

On a Rejection Hook  
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As long as I can remember, I have been attempting to make sense of, and personally deal with, what I have come to call a “rejection hook” that keeps me from living as well as I would like to. I don’t think I’ve used that term on this site, but the idea of it, and various dimensions of it, have come up a number of times since I began it thirteen years ago.

I write these site thoughts and writings—I put them two in separate categories on the site--as independent, self-contained entities. I haven’t always been completely aware that I was dealing with the rejection hook phenomenon, fleshing it out, exploring it, at least in part; but most often, I’ve been basically conscious that that was what I was doing.

The rejection hook I’ll get into here, I’ve come to realize, is a problem I’ve had all of my life, since my earliest years, and even now in old age, I’m still confronting it, though with a whole lot more awareness and success than in prior years—until my forties especially.

I’ve looked through the site thoughts and identified the ones that fit into the rejection hook category. Here they are:

“On Victoria’s Dogs,” November, 2007.

“On the Beans Story,” December, 2007.

“On Self-Abuse,” February, 2008.

“On John Lennon,” October, 2008.

“On Twyla Tharp,” March, 2010.

“On Scaredy Squirrel,” June, 2010.

“On Trying to Charm the Uninterested,” April, 2011.

“On Unimpressives,” March, 2012.

“On Toxic People,” April, 2104.

“On a Ticket to Nowhere,” February, 2015.

“On the Boxer,” August, 2015.

“On the Baritone Horn,” March, 2018.

“On ‘What About Bob?’” December, 2019.

I’ll add a writing (as opposed to thought) from 2016. While it focuses on race relations, it deals with this rejection hook concern and I knew that very well when I was putting it together: “Blacks as Emotional Abusers of Whites: The Exploration of a Possibility.”

For the rest of this thought, I’ll speak to the basic concept of a rejection hook, and if this topic interests you, you can explore the thoughts and writing I’ve listed to see what you come up with.

First, some definitions:

By *rejection*, basically, I mean somebody or some people communicating “Not you.” I’ll use rejection in a limited way, the way I personally have experienced it, and from my very earliest years—three-, four-, five-years-old, perhaps even earlier. It’s not a rejection that gets across that you are—or, I’ll personalize it, I am--incapable, unproductive, unattractive as a person, or immoral or bad. Rather, it is a rejection that may well acknowledge that I—I’ll use I--measure up well to a lot of, or even all of, that list in the last sentence. “You are capable, you get things done, you’re attractive, and you’re a good person. But none of that matters for anything, because *you* don’t matter for anything. You are unnecessary, useless, unwanted and don’t fit here, with me, with us—you are fundamentally, at your core, worthless.” It isn’t said like that, but that’s the message that comes across.

As I read this last paragraph, the rejection comes off stronger, harsher, than I want to portray it. The comic actor Charles Grodin wrote a book called *It Would be So Nice if You Weren’t Here*. That gets at what I’m talking about more, or at least there is a strong flavor of that sentiment in this sort of rejection. It’s not that they are going to throw me out, or even tell me to leave--I’m not important or consequential enough for that, and I’m not “bad-case-rejectable” enough for that. Or it is impractical to boot me out the door given the circumstance, or it requires too much energy. The most likely

manifestation of the rejection I'm getting at here is indifference, avoidance, and off-handed, terse disconfirmation.

By *hook*, I mean like with a fish. It's something that gets you to turn away from what you are doing, and what you—I--ought to be doing and giving energy to the fisherman, who if you think about would just as soon you died. Your attention, effort, is directed at doing more than spitting out the guy's hook and getting on with your business. It is getting him to attest to what a great looking fish you are and to come every day to this very spot (you'll be here) and throw you some fish food. The fisherman, who used to be nobody to you, is now very much somebody and the source of your rewards in life.

I've decided we learn things early in life, before our brains are hooked up to make things a matter of conscious understanding and choice, which happens in the early teen years; and even after we develop the capability of critical, rational thought and decision, we still have to practice it for many years to get good at it. We learn things in a total, pervasive organic, pre-conceptual, pre-verbal way—about who we are, what slot we occupy in the scheme of things, and how people respond to us and what we need to do about it. We just feel it. We don't have words that describe it. We don't think about it. It's there inside us in a gross, here-and-now experienced way, and we do what it tells us to do. It's an inner impulse that says, this is what you have to do; this is your part in life's movie.

The rejection hook I'm talking about here is the basic message that you are unwanted, unneeded, unnecessary—in sum, worthless. But you can't just leave it at that. You *must* do something about it: namely, get the rejecters to change their assessment of you. You are compelled to get them to value you, accept you, want you around, encourage you, support you, give of themselves to you. More, you have to make that activity your number one priority. You can't be happy, you can't get on with your life until you turn rejection into fawning affirmation.

Of course, chasing after rejecters puts you in a powerless position. You aren't OK, you don't feel good about yourself and

your life, unless and until they give you the word. Especially if you are *in fact* unacceptable or useless to them--as is most often the case--you're engaged in a fruitless endeavor. You're playing to them and trying to nurture yourself—often self-destructively, food and alcohol and drugs and television and video games—while waiting around hoping they'll change their posture toward you, which very likely won't happen, when you could be putting your energy into looking for people and places that take to you. Part of a rejection hook is the false assumption that there's nobody out there who will take to you. Oh yes, there is. Seek and you will find.

Nothing in life is all good or all bad, including rejection hooks. While I'm predominantly focusing on their downsides in this context, we should keep in mind that there are potential upsides to them. One of the ways you might win over the "you're nobody" people is to write the great American novel or cure cancer. Or become a great actor. I was struck by the revelation in Marlon Brando's memoir (*Brando: Songs My Mother Taught Me*) that since childhood, he felt worthless. He said he learned that self-perception from his parents. That squares with my impression that most often it is mom and dad that get it across to us that we're worthless, not that they consciously mean to do that.

I've decided that what, most likely, accounts for rejection hook problems is an early-in-life learning, probably from your parents, that you are worthless, useless to anybody, and that your job in life is to get people to change their impression of you. In fact, you should seek out people and contexts where you can do that. Looking back on my life, I see that I put myself in positions where, really, I didn't belong, didn't fit, wasn't wanted, and where the prime thrust of my efforts understandably, predictably, was trying to get approval and acceptance when it wasn't there and shouldn't have been there. I'm thinking of the sports teams I played on, a girl in high school I pursued, a teaching career I went into (students don't take to me), and sadly, someone I married. As could be expected, I was unsuccessful in winning anyone over any of these people, but I somehow had the idea that I had to. While I am way better than I

was, I still think my job is, to use the title of one of the thoughts, trying to charm the uninterested.

What to do.

Use your rational mind to figure out what's going on. Put words to it: "Oh, I get what's going on!"

Commit to taking charge of it: "Here's what I'm going to do about it."

And then, decision by decision, action by action, take charge of it. The basic strategy: in the face of rejection, GO THE OTHER WAY! Not toward it; away from it!!

The big thing, do something about the pervasive feeling of worthlessness. I won't go into that here. Re-read the December, 2019 "What About Bob?" thought.

Another specific suggestion, read the April, 2014 thought "On Toxic People" and the 2016 writing, "Blacks as Emotional Abusers of Whites: The Exploration of a Possibility." Those two make the point that a rejection hook can get you into some pathological circumstances.

Also, look over "On Self-Abuse." Trying and failing to get somebody to love you who really isn't into you, or whatever it is, can get you turning to temporary quick fixes that compound your problem.

Beyond that, selectively read the material I've listed above and think about it.

What it all comes down to is, first of all, setting higher standards for yourself: "I'm not going to spend my life expending energy to people who don't affirm and uplift me!"

And finding that place in your being—call it your conscious self—that can direct your goals and actions rather than the "this is who I am" physical sensations, thoughts, and images that would do it if you didn't take charge. By "conscious self," I mean the part of you that is attending to this screen right now. Take a moment and ask yourself, "Who is reading this?" and bring your attention to who/what that is. That is you. It is the same you that was looking at the world at four and eleven and twenty, and it will always be you

until the moment you enter oblivion for eternity—eight-five, however long you live, it will always be the same you. That’s what has to get in charge of your life. That is what has to direct your mind to come up with goals and actions other than, as I put it in one thought, ways to try to get somebody to see you as an “Impressive” who isn’t impressed at all with you. That is what is going to keep you from biting at bait that will get you reeled in until you die.