



The New Don't Blame Mother: Mending the Mother-Daughter Relationship

By Paula Caplan

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

At least since Freud, mothers have borne the brunt of blame for many of their family members' personal problems, defects and failures. But even cynics may be stunned by Caplan's documentation of a mother who was labeled "hysterical" and lost custody of her children after she accused their father of sexually abusing them. Many such injustices are highlighted in this edition, substantially revised from the 1988 original, building a solid case for Caplan's claim of widespread "mother-blaming." As cultural scapegoats, mothers are often viewed and treated by influential "experts" as unstable, emotionally needy, selflessly giving, smothering and tyrannically powerful. Caplan outlines 10 pervasive myths wherein all mothers are deemed either "perfect" or "bad," a double bind perhaps best illustrated by the myth that both working and stay-at-home moms are somehow "wrong." Fathers are in for a bit of culpability here, but Caplan doesn't offer many solutions for the problems that people often blame on their mothers. Instead, she concentrates on political arguments and rehabilitating the mother-daughter relationship itself. She encourages the daughter to "demythologize" her mother and forge an alliance by, among other things, drawing out her mother's life story and finding qualities to respect in her. Though some of the author's suggestions, including her "expressive training" in which mothers and daughters resolve problems through role-playing, may be simplistic, Caplan effectively articulates an indisputable societal offense and offers the first steps toward its remedy. (May)

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From Library Journal

In this revision of her 1989 book of the same title, Caplan, a clinical and research psychologist, examines the pervasiveness of mother-blame in society and identifies ten myths surrounding motherhood (e.g., "good mothers" don't get angry). She takes an especially close look at the role psychologists and therapists have played in promoting these myths. The book's second half makes suggestions for improving relationships between mothers and adult daughters through honest communication and a rejection of the myths. Certainly, readers will question some of Caplan's views of women and mothers: she seems to overlook many healthy, thriving mother-daughter relationships, and not all readers will agree that the myth of male superiority is as widespread as the author suggests. Nevertheless, this work is well researched, with extensive notes and suggestions for improving relationships. Recommended for public libraries.

-Kay Brodie, Chesapeake Coll., Wye Mills, MD

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Review

"The best way to bond with your mother.."

-Self Magazine, July 2001

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