

## In Search of Maturity

In the last *Graymatters* I opined that the ‘Paradigm Shift’ within the field of complex childhood trauma/attachment disorder treatment has clearly out run its coverage. That is to say: we realize that certain key brain regions react poorly to in utero drug/alcohol exposure as well as childhood neglect and abuse. This is akin to that great utterance by Sean Connery, playing the role of Cold War era U.S.S.R. Naval Captain Marko Ramius in the immortal Tom Clancy novel-turned-movie: *The Hunt For Red October*.

In the Hollywood screenplay of *Red October*, Captain Ramius, referencing his revved up/cutting-edge Dallas Assault-Class Nuclear submarine—and the need to locate an armed traitor aboard—deadpans: “You know, Mr. Ryan, things in here don’t react well to bullets...”

So it is with young brains and gestational toxins, followed up by post-natal neglect and abuse.

Just as Dr. Ira Chasnoff stated in his San Antonio ATTACH keynote, “We have to get serious about prevention”. The question however is what to do once the bullets have already been fired-off within the sub’s nuclear reactor core.

You and I both know that we’re never going to achieve ‘prevention perfection’. There will always be children among us whose birth parents didn’t get the memo.

So as professionals, we must do a better job with our treatment. And this starts with getting serious about research. Research via the different psychotherapies we provide, via our medications, and via our sensory integration therapy.

And with our neurofeedback.

Speaking of neurofeedback (NF), I have a wish list to hopefully improve our treatment outcomes. And not only improve them, but gain faster results. Instead of 150 NF sessions with the complex children/teens we see, how about something closer to half that—say, 75 sessions—for starters.

For those of you keeping score at home, here is my laundry list of NF improvements I’d like to see:

- 1) More entertaining and aesthetically pleasing video games. NF-related video games may never approximate X-Box and PS2; however, we can clearly do better—much better in developing more desirable games that we cleave to our EEG units.
- 2) ‘Kinder and gentler’ NF software. You know, the kind that doesn’t require a master’s degree from M.I.T. to trouble-shoot. I believe those of us in the non-computerease vernacular refer to this as ‘user-friendly’. Yeah, well we don’t have anything close to that yet. Recently, I went through a frustrating 3-month stretch wherein my own clinical unit resembled the hassle-factor

generally reserved for discussions pertaining to a finicky Italian sports car. Way too many bugs. In a busy practice, no one has the luxury of spending hours on end with technicians on the phone—as helpful and patient as Jerry and Richard are. No matter how good Jerry and Richard are, they can only play the software cards they’re dealt.

- 3) **Thinking outside the box.** That is, I have been experimenting with the comingling of various sensory integration techniques, along with real-time NF training. For example, what about integrating nonverbal auditory stimuli (i.e., music, in non-neurobabble).

And the tactile modality too. So, the child holds a squish ball or caresses a small patch of Astroturf while he does his NF sessions.

Oh, and don’t forget olfactory (smell). So for example, each time a child goes into hyper-space/hits warp-speed during *Space Race*, a brief whiff of neuro-agreeable lavender is released.

In short, perhaps NF effectiveness can be enhanced by recruiting from the field of sensory integration training.

- 4) **And then we return to that nagging nuisance of the paucity of NF research.** Yes, there are decent data supporting NF efficacy for, say, ADHD. But we desperately need randomized, controlled NF clinical trials for the complex children among us. As of this writing, I am aware of *no* such NF outcome studies amidst children who suffer from attachment woes. Quite frankly, this is an embarrassment.

Neurofeedback turns 42 this year. It’s time we start acting our age.