

# What makes Mama's boy tick?

By Christie Rose, staff writer

**I**N THE CRASHY MOVIE "The Natural" with Robert Redford, one can sit in the Movies at the Prudential and watch a son being shaped and readied for life by his baseball-loving father.

As the movie ends, the scene is recreated. Now the son stands in the same wheat field he once stood in, toasting a baseball at his own male offspring. Mother plays a shadowy role in the screen father's life, and the mother of his son steps away to let him play the dominant role though he was absent in the early years.

While much is written about mother-daughter relationships, the influence of mother upon son, has been long neglected, but recent findings seem to show most mothers don't step back as they may on film.

Ask a man about his mother and he might reply, as one Southfield businessman did, "My mother's love was unquestioning and all-encompassing."

"My reward was in knowing my actions were acceptable. But, my father was difficult to get feedback from and I needed it and I sought it. My father would pull rank and that's the difference."

SOUTHFIELD psychologist, Dr. Gena D'Allesandro says with an appropriate relationship in adolescence with his mother, a son will seek a mate with similar attitudes, attributes, and even sense of humor.

"The song 'I want a Girl Just like the Girl that Married Dear Old Dad' is not

**'My mother's love was unquestioning and all-encompassing. My greatest reward was to know my actions were acceptable. But, my father was difficult to get feedback from and I needed it and I sought it. My father would pull rank and that's the difference.'**

— A Southfield son

far off track," D'Allesandro says. "Basically a daughter will emulate her mother in an emotional as well as cognitive relationship. Her mother is her role model, but the son, on the other hand, has an emotional attitude, seeing her as a love object, but not internalizing her character."

"In the developmental process, there's a detachment."

D'Allesandro says in role identity, a mother is of utmost importance, but for the male child the father ultimately has the decisive effect.

"A fatherless child will seek out a male model," said the doctor, a native Detroit whose three degrees were all earned at Wayne State University.

For Carol Klein, author of several books, the lack of a book on mother-son relationships was a challenge also set out to meet. With more than two years of research, interviews and writing, she produced "Mothers and Sons" published recently by Houghton Mifflin.

Klein paints mothers and sons as part of a complex relationship that is at once intense, passionate and nurturing.

"While I realized that little has been written of mothers and sons, I also perceived a taboo against acknowledging closeness between them. Mothers are often blamed for homosexuality or lack of achievement and there are sexual overtones to being a 'mama's boy,'" she said.

"There's a perceived nervousness and you get the feeling it's unmanly for males to be close to a woman, even mother."

Klein wrote her book to confirm these feelings and confront them as issues. "She explores the relationship from pregnancy through adulthood with interview subjects, from questionnaires, and in studies of famous literary and political figures."

New York born, Klein holds a bachelor's degree in English from Goddard College and a master's

degree in sociology/psychology, also from Goddard.

The author of "Aline," "The Myth of the Happy Child," and "The Single Parent Experience," she teaches writing and women's studies at Goddard, The New School, and other colleges. Also, she counsels women professionally.

Klein contends that though the terms "mama's boy" and "mama's girl" have very different traditional connotations, the common idea that boys take on independence sooner than girls is not true.

Franklin D. Roosevelt was mother-influenced throughout his life, she points out. "The marriage of Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt clearly suffered from his apparent inability to break free of his mother's hold on life."

She also relates how 20 years after World War II when Dwight David Eisenhower's top-secret papers were declassified, it was discovered on dispatches in May, 1944, just weeks be-

fore D-Day, that the general thought of his mother even in the heat of planning an invasion.

The order was for aides to send a Mother's Day greeting to Ida Eisenhower in Kansas. When he was 80, Sigmund Freud wrote to a friend:

"Deeply buried within me there still lives the happy child of Freiberg, the firstborn son of a youthful mother, who received his first indelible impressions from this air, from this soil."

And Henry James, in midlife, sent his mother a letter that began, "Dear Mommy."

MANY MOTHERS overly invest in their sons' achievements, Klein says. "The cliché 'my son, the doctor' is very common, even today. Klein believes it may stem from the fact that a woman couldn't herself become a doctor."

"There are many men who are very energized by a mother's love," she said. "Many men grow up feeling achieving a father's approval was conditional while a mother's love was based on complete acceptance."

"Jimmy Cagney came from a bad home. His dad was a drunk. Only his mother's love made him feel he could conquer adversity."

Klein says this was a difficult book to write, mainly because people have a resistance to dealing with the issue.

She is positive that mothers have an entirely different response to daughters and sons.

"With a daughter, you're reproducing yourself. A son is your biologic opposite and responses are shaped by the culture. There's a special intimacy between a mother and a male child."

"A MOTHER not only shapes some idea of being a man for her son, but helps him identify the female model. In some cultures, Klein says, mothers with female children would keep on having babies until they produced a male, because it was their only way to status."

"We still witness the triumph of having produced a male child," she said. "Look at the difference in announcement cards in stores."

"And still, boys are sent to colleges or better colleges when choices are necessary."

Klein, who has both a son and daughter, says she shares interests with her 25-year-old son who is "interesting and intelligent."

"I call him in Washington, D.C., at his work for answers to political questions," she said, but admits "I wasn't free from some of the traditional anxieties."



Carol Klein's research to write "Mother and Sons" focused on a little-written area.

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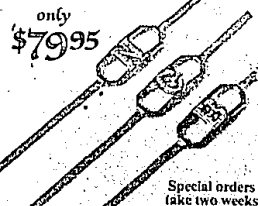
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