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EN40SL

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Mrs. Smith

The Shaky Path of Gertrude and Hamlet's Relationship

"Boys and girls need the special role modeling and traits that men offer as fathers and women as mothers." (Gruen). Throughout William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Shakespeare uses Hamlet's relationship with his mother Gertrude to show how important it is to have these role models. At the very beginning of the play, Hamlet's father has recently passed away and his mother has just remarried to her dead husband's brother. Both of these events play a significant role in not only how the story develops, but also how Hamlet's relationship with his mother develops. Overall, Hamlet and Gertrude's relationship is complicated and emotionally exhausting for the both of them. ✓

The first problem arises with Gertrude's new marriage, which she entered into rather than helping her son grieve over the loss of his father and her husband. The wedding happened almost immediately after the funeral, which Hamlet shows his clear disapproval of when he says, "the funeral baked meats did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables." (1.2.143-144). Hamlet believes the wedding happened too quickly. He is still grieving over the loss but his mother is celebrating the beginning of her new life with her new husband. Of course everyone reacts differently to the loss of a loved one, but most specialists would agree that the average intense grieving period should last about two months (Sharma). ✓ Hamlet doesn't understand how she could overcome her own grief so quickly, to fall in love again and be married, and he becomes very angry about it, which complicates their relationship in the future. It is even more maddening to him that the man

she chose to marry, is his uncle, Claudius. After speaking to both his mother and the new King Claudius, Hamlet begins to compare his father and Claudius. "That it should come to this! But two months dead! nay, not so much, not two; So excellent a king; that was, to this, Hyperion to a satyr." (1.2.137-140) says Hamlet as he tries to understand why his mother would go from a man who treated her so well to his uncle. All throughout the play, this lack of understanding of their relationship creates problems between the two of them, and Gertrude continuously fails to respond to his outbursts and try to help him. Gertrude rarely even pays attention to what would be in Hamlet's best interests, let alone attempts to follow through with the actions necessary to get him to a healthier state of mind.

Unbeknownst to him, Hamlet's mother repeatedly works against him throughout the play. Following his father's funeral, Hamlet requests to return to his school in Wittenberg (1.2.113), a request that his mother begs him to reconsider after Claudius says it is "retrograde to our desire" (1.2.114) meaning it is not in their best interests, ~~not what they want~~. However, Gertrude does not consider what Hamlet wants, or what might be best for him. Not only is she keeping him from his education, but if he had gone, there is a chance nothing more would have happened. It is possible that nobody more would have had to die, including Gertrude and Hamlet themselves. There would not be a *Hamlet* story to tell. However, she asked him not to go, he obeyed her, and because of that, she puts her relationship with her son in an even more compromising position. Gertrude allows Claudius and Polonius to make spy on Hamlet, invading his right to privacy. She stands by as they make their plans, and even aids them in the process of finding lackeys to spy for them. Gertrude and the King turn to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for this position knowing that they are supposed to be trusted friends of Hamlet's. The queen, Hamlet's mother, says to them "He hath much talk'd of you [...] If it will please you to show us so much gentry

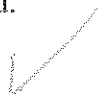
and good will, as to expend your time with us a while for the supply and profit of our hope." (2.2.19-24), this is clearly a factor for them because immediately after, they both agree. The fact that these wishes are coming from Hamlet's own mother gives Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the idea that this is what must be best for Hamlet. However, it is not. It is once again the queen furthering her own wishes as well as her new husband's, instead of considering Hamlet and his feelings and his rights. Hamlet listened to his own mother, promising try and stay for as long as he could bear (1.2.121) and thus proving his own loyalty to her and what makes her happy. Although the feeling is one sided, Hamlet maintains this loyalty through the entire duration of the play. ✓

Even when Hamlet is at his weakest point, he maintains a loyalty to Gertrude and her safety. He gets upset and angry and even frustrated with her, but refuses to be the cause of any of her pain. He says, "Let me be cruel, not unnatural: I will speak daggers to her, but use none;" (3.2.386-387) before he goes to her closet to talk with her. This shows that even though their relationship is under much stress, and he has many issues with his mother's most recent behavior, he has the respect necessary to hold himself back from causing anything more than surface damage. He knows his mother well enough to see how far he can go during that conversation without doing permanent damage to their bond. This hints at a very strong relationship before his father's death, a relationship built on that loyalty and insight. It also hints at Gertrude's potential for love (Mabillard). Furthermore, Hamlet is still willing to do whatever necessary to keep Gertrude safe. When he hears somebody hiding in her closet he immediately jumps to defend them both, exclaiming "How now! A rat? Dead, for a ducat, dead!" (3.4.25). He does not think, he just kills whatever it is that might be hiding in his mother's closet. This is another sign of how ingrained his loyalty to Gertrude actually is. A part of that loyalty is the honesty he shows to her.

Through all of the lies his mother puts him through, Hamlet is always true to Gertrude. He does not hide his dislike and disapproval of her new husband, in fact he makes it very clear. He goes so far as to compare his murder of Polonius in her closet as bad a deed as her marriage to his uncle (3.4.30-31), which gives her an idea of how he is truly feeling. He trusts her enough to be clear with her, and knows her well enough to see that his honesty is what she needs, for she may not have a clue as to what to do with him otherwise. Another example of this is when she asks him what is wrong with him that his grief is lasting so long (1.2.75) and Hamlet responds truthfully. ^{Intro} "Seems, madam! Nay, it is; I know not 'seems' [...] Together with all the forms, modes, shapes of grief, that can denote me truly: [...] I have that within which passeth show; These, but the trappings and the suits of woe." (1.2.76-86) is what he tells her in response to her inquiry. His answer is heartfelt, respectful, and clear. It is more proof of their history and how strong their bonds must have been for it to continue to show in his behavior when he is so angry with her. His clarity continues throughout the rest of the play as proof of his loyalty, which remains strong though their relationship is under duress. ✓

Hamlet and Gertrude's relationship is complicated, and it puts emotional stress on both of them through this very confusing time of change. His mother does not seem to focus on Hamlet or his best interests. She remarries quickly, and she makes choices that go against what Hamlet has made clear that he desires. However, Hamlet remains loyal, and continues to make his wishes clear, even after they are ignored. Their relationship is proof of how deeply the connections between a mother and child must run for the relationship to survive. This is important because their story is told all over the world, and this representation can help to reach other struggling and confused parents and their children, and show them exactly what not to do.

Through *Hamlet* Shakespeare holds the hand of both the confused mother and the struggling son, and allows them to find a middle ground.



Works Cited ✓

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not the editor ✓

Explaining Your Writing Variables

Identify the five writing variables you have chosen for your writing task ~~on a separate sheet~~

Central Idea: The struggling relationship of a mother and her son
Form: Essay
Purpose: To relate Hamlet's relationship with his mother to current struggling
Public Audience: Families going through emotional hardships
Context: Family Therapist office *family relationships*

Explain how your chosen writing variables work together to make your text effective.

5 marks

I chose to write an essay to explore the struggling relationship between a mother and son and relate it to Hamlet's own relationship with his mother because an essay's structure allows me to analyze the issue from all sides and consider every factor that contributed to how their relationship struggled. This essay will help families going through their own emotional hardship because it will show them to look at every possible side, just like the essay does. I would put this essay up in a family therapist office because there the family would possibly be struggling with the same case issues as are examined throughout the essay.