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Why Do I Feel Like He Is Making Me into His Wife?

I have known for a few years now that my father as a child emotionally abused me. I knew that his actions were inappropriate and *yucky*, but I was not sure what to call it. My psychologist helped me through confronting the abuse, but I still never put a name on the form of the abuse, nor was I ever able to feel fully validated in saying I was a survivor of abuse. No one ever touched me, so I did not feel like I had any right to complain.

I am manic-depressive, and during my last two years of high school descended almost as far down as one can go. I was cutting myself on a daily basis, bordering on anorexia, and consumed with rage and feelings of despair, worthlessness, and loneliness. Finally in the fall of 2001 I attempted suicide.

I am much healthier now, and college has exposed me to supportive friends and a healthy environment. I am happy for the first time I can remember, and am now searching for ways to understand my past. One night I was watching an episode of *Law & Order: SVU*, and they had a case involving covert incest. Something about it struck me, but I dismissed it. A couple of weeks later, it was on again and I began to make connections to my own life that was frankly disturbing.

I have been afraid of my father since before I can remember, but I never knew what exactly I was afraid of. Neither of my parents hit my sister or I (I'm the oldest). But I was terrified of his anger. His rages were either fits of yelling or quiet and muttering. The last was worst, since he would sit in the middle of our living room muttering horrible things about his work and himself. Family dinners were torture; the smallest thing would make my father angry. I'd mention something I had done at school and he'd start raging about the degradation of the school system.

He told me to my face once that my mother tricked him into helping her conceive a child, and that he was not ready for children then. Then he told me he wished I had never been born.

He thinks women are taking over the world, and that we are all man-haters. He told me that if I were born a boy he would have strangled me in my crib to save me.

We used to crawl into bed with my mother in the mornings, which was a nice. But when my father was home some mornings they would both be naked and the bed would be wet from them having sex. We would have to lie in it; and as horrified as I was I couldn't bring myself to refuse. I couldn't insult, offend, or question my father. What was peaceful and innocent with my mother alone became something that sickened me when my father was there. A few times they were both naked when we went in. The way this worked was that we would cuddle one parent for a while then switch. When it was my turn to be with my father my brain would scream; I felt yucky without knowing why. I knew it wasn't appropriate but was too terrified to refuse. One time the covers flipped back exposing his penis. I couldn't draw my eyes away as much as I wanted to run. He laughed and said "come on in, I'm not modest."

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My mother is a terrible housekeeper, one of the breaking points in my parents' marriage. She would leave for church Sunday mornings, leaving my sister and me alone with him. My sister would hide in her room. I knew what was coming but couldn't run away because that wouldn't be "right." My father would fly into a rage and start yelling and complaining about how the house was a mess and we would start cleaning. I would keep quiet, not letting myself cry or show emotion, be a good girl and do whatever he said. I once scrubbed the bathroom floor with a sponge on my hands and knees, working furiously so that he wouldn't yell any more. I just wanted him to stop yelling. I hated church so I wouldn't go. I had no escape from his anger. I think I was afraid of him hitting me, or worse. I knew he would never touch me and yet I always felt that he might. And I was so angry for my mother for not knowing what was going on, for not staying and protecting me.

Other times he would have me sit on his lap. I was in high school at this point. This "cuddling" would last for ten minutes or more; when I would start to fidget or say that I had to do homework, he would hold me tighter and say, "Just a few more minutes holding my beautiful daughter," or something similar. Thinking about it now makes my skin crawl but I still convinced myself it wasn't abuse, and that I had to get over my problems.

My parents both felt that sex education was important at home. But my father often went too far, describing the breaking of the hymen in a detailed one-hour lecture that took place in the car so that I could not escape. I fantasized about opening the door and throwing myself into traffic. His fatherly talks often crossed the line. I thought he was only being responsible and that I had no right to mention my discomfort to anyone, yet I could not shake that *yucky* feeling.

I developed horrible body issues in high school, and became underweight by 30 pounds. I would confide in both my parents, but my father would say, "Let me see." Most of my problems involved my stomach being too big. He would put a hand on me and say, "There isn't anything wrong with you," seemingly normal but there was something in the quality of his touch and how long he would touch me that was frightening. If I said that the boys didn't like me he would say, "If I were 16 I would date you."

I don't know why I felt that my father would rape me, but one incident in particular sticks out in my mind. I was about 15 at the time, and I was sitting in my room reading. My father came in saying, "Get your shoes, we're going somewhere." I asked him where but he would not tell me. I remember being convinced he was taking me into the woods to rape me, and I don't know why. Still, I went, afraid to refuse. It turned out that he was surprising me with my first driving lesson, but it took the terror a long time to subside. I never have been able to figure out where the thought he would rape me came from. After this incident I became especially afraid of men. It is still hard for me to hug any male members of my family, and for a few years hugging older men would cause me feelings of panic.

Both of my parents used me as a confidant as I got older, each telling me things about the other that no child should be burdened with. I felt responsible for

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maintaining these secrets so that I could save my parents marriage. I was their mediator. They used me rather than protected me from their anger at each other.

Once my parents separated things got better. The strain of being together was over, and I was finally released from the middle. But my father still continually crosses the line. Shortly before the separation he told me that masturbation was the only thing that kept him sane while he was away from my mother. The other day he was talking about a girl he is interested in, saying, "Talking to her is like talking to you." He constantly brings up how there is no sexual activity in his life. For some reason our conversations always wind up in areas bordering on inappropriately intimate details about his life. I don't really know how we always end up on these topics. It bothers me. I feel like he is trying to make me his life partner, to bring me in to his life to go to functions for his work with him. I once found myself thinking, "Why do I feel like he is making me into his wife?"

Now I am terrified of men, especially those in positions of authority. I feel paralyzed and uncomfortable around single men my own age, and deliberately associate only with men in stable relationships, or with gay men. I didn't realize how pathologically frightened of available men I was until a close friend broke up with his girlfriend, and I immediately began to avoid him. I no longer felt safe around him, even though he is a wonderful person.

It is probably the nature of my sex drive that first made me connect to the girl on *SVU*. I set firm constraints on myself so that anything from making out and beyond has to take place in the safety of a relationship. I have only had three relationships and yet they have settled heavily on sex, more so than I was willing to admit while in the relationship. It was the only way I could feel loved some times. I think about sex constantly. I am so preoccupied with sexual fantasies that it can be hard to concentrate. I look at men around campus like dishes on a buffet table. They terrify me and yet entrance me. Dating is torture. I feel easily rejected, frightened for my safety, and afraid my libido will put me in a bad situation. Asking someone out takes more than a week of steeling me, and rejection will prevent me from acting again for weeks. The amount of fear I feel when I am attracted to someone is horrible. Having a crush is never, ever pleasant.

So that is what brought me here. I feel like I need to understand what did happen so that I can move on with my life.

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