

Childhood,
Development,
&
Relationships

By Connor McGonigal

All rights reserved.

© Connor McGonigal

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the publisher nor author shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

Contents

Chapter 1: Childhood	3
ACTION: Identify Childhood Messages	14
Chapter 2: Familial Enmeshment	22
ACTION: Sexual and Emotional Enmeshment	30
Chapter 3: Development	31
Chapter 4: Expectations	43
Chapter 5: Culture	47
ACTION: Self-Understanding	65
Chapter 6: Long Term Relationships	68
Chapter 7: Insecure Attachment	75
Chapter 8: Lack of Sex In Relationships	85
Summary	91

Chapter 1: Childhood

“Our sexual preferences arise from the thrills, challenges, and conflicts of our early life.” Esther Perel, ‘Mating In Captivity’ (2006)

How did this subconscious inadequacy originally form? How did it develop? How can we stop it from developing even further? In this book we’ll explore the root cause and other contributing factors, so you can take control of anything which causes you to feel inadequate.

The most impressionable time in our lives is in childhood. This is the time when we are learning everything about the world and ourselves. If we experience anything during that time that may suggest we’re inadequate, it will leave a huge imprint on the brain that will last the rest of our lives - or at least until we address it. This is because we are so impressionable, particularly during the first five or so years. During this time, we are struggling to understand the world around us, and doing everything we can to learn about the way things work.

If anything happens during that time, even seemingly small things, it can affect our entire world view for the years to come. If we get even

a tiny sense that we're not good enough, it will form a mental paradigm that becomes the way we see ourselves for the rest of our lives.

There are 6 principles which can cause a child to form a sense of inadequacy.

1. All children are born totally helpless.

When we are brought into this world, we cannot take care of ourselves. We are helpless. We depend on our parents to fulfil our needs. Particularly, children need the four 'S's - to be safe, seen, soothed and secure.

- Safe - Parents must avoid actions and responses that frighten or hurt children. Parents must protect children from threats to their safety.
- Seen - they must be seen for who they are, not just visually, but emotionally and personally. They must be mirrored, given attention when they cry, and empathized with. Their feelings must be acknowledged, and they must feel like they matter.
- Soothed - they must be helped to deal with difficult emotions or situations. They must be comforted when scared, and they must know that their parents are there for them whenever they need them.

- Secure - they must feel protected, stable, and be secure in themselves.

Of course, these are not all our needs, only a few which play a large role in who we grow up to be. In childhood, we are 100% dependent on our parents/caregivers to fulfil our needs.

2. A child's greatest fear is abandonment.

Because children are dependent on their parents, if their parents leave them, they will die. Children are born totally helpless, so abandonment will lead to death. There is nothing worse - and so it is their greatest fear. If they can't get their needs met, they will not survive. A child's greatest fear is abandonment, because abandonment means death.

3. All children can have numerous abandonment experiences.

They will have times where their needs are not met. They will have times when their needs are not met quickly enough, or fairly. This is known as 'abandonment' even though it's a very overdramatic term for what it is - not getting your needs met in a timely, judicious manner.

Abandonment experiences might include any of the following experiences:

- The child is hungry and no one feeds him - not getting his need for food.
- He cries and no one holds him - not getting his need to be soothed.
- He is lonely and no one pays attention to him - not getting his need for attention, or to be seen.
- A parent puts unrealistic expectations on him - parents commonly push their children to achieve, often so those parents can feel good about themselves.
- A parent uses him to gratify his or her own needs - for respect, attention, validation, etc.
- A parent hits him - one of the most common, it threatens their need for safety and security.
- A parent leaves him and doesn't come back in a timely manner. Divorces can cause this.

Because every child is born into an imperfect world and into an imperfect family, *every* child has abandonment experiences of one form or another. All children can and will have abandonment experiences.

It is their greatest fear too, so all of these experiences matter far more than it seems to us adults. To us, we think that if a child is hungry for a little bit, so what? If they cry without getting soothed, who cares? We know they'll be fine, so it doesn't seem like a big deal to us.

However, they *don't* know they'll be fine. They don't know that they'll get fed eventually. They don't know that their lack of attention doesn't mean that their parents hate them and want to leave them. Children are naive, innocent, or some would say plain stupid. They don't possess the intelligence we do, to know that their parents are going to feed them eventually. That's why a baby will cry when it's hungry but a 16-year-old won't; the baby is scared of abandonment and totally dependent.

4. All children are ego-centered.

They have not developed the ability to realize that their parents are separate people with their own thoughts, feelings, and lives. They only see themselves as a person and everyone else seems like parts of their life, as opposed to a separate person. The other people around them don't seem like people, almost robot-like because children can't understand that other people are separate people with their own separate lives. Children believe they are the center of the universe - they haven't developed the ability to think otherwise.

Because of this, they also believe that everything that happens to them is because of them. They can't understand that if their parents are busy, they might not get much attention. They cannot comprehend that other people have their own worries, emotions, and issues, instead they think that everything that happens to them is somehow because of them.

5. This means that when a child has an abandonment experience, they believe they are the cause.

They believe it's because of them that they're not getting their needs met. If they didn't get fed, they believe that they need to do something differently next time. If they didn't get attention, they believe that they can change the way they act to get attention next time. They think it's their fault and they need to do something differently.

If their parent hits them, they are not developed enough to understand the reason why, and to know that their parent still loves them. Instead, they assume it means their parent doesn't like them, and that they are bad. They assume it is because they are flawed and need to change.

If a parent leaves and doesn't come back in a timely manner, they believe their parent doesn't like them enough, and they should have acted differently.

This principle can be a little hard to understand for us adults, because we can't relate to these feelings. We aren't able to fully empathize with children, and understand their undeveloped minds. Children are trying to work out who they are and how to survive in the world. Small things like this can make them believe they're not good enough, because they assume it's their fault.

6. This creates a sense that they are not good enough, and need to change to be good enough.

When they believe that they are the cause, they believe that they are not good enough to get their needs met. They form a perception of inadequacy - and because this occurs during the most vulnerable time of life, when they are learning the way the world works and who they are, this becomes a very deep-rooted perception.

They will do everything to avoid the same experience happening again, because their greatest fear is abandonment. So, children will develop coping mechanisms to try to prevent those experiences from happening again, and to try to hide their perceived 'badness' from themselves and others.

Children find a multitude of creative ways to try to accomplish these three goals. Since their knowledge, intelligence, and experience are limited, these coping mechanisms often don't work, and sometimes don't even make sense. For example, someone who is feeling lonely may misbehave in a way that is sure to attract attention in a negative way. Even though it doesn't make sense for a child to do something that invites painful or negative attention, at least they're getting *some* attention.

Then, they might be punished for their misbehavior, even though they were only trying to meet their needs, and perhaps this punishment threatens their other needs - going hungry (threatening their need for food), getting locked in their room (threatening many different needs), or being spanked (threatening safety as a child). To us adults, these things don't seem that bad - it's really just a small punishment. But we're independent and can take care of ourselves. Children can't. They're helpless, dependent, and very scared of abandonment.

This is why a subconscious sense of inadequacy is actually **very common**. It's not just people with this fetish who have this, it's a significant percentage of the population. It's only when this is repeated, over many childhood experiences, and then strengthened in later life, with the addition of many other factors, that it evolves

into the cuckold fetish. Of course, it's important to note that other fetishes eroticize inadequacy too, in different ways.

Ultimately, cuckolding pushes on that painful emotional hotspot of abandonment. It recreates those abandonment experiences by being literally abandoned by your partner, turning that sense of inadequacy into sexual pleasure as a way to temporarily overcome that pain.

As Jack Morin writes:

‘During our psychological development we repudiate certain aspects of ourselves that we fear might lead to disapproval or abandonment by those we depend upon for survival.

Gradually, images and impulses that are denied conscious recognition... often break into consciousness in the form of bizarre or “perverted” sexual fantasies that flagrantly disregard both cultural norms and personal values.’ - Jack Morin, *The Erotic Mind* (1995)

Feelings of inadequacy create a cuckold fetish. Feelings of inadequacy are often originally created in childhood as a result of these ‘abandonment’ experiences.

When their needs are not met, they believe they are bad and they need to change to be good. On a more literal level, this happens again

and again through childhood when we are taught by our parents how to behave.

Expectations of Life

From the moment we are born, we are handed rules, demands, and expectations, about how to behave, how to act, and how we should be. We're given very clear distinctions about what is bad, and what is good. For example, if you cry in a public place or too loudly, you are told that you are bad. You are told to stop crying.

We are repeatedly told what we need to do to be good, and we are repeatedly reminded when we do things that are bad. Here are some examples:

- You need to eat your vegetables to be good.
- You need to not be too loud or else you'll be bad.
- You need to work harder to be good.
- You need to stop bothering your parents or you're bad.
- You need to stay out of the way to be good.

All of this communicates that if we desire something else, we are not good enough just as we are.

In Rodrigo's family, he was taught that to be 'good', you had to be quiet, you had to do what you were told, and you had to never be a

problem or ask anything of someone else. He grew up as a quiet child that was kind of a pushover, and he grew up thinking that he never had to ask anything of anyone, and that his needs were not important.

This is just his example, yours might be different. The point is that we grew up thinking that we had to change something to be good, and that we weren't good enough just as we are.

ACTION: Identify Childhood Messages

Everyone was raised with different ideas of what is good and what is bad. Identify yours. If you can't remember, try looking at the aspects of your life which are different from other people and working back from there.

Was it bad to cry, and are you now unable to cry?

Was it bad to be loud, and are you now unable to project your voice?

Was it bad to be funny? To be different? To have a girlfriend?

Was it bad to have a penis? A young boy doesn't understand that his nudity is often unwelcome, and this can incite some shaming responses from older people which creates shame around having a penis.

In puberty, was it bad to have a sex drive?

Were you told that privacy is bad?

Again, the solution comes back down to needs. If you didn't get your needs met in childhood, you might feel unworthy of getting them met now. Or maybe you've disowned your needs as a coping mechanism.

Once again, take responsibility for your needs.

Some people find it very hard to accept that these things matter. Some people are insistent on denying the effects of childhood, and refuse to investigate their own childhood. They block out all efforts to consider these things and retreat away. This is a method of emotional avoidance and I'd urge you to try very hard not to fall into that trap. It's a natural reaction to want to deny and retreat away from anything that you'd rather not confront, and there are plenty of logical justifications to make you believe that's the right approach. You don't have to do anything you don't want to, but it would be a great shame to miss out because of that.

Some go as far to describe the childhood formation of subconscious inadequacy as 'abuse' - although I think this is an overly harsh word to describe such a common phenomenon. When a child is ignored, or their safety is under any doubt, some people consider that to be abuse. It does have a huge effect on the rest of their lives, even though it seems so small and inconsequential.

Other forms of abuse exist, which are what most people think of when they hear the word 'abuse' - physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse. These are less commonly experienced, but they all affect the subconscious in similar ways, albeit far more extreme. If you've experienced any of these forms of

abuse, it will certainly be a significant factor in understanding your deep-rooted emotions.

Carlos was sexually abused, in such a subtle way that he didn't realize it. His mother would frequently walk around in revealing clothing, and did not respect his boundaries for privacy. She would walk into the bathroom while Carlos was showering. Carlos felt like his privacy was seriously violated.

His father taught him about pornography at a very young age - by showing him. Carlos was made to view porn, which was much more than he wanted, and at one point, his father decided to teach him to masturbate, which included a 'demonstration'.

Carlos never thought about this until prompted, but it turned out that these experiences left him with deep emotional scars. Simply by not having privacy, and being made to watch things he didn't want to watch, and by violating his boundaries, Carlos was internally hurt.

Subtle Things Matter To Children

Sexual abuse doesn't have to involve physical contact; it just needs to violate some boundary. Parents can act like exhibitionists or voyeurs, or treat them like they're much older than they are.

Inappropriate sexual remarks, or a total lack of information about sex when children need it, can be more hurtful than we're aware.

Other young boys think there's something wrong with them when they have their first erection, and girls can think their first period

means they're dying. A lack of information causes negative self-beliefs. Sometimes sexual abuse is more obvious and extreme, like rape and molestation, and it's not necessary for me to explain the damaging effects this can have. All acts that violate early boundaries cause negative psychological effects. This is why past sexual abuse seems to be more common in people with fetishes.¹

Children can be hurt by:

- Not having privacy
- Not having control
- Not having attention
- Not having trust
- Not feeling safe
- Not having friends
- Being blamed
- Being betrayed
- Being excluded

...and many more.

¹ Nordling, N., Sandnabba, N.K. and Santtila, P., (2000) The prevalence and effects of self-reported childhood sexual abuse among sadomasochistically oriented males and females. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, 9(1), pp.53-63.

Being Shamed

Roger told me a story of how he was shamed. As a 5-year-old child, his mother once asked him to pass her his plate. Roger accidentally dropped the plate, and it smashed. His mother hit him around the head and called him stupid. He was shamed for this mistake, and obviously felt like he was not good enough.

In my life, I've probably broken dozens of plates and glasses. I would like to meet someone who has never broken any tableware (if they exist!). Accidents happen, and they are out of our control. They are a normal part of being human. For a young child, they should not be expected to have that much control (and strength) to reliably move plates around a kitchen. They've only just learned to walk!

Furthermore, they might not even know that plates *can* smash! It is totally unreasonable to expect a child to never drop a plate - in fact, it's totally unreasonable to expect any *person* to never drop a plate! Roger was made to feel like he was bad, because the plate smashed.

Roger's mother was angry though. She now had one fewer plate, and had to clear up the mess too. So, she took out her anger on Roger. She called him stupid and slapped him. This was one way in which Roger learned that he must be in some way flawed, defective, or inadequate. It's ridiculous, but these little things can have a bigger effect than we realize.

Lacking A Sense Of Reliable Safety

Raji was a normal young boy. Annoying, loud, energetic, and boisterous, Raji was as troublesome as any other boy. His father, however, had a very short temper. Without any warning, Raji's father would snap, and either yell, beat Raji, or act aggressively (flipping over a table, snatching Raji's toys and throwing them away, forcefully grabbing Raji and locking him in his room, etc.).

Raji lacked many things, particularly the sense of safety and reliability. His father's short temper left Raji in a constant state of fear, trying not to do anything to upset his father. It is extremely scary for a child to be subject to such emotional turbulence, particularly when it comes from the people they depend on for safety, stability, and security. As adults, we can't fully understand the effect this can have on children, because we're more resilient, independent, and intelligent. Children, however, are needy, dependent, and not as intelligent. To a child, the lack of safety feels like a risk of death. Thus, the emotions are magnified. For Raji, these acts left deep emotional imprints of fear, insecurity, and not knowing how to act. This was how Raji got the idea that it wasn't ok for him to be just as he was. He grew up thinking that he was to blame for his father's anger, and that he could stop it by being different.

There Is No Such Thing As Perfect

Usually, when questioned about their childhood and family, many men will tell me they family was good, perfect, or otherwise fine.

This is never true; all families have some negative aspects to them. They may be positive overall – but no family is flawless; that’s unreasonable and impossible. Even if your family was pretty great overall, it’s still important to know their flaws and how they affected you.

John, for example, told me his parents were normal, nice, and pretty good. Upon closer examination, his father lacked emotional sensitivity in the same way John himself grew up to be. His father was unemotional, and had very little empathy. If a parent is unable to have normal emotions, the child cannot get his emotional needs met. If a parent cannot hold the child and tell them ‘I love you’, the child grows up with the same inabilities and discomfort. John found this to be the case (did you feel uncomfortable reading ‘I love you’, for example?). Children need their feelings to be reflected. If no-one is around to do this, their needs are neglected. Neglect is not always intentional or obvious! But because his parents were normal, nice, honest, and decent, he couldn’t understand how something could go wrong.

Without proper examination and without looking in the right places, it is often a default viewpoint to think that one’s own family is good (particularly in middle-class or upper-class families). No family is without flaws. In fact, the factors in this chapter don’t make a family ‘bad’, because they’re purely unintentional and quite common. Furthermore, the actions of the parents are just one part of the

puzzle; often, the child's interpretation of those actions is even more important. Safety and love, for example, are almost always present, but if the child can't feel these things, it doesn't matter.

It's the lack of insight into these things which causes confusion and ambiguity over the source of your psychology.

Chapter 2: Familial Enmeshment

Emotional imprints in children are mostly created by their parents. Their parents will act out in certain ways - through anger, shaming, neglect, distance, blaming, alcoholism, avoidance, and more. Parents have their own problems; in fact, they have their own emotional imprints, created when they themselves were children.

Often, these emotions are inherited, not through genetics but through parenting. A parent that feels one internalized emotion will frequently transfer this emotion to their children.² Insecure parents create insecure children. Alcoholic parents create children who are far more likely to grow up to be alcoholics than the general population.³

Alcoholism can be caused by toxic shame. Sometimes, that toxic shame can be caused by having an alcoholic parent. When a parent comes home drunk, and shouts, gets angry, gets violent, or gets a

² Rholes, W.S. & Simpson, J.A. (2004). Attachment theory: Basic concepts and contemporary questions. In W.S. Rholes and J.A. Simpson (Eds.), *Adult Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Implications*, pp. 3–14. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

³ American Psychiatric Association (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders : DSM-5* (5 ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, pp. 490–97.

little too close for comfort, it violates their children's needs. The children mistakenly believe they need to do something else to avoid this from happening again, and internalize beliefs that they're not good enough. In later life, they can deal with these feelings by turning to alcohol as a method of release, among other things. They can easily become alcoholics themselves. Then, they come home drunk to their own kids, and the cycle repeats. Feelings get passed down through the generations.

Ethan's dad was an alcoholic. He would shout, scream, and slam doors so loudly that half the street would hear! Not only that, but he would frequently grope Ethan's sister too. At other times, his father would smother him in drunken love and appreciation. How did all of this make Ethan feel? Obviously, Ethan was scared of his father's anger, and constantly unsure about whether his father would be in a good mood or a bad mood. Ethan didn't get his needs for safety and security, and felt unsafe and insecure.

The occasional loving outburst left Ethan confused, and he didn't know how to act. Children believe that they're the cause of everything that happens to them. When raised in a volatile environment, they don't know how to act, but know that there's something bad about themselves that they just need to cover up or hide to gain positive responses from their parents. Ethan never knew how his father would act, and this made Ethan insecure in himself.

Ethan grew up with these emotions deeply embedded in him, and later found a way to cope with them - alcohol. Ethan started drinking heavily himself, as alcohol could transport him away from these feelings and into the drunken state. Ethan's alcoholism was caused by his father's alcoholism. If Ethan had kids himself, there's every chance that he'd instill the same emotions in them too, and raise a new generation of alcoholics.

Of course, it's not always that simple. Alcoholism is one of many methods of release. Children with toxic shame have the option of all those methods, not just one. Methods of control can be equally as damaging to children, in different ways. A parent who dedicates their life to achievement and work will regrettably neglect their children too much; neglect making it impossible for them to get their needs met, and thus causing toxic shame, which, later in life, can manifest itself through a burning desire for a method of control - which may be over-achievement. Workaholic parents can create workaholic children!

Violence

Violent parents who hit their kids create children who grow up to be violent themselves at an alarmingly high rate. These children similarly don't get their needs for safety and security, and grow up questioning their self-worth. One way to deal with these feelings in adulthood is to flip the coin and become the one acting out the

violence. Violence then acts as a way to free them from those feelings of powerlessness and insecurity. So, they discipline their own children with physical violence. Those children grow up with toxic shame and find that violence frees them from that feeling, so they're violent towards their children. Then those children have those same feelings, grow up, and are violent towards their children. The cycle continues until someone stops it.

Spanking and physical punishment are still somehow common in the world, despite 50+ years of research on 160,000+ children⁴ dismantling the argument that spanking/violence can provide positive behavioral outcomes, and showing that spanking/violence causes long-term harm.³⁷ It is probably the most widely studied aspect of parenting and childhood psychology. Yet, it doesn't stop, because many people grow up having been spanked or hit, and pass that on to their children.

It's true that firm discipline is important for the child's future, but *physical* discipline isn't. It causes deep-rooted fears and negative feelings, and is a major source of subconscious inadequacy - which fetishes turn into pleasure. Physical abuse has been shown to correlate with fetishes.⁵

⁴ Gershoff, E.T. and Grogan-Kaylor, A., (2016) Spanking and child outcomes: Old controversies and new meta-analyses. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 30(4), p.453.

⁵ Kafka, M.P. and Hennen, J., (2002). A DSM-IV Axis I comorbidity study of males (n= 120) with paraphilias and paraphilia-related disorders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 14(4), pp.349-366.

How your parents treated you is likely how you will treat your children. This is because the same toxic emotions get passed down through our behavior.

In short, it's likely that your parents had toxic shame too. The way they instinctually treated you was likely just a way to deal with their own deep-rooted emotions. This is useful to know, because it's often easier to analyze other people than to look inward on ourselves. Take a moment to think about the ways that your parents treated you. Think about their emotional attitude. Use what you know about their lives to try to identify an emotional blueprint.⁶

Ron's father worked as a health and safety inspector, trying to prevent problems before they happen. His hobbies revolved around planning events in the local community, because he liked to make sure things would run smoothly with every possible problem identified in advance. He was extremely careful with his money, never investing in anything that wasn't 100% guaranteed. He always had a 'right' way to do things. He clearly held some deep fears around making mistakes. Ron told me that his father grew up in a household that punished him for every mistake.

For Ron, this meant that his father acted strangely around Ron's mistakes growing up. His father knew not to get angry, but instead

⁶ Some people seem unwilling to analyse their own family dynamics, particularly when we talk about specific relationships with the mother or father. That's ok - it's an uncomfortable thing to do. If you don't want to, it's not necessary and you can skip it, but it helps to understand yourself.

he would blame Ron for not having prevented the mistake, or calmly explain what should have been done - which would make Ron feel bad for not seeing it coming. Ron then felt bad about mistakes and felt bad about himself - just like his father.

Carl's mother was not as much angry as she was bitter and negative. She would take out her disappointment about her failed life on her children. She made sure to stamp out their innocence, positivity, and optimism as soon as possible, so that they matched her cruel mindset. She would punish them, neglect them, deprive them of love, and make life hard for them. She thought of this as 'education on the harsh reality of life' - but for her children, it was emotional abuse.

Whenever their needs are threatened, or otherwise experience 'abandonment', they equate it to the possibility of death. They are dependent and vulnerable, and any violation of their needs is a threat of death. It is far too scary for them to feel their mother's simulation of 30 years of her mistreatment and misfortune, disguised as 'education on the harsh reality of life'. An unhappy parent who failed to live out their life how they wanted to often feels the need to 'educate' their children on what they perceive to be the 'truth' (which it rarely is), or to make sure that their children don't get their hopes up. This is done out of love, but unfortunately it is created by a skewed perspective and negative mindset.

Whenever Carl was treated unfairly, either by his parents or his sister, he would exclaim “that’s not fair!”, to which his mother would reply “Well, life isn’t fair”. She used this to justify all kinds of wrongful treatment and downright emotional abuse, and make Carl unable to do anything about it.

Of course, Carl was a bitter and negative man who complained of his perpetual victimhood and the ways in which life had failed him. He grew up with the same mindset as his mother. He would similarly have passed this on to his children.

Same Root, Different Symptoms

Raji’s father had a short temper, as previously mentioned, having anger issues which his children felt the brunt of, despite his best wishes. This was the cause of Raji’s toxic shame. Raji actually didn’t become an angry man. Although these emotions are passed down by parenting, they don’t always manifest themselves with the same symptoms. It’s actually more common for them to show themselves in different ways, in my experience, because children can learn from their parents' mistakes.

Instead, Raji became the opposite. Determined to never be like his father, Raji was calm and collected, and claimed to never even feel anger. Raji dealt with his issues and unmet needs by being the nice guy. He was an underachieving procrastinator with a puritanical

attitude, and he developed a porn addiction too - all as different ways to deal with the same core emotions.

When children experience their parents' shortcomings, they can sometimes learn not to go down that path. They resent their parents and rebel against them, sometimes trying very hard to be the opposite. Either way, the child's life is strongly influenced by their parents. The emotions of parents become enmeshed with their children.

It's no surprise that fetishes have been shown to correlate with substance abuse, body dysmorphia, depression, anxiety (particularly social anxiety), ADHD, and lots more.⁷ We have internal wounds, whether they're from childhood or elsewhere, and fetishes are an outlet for them.

⁷ Kafka, M.P. and Hennen, J., (2002). A DSM-IV Axis I comorbidity study of males (n= 120) with paraphilias and paraphilia-related disorders. *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment*, 14(4), pp.349-366.

ACTION: Sexual and Emotional Enmeshment

In the previous books in this series, I asked you to identify the emotions behind your biggest turn-ons.

Now, see if you can relate those emotions to any prominent emotions you experienced in childhood. For example, if your parents had moments where they teased you, or made you feel guilty, perhaps that's present in your sexual fantasies. If your parents shamed you, blamed you, or excluded you, perhaps you can see the link between that and your fetishes.

This can be an uncomfortable exercise, so don't feel pressure to do this if you don't want to.

It's not all about your parents, they're just the most important people at that time. Think about any of your prior mistreatments.

Chapter 3:

Development

Growing up, many men find themselves without sufficient masculine role models. This is far more common than it sounds, because of the society that most of us live in, especially in most western societies. After the second world war, a number of societal changes were taking place in western societies which made men struggle to have a healthy understanding of what it means to be a 'man'.

In this period, many men decided they had to eliminate any negative male traits because of a pressure to be what women want them to be - essentially giving them the sense that they're not good enough just as they are. Women had it worse, and if this topic was more popular with women, I'd go into it, but I'm sure female readers can extrapolate using this information to work out the similarities for them.

Societies around the world began to change from an agricultural society (based around farming), to an industrial society (based around manufacturing). This meant that families moved away from

the farms and villages where they once lived, to live in cities and urban areas.

In the USA in 1910, one-third of all families lived on farms, but 60 years later, 96 percent of families lived in urban areas. This urban migration brought a huge change in how we socialize. In the past, young boys would work alongside their fathers, grandfathers, uncles, cousins, and brothers in fields. Having all this contact with men provided boys with an intimate model of maleness. They had an accurate image of what it meant to be a man, because they spent an extended amount of time with other men. They could nourish their inner masculinity in a way that was true to the nature of their masculinity, instead of trying to change it or suppress certain aspects.

Having extended contact with masculine role models would encourage the inner masculine traits of that boy, and that boy would grow up comfortable in that aspect of himself, knowing that that part of him is good enough just as he is.

Of course, this pre-war society wasn't perfect, and probably shamed any feminine aspects in the boy too; the goal is for authenticity and wholeness. The aim is to let a child know that it is ok to be just as they are. Each of us has some masculinity and some femininity. If part of this is shamed or discouraged then that boy will grow up

feeling like he needs to change and he is not good enough just as he is.

As families moved into cities and away from farms, the time that sons spent with these male role models diminished significantly. Men would leave home in the morning to go to work and not get back until the evening, if at all - divorce rates tripled from 1940 to 1970 and boys were most of the time left with their mothers. The socially accepted gender roles meant that it was mostly fathers who went to work and mostly mothers who stayed at home, and mostly mothers who kept the children after the divorce.

Because of all this, women were left with the job of letting the boys know that their inner masculinity, and all parts of themselves, are ok just as they are. This led to many boys growing up with a female perspective of masculinity, which is less likely to be as wholly positive and accepting as the male perspective, because males have it themselves. Men won't impose expectations on how boys 'should' be, in terms of masculine traits. No mother wants their little boy to grow up to be boisterous, aggressive, or competitive, whereas fathers would not discourage that. So, boys were told to be more gentle, caring, and sensitive, instead of being just as they are.⁸ Of course, it's good to be gentle and caring, but to feel the need to act in a certain way in order to be good enough is unequivocally bad.

⁸ Robert Glover (2003) *No More Mr Nice Guy*, Running Press Adult.

Not just that, but males serve as a role model for what it's 'ok' for young boys to be. They model the natural traits of young boys in a healthy way. Even for men who grew up without those messages of encouragement/discouragement, simply the disconnection from male role models is startling. In England, 80% of all school staff are female; 85% of primary school teachers are female, and this is increasing.⁹ Young boys growing up are not given enough exposure to healthy male role models, and this leaves them with a bad idea of what they 'should' be.

These men struggle with inaccurate perceptions of masculinity, and live their lives trying to be what they think women want them to be, instead of being themselves. Some become obsessed with being a 'leader', being 'dominant', or an 'emotional rock'; others think that women want 'sensitivity' and 'caretaking'; but all have trouble accepting themselves just as they are, right now, without needing to do anything to be good enough.

Individuation

One of the most important stages in childhood is moving away from the comfort of our parents and out into the world as independent people. We are born into the welcoming arms of our mothers and eventually must learn to leave that relationship and 'individuate' -

⁹ Department For National Statistics (2017) 'School workforce in England: November 2016' [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-school-workforce>

become a person of our own. Our parents need to do certain things to make sure that happens, otherwise it never does, and we stay in a relationship with our mothers forever. (Freudian/oedipal implications aside - that's not what this is about - some men never make this transition and stay their mother's little boy forever. This means they never become emotionally independent and aren't able to form healthy new attachments).

First, the mother must be able to meet the child's needs enough without keeping their son *dependent* forever. Also, she must get her own needs met - or else she'll use her son to fill the void. Second, the father must have a normal, healthy bond with the son - otherwise the son will never want to leave their mother's comforting arms to venture into the scary world of men. If you never had a close relationship with your father, whether they were passive, abusive, unavailable, emotionally numb, or absent altogether, it would likely create an unhealthy relationship with your mother.

Particularly, an unhealthy relationship might form if you had to please a mother who was angry, critical, or controlling. A needy, dependent, or smothering mother would keep you trapped in dependence too.

The solution is to finally go through the stages of individuation. Bond with other men and find male role models. If you get on better with women than men, that's one of the clear signs that you need to spend

more time with men. It will help you to see yourself as a man, instead of feeling subconsciously different or excluded, or having negative feelings about male competition. Some people would benefit from bonding with their real father - particularly if you either hate them or constantly live in their shadow, both of which are bad signs - and try to see them for the human they are. Healing that broken relationship can sometimes be beneficial, but for others who've already tried and failed it can be better to leave it and seek out other male role models instead. Either way, finding male role models and bonding with men is a process that many men need to go through in order to finally become comfortable with themselves.

Approval

Some men have increasingly needed to look to women for approval. Without having enough healthy male role models to allow the encouragement of masculinity, and being influenced by unhealthy projections of how they 'should' be, they may have learned that they were not ok just as they are.

The goal should be for *everyone*, regardless of gender, to grow up in a society that doesn't impose expectations about what you need to be, but rather allows everyone to be just as they are. If you grow up being told to *be* something that you're not, you will live your life feeling that you need to change to be good enough, because you're not good enough just as you are.

Ron grew up thinking it was not ok for him to be just as he is, because he was told he should stop being so boisterous and instead be more sensitive, gentle, caring, attentive, and be what women want him to be, instead of just being him. That is a sense of inadequacy.

The Opposite Is Just As Bad And Just As Common

In other places, none of that happened, and a different phenomenon took place. Instead of being denied masculinity, men were denied femininity instead. They were told they couldn't have emotions, couldn't express concern or worry, couldn't show vulnerability, and more. Men were told that they had to be extremely masculine to be good enough. They were given ideas about 'manliness' which they must live up to or else they were inadequate.

Again, they learned they had to do something different or suppress certain aspects of themselves, and weren't good enough as they are. If you now think that you need to be masculine to be 'good', and can't have emotions, then we've not really come any further than before; there's still the need to be *something* to be good.

Michael was told that he had to 'man up', stay strong, appear to be tough and 'dominant', and never be sad, lonely, or hurt. He thought he could never be seen to be 'weak', and instead had to pretend to be confident and stable. Sometimes, this is also formed by a perception of what women want. By denying his negative feelings, he learned to feel shame around one of the most basic parts of being human.

In summary, there were many messages in society, and there still are today, that prevent people from being who they are. Combined with the disconnection from male role models that resulted from industrialization, men had a hard time knowing that it's ok to just be themselves.

Unconditional And Unconditioned Self-Acceptance

It's ok to have masculine traits of:

- Competitiveness
- Sexual assertiveness
- Exhibitionism
- Ego
- Thirst for experience
- Boisterousness
- Power

All of these things can be good things, but when you grow up thinking that women don't want these things, it's hard to believe this. I frequently come across men who are so disconnected from other men, and disconnected from their own masculinity too. They find it harder to have male friends, and become passive and needy for approval. They find it hard to be a leader in their family, their

relationships, and themselves, out of a fear of appearing in the 'wrong' way, which shifts the job to those around them and particularly their partners, who reluctantly take on the role and essentially become a surrogate mother to them - they boss their husband around in the husband's own affairs (and start to resent their husband for having to do so).

It's also ok to have traits of:

- Emotions:
 - Sadness
 - Hurt
 - Loneliness
 - Disappointment
- Vulnerability, weaknesses
- Social needs, for friendships and love
- Compassion and caring
- Sensitivity

And it's ok to express and show these things too. It's really just a matter of self-acceptance. You don't need to be gentle and sensitive to be good, but that doesn't mean you can't be gentle or sensitive.

Likewise, that doesn't mean you need to treat women insensitively to be good. You don't have to *be* anything in order to be good.

Being Who You Really Are

How do you find out who you really are? How do you know if you're being sensitive and gentle for other people or because it's really who you are? How do you know your masculinity is genuine?

If we only ever think about it, you will never know the true answer, because these societal messages are buried in the subconscious. Our conscious brain does not know who we really are.

The key can sometimes be found in isolation. When we completely separate ourselves from people for a period of time, we have no-one to impress, no one to get sympathy from, and we have total freedom to be just as we are. It takes a lot of time to find that out, so many periods of isolation can be necessary. This can be as simple as just going somewhere on your own, all by yourself. Whether it's a week away or a short trip out, do more things by yourself. You'll discover who you are, what you like about yourself, and what rules you choose to govern your life. You can also use this as an opportunity to reflect on yourself and your life direction. And it's a good time to practice taking responsibility for your own needs - you don't have to please or compromise.

This time alone is spent most effectively when you can observe your tendency to distract yourself with addictive patterns such as keeping

busy, or using porn, food, alcohol, internet, tv, or anything else to medicate.

Remember, we do so many things to be 'good' because being 'bad' means being abandoned and alone. Therefore, spending time alone indirectly addresses that deep rooted unreasonable subconscious fear. You'll learn that nothing bad happens when you're alone.

But Not Too Much

If you isolate yourself for too long, it's bad. You will *lose* who you really are, because you won't be able to get all your needs met on your own, and you will develop coping methods and strategies to get your needs met. Then you'll have disconnected from your needs and won't even know what you were missing! Furthermore, you can very easily get stuck in your head, and resort to extensive introspection which creates a large pressure to be good enough. This usually happens after 2-3 months of reduced social contact.

Some people benefit more from the opposite - spending more time with people. When we have fun in social situations, we draw our focus away from ourselves, and alleviate much of the burden of self-awareness. As we get more comfortable with other people, we feel less need for shams and pretenses, and become more natural and connected to our true selves.

Either through reclaiming our independence through solitude, or through dropping our pretenses with social connection, we can get in

touch with who we really are. The option that suits you best is probably the one that you're not doing now. If you've spent most of your life by yourself, get some social time! If you've been with people for most of your life, spend some time by yourself. If you're unsure or in between, do both, and see which one works best. It's particularly important to spend time with other men, to ensure you have a more authentic view of masculinity and see yourself as a normal man too.

There are so many things in life that tell us we're not good enough. Hopefully this section has expanded your awareness of the messages in society and the changes in society that may have contributed to a sense of inadequacy or subconscious shame about who we are. To discover who we really are we can spend more time alone - but not too much - or conversely spend more time with people. Perhaps both, or simply the opposite of what you're doing now or what you've done for most of your life. Importantly, we should connect with other men, particularly if you find that hard or have mostly female friends.

Chapter 4:

Expectations

John D. Rockefeller was the richest man who ever lived. He made his money in oil, and was the first ever billionaire. His wealth at his richest was 2% of the entire economy of the USA. When a reporter asked him, 'How much money is enough?' He responded, 'Just a little bit more.'

It's never enough! You can always do better, no matter what it is or who you are. You can always be more. Even when you're at the top. Even when you're already John D. Rockefeller. Inadequacy is relative; there is no such thing as being good enough, because 'enough' can change. It's never enough. Your expectations determine that.

If you expect to be the best human that has ever lived, you will live your life being disappointed in yourself regardless of your achievements.

You could find a cure for cancer, but if you expected to cure all illnesses, you would feel like you're not good enough for only curing one illness, despite the remarkable achievement. Expectations cause

inadequacy because inadequacy is relative. It's relative to what you expect, what you're used to, what you think is normal, and the people around you.

If you're a millionaire, but the only people you mix with are billionaires, you're not going to feel rich. If you then go to the middle of poverty-stricken Africa, you'll suddenly feel pretty good about yourself, because it's relative. Here's a shocking statistic: 70% of millionaires would not describe themselves as wealthy. That's excluding the value of their homes; that's millionaires in cash. 70%! Why? Because they're still looking up, they're aiming for more, they're aware of what more they can do and how much more money they'd like. Once you buy one home, you start thinking about bigger homes. Once you buy a massive home, you start looking at mansions. Once you have a mansion, you'll need a fancy car to go with that. Then perhaps a yacht, and a holiday home, and once you've got all of those things you'll still want a bigger yacht. It's never enough.

Inadequacy is relative. There is no such thing as good enough, because as soon as you get it, you'll become aware of even more that you need to be. There is only ever 'better' and 'worse'. You can always be better; it is not something you can achieve or attain. It is never enough.

Does this mean you shouldn't aim high, and that you should just accept where you are and never strive for better? No. The key is in

attachment. It's not the expectations that cause inadequacy, it's when you become *attached* to achieving those expectations, and when you *need* that to feel like you're good enough. When your self-worth is defined by your successes, achievements, and whatever expectations you have for yourself, then your self-worth becomes *conditional*. You get into that same paradigm of needing to do something to be 'good', or to be 'enough', and it never gets to a point where you are good enough just as you are.

Inadequacy is relative. When you become attached to your expectations, your self-worth becomes conditional, and even if those conditions are fulfilled, you still won't approve of yourself unconditionally.

The solution is to become aware of your expectations and reduce your attachment to them. Attachment is a future-oriented state, and indicates a disconnection with the present. If you find yourself imagining future scenarios more than enjoying what's presently happening, that will lead to massive attachment and a thus a sense of inadequacy. Practicing mindfulness meditation can help with that. Mindfulness grounds you in the present moment, and lets you become aware of your thoughts, so you can choose not to follow any future-based projections or fantasies.

Removing your attachment to expectations allows you to feel ok, just as you are, right now. You can still aim high and work hard to be

better - that's a good thing - but when you remove your *attachment* to that, you'll be able to do it whilst accepting yourself just as you are. Remove your need to be better, start appreciating what you've already got, and you'll be able to accept yourself whilst still having the freedom to try hard in life.

Unreasonable expectations mean you'll never be good enough. This can be linked to childhood too, in some cases. Parents can set unreasonable expectations for their children to achieve, and when they don't live up to their expectations they feel like a failure, and when they do live up to their expectations they still learn that they are only valued for their achievements, not themselves. They're told that if they don't get good grades they're a failure, or if they don't go down the route that their parents want, they're a failure. Or our culture teaches us if we don't fit in and be popular with everyone we're a failure. Our society can teach men that if they don't get enough girls they're a failure.

Attachment to expectations creates conditional self-worth.

Chapter 5: Culture

There are many parts of our culture that can make us feel inadequate. All around us are expectations for how we should behave and what we need to 'be', which communicates that we are not good enough right now.

Media

Media (newspapers, TV, and online news/entertainment websites), bombard us with messages that we're in some way inadequate, because that makes us want to read their article, watch that program, or click that link. They get money when we do that. Typically they use either insecurity, fear, or curiosity in headlines and subject matters to make us curious enough to look into it. Insecurity grabs our attention; but it also makes us feel bad, and when you're surrounded by media making you feel insecure, it can be a significant influence on your mental state.

I've collected some headlines below, read them and work out how they make you feel:

- 14 mistakes every guy makes.
- Have you been doing THIS wrong in the shower?

- 8 Essential skills you should already know (but don't)
- If you do 7/10 of these things, you're gross
- Does THIS make you more attractive?
- 10 clothing mistakes you make every day

People are seriously being made to feel that they make 10 clothing mistakes every day. We need to click a link to find out if we're gross or not. We need to make sure we've not been doing anything incorrectly in the shower. We need to make sure we know those 8 essential skills, because apparently we should already know them.

These aren't hard-hitting in any way, and they're to do with trivial things like showering and clothes, but with the constant exposure that we have to these messages it creates a society of worrying if we're good enough just as we are.

Furthermore, companies will use fear and insecurity in their marketing too. If they sell a fitness product, they'll tell you your body isn't good enough, and they'll use a picture of unrealistically muscular men to make you feel like that's where you should be. If they sell a beauty product, especially for women, they'll use a picture of someone with flawless photoshopped skin and make you feel like that's how it's supposed to be. If they sell an app they'll make you feel like if you don't get this app, you'll be excluded. Our culture is full of

these messages and it's so important not to let these things define our self-worth.

Insecurity can come from the glamorous world of TV and film too. TV is filled with beautiful interesting people that aren't representative of the real population. Films are filled with action, excitement, emotions, drama, or hilarious moments, and our lives seem pretty inadequate in comparison. When we spend too long immersed in these worlds, they affect our perception of normality, and our lives seem below average because of that.

Subcultures

Sometimes subcultures can make this even worse. By subculture, I mean when we immerse ourselves in a particular community which has its own values and idealizes certain things.

Each subculture places its own emphasis on some other factor which can again define your self-worth. In the bodybuilding community, for example, it's how much you lift or how big you are; your self-worth becomes defined by your body, and how good you are comes to mean how good your body is.

Certain subcultures will in some way emphasize the importance of being the 'alpha male'. A lot of internet forums, especially those aimed towards men, repeatedly hammer in this idea that if you're not an alpha male, you're a complete failure in life. Of course we want to be the best we can be, but these repeated messages just

create more fear around not being the alpha male, which only creates more fear of inadequacy and focus on whether you're good enough. And within this culture of alpha male obsession, the cuckold fetish is so incredibly shameful, which of course only feeds back into the fetish, in this painful cycle of fear and self-loathing which is by and large created by culture.

Everyone wants to be the alpha male and that's great, but when it becomes an unhealthy obsession it becomes damaging. When it stops being a desire and becomes a need, where your self-worth is defined by how much of an alpha male you are, when you become focused on that and constantly question whether you're 'alpha' enough, that's when it's damaging.

Religion, Politics, Righteousness

Some strict churches can reinforce a need to be perfect and sinless, and to make no mistakes. It's unreasonable to expect anyone to go through life without a few minor sins - but sinning leads to everlasting punishment. This can reinforce the idea that you're not good enough, and the pressure to be unreasonably perfect.

Reinforcing an image of being sinless is another manifestation of toxic shame.

Righteousness is a form of shameless behavior. That means acting like you're right about everything; your opinion is right, and you are perfect. The disciples of any religious system can say 'we are good,

and the others - those not like us, the sinners - they are bad'. This can be exhilarating to the minds of toxically shamed persons. When you suffer from a sense of inadequacy, it feels good to believe that you're right about something. It's soothing to know that no matter how inadequate you are, at least you're right. At least you're better than *them*, whoever they are.

Not just religion, this can also happen with *the lack of religion* - atheism - when atheism becomes a sanctuary for righteousness, or any 'us vs them' mentality. Even politics can become an outlet for toxic shame. By firmly taking a stance on a topic - whether it be politics, religion, or anything else - and then surrounding yourself with evidence that your stance is the correct stance, you can live in a bubble of comforting reassurance that you're not *all* bad.

Socializing

Social life can be a problem for someone who carries toxic shame. If we believe we are not good enough, we will struggle to let people get close to us. If we have a sense of inadequacy, we feel that being truly exposed will only lead to people finding out how bad we are, so we never truly put ourselves out there.

As a coping mechanism, we learn to present our 'false self', to the world, instead of our true self. This results in never getting the true connections that we need, and never getting approval of our true

selves, only the false selves that we present to the world. This in turn means we feel more inadequate.

Furthermore, the sense of inadequacy can lead to a lack of authentic confidence, obviously, because we don't feel good enough. We may naturally struggle to put ourselves in social situations, and get out of our comfort zone. It can be quite unpleasant, and some people would much rather stay at home, isolated from the burden of being social.

One of the worst things for a person's wellbeing is social isolation. If you felt left out in family life, school, or even after that, that can be a huge cause of subconscious inadequacy. Sometimes we can be surrounded by people and still feel left out - it's not totally obvious. Isolation doesn't refer to your proximity to others, it means lacking a sense of belonging.

It can be useful to socialize more, with the aim of paying attention to your false self. Remember, if you hide your flaws, if you lie, if you try to be perfect, that's what the false self is. Our true selves have flaws and that's what we're afraid of exposing. Humans are imperfect. It's ok to let people into the not-so-great parts of your life.

Bullying

Bullying is also something which can cause subconscious inadequacy. Nick was bullied all through school - although he didn't know it himself. His friends constantly made 'jokes' about him, mocked him for anything they could find, and treated him like the

slave of the group. They were friends, but their jokes always struck a chord inside Nick that didn't make him feel good. He managed to hide his feelings and try to laugh along, although that wasn't the most emotionally healthy decision. He traced his cuckold fetish to these roots, realizing that this feeling of inadequacy was caused by this role he was burdened with throughout school.

Others go through similar experiences in work, relationships, or life. Little backhanded insults and jabs under the guise of 'banter' can be very hurtful if they're not taken in the same way as they're meant. Often, they're worse than outright attacks because they're harder to complain against or speak up about.

Not just bullying, but exclusion can also be a source of pain. If you were surrounded by people entering relationships as you were growing up, but you didn't have a relationship until much later in life, it can make you feel like your place is on the sidelines. If you spent too much time alone, or excluded, without stable friendships, it can make you feel left out.

Social Media

Social media can be another hiding place for sources of inadequacy. The only things people tend to post on social media are the highlights; the pictures where they look good, the positive developments in their life. They hide the bad pictures and the times when they're alone, feeling miserable about their life, and we're left

comparing that image of perfection to our unfiltered selves. It's inevitable to get a sense of inadequacy from that. Don't compare someone else's highlight reel with your behind-the-scenes. It will never be as good.

Dating, And Different Sexual Values

Another possible source of inadequacy is in dating. There have been a few young men that I've worked with who have felt inadequate due to issues and misconceptions around casual sex, which is a concept that they either don't agree with, or have unrealistic perceptions of. These men either think all girls have many dozens of sexual partners (and that these are not values that they share), or that they haven't had enough sex and thus feel inadequate, or that their values are so different that they feel left out and feel bad about themselves.

It can be pretty tough if you value committed relationships and you think everyone around you is having hundreds of sexual partners. Having a low number of sexual partners would also make you feel like you're not good enough - even if the reason is a difference in values and zero desire to engage in that.

A lot of elements of western culture judge a man's worth by the number of women he's slept with. If you haven't slept with many women, it can make you feel like you don't 'measure up' in this respect, especially when you perceive it as a significant difference between you and the rest of the world.

Rick was a 24-year-old banker who told me that every girl was a 'slut' deep down. He was absolutely certain that all women would have multiple one-night stands given the chance, and that he had no choice but to accept it, despite his best wishes. He attempted to lecture me on the dating game, informing me that young women are only interested in having sex with as many high-quality men as they can, and will only consider dating someone like himself when they've 'settled down' and are looking for financial stability.

He told me how his previous girlfriend only had one other sexual partner, before adding 'but I know she was lying, they all lie'. Rick felt a huge amount of emotional pain when thinking about casual sex, and as a result, this affected his perception of life and relationships - even to the extent of forming distorted beliefs about women and sex. He told me that he'd never find a good girlfriend, and that he'd simply prefer not to even try. Others turn to anger and resentment, some try to join in and chase girls despite not wanting to, some turn to 'slut-shaming' the few women that have different values, but Rick just felt defeated.

Obviously, the thought of women having sex with multiple other men is exactly what this fetish eroticizes. This is what gets turned into sexual pleasure, and before it's sexualized, it's just an emotional pain. That was Rick's problem; he felt this pain, which warped his perception of the world - and he shares this problem with many other men that I've worked with. I'm not sure if it's more prominent

in those with a cuckold fetish or just a common source of insecurity, but it's certainly a widespread feeling. His vision became so distorted that he couldn't enjoy the relationship he was in without feeling paranoid and extremely insecure.

Studies actually suggest that people with sexual kinks may have more sexual partners than people who don't,¹⁰ so it's quite possible that many people reading this really aren't concerned, and would be better off skipping the next few pages. However, for those who are affected by this, it's a massive source of insecurity and negative feelings which do need attention.

Seeing or hearing about casual sex can make some people feel like they're not good enough. In fact, out of all the causes of inadequacy, this is the one specific one that causes the most feelings of inadequacy when it's present, because some men just don't have much sex, and only with a select few special women in loving relationships, and other men feel pressure to have more sex than anyone else. This makes it very painful to think about other girls having casual sex, particularly if certain factors make them think it's every girl (or even a majority). For some men, this is a huge source of insecurity.

¹⁰ Richters, J., De Visser, R.O., Rissel, C.E., Grulich, A.E. and Smith, A.M., (2008). Demographic and psychosocial features of participants in bondage and discipline, "sadoomasochism" or dominance and submission (BDSM): Data from a national survey. *The journal of sexual medicine*, 5(7), pp.1660-1668.

Social Pressure

This leads to some men feeling that they need to engage in this too, or else they're not good enough; thinking if you've not slept with many girls then you're inadequate. The pressure to have many sexual partners is again something that can make your self-worth be defined by some arbitrary external factor which in this case is created by culture. It's simply a ridiculous kind of peer pressure created by distorted perceptions. For the men that this applies to, this is a huge issue, and many men in our society have an unhealthy obsession with the number of girls they've slept with.

You don't need to listen to messages in society that tell you to think something different from what you think. Again, societal messages which tell you to be anything other than yourself can be ignored. Just like the cultural discouragement of masculinity, it's a toxic force which prevents you from feeling good enough. Live your life on your own terms.

No Choice But To Accept It?

The second reason is probably bigger, which is the misguided expectation that *all* girls are like this - your future girlfriend will have had many, many sexual partners. Or, that your current girlfriend is like this, and that you should be ok with it. That statement would be true if the woman has nothing to do with you - it's none of your business what other people choose to do. However,

if she's your partner then it's not true; it has everything to do with you.

You're allowed to be picky about who you're with. If thinking about your girlfriend's sexual past makes you feel really bad, then why would you put yourself through that? You're allowed to turn down girls that don't make you feel good. If it makes you insecure, then it makes you unhappy, and that's a completely valid reason to not be with someone. Some men need to be reminded that they're allowed to turn down women.

The reason that these young men often don't do that is their internal sense of inadequacy making them think that they have to settle for that: that you have to settle for a girl that isn't what you want and live with the negative feelings that this creates in you.

Although no-one's perfect, and you should expect to make some compromises with your partners because you won't find someone that ticks every box, you should at least find someone that ticks your most important boxes. Unless it's to an unreasonable extent (like rejecting all girls that have even kissed someone else - that's clearly a problem of your own insecurity), sharing common *values* is an important indicator of long-term success in relationships, and it's ok to choose partners by their values - in fact it's more than ok, it's *necessary*.

Faulty Perceptions

However, many things can create a belief that there are no women like that in existence for these men. Firstly, the psychological pain you feel makes that belief become a comforting solution. Oddly, by accepting it, you no longer have to deal with the agonizing doubt and insecurity, and find comfort in letting go and starting the long journey of dealing with it and working your way up.

Secondly, watching too much porn creates an unbalanced focus on women's sex lives, distorts your perception of reality, and can create inaccurate perceptions of sex, promiscuity, and relationships.

Thirdly, confirmation bias; you see it happening and confirm your beliefs, but don't accurately seek out the contrary. Fourthly, media; anything that spikes your emotions tends to be more prominent in media, because it sells more. Some men start browsing online forums which constantly recite these principles in a giant echo chamber, which is comforting and even encouraging if it gives them a sense of purpose and standards to live up to.

Lastly, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; the belief changes your actions which lead to consequences that confirm the belief. Some men turn to treating all women as if they're 'sluts', which works well when it's true and poorly for everyone else, so the only women that stick around in their lives are exactly what they believe in - and this unrepresentative sample confirms and reinforces their beliefs.

It's Not A Problem Of Gender...

Women share the same problem, arguably to an even larger extent. Rita thought all men just wanted sex, and that she had to give them sex in order to be good enough. Rita didn't want to do that, so she often stayed single - on purpose - for long periods of time. When she dated any men, she immediately assumed they wouldn't like her because of her reluctance to have sex, and this left her feeling dejected for no reason whatsoever.

Her attitude resulted in a lack of confidence - she didn't talk to the men she liked, and stopped seeing the men that liked her because she was pre-empting rejection. This left her alone, fully believing she was rejected, inferior, and inadequate, and believing that the reason was because men only want sex, with this real-life 'proof' to confirm it - despite the whole thing being self-inflicted from her mental perceptions. As previously stated, a sense of inadequacy can sometimes become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Clara wholeheartedly believed that 95% of men would cheat on their girlfriends if they were offered the chance. Most of the men she met were ones who approached her while out socializing - but only if she was wearing her nicest outfit and makeup. Clara only actually interacted with a certain *type* of men - ones who would approach her and talk to her, and ones who based their judgements mostly on looks, and as a result, she developed a skewed perspective of men. The men she met were all fairly shallow, valued physical beauty over

the actual person, mostly materialistic and hedonistic, and were far more likely to cheat - which led her to form this belief about all men.

Her belief that most men would cheat led her to try to dress up even nicer, and look even more attractive, so that the men she dated wouldn't want to cheat on her, and she made sure that the only men she dated were ones who approached her first (so she knew for sure they liked her) - but that only attracted even more of the same type of man. She repeatedly experienced infidelity of some form, and believed it was a problem with men, not with her. She based her opinions on an unrepresentative sample that she thought was reflective of all men, developing inaccurate perceptions as a result.

The type of person that you are tends to attract one specific type of partner. The people that you interact with are not a representative sample of the general population, because certain 'types' will be attracted to you and vice versa. Not just in relationships, but in life. This means that your perceptions of reality can easily become warped and inaccurate, because your opinions are not founded on balanced, unbiased experiences. This is how people develop inaccurate opinions of the general population. This doesn't just happen through shared interests or shared subculture, but through a complex emotional and psychological magnetism which is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Solutions

There are two major solutions for those who suffer from this: first, travel, and get out of your comfort zone. Experiencing different cultures and people from different walks of life with different values will overcome any culturally-formed ideas of how you 'should' be, and of how other people are. This is partly why it seems to be the younger men that struggle with these issues the most; having experienced fewer different cultures and environments, perhaps they underestimate diversity, thinking all other people share the same values and they're left out.

Second, socialize more (again) and meet others that share your values. Not by socializing in places where you feel out of place - if you don't like nightclubs for example, then don't go to nightclubs! It's a pretty simple statement but for some reason so many people feel like they have to do this!

By doing something that isn't what you value, you'll only meet people who don't share your values! If you're not into casual sex, don't go to places where people look for casual sex, because you're not going to find a girlfriend that you're completely happy with there! And if you're hurt by the thought of a woman having had a large number of sexual partners, then for God's sake don't get into a relationship with them! If you're a logical, rational, scientific person, then don't spend your days going to ghost hunts and alternative medicine meetups because that's not where you'll fit in.

It sounds stupid and so obvious, but for some reason there are men that have been convinced that this is what they need to do: they need to do the things that other people do, and like the things that other people like. It seems to get easier as you get older but young men in particular really seem to struggle with this. Particularly for men who are quiet and reserved - it's much harder to find others who are quiet and reserved because they're so quiet and reserved!

Find others that share your values and you'll feel far less left out. A sense of belonging is a human need, and you should take responsibility for it and find somewhere you belong. Find people that think the same as you and share your values.

Feeling Different = Feeling Inadequate.

As previously mentioned in the section which explained the interracial aspect of cuckolding, the feeling of being different is equal to the feeling of inadequacy. When we fit in and see ourselves reflected in those around us, we know that we're good enough. When we feel different from everyone else around us, we can feel inadequate, just by being different. If we don't fit in, we then have no obvious confirmation that we're good enough.

We feel like we would be outcast or rejected for being ourselves. If we don't have a community of like-minded people, we feel inadequate because we feel different. It's a human need to have a

sense of belonging and a sense of community, and if you don't have that, you're going to be not getting your needs met too.

The solution is to socialize more (again) and realize that you're not going to be outcast for being as weird and unique as all of us are. Try to socialize with people with the same interests and values as yourself. Try to fit in, not by changing yourself, but by being open and honest and finding where you naturally fit. Take responsibility for your need to feel like you belong.

In conclusion, to overcome culturally-formed feelings of inadequacy, be aware of messages in the media that make you feel inadequate, be aware of subcultures, religion, and righteousness as a whole, socialize more, paying attention to our true selves and letting people see our flaws, travel or get out of your comfort zone if need be, and once more, socialize more with the aim of finding like-minded people.

ACTION: Self-Understanding

One of the distinctive traits of inadequacy is the disconnection from ourselves. We lose who we authentically are. We are disconnected from our needs, wants, feelings, and opinions.

To heal the sense of not being good enough that is the core of the fetish, we need feel good enough just as we are. It's key that we don't impose *conditions* on our self-worth. We can't be required to change something in order to be good enough - that's toxic shame. So we need to accept who we are, before we get to feeling good about it. The hardest part of this is being aware of it, because our disconnection can obscure it, and we can lose who we authentically are.

The way we can get in touch with this is to make preference choices. That means choosing options where we can have an opinion on them, such as picking out which car we like the most in a long line of cars, or picking which house we like the most when we go past a row of houses, or which tree we like the look of. As basic as this sounds, it's the simplest way to advance our self-understanding. Make simple choices in your head about what you like. A good one for men is interior design, because a lot of men simply ignore this. Decide what

color walls you like, or what wallpaper you like, and own your opinions.

Go on google images and search for 'interior design'. You'll see a wide variety of pictures that show different houses and rooms, and the way they are decorated. For each picture, try as hard as you can to find elements that you absolutely LOVE or HATE. Try not to be in between. The worst thing you can do is say you 'kind of like' every picture. It's inauthentic, and comes from not wanting to risk having opinions because of a fear that they won't be 'right'.

Pay close attention to trying to hate. All too often, we shy away from having negative opinions. It's ok to think a certain color of wall is bad, or to dislike the shape of the sofa. Don't be afraid of disliking something.

Similarly, some people get overly critical as a way to be 'above' everything else. Make sure to find pictures that you love too, that you admire and appreciate.

Interior design is just an enjoyable example, but if you're an interior designer then this won't work! You can do this with anything - type in 'dog', 'flower', 'scenery', 'plane', 'plate', or anything with options!

The purpose of this exercise is to own your opinions and connect with yourself as fully as possible. I don't think anyone is 100% connected to themselves, but you can get closer. This exercise is a form of self-affirmation, where you confirm to yourself your

preferences, opinions, and values. By doing so, you become more confident and comfortable in yourself.

To take this one step further, we can make *personal* preference choices. These are choices about ourselves; about the way we look or appear, or the way we present ourselves to the world. Fashion is a good example of this. Hairstyles are another one.

Make preferences, and then analyze what you chose. Did you make that choice to look good or 'perfect' or fit in, or impress the imaginary part of your brain that tells you what you need to be in order to be 'good'?

It goes deeper than just appearing to like something to be 'good'. What can actually happen is we can believe this lie ourselves. To have this sense of inadequacy, to believe that we are flawed in some way, would of course be painful to reveal to others, but also it's painful to reveal to ourselves. We don't like the pain of knowing we're inadequate. So we hide who we are from ourselves. That's why it's so important to practice self-understanding.

Chapter 6: Long Term Relationships

When looking for sources of feelings of inadequacy, it's common to find that relationships can cause this. Whether it's past, present, or future, relationships have massive power over our self-worth. Our partners have an unmatched ability to push on our most vulnerable areas and stir up difficult emotions.

Imprints Of Abandonment

In the beginning of this book, I wrote about abandonment trauma, and how that is the scariest thing for a child. When that is imprinted in our brain, it leaves us extremely scared of abandonment in our relationships in later life. It makes us feel particularly more scared about our partners leaving us. We feel like we will not be able to get our needs met without them.

Our partners have massive control over our needs and when it seems like they will abandon us, we can become a bit too needy. Either that or we go the opposite way and push them away to try to protect ourselves. Whichever happens, we live in a constant state of not wanting to be abandoned. Sometimes it manifests itself as

becoming 'submissive' in the *relationship* - not the bedroom - and doing whatever our partner wants so that they don't leave us.

Ever-Present Neediness

This is especially true for those who are a 'people-pleaser' type of person, who become weak and needy. Of course, this is unattractive, and we can sense this. Believing we're unattractive is hard to deal with, so this usually results in becoming even nicer, even more loving, and trying even harder to please her.

Despite this vicious cycle of neediness, our partners want someone independent and strong minded. We know this, and feel like we're unattractive and not good enough. Then we start fantasizing about a big strong man having sex with her instead and enjoying the masochistic validation from that.

For the few men that have learned how unattractive neediness is, they do the opposite - trying not to be so needy and people-pleasing, to keep them attracted, so that they don't leave you. Of course, this makes you feel that they're only attracted to you because of these actions, and you're not good enough just as you are.

Both of these approaches to deal with neediness end up making us feel inadequate, whether it's by being more needy or by trying hard not to be. Solve this problem!

It's all about needs. We have to be responsible for getting our own needs met. We have to learn to be confident that we can fulfil our needs without our partner. This includes needs for love, respect, touch, intimacy, to be known, to be understood, and many more. Otherwise, we become dependent on them to fulfil our needs, meaning we become needy, which makes us feel unattractive and inadequate. The major source for inadequacy in relationship is needs.

Re-enactment

Abandonment is simply not getting your needs met. It is common to be drawn towards *recreating* this concept, in order to help us process the discomfort around it. This fetish itself is actually one way for the subconscious to recreate the abandonment; it pushes on those same buttons formed early on that were so painful at the time. The subconscious is a very weird thing and recreation is one way for it to deal with pain. All too often, we unconsciously act in ways which repeat the hurt we've experienced in the past, as the brain's strange automatic way of trying to deal with it.¹¹ This means you may pick a partner that makes you feel inadequate, inferior, or toxically shamed.

Relationships have special power for this reason. You may be in a situation (or have been in a situation previously) where your partner

¹¹ Van der Kolk, B.A., (1989) The compulsion to repeat the trauma: Re-enactment, revictimization, and masochism. *Psychiatric Clinics*, 12(2), pp.389-411.

regularly neglects you or acts in an emotionally abusive way towards you. Perhaps it is recreating abandonment, or the way your parents treated you. If so, become aware of it, and take responsibility for changing it.

Partner Selection

You may find yourself attracted to women who are distant, unresponsive, neglectful, manipulative, needy, smothering, or emotionally abusive. Or perhaps not - it's individual - but try to notice if you're unconsciously trying to make up for a painful relationship from the past by unwittingly selecting partners who are doomed to repeat it. It's always useful to examine your partner selection and identify the type of person you pursue, if you happen to notice that they're all essentially the same 'type' of person.

Subconscious inadequacy may affect your partner selection, and it's important that your partner selection doesn't feed back into reinforcing subconscious inadequacy by making you date women who make you feel bad about yourself.

Are they all 'crazy'? Are they victims of abuse, crime, serious health problems, depressed, single mothers, overweight, or somehow 'damaged' in your eyes? Do you always try to 'fix' them - and fail? Are they controlling, angry, critical, smothering, or distant? Everyone has some level of those characteristics, so be careful not to overanalyze - but look for *obvious patterns* and resounding examples. It

will tell you a lot about yourself. Most often, it reflects the paradigms formed in your first relationship - with your parents - in different ways.

Wounds Of Infidelity

Furthermore, remember that the purpose of this fetish is to recreate these painful situations in a way where we're in control, so we can get pleasurable validation from that. If you've been cheated on in the past, then that would be one other reason why you'd have a cuckold fetish. It recreates the same emotional trauma you suffered as a victim of infidelity.

Anecdotally, many men that I've worked with have been cheated on, and believe this to be the origin of their fetish.¹² It's entirely possible, because the emotions that you experience from being cheated on are powerful and run deep, and our brains use eroticism to repeat painful experiences in a way where we're in control and finding validation from it. Being cheated on makes you feel inadequate. It also removes feelings of security in relationships, making you feel insecure, and particularly scared of infidelity and finding it hard to trust. The same can happen with divorce and other major break-ups, as well as being with a partner that threatens breakups, threatens cheating, or any other behavior that breeds insecure feelings about

¹² A search on online forums confirms this; cheating is a common experience among people with a cuckold fetish. However, it is not clear that it is *more* common in those with a cuckold fetish than those without it, and it is not clear that it is causative.

the relationship. Healing these emotions means learning how to trust again, and learning how to feel secure.

Avoiding Fears

Darren, a gay man in his late 20s, had found a solution to his trust issues and fears of infidelity: twice a week, he would go out to pick up strangers to have sex with, and never see again. There are no feelings involved in anonymous sex, and no expectations of exclusivity. Therefore, he never had to risk infidelity or the betrayal of his trust. In this way, Darren found a way to bypass all his fears and never have to face his emotions.

Darren's mother died when he was 12, and he was told by his father to not show emotions and never be upset about it. Vulnerability was a sign of weakness in his house, and Darren repressed all his emotions in order to gain his father's approval. In adulthood, Darren's emotional avoidance culminated in a seemingly endless string of one-night stands as a way to dodge his emotions and make sure he never had to feel vulnerable.

Like Darren, many other people find creative ways to avoid the fears of infidelity. Darren made sure never to get in a relationship that ever built up enough trust or security to make breaking that trust/security painful. He used avoidance as a way to deal with his fears, always staying distant and never letting himself have feelings of love, only lust.

Others avoid the opposite sex altogether, staying single their whole lives. Others create excuses, perhaps forming relationships with women who are 'below' them, to reduce their fears of infidelity. If they feel like they're too good for their partner, they know that their partner won't leave them, and they can deal with trust issues and insecurity this way.

Chapter 7: Insecure Attachment

The way that we bonded with our parents when we were infants impacts our relationships as adults.¹³ Our early experiences give us unconscious expectations, fears, and beliefs about relationships, which impact our thoughts, feelings, and actions in later relationships, not least our perception of what love is, what it means to be loved, and what it means to give love.

For example, some people only feel love when they experience physical touch, others need words of affirmation, others need gifts, others need acts of service, and others need to spend quality time with one another.¹⁴ If one partner is showing their love in the ‘wrong’ way for their partner, it’s as if they’re not showing enough love!

How do you receive love? Which of those five ‘love languages’ you do you need to receive? If you’re not sure, usually the way you give love

¹³ Rholes, W.S. & Simpson, J.A. (2004). Attachment theory: Basic concepts and contemporary questions. In W.S. Rholes and J.A. Simpson (Eds.), *Adult Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Implications*, pp. 3–14. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

¹⁴ Chapman, G., (1995) *The five love languages: How to express heartfelt commitment to your mate*. Chicago, IL: Northfield Publ.

is the way you wish to receive it. Become aware of what you need, and take responsibility for it.

Those love languages are formed early on. Our early experiences in our first relationship - with our parents - create a working model for all subsequent relationships. This is only one way that we perceive love.

We also experience love through attachment. Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space. We form different styles of attachment, which describe our unconscious ways of acting in relationships. We all learn different ways of acting in relationships in early childhood, along with expectations and beliefs. Usually, this is formed depending on how responsive the parent is to their child's needs.

When children are raised with confidence that their parent will be available to them, they become secure in themselves, and that lasts into adulthood. Conversely, if their parents aren't responsive to their needs, they doubt themselves, don't have the same confidence, and are more likely to experience fear and insecurity. Of course, a great deal of time elapses between childhood and adulthood, and a lot can change in this time. Childhood attachment patterns aren't always identical to those in adulthood, and attachment styles can change over the course of our lives.

The cuckold fetish eroticizes deep-rooted fears of infidelity and feelings of inadequacy. These are both results of an insecure attachment style. An insecure attachment style creates insecurity about relationships. This is sexualized by the cuckold fetish. Understanding attachment styles - and how to change them - is key to understanding and overcoming this fetish.

Attachment Styles

There are 3 main types of attachment style in adults:

1. Secure

Someone with a secure attachment style doesn't worry excessively about relationships and displays a healthy amount of warmth and love towards their partner. It means you're able to be intimate without being concerned about little misunderstandings. Loving comes naturally.

You don't smother your partner, and you don't play games or manipulate to get them to do something for you. You also don't become distant - you don't repeatedly shun them in favor of work/hobbies/being busy, you know the right balance intuitively. You're comfortable displaying interest, affection, and love. You can accept your partner's flaws, and don't take things personally yourself. You're able to share both your highlights and low points, and are responsive to those of your partner too. You're able to correctly prioritize the role of relationships in your life - not feeling

like it's everything that matters and your life depends on it, and also not feeling like it's trivial and pointless and you don't care.

About 56% of people have a secure attachment style.¹⁵ When a parent responds to their child's needs in a timely, judicious manner, the child develops a secure attachment system, and knows that their parent will be there for them when they need it.

2. Anxious

People with an anxious attachment style essentially have an over-activated attachment system - they try very hard to feel close to someone, desperately seeking out support, proximity, and love. It's usually combined with a lack of confidence that these things will be provided, and sometimes with resentment and anger when they are not provided.

If you have an anxious attachment style, you're preoccupied with the relationship. It plays an overly large role in your life. You're also often worried that your partner wants less closeness. Maybe you struggle to believe they really love you and need constant reassurance.

You might become jealous at very small things, such as your partner giving the slightest bit of attention to someone else. You might call or text too often, or at least be thinking about it, or planning it. It's the

¹⁵ Hazan, C. and Shaver, P., (1987). Romantic love conceptualized as an attachment process. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 52(3), p.511.

person who calls their partner 20 times in one night, who worries excessively about their partner's whereabouts, or who follows them to work to make sure they're not flirting with anyone else. These are extreme examples and it's usually more subtle.

You may manipulate or play games, by trying to provoke jealousy, acting out emotionally, threatening to leave, or tactically withdrawing unexpectedly. You often take things personally with a negative twist and project negative outcomes.

When a parent is sometimes responsive to the child's needs, but unreliably so, the child gets rewarded for their persistence in seeking proximity because they sometimes succeed - but they never know when. Their attachment system gets over-activated and they try to seek proximity wherever possible. This leads to an 'anxious' attachment style.

3. Avoidant

The avoidant style occurs from an under-activated attachment system, and means retreating away from the relationship, trying not to seek proximity, denying attachment needs, and avoiding closeness.¹⁶

If you have an avoidant attachment style, you don't let your partners (or other people) get too close. They're always at arm's length, never

¹⁶ Mikulincer M., & Shaver P.R., (2007). Attachment in adulthood: structure, dynamics, and change. New York: Guilford Press

being totally let in to your life. You might delay commitment, or not commit altogether. You'll frequently find excuses as to why, whether it's being too busy with work or focusing on your partner's flaws. You create mental distance with ongoing dissatisfaction about the imperfections of the other person. This is the man who works 80 hours a week and gets annoyed when his girlfriend wants to actually see him on the weekend. Or the man who dates dozens of girls but doesn't want anything serious, so never takes things further. Or the person who has never been in a relationship, and not even asked a girl out.

You act self-sufficient and independent, taking care of yourself and acting like you don't need anything from others. You don't seek out connection or closeness. You detach yourself from emotions. Just as the person with an anxious attachment style is always concerned about signs of distance, you are concerned about your partner's attempts to control you or limit your freedom. If they suggest you do something different, you reject that notion instantly, dismissing their feelings and needs. Your partner might often seem needy or 'crazy' to you, but this makes you feel independent and strong.

Essentially, the avoidant attachment style means taking an emotional step back from relationships.

Avoidant/Anxious Attachment Styles = Insecurity In Relationships

Avoidant or anxious attachment styles are indicative of deep-rooted and unconscious feelings of not being secure in relationships. It indicates a deep-rooted fear of infidelity and sense of insecurity. Some people say that attachment styles are the core of most psychological problems,¹⁷ and given the effects they have on deep-rooted insecurity, that could well be true of fetishes too.

About 25% of people have an avoidant style, and 19% have an anxious style.⁵⁵ You can also be both, although this is rarer - in fact it's better not to think of these as separate types but as a continuum. Everyone exists with different levels of avoidance, anxiety, and security, and can roughly fit into those categories - as well as being both avoidant and anxious ('disorganized').

People with anxious attachment styles tend to date people with avoidant attachment styles (and vice versa).¹⁸ They seem to come together like magnets, forming unhealthy insecure relationships as a result. If you're avoidant or anxious, it's worth analyzing your relationships to see if you've dated the opposite type in the past. If you're the avoidant style, have your partners been the anxious style?

Initially, psychologists assumed that attachment styles couldn't be changed; that once they were formed in childhood, they were fixed

¹⁷ Mikulincer, M. and Shaver, P.R., (2012). An attachment perspective on psychopathology. *World Psychiatry*, 11(1), pp.11-15.

¹⁸ Kirkpatrick, L. A., & Davis, K. E., (1994). Attachment style, gender, and relationship stability: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66(3), 502-512

for adulthood. However, this turned out to be a false assumption, and it is perfectly possible to change attachment styles.

This is done primarily by forming *securely* attached relationships. That means your intimate partner shouldn't be avoidant and distant, and they shouldn't be anxious and covert. The more secure your partner acts, the more secure your attachment style becomes (and the inverse is true too). Studies showed positive effects of trust-building and intimacy-building exercises, and verbal affirmations of commitment¹⁹ - essentially showing that the perceived security and stability of the relationship is what matters. So, boost the perceived security and stability of your relationship by engaging in trust-building or commitment-affirming activities.

If you identify yourself doing any avoidant/anxious behavior, you should try not to do it. Your learned patterns of acting in relationships can only be unlearned and replaced by receiving positive results from acting differently. Your pre-existing behavioral patterns are what make you feel safest, and it's how you've got positive results in the past. Break that positive reinforcement of undesired behaviors by daring to act differently. Stop being avoidant by putting yourself out there, seeking closeness, and pursuing proximity. Stop being anxious by giving others room to breathe, allowing them distance, and relaxing in the comfort that they'll still

¹⁹ Stanton, S.C., Campbell, L. and Pink, J.C., (2017). Benefits of positive relationship experiences for avoidantly attached individuals. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 113(4), pp.568-588

be there. This, in turn, will make your partner feel more secure, which will benefit your perceived security too.

Furthermore, your *friendships* should be secure too. Attachment doesn't just happen in romantic relationships, it's all relationships, including friendships. It's possible to have avoidant/anxious patterns in friendships and all non-romantic relationships too. You should make sure that your friendships give you a sense of security.

In addition, you can change your attachment style with the following things (as well as many of the other points in this series of books):

- Self-esteem. Learning to accept yourself, but also to accept other people. The more we judge others, the more we'll unconsciously judge ourselves. Learn to accept other people, just as they are, without fault-finding or trying to 'help' them.
- Assertiveness, particularly when it comes to your needs.
- Authenticity and honesty. It's hard to be authentic and honest, because that means being real. Being real is not desirable when we have insecure attachment - we want to protect ourselves by never being real. Being real means being vulnerable. It means opening yourself to rejection and learning that rejection doesn't end your life (or even affect it significantly).

- Social stability. Your friends shouldn't cause anxiety, self-doubt, low self-esteem, or mistrust. You should have a secure group of close friends - male and female - that are there for you. In this age of instant messaging, you can talk to them nearly every day; that's what a good friendship is (although it's better to see them in person, of course).
- Therapy. Therapy is a great way to nurture a more secure attachment style. The bond with your therapist will mimic a secure attachment and they will ensure you stay there without being anxious or avoidant. It's particularly well suited to people with many other problems.

Chapter 8: Lack of Sex In Relationships

Are you having enough sex? In long-term relationships, sex naturally decreases. This is common. But to our brains, it can seem like a rejection, like we're not good enough, instead of the reality that it's a simple consequence of long-term relationships.

In her book 'Mating In Captivity', Esther Perel studies the 'honeymoon period' where new lovers can't keep their hands off each other, and the subsequent end of that period. She studies marriages and long-term relationships, trying to find exactly why that honeymoon period ends, why the frequency of sex decreases, and why some couples hardly have sex at all. She asserts that closeness and sexual desire are contradictory, and that long-term relationships naturally oppose the sexual impulse because they involve so much closeness.²⁰ Closeness kills sex.

If the erotic impulse comes from validation, then what happens when you have such closeness that validation is at a maximum? What happens when two become one, and no longer see each other

²⁰ Perel, E., (2006) '*Mating In Captivity*' HarperCollins.

as unique people, and therefore aren't able to gain the validation of each other? What happens when the uncertainty about the other's intentions goes away? When they spend years together, or even marry, they know that they love each other, and feel fully validated by each other. There is no space left for erotic validation; sexual desire is minimal.

If they have given all the validation they can give, and can't give any more validation, especially with marriage and years of commitment, then there is no potential for erotic validation. So, hot steamy sex leaves the relationship. Sex becomes an intimate affirmation of connection, or for some a necessary chore, instead of a wild, passionate, exciting thrill-ride. Brief moments of passion and true erotic pleasure in long-term relationships, when they do happen, come from things which create the potential for validation, such as fetishes, uncertainty, or seeing your partner in a new light.

Self-help speaker Tony Robbins also once noted that passion in a relationship is proportionate to the amount of *uncertainty* you can tolerate. Most long-term relationships prioritize closeness, intimacy, love, security, and certainty, meaning that passion dies out, and sex is not done for erotic pleasure but for intimacy.

This new function of sex is not one that needs repeating frequently. For some people, their partner's higher sex drive takes precedence over their own desires (or lack of), and they end up having sex

without the desire for it. Some simply abstain from sex altogether. Sometimes, it's the husband who wants it more, and the woman who rejects their husband's advances, and sex dies out.

If one partner (you) starts to have doubts about why this happens - perhaps doubting if the sex stopped because you aren't attractive any more, or doubting whether she'd be aroused by someone else, or doubting that you're not good enough for more sex - then you'll have doubts about their approval, and a need for validation. This creates greater sexual desire as a result of the greater potential for validation - because eroticism comes from validation. This results in a total imbalance, where one partner has a high sex drive and the other has none, leading to dissatisfaction on your part and unfulfilled needs. Meanwhile, your wife is totally validated and secure, with no unfulfilled needs, completely happy in the relationship and blissfully unaware.

Then, naturally, it's very easy to turn to porn in an attempt to fulfil those needs - partially for sexual pleasure, but mainly for *validation*. And, the most validating of all is this fetish; it turns all your worries about the relationship into sexual pleasure. Your doubts that she's sexually unfulfilled or that she'd prefer someone else become transformed into a fantasy where she's sexually taken by a better man and given more pleasure than you can give her. Painful feelings of inadequacy get turned into sexual pleasure.

So, in this way, the lack of sex in long-term relationships create urges for porn and fetishistic fantasies. This can be one way in which a cuckold fetish can form. We can solve this problem by solving the problem of sex in the relationship.

Esther Perel says that if you want to re-introduce sex, the solution is distance, uncertainty, and separating the two merged lives into two separate people. Removing validation gives rise to the need for validation, which is the sexual urge. This then makes both partners want sex with each other. Not only is the solution to increase uncertainty, but also to reclaim your individualism and identity as a separate person too.

Of course, this is unpleasant. It hurts to remove validation and separate that much, particularly if you're already doubting the security of the relationship. As good as sex is, we also want that safety, closeness, intimacy, and security of long-term relationships. Some people aren't willing to tolerate that much uncertainty. So, for some people, re-introducing sex is a difficult solution, and need to make sure that the process is mutually agreed upon so that their relationship doesn't break down!

Some people are totally fine with just knowing the reason why their partner doesn't want sex any more, and knowing that it's nothing to do with them (and their partner isn't sexually unfulfilled and thinking of cheating!). This itself is enough.

Find whatever works for you. Either spend time on your own, cultivating your own life and independence if you want to re-introduce sex, or investigate whatever solution you'd like to get, and pursue that.

There Are Always Two

Frequently, however, the lack of sex in a relationship can not be a new development, but one that's always been present since the beginning. Having shame and fear about sex will create infinite sexual problems and sexual reluctance for both partners.

This can be created by toxic shame, as well as possible early sexual experiences or sexually wounded parents, guilt from religious or restrictive ideologies, absence of sexual information when it was needed, memories of previous sexual failures or painful experiences, and the shame of hidden compulsive behaviors.

Shame about sex is common, and causes many problems in a relationship. It's also common to blame your partner, as a way to shift the focus and responsibility away from yourself. It's never that simple; a relationship involves two people and the actions of one affects the actions of the other. Look inwards before you seek to blame.²¹ If you have any sexual shame, work on overcoming that first. Accept your sexuality, and become comfortable with it.

²¹ For more information, 'No More Mr Nice Guy' By Dr Robert Glover goes into more detail about sex, shame, and relationships in those with toxic shame.

Fulfilment Of Unfulfilled Needs

Porn gives the illusion of fulfilment. It seems like it will fulfil our needs; and it does on a purely sexual level. However, we also have other needs that porn cannot fulfil. We need to feel loved. We need to feel appreciated. We need to feel like we matter. We need recognition, belonging, mirroring, and simple human touch. To our simple little minds, porn appears to be able to meet these needs. When we see porn, our primitive brains associate that appearance with the capability to meet our intimacy needs. But it doesn't.

Do you feel truly appreciated in your relationship? Do you feel loved? Do you feel like you matter? If you don't, we naturally can turn to porn to try to fulfil these needs because it seems like it will, when we actually know it won't.

Summary

Subconscious inadequacy is usually initially formed in childhood. Small things have a large effect if they happen in childhood, because it's the time when we're the most impressionable and we're forming our initial ideas about the world.

Your primary caregivers in your earliest years of your life - usually your parents - play a large role in the way you see yourself. You see yourself through their eyes. Most importantly, the way that they treated you forms a self-image, and many deep-rooted fears and feelings. In adulthood, if those fears and feelings remain, they'll be shown through your fetish.

There are many other things that can form a sense of inadequacy, such as a lack of the correct role models to show that it's ok to be you. Or, having unrealistic expectations, or any number of things caused by cultural factors; particularly things related to sex. Bad feelings about casual sex, female promiscuity, the perceived likelihood of infidelity, male competition, or any similar things, can all play a role in shaping your fetish.

Long term relationships can cause feelings of inadequacy and fears of infidelity too. Particularly if they lack sex! Your attachment style is perhaps the most obvious way that this is shown in your real life. Your attachment style reflects your deepest feelings about yourself; and an avoidant/anxious attachment style shows that you lack

security in relationships, which is a side-effect of subconscious inadequacy. This lack of security is what the fetish eroticizes!

Changing your attachment style means forming secure relationships, first and foremost, but it can also be done with the exercises in all of these books. Acting more secure yourself is the best way to start, especially if you're currently in a long-term relationship, because that's one of the things that affects the way people around you act. You should get your partner to do this too, and do things to build the perceived trust and security of your relationship. If you're not in a relationship, your attachment style still determines the type of person that is attracted to you - and acting more securely is how to attract a secure relationship.

In the next book, we'll explore the specific actions you can take to heal subconscious inadequacy and change your fetish.