

The Carter-Jenkins Center *presents*



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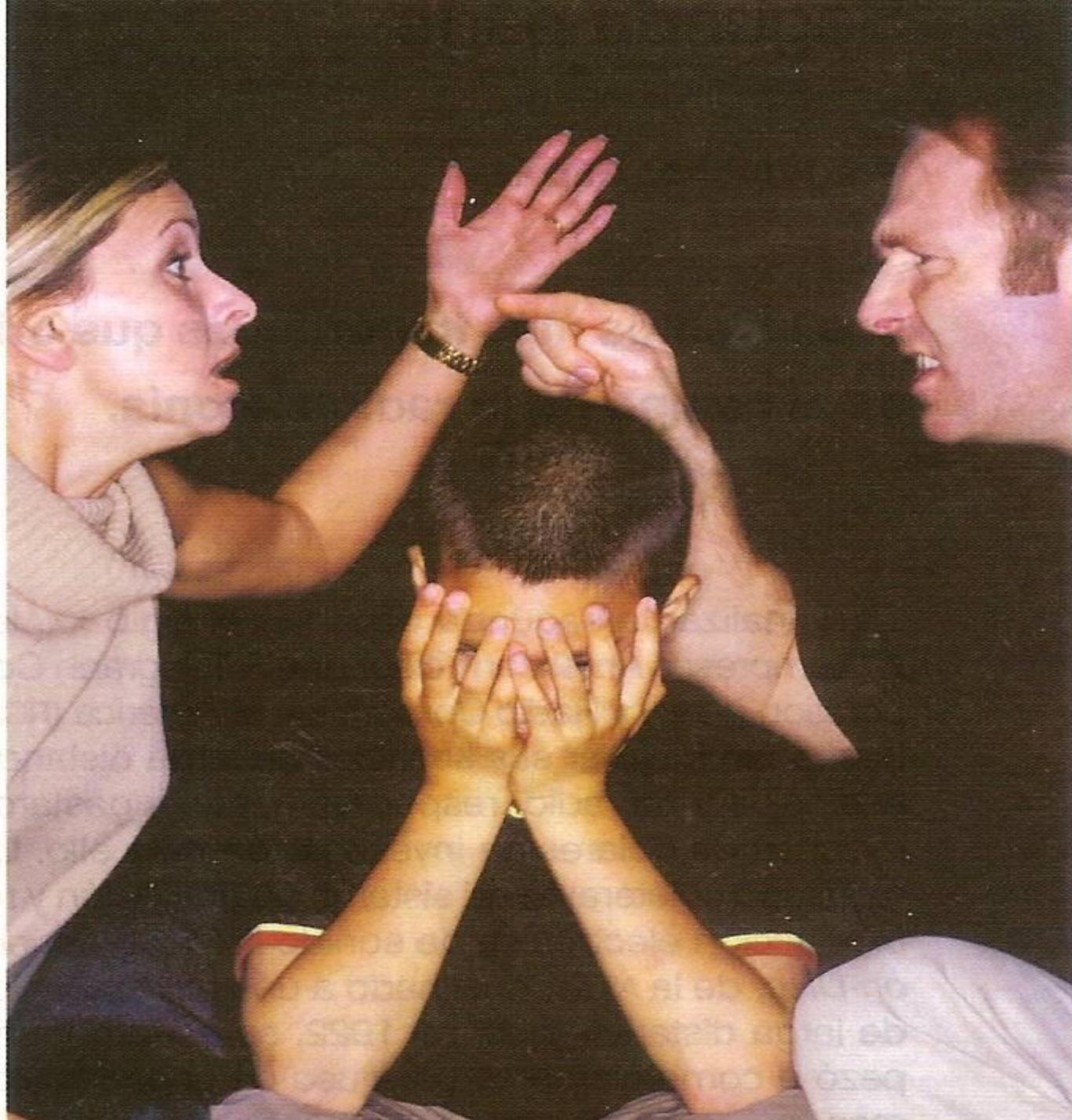
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Severe Marital Discord, Divorce & Their Consequences

Part 1





SEVERE MARITAL DISCORD, DIVORCE & THEIR CONSEQUENCES

By

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SEVERE MARITAL DISCORD, DIVORCE AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

- **Generally divorce and its consequences tends to get the attention at the expense of marital discord (which may or may not lead to divorce) and its consequences. ***
- **All that is observable as consequences of divorce in the case of children and adolescents, applies as well in the case of significant marital discord with or without divorce, plus many other things more idiosyncratic to domestic violence.**
- **Examples that follow will clarify this issue.**

SEVERE MARITAL DISCORD, DIVORCE AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

- The statistics concerning divorce do not specifically address parental discord but divorce in general whatever the causes. Yet, there are large number of extremely dysfunctional, abusive marriages that do not end in divorce for a variety of reasons (the children, inability to survive economically, masochistic personalities, etc)**
- This implies that the consequences and numbers we are concerned with here, are considerable higher when dysfunctional couples (not divorced) are included**

SEVERE MARITAL DISCORD, DIVORCE AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

- In the Divorce lecture (in our Web page) we saw the large variety of consequences left behind in the emotional development of children, as well as the many maladaptive behaviors that it can lead to, lasting frequently a life time. We will briefly review them now (see lecture on Divorce)**
- But before I do that, let me emphasize that some authors believe, that in some cases is easier to help children master the death of a parent than parental divorce (Goldman 1974)**

DIVORCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Divorce and children:

- Generally speaking all children are affected by divorce. Younger children are more affected than older children.(*)
- Depression, grief and anxiety are common, as are feelings of being abandoned
- Regressive moves in toilet training, speech, more clinging behaviors etc, are common
- Occasional oppositional defiant behaviors, conduct disorders and delinquent behaviors are seen as the result of the divorce or of acquiring step-parents*

DIVORCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

- Children frequently feel that they are responsible for their parents divorce attributing it to their disobedience, bad behavior, poor grades at school or what not**
- This is particularly true of children still in the egocentric stage of development. Remember too, that children under 12 years of age have at best a partial understanding of these problems**
- Adolescents are more mature. They may be able to look at the moral problems involved, while drawing lessons for their own futures**

DIVORCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Some consequences in adulthood for the children of divorce:

- a) Fear or distrust of men by women (particularly in cases where mothers were abused). Males, may distrust females in some cases (mothers that abandoned the home for example)
- b) Fear of being abandoned like their mothers. Will give examples from Wallerstein's book in a moment

DIVORCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

- c) Fear of their impulses, if placed in the mother's situation i.e., fantasies of killing, hurting or punishing the potential abusers or abandoners**
- d) Guilt about succeeding, where mothers failed or parents failed, is an important factor that considerably influences the daughters' lives**
- e) In Wallerstein study, many women needed to be protective and close by their mothers, so as not to repeat their father's behavior and abandonment**

DIVORCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

- f) This, of course, has many potential implications for this women's life and personal development**
- g) Many such women do not marry**
- h) Yet, a few of these protective and still young women, said that they hoped to marry and to have children some day (*)**
- i) There is too, a fear of having their children abandoned, as many of them felt they were abandoned**

*** Wallerstein, J., et al, Unexpected Legacy of Divorce, p.289**

DIVORCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

- j) Most of those who did chose not to marry were scared by their own histories (parent's divorce, poor relations, etc) and from the number of broken marriages they have seen***
- k) Interestingly enough some children of divorce become good peace negotiators and mediators as adults**
- l) For examples of much of the above in Wallerstein study (See Lisa, p.284/5/6*)**

*** Wallerstein, J., et al, Unexpected Legacy of Divorce, p. 285-289**

Severe marital discord and its consequences for children

- **Going back to the issue of domestic violence, as we have said in many cases the marital discord does not lead to divorce and the couple remains together until death parts them, which in either case, creates very special problems**
- **As mentioned earlier, the reasons for the inability to separate are multiple. Sometimes they are of an economic nature, sometimes people stays together for the sake of the children, sometimes one of the partners adopts a masochistic solution. In that case what was extremely unpleasant originally becomes at the unconscious level gratifying (*)**

Severe marital discord and its consequences for children

- Consider too, that the marital discord may last through several stages of development of the child and that such discord has different meanings and is understood differently at these various stages, thus leading to many different introjects and identifications.
- Add to this that while a husband may be abusive to his wife, he may be very nice to his daughter. If that happens to be during the oedipal stage for example (with the girl natural inclination towards the father) the introjected imagos of the father, are bound to be of a very positive nature and in sharp contrast, with the brutality the same daughter may observe during latency or the adolescent period, which will cast the father in a different light and lead to a different introjected imago and different identifications.

Severe marital discord and its consequences for children

- Naturally how what is perceived was understood depends of the stage of psychosexual and cognitive development reached by the child and in the degree of attachment to one or the other parent at such points.(*)
- These various possible introjects do co-exist together in the unconscious of that child. One or another of these introjects, may come to the fore at one time or another later on in life, triggered of generally by life situations of different types. This leading frequently to catastrophic results(**)
- Remember that the discord witnessed by the children may have taken place through many years encompassing different developmental stages.

The two stages of the Oedipus Complex of girls and their implications in cases of severe Domestic Violence

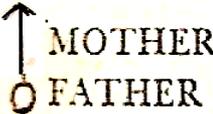
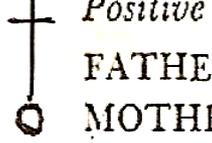
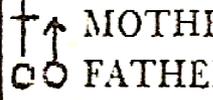
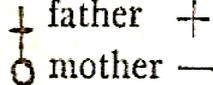
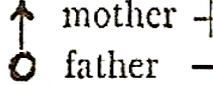
FIRST STAGE PHALLIC-OEDIPAL		SECOND STAGE OEDIPAL	
<p><i>Positive</i></p>  <p>MOTHER + + + FATHER - - -</p> <p>(a)</p>	<p><i>Inverted</i></p>  <p>FATHER + + + MOTHER - - -</p> <p>(e)</p>	<p><i>Positive</i></p>  <p>FATHER + + + MOTHER - - -</p> <p>(b)</p>	<p><i>Inverted</i></p>  <p>MOTHER + + + FATHER - - -</p> <p>(f)</p>
<p><i>Negative</i></p>  <p>father + mother -</p> <p>(c)</p>		<p><i>Negative</i></p>  <p>mother + father -</p> <p>(d)</p>	

FIGURE 2

For an explanation of the symbols and typography, see page 10.

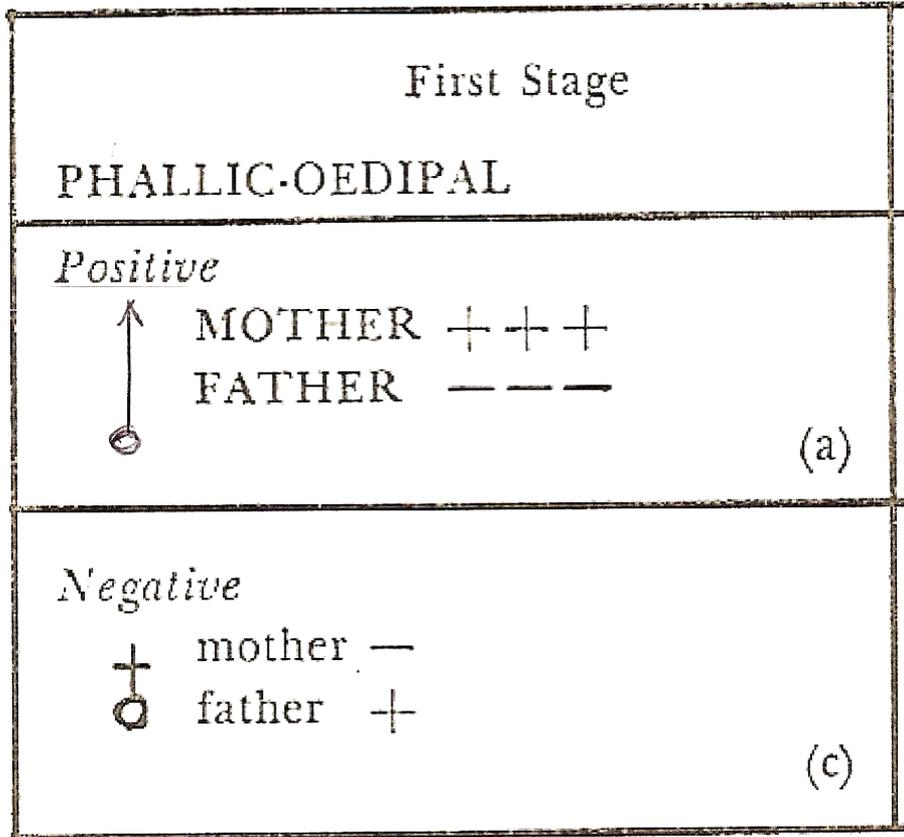
Female Sexuality and the Oedipus Complex by Humberto Nagera M.D.

Scheme of the Normal Oedipus Complex of Girls (First and Second Stage Excluding the Inverted Part)

First Stage	Second Stage
PHALLIC-OEDIPAL	OEDIPAL
<p><i>Positive</i></p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; gap: 20px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div> <div style="text-align: left;"> <p>MOTHER + + +</p> <p>FATHER - - -</p> </div> </div> <p style="text-align: right;">(a)</p>	<p><i>Positive</i></p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; gap: 20px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div> <div style="text-align: left;"> <p>FATHER + + +</p> <p>MOTHER - - -</p> </div> </div> <p style="text-align: right;">(b)</p>
<p><i>Negative</i></p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; gap: 20px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div> <div style="text-align: left;"> <p>mother -</p> <p>father +</p> </div> </div> <p style="text-align: right;">(c)</p>	<p><i>Negative</i></p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; gap: 20px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> </div> <div style="text-align: left;"> <p>mother +</p> <p>father -</p> </div> </div> <p style="text-align: right;">(d)</p>

FIGURE 1

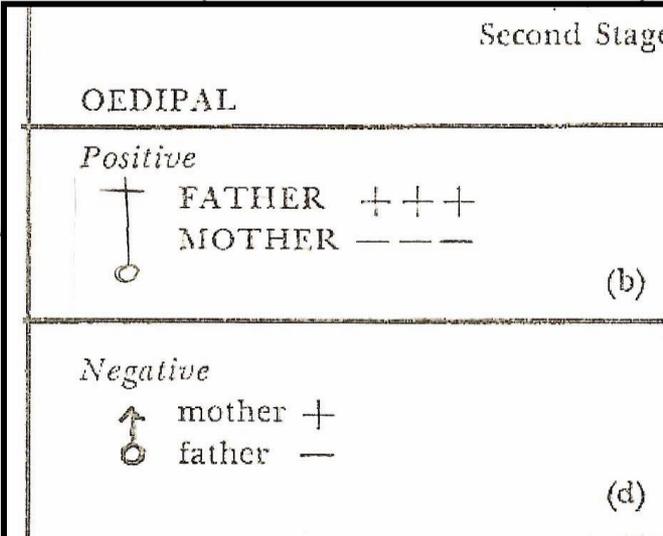
The double/quadruple relationship and how it may get acted-out



- Father is abusing the object the girl has chosen at this stage. Notice too, that the father is the hated rival at this point. His abuse of the mother during this stage can make her fear/and or hate the father and later on all men, in spite of being attracted to them sexually.
- This situation may make a full move to the second stage (oedipal) much more difficult, and fearful. One solution is a masochistic development, so that she will enjoy abuse if she was to receive it, either from the father or later on from other men. Indeed she may provoke it in the end.
- Another is a potential inclination towards women since they are loving and men can be abusive and frightening i.e., a possible homosexual inclination.
- A strong feminine component in her bisexual constitution will still move her to the father and later on to other men, but with significant ambivalence, fears and other problems through identification with the abused mother, a residual fear and hate of men, all of whom sooner or later will come to represent the abusive father. It is from this group that some of the “avengers” will be born. Examples follow soon.

Idealized Father	Denigrated Father	Idealized Mother	Denigrated Mother
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Normal for the stage -Father loves her not mother -Mother is a rival -Girl hostile to mother -She be a better wife -Wants to have child of father -If mother is the abusive one, attachment to father stronger -How are any of the above factors modified in case of abuse by the father? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Because of discord, fights, abuse etc -Father is at the same time a frightening figure -Natural conflict between her interest in father and what she is exposed to leading to a strong masochistic development that thus preserves interest in father (1) -Simultaneous identification with sadistic father (2) -Variations that can occur when mother is the aggressive, abusive one 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -At this stage mother is the rival and as such idealization is less likely -But if daughter is abused too she may empathically idealize the mother and fear the father -One possible solution again is a masochistic one -Another, is an unconscious identification with the aggressor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Natural for an Oedipal girl (3) -Likes to get mother out of the way so that she can have father(4) -At this age aggression may not have the same meaning. Ex of Hamps-tead "Get out of here" -Better her than me -Father loves me, particularly if he is not abusive to the girl but the contrary

**SECOND STAGE
Girl Oedipus
complex**



Severe marital discord and its consequences for children

- 1) Role of the possible early identification with the masochistic aspects of the mother and what it can lead to later on in their lives. How they provoke their partners...**
- 2) Notice the shifting positions (according to what aspect of the mother-father relationship is being re-enacted) and what behaviors that leads to.**
- 3) Notice the unconscious fantasies that girls may develop in order to explain the father's anger and abusive behavior towards the mother. Mother must have done something. These fantasies will vary according to the age of the child. In older children, that something that mother must have done may be fantasies of her having being unfaithful to father. Such fantasies, are commonly acted out later on by these females, frequently leading to the destruction of what may have been a satisfactory relationship, marriage etc**

DIVORCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

- As many as 40% of the men and women (that were children of divorce) in the Judith Wallerstein study never married
- They cohabitated with somebody, or had serial lovers, while others led solitary lives (W. 289) *
- Wallerstein saw it as the inevitable consequence of our “divorce culture”
- There are only 40% of married people today in this country and numbers are going down all the time

* Wallerstein, J., et al, Unexpected Legacy of Divorce, p.289

DIVORCE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

- Divorce is hardly ever a friendly procedure and what leads to it, is not either. Thus, many consequences follow from this:

a) Children have frequently witnessed angry verbal or physical fights and abuse. Children are frightened, sad, worried that the parents may leave, divorce, hurt each other and so on. Some fear going back home from school, not knowing what they may find, or fearing the violence that may erupt

b) They may play various roles, such as mediators, confidants, defenders (verbally or even physically) of an attacked mother for example

Severe marital discord and its consequences for children

- c) The battles after the divorce may adopt different forms i.e., blaming, denigrating, undermining or bad mouthing the other parent or forcing the children to take sides etc**
- d) Not paying child support, not keeping appointments to pick up the children or for visitations**
- e) Drilling the children about the other parent life, boy-friends, girlfriends and the like or exposing them to new lovers, sexual promiscuity. These events will determine too their adult behavior**

SEVERE MARITAL DISCORD, DIVORCE AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

- **Children frequently feel that they are responsible for their parents divorce or fights attributing it to their disobedience, bad behavior, poor grades at school or what not**
- **This is particularly true of children still in the egocentric stage of development. Remember too, that children under 12 years of age have at best a partial understanding of these problems**
- **Adolescents are more mature. They may be able to look at the moral problems involved, while drawing lessons for their own futures**

Summary of dynamics and clinical examples

- The role of the oedipus complex.
- These girls make multiple and simultaneous identifications with various and different aspects of the behaviors of the parental couple (both fathers and mothers). In a way it is as if they have developed multiple personalities.
- Sadism (identification with mother/sadistic father couple).
- Masochism (identification with abused mother).
- Identification with other behaviors of the mother*
- The avengers: (a special type) out to take revenge and punish men who are bad and the tormentors of mother and by extension of the patients who have identified with their mothers. Some examples will show the sadism, masochism and other factors (simultaneously) involved in these behaviors.
- Nobody controls me or isolates me**
- Turning passive into active***
- Do not love me phenomenon (5)

Other dynamics and clinical examples

- **Some of these women are very skilful and successful at seducing men. They seem extremely pleasant, interested and concerned. They act for as long as necessary as very loving, helpful and committed with to the man they wish to attract. This behavior continues for a while in the newly established relationship. It goes without saying that they behave in extremely sexually seductive ways. Yet, at the same time that they are playing this role, they may be simultaneously deceiving that person by being actively involved in seducing other men, or in actual sexual relationships with other men, while still pretending to the uniqueness of the relationship with their “victim” (for lack of another word).**

Other dynamics and clinical examples

- Once the “victim” is trapped so to say i.e., has fallen genuinely in love with her, which of course they would be fully aware of and had been promoting very actively, they make manifest in one way or another, their double or triple game of infidelity and the falsehood of their previous demonstrations of affection and love for the given man.
- As you will expect this is a devastating and traumatic experience for the men so deceived. At times, these girls rationalize their behaviors. Such rationalizations are on occasion quasi delusional (if not completely so) but quite commonly their destructive sadistic intent and provocation is not any longer hidden but quite in the open.

Other dynamics and clinical examples

- In a case I am familiar with, when the surprised and devastated partner asked the girl friend in astonishment at her deceit “Why are you doing this? The callous answer was “ because I want to!” which would have been fine, had she not purposely misled this man the way she had done for a very long time. In fact she had gone for a week of sex to some resort or another with her new found friend! These women, in the very few cases I am familiar with, may have repeated this or similar behaviors 6 to 10 times or more in the course of just a few years! In the one case I have in mind, this particular girl usually came back after a short while after this dramatic and revolting piece of acting out claiming repentance (?) and full of promises of how devoted she would be from that moment onwards, only to have repeated exactly the same behavior later on in several other occasions.

Other dynamics and clinical examples

- The sad thing about all this, beyond the obvious and unnecessary pain occasioned to their male partners, is that behind this piece of acting out there is on occasion potentially truly loving and quite wonderful persons that can never realize themselves, given the acting out that their inner conflicts force them to constantly repeat.
- Somewhat modified forms of the above acting out seem possible for men too though it seems less frequent..

Other dynamics and clinical examples

- Trying to examine what triggers of these dramatic events and behavior changes in these girls is not at all easy, but some factors can be discerned:

In some cases, particularly the case of what I have called “the avengers” they are simply forced to punish all men to whom they may relate since they become sooner or later a representative of the abusive father. In extreme cases of this type, that alone may well be the essential factor. Such girls are constantly recreating this scenario with multiple men, like an obsession. I do not think that they are consciously aware of what it is that they are planning to do, because if that was the case, at least some of them, which are essentially and deep down good persons, will not be able to go on with these behaviors. Example given before was possibly of this type

Other dynamics and clinical examples

- In the more benign cases of this type though, at one point or another their *new valentines are cast in the role of the abusive fathers*, perhaps through some behavior that triggers off some resemblance with the paternal figure. In other cases they construe an scenario where they feel victimized and abused (the *masochistic identification with the mother*).
- One of them will suddenly state for no apparent reason to her boyfriend “I do not want to be your week end fuck” or something in such style (though they were the active promoters of the sexual relationship and some of these men genuinely love them).

Other dynamics and clinical examples

- At other times what triggers the behaviors is the realization that they are really loved by the men they have chosen. That is a no no, since as we have seen they can not do better than their mothers, in their love life with men. Clearly too, in the deceit that soon follows there is an element of turning passive into active, they are not going to be “abused” like their mothers were, but they are the abusers, while at the same time they punishing men for the abuse their fathers inflicted on their mothers. Here frequently one can see the sadistic intention to hurt the other person, which I believe includes in some cases the actualization of what these girls thought (unconsciously) where the wishes of their mothers, that is the wish to hurt their husbands any way they could, including for example being unfaithful to them (that had been so abusive) and in whose web for many reasons they feel caught. Another such girl, suddenly and out of nowhere, started shouting at the boy-friend “I hate you”, ”I hate you” with a lot of anger attached to these words (she was at the time running around with another man). Apparently there was no much of a reason for such an outburst and the boyfriend was flabbergasted at this, deciding to leave for good just there and then. Two hours later she was on the phone calling for help since she had managed to involve herself in some sort of accident that required his help!

Other dynamics and clinical examples

- That one can see some of *the positive loving elements in some of these women*, even under this tragic circumstances, makes the whole thing all the more sad. Remember that many of the women that are so forced to act out, may have had themselves a *loving relationship with their fathers at some point or another*. As mentioned, that makes some men desirable partners and with some of them at least and if only for a short while, a viable relationship. (See W p.286). This oedipal fact is specially highlighted in a case that I am very familiar with, where of the approximately eight or more relationships that this lady was known to have had, three of them were with men older than her, 25 to 45 years older! Further these relationships developed in most cases in a matter of days. Two of them started “secretely” (the deception) while she was pretending to be in a loving relationship with somebody she had been involved for quite a while.

Other dynamics and clinical examples

- Remember too, that women are as much sexual animals as men are, contrary to the common pretence among some of them, that sex is all men care about and want from their partners. Here is the mechanism of projection as their defense against their own sexuality and lack of genuine interest on their male partners whatever the reasons that may have led them there.
- The oedipal victory: In a way you could say that symbolically they got the father that had abandoned the mother but that they may have been very attached too, for themselves later on in life. Perhaps, out of oedipal guilt these relationships are not viable either.

Other dynamics and clinical examples

- **Undoing of father's behavior:** At the same time they seem to be **undoing mother's choice of an abusive partner** when they find a reasonable man, which unfortunately they can not tolerate for long either, for the various reasons we have already discussed.
- In all these cases, it always operates as well, the factor that they are condemned to do not better than their mothers in their relationships to men, which unfortunately constitutes a permanent and ineludible prohibition. They are thus compelled one way or another to destroy their amorous liaisons. Sadly, all of these points to the extraordinary complexity in human behavior, deceitfulness, and human relationships. Sadly too it deprives these women of a lasting loving relationship, a family and possibly children.
- **The patient in question**, after having listened to many of the explanations that his analyst was offering of the behavior of this girlfriend, that he so badly wanted to understand since he has been so much in love with her said one day: I hope you are right. The problem is that you analysts try to explain and justify all kinds of behaviors. May be the answer is a lot simpler e.g., there are somewhat better people (not perfect of course) and some not so good human beings! Perhaps he was right!

Other dynamics and clinical examples

- The patient in question, after having listened for years, to the many explanations that his analyst was offering about the behavior of his girlfriend, that he so badly wanted to understand, since he had been so much in love with her, said one day: I hope you are right. The problem is that you analysts try to explain and justify all kinds of behaviors. May be the answer is a lot simpler e.g., there are somewhat better people (not perfect of course) and some not so good human beings! Perhaps he was right!

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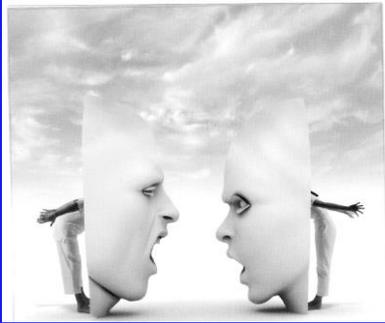
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Utah's Governor Marriage Report

Web page of the Census Bureau of the U.S is a valuable resource

The Internet is a valuable resource for this subject but care needs to be exercised as to the sources, motivations for the publication, etc



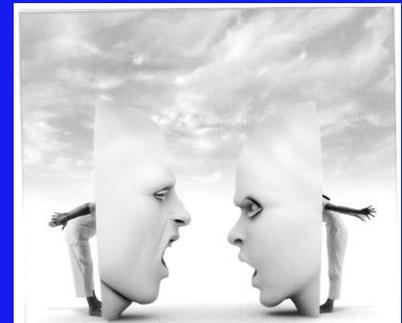
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SEVERE MARITAL DISCORD, DIVORCE THEIR CONSEQUENCES

This lecture is continued in Part 2: Clinical Examples
Look for the continuation on our website @ <http://www.thecjc.org>



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THE END

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