

Conflictual Relationship

Supplementary Case 1: Helmut

Like Franz, Helmut was born in 1946, the son of a German mother and an Occupation soldier from the Soviet Union. However, in Helmut's narrative, the ambivalent nature of the mother-child relationship surfaces as he oscillates between hateful, grateful, and affectionate feelings for his mother. Helmut describes both himself and his mother as victims. However, even as he depicts himself as a victim of his mother's passivity, he also holds her accountable and recounts having feelings of hate for her as well. The following quotes exemplify this in two different contexts, domestic and beyond.

I think it was when I was 12 that I started hating my mother's husband and her, when there were all these crazy fights that were pretty below the belt, with arguments about "why didn't you have an abortion?" and things like that.

His mother is represented along axis 1 (accountability) as not being sufficiently protective. Nevertheless, much like Franz, Helmut supplements his accusation with excuses for his mothers' parental inadequacies and lack of protection, even when he discloses sexual abuse by a third party, and thus downplays her accountability (axis 1),

There was a monastery in the area where my mother used to work as a cleaning lady, and, well, to be exact, I actually ended up being the victim of abuse there. There was this pastor or father there, and when he was around he'd tell you to come closer and then he'd grab you in the crotch and play with your penis. There were three... there were three people he did that to. One of the mothers reported him – that must have been 1956 or 57, that was around the time he was sent away – and my mother didn't do anything. She worked there you know. She cleaned there or something and so (...) "Nobody can say anything, you'll get the boot, etc, etc" and at that point we were happy for every Mark, and there you might have been able to earn a Mark an hour.

Helmut's ambivalence regarding his mother's accountability and his exonerating impetus reflects an ambivalence in the relationship. Indeed, regardless of the aforementioned ineptitude as a guardian, Helmut constructs his mother-son relationship as one that is replete with care, albeit mal-attuned care. He notes of his mother in this manner *"My mother was very caring, which actually really got on my nerves sometimes."* Further establishing that her care was present yet exaggerated, Helmut notes: *"I'd come home on the weekend and throw my clothes on the floor and the next day they'd all be put neatly away, my shoes polished and everything."* When relating to his mother's caring, Helmut positions her as accountable for her actions (axis 1) and himself as a victim (axis 2). This is a position towards which he is nevertheless ambivalent as he acknowledges the unique context of their relationship (i.e., CBSV). Acknowledging his mothers' caring attitude within the CBSV context almost forces a realization that he was *not* aborted or put up for adoption as was often the case, which leads to a sense of appreciation of the relation (axis 3),

If I compare my story with those of the other "Russenkinder" ("Russian Children") my mother did accept me, that is, I never experienced her signaling outright signs of rejection or anything like that towards me, so, based on that, one could perhaps somehow conclude that, um, I was loved as a child. Maybe I'm being a bit big for my britches with this, but, yeah, considering that others tried to abort, or didn't even look at the children, or sent the kids to a home... Nothing like that ever happened to me.

Here, along with axis 1 Helmut changes the image of his mother from a perpetrator to a victim when exonerating her by changing the narrative of being a CBSV. While positioning himself as a CBSV, later in the interview he raises doubts regarding being born as a result of rape. In hindsight, he highlights three points. First, he refers once more to his mother's decision to take care of her son instead of considering abortion or putting him up for adoption. Second, he acknowledges that she chose to inform him about the rape and accepted him, while others chose otherwise. Third, he was provided with contradictory information about his biological father by his half-brother, who argued that he might be the result of a love affair, since his mother had met with the Russian soldier several times. This leaves Helmut in a conundrum as he tries to make sense of his relation to his parents,

Maybe it was rape, maybe not, I'll never know. Ever since I've made my peace with the two of them though, I've told myself it wasn't. Otherwise it's possible I might start to develop feelings of hate – to put it a little dramatically huh?... Regardless of how it happened, the fact is I'm here on this earth

now, and, statistically speaking, might have another eight years to go, yeah (...) 78, and well, yes, it's been an exciting life [...].

This change in narrative about his self-representation and mental constructions is along axis 2; an exoneration of himself, a CBSV, based on his choice to believe that he was conceived in a loving relationship. Surprisingly, he concludes his narrative with this uplifting idea, saying *"I do believe [...] that it wasn't a rape, or at least I am at 99.9% sure."*

Helmut is forced to arrive at a resolution regarding his origins and needs to make an internal decision about his own truth, which most likely will remain uncontainable and tabooed,

If you were to ask me 'what would I do differently now?' if I still could, I would ask more detailed questions (...), things like, what was the man like? what kind of a person was he? etc. But that will never be possible again. Everything always got swept under the rug. This subject is something that just wasn't ever talked about. I think if we HAD started to go there my stepdad would have gotten going with his bellyaching again. Yep. Sweep it under the rug. That's how it is.

He also portrays himself and his mother as alienated and negatively viewed by the rest of the family (axis 1 & 2), invoking the term *"Mischpoke"* in reference to the two of them – a pejorative term that designates a family as bad or despicable.

Nevertheless, Helmut reports wishing he and his mother had had more time together (axis 3),

Yes, at the end she was in a nursing home nearby and I remember there was something I held against myself for a long time / I had gone to see her on the day she died, and if I had stayed just a half an hour longer she would have / I would have been with her when she took her last breaths. Right as I got back home I got a call that she had died. Yeah. That's how it is.

When asked within this context how he would describe his relationship with his mother, he further expresses regret and guilt *"I would do things better now, I would do things better but... ["what's one to do?" physical gesture] ... the circumstances. Like I said, I wasn't always fair and I would do a lot of things differently today..."*

he adds while remaining in an ambivalent position towards his mother. Helmut emerges as a son longing for a harmonious mother-child relationship but nevertheless disquieted by the uncertainty regarding his origins, which ultimately results in an identity complex he was unable to solve with his mother. He, therefore, remains undecided between condemning and reconciling his mother. As he reaches the end of his, and more so her story, he notes:

There were times when you were a little out of line, and when that happened, yeah, later she also / when you got out of line you did end up getting a little criticized, and then you immediately shot back, and that always worked with / exactly with this subject / one would be hurt, and then when you came back, seemingly, you'd have get really really mean so it that would properly hit home. No, it really wasn't, it really wasn't nice. From my side as well, I wasn't always fair. When she was on her deathbed, I told her I was sorry [appears emotional / appears to cry a little] it was / oh [searches for the right words] it's just that / oh, even those little overblown acts of care alone used to get me going.

Helmut positions himself in the end as a son seeking to make peace with his mother, excusing their bumpy past.

An emotionally absent parent

Supplementary Case 2: Heinz

Born in 1946, Heinz is the son of a German mother and an Occupation soldier from France. His story is one of a life lived apart from his mother. As he explicitly states, *“Actually, my mother was a stranger to me.”* And he adds elsewhere that, *“When I was little everything was totally normal, was affectionate, and just familial; there wasn't any hitting or anything like that. Of course not everything was allowed, if someone did something strange, pulled a prank or something, they got scolded for it, but we didn't get hit at all.”*

However, Heinz uses the estrangement not merely in order to substantiate the emotional relationship he had with his mother, but rather to highlight that all he had achieved was on his own drive. Drawing a picture of him as a *self-made* man, he positions himself with a high level of self-efficacy and a lack of need for a mother along on axis 2,

I achieved everything under my own power. I never asked my mother for anything. There was just a single occasion when she signed an apprenticeship contract for me when I was 14. Apart from that, I did everything on my own.

Nevertheless, Heinz does demonstrate a certain longing for his mother's recognition. This is evident in a comment wherein he seems to value his mother's opinion of him, particularly her positive opinion along axis 3,

Although she never expressed it to me, she did it in front of others. She was proud of me when she realized I became an official in a high position despite struggling at the beginning. Even though she never said so to my face, she did express it to others. Yes, she was proud of me, especially when she saw how quickly I rose through the ranks to a top position, despite coming from such humble beginnings.

In this statement, Heinz expresses both the absence of his mother's high regard of him and its presence. In this manner he establishes its double significance for him: that when absent and that when present. Within this context, Heinz expresses pride in his accomplishments and pleasure at being needed. This joy in being accomplished and needed also follows Heinz into the familial domain. Thus, it becomes evident that he values his family's opinion as well,

And when I became a bit older I became the person in the family people turned to for advice. Yes, I was somebody, I knew things, and I was respected. I have to say, yes, I had answers for almost every question. In many aspects I just became the go-to guy for solving problems and getting things done.

Though he boasts himself as a self-made man, Heinz also acknowledges that he owes much to his mother (axis 1). He states explicitly in this manner that *"You have to be grateful. (...) You have to be grateful to women that any of us are here at all. Who knows, today, maybe none of us would even be born nowadays. [...] The women back then took so much on and what they managed was really, really tremendous."*

Conversely, as Heinz assumes the role of caregiver within his family, he also takes charge of caring for his mother. Constructing his mother-son story, Heinz does not allow himself to complain about her actions. Rather, he excuses his mothers' actions, partially because of what she has gone through in his conception as a CBSV. It is for this sense of accountability towards his mother (axis 2) that he expresses a need to protect her

from harm. However, this protectiveness and the silence it demands concerning his background had cost him the knowledge regarding his identity that he seeks at old age.

Of course, those thoughts are there [search for origins]. In mid-life they didn't occupy me at all though, not in the very, very least. I think things like that first start to come up when you're a little older. [...] I actually should have brought it up and asked more questions but somehow, I also didn't want to pressure her. (...)

Heinz's story is that of a self-made man who emerged triumphant in life, despite his mother's incapacity to care for him. The deficient mother-child relationship is the backdrop against which he constructs this identity, and it serves to enhance his sense of accomplishment.