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**Catherine Herriger**  
**The Evil Mother**  
**Why certain women become fat – and remain fat.**  
**The true and shocking causes of female binge eating**

**(Die Böse Mutter)**  
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**Sample Translation by Gina Higgins**

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## **The evil, castrating messages**

How, then, *do* mothers castrate their daughters?

For a “successful” castration by the mother to take place, two big trigger words are crucially important: DEVALUATION and INADEQUACY.

The earlier a person is belittled in terms of their self-image, and thus devalued – by having feelings of personal inadequacy drummed into them – the more enduringly the foundations of a personality will be shaken, and the more destructively their entire concept of life will be shaped.

If it is suggested often enough to a child that it cannot do something, is no good at this particular thing or will never achieve success with it, then that child’s inner conviction will grow – markedly in certain areas of the ego, the centre of inner existence – that its judgement is deficient. The child feels inadequate in the real sense of the word, and therefore will always be dependent on someone else to help them.

Two important aspects of personality fall by the wayside, unable to flourish: pride, and self-esteem. These are essential in order to have pride in one’s self and in one’s own achievements, and to have faith in one’s self and in one’s own personal resources

The messages of inadequacy can also come all wrapped up in love and solicitude. “Leave it, sweetheart, you might hurt yourself... ; “Why don’t you let me do that? I know much better how to do it”; “Be careful, you’re still only little”; “You’d better not do that – remember what happened last time?”, and so on.

In one way or another, whether intended in a loving way or an undermining way, the wings of the child’s personality will, literally, be clipped – the very wings that should actually have afforded the child the possibility of developing sufficient autonomy and self-confidence to strive patiently to progress towards certain goals and, eventually, also to achieve them.

These messages of “I am not OK” sow the seed with the child and from there, all the awareness of apparent inadequacy and worthlessness will spring forth and cause insecurity throughout that person’s life. In direct parallel to this, a degrading feeling of helplessness and dependence grows rampant.

A person can only be dependent if - he or she - has truly come to believe that one is personally deficient to the point of being inferior; that one can trust neither the own judgements or perceptions; and that one will, from then onwards, always be reliant on continual parental supervision (for which, read: control). The longer this situation continues, the more that person will mistake being controlled for a real proof of affection and love.

Those deeply insecure persons integrate this relinquishment of control into their life, and will actively seek out situations where they can put themselves under the guidance of another – they have, after all, been “programmed” to allow their ego to be defined, controlled and governed by others. They have now surrendered all self-determination and the management of their own life – or rather, they were never allowed to be fully capable of assuming those functions in the first place. After all, they know that they count for nothing – and can achieve nothing. A truly terrible feeling!

It is true that every so often those persons in this position will rally against this mute role, against this lack of autonomy, but are unable to muster neither sufficient personal strength nor enough reserves of patience to strike out on new avenues. After a short protest, they soon return to the path that has been carved out for them. There are no sustained attempts at achieving independence, and persistence is just not in their vocabulary. In other words they will, from now

on and for the rest of their life, have a dependent personality structure and, along with it, a character that is prone to addiction. They are castrated in the depths of their personality.

So, when a mother does not want to let go of her daughter because of her own feelings of inferiority, she will clip the wings of her daughter's personality in order to devalue her and maintain her maternal dependency. She is unaware of how this relates back to herself, and cannot see that she is opening the door to a serious addiction for her daughter.

Excessive maternal control and supervision – the first instruments of the castration – enter the frame quietly and softly and have their beginnings in the earliest years of childhood. Only Mummy knows if and when her little girl should be hungry; she insists that potty training be carried out in a certain way; she consistently determines the style and colours of her daughter's clothes, and who her playmates are: in short, she wants to know every last little thing about her daughter's life and to be her confidante. Very early on in life, the little girl learns to accept that Mummy always knows best and that Mummy can, if necessary, be a vindictive control freak and monster.

Quietly, but in every way perceptibly, the message hangs in the air: "Believe me – I'm your mother and I know you inside out. I know your feelings and your capabilities better than you ever will yourself." And so begins a life based on feelings of deficiency.

In our society, obsessed by health and slimness, it is chronically apparent that serious, excessive body weight in a woman is one of the most obvious signs of this programmed state of "I am not ok" and clearly constitutes the most successful of all the maternal messages of inadequacy.

The ever more pronounced scarring of personality, coupled with the loss of any self-esteem whatsoever, results in such an overwhelming accumulation of problems that there is, in any case, barely any room left over to deal with any other, possibly helpful questions. Lovelessly bound up with so many deficiencies, the umbilical cord between mother and daughter remains intact – and the castration is complete!

Constantly in search of a new diet or a new, fast-acting miracle cure, which is then helplessly offered up to a long-since unloved body in an attempt to combat an incomprehensible craving for food; beset from all sides with advice and expectations and bouncing between them like a ball – daughters who have been devalued by their mothers frequently wind up in the dead-end street of tired resignation, chronic illness, depression and suicidal tendencies.

But woe betide any daughter who might instinctively distance herself from a mother who constantly humiliates and belittles her, seeking to forge her own path with the help of alternative attachment figures! Because this is when her very own daughter may, as a result of the mother's own attempts at self-protection, become an opponent or an enemy.

It is even conceivable that when her attempts to devalue, to castrate - to cripple emotionally - have failed, either partially or totally, a deficient mother who feels massively challenged in such a scenario might openly declare war. In this way, unspeakable family dramas can develop, strictly in line with the mother's motto: "If you're not for me, you're against me!" This is what happened in the following sad case of Céline.

## Case study: CÉLINE

Right to the end of my mother's life, I remained the "little tart" to her. Even more bluntly, she usually just called me "Fatty" – she never used my real name. She always stubbornly maintained that I had destroyed her life. I was never able to find out why.

She got migraine attacks just from setting eyes on me; supposedly became dependent on pills; and threw plates of food against the wall, screaming, instead of setting them down on the table. And all just because of me. That is what she said, and I could not understand – still to this day, cannot understand – why a mother would loathe her own daughter to such an extent. I had never done anything to her!

As a child I thought that I was obviously different from everyone else, or at least different from the rest of my family, rather like a cuckoo in the nest – why, otherwise, would my own mother treat me so dismissively, and react to me in such a horribly aggressive way?

My only experience of her behaving lovingly was the way in which she treated my brother, who is two years older than me. He was my mother's avowed favourite, and my father's too, perhaps because he always did everything right. Because of this disparity between us – my brother, the proud swan, and me, the chubby, ugly duckling – no sibling relationship of any kind was ever able to develop between us. We remained like strangers to one another.

Luckily for me there were always nannies around, most of whom were friendly. The last nanny we had was Heide, who stayed with us for several years. For me, she was a real mother substitute – she was always there when I was ill or needed someone to cuddle. I now believe that it was predominantly from her that I learned emotional values such as affection and trust.

Things would become really bad for me whenever Heide was out of the house. There was one other maid, but nobody else who showed me any warmth or affection. And certainly not my father, who in any case just floated along in my mother's wake. Whenever he wasn't just simply ignoring me altogether, he would carp on at me incessantly. He spent most of his time at the office.

Then I started school and, all of a sudden, I had somewhere I could belong – somewhere I felt comfortable. Each day, I couldn't get to school fast enough, but I dreaded weekends and holidays with my family. I had a rough time at home, but I thrived at school.

The subjects taught were exciting, and it was a thrill to have so many classmates. At last I was allowed to be a child, and to play with other children. But this only lasted while I was at school, far away from the reach of my mother. So I searched out and found an increasing number of friends outside the family home and tried, wherever I could, to spread my wings – to pull away from my family, just a little. Of course, this meant that I kept on arriving home late and I would then be punished accordingly. It didn't stop me, of course, and this defiance of mine had the added effect of making my mother even more aggressive towards me.

She began to exert ever more pressure on me and to restrict, demean and control me with increasing force – and she managed to extend this behaviour into the realm of my school life, too. When I was in high school, she informed my teachers how difficult I was and gave them advice on how to deal with me. She hounded me at every turn and I felt that I was literally being spied upon. I searched desperately for some little pockets of freedom, some areas of personal space, but it was futile. Like the wicked witch in a fairytale, my mother would crop up again and again wherever I had imagined myself to be safe.

No wonder, then, that I gradually started having problems with discipline at school. As a result, my parents packed me off to boarding school. The idea was that I might at least learn some

manners there, so that hopefully I'd eventually marry well. But the same happened at boarding school as had happened in high school: I thrived; I felt liberated; I could breathe again; I had friends once more.

Back home after boarding school, my parents forced me into training as a paralegal at my father's law offices. I could see no other option and so had to accept it, but I did also entertain the hope that the family's attitude towards me might have improved in some small way while I had been away.

How wrong I was. The pressure now ratcheted up to the point of being unbearable. By day, I was criticised and humiliated at the office. Nothing I did was ever right, and whenever I *did* manage to achieve something, it didn't even warrant a mention. In the evenings, the whole cycle would start again from scratch at home. I was a failure; a nothing; a nobody.