



Affective Center for Therapy

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CINDERELLA/CINDERFELLER

In the nineteen-seventies, much of the woman's movement seemed very anti-male. The woman's movement was about the "glass ceiling," how men were holding women back, and how unfair the market place was for women because of the men.

In 1971, a woman's writer, Collette Dowling, wrote a book called *THE CINDERELLA COMPLEX*. This book had a revolutionary impact on the woman's movement at the time. Three of the main ideas she presented were: First, If the men are doing it to us, then we will be powerless all our lives, but if we are doing it to ourselves, we can change and make a difference in our own lives. Her question was, "Who is it that chooses to take secretarial courses rather than business administration? Who is it that chooses to study nursing instead of being a doctor?"

Next, she pointed out the self limiting beliefs that many women, at that time, had: "If you are too smart, you won't get a husband." This, of course, presupposes the idea that the ultimate goal of a woman is to be married.

The third point she makes is the double bind that many women find themselves in, and it is of their own making! The double-bind is a result of their contradictory beliefs. Women were caught between the belief, "I have a right and a duty to stay home, take care of my kids and my husband," and the belief, "I have a right to have a career, to grow and develop to my fullest potential of being productive, independent, creative, and mentally stimulated.

Collette Dowling pointed out that, as a result of these often unconscious beliefs, women had the sense of being trapped and limited. Women, who hold these double-bind beliefs, are often frustrated with their lives and are angry, acting out a lot of their frustrations on their husbands, children and families. When they are at home, they feel dependent, having to ask their husbands for money, and starved for adult conversations and interactions. BUT, when they are at work, they feel guilty and resentful that "I am not at home baking apple pies and taking care of my family."

Women are not the only ones who have contradictory beliefs that result in dysfunction in their lives. You can say that many men have the *CINDERFELLER COMPLEX*. Men have been equally programmed with ideas, thoughts and beliefs that can be destructive. Cinderfeller is the man who goes out, slays the dragons,

chops through the underbrush, climbs the castle wall (while the woman is just sitting there waiting for him). She doesn't have to do anything but keep the place clean and cook. He comes home, climbs the castle wall, climbs through the window, kisses her and they live happily ever-after. End of story.

I had a doctor's fifth wife "drag" him into counseling. She complained to him, "We have to work on our relationship." His response to her and to me was, "If you have to work on a relationship, then it is no good!"

After they marry, Cinderfeller expects the happily ever-after to continue (that is how all the fairy tales end). Now, what he cannot figure out is why she was unhappy. He was doing his part, going to work, paying for the groceries and slaying the dragon, which is what made him happy. But, she would often cry and he would feel guilty. His "fix it" response was "Don't cry" or, when that did not work, he would get quiet or walk out. His irrational belief was that he was the fixer (it worked at work) who was to make everything OK; when his woman cried, he was a failure.

In many ways, men have the same belief that a lot of women have that "you are responsible to make your mate happy." This is another of those irrational beliefs. Instead of changing the belief, men and women will often try to fix the person's unhappiness by giving quick "advice column" answers such as "Why don't you take an aspirin" or "You should done. . .," or "You should have said. . ."

Most of us know what we should of, or could of, said or done. All these types of solutions do is to "tell" the other person, "You're so *dumb* you didn't know enough to take an aspirin." A better way would be start with validating the person's feelings. "It sounds like it has been a hard day," then you might suggest, "What do you think you might want to do differently next time?"

The only person you can make happy is yourself! If someone is determined to be miserable, there is NOTHING you can do to make them happy. What you can do is to make yourself happy and invite others into your happiness. Many people have no idea how to make themselves happy and expect their mate and children to make them happy. Then they become very angry and depressed when others are unable and/or unwilling to make them happy.

Cinderfeller often has a negative self-image of his body. He looks at his mate and is turned on when she is doing the dishes. She can be cleaning the toilet and he is turned on. In fact, there are very few things that she does that do not turn him on. While on the other hand, it seems that there are very few things that he does that turns her on. As a result, he feels very powerless with her. So, he finds it hard to tell her "I love you," for fear she will get the big head and leave him for someone who is better looking or who is better in bed than he is.

There are some beliefs that Cinderella and Cinderfeller have in common. One of the most common is the fear that there will not be an “ever after” like in *they got married and lived happily ever after*.

The reality is that there is no “ever after”. The relationship that you are in right now will end! Either he will die, or she will die, or he will wander off, or she will wander off. Nothing is forever. You have a choice. You can live in the fear of the ending of the relationship, or you can enjoy every minute that you have until the relationship ends.

There are other beliefs that both Cinderella and Cinderfeller have in common. A common one is that emotional pain is terminal. Of course, you will never say it that way. What I hear is, “I can never stand to be hurt this way again.” This is a lie. If you have been hurt this badly before, and you made it through, then must be a strong, gusty person. If anything, going through so much emotional pain that you hurt physically, proves how strong you are, not how weak you are. The avoidance of emotional pain is based on the belief that emotional pain can be terminal, and it is something to be avoided at all cost. As a consequence of these beliefs, many people find themselves unwilling to be open and honest in relationships. They are afraid of getting too close, becoming vulnerable, and then having the relationship end. It is because of this fear of ending, that many of you do not enjoy what you have right now.

The belief that your relationship will last is illogical. I am willing to bet you a thousand dollars to one that your relationship with the person you are with right now will not last! What I know about your relationship is that seldom, if ever, do two people die in at the same moment. One or the other will die first, or one of you will wander off. Nothing is forever. Yes, emotional pain is unpleasant and no one enjoys having to go through it, but the pain is not terminal. The decision that “I cannot live without you” is your decision.

Whether you are a Cinderella or a Cinderfeller, the result is often confusion and a feeling of frustration with your relationships. As a consequence, you tend to either blame others or feel like a failure — “something is wrong with me.” Often, there is nothing wrong with you; the problem is in your belief systems. It is the programming that you got as you grew up; it is those contradictory and confusing beliefs. In some cases, the beliefs are outright lies that you were told which drives you crazy. “Big boys don’t cry.” “Nice girls don’t get angry.” “If you can’t do a job right in the first place, don’t do it at all.” In therapy, you need to be looking at not only your feelings and behaviors, but also at your beliefs.

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