

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 abuses that can be experienced by a developing human being, I believe.

They are the family bin-bag, the repository of all the trash the family cannot acknowledge, the 'identified patient' but also the family therapist and most damagingly, the host for the narcissist's 'bad part'.

Scapegoats are truth-seers and tellers, and comprehensively punished for that. Usually the child has qualities that irritate the narcissist – intelligent, pretty, insightful, creative, but like all children they personalise the abuse and blame themselves. I rarely see a narcissistic parent genuinely 'switch' the roles of scapegoat and golden child over the long-term, even though it can look like that has happened.

Ultimately, scapegoats are the strongest people and most able to be free of this abuse when they turn their focus around to their many qualities and strengths and away from the fruitless battle to get the love and approval they crave.

However, scapegoats, in their yearning for love and validation are, just as commonly as the golden child, lured/demanded to stay close and look after elderly parents.

The Golden Child

Clinical experience demonstrates that the golden child is as much a victim of abuse as the scapegoat. They can form an alliance with the narcissistic parent and their status (and safety) is elevated as the scapegoat's decreases. The enmeshed family, which to all intents and purposes looks good on the outside, becomes locked in the misery of this dynamic. Golden children's developmental stages are impacted by the witnessing of scapegoating and hence vicarious trauma. Deprived of a normal model of parenting (so anxiously attached) and coerced into adopting the narcissist's view of the scapegoat, golden children can develop a distorted view of relationships as dominant/submissive. As well as that, we see a dissociation between their thoughts and feelings (to witness the

abuse and maintain the family secret), the development of cognitive distortions in the service of self-preservation (e.g. blaming the scapegoat) and internalised learned helplessness (from fear of the parent as a result of trying to help the scapegoat).

With their empathy deficits, these children become emotionally numb later in life. Children who have developed empathy but fail to demonstrate it towards the scapegoat are vulnerable to experiencing damaged self-esteem and identity difficulties, as well as a compromised self-concept in perceiving themselves as a good and worthy person. This damaged self then enters into relationships as an adult, and the intergenerational problems continue when a new family is patterned on a template of power and control.

Literature commonly suggests that golden children are expected to live out the parent's grandiose self-beliefs and expectations, as an extension of them. That they are valued then for what they achieve not for who they are is a problem. However, I equally see situations where the golden child is an abject failure and still held in the highest esteem - the failures are overlooked and made excuses for, thus enhancing the golden child's arrogance. Hence, they can find it hard to operate in the outside world ('Nobody else is so reverential and attentive - why is that?' thinks the golden child). Childlike, self-pitying but also grandiose, condescending and arrogant, I often witness either a distancing from the parents or a 'failure to launch' - lured to stay in the nest by promises of inheritance for example, unaware they have been manipulated to stay by the narcissist because of their own abandonment schema (their utter self-interest is focused around 'I can't be alone', and/or 'Who will look after me when I'm old?').

The golden child commonly becomes an untrustworthy and inconsistent fence sitter at the least, who sometimes agrees that the parent is narcissistic and at other times is their biggest supporter.