

# Why Do You Need to Tie Me Down? - Reflecting Back on a Significant Dynamic of Turmoil in Intimacy

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to focus on the concept of aversion to intimacy, a personality trait that can give rise to a dynamic of victimization which in the peculiarities of psychological subjection is a minor manifestation of domestic violence. By aversion, we mean a light inhibition in coping with difficult emotions in facing turbulent situations. This defensive behavior is a risk factor because it permeates the family's relationships with strain within a deficiency in the capacity for intimacy which is an indicator of relational disturbances.<sup>33</sup> In examining the key mechanism of a developing family's process similar to the construction of a scapegoat, we intend to exemplify how the 'neediness' in mothering can trigger the unconscious in a dynamic sequentiality that can sort out that kind of female passivity that leads to mental laziness.<sup>24,27</sup>

Thanks to data coming from a case of infant observation, we had the chance to reflect upon a psychic constellation that the author has named "the emotional need for a familiar enemy".<sup>10</sup> The onset was mainly due to a stand-by of the mother's function to work through the anger and jealousy of her two children because she was so overwhelmed by her emotional perspective. Progressively, her psychological fatigue induced her to bypass questioning and judgments about a climate of enmity because she was prone to tolerate it. The underlying consideration is that when mothers feel frustrated, a form of avoidance in understanding can take place.

**Keywords:** Aversion to intimacy, Submission, Persecutory anxiety, Familiar enemy.

## Turmoil in the Process of Familiarity

Without doubt, romantic love is emotional nourishment vital to existence itself. As reported in various studies, safe emotional relationships represent an anchor that allow us to feel supported in facing the tasks of life.<sup>1</sup> This is the reason we are vulnerable to suffering and anxiety, because we depend on another.<sup>2</sup> The psychological significance of sentimental relationships is found in the aftermath of its breaking, which results in a reversal of existential meaning, since a part of us, its representation, collapses. In the case of both divorce and the death of a spouse, the dependence on the partner is central to the elaboration of mourning. In this regard, it is considered that emotions inherent affective dependency can be found from the beginning of life, and that they form the psychological core of interiority, or rather of how the capacity of elaborating and sharing one's own experiences develops.

Although in the initial period of the couple's relationship, there is a frequent need to discover affinities, the psychic guarantor of the ability to love is the personal Promethean attitude. The feature of this need for knowledge is the attraction to psychological and cultural diversity. By virtue of their own emotional security, the partner is invested with resources of knowledge, and the space of separation, that is, the confrontation with otherness, is something he/ she likes. This allows for enrichment of the interchange that stimulates appreciation, esteem, and mutual respect that are the qualities characterising intimacy and adequate familiarity. The litmus test is given by the observation that these couples resolve their inevitable conflicts because they retain a desire to communicate, to explain and to clarify, because diversity does not create fear, but curiosity.

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Bearing in mind that emotional security predisposes people to reveal their own experiences, it seems that there is a competence subject to intimacy, and that confidence is the virtuous circle that implements it. As reported in literature, relational competence-that is the premise of how to develop intimacy-is derived from the interactive patterns learned in childhood.<sup>3,4</sup> In particular, the emotional tone that characterizes the way of getting to know people comes from various emotional memories that range from pleasure to displeasure, from anger to joy, from confidence to fear.<sup>5,6</sup> In fact, emotional development has an imprint on an individual's way of processing knowledge, which is triggered by emotions and also by anxiety and curiosity, which vary depending on Promethean propensity or inhibition-aversion to knowing one's own parents, since it is something that is learned.

The essential difference between these emotional dimensions places the distinction between the reliable, understanding parent, and the unreliable, incompetent or pathological parent. There is, therefore, an interconnection between the way of loving and relationships with caregivers in infancy because the gradient of emotional security develops within the understanding qualities of and secure attachment to the mother figure.<sup>7</sup> This trace of memory, although partly unconscious, is the mental equipment that regulates the willingness to give trust, in the sense of trusting partners, and to being able to wait for moments of intimacy. This is a pillar of the successful relationship that maintains emotional proximity even through the occasional relational conflict, as psychically it is a sharing of the sentiment of us, or the internalized representation of romance perceived as a safe haven.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, openness to dialogue-both psychologically and of time-is a protective factor of everyday life that comes from the fusion between the individual's personality and the culture he/ she belongs to. Certainly, the space and time of intimacy coincides with the need to be trusting. This is the psychological experience that helps the processing of emotions and thoughts, even oppressive ones, and solidifies the experience of familiarity. This is the focus of psychological relationship of solidarity that permeates co-parenting, as it supports the maternal function and the paternal function which are essential to the understanding and harmony children need.

Since collaborating means being able to mediate between different points of view, it is clear that dialogue is the psychological context that deals with tensions if the dynamics of interpersonal communication are characterized by the mutual ability

to discuss things. So, intimacy is appropriate between partners that recognize in each other the ability to give and receive comfort.<sup>1</sup> Logically, each couple has its own way of handling everyday life, such as choosing how to regulate work commitments and domestic life, an approach rooted in shared value that motivates them emotionally to take care of the marriage and family bond; often the woman takes more responsibility for this. In a broad sense one's approach to values stimulates the endurance required to tolerate the stressful moments of coexistence and co-parenting. More precisely, endurance is something that spreads from the history of the bond; however, it must be driven by the tenderness that partners mutually exchange in the intimacy of understanding.

To us, it seems that complexity lies in the realistic possibility that routine events favor or impede a couple's interpersonal exchanges, taking into account that the element of the fatigue of care enters into the solitude of maternal tasks that make women vulnerable to emotional saturation. This specification introduces the idea that tensions are unavoidable. A combination of factors that make up a variable that can interfere with the process of familiarization of the child's growing personality, as the competence to understand the emotional events in the here and now of their present may weaken. Beyond personality profiles, the psychoanalytic model of mental functioning has shown that the unconscious has an influence on the conscious, meaning that one may have unwanted thoughts, as much as one may not be able to take thoughts into consideration that it would be opportune to consider more. In the face of the unconscious contents, the dynamic field of coexistence is inevitably exposed to psychological mechanisms. It understands clearly that the ability to question both individually and in dialogue supports the understanding of relational events, but it must also take into account that intimacy is an inter-subjective dimension of feelings, emotions and thoughts that stimulate the process of individual change as the person, although remaining the same, is never the same.

Beyond the diversity of ways and the times in which the couple can count on the intimacy of emotional and physical closeness, there are emotions that continuously guide personal experiences that are the psychic determinants crossing the dynamics of everyday life. Obviously, there is a variability of individual differences that more or less connotes competence in the cognitive processing of emotions, particularly negative ones, such as jealousy and anger, bearing in mind that the ability to cope and resilience modulate but do not balance the

effort. At this point, we can describe the phenomenon of intimacy in terms of an experiential process of familiarity that facilitates mutual understanding between spouses, both through trust and knowing aspects of oneself and each other. These three elements are essential for the functioning of families. Within this framework, familiarity is the criterion regulating the emotions of need and/or the desire for intimacy. This is an important difference because the first favors domestic matters while the second focuses on the couple's emotions.

Now, the distinction between intimacy and familiarity raises the following question: if it is true that intimacy is an interpersonal process of familiarization that hinges on dialogue, it can be assumed that the experience of familiarity-whose pivot is the feeling of us-can in some events contain or even inhibit the perception of need. The author refers specifically to the possibility that a woman motivated by the desire of her partner, or by nature or upbringing, or by her state of mind or fear of judgment, might not verbalize her experiences related to the maternal role to her spouse. From this point of view, the question arises: what sort of psychological effect can this feminine behaviour have on the family dynamic? Perhaps, this inhibition can be considered as a point in the continuum between functional and pathological intimacy? Can the concept of passive collaboration be a construct that helps us to understand women's experience of neediness?

As already mentioned, realistically there are various reasons that can lead to a state of humoral dissatisfaction, uncertainty or insecurity which stimulate negative opinions toward oneself and/or one's children and partner, because emotions are the estimate of cognitive assessment.<sup>9</sup> This means that one inescapably feels that one is judging, even though it is painful to judge those you love. To this emotional tension is added love that includes a biological quantum of aggressiveness that comes from the need to preserve the bond of the couple. This is another tension that characterizes the difficulty of those times when the maternal role is all-encompassing, while the desire to carve out space is equally intense for the couple. These are the key elements that process the phenomenon of intimacy, given that turmoil settles on the basis of unelaborated negative emotional reactions. One can now consider the concern in terms of a flow of emotional feelings that, when they solicit unconscious contents, are due to intrapsychic processes that disturb the relationship dynamic because anxiety, fears and judgments influence subjective interpretation. If the ability to know and understand generates an invisible

turbulence in the psychological climate of coexistence, its dynamic sequencing is likely to have psychological effects.

With this premise, the aversion to intimacy can be framed as a defense from the intimate perception of the showing of the self in the path of the other. This factor hindering the need for intimacy is the result of the connection between the individual psychological condition and the dynamic of the context shared by the couple. Realising that intimacy is a construct of functional and/or dysfunctional elements with the conceptualization of aversion to intimacy, we refer to a personality trait that is configured to slight inhibition in addressing the turbulence that otherness implies during the interactive process, because even family members constantly need to be known better.

A central point is the assumption that inhibition-aversion includes the delicate issue of understanding jealousy and sibling rivalry, which envy underlies, which is a factor that can affect exercising unconscious manipulations that shape the behaviour of children. Having said that, we want to illustrate this relationship context to show how a concatenation of factors led to an aggressive tension that, although not acted out, went through the emotional climate of the family relationships. This case exemplifies the probability that at some critical moments, a spiral of factors that activate a schizoid defense becomes the need for an enemy, or the receptacle of the intolerable aspects that cannot be understood. In theory, it is a process of victimization that can be classed as a type of psychological submission and the author has called this "the emotional need for a familiar enemy".<sup>10</sup> More precisely, this study shows that inhibition-aversion to clarify some emotional experiences connected to the repetition of events generates a tension that is a risk factor of veiled violence.<sup>11</sup>

Based on material from an infant observation carried out according to the Tavistock Model,<sup>12</sup> clinical reasoning enabled the author to consider how and why intimacy concerns-functional for the affectivity of care-triggered a process of victimization toward the female observer. This psychological consequence arose from the mother's aversion to recognising certain negative emotions such as jealousy, hostility, anger, dislike and sibling rivalry. This denial reverberated into a tension that spiralled inside the family dynamic, creating a restless emotional dynamic of latent dissatisfaction. In fact, the loss of authenticity in recognising personal experiences engenders a sense of dissatisfaction, which though not expressed is a vehicle for latent aggression.

This result opens the way to considering that continuing disquiet might produce a restless intimacy manifest in subtle forms of perversion of understanding, having a consequence on the children's personality development.

As we have mentioned, interpersonal communication is the psychological context that treats tensions of coexistence with the ability of partners to reflect on their own and others' mental states, motivating them to recover harmony and overcome factors of conflict.<sup>13</sup> If psychological conditions that support the desire to clarify things are weakened, inauthenticity can manifest itself in the marital relationship between the parents because they think that in doing so they can ensure the harmony that makes them feel safe. It should first be noted that misunderstanding and dissatisfaction lead to a loss of empathic identification with partners. Occasional antipathy weakens the recognition of the affinity which positively affects partners' judgments of that sentiment.

### **Worrying Atmosphere of the Aversion to Knowing**

By passing the linear cause-effect model, the data collected over two years is an exploratory source for the theoretical view that we have assumed here relating to the turmoil in intimacy scenario. It was structured around regular weekly naturalistic observations that lasted two years. Both psychoanalysis and developmental theories are taken into account. The perspective that we intend to present regards how children develop when their parents are averse to displaying intimacy, since there are many similar situations which are not adequately recognized. Within the system of family relationships, this deficit of recognition-albeit partial-creates dissatisfaction and, therefore, aggressive tension that children, especially younger ones, spontaneously manifest with their behaviour. Since explaining is part of bringing up children, we can consider that an aversion to intimacy, as a personality trait, causes an inhibition in children when a dynamic becomes the rule that emotionally subjects and leads to passive behaviour. This is a slight and unconscious submission which conditions the subject into docility.

Methodologically, it is important to point out that the observer does not act or actively converse during observations. If need be he/ she responds to questions but avoids personal references. For this reason, the observed family develops an atypical relationship of familiarity, agreeing that the observer will come to know them but that they will not know him/ her and

will not even know what he/ she thinks of them. As for the parents, the aim of this approach is to encourage them to become interested in observing their children's behaviour, and to self-questioning that help them explore the subjectivity in the growth of their children.

As we know, the experience of infant observation can nurture the interplay between containment and curiosity in mothers. This behaviour indicates a deepening in the process of getting to know how their family relationships work. Whenever this happens, it stimulates parents in the construction of meaningful nodes, forming links in a narration that constitutes a mental background that orientates them toward more reflection.<sup>13</sup>

This can be inferred from observing a change in the behaviour of the mother and father (if present) which allows them to understand their child's mental state better. This is made possible by two intersecting factors: the first is the individual ability to question oneself-especially on the mother's part-while observing the child, which means tolerating not knowing while maintaining the desire to understand the child by exploring his/ her development; the second can be attributed to the quality of the link between the couple in terms of mutual support, bearing in mind that the mother needs to feel her husband's emotional support. This emphasises the difference between need and desire for intimacy in a couple.

With respect to the limit between the observed family and the clinical discussion, the dynamic link here is that the observation was characterized by the anxiety evident in the baby's unexpected fearful discomfort toward the female observer, even though the female observer was only ever seen in the presence of the mother. This emotional event lasted from the age of six months until the end of the observation. In parallel, the elder son who was 27 months old revealed a slight antipathy toward the female observer associated with jealousy-which was not curbed by the mother-to his sister. What is more, whenever witnessed overt manifestations of anger and/ or tears in either child, although there were peaks of distress related to the attention given by the female observer, and by frustration when the mother ignored some communications.

The behaviour of both children showed that they did not accept the female observer. This unexpected refusal coincided with the emergence in the mother of an aversion to recognize the authenticity of these emotional experiences, even though until that moment she had shown reasonable emotional competence

together with the ability to verbalize her children's mental states.

It is interesting to note that the mother's emotional reaction to the baby's fear was that it was a sign of her timidity, while the father attributed it to her being afraid of the female observer's black hair, as the baby did not smile spontaneously at him either (the father has Mediterranean features). Comparing these two explanations, the emphasis is on the similarity between the mother and children, all of whom have a Northern European aspect. This way of thinking correctly indicates that the problematic center of family intimacy was anxiety toward diversity, and how emotions reverberated in response, as revealed by the father when he referred to the way the baby reacted to him, not smiling at him and thus communicating a preference for her mother.

In this respect, it should be noted that, at the mother's request, the female observer went to their home when the father was at work. Explaining this choice, the mother said that she preferred to maintain a space for the couple in the organization of her household. In fact, father often came home when the children were already asleep. This information-provided by the mother-can explain their lack of familiarity with their father and is the link between the background of domestic life and the scenery of the observation which allows us to frame the turmoil in the process of familiarization.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, the concept of anxiety<sup>14</sup> explains the physiological tension which follows the time of familiarization that in the early stages of development, or in the lack of competence in adults, can turn into a feeling of persecution if the recognition of this emotional state is not processed by the caregivers, because psychologically it is not able to think and verbalize the experience disturbing the process of knowing, which involves familiarization with diversity. Consequently, if the anxiety contrasts the desire to understand, it causes an "averse circumstance"<sup>15</sup> that characterizes the kind of turbulence deriving from the tensions of two parties, while the interpersonal dynamic is unconsciously focused on exploring if they have something in common.

In order to investigate the reasons underlying the dynamics, the female observer was involved in a reflexive assessment, crucial with respect to the function of the observer in terms of an emotional dynamic, determined by the intertwining of two unconscious mental dimensions: that of the observer,

who reflected on the situation, and that of the family as a system of psychological relations, in order to show how the female observer-as a metaphor for the unknown foreigner-allowed the emergence of a circulating tension which the author can call an adverse attitude to diversity, symbolized psychologically by the father. As Anzieu-Premmereur wrote: "Symbols are mediators between the intrapsychic world and the intersubjective space".<sup>16</sup>

The blind spot from this summit is the functioning of the couple in the intimacy of the unavoidable friction caused. The issue is that while the couple shares intimacy subconsciously, mechanisms can be triggered inhibiting them from knowing each other better and therefore creating obstacles in that precise moment. On a rational level, this corresponds to the superficiality of an explanation. In addition, it should be noted that if one-half of the interacting couple exhibits even a slight inhibition, the difference is opposed and the unelaborated emotions lead to an unconscious anxiety, which transfers to the context of shared relationships. At the family level, it amplifies aversion to intimacy in that it fails to recognize the authenticity of some experiences which are inhibited in children.

For the dynamics of the process that we are analyzing, we are inclined to think that anxiety is also a sign of an unconscious mechanism of fusionality<sup>17</sup> in the couple that helps explain why although the explanations about the baby's distress were different, the couple did not try to get to the bottom of it. In a broad sense, the superficiality indicates certain collusion, bearing in mind that the female observer's presence was never questioned.

That said, we can outline the mechanism of displacement which explains how and why the context of observation has become the receptacle of the intolerable anxieties and emotions circulating in the relationship, which were unconsciously split and projected on to the female observer by the children and mother, since the female observer symbolized a barely familiar or unfamiliar difference.

From this view, the father's and female observer's representation of family-foreigner generated an uneasy tension that highlighted the mother's aversion to getting to know, which emerged in the difficulty to recognize negative emotions in terms of interpersonal communication. In adults, the common denominator of this type of inhibition is anxiety felt as part of a relationship in which the difference with the other solicits an apprehensive state of mind. The background has to be traced back to the self-representation of

agency when discovering, and whose matrix dates back to the phase of learning differences starting from six months. If the experience of parents' mediations fails, the aversion-inhibition pattern can develop and this constitutes that type of emotional refrain, which starts when trying to translate the unfamiliar into knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

In the mother, evidence here refers to persistence to slipping away from clarifying the baby's fear, which could not be rationally justified as shyness since the female observer was somebody she knew, and then the repetition of the avoidance in understanding the negative emotions developed a slight insecurity in the baby that interfered with its activities of exploration. More specifically, regarding the mechanism of the process of knowing, this study gives evidence that interaction is an experience of otherness which can be originally disturbing in infancy<sup>18</sup> and, therefore, in adults,<sup>15</sup> a fact that exemplifies how maternal emotional inhibition is revealed in the relationship with children, giving rise in both to a tendency to introversion as a minor aspect of their socio-emotional development.

In sketching this trans-generational line, it is important to attribute inhibition versus aversion to the intimacy of the mother-limited by some negative emotions-due to the fact that at approximately three years old, her mother died, and she was cared for immediately afterward by her stepmother. This information focuses the matrix of her maternal competence, but also emphasises anxiety compared to intimacy in that they are authentic emotions she felt.

In fact, as reported in literature, competence in relationships depends on the positive or negative emotion which has more frequently characterized the bond of the baby with his/ her mother in the two first years of life. Thanks to Infant Research-the field of infant mental health-it has been understood that adults behave in their relations repeating behaviour they learned in infancy. From the early days of life, a baby interacts according to his/ her mother's behaviour like two attuned systems which construct the interpersonal context where one becomes aware of the emotional effect of the other. This process is defined recognition and it roots the sense of identity since the person is able to know oneself while knowing the other in a shared moment of effects.<sup>19,20</sup>

This stage of development depends on the mother's emotional containment,<sup>21</sup> mainly in her ability to distinguish and then link actions with effects as to the structure of the experience of knowledge without creating insecurity in the baby. This behaviour is defined

as "transitional facilitating behaviour"<sup>22</sup> since it mediates the baby's process of familiarization. In addition, it is suggested that the quality of this experience is a predictor of the capacity to understand oneself and others.<sup>13</sup> Conversely, if the mother's mediation fails, the inhibition-aversion pattern develops and a kind of uneasiness starts when facing to understand the unfamiliar.

The stream of neuropsychological research on emotions that mould the perception of the other and the way human beings relate<sup>23</sup> is the theoretical reference for the concept of the variability in aversion to know others by which we mean the individual behaviour deriving from early memories within the range of inhibition, implying difficulty in reflecting on worrying thoughts.

Our thesis is rooted in this, that vulnerability from the aversion to knowing is a form of inhibition deriving from the memory of early experiences which the mother cannot recognize, who if she inhibits herself teaches herself to subdue emotion. Therefore, due to this stand-by of the mother's capacity to attune with the emotional experience of the baby in the process of discovering the meanings of the world, a fearful uneasiness is internalized.

## Final Considerations

This study shows that the matrix of family disquiet stems from a concatenation of factors that are the cause and effect of problems in working out the process of familiarization with otherness. It also confirms that if the Promethean attitude is compromised, parental relational competence is disturbed. This also substantiates the fact that the emotional climate that the process of family intimacy experiences is highly dependent on the psychological dynamic of the married couple: more precisely, whether and how the inhibition of one parent is compensated for by the other partner's propensity to communicate, with the emotional competence necessary to deepen understanding of each other and of their children.

The question is raised of how the aversion to knowing others better can induce an interactive habit which is theoretically similar to "veiled violence"<sup>11</sup> because the children are not helped to learn how to process some emotional reactions which are a component of the psychological dynamic that simultaneously involves parents, siblings, children and couples in interactive exchanges. Specifically, it was observed that the mother's behaviour of non-verbal response was similar to a way of subjecting the feeling of dissatisfaction, a sign of which is the inhibition observed in children to

outsource the type of physiological aggressive reaction in early childhood which manifests itself with frustration, anger, jealousy and envy, all of which are a normal part of family rivalries: a constellation of relational dynamics that must be modulated by the parents so that children can learn to process them.

Bearing in mind the persistent and long-lasting emotional turbulence caused by the female observer's presence, we may say that the observation has triggered a dynamic of pretext<sup>24</sup> that allowed persecutory anxiety or mental suffering to be externalized because of the aversion to facing the differences in the family relationships' emotional nuances.

The fact that, despite both children's negative reactions, the parents kept to the two-year commitment bears out the importance of the female observer's role. Since the observing function symbolically represents the maternal function of "being with" and the paternal function of "assuming a different perspective," we understand why the female observer psychologically became the receptacle of the unresolved family relationships which came to the fore simultaneously with the turbulence with relating to the father figure did. Within the triangle of relations observed, the female observer's presence was unconsciously necessary as a means to represent refusal, antipathy, hostility and, at the same time, offer the mother the opportunity of being observed in her efforts, or perhaps to feel appreciated for her commitment and devotion (she had given up a satisfying career) and also for her endurance of the obvious social loneliness.

The main reason for the aggressiveness toward the female observer was the perception of familiar-enemy,<sup>10</sup> as she embodied the balance between preserving a private mental space and offering constant attention and interest. This is the key element in allowing us to understand how she became the center of gravity of the unconscious dynamic she was engulfed in, which made her feel powerless: she knew her presence was opposed as she contributed to a relational configuration<sup>25</sup> that satisfied the family's emotional need to receive attention and understanding, conveyed through her neutrality and her abstention from action in the observing of the emotions connected to her.

The feature of the interactive process with the female observer is to be a link between an intra-familiar and extra-familiar dynamic which permits the experience of diversity, giving the observer a threefold psychological function: the first was that of scapegoat<sup>24</sup> for which the turmoil was connected to her presence; the second was

that of familiar-enemy which placed the mother and children in the psychological condition to share familiarity in terms of non-intrusive participation; the third was that of containment, offering an open mind to receive communications while maintaining the ability to think while tolerating the tension.

The cornerstone of this dynamic was a passive form of tension: the female observer became aware of being the trigger of negative emotions and at the same time "victim" of having to bear the anguish of sense of guilt for causing the children discomfort, and also regret at the mother's lack of interventions.

Emotion needs permanent elaboration but this mother was too afraid of experiencing the negative part of everyday life. As reported, in some cases the attention received by observation helps the mother to reflect on herself, stimulated by the experience of looking at herself in interactions with others.<sup>26</sup> Otherwise, for this mother, the attention was experienced in a conflicting way, probably as soon as she realized she could not establish a friendship with the female observer, something she felt she needed to have. Related to this, the mother not only told the female observer that she had had a troubled relationship with her stepmother but, on more than one occasion, she gave voice to her fantasy with respect to what she described about the female observer's gentle and calm character which revealed the projection of her emotional need to feel a representation of a supportive mother in the observer.

Understandably, the female observer's reserve was unconsciously perceived by the mother as a refusal from a person she felt close to, but whom she also felt at the same time was her "enemy" for the female observer's "aversion" to make friends with her. Perhaps the frustration together with psychological fatigue from looking after her children and doing the housework are factors which weakened her ability to understand her children intuitively, to the point that she became inhibited in working through some difficult emotions in terms of an intimate communication with her children. These unresolved emotions were a basis for seeing the female observer as a persecutor, as the observations were sometimes characterized by a subtle form of competition in the receiving and giving of attention. However, it allowed the elder child to express jealousy for being excluded and a dislike of the female observer. This shift from the mother to the female observer can be explained as caused by the mother's aversion to recognising emotions, and also that the child had internalized a nurturing mother figure, as he recalled that until his sister's birth he had had her exclusive devotion.

From all the above factors, we can consider that this observation method had the effect of a passivizing collaboration. Without a doubt, her loneliness led the mother to accept being observed, even to be observed during the intimacy of breastfeeding, as an acquaintance had told her that this was an important circumstance in which to observe the baby's development. In spite of this, the female observer's silent presence was frustrating to her need for intimacy, and this may have interfered with her maternal sensitivity, leading to a fear of being judged instead of being understood when the baby was distressed.

Perhaps in this uneasy intra-family dynamic the female observer's receptive but passive behaviour stimulated the mother's mechanism of identification with the observation but, due to psychological fatigue, this attitude indirectly contributed to her emerging difficulties with exploring questions and doubts, as if the function of observing contributed to putting this lady into a psychological condition of inequality of roles, leading to a condition of mental laziness<sup>27</sup>: this means that someone else is delegated to thinking. In a wider sense it can be added that within this dynamic, the mother's passivizing condition brought out her neediness and lack of emotional support. Hence, frustration can be included as another experience which unconsciously made this lady anxious and contributed to her incipient refusal in recognising the emotional turbulence of some family interactions.

At this point, it can be deduced that the parents, starting with the mother, did not face the issue of protecting the baby from the distress of the presence of a "familiar enemy" as this was outweighed by the need to have an external witness able to understand the anxiety caused by diversity and rivalry, a sign of a combination between the dynamics of passivizing collaboration and the anxiety of worrying factors being revealed.

Generally speaking, when things are not called by their names in a family,<sup>11</sup> this means that the couple are in collusion. If the partners share a gradient of emotional insecurity, a fear of judgment is revealed as an obstacle to the possibility of knowing and also addressing the feeling of inadequacy. In the sequential process of the dynamics observed, we can hypothesize that the intimate experience of dialogue for this couple, for each of them to know himself or herself, the partner and the children, was insufficient.

As we pointed out, interpersonal communication is the psychological context which takes care of the tensions of coexistence whose pivot is the ability of the partners

to reflect on their own and others' mental states,<sup>13</sup> sharing the need to converse and knowing they can count on harmony. If it is weak, the motivation to clarify inauthenticity creeps into the couple's relationship as it dominates the need to avoid the dialectic of fear of conflict.

In these cases, however, the lack of understanding generates dissatisfaction which can lead to a weakening of the capacity for empathy, which feeds anxiety and the related mechanism of the inhibition to know. Highlighting a correlation between restless intimacy and a tendency to avoid conflict is in line with what is experienced in problematic marriages, which is that the lack of intimacy is correlated with the inability to resolve conflict.<sup>28</sup> If we add something explained in the theory of adult attachment, that psychobiologically we tend to adopt strategies to preserve ties<sup>1</sup> we understand that anxiety, insecurity and psychological fatigue make the perception of emotional dependency uneasy because the fear of losing the loved one is amplified.<sup>29</sup> This state of concern unconsciously feeds the drive to control one's partner with intrusiveness, or motivates complacency, contributing in this case to inhibit the need while preserving the desire for intimacy.

Of course an emotional relationship is a psychological experience with a high potential for changing personalities, as there are two active mechanisms: the first is the conscious motivation to understand one's partner who expresses his expectations and desires, which one tends to go along with, and if this is present in both partners a collaboration forms which increases mutual commitment and satisfaction; the second is the emotional dialectical impact, as the mind is biologically predisposed to collaborating due to the presence of mirror neurons<sup>30</sup> and the plasticity of the brain. On this basis, it prefigures a measure of interactive adjustment shaped on how the individual's mental functions, consciously or not, elaborate the meaning of his relationship.

Stating that the couple's bond creates an atmosphere of influence which follows the parameter of awareness-unawareness coincides with the affirmation that it is a psychologically ambiguous form of power arising from the dynamics of emotional dependence. From this, the necessity to ponder the impact that every action has on other people's psyches arises, placing the distinction between healthy intimacy, which supports personal growth, and pathological growth which determines a range in severity due to its effect of damaging or even cancelling out the sense of agency. This can be seen in cases of domestic violence: relationships between partners is characterized by arrogance and abuse of



power from the male, setting off a process of victimization that shows how a relationship of abusive power generates psychological wounds in the woman and children that change their personalities.

A review of literature shows that the psychological core of violent behaviour comes from a deficient emotional and reflexive competence which is the result of an early psychic trauma caused by abusive parents who expose the child to constant fear.<sup>31</sup> This indicates that how people treat their relationships is affected by childhood psychological memories. It is fundamental to bear in mind that an aggressive and violent person is afflicted by a distressing insecurity, and so his interactive behaviour is characterized by control strategies which show themselves as acts of power that can be fomented by how much the culture he lives in expects him to dominate his partner. This personality trait shows that he has not developed an adequate capacity to love, and he treats his partner as a propagation of himself. This means that in denying her individuality, the wife is perceived as if she were a piece of property because he cannot even recognize the suffering he causes her. It is also true, on the other hand, that the mistreated wife endures this.

At this point, it is crucial to ask which psychological mechanism, beyond other reasons, imprisons the woman and makes her feel unable to break away from the relationship. If one considers intimacy as a synonym of familiarity rooted in the adequacy of the process of knowing oneself, reflecting on oneself in the desire to understand one's partner and children, it can be deduced that the intimate space of this type of relationship is characterized by the psychic commonality and the difficulty both parties have in understanding each other. This aversion, united to the perception of emotional fragility, psychically activated the mechanism of fusionality, which involves a loss of boundaries of one's own identity.<sup>17</sup> As Colman wrote: "The lack of a secure ego boundary creates a primary confusion about what is inside and what is outside".<sup>32</sup>

Against this emotional enmeshment, the partner's perverse, manipulative and violent actions are justified by his wife as she unconsciously colludes in representing herself negatively, since the fusion corrodes her poor self-esteem and leads her to feel completely dependent. This concatenation of psychological factors realizes the dynamic of submission within a process of victimization that transforms the person. This explains how and why a perverse relationship deteriorates along a timescale whose length depends on how long the woman supports this treatment until she realizes it is unacceptable.

Only if the woman succeeds in preserving or recovering a sufficient capacity of psychological autonomy can she become aware that she is being victimized and start convincing herself that she should separate from him.

How correctly to interpret the outside world on the basis of one's individual capacity to examine oneself shows that the psychological power between the couple is the cut-off point between collaborative intimacy and collusive intimacy. This framework constitutes an intermediate range of intimacy where the variability of functioning depends on experiences that affect the ability to understand mental and emotional states which destabilize the psychic condition of separateness that interferes with parenting.

Ultimately a form of mixed intimacy characterized by a working relationship fluctuating between collaborating and colluding is envisaged, hypothesising that one or both partners are emotionally vulnerable to the anxiety that goes along with finding things out better, as it is an encounter with otherness synonymous with diversity that must be explored. If this leads to anxieties, as worrying aspects can unconsciously emerge, the capacity to reflect is permeated with defensiveness that the author would even call aversion because it hinders understanding what happens when one thinks. This indicates how anxiety interferes with questioning.

This is described clinically as a light inhibition in facing new situations, which indicates one's capacity for intimacy and is an indicator of relational disorders<sup>33</sup> which are characterized by an inadequacy in processing conflict arising from the dynamics of familiarization.

Thinking that balanced intimacy is characterized by a Promethean attitude, lets us see that restless intimacy is conditioned by unconscious mechanisms. In particular, this case describes the psychological determinants of a process of intimacy we observed that exemplifies the complexity of a woman's condition in expressing emotion in the maternal and conjugal role.

Focusing a bit wider, a perverted form of power is likely to emerge as a result of passive collaboration between husband and wife, since it is not completely authentic. If the need to conform to dynamics of submission is intense, this can also be present invisibly as the woman learns to keep relationships non-confrontational. This passivizing collaboration avoids an awareness of dissatisfaction and is the psychic mechanism that can lead to mental laziness,<sup>27</sup> which fuels the tolerance and conditioning not to express her point of view of her experiences. In this ambiguous situation, there is the

risk that the children will be brought up not to externalize their emotions: a mild form of submission which interferes with one's capacity for intimacy.

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