

Perpetrators & Victims

The Psychodynamics of Traumatising Relationships

London, 4th of October 2013

Professor Dr Franz Ruppert



www.franz-ruppert.de

Agenda

- Victims and perpetrators – definitions
- Victim and perpetrator attitudes as surviving strategies
- Victim-perpetrator-splitting
- Ways to resolve – realistic and illusionary

Victims

- A person becomes a victim by experiencing harm to his body and his psyche (from natural disasters, from other human beings).
- The harm can be small or big, stressful or traumatic.

Perpetrators

- Someone becomes a perpetrator if he does harm to someone else (by violence, murder, theft, betrayal, dishonesty)
- or if he does not give the necessary support to another person he is responsible for (particularly lack of contact, love and food).
- One can be a perpetrator consciously and unconsciously.
- One can also be a perpetrator towards oneself.

Harm as a traumatic experience

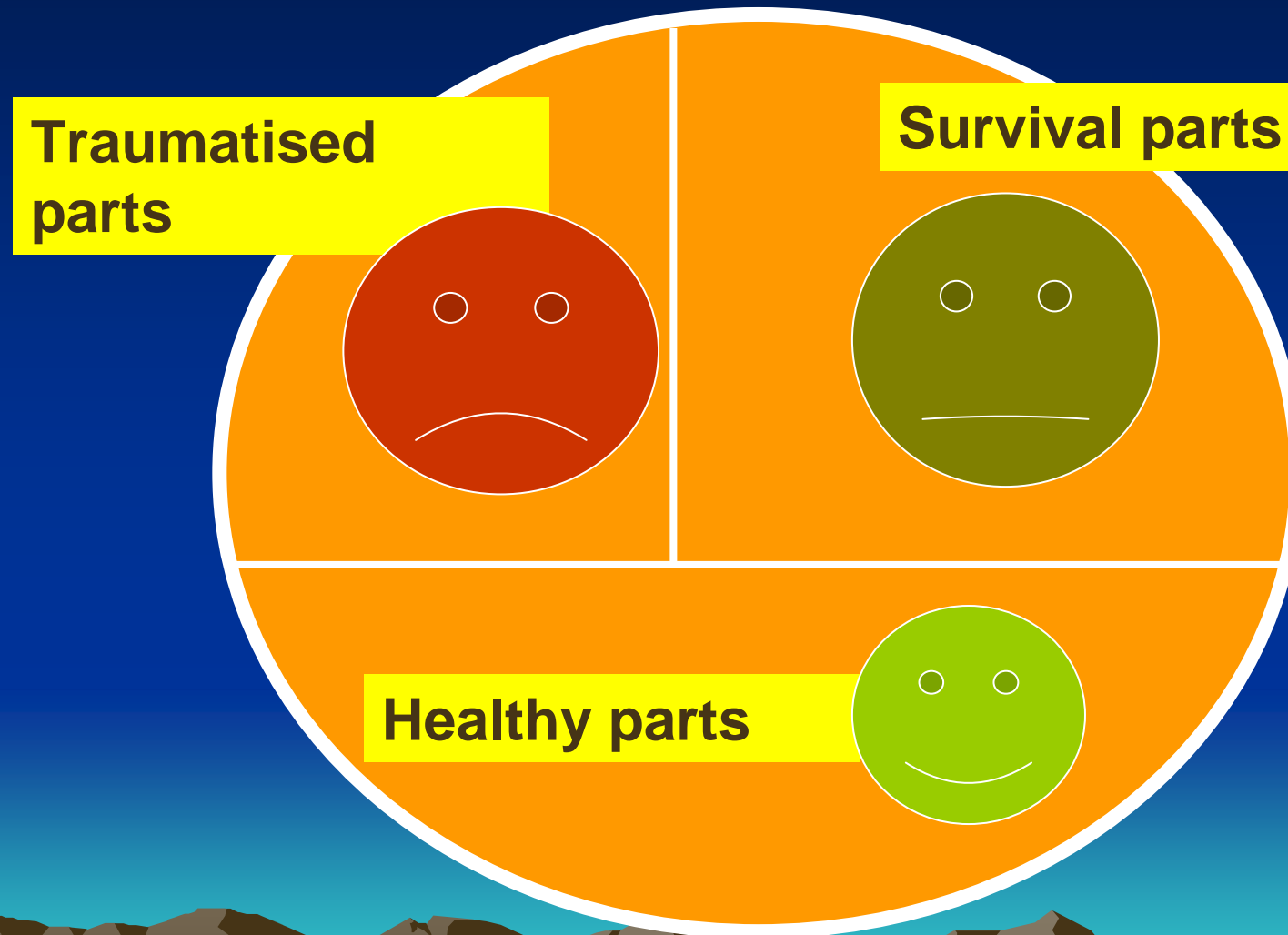
- A victim feels helpless and powerless
- His stress reactions (fight or flight) make the harm even greater
- Blocking, freezing, dissociating and splitting are psychic emergency reactions in order to survive
- It is not possible to reverse the harm that happens.

Different types of Trauma

- Trauma of Existential Threat
- Trauma of Loss
- Symbiotic Trauma (pre-, peri-, postnatal)
- Traumatisation of a whole bonding system

Every sort of trauma can produce a specific type of victim-perpetrator-dynamic

Splits in the personality structure after a traumatic experience



Being a Victim means

- Having undergone a traumatic experience
- Surviving it by splitting
- Being a victim stays present in the psychic structure/in the body
- Trauma-surviving strategies become necessary

Victim Attitudes as a Trauma-Surviving-Strategy (1)

- Suppressing impulses to fight or run away
- Submissiveness
- Denying being a victim
- Trying to be strong
- Suppressing memories of the trauma
- Feeling guilty
- Feeling that punishment is justified

Victim Attitudes as a Trauma-Surviving-Strategy (2)

- Suffering, lamenting, complaining without mentioning the real underlying reasons
- Chronic depression
- Chronic diseases
- Has ideals of harmony and peace

Victim Attitudes as a Trauma-Surviving-Strategy (3)

- Not seeing perpetrators as perpetrators
- Clinging emotionally to the perpetrators
- Protecting perpetrators
- Identifying with the needs of perpetrators
- Disgust at ones own weakness
- Self destructive behaviour
- Becoming a perpetrator oneself towards innocent others

Being a perpetrator as a traumatising experience

- Bad conscience
- Massive feelings of guilt
- Massive feelings of shame
- Fear of being socially despised

Perpetrator Attitudes as a Trauma surviving strategy (1)

- Not seeing the harm that they have done to another person
- Denying perpetrator deeds and facts
- Not feeling guilty, instead feeling righteous and justified
- Demonstrating a good conscience in social situations and in public
- Suppressing anxiety

Perpetrator Attitudes as a Trauma surviving strategy (2)

- Blaming victims, playing with their anxieties
- Feeling oneself as the victim
- Insulting victims
- Calling victims sick and insane people
- Claiming an ideology that justifies perpetrator actions as a higher and socially justified duty
- Feeling satisfaction in destruction and aggression

Antisocial personality disorder

is characterised by at least 3 of the following:



- Callous unconcern for the feelings of others and lack of capacity for empathy.
- Gross and persistent attitude of irresponsibility and disregard for social norms, rules, and obligations.
- Inability to maintain enduring relationships.

Antisocial personality disorder

- Very low tolerance of frustration and a low threshold for discharge of aggression, including violence.
- Inability to experience guilt and benefit from experience, particularly punishment.
- Markedly prone to blaming others or offer plausible rationalisations for their behavior bringing them into conflict.
- Persistent irritability. (ICD 10, F60.2)

Victim-Perpetrator Splitting (1)

- Split off victim experiences create victim and perpetrator attitudes as survival-strategies
- Victims become perpetrators and are not aware of their victim and perpetrator attitudes
- Numbness towards oneself becomes unempathetic behaviour towards others

Victim-Perpetrator Splitting (2)

- Pendulum swings between victim and perpetrator attitudes
- Alternating feelings of powerlessness and rebellious fury
- False atonement
- Revenge against innocent others
- Aggression and depression as normal in relationships
- Illusions of love as a fragile basis for living together with others

Victim-Perpetrator Splitting (3)

- A vicious cycle that sucks in more and more people
- A vicious cycle that goes on for generations
- Violence, murder, incest and sexual abuse become the norm
- Consequences: Traumatization of whole bonding systems which is dominated by trauma

Victim-Perpetrator Splitting (4)

- Criminal behaviour
- Personality Disorders, Dissociative Identity Disorders (DID), “Psychopath”
- Psychosis, Schizophrenia, Delusions,
- Chronic diseases e.g. auto-immune diseases, cancer
- Self destructive behaviour, suicide

Illusionary attempts to find a way out of the victim-perpetrator-splitting

- Revenge: wanting to destroy the perpetrator
- Rebellion: fighting blindly against the perpetrator
- Forgiving: trying to take away guilt and shame from the perpetrator
- Reconciliation: Ideals of harmony without integrating one's own victim or perpetrator trauma
- Escaping into the realms of spirituality

How to overcome the victim attitude?

- Acknowledging being a victim, i.e. feeling one's own trauma
- Seeing and accepting the harm that has been done to oneself
- Feeling compassion for oneself
- Realising one's own healthy strength
- Learning to protect one's personal boundaries
- Acknowledging one's own perpetrator attitudes

How to overcome the perpetrator attitude?

- Acknowledging the facts and deeds
- Accepting real guilt and responsibility
- Feeling one's anxieties and shame
- Feeling empathy towards the victim
- Offering compensation, making appropriate amends
- Renouncing the need for lifelong atonement

Without getting access to the fact of being a traumatized victim, perpetrators will not realize that they are perpetrators.



Living beyond the Victim-Perpetrator Splitting (1)

- Learning to regulate one's feelings (fear, rage, love)
- Continuous contact with oneself, healthy autonomy, clear boundaries
- Self respect, growing ability to deal with conflicts
- Leaving systems that are caught up in victim-perpetrator-dynamics
- Learning to live in constructive symbiotic relationships
- Creating win-win- instead of win-lose-situations



Literature

- Ruppert, F. (2008). Trauma, Bonding and Family Constellations. Frome (UK): Green Balloon Publishing.
- Ruppert, F. (2010). Splits in the Soul (2010). Frome (UK): Green Balloon Publishing.
- Ruppert, F. (2012). Symbiosis and Autonomy. Frome (UK): Green Balloon Publishing.