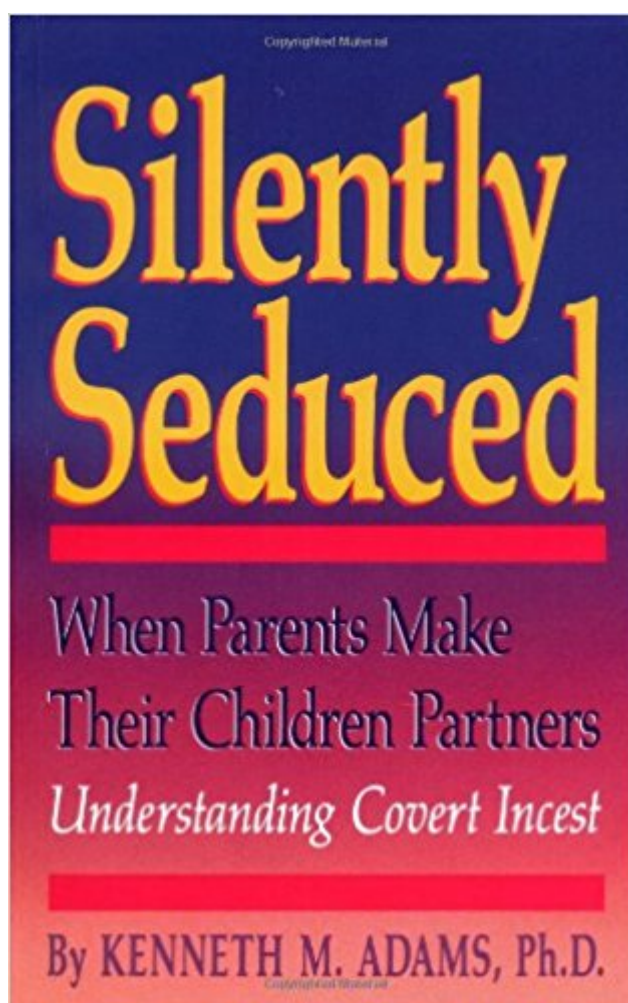


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Silently Seduced: When Parents Make Their Children Partners - Understanding Covert Incest



Synopsis

Did you have a parent whose love for you felt more confining than freeing, more demanding than giving, more intrusive than nurturing? Did you feel trapped in a "psychological marriage" with this parent? If so, you may be a victim of covert incest. Identification of this kind of incest is difficult, since covert incest victims often feel idealized and privileged, not violated and abused. In *Silently Seduced*, Dr. Adams, through illustrative case examples and perceptive insight, provides covert incest victims a framework to understand what happened to them, how their lives and relationships continue to be affected and how to begin the process of recovery.

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Customer Reviews

Kenneth M. Adams, a licensed psychologist, has worked with children and adults who have grown up in dysfunctional and alcoholic families. He is a national lecturer, workshop leader and consultant in the areas of childhood abuse, adult children and addictions.

Chapter 1 As long as the child within is not allowed to become aware of what happened to him or her, a part of his or her emotional life will remain frozen ... all appeals to love, solidarity and compassion will be useless. #151 Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good* Tom came home from a long day at the office looking forward to the quiet, intimate dinner he and his wife had planned. The telephone rang. It was his mother. Now what? he thought. He listened as she described her day. Eventually she began discussing how lonely and miserable she felt with Tom's father. Tom felt his

rage boil but was paralyzed by his guilt. He looked for an opening in her tirade so he could politely excuse himself and eat his dinner which was waiting for him. How do I get out of this one? Tom thought, as his mother went on describing her feelings of sexual dissatisfaction with his father. Impatient and outraged, he paced the floor and hoped his mother would hang up. When she said, "I don't know what I would do if I didn't have you. I wish your father would listen to me like you do," Tom had had enough. He hung up without a word and threw the phone to the floor in a rage. Teary-eyed, he screamed to his wife, "I don't want to know about her personal problems! I hate it, but I don't know what to do." As had happened so many times before, Tom's evening with his wife was ruined. As a therapist I've learned Tom's story is not unique. Frequently I hear comments such as, "I can't stand it when my dad keeps telling me how much he loves his 'little princess'" or "I wish my mom would stop telling me about her loneliness. It's not my business" or "I know my dad doesn't mean anything by it, but it feels funny when he seems so worried about how I dress and gets jealous when I go out with men." The list is endless, but the theme is the same: a sense of violation and a boundary crossed. These violations are usually done in the name of "love" and "caring." There is nothing loving or caring about a close parent-child relationship when it services the needs and feelings of the parent rather than the child. "Feeling close" with your parents, particularly the opposite-sex parent, is not the source of comfort the image suggests. It is a relationship in which the individual, both as a child and later as an adult, feels silently seduced by the parent. Feelings of appreciation and gratitude do not prevail in these "close relationships." Instead they are a source of confusing, progressive rage. During the feedback section of my lectures on the subject, some participants are quite vocal with their rage and express relief that they now understand why at times they hate with vengeance the same parent who has always loved them "so much." Some are frozen in their seats and can't speak, while others can't wait to leave. A few courageous parents speak up, expressing that they are now beginning to understand why their sons or daughters struggle in relationships. Others listen to the lectures and insist there is no harm in their close relationship to their opposite-sex parent. Actually they claim to feel special and privileged. These children were given a special position by being idealized by the parent. But there is no privilege in being cheated out of a childhood by being a parent's surrogate partner. As adults these individuals in turn idealize their parents to cover the pain of the abandoned and victimized child within. To be a parent's surrogate partner is to be a victim of covert incest. This book is about the silent seduction covert incest victims experience and its effect on their sexuality, intimacy and relationships. Being a parent's surrogate partner as a child and continuing to be one as an adult has a profound effect on one's life. The following are some common characteristics resulting from

the silent seduction of a covertly incestuous relationship. If you find yourself in these descriptions of characteristics, this book is for you.

Love/Hate Relationship. One often has intense feelings of both love and hate for the opposite-sex parent. On one hand you feel special and privileged because of the relationship; on the other you frequently feel you aren't doing enough for that parent. This results in feelings of guilt which result in rage that is seldom directly expressed.

Emotional Distance from Same-Sex Parent. In contrast to the love / hate relationship with the opposite-sex parent, you feel abandoned by the same-sex parent. This relationship often is competitive and the parent feels like an adversary. Feeling contempt for this parent is common.

Guilt and Confusion over Personal Needs. You feel guilty about your needs and probably have a difficult time identifying what they are. You generally try to "be strong," "be a caretaker" or always "be there" for others as a way of meeting your own needs.

Feelings of Inadequacy. You are likely to have chronic feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. You believe your worth as a man or woman is determined by what you can do rather than who you are.

Multiple Relationships. You are likely to have been in and out of many relationships and never felt satisfied. You are always on the lookout for the perfect partner or relationship. Establishing intimacy is difficult for you.

Difficulty with Commitment. You generally experience ambivalence regarding commitment in relationships. You always seem to have one foot in and one foot out of the door just in case.

Hasty Commitments. You make a quick commitment to a relationship, then realize later it was not a good choice. You then feel too guilty to leave. Instead you try to make it right.

Regret over Past Relationships. You find yourself looking back at a previous relationship and wondering if it could have worked if you had stuck it out.

Sexual Dysfunction. You find yourself feeling sexually shut down or driven and compulsive in the pursuit of sexual highs or conquests. Sex may become addictive.

Compulsions/Addictions. You have other compulsions or addictions. You are driven in the area of work, success and achievement. You find yourself addicted to food. Either you compulsively overeat, starve yourself or you binge and purge.

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As a person who's father left, this book was a real eye opener. I always felt like I was "doing the right thing" by trying to meet my mother's needs, even at the expense of my marriage. This book is excellent at deconstructing the motives, behaviors, and habits of parents and children who cross emotional boundaries stemming from dysfunction in the parents relationship. While uncomfortable,

or even taboo, it is a worthwhile read for any man/woman who has been accused of putting their parent(s) first. If you have ever felt like you were put into a role you don't belong in (spouse), this book may be for you. On a side note, I felt this book was an excellent companion to the book "Boundaries" by Henry Cloud.

Helpful and thorough book of the results of covert incest and advice as to how to deal with the fallout. It will help persons who have known the trauma - it seems to me that the trauma is difficult to overcome, but this book does help to outline the problems that result, so this book will clarify for those who have had this issue. At least we will know with more clarity why we act as we do and this will help.

The basic premise of this book is that dysfunctional family systems tend to have parents in which lack of intimacy between partners leads to an inappropriate and unhealthy emotional burden being placed on the children, e.g. where a wife relies on a son to share her emotions with rather than her husband. Hence the 'silent seduction'. There is a lot of literature on dysfunctional families and this adds a unique dimension that I have not seen in other books, at least at this level of focus and detail. At times the discussion can be a bit loose and imprecise, but overall this is very useful and helpful book.

This book was good as it explained the syndrome of covert incest well, however it was not quite as good as another title called "What to do when a parent's love rules your life" by Patricia Love. The author appeared to have some personal experience with the syndrome and hence it did not come across as objective Dr Love's book. However it was still well worth a read if you or someone you know is affected by covert incest.

Got this for a college course, and it actually allowed me to see the phenomenon in action as I read it! Turns out it is a pretty common mechanism, yet invisible to most naked eyes. Life is amazing like that.

This book was so informative in terms of understanding how the parent child relationship can impact a life that I ended up buying several copies and sharing them with friends after my first copy was borrowed and started on its own circuit of eager readers.

I bought this book for my adult children, to use in their relationship with my grandchildren. Easy to read and helps you understand how to remain the parent-alpha which kids today so desperately need. I so wish something like this had been available when I was a parent.

I purchased this book to use clinically, however found it personally enlightening as well. It is fairly simple to read, but the message belies the book's easy readability. The book focuses on covert incest, as the title suggests, and will probably not be very beneficial for overt incest survivors seeking answers. A client of mine borrowed the book and reported that little pertained to her. This does not mean, however that the parent-child dynamics involved in covert incest can't also exist in a more physically/sexually abusive relationship. I recommend this book for clinicians and survivors.

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