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The Monster Within: The Hidden Side of Motherhood

Barbara Almond
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On June 20, 2001, Andrea Yates drowned her five children, one by one. The media seized on the horrific act, splashing pictures of the children across televisions and newsstands across the country. When it was revealed that Yates had been suffering from extreme post-partum psychotic depression, mothers everywhere breathed a collective sigh of relief. Severe mental illness was at fault. Mothers in their "right mind" would never do such a thing.

That's true. But neither do most mothers love their children one hundred percent of the time. For many, ambivalence towards one's children causes serious guilt and anxiety. In *The Monster Within,* Dr. Barbara Almond explores maternal ambivalence, which she defines as "a combination of the loving and hating feelings we experience toward those who are important to us. [It] is a normal phenomenon. It is ubiquitous. It is not a crime or a failing."

In these simple, powerful words, Almond dispels the myth of the perfect mother. In its place, Almond provides a vision of motherhood that is realistic and compassionate. It is normal for a young, sleep-deprived mother with a colicky baby to feel hatred towards her infant when it won't stop crying. It is normal for the parents of a defiant teen to feel intense anger when they are disrespected by that teen.

Almond, a psychotherapist and psychoanalyst in private practice, serves on the faculty of the San Francisco Center for Psychoanalysis, and is Emeritus Adjunct Clinical Assistant Professor at Stanford University. She explains that "it is the failure to recognize that most ambivalence springs from conflicts between the child's and the mother's needs, both legitimate, that explains much of the social and cultural condemnation of 'imperfect mothers.'" But there are no perfect mothers. Instead, Dr. Winnicott, a British psychoanalyst and former pediatrician, coined the phrase "good-enough mother."

In this book, the concept of maternal ambivalence—including extreme examples like Andrea Yates—is explored through literature and illustrative case studies from Almond's private practice. She provides tools to recognize ambivalence and its impact on mothers, and offers compassionate insight about what to do when those feelings interfere with the ability to be a capable parent.

In *The Monster Within*, Almond has given mothers everywhere a gift: freedom from the chains of the myth of the perfect mother. Being a "good enough" mother is…good enough. Mothers, soon-to-be mothers, and people who have mothers will read this book and breathe a collective sigh of relief.

JULIE MCGUIRE (November / December 2010)

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