



# Mother-Daughter Ambivalence According to Sigmund Freud and Chantal Akerman

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## Abstract

Freud's defensive stance toward female psychosexual development has two clear sources: one, his sensitivity to feminist critiques; and two, his awareness that female sexuality remained slippery despite his sustained effort to incorporate it into his major theories. Like the psychoanalytic process, which brings patients into direct contact with areas of psychic tension, Freud's writings on female sexuality expose the theoretical ambiguities that continue to complicate cultural analyses oriented by gender. This essay reads Freud in conjunction with representations of the mother-daughter relationship in several films by Chantal Akerman, which affectively render the ambiguity Freud diagnosed in that often-fraught familial bond. In the process, I employ an analytical approach that integrates aesthetic and psychoanalytic theories, a combination I consider productive in relation to 21st century culture, which defines itself as sexually progressive while avoiding significant blind spots that make widely-circulated notions of gender equality ring hollow.

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