

# **ABUSE**

by

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What actually is abuse? When I speak of it from the viewpoint of Pesso System/Psychomotor Therapy I have very specific meanings attached to the words that I use and shortly I shall define my terms.

But first let me speak about abuse in more general terms. Abuse is a topic of high current interest. We read about it and hear of it everywhere. Children are abused by their parents, their teachers, and others who would ordinarily be expected to be earnestly concerned with their care. Wives are abused by their husbands, and husbands by their wives. And now, in this insane period when acts of terrorism have become common, ordinary citizens, tourists, and other innocent bystanders are beaten, held as hostages and even murdered.

No one, anywhere, can feel sufficiently safe to ignore the outbreak of this plague of abuse. Abuse threatens and offends all of us. It disturbs our sense of well-being. It robs us of our birthright expectation of security, safety, and comfort in our personal lives. Abuse is more than just another topic for psychological exploration.

It is a social phenomenon that can affect everyone and demands that we, who are especially involved in the treatment of victims of abuse - that we most fully understand it so that we may be more effective in our efforts to bring healing to victims' pain and distress.

There are three general categories of abuse.

First, there is physical abuse which comes from damaging blows to the body of the victim from weapons, such as, guns, knives, etc., hard objects, such as rocks, sticks, etc. or body parts, such as fists, feet, teeth, etc., used to injure, tear or disrupt the normal use of the victim's body, muscles, bones, tissues, and organs. In simple words, the victim is physically beaten.

Then there is sexual abuse which comes from unwanted sexual relationship and stimulation - via sexual intercourse, contact, or penetration of other body parts with the abuser's genitals, or other body parts.

Finally, there is psychological abuse which comes from unwanted reduction of the victim's self esteem and value through imposed degradation, humiliation, ridicule, derision, and/or other psychological blows, demeaning to the self image, and damaging to the identity and functioning of the victim. Another form of psychological abuse results from forced submission to the commands and will of the abuser with no possibility of resistance or escape, where the victim must only show obedience.

Clearly, abuse (ab-use) is an ab-(normal)-use of a person, whereby a person is treated as a thing, an object or a commodity and not as a living soul and ego. The twenty seven years that I and my wife Diane

have been engaged in the development of Pesso System Psychomotor has given us a unique perspective on the human psyche. Using and developing PS/P techniques with clients who have been victims of abuse, and working with other clients who have experienced crises that required them to reorder their lives in meaningful ways has led us to fundamental conclusions about how the human psyche is organized.

It is from that vantage point that I would like to describe how I understand the terms, soul and ego.

Soul is the word I use to represent the essential self - the core of a human being. The soul is the source of all the energies of a person - those energies that arise out of the genes, out of the unconscious. The individual soul inherits the treasure of the collected information and knowledge about life and existence that has been accumulated through evolutionary time and recorded and deposited in our genes. Our individual soul, though born in our lifetime, traces its history to the beginning of time. It is this power and history of life I mean to denote when I use the word soul.

The ego is the encircling band of consciousness, control, and mastery that enables people to live their souls as individuals in charge of their own lives and destinies. It is the agency by which we connect with the energies springing from the soul.

The ego is not ancient, it contains no information rising from the evolutionary past. We are born with the possibility of an ego, with blank slates where our egos shall arise. Our egos are created in our own lifetimes.

Metaphorically speaking, if the soul is the protoplasm in the biological cell of existence, then the ego is the cell membrane which holds it together, defines it and separates it from other cells and the rest of the outside world.

The shapes and characters of our egos are formed and influenced by our relationships and contacts with the significant individuals involved with our upbringing, especially our parents and parent surrogates.

In this definition of the soul I include attributes that are similar to what are usually referred to as instincts.

The soul is the source of our emotions, our impulses, our instinctive behaviors and reactions to external events. From there we learn to find pleasure and laugh when things are satisfying, to become angry or sad when things are frustrating. From there arise the urges to be close to others, to love and to create. From there we find the capacity and willingness to attack when we are in danger, or to run from it.

As well as giving us impulses upon which to act, our soul also gives us our capacity to feel, to sense, to take in the world as food or experience. When we take in the world literally, as food, we digest that food and convert it to energy or the stuff our bodies are made of. When we take in the world symbolically, as events and experiences, we neurologically and psychologically digest it and convert it to meaning and the stuff our minds are made of.

In summary, the soul consists of the polarities of power and vulnerability. By power I mean the capacity to move, to act, to transform, or make an effect upon the world. By vulnerability I mean the capacity to feel, to respond, to take in and be transformed by the world.

From its position as the interface between the outer and inner world, the membrane which separates the soul from the outside world, the ego mediates, modifies and controls, what shall go out of us or come in to us. It determines what form the action shall take when the impulses from the soul are allowed to become behavior and what form the meaning shall take when the significance of external events are internalized.

The ego gives us the capacity to become conscious of existence as it gives names, words, images and measurements to the outer world of events as well as to the inner world of our impressions. The ego has the capacity to make discriminations between things, categories, and emotional states. In that function it assists in differentiating between this and that, inside and outside, self and other, dreaming and awake, thinking and feeling, etc. This discriminating ability is a function of its encircling, boundary making and separating capacities.

As the ego is created in the crucible of the family home, it is a reflection of how our parents and significant others have reacted to us. It is a record of what names they have given to what they license or allow to come in or out of us. Simply put, the child, through interactions with its parents, learns to know and to control his/her own emotional range of feelings and actions. Then, having internalized the knowledge gained from those interactions in his/her ego, the child is more or less equipped to handle those ranges of feelings and actions in relationship with the rest of the world. Ultimately, it is the parents who determine the relationship and balance between the soul and the ego.

We are in good balance if our parents and our early history licenses and allows as much as possible of what our souls actually and potentially consist of to be expressed consciously and to be given names and sanction for expression or experience. For only what is named and sanctioned is made conscious by the ego and given the right to be expressed, have a place in the world and be experienced as real. All else becomes inadmissible, sinks to the unconscious and will not be experienced or recognized as coming from the self. What the ego has no place or name for becomes psychologically invisible, whether it be inside or outside the self.

It is for this reason we spend such a large part of our lives learning to maintain the balance between our souls - who we really are or potentially can become - and our egos - who we can consciously and actually be in the real world.

Thus the ego is always at work balancing the nuclear forces of power and vulnerability within us. Containing power so that we do not explode ourselves or the world with what can come out of us. Withstanding vulnerability so that we maintain our physical integrity without losing our own shape by merging or making union with the rest of the world.

With this as background let us return to the subject of abuse.

What effect does abuse have on the soul and the ego?

Abuse dramatically damages the carefully constructed relationship and balance between the soul and the ego.

All abuse figuratively pierces the ego (which penetration can be experienced as a rape). As experience is thrust into the victim by the abuser without his/her consent, the ego defenses are broken or burst, and the soul-stuff is left without boundaries, giving rise to omnipotent levels of feeling.

The ego, throughout its lifetime attempting to gain mastery of the self and the outside world, is given a great shock, for the abuser gives the victim's ego no part in the decision making process determining what shall come in to his/her body or consciousness. The abuser may beat the victim, rape the victim, ridicule the victim - or all three - and the victim finds him/herself absolutely unable to control what is happening.

The ego is thereby damaged. All the ego functions are affected and reduced, resulting in feelings of loss of control, loss of language, loss of consciousness, loss of identity, loss of meaning, loss of capacity for discrimination between inner and outer, fantasy and reality, dream and awake, etc.

As abuse is extremely life threatening it produces highly charged survival reactions in the soul and figuratively raises internal temperature to a dangerously high degree. Abuse produces levels of feeling and reactivity (vulnerability and power) that are far beyond what the victim's ego has heretofore learned to cope with. Their normal life histories have simply not prepared them for this amount of response. Since these feelings have had no interaction or contact with any ego constructing figures, they are unknown, not named as their own feelings, thus responded to as foreign by the ego. Consequently, victims become uncertain as to who they are, and what their true identity is - more evidence that their weakened ego is in great distress and jeopardy.

Most victims tend to become quiet and fearful. The outer world has presented them with great danger. Their own souls have reacted in ways that are beyond their consciousness and comprehension. The first response is to shut down. The ego shrinks and grows rigid - letting little in or out - everything is regarded as suspect, foreign and dangerous.

Some victims may become psychotic if their egos burst rather than shrink and shut down.

Other victims may act out, releasing behaviors that they would never have allowed before, creating distress in themselves and to all who know them.

These are the miserable conditions that abuse leaves victims with.

Interpersonal contact must be made with those nuclear forces or there will never be peace between the soul and the ego. The truth of what one has lived through must be felt and experienced consciously, in interaction with ego-making figures and thereby made real.

It is the aim of Pesso System Psychomotor Therapy in the treatment of abuse victims to attend to these problems by:

- a) creating conditions that allow the ego to once again be in charge;
- b) creating a setting where the victim may bring all those powerful feelings and impulses to the surface of consciousness and behavior;
- c) providing that behavior and those feelings with the necessary limiting countershapes via the use of role-playing group members.

These steps have the function of allowing everything in reaction to the abuse to be understood, made

conscious, given names, given shape, given a place, given acceptance, and therefore made available for internalization in the ego.

In order to help you more clearly understand the interventions I will be describing in the next section, I will describe two more Psychomotor concepts.

The first is shape/countershape. If we think of the soul as having a shape, then the perfectly fitting ego would provide the perfect countershape. Such an ego would perfectly represent the soul as it surrounds and contains it.

But the ego is created in the relationship and contact with one's parents. This means that before there can be an ego countershape, the parents must provide the appropriate countershape to every dimension of the soul and that countershape would then get reflected to and internalized by the ego.

What I am getting at is that there is a need for action and touch in the process of experiencing the countershape. If the shape of the soul is represented by the action of the body, then the countershape of the ego is first experienced in the touch and action of the parents' bodies in relation to that action, as well as in their acceptance, naming and defining of the action.

In conclusion, the victim's damaged ego requires touch and action to repair it.

If one would attend only to the victim's fear and uncertainty following the abuse, then touch and action might not be entirely necessary, but if one acknowledges and understands that some of the major damage to the ego results from the condition of over-arousal of the instinctual or soul energies which severely buffet the ego, then it becomes clear that touch and action will be absolutely necessary.

The second concept is that of ego-wrapping. I mean wrapping in the sense of wrapping a package or a gift, or wrapping a blanket around a baby. Wrapping is the countershape around the shape. The skin of the ego, in this sense, wraps around the soul.

Using this metaphor, the totality of soul should be wrapped in ego. That means that every expression of the self, the shape, should be met with the touch and action countershape of those figures who assist us in making ego. That is, every part of our self should be met, touched, named, given dimension and accepted by the important ego making figures in our life.

That is what I mean by ego-wrapping.

Following the extreme impact of abuse, much of the earlier wrapping of victims' souls may be ripped apart. The intention of the treatment of abuse in Pesso System Psychomotor Therapy is to create conditions for the re-wrapping and ego repairing of the damaged areas.

We do this by giving the clients the opportunity for doing "structures". A structure is a symbolic re-experiencing of a given event. During a structure, victims are allowed and encouraged to discover all the powerful soul feelings and reactions coupled to the abuse that may never have been brought to the surface before in their lives.

During the structure, accommodators, who will role-play all the significant figures in the event, are provided to insure that sufficient "ego wrapping" is available. Ideal figures are role-played by other

group members. In effect, the ideal figures are the ones the client would have needed to have present either to have stopped the abuse or to have given the support needed in order for abuse effects to be processed and dealt with by their confused and distressed egos. The ideal figures become the ego supports or props which permit the soul and the ego to come in better balance.

Other group members role play "negative" figures, such as abusers, or negative aspects of abusive parents, etc. When these figures are used and are targets of aggression or revenge they do not fight back but make sounds of pain and defeat, giving the client expectations of success in the expression of anger and self defense.

I shall now list the topics that are attended to in the treatment of abuse using Pesso System Psychomotor Therapy.

1. THE EXPERIENCE OF LOSS OF CONTROL.
2. THE EXPERIENCE OF FEAR AND TERROR.
3. THE EXPERIENCE OF PAIN, HURT AND SADNESS
4. THE IMPULSE AND EXPRESSION OF REVENGE.
5. THE EXPRESSION OF EROTICISM AND RECEPΤIVITY.
6. THE IMPULSE AND EXPRESSION OF MURDER
7. THE INCREASE OF GUILT, SHAME AND THE DESIRE FOR PUNISHMENT
8. THE DESIRE TO EXPRESS LOVE FOR THE ABUSER.

I shall describe the body symptoms and the treatment as I attend to each topic listed.

#### THE EXPERIENCE OF LOSS OF CONTROL.

Inasmuch as abuse denies the client choice and control, those rights must be freely given in the therapy. If the therapist is too rigid and follows a too formal procedure, the therapist and the procedure itself will be further evidence that the world is abusive, even including the therapy session.

There are two simple Psychomotor Therapy exercises that help the client regain control. These two exercises are not set forth as major procedures in the healing process but as simple examples of the kind of techniques and exercises that can be applied to the problem of loss of control.

The first exercise is called the Controlled Approach.

The client chooses where to stand in the room and another group member is asked to volunteer to be the figure that is controlled. The rules of the exercise are that the controlled figure must respond to the commands of the client, given by signs of the hands. The client can indicate whether they want the controlled figure to move closer or further away, to one side or another, to stand higher or lower, to move faster or slower, etc.

This gives the client practice in controlling another person in their field of sight and produces feelings of safety and mastery. Although it might produce anxiety as they move the figure closer, they discover that they can command the figure to move further away to reduce their anxiety.

This exercise can be repeated many times over the period of therapy and the feelings and reactions that the distance and direction produce can provide much material for the therapy as well as be indicators of the clients' increasing safety with physical closeness.

The second exercises gives the client practice in regaining control of their own body. It is called Conscious Voluntary Movement. There are four steps in this exercise. The first is decision. The second is plan. The third is implementation. And the fourth is verification. Briefly, it supplies an opportunity to practice mastery and control of the body in a non-threatening, non-emotional task. In the first step the client must make a decision regarding raising an arm, using only the shoulder joint, limiting the movement so it is devoid of expression. The choices are limited to which arm, which direction, and what height. The second step is to make an image or a plan of the arm in the finished position. The third step is to carry out the action devoid of feeling and making sure that each bit of action is a product of conscious choice and execution. The fourth step is to determine that the action has been carried out according to the decision and plan. This exercise provides the client with the chance to gain control over their own actions, not allowing any other movement than that of their own conscious choice to be allowed action. Thus the client practices and learns that at any time, the turbulent emotions beneath the surface can be held in check while they make their bodies follow their will.

Those who wish to use these specific exercises can refer to my book, "Movement in Psychotherapy", N. Y. University Press, 1969, for more details. Having learned to control their emotions and their body actions the client is more prepared to give those emotions bodily expression.

Now we shall turn to the remainder of the conditions on the list.

#### THE EXPERIENCE OF FEAR AND TERROR.

Fear and terror is experienced intensely during abuse and, without ego-wrapping, it is felt as boundless, endless, and omnipotent.

We see the residue and signs of this unbounded fear in clients when they report trembling in their legs or that their shoulders are tense, both indications that the fear is at the threshold of expression. Trembling in the legs indicates the possibility of an impulse to run. Tension in the shoulders suggests the possibility of an impulse to hide.

A goal of the structure is to provide the client with opportunities for the bodily expression and discharge of that energy. In doing this it is important to understand that the expression of fear will not be "finished" and satisfied until the client feels safely "away" from the threat, in a secure place. Therefore ideal figures must first be established as a completely safe haven, and so equipped with power that they can be perceived as equally powerful or more powerful than the abuser. This reassures the client that the attacker could not overcome this newly found security.

It is not wise to invite clients to fully contact their fear before those conditions are present; otherwise the structure will not result in the experience of safety, but in a never-ending running panic and pit of

terror from which the only escape is death or psychologically splitting from the body. As safety is the countershape to fear, fear without safety is felt as endless.

Quite simply, the bodily experience of fear can only be successfully processed within the confines of a safe place. The client can be given the freedom to literally do this running when the ideal figures are established in the room as the haven to run to. This releases the incipient action and provides great relief when the safety is reached.

The hiding impulse is attended to while the client is curled up in the arms of the safe figures. They might look as if they would want to pull their head into their body, making their neck disappear. Or shrink into a ball and make themselves less visible or even to become invisible. This can also be understood as an attempt to get out of their body.

Gentle, but firm, counter-pressure to the raised shoulders releases cries of fear and terror that may be locked up in that tension. The therapist must be prepared to hear, and handle calmly, the screams of fear, terror and helpless-calling-for-help that erupt from the client. The ideal haven figures must hold the client tightly during this expression so that the client doesn't think for a moment that there will be a loss of contact in the midst of this terrifying expression. Loss of firm contact would feel like a collapse of the ego.

The remarks that the ideal figures may be assigned or asked to say during these interventions includes statements like, "We won't let him hurt you." "We can help you handle how frightened you are." "We are not frightened, your fear is normal and we will help you deal with it." etc. Such words of acceptance and reassurance give dimension to the experience.

In contact with the ideal figures, the fear becomes experienceable, expressible, nameable, finite, measurable and acceptable, giving it consciousness and a place in the ego.

#### THE EXPERIENCE OF PAIN, HURT AND SADNESS

The experience of physical pain and the emotional anguish of what had been lived through will now be attended to. The physical symptoms connected with those feelings are often reported as tension or hardness in the stomach, tension in the throat and pressure in the chest. That is not to say that emotional or physical pain always shows up that way, but deep sadness, grief and other painful feelings frequently give first evidence of themselves in those areas of the body.

The technique, as with other reports of bodily tension and pain, is to ask the client to tighten the muscles around the distressed area and then to note what emotions, feelings, sounds or actions arise out of that increase of tension. In most cases the client will begin to cry, for it is with just those muscles that crying normally comes about. The pain and sadness that have been locked in now come out. It is a purging kind of crying which includes grieving for the lost innocence, the lost safety, or grief for whatever losses the abuse produced.

As before, the ideal figures are there to facilitate the crying, by totaling surrounding the agitated surfaces of the client's body. For if the crying was expressed without solid contact it might feel too great an emotion for their bodies to handle and they might turn the feelings off in an attempt to keep their bodies from bursting or imploding from the force of the tumultuous feelings.

Hands are firmly placed against all turbulent and shaking surfaces. Those surfaces are usually the stomach and the shoulders. The body shows the distress to its physical integrity at those spots and needs external support to help sustain it through the storm of feelings that are surging through it and being expressed by it. The agitation and distress is felt as a strain on the ego, and the external support results in strengthening the ego.

The phrases that the ideal figures may say at this time include, "We can handle how sad you are." "We are not overcome by your feelings." "We can help you handle how sad you are." "We can understand how sad you are." "We won't let you explode or implode from this feeling," etc.

#### THE IMPULSE AND EXPRESSION OF REVENGE AND SADISTIC FEELINGS

Although there is no pre-determined sequence in the expression of feelings it is usual that when clients feel safe they are more ready to encounter their reflexive impulse to return the insult to the attacker in the form of revenge and sadism.

This is not an easy emotion for clients to find or identify. The abuser has been judged as less than human for what has been done and it is repugnant for victims to consider that there is even the remotest possibility of finding such feelings, impulses, fantasies or behaviors in themselves. It is a matter of individual judgment as to when it is the right moment to bring up this topic.

I say bring up this topic for I have found that clients do not usually surface those feelings on their own.

Fortunately, the body gives some clue as to the appropriate moment for this intervention. The body sensations that are most closely associated with sadistic aggression are tensions in the calf muscles. Often such clients complain of waking in the middle of the night with severe pains and cramps in the calf muscles. When asked to exaggerate this tension, if they feel it during the therapy session, they flex the foot in a way that is similar to the appearance of someone about to stamp on the ground or on some object.

If this association is acceptable to the client, permission can be given to stamp symbolically on the abuser. The client may then proceed to grind and stamp on a pillow while another group member, role-playing the abuser, provides the appropriate groans and cries of pain.

The therapist has to see to it that the pillow that the client digs into and stamps upon is not too soft or it will be too easily compressed, resulting in the client's heel striking the hard surface of the floor and possibly producing an injury. Unconscious guilt feelings about sadistic emotions might incline clients to accidentally punish their own foot for the unacceptable act, even if the act is only done symbolically and in fantasy connection with the abuser.

For clients who might be guilty about this form of expression, it may be useful or necessary for their foot and leg to be restrained by ideal limiting figures, keeping them from carrying out the full motion of stamping. This limiting function is accompanied by statements such as, "It is all right that you have such revengeful and sadistic feelings, but we won't let you 'literally' do it." This intervention clearly defines the expression as symbolic and conveys the message that its full realistic expression in the outside world, to the real attacker, would not be permitted. However, not all clients need to be limited in this fashion as they already have the notion that the action is purely symbolic, not only in the motoric expression but also in their minds.

Then the therapist can offer the information that sadistic impulses and wishes to "pay back" the abuser - by penetrating them and violating them - are common.

The client might have been beaten with fists, or shot, or cut with a knife. he/she might have been slapped, or humiliated or tortured. he/she might have been sexually assaulted or had bones broken. Whatever the form, the therapist can expect and anticipate that the client has unconscious impulses to return the method of the attack. It seems the unconscious contains a kind of "eye for an eye" attitude, an inverted variety of the golden rule that would be expressed in words as, "Do unto others as others have done unto you." Repulsive as it may be for clients to hear of the possibility of such attitudes, especially within themselves, they are relieved to learn that those impulses do exist in others. And when those impulses finally do surface to consciousness and are expressed in this symbolic setting, it brings great satisfaction and relief, for, even if only in fantasy, "revenge is sweet".

The role-player who is representing the attacker must act as if punched, shot, tortured, etc. when the client symbolically carries out those deeds in the structure. The therapist attends to reports of sensations in the client's hands, arms, or whatever part of the body is receiving the impulses to carry out the revenge. If the client had been shot, they might hold their hand as if a gun were in it. Usually, the emotional reaction to imagining shooting back makes it evident to both the client and the therapist, that such reversal impulses do indeed reside in the musculature and in the soul. The same procedure would be followed if the client had been stabbed, punched etc. He/she would then play out the reversal procedure with a role-player identified as the original attacker.

Once again the therapist must be prepared to offer limiting figures if the client is too frightened or uneasy about finding those impulses. As in the earlier example, the limiting figures would restrain the client from fully completing whatever action the vengeful impulse had taken. They might make statements like, "It is all right that you want to stab the attacker, but we will not let you literally do it," thus giving validation and permission for the impulse, but not for it being literally carried out. They would then illustrate that by keeping the stabbing action from being completed, keeping the symbolic knife from its target. The same procedure would be followed whatever act of revenge was imagined, such as, keeping the client from pulling the trigger on the gun, or keeping the client from sexually assaulting the attacker - for instance, by placing hands on their hips and restraining them while they attempted to "rape back" the attacker.

#### THE EXPRESSION OF EROTICISM AND RECEPTIVITY

One of the most unexpected and surprising findings in our work has been that abuse of any kind produces a reflexive increase in vulnerability that includes an erotic element. The person under attack not only responds with defensive reactions, but may also experiences reflexive bodily impulses, not immediately available to consciousness, that imply a readiness to receive penetration. It is as if some archaic portion of the soul is highly responsive to and appreciative of aggression - and is prepared to welcome it. This level of vulnerability feels like a kind of infinite and omnipotent openness. It includes a kind of chaotic excitement and willingness that would appear ready to take in and absorb everything and anything.

On the bodily level, this state shows up as trembling in the upper thighs and often is associated with pain and tension in the lower back. A client's psychological readiness to deal with this topic must be assessed by the therapist and includes attending to the time when those physical elements are noticed

by the client. The client, while recalling the attack, might report that their thighs are trembling, which they react to by clasping their arms around their knees and holding their legs tightly together.

Imagine a client sitting on the floor with their knees bent up, with their chin or face near their knees and with their arms around their legs - kind of in a small ball. It looks protective and indeed is an expression on the bodily level of this type of statement, "Keep away from me, I won't let you get to me. I am keeping myself tightly closed."

When these positions and bodily actions are found in female victims who have been sexually assaulted, it is clear that they are closing themselves to keep their genitals from being penetrated. However, one need not be physically and sexually penetrated to get the reaction of omnipotent vulnerability or openness. Psychological abuse and attacks on the ego produce the same out of control, unconscious responses on men who have been assaulted or regularly beaten by siblings or parents. These men fight the same battle with their out of control receptivity as assaulted women do. With no literal vagina to close, they present the same picture following a physical attack. They report and show the same trembling in the thighs, combined with the same desperate holding together of the legs.

On the topic of eroticism and receptivity the treatment of abuse should be the same for men or women, whether or not the attack included sexual elements. It is as if the force of the violence created a "magical" vagina in the victim via the psychological "hole" that was torn in their personal boundaries or in the psychic structure of their ego.

My speculative hypothesis is that the endocrine system, influenced by the unconscious, responds to the feeling of the omnipotent vulnerability or "magical vagina", by secreting significant amounts of those hormones that are associated with sexual receptivity into the bloodstream. It would make an interesting research study to measure the shifts in hormone levels in men and women after they had suffered various kinds of abuse.

This unconscious pattern of receptivity creates great conflict and difficulty for victims. They know that they are very uncomfortable in their bodies following the attack, and they know on a conscious level that they are trying to protect their bodies, by holding themselves tightly. But they don't know that part of the discomfort arises from the paradoxical and unthinkable impulse to open themselves to receive the attack. To repeat, the discomfort in the body is not only from the shame and pain of the attack, but from the effort of holding down those unconscious and extremely powerful yet conflicted drives. It is only when the legs are tightly held together by ideal limiting figures that the full force of those bodily impulses can become conscious, visible and controllable. But more on that in a bit.

The more regularly one has been a victim, especially with a more powerful family member, the more reinforced is the unconscious notion that one has not only a "magical vagina" but an "omnipotent" one as well. It is as if the repeated attacks demonstrate to the victim that they "draw" the attacker to them and that the attacker cannot resist attacking them. They may feel that they have become irresistible in their attractiveness as victims. For the attack is attention, even if negative, and is a highly charged form of recognition with much emotional heat attached to it on the side of both the aggressor and the victim. When the PS/P therapist works with this aspect of the treatment it is important to let the client know what is behind this intervention. Teaching is necessary to assist the client in the creation of a cognitive frame of reference that makes sense to them. The therapist must tell about the notion of openness, that I have just described, in such a way that the client does not feel judged or reproached for their paradoxical erotic responses. Rape victims have so often been blamed for what has happened to

them that it is important that it does not appear to the client that they are once again being blamed for causing the attack, rather than being sympathized with for its damaging effect.

It must be made clear to the client that the sexually receptive response is not a conscious choice representing their wishes, but an unconscious reaction created by the attack. They have to understand clearly that "they" have not chosen to become stimulated by the attack. That they are not perverse and desirous of pain, but that a "process" has been triggered within them by the attack which overcame the, till then, balanced ego controls upon their inner vulnerability and receptivity.

If the client is not told in advance why this intervention of holding the legs together is being done, this act itself could be perceived and experienced as another abusive attack. The abused client's ego, having lost control of both the outer and inner worlds, must be actively included in the treatment. Everything done in the therapy must include the client's conscious control and choice.

The intervention that is used to deal with this openness is to provide limits to the impulse to separate the legs via ideal limiting figures. (They may also be likened to or even be enrolled as Ideal Parents). They tightly hold the client's legs together at the knees, so that they "take over" the task of holding the knees together, allowing the client to then feel the opposite impulse of separating them. It may take more than one person to do this successfully, for it is important when the client attempts to separate the knees that the accommodators keep him/her from doing so - even the slightest bit.

When all is prepared, the client can then attempt to separate his/her legs with all the feeling for doing so that he/she can find in his/her body. The scene that follows is usually startling and dramatic. A tremendous energetic struggle begins. With impressive effort the client attempts to separate their knees and with equal and greater effort the limiting figures keep them from doing so.

It is as if the "magical vagina" is asked to make its appearance or the omnipotent receptivity is invited to express itself. Although the limiting figures are external, they represent allies for the ego which in this intervention succeed in keeping the legs closed, no matter how hard the effort is made to open them.

It is not exactly accurate to say "no matter how hard the client is trying to open them" for in a way it is not the client in their ego state that is trying to separate their knees. It is as if the client has permitted the "out of control" or seemingly, "possessed" element within themselves to take over their body and then it is that element that fights and ultimately finds that it cannot overcome the limiting efforts of the external ideal figures.

There are screams that come out of the client at this time. Not screams of terror or pain but screams, high and piercing, like some mythological banshee. "Let me go, you-----!!", the client shouts. I may stop the process at this point to check if the client truly wants to be let go. Almost always, the client reassures me in their normal speaking voice, "Oh no, not at all, I just have to say that while I struggle, but please don't let go of me." The struggle resumes.

Finally, after repeated and frenzied efforts, the battle is over. One would not have expected such titanic efforts coming from the timid or quiet victim we began with. There has been no timidity here. Certainly no quiet, as one listens to the client's screamed demands for release and the heavy breathing of all involved in the struggle. It is almost as if one were able to graphically witness a Freudian primitive id struggling to escape the grip of an ego force. If that really was the case one would undoubtedly learn to seriously attend to the force of the id in its wish to be "free".

Even small, seemingly weak and helpless women demonstrate tremendous energy at this point of the structure. Those therapists who use this technique should be prepared to confront this great force regardless of the physical appearance or sex of the client.

At the finish, the client feels relieved and cleansed. They report that the tensions which they have chronically felt in their lower backs and in other parts of their body have relaxed. It is clearly a relief for them to find that they were not able to break the bounds of their openness. The verbal message of the limiting figures can be internalized along with the experience; the limiting figures can say, "It is all right to feel open and to want to be receptive, but we can put limits on it and help you handle your openness and vulnerability".

It is especially important when the client has been sexually abused by a family member to add, "We will not let you be literally penetrated, even if you want it", for in that situation there may be a part of the client that might unconsciously wish to submit and this verbal injunction gives the right for that wish to exist, while emphasizing that the limits shall still be applied.

Those limits and statements empower clients to say to themselves that, "It is all right for me to have powerful receptive and vulnerable feelings, or even incestuous sexual wishes. It does not mean that I will submit to those impulses and have them carried out against my conscious wishes of choice and control. I can handle those feelings."

#### THE IMPULSE AND EXPRESSION OF MURDER

Victims ultimately have to deal with their own murderous anger at the attacker. Some of that theme was examined in the section about revenge, but now I shall go into that topic further. One portion of the murderous impulse arises out of the outrage for what has been done. Another portion originates from the strongly felt impulse to kill that person who was capable of awakening such powerful and unacceptable feelings in one's self as those just described. I would like to address this second element now. Because their self esteem as well as ego membrane has been so damaged by the assault and because so many unacceptable and disturbing feelings are released by that wound, the client, in an attempt to stop that threat from ever happening again, comes to the instinctive conclusion that murder is the only solution.

A third way to understand those impulses is to see the rise of those murderous feelings as an attempt of the soul, in the absence of ego ability to contain its unfettered vulnerability, to balance itself by releasing equivalent antithetical power in the form of unlimited aggression. A primordial penetrating force is set loose - directed, not so much sexually, but aggressively toward the attacker - and if one adds the second element, with this unconscious or possibly conscious thought, "I am not well or safe until the attacker is dead."

In the structure which develops out of this stage in the treatment, the client, as before, is permitted fuller expression of the inhibited body impulses which would result in the visible emergence of those unconscious drives. The body symptoms which are reported at this time are rather global and include rapid heart beat, increased breathing, and tensions which result in extension of the body in many places - tension in the arms, hands and jaws, which produce fists or fingers extended like claws, and bared teeth, resulting in biting actions. It might also include tension in the legs, which when released, results in kicking actions. When the client is viewed in this state, the impression is one of destructive hatred.

The assistance of ideal limiting figures is essential for the release and safe expression of those feelings. Without them, a client might choose to remain frozen and emotionally paralyzed rather than risk releasing the devastating explosion that might issue from the direct, open expression of all that power stirring inside.

It takes at least six people to limit one person in this state. They must be expertly placed so that no injury to the client is possible. For when the client releases those furious emotions into action the force and speed of the movement are prodigious. Care must be taken that there is no chance of accidental wrenching or dislocation of joints, and no possibility of painful contact with people, furniture or other objects. In the holding, they permit some action, but completely check the possibility of harmful outcome. Pesso System Psychomotor therapists are trained in this intervention and know how to teach group members to properly hold one another for safe limits. This intervention should never be attempted without taking all appropriate measures beforehand.

The limiting figures might give the following verbal message, "It is all right to want to kill your attacker but we won't let you literally do it." This kind of statement and intervention licenses the emotional impulse while simultaneously making it safe to express it without danger or damage. It communicates to the client that he/she is justified in his/her outrage and feelings but doesn't stop the flow of feelings to the muscles. It simply stops the motoric expression from resulting in the literal death that is emotionally intended. When the client completes this expression, great relief can set in and expressions of changing levels of tension in the body reported. Now, even this level of inner fury and penetrating-ness can be tapped safely. The ego is once again in charge. The client learns that primitive feelings do not have to cause literal disruption, and that the flow of living emotional rhythms can be attended to safely, without danger.

#### THE INCREASE OF GUILT, SHAME AND THE DESIRE FOR PUNISHMENT

Guilt, shame and self punishment are processes used by the psyche to bring it more into balance when ego processes have failed. If there had been sufficient ego, that is, ability to handle one's own strong inner forces, then there would be less, or no, need to bring such drastic measures to the task. Whenever there is an abundance of guilt, shame and self punishment, one can assume that there are strong inner forces that are not yet under ego control, in this way guilt is used to control those unruly forces.

The victim, thrown out of balance and out of control by abuse, is ashamed and guilty about how open they are, and, by the law of opposites becomes rigidly closed. Ashamed and guilty about how angry they are, they become rigidly "nice".

Guilt, operating on the law of opposites, inclines victims to punish themselves for their out of control impulses. The murderous energies directed outward are turned inward as a way to reduce the discomfort. Thus clients have a predisposition to be accident prone or self-destructive.

Paradoxically that very self-punishment which is sought to alleviate the distress allows an indirect but precise expression of the two forces that the victim seeks to place under control. In that act of self-punishment, both the enactor and the object of those drives is the self rather than an external figure. Guilt takes the client's own wish to penetrate the abuser, deflects it from that external target, and directs it back towards the self, resulting in the self-destructive wish to punch one's self or tear one's self apart with their nails, knives or any other penetrating object. When the deflected blow lands on the self,

it is the self that is penetrated and thus the forbidden, unconscious wish to be penetrated is partially satisfied, but by the self and not by the outside figure.

The non-interactive solution of self-punishment leads to isolation, and in an odd way, omnipotence. Since one's penetrating forces are not reality tested and limited by an outside force, one can assume that one is omnipotently penetrating. And when one's receptivity is not reality tested by an outside force, one can come to the conclusion that one is the most open person in the world and the very model or paradigm for openness in the universe.

So, while the victim feels awful, shamed, guilty and wishing to destroy him/herself, there is a significant secondary gain of specialness and uniqueness. Even though this is unconscious it isn't given up easily. This fact must be recognized in the treatment. Simple verbal reassurance to a victim that they really aren't so bad is not satisfying to the unconscious omnipotent fantasy, and even threatens to take away the pleasure of one's uniqueness. The treatment must include the expression of the force and power of both the penetrating and receiving impulses and meet them head on in their most active forms and levels of expression.

As before, the limiting figures are required. This intervention can be applied when the client exhibits gestures and impulses that indicate that they are about to direct their anger inwardly. For example, the client may have his/her fist balled up and be preparing to strike in the direction of the attacker and it becomes apparent that the gesture has a tendency to move toward the self rather than toward the object. The therapist can check with the client if indeed there was such an intention. If the client says there was and also admits feeling a strong inclination for self-punishment for all that happened, the therapist must be prepared to limit that action. With the agreement of the client, the limiting figures place their hands over the balled fist and keep it from landing on the client's body, saying, "We won't let you hurt yourself."

This statement has to be delivered seriously, and acted upon with determination so that there is absolutely no possibility of the client touching his/her own face with either his/her own fist or the controlling hands of the limiting figures. For any touch at that moment is taken as indication by the client, that he/she has succeeded in breaking the limits. Another mighty struggle may begin at this point. The guilt-driven wish to hurt one's self is now allowed free expression as the client, in a self-hating-rage, attempts to break loose and attack him/herself.

What is also set loose is the penetrating force that has been out of control and which is now directed toward the self in an omnipotent, non-interactive form. That too, is limited by the limiting figures. Their very blocking of the landing of the blow places them between that part of the client that is punching, and their super-receptive part. This limiting act forces the client to recognize that they are now in a non-self interaction with those forces that have been kept from external interaction, which they have avoided for fear of the danger they might cause. Also they have avoided interaction in the service of their omnipotence which has found pleasure in being the greatest and only force in the universe.

The struggle of the client is impressive and can be likened to an image of a primitive god figure who might be saying, "Get out of my way. I will punch myself, I will kill myself, I will rape myself, for I am the mightiest power in the universe and no one can control me." By being limited, such clients are reduced to the level of being only people and not gods.

But they do not give up the struggle easily, for in the struggle is also included this element - the client

may imply or directly say, "Let go of me, I am the worst person in the universe because of what happened and my responsibility for making it happen, and I should be punished." The omnipotence is followed by the impotence which would balance it, but which maintains the omnipotence in that the client would be both the punisher and the punished.

When the struggle finally subsides, the client is both relieved and saddened. The human, interactive part of themselves is relieved. They are not God, they are not the worst person in the universe, they are just another person. Someone outside of themselves is caring enough to keep them from hurting themselves and that feels good. But the omnipotent aspect may leave the client somewhat frustrated and unhappy, for now they have to give up their solitary, unique posture to join the world as simply another human being.

#### THE DESIRE TO EXPRESS LOVE FOR THE ABUSER

Having put many of their unlimited feelings under ego control, it is possible for the client to consider feelings of love for the aggressor, especially if the aggressor was a family member. They may now be more able to consider their feelings of tenderness and affection toward that part of the abuser that they may care about. Not the hated part, not the awful part, but the human part that they have known.

Imagine a client who has been regularly abused by her father, who is an alcoholic. In the father's alcoholic periods, he would be savage and violently beat all in the family who came near him. However, when he was not alcoholic he would be considerate and even pleasant to be around. Furthermore, when he and the victim were both younger, they shared some very happy times fishing, going for walks, riding bicycles together, etc. The warmth and love of those periods may have been buried and never been fully savored, or expressed, probably because the client hesitated out of inhibition or fear of when the next outburst would occur.

The figure used in structures to facilitate this expression is called the loved aspect of the real figure. This figure represents neither the totality of the real figure nor the hated aspect of the real figure, but only the loved aspect in isolation from all the other parts that the child knew and remembered so clearly. When such a figure is placed before a client in a structure, many feelings, including some negative ones, may rise up in relationship toward the entire, "real" figure. Then it is necessary to have the negative aspect present in a role to distinguish it from the loved aspect figure. Thus the negative and positive emotions both have their objects in roles.

When the loving feelings well up, the client can voice and finally openly express the warmth and affection that has been so long suppressed. At the point in the structure when the client might want to touch the loved aspect, feelings rise higher than they may be prepared to handle and they might get anxious. At that moment it is useful to introduce the limiting figures who would hold the client, bursting with their feelings, to provide reassurance and limits on their tendency of becoming too receptive and vulnerable in the presence of that figure. The limiting figures might possibly encircle the client's legs to keep in check the receptive impulses.

More typically they provide flexible restraint as the client reaches a hand to caress the loved aspect. This restraint assists the client in modifying and controlling the level of impulse that would ordinarily be out of ego control. The words that the limiting figures might say at this time are, "We can help you handle how much you love him." "We won't let you burst with your feelings," etc. It is very touching to watch clients express this long suppressed love. It also a great relief and satisfaction for the client. Those

feelings are no longer frightening. They may have feared that had they expressed them in the past, the real figure could have made them their "slaves". That is why they preferred to hide those feelings even from themselves.

This step helps create a more balanced figure of the aggressor who no longer looms so large and forbidding. Aggressors become less gigantic and more human sized now that this lovable aspect is included in the client's mental image. They also appear less charged, because the client can now handle all the different range of feelings that the abuser is capable of provoking in them. The client no longer feels out of control in their presence and can handle each different emotional response without them getting out of hand - neither too much love nor too much hate. The loving reactions to the abuser are now handle-able and ego integrateable.

This concludes the list of elements attended to in structures. I have tried to show how we tap all the energies in the bodies of the clients so that nothing is left unexperienced, unexpressed, unconscious, unlimited, unnamed and without place. Everything rising from the soul is ego-wrapped by contact with the ideal figures.

The body, no longer the store house of frightening omnipotent impulses, can be in balance and living in it can be comfortable again.

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