

Mothers and Daughters

Following my previous blog 'Is it Gutsy to stay in a marriage after Infidelity' (please click here to read it) which discusses the book co-written by Hilary and Chelsea Clinton 'The Book of Gutsy Women', I recently attended a packed Royal Festival Hall watching Mary Beard in conversation with Hilary and Chelsea Clinton about their book. They were also guests on the Graham Norton show.

As they embark on their publicity tour to promote the book, it has got me thinking about their mother daughter relationship. They looked very comfortable in each other's company and they showed a mutual respect and love for each other that shone through as they talked, bantered and laughed together. They are both feisty women with strong opinions and, I imagine that they probably have frequent rows too. It seems as if their relationship works but who knows? It made me think just how important a mother daughter relationship is in our everyday lives and wonder how it affects our couple relationships?

What category of mother-daughter relationship do you have?

A recent article in *The Telegraph** described the following four categories:

i) Best friends:

Mothers and daughters are not best friends and it's not particularly healthy to behave with each other as if you are. It can result in over sharing on the mother's part that can be very burdensome for a daughter. To avoid being stuck in a permanent child-like relationship, achieving emotional separation is a crucial part in growing up which allows the child to become an adult who can make her own independent choices.

ii) The Sunday night caller

What does it mean if you only speak to your mother once a week? Does it mean you have a bad relationship? Or does it show that you have a strong bond and can manage separation and can tolerate difference? Are you calling out of duty rather than love? Perhaps you have had a difficult relationship and now you may be geographically separated, has your relationship has improved?

iii) Can't live with/her can't live without her

The actress/comedian Dawn French says of her relationship with her daughter Billie "Our relationship exists in a bizarre kind of process of peacetime, small battles, war".... *The love, thank God, is profound and I do thank God, because I love that kid so much that sometimes if I don't like her or she doesn't like me, we survive it.* This surely is a great example of a healthy parent-child relationship.

iv) Mum as staff

Nowadays it is not uncommon for mothers to play a significant role in the child care of their grandchildren whilst a daughter goes out to work. However, this can

often lead to a mother feeling unappreciated and taken advantage of by an unthinking daughter. Likewise, it can lead to a daughter feeling her mother is taking over and imposing the same parenting as she experienced on her grandchild when she wants it to be different. What's important for a healthy mother daughter bond is that any issues can be tolerated in a conversation and be sorted.

Mother/daughter relationships can be complex and diverse but also the most important relationship you will probably ever have. Because of how intense and powerful it is, it shapes every other relationship you may have. It is also the strongest of all parent/child bonds when it comes to how our brains process emotion. Mothers occupy a critical role in their children's physical and emotional growth. According to a study published in the Journal of Neuroscience, the part of the brain that regulates emotion is has greater similarity between mothers and daughters than any other intergenerational pairing.

The bond between mothers and daughters can influence our lives in ways that aren't always obvious. For most, our relationship our mother is often our first primary attachment relationship. This bond can be very powerful and influential and sets the stage for all future relationships. It helps shape:

- our self esteem and self confidence
- our sense of identity
- our capacity to self care and nourish
- our ability to cope with our feelings

The mother/daughter relationship that is attuned, secure and connected builds a platform from which we can grow and separate in a healthy way. A shift needs to be made in your heart that your adult child has become autonomous. This may result in your child making choices that differ from the ones you would like them to make, that doesn't mean they are wrong, just simply different. Accepting that your role as a mother changes from protecting and instructing to supporting and encouragement helps your child develop their own abilities and resourcefulness.

Unfortunately, not all mother daughter relationships are healthy ones. They can often be fraught with anger, disappointment and loneliness. Here are some of the feelings that get expressed in sessions when mothers' distance themselves.

- She always criticised me
- She wasn't interested in me - I felt ignored
- I never felt I could do enough or be good enough
- I was a disappointment
- My sibling was her favourite child
- She never made time for me.
- I felt dismissed and rejected
- Her drinking was more important than me
- There was no kissing or cuddling for comfort.

Difficulties also arise when mothers are too closely attached to their daughters, are inseparable and continue to be as enmeshed with their adult child as they were when they were children. Mothers may not acknowledge any kind of boundary between them, resulting in a daughter's sense of self being swallowed up.

Working with couples I often see clients whose problematic relationship with their mother gets projected into their current adult relationships. They often feel their partner's behaviours towards them replicates the difficult feelings they have carried with them from their mothers since childhood. These insecurely attached daughters often find themselves emotionally needy and clingy to their partners, needing constant attention and reassurance. Therapy helps clients to heal these wounds and work towards a better understanding and to connect differently.

If you would like to discuss things further or to make an appointment, you can call me on **07976 403741** or **(020) 8959 9528**. Alternatively you can contact me by email by clicking [here](#).

Dawn Kaffel