



The Intimacy Paradox: Personal Authority in the Family System

Donald S. Williamson PhD

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"How does one leave home emotionally and yet somehow still remain lovingly connected within the family of origin? It is my thesis that this is both the fundamental psychological issue and the essential relational challenge of adulthood...." --From Chapter 1

Although most people physically leave home by their early 20s, emotional separation from one's family is a more difficult process that can continue for a lifetime. THE INTIMACY PARADOX addresses the struggle of adults to establish individual autonomy without sacrificing family connections, and offers a psychotherapeutic approach designed to simultaneously foster both personal development *and* family of origin intimacy.

As viewed here, the key to achieving the goal of personal authority (or autonomy with intimacy) is to facilitate a deconstruction or demythologizing' of the parents *in their parental roles*. This allows for an adjustment (sometimes transformation) of mutual expectations, leaving the adult free to experience parents in a new way, with every admirable trait intact, indeed highlighted. By changing present relationships with parents, the book shows how one can change the present meanings of past memories and thus generate new possibilities for healthier and happier future experiences.

Williamson's theory of *personal authority in the family system* is offered as a synthesizing construct, which reconciles the opposing pulls of differentiation from parents and intimacy with parents. Personal authority therapy prepares clients to talk directly to their parents as adults and equals and, therefore, without fear. Through hearing the personal narrative of each parent's life firsthand and exploring the private meanings of significant events and relationships, sons and daughters can both demystify and humanize their parents. It is this humanization that ultimately resolves intergenerational intimidation. The goal is to create a family of former parents and former children who share psychological freedom of action and interaction as adults. This creates the conditions for intimacy. The former parent no longer has any special position of power, control, or privilege inherent in the old role; the former child no longer has any obligation to attentiveness, obedience, or overriding loyalty. What is now given, is given freely.

THE INTIMACY PARADOX demonstrates that psychological power and control can and must be redistributed across generational boundaries, so that parents and (former) children can achieve psychological and relational equality. For all professionals engaged in family therapy, this work presents an innovative psychotherapy method for ending intergenerational intimidation while fostering intimacy, love, and a renewed sense of family identification.

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