

Original Scars

Category: Scars

written by Pamela Adelstein | April 18, 2024

My chest tightens, then relaxes, as the tears roll down her face. She gradually bares her soul, revealing the events that led her to my exam room. She may have been born to a mother whose own experience with trauma stunted her ability to be a supportive parent. She may have suffered abuse at the hands of people who were supposed to be trustworthy. Or she may have experienced the loss early on of the primary person in her life who understood her.

The circumstances may vary, but the net effect is the same—deep down, she harbors a secret fear that she is unlovable. To distract herself from the pain in her heart, she has employed one or more of various coping strategies. She may have numbed the unbearable sensation with food or drink or sex or drugs. Perhaps she worked endlessly to achieve, hoping her accomplishments would prove she was worthy of love. Or maybe she simply built emotional walls to bury her foundational wound.

She is visiting me because I am a physician, and she hopes fervently that I can diagnose and cure her of ailments that have surreptitiously built up from emotions gone sideways. We sit and chat together about her past and her present. She speaks with a yearning, a desperation, to be acknowledged and seen rather than diminished and dismissed. Since childhood, she has been drowning in physical and/or emotional pain. Yet she is resourceful and a keen observer, so she learned how to mimic people who'd had more supportive upbringings so she could pass for someone who felt whole. This improvisation exhausts her, and she is at a loss for how to refill her soul.

I gently ask about her traumas. She slowly lets her guard down and allows me to witness her pain. Finally, we talk about it—about the Original Scar that developed in response to her Original Injury: a lack of trust in and attachment to a parental figure. This insecure attachment bred a secret fear of being unlovable. She was taught that love is conditional, and conditions did not work out in her favor.

I will then put down my stethoscope, stop typing, and turn away from my computer to look her in the eyes. My inner empath is on high alert. I try to show her a mirror of what I see: someone brave and fierce, vulnerable and gentle, wise beyond her years. A survivor.

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