

*Feminist Theories and the Voices of Mothers and Daughters in Selected African-American Literature for Young Adults*¹

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In the young adult novel, *Rainbow Jordan*, written by Alice Childress and published in 1981, fourteen-year-old Rainbow narrates how she feels abandoned during her mother's frequent absences: "Truth is, what else is it but *abandon* when she walk out with a boy-friend, promise to come home soon, then don't show?"² Her language expresses the pain of loss she feels at her mother's absence and the import to her of her mother's life-affirming presence: "When my mother is away it feel like death; but when she's back it's like life again."³ The love, anger, and loss that Rainbow voices in relation to her maternal mother⁴ reproduces the intensity of a particular relationship imagined and constructed between an adolescent and her mother in a specific cultural context.

The increase in multicultural materials and studies in children's and young adult literature emphasizes the imperatives of respecting cultural diversity and context of texts and being aware of the issues involved in writing about, discussing, and defining those who are outside the dominant culture.⁵ The focus of this chapter therefore, is to briefly discuss some of the different feminist theoretical positions from which the mother-daughter relationship has been studied in both black and white critical literary studies and the relevance and limitations of

recent feminist studies on female adolescence and the mother–daughter relationship. Additionally, an analysis follows of how the mother–daughter relationship is constructed in the context of various black family structures in different settings represented in selected African-American young adult novels and adult books recommended for high school students.

THE MOTHER–DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP AND FEMINIST THEORIES

Since Adrienne Rich’s oft quoted statement that the “cathexis between mother and daughter . . . is the great unwritten story,”⁶ the significance of the mother–daughter relationship has been recognized by feminist theorists from diverse theoretical approaches. No longer an unwritten story in white feminist scholarship, there is now a rich resource of interdisciplinary scholarly studies on this relationship crossing the fields of psychoanalysis, sociology, and literary criticism and which includes within its bounds the study of motherhood as an institution. White feminist literary criticism, in particular, has drawn upon feminist revisions of psychoanalytic theories as frameworks within which to study the mother–daughter relationship in literary texts.⁷

The narratives of these revisions, although from diametrically different theoretical positions, have emphasized the importance of the mother’s early relationship with her daughter in shaping this relationship and the continuing working out of this relationship in adulthood.⁸ The seminal work of Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* for example, argues that less distinct boundaries are drawn between mothers and daughters than between mothers and sons. Girls do not give up attachment to their mothers in forming a relationship with the father, but rather define themselves in a relational triangle with both mother and father.⁹

In calling for a specifically black feminist approach in discussing black mother–daughter relationships, Gloria I. Joseph warns against analyzing conceptions of motherhood and mother and daughter relationships from white feminist psychoanalytic theoretical perspectives without taking into account the differences of race and culture. Black females, writes Joseph, have been excluded from these studies and to discuss relationships between black mothers and daughters in the same terms as those of white mother and daughter relationships disregards black women’s own explanations, interpretations, and experiences.¹⁰ The same critique is made by Patricia Hill Collins who points out that

white feminist scholars, who have written about motherhood for example, Nancy Chodorow and Jane Flax, have written from the standpoint of white middle-class women which does not address issues of black motherhood.¹¹

Joseph suggests that the black mother–daughter relationship is best discussed within the context of the black family network rather than in the isolated dyad of mother and daughter which is the object of study in psychoanalytic theoretical writings.¹² Collins also stresses the centrality of the extended family and the “resilient, woman-centered networks of blood mothers and othermothers” to the concept of black motherhood and the mother–daughter relationship.¹³ Other issues which are germane to the study of the black mother–daughter relationship are the sharing of a collective history of the injustice of slavery in which mothers and children (and thus daughters) were forcibly separated one from another, the continued sexism in both black and white communities, and racial inequality.¹⁴

In black literary criticism, studies of the mother–daughter relationship have included novels written by Toni Morrison and Paule Marshall.¹⁵ Writing of the lack of material on black mother–daughter relationships in general, Joseph refers to the novels, biographies, and poetry of black women which have served as primary source material for a study of this relationship including authors Zora Neale Hurston, Gwendolyn Brooks, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker among others.¹⁶ *Double Stitch* is a recent anthology of poems, essays, and fiction on the black mother–daughter relationship together with critical essays which reproduces both the diverse experiences of this relationship and its central importance in the lives of black women. The inclusion of narratives by authors Maya Angelou, Sonia Sanchez, and Alice Walker for example, makes this collection eminently accessible to high school students.

THE MOTHER–DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP AND ADOLESCENCE

Both black and white feminist literary studies of the mother–daughter relationship have generally excluded novels marketed specifically for young adults. Young adult literature is a literature which specifically addresses itself to adolescence and at the same time constructs the experience of adolescence for the young adult reader. Often foregrounded in these novels are relationships with parents with the concomitant issues of conflict, separation, and individuation. Terri Apter in *Altered Loves: Mothers and Daughters During Adolescence* and

authors in *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls At Emma Willard School* critique the traditional theories of adolescence which have posited adolescence as a time of rebellion against parents, a time of detaching oneself from parents and turning to peers for self-validation. It is a construction of adolescence which has also been reproduced and applied to black female adolescence in which it is stated that in mid-adolescence, a teenager will push herself away from family and become more closely allied to peers. And separation and independence between a female adolescent and her parents are constructed through conflict and questions of control.¹⁷ Feminist theorists have posited new narratives for female adolescence based on connections between adolescent girls and their mothers. Apter, who interviewed pairs of mothers and daughters, suggests for example, in *Altered Loves* that adolescent girls transform rather than abandon their relationships with their mothers and that conflict with a mother becomes a way of a daughter maintaining her relationship with her mother. "She fights with her mother because she wants, and believes she can, make her mother see and make her mother listen."¹⁸ Conflict thus becomes a way of remaining in connection—an argument reiterated by Carol Gilligan. Disagreement between an adolescent girl and her mother accordingly, can be a sign that they are in relationship.¹⁹ The crisis for adolescent girls, writes Gilligan, is one centered around connection not separation:

For girls to remain responsive to themselves, they must resist the conventions of feminine goodness; to remain responsive to others, they must resist the values placed on self-sufficiency and independence in North American culture.²⁰

The limitation of this research is that western white feminist perspectives on adolescent mother–daughter relationships have, in the above texts, not generally addressed racial and cultural differences in their analyses of the relationship between adolescent daughters and their mothers. The interviews with adolescent girls at the Emma Willard School, for example, are based, as Gilligan points out, on girls living "in a relatively isolated setting, in an atmosphere of privilege and promise, in an intensely female community housed in the architecture of high western culture."²¹ A small group of minority students were interviewed at the Emma Willard School, but these girls are not representative of black female adolescents since they were growing-up and being educated in settings in which they were racially apart.

Janie Ward concludes from these interviews that questions of

racial identity and the consciousness of the double jeopardy of being both black and female were central in the girls' answers in the interviews.²² Joanne Braxton, in her analyses of black women's autobiographies, writes that in these texts, black women "speak of a perilously intensified adolescence, accompanied by perception of gender as well as racial difference."²³ The black mother–daughter relationship is discussed in recent scholarship within the context of race, class, and gender oppression in which mothers protect their daughters as long as they are able, while also imparting to them the necessary skills to survive.²⁴

Social learning theory rather than psychoanalytic frameworks are used in analyzing this relationship in which mothers and othermothers are discussed in relation to their function as role models for their daughters.²⁵ The connections and affective relationships between black mothers and daughters and the independence and responsibility of black daughters are considered within socio-economic contexts. A mothers' emotional relationship with her daughter is thus considered in relation to the pressing demands of ensuring physical nurturance. "Black women's efforts to provide a physical and psychic base for their children," writes Collins, "can affect mothering styles and the emotional intensity of black mother–daughter relationships."²⁶

The mother–daughter relationship has thus been studied from a number of very different theoretical perspectives. In particular, white and black feminist critics suggest different approaches in analyzing this relationship. The emphasis of black feminist scholars is placed on analyzing the mother–daughter in racial, social, and cultural contexts rather than within psychoanalytic frameworks. The white experience of adolescence is also constructed through different scripts of development. The most recent research posits connections between adolescent mothers and daughters. This different narrative of female adolescence challenges the classical psychoanalytic theories of adolescence in which attachment to the mother has been written about for example, as "an insidious dependency" by one influential male theorist.²⁷

Studies of black adolescence stress the double jeopardy of being both black and female, and emphasis is placed on the role of mothers in the enculturation of daughters and the effects of this role on their relationships. Black feminist critics have thus discussed the relationship through the integration of theory and the concrete everyday actions and experiences of black mothers and daughters. The merging of abstract thought with action, Collins explains, is a theoretical stance adopted by black scholars that engenders other ways of thinking and results in different theories than can be generated by either thought or action alone.²⁸

In the African-American texts discussed below, the mother–daughter relationship or grandmother–mother–daughter relationship is constructed as an important and integral part of an adolescent’s growing-up. Central in determining how the mother–daughter relationships are imagined in these texts, are the questions of who is speaking—mother or daughter—from where she speaks in terms of time, place, and socio-economic context, and how she speaks. The relationship between the mother and daughter is thus analyzed within the context of family and place with an emphasis on listening to voices of mothers and daughters whether in relationship, conflict, or in separation. And essential also to these analyses are questions of how much and in what ways a female black adolescent identifies with the voice of her mother in relation to the double jeopardy of being both black and female.

THE VOICES OF MOTHER AND DAUGHTER IN *RAINBOW JORDAN*

In Childress’ *Rainbow Jordan*, the voices of teenage daughter, Rainbow, her mother Kathie, and Josephine, Rainbow’s “interim” mother, who cares for Rainbow in Kathie’s absence, each speak separately in separate chapters. While Rainbow speaks of her loss, abandonment, and love for her mother, the voice of Kathie, Rainbow’s mother speaks from a position of economic and social powerlessness as she is “stranded outta town” in a motel with her boyfriend and promoter, Burke. Pregnant at the age of seventeen years and divorced after one year from Rainbow’s father, Leroy, Kathie has struggled in limited circumstances to provide economic support for Rainbow, relying on occasional child support money from Leroy, Aid to Dependent Children checks, and earnings from her sporadic work as a go-go dancer.

Collins writes that an assumption of white perspectives of the patriarchal nuclear family has been the existence of separate gender roles for the economic provision and love and care of children, respectively. In contrast, women in African-American families have through necessity “long integrated their activities as economic providers into their mothering relationships.”²⁹ The mother–daughter relationships in the majority of the young adult novels discussed in this chapter are noticeably constructed within a one-parent family structure in which the absence of fathers, through death, desertion, or divorce places the onus of providing and caring for a family on mothers.

In *Rainbow Jordan*, as in other novels cited in this chapter, the difficulties of a mother in meeting both the economic and affective needs of a daughter as well as her own needs, engenders a rupture in

the relationship between mother and daughter. The rupture in *Rainbow Jordan* is revealed through the angry and frustrated voice of a young woman. Thrust into the responsibility of mothering situated in a context with little social and economic support, Kathie tells of the incident when five year old Rainbow, left alone in the apartment, is rescued from the burning building when some cheap wiring catches fire:

Yes. I HAD LEFT HER ALONE. I had bein so damn good till life was no fun a-tall. Gotta go out sometime. . . . That fella had been after me to go out with him and kept sayin how he could help me. People lose interest if you never can go anywhere. He was a louse.³⁰

In this passage as in others, Kathie voices her own needs for a life and identity separate from that of being a mother to her daughter and discloses her continuing dependence on men for financial and also emotional support. Kathie's voice, out-of-relationship with that of her daughter's, defines Rainbow in opposition rather than in relation to self reproducing a split between her wish for separateness and the satisfaction of her own needs and the nurturance which she attempts to give her daughter. This split is doubled in Rainbow's first-person narrative which reveals the destructive side of a relationship in which Kathie displaces her anger on Rainbow—blaming Rainbow's very existence for her entrapment. Rainbow remembers and reports her mother's frustrated outburst: "Wasn't for you I'd be somewher. No man ever got serious . . . cause I got you!"³¹

Elided from Kathie's narrative is the physical and verbal abuse which she metes out to her daughter. The ellipses in the text signify what is not said or admitted to self as she tells how she had spent the babysitting money on new pajamas for Rainbow and had also "bought new black patent shoes with a ankle strap . . . like she had been wanting."³² The silent spaces in Kathie's narrative are filled in by Rainbow's first person narrative in which she tells of the beating she receives from her mother for drinking the milk that Kathie was saving for the next day without permission and the new "pair-a black leather sandals" her mother had bought her with the ADC money. "Some of the best presents I ever got," Rainbow continues, "was the day after a beatin."³³

Kathie's silence thus covers over that to which a mother cannot admit even to herself—the actual physical and verbal abuse of her daughter. Marianne Hirsch points out that to express anger as a mother is to separate herself from the expected role of a mother to care and

nurture others. Not only is this culturally unacceptable but it also does not allow a mother's self-interest to be taken into account along with caring for others. Hirsch writes that this is a "pervasive general cultural taboo to which all women whether white or black, are subject."³⁴ Kathie's voice reveals her anger, but it is in the daughter's narrative that the abuse which is the result of maternal anger is exposed. Kathie's threat (reported in Rainbow's narrative) that she is "gonna beat all the black of you, Rainbow!" reproduces the terrible anger of being both black and poor, and a young mother. Her daughter's blackness, literally and metaphorically, signifies the powerlessness of this position.

Kathie is one of the few mothers in adolescent literature, who has agency in the sense that she speaks as a subject through taking up an unmediated "I" position in the text. She thus directly expresses both her own thoughts and feelings about her daughter, their relationship, and her anger from her perspective. Her first-person narrative, however, reveals her entrapment and actual lack of agency in a relationship with a man who abuses her, upon whom she is dependent, and her position in a situation she cannot control. As she unsuccessfully struggles to sew dresses for Rainbow, her desperation is revealed in her cry that she is "gonna be a good mother if it kills" her.³⁵ Little more than an adolescent herself, Kathie's powerlessness, and her voice of anger and self-interest are thus constructed in opposition to the expected role model a black mother is expected to be for her teenage daughter.³⁶

Rainbow's voice reveals her own love and loyalty for her mother with whom she attempts to stay in relationship: "I love her even now while I'm puttin her down."³⁷ Rainbow finally realizes that she cannot "count" on her mother, and only then does she acknowledge the lacuna between her desire for connection and the reality of her mother's lack of attachment to her as she tells Josephine that her mother has never loved her as she has loved her—"and never will."³⁸

THE DIFFERENT VOICES OF MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS

The intense need for the love and presence of their working mothers is also expressed by adolescent daughters in Virginia Hamilton's *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and Jacqueline Woodson's *The Dear One*. The voice and language of fifteen-year-old Tree, in Virginia Hamilton's *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, speaks, like Rainbow, of her love and loss for her absent working mother.

Muh Vy, spoken M'Vy, with the softest sighing to mean, Miss you, Mama; Love you, Mama. All the tenderness and grief she and her brother Dab felt at the thought of her when they were so alone sometimes without her."³⁹

Left alone to care for her retarded brother, Tree accepts the need for her mother to be absent in order to provide for herself and Dab. "M'Vy had to be somewhere else so she and Dab and M'Vy, too, could have all the things they had to have."⁴⁰ Placed in economic circumstances in which they must provide economic support to their families, mothers excuse and explain their choices to their daughters. The voice of Tree's mother, faced with the illness and death of Dab, reproduces the guilt and blame of a mother who has had to choose between providing nurturance and economic sustenance as she admits to Tree that she had made a mistake and should have "taken less money and stayed" with Tree and Dab.⁴¹

However, when twelve-year-old Afeni in *The Dear One* accuses her mother, an attorney, of allowing her career to prevent her from spending time with Afeni, her mother's voice is firm as she spells out to her daughter that her love is shown through that which she provides:

Don't you ever let me hear you say I don't love you, because if I'm not showing it in words, I'm showing it with actions! I didn't grow up saying it, so I can't start now. But I love you is in every meal you eat, every piece of clothing you wear, and every clean sheet you sleep on!⁴²

Afeni's mother's refusal to accept blame for her style of mothering consciously reproduces in this more recent novel, both an awareness and a refusal of a culturally prescribed ideal of mothering and of a mother-daughter relationship that does not allow for differing circumstances and different kinds of relationships. Afeni realizes that her one-parent family is not represented by "some TV family where everything was perfect all the time." Her father was absent, and even if other girls had close relationships with their mothers, she and her mother were not, perhaps because of their personalities as loners.⁴³ In this young adult novel, as in *Sweet Whispers*, *Brother Rush* and some other young adult novels, the mother does not represent the limiting and stereotypical image of the "strong black mother" for her daughter.⁴⁴ Afeni's mother, though described as "strong," has had a drinking problem and has made "mistakes." Reproduced in these novels is the schism between the "idealized versions of maternal love extant in

popular culture” and the kind of love and care that can be provided by mothers whose own lives are less than perfect.⁴⁵

A tone of cynicism and defeat is heard in the voice of Didi’s mother in *Motown and Didi* set in Harlem in the 1980s, when Didi is upset at the news that she has not been offered a full scholarship. “It wasn’t everything, because the sun kept burning and the earth kept turning—that’s what she was fixing her mouth to say,” but Didi’s mother suppresses her words when she sees the “pain and hurt twisting Didi’s face into an ugly mask.”⁴⁶ Seventeen-year-old Didi voices her strong need to “forget who she was and where she came from” by obtaining a scholarship at a college far from Harlem with its environment of drugs and poverty, and the need to get away from her mother whose “fragile hands” she had been “holding” for “too long.”⁴⁷

The manipulating voice of her mother reveals her need for her daughter. She does not see her daughter’s need to go so far away to college, and when she recovers from a stroke tells her daughter that the doctor said if she has “another accident” she may not live. She would then not “need” her daughter as much.⁴⁸ Her mother’s need for her, although perceived by Didi as real is also perceived by her as a “trap.” The conflict between providing sustenance to her mother in which Didi “would have to give more of herself” and give up her own dreams for college and other choices in life reproduces the tension between an adolescent daughter’s voiced need to move away to find a different life for self and the moral responsibilities she has towards the “flesh and blood” of family. In this particular situation and context, Didi’s voice clearly reproduces the dilemma of the cost of staying in relationship with those she cares about: “For any person she cared for, any brick in the squatting buildings that she touched, any rhythm she walked to in the streets would help to trap her in Harlem.”⁴⁹

Throughout the novel, however, her choices have reproduced a valorization of care and commitment to relationships—to her mother, to a brother hooked on drugs, and to the welfare and safety of Motown, a young man who saved her from an attempted assault. Didi’s wish to go away is associated with her wish to “lead her family out of the poverty that sucked on them, night and day.”⁵⁰ In the 1980s urban setting of *Motown and Didi*, there is a lack of an extended family network to whom mother and daughter may turn for support. Collins refers to the breakdown of “community structure of blood mothers and other-mothers in many inner-city neighborhoods” because of illegal drugs.⁵¹ In this novel, as in *Rainbow Jordan*, the relationship between mother and daughter is constructed within a structure of disintegrating family and community networks in which the absence of the daughter’s father

is conspicuous.⁵²

Listening to the voices of female adolescents, Gilligan and others note the tensions and shifts in the language of young women as they define their meanings of independence and talk about issues of separation, connections, and relationships in association with their own needs and the needs of others.⁵³ In these and other African-American young adult novels discussed in this chapter, a tension is constructed between the voices of those mothers who struggle for physical and emotional survival in difficult circumstances and the voices of their adolescent daughters. Daughters voice their own needs for love, support, and autonomy yet are expected to take on responsibilities both on-behalf and for their mothers.

In *Listen For the Fig Tree* by Sharon Mathis, the voice of twelve-year-old Muffin reveals the ambivalence she experiences between feeling responsible for her mother, who is distraught with grief on the anniversary of her husband's brutal murder on Christmas day, and the sacrificing of her own plans for enjoying the celebration of Kwanza. Accused by her friend, Ernie, of not "seeing" clearly in relation to her mother's problems, Muffin (who is literally blind) wishes Ernie to understand:

that saying she wasn't going to worry about her mother anymore didn't mean she really wasn't going to worry. It just meant that she was going to think only about the good things that happened.⁵⁴

At one point, losing patience with her mother, who has turned to alcohol to bury her pain, Muffin tells Ernie that she is going to Kwanza "no matter what!" And she places her own needs over those of her mother the day she arrives home to find her mother lying asleep in her own vomit—deciding to go ahead with what she had planned to do that day rather than focusing on the care of her mother.

The hiatus and misunderstandings constructed between the voices of mother and daughter are increased by Leona, whose voice is out-of-relationship with her daughter. She accuses Muffin of blocking her "way" as she goes out to drink and states that Muffin's "being embarrassed" means "*nothing*" to her.⁵⁵ She has defined herself in relation to her husband rather than Muffin: "Mainly it was just me and that man." She had told him that without him she "just" did not "count."⁵⁶

The less powerful voices of mothers' are constructed in opposition to the stronger voices of daughters in several of these young adult novels. Muffin's mother tells her daughter not to give up after Muffin

has been assaulted. “I give up. You can’t give up. You young!”⁵⁷ Muffin eventually understands that she can give her mother the “strength” she needs to survive. In this novel, as in *Motown and Didi*, the strength of the daughter’s voice reverses the power relation between mother and daughter. Muffin’s mother ineffectually reminds her daughter and others that she and not Muffin is the mother. Didi wonders: “Was she the daughter? The child? Perhaps there had been a mistake, and it wasn’t Darlene that wasn’t ‘right’ but Didi, and she was the mother.”⁵⁸

Subverted also by these daughters is the powerlessness which is handed down to them by their mothers. Metaphors constructed around seeing and blindness denote their daughters’ clearer visions. Muffin’s mother speaks of herself as being “bad luck” to her daughter and of the legacy of blindness that has been handed down to Muffin from her family. The blind daughter however, sees more than the mother who “don’t want no eyes.” As Govan points out, the voice and vision of Rainbow in *Rainbow Jordan* is more perceptive than either Kathie, her mother, or Josephine, who cares for her in her mother’s absence.⁵⁹ Tree, the adolescent daughter in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* sees the “mystery” which her mother has never seen and thus gains insight and understanding of her mother’s past which her mother has hidden from Tree—a past which has its own inheritance of “blood and sickness.”

A DAUGHTER’S IDENTITY WITH HER MOTHER

Didi’s perception in *Motown and Didi* that her mother is vulnerable because she is a woman alerts her to the vulnerability of her “own womanhood.”⁶⁰ The vulnerability of mothers and the awareness of the double jeopardy of being both black and female alert daughters to their own positions. In *The Dear One* is reproduced the consciousness of the power relationships of gender and race as well as the inequality of parent and child. Twelve-year-old Afeni tells her mother that:

There’s always going to be someone deciding what I can and can’t do. If it’s not because I am a kid, it’ll be because I’m a woman. If it’s not because I’m a woman, it’ll be because I’m black.⁶¹

A raised consciousness engenders its own strength in that these daughters are aware of the danger of becoming subjected to the same oppressive patriarchal and racial structures that their mothers have endured and in which they are positioned. Afeni’s mother tells her

with “something like fear” in her voice to never “feel like you don’t have power, Feni.”⁶² In this novel however, Afeni’s voice is strengthened by her mother and her friends—a female bonding through which Afeni is taught both the values of responsibility and caring for others and to regard and take pride in the strengths and values of the black community.

The voices of daughters constructed in some of these novels are caught between their rejection or repetition of their mothers’ histories and their loyalty, attachment, and identity with their mothers—mothers, who have also often shown themselves to be strong, despite their mistakes and weaknesses. Afeni’s mother expresses concern that her friend’s daughter, Rebecca, pregnant at fifteen, is repeating her mother’s past.⁶³ Rebecca, whose grandmother and great grandmother were also pregnant in their early teens, comments that she “don’t want to be like my moms. She had to leave school because of me.”⁶⁴ She affirms her identity separate from that of her mother, whom she resembles. “But I’m not Clair, I’m Rebecca!” she insists.⁶⁵

Reproduced in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, is the shifting double consciousness of being both daughter and mother as Tree moves between present and present, taking her mother’s place in caring for Dab in the former, and in the latter becoming her mother as she observes her mother whipping Dab. “Tree was there, seeing, but felt herself fading. She was the woman, her gorge rising. She was the girl child, seeing pictures, shapes.”⁶⁶ When Dab dies, Tree, who had rejected identification with the mother who abuses her brother, blames her mother in terrible pain and anger for her treatment of Dab. She would put a “kitchen knife” through her mother or herself to “bleed out the hate and the love.”⁶⁷ There is in these novels, a consciousness of the shifting, blurred boundaries between wishing to both identify and disidentify themselves from their mothers. While daughters disassociate themselves from and blame their mothers’ weaknesses, they can also acknowledge their strengths. Afeni affirms her mother’s strength to Rebecca in *The Dear One* and in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, the toughness and determination that Tree had always known, shows in her mother’s face.

When mothers fail to enable their daughters to move beyond their limitations, reproduced in the voices of their daughters is the fear of being subordinated and trapped within the same circumstances. In Kristin Hunter’s *Lou in the Limelight* Lou finally separates from her mother, whose strength is used only to keep her daughter from that which she fears and which lies outside the boundaries she knows. Only by separating from the confining strictures and values of her mother,

whom Lou and her brother perceive as wanting to “*stay down*” can Lou move out and upwards. Community and religious values constitute identity with mother in *Lou in the Limelight* and Higginson and Bolden’s *Mama, I Want To Sing*. They are the basis for conflict between mothers and daughters in these novels as daughters move outwards from the inside environment of family, community, and church to the outside as they insist on establishing their own lives and identities separate and different from that of their mothers. The anger of mothers is expressed at what they focalize as their daughters’ rejection of the values they have instilled in their daughters and therefore a rejection of themselves as mothers. In both of these last mentioned novels, narrative plots are constructed in which daughters wish to sing “worldly” music outside the bounds of home and to separate their talented voices from the disapproving voices of their mothers in order to create songs of their own. Lou’s angry blues composition “Talk `Bout Yo’ Mama” sums up her attitude that her mother “only knows about her life” but not what is “best” for her daughter.

A NETWORK OF OTHERMOTHERS

While daughters may find their voices out-of-relationship through conflict with mothers, voices may stay in relationship with women who become othermothers. Reproduced in several of young adult African-American novels are the networks of othermothers which supplement the mother and adolescent daughter relationship. They substitute for a lack and absence that is missing to the daughter from her maternal mother and are additional to the maternal mother’s emotional and physical nurturance of a teenage daughter. Alternative relationships are constructed between these othermothers and adolescent daughters in which voices of these supplementary voices take a mediating position between a maternal mother and daughter in situations of conflict. They represent for the daughter alternative values and roles for the young woman struggling to extricate herself from what she perceives as the confining strictures of her mother. Without the boundaries of the confines of the maternal, these othermothers nurture, train, and provide practical support to young women. They help daughters to traverse the boundaries of the inside to the culture and power of the outside while maintaining those connections to family and values that contribute to empowering the adolescent female.

THE DIFFERENCE OF OTHERMOTHERS

Pivotal to the construction of othermothers in these texts are their

differences from maternal mothers and the different relationships constructed between them and their proxy daughters. This difference is constructed through the opposition of gender in *Listen For the Fig Tree*, as a circle of male nurturers protect Muffin and her mother. Muffin's mother is displaced by the gentle Mr. Dale, who offers the young girl love, protection, and tutelage—in effect engages in the practice of mothering—subverting stereotypical sexist assumptions of masculinity. The male voices reproduced in this novel are ones that embody caring for others in relationship—a caring that is absent now from the maternal voice of Leona.

Differences from the maternal mother in other novels are reproduced through traversing class and socio-economic boundaries. The constructions of other, alternative world views through the agency of othermothers contribute to both the liberation and liberalization of adolescent daughters. The presence of a network of othermothers and their differences from the maternal mother is constructed in *Lou in the Limelight* in which a succession of different women provide care and sustenance to Lou. Julia, the cousin who adopts Lou is described as: “Wonderfully different” and a “law unto herself.” Surrounded by books, art, and music, Julia, a gifted musician, is eager to share her life of culture and travel with Lou. Julia's house makes Lou feel as though “she was in Paradise.”⁶⁸ Sister Carrie, is described as a “second mother” to Doris in the novel, *Mama, I Want To Sing*. A former blues singer, she breaks down for Doris the oppositions between the inside culture of church and community and the outside world of fashion and show business.

In *The Dear One*, fifteen-year-old Rebecca moves from the poverty of her home in Harlem to the black suburb of middle-class professionals, where Afeni's mother and her lesbian friends give her support during the last months of her pregnancy and for the birth of her baby. They are there for her, Marion tells Rebecca, to give her “space and quiet,” to spend “time” with her—to prevent her slipping through “the cracks.”⁶⁹ Rebecca confronts her prejudices towards lesbianism and Afeni her negative attitude towards sharing her home with a pregnant young woman as they form connections across barriers of socio-economic differences. In this young adult novel, written from a feminist perspective, the voices of othermothers affirm the care for others in their relationships and are constructed as exemplars for the adolescent daughters.

The adoptive mothers in these novels mostly speak from networks of connections and relationships in the black community, for example, the protective mothering circles in *Listen For the Fig Tree*

and *The Dear One*, and Julia in *Lou in the Limelight*. Their relationships with these female adolescents are however, predicated on the distances constructed between them. Mr. Dale is always “Mr. Dale” to Muffin. Othermothers do not supplant the maternal mother by reforming the maternal bond between mother and daughter. Daughters acknowledge the difference. Doris in *Mama, I Want to Sing* “knew no one could replace her mother” using words and images to describe their relationship that emphasize the maternal, nurturing body of the mother.⁷⁰ Jerutha, who defines herself to Lou and the Soul Brothers as their “mama away from home” in *Lou in the Limelight* reassures Lou’s mother that she “wouldn’t dream of coming between mother and daughter.”⁷¹ Underlying these connections with a difference in these latter two novels are assumptions about the conflicting relationships between adolescent daughters and mothers structured around the daughters’ needs to individuate and the resulting clash of values. An assumption also reproduced in *Lou in the Limelight* is that the intensity of Lou’s relationship and the love they have for each other prevents them, as Aunt Jerutha suggests, from getting along. “Of course you love her, I know that. She knows it too. And she loves you. That seems to be why the two of you can’t get along.”⁷² And Aunt Jerutha, as othermother, mediates by separating Lou from her mother. Collins writes that othermothers “often help to defuse the emotional intensity between bloodmothers and their daughters.”⁷³ Distance thus seems to be a necessary corollary for an adolescent daughter’s good relationship with an othermother in these novels. Maintained however, are the unequal power relationships between an othermother and daughter.

OTHERMOTHERS AND THE PRACTICE OF MOTHERING

While an othermother may mediate between a maternal mother and her teenager, she also may take on a disciplinary role in relation to the daughter thus showing her responsibility to the young woman and legitimizing her position as a surrogate mother—a member of a larger protective circle extant to the girl’s home. In *Lou in the Limelight*, Tina, an employee of the casino in Las Vegas where Lou and the Soul Brothers are working, warns Lou against the prostitution indigenous to performing in the corrupt milieu of show business at the casino. She gives Lou a “stinging slap” when she forces Lou to utter the word “prostitution.” And Lou understands that the slap was “like one of her mother’s, and meant that Tina was treating her like one of her children.”⁷⁴ In the voice of an admonishing mother, Tina tells Lou: “I’m

talking to you like a mother, that's why I won't stand for any lying from you."⁷⁵

Reproduced in this novel and *Mama, I Want To Sing* is the maintenance of traditional family, community, and religious values that are still to be valued and maintained by the adolescent daughter away from home and her maternal mother which are enforced by the voice of an othermother. Aunt Jerutha, in *Lou in the Limelight* subdues Lou's singing group partners, who are high on drugs at the casino, by reintroducing religious values into their environment through the recitation of prayers and the group singing of hymns. Jerutha's injunction to Lou: "Don't forget who you are and where you come from"⁷⁶ is repeated almost word for word in Sister Carrie's warning to Doris in *Mama, I Want to Sing* that she "keep in touch" with herself, that she remember who she is and where she comes from, and to remember her "house training."⁷⁷

The central role that othermothers play in the lives of adolescent daughters as role mothers is thus reproduced in several young adult novels. And othermothers, rather than maternal mothers, are constructed as the strong mothers in these young adult novels, without however, being constructed through stereotypical images of the good mother. Othermothers would thus seem to engage in the practice of different kinds of mothering in specific contexts—a mothering separated from the maternal bodies of mothers.⁷⁸ Collins explains the concept of othermothers as one in which:

community othermothers work on behalf of the black community by expressing ethics of care and personal accountability which embrace conceptions of transformative power and mutuality.⁷⁹

In *Water Girl*, by Joyce Carol Thomas, Amber's adoptive mother gives her the love that Amber realizes legitimizes her as her mother: "A mother is the one who loves you."⁸⁰ The painful absence of the maternal mother is described by Amber in terms of abandonment—the language used by Rainbow to describe feelings about her mother's absence.

THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP AND THE FEMALE SLAVE NARRATIVE

The anguish of separation of maternal mothers from their daughters is recorded in the social and historical context of the female slave narrative. Perhaps the most difficult relationships to comprehend and

give testament to are those constituted out of the oppression and injustice of slavery itself—connections instituted between white women who are described as like mothers to young black slave girls. These connections were predicated on the very crux of those power relations which sexually abused and oppressed black mothers, whose daughters were sometimes forcibly separated from them.

In the oral histories of North Carolina slave women narrated in *My Folks Don't Want Me To Talk About Slavery*, daughters give voice to the separations between mothers and daughters that were enforced through the institution of slavery. The voice of Patsy Mitchner reports how her mother was sold and with her sister and brother “were shipped to the Mississippi bottoms in a boxcar.” The separation from her mother was irrevocable. “I never heard from my mother any more,” she reports.⁸¹ Sarah Debroh tells how she was taken from her mother’s cabin to be trained as a housemaid and how her “mammy cried, ’cause she knew I would never be allowed to live at the cabin with her no more.”⁸²

Set during Reconstruction in the piedmont area of North Carolina, Belinda Hurmence’s young adult novel, *Tancy* constructs the parallel narrative of the adolescent Tancy’s emancipation from Miss Puddin, within the larger historical and social context of Emancipation. Tancy’s subsequent search for her “real mother,” writes Hurmence, parallels the “innumerable ex-slaves who set out to find their families after the Civil War.”⁸³ Throughout the novel, the language of independence and freedom is used to construct Tancy’s position as adolescent and that of black mulatto slave girl as she realizes that she is free both as slave maid and surrogate daughter to the white woman who, with Mas Gaither, her father, has “meant everything to Tancy, everything,” for she “had never known a mother or father.”⁸⁴

Tancy’s relationship to Miss Puddin has been constructed around the sexual exploitation of Tancy’s mother and the forced separation of mother and daughter when Tancy is only a nursing baby. Tancy is taken into the house by Miss Puddin “to be a constant reproach to the master.” Tancy’s attachment to the woman she refers to as “like a mother” and “more like a mother to us than a mistress,” and the affection that is reproduced between Miss Puddin and Tancy is constructed, however, through a violation of relationships. White mother as other-mother is invested with a dominance and inequality based on slavery over and above the unequal power relationship between mother and child, which necessarily distorts and falsifies a relationship with a young black slave girl taken into her home.

In the double voice of adolescent and slave girl, Tancy voices

resistance to ownership and inequality. She resists Miss Puddin's efforts to deny her the knowledge that she is free and independent and Miss Puddin's threat to "reclaim" her. She resists the sexual violation of Billy, her stepbrother. The injustice that unites Tancy and her maternal mother, Lucy, is that they are placed within a system of sexual abuse. Tancy, herself the blood daughter of a white slave owner, is exposed to sexual assault, a common occurrence for many young black female slaves.⁸⁵ The false family relationship constituted through slavery is unmasked as Julie, the cook, tells Tancy: "No such thing as brothers and sisters between white folks and black. You and Billy got the same daddy, is all."⁸⁶ And Tancy, when she uncovers the facts about her black mother, comments that: "No matter how Miss Puddin expressed it, she was *not* Tancy's mother. Lucy was; Lucy who resided as Lulu in Mas Gaither's ledger, real, taken note of."⁸⁷

Only through the forbidden act of reading anything other than the Bible had Tancy learned of her slave mother in an entry in the plantation ledger: "6/16/48—Lulu lying in. 6/17/48—Lulu delivered of Nancy. Both well."⁸⁸ The record of the alteration of Tancy's name from the name given to her by her mother and the various names by which her mother is known—Lulu, Lucy, Lucinda, Sin—reproduce the loss of identity and forced separation between mother and daughter. The search for Tancy's mother ends with her location of Sin, now mistress to a former slave owner, and charging rent to black families living in the huts and hovels of Shantytown from land procured from her white lover. Tancy recoils from the old woman who does not represent the idealized mother of her dreams:

Sin, Lucinda. Oh, Mother, Tancy grieved already yearning for the lost mother of her dreams. How could she give up the Lulu she had fashioned in her mind—soft, sweet Lulu, beloved of Mas Gaither?"⁸⁹

The de-idealization of the mother is constructed within the historical and social denigration of black women under slavery. "Lulu was a bad woman," Tancy is told, the "kind of woman" who was sold to speculators in the slave trade. Blamed for the sexual exploitation of her masters, her name Sin, the symbol of "female evil and sexual lust," Tancy's black mother is constructed against the purer white mother, Miss Puddin with her "smooth and golden and shining" hair.⁹⁰

Subverting archetypes of an idealized and strong black mother, Sin is nevertheless accepted by Tancy as her mother for whom she is—a survivor of forced labor and sexual exploitation. Rejected by her sons

and their wives, Sin is reunited with her daughter, who is determined now to stay with her mother and not lose her again. In this novel, a narrative plot which reproduces connections with a maternal mother is a reversal of those narrative plots in young adult novels in which adolescent girls move away from their maternal mothers to achieve independence or, are in relationship with replacement, or surrogate mothers in lieu of their mothers. Tancy's emancipation is achieved in conjunction with the search for her maternal mother:

It was not emancipation that had freed her, she realized; she had to do that for herself, and she debated whether or not she would have struck out at all, had she not gone looking for her mother.⁹¹

Hurmench writes that “Tancy’s yearning and searching parallels what many young people experience today, looking for some ideal, or ‘mother’ on the way to discovering themselves.”⁹² Independence for a black adolescent female as constructed in the social and historical context of this novel is the freedom to search for lost connections that have denied her the worth of her black identity and identity with her black mother. Sin tells Tancy that there is no “mistake”—that she is indeed her mother as she links racial identity with identification of the maternal mother. “Look at her eyes, no whites to them, just like mine.”⁹³ Tancy’s emancipation and re-connection with her maternal mother is thus constructed within the collective history of the severing of the bonds of black mothers and daughters in slavery—a severance that denied black daughters ownership of their rightful name, maternal mother, and racial identity.

The fictional narrative *Tancy*, though narrated by an anonymous narrator, is analogous to the female slave narrative, which tells not only of the “journey from slavery to freedom” but tells also of the black woman’s experience as a slave from her perspective. In this novel, as in Mary Lyons’s young adult novel, *Letters From A Slave Girl*, the focus is on the abuses suffered by black women and on the separation of families generally left out of male slave narratives.⁹⁴ In *Tancy*, the loss and re-connection formulated around the absence and presence of the mother—a central figure in this novel—is doubled in a sub-plot in which Tancy experiences the anguish of giving up a child she has cared for to his rightful mother. In *Letters from A Slave Girl*, Harriet, a black slave mother, is separated from her own daughter for the years she is in hiding before she can escape and they are eventually re-united in the North. In both novels, the stories of mothers and daughters—often an unwritten story—are especially documented.

In the young adult novel, *Letters from A Slave Girl*, a fictionalized version of the slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*, by Harriet Jacobs, published in 1861, Lyons chooses to reproduce Harriet's loss of her own mother and her need to still feel connected to her through the use of a narrative style in the form of letters that Harriet as a young girl, addresses to her dead mother, one of several addressees. "Mama," she writes, "I am not so lonesome if I can talk to you in my Book."⁹⁵ And to an absent mother she recounts in an intimate voice her feelings and experiences as she grows up, her first dance, her first beau, and then as she grows older, the vulnerability of a young black slave girl to the sexual exploitation of a slave owner.

She tells of the betrayal of her mother's mistress, who had left eleven-year-old Harriet to be sold in her will, despite the promise made to her mother that she would take care of Harriet. She admits to the love that she feels for her mistress who had "been almost a mother" to her since her maternal mother's death: "I love her like I love you. It might hurt you to hear that, but I can't help it."⁹⁶ The relationship had seemed especially strong to Harriet since her grandmother had nursed her mistress, and her mother had grown up and played with her like a sister before they understood that "the white girl be owning the black one."⁹⁷

The attachments and connections reproduced between white mothers and their black slave girls are necessarily based in a system of betrayal and ownership and formed in the absence and lack of the maternal mother. Yet in *Tancy*, the connection and mother-daughter tie that exists between them is acknowledged when Tancy pays Miss Puddin a visit, once she is secure in her knowledge of freedom and independence. Miss Puddin claims that she was "more of a mother than ever" Tancy's mother was. Tancy admits to the truth of this and is sensitive to the "mother-tie [that] twanged between them like a strummed chord."⁹⁸

Tancy's symbolic journey as a daughter from ownership and the unequal power relationship of a white mother to emancipation and a rediscovery of her own black roots and mother parallels the historical moment in which the novel is set. Tancy's journey however, resolves neither the contradictions and ambiguities between mother(s) and daughter nor racial difference. As Tancy comments, "everything was never *worked* out. Not with Miss Puddin, not with Sin."⁹⁹ Attachments between mothers and daughters, whether maternal, othermothers, or between surrogate mothers are thus structured across distance, contradictions, and differences.

A WHITE MOTHER AND BLACK DAUGHTER NARRATIVE WITH A DIFFERENCE

A more recent adult novel recommended for young adults also reproduces a mother–daughter relationship situated across racial difference. In Dori Sander’s *Clover*, set in recent times in South Carolina, ten-year-old Clover and her white stepmother, who barely know each other, struggle to cross the racial and cultural differences and oppositions that divide them, after Clover’s father is killed. Sara Kate, focalized by Clover as “strange,” is objectified and criticized as one of those “white women” by Clover’s family. The perceptive voice of Clover, aware of prejudice and difference, focalizes the distance that separates them at the beginning of their relationship:

So here we are. Two strangers in a house. I think of all the things I think I’d like to say to her. Think of all the things I think she’d like to say to me. I do believe if we could bring ourselves to say those things it would close the wide gap between us and draw us closer together.¹⁰⁰

Wishing for their voices to be in relationship and for them to “learn something from each other,” Clover’s voice reveals her need for attachment and love from a mother. The day Sara Kate calls her her daughter is for Clover “really something.” The difference that will always be between them is humorously noted by Clover as she comments that:

They say when two people live together, they start to look alike. Well, Sara Kate and I have been living together for a long time and there is no way we will ever look alike.¹⁰¹

GRANDMOTHERS, MOTHERS, AND DAUGHTERS

In *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, Braxton writes of “the importance of female bonding especially between the narrator, her grandmother, and her daughter” in the female slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*.¹⁰² The bonds of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters are also reproduced in Maya Angelou’s autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and in the adult novel, Ntozake Shange’s *Betsey Browne*. In Angelou’s biography, particularly, the voice of the grandmother is strong, as she disciplines and protects her granddaughter in the face of racial inequality. In both of these texts set in the historical and social context of racial prejudice, the grandmothers are central figures in the family structures of the adolescent daughters.

Loving bonds between grandmothers and granddaughters are

reproduced in young adult novels. The voice of the grandmother has been an important and strong one to Afeni in *The Dear One*. In Woodson's *Maizon at Blue Hill*, Maizon's grandmother has raised her granddaughter whom she encourages to move beyond the bounds of Brooklyn. The strength of the lineage of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters is celebrated in the poetry, autobiographical writings, and essays of black women in *Double Stitch* including for example, Alice Walker's essay, "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." Reproduced in both young adult and adult texts is the vital importance and emotional intensity of the mother–daughter relationship.

CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

The diversity of these relationships constructed and imagined within different socio-economic contexts and time-frames emphasize the pluralities of black mother–daughter relationships and the differing experiences of black female adolescents as constructed in these texts. With the recent focus on the mother–daughter relationship, both in the field of scholarship and literary works, more young adult and adult novels are available in which this relationship is situated within different racial and ethnic contexts. A question to be raised is what commonalities and differences are there in relation to those mother–daughter relationships reproduced in other cultural contexts in young adult literature, particularly?

Limiting discussion to white American mother–daughter relationships reproduced in various contexts in young adult novels, and conscious that different theoretical perspectives produce different kinds of knowledge, some preliminary questions may be raised and some preliminary brief overall comparisons made with the African-American young adult novels discussed in this chapter. One might ask, for example, what different assumptions are made and what different narratives are written about adolescent development cross-culturally, which would affect the kind of mother and adolescent daughter relationships imagined and constructed in these texts?

The assumption that adolescence is a time of individuation and separation when the adolescent daughter separates from her mother with hostility and turns toward her father within the patriarchal nuclear family will provide a different script for a narrative plot of the mother–daughter relationship for example, than the assumption that adolescent daughters remain in relationship with their mothers. The question of what is valorized—an adolescent daughter's coming to maturity through attaining self-sufficiency and independence or

through maintaining connections and being responsive to a mother while retaining a unique sense of self—will affect the the kind of mother–daughter relationship constructed within a particular narrative plot. A linear plot, for example, may construct a daughter’s move towards independence by separation from her maternal mother. A plot more circular in conception may construct a daughter’s connections and re-connections with a maternal or othermother.

The question may also be raised how different socio-economic contexts and assumptions of family structures and mothering affect the construction of this relationship? Assumptions that a mother and adolescent–daughter relationship is situated in the separate gendered spheres centered around the patriarchal nuclear family will provide a different narrative script perhaps, than the alternative reality that mother–daughter relationships are situated in contexts in which the mothers provide economic sustenance in one-parent families. The absence of the father particularly, may engender a different narrative plot in which mother, father, and daughter form a triangular relationship within the nuclear family, as scripted by Chodorow. In the small selection of African-American novels discussed in this chapter, the absence of the father is particularly noticeable.

Reproduced in the mother–daughter relationships in the specific novels discussed in this chapter, is a valorization of an adolescent daughter’s attachment or re-connection to a mother, although not necessarily a maternal mother. The presence of a network of othermothers in some African-American young adult novels discussed, for example, in the novels, *The Dear One*, *Listen For the Fig Tree*, and *Lou in the Limelight*, emphasizes a community role of mothering—a concept which seems generally absent from young adult novels in which relationships between white mothers and adolescent daughters are constructed. Alternative mothers constructed in some of these latter relationships are more apt to be replacement mothers, whose connections to an adolescent girl are predicated on a maternal mother’s permanent absence. Or, an alternative role mother may be the mother of the daughter’s friend in a contrasting and separate sub-plot of a mother–daughter relationship. The questions then to be raised are: is this a difference that would hold true across a larger comparative study and how much do different social constructions of mothering affect the kind of mother–daughter relationships created in young adult literature?

The voices of adolescent daughters in several African-American young adult novels shift between the needs and responsibilities of self and those of their mothers—those of Muffin in *Listen For the Fig Tree* and Didi in *Motown and Didi*, for example. The absence of the patriar-

chal nuclear family and the mother's struggle to be both economic provider and affective nurturer is noticeable in the narrative plots in which this relationship is constructed. The construction of the mother-daughter relationship in these novels are in contrast to several constructed relationships of white mothers and adolescent daughters in the narrative plots of some young adult novels in which the separation of the daughter's voice from that of the mother's is culturally assumed and valorized.

In considering how this relationship is constructed and imagined in young adult novels, one might also raise the question of how much the formulaic conventions of young adult literature might also structure this relationship across cultures? The voices of adolescent daughter protagonists, with whom readers are more likely to identify, would sometimes appear to be stronger and more perceptive than the more fragile voices of their maternal mothers in relationships constructed between both black maternal mothers and their daughters and white maternal mothers and adolescent daughters. In this selection of African-American novels, the voices of Rainbow, Didi, and Muffin are particularly strong, for example. In the relationships formulated between maternal mothers and adolescent daughters in young adult novels, there would appear to be an absence of the archetypal white maternal mother or maternal "strong black mother," in comparison for example, to Angelou's autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Adolescent daughters may sometimes, Didi and Muffin for example, be rescuers of less strong mothers thus subverting the powerlessness that is handed down from mother to daughter, whether the mother be white or black.

In these African-American young adult novels, the awareness of the vulnerability of being both black and female is often reproduced in the voices of adolescent daughters in relation to their relationship with their mothers. It is present in the voices of Didi and Afeni, for example. The voice of Muffin speaks from a position of strength and pride in her racial identity: "To be black was to be strong, to have courage, to survive. And it wasn't an alone thing. It was family . . . It was her mother."¹⁰³ Questions of power and powerlessness and racial identity would thus seem integral to the construction of the black mother and adolescent relationship in these novels.

In the majority of young adult novels, in which both black and white mother and adolescent daughter relationships are constructed, the mother is not a narrating agent in that she does not take up an "I" position in the text and thus does not relate her thoughts and feelings about the relationship from a subject position in the text. Focalized by

the daughter and other characters, she is most frequently an object in the text, whether a black or a white mother; a mother who is spoken of and spoken for by others, especially by a daughter. The formulaic conventions of young adult literature may thus cut across cultural differences to some extent in constructing particular kinds of narrative plots and representations of mothers in which mother–daughter relationships are reproduced and in which daughters must be represented as strong adolescent protagonists.

THEORETICAL ISSUES

I have listened to the voices in these texts as a white woman. Aware of the different theoretical positions of black and white feminism(s) in analyzing the mother–daughter relationship, I nevertheless, ask whether there are some points of intersection. How relevant, for example, are recent feminist revisions of female adolescents and their relationships with mothers by Gilligan and others to black female adolescents? The voices of daughters in these young adult novels strongly maintain connections with difference to either maternal mothers and othermothers for example, in different historical and socio-economic contexts. Their voices also struggle with the issues of independence, separation and their own needs in conjunction with meeting the needs and responsibilities of mothers. While Gilligan’s research and others exclude black adolescents, for the most part in texts quoted in this chapter, are there yet points of connection here which may be useful in talking about the black mother and adolescent daughter relationship?

In affirming the attachments between African-American women, Collins refers to the mother–daughter relationship as “one fundamental relationship among black women.”¹⁰⁴ Central to the different constructions of mother–daughter relationships in young adult novels, whether white or black, are the feelings of love, anger, and loss that daughters experience in relation to their mothers, which would affirm the centrality of the relationship in both black and white mother–daughter relationships. And while the theoretical perspectives of black and white feminists are diverse and are posited from very different positions, there is a convergence at least in the affirmation of the importance of the connections and continuities of the mother–daughter relationship which would appear to cross different cultures and theories.

bell hooks writes of the value of a “cross-ethnic feminist scholarship.”¹⁰⁵ Cross-culturally, there would appear to be commonalities and interesting cultural differences in the structure of mother–daughter relationships in young adult novels. The work of Nancy Scheper Hughes

for example, emphasizes the different social constructions of mothering and mother–daughter relationships in her research in Brazil.¹⁰⁶ Certainly, I have found insights from both black and white feminist theories useful in listening to the voices of black mothers and daughters in a literature in which cultural assumptions of adolescence and their parental relationships are scripted in books marketed for black and white adolescents alike.

The study of mother–daughter relationships in young adult literature emphasizes the importance of noting the multiplicity and diversity of this relationship in different social, cultural, and racial contexts. It also emphasizes the need to take into account revised narratives of female adolescent development which differ from a monolithic traditional adolescent psychology—in which the development of girls and their relationship with their mothers have been subsumed under a white male development narrative as an other unwritten story.

NOTES

1. Portions of this chapter are from Hilary S. Crew, “A Narrative Analysis of the Mother–Daughter Relationship in Selected Young Adult Novels” (Ph.D. diss. in progress. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey).
2. Alice Childress, *Rainbow Jordan* (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1981), 7.
3. *Ibid.*, 58.
4. The term “maternal mother” is used throughout the text to define a daughter’s biological mother.
5. See for example, Kay Vandergrift, “A Feminist Perspective on Multicultural Children’s Literature in the Middle Years of the Twentieth Century,” *Library Trends* 41, no. 3 (1993): 354–377.
6. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 225.
7. See, for example, literary studies of the mother–daughter relationship from a white feminist perspective in novels published for adults recommended for high school students: Roni Natov, “Mothers and Daughters: Jamaica Kincaid’s Pre-Oedipal Narrative,” *Annual of the Modern Language Association Division on Children’s Literature and The Children’s Literature Association* 18 (1990): 1–16; Jeanne Gerlach, “Mother Daughter Relationships in Lois Duncan’s *Daughters of Eve*,” *The ALAN Review* 19, no. 1 (1991): 36–38.
8. Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 132.
9. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 167.
10. Gloria I. Joseph, “Black Mothers and Daughters: Their Roles and Func-

- tion in American Society,” in *Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White Feminist Perspectives*, by Gloria I. Joseph and Jill Lewis (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1986), 76–81.
11. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 116.
 12. Joseph, 76.
 13. Patricia Hill Collins, “The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Black Mother–Daughter Relationships,” in *Double Stitch: Black Women Write About Mothers and Daughters*, ed. Patricia Bell-Scott et al. (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993), 47 & 53.
 14. Johnetta Cole, “Preface,” in *Double Stitch*, ed. Bell-Scott et al., xiii–xiv.
 15. For example, Carmen Subryan, “Circles: Mother and Daughter Relationships in Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*,” *Sage V*, no. 1 (Summer 1988): 34–36; Rosalie Riegle Troester, “Turbulence and Tenderness: Mothers, Daughters, and ‘Othermothers’ in Paule Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones*,” in *Double Stitch*, ed. Bell-Scott et al., 163–172.
 16. Joseph, 80.
 17. Mary C. Lewis, *Herstory: Black Female Rites of Passage* (Chicago: IL: African-American Images, 1988), 7.
 18. Terri Apter, *Altered Loves: Mothers and Daughters During Adolescence* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990), 77.
 19. Carol Gilligan, “Preface,” in *Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School*, ed. Carol Gilligan et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 20.
 20. *Ibid.*, 10.
 21. *Ibid.*, 5.
 22. Janie Ward, “Racial Identity Formation and Transformation,” in *Making Connections*, ed. Gilligan et al., 220.
 23. Joanne Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within A Tradition* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1989), 205.
 24. Collins, “The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Black Mother–Daughter Relationships,” in *Double Stitch*, ed. Bell-Scott et al., 55.
 25. *Ibid.*, 54–57.
 26. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 127.
 27. Peter Blos, “Modifications in the Traditional Psychoanalytic Theory of Female Adolescent Development,” *Adolescent Psychiatry* 8 (1980): 16–17.
 28. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 29.
 29. Collins, “The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture,” in *Double Stitch*, ed. Bell-Scott et al., 48.
 30. Childress, 26.
 31. *Ibid.*, 11.
 32. *Ibid.*, 26.

33. Ibid., 12.
34. Hirsch, 170 & 194.
35. Childress, 30.
36. Joseph writes of the tradition in which black mothers “have served as role models for their daughters” and the special difficulties of adolescent mothers in fulfilling this role. See “Black Mothers and Daughters” in *Double Stitch*, ed. Bell-Scott et al., 101–102.
37. Childress, 9.
38. Childress, 138.
39. Virginia Hamilton, *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* (New York: Philomel, 1982), 12.
40. Ibid., 17.
41. Ibid., 211.
42. Jacqueline Woodson, *The Dear One* (New York: Delacorte, 1991; Dell, 1993, 84).
43. Ibid., 85–86.
44. Barbara Christian writes about the “domineering mother [which] has been so much a part of black mythology,” see *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1985), 17; Collins writes about the “controlling images” of black motherhood and the need to unmask the images of the “matriarch” and “superstrong black mother,” see *Black Feminist Thought*, 117.
45. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 127.
46. Walter Dean Myers, *Motown and Didi: A Love Story* (New York: Viking Kestrel, 1984), 10.
47. Ibid., 13.
48. Ibid., 90.
49. Ibid., 73.
50. Ibid., 17.
51. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 122.
52. Sandra Govan writes of the lack of the “usual or traditional community support structures typically illustrative of Afro-American life and culture” in “Alice Childress’s *Rainbow Jordan: The Black Aesthetic Returns Dressed in Adolescent Fiction*,” *ChLA Quarterly* 13 (Summer 1988): 70–74.
53. See Carol Gilligan and others in *Making Connections*; also, Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
54. Sharon Bell Mathis, *Listen For the Fig Tree* (New York: Viking Press, 1974), 84.
55. Ibid., 10.
56. Ibid., 113.
57. Ibid., 153.
58. Myers, 13.
59. Govan, 72.
60. Myers, 13.

61. Woodson, 31.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., 13.
64. Ibid., 69.
65. Ibid., 62.
66. Hamilton, 69.
67. Ibid., 173.
68. Kristin Hunter, *Lou in the Limelight* (New York: Scribner's), 291.
69. Woodson, *The Dear One*, 60.
70. Vy Higginson with Tonya Bolden, *Mama, I Want To Sing* (New York: Scholastic, 1992), 48.
71. Hunter, 213.
72. Ibid.
73. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 128.
74. Hunter, 121.
75. Ibid., 122.
76. Ibid., 135.
77. Higginson with Bolden, 176.
78. Sara Ruddick writes of the concept of "maternal practice" separated from that of the biological mother which "begins in a response to the reality of a biological child in a particular social world," see (*Maternal Thinking: Toward A Politics of Peace*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 17.
79. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 132.
80. Joyce Carol Thomas, *Water Girl* (New York: Avon Books, 1986), 106.
81. Belinda Hurmence, ed., *My Folks Don't Want Me To Talk About Slavery: Twenty-one Oral Histories of Former North Carolina Slaves* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 1984), 76.
82. Ibid., 56.
83. Belinda Hurmence, *Tancy* (New York: Clarion Books, 1984), 203.
84. Ibid., 2.
85. bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981), 24.
86. Hurmence, *Tancy*, 27.
87. Ibid., 30.
88. Ibid., 11.
89. Ibid., 158.
90. bell hooks writes of the "sexist ideology" of the 19th century, in which black women were denigrated "as the originator of sexual sin" and constructed as the "embodiment of female evil and lust" in opposition to the "glorified de-sexualized identity" of white women, see *Ain't I A Woman*, 31 & 33.
91. Hurmence, *Tancy*, 182.
92. Ibid., 203.
93. Ibid., 158.
94. Valerie Smith writes of the differences between male and female slave narratives in the "Introduction," in *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*:

- Harriet Jacobs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xxvii–xl.
95. Mary E. Lyons, *Letters From A Slave Girl* (New York: Scribner's, 1992), 4.
 96. *Ibid.*
 97. *Ibid.*, 10.
 98. Hurmence, *Tancy*, 194.
 99. *Ibid.*, 201.
 100. Dori Sanders, *Clover* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1991), 100.
 101. *Ibid.*, 130.
 102. Braxton, *Black Women Writing Autobiography*, 38.
 103. Mathis, *Listen For The Fig Tree*, 170.
 104. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 96.
 105. bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989), 48.
 106. Nancy Scheper-Hughes' research shows, for example, that alienation and distance between mothers and daughters are regarded as an "aberration" in the community of Alto women in the northeastern region of Brazil, and that the community of the Alto is clustered around "intergenerational female-centered households," see *Death Without Weeping: The Violation of Everyday Life in Brazil* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 310.

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