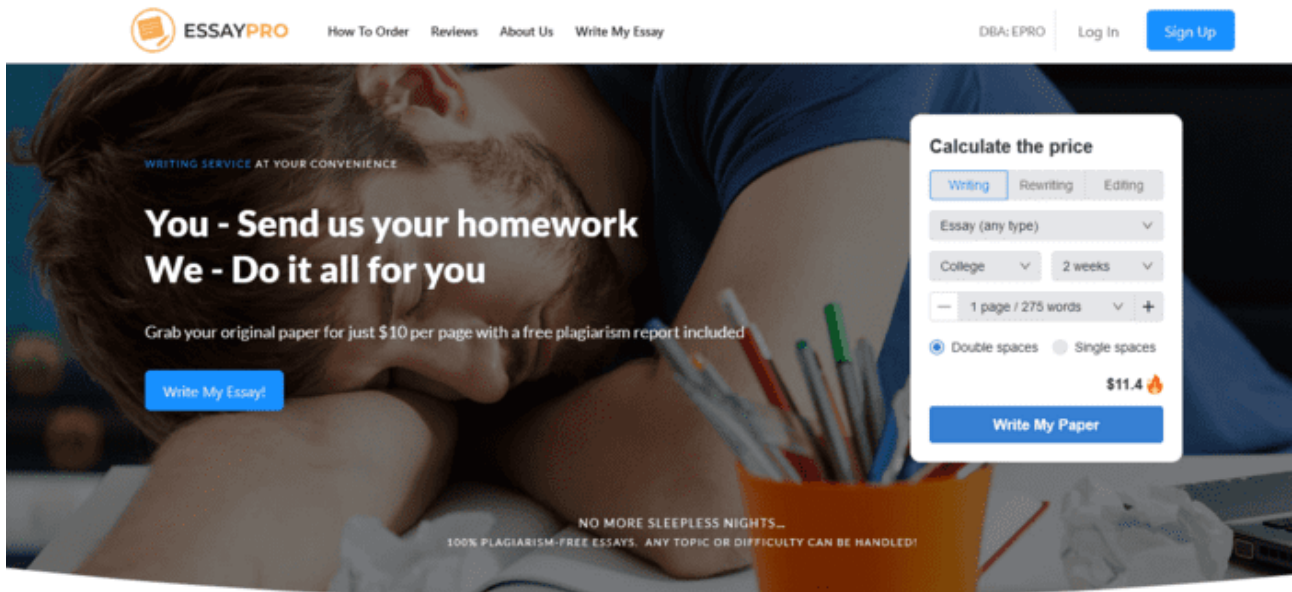


Oedipal and Electra Complexes



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Oedipal and Electra Complexes

In *Rebecca* female sexuality is explored through the heroine's symbolic development of a negative Oedipal complex followed by an Electra complex. Although avoidance of incest was believed by Freud to be the impetus for normal sexual development, the film explores the abnormal outcome of a negative Oedipal/[Electra](#) complex, i.e. replacement of the mother by the daughter as the father's heterosexual love interest. The heroine is torn between her desire to merge with Rebecca and to separate from her due to this [combination](#) of negative Oedipal and Electra complexes. The key difference between these two complexes underlies the heroine's development.

The difference between a negative Oedipal and Electra complex is not subtle. A negative Oedipal complex involves love for the mother in the form of Freud's "bisexual attraction". The girl will desire and identify with her, wishing to emulate her. An Electra complex is defined by the girl's imagined [rivalry](#) between mother and daughter for the father's love. For Freud the heterosexual development of little girls is more difficult to explain compared to that of little boys because the girl must change the object of her love from woman to man. Initially the girl has a negative Oedipal complex until some catalytic occurrence shifts

her into an Electra complex marked by dislike of the mother and rivalry. In a normal Freudian non-incestuous relationship the girl will transfer love of the father to other men and will not stop loving the mother entirely. In an incestuous relationship the girl will eliminate the threat of the mother, take her place, and engage in a sexual relationship with the father. Avoiding this, Freud believes, drives the female sexual development. Embracing this, Hitchcock displays, drives the unheimlich development of Rebecca.

Symbolically in the film, the main characters take on the roles of key players in Freud's development strategies. The lovely heroine is clearly the girl, very young relative to Maxim and for the first half of the film innocent, weak, and small. She is made smaller by the overpowering presence of Rebecca, who for her typifies the perfect female. Maxim is clearly the father figure due to his age relative to the heroine and his relationship with her. His comments about her being a child, his desire for her never to grow up or wear ...

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...e destruction of Mandalay and the death of Danvers, her last true worshiper. The last scene shows Maxim and the heroine embracing, insinuating that they go on to a heterosexual, symbolically incestuous relationship that is not overshadowed by Rebecca.

In short the heroine's development in the film from a naive, weak little girl into a powerful, knowledgeable wife is mirrored by this symbolic transition from a negative Oedipal stage to an Electra stage to a father-daughter incestuous relationship. The heroine's actions are not given explicit justification in the film, but the typical behavior of Freud's proverbial girl matches her behavior perfectly. The heroine tries to become like the woman who she believes Maxim loves, fails, and tries then to compete with her. The twist on the Oedipal/Electra complex comes about when the girl's feminine rivalry turns to aligned opposition with the father against the mother leading to an incestuous relationship, precisely the outcome Freud's theory sought to avoid. Because the film's development of the heroine diverges from normal sexual development in this way, Rebecca's development attains Hitchcock's sought after unheimlich effect.

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