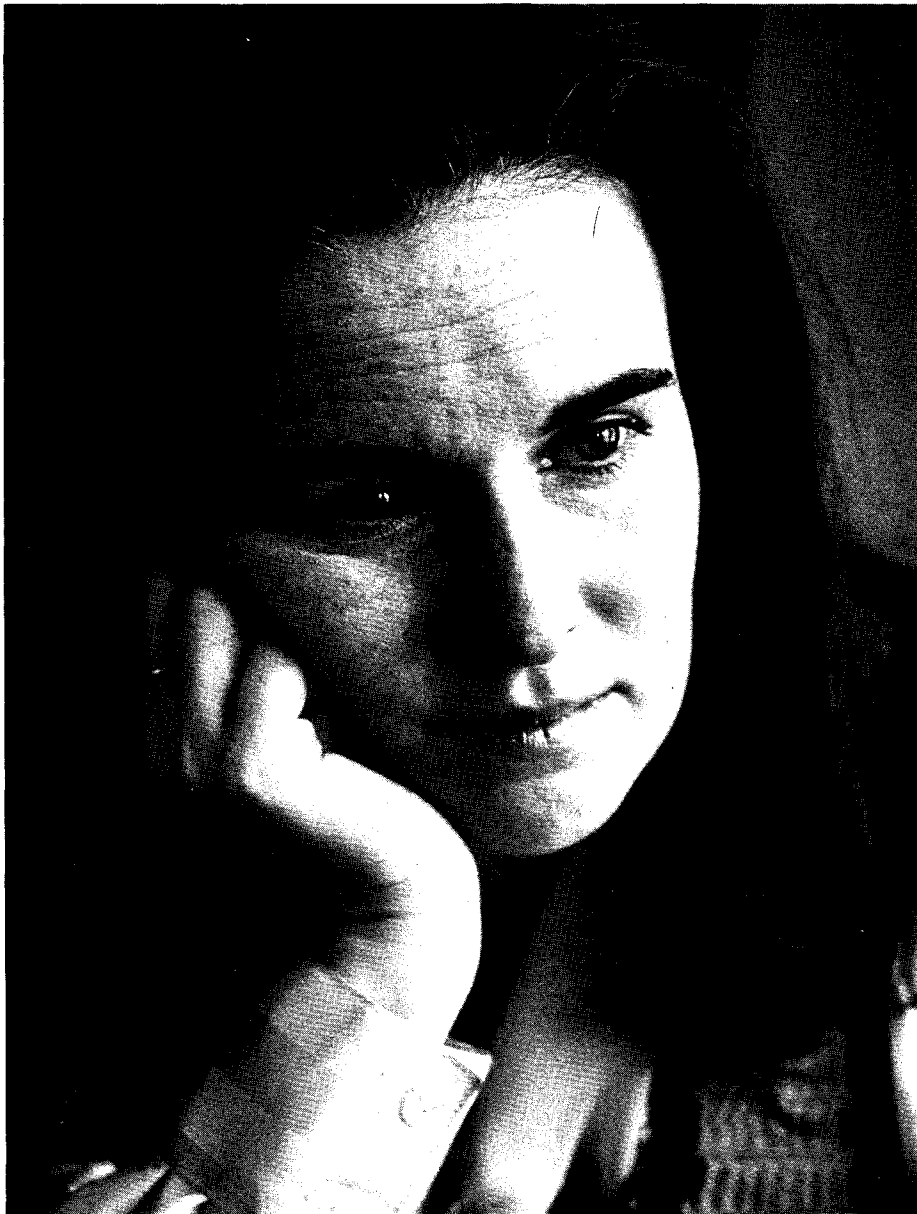


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# A Discovery Workshop for Mothers and Daughters

LANIE MELAMED and  
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Rosemary Sullivan

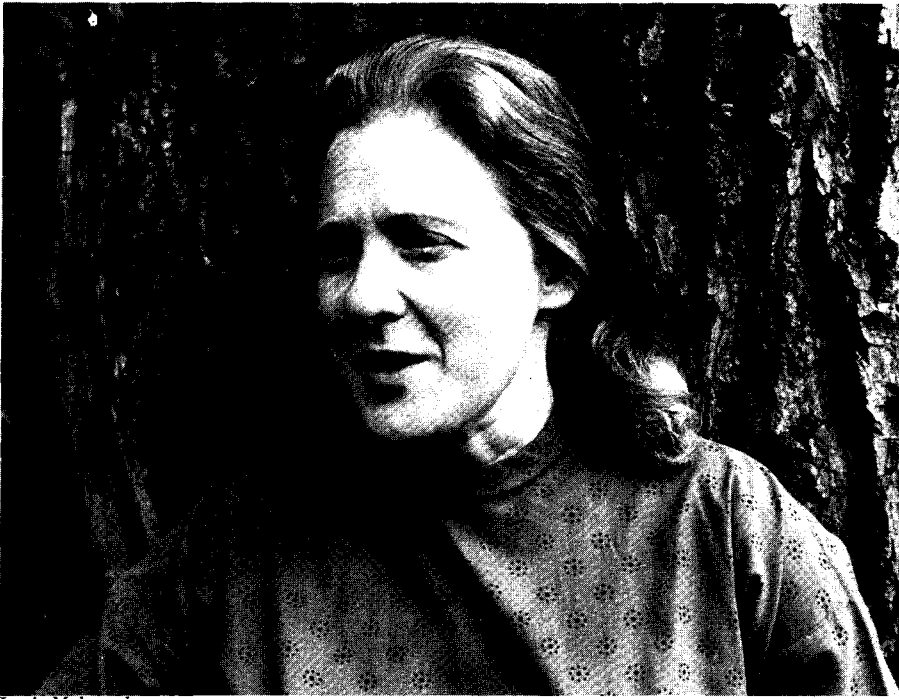
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Description d'un atelier où les mères et les filles peuvent explorer leurs conflits.

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Throughout history, people have been talking about fathers and sons – why has it taken us so long to explore publicly the intricacies of mothers relating to their daughters? Women have talked about this in kitchens, at quilting bees and on the assembly line for years, but only recently has the subject surfaced. About the same time as Nancy Friday's book, *My Mother/My Self* became a bestseller, the two of us began sharing parenting stories. We are both mothers of teenage daughters and have found the relationship trying, painful and frequently joyful. It occurred to us that other women were struggling with similar issues and might want to explore them in a group. Last spring we offered our first workshop at a local community college, followed by another in the fall. The point of the workshop was to create an atmosphere in which mothers and daughters could take time to explore their conflicts and learn how to live with them, if not to resolve them. The workshop consists of one evening and one full day at a local community college. Mothers and daughters are encouraged to attend together to increase awareness of each other's needs and to begin opening up lines of communication. We learned from experience that daughters aged sixteen and over are best able to contribute to and learn from the workshop experience.

During the first evening together we use various methods to help 'break the ice.' For instance we distribute images of women from a variety of magazine clippings and each participant chooses one or two images which best express how she feels about herself as a woman. The next step is to glue the images to a large sheet of paper on one wall, making a 'spontaneous collage.'



Lanie Melamed

When the group assembles each woman introduces herself and explains the image she has chosen. Images are used because they come from (and speak to) the non-rational parts of us. Because they are symbolic and closer to the reality of our unconscious they often reveal hidden parts of our inner selves and permit new insights and understandings.

Sitting in a group, each woman is asked to introduce herself and say why she is at the workshop and what she hopes to gain from the experience. We also share our own reasons for offering the workshop. We participate as mothers who have been faced with the dilemmas, problems and joys of mothering and not as experts with answers.

Next we use a 'spontaneous drawing' exercise to get a deeper look at the issues. People can 'draw' or use magazine photographs to portray in a visual way the experience of the mother-daughter relationship. (We try to avoid using the word 'draw' as drawing denotes 'art' and 'artistic,' and this can be a barrier for many of us.) One side of the paper denotes the experience of being a daughter and the other of being a mother, actual or supposed.

We then break into small groups of three or four people to share what we have done. We stress that sharing is not obligatory and that people need only share what they choose. We do mention that the purpose of disclosure is to learn more about ourselves and others and often by risking a bit we find we have more in common than we think. We encourage questions rather than judgements.

The evening ends as the entire group comes together to share their small group learnings. These often provide the key is-

sues for the following day. Participants are asked to contribute to a pot luck lunch for the following day and to bring some artifact, a poem, a song or an object which has special meaning for them as mothers and/or daughters.

The next morning we begin at 9:30. We ask if there is anything left over from the previous evening that people would like to talk about. One mother said that she had the best talk she had ever had with her daughter the night before. 'If the workshop does nothing else I have already gained enormously.'

We mention again that we aren't here to solve problems but rather to look at shared dilemmas. Most of our preconceived ideas come from outside ourselves, from our mothers and their mothers—from society rather than from our own expressed need. We emphasize that we all have options for change, in spite of external pressures. We take the opportunity to share some of the changes occurring in society that affect us as women.

We illustrate the pyramid of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We explain that our parents were largely concerned with fulfilling physical and safety needs. For most of us this is no longer paramount. We live today in a society that enables us to pay attention to fulfilling 'higher' needs, those related to our own growth and self-actualization. There are new frontiers ahead for which we have few models to follow. We are the pioneers as we create new ways of being women, mothers and daughters. No one is at fault and there are no right answers.

The rest of the morning is spent with mothers in one group and daughters in another. The daughters' group works on

a list of characteristics of the Ideal Mother and the mothers' group compiles one for the Ideal Daughter. Then each individual makes another list, consisting of the obstacles that keep mother or daughter from attaining the 'Ideal.'

The afternoon is spent sharing the lists that were generated in the morning's exercise. Inevitably we become involved in the reasons for some of the items on the lists and the feelings behind the words. This exercise is often the high point of the two days as conflicts become apparent and mothers and daughters begin to talk to each other without anger or blaming.

Some 'pulling together' is done by the facilitators as the day draws to an end. Guidelines for dealing with conflict in interpersonal relationships and for improving communication patterns are suggested. The idea, which the mothers and daughters have already discovered, that other people cannot make us happy, is reinforced. The first step in getting our own needs met is to become aware of them and to begin to take responsibility for ourselves. As long as we play power games with our mothers/daughters nobody wins. By treating each other as separate individuals we begin to erase the roles which keep us apart and to see each other as women who are both strong and weak.

Finally we talk about the importance of remaining flexible and open to change. We end each workshop differently, depending on our sense of what people are feeling and what needs are apparent. And then we hand out a short evaluation with a reading list that is included below.

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For more information on this course please contact: Lanie Melamed at Room 4006, Victoria Campus, Dawson College, 485 McGill Street, Montreal, Quebec, 866-7951 or 672-7360 ext. 249.

#### Mothers/Daughters Reading List

Bachofen, J. *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*. Princeton University Press, 1967.

Briffault, J. *The Mothers*. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1927.

Diner, Helen. *Mothers and Amazons: The first feminine history of culture*. New York: Doubleday, 1973.

Friday, Nancy. *My Mother/My Self*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1977.

Hammer, Signe. *Daughters and Mothers: Mothers and Daughters*. New York: Signet, 1976.

McBrade, Angela Barron. *The Growth and Development of Mothers*. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

Neumann, Erich. *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*. Princeton University Press.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born*. New York: Bantam Books, 1976.

Slater, Philip E. *The Glory of Hera*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1968.