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Problems and dilemmas within relationships

Relationships challenge all the ways in which we feel about and experience ourselves. It is through flesh and blood human relationships that we experience a mirroring process of the reciprocal roles we have learned. Difficulties in relationships arise when we stumble into the more powerful not yet understood emotions that may be linked to our early life survival patterns, which bring up the more fragile and less-known aspects of ourselves.

All relationships, when our attachment needs are pressed, return us to the world of childhood where we strive to maintain control over what feels like helplessness and powerlessness. We are brought into our vulnerability, our smallness, alongside our need for closeness and intimacy. Often it isn't until we have been in a relationship for some time, or have perhaps had a series of similar relationships, that we realise there are meaningful patterns at work. Because we learn to be a person with an 'other', the patterns of inter-being are the foundation from which we seek attachment to others. So we are naturally drawn towards people with whom we engage in similar learned ways to those significant others in our early life. When this is balanced by mutual sharing and respect these patterns can be mediated, even changed.

But when we realise we are repeating the more negative reciprocal roles, such as being *controlling* and feeling *restricted*, or being *judging* in relation to feeling *crushed* we find ourselves caught up in potentially destructive patterns. Once again we become the child who felt humiliated or rejected, hurt or abandoned, lost, furious, uncared-for and needy.

Our core wound is pressed over and over again by our experience in relationships. We may avoid involvement with others and keep relationships superficial, limiting contact to people at work, or only talking on the telephone, in order to cope with fear of closeness but pay the price in loneliness and isolation. We may rush from one relationship into another hoping to heal the pain inside us. We may long to find 'perfect care' only to feel crushed and disappointed over and over again.

We may suffer from several broken or destructive relationships, including the ones at work or with acquaintances, before becoming aware that there are unconscious patterns at work. Once we start looking, however,

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our journey toward change has begun. It is possible to shift reciprocal role patterns into being less rigid and dominating, just through our awareness of being invited into them. We can create new reciprocal roles that are helpful and healthy. Reciprocal roles such as: *listening* in relation to *listened to*, *caring* in relation to *cared for*; *loving/nurturing* in relation to *loved/nurtured*. By reading this book you are developing an observer self who is witnessing all you have been through, and thus creating *respectfully witnessing* in relation to *respected and witnessed*.

In this chapter we look at the more complicated difficulties which arise from our relationships with other people, which press our core wound against which we defend ourselves in the old learned way. In order to understand this we need to look at the patterns we learned in childhood.

Questionnaire: Relationships

How many of these statements apply to you?

If I get close to someone, I fear:

- Ridicule: 'I'll be laughed at for what I feel.' And –
- 'Contempt: 'I will get spat upon.'
- Humiliation: 'They will look down on me.'
- Dependency: Being made to feel small and helpless: 'I don't want to have to need anyone.'
- Being taken advantage of: used and abused.
- Being teased and taunted: 'They will get just within my reach and disappear.'
- Invasion: 'They'll get right inside me.'
- Cruelty: 'I'll be beaten or my words used against me.'
- Lack of privacy: 'They are watching me all the time.'
- Overwhelming need: 'No one will ever fill the hole in my heart.'
- High expectations: 'I'll have to be on my "best" behaviour all the time.'
- Abandonment: 'I'll be left just when I've let go.' Or, 'I'll be abandoned in the end, no one will stay with me.'
- Hypervigilant: 'I have to be on my guard all the time. You never know when they will get you.'
- Suffocation: 'Being close is too much, there is no room to breathe.'
- Being overwhelmed and overpowered: reduced to nothing, like a slave.
- Conditional/restricting: 'I'll never come up to scratch, be what they want.'
- Losing myself completely: disappearing into the void.
- Losing my independence.

- Crying all the time.
- Abuse – sexual, physical or verbal.

Do you recognise the following patterns of thinking?

- 'No one could ever be as good to me as ...'
- 'They will see things about me I hate and want no one to see.'
- 'It is only a fantasy, and I'll never get near it.'

Mark which of the above you recognise applies to you and see if you can name your own three-way reciprocal roles.

Learning to recognise the 'shadow'

What was done to us we do to others and to ourselves. Sometimes one way of coping with painful emotional early experiences is to cut off from pain and try to live in a controlled but restricted way. We try to protect the hurt and fragile child in us by looking after it in others, or by hitting out at it in others. It is very hard to acknowledge this in ourselves, because in acknowledging that we have taken on the parental role in our relationships we are admitting that we are behaving like the people who once damaged or hurt us. If we understand that our choices were limited by the unconscious need to be in reciprocation to others we can invite conscious revision and seek help to change. We usually act from both ends of our reciprocal role, but it's harder to acknowledge the more negative role. This may mean facing our critical side, the side that secretly enjoys humiliating others, that likes to be possessive, demanding, cruel, taunting or over-controlling.

When these aspects remain unconscious they cause more trouble than if we face them. If we have experienced humiliation when young we will do anything to avoid it – for example, by living life 'above reproach' or 'beyond criticism'. But the fear will remain, unconsciously. Because we have put it down so firmly in ourselves it's likely we will do the same when we meet it in others. This may present itself in the form of a 'pathetic' old man or woman, someone we see as weak, and from out of the shadows will come our most caustic remark – the very thing we received and fear receiving.

We may get into a relationship with someone we have idealised and admired and wanted to live up to and please. All might be lovely at first, and then we find that they are no longer 'special' and we feel disillusioned and disappointed.

We may find parts of ourselves that do not emerge until we are in a relationship. For example, the successful, ambitious young woman, whose hard work and effort have come from being a striving child, becomes once again the young, frightened child once she's close to a partner. From behind the admired, glossy, confident surface to which the partner was initially attracted steps a small person craving assurance and ready to be pleasing and dependent, whom he does not know or understand.

Dilemmas relating to our relationships with others

If-then and either-or dilemmas restrict other possibilities in relationships. All of us feel vulnerable when we are in a dependent position, which is part of attachment. If we have had an early experience (our very first dependency) which was 'good enough', we do not fear or avoid dependency. When relationships are going well, there is give and take on both sides and a feeling of equality.

See if any of the following dilemmas relate to you.

If I care about someone, I have to give in to them or they have to give in to me

When we care about someone and feel we have to give in to them it tends to be because we want their approval or affection so much that we will do what they want, as in the placation trap (see Part Three). There is no sense of equality in our relating, and relationships feel highly charged. There is no freedom to be ourselves, and others rule the way in which we respond and act. The 'giving in' seems to be based upon self-protection, with the learned assumption that if we do not give in to those we care about something bad will happen. Our sense of self feels under threat.

This learned dilemma could arise from an experience of conditional caring in early life, or from *dominating/powerful* in relation to *powerless/needly*.

The other part of this dilemma is in experiencing our feelings when we care about someone as being quite powerful and demanding. Our sense is that because we feel strongly others must respond and give in to us. We may have internalised the sense of the child who was given free rein or over-protected from an early age, who has become used to their strong feelings being reciprocated in kind and their every demand met.

If I depend on someone, I have to give in to them or they have to give in to me

This is a deeper version of the first dilemma, and can form a very important 'B movie' for what goes on unconsciously within a relationship. Our fear of dependency may stem from the fact that we have never actually been allowed to be dependent and have learned from this to become independent. It feels that, when we do allow ourselves to depend on someone, then they are in control and we have to give in to them. We feel powerless and helpless, which can express itself in passivity and sometimes a feeling of emptiness, coupled with feeling afraid of being at the mercy of another. We may feel that we come near to being just as helpless and needy as we were when small.

If we establish a relationship with a strong caring other, it feels as if we can be dependent with nothing to fear. But this may be challenged when we do have to grow up and stand alone. We may accept this and grow within this care, and if the other person is flexible and allowing we can indeed overcome a fear of dependency and allow some interdependence.

However, if we recognise that we feel resentful and cross at having to give in when feeling dependent, and we are expecting others to give in to us, we need to see that we are using our neediness as if it were our only 'strength'. Our fantasy is that were it not for our need keeping someone with us, they would not stay. There might be a fantasy that 'growing up' means others leave us. Sometimes this is related to the actual experience of a mother who found it very difficult to let go of her mothering role and wanted her children to remain as her 'babies'. If we believe that this dependency is our only power or strength we will undermine our ability to grow up and move away independently.

Questionnaire: Caring and depending on someone

If I care for someone, I feel:

- Self-conscious and worried.
- Eager to be seen in the best light.
- I must give in to them in order that they might care for me.
- I seem to withdraw and become passive and helpless.
- I must control myself, my fear and my anxiety and I must learn all about the other person and please them.
- I expect others to notice me, to care equally about me; and to look after me, meet my needs and demands.

If I depend upon someone, I feel:

- Afraid and vulnerable.
- Frightened of being hurt.
- Humiliated and disadvantaged.
- I must do what the other wants; give in to the other in dress/manners/behaviour/religion/work/all standards/looks/sex.
- I must give over my whole self to the other.
- I expect others to be stronger and therefore able to do as I ask.
- I expect others to make decisions for me, to do what I want.
- I am in control, as if what I need dominates and makes things happen.
- I feel secure that other people know where they stand with me and what I need, and will give in to me.
- I feel cosy, knowing what others need and giving it to them and with others knowing my needs. In this way neither of us needs anyone or anything else; safe and 'all wrapped up'.

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I never depend upon anyone.

- I do not allow myself to be dependent at any time. I notice this in the following ways:
- I do not allow myself to get close to anyone in case I feel dependent.
- I never allow myself to get in anyone's 'debt'. If I'm given gifts or paid compliments I have to give back as soon as possible.
- I never let anyone pay for me; I make sure I always pay my own way. I much prefer to give than receive.
- If a woman, I would never let myself get pregnant. If a man, I would never let myself get married.
- I like to be in charge. It's hard for me to be a student, to admit I don't know things, to share equally with others.
- I'm afraid of being dependent and will do anything to avoid it. Secretly I'm afraid of being ill or getting old, and my images of these are full of humiliation, defeat, suffocation or worse.

If you answered 'yes' to any of the above, ask yourself what you fear from dependency. What gets in the way of your allowing yourself to be in a dependent position? Is it:

pride?

fear (of what)?

fierce independence?

rage?

a yet unresolved memory of being let down, suffocated or other?

Spend some time pondering on what you discover from this questionnaire. Look at the number of times you have shied away from any kind of dependent position. Write about this in your notebook, and let the images or memories stay with you as you read on through Part Four, 'Gathering Information'.

I'm either involved and hurt, or not involved and in charge, but lonely

This dilemma can operate whether we are in a relationship or not. Our vulnerability is towards hurt, and our unconscious antennae are quick to detect it. We have probably been hurt at some time and we therefore associate all relationships with hurt. We expect to be hurt, and we may be highly sensitive to words, nuances, actions and hidden meanings which support us in this belief. To cope with hurt we have learned to withdraw, either literally or inside ourselves, and this remains our position, keeping the dilemma intact. Others may not realise how we feel, because we don't communicate it directly; all they may know is that we are hard to get close to. This may be because we are so brittle and

scratchy when we come up against our fear, or because we depart moodily to nurse the fear on our own, or we may fear our own capacity to hurt or destroy if we get close.

Many of us cope with this dilemma by not having relationships or by keeping those we do have very limited and superficial. This gives us control over the hurt, but at the cost of our loneliness. Those daring to enter relationships may find them a torment because of fear and difficulty with trust. It may take a long time before we overcome this dilemma and learn that it is possible to be with someone and not get hurt. Unfortunately when this dilemma operates it's as if we are waiting for our fear of getting hurt to be activated. And, of course, sooner or later something happens which proves we have to stay alone to be in charge. Many people do feel lonely, either within relationships or nursing their hurts alone.

One of PAUL's ways of coping with hurt feelings was to bottle them up. His social isolation was also a coping strategy. He had been very close to his mother, who had died when he was six, and then passed around the family. He promised himself he would not get close, and therefore hurt again. When we met he felt his depression had been caused by personal hurt from the children of his new love. Before this time he had kept in his 'lonely but in charge' position, and it worked up to a point. On falling in love at forty, however, he risked expressing his deep feelings and being hurt. His ensuing depression followed when, inevitably, the initial intensity and closeness of the relationship began to wane. His adjustment and subsequent change involved working through much of the unrecognised mourning for the loss of his mother, and to understand and feel for the lonely boy who had only had encyclopaedias for company.

He monitored all the occasions when he felt slighted or got at by others, the times when he fled to his own room after feeling excluded or misunderstood. He recognised *needing to be special six* in order to feel safe in relation to *perfect but unobtainable*. ['Special six' related to the years he had his mother, which he saw as special.] He saw that his hurt could be triggered by the smallest nuance and was out of proportion. He had to learn that his need to be *special six* meant that what felt like the heartless and thoughtless behaviour of others was just ordinary banter and exchange. It was not people being less than perfect and not caring or coming up to scratch, from which he had to withdraw into his familiar lonely state.

exercise

It is important when pondering on this dilemma to realise that the part of you which feels hurt corresponds to when you were a child. It is he or she who needs your care. When you feel hurt by someone, spend time examining

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what happened. What was said, referred to, acted out? What was actually said, and what did you hear underneath the words that confirmed your worst fears? Write it down. Try to describe the tone, feeling, image of what happened. Draw it if you can. Notice your eye level when you are pondering this. Are you looking up, or down?

With others I'm either safely wrapped up in bliss or I'm in combat. In combat, I'm either a bully or a victim

This double dilemma refers to our need to return to the safety or hiding of a womb-like environment when we get close to others. We're either enclosed in the relationship in a 'garden of Eden' type bliss, or we react aggressively to others, always ready for a fight and adopting either the victim or bullying role.

In this dilemma there is no comfortable breathing space in between, where we can experience a mutual interdependence. It's as if we have found it hard to learn a model of being with someone which allows for the ebb and flow of energy and difference. We may find that we lurch from one extreme to another: feeling the dependency and flight of being all wrapped up one minute, only to swing into combative mode the next. We may have the 'wrapped-up' relationship with one other person and be in combat in all our other relationships.

The dilemma often arises because of our longing for 'perfect care' and fusion with another. This may be the result of an over-close or 'tight' relationship with mother or sibling, or conversely because we have had empty, deprived early beginnings, where it was left to our imagination to provide an ideal model. The reciprocal roles are of *idealised 'perfect'* in relation to *neglected/forgotten*. So inside ourselves we swing from hope to despair, from clinging to an ideal of how we long for things to be to a position of rage when we are disappointed, at which point we invite a combative situation, bullying others or allowing ourselves to be bullied.

It can be hard to accept that our idealisation is the very thing that stops us having satisfactory relationships. Whilst the fantasy longing for another who can meet our every need can feel good in fantasy, it puts us and others under huge pressure and means we are always doomed to be disappointed. The fact that no one other mortal person can meet the needs of our deprived inner child can make us depressed. But out of this sense of despair we may begin to find the seeds of giving and receiving care from others that eventually becomes 'good enough'.

If we can see that our 'combat' style is an attempt to gain independence from the fantasy of being all wrapped up, we can build on this, finding more robust and realistic ways of relating.

exercise

Write a story about 'perfect care' or 'perfect revenge'. Make it as dramatic as you wish. Read it aloud to someone you trust. Allow yourself to experience the feelings or longing behind the words, to identify the 'core pain' of the person in the story, and inside you, who wishes to relate to others.

Write another story about how you might care for the child inside whose feelings you have identified in the first story. Use everyday people and objects that have had some reality for you, or invite characters from your imagination who might serve the needs of the child today.

Either I look down on people or they look down on me

How much do we know of our haughty selves who look down our noses, feel compelled to compete when someone is telling us something, have to cap everything with something of our own? And at the other end, how well do we know the self that is looked down upon, humiliated and laughed at, both by ourselves and, we fear, by others? This dilemma is about the world of despising and being despised, and how we deal with it. Much of the dilemma stems from a particular experience when we felt despised, or were treated contemptuously – by adults when we were small, by admired elders at an impressionable time – and from which we were determined that we are in some part contemptible, laughable, a joke. We may also believe that we deserved our deprivation and are the rotten person we were made to feel.

Believing this is so painful that we have few options. We can go through life with the false belief that we are all the things we despise and that others will look down on us, whatever we do. In this place we may play the contemptible one, or may block out any feelings by going 'on automatic'. We may live only via a 'mask' and suffer the limitations and restrictions of this protective superficiality. Many compulsive workers – men or women – who become addicted to their work in whatever form do so because they are running from this fear and this place. They fear that if they are not sustained by the admiration of others whom they admire, they will be exposed and then will have to feel contemptuous or suffer feeling contemptible. In their studies of post-heart-attack patients, *Treating Type A Behavior and Your Heart*, Meyer Friedman and Diane Ulmer (1984) make the following observation:

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As the perilous drive continues (to do more and more in less and less time and against greater odds and with increasing aggressiveness and desperation), the Type A person confines his disdain to those persons he is able to control; eventually he begins to entertain less and less regard for himself. It is when this latter process begins that his own spirit starts to wither, and the urge to self-destruct mounts. Much of this occurs in the unconscious, which makes the tragedy no less profound. (p. 201)

We may only sense that there is something inside us which makes us feel miserable and frightened and from which we are aware of running away, but our external adaptation takes up most of our time. We may not know that what we fear is contempt, and we will not know that at times we appear contemptuous. It is usually when our outer adaptation fails that we feel thwarted and fall into the place of contempt or become contemptuous ourselves.

Questionnaire: Either I look down on people or they look down on me

Can you recognise this statement to be true:

Others I relate to have to be special and see me as special. If they fail, then they are objects of contempt. If I fail, then I become contemptible.

In which of the following ways can you recognise your own contemptuousness:

- I have to keep 'one ahead' of others, which makes me competitive. I have to get in my own story, and I am constantly striving to win.
- I am judgemental of others whom I see as weak and pathetic. I ignore them, or bait them by teasing and provocation over matters on which I know they cannot cope. Or I sneer, am sarcastic, humiliating.
- I enjoy others' discomfort when I have 'found them out' or tricked them into falling into their own mess.
- I am envious of others' success but cannot bear this feeling, so I repress it and am only aware of it in my difficulty with being 'less than' at any time.
- I find it very hard to be in a learning position where I have to take from another whom I see as being in a superior position to myself and in which I feel inferior.

How do you use your contemptuousness:

- I am very uncomfortable with it, but I use it to drive me on in this world.
- I am aware I am envious and competitive, and I use it to get me going, to make sure I keep up and ultimately overcome those in whose company I was made to feel small.

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- I am revengeful to those whom I feel have put me down. I fantasise about situations in which I am the victor over someone whom I feel has treated me with contempt. I practise very hard so that I can get my revenge.
- When things go wrong I am aware of feeling more than usually shattered. I swing from being contemptuous, angry and bitter towards others, to feeling contemptible and alone, self-destructive and suicidal.

In which of the following ways do you recognise that you feel others look down on you with contempt:

- I always put myself down, usually jokingly, sending myself up.
- I sneer at myself frequently and invite others to do the same.
- I try to rise above these feelings by being very intellectual and clever. I use complicated words and sentences that few understand to hide my inadequacy.
- There is no fight in me. I let others walk all over me, while secretly despising them for it.
- I expect others to behave better, but I am not surprised when they don't.
- I am bitter. I want others to be better than they are, but I don't give any clues as to how this could be for me. I don't say what I really feel or what I really want from them. I allow others to treat me contemptuously.
- Most of my dialogues with others are in fact in my head. I rarely say what I feel or what I would like to say. I presume that others wouldn't be able to cope with it, and so I don't give them the chance.
- Although I despise myself, I feel that others should know better and do more for me. I am aware that this makes me incredibly angry, and that I feel angry a lot of the time.
- It doesn't take much for people to get through or push me off-centre. I do rely on admiration from others to stop me feeling looked down upon.
- I rely a lot on having to be in positions of authority or usefulness to stop me feeling the pain of people looking down on me. But even though I achieve those positions (I look after others well, teach others, am my own boss, have a good job with others working for me) I am still on the lookout for those who would put me down. *There is nowhere I feel really safe.*

What we have to cope with in this dilemma is the feeling that we are contemptible, and the fear that we will be forced to feel this again as we once did. The way in which we lessen the gap between feeling we have to look down on others and their looking down on us is to submit ourselves to the pain of that despised place. In that place we do indeed get in touch with many of the

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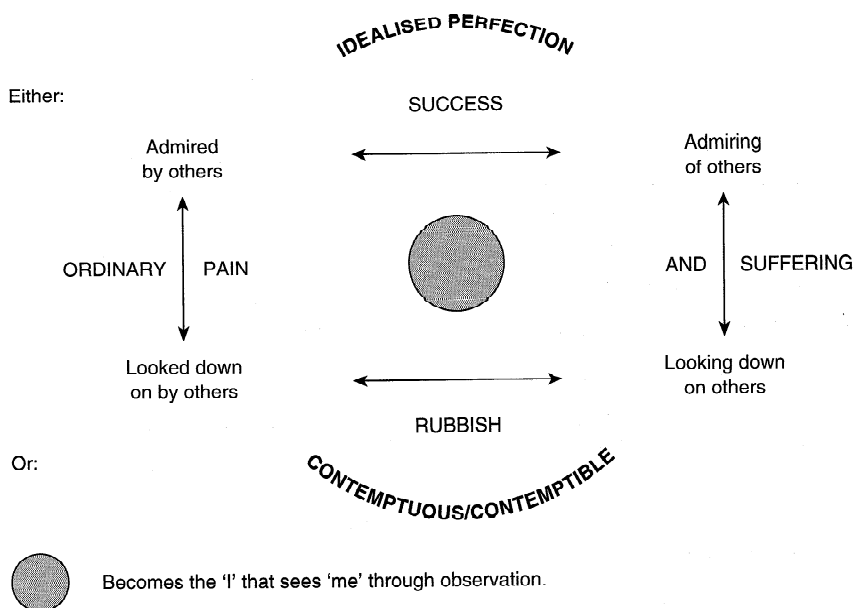


Figure 4.1 Looking down on others or looking down on me. The aim for change is learning to tolerate ordinary everyday pain and suffering

feelings that arose during our experiences of humiliation as a child. But when we experience them during a programme of self-discovery or therapy we bring to the damaged place another awareness of ourselves: that we are more than the child we once were, even though the feelings we suffer may seem overwhelming.

In Figure 4.1 we see how this dilemma operates. If we are not living in the top section (admired and admiring) then we inhabit the bottom (contemptuous or contemptible). When we experience 'the fall' from the idealised heights of success, we so fear being humiliated ('beyond the pale') that we turn our fear into a contemptuousness towards others.

Healing by mourning the loss of idealisation to become 'real' and 'good enough'

As we become conscious of this dilemma we begin to dilute its power and 'splitting' nature by recognition, and by bearing the 'ordinary' pain and suffering of our core pain. This then gives more space to experience a natural 'healthy island'. Here, ordinary pain and suffering, loss and disillusionment will be experienced as we grieve for the loss of 'idealisation'. So healing takes place as we allow ourselves to be ordinary mortals in pain.

Either I'm a brute or I'm a martyr

This dilemma relates to how we cope with our angry and aggressive feelings. If we do get angry and express it we feel like a brute, or we imagine that our anger is brutish. Conversely we get angry but don't say anything. We take on the martyr role, feeling full of self-sacrifice, with all the internal resentment and hostility this evokes. There is no middle place for assertion or appropriately angry responses, and at both ends of the dilemma each position blames the other. For the martyr says, 'I'm not going to get myself involved in anything that's unpleasant or brutish, I am better than that'; while the brute will say, 'It's no good sitting back and letting oneself be slaughtered, it's not worth it. Let's just steamroller over this and get something happening.' Each one serves the other. Each one brings out the opposite, either in another person or within the individual. For everyone who is caught up with the myth of the martyr there will be a brutish side, coming out unexpectedly because of its repression. People who take on the role of martyr are often prone to violent, brutish outbursts, or behave horribly to their animals, children or old people. Many people who appear brutish believe that if they did not act in such a way they would be martyred by others or to some cause in which they do not believe.

We are using the word 'martyr' here in a negative sense and not in the sanctified religious sense of one who gives their life for a believed cause in exchange for a heavenly after-life. If someone consciously chooses to martyr themselves for a cause they believe in, this is conscious acting from a position of idealism. We may say they are brutish to themselves at the same time, and to those whom they deprive of their full company.

However, most of us who take up the position of martyr in our everyday lives feel put upon and deprived of our freedom of choice. Thus, we adopt the role resentfully and harbour a good deal of hidden anger. It is this underlying fury which can be quite devastating to others, precisely because it is so unexpected. We feel guilty if we are not serving others or being slaves to the object of our martyrdom, and we tend to look for ways we should be serving this master. We may expect to receive gratitude from others in reward for our sacrifice. But others may feel enslaved by our martyrdom and unable to go along with it. Martyrdom can be tyrannical and bring out the brute in the best of us! Martyrs can easily become depressed victims, inviting the oppressor in others and thus actualising and extending the period of martyrdom still further.

JOE experienced his mother as a martyr to his macho brutish father. He had a good bond with his mother and was devastated when she died of a heart attack when he was only eleven. He came into therapy because he was very depressed and phobic about death. Unable to go out to look for a job, obsessed with death and the after-life, he was becoming reclusive. In asking him to monitor the feelings he experienced during his panic attacks, we discovered that they came on in situations where he feared he might have to

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be assertive to someone. A man in the shop, on the end of the phone, when out running with his dog. He was terrified of getting into a situation where he would 'boil over in rage like an exploding volcano'.

When we looked at this we discovered that as well as his father's macho image, which Joe felt he could not go along with, the week before his mother had died his father had thrown a lamp at her in a fit of temper. He had associated his father's anger with a brutishness and murderousness, triggering off his mother's death. He had never put these two together before, but his unconscious had, preventing him from expressing any kind of anger in case it came out in the same way. He had blocked off assertiveness, frightened that it might turn into anger and aggressiveness. When he could see how this dilemma had ruled his life he could begin to learn to be more assertive, to choose his own way of being angry. Then he could begin to go back into the world less afraid, and free himself from the unconscious ties that had deprived him of his own life.

Questionnaire: Either I'm a brute or a martyr

If I am a martyr, is it because:

- I believe it is the only way I can receive gratitude and thanks from others?
- I believe it is the only way I can be?
- I don't believe in my freedom and right to a full independent life?
- for me it is a form of love?
- I learned it and am now copying it without revision?
- I am caught up in a centuries-old-woman-as-martyr-to-men complex?

Name the martyrs in your family, in your experience – from literature, the Bible, films, stories. Do you identify with one of them? Do you fear being identified as a martyr, and so adopt a brutish role?

In what way do I express my hidden 'brutishness':

- against myself?
- against my animals?
- in fantasy?
- in sudden outbursts of temper directed against others?

If I am a 'brute', is it because:

- it's the only way I've learned to be from (i) family, (ii) others?
- if I'm not a brute I'll be a martyr (like someone I know)?
- it's the only way I can keep on top and avoid victimisation?
- I enjoy the power and letting others live out the martyr role?
- It limits my life.

Brutes also have feelings. What are they?

The male/female dilemma: as a woman I have to do what others want; as a man I can't have any feelings

All men and women are influenced not only by the myths about being a man or woman passed on by families, but also by their male and female genes. The most recent research involving MRI brain scans of male and female brains shows differences in speech and language areas. The female brain is highly utilised in speech and language functions. For centuries these myths involved a need to 'placate' the needs of men and play down a woman's own skills for fear of 'emasculating' a man. Are women breaking with these myths today – myths that if we are not subservient we are not feminine and it spoils relationships?

Women are trying to, but it's often surprising how much these myths live on and unconsciously inform what women do and how they behave. Until the last ten years women have felt suppressed by men and masculine ideology, by the force of patriarchy. Although there have always been pioneers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft or Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot) to show that the female spirit was alive, all reflection of women has predominantly come through men. Since gaining more independence economically, sociologically and biologically, women have often still to go through masculine channels to receive recognition, often having to work much harder than men.

In the midst of this transition in women's roles, relationships are changing. One in three marriages ends in divorce. Many women are leaving it until later to get married, and then have difficulty finding a partner who meets their expectations. Many women feel very torn at this point. They want independence to work and express themselves, but they still feel there is a substantial cost involved and that it poses a threat to relationships.

ALICE, a successful architect with two children, is aware of this tension in her own life: 'At work my role is very clearly defined and I am respected for it. I say my piece and it is heard and acted upon. I experience myself as being free and powerful in a creative sense. It is stimulating and exciting and I love the work I'm doing and the feeling of expansiveness and generosity it gives me. But when at home something else seems to take over. I fear being seen as "boss" as I see it as a basic threat to the safety of my relationship. So I give in to my partner's wishes and feel bad after. I don't say what I really think and believe in. I feel that were I to be more assertive he would see me as strident and demanding. He says: "I'm not one of your office minions ... you can't behave like you do in the office here." I don't feel I can answer because I feel he's right, that somehow I've got to be submissive in my private life to make up for "getting away with it" – success – elsewhere. The awful silly guilt. I know I'm resentful. I often get headaches at the weekends and feel unbearably tired when I get home. I associate that with my confusion, not knowing what to do, and a general weariness and lack of clarity about the whole thing.'

Feelings, emotions and relationships

Some women actually sacrifice their own views and voice when they marry or enter a relationship, and upon having children. For some it is a relief not to fight or struggle any more, but be content with the age-old passive role of serving home, husband and children. And, indeed, within this role there are many modes of expression. But to give up one's own voice because of a fear of not being feminine causes only conflict and struggle, and leads resentments and angers to build up underneath.

Thanks to feminism these old myths are under revision, but women tend to slip back into them when things get difficult or they try out new ways of expressing themselves that are misunderstood.

Somewhere in this transition of male and female expressions lies the hope for the emergence of a way of being a woman that brings into the light of consciousness the most positive qualities of the feminine principle:

- Receptive, rather than passive.
- Empowering, rather than selflessly giving to others.
- Flexible, adaptable, yielding and creative, rather than submissive with 'no mind of her own'.
- Centred in body and emotions and unafraid of each, rather than overemotional, flighty, frivolous, self-conscious.
- Sexual and sensual, rather than seductive, flirty, posing.
- Nurturing, rather than manipulatively feeding and devouring.
- Containing, rather than possessive.
- Holding close and letting go appropriately, rather than emasculating (men and women) and overcontrolling.

From a central womb of womanhood a woman can then express her masculine side. This would be ancillary to her feminine being, not instead of or to compensate for the negative sides listed above.

As a man, I have to be a 'proper' man, which means not expressing anything to do with feelings

This dilemma will remain unrevised if men can find both work and relationships that avoid the need to get into anything of a feeling nature. If women are still living out the need to define being feminine as not being assertive or having independent views, the men with whom they are involved will be able to dictate the tone of the relationship and look to women to contain the feeling side of things. Many men do manage to avoid having anything to do with feelings, until something happens that hits them personally on that level – their partner leaves them, they get ill and become dependent on others, they fall in love, they lose someone they had never realised was important to them.

With the change in the role of women in society, relationships between men and women are having to adapt radically, and men are finding that they must deal with their feeling side earlier than in previous generations. For many men who have been brought up in a traditionally 'macho' environment, there is little or no developed language for expressing feeling or emotion. The myth seems to be that a man must be in the outside world where his rational, focused side is uppermost, and that the convoluted, diffuse world of the emotions would only impede progress and draw a dangerous veil over the masculine purpose. When men cut off their feeling side because they are afraid of being overpowered by it, they become lopsided. They can get stuck at the extreme end of the masculine principle. They tend to become lonely and are unable to relate to others, their work or the world. They can become depressed because they think they are supposed to act like an automaton, so rejecting a major aspect of themselves and appearing brittle and unfeeling, strident and fixed.

The old myths about men and masculinity persist: tough, macho, in charge and command-driven, strict, controlled, focused, unyielding, unable to compromise. Any show of softness is seen as a weakness. Although a man may have strong feeling instincts and a strong feminine side, he may have been discouraged from using or expressing this aspect of himself because of the powerful taboos that exist against it. There are a hundred little injunctions – 'boys don't cry', mother's boy, cissy, hiding in a woman's skirts, floppy, spineless, weedy, wet, impotent, foppish – all linking the feminine side with negativity.

Questionnaire: The male/female dilemma

What do you feel are the important qualities of being a woman, being a man? How much do you include these in your own life?

My expectations of masculine and feminine

I expect men to:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> be strong | <input type="checkbox"/> have exclusive male company |
| <input type="checkbox"/> make all the decisions | <input type="checkbox"/> not be bossed or affected by a woman |
| <input type="checkbox"/> not to be fazed or bothered | <input type="checkbox"/> have the most important role |
| <input type="checkbox"/> not to be fazed or bothered by anything | <input type="checkbox"/> not give in to any weakness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> be able to take liquor | |

I expect women to:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> be kind and gentle | <input type="checkbox"/> be good housewives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> have warm feelings | <input type="checkbox"/> be the peacemaker |
| <input type="checkbox"/> care about children and relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> have a special 'women's' world |
| <input type="checkbox"/> keep themselves looking nice | <input type="checkbox"/> never be aggressive or masculine. |

(Continued)

Feelings, emotions and relationships

Perhaps there is a third position in relating, and sharing:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> strong ideas | <input type="checkbox"/> an understanding of each other's |
| <input type="checkbox"/> strong feelings | 'no-go' areas |
| <input type="checkbox"/> decision-making | <input type="checkbox"/> tears and sadness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> assertiveness at all times, and | <input type="checkbox"/> anger |
| aggression when appropriate | <input type="checkbox"/> other |

We may not yet have incorporated the strength of a feeling heart into masculine judgement, but we always know that when these two attributes come together something wise and wonderful happens. A wise leader, judge or company head, for example, will be able both to relate in a heartfelt way and make hard decisions.

Part three

getting off the symptom hook

naming the problems

Delusion is the mind's tendency to seek premature closure about something. It is the quality of mind that imposes a definition on things and then mistakes the definition for the actual experience.

Mark Epstein *Going to pieces without Falling Apart* (1998: 126)

In Part Three we begin the process of trying to name as accurately as possible the old patterns that lie behind our thinking, feeling and behaving, which lead to things going wrong. In CAT these patterns are known as learned 'procedures' because they occur in sequential ways in the form of traps, dilemmas, snags or unstable states of mind.

