

Jungian clinical approach with women in abusive relationships and post-divorce abuse: challenges and coping

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Artigos



Abstract

This article seeks to discuss how the Jungian clinical approach can contribute to the analysis of women in heterosexual abusive relationships or post-divorce abuse. Initially, the characteristics of this gender violence are addressed, as well as more specific aspects of psychological violence, in addition to explaining the existence of so-called judicial abuse, necessary interfaces with the discipline of Law, psychological characteristics of the aggressor, which are consistent with the alpha narcissistic personality disorder and sociocultural aspects in the prevalence of men's violent behavior and women's victimization, involved in the cisheteropatriarchal cultural complex. Clinical work involves identifying the characteristics of these relationships, carrying out psychoeducational work, strengthening the ego, and helping the patient to establish limits and reconstitute her psychic individuality by disidentifying with the aggressor, who appears as an inner demonic lover, seeking to help her get out of the role of victim. This way, she could connect with herself and continue in her individuation process. The biggest challenges arise from the fact that this demonic lover is embodied and present in real actions of violence in his external world.

Keywords: abusive relationships; narcissistic abuse; gender violence; analytical psychology; post-divorce abuse.

Introduction

A therapeutic process is always a journey. It is even more difficult when dealing with heterosexual women in so-called abusive relationships and, worse when the abuse does not finish after the end of the relationship: *post-divorce or post-separation abuse*.

We resort to the Jungian method through the transference relationship to deal with this challenge. In these cases, it requires the addition of certain precautions by the analyst, such as so-called *gender literacy*, so as not to act countertransferentially and further consolidate the pattern of violence experienced by this woman, in

addition to knowledge about the current term *narcissistic abuse*. This draws attention to the awareness of the relationship patterns of the aggressor figure, so that this woman, through the strengthening of the ego and reconnection with the Self, can be transformed. In the realm of images of the unconscious, it is possible to say that there is a “dance” with a *negative animus*, personified by the figure of the abusive partner or ex-partner. It is very difficult to stop dancing to his tune. According to Carl Gustav Jung: “Where love reigns, there is no will to power; and where power takes precedence, there is no love. One is the shadow of the other.” (JUNG, OC, vol. VII/1, §78). We will continue to show that the dynamics of these couple relationships are about power and control, not love.

1 The problem of abusive relationships

To address the challenges of clinical work with women in abusive relationships and the prolongation of these relationships after divorce, we must first talk about a reality that many ignore: the alarming and growing numbers of violence against women and femicide, which increased significantly with the isolation imposed by the pandemic but continue increasing after it. According to the Yearbook of the Brazilian Public Security Forum (*Anuário do Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública*), femicide broke a record in 2023, with psychological violence against women having increased by approximately 33.8% compared to the previous year. In 21.0% of cases of violence, ex-spouses were responsible for the case. Increases also occurred in assaults (9.2%) and domestic violence (10.0%). Meanwhile, general violence, considering the population as a whole, decreased by 3.4%. Among the most common effects of domestic violence on the physical and mental health of victims are symptoms of anxiety, depression, traumatic stress disorder (TSD) or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), fibromyalgia, and autoimmune diseases (KOLK, 2020; MATÉ, 2003).

What characterizes an abusive relationship? Talking about this is something relatively new, although it has always existed under other names: until recently, people only talk about marital conflict, making violence against women invisible.

Kast (2022) reminds us that whenever someone’s boundaries are violated, there is abuse. Thus, an abusive relationship is one in which there is abuse of power and domestic violence. Maria da Penha Law, number 11,340/2006 (BRASIL, 2006), recognizes five types of gender-based violence: physical, sexual, patrimonial, moral, and psychological. In understanding the existence of post-divorce abuse, we would add procedural violence and institutional violence, which we will detail later.

The use of physical and sexual violence, although not yet properly addressed by our society, has always been the most obvious violence. Psychological and moral violence, on the other hand, have more subtle forms, through manipulative mechanisms, and perhaps only their effects seem more visible such as physical and mental illness, while their mechanisms remain hidden. Due to how this violence occurs, insidiously and across generations, they have always been normalized.

Dealing with women in abusive relationships involves understanding, together with them, the conditioning and normalization of violence to which men and women are subjected when they witness their parents' relationship patterns. Feminist writer bell hooks (2021) understands this phenomenon as follows:

Most of us cannot accept a definition of love that says we are never loved in contexts of abuse. Most children who have been physically or psychologically abused have been taught by their caregivers that love can coexist with abuse. In extreme cases, abuse is an expression of love. This flawed thinking often shapes our adult perceptions of love. So, just as we cling to the idea that those who hurt us as children loved us, we try to rationalize our being hurt by other adults by insisting that they love us.

[...]

And if a person's goal is self-healing, the well-being of their soul, confronting unlovingness honestly and realistically is part of the healing process. (hooks, 2021, p. 51).

Another aspect to be considered is the psychic mechanisms that a woman has when dealing with this violence, which are unconscious, with neurological correlates, as they are mechanisms of reaction to trauma, in this case, the so-called relational trauma. We will highlight the concept of *abaissement du niveau mental*, coined by Pierre Janet, to explain a psychic phenomenon that "reduces the threshold of consciousness, and allows the entry of unconscious contents [...], beginning to penetrate consciousness in the form of autonomous invasions" (JUNG, OC, vol. III, § 510), and the mechanism of "identification with the aggressor" (FERENCZI, 2011) contributing to the phenomenon of participation mystique (LÉVY-BRUHL, 1912 *apud* JUNG, 1991), a phenomenon of unconscious psychological identification between the woman and her aggressor. The emergence of these psychological phenomena makes it difficult for women to become aware of the abuse they have suffered and to make the definitive decision to distance themselves from their violent intimate partner.

Going through these difficulties, a woman who has children with an aggressor will face another phase of difficulties that may last throughout their childhood and adolescence. This is the continuation of psychological violence but in another format, this time, being able to be followed by procedural violence and patrimonial violence, and reinforced by the Brazilian Justice System as institutional violence.

As this article is being written, in the Paris Olympics, the story of Olympic sprinter Flávia Maria de Lima is making headlines. She said having left an abusive relationship, in which her partner, among other abusive behaviors, controlled all of her money. When she became pregnant, he stated that he did not want to be a father, but ever since they separated, he, who shows no motivation to spend time with his daughter, files a lawsuit every time Flávia leaves the state to compete and support herself and her daughter as an athlete, claiming maternal abandonment. In her testimony to the *Coletivo Mães na Luta*, she states: “When this judicial terrorism began, I started to panic about competing” (MACHISMO, 2024). We understand here that there is psychological, procedural, and institutional violence because the Justice System allows the existence of mechanisms available to men to violate women. Cases like this and other even more serious variants are frequent.

Despite some advances in laws protecting for violence against women, to this day the Brazilian Justice System, represented by certain judges and lawyers (not all, fortunately), still insists on considering abusive relationships as marital conflict or high-conflict divorce. Today, in common sense, our Justice System carries the names of abusive relationships, narcissistic abuse, domestic violence, and other more technical names, such as *coercive control* (KATZ, 2022), psychological violence, and the name proposed by psychologist Ramani Durvasula (2020a), *stress due to antagonistic relationships*, which is more consistent, even, with scientific knowledge on the topic. We will continue to use the terms “narcissistic abuse” and “abusive relationships” because they have become popular and, therefore, are easier to understand. When the Brazilian Judicial System, based on the decisions of a judge, ignores the violence suffered by women or their children and imposes conditions for the maintenance or intensification of violence, we understand that there is institutional violence.

2 The cycle of violence

Understanding the cycle of violence is the first step in a series of understandings for good clinical care. It was initially described by American psychologist Lenore Walker (1979), as comprising the phases of increased tension, a phase in which there is *psychological violence*; *physical violence*; and *honeymoon*, a phase of “redemption”

for the aggressor, when he realizes that he is about to lose the victim, seeks forgiveness, promises changes and tries to behave like the perfect partner. However, several psychologists who study narcissistic abuse, such as Dr. Ramani Durvasula (2020a), consider it more appropriate a cycle that involves love bombing: a conquest phase in which the man is the prince charming, seductive, helpful, promises to fulfill all the woman's needs and usually wants to commit quickly, making many romantic or family plans for the near future; *devaluation*: phase in which psychological violence begins, with effective devaluation, blaming, betrayals and may include physical violence, and *discard*: when he breaks off the relationship, he may turn to conquer other women, but later returns to harass the first woman, restarting the cycle.

The existence of *love bombing* makes it difficult to identify the violence in the future and causes a lowering of the mental level (JUNG, OC, vol. III). Not all abusive relationships will necessarily begin with this phase. We have seen more than one relationship that begins with an ambivalent game, alternating between wanting and not wanting the woman, creating a bond of dependence for "crumbs of love" and seeking approval. This manipulation is popularly called *negging*. In another case, the relationship begins with the partner being threatening, filling the woman's psyche with a paralyzing fear that prevents her from leaving the relationship. She reads about the usual descriptions of abusive relationships and she cannot identify herself because she did not find typical elements of love bombing, such as grandiose declarations of love, receiving flowers, or gifts, or meeting an extremely kind man who would be willing to do anything to fulfill her desires. We need to be aware of these variations.

3 Forms of psychological violence

We understand that there are many ways in which psychological violence can be expressed in an abusive relationship. The problem with psychological violence is that it is often made invisible by culture and by the victim, whose consciousness is at a low point, especially after the aggressor has gained her trust during the *love bombing phase*. Furthermore, psychological violence often occurs initially in a very subtle, almost imperceptible way, before reaching more intense levels. These include acts compiled by the so-called Violentometer, an instrument developed by the Interdisciplinary Program for Gender Studies in Mexico (INSTITUTO POLITÉCNICO NACIONAL, 2012): devaluing – including humiliating comments and jokes –, stalking, cursing, belittling, blaming the woman for his violent acts or for anything he interprets as "wrong", isolation from family and friends, excessive jealousy, emotional blackmail, controlling friendships and activities, threats, humiliating in public or private, ignoring or excluding

("the silent treatment"). Among the most insidious and harmful forms of psychological violence is what has come to be called gaslighting, which consists of distorting or denying reality to cloud the victim's perception of reality and themselves. Thus, the victim begins to hand over their reality screen and needs approval from the aggressor, who begins to exert even more control over their life (STERN, 2019). The lowering of consciousness caused by gaslighting reaches the point where the victim identifies with the aggressor's point of view and believes that she is going crazy.

Some signs in clinical care may indicate that a woman is a victim of gaslighting. It is common for her to have little confidence in her perceptions, which is a point to be worked on in therapy to validate them. It is also common for the patient to describe many arguments she has had with her partner in which she justifies herself to the analyst with excessive arguments for having done things disapproved of by the aggressor, projecting onto the analyst the gaslighter (perpetrator of the gaslighting) who pretends not to believe in her point of view. When there is some confidence in herself or her memory, the arguments with the gaslighter are endless, turning the couple's life into a living hell as the woman and her partner meet daily.

The last stage of psychological violence, showing the escalation to physical violence, is when the aggressor damages or breaks objects in fits of rage, hinting at what he might do to the woman next time. All of these acts have the ultimate goal of increasing the aggressor's power and control over his victim and are not at all about love.

In the violence assumed in the post-separation period, in the case of a woman who has children with the aggressor, we can highlight what the collective of mothers *One Mom's Battle*, translated into Portuguese by *Coletivo de Proteção à Infância Voz Materna*. It describes, based on the experience of women in situations of coercive control who are part of or seek advice from these movements:

Counterparenting: He undermines parental decisions and imposes conflicting values to anger the other parent. He denies or withholds consent for the child's needs (medical, therapeutic, educational, or extracurricular).

Isolation: He creates false narratives and spreads rumors to family, friends, teachers, and community relationships to discredit or destroy reputations and undermine current (or future) support systems.

Harassment and stalking: He sends a barrage of manipulative, threatening, or abusive messages with the intent to terrorize or intimidate. He monitors whereabouts and activities through social networking, social media, spyware, or physical stalking.

Neglectful or abusive parenting: He exposes children to unsafe content, situations or people while using violence, intimidation, threats, manipulation, or ridicule to obtain children's obedience.

Legal abuse: He disregards and manipulates court orders while misusing legal systems to control, harass, intimidate, and drain financial and emotional resources. He seeks custody orders for revenge, punishment, and control. [so-called abusive litigation]

[False] "Alienation" Claims: "Parental Alienation" Claims as a Legal Strategy to Overcome Allegations or Findings of Abuse, [...] (O QUE, 2024).

These behaviors also involve what we call "vicarious violence." In these cases, the aggressor uses the children, causing them harm or using them to harm their mother.

4 How to explain the behavior of a male aggressor?

By following women in clinical care and hearing testimonies from women who have lived through abusive relationships, we have observed that the aggressor's behavior is stereotypical. The stories repeat, leading to believe in pathological and cultural factors. The profile of the aggressor usually fits, with some variations, the so-called Alpha Narcissistic Personality Disorder, as named by American Jungian analysts Dougherty and West (2007), who describe the following characteristics: aggressive competitiveness, destructive envy, inability to suffer, a sense of entitlement and aggrandizement compensating for low self-esteem, constant belittling of others, habit of humiliating people, inability to tolerate intimate relationships, being driven by manipulative interpersonal strategies with manipulative cycles and the search for power and control, in addition to an antagonistic relational pattern. A great insight is provided by Dougherty and West (2007) when we come across their description of the alpha narcissist as someone who has a compulsion to attack the envied object. We understand that the manipulative cycle with the person she tries to have a relationship would tend to repeat unconsciously and without modifications. It hardly crosses women's minds that they could be the target of the narcissist's envy. In the case of the Olympic athlete Flávia Maria de Lima mentioned above, this dynamic becomes more visible with the attack always following each of her professional achievements. "The predatory archetypal identification of the alpha narcissist manifests in a determination to win, to ruin or humiliate the other, to put the other down" (DOUGHERTY; WEST, 2007, p. 218). It is common for the narcissist to seek constant conflicting interactions to obtain emotional supply, even if this is negative.

Mario Jacoby (2023) and Dougherty and West (2007) also highlight the delusional nature of the narcissist, who considers everyone as an object that must work according to his will. After all, the narcissist

imagines that this is his world, which must work according to laws and rules dictated by him. Another correlated aspect is the lack of empathy, which explains his difficulty with relationships:

Narcissistically disturbed people defend themselves against any form of demonstrating empathy since this leads to human closeness. For them, this would involve the risk of merging with the other and having their fragile self-identity dissolved (JACOBY, 2023, p. 325).

In a violent relationship, the abusive partner reverses the possibility of an intimate and deep relationship based on intimacy and Eros, to be expected into a relationship based on power.

Outside the Jungian circle, scholars who specialize in narcissistic abuse, such as Durvasula (2020a, 2020b) and Sarkis (2020), do not restrict it to narcissistic personality disorder of any type but show manipulative, aggressive, and harmful behaviors in interpersonal relationships, in the former so-called disorders belonging to "Cluster B" of the DSM-5: narcissistic, antisocial, borderline, and histrionic. They also no longer understand narcissism as a personality disorder but rather consider the existence of narcissistic defenses.

When dealing with the stereotypical behavior of the aggressor in these abusive relationships and how psychological violence occurs, as well as the cycle of violence, we come across the archetypal figure of a Trickster (JUNG, OC, vol. IX/1), with his ambivalence and duality, leading to deception, sometimes introducing himself as a wonderful man, with promises of being a savior, and sometimes acting as the executioner, a monster. The hope of having their partner back as he was during the love bombing phase is what keeps many women in abusive relationships but they need to realize that this is not his whole personality. The good man carries the bad man with him. We also understand that the image of the good man is part of a strategy to confuse and dominate. More than just presenting the Trickster archetype as a possible complex in the aggressor's psyche, we need to understand that this archetype is constellated in the abusive relationship, as a third element, in which this duality always makes the woman want to try again to improve the relationship, as they are culturally held responsible for the success of the relationship. We also find this quality of the Trickster especially in gaslighting and devaluation strategies in which the aggressor distorts reality, inverts the blame and disqualifies the woman, disguising the devaluation as praise.

5 Cultural Aspects of the Advent and Rise of Narcissistic Abuse

Attributing a personality disorder or pathologizing behavior can be an easy way to avoid ethical responsibility for harm caused to

others. It is difficult to think about increasing violence, with alarming numbers: a minimum of three femicides in Brazil per day, according to the Brazilian Public Security Forum (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2023), most of them perpetrated by intimate partners or ex-partners, without questioning what is happening in our society. We know that patriarchy promotes cultural values that enable the escalation of violence. Based on the questioning of patriarchal culture, it is expected that it will react to its possible decline with even more violence. The so-called social devices and processes of subjectivization in men and women, as conceived by Brazilian researcher Valeska Zanello (2018). The *love device* in women makes them seek emotional fulfillment – and also be held accountable for it –, attributing to them the responsibility for the failure or success of a relationship, which also makes it difficult for them to identify and leave an abusive relationship, and makes them believe that their partner can improve if they make an effort. Another harmful effect is that it makes them have as a life goal to be approved by men, distancing them from themselves, which makes them vulnerable to abuse once again and to rivalry with other women. The *maternal device*, on the other hand, drives women to the socially shared desire that they should find fulfillment in motherhood, concentrating the tasks of care on them, who take care not only of their children but also of their partner, who has not learned the task of caring, because efficiency, focused on professional and material achievements is his device.

Feminist bell hooks (2020) reinforces the deleterious effect of the idealization of romantic love and patriarchal culture in the naturalization of violence:

Feminist thinkers have drawn attention to how this idea of love has been the interest to patriarchal men and women. It has supported the idea that a person can do anything in the name of love: beating people, restricting their movements, and even killing them and calling it a 'crime of passion', claiming "I loved her so much that I had to kill her". Love in patriarchal cultures is linked to notions of passion, to paradigms of domination and submission, in which the assumption was that one person would give love and the other would receive it. (hooks, 2020, p. 146-147).

All this can be understood as the domain of a cultural complex, in which practices, norms, standards, values, and implicit assumptions of gender roles and power encompass what Gustavo Pessoa (2022) called the cisheteropatriarchal complex. This validates the supremacy of white, cis, heterosexual men over women and the feminine, relegating all those who do not belong to the hegemonic group to an inferior category and considered objects of possession. Gender-based violence also stems from a cultural complex whose historical roots date back to the colonial period, with its sugar mill owners, slave owners, women, and children. Thinking about the

cisheteropatriarchal cultural complex in this way also points us to the transgenerationality of abusive relationships within families, reinforcing family complexes. Unfortunately, the action of this cultural complex behind abusive relationships also occurs in LGBTQIAPN+ relationships, although our scope of study is limited to heterosexual relationships. All of this will imply the need for greater awareness by the analyst so as not to act countertransferentially in the therapeutic setting with the corresponding oppressive couple of this woman in an abusive relationship (MATTA, 2023). As hooks (2020, p. 107) rightly points out: “we know that patriarchal masculinity encourages men to be pathologically narcissistic, childish, and psychologically dependent on the privileges (albeit relative) they receive simply because they were born men.”

Graham et al. (2021) go further in understanding the social mechanisms for the emergence and maintenance of a society constituted by misogyny, with their theory of Social Stockholm Syndrome. They have consistent arguments based on robust and diverse research, that Stockholm Syndrome can be generalized to society as a whole. In this conception, the female gender (not just women, or everyone who is not a cis, heterosexual man) is devalued and subjected to male violence. With no way out of this violence, women choose, or rather, strive to be chosen, approved, and emotionally bond with those who demonstrate acts of kindness and appear to act as protectors, even if, in the future, they turn their violence against them. As in an abusive relationship where Stockholm Syndrome is observed, girls are raised to be around and obtain approval from men, and their lives revolve around the idea of romantic love, projecting these protective and kind qualities onto men. Thus, once again, they are socially forced to take responsibility for the success or failure of the relationship and are blamed for the violence they suffer in the most diverse areas of life, from romantic relationships, family relationships, work relationships, or occasional violence without a previous relationship, such as rape by a stranger. Reporting on research, they show that the violence that women fear most is not death, but rape: genuinely male violence. Men, on the other hand, are raised to reinforce narcissistic qualities, such as the sense of entitlement to always have their needs met by women.

Graham et al. (2021) even point to the contamination of this social functioning in the construction of the understanding of the female psyche in psychological approaches, which becomes biased by femininity understood by the Social Stockholm Syndrome model. What model of the female psyche do we have in analytical psychology? Neumann (2000) suggests the model of the myth of Persephone and Demeter: Persephone, in her feminine initiation, needs to make an abrupt break in her symbiotic relationship with her mother through the abduction of Hades, which represents the – violent – entry of the

masculine principle into her life. She marries her abductor. Despite this, in Bill number 4,053/2008, for the approval of the Parental Alienation Law (OLIVEIRA, 2008), it is the model of the myth of Medea, the one who resents the end of the marriage and deprives the parent of his children, that prevails as a stereotype of women in the family courts of the Brazilian Judiciary, that is, once again, they are blamed for the violence they suffer.

6 Clinical work with women in abusive relationships

Under the unconscious influence of the cisheteropatriarchal complex and all its transgenerational burden, the testimonies of women who suffer violence of any kind by men are silenced, disqualified, and even denied. This is the first trap that the analyst must avoid falling into. Validating the patient's experiences already has transformative power in a society that commonly labels them "crazy". In this way, perceptions and experiences can be made aware and elaborated.

The dynamics of gender devices (ZANELLO, 2018) can be a good start for *gender literacy* when dealing with these cases. Without recognizing the social, family, and individual mechanisms that violate women, they can be thrown into a hole of misunderstanding in the analysis, through which acceptance or bonding, fundamental to Jungian therapy, is not created. In our clinic, what we understand as *gender literacy* must be more than the understanding of the socio-cultural issues that permeate gender, especially about violence. For transference work that helps lead the patient to profound transformations, a conscious and genuine experience of what the cisheteropatriarchal complex means is necessary. Paraphrasing Jung (OC, vol. XVI, §179): "It is because it is not possible to take a patient beyond the point where we are."

Most of them come to the clinic with symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, with anxiety, hypervigilance, sleep disturbances, flashbacks, and intrusive memories. One of the main signs of psychodynamic issues of an abusive relationship in the clinic is to observe that the patient "walks on eggshells", that is, lives in hypervigilance, because the partner can be overcome by narcissistic fury and "explode" at any moment, for any reason, and blame her. As in typical Stockholm Syndrome behavior (GRAHAM et al., 2021), the victim thinks to control the situation and keeps circling the aggressor's desires and needs so as not to "make a mistake". This is where we can understand that an unconscious psychological identification is formed between the aggressor and the victim. Regarding the Stockholm Syndrome, we can see that the person turns to the aggressor and lives as if in a long-term kidnapping. Graham et al. (2021) explain that, at this moment, the feeling of guilt sets in as a survival mechanism for a neurological

traumatic fight reaction, as the guilt takes the victim out of a possible freezing reaction, making her feel responsible for what happens to her and makes her fight to please and influence her aggressor, trying to free herself from punitive violence, even if, in fact, the aggressor's outbursts do not depend directly on what the victim does or does not do, but rather on her internal motivations.

One of the patients we treated came to the office somewhat aware that she was in an abusive relationship and that her husband was gaslighting her. Many years before coming to therapy, she had noticed that she was experiencing tachycardia and cardiac arrhythmia. After undergoing all the tests to detect heart problems and obtaining negative results, she was able to conclude that this was due to a state of anxiety every time her husband came home and that it also affected her sleep, as she could be woken up at any time by him to discuss something futile for which he blamed her. In her case and that of other women subjected to psychological violence, an important task is to help them give up seeking the approval of the aggressor, despite all the disqualification, devaluation, and blaming (STERN, 2019).

The extreme importance given to psychoeducation is one of the main concerns highlighted by Ramani Durvasula (2020a). It is important to emphasize that most of these specialists do not belong to psychology approaches with transference as a central element of psychotherapy. Psychoeducation is named by Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) as a resource that seeks, in our case, to explain what is understood by an abusive relationship, its characteristics, and to understand the aggressor's *modus operandi* to better deal with him, even if there is a long way to go for the patient to become aware of the destructive power of his behavior and to convince herself that some guidance can be useful in helping her deal with him and overcome narcissistic abuse. It even goes as far as naming each type of abuse that women suffer, such as *gaslighting*, *love bombing*, *silent treatment*, *triangulation*, *smear campaign*, and *use of flying monkeys*, among others, helping her in the process of awareness. What we explained in this article can be considered a work of psychoeducation. Jung (OC, vol. XVI), in *The Practice of Psychotherapy: Contributions to the Problem of Psychotherapy and the Psychology of Transference*, shows us that he is not exclusive in his approach and that different methods should be used according to the patient's needs. These methods may originate from other approaches, as he emphasized those of Freud and Adler. All this work involves strengthening this woman's ego.

Not only is it important to identify signs of abuse within a romantic relationship, but it is also important to have models of healthy relationships. It is interesting to look at the explanations of James Hollis (2011), in his book *The Middle Passage: From Misery to Meaning in Midlife*, and the transformations from the romanticized form to the humanized form of a romantic relationship. A realistic and mature

model of relationship would be one in which two people remain in their individuation processes, but have each other as partners on the journey, with mutual support and respect, without expectations that a “magical other” (HOLLIS, 2011, p. 66) will save them. It is necessary to give up the fusional model of relationship, typical of romantic love, which places the couple in a mystical participation, distances them from their respective individuation processes, and leaves room for abusive invasions by the other.

Among the psychoeducational resources, the concepts of zero contact and gray stone stand out (MACKENZIE, 2015). As much as the victim is deceived by her psyche into believing that she is capable of changing the quality of her interactions with the aggressor, contact with the aggressor will always evoke the same stereotypical reactions in him, which we Jungians understand to be due to the activation of a complex since his ego is poorly constituted (JACOBY, 2023).

Zero contact is a goal to be pursued especially after the relationship has been successfully broken off. It involves blocking electronic or in-person contact, and not seeking access to details of the aggressor’s new life, or vice versa. This is particularly painful and difficult for these women because the bond to be broken requires going through mourning. This mourning is more painful than the mourning of a healthy relationship, as it involves dealing with unfulfilled promises, dreams of a “perfect love” that have been shattered, grandiose idealizations shattered, dealing with the disappointment of a strong devaluation, strong feelings of rejection and unilateral guilt for the failure of the relationship.

In the case of a woman who has children with the aggressor, *zero contact* is not possible, even if she has obtained a restraining order through the Maria da Penha Law (nº 11.340/2006) that prevents the aggressor from contacting her. This woman is obliged to maintain contact to send information about the health and education of her children, to arrange details of parenting time or even to make decisions regarding the children together, if custody is shared. If she does not do this, she may be accused of the legal argument of practicing “parental alienation” and have her custody reverted to the aggressor. In this case, the *gray stone* is the resource to be used. This resource consists in showing the least amount of emotion possible, with the image of the *gray stone* as an inert, banal, almost imperceptible element, becoming uninteresting for the typical narcissistic trait of seeking conflicting interactions to feed oneself emotionally. Acting under the *gray stone* principle requires a much greater mobilization in terms of psychic efforts to disidentify with the aggressor and reestablish the woman’s individuality, to end the mystical participation. This requires that the patient strive to react less and less emotionally and not respond immediately after receiving the violent communication. We advise women to wait one to three days to respond to an email,

if possible, and not to respond to any attacks, limiting themselves only to exchanging information necessary for decisions regarding the children's lives. As this objective is achieved, the endless discussions, about what the aggressor seeks, tend to decrease and become more spaced out. We also understand that the aggressor's point of view is gradually left aside, helping the woman to center herself and reconnect with her Self, which can be understood as the process of individuation.

However, although we can help our patients understand their aggressor's manipulative mechanisms and take steps towards limiting their aggressions through conversations with the analyst about the resources of *zero contact* or *gray stone*, we still have another deeper problem to solve. So far, we have talked about many resources that are more consciously worked on but with the approach of analytical psychology, we can deal with its powerful unconscious counterpart, which, in our view, is reflected in all of the victim's conscious difficulties: the internalized figure of their aggressor, who insists on being part of their life and poisoning the possibility of new perspectives.

7 The demonic animus that inhabits the woman who is a victim of relational trauma

It is common in observations and clinical reports or testimonies of abusive relationships for women to admit that they are always dealing with their aggressor in their psyches as if they were in a mental prison. They are always worried about how they will react if they do this or that, with arguments to avoid being blamed or with the repetition of verbalization of a disqualification made by the partner or ex with whom they have to deal, always reacting emotionally to these mental attacks. We can also see the phenomenon as a type of psychic slavery or emotional kidnapping. In cases where there is psychological violence from gaslighting, this internal aggressor can also appear as a judge for whom she builds arguments to avoid being "guilty" based on the accusations that the aggressor makes against her in real life and others that she projects onto her psyche. The figure of the aggressor is usually present in her psyche, terrorizing her, regardless of whether this woman is still at a lowered level of consciousness and still makes efforts to save the relationship or whether she has already become aware of the deleterious quality of this relationship and has already ended it. We would call this *animus* as an evil or demonic lover, according to Kast's (2022) denomination, who exerts control and continues the abuse in her psyche.

It is interesting to note that this demonic *animus* seems to incorporate more of the characteristics of her aggressor in her external life than vice versa. Regardless of the victim's situation in her

dreams, it is common for him to appear as her true lover or current partner, even when this relationship has already ended. There are cases in which the woman even feels repulsed by this ex-partner, she is already in another relationship, and the aggressor appears in the dream as her current partner, with whom she stays by his side, dances, or has sexual relations. This reveals the quality of fusion that this woman still finds herself with this aggressor, in what we understand to be a mystical participation. This internalized aggressor carries the characteristics of the aggressor from her external life and poisons her future relationships, either by creating distrust towards the next men she may meet, or by unconsciously attracting her to new abusive relationships.

This is the biggest challenge for the clinic with these women because it is as if it were necessary to carry out an internal transformation in which this internal aggressor diminishes in size and strength so that this woman can change her attitudes towards the external aggressor. Efforts to strengthen the ego are useless if no changes are in the unconscious. We believe that the depth of the Jungian method can help in this transformation as the woman faces daily and renewed violence, whether from the aggressor, the justice system, or even society.

Bringing the understanding of trauma experts, such as Bessel van der Kolk (2020) and Judith Herman (2020), who will consider the intolerable and prolonged affect on the nervous system of an abusive relationship, as the so-called *relational trauma*, we initially try to seek understanding from the Jungian perspective of the images of the unconscious in trauma, first brought by Donald Kalshed (2013), in *The Inner World of Trauma*, and its subsequent update in line with the most recent discoveries of neuroscience and other psychological approaches to trauma, in his chapter *Working with Trauma in Analysis* (Kalshed, 2019).

Kalshed's thesis (2013, 2019) says that, when an early trauma occurs, the *self-care system* comes into action in the psyche, as forces of the Self, splitting the traumatic complex into a part of the personality that regresses to a moment before the trauma, which would be the sacred core of the personality and which is sometimes protected, sometimes terrorized by a *daimonic* figure. This *daimonic* figure, in addition to the terror to avoid retraumatization (which fails), would have a protective function of taking the child to a fantasy world where he or she could take refuge from the evil of the world, with archetypal figures of magical animals, dolphins, and others.

In the cases discussed here, the idea of the demonic lover brought by Verena Kast (2022) appears to be much more plausible than in Kalshed's (2013, 2019) explanation of the splitting of the trauma complex. He makes it very clear that his theory refers to early

trauma, which does not prevent women in narcissistic abuse from having already suffered it. However, in clinical practice, reports show us that even women with good parental support and a good marital relationship between their parents are susceptible to falling into an abusive relationship. Furthermore, these women demonstrate that they cannot take refuge in a world of fantastic or even comforting fantasy, neither in dreams nor in daydreams, because the violent reality is present in real life and their psyche. Kalshed also refers to the violence of archetypal proportions in which the *daimonic* figure of early trauma usually threatens. In the case of women in abusive relationships, the violence of the real aggressor can be much greater than she could imagine and can escalate to femicide, the greatest risk of which occurs in the months immediately following the breakup of the relationship. Therefore, it is possible for those who pay attention to see at least one reprehensible newspaper headline every day reporting that a woman was killed by her ex-partner followed by the following subtitle: "he did not accept the end of the relationship". According to sociologist Evan Stark (2007), femicide, contrary to the old idea of a crime of passion, is a way for the aggressor to regain the control that was threatened to be lost with the end of the relationship.

Verena Kast's explanations (2022) are more in line with the empirical reality of these women and even project possible solutions, even though she emphasizes that the psychodynamics of the aggressor-victim described by her do not refer to extreme cases, as we can understand that they happen in cases of domestic violence. This demonic lover archetypically resembles Bluebeard, analyzed by Kast (2022), as the one who kills all the women he marries and who come into contact with his shadow. Bluebeard shows us the strength of the compulsiveness of these attacks. The woman also dies when she loses her innocence and discovers what marriage is really for in the way we have always known it: for the interests of patriarchy. Women think of marriage as the fulfillment of a dream, but they find violence, power, and expectations of submission. The happy ending with Bluebeard's death signals the hope of transformation of the demonic lover, but first, the Evil must end. We can associate Bluebeard's story with a cycle of violence, using Kast's (2022) analysis as a guide. First, the distance. Second, he seduces her and becomes more interesting. She marries him. Then she discovers his shadow, something that was repressed and dissociated, and all the violence appears. It is interesting how Kast denounces how the woman in the story distances herself from her feelings and intuition to let herself be seduced by him. We can find a cultural correlation with the way women are socialized: to be approved by men (ZANELLO, 2018).

Bluebeard is described as someone who yearns for relationships but is very afraid of closeness, which is why he kills women. We see a narcissistic trait here: "Instead of giving over to the relationship, he destroys it." (KAST, 2022, p. 20). Despite the happy ending in the story, Kast (2022, p. 21) points out that, unfortunately, Bluebeard's aggressiveness cannot be transformed and, rather, needs to be "combated in a limited and aggressive way at the right time." This is why, in the story, he is killed, and does not turn into a prince after being removed from a witch's spell, as often happens in other stories. This is also an example of women not waiting for this man from the outside world to turn into a good man, as happens in the story *Beauty and the Beast*.

As we manage to get the patient to be distanced from the company and aggression of her tormentor, which may even come via email, her psyche calms down and the terror in her life diminishes. Then, it becomes possible to dream of other *animus* figures, even as a sign of possible inner transformation. But this woman will only be able to do this after distancing and protecting herself from this man's attacks, which becomes difficult given the open path of the legal system with its misogynistic laws and behavior.

We do not have romantic and easy solutions. We need to think about transforming the way women deal with violence and empower them. The work is hard, because aggressions are updated in new acts of violence and, often, are reinforced by society, whether through its laws and conduct or by blaming women in various ways.

Transformation Possibilities

The transformation of the demonic *animus* goes in the direction, as Kast (2022) points out, of leaving the identification with the aggressor and finding herself, removing the sieve of reality that she had given to this man and the need to be approved by him. For her, since aggression cannot be transformed, but rather stopped, it is necessary to take ownership of her intrinsic aggression, leaving the role of victim. This aggression can be experienced assertively when the patient is encouraged to set limits. As her ego is strengthened, the woman can also begin to see her aggressor with more deficiencies and less power than he seemed to have before. Her fear, therefore, diminishes, and she feels ready to set such limits. It seems simple, but transference work is essential for the patient to feel empowered when mirroring herself in an analyst who is awake and in control of herself within a patriarchal society or in a sensitive and kind male analyst, who can mirror a positive male figure for her. We can also think of an analyst who transcends gender binarism, showing the

possibility of overcoming the power relationship between masculine and feminine.

A patient, encouraged by a lawyer and a psychotherapist, obtains a court injunction that prevents her daughter's alcoholic father from being with her without the presence of someone the patient trusts. Despite the initial threats and protests from this abusive father, over time, her anxiety began to diminish and she began to see the poorly thought-out way in which he acted to attack her. This also diminished her fear.

Within the therapeutic process, we may be faced with the need to process anger and grief, in addition to having to work through the mourning for the end of this relationship. As much as we may be tempted countertransferentially to deny this relationship, it existed, and for another way of living to emerge, this mourning must be experienced and worked through (MARLOW-MACOY, 2020).

Following the specificity of Jungian psychotherapy, working with dreams, fantasies, and images that appear in expressive techniques can be a fruitful path, by transforming emotions into images, depotentiating the destructive power of this aggressive animus as Dr. Nise da Silveira (2001) worked with her psychotic patients and their internal monsters.

Being confused by an *animus* and an abusive man with Trickster characteristics leads her to decentralization. Reconnecting with the Self is naturally the purpose of therapeutic work. To this end, Kast (2022) warns of the need to seek the cultivation of other, healthier areas in their lives, even while this demonic lover reigns in their psyche. This may involve encouraging these women to resume their professional development – after all, many will be at a financial disadvantage when their relationships end – as well as seeking desires, projects, and contacts with creative areas in their lives that can be discovered or rediscovered. The more connected to the Self, the fuller of life their psyche will be and the less susceptible to the external aggressor. Despite the paths outlined here, it will never be easy. The real attacks from the external aggressor shake and overwhelm victims of narcissistic abuse, but the closer they are to themselves, the less damage they will suffer.

Last but not least, we must heed Hillman e Ventura (1995) advice, in an interview with Michael Ventura, not to individualize and demobilize the individual from the power of social action. As we have seen, gender-based violence has historical and cultural roots, which are reflected in our institutions, especially in the Justice System. Every day, women join collectives, help other women in abusive relationships on social media, and actively campaign in the National Congress to raise awareness among members of Congress for changes in our laws. These efforts are not always fruitful. Brazil still ranks fifth in

the world in the number of femicides, and many mothers succumb and lose custody of their children in an act of violence and injustice against them. However, anyone who can follow these efforts over the years will see that changes, although very small and slow, have been achieved.

We can see the above path as the flow of the individuation process, making conscious something that goes beyond understanding each woman's situation. By making each other's realities known, they begin to wake up to the fact that there is a patriarchal system that works as a superstructure. They begin to question and position themselves critically regarding how they are socialized to this day. This is extrapolated to question the criteria and the beauty industry with its health risks, female rivalry, invisible maternal work, and the way their children should be raised. It also involves breaking with prejudices and pre-established standards of how they should live, in addition to being able to experience – and be capable of acting – true female sisterhood.

Final considerations

Analytical work with women entangled in stress due to antagonistic relationships aims to establish the strengthening of the ego, their individuality, the ability to set limits by disidentifying with their aggressor, reconnecting with the Self and the alchemical/transferential work of transforming the demonic *animus*. However, we can understand that the existence of gender violence is not an individual problem. Therefore, we find its transgenerational roots and observe how stereotypical and compulsive these relationships are due to the deep-rooted cisheteropatriarchal cultural complex, which discredits women's testimonies in society and in the judiciary, privileging men's rights.

Despite the efforts of collectives of mothers and institutions focused on protecting women, there is still a long way to go before laws and practices are consistent and fair. This will involve dealing with the defeats and frustrations of patients and their analysts. What we can do, as far as possible, is to help them wake up to the patriarchal reality and encourage them not to give up on seeking fairer ways in their lives, in their relationships, in the education of their children, in their work relationships and in the laws and rules that regulate our society, that are more fair and consistent with a dynamic of alterity and equity. Cultivating spaces where healthy relationships with the community and oneself are experienced is also an ideal proposed by analytical psychology.

Coercive control is already a crime in Australia and England. This may be a hopeful start to the patriarchy's continued decline. A society where the dynamics of otherness are valued is also loving.

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