

SUSAN E. SCHWARTZ

THE ABSENT FATHER EFFECT ON DAUGHTERS

Father Desire, Father Wounds



ROUTLEDGE



The Absent Father Effect on Daughters

The Absent Father Effect on Daughters investigates the impact of absent – physically or emotionally – and inadequate fathers on the lives and psyches of their daughters through the perspective of Jungian analytical psychology. This book tells the stories of daughters who describe the insecurity of self, the splintering and disintegration of the personality and the silencing of voice.

Issues of fathers and daughters reach to the intra-psychoic depths and archetypal roots, to issues of self and culture, both personal and collective. Susan E. Schwartz illustrates the maladies and disappointments of daughters who lack a father figure and incorporates clinical examples describing how daughters can break out of idealizations, betrayals, abandonments and losses to move towards repair and renewal. The book takes an interdisciplinary approach, expanding and elucidating Jungian concepts through dreams, personal stories, fairy tales and the poetry of Sylvia Plath, along with psychoanalytic theory, including André Green's 'dead father effect' and Julia Kristeva's theories on women and the body as abject.

Examining daughters both personally and collectively affected by the lack of a father, *The Absent Father Effect on Daughters* is highly relevant for those wanting to understand the complex dynamics of daughters and fathers to become their authentic selves. It will be essential reading for anyone seeking understanding, analytical and depth psychologists, other therapy professionals, academics and students with Jungian and post-Jungian interests.

Susan E. Schwartz is a Jungian analyst and clinical psychologist in Arizona, USA. As a member of the International Association of Analytical Psychology she has taught and presented at conferences and workshops in the United States and worldwide. She has several articles and book chapters on these aspects of Jungian psychology. Her website is www.susanschwarzphd.com.

‘Truly something new and original on the daughter–father connection. Schwartz explains how and why daughters remain enmeshed with fathers whom, for whatever reason, have been less than good-enough. There is no demonization; rather, an exquisite compassion shines through. Whilst she writes as a clinician – and a really good one, as her account of working with dreams shows – Schwartz offers something that, by definition really, applies to every woman and the majority of men who will read it.’

– **Andrew Samuels**, author of *The Plural Psyche: Personality, Morality and the Father* and editor of *The Father: Contemporary Jungian Perspectives*

‘How do you have an incest fantasy about someone who isn’t there; or if they are, they terrify? How do you mourn the loss of someone you never knew, of a relationship you never had? Drawing on her life’s work as a clinician, the author deftly goes to the heart of trauma in the father-daughter relationship: showing how connecting to the archetypal father and collective experience a healing can begin.’

– **Dale Mathers**, Jungian analyst, UK

‘Susan Schwartz has written a much-needed book about fathers and daughters, one that addresses the psychic damage of the “emotionally absent and deadened father”, which “affects a daughter’s body, mind and soul”. With compassion, wisdom and a Jungian theoretical and clinical understanding of the psyche, Schwartz places this psychological dilemma in a wider context of psychoanalysis and the depth psychologies. Her clinical examples are apt and her passionate encouragement for us to understand this issue is inspiring.’

– **Margaret Klenck**, MDiv, LP, Jungian analyst and past president of the Jungian Psychoanalytic Association, New York, USA

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Sublime and severe, the rock is supremely dangerous; for it takes whatever it wants and offers no explanation. It is power and might without love and grace; the god of an old testament, the Ancient of Days.

Gillian Rose, *Love's Work* (1996, pp. 48–49)



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Credits

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Introduction

This is a love story, but an unrequited one. It is about the needs a daughter has for a father figure, made more prominent and painful when he is absent. A daughter is left to cope in countless ways with the difficulties encountered when her father is not there. The presence of the father's absence affects a daughter's body, mind and soul. I contend it is *this presence of absence* that is most harmful. Additionally, absence is accentuated because it implies a space to be filled and the need to attend to the lack. Absence is also significantly 'a call for the potential of the positive to emerge ... it allows for new thought and fresh experience' (Kohon, 1999, pp. 114–15). For the many reasons detailed throughout this book, the father is an important aspect of the psyche and significant for development of a daughter's psychological and physical life expressed personally and culturally. 'The father is decisive in the destiny of the individual' (Jung, 1961, p. 303). Jung's quote reminds us of the value of a loving father for a daughter's growth.

This book develops the idea that overidentification with or ignorance of the absent father has serious ramifications. A daughter can become unconscious and inwardly empty, without connection to herself. Here, I pay specific attention to the absent father–daughter dynamics, even though other factors affect her development, such as her mother, culture and learned gender roles and styles. Of note is that when there is no father, a daughter is left wondering if she is valued and worthy of love from herself and others. When her father cannot see, regard or be with her, she has a hole in her heart; the threads of her personality rupture. She is placed on the journey to repair and join the missing pieces together. Consider Sarah Kofman's words on the 'pathos of distance':

which separates two types of life that have always already been in existence: the one flourishing and superabundant, projecting its own excess into things and embellishing them; the other degenerate, able only to impoverish the world by reducing it to the narrow and ugly measure of the concept, in order to spite itself and out of resentment toward life.

(Kofman, 1994, p. 20)

The situation of a father's absence implies the question of how a father dreams of his daughter. What does he wish for her? When absent, he has not realized her needs for good attachment or how he might damage her by his withdrawal. This lack of regard creates delicate areas within the daughter punctuated with various psychological impasses. Because she does not appear in his vision, she receives no reflection from him, impeding her self-development.

I explore this topic from the perspective of Jungian analytical psychology with its particular in-depth approach to the personality. This includes the unconscious made apparent in father complexes, archetypes and symbols appearing in a daughter's life and dreams. Each of these aspects reveals the origins of fathers and daughters, the potentials and paradoxes, the issues and problems and their release and resolution. How the father is imagined and perceived comes to us through books, media of all kinds, mythology, fairy tales, movies and literature. Depending on each culture and era, the father takes on somewhat different roles and images that reflect his presence in our collective and personal psyches.

This book evolved from being privy to the numerous stories told in Jungian analytical psychotherapy by daughters with absent fathers. It derived from colleagues, friends and personal experiences of the deprivation suffered without a father's love and care. These daughters emoted the needs, longings and wishes for the presence of a good father. This common and necessary desire has sadly gone unmet through generations. The need for the love of a father is made more painful and apparent by its absence and loss. The accompanying melancholy and the residual lack remain palpable. Here I trace the array of feelings and the effects on women bonded to the father not there.

The topics range from the negative father complex, to the daddy's girl or the puella archetype and narcissism, as interpreted in Jungian analytical psychology. The book also explores other approaches to the absent father, including the perspectives of French psychoanalyst André Green on the dead father effect, British Jungian analyst Hester Solomon on the 'as-if' personality and the body collapse in autoimmune disease applied to the theory of abjection from French psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva. Of interest to therapy professionals is a chapter addressing issues of transference/countertransference and the reflective, symbolic and transcendent functions providing healing.

The book has relevance for those wanting to understand the complex dynamics of daughters and fathers affecting personality development and the capacity to be authentically true to one's self. Each of the chapters addresses multiple responses to a father's absence, and each personal story has collective repercussions. The focus is on daughters and fathers to help shed light not only on the symptoms and problems but also on the treatment and hope. The chapters contain composite examples of daughter narratives and their subsequent journey through dreams, interior reflections and relationships. This book is composed of their stories and the emotional events encountered in therapy along the way to self-discovery. The narrations allow readers to identify with the private and intimate examples of the obstacles expressing life tensions and challenges and the possibilities for

development. Interspersed are quotes from a variety of writers. As Adam Phillips reminds us: ‘Our passionate selves are our best selves: and a passionate life is only possible, by definition, if we can make our passions known: to ourselves ... There can be no passion – without representation. ... Passion entails circulation and exchange’ (Phillips, 1999, p. 166).

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The parallax

We hear endlessly all around us that unvarying sound which is not an echo from without, but the resonance of a vibration from within.

Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way* (1922, p. 93)

A *parallax*, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a word referring to the apparent displacement and change in the position of an object relative to other objects. What changes is the observer's sight directed towards the object. The word originates from the Greek and the French meaning to change, exchange and also to include other viewpoints. This exploration is a window through which to perceive the father absence, a parallax focusing on the grimmer perspectives. These narrations are meant to evoke, to escape the fetters and the devitalizing depression, and subsequently to bring out self-assertion and creation. They illustrate and reveal the complicated map of the psyche. The dynamics form a kaleidoscope of images revealing disturbances of the soul, the misalignments and the repair.

To find her centre a daughter has to turn inwards to find her life story. The parallax of her perspectives alters by recognizing the disturbances from the absent father. Sifting through and peeling off the layers of time, learned responses, the wishes covering reality takes a long time. Through all this the daughter begins to feel, think, reflect and discover herself.

Personal and collective reflections open the wounds to reveal damages and patterns, allowing the daughter to discover what can be transformed. My emphasis in this book is on the exploration of psychological life affected by the absent father personally and collectively. Focus on the daughter herself is a parallax, a twist and a purposeful change of emphasis. The daughter is one of the female archetypes in need of exploration (Porterfield, Polette, & Baumlin, 2009, p. 4) to foster individual and collective healing. To unravel the issues caused by father absence, the daughter recollects what was lost and damaged. Personally, culturally and psychologically a daughter finds her way through the generations of cumulative wounds, losses and absences, and, in the process, diverges from her father's way onto her own way.

A myth of betrayal

In the ancient Greek myth of Iphigenia, her father, Agamemnon, in essence sacrificed her to get a good wind to sail to the Trojan War. While the Greek army was preparing to set sail for Troy, Agamemnon killed a sacred deer, angering the goddess Artemis. Artemis calmed all winds, so the ships could not set sail. The seer Calchas informed Agamemnon that to appease the goddess he had to sacrifice Iphigenia. Reluctant at first, Agamemnon was forced in the end to agree. He lied to his daughter and his wife, saying that Iphigenia was to marry Achilles before they left. The mother and daughter happily went to the port of Aulis, only to discover the horrible truth. Achilles, unaware his name had been used in this lie, tried to prevent the sacrifice. Iphigenia then decided to sacrifice herself in honour and of her own volition. The most popular version of what happened afterwards is that at the moment of sacrifice Artemis substituted a deer for Iphigenia and the seer Calchas, who was the only witness, remained silent. Artemis brought Iphigenia to the city of Tauris where she then became the goddess's priestess.

This myth brings forth the archetypal story of betrayal by a father using his daughter for his benefit, resulting in her demise. She is damaged by her father's personal greed and need for glory. Like so many stories and realities, it reveals one of the many iterations of the daughter betrayed, abandoned and killed, be it physically, as in this story, or psychologically.

From childhood we create complex, ongoing narratives from words, body language, emotions, images, rituals and interactions to articulate our life. Psychic growth occurs in relation to a father and a daughter's experiences with him. When a father is absent, he neglects the relationship with his daughter. He becomes associated with yearning, sadness, frustrated love, anger and rage, oppression and desire. These contradictory feelings cause stress to body and soul, and from this comes the urgent need for the daughter to find herself.

The emphasis here is on the father's betrayal, his breaking of the good paternal promise, the deprivation of support and love and its effects on the daughter's mind, body and love for self and other. 'The primary context in which betrayal is experienced is the family, for it is there that the first love pact is sealed, a pact that menaces and at the same time makes possible individual psychological birth' (Carotenuto, 2015, p. 43). An absent father oppresses to the extent he is and is not there. His absence contributes to a self-image as inadequate, infantile and dutiful. The daughter might also be ambivalent about her life, angry and depressed.

The father is supposed to foster emotional life and value but does not. What the daughter gets instead of love is emptiness which she can neither securely attach to nor separate from. This is often accompanied by masochistic and unloving attitudes, mostly turned onto herself. The result is confusion and denial of autonomy. She is, in effect, imprisoned with the absent father and in this place remains unconscious. The disturbance caused by an absent father early in life can set up a daughter to hate and distance herself not only from him but also from other males and be unable to access the range of the masculine and the feminine within herself.

Many daughters are raised on the myth of the daughter–father romance. But is this myth really true? Why has this story been accepted as true even when a father has rarely been present? Remaining faithful to the myth of the father who rules and has authority has ramifications as the daughter renounces the meaning for her existence (Carotenuto, 2015, p. 52). The absence of a father sets a daughter up for anguish and disappointment, often killing her creativity and life force. Her endeavours are stamped with depression, anxiety and disturbed relationships.

Aurora dreamt there was a line of men in hats and suits. Her father was with them at a distance from her. The men had cameras from her father's era. She could go with them. However, she noticed another man dressed in modern clothes, sitting on the side of the road at a table full of lovely things from the father's era. He suggested she sit down, and as she did so he gave her an iPhone filled with photos of her current home, the area across the street and one of her favourite women poets.

As we discussed the dream, Aurora did not think to associate the men with her father. Although this might be an obvious association, she had been so hurt by him and cruelly rejected she had erased all else but the dull reaction of duty.

The dream brought up memories of his emotional stoicism and lack of love or kindness. Her father was absent in quite radical ways, even bordering on the perverse in his lack of attention. Out in the world he was lauded and the centre of attention, a quite charismatic man. At home, however, he was mean and selfish, a patriarchal presence, stern, demanding, forbidding, rarely present, filled with rules of how to be, pointing out how she fell short. The contrast was confusing, and she could tell no one how she suffered his lack of love. Who would believe her? Moreover, he ignored her or his comments to her were derisive. Nothing she did gained any good recognition. Yet she anticipated his coming home when he did. He had an extensive library, and she snuck out the books she loved to read. She did not tell him because she knew she would be punished or put down. Yet he was better than her mother who ignored her altogether.

In the dream the man by the roadside, although sitting down with a cane and seemingly tired, had lovely things from the father's era. She could take a picture with the iPhone, a modern camera, and see the surroundings from her viewpoint. She did not have to go the father's way, although the dream paradoxically recognized some value there. Perhaps she had yet to discover the value as it had been obstructed by his abrupt, cold and dismissive manner towards her. Currently she was at a crossroads: a relationship had ended, her career was in question, physical issues needed attention. The dream and her associations illustrated the divergence from the father, his rules and authoritarianism. Had she, however, retained an unconscious identification with him although she had determined to be otherwise?

Her primary relationship for many years was with someone equally distant and unemotional, someone who wanted things done but who expressed little warmth and connection. She had to keep proving her worth. She did not get her needs met, but then she was not in touch with them. She had no place to get care. Long ago she had learned not to go to her father for anything as he would just be cold and