

Book Reviews

The Mother-Daughter Puzzle: A New Generational Understanding of the Mother-Daughter Relationship

Rosjke Hasseldine

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REVIEWED BY GILLIAN M.E. ALBAN

This book offers a road-map enabling readers to learn in what ways gender and generational relationships have gone off track, and suggestions regarding how to get back on the road complete with one's psyche, mind and relationships in working order. Hasseldine makes no concessions to traditional gender perceptions that silence women and their emotional needs. Nor does she tolerate the general mother blame that permeates our societies, placing the new generation's needs over the wholeness and completeness of those who have gone before and suffered. She asserts that the relationships between mothers and daughters are entirely central to a healthy life not only for women, but also for society as a whole. Her methodology offers a series of exploratory puzzles and straightforward diagrams for the reader to work through. She proposes that when women as daughters investigate and attempt to understand the history of their family relationships, this frequently reveals a history of abuse that women have inherited from their predecessors. Gaining insight into such fraught histories will enable the younger generation to empathise with the oppression of their mothers and grandmothers. At this point Hasseldine unfolds the story of her own mother's abuse of her, and her own generous blessing on her mother, despite the fact that she has apparently been unable to heal her fraught relationship with her mother.

She suggests that women have so frequently inherited a mantle of silence which gags their free expression, together with women's persistent enslavement within the traditional "Culture of Female Service." Perpetuating a system of women's servicing the needs of others, their own needs remain permanently on hold.

Rosjke Hasseldine is an internationally innovative psychotherapist working within the under-explored and under-valued key relationships between mothers and daughters. She expresses her frustration with attempting to solve women's issues, and feminism's struggles to instigate change in society, when we understand so little of the generational damage that has occurred between generations of women. She enlightens her reader regarding how women have been abused and gagged, leading to an endless cycle of female frustration, with women trapped and unable to voice their needs. Through the pertinent use of illustrations of problematic relationships, and demonstrating her own diagrammatic steps of self-analysis and enquiry into family history, she offers practical steps to enable women to break free of crushing relationships to end continuing under-achievement. Her questionnaires include such topics as "How emotionally Hungry are you?" and "How Strong is your Mother and Adult-Daughter Relationship?" while showing the reader how to draw their own family tree or genogram, complete with relevant lived experiences, in order to trace the patterns of frustration and abuse that may have dogged their foremothers. From this point of insight, she suggests methods devoted to changing such circularly destructive cycles, thereby empowering her clients to free themselves of the debilitating patterns of the past that have thwarted their family's inter-personal relationships.

This book is based on Hasseldine's extensive experience of working with clients throughout the world through their problematic relationships. Her personal legacy is of a generational journey traced all the way from Holland to New Zealand to England and finally America, indicating the universality and hence the relevance of her experience and treatment. Her methods enable her readers to empower themselves as independent and inter-caring human beings, rather than remaining doomed to be female doormats. Backed up with her extensive research, this book offers clues as to why feminism so frequently remains helpless at solving women's problems. She suggests that until we investigate the primal relationship between mother and daughter (and whether we actually have daughters or not, all women are daughters), then we cannot solve the problems of women in the world. I highly recommend Hasseldine's book and intend to instigate this programme myself where I can.