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MY FATHER BEFORE ME

How Fathers and Sons Influence Each Other Throughout Their Lives

by MICHAEL J. DIAMOND

The father/son relationship has been downplayed and understudied since the Industrial Revolution as psychologists, psychoanalysts, novelists and anthropologists have focused on what was thought to be the more essential relationship: that between mother and child. But in recent years there has been increasing interest in the ways in which fathers interact with their sons, and how that relationship, as it evolves, affects the new father's relationship with both his own father and himself.

In **MY FATHER BEFORE ME** [W.W. Norton & Company; February, 2007; \$24.95 cloth], well-known psychoanalyst and clinical psychologist Michael J. Diamond takes a closer look at fathers and sons, firmly establishing fatherhood as an essential event for the emotional and intellectual development of all the men in a family while providing a model for understanding the intricacies of the father-son bond.

As Diamond explains in his profound and groundbreaking book, "becoming a father is a lengthy, often subtle, and highly complex process of development." This accessible and thought-provoking book rich in detail draws on Diamond's long experience with patients who are grappling with stunted emotions that are often blamed on their mothers, and demonstrates how the resolution of these emotional difficulties enables men to think and behave more constructively as fathers.

The effects run in a continuum up and down the family: as a man becomes a father, he begins to reassess his experiences with his own father, often realizing that points of sharp conflict and emotional turmoil stem more from methods of coping or adjusting to fatherhood rather than indicating some deeper psychological problem. Many men, later in life, find ways to reconcile with their fathers as they watch their own sons move through the natural stages of development.

Fatherhood also offers men a chance to accept and integrate disparate sides of themselves into a more inclusive, flexible and yet cohesive sense of manliness, rather than repressing the emotional or physical aspects of their relationships that don't seem to fit into the traditional, rigid notions of manhood.

MY FATHER BEFORE ME neatly sets the stage for this progression, describing – with the help of real-world cases from Diamond’s clinical practice and personal experience – the various stages of differentiation each man goes through, from the initial realization as an infant that he is separate from his mother, to the hero-worship of his father that accompanies the preteen years, to disillusionment as he moves into manhood, to the broader understanding and acceptance that can arise when his own children are born.

Diamond also shows how confronting the final moment of individuation – death – is part of the task of being a father and a son, and he explains how a healthy and honest approach to the final chapters of life can help ensure a familial sense of continuity and the passing on of a true legacy.

Being a father – becoming a father – is no simple task. It does not end, as some believed in the past, with conception. It is a complex and evolving lifelong relationship that repeatedly requires men to access parts of themselves they previously ignored or purposefully shut out. As Diamond explains in detail, fathers and sons are uniquely positioned to help one another through each of life’s major transitions – and recognition of the phases of the process, and knowledge of strategies for confronting and expressing fears, doubts and difficult emotions, makes men better fathers, better sons and better partners.

Concise, approachable and scholarly, **MY FATHER BEFORE ME** is an important book that rounds out the traditional literature on familial interaction as well as the modern concept of what it means to be a man. Diamond’s book will encourage and empower men to guide and mentor their sons – and daughters – by helping them regulate their emotions, achieve mastery, appreciate others’ uniqueness, value connections as well as independence, and take on the challenges the world at large presents.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Michael J. Diamond is a prominent psychoanalyst and clinical psychologist and was recently named Distinguished Psychoanalyst of the Year by the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research. He lives and practices in Los Angeles.

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