

“The healthy man does not torture others...it is the tortured who turn into torturers”

C.G. Jung

Discussing this line from Jung brought us immediately to the dynamics of groups and the behaviour we witness or experience regarding young children. Nature's weak and blameless ie children whom we cosset and nurture can display blood-chilling cruelty towards the weak, the less able or those who are simply different – even child cancer sufferers and sexual abuse victims.

Environments we most noted as mediums for a culture of abuse were on one hand schools- particularly boarding schools and also the army. Currently in the news we are frequently being made aware of the appalling sexual abuse of women in India which clearly involves torture and again group dynamics of a destructive nature due to the rampant misogyny of groups of young males in certain regions and parts of society there.

In trying to connect the different sides of the coin, we found matters were not black and white. We noted that the abuse of power by army officers with for example their mind games could serve as a tool to create survivors and as such be a useful training of which some people are glad. However, this sort of character building might not be sought out again as a source of further self-development! The rough and tumble of boarding school is loved by some and hated by others. There can be no doubt that those boys and girls who experience bullying or are terrorised by their peers bare life-long memories or scars they would be better without. However, the harsh group environment of boarding school will not by definition spawn monsters and could even produce some more moderate adults. Similarly, not all women survivors of abuse in India will go on to abuse their own children.

Perhaps it was easier to begin with to contemplate the torture at work in groups but we did acknowledge that something in our very own consciousness abuses the weak – that we need to accept our own innate cruelty. There are amongst us natural born killers as well as natural born healers. So not every torturer was once a victim. We asked if bullying could in fact be described as torture. Perhaps many victims would do so while very few bullies would. So are bullies not in fact a tyranny of the weak – unable or too weak to control their own destructive urges and instead forcing others to experience what they themselves cannot bear? It was suggested that stated Ethical Codes might be a source of help and some antidote to the negative dynamics that can come into play amongst any given group.

Broadly the group agreed with Jung's perspective but it was with qualification. Of course, the healthy man or woman does not torture but only some of those who are tortured go on to become torturers. Witnessing another's pain might serve to relieve one's own rather than being stuck in it. We were reminded of the Jamie Bolger murder case of 1993 in the UK. We have all experienced suffering and given the right conditions we all have the potential to be torturers. The thing is we don't all turn to the bad even if we've been dealt a bad hand. If instead we said that..... it is the tortured who *can turn into torturers* then we would have probably agreed completely.