

The Invisible Molester and the Hidden Child

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Abstract

When we think of the violence of one person who falls upon another, we usually imagine blatant and unequivocal acts, physical and verbal abuse, fury and uncontrolled oppression.

Yet human violence is not always manifest, indeed in some cases it is 'controlled' very well and takes on silent and invisible forms, even in the eyes of its victims.

The disguised abuse of an individual against another is a more widespread reality than is commonly thought, and often has to do with an unconscious project of psychic annihilation towards someone.

It is hidden in very close relationships such as those within family, work, friends, or in couple relationships where it can find particularly fertile ground.

Through well-hidden moral harassment, which aims at the wearing down of a person, one can arrive at his psychological annihilation.

Beyond the many forms and circumstances in which this type of destructiveness can occur, often the most dramatic consequences take place on a child by a parent or other caregiver, or on a partner by the other; and it is to the latter that I will allude here most often.

Anyone can occasionally assume a destructive behavior, but quite another thing is that systematic, and therefore perverse, hostility that produces ruinous results on another person and without the link between his psychophysical deterioration and the devastating action being easily identifiable. of which he is a victim.

The elusiveness is one of the most insidious aspects of such an abuse that is inexorably consumed in the innermost folds of our social fabric, while the community remains largely unaware of it.

Yet it is a powerful aggression, capable of undermining a person's identity, destroying deep bonds through deadly triangulations and upsetting the balance of entire families.

Keywords: *Invisible Molester; Hidden Child*

The perverse manipulator

Such violence arises from a particular psychological configuration of the abuser who, although not considered by others to be a pathological person, much less dangerous, adopts - somewhat undisturbed - a de facto ruthless behavior.

From the clinical point of view, the figure of the 'perverse manipulator' - who escapes a precise nosographic category - is disposed, in an approximate way and according to the severity, along a psychopathological continuum that goes from the narcissistic personality disorder to the so-called 'malignant narcissism' to then cross over into antisocial personality disorder.

These profiles can be combined with further dysfunctional traits such as borderline, paranoid, and so on; however, beyond the diversifications and the degree of pathology, it is possible to identify different characteristics of morbid manipulation starting from some criteria that classify the pathological narcissist.

The latter is characterized by a lack of empathy, an unbridgeable need for recognition and admiration, stubborn ideas of grandeur, an aversion to criticism and to taking responsibility for one's actions.

On a superficial observation, the individual with this type of personality can be noticed for some qualities such as charm, intuition, sociability; in reality the basic nucleus of him is represented by a deep-rooted affectivity, by the need to exploit others for his own needs of recognition and by the propensity to satisfy his own impulses of sadism and predation.

Furthermore, the more perverse the narcissist is, the more he aims to convey anguish in his victims, of which he can become on the one hand a sort of emotional parasite and on the other a regular source of affliction.

At the base of this personality set up tormenting feelings of emptiness coexist together with profound experiences of insecurity and distrust, albeit disguised. The causes can be different and complex, from a deficiency to an excess of attention received, but they have in any case led to early and significant wounds to the value of the person, compromising his self-esteem and a healthy sense of self.

The narcissistic subject, in fact, is barricaded in a fundamentally defensive psychic organization that prevents him from opening up to an authentic affective experience - even if he often pretends the opposite - and from getting involved in any type of relationship if not superficially and that, finally, it leads to devaluing anyone in order to gain good self-esteem and to feel superior and admired.

Secret violence in action

Perverse manipulation takes place through constant attacks on a person's integrity, dignity, value through dark ways that escape the direct gaze of anyone.

As much such attacks are indirect and implicit, so much are they systematic and obstinate and have some recurring aspects: the search for and abuse of power, the refusal of direct confrontation, disqualification, lies, mockery and control of the other, the use of tactics to isolate and discredit it.

Furthermore, communication is strewn with implications, destabilizing jokes, inexplicable silences, ambiguous or partial information.

Not infrequently, the manipulator's statements have a double meaning, or his accusations are expressed indirectly, which deprives the other of the possibility of effectively replicating or possibly clearing himself up; in fact, if he did so, in addition to being easily hesitant or inappropriate, he could be further attacked and criticized for having misunderstood, exaggerated, argued. On the other hand, not replying to the attack would result in equally intense moral distress. Therefore, there is no solution.

In addition, among the weapons of the manipulator, there is also self-pity, if necessary, which feeds the victim's sense of guilt, disarming her definitively. For example, if the latter in a moment of particular exasperation exploded into momentary anger, the manipulator would readily use it as irrefutable proof of his wickedness or madness; In this way the victim would fall into an even more painful condition since - already very tried - she would see herself accused of something that she actually committed and in addition she would feel all the guilt.

And this can happen without the director of the crime taking the slightest responsibility.

Indeed, such circumstances are particularly satisfying for the pathological narcissist who thus achieves one of his primary goals: to sanction his victim's guilt.

When the manipulator succeeds in his most coveted purpose - that of making his victim behave in a condemnable way - for his part he can discharge his aggression in a more open way or he can aim to be the magnanimous rescuer of those who have now lost their mind... Nonetheless, it is precisely at moments like these that he secretly reaches the height of satisfaction.

In dynamics of this kind, confusion gradually adds up to previous distortions, producing a deadly network from which the victim does not know how to extricate himself, increasingly disoriented about what is happening and often taking the blame, while the manipulator gradually dampens his vital energy.

All this is conducted in such a skillful and "measured" way as to always leave the victim in doubt whether it is she who interprets the events in a malicious way or does not have an exaggerated susceptibility and so on.

In fact, one of the hallmarks of such violence is its unspeakability: when the victim decides to describe a given episode he would always find himself in a state of confusion, undecided whether the abuse actually took place or was not the result of a own reconstruction. Sometimes the result is that of a terrible moral annihilation and without the closest people noticing what is happening.

But, even when the victim, unnerved and exhausted, tries to represent his discomfort to another, in most cases he will find himself in front of someone unable to recognize the extent of the crime and who, at most, would try to reassure him with the effect of diminishing what happened.

This occurs because the so-called 'affective manipulator' is a sophisticated expert in misrepresentation, able to conceal his prevarications so well that he is also able to give an irreproachable impression of himself.

Therefore, any attempt at clarification is doomed to failure for the victim, who is in check and has no way out, if not the clear separation from her executioner; but the repeated counterfeiting to which she is subjected of her prevents her from understanding what is really happening and therefore it is very difficult for her to get out of it.

In fact, the manipulator knows how to dose, together with the torments, even affective gestures that bind the victim to himself, making him dependent on the one hand and disoriented on the other.

On the other hand, any executioner to maintain his dominant position and keep his prey hostage always offers something "good" to the latter, who ends up wondering if there is something "wrong" in her that, after all, it generates a lot of misunderstanding. So, she continues to increase her efforts in hopes of healing the relationship by sinking more and more, instead, into a grueling spiral.

The victim

When faced with a person who blocks any kind of communication, the victim is forced to act.

But she, prevented by conditioning, she can do it only in a violent start, in order to recover her freedom.

An outside observer considers any impulsive action pathological, especially if it is violent.

Those who react to the provocation appear to be responsible for the crisis. [...]

He's between two fires and, whatever he does, he can't get away with it. If he reacts, he ignites the conflict.

If he doesn't react, he lets the deadly destruction spread.

M.F. Hirigoyen

Anyone can fall into the plot of a perverse manipulator, but those who become its prisoners carry within themselves, in turn, an ancient narcissistic wound, that is, they have experienced early traumatic experiences starting from a lack of love: lack of attention, of empathy, care, behavior harmful to one's dignity, physical abuse, abandonment, a parent or an entire pathological family system, etc.

Affected by these wounds - which may be similar to those received by the manipulator in his childhood - a child can develop survival strategies in accordance with the 'unfavorable' climate in which he lives; that is to say that he can unconsciously give up that part of himself that the surrounding environment does not tolerate and does not allow to exist, such as spontaneity, vitality, authenticity, trust or even talents.

To give up on these aspects also means to stop recognizing them as parts of oneself and no longer feel empathy for them and not even, unfortunately, for one's own suffering. This is equivalent to being amputated of a portion of self-awareness and vitality that would be necessary to orient oneself and genuinely fulfill oneself in one's existence.

When these wounds are particularly deep it can happen that the person lives with an equally dark feeling of shame and with the dark feeling of not really deserving the consideration of others, their attention or their love.

Not only that: those ancient wounds, having induced the unconscious belief that they do not deserve love, can generate an acute sense of guilt in a person and lead them to unknowingly punish themselves, even through destructive relationships.

Those who have internalized a negative image of themselves at a deep level, such as "I am a nullity", believe themselves worthy of it and therefore are convinced that the world is entitled to mistreat them, but not being aware of this sabotaging belief, they do not have any control and unfortunately lets itself be piloted.

It all begins when the unloved child, in order to survive, first aligns himself and then allies himself with the one who inflicted the first wounds on him, who over time becomes an internalized part of him. As an adult, he will unconsciously go in search of a new persecutor since that ancient alliance coincides with the belief that he deserves just that.

Therefore, if at one time the child perceived that as it was it was not good and has subconsciously exchanged his truth for his survival, subsequently the adult will continue to repeat the same irrational pattern in the unchanged illusion that by sacrificing a part of himself will finally be recognized and loved.

We could then say, metaphorically, that 'that renegade child' remains hidden in the basement of the psyche, helpless and disheartened, while the adult goes on in his life indifferent to that so precious part of himself, now forgotten.

Superficially, it might seem that in that existence everything proceeds normally, but in reality the person is separated from his vital source which he would need instead to take root in his own power and to mature a healthy self-government; as a result, he will easily come across experiences that will reenact the childhood trauma of disaffection.

Moreover, the victims of invisible molesters are often altruistic, naive, idealistic people, which leads them to bond with exploitative individuals, and, not infrequently, they are rich in skills, but their shaky self-esteem hardly allows them to realize their worth.

Thus, while the perverted narcissist is stuck in his devastating mode, his victim tends to remain immobilized in his sacrificial script.

As Bernard Lempert says, when hatred strikes a child he ends up replacing that destructive system with self-destructive behaviors.

The child has understood on an unconscious level that he does not have to exist and has no choice but to submit to his own crime.

A crime without bloodshed: for all the deceased is alive, so what is the problem?

Beyond the wounds

For a man alienated from his own inner source, creation arises from despair and ends in failure; but this man has not walked the path that leads to the end of time and space, to the end of darkness and light: he does not know that where all these things end, right there they begin.

R.D. Laing

Both the manipulator and his prey, therefore, have survived ancient traumatic experiences that often resemble each other, and both carry buried within themselves the tenacious conviction of not worth, of not deserving, of never being enough. They drag a dead psychic core within themselves. But, while the pathological narcissist props up his insecurity by placing himself on a pedestal of grandeur and supplying himself with all the power available, the oppressed tries to save himself by using the opposite strategy, that is by placing himself in a position of subordination in the hope of being thus welcomed. and popular. Both, in fact, use a different form of manipulation.

It goes without saying that a problem so compromising human health would deserve to be addressed in depth at many levels of the community, from the clinical to the socio-cultural, especially in view of a work of prevention.

That said, psychotherapy can be an effective recovery path to process past traumas and to resume the path of healthy development, but people with severe narcissism do not generally attend psychotherapists' offices, or, if they do, it does. either because of a particularly painful meltdown in their life or because they are forced into dramatic circumstances in which they don't have much choice. However, even when in therapy, usually their goal is not change, but to find confirmation on themselves and on the 'impeccability' of their choices because they are unable to get out of the conception that the cause of their difficulties inevitably lies in the external.

On the other hand, it is easier for the so-called victim to realize, at some point, that he needs help and to be able to undertake a therapeutic path of transformation, recovery and integration of his own Self.

The therapeutic setting can become for the violated person the privileged scenario in which to realize the loving recovery of his 'abandoned child', that is of the deepest nature of himself.

In my clinical practice, I extract different approaches from the 'toolbox', depending on the patient, to facilitate wound healing.

However, whatever the choice of therapeutic means from time to time, the heart of the healing process, especially for victims of abuse, always has to do with the patient's emotional encounter with his child, since the one needs the other: the injured and long-hidden child needs a finally reliable adult who will protect and take care of him, making him recover the lost basic trust and allowing him to get out of his hiding place; the adult, for his part, needs the creativity and vitality of the child without which life cannot be lived in its fullness and depth.

Where the child resumes his rightful place by returning to the person the centrality of his feeling and making him discover the necessary empathy for himself, any manipulator has his days numbered.

At that point, in fact, the greedy predator will lose the character of invisibility in the eyes of its victim to become instead very recognizable and the freed child will be able to finally attract love and respect, starting with his natural self-empathy.

The interminable journey towards who we are can start with new momentum precisely in the solid and invigorating alliance between patient and therapist.

There, the two set off along a mysterious path, on the trail of a key that intervenes in any human evolution and that breaks all spells: to begin to sincerely love yourself, just as you are [1,2].

Conclusion

With the clarification, albeit obvious, that such a renewed feeling towards oneself will not derive from a strengthening of the ego, but from the authentic good - that each of us should nurture - for our own and deeper essence.

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