EXPLORING YOUR FULL SEXUAL POTENTIAL, PART 35: ENMESHMENT WITH THE MOTHER

A mother can be a major source of enmeshment. *Why don't naked girls fill my dreams?'* This question lingers ever so often in the mind of men who struggle with same-sex attractions (SSA's) and for whom those attractions appear to leave so much unfulfilled in their life. It seems as if there is a lack of attraction to the opposite sex. The truth is, however, that men who experience SSA's have just as many opposite-sex attractions (OSA's) as anyone else but they do not perceive those feelings as sexual. Enmeshment is standing in the way.

They know very well when a woman is attractive, or nice, or when she is good company, or when she has a bewildering influence, but the man does not recognize that those feelings are the same feelings as a so-called 'heterosexual' man has. He has not come to sexualize his emotions. But those feelings are there alright. Yet there is enmeshment at play. What is that? In this article, we will try to peel our way through these mysteries as though we are cooking onions for dinner. Don't cry.

1

When we use paradox psychology on this predicament, we may say that a man likes/loves that woman and all that she stands for, but that he is also in the opposite state of mind: he hates the predicament and needs her/them to stay away. Forever. This is called a paradox or a double bind. It is *'yes'* and *'no'* at the same time in the same person. Let us start with the exploration of the negative emotions.

I asked Rodney to explore his hitherto shameful negative attitude toward women using a simple journaling exercise. I gave it the tantalizing name *'The Witchcraft Game'*, meaning: *'will the bitch float?'* I aimed to see to what extent he was bewitched or enmeshed with his loving mother and to unveil the inevitable emotions that enmeshment leads to. I said:

> *"Imagine you are a boy again. Write a letter each day for a week to your imaginary mother, treat her like a witch who is invading your inner mind, and tell her off. You say "Get out of my soul, you bitch!" and then continue to write."*

In doing so, I permit Rodney to write negative things, a predicament he would not normally dream of. After all, most men who struggle with same-sex attractions have learned to masquerade ambivalent feelings under a veil of *'good-little-boy'* behavior. I call it *'Little Lord Fauntleroy, the perfect brat'*. Rodney calls it *'Goody Two Shoes'*. It is a coping mechanism to avoid getting thrown out of a parent's love and to avoid the child's subsequent crashing down into a void of abandonment and nothingness. Perfect behavior is the only lifeline to hope and a promise of happiness when you are grappling on your own.

Well, off he went. Say no more. Without further ado, he writes,

> *"When I tell Mum to 'get out of my soul, you bitch', I feel like I'm more powerful and that I'm creating some distance between us. We are not the same person but two people who are individuals. And thus, there are individual needs present in both of us that should be respected.*

> *A mother should be selfless in finding out what my needs are, and she should meet them in my early years until I'm able to start doing so autonomously, which she should also give me agency to do. Instead, she did everything, oh so 'selflessly' (that is sarcasm, Job, because it's what she says but doesn't mean. She instead wanted me to stay an infant so I'd never grow up and be myself and leave her, I think. She crippled me when I'm not actually disabled, so that I would stay dependent and meet her needs)."*

Wow, he is really socking it to her. I merely sounded the bell for the first round in the boxing match, struggling to find my pack of crisps, and bang, down she goes. We were only twenty seconds into the match! *"Get up, woman, get up"*, so I thought. *"He's accusing you of Munchhausen, like on Netflix!"* But nope, here he comes for a second helping.

> *"I'm the child, you're the adult, you bitch. Job, it feels good to put her outside of me on the other side of my skin. It now enables me to set some boundaries about her trying to re-enter my soul because she needs me for her narcissistic needs. I want to be guilt-free in asserting to her 'I don't need you. I need dad and I'm on a journey to manhood without you."*

Wow, I had casually mentioned the notion of boundary issues, but I am not used to anyone catching on so quickly. We shrinks, we take our time. But Rodney needs no target practice. Not Rodney.

> *"Fuck you for not sorting out your problems before having me, mum, because my life*

has been about trying to please you and about easing your pain so you don't have to face your own problems. It is unfair."

End of round #1, at least for the moment. We will deal with more of Rodney's rants in the next article, but let us analyze the gems of wisdom which have now been generously strewn at our feet. Great match, by the way. I can smell the bonfire. And yes, she floats.

2

It feels good for Rodney to finally get in touch with ancient feelings of enmeshment which he has been reluctant to show all those years. But in paradox psychology, we acknowledge that the opposite is also true. Therefore, it doesn't feel good at all. Fancy throwing your mother before the bus like that. You have been a naughty boy, Rodney. Naughty Rodney. You are so wicked, aren't you Rodney. Bad Rodney, you should be ashamed of yourself.

And it is in that very moment when ambivalent feelings catch up with him that shame sets in. Always shame. Isn't that your second name, Rodney, hmm? Well, cough it up, what do you have in store to say for yourself?

It didn't take long for Rodney, who was caught up in the middle of his rants, to start feeling guilty:

"*This feels like I'm creating a distance between us but my brain is getting foggy and I feel a tinge of fear in my chest. I think she's about to get rageful as I say this to her. She'll get more and more desperate to find a way in and make me feel guilty for this betrayal."*

Rodney is apparently speaking from experience. As a child, he must, no doubt, have experienced this dozens of times. Notice his fear reaction which is even becoming physical. His mind is desperately chickening out of the confrontation. *'Foggy'* he calls it. *'Resistance'* is more like it. He is telling us that the feelings are vanishing, or should we say that the paradox is forcing him to suppress his spontaneous answer to my simple question. He is pushing his true self away and is trying to become the nice and complacent boy yet once again.

"If I were to actually say "get out of my soul you bitch", I think mum would start crying and make me feel guilty and then hold it against me forever. I feel like I'm putting myself in danger. Imagine when I was eight saying this, I'd never get fed or feel loved ever again unless I gave up on myself and apologized profusely. So while scary, I am an

adult now and can handle the backlash, but how not to feel guilty… I feel unsure about that one."

If the guilt feelings are not adequately resolved, a grudge will start to grow. The image of his loving mother will become stained by negative feelings which are eroding the foundations of his manhood. His mother, or women in general, are very nice and wonderful, but deep in the dark cellars of his mind, there is another Rodney: the frightened child, the lonely infant, the betrayed boy. Or so it feels.

Will he grow over it, as they say? No, the feelings may fade into the background, but it took a mere scratching of the surface to make the scars bleed again. I admit that I have the advantage of knowing where to look, but credit goes to Rodney too, for his courage to take a good long look at himself.

3

The next day, Rodney repeated the exercise. Round #2. The ringside bell clangs, towels away! And they're off. Go, Rodney, go!

"*This feels great. It has a positive effect on me to say "I'm me, and mum is not me". We are separate. We both need to see that. If mum has a problem, it is not mine. If I have a problem, it is not hers. Support is normal but taking over each other to stay connected is not."*

If that is not zapping her between the eyes, what is? Naughty Rodney appears to be breaking free from enmeshment. Down she goes to the floor, and down with her goes her sticky glue with which she used to lovingly smear her favorite child.

Is this predicament exclusively her doing? Are we to believe that at the core of ambivalence toward women it would be a mother's dominance? I propose we update the *'dominant mother'* narrative and replace it with the more accurate *'enmeshed relationships'* narrative. It is not her being dominant that is the fundamental problem, the stress is caused by the child's being hopelessly enmeshed, a condition that, in time, one can overcome.

This explanation is more inclusive because it takes a child's own behavior equally into account and in doing so, empowers him to take responsibility for his situation and feelings. He needs to own his feelings. It makes him less passive. The last thing in the world we need is to magnify the *'poor-little-me'* stance.

The way that radical gay-lib psychologists incessantly stress or conjure up a victim role only adds to the feelings of weakness and shame. I insist, as do many mental health workers, that the said shame has always been there; it finds its origins in infancy. It was not done to you by a cruel society, a nasty set of wretches. *"The child is the father of the man"*, said William Wordsworth in his poem *"My heart leaps up" way back in 1802*.

Your childhood experiences have fathered your current ability to interact with the world now that you are an adult, a man. The notion has been commongood for more than two centuries.

The boyhood experiences with the mother were (in an enmeshed family) marvelous on the one hand, home sweet home, but they may very well generate a grudge, on the other.

And so a defensive detachment can come to grow at the idea of women getting all too close, with women creeping up in your bed, with women intervening in your play with your sexual organs, and with women placing themselves yet once again center stage at the expense of your need for a life of your own. You were not seen as an individual, you were used. And no one knew the difference because in a life of enmeshment, boundaries are gone with the wind, leaving a bewildering nothingness to prevail all around. Who am I really, the child may ask. He has no clue. I am everything you want me to be.

It is then that an unfathomable awe for that peer that you see outside of the window starts to creep up and intrude into the mind. *'Boy, does he look great, that attitude. Let us hope that no one notices my cravings for a force lifting me up into maleness and being like him. Gosh, look at him'*. A desire arises to get mom and all that she stands for from under the skin. *'Be-gone, creature of my past. Boy, does he look great'*.

4

Recognizing enmeshment

Recognizing whether you're in an enmeshed relationship can be difficult, particularly if it's all you've ever known. Blurred boundaries become accepted, they become the norm. In enmeshed families, they are even seen as a sign of love, loyalty, and safety. The safety issue has morphed in the new millennium as a necessary attribute on every campus, high school, and at every peer-group engagement.

It has been referred to by critical writers as *'safety-ism'*. This alleged safety issue is growing way out of hand. It finds its origins, however, in enmeshment where a parent needs to take great care of the child and to protect him/her from all harm, read: to avoid exposing him to the horror of other people with their dangerous other views and, no doubt harmful other be-havior. It is the enmeshed family crying out.

Mom is not dominant, mom is enmeshed. In that family, everybody is. And when she is not enmeshed, and when the kid is not enmeshed, and when dad is not enmeshed, she can be as dominant as she likes. When the dragon of enmeshment has been slain, the kid will create his boundaries, dad will stick to his feelings, while mom just carries on being who she is. It is better to have a monument of a mother who sets her mark on (local) history than a jellyfish who cannot be counted on.

Hang on. Lord almighty, she is up on her feet! Look out, Rodney, behind you! She now has the audience on her side. But Rodney is regaining his wits, too. Clang! Clang! Towels away! Go, mom, go!

Rodney writes:

> *"Anyway, I feel like I'm gaining some independence by ridding her of my soul. I prefer me without any attachment to her. I like myself as a male and someone who is likable. I wish she hadn't have incested me emotionally. We are different. I am me. You are you, mom. That's how we should have loved each other, but now there is none there.*
>
> *Yet I still feel compelled to tell you I love you because you would emotionally blackmail forever if I didn't. You would probably tell everyone how nasty I am as a son not to make you feel loved. I'm sick of the fake bullshit. I love you if you don't strip me of my soul. I'm getting my soul back and choosing to love myself instead."*

Incest! Did you hear that? Rodney is making accusations of incest! Where are the cops? Oh no, he meant emotional incest. She is going down for the ten-count, all the same. The referee is ending the tug-of-war. What a fight, what a night! Incest, who would have thought. This is even better than Agatha Christie.

Conclusion

In the beginning of this article, we asked: why don't I dream of girls? Well, when a young man, coming of age, gets to grips with the fact that the human race is gendered (as all mammals are) and when he feels comfortable with acknowledging the limitations that this entails for him, then he will experience heterosexual interests as part of the human condition. It is necessary to truly realize that when you are male, you are limited. You can only be male. You cannot be female, nor can you appropriate femaleness into your soul. You need to acknowl-

edge that you have no “feminine” side. That is New Age crap, the bullshit du jour, a play of words, pronounced by wine-intoxicated feminists fiddlng with their sons as though they were toys for their mucking around.

In our email exchanges, Rodney finally dared to address the way he had let his mother define his range of feelings. He is now chopping that forest of enmeshment down. Here is one of his final emails in which he is struggling to empower himself. Feminists may find it offensive, but then again, as a psychiatrist, I am helping a young man to find his soul, not a young feminist to grapple with her grievences.

> *“Mum needs to go. I deserve her to go and to be a woman and let me decide to be a man and overcome my emotional blocks to attaching to manhood and becoming a man. I am male, therefore will become a man and not a woman. I feel more of a boy the more I drill getting her out of my soul. Mum has no place in my essence. She is a nurturer for the child me years ago, but now she is just the mother I once had and let program me to be someone I’m not and never wanted to be so she could feel good.*
>
> *It feels liberating to think about her getting out of my soul. It feels like a trauma bond is breaking and I’m able to see myself as a self, a subject, not her little toy who had to be the perfect toy so she looked like the perfect toykeeper. Fuck you. I’m not your toy. I’m a person. I just am not a person who has a self yet, but I’m not an object. I’m a man and should be respected and loved for who I am. I mean ‘I’ am. Not the body. ME! My essence. The ME. I. Don’t you see? I am an I. I have an I. An inner essence that is NOT YOU. FUCK YOU. Get out of my soul, you bitch. Once and for all. You’re not welcome. For I am male. I need to internalise that now. And keep it. So fucking get out. And stay out.”*

Folks, we have a winner.

To be continued.

Job Berendsen, MD.

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