

## 0.1 Chapter 3: relationships: Conflicts

### 0.2 Conflicts

#### 1 If It Wasnt for You...

There are many nice things we want, but are somehow a little scared of getting, because they are bound up with risks and subtle inner complications we dont quite have a handle on: we may at some deep level be scared of succeeding at our career, of making money, of going out to parties, of having sex, of doing less of the cooking and cleaning, of not spending so much time with an ailing relative, of living for ourselves...

The burden of these fears is heavy, and while we are on our own, away from parents, we generally have to bear the force of our ambivalence by ourselves. But once we enter a long-term relationship, a pleasing possibility comes into view: we may be able to reallocate blame to those who have pledged themselves to us. We may (if were lucky enough) be able to accuse them of preventing us from getting all sorts of things we think we want deeply but are, in our hearts, somewhat conflicted about laying claim to. We end up frustrated, and yet able to throw a highly useful line at our loved one: If it wasnt for you...



Imagine a couple who havent had sex for a while. When theres a chance (a free evening, some wine, a relaxed mood), things start off well. But then two things can be counted upon to interrupt the process. As he begins to caress his partner, she will seem ever so slightly distracted and disengaged. She might

wonder whether she locked the back door or ask if he called his mother back. Im sorry, shell add, noticing his annoyance. But the annoyance isnt just minor (both have been here before). He grows furious, accuses her of never being in the mood and storms out to the spare room. She asks him to return, but he refuses to re-emerge, saying its too late now. The couple spend the night apart. Both parties, sulking alone, are left to think of themselves as harbouring uncomplicated desires for sex. Its just the other person who created difficulties. Both have the relief of thinking: If it wasnt for you...

Many of our wishes are bound up with resistances and fears. We defend ourselves against so much that we want, for there are dangers around success, intimacy, triumph, freedom... Both members of the couple might want, and yet at the same time, really quite strongly not want to sleep together (they picked each other out carefully for precisely this reason). They may have worries about potency, surrender and acceptance. Both parties have therefore skilfully elaborated behaviour (distraction; fury) that will resolutely ensure that sex is unlikely and yet theyre able to attribute the blame firmly to the other. I was only asking about the back door, the woman can sincerely reflect. Its normal to be furious if someone is never in the mood, the man will muse, from the spare room.



Or take a very promising student who becomes pregnant just at the end of her degree, totally by accident. She and her boyfriend were planning to get married anyway, but this inadvertent pregnancy puts immediate pay to her career ambitions (there had been talk of medical or law school). The woman goes on to have three more children by the time she is thirty. They are sent to demanding schools, and every afternoon and weekend, there are activities and playdates. The woman never has a single moment to return to thoughts of her own career everyone can see that. At cross moments, she will accuse her

husband and children of placing their needs ways before hers and of preventing her from reaching her potential. If only it wasnt for you... she would have a great career by now.

It isnt that she doesnt want a career at all, but that alongside her sincere ambitions, lie terrors of choosing the wrong thing or being humiliated through failure (her parents didnt tolerate setbacks well; her older sister is an over-achiever).

By their very structures, relationships allow for an uncommon amount of blame fudging: whereby one person can accuse another of having blocked them from doing something they were only ever partially sure or convinced they had it in them to want.



To purge ourselves of these patterns, in the silence of our souls, we should face up to our games. Firstly, we should make an audit: What are the things I routinely blame my partner for frustrating me from doing/getting? The list might read: finding a better job, seeing my university friends, time to practice the guitar, playing with the children, buying a new car, doing more of the cooking, having more sex... Then one must ask: Could it, strangely but truly, be in some ways a relief for me to be frustrated in some of these areas? Do I have reasons to be scared of, or resistant to, some of the things I repeatedly and eloquently tell the world I so badly want? Am I deliberately creating situations for myself where I will be frustrated, to avoid the difficulties of my wants...?

Unless one is a paragon of mental health, the correct answer will be yes perhaps creating an occasion for

a little contrition before the long-suffering partner (who has, of course, been using us in the very same way over their own set of terrifying desires).