
Why it's Crucial for Women to Heal the Mother Wound

By Bethany Webster

What many people do not realize is that the core issue at the center of women's empowerment is the Mother Wound.

Difficulty and challenges between mothers and daughters are rampant and widespread but not openly spoken about. The taboo about speaking about the pain of the Mother Wound is what keeps it in place and keeps it hidden in shadow, festering and out of view.

What exactly is the Mother Wound?

The Mother Wound is the pain of being a woman passed down through generations of women in patriarchal cultures. And it includes the dysfunctional coping mechanisms that are used to process that pain.

The Mother Wound includes the pain of:

- Comparison: not feeling good enough
- Shame: consistent background sense that there is something wrong with you
- Attenuation: Feeling you must remain small in order to be loved
- Persistent sense of guilt for wanting more than you currently have

The Mother Wound can manifest as:

- Not being your full self because you don't want to threaten others
- Having a high tolerance for poor treatment from others
- Emotional caretaking
- Feeling competitive with other women
- Self-sabotage
- Being overly rigid and dominating
- Conditions such as eating disorders, depression and addictions

In our patriarchal, male-dominated culture women are conditioned to think of themselves as "less-than" and not deserving or worthy. This feeling of "less-than" has been internalized and passed down through countless generations of women.

The cultural atmosphere of female oppression puts daughters in a "double bind."

Simply put, if a daughter internalizes her mother's unconscious beliefs (which is some subtle form of "I'm not good enough") then she has her mother's approval but has in some way betrayed herself and her potential.

However, if she doesn't internalize her mother's unconscious beliefs in her own limitations but rather affirms her own power and potential, she is aware that her mother may unconsciously see this as a personal rejection.

The daughter doesn't want to risk losing her mother's love and approval, so internalizing these limiting, unconscious beliefs is a form of loyalty and emotional survival for the daughter.

It may feel dangerous for a woman to actualize her full potential because it may mean risking some form of rejection by her mother.

This is because the daughter may unconsciously sense that her full empowerment may trigger the mother's sadness or rage at having had to give up parts of herself in her own life. Her compassion for her mother, a desire to please her, and a fear of conflict may cause her to convince herself that it's safer to shrink and remain small.

A common objection to facing the Mother Wound is to "Let the past be in the past." However, we never truly "escape" or bury the past. It lives in the present as the obstacles and challenges that we face every day. If we avoid dealing with the pain associated with one of THE most primary and foundational relationships in our lives, we are missing a pivotal opportunity to discover the truth of who we are and to authentically and joyfully live that truth.

Stereotypes that perpetuate the Mother Wound:

- "Look at everything your mother did for you!" (from other people)
- "My mother sacrificed so much for me. I would be so selfish to do what she could not do. I don't want to make her feel bad."
- "I owe loyalty to my mother no matter what. If I upset her, she will think I don't value her."

The daughter may experience fears about fulfilling her potential because she may fear leaving her mother behind. She may fear her mother feeling threatened by her dreams or ambitions. She may fear uncomfortable feelings from her mother such as envy or anger. All of this is usually very unconscious and not openly acknowledged or talked about.

We all have sensed the pain that our mothers carry. And all of us are suspicious to some degree that we are partly to blame for her pain. Therein lies the guilt. This makes sense when considering the limited cognitive development of a child, which sees itself as the cause of all things. If we don't address this unconscious belief as an adult, we may still be walking around with it and greatly limiting ourselves as a result.

The truth is that no child can save her mother.

No sacrifice a daughter makes will ever be enough to compensate for the high price her mother may have had to pay or for the losses she has accrued over the years, simply by being a woman and mother in this culture. And yet, this is what many women do for their mothers very early on in childhood: This decision is made out of love, loyalty and a true need for approval and emotional support from the mother.

Many of us confuse being loyal to our mothers with being loyal to their wounds, and thus, complicit in our own oppression.

These dynamics are very unconscious, and they operate on a continuum. Even the most healthy, supportive mother/daughter relationships may have this dynamic to some degree by virtue of simply being women in this society. And for daughters who have mothers with serious issues (addictions, mental illness, etc.) the impact is can be very damaging and insidious.

Mothers must take responsibility and grieve their losses.

Being a mother in our society is unspeakably difficult. I've heard many women say "No one ever tells you how hard it is" and "Nothing prepares you for when you get home with the baby and realize what is being asked of you." Our culture, especially the U.S., is very hard on mothers, offering little support and many are raising children alone.

Our society's unspoken messages to mothers:

- If motherhood is difficult then it's your own fault.
- Shame on you if you're not super-human.
- There are "natural mothers" for whom motherhood is easy. If you are not one of these, there is something deeply wrong with you.
- You're supposed to be capable of handling it all with ease: having well-behaved children, being sexually attractive, having a successful career, and a solid marriage.

For mothers who have indeed sacrificed so much to have children in our culture, it can truly feel like a rejection when your child surpasses or exceeds the dreams you thought possible for yourself. There may be a sense of feeling owed, entitled to or needing to be validated by your children, which can be a very subtle but powerful manipulation. This dynamic can cause the next generation of daughters to keep themselves small so that their mothers can continue to feel validated and affirmed in their identity as a mother, an identity that many have sacrificed so much for, but received so little support and recognition for in return.

Mothers may unconsciously project deep rage towards their children in subtle ways. **However, the rage really isn't towards the children.** The rage is towards the patriarchal society that requires women to sacrifice and utterly deplete themselves in order to mother a child.

And for a child who needs her mother, sacrificing herself in an effort to somehow ease her mother's pain is often a subconscious decision made very early in life and not discovered as the cause of underlying issues until much later when she is an adult.

The Mother Wound exists because there is not a safe place for mothers to process their rage about the sacrifices that society has demanded of them. And because daughters still unconsciously fear rejection for choosing not to make those same sacrifices as previous generations.

In our society, there is no safe place for a mother to vent her rage. And so often it comes out unconsciously to one's children. A daughter is a very potent target for a mother's rage because the daughter has not yet had to give up her personhood for motherhood. The young daughter may remind the mother of her un-lived potential. And if the daughter feels worthy enough to reject

some of the patriarchal mandates that the mother has had to swallow, then she can easily trigger that underground rage for the mother.

Of course, most mothers want what is best for their daughters. However, if a mother has not dealt with her own pain or come to terms with the sacrifices she has had to make, then her support for her daughter may be laced with traces of messages that subtly instill shame, guilt or obligation. They can seep out in the most benign situations, usually in some form of criticism or some form of bringing praise back to the mother. It's not usually the content of the statement, but rather the energy with which it is conveyed that can carry hidden resentment.

The way for a mother to prevent directing her rage to her daughter and passing down the Mother Wound, is for the mother to fully grieve and mourn her own losses. And to make sure that she is not relying on her daughter as her main source of emotional support.

Mothers must mourn what they had to give up, what they wanted but will never have, what their children can never give them and the injustice of their situation. However, as unjust and unfair as it is, it is **not** the responsibility of the daughter to make amends for the mother's losses or to feel obligated to sacrifice herself in the same ways. For mothers, it takes tremendous strength and integrity to do this. And mothers need support in this process.

Mothers liberate their daughters when they consciously process their own pain without making it their daughter's problem. In this way, mothers free their daughters to pursue their dreams without guilt, shame or a sense of obligation.

When mothers unwittingly cause their daughters to feel responsible for their losses and to share in their pain, it creates a **dysfunctional enmeshment**, reinforcing the daughter's view that she is not worthy of her dreams. And this supports a daughter's view that her mother's pain must somehow be her fault. This can cripple her in so many ways.

For daughters growing up in a patriarchal culture, there is a sense of having to choose between being empowered and being loved.

Most daughters choose to be loved instead of empowered because there is an ominous sense that being fully actualized and empowered may cause a grave loss of love from important people in their lives, specifically their mothers. So women stay small and un-fulfilled, unconsciously passing the Mother Wound to the next generation.

As a woman, there is a vague but powerful sense that your empowerment will injure your relationships. And women are taught to value relationships over everything else. We cling to the crumbs of our relationships, while our souls may be deeply longing for the fulfillment of our potential. But the truth is that our relationships alone can never adequately substitute for the hunger to live our lives fully.

The power dynamic at the center of the mother/daughter relationship is a taboo subject and the core issue at the center of the Mother Wound.

Much of this goes underground because of the many **taboos and stereotypes about motherhood** in this culture:

- Mothers are always nurturing and loving
- Mothers should never feel angry or resentful towards their daughters
- Mothers and daughters are supposed to be best friends

The stereotype of "All mothers should be loving all the time" strips women of their full humanity. Because women are not given permission to be full human beings, society feels justified in not providing full respect, support and resources to mothers.

The truth is that mothers are human beings and all mothers having un-loving moments. And it's true that there are mothers who are simply un-loving most of the time, whether because of addiction, mental illness or other struggles. Until we are willing to face these uncomfortable realities the Mother Wound will be in shadow and continue to be passed through the generations.

We all have **patriarchy** in us to some degree. We've had to ingest it to survive in this culture. When we're ready to confront it fully in ourselves, we also confront it in others, including our mothers. This can be one of the most heart-wrenching of all situations we must face. But unless we are

willing to go there, to address the Mother Wound, we are paying a very high price for the illusion of peace and empowerment.

What is the cost of not healing the Mother Wound?

The cost of not healing the Mother Wound is living your life indefinitely with:

- A vague, persistent sense that "There's something wrong with me"
- Never actualizing your potential out of fear of failure or disapproval
- Having weak boundaries and an unclear sense of who you are
- Not feeling worthy or capable of creating what you truly desire
- Not feeling safe enough to take up space and voice your truth
- Arranging your life around "not rocking the boat"
- Self-sabotage when you get close to a breakthrough
- Unconsciously waiting for mother's permission or approval before claiming your own life.

What's the relationship between the Mother Wound and the divine feminine?

There's a lot of talk these days about 'embodying the divine feminine' and being an 'awakened woman.' But the reality is that we cannot be a strong container of the power of the divine feminine if we have not yet addressed the places within us where we have felt banished and in exile from the Feminine.

Let's face it: Our first encounter with the Goddess was with our mothers. Until we have the courage to break the taboo and face the pain we have experienced in relation to our mothers, the divine feminine is another form of a fairy tale, a fantasy of rescue by a mother who is not coming. This keeps us in spiritual immaturity. We have to separate the human mother from the archetype in order to be true carriers of this energy. We have to de-construct the faulty structures within us before we can truly build new structures to hold it. Until we do this we remain stuck in a kind of limbo where our empowerment is short-lived and the only explanation for our predicament that seems to make sense is to blame ourselves.

If we avoid acknowledging the full impact of our mother's pain on our lives, we still remain to some degree, children.

Coming into full empowerment requires looking at our relationship with our mothers and having the courage to separate out our own individual beliefs, values, thoughts from hers. It requires feeling the grief of having to witness the pain our mothers endured and processing our own legitimate pain that we endured as a result. This is so challenging, but it is the beginning of real freedom. Once we feel the pain it can be transformed, and it will cease creating obstacles in our lives.

So, what happens when women heal the Mother Wound?

As we heal the Mother Wound, the power dynamic is increasingly resolved.

Once women increasingly process the pain of the Mother Wound, we can create safe places for women to express the truth of their pain and receive much needed support. Mothers and daughters can communicate with one another without fear that the truth of their feelings will break their relationship. The pain no longer needs to go underground and into shadow, where it manifests as manipulation, competition and self-hatred. Our pain can be grieved fully so that it can then turn into love, a love that manifests as fierce support of one another and deep self-acceptance, freeing us to be boldly authentic, creative and truly fulfilled.

When we heal the Mother Wound, we begin to grasp the stunning degree of impact a mother's well-being has on the life of her child, especially in early childhood when the child and mother are still a single unit. Our mothers form the very basis of who we become: our beliefs start out as her beliefs; our habits start out as her habits. Some of this is so unconscious and fundamental, it is barely perceptible.

The Mother Wound is ultimately not about your mother. It's about embracing yourself and your gifts without shame.

We address the Mother Wound because it is a critical part of self-actualization and saying YES to being the powerful and potent women that we are being called to become. Healing the Mother Wound is ultimately about acknowledging and honoring the foundation our mothers provided for our lives so that we can then fully focus on creating the unique lives that we authentically desire and know we are capable of creating.

Benefits of healing the Mother Wound:

- Being more fluent and skilled in handling your emotions. Seeing them as a source of wisdom and information.
- Having healthy boundaries that support the actualization of your highest and best self
- Developing a solid "inner mother" that provides unconditional love, support and comfort to your younger parts.
- Knowing yourself as competent. Feeling that anything is possible, open to miracles and all good things
- Being in constant contact with your inner goodness and your ability to bring it into everything you do
- Deep compassion for yourself and other people
- Not taking yourself too seriously. No longer needing external validation to feel OK. Not needing to prove yourself to others.
- Trusting life to bring you what you need
- Feeling safe in your own skin and a freedom to be yourself.
- So much more...

As we engage in this healing process, we slowly remove the thick fog of projection that keeps us stuck and can more clearly see, appreciate and love ourselves. **We no longer carry the burden of our mother's pain and keep ourselves small as a result.** We can confidently emerge into our own lives, with the energy and vitality to create what we desire without shame or guilt, but with passion, power, joy, confidence, and love.

For every human being, the very first wound of the heart was at the site of the mother, the feminine. And through the process of healing that wound, our hearts graduate from a compromised state of defensiveness and fear to a whole new level of love and power, which connects us to the divine heart of Life itself. We are from then on connected to the archetypal, collective heart that lives in all beings, and are carriers and transmitters of true compassion and love that the world needs right now. In this way, the Mother Wound is actually an opportunity and an initiation into the divine feminine. This is why it's so crucial for women to heal the Mother Wound: Your personal healing and re-connection to the heart of life, by way of the feminine, affects the whole and supports our collective evolution.