EXPLORING YOUR FULL SEXUAL POTENTIAL, PART 13: JEREMY'S LITTLE SAD NOTEBOOK

Playing games is important. How are we to dig deeper into the sediments of old events which have made one feel unnecessarily different from others? There is an easy way: we can to do it as do little children. They invent their own games, share emotions, access their creativity and work their way out of it. Kids are great. Men who have lived their lives in Squaw Camp, have gotten to become frustrated at a deeply emotional level. But they are so used to this life, so used to the lack of alternatives, that their frustrations just seem to be part of who they are. So, let us use, or rather, make up games. Here is one: Jeremy's little sad notebook.

It is a simple game, but ever so effective. Jeremy played this game, showing us his notes, his sadness and ultimately his insights.

1. How children overcome emotional overkill

First, let us look at the importance of inventing games like children do. How useful are they? According to Professor Sandra W. Russ (2010) in her study on the significance of play in children, she notes:

> *"Play has been associated with the development of creative problem solving. Creative problem solving is thought to be a resource for everyday coping and adjustment".*

She is a child clinical psychologist and Professor of Psychology at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. Her research and publications focus on pretend play, creativity, and adaptive functioning in children. She has demonstrated in a scientific way the contribution that playing games can have to social adjustment and later adult health.

Kids make up games collectively. In this photo of an Afghanistan refugee camp for instance, we see boys seemingly having fun at re-enacting traumatic situations of Taliban terrorism. We see them helping each other to get over it. Some are smiling, as they use creativity to reach out to each other. They need not to be scolded; they need to be respected for using their in-built coping strategies.

In view of this, I feel that it is scientifically sound policy to deploy games as a useful instrument to help a client cope. But making up and playing games is a behavioral trait that withers away from lack of use as we grow up. In this series, I want to introduce some simple games and see where that leads us. (Perhaps you can make up even better ones!)

2. Jeremy

Jeremy is married with two children, 38 years old, and struggles with same-sex attractions, not to the degree that he wants to leave his wife and children, but to the degree that he experiences a nagging sense of bewilderment. In our view, the notion that you are either gay or straight means you are boxing people in labels. These labels tend to start living a life of their own, especially when they are intellectualized by activists who insist that their new worldview is the only way to go. In my view as a secular psychiatrist, I feel it is my professional task to help someone investigate all aspects of his full sexual potential, so he can take it from there.

Where does that lead to? I do not care: that is his business. I can offer him insights into what is going on. But what he ultimately does with his life is not my responsibility, nor am I accountable. Every psychiatrist or psychologist should be impartial to the extent to which same-sex attractions emerge or diminish, or opposite-sex attractions are unveiled or sink into oblivion. I am never to be held accountable. Your life is your business, not mine. Therapists just help you focus and feel more positive about yourself. Same applies to marriage counseling: you can choose stay married to her or drop her. Not my decision, not my business. Lay activists fail to see this professional paradigm; they blame therapists for the outcome. They feel that therapists are so powerful that they can run your life. That is ridiculous!

Having said that, Jeremy reached out to me in the support group, People Can Change, describing his restlessness, bewildering fears and tensions. He could not make sense of them, but it made him agitated, moody and at times hyperactive. When I gave it some thought, I felt he was running away as if there was a devil on his tail. Always dashing forward, always on the move. What was biting his tail? I felt that perhaps it was an infinite sadness. After all, as we have seen in previous parts of this series, there are many building blocks of late-onset depression in the psycho-sexual development of men with SSA at an adult age. Why are you running, Jeremy?

3. Notebook

I made up a game: Jeremy's little sad notebook. You buy a pencil and a small notebook, preferably colored blue (the color of sadness). You carry it around all the time in your shirt pocket near your heart (part of the game). Every day, you are required to write down one incident in which you as a 3 to 5-year old, felt sad. No more, no less. Think hard, every day for two months. You write it down in your own handwriting (a kid's handwriting), and later on transfer it to a computer (as an adult, and at the same time processing it in your mind, which is also part of the game). Then you send it to me, reaching out to others, just like kids do (another part of the game). You dare to share, you dare to say 'this is me' in all your inevitable shame.

Jeremy bought the book, but could not think of anything at first, until some days passed. After two weeks, we witness the rage and tantrums of a really sad little boy, something no one knew (and something no one had asked about either, up till now).

Here we show his notebook entries on seven different days, and the way he ultimately found a self-narrative to start dealing with the feelings.

Day 1:

> *"I find it difficult to write down any sadness from my very early age. I've got to find little Jeremy, but I'm not sure where he is or who he is."*

Day 2:

> *"I hate my tendency to want to identify with the feminine, or the feminine approach to situations. I have this tendency to think about things the way a woman would."*

Day 3:

> *"I want to stay with YOU, Dad, and learn from you. When you're in a good mood, this feels okay. I wish you could stay this way so I wouldn't be afraid of you anymore. I wish I*

could be solid with you, so I don't have to run back to Mom for defense. I want to love you so bad."

Day 4:

"*Something has made me shameful but I don't know what it is. I hang my head down a lot, cheeks red with embarrassment. For what, I don't recall. I have vague recollections of being shamed for my penis; for playing aggressively. Harsh scolding from Dad. I was playing with my sister's friends and was being aggressive. I don't remember the details but I was about 4 years old, and I got in trouble for it. The criticism of such was shaming. In bursts of anger I was told I was hated, or my parents were wishing I hadn't been born. Even Mom, who was my protector, would show dismay and disappointment with me. It killed me."*

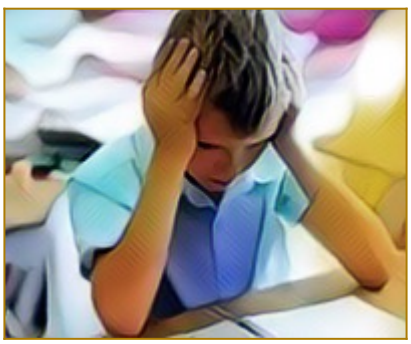
Day 5:

"*I want to play with my friends. Mom loves that I have girls for friends predominately. She brags to other family and friends about it. Even at a young age this doesn't seem normal. I have a couple of male friends. Sometimes they will come over to play. I feel like Mom doesn't like them as much though. Playing with male friends makes me feel like I'm betraying Mom, and sometimes my sister. Why?"*

Day 8:

"*I am so mad at mom. All of the hers. Why this rage? I hate them. I'm so angry. I want to scream at them and hurt them. I'm so mad. They take away everything from me. They won't let me be. Everything is all about them all the time. I don't want to serve her. I don't want to be her good little boy any more. I can't even fucking sit down and enjoy a few minutes of peace without feeling guilty because I took time away from her and her ego. Fuck her. I'm so sick and tired of this shit. I can't even have a friend because there's always a her that takes precedence. Let me go. Just let me go."*

Day 10:



"*I am trying to understand myself better. Being little Jeremy, I reach out to Dad. He yells at me or hurts me in some way. Many times, I get hurt. He can be so evil at times. Sneering at me and the horrible things he would say to me. Things like "you should have never have been born! Please cease to exist!" How far does the hurt go? It's there, I see it! He pushed me there. Or did I put myself*

there to protect myself? At one point, I crossed a thresh-
old, never to return again. A threshold of protection, rejection, and utter contempt and hatred for him. A portal to another dimension."

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4. Our comments

In these entries, we see a multitude of layers, stemming from kindergarten time. We see:

1) A disappointment in Dad, growing into rage and rejection;

2) We see Mom as the protector but ultimately, so omnipresent (present all around) and so suffocating, that a hatred grows towards her and all females to go with it;

3) We see a child being shamed and we see this turning into self-hatred instead of the usual self-love that a child should acquire at this age.

So, we see an adult man with:

a) Self-hatred and hence low self-esteem,

b) A love-hate relationship with his father

c) We see him saying to women 'get off my back!',

d) We see him growing into a lonely man who acquired no skills to build and maintain healthy same-sex friendships or buddies.

All these negative qualities are not perceived in other boys or men. Those same-sex peers seem to have it all, and so an envy slowly but surely grows. When testosterone comes around, the envy and eternal frustration become sexualized. The boy not only starts admiring buddies but he finds himself craving for them in a sexual way. We must not underestimate testosterone. It is a strong chemical, a very soothing drug, one that makes all feelings of being a wimp or a lonely loser disappear on the spot.

And so, same-sex attractions become a coping strategy that works for him. The sexual aspect which seems to emerge out of nowhere, compulsively creates a pleasant experience in which all low self-esteem, self-hatred, ambivalent relationships with others and loneliness fade away like the morning dew.

The downside is, that it wears off quite quickly after an episode of sexual gratification. But it works each time, leading him to become someone who is always enviously goggling his eyes out at every good-looking guy in the street, or he may be actively checking them out on the Internet.

But no matter how often he looks at other men, how often he surfs on the Internet, or how often he seeks the thrills of testosterone in public activities with men, at the end of the day a vague feeling creeps up again. An old feeling, an inner sense of being back to Square One: the low self-esteem which never seems to get better, the pain of the lousy relationship with a distant or absent father, a sense of being orphaned, and the feeling of having women close but wanting them to keep their distance once and for all. What is wrong with me? I feel so lonely. I need another fix.

People can have negative reactions towards their own SSA's. If you label your craving as something wrong, something to avoid or as something unwanted, it makes the obsession only greater, not to mention the shame. I would dare to say that you can see it in a positive way: they are road signs leading the way to inner psychological understanding. They are coping strategies. A healthy ego is striving for solutions and we should embrace the solutions which have been found up till now. You are halfway there. Good on you. Now go for the last innings, as they say in cricket.

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We can analyze these themes on a rational level, but I decided to ask Jeremy to do something different. Instead of pondering on all those feelings, I asked him to write a letter to little Jeremy and to tell little Jeremy what to do. This is of course a very bewildering thing to be asked. Fancy being asked to be your own therapist! But, why not? Let us see where that leads us. It led to great insights.

So as a counselor, I composed a letter on behalf of Little Jeremy. I sent it to Big Jeremy, and then Big Jeremy wrote something back to me.

My letter on behalf of Little Jeremy:

> *"Jeremy I need your help here. It is about Dad. I hate him. He yells at me or hurts me in some way. Many times, I get hurt. He can be so evil at times. Sneering at me and the horrible things he would say to me. Things like "you should have never been born! Please cease to exist!" Jeremy, I am crying. I need someone to comfort me. Please, Jeremy. What am I to do?"*

The letter Big Jeremy wrote back, addressing the child in himself:

"Jeremy, you came and talked to me today. You told me some horrible things about how Dad treats you. I can see you reject him. You reject him so much on an intrinsic level that you have rejected part of yourself. It's like you can't even love him even if you wanted to. This horrible, horrible wall that you have built to protect yourself. I'm not sure I know how to tell you how to get through this. I'm sure that on some level Dad really does love you, but you don't see it, Dad doesn't show it, and if he does, you refuse to embrace it. So, telling you that Dad really does care for you isn't going to cut it. Actions far outweigh the words here. Jeremy, this may sound crazy, but I want you to try this. You hate your Dad, but you have also rejected yourself in the process—it's quite apparent. You have to stop doing that, for your sake.

I want you to repeat this to yourself, in the mirror and look at yourself with compassion: 25 times: "I forgive you, Jeremy. I love you." "I forgive you, Jeremy. I love you." Now, with deep breath, visualize Dad, and repeat the same: "I forgive you, Dad. I love you." "I forgive you, Dad. I love you." I know this is the last thing in the world you feel like doing. And you feel like you shouldn't have to. I completely understand. But you're doing this to free yourself. Trust me. You must set yourself free from the emotions that have imprisoned you."

By looking at his childhood feelings and then contemplating on them as an adult, Jeremy is slowly helping himself to cope with inner turmoil, anger and despair. He is coming to terms with deeply felt emotions, and is starting to learn to love himself, which ultimately will lead to a higher sense of self-esteem. This is after all, the core predicament of all men who experience SSA's.

To be continued.

Job Berendsen, MD.

Next Part

Complete Series

Home