



Men and Mothers: The Lifelong Struggle of Sons and Their Mothers

By Hendrika C. Freud

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Not all men feel rivalry with their fathers to vie for the love of their mothers. In some families the mother becomes the central figure for her son. The father is excluded or excludes himself. He does not come between mother and son. The main thesis of this book is that in these cases fantasies of matricide replace patricide. Men develop their male gender identity by being permitted to separate from their mother early on. When a man does not resolve his infantile tie to his mother he risks remaining in a passive and/or dependent position towards her. Over-identification with the mother might ensue, hampering heterosexual masculine development. Clinical vignettes and quotes from the work of Marcel Proust illustrate the author's point.

Mothers who seek emotional support by binding their sons too closely can become seductive towards them. The child is inclined to try to satisfy the emotional needs of his mother. He fears rejection if he asserts his independence instead of complying. A silent pact between mother and son leads to denial of differences, specifically between gender and generation. The author calls this mother-son bond, from which aggression has been banned: "the symbiotic illusion". Suppressed hatred will seek alternative routes of expression: a son might avoid all intimacy with women or he might develop a sexual perversion. Perverse sexual scenarios then become a prerequisite in order to save potency while functioning heterosexually.

Even without this lifelong struggle, most readers will recognize traits of themselves or their partners in this book, as the particular elucidates the general.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This fascinating book is an in-depth study of the complex bond which develops between mother and son, and of the perverse landscapes that can emerge from this relationship. The exploration of the complementary views on this theme - shared by Freud and Proust - is also of great interest and originality. We are all grateful for this thoughtful reflection which, without overlooking the father, further investigates the role of the mother in the understanding of both perversion and homosexuality. This book makes a very important contribution to the advancement of psychoanalytic theory and practice." (Dr Emanuela Quagliata, psychoanalyst, Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist)

"The important topic of male sexuality – in its many variations – and the link to a highly ambivalent bond to the maternal figure are lucidly discussed in this book. The author's references to her clinical work and to literature, particularly Proust, are very interesting. This book can greatly help professionals and laypeople to understand the compelling need, potential value, and tragic limitations of atypical or perverse fantasies and behaviour." (Dr Paola Mariotti, psychoanalyst and author of The Maternal Lineage: Identification, Desire, and Transgenerational Issues)

About the Author

Hendrika C. Freud a psychoanalyst and a member of The International Psychoanalytic Association and Association for Child Psychoanalysis. She is a teacher, supervisor and training analyst of the Dutch Psychoanalytic Society and has been in private practice for nearly fifty years.

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