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Generational Mother Hunger

Exploring The Invisible Messages Within You

The study of epigenetics informs our understanding of generational inheritance between mothers and daughters. Research shows us that calm mothers influence their daughters' nervous systems in positive ways, setting them up for secure relationships in life. Alternatively, stressed mothers become less nurturing, and their daughters feel their mother's emotions in the preverbal formative years when communication is a right brain to right brain experience.

We're also learning that the shared nervous system between mothers and daughters can transfer over generations. Dr. Christine Northrup explains that "our maternal legacies, and the mitochondrial DNA that wires them into place, keep our mothers voices alive within us in a particularly powerful way." Daughters inherit the unrealized dreams of their maternal ancestors. Thwarted hopes and goals that your mother and her mother experienced may color the way you see the world. For this reason, as you think about your life choices, it's helpful to examine your mother and grandmother's life. What belief about relationships or being a woman have you inherited?

If you did not grow up with either your mother or your grandmother, the loss may be too tender to think about. If you were separated from your biological mother at birth, the "neurological imprinting (that) begins during pregnancy" may still influence your beliefs about the world. If she was stressed or frightened during her pregnancy with you, the neurochemicals (cortisol, adrenaline) flowing through her body traveled through the placenta to your brain. If her stress was constant, your brain developed to meet the demands of an unsafe world, and may have curated an anxious temperament.

There are other reasons this kind of writing activity might feel dreadful for you. If your mother was avoidant, dismissive, or neglectful of you, your adaptations to her may have left you with a huge dose of indifference. You may feel you know everything you need or want to know about your mother. On the other hand, if your mother was sometimes fun or affectionate, but unpredictably prone to angry outbursts toward you, you may long to understand her hurtful behavior and hope for an apology. I call this "an apology ache". Finding the answers to these questions does not mean you need to go directly to your mother or her mother. If your mother is not alive, your body holds the information you need to answer these questions, but a flood of emotions might come too. Be gentle as you explore these tender questions. This kind of exploration is best done in the safety and connection of others. Either a trusted therapist, a secure group of women, or a close partner who is interested in your well-being.

For each question, consider both your mother and her mother.

1. How did your biological mother feel about her body?

2. What kind of clothes did she wear? What kind of comments did she make about her body? Did she take care of herself with nutrition, exercise, and rest?

3. How did you mother feel about her free time? (Did she have fun? Did she have interests that she explored?)

4. How did you mother feel about her work? (If she worked outside the home, did she enjoy it? If she worked taking care of home and children, was she happy? How did she express satisfaction?

5. How did she show frustration?

6. How did you mother feel about important relationships in her life? (Did she have friends to talk to? Was she happy with romantic relationships? Could her friends/and or partner trust her?)

1. Brizendine, L. *The Female Brain*. New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2006
2. Northrup, C. *Mother-Daughter Wisdom: Understanding the Crucial Link Between Mothers, Daughters, and Health*. New York. Bantam, 2005. p.61
3. Yehuda, R et al (2009). Gene Expression Patterns Associated with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Following Exposure to the World Trade Center Attacks. *Biological Psychiatry*, DOI: 10.1016/j.biopsych.2009.02.03