

## **Mama's Boys and Daddy's Girls: From Passion to Sabotage and Back Again**

By Joseph and Sarah Elizabeth Malinak

The relationship between mama's boys and daddy's girls may be the most prevalent kind in North America today. Whereas we can all pretty well identify the daddy's girls in our lives, mama's boys come in a variety of ways that may not be so easily identifiable. For one thing, daddy's girls are usually quite proud of the fact and comfortable advertising it! Mama's boys, on the other hand, want to keep that identifier so under wraps they might not even recognize it in themselves. However, since mama's boys and daddy's girls are attracted to each other like magnets; it behooves us to become familiar with these two types and their variations.

A daddy's girl can look like a very competent woman, someone who was once a vivacious tom-boy and is now really on top of her life and career. She can also look like an especially brilliant nurturer, taking care of everyone in her life. The more assertive and aggressive daddy's girls are at risk of bullying the men and children in their lives. Refraining from being abusive can take a lot of self-discipline and self-care.

Too, a daddy's girl can be a very sweet, submissive type whose devotion to husband and children can border on dysfunction. This type is at risk of being abused if the people in her life are so inclined.

Traditionally, we think of a mama's boy as a very soft male who may be very good at nurturing the women in his life or who may even be quite timid. This kind of mama's boy is at risk of being mentally or emotionally run over by the dominant women in his life. But a mama's boy can also be domineering or even abusive. Not all "macho males" are mama's boys, but some are macho because they are overcompensating for feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. Domination and/or abuse are not masculine qualities. They are tools used to control people so that the dominator or abuser feels taken care of, even if it is at someone else's expense.

When a man, either by hurting or pleasing his woman, tries to control her, he is a mama's boy who believes he gets his power from the women in his life.

When a woman, either by serving or dominating her man, tries to take care of him, she is a daddy's girl who believes she will find fulfillment by taking care of the men in her life.

Mama's boys and daddy's girls attract each other romantically because they are complementary reflections of each other. In each other they are reminded of what they didn't get from their parents. It creates longing, hunger, desire, even frustration and anger. Those feelings are fuel for passion at the beginning of the relationship but can become fodder for relationship sabotage and destruction.

When a mama's boy and a daddy's girl are falling in love, they are on their best behavior. The usual ways he either pushes against or pulls on the women in his life go

underground. Instead, he is chivalrous, thoughtful, loving, and protective. Likewise, the typical ways she controls her life and the people in it get shelved. Instead, she is happy to be courted, generous in her appreciation and respect.

When the relationship reaches a certain level of commitment, the old habits surface and two apparent strangers finally meet. Only, if these two can be honest, they are not strangers at all because every other relationship they've ever had has resembled what happens next.

His needs become more important than hers. Perhaps he's a domineering kind of mama's boy and when things don't go his way he pouts or shouts or hits or hides. However he handles disappointment, this is no longer a knight in shining armor. He becomes callous, selfish, and thoughtless.

Or, if he is a soft male, the gentler kind of mama's boy, his need to protect and take care of her becomes annoying and a big turn-off. He may appear to still be all about her but really he's manipulating her in order to take care of himself. This kind of mama's boy pulls on the woman in his life. What he perceives as him giving of himself to her, she experiences as draining.

In either scenario, the partner of a mama's boy finds herself walking on egg shells and developing mental lists of what it takes to keep him happy and content.

On her side, when the relationship reaches a certain level of commitment, the daddy's girl resurrects her need to control her environment and the people in it. If she is the domineering kind of daddy's girl, she becomes impatient and disrespectful. She tries to improve her partner in order to make him acceptable.

If she's the more submissive type of daddy's girl, she goes from feeling like a queen being courted to a servant keeping his house the way he likes it, making love the way he likes it, managing the children the way he likes it.

These behaviors that rise to the surface after a certain level of commitment has been achieved don't come from meanness or spite. The people involved here are not inherently bad. Rather, they both desperately long to be made whole. She is trying to find fulfillment and he is trying to be powerful.

The problem for her is that she believes fulfillment comes from taking care of the men in her life. Whether that means bullying them to improve them or acquiescing to them in order to make them happy, she believes her fulfillment comes from outside her. It's the way she was raised. She doesn't realize her fulfillment comes from within.

And the problem for him is that he is trying to be powerful by either pushing against or pulling on the women in his life. He doesn't realize his power comes from within. He tries to get it from without, from who he believes is the source of his power – his woman. It's the way he was raised.

While there are many ways to address the relationship entanglement that mama's boys and daddy's girls find themselves in, one sure way to steadily make progress is for each to remind him or herself that they are neither the parent nor the child of the other! When they find themselves embroiled in the power struggles that are unique to the mama's boy/daddy's girl relationship, either one taking a step back and refusing to play the role of either parent or child can make a difference. If both can do this, healing comes even more quickly.

So, the next time she finds herself exhausted because she's taking care of one more thing he is perfectly capable of taking care of himself, she can stop what she's doing, walk away from the task, and tell herself, "I am not his mother." Speaking to every single daddy's girl out there, there are things you do for him that you have no business doing. Oftentimes you do things for him he hasn't even asked you to do. But you do them because you believe you can do it better. Stop. Don't do it next time. Practice the self-discipline of stopping yourself, reminding yourself you are not his mother, and let him handle it when he gets around to it. This is a wonderful practice of self-discipline and self-care! It's challenging and it'll stretch the daddy's girl more than most anything else in her life! But it's worth it. The self-respect you'll grow will help you rediscover how much you respect and love him and that can make all the difference.

And the next time he finds himself either pushing against or pulling on his woman, he can take a step back and remind himself, "She isn't my mother! I am not her son!" This may send a man to his cave because it is very uncomfortable for a mama's boy to look at his behavior this closely. But that's ok. If in his cave he can get real that he only has one mother and she isn't his romantic partner, he'll be doing more to fix his relationship than he can imagine is possible.

Speaking to every single mama's boy out there, you know when pushing against your woman is actually a temper tantrum in disguise. You know when bullying her, raising your voice at her, even abusing her emotionally, mentally, or physically is really you throwing a temper tantrum. That's what little boys do, not grown men. You also know when pulling on her or manipulating her to meet your needs is like a boy grasping at his mother to get it right. You can make a different choice. You can remind yourself, "She isn't my mother. I can treat her like an adult. Not only that, I can get back to cherishing her as my lover and friend." That shift in your thoughts and behavior can make all the difference.

We're not really meant to give each other what our parents didn't. Our parents' job is their job and our partner's job is something very different. In our romantic partners we get to have playmates, soul mates, love, friendship, cherishing, respect, nurturing, champions, and challengers who help us grow.

If you are a mama's boy and a daddy's girl in a romantic relationship, the way you mirror each other creates heat and passion. By learning to take yourselves out of the parent/child roles and step into your roles as adults, you can take the potential for

sabotage out of the equation and experience tremendous fulfillment, power, and love in yourselves as individuals and in your relationship!