

# ABUSED WOMEN AND ABUSERS

## A DEADLY TRAP

### Maddalena Bosio

The work I have been doing with women sexually abused in childhood, has given me the opportunity to figure out some important aspects in the *healing process* as regards victims and to try to find the *roots of violence* as regards abusers.

These observations need further clinical research, even though I consider them important since they stem from a phenomenological approach.

It's an approach that differs from other approaches since it doesn't rely on any kind of theory, but goes deep into the client's experiential world, an experiential world that agrees with the Maslow Theory of Needs, and Rogers' Client Centred Approach.

Specifically incest is a highly threatening experience for the Self Esteem that a child has to build in order to be able, in the future, to move in the world with confidence and respect towards him/herself and the others.

It's the "**Existence**" of the self, in the philosophical sense, that is jeopardized, because the "**Being**" is weakened; violated down to its roots.

Behavioral disorders, their complexity and extension, vary according to the age of the victim, the kind of relationship with the abuser or the kind of damage.

The aim of this study is to help operators who deal with abused adults or children.

These principles shape outcomes of the most painful disruption a person might happen to go through, both on interpersonal and affective levels. It sorts out the severely tested personality structures.

The principles I am going to describe are the outcome (with a high frequency) of psychotherapy with adults abused in childhood and who were compelled to come to terms with experiences they had buried deep inside but that kept on causing troubles in their lives.

It's precious material that comes up from the depths of the victim's wounds. Victims who survived to their trauma.

The therapeutic process is always very slow and often despairing since the acceptance of the "chain" of realities unfolded from dark corners where they had been stored for long time, is something like dying to oneself. Because *the acceptance* goes along with the *mourning of "dreams"*. A healing therapy with children will be different, but the wounds are the same ones healed in adults.

I also worked with abusive mothers, and women attracted by children.

The wounds are actually the same... Nevertheless, there is a difference: there are specific aspects during the experience that give way to different behaviors.

The therapeutic target is to recover the *Personal Power* by going through a *process of acceptance*, by going through the **fear** of having been left alone, experiencing the lack of defensive instruments, realizing that there weren't adequate personal resources, while facing and coping with experiences that were so far from the victim's reality.

Clinical experience enables to point out that terror more than pain is the mainstream for the recovery of one's personal power and judicial capability.

Terror leaves many traces in adulthood and sometimes turns into violence.

The experiences of family abuse throw the growing up person into an affective dimension that is mainly featured with ancestral fear. Similar to the experience an infant goes through the moment he comes to life and has to learn to breath.

Uncertainty, ambivalence, perversion, undermine down to the roots two basic developmental elements:

- The judgement capability, that is to learn the difference between what's right and what's wrong.
- Empathy. It's empathy that leads to the control of violence. It helps to recognize and feel a personal pain as well as others' and gives way to an action or to a control towards the world.

De Zulueta (1993) and Alice Miller (1988) point out that every violent behavior, every impediment to emotional worlds lays its roots in a past story of losses, betrayals, abandonment, neglect and in the anger that is produced, an anger that doesn't allow to recognize and hence get in touch with one's feelings.

My clinical experience suggests that behind a painful feeling, more than anger, there is a hidden **terror**.

#### **An important aspect to bear in mind:**

Anger is a feeling toward the "other" (I – Thou), terror is a feeling that belongs to the "Self" (I – Me)

Existential philosophy says that "the first I in a relationship with the other is "I".

- There is the **fear** that appears the moment when the child senses to be without protection.
- There is the child's **fear** to lose the figures of reference and, at the same time, to be overcome.
- There is a **fear** stemming from feelings of being powerless and hopeless, thus the failure to cope with reality, because there are no instruments, not even the ones a child should have: cry, scream, ask for help... "*...instruments are out of use...*" says a client (attack-flight).

The main "break down" of the Self, the jeopardizing of the "**Being**" in its phenomenological meaning, are therefore caused by terror that entangles and distorts the affective potentials of the growing up person. Also the cognitive process is severely compromised, because there is the failure to handle and understand what's really happening.

Fear, as it usually happens in panic experiencing, breaks down the cognitive and emotional functioning, precipitating the victim into a dark prison of ambivalence.

And last but not least, terror is fed by the endless, unbearable feeling of being left alone... Lost in the world... the "**Being in Loneliness**".

In the case of a total breakdown of the defensive system, terror turns into violence and often perversion and other times, causes a psychotic split.

## THE DISRUPTIVE EXPERIENCE

### *IT'S TERROR THAT DISMANTLES THE "STRUCTURE OF EXISTING"*

It's important to explore several aspects of the Ego, that are involved in this dramatic experience, in order to be able to help the survivor to recover after the shattering experience.

I found two important nucleus that I consider the **pillars** from which all the other aspects of the abused adult radiate: "**POWER**" AND "**BEING**".

On one hand there is the **abuse of power** by the adult, on the child.

On the other, there is the expropriation and thus the **shattering of the "being"**, in the victim.

When the abuser is also a parent, this causes further and much more serious problems since incest is the most serious of taboos ever existing. The victim is unable to confront the event with any other kind of experience. It's in itself a behavior considered "against nature".

A good number of Personal Constructs get upset. Survivors bear a feeling of violation, of being robbed and cheated right from those who were supposed to respect, protect and defend them and offer an unconditioned love.

During psychotherapy with adults, the therapist tries to produce a Personal Construct that may become a basis on which one can give life to "**stems**" that little by little can help to re-build one's self esteem. It's something like the re-construction of the skin, where the body has been ruined in an accident.

Their experience is like having been in a “deadly” place, and they came out “alive”... (the words of a client) Abuse is an experience that carries within itself the taste of death:

- The death of a **relationship** with a parent;
- The death of **trust** in the other and in a world that many times doesn't believe in the victim;
- Death in the moment of the **shattering** of the powerless and deadly wounded self;
- It's the death of one's "**being**": "...I feel uninhabited..." ( a client) – "...I feel devastated..." - **It's a Waste Land feeling.**
- There is also a deadly feeling coming from the **fear** that is felt for being alone at the abuser's mercy. No protection and moreover, being “inside” an experience which is too big for the young person. It's through this fear that **the quality of the “being” in terms of “Existing” undergoes a modification.**

One of the personal constructs that I use, maybe the most significant, is the following: **“They have been in a place where not even angels dare to go”**. And they came out alive... There isn't an exact moment to use it. Only empathy and sensitiveness can spot the right moment. It's like starting out a long track in order to repair what happened.

This personal construct that, for the time being, is in the place of a “being in shatters” and that is taken in like a delicate caress and maybe the very first laid on so much havoc, will enhance the survivors' recollections and integration of the experience.

The psyche undergoes a likewise schizophrenic trauma, since the victims often talk about having the feeling that the body is in one place, the story in another, while they are somewhere else.

The work consists in putting these parts together again and we shall see this later.

The strongest experiences that are responsible for the undermining of personality, are explained without a precise guideline. There are no guidelines even though in psychotherapy there is a “bundle” that gets untangled. There is an **“approaching code”** to the items that are to be faced and that changes from person to person. I believe that this method is useful also for children.

There are sessions when the client goes on and on with the same topic, just as if that should be the most important aspect of the whole story. Of course there is an underlying meaning to all this. Some other times it happens when incredulity is overwhelming. “...How? ...Why this? ...Why to me?”

We must keep in mind that these people are a handful of “clots of blood” stored up inside in confused ways. The outline of the therapeutic process comes out as soon as the pieces of the puzzle are “faced and cleared”.

Also in this work where I use “constructs” and “grafts”, I follow the “river” of the person's coming out, according to the “non-directive approach”.

## THE PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

A widespread concept of the experience is that of “being robbed”.

### PIECE A: TRUST

First of all children have been robbed in **“trust”**. Trust has been betrayed and the betrayal has taken place in a particular sphere such as sex. So there is a double betrayal. This leads them to have little or no trust in others.

The **“living space”** has been violated and robbed. There has been a violation of the “borders” of one's “being a person”. Borders that cannot be trespassed. Not even by a parent, even though we often hear a parent say: “Since I made you I can just as well destroy you...”

This implies the concept of **“Respect”**. Respect is the last string that keeps us in hold of our **“dignity”**. The victim is robbed of a value, which is the basic milestone for the survival of our being “in the world” and “of the world”.

The abusive act deprives the child of the personal sense of control of it's own world, causing on the contrary a feeling of impotence, of an incapability to protect the personal space.

The “**safety space**” between child and parents is very small and it’s from this violated space that the defensive mechanisms spring up, in an attempt to create a “big” security space. In this case the defensive system consists in keeping everyone at a far distance. For example there are abused mothers who can’t even bear a hug from their children. Only when they grow up, there can be a little change.

Others go through sexual intercourse with a feeling of “**not being**”: “...yes my body is there, but it’s as if I’m not there...” In other words they don’t exist in the relationship.

Others spread out too much with everybody, there are no more boundaries. This behavior leads to have sex in any occasion, in an unending experience of powerlessness and of possession of their body by another person.

Otherwise, always owing to this violated space, everything gets so messed up, that in an extreme attempt to save oneself in an experience that cannot be faced, nor handled, the victim “**gets rid of the Being**”: a part of the Self is shifted (there is a split) in order to be able to forget. In this case, we are dealing with a Psychotic Defensive Trauma.

Nevertheless, **eyes and body will never forget**. Even though hidden in the depths of the body, wounds will keep on bleeding until they will be opened and healed.

The therapist is not allowed to get into this space using a directive method or following one’s own pattern or working program. We can only accept and respect the distance decided by the client, who, deep in his/her heart, is aware that it’s necessary to come to terms with something that is **desperately refused**.

It will be the message that “we know where they have been, it’s a place from where they came out alive”; it will be this walking side by side that turns out to be the key that will open the way to a slow though painful recover of personal power.

It’s necessary to go through a deep work regarding:

- The fear of having been left alone, hopeless and powerless;
- The specific feeling that comes from an absolute impossibility to cope with such experience of abuse;
- The failure to ask for help, to be able to give voice to fear;
- The acceptance of this reality.

#### PIECE B: **INNOCENCE**.

The victims have been robbed of their innocence and with this word I don’t mean a moral value, but a feature that along with many others, is part of the child developmental process. Innocence is a part of the child’s identity, but after an experience of abuse a “confused” identity takes place... “*...I was obliged to be a grown up...*”

All this turns out into a feeling of something very bad, but of which one can’t grasp it’s meaning.

On a phenomenological level, the experience has destroyed the sense of trust and the feeling of safeness, In other words, the warm feeling of being protected.

This is an important aspect in perverse peoples’ experiencing. We shall examine this later.

When these boundaries have been violated, the child is deprived with the feeling of “**Being in Touch**”; of the kind: “It’s me...”. In other words something is “unstuck”. The “grounding” feeling is damaged.

The frightful experiencing is made of a “being utterly powerless” on one hand and in an inconsolable pain growing from the sensation of “wreckage” into which the victim sinks... A feeling in which it’s almost impossible to stay if not at a risk of one’s mental health. Sometimes, in the sessions, the sound of a baby’s cry that turns up in these adults, is impressing

In all this scenery, the only one who remains clear minded is the abuser who once more has exorcized or reiterated something belonging to his/her own story.

#### PIECE C: **VIOLENCE**

When in addition to these events there is also violence, the victim behaves like a Vietnam survivor, who recollects and gives life over and over again to the pathos, the terror, the pain and the drama of his experience. At the same time he feels and refers about his enemy’s violence that has gone through his

broken defensive system. The self is at a risk to dissolve in this “swapping” over from one person to the other. The feelings of “being” the victim are penetrated by those of the violent enemy... and the two figures are confused and interwoven into the victim’s mind. ( “ I became the blows” ...says an abusive mother).

At this point also the “ existing” is at a high risk : it’s structure is in danger since there are no adequate instruments , no functioning Personal Power. This means that the defensive system is at a severe trial, that the Self is struggling in an attempt to maintain a separation from the Other Self: in that moment there is only powerlessness, a violent and unacceptable reality and feeling of being in “ruins”; there’s the annihilation of the “Being”

. As I said before, it’s terror that “breaks” the defensive system of the Self:

In so far as the Self is able to save something of itself, it will be saved. On the contrary when it is overtaken by the two parts clinging one on to the other; the victim will be doomed to “repeat in the guise of the abuser” it’s own story.

This is the passage from fear to violence. We shall see how it works further on.

#### Piece D: **FEAR**

During the healing process, the work that deals with impotence and annihilation will enhance the touch with other feelings regarding **pain and fear** and thus feel the ravage of the being and the terror for being so alone and hopeless while all this was taking place.

From the report of a survivor in adolescence:

*...The moment of the violence, is the first, total striking moment of awareness of being alone in that havoc, for two very simple though devastating reasons.*

*Nobody who hasn’t undergone an abuse can have an idea of what means being in two boundaries : a physical, and now I mean the body in it’s whole, and a spiritual one and I am talking about the energy that each “Self” is bestowed with in order to assert the “Being”.*

*When violence is taking place every nerve, every muscle, every cell of the body seem to amplify their feeling as if to rebel or to put the mind on the alert of what is taking place. The outcome is even more devastating...Never you have felt your legs so legs, never you had such a clear definition of how the “belong” to you, your skin captures and remembers every rub, every bruise with utmost precision and reluctant intenseness, your hands understand what is their real purpose, their real power because it’s of these two qualities that they are robbed.*

*And then you understand the meaning of being a body also in your inside ,that you exist wherever there is flesh of yours, because every bit of flesh, also the one you have never touched, is crying and screaming it’s own “Being” in that moment, the only one when it would have chosen silence in front of the total impotence in that violent speechless statement.*

*Every cell, every nerve calls the mind and it’s there that you gain the absolute certainty of “being” in that guise, all over. Everywhere so powerless...*

*Never you ever had such a clear perception of yourself, except in that very moment in which, all what we had understood and found about us, was being taken away...”*

If we go back to the period when these things were going on, we can figure out how the girl’s Self was too frail to cope with these kind of emotions, that are absolutely anomalous for that age. We can understand her great struggle to avoid such reality.

In other words, since there were no adequate instruments she was compelled to submit to reality instead of coping with it.

The final act is: **A stolen childhood.**

#### PIECE E: **ABUSE AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE**

In family situations where there is a high amount of violence, the child builds up “short circuit” mechanisms. There is:

\_\_\_ a Waiting time

\_\_\_ a Storming time

\_\_\_ a Final act, when violence takes place, but that turns immediately into another repetitive  
\_\_\_ Waiting time.....

This is what Michaela says. A client who underwent physical and sexual abuse:

*... "There wasn't a time that could have been called respite, because also silence had a noise, since I was already on the alert, waiting for the violence to be repeated (physical) because I never knew how, why, or when it was going to happen... and also the abuse was an uncertainty, since my father could grab me when I was on the sofa in the sitting room, when I was in bed, either alone or when there was my mother..."*

Because of these experiences, communication and socialization get ever more difficult . It's unavoidable that these mechanisms go along with behaviours that state an uneasiness, agitation, violence, closure. Michaela was ever more withdrawn; her behaviour was of a silent and docile girl who didn't want to socialize with children of her age. When she became an adult she had built up a confused personality and from the social and sentimental point of view she gave herself to everybody.

We can but repeat and state that when there is an abuse of power, the child isn't able to rebel and reject because the experience is painfully lived in utmost loneliness and fear . " On the stage" there are no figures of reference to rely upon

The situation is worse when parents try to get ride of any kind of responsibility "blaming" the child. Sandra experienced a situation of abuse up to her late adolescence when she found the courage to say to her father:..."I don't want you to do those things to me"... and her father answered: ..."why?! ...I thought you liked it..."

Also in this case there is a short circuit and it's hard for a child to stop it without somebody's help. The victim's experiencing is of the kind: who is the victim? Who is the abuser? Am I a victim? an abuser? or am I a party to all this? Besides these thoughts there are ideas of one's possibility of intervention like:"...I could have told him before...I could have stopped the thing..."

FROM A CLIENT:

*..."One of the reasons why the fault is turned upon ourselves, is that when we are alone, with the memories of the moment when we felt to be stolen away ,the picture of what happened, gets clear and complete in a sudden, for a moment, an instant of total obscene conscience. There is nothing that can make us accept that we permitted that the person in the picture could undergo such a violent deprivation..."*

*There is a solution, when we think that we ourselves permitted it, maybe just a second, or a month earlier, with a look, a gesture that was certainly misunderstood. We should never had allowed it, they must have misunderstood, they have mistaken but it was us first of all who weren't clear..."There is so much violence inside of us that when we take in a bit of fault, this makes us feel a little stranger because, if it was really our fault, well...then tomorrow or within a month we shall be able to avoid it. If it's our fault, well then we have the power to "not make it happen anymore"...We have learned that the illusion to find love is the thing that has condemned us, and maybe this new illusion of a fault which is so impossible and not convincing will save us."*

So they have the illusion that the problem is solved. These convictions are favoured by the lack of dignity and pride that have the power to sign the border between the two " Beings". Two aspects of the personality that in a child are not built in and moreover the small amount that was structured has been destroyed by the abuse. So, as a consequence of what has been described, there is the following experience: " this maintaining myself separated from the Other is impossible; so, I victim, slip into the queer world of the Other..." Because the other is King of queerness and flattery, because the other remains, beyond any other thing, a Parent.

#### PIECE F: THE COLLOCATION

There is another frustrating aspect: the "collocation" of the experience, because it doesn't belong to the child's sexual sphere, since it hasn't yet developed in it's whole.

And here I ask myself why Freud thought that, even though on an unconscious level , the child's Oedipus desire is achieved. (De Zelueta).

Through a slow and painful **“healing process”**, when the abused person is able to “take in “ all this , it means that the “black hole” is reached. The client comes to terms with **that reality** and recognizes that what has happened belongs to the inner world and accepts it as an identification part of life and impossible to erase.

#### **PIECE G: BEING “DIFFERENT”.**

This is the reason why abused women feel to be **“different”** from others. And here is another big obstacle to overcome, because before the acceptance of such a reality, there is the refusal to feel different :*“at school I used to look around and ask myself if it was possible to see what was happening to me. Other times I would ask myself how my school friends’ fathers could be....”*

It’s impossible to comfort them by saying that it’s not true. This is one of the greatest griefs, since this being “different” carries along other feelings: *“...now I ask myself what kind of sexual life I would have had in adolescence if this hadn’t happened...” and so on*

.In psychotherapy the work on these feelings and others, such as fear, sorrow, guilt ,mourning, betrayal, painful cries, angry weeping also against the therapist, slowly gives way to a grief for the “losses”; to the consciousness that they were the victims of a taboo, and of it’s violence. It’s a very tough and slow work of emotional holding.

It’s not only a work of getting the clients to talk about the facts . The work consists in walking with them into **their emotional world**. It’s there that changes can take place. When they have the courage to experience , accept and take in the relinquished part of them as victims with the mark of “being different” they come to feel a sense of **“innocence”**, a paradox process within the phenomenical method and keeping stuck to the client’s frame of reference.

It’s the “different one” who was betrayed. It’s the “different one” who has been in a place where not even Angels dare go...This reborn feeling of innocence , gives way to the feeling of being a **“special “person** because she has survived and can go proud of the fact that from that “black hole” she succeeded in coming out **“by herself”**. Now she is able to redeem the once rejected experiences and also heal the Self, with all it’s no longer bleeding wounds, that nevertheless will “ wear” it’s scars.

#### **THE EXPERIENCE IS REDEEMED.**

All along the therapeutic process, there is an everlasting string ; it’s the feeling of a “ being left alone”. The therapist mustn’t make the mistake to replace, somehow, “ the missing “ caregiver , or give that protective feeling as a substitute to “what has not been”. The client must have the feeling that you are there, but there as he/she who looks, reads with “ eyes of reality”. Who understands, accepts,. Who is able to wait, to respect. Who has trust in the client. Who “ suffers” with you, but “ not” for you.

#### **The developing process in order to understand some aspects.**

We know that during the emotional development, children are self-centred . They view the world from a subjective point of view and believe that everybody sees the world with their same eyes.

They feel all-powerful, but also guilty. They might believe that all the negative in the family is their fault. This is possible because they still have a magic thought: “I haven’t done...I failed... I could have”...and so on.

Also external values are internalized and become part of their world: “This is not to be done...This is bad...and so on .

Owing to these internalized values, the abused child feels that something “doesn’t fit”; understands that things are hidden. Has the sense of something threatening. Since the child is unable to keep the Self separated from the Other, it says that the fault is his. A child can’t read reality and extract the shades of meaning, so the reality that figures out the tutor as the one who is liable and responsible for certain behaviours ,isn’t shaped out. When grown up, victims state that they were supposed to stop the thing from happening, that it’s their fault.. Here we are dealing with the process of guiltiness explained

beforehand by the client. Actually it's a defensive mechanism: *... "If I hadn't caused the problem, all this wouldn't have taken place..."*

Unfortunately, as I said before, besides there being no protection, sometimes parents individuate them as the "provokers". This can come both from the abuser or the other parent.

A mother: *... "You know doctor... sometimes I have the impression that it's my daughter (not yet 3 years old) who has a malice attitude... This mother hadn't asked herself why her daughter had such an abnormal behaviour. A psychiatrist had told her that the girl was dealing with her Oedipus fantasies... This child, three years old once said to her mummy: "when daddy puts his "pissy" here (touching her genitals) he hurts me..."*

As I said before, some children are so needy of attentions and caring that they accept any form of contact included erotic manipulations. Sometimes molest produces pleasant feelings thus increasing guilt and confusion, because on one side the needy part is satisfied, and on the other there is guilt for doing such things.

In adolescence, when molestations have been going on since infancy, it may happen that the victim can find the strength to say "that's enough", but the damage is done. Mary used to go to her friend's home after school (primary) because at her place nobody was there. Before meeting her friend she was often molested by her friend's father. This went on for many years. When she was in high school and was interested in flirting with her school mates, she found the courage to stop the abusive relationship, but she had to realize that she couldn't bear any kind of physical contact and no effusions of love. She experienced reactions of disgust, and the refusal to have pleasant sensations... *"I feel that the disgust I had towards Loretta's father, has remained on my skin..."*

During the therapeutic process clients get in touch also with **SHAME**.

The person must come to terms with such feeling and with guilt. This is the only way through which it's possible to have access to the "abused part" that has been rejected by the victim, and then be able to live with oneself as a whole.

The very experiencing of abuse has been cut out from the Self, but it must be taken back, because also this piece is part of the Self.

Sometimes children have particular behaviours that are the Signal of their uneasiness. This is what Robert says:

*"...I remember that at the time when I was undergoing such things, my sister didn't want to go to bed at night and at the same time she would be overtaken by a violent itching over her legs and would scratch herself to bleeding. Last week I told her that I am coming here for a psychotherapy and I mentioned my problems and asked her if she went through the same problems at the time she had all that itching stuff. She started crying and screaming to stop. She didn't want to know anything else, and wouldn't listen any longer. I fear she has gone through my same fate..."*

Another important step in psychotherapy is the processing of **LOSSES**.

One must go through the pain for the losses mentioned before. Here comes the awareness for the loss of the Essence of Childhood:

- of having lost the image and uprightness of a Parent
- the awareness of a Trust that has been lost forever
- of a relying upon someone
- this person is no longer a father ...he is a father who has been a Lover.

Of course these aspects come up at the end when the most painful aspects have emerged and have been processed and accepted. The person must have attained a Personal Power and a well functioning Actualizing Tendency before these concepts, that are so cruel, but so real, can be faced and processed from this point of view.

Nevertheless this is **The Reality**: *"things have really gone like this"*. And it's right from here that one can start over again... the most important thing is to "stay with reality"...that has never killed anybody. This

is what I say to my clients. What I am stating seems very "cruel" to face over again, but at the end there is a shift towards universal values that have the magic touch to sooth all this painful journey...

On the contrary if we don't stay into reality we move in a schizophrenic reality: *I know that you know that I know , but we can't say ... ( Laing)*

All this is processed through the mourning of losses and illusions. The refusal to get into these parts of the "black hole" comes up with pain, rage and fear, just like:..."*why right me?...it's not fair...*"

The victim must come to terms with the **limit of things** that are a part of our Being in the World. The work consists in interiorizing the limit of one's omnipotence and gaining a critical sense of reality.

The philosophical concept of "**limits**" cannot be thoroughly dealt in this work. It's important to keep in mind that it's a very important part of the process and it must be faced and experienced in order to be able to accept reality and to attain the "psychological principle of reality" in the wholeness of it's Being...

Also here by means of a paradox effect or process, the dying, the giving up to this reality, enhances the integration of the Self. *It's a Redeemed Reality...*

When I accept reality and give up the cunning "refusal" of it, ( a defensive mechanism used in order to refuse "having lost the game ... that is " being defeated") the wounded part ,that was rejected , can be placed back into the Self, as a Citizen of the World... There comes a change from a feeling of being in shatters to a feeling of **wholeness**...this gives way to a period of " convalescence".

When it comes that the offender is a parent, It's very hard to accept the personal construct of a "father-lover", because during the developing process, the child (and the therapist...) interiorize the value of taboo into the Basic Personality. On one hand there is the part that experienced violence and betrayal , on the other there is the taboo feeling that belongs to the part of being a "citizen of the world" and which prevails over the abused part. Working with this wounded part and experiencing it over and over again, and finally accepting it, the taboo feeling slowly fades away and loses it's power. This will be cleared further on. The survivor can take back the lost innocence and the "circle" is thus closed...

..."**you meet something. You get in touch with something that goes very deep inside and that "transcends" the material Self of the "Being" and meets the " humanity" of ones EXISTING.**

Maslow describes this aspect somehow " spiritual". When in encounter groups, one goes down to the depths of feeling, this enhances a special communication between the participants. It's of a spiritual kind. It's the moment when energy moves at the same rhythm, thus " transcending" one's being and experiencing the "humanity" of existing...

...**It's in the finitude of Being that the human sacrifice is accomplished and the individual regains that "spiritual" feeling that sets him free from the "chains" of Being...**

According to what has been described, we can now understand another aspect of this painful event which is BETRAYAL.

The victim experiences the drama of being VIOLATED by the father (or mother) and this is added to the incest taboo that has been interiorized. It gives way to a dreadful rage for being "cheated".

The survivor states, and it's true, that it's impossible to share these feelings with " others ",except for those who have gone through the same fate, since she herself is at the same time, part of "the others". The victim is also one of "those who can't understand ",because what has happened is a taboo. She must become conscious of this "mess" and understand that the incommunicability she is talking about, is also dwelling in her , since it's origin is in herself, being "a citizen of the world". Sometimes the client shouts out: "*you will never be able to understand me...*"but she also will not understand herself until this confusion is dissolved. Only when innocence is recovered the client can find citizenship in the world **and again be like others...**

It's very hard to go through this point and call back the feelings, but it helps the person to experience the being "**VICTIM**" AND "**PROTAGONIST**", ( another PIECE of the puzzle). In those moments, in that "**here**

**and now**" it's her who was there. It's an experience that belongs to her story. Yes, she is a victim, but before that there is the "being" a co-protagonist.

Those sensations, erotic emotions, were, in spite of all, "her" experience...pleasant or disgusting whatever. A point that also a child must go through in a therapy. It can be seen as something cruel, but this is the "cruel reality". The person **was there**....

**"I have been in a place where not even angels dare to go...** This is the place where the Personal Construct was placed!

The co-protagonist is **the PREY**. Prey and not a party to the event according to the Freudian theory (De Zulueta). During the therapy I never found the Freudian fear of punishment (punished by one parent because I desired the sex of the other one) but the pain for the betrayal and the fear for being left alone at the mercy of the abuser **and his intentions**, and the paralyzing feeling of being deprived of any form of respect.

Guilt isn't towards the enemy/mother for the contended father, but is used to conceal the refusal of one's own powerlessness and thus the acceptance of several aspects of reality: The failure to control the situation. Having to recognize that they "lost the game". They have been a "prey". This affects the basic feeling of the structure of "existing". It crushes "the person's **world of "existence"** (the I-Me). **A reality** that differs from the Freudian **theory**.

When working in therapy with children, the metaphor of the "prey" is important to role-play and play it to the extreme of "BEING DEFEATED". Children also must be helped to accept this reality.

...Freddy (9 years old):...*"the prince was fighting with his sword, and was killing everybody.*

...Ther....*"but at the end he was defeated"*

...Freddy...*"Noooooo!!"*

...Ther...*"Yes...also a prince can be defeated. Not always he wins... but this doesn't mean that he is no longer a hero..."*

...Freddy...after a while: *"I'll think this over"...*

The experience of being a victim, is already something "after". It's important to strip away "also that skin"; that of being a victim.. (often victims say..."I wanted to strip away my skin"). It's here where **the "being" protagonist** takes place. This experience occurs "before" being a victim. Often when they talk about the event they mention things as if they "weren't there"; as if those things happened to the "victim" part of them...whereas the two parts "must" integrate in order to repair the damage. On the contrary their psychical world is withdrawn and the body is left at the mercy of the "existing" deprived from the "experiencing", but the body holds the "signs" of the experience that is blocked in a waste land feeling. a feeling of being in ruins.( confirmed by Neuroscience)

If the client can handle this piece of the "puzzle" and say that "this is the truth" and no other one, and that those things were "*experienced by ME*", that there are no "if this", "if that"; but that things have gone "this way", that she lost the game, that this is an unchangeable reality, that it was "her" being there with all the baggage of her *EXPERIENCING*, at this point the being a victim disappears and "you are there in the *NAKEDNESS* of *your BEING*..." Because : **this is the point from which everything started.**

The person feels lighter, as if a burden has been taken away. And there was really *something very heavy*: **the burden of the denied experience.**

This process gives way to a thing and to its opposite. At the end there is no more "if"... "but"... "maybe"... "guilt", but the **dramatic "sexualization"** of the experience and at the same time the achievement of a new feeling : **"THE EXPERIENCE"**. This is the **PIECE** which was **removed**...Otherwise there shall be an endless reiteration.

Last and not the least, there's also a pain for the impunity of the abuser. The child or the abused adult are often frustrated for not being indemnified with the abuser's punishment. But when the survivor is able to forgive herself and regain a wholeness of the Self, this pain is soothed. In this way of being there is no need to forgive : there is the pure reality and reality is not right or wrong but ...**"IS"**.

If trauma took place in an age when verbalization was hardly developed, it turns out difficult to “re-visit” those places: sometimes there are “pieces” of signals that have no story, but feelings. You don’t know where they are coming from.

For example a client talks about an instinct to grab her father’s penis when she’s in the car alone with him. She has only fragments of memories : *“ I remember going upstairs in a place I don’t remember where. It was when I went on holidays me and my father alone. Now and then I have the sensation of a sour taste like sperm. I remember the afternoons when I used to go to bed with him... that’s all...”*

Now her sexual life with her husband is very difficult... *“it’s a terrible strain for me to let him touch me, but I do it because I know I can’t refuse it...”*

From a session:

A young boy living in a community for drug addicts committed suicide by hanging himself. My client, the operator a young girl is very upset: *“for the strike, the millionth time he struck his body”* she says.

From her talking, it turns out that what keeps on fretting her mind, is not the fact that he is dead . Death wasn’t part of her worries, it was the *“violence” he did to his body: ...“he had already used violence to himself when he used to prick himself; violence for the low consideration of his body... she says again.*

*“His body had no longer a protector “ I returned to her ...“Yes ...she replies. I continue:...“this happens also in sexual abuse .(This is an input I gave her since she has been abused) ...It goes like: “you can do what you like”, says the victim to the abuser ...I’m not there ...”*

The client answers to my graft : *...“and you let the body live the experience on it’s own...”*

continue...*“the first violence came from the abuser but also from the part of yours that says “I’m not there...”*She answers :*...“ I did that to myself...”* Silence...After a long time , she slowly comes back and

continues:*...In that moment it’s like being on top of the Himalaya ...**You’re alone** ...She stops but I decide not to let her go and catch her emotion and I describe the scenery she gave me:...“There is the absence of somebody, and no one can hear you...and you haven’t the resources to do something... She continues :...**and a deadly terror comes up inside...***

Here it’s clear that in an experience of terror there is **the loss** of Self Power.

I decided to try to use a graft because I was touched by the fact that she kept on going back with a feeling of terror , anguish and anger, to **the “violence”** the boy had done to his body; a fact that was extremely secondary respect to his death. I first shared with her this queer point. I told her that I was touched by her repeatedly going back on this point She understood why I was showing this to her , but of course she wasn’t able to go into it on her own.

Once I tried the graft, if she wasn’t able to get into her story I would never had added on my own the piece she herself added to her own story.

I have already pointed out that there isn’t a standardized process or protocol. It’s important to know the several aspects of the” being involved”, in the trauma, and know when to give the “ input” in the emotionally appropriate moment.

I can state that deep in the black hole, there is a mortification that is often confused with the feeling of “shame”. Shame has to do with the “ I – Thou”; whereas mortification has to do with the “ I –Me”. Only when the victim gets in touch with the feeling of “ mortification” caused by a “ non respect” e by “ being used” , there is a reaction of the “ wounded dignity”. From the depths of this experiencing springs the renewal of one’s **empowerment** .

**The survivor’s cry:**

**“Please help me heal my wounds”.**

**The abuser’s cry:**

**“ Please lead me out of worlds  
that art not mine”**

## THE ABUSER

The following are considerations and theoretical analysis that need further research . However these analysis differ from the theory stemming from the freudian theory and positivistic philosophy.

### FIRST EXAMPLE. From a session.

A 5 year old girl was touching a baby in a pram. The little girl's mother says: *Mind out "Babies musn't be touched ..."* the girl keeps on touching... *"mind out that I'll spank you..."* The girl takes her hand off the baby, but then slowly goes back...and at this point there's a struggle between mother and child . Besides the baby's mother, there are other mothers there , but nobody interferes. ...*"If you do it again I'll pull down your knickers and spank you..."* The girl stretches out her little hand and her mother grabs it. She starts to pull down her knickers and "at last" ( I say) the little girl "reacts" and screams:..."*Mummy please don't do it..."* and clings to her mother's legs. Nobody reacted , because I suppose that all the adults were "allied" with the mother of this "spiteful" "domineering" little girl.

Sometimes children are perceived as those who want to dominate – take over one's power...whereas they are striving in order to **exorcize fear and impotence** experienced and suffered owing to the wrong irrational adult's fear to be defeated by a **non existing** child's challenge.

The baby's mother (my client) could have done something, for example moving away with the pram... but ...she was an **abusive mother...**

In fact she referred, that she also was against that little girl: *"...I was furious and waiting for the moment when there would have been a pouring of blows and I would have enjoyed the scene..."*

I asked my client: *"where was your inner little girl in that moment?"* – She answers:..."*she was there still...motionless, waiting when blows would arrive..."*-I continue: *"there was only the body of the girl that was going to be beaten. In that moment you had decided "not to be there" ...-* She bursts into a desperate cry and comes over to me and clings to my legs...

Later she will say :*"I was crying for that little girl of mine who in that moment used to become only blows..."*

A few weeks before this session she recalled the following:..."*when me and my brother heard our mother tossing around the pans in the kitchen, fear began to rise. We couldn't understand what was going on since me and my brother were playing and not mucking around. Neither did we know how it was going to end up...when the blows came, the fear wasn't there.*—I had asked her if she was scared —*"there were only blows and I used to "become" the blows...Then a pleasant feeling would arise because I used to sense her violence penetrate me ( It passed through the defensive system)...I was powerless...prisoner of her fury that wouldn't let go ...-*Silence—I say:..."and you felt to be without anyone protecting you ... --She continues—"and I felt my mother's pleasure in feeling so free to beat me..."

Here the two parts: victim and abuser, weave together .Most likely it's here, in this space left open by the paralyzed withdrawal, that the " monster" ( the abuser's aggressiveness) penetrates the victim's Self. Maybe a freudian therapist would say in return that the pleasure was the clients getting free of her guilt towards her mother ...This is the way Freud saved adults.

During the session mentioned above I used one of my grafts :

I felt I was deeply in empathy with her feelings. When this happens I try to " restore" the reality of that " here and now" . I do it when I feel I am " clasped" to the other and the other is ready to go down deeper.

Ther: ..." *in that moment you were prisoner of her..."*

Client..."*yes...I was there alone...I only had to stay still..."*

Ther: ..."You were in a place where not even angels dare to go ..."

Client...*"Yes...I was scared because I couldn't know how long the blows would go on nor what would have happened ...and I was alone at the mercy of her fury."*

At last she could cry for her loneliness and the dispossession of her personal power. Her cry was like a little baby's cry....

This client during her childhood and now a young mother experiences erotic feelings when she is in the presence of infants who are left "unguarded": *"... I smiled ...with a grimace look ...I used to think..."now I can do what I like, I'm free to do whatever I want .The baby is alone ,and no protection..."* She would masturbate herself or sexually molest the child. Now she says...*" the pleasant feeling that came from the fact that nobody was there and that the baby was unable to tell these things was terribly strong..."* When her son wants something, and previously when he was a baby and was hungry, she has the feeling of "him **dominating her**" and pounces on him with all her rage. ( other parents refer this mechanism). In her therapy, when she got in touch with **the relinquished part** of herself she recovered her own impotence , her loneliness, her ancient fear . She was able to see her son's fear and understood the damage she was reproducing in her son.

These contents are likely to suggest that perversion sets on processes of regression.

It seems that the source of both behaviours (both the sexual and physical violence ) are an experience of terror and it's removal that turns into eros and violence.

It's the terror of who is annihilated, prisoner of the other, "dismantled", without protection...*" my parents were supposed to be there"* . The statement of an abused client.

In those moments there is the withdrawal of the psyche. The body is left at the mercy of an "existing" deprived of the "experiencing". But the body holds the signs/signals of the experience blocked in a sensation of devastation.

*"...violence can undermine and change the structure of "existing"...says a client..."this is the reason why we ask ourselves:" why have I got the right to exist?"...*

So **it's terror** that leads to murder:*" Oh God! !what does she (the daughter) want?...I can't understand...and fear and terror are swelling up ....the panic...I feel I am choking..."And if I make a mistake?...And the baby keeps on crying... and I can't understand..."*...( Silence...) *" I get into a fierce rage because she is asking me something..."*

Ther:....*"you have no tools...you can't find anything..."*

...She stops talking. I can feel her terror, I see the violence in her eyes. Everything is uttered with great effort, and guilt, but I feel the courage this person has in trying to go down deeper as possible into her inner world. ...I send an empathic feedback. In turn I say :

Ther.*" I feel there is fear..."*

Client...*" Yes...terror is growing up... panic..."*

Ther....*"The fear turns into a" deadly feeling" ...I try to reply to her ,as if I were her in that moment".*

Client:....*"I understand why a mother can kill ...because in order to stop the terror, I must eliminate the thing that is causing it . The baby turns into my monster..."*. This client is a physical abuser...but also a loving mother...)

.  
SECOND EXAMPLE: A FATHER.

*"...when my daughter cries I get violent, a ferocious anger grows in me, I try to control it, but I burst out..."*. Helping the client to go into these feelings he understands that when the girl cries , he doesn't understand what she might need, he gets scared because he feels he isn't able to deal with what's going on . He also feels he hasn't got the means...he is overtaken by panic...and gets violent.

.

The reason why terror may lead to an erotic perversion or to a physical violence may depend on the fact that the child is experienced as being : alone, frail, at the mercy of a reality the adult is unable to deal with, dissociating. The deadly feeling is likely to lead towards an erotic world.

This is proved in sexual perversion where excitement and arousal are produced through dangerous behaviours: hands and strings around one's neck, injuries or severe tortures over the body and so on.

There are also war events that talk about this : People who are strangers to each other and come to meet in situations of extreme danger, have sexual intercourse.

-In the second case ( physical violence) the "threat" seems to come from the victim's "power":..." *she is challenging me"..." she want's to dominate me"...*

In the first case the dominating perception of the Other is : Frail and left Alone.

In the second case the dominating perception is : Strong and Dominating.

It's most likely that the abuser's hidden terror and pain, have the "opportunity" to be experienced in the moment when abuse is acted.

The question that arises could be the following: Are there two pains and two terrors that meet in that moment? The question grows from the fact that abusers often say that after the abuse there's a heavy depressive fall....But just after a short time, the child is blamed (victim) because the abuser must preserve his "original" fault (the one of his inner child), and claim the innocence of his adult side...

The reason why he does this, lays in the fact that he has never been able to accept reality; the two parts are still split aside....

I hold the conviction that it's the terror that dwells in the **structure of the Existing**, that produces the feeling of incapacity, lack of instruments, an impotence, that erases ones powerfulness, that prevents the cognitive part to maintain a critical sense of reality, the clearness of mind, thus a feeling of Confidence.

Such a ruin causes another fear; the one towards all what is external to the Self. That is panic and terror that cause abnormal **behaviours in the " Being"**.

I will conclude these considerations, that I have drawn from a phenomenological lecture and that need further research, with a personal idea of mine.

In the abuser's "inner world", perversion doesn't have to do with "Power" but with "**Defeat**".

It's *the rejection* of defeat in the *structuring process* of the "Being in Perversion" first, and the *refusal of the "Being in Defeat,"* in the *acting out* of "afterwards".

It's an obsessive exorcizing of the feeling of being defeated...of having lost the game...**thus a cunning "cry":** I won't give up... I want what I had the right to receive...

#### **A piece of story written by a client. (written after a session.)**

" ...I am upset by the T:V service I saw last night ,regarding the " X" crime (a mother is charged for murdering her two year old son but claims to be innocent). I'm struck by the brutality and the sudden ,unforeseen explosion of insane hatred.

I go to my session all closed up inside, reticent, confused.

Maddalena tells me that it's the little girl/victim that saw the service on tv, that she's upset and now is "blocked with terror" (I thought I had understood this after 30 minutes ,so I gave her my feedback ).

Straight away I recall to my mind my mother's face in an explosion of rage and violence, her mouth wide open in a roar, the foam at her mouth that comes out, her crossed looking eyes, that at the distance of a millimetre from my face are looking into nothingness.

I was frightened not only by her violence but also from her insanity.

It was a fear that went beyond that step of tension/alertness/mistrust in which you stay owing to the unknown next move. It was the terror and bewilderment in front of those eyes that were detached from the world. Blind, that couldn't see me, completely withdrawn into a dimension of madness, transfiguring the face of a mother I wasn't able to recognize anymore. Not even as an abuser with the conscience of being so.

The impression I have now, looking at mother X's face while she is answering, very calm and quiet, to the journalist's questions, is the horror to know that she may have known, even for just a few seconds, the violent monster hidden behind normality and that after showing up, goes back and hides himself silently, without anybody, **except "you victim"**, having noticed anything and without anyone, and she least of all, can even imagine it's existence.

At this point I'm touched by two things:

First, the unimaginable, the painful refusal of me as a mother, of the possibility to be a monster for my children.

Second, the desert of solitude in which I child/victim was left to die with terror.

In the following session I made an incredible effort to remember why the week before I walked out of my session crying.

During these last weeks, I realized that, during my sessions, I end up so confused on what is coming up that I forget many pieces of the therapy.

This disorientation depends on the fact that in this specific moment of my process I am narrating with more voices, exactly two: the one of the **child/victim** (see the terror above) and the one of the adult abuser (see the guilt towards my children).

And since these parts haven't yet been integrated, but can only co-exist in a new consciousness I achieved in order to give voice to them I must stay in this split. It's the split that causes me disorientation.

On the contrary, the experiences of a third part, the one of me **adult/victim**, I'm not ready to see it. So this voice isn't yet making itself to be heard...it still needs to hide...

My conclusion is that the DRIVE to violence isn't the need of Power, but the need to defeat DEFEATNESS. The cry of the inner-child is : " I shall never give up because I am innocent...and I have the right to be given what I am craving for..."An adult unable to " give up" the dream... and thus take care of one's inner child ... because unable to get in touch with the underlying pain and fear suffered in childhood and that has to do with the " not being attended to" according to the " sacred values" towards which an adult should never fail... And a " not being attended to" by a person with a " Being" in emptiness...a Non-Existence...