

A Counselee's Inability to Find Intimacy

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The Counselee's Background

The counselee, whom I will refer to as Miss A, is now 43 years old. She works in a museum as the head of the education department. She has a stable income and a peaceful life. She is single and lives alone without family. She is able to arrange her free time well and has good relationships with friends and colleagues.

The Counselee's Problem

Miss A is bothered by the fact that she is so far unable to find her Mr. Right. This counseling focusses on her relationship issue.

Starting a Counseling Session

Counselor (Katia Lenehan): What would you like to talk about for this meeting?

Miss A: Well, what I want to talk about is not really something urgent or anything like that, but it indeed bothers me a lot.

Counselor: What is that? Tell me about it.

Miss A: I am single and have no trouble with my job or with money. However, I am eager to fulfill my wish to find an intimate partner in life.

Counselor: Do you mean a marriage partner?

Miss A: Not really. Being married or single doesn't really matter to me. I just hope to have somebody in my life that I can develop an especially intimate relationship with; someone who neither friends nor family can replace.

Counselor: A relationship which cannot be replaced by friends or family members.

Which element in this relationship do you think is irreplaceable?

Miss A: I am not currently living with my family, and I meet my friends every now and then. I feel like I am always alone. But if I can find someone in my life, someone like an intimate partner, I will feel that there is somebody always with me.

Counselor: If this wish is not fulfilled, will it affect your life in any way?

Miss A: I know this problem does not impact my everyday life; the worst case is just that I stay in the same situation as I do now. But remaining in this situation would make me feel sorry for myself. There are some important moments in my life, but I have no one to share them with and, for me, this is a big minus in life.

Counselor: If you have no one to share the important moments of your life, you will have big regrets, is that what you mean?

Miss A: Yes, exactly.

Counselor: Tell me about how you feel about this situation?

Miss A: I feel disappointed, when I think about it. Sometimes I feel anxious, because I am worrying that I am not able to find an intimate partner that I want in the future. I also feel sad, because I realize that my life cannot be complete; it cannot be satisfied if this partner is not found.

Counselor: Let's talk in more detail about your definition of an intimate partner.

Miss A: I expect from an intimate partner much more than I do from a friend. He has to understand me, to feel the same way I do, and also, he can share all the important moments in my life and he can be there when I need him.

Counselor: If he is not able to achieve all these requirements, is he unqualified to be your partner?

Miss A: Yes.

Counselor: You have mentioned that without someone to share the important moments in your life, your life will suffer greatly. On top of that, according to your definition, this someone needs to fulfil all the requirements to be qualified as an intimate partner, such as requirements of understanding you, resonating with you, and being there with you when you need him.

Miss A: Yes. If he is not able to do so, his company would be meaningless. That would not be the company or type of sharing I want.

Counselor: You have not found the partner qualified as such so far, so how do you feel now?

Miss A: Very frustrated. I have tried so hard and nothing has happened. My life is not good without an intimate partner like this.

Analysis of the Counselee's Emotion:

Our findings for the reasoning behind Miss A's emotion are as follows:

Reasoning 1:

Emotional Rule: Without a partner to share important moments in my life, I will have regrets.

Object (O): I am unable to find an intimate partner to share important moments in my life.

Rating (R): I have life regrets.

E (Emotion) = $O+R$ (Object + Rating)

Disappointment and anxiety = I have no intimate partner (O) + I have regrets in my life (R)

Reasoning 2 :

Emotional Rule: An intimate partner must understand me and accompany me when I need him, and only when I have this kind of partner, then my life can be good and complete.

Object (O): I don't have a partner who can understand me and accompany me when I need him.

Rating (R): My life is not good and complete.

E (Emotion) = $O+R$ (Object + Rating)

Depression = I do not have a partner who can understand me and accompany me (O) + my life is not good and incomplete (R)

Finding Fallacies in the Premises

In the above reasonings, we can see that the counselee treats her *preference* as *obligatory*. To have an intimate partner to share life's most important moments is what Miss A prefers; however, she regards this preference as what she *must* possess in life, and she believes her life is neither good nor complete without having this preference satisfied. Meanwhile, she insists that her partner *must* be qualified as a person who is able to understand her perfectly and accompany her at any time she needs him; this reveals her wish and preference again. At the same way, she treats this condition as an essential condition to have a good life, and if she is unable to find such a qualified person, she will assess her life negatively. In conclusion, the two stated reasonings above commit the same fallacy: Demanding Perfection.

Refuting the Fallacy

Counselor: You think that you will have regrets if you don't have an intimate partner to share the important moments in your life, is that right?

Miss A: Yes.

Counselor: Now, please imagine that you have already found the one you had been looking for.

Miss A: Okay....now I have an intimate partner.

Counselor: Imagine that your partner is unemployed and without family. He is there for you 24 hours a day and is there for you only, so that he is able to come anytime you need him. Can you really imagine this happening?

Miss A: ...it seems so unreal....

Counselor: You may see that even if you have found a person who can understand you, what you ask from him, such as being there for you 24 hours a day, is something beyond what a normal person can do.

Miss A: ...I guess so. I seem to be asking something that no one can do.

Counselor: I think so. The image you create for your partner is only your wish and preference. This image in the real world, however, is not at all practical. It seems obvious that your insistence on fulfilling an impractical preference is the source of your distress and anxiety.

Miss A:...It would seem to be so.

Counselor: Beside this, you believe that you have to have a partner with such high standards; otherwise your life is incomplete. But, please think about your friends or those people around you. Do they feel that their life is incomplete because their partners are unable to reach such high standards? Please think further on the subject. Is there anyone you know, who does not have a life partner, yet does not think that their life is incomplete?

Miss A: (pauses for a while) Actually, not everyone has my kind of demands for a life partner.

Counselor: Yes. The fallacy in your logic is mainly, Demanding Perfection. When you are unable to reach this state of perfection that you set up for yourself, you thereby suffer from this imperfect dynamic. However, you know, the world in which we live is not a perfect world!

Identifying the Guiding Virtue for Correcting the Fallacy

The guiding virtue of Metaphysical Security will be helpful for refuting the fallacy of

Demanding Perfection. A person who possesses a sense of metaphysical security will accept the fact that the world is imperfect and admit its uncertainty. However, this person is still able to maintain hope for the future. He knows that he might not accomplish all the things he wants to do, yet he remains focused on what he can do without trying to control everything.

Philosophical Thinking to be Applied

Here are two possibilities of philosophical thinking which can be applied:

1. The teaching of the Buddha: let go of unnecessary attachments or desires. The Counselee's high-standards for an intimate partner are in fact "unnecessary" attachments or insurances of her preferences and wishes, but she believes that they are all "necessary." Therefore, if the counselee realizes that these attachments are "unnecessary," it would be easier for her to redefine an intimate partner in a more realistic sense, which will give her a better chance to find happiness and a life partner.
2. The teaching of Zhuangzi: "when the springs dry up and the fish are left stranded on the ground, they spew each other with moisture and wet each other down with spit---but it would be much better if they could forget each other in the rivers and lakes." Two fish stuck with each other seem to be very cuddling and romantic; however, the truth is that they are miserable and unfree. It would be better if they are able to swim freely in the lakes as if they had forgotten each other. Forgetfulness is based on mutual understanding and real intimacy has set them free.

Finding the Antidote and Plan of Action

Miss A: I know I may be asking too much, but this is what I really want! It's too hard to remove this desire from the bottom of my heart.

Counselor: Through cultivating Metaphysical Security you can gradually let go of these unreasonable desires.

Miss A: How can Metaphysical Security make me put down my demands for perfection?

Counselor: The virtue of Metaphysical Security is the inner power to make you feel comfortable and safe even in an imperfect world full of uncertainties. I am wondering if the teaching of the Buddha may help you with this issue. The Buddha tells us not to be attached to those things or desires which are

unnecessary, and in this way we may suffer less. If you saw that the standards you set for your partner are unnecessary, you would also realize that these standards are changeable, since unnecessary things are things that can be changed. Whether you attach yourself to these high standards or not, this world will not change for you and thus offer you the ideal partner you want; what you gain from this world is only your own suffering.

Miss A: You mean that the more I try to hold onto these attachments, the less I can be satisfied?

Counselor: Exactly. Also, Zhuangzi's philosophy may give you more room for imagination. Zhuangzi said: "when the springs dry up and the fish are left stranded on the ground, they spew each other with moisture and wet each other down with spit--but it would be much better if they could forget each other in the rivers and lakes." You have tied yourself and your potential partner up with those demands for perfection. However, a person who can understand you has no need to accompany you every second in your life, like those fish that have to stay together at all times and spit on each other for their survival. If you are able to let go of your demands for perfection, you may see that any person in the world, just like any fish swimming freely in the lakes, can be the one who knows you, understands you, and resonates with you.

Miss A: What you are trying to say is that if I find anyone who can understand me, it does not really matter whether or not he is around me.

Counselor: Yes. When you refer to an intimate partner, what you really mean is a soulmate, isn't it? A soulmate can be with you at all times, and of course, that is good; but a soulmate, if he is the real one, should be someone who is always able to understand you and support you no matter where he is. Now, think about what you can do to get rid of all your distress and anxiety, since you already know what the source of all these bad feelings about yourself is.

Miss A: I guess I have to readjust my standards for a partner. I know that it is impractical to ask somebody to be with me all the time. A person who is able to understand me can be around me or far from me physically, but he is always that person who understands and supports me. I shall try to more actively reach out to people and try to know people more. I should always keep my mind free and flexible!

Counselor: Great! Let go of your attachments, and you will have all the rivers and lakes; keep these attachments with you, and you will get only one dying fish spitting on you.