

The Scapegoated Child

Scapegoating is a huge area for recovery and the impacts are too manifold to cover here. Being the scapegoated child of a narcissist is one of the most profound psychological and emotional abuses that can be experienced by a developing human being.

Scapegoats are the host for the narcissist's 'bad part', the family bin-bag, the repository of all the trash the family cannot acknowledge, the 'identified patient' but also the 'used child' e.g. the family therapist, babysitter from an inappropriate age etc.

Scapegoats are truth-seers and tellers, and comprehensively punished for that. Usually, the child has qualities that irritate the narcissist or incite their envy – intelligent, pretty, insightful, emotionally intense and creative, but inevitably they can introject and personalise the abuse even if they can see it for what it is.

Most people can barely perceive that it would be possible to have a parent who 'has it in' for one or more of their children, who relentlessly and intensely smears, lies about, criticises and manipulates others against the child such that they really do become the proverbial goat in the desert. It is scarcely believable too that a family that looks 'normal' to others contains such pathology that numerous family members collude to 'mob' the scapegoat at a level of intensity and malignancy that goes way beyond 'family discord'.

Often there are disinterested bystanders within the family, there is traumatic invalidation and at a primeval relational level, this is betrayal trauma.

The losses that the scapegoat endures are again beyond the perception of most people: their deep lack of a sense of safety from a young age – the knowledge that if they say or do the wrong thing they could be emotionally or literally homeless; their lack of access to genuine nurturance and family support; the lack of being celebrated, valued and reminisced with; the fear that if they have a problem they will be judged and condemned; their exhaustion due to taking on too many tasks without enough psychological and practical support; the intense hope they feel when seemingly loved and approved of, and the inevitability of that turning to dust.

Scapegoats' desperate attempts to seek understanding, compassion and validation externally too often only lead to a familiar refrain of 'Oh but it's your mum/brother', 'Don't you think you're being a bit unforgiving/oversensitive?' 'Did you not get on with them then?' 'I thought X was lovely, you don't like them much do you,' leading to further judgement, sadness and shame.

Scapegoats' deep and overarching sense of being ostracised can gather moss (shame) like a rolling stone as they continue their existentially lonely journey in life, and can become a pattern if they remain unaware; they can unconsciously, repeatedly, manipulate their environments such that they become the office or group scapegoat. Their sense of self and what they bring to others is poisoned – intense self-judgement abounds; overthinkers, for example, can predict that any future partner and their family will judge them for their family situation, so stay single.

In short, the scapegoat's grief is complicated and disenfranchised; eventually, all that they have been through is barely able to be spoken about through a lack of energy, self-doubt 'was it that bad' and cloaked in fear of judgement and further alienation.

But when their splitting defence and 'hopeful self' wears thin, ultimately, scapegoats can realise that they are the strongest of people, and most able to be free of this abuse when they turn their focus around to themselves and their many qualities and strengths and away from the fruitless battle to get love and approval from a source that is not equipped to give it.