



The Patrix



It feels like a warm glow when it is right and easy and like a gutted fish must feel when it is raw and challenging.

Imagine the following vignette, like others which unfold day-in and day-out between parent and child - It is dinner time, and a father calls his boy to the table. The child's first response is, "no, I am busy." In this moment, the world of the child, perhaps at play, comes into conflict with the agenda of the parent - it is time to eat dinner.

*I am going to say it this way,
two separate worlds are about to come into conflict.*



The conscious world of the parent has come into direct confrontation with the child's world, which for all practical purposes is just outside of the consciousness of the parent. Dad really doesn't know what he is interrupting. From the child's experience, his consciousness and everything he is doing and processing in his head and body is being impinged upon by the parent's world, which is of little concern and unconscious to the child.

It is safe to say that in this moment, there exists a compensatory tension between the world of the child and that of the parent and this tension will naturally build to a breaking point. Something must give. Someone — parent or child, will have to make an internal accommodation so that these two worlds can come together. How is “yes it is time for dinner” and “no, I am too busy” going to come together?

Now I have a term that I coined that emerged from just such a scenario. I call it the “Patrix:

*The Patrix is a psychological, emotional, and behavior context
that both holds the father while the father simultaneously holds
his child or children within it.*

Think of it as an environment much like any other. It has cycles and season and stages of evolution. It inhales and expands its volume and exhales to relax and open to space. The Patrix is that felt sense of connection that once formed becomes common ground for father and child to always find the deeper connection that is true and real.

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For a father it can be that place of wounding that he carries from his relationship with his father that is so ripe for healing as he cultivates his children and their well-being within him.

Back to dinner – as father announces dinner, the normal equilibrium of the patrix is momentarily interrupted. This disruption is an opportunity for transformation and growth for the parent, the child, and their relationship depending on how it is managed. It is also an opportunity for wounding to occur. This tension and how it is resolved in this seemingly insignificant interaction, and the thousands like it that make up father-child interaction, is foundational to the child's and the parent's maturational and transformational process. How this tension is mediated and who takes responsibility for the mediation literally determines how the fabric of their relationship is woven.

This is the ritual ground of relatedness. What immediately affects the parent in the above vignette is unknown by the parent. He would need to have a more intimate understanding of the child's experience and what is being interrupted to know. If eating dinner is all that matters, then words and behaviors will work toward that goal to motivate the child to comply. "Hey, I said now!" However, whatever is constellating in the child's experience, what they are thinking about, planning, feeling, may be lost. If time and patience and consciousness exist for the parent in this moment the choices he is about to make can be seen as a potential for growth and development. In this case, whatever it is that the child is experiencing is facilitated so that a third position is reached where **the child's world is ushered into the world of the parents.**

Because we really do not know what is happening for the child in that moment it may be worth the effort to stop and consider what it is we are interrupting. If we turn the situation around and imagine that the parent is writing an important letter or concentrating on a winning pitch in the ninth inning of the game, and the child interrupts, it is easy to see

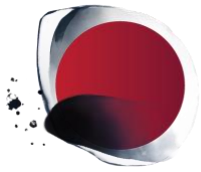


what is at risk. However, with children, their world is so dynamic and quick growing, we don't know what is at stake. Of course, most of us would like to allow the child's agenda to unfold and complete itself and if we remember we can be instrumental in helping them make the transition. After all, aren't these the life lessons where we have an opportunity to work at the very foundation of our child's ability to learn how to make successful transitions into the world? Isn't this an opportunity to teach our child how to be in the world successfully? Certainly, many of us do this unconsciously and successfully much of the time.

For example, when the child says "no, I am busy" the parent bridges from his world of dinner preparation to that of the child's. Instead of calling out, Dad walks over to his child, kneels, and says something like; "Oh, you are very busy, I can see that, could you bring your work to the table and tell us about it while we eat?" Were the child to respond, the third position would be reached through these mediational skills of the parent. Both worlds combine to manifest a third position which is informed by what was hitherto separate but parallel experience. Is this not transformational?

When the son joins the father for dinner, which is inclusive of his world of play as mediated by the father, the son flows into the father as he finds himself and the father flows into the son as he finds himself. This third position, the Patrix, has new content and the potential elements of disintegration and chaos are transformed into creation and connection. Everyone died to his previous experience, was born into the relational experience, and in a very small but real way is transformed.

We all know countless stories of when a father is excluded or excludes himself from his child's world. A child, a teen will wrestle with feelings, experiences that, try as we might, our best efforts will not give us access to them. Adult children will exclude their fathers from their lives not because they don't need us there but because in many small and some large ways, we fail them. It is inevitable that we can only travel to a limited degree into their world and they into ours. It is the nature of being separate people.



However, what we share, what is inevitable, is the bond of our relationship. It is here whether we see it, feel it, or recognize it. Our relationship with our children is woven from the fibers of every interaction we have with them. It starts when we first utter words, pick them up, and make the thousands of adjustments to weave their world into ours and ours into theirs. This is the third thing, woven from the tens of thousands of “yes” and “no” moments that we hold.

May the holding of these moments remind you of who you are as a father. And I want to remind you that in the unconscious, in the deep recesses of our relational being, there is no time. Find your way into your child’s world. Show them gently how to be in yours and prepare them for the generations that they will influence during their time on this Earth.

Image Courtesy of: [Liv Bruce @livvie_bruce](#)

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