

Editorial

Alessia Fedeli*, Viviana Fini**

This issue of the journal *Ricerca Psicoanalitica* presents contributions from the experience of the seminar entitled ‘*Violence in relationships: the relationship that explains. The relational contribution to understanding gender violence as a pathological matrix of relationships*’, organised by the Institute in Rome on 8th October 2022.

At the end of the study day and also thanks to the interesting ideas put forward by those who participated, we felt the need to invest more time and space in reflecting on the issue of violence in intimate relationships. That was why we proposed to the journal *Ricerca Psicoanalitica* to host a thematic issue, hoping to broaden, deepen, or even simply keep an open eye on a topic of great political, social and clinical relevance today.

In the editorial, we will present this issue and accompany the reader with some thoughts on the various contributions.

We wish to encourage reflection on the topic: we understand its relevance from both a professional and a political point of view. It is a much-debated topic (today, we record from twenty to thirty thousand bibliographical entries relating to research in various disciplines on the topic); we hear and read about gender violence on a daily basis, indeed in general, violence in relationships concerns us, it touches us closely, we are not exempt from it and, above all, it is a topic for which there is a strong contiguity with common sense. By common sense, we mean an attitude that leads one to accept prejudiced positions, uncritically taking as true opinions on phenomena just because they are widespread. In other words, common sense has to do with conformism.

*Psychologist, SIPRe Psychoanalyst, specialist in Group-Analytic Psychotherapy, Area Referent of SIPRe Violence Center of Rome. E-mail: alessiafedeli@icloud.com

**Psychologist psychotherapist in the *UOC of Psychology of continuity hospital territory*, ASL Toscana nord-ovest and lecturer in the Specialisation Course in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy. Clinical psychological intervention and demand analysis, Rome. E-mail: vivianafini@gmail.com

Sergio Salvatore (2013), in outlining the causes of the crisis of the psychological profession, identifies contiguity with common sense as one of the most cogent reasons. In the case of violence, such contiguity leads one to see it as inherent in the individual and to assume that intervening means controlling it. Such contiguity, Salvatore explains, is an indication of the weakness of the theoretical models with which we read the phenomena in which we are about to intervene. The limited capacity of psychological models to express counterintuitive visions of reality contributes to organising the demand of the social mandate vis-a-vis our profession in terms of a *reductio ad hortum* of discomfort, conflict, and violence. Thus, the social mandate and patronage often invest us with a mythical role, functional to rhetorical dynamics of symbolic regulation of relationships, asking us to normalise what are considered deviant behaviours. In the absence of theories capable of giving meaning to social phenomena, which are culturally determined relational phenomena, we risk assuming this function in contiguity with common sense, forgoing reflection on the specific needs and functional objectives we are working on.

What we are saying is that it is our responsibility to decide whether to keep the social mandate we have been given in view of this incompetence. We are hereby proposing a choice.

With the conference first and with the publication now, we have an interest in building a setting in which we can deconstruct the premises of common sense about violence, proposing something counterintuitive in order to foster the construction of interventions which, starting with the micro-relationships, are also able to affect the macro- dimensions of our culture. We think this means providing opportunities for the younger generations and not just limiting the damage of violence.

And it is precisely for this reason that the seminar and publication bring together in a dialogue different vertex of interpretation of the phenomenon in question (psychological, psychoanalytic, cultural and social), theories and methodologies but also different contexts of intervention, which, in the seminar - through the presentation of cases - offered the possibility for small discussion groups to exchange their views. Finally, the final round table allowed us to make a meta-reflection on the relationship between theories, methods and cases, which is accounted for in this editorial and in the proposal of the monographic issue. In the seminar, the debates were carried out in different settings (theoretical papers, reports on interventions, discussion of clinical cases, final round table) precisely to bring out the complexity of the topic and allow the different issues to be read, focusing on how the theoretical premises, which the initial reports deconstructed and reconstructed, inform and develop the understanding of the cases. Overcoming an individualistic reading of violence, which places the causes on individuals, requires theories and theories of techniques capable of holding together

aspects related to the individual and socio-cultural dimensions. Only relationship-centered theories can provide criteria for holding this complexity together, and keep us away from the temptation to take on the words of common sense as the objective of our intervention.

Federica Formaggi's paper warns us against the risk of taking the common-sense view as a guide to our professional actions. It makes us realize that in doing so we risk operating 'a violent separation of violence from life'. She urges us to question violence as a specific form of relationship, a culturally determined form, on a par with tenderness, seen as another pole of a dialectical tension. She suggests going beyond what the patient brings as a symptom; using the symbol to grasp the part that generally remains hidden. We can read about this part, usually concealed by the violent one, in the clinical case presented by Andrea Bernetti.

The way we act is intrinsically linked to how we perceive ourselves and the world around us, which is why conceiving violence as an individual, intrapsychic pathology is a theoretical and methodological error. This is made clear to us by Stefano Ciccone, whose paper highlights the close correlation between the individual and culture, inviting us to reflect on the loss of 'order' that cultural changes have brought to the horizon of relationships and individual identities. Always bearing in mind the correlation between the individual and the context/culture, Ciccone claims, helps us overcome the risk of diminishing the responsibility on the part of the author. Reading the relationship in the context of representations, social roles, and power dynamics avoids reducing it to just the two subjects but takes into account third elements and their location.

We could say that culture prescribes emotions, offering us words to put an order within ourselves, in our relationships, in our view of things in the world.

Faced with major changes, unseen subjectivities emerge, disturbing emotions that do not yet have forms or words to be said. New interpretive words for relationships in context are needed in order to reconstruct an order of meaning that is not only individual but cultural.

Within this view, then, violence can be considered the expression of an act of disturbing emotions which the person experiences in the presence of the other.

Valentina Feroletto tells us about 'anguish' to describe such emotional disruption. The end of a known cultural order capable of naming the emotions experienced and the onset of strong anguish brings to mind what the philosopher Byung-chul Han (2019) argues in his *Eros in Agony*: Western society has become a palliative society, that is, a society which – in the name of an alleged well-being – has lost the capacity to suffer, in other words, to relate to confusing emotions, such as those we feel in the presence of the other, who by definition is a stranger, within a cultural context that is also highly confusing.

Valentina Feroletto writes that the goal of psychoanalytic intervention is to build a setting to foster the emergence of the 'subject as a reflective gaze.' Federica Formaggi writes about the possibility, through the conditions that psychoanalytic intervention promotes, for the subject to experience tenderness.

Finally, Andrea Bernetti allows us to understand how important it is for us as psychologists to read the social mandate and build competent patronage. He tells us about his work with male perpetrators of violence. And he tells us how the prison system, expecting inmates to be motivated by the possibility of shorter sentences, acts in that direction by prescribing courses to educate about appropriate behaviour. It thus mistakes inmates' participation in prescribed courses for changes in their behaviour, without grasping that such a proposal builds inmates intent on cheating the system. Failure to read this phenomenon results in a major waste of resources for the system and a risk of obsolescence for our profession, which thus remains tied to a poorly strategically oriented mandate, without expecting specific utility. But professional practices that are not substantiated by the capacity to analyse and govern settings are unlikely to enter into dialectical relationships with issues such as those related to violence. Andrea Bernetti tells us that not colluding with the prison institution means exiting the fantasy that our intervention is a persuasive intervention, which alternatively promotes interventions aimed at fostering an understanding of the experience on the part of the abusive man. Developing a competence to read one's own emotions within a workspace that focuses on the relationship with the abusive person can enable the abuser to introduce his or her own demand, giving substance to his or her own desire for change.

Three different clinical cases were discussed in the seminar: a clinical case best allows one to see how the individual and his or her context, including that of the therapeutic relationship, are inextricably linked.

The case presented by Andrea Bernetti, a case of a male perpetrator of violence, was chosen for this issue of the journal, which is interesting because it is in the establishing phase of the psychotherapy process, when the therapist's reading categories are 'tested' within the relationship between two subjects.

The case is enriched with considerations and reflections by Giovanna Frezza, Daniele Rovaris and Alessia Fedeli.

REFERENCES

- Han, B. (2019). *Eros in agonia*, Nottetempo, Milano.
- Salvatore, S. (2013). La funzione del senso comune nell'intervento dello psicologo clinico. Note sul lavoro di Sergio Salvatore: 'Questioni intorno allo sviluppo della professione psicologica', *Rivista di Psicologia Clinica*, 1, pp. 36-50.

Conflict of interests: the authors declare no potential conflict of interests.

Ethics approval and consent to participate: not required.

Received: 21 February 2023.

Accepted: 24 February 2023.

Editor's note: all claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, editors and reviewers, or any third party mentioned. Any materials (and their original source) used to support the authors' opinions are not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

©Copyright: the Author(s), 2023

Licensee PAGEPress, Italy

Ricerca Psicoanalitica 2023; XXXIV:784

doi:10.4081/rp.2023.784

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits any noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are credited.

