are of immense practical value in the training of all mental health professions likely to encounter these population groups. Through detailed case studies demonstrating clinical interventions, specific attention is given to the fragile nature of therapeutic alliance, managing primitive defenses, transmuting countertransference, and reaching the affect.

## **Training Goals & Objectives:**

Participants will acquire clinical knowledge and technical skills in the following areas:

1. Develop an understanding of the role of attachment processes in the structure of adult personality, adjustment, and psychopathology.
2. Learn diagnostic skills in identifying dysfunctional attachment styles when forming clinical impressions of patients.
3. Identify and meaningfully comprehend polysymptomatic clinical profiles inherent to borderline organization.
4. Learn a new classification system of attachment-related disorders including those affected by developmental trauma, structural fragmentation, depressed character structures, internal emptiness and schizoid phenomena, and aggressivity.
5. Acquire methodological perspectives on beginning the treatment, creating a viable clinical atmosphere, offering diagnostic impressions to patients, and engendering mutual collaboration in the initial stages of therapy.
6. Appreciate a relational approach to forming a therapeutic alliance through attachment, empathic attunement, authenticity, and the need for recognition.
7. Develop strategies that allow for benign resistance, prevent premature termination, handle malignant transferences, deal with therapeutic impasse, ameliorate suicidality, contain psychotic anxieties, and de-escalate potential violence.
8. Transmute countertransference, defuse rage, and turn projective identification into an avenue for empathy.
9. Differentiate different attachment affect styles, develop an emotional tie with the severely troubled patient, and approach matters of ego-integration, intimacy, and termination.