

Gleaming insight into the Intrapsychic dynamics of depression through two lenses

1. Fairbairn's Object Relations Lens

- Loss is an irreducible fact of the external world. It occurs despite all efforts to avoid it, and it is a reality despite all manner of attempts to deny it. Thus, it is that the depressive is forced to retreat into the closed system of the inner object world. There one can cling to the belief that relationships, objects, and self-states can be maintained in an unchanging, eternal way.
- Although depression is a denial of change, the depressed person feels so overwhelmed by the 'loss' he is experiencing, that he becomes trapped in the experience in a way that refuses to resolve itself. I place the word 'loss' in quotes in the previous sentence because while the depressed person is virtually completely immersed in a preoccupation with 'loss,' he simply does not experience it as true loss. The reaction does not in any way accept the change of internal state that would of necessity eventuate from the acceptance of the reality of an actual loss.
- **Sadness contains within itself the ultimate possibility of resolution – the letting go of an internalized object, belief or assumption** - while depression specifically struggles to defy resolution.

2. Existentialism & Self-Concept Lens

- Cornett (1998) cites Rollo May (1953), who noted that so many of his clients suffered depressive states, characterized by a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness, that he subsequently labelled the 20th century, the "Age of Emptiness".
- Basch (1980) "The hallmark of depression is the sense or the attitude that life is meaningless — an indication that the perception of the self is no longer a unifying focus for ambitions or ideals"
- Yalom cites Frankl (1972), whose theory proposes that two stages exist in the syndrome of meaninglessness. The first stage is the *existential vacuum*, which is characterized by a subjective state of boredom, apathy, and emptiness. One feels cynical, a lack of direction and questions the point of life. One may have free time but there is nothing one feels compelled to do. Frankl named the second stage, *existential neurosis* and says symptomatic manifestations such as alcoholism, depression, obsessional-ism, delinquency, hyperinflation of sex, or dare-devilry for example, will "rush in to fill the vacuum" (1980, p. 450).
- According to Frankl, modern man's dilemma is that one is not told by instinct what one *must* do, or any longer by tradition what one *should* do. Nor does one know what one *wants* to do. Two common behavioral reactions to this crisis of values are conformity (doing what others do) and submission to totalitarianism (doing what others wish) (1980, p. 450).