

Archetypal Aspects Regarding Childhood Sexual Assault Trauma. Short Essay.

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Abstract

Donald Kalsched (2013) supports the idea that the internal response of the psyche to trauma, implying the appeal to an archetypal defense mechanism against emotional and physical pain involved, becomes on one hand a survival system and on the other hand a true inner saboteur which may impede or limit further individual development. Kalsched compares this defense mechanism with the electric panel fuses: when too much electric current passes through, the system takes notice and protects itself (through dissociation and splitting) – the Ego is no longer present, or it is, in an altered form. The traumatic experience will stay “printed” in the psyche, in most part in the subconscious but also stored in the body.

Keywords: *childhood abuse, Ego-Self, the internal response of the psyche to trauma, Jungian analysis*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Childhood abuse, through its specific stimuli (loss, the unknown, autonomy limitations, reject, and the unexpected) invokes way more than immediate emotions. The event is associated with archetypal crisis affects, with heavily charged, which are triggers for complexes. An important valence of abuse is related to the (still unshaped, developing) Ego, alienating from the Self (Koole, Tops, Strübin, Bouw, Schneider, & Jostmann, 2014).

The Self at that time of development is only experienced as a projection on the parents, while the lack of the parental protection is perceived as loss of divine protection. The inability to experience acceptance and protection (from the close persons –mother, father or adults who are tutoring the child), along with the feeling of being rejected (by the abuser, as a being) will be experienced as losing acceptance from the Self.

Self-trust will be crushed, as the Ego-Self axis is very vulnerable at this development phase and sensitive to disruptive factors of the development environment.

When the Ego-Self connection is affected, the psychological health itself suffers. The Ego cannot have a further healthy development, as the Self no longer delivers energy, interest, sense and life meaning (Freeman, 2014).

The alienation can have worse and worse consequences: emptiness, despair, and lack of sense and in extreme cases, psychosis or suicide (Edinger, 1973).

II. A SURVIVAL SYSTEM

Donald Kalsched (2013) supports the idea that the internal response of the psyche to trauma, implying the appeal to an archetypal defense mechanism against emotional and physical pain involved, becomes on one hand a survival system and on the other hand a true inner saboteur which may impede or limit further individual development. Kalsched (1998) compares this defense mechanism with the electric panel fuses: when too much electric current passes through, the system takes notice and protects itself (through dissociation and splitting) – the Ego is no longer present, or it is, in an altered form. The traumatic experience will stay “printed” in the psyche, in most part in the subconscious but also stored in the body.

Traumas invoke archetypal energies – which are a lot bigger than the ones present in the child’s psyche (Wilson, 2004). Hence this mechanism is the mediator which protects the psyche. The risk consists in that such archetypal energies, many times perceived as diabolical, valences of the evil, stay clenched by complexes which are formed and be further aroused, endangering the Ego, which may become re-traumatized, overwhelmed or possessed by them. Kalsched (1998) also supports the idea that, during the abuse, the natural and healthy process of

psychological development is compromised, thus playing significant effects upon the creativity, trust and ulterior sense of self.

The normal reaction to trauma, according to Kalsched (2013), is to retreat from the reality of the event. Because physically this is not possible, only a part of the self will retreat, through splitting, fragmentation (Jung, & Von Franz, 1968). The two or more parts develop differently: the part of the abused, wounded parts, stagnate or even regress, in the attempt of preserving or recomposing the innocence, the inner harmony of the event, while on the other hand, the survivor develops, sometimes even faster; most of the times we will hear about some of the abused people that they are “as serious as adults” during childhood, or “precocious children”.

III. THE FOREVER CHILD

Escaping reality is done in multiple ways, and according to it, future mechanisms will be activated, following a similar pattern. A way of escaping the situation is “freezing”. The abused part “freezes” emotions and inner experiences so that the event is remembered as a fact of life, as an image - the affective side being dissociated. In ulterior interactions of the person, it is possible to have the same reaction pattern in similar situations (Minulescu, 2001).

A second way of reacting is the “flight”. The abused part “escapes the body”, is being out of contact from the outside world, as many times this state is associated with amnesia, with deleting everything from the memory of the event. In most cases, this way of escaping the situation is determined by the existence of associated physical pain (specific to rape, for example). Characteristic to this kind of coping can be the ulterior escape in the imaginary, in fantasy (Cambray, & Carter, 2004).

A third way of coping is the “fight” typology. In this case the surviving part is fighting the hostile reality (Stevens, 2001). Anger will be ulterior directed to any kind of authority: police, governing system, state, etc. This coping typology is less frequent in the case of abuse prior to adolescence, because of the fact that a child is in a position of inferiority (from the point of view of size, authority, etc) compared to the adult (who is in a power position).

During adolescence, though, when energy, inner fire, anger are mobilized, the young person can protest and “fight” the aggressor, even if not on a physical level. In the future, such dynamics will provoke in the life of the person who was abused, diverse fight dynamics (Kalsched, 2014). In a positive way, these will be mobilized under the form of activism focused on constructive initiatives, with positive consequences on a society level.

The fourth modality of coping with childhood sexual abuse is the “collapse”, which is also the most serious as the psyche, crushes, generating immediate psychosis (West, 2013).

Coping variants are not presented in reality in a defined shape, they can be defined. In all coping variants, on the other hand, the little – large, submissive – powerful, inferior-superior, will generate in daily situations, the use of defense mechanisms similar to the ones during abuse. Also, the person might be incapable of trusting authority figures, may manifest anger regarding authority or people placed in authority position, or might feel the need of fighting authority or even being the authority.

Jung speaks of this “forever child” who is hidden inside every adult, “as being forever in becoming, never accomplished, with a steady need of caring, attention and education”. He is the “new God” presented in the Red Book, described as “a boy who mellows the demons in his own hand” (Jung, 2012).

Re-establishing the splitting valences of the psyche at maturity involves a complicated road (Fiumara, 2001). There are, on the other hand, people who succeed in passing this therapeutic way of “bringing home” the parts they have lost because of the trauma.

Kalsched (2010, 2014) suggests more containment is needed – therapeutic, amiable, religious along with tolerance, patience, perseverance, will of confronting the unknown and painful inner emotions. Integration involves inner rewriting of the event story, repositioning versus aggressor, from the point of view of the adult, of the healthy part of us, resettling coherence – from guilty, responsible, unworthy, to powerful adult, reconnecting with people who deserve trust to cultivate trustful relationships.

However, true healing comes when we succeed, among other things, to initiate a relationship with our inner persecutor in order to civilize it, to soften it up, to re-educate it, because behind it a real treasure can be found, the innocent side, the inner child, who carries the real pain – the ordinary one and not the one induced by the persecutor through assumed inadequacy - also part of the Self.

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