

The Profile of an Abuser

It's not easy to identify an abusive person by his appearance. Unlike the graphic on the front of this issue of FOCUS, an abuser does not grow horns and look like a snorting bull just before he smacks you across the face or hurls an arsenal of verbal weapons at you.

Many abusers are very charming, well-dressed, cultured people who act one way in public and another way at home. It is wrong to characterize an abuser as someone who is a drug addict or an alcoholic because most abusers are not either of those.

"Researchers in the field of abuse have drawn a variety of profiles of abusive men after years of working closely with them. These researchers identify eight groups of batterers:

1. Men unable to control their impulses, who change swiftly in a Dr. Jekyll-Mr. Hyde pattern
2. Men who demand strict adherence to rules and, with no emotion, mete out punishment to those who break them
3. Men who are rebellious, hostile, dependent, and low in self-esteem
4. Men who are aggressive and antisocial
5. Men who exhibit great and inexplicable mood swings
6. Men who are outwardly pleasant, but unable to handle rejection, and aggressive when they feel their wife or girlfriend has let them down
7. Men who are excessively dependent, anxious, and depressed
8. Men who show only minor signs of the other seven characteristics and have no psychopathology

It is believed that the majority of abusers do not act out of mental illness, but instead from the socially developed use of immature or neurotic defense mechanisms to satisfy—or seek to satisfy—the emotional needs that may have been unfulfilled in childhood.”¹

What are defense mechanisms? They are the ways people handle conflicts. One person may handle failure by blaming someone else or striking out in rage while another person may either deny it or laugh it off.

Most abusers use three defense mechanisms: repression, acting out, and projection.

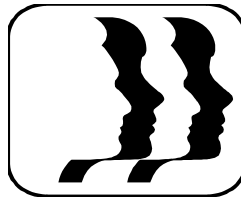
Repression

Repression is collecting deep hurts, fear,

anger, and unexpressed feelings inside until those feelings spew out like a volcano on an unsuspecting victim, giving the abuser a feeling of relief and power over a weaker person.

The abuser may have grown up with a overly strict, controlling father who belittled and beat him for the slightest infraction. All through childhood the abuser may have repressed his anger in fear of further retaliation from his father.

“Statistics indicate that a large percentage of abusive men were themselves abused as children. That they as adults, as a means of relieving the rage packed years earlier into their subconscious for survival's sake, disgorge it on their women follows logically.



What weaker person can they find? Who more helpless than the woman dependent on them for their survival as

they once depended on their father? Obviously the children of a wife abuser are equally dependent on him, yet he abuses them less frequently; first, because society is more watchful of child abuse than of wife abuse; and **second, because it is to his advantage to use his children not as an object of abuse but rather as a weapon of abuse against his wife.”²**

It is believed that even though a child has been abused by a parent, they will continue to defend them to anyone who points out their parent's wrongdoing. Some abused children will even lie to defend their parents, deny that they suffered any abuse, make up excuses for injuries that were inflicted upon them, and often believe they deserved the ill treatment from their parents.

This is because parents represent a security base for children, something they can count on in life, and they will do anything to keep it intact. As they grow, they identify more and more with their abusive parent (the good guys punishing the bad guys), finally taking on the role of the abusive parent by inflicting abuse on their girlfriends and wives.

Acting Out

This defense mechanism is a very immature behavior in which the abuser acts out his anger instead of allowing himself to feel it because the tension is too much to bear.

Abusive acting out includes screaming, breaking or throwing things, destroying

someone else's property, and all types of physical violence (from pushing and shoving to battering).

If an abusive man learned to manipulate both parents as a child in order to get his way (if one parent says no, go to the other parent who might say yes), he has learned the fine art of manipulation which can be used as an adult to control his wife through implied threats and other nonphysical abuses. If an abusive man repressed his rage as a child, he may now act out the rage at his wife which he dared not hurl at his parents.

Projection

“Projection grants the abuser self-righteousness because on the conscious level he sees himself as the perfect husband, and the defense mechanism works to obliterate what seethes in his unconscious. On the conscious level his wife becomes a helpless failure, his responsibility to keep in line and make over, and the defense mechanism works to render him blameless. As a result, he feels no more guilt over his treatment of her than the schoolmaster who raps the knuckles of the spitball-throwing student or the slave owner who rapes his wife's housemaid.”³

The abuser who uses projection as his defense mechanism often says, “You always start it!”, “You won't do what I tell you.”, “You made me hit you.” One man, who was screaming at his wife, said “Don't get so hysterical” when she hadn't even said a word! Another more psychopathic abuser assaulted his wife and then accused her of assaulting him!

Although the above research into the behavior of abusive men may be valid, it would be unwise to leave out the spiritual dimension in which men are influenced and guided by evil rather than by the Spirit of God. Even though a man may have been abused as a child and suffered great pain, **he still has a choice** to seek healing from the Lord and freedom from his evil thoughts and actions.

Some abusers have embraced evil and are permeated with the desire to inflict pain and destroy anyone who exposes or confronts them. **All the understanding and therapy in the world won't penetrate their darkness. Turning to God is their only hope.**

¹ No Visible Wounds, Mary Miller (p. 115-116)

² Ibid (p. 119)

³ Ibid (p. 122)