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NO, BUT REALLY, WHAT EVEN ARE DADDY ISSUES?

They say to write about what you know, and I know *daddy issues*—or so I thought.

My desire to identify with this label came from my firsthand experience with *Daddy Dearest* but also from misunderstanding a term that has been so trivialized that it has almost lost its meaning, reduced to nothing more than a punchline.



From a young age, I felt the growing estrangement between my father and me. The man I once saw as my hero suddenly stopped showing up—in more ways than one. I swallowed my jealousy and rolled my eyes at the cliché that a girl's first love is her father, the supposed blueprint for her future relationships. *Ugh.*

Still, I couldn't help but feel like I was part of a special club when I listened to The Neighbourhood's song *Daddy Issues*, with lyrics like: "*I'd run away and hide with you, I know that you got daddy issues and I do too.*" Or when I thought I was asserting my sexuality singing along to Lana Del Rey's deep cut *Be My Daddy*: "*If you're seeking heaven, then you wanna come and get it, get it. You can be my daddy tonight.*" Mind you, these aren't even the worst lyrics—the song flirts with a *Lolita*-esque theme.

Sitting on your lap, singing you my song
Ooh ooh ooh got a lollipop
I'll give you some
All for you you you you you you

You can be my daddy tonight-night-night
I'm neon phosphorescent
Open like a Christmas present, oh
You can be my daddy tonight-night-night
If you're seeking heaven
Then you wanna come and get it, get it
You can be my daddy tonight-night-night

It wasn't until recently that I started paying attention to the *Daddy Issues* label I so willingly gave myself. Why was I so eager to expose myself in this way? I don't even have an inclination to date older men—never have. Nor do I want to call anyone *Daddy*, for that matter. Naturally, there's more to it. But where do these ideas about *girls with daddy issues* come from? My answer, as it often is: *the media*.

THE MEDIA AND THE FETISHIZATION OF DADDY ISSUES

The media isn't inherently bad—we turn to movies, books, and music to understand the complexities of the human experience. But for most of history, media has been dominated by white men. So it's no surprise that we find fetishized stereotypes that perpetuate the exploitation of women.

It also isn't surprising that so many women label themselves as *girls with daddy issues*. After all, sex is currency. The trope of the *damaged girl with a troubled past* is appealing to men because it makes her seem *exciting*, sexually adventurous, but most importantly—desperate for male validation.



In an age where women are actively resisting societal norms imposed by men, the *girl with daddy issues* is still the outlier—the unicorn. She is seen as someone who will do anything for attention, someone men can mold. And because men have deemed this type of woman desirable, many of us have subconsciously leaned into the stereotype, proudly wearing the label like a badge of honor.

In reality, this all points to vulnerability and low self-esteem, often stemming from an inability to form secure attachments at a young age. My goal here is to shed light on the misogynistic nature of terms we've accepted for so long that we've stopped questioning them. The blame almost always falls on the *girl*—rarely on the men who take advantage of her.

While I am referring to binary gender roles, I acknowledge that this experience is not exclusive to women. However, as someone who identifies as She/Her, I can only speak to my own experience.

CASSIE HOWARD AND THE PRICE OF SEX AS CURRENCY

One character that embodies this fetishized *daddy issues* narrative is Cassie Howard from *Euphoria*. Before most of us realized that Sam Levinson might not have the best interests of female representation at heart—and before the car crash that was Season 2—Cassie was a fan favourite.

In her dedicated episode, we learn that Cassie's father abandoned their family when she was young, laying the foundation for her *daddy issues* and dysfunctional relationships. She was sexualized from an early age—even by her own family—which led her to believe that her worth was tied to her desirability.

One of the first things we hear about Cassie, narrated by Rue, is: “*She almost always said yes, even though it didn't always make her feel good.*”

Cassie humiliates herself in search of validation, even at the expense of her closest friendships—like when she started dating her best friend's abusive ex, Nate. It's a *rigged* game. She will always be reduced to an object because of her looks, yet she is punished for *giving it up*, while the men she sleeps with gain *clout* by showing her nudes to their friends.

This is *sex as currency* in action. Cassie believes her body is all she has to offer, and she desperately seeks intimacy in return. But the cruel irony is that the more she gives, the less valuable she becomes in the eyes of the men around her.

Of course, the fetishization of her character isn't just a result of Cassie's trauma—it's Levinson's vision. While her story explores the real consequences of parental abandonment, *Euphoria* blurs the line between portrayal and exploitation. Levinson makes us complicit in Cassie's objectification by making her the most nude character in the entire series.

DADDY ISSUES, BDSM, AND THE POWER IMBALANCE

The *Daddy Issues* trope doesn't just justify why a woman might be attracted to older men—it's also deeply intertwined with BDSM.

Take Lee Holloway, the protagonist of *Secretary* (2002). She has an alcoholic father and a dysfunctional home life—so, naturally, she has *daddy issues*. The film begins with Lee leaving a mental institution for self-harm. She later falls in love with her boss after he *spanks* her, and they

enter a dom/sub relationship. While the film presents a *happy ending*, many modern viewers might see it differently.

This isn't about kink-shaming—women should have the right to explore their sexuality however they choose. But in *Secretary*, Lee is not in a stable mental state, and her willingness to submit to a man in a position of power over her should be seen as a red flag, not an empowering moment.



THE DOUBLE STANDARD OF DADDY ISSUES

While men with *mommy issues* are often portrayed as powerful (*Oedipus*, *Luke Skywalker*, *Indiana Jones*, *Spider-Man*), women with *daddy issues* are framed as weak, submissive, and broken.

Even in horror films, the outcomes differ—men with *mommy issues* (*Psycho*, *Hereditary*) resort to violence against women, while *girls with daddy issues* are doomed to a lifetime of chasing male approval. Buzzwords like *sex-positive feminism* and *taking back one's power* can sometimes blur the line between female subordination and liberation. So when it comes to *daddy issues*, we should ask ourselves—why are we so eager to embrace a label that defines us as broken, while men get to be heroes?

