

EXPLORING YOUR FULL SEXUAL POTENTIAL, PART 18: OVERCOMING DEFENSIVE DETACHMENT



In her 1983 book *'The Early Development of Gender Identity'*, the British research psychologist Elisabeth Moberley laid the foundation for a deeper understanding of same-sex attractions. Her contribution of the concept of defensive detachment is the groundwork for effective psychotherapeutic help that followed from a causal model. In this article, we will look into the mechanisms of detachment, and identify the challenge to recognize it when you are doing it.

1. What is defensive detachment?

Detachment started early on in life, between the ages of 2 and 4, so researchers have come to realize. You did not manage to identify sufficiently with your same-sex parent for various reasons that we have explained in previous articles. Your Dad was not the kind of guy you wanted to identify with, if he was there at all. Perhaps he did not wish to identify with you, or was not capable of fathering because he didn't know how, or never learnt to do so due to his own youth. Perhaps he was having a rough time during that short of space with you as a toddler: a problem with alcohol or other addictions, marriage problems, an affair, fighting unemployment or feeling compelled to be at work excessively to get higher up. Chances are, he did not realize how important a father's physical and emotional role is to every son. Maybe he was less sensitive than you are, and merely appeared not to care enough, not expressing the affirmation that you needed.

You tried though, but you were not noticed or understood by either your mother or father in doing so. So your psychological umbilical chord to your mother was never sufficiently severed. This is called the primordial conflict and refers to the earliest stage of development.

When a child is frustrated long and heavily enough in this way, he will give up and learn to switch off. The identification process is growing into something quite painful; withdrawing and detaching becomes his coping strategy. In doing so, he is making the biggest mistake in his short life up till that moment.

Basically, he is saying: *“go to hell, Dad, to hell with you and all that you stand for”*. In doing so, he will not identify sufficiently with maleness, with heterosexuality or with his core needs. He keeps his distance, and he senses peers as ‘other’. Ultimately, he becomes a mature man with a mature *“no”*.



In the meantime, the call of his instincts remains, the yearning for male identification. We are all wired to identify with the same-sex. Later when the sexual hormones kick in, the yearning will become romanticized, and sometime following puberty, it gets sexualized. The need for same-sex connection that was unmet has become a sexualized yearning. From that moment, the chase is on for the original urge to embrace maleness. The childhood longing will never disappear.

In this way, two opposing forces have developed: on the one hand there is a habit of detaching from maleness and male peers, and on the other hand the urge to correct this, as it were, to achieve that connection after all. Due to sexual hormones, the urge is sexualized and through romantization and sexualization of other males, a man tries to resolve the primordial conflict at last.

Homosexuality is not a separate form of sexuality (sexuality does not come in all sorts of configurations). It is merely the way that the human body uses the available sexuality (that we all have) to resolve and satisfy an age-old conflict, and to alleviate a persistent and legitimate yearning and an emotional need for same-sex identification.

2. The repetitive nature of defensive detachment

In men with SSA's, defensive detachment from same-sex individuals goes on all day and toward almost all men. The only exceptions are perhaps one or two individuals who have been allowed into the private space.

The driving force of homosexuality is not feeling attracted to other men for an unknown and equally unimportant reason, as most people (including gay activists) have come to assume, it is the way that the identification with other men is incessantly driven out of mind between the bursts of attraction and identification when they do occur. It is a full-blown Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde syndrome. During the day, you incessantly detach, but come night, the mind drifts in the opposite direction and the body tries to make up for the loss that detachment has created during the day.

In this sense, men with SSA's are not the same as men who have identified successfully with maleness at a very early age. Defensive detachment becomes a habit, and it is the main cause for the fact that the connection that a man can have with other men through homosexual romances and homosexual sex, sadly fades away again within hours or days.



3. Recognizing defensive detachment

Do you realize that you are detaching? Usually not. Why is that?

Well, it doesn't feel as if it is your doing. The detachment feels as if the other person showed certain behavior; he gave you negative feelings (so you think) or demonstrated a painful indifference toward you, after which you of course detached.

But this is not the way defensive detachment actually works. It is the other way around. First you detach, then your mind fabricates negative feelings about the person from whom you have already detached, you show or radiate these negative feelings or this indifference toward him, and then the other guy reacts to your negative reaction or to your indifferent demeanour.

It was you who started it, and it was you all the time. It has nothing to do with the other guy. That is a very painful insight, once you comprehend it.

Not many men with SSA's realize this, and hence, not many men will make the ultimate change, that is to confidently and effortlessly become part of the men's world outside the defensive barrier. It takes work and understanding to step out of one's comfort zone of detachment and to develop connection to men. You are the one doing the rejecting, and you are the one keeping it up.

4. The mechanism of your defensive detachment

Talking, but with a baseball bat behind your back. You do not notice your detaching, because your feelings appear to be a genuine representation of reality. The other person appears to be distant, he is 'other', he feels as someone who is not like you. He appears to be hostile and to be rejecting you. He appears to know for sure that you do not belong to his crowd.



He has it all, he appears to be with friends, people who you feel you will not be a part of. He

appears to be different and he definitely is not being friendly and reaching out to you. He appears to have negative opinions about you. He looks more masculine, stronger, more attractive and seems to be far more confident. How does he do that? How can he be so confident?

Little do you realize that it is all in your mind. You do not invest time and energy in what seems to have become a hopeless cause.

5. The way you come across

You ignore him, you let the opportunity pass by. And that is what he sees and feels. You are doing nothing, you are not affirming him, you are not reaching out or being open or vulnerable. You are not taking interest in him, and it is you who looks the other way.

After which, he does the same thing. After all, he is not chasing after you, he has no reason to do so. He is not the one who is dying for contact, for same-sex intimacy, for being seen and acknowledged. He has already had plenty of that in his life, and it is not he who is marching around with an insatiable same-sex neediness.

And so, you fall prey to defensive detachment. You approach no closer or even move away. Detachment is keeping you from homing in on your deepest desire for acknowledgment and affirmation. Defensive detachment is a curse, but it is elusive, for it is cloaked in six shades of gray. Which is yours?

At one extreme, you may find yourself saying no by falling into complete passivity, withholding from the other guy your energy and connectedness. At the other extreme, you may persecute men in your mind, savagely smiting imaginary enemies who appear to have troubled you for so long. And there are shades in between.

#1 The state of passivity

We see a lack of your own initiative. You gently float along on any wind that passes by. You have no gumption, no indulgence in others, and like a snail you may find yourself crawling back into the shell which you carry around for moments when the going gets tough.

#2 The state of passive-aggressive behavior

This is passivity, but with a hostile undertone. You procrastinate, play hard-to-get, bottle feelings up, shut off verbally, give angry looks, make obvious changes in behaviour, act obstructively, sulkily or put up a stone wall. In conversations, you make remarks like a sniper does, one whose negativity is short and snappy. A sniper cannot be tackled imme-

diately but the arrow hits its aim.

#3 The state of open aggression

There is an anger under the surface which easily bubbles up, in order to prove that you will not be pushed around. It is an assertive and vigilant state: "You are not going to mess with me". Some onlookers will attribute leadership qualities to this sharpness and rudeness; others will spot the bullying quality into which it erodes all too often.

#4 The state of hostile-aggressiveness

Here, we see no consideration of or compliance to the emotions of others around you. You feel very entitled to throw your weight around, giving way to a desire to dominate either a situation or other people around you. You do not care what emotional discomfort your reactions give rise to. The other person's needs are of no avail.

#5 The state of fearful paranoia

Here, you are projecting your negative feelings and attitude onto the surroundings, believing yourself therefore to be the victim. Hostile-aggressive people own their hostility, but paranoid persons attribute their hostility to others. The more hostile they are, the stronger the paranoia. And a paranoid person will go a long way to prove that the others or society are indeed evil, untrustworthy and full of malice.

#6 The state of persecutory paranoia



Paranoia can deteriorate to the urge to persecute others. Fear makes room for certainty: there is no doubt anymore that others are to blame, and you step in to take action. Like a Don Quixote, you take to your horse, rally others to ride with you, aiming to smite the foe. Fanatism becomes the driving force, and lying and deceiving are part and parcel of a clouded state of mind.

6. The negative consequence of the good-little-boy syndrome

Men with SSA's often get away with their hostility due to the good-little-boy performance that

they have come to demonstrate at all times. No-one will come to suspect that this likable fellow could harbor hostility toward others.

But he is marching around with a dagger under his cloak. Superficially, he is delightful and elegant, but in reality, he actively creates and hostilely maintains a distance to others, keeping them away from his inner self. He is producing, directing and staging a false self, a facade, a theater even. But his seemingly charming apparel disguises hostile moves, as he compulsively detaches from same-sex peers and places himself outside of their male world.

"I am not you. I am nice, kind, and considerate, but I am not you".

Like it or not, that phrase constitutes peer-to-peer hostility, pushing someone away.

So, we witness how he alternates his three egos. During the day, first he is the good little boy, the nice guy, but secondly, he detaches over and over again creating a great distance while maintaining the air of the nice guy. Then comes the night, and his third persona emerges. The healthy yearning for male connection demands its pound of flesh and he searches for that lost masculinity, the one he failed to claim sufficiently, and he does so by means of fantasy, pornography, gay bar visits, cruising in public gay places or gay sex. "I want it, I want it, gimme, gimme, please *give it to me*".

7. The primordial conflict revisited

The central driving force of his predicament is detachment, a letting go or saying *no* which once served a purpose for the small child, but which has grown into a way of life. Detachment has become the default filter of perception and behavior, all of which are concealed due to the good-little-boy performance, the compulsive stage act of the nice guy.

If you do not succeed in unraveling this mystery, you may find yourself spending your whole life trying to understand SSA's, but you may never achieve the connection to maleness that you so strongly desire. Maleness stems from within, not from without. You, like any other man, have it all, and maleness is yours to experience. It is the incessant ingrained drive of detachment which is frustrating your endeavors.

To be continued.

Job Berendsen, MD.

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