

# **Analysis of Contributing Factors to Development of Self when Exposed to Violence**

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## **Abstract:**

This paper outlines case studies of two men who were subjected to abuse during their childhood. Sociological and psychological theories are considered when an individual experiences inconsistent and dysfunctional caring. The sociological elements in the development of self will be addressed and how cultural norms can impact on the balance of power within society. The history of society's view of violence within the family is considered and the historical context in which it emerged as a social problem are compared to the abuse suffered by the subjects of the case study. The paper addresses the need for a psychosocial approach when violence disrupts the formation of self and impairs psychological development.

**Key Words:** abuse, violence, mirroring, a psychosocial approach

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*To be that self which one truly is  
(Kierkegaard, as cited in Rogers 1976, p. 110)*

The aim of this paper is to examine, in detail, case studies of two men who were born around the same time and both who suffered abuse. Having been exposed to domestic violence through my developmental years, I was drawn to this area of analysis in an attempt to reveal why I survived such trauma and others did not. Also, is my survival due to some innate strength I was fortunate enough to possess? Or was it due to a combination of events that ensured my survival? Since writing this paper I have decided to start a journey of discovery in my own on-going therapy to better understand how I survived as a young child. The case studies used in this paper were selected from a published biography and autobiography. They provided the opportunity to compare and contrast two vastly different outcomes for victims of abuse. One appears to display remarkable resilience, in contrast to the second, whose life ends in tragedy. To

try and fully understand the reasons why their lives took such differing directions it is necessary to adopt a psychosocial approach. To comprehend why an individual's mind develops in a certain way, consideration must be given to the structure, development and functioning of the society within which the person exists. To start, it is necessary to delve into the experiences of childhood, through their engagement with their carers, and then how they draw from this engagement to equip themselves - or not - with the required tools to function within society.

The chosen area is vast and one can easily be drawn down various avenues of enquiry. This report will focus on the early interaction between infant and care-giver, and how that contributes to the development of the self or, as Fonagy and colleague's term, the 'psychic self' (Fonagy et al, 2002, p.4). Their work focuses on the psychological self, which they believe evolves from infancy through childhood and whose development is critically dependent upon the interaction with the more mature minds, which are both benign and reflective in their turn.

Consideration will be given to the possible outcomes if a child is exposed to dysfunctional caring. The work of John Bowlby and his theory on attachment styles, written in 1969, will be included. He believed the child adopts a similar style of attachment to that of their parent. Also, during the early years, a child will form strong affectional bonds to a particular other and if unwilling detachment arises this could lead to emotional distress and personality disorder (Bowlby, 2005). Gerhardt (2004) also believes "our minds and our emotions become organised through engagement with other minds, not in isolation" (p. 15). She addresses the biological process that takes place within the development of the child's brain in the early stages. She believes without the appropriate interaction with others the development of the brain will be impaired. Again reinforcing the argument that the social forces an individual are exposed to in the early years has an immense impact on the developmental process.

Therefore, if one takes the studies of Bowlby, Gerhardt and Fonagy in isolation, and posit that the environment a child is exposed to hugely affects the early years of development, it would then follow that all siblings should emerge in very similar ways. This is an area that is addressed by James (2002), who claims "each individual child's nurture is particular to that child and she develops her own niche in the family as a result of receiving radically different care" (p.39). James believes that each child enters the family environment a different stage from those of their siblings. The marriage could be gradually deteriorating and therefore the environment more hostile. Also, parent's treatment of each of their children is different, and he suggests that one of the reasons for this is due to gender.

The final area addressed in part two is the question: Is an individual's psychic reality innate; or is it, as suggested above, a product of the influences children are exposed to in their early years? An understanding of this area might contribute towards understanding why one victim appeared to survive his abuse and the other did not. Was the first born with some inherited inner strength, or self-belief, or was he fortunate to be exposed to the right environment at the right time? Doctor Susan Blackmore (2005) addresses this area when discussing consciousness. She believes to talk about consciousness is to talk about subjectivity. This area of research is vast and will therefore only be touched on briefly. To reflect its complexity, Chalmers phrased it 'the hard problem' (Chalmers, 1995 as cited in Blackmore, 2003, p.21). Also, Blackmore claimed that to try and locate exactly how our subjectivity emerges is like trying to look into the darkness (Blackmore, 2005).

Having looked at psychological approaches to development, the final section will examine the sociological aspects. It will pose the question of why no intervention was forthcoming when the victims were being abused and also why the victims themselves did not inform anyone outside of the family about the abuse. It will begin by examining some of the changes that modern living has brought on individual behaviour. Craib (1994) believes the systematic social changes that have occurred have led to the notion that an individual's emotional life can be managed and organised; this leads to the phantasy of the all-powerful self (p.97). Bettelheim (1960) refers to the intolerance society shows when individuals do not match the social norms.

Horley (2005) tackles the issue of violence within the family, in particular the imbalance of power that is found there and the apparent tolerance society attributes to it. Barnett and colleagues highlight exactly when violence within the home was deemed a social problem, and not just a social condition (Barnett et al, 1997). This will help to give possible reasons why the intervention mentioned above did not take place. When examining the modes of intervention that are available, Yllo raises the issue that there is yet no over-arching theory when addressing violence within the home (Yllo as cited in Hansen et al, 1998).

Having pulled back and examined the broader sociological issues, the final section of the paper will address the issue of social isolation and the lack of social integration, which was evident in both case studies. John Demos illustrates clearly how social changes have had an impact on how society self-monitors (Demos as cited in Hansen, 1998, p.661). It also considers how society reacts to individuals when they do not conform or meet social norms. The emotion of shame will be adduced to help address the possible reasons why the victim did not feel able to notify the authorities and why society did not intervene sooner.

## Part One: Psychosocial Selves

To begin this analysis it is first necessary to outline the areas of David's and Stuart's lives that had the most impact on the development of their psychological selves. In the first five years of *David Pelzer's* life his environment seemed stable, but his mother's behaviour was extreme. She pushed herself to maintain most aspects of her life to the highest standards possible, instilling in her children the mentality that they must do their best at all times whatever the task. One reason for this extreme behaviour could be what Fonagy (2004) terms an imbalance in an individual's psychic reality. 'Psychic reality' is the subjective experience influenced by unconscious processes. For example a neurotic adult will attribute more importance to their internal reality than their external.

When trying to plot the first five years of *Stuart Shorter's* life, difficulties are encountered. When asked about them Stuart would reply, "I blew it out" (Masters, 2005, p.271). When pushed for an explanation he claimed he could not remember events from his past due to the amount of prescribed anti-psychotic drugs he had taken.

"Cos that's what a lot of the anti-psychotic I've had over the years are designed for, to stop you from lying there brooding, going over and over the same things. When I go on a really bad one, start smashing things up, cutting meself, it's because of all the thoughts that are still there, but there's no reality to them any more, there's no visual reality, it's just feelings within" (Masters, 2005, p.272).

Research into Stuart's past revealed that during his initial years he was exposed to a violent relationship between his parents. Stuart's mother claimed his father would beat her whether sober or drunk. The grandparents declared they could hear the screams from two houses away. By the time Stuart was five his parents had divorced and his mother went on to marry a quiet placid man (Masters, 2005, p. 201). By this time Bowlby's (1988) theory would predict Stuart's attachment style had been formed. Bowlby believed the tendency to treat others in the same way that we have been treated is deep in human nature. This could account for the emergence of violence, which dominated Stuart's life in later years. Having been exposed to extreme violence in his early years Stuart joined a mainstream school. Unfortunately he inherited a condition from his father termed muscular dystrophy. During a P. E. lesson he fell and cut his mouth, an event which led to the school declaring him unfit for mainstream education and he was sent to a school for the severely disabled, which involved him being picked up from his home in what the local children called the 'the Spaggy Bus' (Masters, 2005, p.196). If they saw the bus coming by they would run alongside it, laughing and waving their arms. Whilst attending the school Stuart was described by one teacher as "an affectionate little boy, but could sometimes be a little buggier". I always felt I wanted to rescue him and take him home – from what

I did not know” (ibid p.5). Stuart had to endure the stigma enforced on him by his peers; Scrambler defined “Stigma is a societal reaction that spoils normal identity” (Scambler, 1987, p.139). One of the types of stigma Goffman (1963) identifies is attributed to an individual suffering from physical deformities, the consequence in which ordinary social intercourse is turned away.

In contrast, the period between the ages of five and twelve was when David was subjected to extreme physical abuse at the hands of his mother. He was made to wear the same clothes to school day after day and he was not allowed to travel to school in the family car with the rest of his siblings, but made to run (Pelzer, 1995, p.58). Due to the lack of food he was given at home David began to steal food from his fellow pupils. He was eventually caught and his mother notified, which led to further beatings and his becoming an outcast at school. She started to refer to him as ‘it’ in an attempt to psychologically disassociate herself from him. He was made to sleep in the garage, having been told he was not good enough to sleep upstairs. His father appeared powerless to intervene in David’s suffering. At the age of twelve David was taken into care due to the intervention of his teachers. He had suffered abuse at the hands of his mother for seven years, and during that time he had displayed various injuries. The school had recorded his injuries for several months before they alerted the police. The lack of intervention is a reflection of the reluctance of society to intervene within the family unit. It is important to note that David’s abuse did not start until he was five years old; therefore he had a time in his life to develop a secure attachment style. It could be suggested that this would have sustained his psychological well-being during his most trying times. Siegel (1999) claims longitudinal studies of attachment styles have found that early relationship styles can promote social competence, cognitive functioning and resilience in the face of adversity.

In comparison, around the age of nine Stuart’s brother Gavvy would climb into his bed at night and sexually abuse him, “touch him up” (Masters, 2005, p.254). A few months after this Gavvy involved a male babysitter and the assault became more penetrative and aggressive. In the years ahead when Stuart was consumed with the memories of these assaults he would reach for the nearest available implement and injure himself. When asked if it hurts he replied ‘yes, but at the same time it’s pleasurable. Not sexually pleasurable, but it’s not like ordinary pain. It’s like you are separated from it. There is a sense of unity, the physical act displaces the mental pain” (Masters, 2005, p.123). At the age of twelve, whilst walking home, Stuart was tormented by local youths, who called him ‘spaghetti legs, bandy boy, vegetable’. He eventually turned around and head-butted the tallest bully. This was to prove to be a pivotal moment for Stuart; he discovered violence and felt it gave him power. Later Stuart confessed that this incident released or created an aspect of his personality that he had always toyed with, but kept at arm’s length. It became too strong for him and began to dominate his behaviour.

Later in his life Stuart describes this feeling:

“Somebody who’s educated could probably control it better, because they’ve got a stronger mind. The more I try and control it the worse it gets. There’s no set pattern for my rage now. I don’t even ever see it coming. I have these conversations with myself, where the more I try and calm myself often the worse I get. That’s the bit I hate. I lie there fantasising, talking to myself, having mad conversations. I won’t get out of bed for a couple of days, won’t go out the house, won’t undo the windows, won’t answer the door, won’t answer the phone. Then I start getting paranoid. Well, I call it paranoid, but the doctors keep saying to me, that’s not paranoid, it’s anxiety. I beg to differ” (Masters, 2005, p. 228).

Stuart’s doctor diagnosed him as having Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). At the age of twelve Stuart was sent back to a mainstream school, but he had now developed a coping mechanism - using violence to silence the bullies. He claimed “the same people who use to be cruel, were now cautious” (Masters, 2005, p. 259). After six months he was expelled. Applying Sigmund Freud’s theory of development to Stuart, the way Stuart describes the violent incident as releasing or even creating an aspect of his personality. Freud would believe that this incident tapped into Stuart’s unconscious; the violence he had witnessed as a very young child was now being re-enacted, the behaviour which he had internalised and repressed within his id. Crain (1980) describes the id as “containing basic drives and reflexes, along with images and sensations that have been repressed” (p. 265).

At the age of twelve Stuart repeatedly demanded to be put into care; he had run away from home constantly for the past year. One night he smashed the house and threatened his mother with a knife, screaming he would kill the young children if she did not let him go. Years later he disclosed that whilst his mother had been out Gavvy and the babysitter had sodomised him with a milk bottle. The trauma Stuart was exposed to and the fact he did not disclose to his mother what he was being subjected to was, added to his psychopathology. The more consistent, chronic and intense the insufficiency of the carer the more likelihood there is for the child to develop negative and unhealthy characteristics. “More significant than the trauma itself is the absence of the healing and supportive relationship following the traumatic experience; it is this absence that transforms the experience from a painful, one-time incident to a script-forming trauma” (Moursund and Erskine, 2004, p.52).

Both boys were placed into care at the age of twelve, but the main difference was that David was immediately placed with foster parents whereas Stuart was placed in a care home. David received the love and support he had lacked for many years, but Stuart continued to be sexually abused by the man who ran the care home. Stuart continued to run away from the home, became involved in crime, which resulted in his incarceration in one of Her Majesty’s

prisons. This was to become a pattern in his life, at the time of his death he had ninety-eight criminal convictions. Whilst in prison his violent behaviour continued. When the prison officers tried to restrain him during a violent outburst, it would only serve to increase the violence. Stuart would say “I used to go in such a state, just so I didn’t feel nothing. Get yourself so fucking psyched out, so you couldn’t feel it when they are jumping on you, pinning you down” (Master, 2005, p.262). When his mother was attacking him, David’s coping mechanism was to totally disconnect himself from all the physical pain. He states “whenever mother struck me, it was as if she were taking her aggressions out on a rag doll. Inside, my emotions swirled back and forth between fear and intense anger. But outside I was a robot, rarely revealing my emotions; only when I thought it would please The Bitch and work to my advantage” (Pelzer, 1995, p.131).

In contrast to Stuart, between the ages of twelve and fifteen, David did get himself into trouble with the law but this behaviour did not last. David entered the local school suffering some disadvantages. His social skills were poor and he had to have extra lessons to improve his speech. He suffered numerous disappointments from his father who would arrange to spend time with him but fail to turn up. This resulted in David becoming very rebellious; because his social skills were so poor he found it hard to make friends. He began to steal from local shops to impress his peers. He became embroiled in an allegation of setting light to the school and was placed in a Juvenile Hall. This appeared to be a turning point in David’s life; he started to work extremely hard at everything he did. This was to become a trait; it could be suggested that it was mirroring his mother’s previous trait, and that he would carry it for the rest of his life.

He struggled to enlist in the United States Air Force, having to undertake extra tuition to ensure entry. Throughout his early adult years he was plagued by self-doubt, always looking for answers to why he was abused as a child. He felt drawn to work with children who had been abused to, encouraging them to break the cycle of abuse. He found it hard to commit to his first serious relationship, always keeping his girlfriend at a distance. She became pregnant and they married, but it was not to be a happy marriage as David could not bring himself to truly open up to his wife or indeed to trust her. Their marriage ended and this sent David crashing into a solitary existence, where he spent most of his spare time cleaning his new home to extreme lengths. He did not feel worthy of even going to the cinema, full of self-loathing because he felt he had let his son down by allowing the marriage to fail. He eventually married again, and it was only when he met his second wife that he realised he had been fighting for most of his life to be the best he could be. Oliver James believes children find their own place within the family; he terms it as ‘scripting our place in the family’ (James, 2002, p. 44). He believes each child develops particular strategies to gain their parent’s attention. One such strategy a child can adopt is the ‘*dominant goal*’. Many successful people are afflicted by self-criticism, feelings of unworthiness, inferiority and guilt. They may set themselves impossible standards, strive to

achieve perfection and are highly competitive. Unfortunately they are always plagued with the feeling that their best is never good enough (p. 62).

Stuart's life became a cycle of self-abuse and violent outbursts. In between prison sentences he lived on the street. The author of the book, Alexander Masters, first met him whilst he was sitting in a doorway in Cambridge city centre. Stuart informed him that he planned to kill himself and to make it look like murder. When asked how he would achieve this Stuart replied, "I'll taunt all the drunk fellas coming out of the pub until they have to kill me if they want a bit of peace. Me brother killed himself in May. I couldn't put me mum through that again. She wouldn't mind murder so much" (Masters, 2005, p.13). Stuart had supportive family, loyal friends and could even get a job, but he chose to remain on the streets. When asked why he had messed it up, he replied, "I don't know, sometimes it gets so bad you can't think of nothing better to do than make it worse" (ibid p.39).

David displayed resilience in his life, always striving to be the best he could be, and he later became a successful writer. Stuart showed a different determination. Throughout the stories of Stuart's life he would always show a grim willfulness, a determination not to be thwarted. "Sometimes it would come across as a display of spirit, sometimes as idiotic defiance in the face of failure. He simply keeps going until either brute force or exhaustion steps in and puts a stop to him" (Masters, 2005, p.177). Before Stuart died he made a tape recording of his thoughts one night for the author of the book. In this recording he summarized his feeling about his life. He felt anger towards the injustice he had suffered whilst young, and he recalls reporting the abuse he had suffered at the hands of his brother and babysitter but frustrated no action was taken. Stuart claimed the more he spoke about it the more people did not believe him, so he just carried on, not wanting to be here anymore, feeling dirty and disgusting. He stated, "I wanted just to lay down and die. I felt so dirty, and fucking horrible and hated and attacked anyone I got close to. I can't even have a relationship if I want it because I think sex is dirty and disgusting. I just wish once there could be an escape from this madness" (ibid p.191).

Comparing the lives of these men, it is clear that they hold similarities in the fact that they both suffered abuse from their families, but there would appear to be some crucial differences. Firstly, David's first five years were free from physical abuse, while Stuart witnessed the physical abuse towards his mother from his father. They both did endure abuse from the age of five years to twelve. They both experienced the shame and stigma forced onto them by their peers. David displayed poor social skills and Stuart had a physical disability. Stuart responded with violence but David strived to impress by stealing from local shops. Both boys were placed into care at the age of twelve. David went to a caring foster home, and developed a supportive and caring relationship with his carers. Stuart was placed in a care home where his abuse continued, and he



responded by continually running away, eventually to live on the streets. Finally, David pursued the need to help others and as a consequence became a successful writer, but Stuart could never find peace, always fighting the painful memories of his past. To try and delve into the reasons why one man took one route and not the other, it is necessary to start at the beginning of the development of the self, to apply psychological theories to the relationship a child experiences with their carers and how they emerge with a sense of self.

## **Part Two: The Psychological Self**

The first developmental theory that will be applied is that of Bowlby, who is one of the most prominent voices in this field, and renowned for his Attachment theory, which was presented in 1969 in a paper called '*Attachment and Loss*' (Cassidy and Shaver, 1996). Bowlby believed children should achieve a sense of security from the attachment they form towards their carers, by their interaction with them from birth. Through the responses they receive, such as touching, holding and soothing, this will strengthen their attachment. The experience of security is the goal of the attachment system, which is thus first and foremost a regulator of emotional experience; a child will adjust its behaviour according to the responses he or she receives from the carer. When frightened by a new experience it will seek out the caregiver for reassurance. Bowlby believes that by the end of the first year the child will have developed its own representational systems which he terms as the Internal Working Model (IWM) (Stroufe, 1996 as cited in Fonagy, 1999). The child's IWM will effect how it interacts with others throughout its adult life. It provides a prototype for all later relationships, and such models are relatively stable across the lifespan (Collins and Read, 1994 as cited in Fonagy, 1999). However, Bowlby (1988) also states:

“Although the capacity for developmental change diminishes with age, change continues throughout the life cycle so that changes for the better or for the worse are always possible. It is this continuing potential for change that means that at no time of life is a person invulnerable to every possible adversity and also that at no time of life is a person impermeable to favourable influence” (p. 154).

David's first five years were relatively stable, although he was subjected to his mother's obsessional behaviour of striving for high standards in all areas of her life. Due to this stability David should have initially developed a sound internal working model. In contrast, Stuart witnessed a violent relationship between his parents in his first year. Bowlby (1988) believed this can lead to the child showing an unusual sensitivity towards the needs of his carer. This could go some way to explaining why Stuart was reluctant about telling his mother about the abuse he was suffering at the hands of his brother.

Fonagy and colleagues build on Bowlby's theory and the (IWM). They believe its development creates a processing system for the self, the capacity to interpret human behaviour, to make sense of each other. Fonagy terms another process as having an 'Interpersonal Interpretive Mechanism' (IIM). He differentiates this from Bowlby's IWM because the IIM does not just process previous attachment experiences, it processes new experiences. He compares it to possessing a 'theory of mind', the ability to attribute independent mental states to others in order to explain and predict their behaviour (Leslie, 1987 as cited in Fonagy 2002).

The 'theory of mind' (Baron-Cohen, 1995) demonstrates how a child's psychic reality develops from 0 – 4 years. The definition of the theory of mind is: "The ability to attribute intentional mental states – goals, desires and beliefs to oneself or others as an explanation for actions, and this is not fully developed until 4 years of age" (Wellman, 1990 as cited in Fonagy, 2002, p.261). At around 3 the child displays psychic equivalence, where ideas are not felt to be representations, but rather direct replicas of reality and consequently always true. Alternatively the child uses pretend modes, through play it enables ways of functioning that are rarely used, developmentally suppressed, or only just being formed to occupy centre stage (Fonagy, 2002). This playing or pretending at times reveals surprising competencies, while at other times it offers opportunities for regression and the expression of unconscious concerns. It is at this stage that it is crucial that the child receives a secure loving environment and effective mirroring, to explore these new skills. In the fourth or fifth year, the psychic equivalence and pretend mode normally become increasingly integrated, and a reflective or mentalizing mode of 'psychic reality' is established (Gopnik, 1993). It could be suggested that both men in the case studies failed to receive the secure environment to 'play with reality'; Stuart experienced deep rage when life became difficult and David displayed compulsive tendencies.

The term 'psychic reality' is usually used to describe a subjective experience that takes place as a result of an unconscious process (Michels, 1984). Freud's original concept was "thought reality" versus "external reality". Laplanche and Pontalis (1973) give the definition of psychic reality as: "whatever in the subject's psyche presents a consistency and resistance comparable to those displayed by material reality" (Fonagy, 2002, p.255). Freud believed that psychic reality poses danger when there is imperfect discrimination between stimuli from the outer world and stimuli that stems from products of the unconscious process. For example an obsessional person "knows" that the door is locked but still checks several times, because for him the internal image of the unsecured house has much more meaning and power than the external images provided by his senses. This could contribute to explaining David's preoccupation with cleanliness and how this intensified at times of stress and anxiety. He would repeatedly clean the house over and over again even though the external reality was that it was already clean.

Fonagy (2002) and colleagues claim the self is originally an extension of the experience of the other. Caregivers and siblings are crucial in helping three to four year olds to accept the two realities, the internal and the external, without needing to split their ego functioning to maintain dual modes of thinking. There is a need for adults to play along, to adopt a 'as if' attitude to pretend games. So they know that his thoughts or feelings are not 'for real'. Linking his internal state to a perception of that state outside offers a representation – a symbol – of internal state. If the adult's attitude precludes the duality of holding the frame of external reality while offering mirroring or reflection, the child's transition towards integration and mentalization may be jeopardized, as in the lives of David and Stuart. The importance of the process is not simply play, but play that breaks away from psychic equivalence, while refraining from contact with reality. In other words, the child, using the parent's mind, is able to *play with reality*. 'This provides us with the capacity for seeing ourselves in interaction with others and for entertaining another point of view whilst retaining our own, for reflecting ourselves whilst being ourselves' (Britton, 1987). To fail to do this would then lead to the claim that the true self is lost, as the individual merely adopts the image of the carer and those around them. A weakened sense of self perpetuates the feeling of detachment and emptiness. When David was asked to explain why he always strived to achieve the best, no matter what the task, he replied "because that's all I had! I got nothing else! It's all I am! It's all I've ever known. If I quit back then, once for just a second...it could have been all over. I got nothing else all my life" (Masters, 2005, p.376). This is a clear example of what Fonagy termed as the self-being an extension of the experience of the other. David internalised the mother's behaviour he witnessed in his first five years.

Fonagy and his colleagues claim that we must assume, as do most cognitivists working in this area, that the development of theory of mind is as Waddington's (1966) use of the term, canalised, but the canal is dug not by biology, but by infant-parent interaction. So to understand the nature of the mental world is a task that cannot be done alone; it requires the understanding of the self in the eye of the other. Fonagy suggests that where the parent is unable to incorporate and think about a piece of reality and cannot then enable the child to do so safely, through playing with the frightening ideas, this reality remains to be experienced in the mode of psychic equivalence. Neither child nor parent can 'metabolise' the thoughts, and so the 'unthinkable' thoughts are passed on from one generation to the next (Fonagy, 2002, p.287). The essence of what Fonagy is saying is that the self arises out of the infant's perception of the intentionality of the caregiver, and if the child experiences insensitive miss-attuned parents, a fault will develop in the construction of the psychological self. He also believes that the understanding of subjectivity is essential in understanding the mental mechanisms that emerge from early development. He suggests the infant attachment function makes possible the development of the 'interpersonal

interpretive mechanism' and the quality of this early development plays a major role in determining the robustness of this capacity throughout life.

Siegel (1999) addresses the issues surrounding the regulation of emotions resulting from attachment styles. He believes that human emotions represent the primary value system the brain uses to help organize its functioning. He states "the communication with and about emotions between parent and infant directly shape the child's ability to organize the self" (p.278). Gerhardt (2004) addresses the development of the brain. She claims "the orbitofrontal cortex of the brain is developed in the first three years of a child's life, and is responsible for managing emotional behaviour and responding to other people and their emotional cues" (p.36). Its development is dependent on the child's interaction with her carers and without appropriate contact the development will be impaired. Gerhardt describes the process as "when we are babies, our brains are socially programmed by the older members of our community, so that we adapt to the particular family and social group we must live among" (ibid: 38). In a sense, the human baby is invited to play a part in human culture.

Regarding the development of the self, Fonagy builds on Gerhardt's concept by claiming that infants who experience disorganised attachment develop a preoccupation with self-generated perfect contingencies in the attachment context. This is supported by evidence by Koós and Gergely (2001). They go on to state "It is clear that, associated with certain extreme social dysfunctions – such as childhood maltreatment, environmental trauma of various kinds – an individual's capacity to behave with any degree of flexibility comes to be compromised" (Fonagy, 2002, p.250). They go on to suggest that this level of inflexibility could be due to the individual's unconscious need to rediscover the self in response to the other and therefore reactivate the need for higher levels of anticipated responsiveness. This could contribute to explaining Stuart's display of inflexibility, his refusal to be thwarted when circumstances were stacked against him. On one occasion he recounted how he had entered a shop to try and buy a tin of glue, but the shop assistant refused to sell it to him. Stuart returned to the same shop later that day and took the glue off the shelf and attempted to run out of the shop. Considering the fact that Stuart had to leave his first shop because it had too many steps, the likelihood of him out running the shop assistant was minimal. The incident led to his arrest. It could be surmised that this is a good example of Stuart's unconscious need to rediscover the self in response to the other and therefore reactivate the need for higher levels of anticipated responsiveness. In acting out these familiar scenarios there lies a hope that it will be different.

The question Fonagy asks is psychic reality experienced like pain or are thoughts, beliefs, desires and mental states a construction of our minds, built up in the early years of our development. Searl (1983) believes psychic reality is intrinsic, that we are born with it, it is 'a given'. C G Jung also believes that deep

in our unconscious is an inherent primitive archetype; he proposes this represents the self, it is our unconscious striving for centeredness and meaning (Jung 1961, as cited in Crain, 1980, p.341). Freud believed that the unconscious contains the developmental process in the individual child but also reflects the entire history of the human race. Therefore individuals have their own private life history, which emerges during dream work and analysis, but there is also a bigger picture common to all of us, which is not acquired by learning (Snowdon 2006).

Blackmore believes that to talk about consciousness is to talk about subjectivity (Blackmore, 2001). When exploring this area the dualism argument cannot be ignored because to study consciousness by sticking purely to the neurological aspects would be to deny one's own subjectivity. To accept that the physical brain causes experiences and subjectivity then is to bridge the gap, or as William James would call it, " 'the chasm' between the inner and outer worlds" (James, 1890 as cited in Blackmore, 2001, p.19). An Australian philosopher, Chalmers (1994) proposed that the challenges consciousness presents could be divided into two groups, the 'easy' problems and the 'hard problems'. The easy problems are those that can be explained by cognitive science, such as accessing and reporting mental states, deliberate control of behavior, make a distinction between different stimuli. All these areas can be explained by using scientific methods. "The really 'hard' area is how one can '*experience* what it is like to *be* an organism, or to *be in* a given mental state" (Blackmore, 2003, p.20). When an individual performs all the functions that can be explained by cognitive science why do they have to be accompanied by experience? Chalmers states 'why doesn't all this information processing go on 'in the dark', free of any inner feel? (Chalmers, 1995 as cited in Blackmore, 2003). It is the 'inner feel' that leads to extensive, continued debate.

To try and drill down to what developmental factors contributed towards David's survival and Stuart's demise, involves examining a plethora of complex developmental stages, each one vastly influenced by environmental factors. From the *attachment styles* the men were exposed to, the forming of their *internal working model* or as Fonagy termed it, the interpersonal interpretive mechanism, to the forming of the theory of mind and psychic equivalence to psychic reality are to be considered. All these stages of development contribute to the individual's unconscious and conscious drives. It is here that the uniqueness of the individual emerges, why no two individuals are exactly the same. Ultimately, whatever external experiences individuals are exposed to, they and only they can arrange and organise them internally.

### **Part Three: The Sociological Impact on the Self**

Having addressed the psychological developments of the self it is now necessary to draw back from the minutiae and focus on the sociological aspects of David's and Stuart's lives. Both men were exposed to violence within their family unit, with disastrous consequences. The aim of this part of the paper is to ascertain why no intervention was forthcoming and also why the victims did not inform anyone of their plight. Two theorists who help to pose key questions when examining human behavior in a wider context are Bettelheim (1960) and Craib (1994). Craib addresses the issue of disappointment and how important it is for the individual to acknowledge and accept it. He claims that in today's society individuals are led to believe that any goal can be achieved and any obstacles overcome. He states that society has suppressed the reality that individuals can never be all they wish to be and as a result of this suppression there is a feeling of being incomplete and empty. Craib also states "it is about the necessity of conflict, and the necessity of both liberation and repression the result being summed up in Freud's classic phrase 'normal human misery'" (Craib, 1994, p.39). This desire to feel the master of one's destiny could account for the need to distance oneself from the suffering of others; by doing so individuals can create the illusion that it could never happen to them.

Bettelheim addresses the internal and external realities and also the compromises that individuals have to make within these realities. He believes individuals must integrate the internal and external realities in order to permeate their surroundings with their own personalities. He states "one must develop a clear concept of what can be given to the environment without compromising the inner-self" (Bettelheim, 1960, p.15). Bettelheim claims psychoanalysts suggest it is not society that creates all the difficulties in man, but the contradictory nature of man that creates the difficulties in society. Jung believed that the self is an inner urge to balance and reconcile the opposing aspects of our personalities, to achieve a psychic balance, but one which also separates ourselves from our ordinary conformity to the goals and values of the mass culture (Jung 1933 as cited in Crain, 1980, p.89). Bettelheim (1960) believes unless an individual's life bears the flavour of personal preference and individual style it will seem barren. He also addresses the intolerance that society shows when individuals fail to live up to standards that may be culturally desirable but not essential for society to continue. This could go some way towards explaining the social taboo that surrounded domestic violence for many years and to some extent still does today.

Violence within the family has a huge impact on society, both financially and emotionally. In London a minimum of £278m is spent each year responding to domestic violence, and this figure does not take into account the medical and legal costs (Horley, 2001). Horley advocates that alcohol, unemployment, drugs

or stress alone do not cause violence within the home. She claims “it is as a result of a complex interplay of psychological and social factors, which have created an imbalance of power between the sexes. Where there is an imbalance of power, it may be abused, and it is this, coupled with society’s tolerance, which has allowed domestic violence to flourish” (p. 11).

When looking back in history to account for society’s tolerance to domestic violence, one of the more revealing aspects and one that will throw the most light on the question proposed above is to pin-point when violence within the family was deemed a social problem that needed to be addressed. Barnett (1997) and colleagues state that family violence was a social condition long before it became a social problem. Many sociologists point out that social problems are socially constructed (Spector & Kituse, 1977 as cited in Barnett et al 1997, p.5). The social problem is dependent on social reaction and this is produced by a number of different sources from social movements and organisations, such as the church, media and political interest groups. Barnett refers to the interest groups as *claim-makers* who are actively engaged in raising society’s awareness. As a social condition comes to be recognized by society more generally, the social *condition* becomes a social *problem*. It would then follow that the levels of acceptable violence within society are culturally led. A very clear example of this is that in the Japanese language there is no word for the English concept of ‘domestic violence’ (Yoshihama & Sorenson, 1994 as cited in Barnett et al 1997, p. 6). Due to the fact there is no social condemnation of intimate violence within Japanese culture, it is not perceived as a social problem.

David and Stuart were born in the nineteen-sixties; it was from the late sixties into the seventies that violence towards women received renewed attention. In 1971 the first Women’s Aid shelter was opened for female victims of domestic abuse in Britain. Therefore when Stuart was witnessing the violence between his parents, the acknowledgment of violence against women being a social problem was only just emerging. Also, David became a victim of his mother’s abuse around 1966. It was in the early sixties that child abuse was recognised as a social problem. In 1962 Kemp and colleagues defined child abuse as a “clinical condition with diagnosable medical and physical symptoms resulting from deliberate physical assault” (Kemp, 1962 as cited in Barnett, 1997, p.7). It was not until 1974, the year after David had been taken into care that the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act was passed in America. This may go some way towards explaining why it allegedly took seven years for the authorities to intervene in David’s plight. It could have been that the *claim-makers* had not sufficiently brought the issue of child abuse into society’s awareness. When looking back into the history of childcare it shows that a child was perceived very much the property of the parent and subsequently parents would treat their children how they saw fit, as a being without any independent status or rights (Walker, Bonner & Kaufman, 1988 as cited in Barnett et al 1997, p.6).

Sociologist Yllo believes violence within the family cannot be fully understood unless gender and power are taken into account (Yllo as cited in Hansen et al 1998, p.609). She acknowledges that the feminist movement has not yet fully developed a distinctive framework for explaining domestic violence, but they are in good company because there is no single view in existence. Hanmer believes that the field of sociology fails to consider adequately the role violence plays in maintaining male and female relations. Like Yllo, she raises the point that there is a lack of one over-arching theory about violence within the family unit. Instead, researchers propose the cause to be explained by several theories addressing different areas. Hanmer states "at crucial moments there seems to be a tendency to individualise and psychologise. The norms and values of violence are seen as deviant, affecting either sub-cultures or some individual families, while society as a whole remains unaffected" (Hanmer as cited in Littlejohn, 1978, p.222). The complexities that arise when trying to develop a framework or theory become apparent when consideration is given to the multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach that is evolving today. As Nicky Stanley and colleagues state "there is a potential structural problem which lies at the heart of responding appropriately to the needs of a child living with violence and abuse as well as to those of the adult victim who is usually also the child's mother and primary carer" (Stanley, as cited in Humphreys, 2006, p.36).

In response to the complexities encountered when trying to address the social problem of violence within the family, a Domestic Abuse Intervention Programme was founded in Duluth, Minnesota in 1980. It was formed as a result of the efforts of some innovative feminist activists who received the support of a progressive community. The main aim of the program was to shift the responsibility for the violence away from the victim and on to the state and the assailant. (Dobash and Dobash, 1992). The program was based on the theory that violence is used to control people's behaviour and that individuals are socialized in a culture that values power.

"The long patriarchal tradition...was explicitly established in the institutional practices of both the church and the state and supported by some of the most prominent political, legal, religious, philosophical, and literary figures in Western society...They believed that men had the right to dominate and control women and that women were by their very nature subservient to men. This relationship was deemed natural, sacred and unproblematic and such beliefs resulted in long periods of disregard and/or denial of the husband's abuses of his economic, political and physical power" (Dobash & Dobash, 1980, p. 7).

In essence men are socialized to be dominant and women to be subordinate. Men who assault women draw from cultural messages justifying their dominance within the home. For example they will make statements such as 'someone has to be in charge' or "'this is my child, it is my responsibility to control him'" (Pence,



1993, as cited by Dobash & Dobash 1980, p.183). However, Pence, a founder of the Duluth project, does believe there has been an important shift in perspectives. "Rather than seeing violence in the family as merely a 'domestic' problem arising from pathological individuals or dysfunctional families, battering is now seen as a criminal offence. (Dobash & Dobash, 1992, p.183). Throughout the life of the Duluth project, between 1982 and 1984 there was a 47 per cent reduction in reported domestic incidents received by the police.

When examining the history of violence within the family and its apparent persistence, and lack of intervention, a proposed contribution towards an explanation by the historian Demos is social isolation. Many families in today's society find themselves living in a neighbourhood where they do not know who their neighbours are. In the past, society reflected a more integrated existence; every day offered a density of human contact. Just by carrying out daily essential duties guaranteed an encounter with the wider community. This in return ensured mutual support and mutual surveillance (Demos, as cited in Hansen, 1998, p.661). The studies carried out on the lives of abusers frequently found them to be friendless, isolated and, as Demos phrases it, 'rootless'. Human animals are essentially social beings, and without a social outlet the abuser turns to the nearest available target. In the case of David, his mother had withdrawn from all social contact, spending the majority of her day in the house alone.

In addition to the above, quantitative studies have shown that abusing parents have a disproportionate experience of 'crisis' as measured on a 'social readjustment scale' (Demos, as cited in Hansen et al, 1998, p.662). Demos argues that in this pre-modern setting, change occurs more frequently than a few generations ago. It appears that for many individuals the capacity to absorb change has diminished. Demos states "we have no clear equivalent to the 'providential' worldview of our forebears – their belief that all things, no matter how surprising and inscrutable, must be attributed to God's overarching will" (p. 662). In the beginning of the nineteenth century, this view was replaced by 'individualism', personal destiny was seen as something self-determined, but also dependent on one's family. The family structure moved from the child contributing to the working of the household to the parents being charged with the responsibility to provide the best life prospects for their children.

To return to the original question as to why society did not appear to respond to David's and Stuart's sufferings. Psychologist Lerner believes one possible reason could be an individual's tendency to find a reason to attribute blame towards the victims, stemming from their own need to believe in a just world (Segal, 1986). Kushner also states "blaming the victim is a way of reassuring ourselves that the world is not as bad a place as it may seem, and that there are good reasons for people's suffering. It helps fortunate people

believe that their good fortune is deserved, rather than being a matter of luck” (Segal, p.86).

The next aspect of these case histories to be addressed is the fact that the victims did not inform the authorities outside the home of their plight. David attended school every day and was repeatedly asked how he had sustained his injuries. He would attempt to explain them away by fabricating accidental events around the home. Stuart, whilst being repeatedly abused by his brother, did not immediately disclose to his mother or the school that abuse was taking place. The one emotion that is likely to have prevented them from doing so is shame. Shame is an emotional response individuals experience when presented with a situation that does not reflect the cultural norms, either as the victim or the observer. Examining ‘shame’ brings both sociology and psychology together, because shame is a psychological response to social expectation. Yet to talk about shame is a social taboo. Most other languages such as French and German have two words that describe two types of shame; ‘everyday shame’, which carries no offence and is necessary for daily interaction, and ‘disgrace shame’, which carries with it a social stigma. Due to this lack of distinction within the English language it is not possible to discuss shame without risking offence (Scheff, 2003, p.241). Katz proposes one definition of shame:

“An eerie revelation to self that isolates one in the face of a sacred community. What is revealed is a moral inferiority that makes one vulnerable to irresistible forces. As a state of feeling, shame is fearful, chaotic, holistic and humbling” (Katz, 1999 as cited in Scheff, 2003, p.245).

Whilst reviewing the David and Stuart stories it is evident that they experience shame. David, in his early years, experienced obsessive behaviour, periods of isolation and a deep feeling of worthlessness. Stuart experienced the feeling of isolation when living on the street, always being on the outside looking in, and he managed his feeling by turning to drugs and alcohol. Scheff (2003) states that shame is inherently a social emotion; unlike any other emotion it depends on specific aspects of social relationships. He believes there are two social sources that are common to shame:

“First, most of one’s personal ideals are held in common with other members of one’s society. Personal ideals are largely social ideals. Second, and more subtly, the interior theatre of the self, in which both shame and embarrassment occur, is modelled on social interaction. One becomes ashamed by seeing one’s self in the eyes of the other” (p. 253).

When trying to step back and uncover the possible reason why the society of their time did not intervene in David’s and Stuart’s lives, and why they did not disclose their abuse to someone outside the family, the over-riding thread seems to be the influence of cultural norms. Jung spoke of the ‘ordinary conformity of the goals and values of the mass culture’ (Jung, 1933 as cited in Crain,

1980p.341). Bettelheim also addressed the intolerance of society when individuals fail to live up to what is culturally desirable (Bettelheim, 1960). Dobash and Dobash (1992) reflected on the culture that surrounded a patriarchal society and where individuals were - and still - are socialized to value power. In addition, Barnett also believes that the acceptability of violence within society is culturally led (Barnett, 1997). Even clearer is the way the emotion of shame is reacted to, in particular within English-speaking cultures. The issue of shame being an emotion that is aroused when individuals fail to meet the social or cultural ideals, which leads to the inhibition of the individual when there need is greatest, as demonstrated by David's and Stuart's behaviours.

## Summary

Placing the case studies side by side creates an opportunity to analyse what elements of the men's lives influenced the outcomes. The first crucial difference took place in the first five years. David experienced a fairly stable environment, whereas Stuart did not. This makes the application of Bowlby's attachment theory extremely relevant. It would appear that by experiencing this stable, consistent, nurturing, secure base, David managed to create a more robust internal working model and, as Bowlby states, this affected how he interacted with others throughout his life. Stuart was not so fortunate as he witnessed extreme violence during his first five years; Bowlby believed a consequence of this would be to develop an extreme sensitivity towards the carer. This is evident during the initial conversation Stuart had with the author of his book. He was trying to provoke someone into beating him to death, as he thought his mum would be less upset by murder than if he committed suicide.

The next theory that was applied in more detail was that of Fonagy and colleagues and the 'interpersonal interpretive mechanism' (IIM). He compares this to the development of the 'theory of mind'. Fonagy and colleagues again place great importance on the first four years of a child's life, and the development of a 'psychic reality'. They believe a child will move from their 'psychic equivalence and with the appropriate loving environment and effective mirroring, they will develop their psychic reality. They term it 'playing with reality', and it allows children to reflect themselves whilst being themselves. If they fail to experience this then their true sense of self is lost, and they will merely adopt the images that are around them. This weakened sense of self perpetuates the feeling of detachment and emptiness. David appeared to have an opportunity to gain a sense of self, even though evidence shows he did internalise his mother's obsessive traits. Stuart in contrast experienced a volatile existence; he continued throughout his life to have a deep sense of being worthless.

The above theory clearly demonstrates how a child's early development can be either hindered or helped by the care received. It can determine

psychological behaviour in the future, even though Bowlby did believe that change was always possible, it does become more difficult with increasing age. Fonagy and colleagues believe that it is never too late for an individual to 'play with reality' and possibly transform aspects of themselves from the 'psychic equivalence' to a 'psychic reality'.

The next crucial aspect of the case histories is how their paths held similarities when they were twelve years old. They both went into care, but while David went into loving and supportive foster care, Stuart went into state care where his abuse continued. Moursund and Erskine (2004) believe that the longer a child is exposed to insufficient or inappropriate care, the more likely it is to develop negative characteristics. What is also extremely relevant when applying this to Stuart's story is that they believe that what is more important than the exposure to abuse, is the absence of a healing and supportive relationship. If this is absent the experience will be transformed from a painful period to a script-forming trauma; when considering Stuart's last recording before his death, the evidence of this is clear; the feeling of being dirty and disgusting, and wishing to die.

In an attempt to look more closely into the meaning of an individual's 'psychic reality', a term that is usually used to describe a subjective experience, consideration was given as to whether it emerges at birth as part of the self or is formed through interaction with others. Analysis of these cases was an attempt to clarify whether or not David was born with a strong 'psychic self' which gave him the ability to survive the abuse. It was quickly realized that this is an unanswerable question; to break down someone's subjectivity or consciousness into examinable pieces is not possible. It is as Blackmore (2003) put it, 'trying to look into the dark'. Freud believed every human carries the history of human nature within the consciousness, a claim that could never be proved. The most plausible explanation is that there is no one single influence that creates the 'psychic self'; it is a mesh of inputs, running parallel and interconnecting within the self. It is for this reason that individuals are unique within their own subjectivity.

The final section of the paper addresses the sociological aspects of the case histories. It poses key questions as to why there was no intervention from the state into the boy's plights and why the boys themselves did not ask for help. Craib (1994) highlights how individuals within society live within an illusion that they can achieve everything they want to achieve, and therefore pull away from disappointment. Bettelheim addresses the need for individuals to integrate their internal and external realities to permeate their surroundings with their personalities. Bettelheim (1960) also addresses the intolerance society shows individuals when they fail to live up to the cultural norms. This intolerance could attribute to the social taboo that surrounded violence within the home for many years.

Horley (2001) begins to bring the psychological and sociological factors together, stating that it is due to the imbalance of power between the sexes and society's tolerance that has allowed domestic violence to flourish. By looking back into the history of family violence it reveals that when the men were being exposed to abuse the issue had only just been deemed a social problem that needed to be addressed. This could go some way into explaining why the intervention was slow or absent. It is also relevant to note that there is no one over arching theory when addressing violence within the home. The plethora of agencies that are needed when attempts are made to intervene is immense. Such are the complexities when trying to deal with conflicting psychic realities and cultural norms.

The project that took place in Duluth achieved impressive results. It strived to coordinate all the agencies involved, but most importantly it moved the responsibility of prosecution away from the victim and back onto the assailant and the state. It recognised that the acceptance of violence within the home stemmed from the ingrained, patriarchal standpoint and, unless challenged, would continue to be tolerated. Essentially there was present, within society, a cultural message justifying men's dominance within the home.

The consistent thread evident when examining the sociological aspects of violence within the home is the influence of cultural norms. Demos highlights the changes that have occurred within modern society, the isolation that occurs as a direct result of the demise of daily interaction. As he states, at one time individuals had to interact within their community to ensure essential tasks were carried out. With this interaction came mutual support and mutual surveillance. However, social isolation can only be one of many contributing factors when considering the apparent social tolerance of family violence.

The final area addressed is the individual's and society's experience of shame. Shame was the possible reason for the men not disclosing their plight. It is also possible to apply the place of shame in a wider sociological context. Social taboo surrounds the issue of shame and how it is not socially acceptable to admit suffering from it and how the English language is inadequate when trying to express different types of shame. It is a social emotion because it stems from the feeling of being outside the cultural norms and it is the individual's perception of how they are seen through the eyes of the other. This leads this paper back to the issue that humans are social beings, and the sense of self is derived from how the individual is perceived in the eyes of the other.

In conclusion, at the beginning of this research, I held the belief that there had to be one clear answer, such as the idea that survival of the individual was due to some innate, inner strength that they possessed. Having researched this area it has become clear that there are no clear answers when addressing

violence within the family. A multi-faceted approach is necessary to intervene and develop a relationship to work closely with the other.

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