

Part Two: Applying the Enneagram to Others in Your Life

Chapter Six

Family Structure in Enneagram Type

The life we experience growing up is, obviously, highly influenced by, and dependent on, our parents. Did we have two parents, who loved each other? Was there only one parent, or were we raised in Care, or adopted? Was there a divorce? Was there a lack of love? Were one or both distant, or angry, or controlling? We may believe we have already made sense of our circumstances, even made our peace – but now we will consider our upbringing in the light of the new information available through the 12-Type Enneagram.

We are already aware of how different the experience of growing up can be for each individual child-now-adult. Many factors are involved, including the number of geographical moves and schools, number of siblings or lack of, whether or not the individual was a gay boy or girl growing up in a heterosexual (or now, increasingly, homosexual) family unit. Plus what is our racial profile and was that a positive, negative or neutral influence? To these traditional questions we now also need to consider that the experience of childhood will be different for one sibling from another *depending on their type*. So a Lunar type child growing up in a Lunar type family will be differently *equipped* for the family environment as would a Mars type. Each of the descriptions includes notice of the child types, so we attain a richer picture of the family type dynamic.

Some Descriptions of Parental Essence Types

It stands to reason that a childhood lived with a Jupiter type mother and a Saturn type father will be markedly different from a childhood with a Venus type mother and a Mars type father. Or two Saturn type parents, or a total of one Lunar type parent. When we begin to examine what effect *different parental types* will have had on our childhood we gain new insight on our family-of-origin experience. Below are some real-life scenarios:

1. **Lunar type father, Lunar type mother.** Both wanted the other to give them Venus type love and support, which neither understood, leading to both becoming disappointed and angry. Influence of Lunar type *self-obsession* created a family in which each person became responsible for their own emotional survival: there was no benevolent parental containing. Interestingly, of the four siblings, *three* are Lunar type as well: the other is Mars type. Mars has

difficulty with Lunar type energy, so for this sibling, living in a Lunar type family with the resulting 'whimsical', 'isolated' family dynamic, brought about in the Mars type child a particularly strong loathing for 'playing' and a desire to control all absolutely (not softened by Jupiter type influence). Without a cohesive, structured parental influence, each child made their way through life more, or less, successfully.

2. **Mars type father, Venus-Mercury mother.** The mother appreciated the father's ability to bring money into the family and she turned their home into an antique-and-art-filled showpiece. The wife was often absent from the home and did not truly appreciate the negative Mars type influence of the father on the two children. The two children are Saturn type (girl) and Venus type (boy). Both suffered in different ways: the boy because he could not achieve the way his father wanted, and was punished. The girl because she did not want to be 'girlish' and subservient.
3. **Jupiter type mother, Saturn type father.** Strongly religious, but able to argue logically (the mother accessed Saturn type energy for disagreements with the father while the father went to Jupiter type, not Mars type energy, in conflict). Five children. All children grew up independent, active and resourceful. Much love towards, and received from, the children.
4. **Mars type father, Jupiter type mother.** Two children, both Lunar type. The husband responded to the influence of the warm earth-mother wife and this was a happy family. The main issues were when the children grew to their own adulthood. Here we see that it is not *all* parental influence: the children's self-exploration led to some expensive mistakes and the parents sacrificed their own financial security to bail them out.
5. **Saturn-Mars mother.** Divorced, highly prominent in the media. Children are loved but miss out on the one-on-one attention they crave: their mother has an important political/social agenda to fulfil and the children have many examples of being second place.
6. **Lunar type two mother.** Single parent. She is able to balance both a career in a high-paying creative field, and raising her two children, through disciplined, intuitive, practice.
7. **Venus type husband, Mars type wife.** Husband visibly younger (wife's second marriage). Wife's high-profile job requires the husband to raise their only child (boy: Venus type). Wife's choice of career (in Charity) indicates a marked movement towards Jupiter type, and this is the energy she brings to her family. The

husband is happy with raising their son; the wife is happy with a stable home and exciting career.

8. **Mercury type husband, Saturn type wife.** Second marriage for both. Wife is aware of husband's scattiness and becomes angry when he breaks or loses something for the third time. However she also appreciates that he was a late-life opportunity and is able to swallow her disappointment given her understanding of the bigger picture. Both have adult children with lives of their own (types not known).
9. **Lunar type husband, Mars type wife.** Two girls: one Venus type, one Saturn type. The husband attempted to be the dream mate he believed his wife wanted (which turned out to be another Mars type). Being Lunar type he ran out of energy and became angry and depressed. Wife responded by starting an affair, then leaving her husband for the other man, taking the children.
10. **Saturn type parents.** Saturn type daughter; Mercury-Saturn type son. Both siblings benefited from focus on intellectual achievement and always knew they would succeed in intellectually demanding positions. Because the parents were not able to provide much emotional development modelling, children struggled with personal relationships. Son distanced himself geographically; daughter availed herself of therapy to learn how to fill the emotional gaps.

From reviewing the examples we can see how much of an unconscious, invisible influence parental types may have had on our upbringing.

What types do you think your parent or parents are/were? In formulating an answer, please bear these aspects in mind:

- a. Being in a relationship often moves the individual forward, but this may not be a permanent situation. Thus a Lunar type may appear for the first few years of the child's life to be a Venus or a Saturn type. As the demands of the child increase, the parent may revert to the spaciness of Lunar type or the speediness of Mercury – and disappear or disappoint.
- b. The parent may be defeated by the limitations of their type. A Venus type parent may rely on the children to bring themselves up since providing a Mercury type environment, with clean clothes and organisation, is beyond them. An undeveloped Saturn type parent may feel vaguely concerned towards their child, but be aware that their intellectual abilities are not appropriate for the child's needs, so instead they withdraw, leaving the child to cope in an atmosphere of benevolent neglect.

- c. It is usually only with hindsight that the child can understand how the parent suffered. A Lunar type parent may attempt to raise the child in a 'fairy tale' reality; a Mercury type parent may regard children as something entirely outside their understanding, and desperately thrust things at the child to cover up their sense of inadequacy.
- d. Examining your parent from *your own type*. For example: A Mars type parent will demand obedience so a Venus type child may have less of a problem, being acquiescent, than would a Mars type child who may adopt a belligerent attitude. A Saturn-Mars type child will confuse a Venus or Lunar type parent since the parent won't understand from whence their child gets 'all their big ideas'.

A Cosmic Family Concept

This system is sympathetic to the idea that *we choose our parents*. Those of us whose parental influence has been difficult, harsh or virtually non-existent may resist this idea. Yet if we consider *this life* as part of a *more complex set of life journeys* the idea that we may have chosen difficult, dysfunctional, distant or cruel parental figures does make a kind of sense and, if we stay with the idea, this notion may illuminate our relationship to our parents in a new and more positive perspective.

It has already been noted that in this life we are concerned with *this life*. The system does not encourage *regression* (the study of past lives). In this system the belief is that the *curtain has come down* on our past lives: it is this life on which we are wholly focused. However, we cannot help speculating that in a former life we, for example, may have been indifferent, absent or dysfunctional parents: perhaps this is why we have selected the parents we have in this life, in order to experience the relationship from the receiving end. But these thoughts can only ever be speculative: what is most important is the sense we can make of our parents and family in this life.

This does not mean that if we have suffered, we should not do something to ease our distress and make sense of the past. The distressing emotions and memories held in the *amygdala* and *hippocampus* – those two small areas in our brain that are the depositories of memory - behave us to work on past hurts and distress if we are going to heal emotionally and make more out of our emotional resources. The notion of 'choosing our parents' does not cancel this out: but it does allow us to examine parental relationships in a different light.

Sibling Relationships in the Light of the Types

Having already looked at the possible consequences of the types our parents are or were, we will gain further information by examining any sibling relationships:

- A Lunar or Venus type daughter, in a family of boisterous Lunar or Mars type boys, will suffer. However, if the parents *promote* the daughter *over* the sons, the daughter may grow up with a warped sense of her own importance, while the boys will grow up feeling ‘bad’ inside.
- Twin Saturn types, a boy and a girl, are inseparable until the time comes for the boy to assert his independence *from his twin* (accessing Lunar type energy). Having taken the Venus type energy from her twin for granted, the girl is left aching as her familiar ally develops beyond the family bond.
- A Lunar-Venus type boy is adored by his Mars type sister until he wants a girlfriend. Then the sister wages war on every candidate.
- A Mars-Jupiter type son in a family of otherwise Lunar type children cannot understand the ‘secret world’ the other siblings create: his wide external agenda is completely bewildering to them, and they politely ignore it, leaving him feeling unsupported and misunderstood.

Observing Type Differences and Outcomes

It is fascinating to observe that two people of the same essence type, say Venus-Mercury types, may manifest the type characteristics in ways that would appear to make them polar opposites, *while in actual fact they are only manifesting the type characteristics differently*. One Venus-Mercury child falls in love with the drama of religion and becomes a monk: the other focuses on the luxurious rewards of working hard and selects a City job which enables him to indulge his love for expensive clothes.

Within the Lunar type there is a further complication. We take the example of a family where there are two Lunar type children. The older one leaves school early, does a number of unrewarding jobs, and then returns to education, eventually going to University. So when the younger child also ‘acts up’, the parents encourage him also to leave school early, believing that the second child will follow the pattern of the first. But the first child is a Lunar type B, who can benefit from the feedback life offers, and make the changes needed to be more successful in life, while the second is a Lunar type A, who will always need to be looked after.

Another example is of a family where the two children are a Venus type daughter and a Mars type son. During their upbringing, the Mars type son bullied his sister, telling her that her opinions were not of any worth. So when she decided on a career in public relations, she was nervous of the intellectual content, but managed to acquire a qualification through speeding up to Mercury type energy, and ‘cramming’ herself full of facts. Whereas her Mars type brother, rather than knuckling down to his chosen career in teaching, becomes aggressive and antagonistic to the academic process involved (we remember that Mars type disparages intellectual pursuits) and drops out.

Where the type lies in the *chronological order*, is also important. A Jupiter-Lunar type oldest daughter readily embraces the task of looking after her younger siblings. However, in another family, where the oldest child is a Lunar type boy, the parents assume he will take on an early adult role, which he resents bitterly, and as an adult tells people that he ‘never had a proper childhood’.

Where the Parent is ‘Younger’, the Child ‘Older’

At first glance it might appear that in the parent-child dyad, the best relationship flows from a situation where the parent is one of the ‘older’ types (Saturn, Mars, Jupiter or one of the hybrid types) and the child is one of the ‘younger’ types, (Lunar, Venus, Mercury or, again, one of the hybrid types). However, obviously, the child does not always remain in the more vulnerable, learning state, and therefore it is not, in terms of the overall parent/child relationship, always an advantage. Indeed, some children report that their controlling parent turned from an asset to a liability as they strove to establish their own identity.

We should bear this in mind when considering the circumstance where the parent is ‘younger’ and the child is ‘older’: although it may be confusing for the child growing up, it might in the long picture help them establish their true identity earlier. What sort of consequences may we expect to result from the parent being a younger type, the child an older type?

- **Lunar type parents, Saturn type daughter.** For the first few years the daughter enjoys the cosy, make-believe world the parents have created. When the daughter begins to visit her friends at their own homes she observes the differences in the family interactions. She begins to step back from the self-created world, instead launching on her lifelong investigation into the way things actually are. She learns to love her parents as basically adult children, and to find intellectual guidance at school, where she excels academically. Her parents sweetly reassure her that they will love her no matter what a mess she

makes of her life, while not appreciating that she is forging a worthwhile life for herself. Finally, as her parents' age, she takes on the role of benevolent parent to them and they relax, relieved at being looked after by someone who knows them well.

- **Venus type parents, Mars type son.** The Venus type parents raise their child to appreciate the joys of life to be found in beauty, stillness and one-to-one relationships. The son soon carves out his own little fiefdom, delighting in distressing his parents by his rough and abrasive manner. The parents have to learn to protect themselves and by the time he is a teenager he controls the power in the household. Yet because Mars types often value good family ties, he does not alienate them too much. His achievements on the sports field and his popularity with his peers and girlfriends are offered as trophies to his parents. They come to appreciate that he is very different from them, and he learns to regard them with tenderness and compassion (moving towards Jupiter type energy).
- **Mercury type father, Mars-Jupiter type daughter.** As often happens with the Mars-Jupiter type, it takes time for the daughter to discover the means to give her life meaning and purpose. For a brief while she imitated her father's speedy and sometimes chaotic patterns but she learned early on they did not suit her. She observed how her father could become overwhelmed by too many demands, so she took care not to share too much of her ambitions.

These three examples are broadly positive. There are other, less rewarding combinations:

- **Lunar-Venus type mother, Saturn type son.** Being a deep thinking, sensitive boy, he finds his mother's reckless emotional behaviour particularly distressing. As soon as he can, he seeks to be the solid counsel she can rely on. She repays his devotion by making him the focus point of all her disappointments.
- **Jupiter type daughter, Venus type parents.** The parents cannot understand their daughter's distress over homeless pets, floods in Asia and other everyday tragedies. They tell her she is only 'putting on an act' and that underneath she is 'just like them'. This causes the daughter even more distress as she becomes convinced she is worthless, and works ever harder to make herself feel acceptable.
- **Venus-Mercury type son, Lunar-Venus parents.** Both these hybrid types are vulnerable, but the parents more so. The son has to defy his parental script ('anything for a quiet life') in order to find a focus for his energy. Since the parents often sabotage their opportunities

through a combination of childish whimsy and reckless indulgence, the son has to learn to follow his own voice rather than listen to theirs.

Finally there is the example of a young boy whose birth mother gives him away. He is raised in Care, which is often brutal, and grows up with a fierce determination never to compromise his independence. He is a Lunar type. Had he had the benefit of a loving family, he may have learned to move towards Venus type energy and the one-to-one happiness of a committed relationship. Instead his many years of neglectful treatment make him chronically incapable of forming the intimate relationship he deeply craves.

Although we enter this world naked and alone our lives are never lived in isolation. Even if a parent is absent, or we are raised in 'Care', we are surrounded by older people in the caretaker role, and that means we cannot escape the influence of other types – whether or not they understand what 'caretaking' requires. In the next chapter we will expand on the issue of relationships to address those relationships that we make for ourselves: our friendships.