



## Painful projections

by Rick Belden

Last December, I published a post titled [“A male survivor’s perspective on ‘rape culture’”](#) in which I wrote about attending my first group for male survivors of childhood sexual abuse at the local rape crisis center. I recalled that as men entering a space most prominently defined as a safe space for women, an environment where men were perceived by many to be the enemy, we were less than welcome:

*I’ll never forget the looks I received from the women I encountered as I crossed the parking lot and entered the building. Hostility would be putting it mildly ...*

*I could understand the attitude, given the “men are perpetrators, not victims” orthodoxy of the time and the likelihood that at least some of the women felt profoundly unsafe around men due to personal history. I could allow for all of that, but it didn’t make screwing up the courage to face the unearned anger, scorn, and disdain every week any less of a challenge.*

The publication of my post resulted in an email conversation with a female reader who, having also read some of my poetry (including my poem ["virus"](#)), said:

*I wrote something, encouraged by the directness of your poems, and even though I don’t want to share it as ‘me’, I would like to share it anonymously. The idea came to me that this could be something that would fit well with your mission and would allow you to address the topic you addressed [here](#) further, on how it’s*

*important for women to understand the impact they have on the men around them who had nothing to do with their abuse trauma ...*

*Writing this has been a big healing milestone for me and an anchor point and I wouldn't have if it hadn't been for your e-mail. Thank you!*

With her permission, I'm posting her poem below (anonymously per her request). It is untitled.

*I already knew that love was foreign to you.*

*Yet mom always said you are a typical (normal) man*

*and so for a long time I believed her.*

*I knew that getting on your good side  
meant being rational.*

*I knew that the closest thing you knew to love  
was respecting someone  
because they were able to win.*

*I tried hard to win.*

*Yet the better I got,  
the more I was losing.*

*I got to a point where I realised I didn't want to compete with you for approval.  
I didn't want to try so hard to get your 'positive' attention.*

*I started to understand that it wasn't normal that I had to try so hard.  
I started to understand that you are not a typical, nor normal man at all.*

*All this time I'd expected all the men in my life to be like you,  
and so I let them get away with being cold and rational,  
just like I expected.*

*I was pushing away all the good men out there,  
because I didn't believe they really existed.*

*Sometimes I was mean to someone  
and I didn't understand where it came from.  
Or I didn't realise I was being mean at all.*

*I had forgotten that I was maintaining  
two different versions of you:  
version one was the man who did  
what you did.  
Version two was the man who did  
what you should have done.*

*I waited a long time for version two to materialize in you,  
and all that time,  
I was angry at all the men out there  
because I believed that deep inside,  
they were all a version one of you.*

*I was confused.*

*I needed to be confused  
to survive the insanity.*

*So I saw you everywhere,  
except in yourself.*

*Now that you are you again,  
all the other men  
can again start morphing back  
into who they truly are.*

*No longer version one of you.*

*I am sorry  
for all the pain  
of those projections  
that kept me safe  
from my own fear  
of the truth.*

*incest.*

*~AnonyMiss.*

Beyond its personal significance for the author, this poem is a wonderful example of how an open-hearted dialogue, in which men and women hold their own space while allowing space for the other, can lead to significant new insights and better understanding of self as well as of the other. As such, it is a welcome antidote to the deeply held antagonism and bitter power struggles so rampant nowadays in what is commonly known as the gender wars. It serves as a much-needed reminder that a healing conversation between men and women is still possible, especially if we are willing to identify and take full ownership of our personal histories, projections, and fears.

*Originally posted at [poetry, dreams, and the body](#) on Apr 14 2013.*

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Rick Belden is a respected explorer and chronicler of the psychology and inner lives of men. His book, [Iron Man Family Outing: Poems about Transition into a More Conscious Manhood](#), is widely used in the United States and internationally by therapists, counselors, and men's groups as an aid in the exploration of

masculine psychology and men's issues, and as a resource for men who grew up in dysfunctional, abusive, or neglectful family systems. His second book, [\*Scapegoat's Cross: Poems about Finding and Reclaiming the Lost Man Within\*](#), is currently awaiting publication. He lives in Austin, Texas.

More information, including excerpts from Rick's books, is available on his [website](#) and [blog](#). You can also find him on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).