



It's All in the Family Introduction

By Michael J. Lincoln, Ph.D.

Why is it that I always feel so responsible for everything? Isn't it strange how things always seem to go wrong where Martha's involved? It's weird how Al always seems to get his way and get away with it, isn't it.

These and all kinds of other patterns abound in our lives. What they represent are lifestyles or life scripts that get laid down in the childhood home as survival strategies or parent-pleasings.

What happens then is that what was needed for successful functioning in the home becomes a behavioral prison. That is, the style you develop in the home is taken out into the world, and it coerces, cons or casuals (by seeming insignificant) the environment into inadvertently supporting it. The result is that one's personality is cast in stone by this process.

The purpose of this book is to present an overview of the circumstances which have produced this process of script-induction, and to describe a number of personality patterns that are commonly seen nowadays. For each pattern, there will be a description of its origins, its dynamics, its behavioral/functional play-out patterns, its intervention requirements and its larger purpose.

THE STATE OF THE FAMILY

Although personality derives from many sources, such as heredity, health issues, cultural/ethnic/subcultural forces, environmental characteristics, etc., the single most influential factor in the formation of personality is the family in which we grew up.

And it's becoming increasingly clear that the isolated nuclear family is in a lot of trouble. Government studies, scientific research, clinical practice, daily observation and even the media recently indicate that the family is under enormous pressures which make it almost impossible to function successfully.

The family is being subjected to overwhelming demands that inevitably lead to breakdowns in its weakest links. Unfortunately, the weakest link of all appears to be in the process of rearing the children. Hence, our personalities are becoming increasingly maladaptive, due to the way we were reared.

There are many aspects of the situation of the isolated nuclear family that make it very difficult to cope with the day-to-day requirements of raising children. One of the most important of these is the lack of information and training for the tasks and realities involved.

The fact is that it is perhaps the most difficult and important job in the world, and yet very few people get any training in how to do it before they are up to their eyebrows in it. (For information on this, see "*Honey, I blew up the Kids!*" by the author).

This is little short of disastrous, because these are the areas which due their enormous complexity and importance require the most preparation and training. What all too often happens is the good person-bad spouse-worse parent phenomenon.

In essence, we are at our worst in the areas of intimacy and parenting because of this lack of training and because of the fact that our priorities as a society place the family last.

In part, this is because these areas are so completely different in their requirements from those of general public citizen and competent work performance (though the latter should take the rules of intimacy and parenting as their starting point).

The other major reason we falter so often in these areas is that they are so intensely difficult in their demands of us, especially given the inadequacy of our preparation and the back seat position they are relegated to in most of our cultural priorities. As a result of this, all too often we encounter individuals who are really fine people, but who do the most amazing things with their spouses and with their children.

What often happens under the circumstances is that we fall back on the only available source of guidelines in these areas, namely what happened to us when we were growing up.

So we set up intimate relationships with people very much like dear old Mom and Dad in the way they make us feel, and the patterns we carry out are strongly related to those we witnessed as children.

We end up either doing unto others what was done unto us (with minor adaptations and variations) or we bend over backwards to NEVER do what was done unto us, which guarantees that we will pass a lot of it on anyway because we preserve most of the system by doing a "180 degrees opposite" trip.

Another extremely important problem in the isolated nuclear family has been the gender roles we have lived under for so long. For instance, the traditional roles produce a very unequal relationship with regard to power, privileges and responsibilities, as well as with regard to the basic human needs.

Thus, while the male was placed in the position of the primary decision-maker, the bulk of information necessary to make the decisions falls in the province of the female's gender role. In addition, the woman is required to sustain, nurture and support all the family members while receiving little, if any nurturance herself.

Dad was supposed to be completely invincible, dependable and the pillar of strength who shares neither his load nor himself with anyone. He was to bring home the bacon and to keep things in good repair, while Mom was given almost exclusive responsibility for dealing with all the emotional and basic needs aspects of the family life.

This difference between the genders creates a disastrous limitation of and drain on each of them in that their fundamental human needs and capabilities are denied. It also makes for many frictions and misunderstandings between the partners.

For example, men express their commitment through instrumental activities and problem-solving, while women do it through nurturance and both physical and verbal affection.

To the woman, the man's behavior feels like coldness and rejection, while to the man, the woman's approaches feel like space-invasion and demandingness. Or take their different responses to be abuse.

Women react with self-blame and serve-aholic atonement attempts and validation-courting. Men, on the other hand, typically respond with rage, acting out and destructive/assaultive reactions.

The net effect of this sort of thing is one of increasing distance between the parents, along with an almost sole involvement with the children by the mother. This puts the woman under considerable excess of responsibility and demands, and it has the effect of increasingly eliminating the man from the household.

It also results in his becoming more and more incompetent in the realm of closeness and caretaking, and he is much less sharing in and of his children's developmental process.

The result is that he tends to end up dead in the harness, so numb and hyper-rational that he can't experience life. Sooner or later, the children pay the price for all this.

But even the problems of lack of preparation and the gross inequalities and impracticalities produced by the gender roles pale in comparison to the impact of the major stress-producer for the family, namely the massive overload created by today's circumstances.

To put the whole thing in a nutshell, in effect the isolated nuclear family is required to attempt the impossible with nothing. That is, it is expected that the individual family will seek to meet all of its own needs with almost nothing in the way of resources provided.

What has therefore happened is that each individual is now required to carry out all the responsibilities that used to be shared by the entire community throughout our evolutionary history.

The effects of this situation are deeply felt by all the family members. For instance, the father is often a rarely experienced figure, leading to a desperate need for masculine contact in everyone.

Furthermore, the relationship between the parents often deteriorates as a function of the isolation and excessive in-home responsibilities for the woman, the

growing emotional encrustation of the male, and the accumulating bitterness resulting from the biological inability of each to be everything to the family as demanded by the circumstances of the isolated nuclear family.

The family then becomes more of a contractual and payoff-based system than a commitment and a caring relationship. The effect of this is to put both parents in a situation where their basic affection and nurturance needs typically become increasingly denied. They become starved for love.

Given these circumstances, it is perhaps not very surprising that both parents tend to begin to form highly intense relationships with the children which often carry a heavy undercurrent of sexuality, due to the increasing chasm between the spouses.

This has the effect of dividing the family even further, as rivalries, alliances, jealousies, and even warring camps develop. If current statistics are any indication, it also results in actual physical incest in something like 60% of the girls and 25% of the boys. Given the enormous practical impact of reporting this sort of thing, these data strongly suggest that the rate is much higher.

This puts the children in the position of having to deal with the profound boundary invasions and violations that feel like being raped by God. And that doesn't even take into account the impact of the increasingly frequent process of the parents' reversing roles with the children and requiring them to be the parents of the parent--and this while this other is going on as well.

It is perhaps surprising that there is not *more* negative impact on the maturing people who are forced to grow up in these conditions.