INDIVIDUATION AND CONNECTION IN MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the processes of individuation and connection in mother-daughter relationships, and describe how these relationships may or may not be facilitated by the intervention of reflections and joint narratives.

This study used social constructionism as the epistemological framework and involved in-depth interviews with three mother-daughter pairs. Hermeneutics was used to analyse the data.

The participants' experiences were recounted through the researcher's lens in the form of themes that characterised their relationships as well as interactional patterns. Participant's experiences of the research process, and what the researcher believed were helpful and unhelpful behaviours in her interaction with each mother-daughter pair, were discussed. A comparative analysis was also undertaken between the common themes identified in the stories of the mother-daughter pairs and the literature.

The information gained could assist women as well as professionals in understanding and respecting mother-daughter relationships in their specific contexts.

Key words: individuation, connection, separation, disconnection, female identity, mothers, daughters, relationships, social constructionism, hermeneutics, qualitative research, stories, process oriented.

I declare that,

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is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

General Introduction

Clever men create themselves, but clever women… are created by their mothers.
Women can never quite escape their mother's cosmic pull,
not their lip-biting expectations or their faulty love.
We want to please our mothers, emulate them, disgrace them, oblige them, outrage them,
and bury ourselves in the mysteries and consolations of their presence.

Carol Shields
Mothers and Daughters: A Loving Bond

The above poem illustrates the different expectations of men and women in that while men are supposed to be self-sufficient and independent, women are assumed to be more dependent and socially reliant. More importantly, it exemplifies the assumption that mothers are all-pervasive in their daughters' lives and that they have immense power in influencing who daughters become and continue to be as individuals. Daughters are portrayed as almost powerless in their mothers' grasps so that they cannot become independent and autonomous individuals who are no longer under their mothers' control. As Caplan (1989, p. 20) claims in her study,

> *[t]he very word 'mother' elicits a wealth of conflicting, ambivalent feelings – protectiveness, a desire for her approval, need for her love versus rage at the terrible damage we feel she's done to us, however unwittingly.*

This study addresses this presumed pervasiveness of mothers and the speculated enmeshed nature of mother-daughter relationships, and attempts to explore alternative ways of perceiving mothers and daughters as individuals and in relationship.

The poem also highlights the seemingly inevitable ambivalence present in the mother-daughter relationship. As this study will show, the balancing act between independence and dependence, identification and rejection, and individuation and connection, fundamentally characterises the mother-daughter relationship and appears to be the source of most conflicts in this relationship.

The above poem is furthermore based on mother-daughter discourses such as the closeness between mothers and daughters, the expectation of mothers that they will raise perfect or '*clever*' daughters (Shields, 1998, p. 22), and the full responsibility that mothers bear for how their daughters behave as individuals. It further negates autonomy in women and implies that they cannot be in control of themselves. These discourses are likely to be products of our traditionally patriarchal society and have become means that serve ends such as the suppression of females and the minimisation of the importance of males in child rearing. The societal expectations that require men to work outside the home whilst women work within the home have been historical ones but nonetheless still pervade our present society. It is therefore important to see mothers, daughters, and their relationship within their context by taking into account the cultural and social environments in which they exist and operate. These contextual factors will influence how mothers and daughters think, use language, and act on the environment around them, including their relationship with each other. The epistemological framework that emphasises the importance of social processes and context in meaning making or understanding is known as social constructionism (Owen, 1992).

Social constructionism regards reality as co-constructed between interacting individuals in specific contexts and considers that since no two persons have the same experience, each co-constructed reality is different from any other (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). Social constructionism therefore believes in the existence of multiple realities and the possibility of many 'truths'. In the present study, the participants each face a different reality within which

they operate and live their lives. Although mothers and daughters tend to experience similar realities, they are nonetheless dissimilar due to their individual differences, such as the eras in which they have each grown up and their age gaps. The mothers and daughters in this study therefore bring their individual realities into their interactions with each other, and together they co-construct another reality that characterises their relationship. Although there may be similarities between the mother-daughter relationships in this study, each mother and daughter relationship is regarded as unique within the specific context where it exists.

Owing to the in-depth nature of the enquiry undertaken in this study and its aims, a qualitative research methodology that focused on the analysis of a few mother-daughter pairs' lived experiences was deemed appropriate. The qualitative research design is further consistent with the theoretical framework of this study because it enables the researcher to enter into the participants' worlds and, together with the mother and daughter pairs, to co-create new meanings and understandings of their relationship for both the participants as well as the researcher.

Definitions of Terms

Several terms will now be defined since these definitions provide the lens through which to view this study. These terms include **identity**; **individuation**, **connection** and **disconnection**; and **social constructionism**.

Identity

The definitions of identity have changed over time and have gradually moved away from the individualistic view of identity as fixed and autonomous towards a more relational view of identity as dynamic and being formed in relationships. Reber and Reber (2001, p. 338) offer a more traditional definition of identity and state that it constitutes,

> *[a] person's essential, continuous self, the internal, subjective concept of oneself as an individual.*

According to this traditional view, the self is regarded as relatively coherent and consistent across time and context, and as bounded and autonomous (Cushman, cited in Lyddon &

Weill, 1997). To establish an identity therefore means to become a unique individual with identifiable traits and consistent characteristics. However, as general thinking began to shift, more emphasis is now being accorded to the context in which human behaviour occurs, including focusing on how identities are embedded in cultural and social discourses (Artus, 2003). Gergen (1991, p. 139) offers the following alternative to the earlier definition of identity:

> *One's identity is continuously emergent, re-formed, and redirected as one moves through the sea of ever-changing relationships.*

As this study will demonstrate, the shift in the conceptualisations of identity to include social relations, cultural context, and social discourses has major implications for the development of the female identity and how it is conceptualised.

Individuation, Connection and Disconnection

The term *individuation* is closely linked to the traditional view of identity and was often deemed to be essential for a healthy individual with a stable and mature identity. Individuation therefore also means to achieve autonomy and become self-sufficient, unique, integrated and complete (Cross & Gore, 2003).

However, together with the shift in thinking to include relationship influences in the definition of identity, individuation also took on a slightly different meaning. For the researcher, this alternative view of *individuation* is one that emphasises psychological separation where one establishes personal boundaries that enable one to distinguish oneself from others but without rejecting others or characteristics that are different from oneself. Individuation of daughters from mothers will therefore indicate a psychological process where mothers and daughters gradually see themselves as unique and separated individuals with a special connection, but without having to reject or repudiate one another and become disconnected. In a relational model of identity, separation or self-differentiation is not seen as crucial to development although it does have its significance. Rather, connection is the primary core element and energy of psychological development; one grows, and from connections, develops into an individual who is continuously related to others (Surrey, 1993). This ability in women to connect and grow has its origin in the mother-daughter relationship (Nice, 1992).

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In the *Oxford Dictionary* (1998), disconnection is defined as the breaking of connection between parts, putting the object out of action and also as being incoherent and illogical. In this study, disconnection refers to a psychological state where mothers and daughters no longer join together or connect psychologically. Even if they appear to be outwardly connected in their interaction, mothers and daughters may be disconnected from each other's inner selves.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism comprises an epistemological framework that subscribes to the view that knowledge is not only created by the individual, but also arises from social interchange and is mediated through language (Hoffman, 1993). According to this approach, an individual is defined in terms of an ongoing flux of social activity, and his or her self and thoughts are actually social processes (Babbie & Mouton, 2002). This implies that all knowledge is value-laden and subjective, and that objective neutrality is not possible. All knowing is therefore co-created in relationships, between interacting individuals, and in a particular context. Since multiple contexts exists, such as cultural and social environments, so there are multiple realities in different contexts as well as within each context.

Social constructionism in addition examines the social interactions and processes in society that give rise to people's common understandings of the world (Gergen, 1992). It is interested in how people know what they know and therefore constantly questions beliefs and taken-for-granted knowledge (Gergen, cited in Nagar, 2002). Social constructionism therefore does not view all interpretations as valid. It believes that there are certain dominating discourses in society that are embedded in our language, which influence our perceptions of the world. Social constructionists challenge those stories that are not respectful of differences amongst people such as race and gender (Doan, 1997).

In this study, it is assumed that the researcher and the participants possess their unique ways of perceiving and creating reality based on their culture, social environments, and personal experiences. The researcher and the participants bring their own perceptions and understandings of the mother-daughter relationship into the research context. Through conversation about the participants' relationships, both the researcher and the participants are able to exchange their understandings and re-evaluate their preconceived ideas of mothers and

daughters. This also allows the researcher and the participants to question their underlying beliefs and assumptions and, together, co-create new meanings and understandings of the mother-daughter relationship.

Aim and Rationale of the Study

As the literature review in Chapter 2 will demonstrate, there exists vast amounts of literature on mother-daughter relationships in Western culture. Research on these relationships has tended to advocate either of the two extremes in perceiving this relationship; as inherently close and intimate or as difficult and fraught with conflict. Minimal research however exists that attempts to integrate these two extremes and attempts to view mother-daughter relationships in their context. Furthermore, although most of the research has been conducted in the name of mothers and daughters, little research involved both mothers and daughters. Rather, the majority of the research consisted of daughters' accounts, with the mothers' stories implied or assumed. The few studies that have involved both mothers and daughters and include the voices of both have seemingly been more helpful in the understanding of the mother-daughter relationship since they provide an integrated and more realistic representation of how the relationship is experienced by both mothers and daughters.

Literature discussing how feminine discourses impact on the mother-daughter relationship in male-dominated societies is also widely available and comprehensive, but little opportunity has been afforded to allow mothers and daughters to reconstruct their realities through facilitation and intervention and thus enable them to deconstruct the discourses that may be limiting their relationship. Although previous studies have provided recommendations regarding how to enhance and improve mother and daughter relationships, these have so far only taken the form of suggestions and their effectiveness is uncertain. A limited number of studies have made observations and comments on how mother and daughter relationships evolve owing to intervention and facilitation.

The aim of this study is therefore to narrate the stories of the participating mothers, daughters, and their relationship together, and to describe how their relationships may or may not have changed as a result of the research process and the interventions of the researcher. The

researcher joins with the mothers and daughters in this study to tell their stories and appreciates that these relationships have evolved over time and contain established patterns of interaction. Therefore any possible shifts brought on or triggered by this research process will most likely also take time before they eventually result in change, if at all, in these relationships.

It is hoped that this study will make a valuable contribution to the understanding of mother and daughter relationships by including both mothers' as well as daughters' voices, and that it will add to the literature by emphasising the process-oriented nature in these relationships and how they can be enhanced or facilitated. It is also hoped that this study will benefit professionals who work with women struggling to connect with their mothers and/or daughters, and increase understanding of how the mother-daughter relationship may impact on women's sense of self and identity. More specifically, this study hopes to speak to the heart of the mother-daughter experience and resonate with women in providing them with alternative ways to view, and thus interact in, their mother-daughter relationship. As mothers and daughters see beyond the societal expectations that limit their relationships, they may gain a deeper understanding of and become empowered in renegotiating their relationship. In this process, it is hoped that women will come to accept themselves as humans, as women, as mothers, and as daughters.

Design of the Study

Although a number of studies have been carried out employing a quantitative framework, most studies involving mother and daughter relationships have used a qualitative research design. A qualitative research design is therefore selected for this study. Traditional quantitative research methods appear too restrictive to fully capture the complexities in mother and daughter relationships and do not allow for an in-depth search for interactional patterns in these relationships. A qualitative approach allows the participating mothers and daughters to tell their stories and, in the process, to construct and re-construct their realities with the researcher as well as with one another. The approach also allows the researcher to take into account the context within which mother and daughter relationships exist and to explore societal discourses that underlie and operate within these relationships.

A study of this nature may furthermore raise awareness and lead to potential personal growth in both the researcher as well as the participants. Subjective realities and meanings are shared and new realities and meanings become possible when the researcher and the participants join in story telling and co-create more beneficial and empowering stories.

Although the researcher has in mind her own experiences in her relationship with her mother, the participants as individuals and as a mother-daughter pair are regarded as experts in their own experiences and processes. This approach is therefore a humble one in that the researcher is viewed as the 'learner' while the participants are seen as the 'experts'. Owing to individual differences, the researcher cannot impose her values and principles onto the participants since experiences differ as a result of varied social and cultural contexts.

The themes and patterns identified and discussed that are unique to each individual participant and each mother and daughter pair as well as common to the mother-daughter relationships, will offer greater insight into the dynamics and processes involved that shape these relationships. In addition, these themes will possibly provide participants with a different understanding of the processes present in their relationship and of how they can be transformed.

Sampling and Selection

In this study, sampling will be purposive in that unique-case and convenience selection will be used. Participants who are willing to discuss matters openly and who are able to articulate their experiences in their relationship as mothers or daughters will be selected. The sample will comprise three mother-daughter pairs who are interested in discussing their relationships and feel that their stories will contribute to and further the general understanding of mother-daughter relationships.

Data Collection

Participants will be encouraged to tell their stories through the method of unstructured interviews or conversations. Questions will tend to be open-ended and exploratory in order to uncover information from the participants' worldview. The participants will also be requested to provide a reflection of their experiences in the research study, and these reflections will form part of the data to be analysed.

Data Analysis

The technique of hermeneutics, a methodology that values discovery of meaning through interpretation, will be used to analyse the data.

The data analysis in this study will be implemented in the following progression:

- ➢ The six participants (three mothers and three daughters) will be interviewed individually. These interviews will be audio-recorded and both the researcher as well as the individual participant will decide on the number and length of the interviews.

- ➢ The researcher will transcribe these individual interviews and compile a summary of each individual participant's interview/s. Each mother-daughter pair will receive a copy of both the mother's as well as the daughter's individual interview summary. These summaries can be found in the appendix.

- ➢ The participants will be asked to read through their summaries and make notes of problematic interpretations and understandings. They will also be asked not to discuss these summaries with each other until the joint interview.

- ➢ While the mothers and daughters review their own as well each other's interview summaries, the researcher will listen to the individual interview recordings one at a time and immerse herself in each participant's stories, taking note of themes and patterns that emerge as she gains a sense of the participants' experiences.

- ➢ Joint interviews with the three mother-daughter pairs will now be conducted where the individual summaries will serve as a point of discussion for their relationship. These interviews will also be tape-recorded.

- ➢ These joint interviews will be transcribed and the researcher will listen to the tape recordings of the joint interviews and immerse herself in each mother-daughter relationship, taking note of the unique and common patterns and interactional styles that surface.

- ➢ The researcher will write three stories for each mother-daughter pair in the study; of the mother, the daughter, and their relationship. In these stories, the researcher will identify the themes and patterns pertinent to the particular mother, daughter, and their relationship, and will consider how the research process may or may not have impacted on their interaction in the relationship.

- ➢ The researcher will also write the story of the participants' reflections concerning how they experienced the research process and how they might have found it beneficial or harmful. This will be combined with the researcher's own reflections regarding her role in the research and personal experience with each mother-daughter pair.
- ➢ Finally, a comparative analysis will be undertaken where the researcher integrates the themes found in the three mother-daughter pairs in this study with previous research.

Format of the Study

This study will consist of both a literature survey and a practical component.

The literature survey in this study provides a backdrop against which to perceive mother and daughter relationships. It represents an exploration of the existing body of knowledge on female identity, mother-daughter relationships, and the process of individuation-separation in such relationships. An overview of these aspects will provide the readers with some background into how the conceptualisation of mother-daughter relationships has changed and how societal discourses impact on women's perceptions of and behaviour in these relationships. Although the literature survey can be offered as an alternative voice with which the emerging themes in this study can be compared, its purpose is not to validate the themes identified in the participating mother-daughter pairs. Rather, a both/and perspective is supported and the literature survey demonstrates the existence of 'multiple realities'.

The purpose of the practical component is to provide three mother-daughter pairs with the opportunity to tell their stories and relate their experiences as mothers or daughters in relationship with one another. This component also allows the researcher to explore how the mother-daughter relationship can be enhanced and whether changes can occur through process interventions. These conversations engaged in by the researcher and participants will provide a different and alternative reality to that provided by the literature survey, again illustrating the concept of multiple realities.

The study will include the following chapters:

Chapter 2 encompasses a literature survey in which the female identity and its theoretical development over time will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion on mother-

daughter relationships and how they are explained by theories. An overview of recent research will be provided and its implications as well as suggestions regarding further study of these relationships will be offered.

Chapter 3 will discuss the theoretical approach chosen for this study: social constructionism, and the implications of this particular epistemology for this study. This will be followed by a comprehensive explanation of the research methodology utilised in this study where the qualitative research design and the hermeneutic data analysis method are discussed.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 will contain the researcher's narrative of each mother-daughter pair's stories. Individual themes related to the mothers, then the daughters, relevant to the mother-daughter relationship, will first be discussed, followed by the themes prominent in the particular relationship itself. Thereafter, participants' reflections as well as those of the researcher, concerning the participation process will be considered.

Chapter 7 comprises the comparative analysis between the common themes found in all three of the mother-daughter pairs, and the literature survey.

Chapter 8 will discuss the role of the researcher in the study. The emphasis falls on the researcher's dual role as an interviewer/researcher and a therapist/facilitator. The researcher's understanding of helpful and unhelpful processes in the research will also be reflected on.

Chapter 9, the concluding chapter, offers an evaluation of the research study as well as recommendations for future research.

Conclusion

Although the mother-daughter relationship has received much attention in recent years, the investigation has appeared to be rather one-sided in that daughters' perspectives have been emphasised and accorded more importance. Furthermore, little research has been dedicated to actively searching for and observing process changes in the mother-daughter relationship. In employing a qualitative research method, this study will attempt to bridge the gap between theorising about and acting on the mother-daughter relationship.

Chapter 2

The World of Mothers and Daughters

Introduction

In this chapter, the literature pertaining to female identity and the mother-daughter relationship will be explored, with the aim of providing a more comprehensive backdrop against which to view this research study. A discussion of identity, related and relevant definitions pertaining to identity, and the female identity and its theoretical developments will first be presented. This will be followed by an examination of the mother and daughter relationship in its sociopolitical and cultural contexts, and as explained by psychological theories. The importance of the separation-individuation process in identity formation, and particularly its implications for the mother-daughter relationship, will also be discussed. An overview of relevant research relating to mothers and daughters will then be provided, followed by the implications of these studies and of suggestions made by various researchers and theories regarding the relationship between mothers and daughters.

The Female Identity

In this section, various definitions of identity and concepts related to identity will first be mentioned and elaborated. This will be followed by a more in-depth discussion of female identity theories, particularly in the light of their development in terms of the psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives.

Definitions of Identity

Reber and Reber (2001, p. 338), authors of *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, define identity as:

> *[A] person's essential, continuous self, the internal, subjective concept of oneself as an individual*.

Identity therefore refers to an abstract construct or concept that is personal, unique, and stable. This is a rather traditional view where the conception of the self is regarded as relatively coherent and consistent across time and context, and as bounded and autonomous (Cushman, cited in Lyddon & Weill, 1997). From this traditional Western perspective, to establish an identity is to become a unique individual with identifiable traits and characteristics. Identity is therefore also synonymous with related concepts such as personality, individuality, and the self (Nixon, 1999).

Traditionally, in Western, male-dominated societies, to possess a healthy identity means to achieve autonomy and become self-sufficient, unique, integrated and complete (Cross & Gore, 2003). In both *The Oxford Dictionary* (1998) and *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology* (2001), definitions of autonomy make references to being independent, to being free from the influence of others, and to being internally regulated. The ideal individual is therefore not reliant on others, is self-sufficient, and rational. ***He*** is not emotional, dependent, and definitely not relational. As this chapter will continue to demonstrate, in various ways, such a viewpoint of selfhood does not cohere very well with the female identity.

The social-political context of the sanctity and freedom of individuals prevalent in Western, democratic, and male-dominated societies seems to have overshadowed the reality of the communal and deeply interdependent nature of human beings (Jordan, 1993). As Lawler (2000) indicates, this individualistic self, revered in Euro-American philosophy and culture, is someone who is bounded, rational, unique and autonomous; a model of the self, seemingly so universal but developed merely on the basis of a male-gendered subject to the exclusion of women. As Gergen (2001, p. 155) observed:

> *Western culture has long tended to define the male as more unitary and solid in character than the female.*

In the process of upholding an ideal self suiting white, middle-class males, all other characteristics not falling within the masculine ideal have by default become devalued and secondary, including the characteristics typically accorded to women such as sensitivity, caring, and intuition. However, as general thinking has begun to shift, more emphasis is now being given to the context in which human behaviour occurs, including a focus on how identities are embedded in culture and social discourses (Artus, 2003). Although it was acknowledged that a person's identity did not develop or exist in isolation, but was also

influenced by the person's surrounding environment such as his or her culture and family, these were not traditionally perceived as central. The shift in the conceptualisations of identity to include social relations, cultural context, and social discourses suggests major implications for the female identity and the way in which it is viewed. The next two subsections will provide an overview of how the female identity can be perceived in different ways.

Psychoanalytic Views on Female Identity

Psychoanalytic theories assume that all infants are cared for mainly by their mothers and therefore that every individual's first bond occurs with his or her mother, who is also the first person with whom he or she identifies as a human being. The process of identification, according to psychoanalytic perspectives, is however very different for girls as compared to boys.

Freud perceived the female self as inherently deficient, a view based on the female anatomy and the missing body part – the penis. According to the psychoanalytic perspective, girls soon discover in their toddler years that they are penis-less, and consequently feel inadequate and incomplete. The female oedipal complex begins following this 'horrific' discovery and women spend the rest of their lives yearning to possess a penis (Gershenson, 2000). In other words, psychoanalytic theory postulates that women's existence is one of inferiority and resentment, where they are constantly wishing to become male, living out a life of impending doom and misery. Freud therefore concludes that women display less of a sense of justice than men, are less ready to submit to the great hardships of life, and are also more often influenced in their judgments by feelings and emotions (cited in Gilligan, 1993). According to Freud's theory, women are essentially perceived as volatile, unstable, weak, and incompetent.

Building on Freud's theory, Chodorow (Gilligan, 1993) elaborates and further explains the development of females, attempting to place women in a more positive light. For Chodorow, females are less individuated because they are mothered by the same gender. Rather than perceiving this situation as a lack of separation in females, it is reframed as providing an added sense of empathy in a female's definition of self and it is seen as coming about because they have identified and related to their female caregivers since early childhood. Girls therefore tend to fuse attachment with identity formation, resulting in a less individuated and separated self. Since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined

through attachment, Chodorow postulates that intimacy threatens the male gender identity while separation threatens the female gender identity (Gilligan, 1993). Women are furthermore relational because they exhibit more permeable boundaries than to men. Chodorow posits that because girls are able to experience immediate and close attachment, and consequent identification with their mothers, for a much longer period of time than boys, girls develop a more flexible personal boundary. Boys, on the other hand, experience a sudden interruption of identification with the mother when they discover that their mother does not possess a penis and must therefore be defective. Boys quickly shift their identification away from their mothers and toward their fathers, who are perceived as physically intact and therefore more superior and powerful (Jordan, 1993).

Although Chodorow's views have attempted to account for female identity development and acknowledged it as being different from that of males, they perpetuate the status quo by continuing to imply that masculine characteristics are superior, and in this way keep women suppressed and disempowered. Therefore, masculine traits such as individualism and competitiveness remain disapproved of when displayed by women as these cause females to seem 'unfeminine' or 'too strong and male-like', and threatening to males. A study conducted by Horner (cited in Gilligan, 1993) found that women were motivated to avoid success as they appeared to experience difficulties with competitive achievement owing to the perceived conflict between femininity and success. The avoidance of success seemed particularly prevalent in women when one person's success was at the expense of another's failure. The present study highlights the avoidance of traditional male characteristics in females as well as emphasising the relational nature of women. Feminist theories on female identity provide a further understanding of the relational aspect of female identity.

Feminist Views on Female Identity

Although historically feminine qualities such as caring for others, emotionality, and passivity have been acknowledged as important in women's roles as caregivers, these qualities were not prized. Society has tended to attribute greater importance to the more valued male characteristics such as assertiveness, independence, and ambitiousness. Rather than turning the tables by discarding masculine qualities and celebrating feminine traits, however, Carol Gilligan's formulations seem to indicate that both male and female characteristics are equally important and significant. Carol Gilligan has become one of the most influential theorists in

female identity development. Her theory has formed the basis of much research and additional theories pertaining to women (Buysse, 1999; Caplan, 1989; Fingerman, 2003; Gershenson, 2000; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Josselson, 1987; McCarter, 1999; Phillips, 1991).

According to Gilligan (1993), women's identity is defined in the context of relationships and judged by standards of responsibility and care. She illustrates the differences between male and female development by explaining the development of morality. Briefly, her formulation states that male development is guided by the moral ideology of separation which is justified by an ethic of rights, while female development is guided by the moral ideology of attachment which is supported by an ethic of care. Hence, while the male identity is one of individualism, logic and reason, the female identity is mainly a relational one characterised by connection and care (Schreurs, 1993).

Following observation of and interviews with women, Gilligan (1991) noted that women's psychological development is profoundly transformational and dynamic, marked by a struggle to stay in relationship. Instead of viewing women's psychological development as their inability to individuate, this can be seen as a healthy resistance to disconnections, which are psychologically wounding to women since they are relational in nature. Resistance to loss seems to be at the centre of this process. What for men is a process of separation, for women is a process of dissociation that is incongruent with their fundamental psyche (Gilligan, 1993). Girls' healthy resistance to disconnection, which normalises separation and individuation, is embedded within a culture of relationships. This calls into question what has been accepted as constituting conventional and normal human development; one which takes separation for granted, seems logical, and rejects the possibility of honest or genuine relationship (Gilligan, 1991).

The paradoxical truth of the human experience according to Gilligan (1993, p. 63) is that,

> *[w]e know ourselves as separate only insofar as we live in connection with others, and that we experience relationship only insofar as we differentiate other from self.*

This appears to be particularly true regarding the existence of women, especially in terms of the current topic of the female identity. It seems that it is extremely difficult to separate the *self* from the *relationship* or vice versa*, because women tend to be fundamentally relational in

nature (Jordan, 2003). Some theories emphasise the self as crucial for relationships while others maintain that relationships are foundational for the self. However, since feminist theories stress the importance of relationship at all stages of women's psychological development, it seems impossible to view the feminine self and the relationships in which it is involved as distinct and different concepts (Stern, 1991). It is through relationships that the concept of self becomes possible (Gergen, 2001), and therefore the Western, male dominated view of selfhood that emphasises autonomy and independence often causes major conflict for women's sense of self and the formulation of their identities. This challenge of separating the *self* from the *relationship* is explained by Stern (1991, p. 113) as follows:

> *When one holds one's true views and feelings outside of a relationship, the relationship becomes unauthentic. If the relationship is false, then the self, which depends on the relationship for sustenance, also suffers. If self and relationship are inextricably intertwined, girls cannot hold out on one without diminishing the other.*

In attempting to achieve autonomy but at the same time maintaining the feminine characteristics of nurturance and care, the conflict between self and other constitutes the central moral problem for women. A dilemma therefore exists in which the resolution requires reconciliation between femininity and adulthood. However, femininity and adulthood embody contradictory values, which the feminine voice struggles to resolve. Being a woman therefore encompasses facing constant conflict between compassion and autonomy, between virtue and power, and the task of reclaiming self without harming self or others. Gilligan (1993) therefore calls for a different framework in which to better understand the psychology of human relationship, and this understanding incorporates an ethic of care, which centres on the important insight that self and other are interdependent.

The different starting points for women's development must therefore be recognised. Gilligan (1993, p. 169) contends that,

> *…women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation with others, that women's sense of self becomes very much organised around being able to make, and then to maintain, affiliations and relationship, and eventually, for many women, the threat of disruption of an affiliation is perceived not just as a loss of a relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self.*

This alternative perspective, a relational model, on the development of self is one that insists on remaining in connection, so that psychological separations that do not take into account reconnections and relationships, which have been justified in the name of autonomy, selfhood, and freedom, no longer appear as the norm of human development, but possibly merely as human problems. The most basic questions about being human are fundamentally questions about human relations, because our lives are deeply connected: psychologically, economically, and politically.

Janet L. Surrey, working with the Stone Centre, an organisation dedicated to the study of women's experiences and the implications for theory and psychotherapy, further elaborated on Gilligan's theory. Surrey (1991) indicates that three basic elements summarise the core self in women:

1. Interest in and attention to the other person, forming the basis for her emotional connections and the ability to empathise with the other.
2. Expectation of a mutual empathic process where sharing of experience lends itself to a heightened development of self and other.
3. Expectations of interaction and relationship as a process of mutual sensitivity and responsibility providing the stimulus for the growth of empowerment and knowledge.

In other words, a woman's self is based on relationships in which she cares for another person in a way that is sensitive and responsible, and expects the other to care about her in the same way. It is in such a relationship that a woman develops her sense of self and of others. Hence, the 'self' in women and the women in 'relationship' are not mutually exclusive, but are rather complementary and constantly intertwined.

In addition, it is important to note that identity, particularly female identity, is not fixed and stagnant. Our identities are continually being refined and evolve as our life circle widens around us; we encounter more significant others and experience increasingly meaningful events (Josselson, 1987). Since women are relational creatures, new people and different experiences involve new and different relationships for women; our sense of self is therefore constantly being redefined as we engage in these relationships. Rather than fight against our relational and fluid nature, we can utilise it to achieve healthy development; one that combines male values of separation, differentiation and autonomy, with the female values of

caring and attachment, interdependence, relationship, and attention to context (McCarter, 1999).

Theories of female development are simply another form of subjectivity and do not represent the 'truth'. Being able to relate to these new theories as women does not mean that we should discard traditional and perhaps more male-appropriate developmental theories, nor should it produce another basket of 'shoulds' for women and result in the creation of a 'new dogma on superior subjectivity' (Van Mens-Verhulst, 1993). It is perhaps more constructive to embrace all the theories and perceive them in the context in which they were developed and intended to be applied. Hence, although these theories are created and explored as female developmental theories, they do not refer exclusively to the female gender. Instead, they add to the puzzle of our attempts to understand the human condition, to understand ourselves as human beings, and should be incorporated as part of the, rather than the new and better, theory of identity formation.

Most theorists of female development agree that the mother-daughter relationship has a profound impact on women's identities and their sense of self (Glasman, 2001; Jordan, 1993; Josselson, 1987; Lawler, 2000). The following section attempts to explain this special yet complex relationship more fully.

Explaining the Mother-Daughter Dyad

The mother and daughter bond is said to be one of the closest and strongest in all human relationships. At the same time it is also often described as one fraught with the most conflict and ambivalence. Indeed, mother-daughter accounts of their relationship can be analysed in terms of complicity with, and resistance to, the notion of mother-daughter closeness as part of a femininity discourse (Henwood, cited in McCarter, 1999).

As Karen Fingerman notes in her book *Mothers and Their Adult Daughters* (2003), the strength of the mother and daughter relationship can be explained by three factors: familial/cultural, sociopolitical, and psychological. These factors are not isolated but are, rather, interdependent and interlinked in their influence on the mother-daughter relationship. This section will employ these three explanations to explore the complexities of the mother-

daughter relationship, and this discussion will be followed by an attempt to weave these compartmentalised perspectives into a more complete worldview.

Familial/Cultural and Sociopolitical Explanations

These two factors are discussed together owing to their interrelatedness and overlapping influence on the mother-daughter relationship. Social and political expectations more often than not become societal and cultural norms that exert a pervasive influence on our everyday existence.

Motherhood must be understood in the context of history, culture, and even mythology, because women's choices concerning how they function as mothers result from these contexts (Leira & Krips, 1993). Given that our predominant ideology of self and personhood has been modelled on white, middle-class males where the emphasis has been placed on autonomy and individuality, women have not been the most valued gender as they possess fewer of these attributes and in fact, experience great difficulty in trying to achieve them. However, as the human race can only be preserved through women and their ability to reproduce, a special ideology underlies motherhood. The ideology of motherhood, which is all-powerful and righteous, is in stark contrast to the ideology of womanhood, which is devalued and inferior. The maternal power attributed to mothers is however an illusion, because they do not have 'real' power or agency but are instead dictated to by patriarchal societal expectations (MacCallum-Whitcomb, 2000). Mothers actually seem to have little say in how they raise their children but instead are evaluated and instructed by society in terms of how good they are as a mother (Glenn, 1994). Historically therefore, society has handed women a consolation prize and created a sub-standard world in which women can dominate: at home amongst their children; but this world has been and still is to some extent, inferior to the 'real', more powerful world of men; a world that cannot include women because it was, and still is, believed that they just 'do not have what it takes'; independence, autonomy, and a sense of justice.

All mothers in society have therefore been and still are subjected to society's expectations of mothers, whether or not they have wanted to meet them. Mothers are assigned the 'good-enough' badge in order to assist their children to become 'good-enough' citizens approved by society. Societal expectations of femaleness are passed on from mother to daughter in their

socialisation practices; an ironic process where the all-powerful yet powerless mother raises her daughter to be inferior in society. The task given to mothers by society is to teach their daughters to be, as they themselves are supposed to be, nurturing and self-sacrificing (Caplan, 1981).

For a women mothering means meeting her children's needs, particularly their emotional needs. 'Good' or 'bad' mothering is therefore judged by how successfully she fulfils these needs. Instead of recognising children's needs as a product of the social and cultural context in which adults formulate ideas about how children should be, they are perceived as qualities intrinsic to children themselves. Since needs are difficult to identify in reality, children's needs become relative and change with cultural trends and what is at that point deemed as appropriate and desired behaviour. The mother's task of meeting children's needs however remains and she is given the impossible task of fulfilling needs she is not even possibly aware of or thought existed. This is further exacerbated by the very children whose needs are a reflection of political interests and preoccupations. As children grow up, they become indoctrinated into the mother discourse and see their demands as inherently legitimate and therefore expect mothers to meet them (Lawler, 2000). It is hardly surprising then that daughters are, more often than not, disappointed with their mothers for somehow not having fulfilled their roles as good mothers, because they simply expect so much! Very often, a daughter's rejection of her mother is a rejection of the conforming female role (Nice, 1992).

Society's expectations can also affect the closeness between mothers and daughters. According to Fingerman (2003), the particularly close tie observed between mothers and daughters occurs partly because of women's disadvantaged status in society. The fact that women are devalued and made to feel inferior can result in their uniting in comfort as well as in revolt. However, it is also conceivable that society creates unrealistic expectations that we often do not question. A study by O'Conner (cited in Glasman, 2001), found that only a quarter of the sixty women she interviewed felt close to their mothers, therefore challenging the idealisation of the mother-daughter relationship. Social pressures and expectations may therefore distort the reality of the mother-daughter relationship (Glasman, 2001). It is possible that mothers and daughters may appear to be extremely close, but there is often an underlying ambivalence or anger in their relationship that is so painful that both must deny it. Partly, this view of the close mother and daughter relationship is due to how we raise our females: to look for approval and affection throughout life (Caplan, 1981).

Since aggression, anger, and competition are not considered to be valuable feminine characteristics, women who experience conflicts face difficulties in expressing them. Conflict is therefore often manifested quite differently from and often subtly between women, particularly between mothers and daughters. Since society, to this day, still holds different expectations of men and women, mothers may restrict their daughters' behaviour in various ways in order to make them 'acceptable' to their communities (Caplan, 1981). A mother is placed in a double-bind because she cannot raise her daughter/s differently from the manner in which society expects her to. Being a female herself, she understands society's sanctions on women and the limitations on women's behaviour; therefore she rationalises that she is conforming to society's expectations for her daughter's own good. Indeed, a mother who is unconventional and different can possibly bring shame and embarrassment to her daughter because her behaviour is not approved of as traditionally feminine and motherly. Daughters therefore become frustrated with themselves as well as their mothers, and constantly see their own limitations in their mothers. Hence, daughters are also caught in a dilemma; they feel intruded upon by their mothers since they are so similar, but they cannot be otherwise because this calls down disapproval from their mothers as well as others in the community. Becoming different from her mother also arouses much guilt in a daughter because she does not want to betray her loyalty to her mother (Caplan, 1981). Conflicts in mother-daughter relationships are often kept at bay, brewing under the surface since they are not allowed expression.

Some sociologists have indicated that mother-daughter relationships tend to improve when daughters become mothers themselves. However, it seems that, rather than the differences in life roles that motherhood brings about, it is the gaining of perspectives and understanding that is more conducive to a better relationship. Therefore instead of role convergence, increasing experiences of life may serve as the vehicle for bringing understanding to the mother-daughter relationship when daughters achieve positions of authority and responsibility as adults and as mothers, and are therefore able to sympathise with the challenges faced by their mothers (Fingerman, 2003).

The above discussion is conceptualised within Western and male-dominated cultures and may not be applicable to all societies. In other non-Western societies and cultures where multiple mothers or extended families are the norm, the desire for autonomous and individuated selves may not be as revered as in contemporary western societies, and therefore the concept of self and the mother-daughter relationships possibly develop differently (Phillips, 1991). For example, the Balinese culture does not emphasise the unique self but rather distinguishes

between people according to more general social categories (Gergen, 2001). In such cultures, relationships tend to be general and formal instead of personal and specific, and the relationship between mothers and daughters would perhaps not be very different from any other relationships between women of different generations or women in general.

Psychological Explanations

Psychological explanations for the mother-daughter relationship can be broadly categorised into those that are psychoanalytic in origin and those that are feminist in their viewpoint. Both of these categories will be discussed below.

Psychoanalytic Theories

According to Freud's theory of human development, girls enter the Electra complex after discovering their own penis-less state. Girls come to the conclusion that they must have been bad and therefore had their penis cut off. In the Electra complex, females identify with their mothers in their inferiority and deficiency, that is of being anatomically incomplete, but at the same time reject their mothers because of the very same reasons and become envious of their fathers' penis. On the one hand, girls perceive themselves as being the same as their mothers and find comfort in having someone who understands them. On the other hand, girls also do not like their devalued state and since they cannot repudiate themselves and risk disintegration of their selves, they reject their mothers instead and hope that by not becoming like their mothers, they have the opportunity to be different. Repudiation of the mother therefore forms part of the successful resolution of the female Electra complex; holding the mother responsible for having sent the woman into the world so insufficiently equipped without a penis. In Freud's opinion, this repudiation of the mother is necessary in order for all daughters to solidify their heterosexuality and yearn for the opposite sex. A daughter must however repress her hatred towards her mother and identify with her femininity in order to attract someone like her father (Gershenson, 2000).

Psychoanalytic theories therefore propose that the mother-daughter interaction is characterised by feelings of resentment, alienation, and longing (Gershenson, 2000). The daughter pulls away from her mother and resents her for not having given her a penis; she wants to alienate her mother so that she does not become the same inadequate woman her

mother is; however, the daughter also longs to be close to her mother since she provides unconditional love, and is the same as herself. It is this very push and pull that seems to characterise a woman's relationship with her mother (Caplan, 1981).

Chodorow's theory proposes that motherhood reproduces itself. In other words mothers raise daughters who want to mother; who gain the ability of mothering through the experience of being mothered themselves (Hyde, 1991). Chodorow also makes mention of the problematic nature of women's position as mother. Mothers are forced to play the dual role of the one who is seen as inherently capable of nurturing individuality and also of the one who will not allow individuality. The latter occurs because mothers are passing onto their daughters the message that they should be like themselves – completely selfless and all forgiving and therefore not autonomous, thus thwarting their daughter's individuality. Using Fischer's (1991, p. 242) words, there is therefore a '*liability of mutual rejection*' between mothers and daughters. A mother must bask in the glory of motherhood otherwise she is in effect rejecting her daughter, and if the daughter does not embrace motherhood and become like her mother, she is rejecting the very being her mother accepted, and in effect, rejecting her mother (Fischer, 1991).

Psychoanalytic theories portray mother-daughter relationships as inherently and unavoidably conflictual and difficult (Friday, 1977; Herman, 1989; Phillips, 1991). Yet research has shown that this is not necessarily the case. Boyd's (1989) review of mother-daughter research found that many studies (Boyd; Fox; both cited in Boyd, 1989) have demonstrated that the relationships between mothers and their adult daughters are more often experienced as rewarding and close. Similar results were discovered in the study conducted by Smith, Hill, and Mullis (1995).

Psychoanalytic theories are based on Western, middle-class male vales and norms, and therefore embody certain expectations and stereotypes of women, which may no longer be applicable. A mother as an individual is also not considered, but is viewed only as an agent fulfilling the child's needs (Fingerman, 2003). These theories appear to perpetuate mother-blame and place tremendous responsibility on mothers to be 'good-enough'. Psychoanalytic theories can also be perceived to be devaluing femaleness whilst entrenching maleness. They keep women secondary by emphasising their incomplete and perverse female form, which is also the cause of their devalued traits such as weakness and emotional instability. However, viewing the repudiation of the mother and thus conflict in the mother-daughter relationship as

inevitable is perhaps useful, because it implies that this is not something mothers can actually prevent and therefore should not try to change or blame themselves for it (Lawler, 2000).

Feminist Perspectives

According to Fischer (1991), two perspectives are observable in feminist writings concerning the power of women; the power of motherhood, also known as the women-are-different perspective, and the power beyond motherhood, also known as women-are-equal perspective. In the women-are-different perspective, mothers and daughters are accorded special status because of their ability to mother. This view encourages a sisterhood amongst women that treasures the mother-daughter bond as the most enduring woman-to-woman relationship in any woman's life. This explanation implies that in motherhood, women have the power. By contrast, in the women-are-equal perspective, motherhood is seen as just something that happens to fit the female anatomy and that in all other respects, women are more similar to rather than different from men. In this view, mother-daughter relationships are diminished in their importance. It also implies that women should see motherhood as a personal choice rather than some inherent gift, and that if they should choose motherhood, they should approach it with a value system which is different from that which is currently prescribed. Therefore the myth of the 'perfect mother' must be abandoned or reviewed, given the context within which motherhood is to exist. In addition, this power-beyond-motherhood perspective renders all previous theories and explanations of motherhood null and void, and insists on new and different understandings.

Although attempts have been made to develop more innovative theories that are applicable to both males and females, most women-are-equal formulations involve returning to male-dominated theories by simply including women, resulting in women trying their utmost to make these theories fit for them or worse, attempting to conform to those theories at the expense of their womanhood. Other attempts therefore involve elaborations of the women-are-different constructions. Since it is the power-of-women branch of feminist theories that has contributed most to new understandings of the human condition, the following discussion will centre on the power of womanhood, motherhood, and connections.

Feminist theories regading the development of women and consequently regarding mother-daughter relationships emphasise the importance of connection in women's identity. Rather than seeing a specific goal of the relationship which mothers and daughters possess, the

special bond is perceived as the context in which women establish their identities, and at the same time this special bond forms part of their identities, which are dynamic and ever-changing (Fingerman, 2003). A failure to separate completely from one's mother should hence not be seen as pathological but viewed as a valuable aspect of female psychology, and according to Gilligan (1993), as part of women's psychological health.

Essentially, this model indicates that what is deemed normal for males is not normal for females, and at the same time, what is pathological for males is psychologically healthy for females (Gershenson, 2000). Perhaps this can help us solve the mother-daughter problem, but one cannot help but wonder about the implications for the male-female relationship in our society. It seems then that, at least in Western culture, a balance needs to be found that incorporates both male and female norms, since both genders need to psychologically individuate as well as connect. It may therefore be useful to redefine concepts such as relationships, autonomy, and identity, or incorporate other concepts such as interdependence and mutuality in order to integrate both male and female psychological health.

Surrey (1991, p. 60) offers the following definition of relationship:

> *An experience of emotional and cognitive intersubjectivity; the ongoing, intrinsic inner awareness and responsiveness to the continuous existence of the other or others and the expectation of mutuality in this regard.*

In a view consistent with the above definition of relationship, De Kanter (1993, p. 31) perceives the mother-daughter relationship as being triadic rather than dyadic: mother, daughter, and the women in mother. In her words, for daughters,

> *[t]o gain their own subjectivity and feminine individuality, they need to acknowledge the subjectivity of the person out of whom they are born.*

The above subjectivity and individuality are attained when daughters acknowledge the social context within which their mothers exist as women. When a daughter denies her own subjectivity and attempts to become different from her mother, her mother feels unconfirmed, and the more she needs her daughter for confirmation of her own femininity. This results in greater aggression in the mother-daughter relationship as the daughter struggles to separate and individuate and the mother tries to hold onto the daughter. Therefore by understanding

that mothers are also women, daughters are more able to become less resentful of the power-relations in which motherhood is organised. By realising that their mothers are also women themselves, daughters come to see that their mothers also were, and possibly still are, subject to the same fears and insecurities as their own (De Kanter, 1993). This formulation recognises the intersubjectivity that is necessary between mothers and daughters, but leaves out a fourth element in the mother-daughter relationship; the woman in daughter. By acknowledging daughters not as just a girl child but also a woman, a more integrated mutual understanding and connection between mothers and daughters becomes increasingly possible.

Blenkner (cited in Fingerman, 1997, p. 58) refers to a similar coming-of-age process in which daughters reach '*filial maturity*' and understand their parents' humanity; recognising that their mothers may not be so different from themselves. This is not so much a complete change in the relationship, but a shift in the understanding of the individuals in the relationship. The expressive features of the mother-daughter relationship in later life retain many of the same nuances as in early life, but there is an added sense of compassion and understanding. In Fingerman's (1997) study, she found that women forgive their mothers' inadequacies when they have children of their own, because they can now see their own inadequacies and realise that their mothers were only doing the best they could.

Both De Kanter (1993) and Fingerman (1997) in effect are emphasising the connection and relationality in the mother-daughter relationship. Bing consistent with feminist theories, they do not call for an abandoning of the relationship, but rather for a reviewing and renegotiation of it.

An Integrated Framework

Clearly, the mother-daughter relationship is a complex one influenced by a multitude of factors, elements, and contexts. This subsection attempts to summarise the explanations previously discussed in order to provide a more comprehensive view of the various determinants impacting on the relationship between mothers and daughters.

In both psychoanalytic and sociopolitical formulations of motherhood, the mother's self is lost in motherhood. She becomes mother and nothing else. A mother who exhibits her own wishes, activities and thoughts is seen as insensitive, selfish, and not 'good-enough' (Lawler, 2000). Such mothers are doomed to raise children who are deficient and similarly also not

'good-enough'. While a daughter's identity is formed on the basis of fulfilled or unfulfilled needs, a mother's identity can only be formed on the basis of responsiveness to those needs. A mother's desires can be met, or not, but a child's needs must be met, or dire consequences will result. It seems, then, that the only escape mothers may have from this positioning is to be bad mothers; an option not many mothers would, presumably, choose willingly. As Lawler (2000, p. 148) illustrates,

> *[t]he point is not that women are 'cultural dupes', rather it is that they inhabit a social world in which their identities as mothers and daughters are forged within relations of power/knowledge which it is impossible to simply walk out of.*

For mothers, then, motherhood implies the sacrifice of self. Since motherhood is linked with a form of femininity based on relationality that excludes autonomy, it renders autonomy impossible from within this position. And since becoming a person is usually equated with becoming autonomous, then becoming a mother also means the sacrifice of personhood. For daughters, a similar battle ensues. By becoming autonomous and achieving personhood, she rejects what is inherent in herself; her femaleness and potential motherhood. But submitting to it implies that she cannot mature and achieve a 'normal' sense of self. The daughter therefore constructs her identity by pathologising the mother and disavowing her image of the mother, holding her mother individually responsible for the effect of social inequity (Lawler, 2000).

It is important to keep in mind that rarely does anyone completely conform to the normative expectations of a social role. Therefore it will be useful to recognise the distinction between the subjective person and the generalised stereotypical role, and remember that not every mother will be exactly the same as the mother which society expects mothers to be, nor will every daughter experience the mother-daughter relationship as postulated in this study. The possibility also exists that serious deviation from the ideal-type mother-daughter relationship leads to 'political' consequences for both mothers and daughters. The suggestion is hence the following:

> *…to look beyond the stereotypes and gain a deeper understanding of both sources of variability and role strain in contemporary relationships between mothers and their adult daughters* (Fischer, 1991, p. 246).

Feminist psychological formulations of mother-daughter relationships suggest that if we could be aware of the discourse of individualisation implying that lack of separation is pathology, we might bring about a different discourse where being relational is positive, thereby allowing for the 'lack of separation' between mother and daughter to be reframed as 'connection' (Nice, 1992). It is a healthy development in a woman to strive to be different from her mother, to develop her own way of being. This however does not necessarily make a daughter hostile and resentful towards her mother, and neither does a daughter need to abandon her connection to her mother for the development of her own identity. The only thing called for, is a renegotiation of the mother-daughter relationship (Nice, 1992).

Motherhood is not a fixed identity or role, but is rather a concept constructed by language and context (McNab & Kavner, 2001). Current constructions of mothers and daughters in Western societies appear to limit the ways in which mothers and daughters relate to one another. In fact, the very expectation that the mother-daughter relationship has more influence on female development than any other familial relationships places both mothers and daughters under pressure (Walters, 1999). Walters (1999) identifies four separate functions served by the construction of the mother-daughter relationship as unique:

1. It makes the mother-daughter relationship an explanatory resource for gender differences;
2. It minimises differences between women such as race, class, and so forth;
3. It positions texts supporting women as being 'women positive' in that they give voice to the strengths and experiences associated with being female; and
4. It reconfirms maternal responsibility for child development, at the same time minimising the influence of fathers.

The portrayal of problems and possible solutions to the mother-daughter relationship have to date been directed at the individual level of mothers and daughters, rather than at the relational or contextual levels as reflecting the sociopolitical context within which the relationship exists (Walter, 1999).

All ideologies prevalent in a society serve a purpose, and the ideology of motherhood has kept women on the periphery of society away from the centres of real power; of the world belonging to white, middle-class males. As the centre of power begins to shift so as to include previously excluded communities, the ideology of motherhood also begins to alter. A search

for a universal blueprint of mothers and mothering is likely to be futile. Rather it may be more beneficial and fruitful for us to uncover the ideologies and discourses within which we function and recognise that the suppression or minimisation of differences among women is not necessary to develop a sense of community or preserve human life. Differences between men and women should be perceived as complementary and interdependent rather than conflicting and separating, and community itself should be seen as built on difference as well as on sameness (Glenn, 1994). Hence, rather than concentrating on how different we are, it would be more constructive to review ways in which these differences can be integrated and negotiated to foster better relationships in our society.

In understanding the mother-daughter relationship, it is therefore imperative that we take into account the sociopolitical context within which it exists as well as the psychological theories emerging from those contexts. This allows us to realise the functions which ideologies about womanhood and motherhood have served in the past and what purpose they will serve in the future. Being able to see the various options open to us, we can now choose the path we walk instead of following blindly the paths created by others. Ward (2001) concludes that a complete understanding of the mother-daughter relationship requires the cognitive and emotional negotiation and integration of life experiences and themes, socio-cultural-historical and idiosyncratic contexts, along with multiple meanings and intentions.

Given that historically, the ideal self in the Western, white, male societies was, and to some extent still is, someone who is independent and autonomous, it follows then that it would be important for individuals to become separate and break away from caregivers or others on whom they could become dependent, thus making him/her weak and emotional. This Western and male-oriented model of the ideal self contradicts the female sense of self as discussed in the previous section. It is therefore not surprising that women experience conflict, particularly when it comes to having to individuate and become autonomous as an adult. The process of separation-individuation hence appears to be much more problematic for women than it is for men. The following section attempts to highlight some of the difficulties in this separation-individuation process for the female identity and particularly those within the mother-daughter relationship.

Separation-Individuation in the Female Identity and the Mother-Daughter Relationship

Since women generally seem to perceive social realities differently from men and these differences centre on experiences of attachment and separation, it can be expected that life transitions that invariably involve these experiences will offer distinctive meanings, involvements and possibly difficulties for women. Furthermore, because women's sense of integrity is entwined with an ethic of care, meaning that seeing themselves as women is parallel to seeing themselves in a relationship of connection, the major transitions in women's lives will most likely involve changes in the understanding of and activities related to care (Gilligan, 1993). Josselson (1987) also indicates that while men often experience crises in occupational aspirations as nodal growth points, women experience a similar watershed when there are crises in their relationships.

As mentioned previously, identity, particularly that of women, can only be formed in relation to others since it is only in recognising other individuals that we become aware of ourselves in relationships. It is therefore possible that separation-individuation has been interpreted to include only the one extreme of disconnection from and rejection of everything other than the core self. What we need is perhaps an understanding of the other possibilities of what this process entails; the part that involves integration and connection. It is recognised by many writers that women can develop a strong sense of self while being connected to others (Nice, 1992). In fact, it seems that this is the essence of the female identity; **individuation through connection** and **connection through individuation**.

As indicated by Josselson (1987), separation does not imply individuation, and similarly, separation is not necessary for individuation. The process of achieving identity, of viewing oneself as distinct from others, does not abolish relationships but, instead, involves the revision of relationships. It is important that we pay attention to the processes of individuation and autonomy, as well as to the connecting and relating self. Becoming an individual therefore means to perceive oneself as both independent, in that we are distinct individuals with specific characteristics and properties and possess the ability to make choices, and are at the same time, interdependent. In other words we are who we are because of everything around us and in that everything we do impacts on the people and environment we interact with and vice versa. Identity formation therefore appears to constitute both an intrapsychic and a psychosocial process (Josselson, 1987).

As has been emphasised in almost all the literature pertaining to women, the struggle to become autonomous from their mothers is a major issue in most women's lives (Glasman, 2001; Smith, Mullis, & Hill, 1995). In the study conducted by Josselson (1987), she found that women's identity development seems to take place on the continuum of the separation-individuation process and is dependent on to what extent this process has been undertaken and accomplished. Women's difficulties not surprisingly revolve around that of separation and individuation from their mothers, because this is the first intimate relationship women (and men) experience. The mother is also the person with whom every woman enjoys a unique tie as she has only one (biological) mother, and she is also of the same gender. Most women therefore identify strongly, whether consciously or not, with their mothers. All these factors make it almost impossible for mothers and daughters not to exhibit a complex and intricate way of relating to one another. As women, we are relational in nature, we prosper in connection and in relationship, but in the Western patriarchal culture, the dominant discourse prevalent in our society devalues dependence and care, and urges us to achieve autonomy and self-efficacy and yet also expects women to be nurturers. This places women in a double bind. We try and resist our need for connection by telling ourselves that we need to separate from our first and foremost attachment object, our mother. The process of separation-individuation, understood in psychoanalytic formulations as being the basis of human development, is therefore objected to by many feminist theorists (Glasman, 2001).

It seems then that the female self corresponds better with a relational view of the self rather than with the view of a separate and individuated self. However, as much as women revel in connections and relationships, they are in fact separate entities who need individual identities as a person. Nagar (2002) indicates that women should psychologically separate from their mothers for three reasons:

1. To see their mothers in perspective; as separate individuals who have experienced and exist within possibly different social and cultural contexts, and are therefore different from themselves,
2. To differentiate from their mothers and develop their own boundaries in order to take ownership of their own feelings, attitudes, and behaviour, and
3. For mothers to see daughters as adults and no longer as children, and therefore alter their interactions with them accordingly.

Psychological separation and individuation allows women to find unique definitions of self and of what it means to them to be female (Nagar, 2002). Perhaps because women value connections so much more than men, the process of separation-individuation is even more important for them, so as not to become enmeshed with significant others and lose their sense of identity in their attempt to relate with others.

It may be beneficial to redefine the idea of autonomy; rather than to give it connotations of separateness and individualism, it could be viewed in relational terms to include a person whose independence and individuality encompass the ability to be interdependent. In other words, autonomy can be interpreted to mean,

> …*to depend on others and to be depended on in a manner that is respectful of the needs of others as well as appropriate to the situation* (Smith, Mullis, & Hill, 1995, p. 496).

Such a reframe eases some of our discomfort in being obliged to disconnect totally and enables us to possess a sense of self both as different and unique as well as connected and caring.

> *To be different yet attached is one of the great challenges of human relatedness* (Josselson, 1987, p. 171).

This is certainly the challenge faced by all women; to perceive themselves as distinct and unique, and yet at the same time to feel connected and interdependent.

Given that mothers inevitably reproduce themselves in their daughters and that it is easier for mothers to project their motives, wishes and hopes onto children of the same sex (Phillips, 1991), it has been suggested that rather than daughters having to individuate and separate from their mothers, it is the mothers who must separate from their daughters. This separation by the mother will then facilitate the daughter's necessary process of individuation-separation in that it almost provides the daughter with permission to become independent (Flaake, 1993). However, this may not be what daughters want. The urgency in a mother to create separation and disconnection from daughters can alternatively breach trust in the relationship and rather than strengthening daughters, it may leave them weakened and adrift (DeBold, Wilson & Malave, cited in O'Reilly & Abbey, 2000).

It is proposed then that when considering separation-individuation in women, it is vital to recognise that women possibly never fully separate from their mothers. Jordan (cited in Glasman, 2001) in fact proposes an alternative construction for women's self-development; that of relationship-differentiation. The mother-daughter relationship is extremely important to women, particularly during daughters' early adulthood. It seems and also makes sense, then, that a woman's identity is always placed in contradistinction to and in the context of her mother's identity (Josselson, 1987). This implies the possibility that disconnected mothers and daughters may experience difficulties with differentiation and self-identity. A revolution may be needed to emphasise relationship and connection, as O'Reilly and Abbey (2000, p. 18) indicate:

> *What is required is a mother-daughter revolution so that we, as daughters and mothers, may in life and literature, in theory and practice, in public and private, secure connection to bring about personal empowerment and cultural transformation.*

Recent Research

This section will provide an overview of the recent research pertaining to mothers, daughters, and the mother-daughter relationship in the Western society and culture. Both quantitative and qualitative studies will be discussed.

Indicative of the consequences of society's devaluing of women and the difficulties women experience in separation-individuation, Lawler (2000), in her interviews with fourteen white females in the United Kingdom, found that self-confidence was a trait which most women perceived as lacking in both themselves and their daughters. Women struggle to achieve the independence and autonomy prescribed as fundamental in a healthy identity and therefore experience difficulties seeing themselves as competent individuals. Corresponding with popular belief and theoretical formulations, identity struggles seem to begin as girls enter adolescence. Beaumont (1995) studied conversational patterns between mothers and their adolescent daughters and found that as girls become older and enter adolescence, they interrupt their mothers more frequently in conversation. This is hypothesised as being an attempt by daughters to gain control as well as being perhaps a clash of style, possibly due to generational differences. In the study by Stern (1991), it was concluded that once activated,

the process of disavowing the self and in effect the mother, would be sustained into adulthood. Therefore if women are unable to achieve a balance between independence and dependence, they may spend much of their adult lives denying their self, fighting against dependence. However, research by Glasman (2001) concludes that identity development continues throughout a woman's life, with women struggling to negotiate between the feminine ideals of nurturance and caretaking on the one hand, and the masculine ideals of autonomy and achievement on the other.

According to both sociopolitical explanations as well as psychoanalytic theories, mother-daughter relationships are inherently ambivalent and difficult, and at the same time extremely close and possibly enmeshed. A study conducted by Frank, Butler, and Laman (1988) found that young women were more connected with their mothers but that their relationships were also more likely to be tinged with conflict. In her in-depth analysis of seven women, McCarter (1999) noticed that adult daughters who perceived similarities between themselves and their mothers also felt a positive regard for their mothers while a less positive attachment was noted among those who reported dissimilarities. Regardless of the positive regard felt for their mothers, adult daughters in the study also seemed to experience ongoing tension between continuing connection with their mothers and individuation. The continued ambivalence in the mother-daughter relationship was also noted in the research by Glasman (2001). This seeming all-pervasiveness of the mother has been observed in several studies. In Glasman's (2001) study, she found that mothers appear to exert a pervasive influence on their daughters' self-development, manifested in whether the daughters wanted to be similar to or different from their mothers. Daughters were also found to be particularly affected by what mothers said in terms of their current role choices (Sholomskas & Axelrod, 1986). Daughters perceive messages from their mothers more in terms of their mothers' attitudes towards them, than in what their mothers do.

The closeness between mothers and daughters as well as the similarities between them are also confirmed by research. Peterson and Roberts (2003) requested mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons to separately narrate a particular experience they had in common and discovered surprising similarities and correlations in mother's and daughter's narrative styles. This could however be indicative of a certain communication style in females, which has been passed down from mother to daughter.

In terms of the interactional patterns that occur between mothers and daughters, several studies have observed that mothers are consistently more positive about their relationships with their daughters than daughters are with their mothers (Fingerman, 2003; Smith, Hill & Mullis, 1998; Walters, 1999). This pattern is an expected consequence of society's pressure on mothers to be perfect, to love their offspring unconditionally. Walters (1999) in fact noted that mothers tend to adjust their accounts of themselves and their relationships with their daughters depending on how their daughters responded to their accounts. She further discovered that mothers are more likely to support daughters' constructions of the latter's subjective perceptions with almost no resistance and that even when there was resistance, it was only tentatively stated. This could also account for the similar narrative style found to exist between mothers and daughters. Interestingly, while mothers want to demonstrate their 'good' mothering by exhibiting good relationships with their daughters, daughters seem to want to demonstrate their independence by presenting themselves as having individuated from their mothers. Caplan (2000), in her interviews with women, discovered that even when women were close to their mothers, they were reluctant to admit it. This was because they were concerned that being close to their mothers would mean that they had not individuated or reached autonomy.

Partly as a reaction to the seemingly inevitable conflict in the mother-daughter relationship, more and more mothers are presenting themselves as friends of their daughters, trying to minimise the inherent power-relations in the relationship. However, they remain concerned about what their daughters do or do not do, since the realities of society remain and even though women have been given equal rights and opportunities, discourses still exist that prescribe gendered characteristics and behaviours which expect women to exhibit feminine traits such as being caring and nurturing (De Waal, 1993). Psychologically, this blurring of boundaries in becoming friends may not be optimal for daughters. Research shows that mothers who disclosed sensitive topics to and confided in daughters increased their daughters' psychological distress and that this did not contribute to any closeness of relationship with the mother herself (Koerner et al., 2000; 2002).

Like most other relationships in our lives, the mother-daughter relationship is also expected to change and evolve over time. Fischer (1981) noted that when daughters marry and become mothers themselves, their relationship with their mothers becomes more involved and is renegotiated in terms of their relative statuses, role perspectives, and family structure. Other studies have indicated that long-term improvements occur in the mother-daughter relationship

when it is no longer characterised by conflict even though conflict is still present (Glasman, 2001). A large study of 221 post-adolescent females and their mothers discovered that adult daughters maintain their connection with their mothers while establishing their identities, and that both mothers and daughters were both emotionally close and behaviourally independent of one another. The research concludes that the mother-daughter relationship can be experienced as rewarding and mutually beneficial, and is not necessarily defined by conflict (Smith, Hill, & Mullis, 1995).

Fischer (1991) suggests that future research into mother-daughter relationships should include comparative studies of cohort, class, culture, and other variables that may exert an influence on the relationship. Consistent with this suggestion, the study conducted by Ward (2001) found that a contextualised understanding of relationships may lead to a sense of acceptance of one's own life story.

The vast amount of research on mother-daughter relationships has substantiated both the conflict ridden and ambivalence dominated characteristics, as well as the compassionate, inherently close, and interdependent nature, of such relationships. It is possible and indeed likely that researchers are biased in their starting points as to whether they view the mother-daughter relationships as being inherently conflictual or naturally supportive, thereby affecting their research methods, results, discussions, interpretations, and conclusions. Researchers therefore often reach the very conclusion they initially set out to find. In addition, although the research discussed so far has all been conducted in the name of mothers and daughters, little research involved both mothers and daughters. Most studies have consisted of daughters' accounts with the mothers' story implied or assumed (Buysse, 1999; Caplan, 1989; Friday, 1977; Gershenson, 2000; Glasman, 2001; McCarter, 1999). Those who have attempted to include the mothers' voices have involved individual women who were both daughters and mothers, and relied on them to provide comprehensive accounts of the mother-daughter dyad (Lawler, 2000). Studies and stories that have encompassed both mothers and daughters and include both their voices (Fingerman, 2003; Firman & Firman, 1989; Rio & Rio, 2003; Walters, 1999) have seemingly been more helpful in the understanding of the mother-daughter relationship, since they provide an integrated and more realistic representation of how the relationship is experienced by both mothers and daughters.

Implications and Suggestions

This section will discuss some implications of theories and research for, as well as note some suggestions made by such theories and research regarding, the improvement and further understanding of the mother-daughter relationship. This chapter has in fact taken the shape of a journey towards understanding the mother-daughter relationship and through this, has also become a journey towards discovering new and different ways to enhance this complicated relationship. This section merely serves to consolidate the implications and suggestions already made along the way.

Although the various explanations of the mother-daughter relationship express a different focus and emphasis, they all seem to agree on what they perceive is a healthy situation between mother and daughter – that of allowing each other to be, whatever that may be, to see each other as individuals, as women, to realise that although they are intimately connected through blood, psyche, and gender, they are also separate individuals with unique desires, wants, wishes, and needs.

A theme that resurfaces in most of the literature, suggesting ways to improve the relationship between mothers and daughters, is that of humanising the mother, which includes the demystifying of motherhood (Caplan, 1981; Caplan, 1989; Lerner, 1995). This involves recognising and seeing the impact of the social-historical context within which mothers and motherhood function; realising that mothers are only human with fallible characteristics (Phillips, 1991). The present society is slowly shifting the idealised view of mothers to a more realistic perspective that takes into account the multiple roles which women play. This should help mothers and daughters in their perceptions of and interactions with one another (Firman & Firman, 1989). Often we are unaware of how societal norms are influencing our behaviour and thinking and as societal norms change, so will our expectations of ourselves as women, as daughters, and as mothers.

Together with acceptance, we take responsibility. To move out of the victim role, one must assume responsibility for oneself and one's own life. This is the first step towards becoming a co-creator of one's own story (Firman & Firman, 1989). Caplan (1981) suggests two general rules for mothers in improving their relationship with their daughter/s: to make clear their own dilemmas, and to become as strong and as self-assured as possible. Although Caplan (1981) makes mention only of mothers, it is proposed here that these general rules apply to

daughters as well. By owning responsibility and asserting our rights as women, we can begin to see relationships as a dynamic of interdependence rather than a bond of continuing dependence, and the concept of care expands from the restrictive notion of not hurting others to mean acting responsively toward self and others and thus to sustain connection (Gilligan, 1993). Some literature mentions that mothers and daughters should relate as friends where they treat each other as equals, as both being adults (Nice, 1992). However, as previous research indicates, there are important boundaries between mothers and daughters that need to be taken cognisance of. Ignoring and blurring these boundaries before a certain level of maturity is achieved in the relationship can be destructive to both mothers and daughters. Walters (1999) points out that shifting the mother-daughter relationship to that of being 'friends' places both mother and daughter in a paradox of dual roles with conflicting interests.

It has been recognised by many researchers and theorists that the mother's voice is too faint in the available literature (Nice, 1992). Even in writings that include mothers, the daughters' stories almost always seem to dominate the experience. The implications are that daughters develop and flourish, looking forward to a future with many possibilities; mothers, on the other hand, cease to exist beyond motherhood. It would be helpful therefore to realise that mothers as women continue to have a life after motherhood, and they do; that their life is not just about their children, which it is not. Phillips (1991) offers the following suggestion for all mothers: good mothering is courageous mothering, which involves passing on self-esteem and seeing through patriarchal propaganda.

Research has also attempted to find ways in which to enhance the mother and daughter relationship. An interesting qualitative study by Juhasz (2000) used the process of daughters engaged in writing to improve the mother-daughter relationship. The study concluded that the process of writing to their mothers helped daughters enhance their relationship with their mothers through the daughters experiencing the feelings of recognition and of 'being heard'.

A journal article by family therapists McNab and Kavner (2001) in many ways forms the backdrop against which the present study is conducted. The article describes effective psychotherapies conducted with mothers and daughters who show high levels of psychological stress in their relationship yet at the same time are trying to find a way to remain connected. Operating within a social constructionist systemic framework, McNab and Kavner perceive family relationships as being contextualised within a sociopolitical, cultural context while simultaneously focusing on individual and relational experiences of connection.

Their style of therapy therefore involves listening to mothers and daughters individually and then reuniting them to share their experiences with the aim of working towards their preferred shared relationship narrative. McNab and Kavner strongly emphasise in their article that they do not prescribe the kind of mother-daughter relationship that should exist but are rather aiming to keep something alive that is valued. They do this by providing a safe enough therapeutic space for mothers and daughters to take the risks needed to experiment with reconnection.

The current study almost parallels the process described by McNab and Kavner (2001). The present research involves eliciting the individual stories of mothers and daughters and bringing them together to create a new narrative that is interwoven with both their stories, thereby forming the third story, that of their unique relationship. The study seeks to focus the solution to balance in the mother-daughter relationship on the relational level rather than on the individual level (Walters, 1999). In addition to providing a therapeutic experience for the participants, it is also the aim of this study to offer a more inclusive and extensive account of the mother-daughter relationship experience by incorporating both mothers' and daughters' voices first separately and then together.

> *If mothers and adult daughters can jointly construct their interpretation of experiences and relationships, they can operate as a team, emphasizing mutuality and consensus* (McCarter, 1999, p. 12).

The above quotation highlights the aim of the current research: to enable mothers and daughters to engage in a joint conversation about their experiences and relationship, hopefully leading to mutual understanding and consensus. The story of a mother and daughter relationship involves at least two stories: of two different lives, of two different people, although separated by a generation and by the changing roles of women, yet who remain connected by blood, by body and by womanhood (Nice, 1992). In this study, there are three stories in the mother and daughter relationship, of three lives, of three different entities; those of mother, daughter, and the relationship shared between them.

Chapter 3

Research Paradigm and Design

Introduction

This chapter outlines the paradigm behind the research as well as the methodology chosen for this study. A brief historical overview will first be offered, tracing the shift from objective modernism to subjective postmodernism. This will be followed by a discussion of social constructionism, the epistemological framework of the current research. The qualitative research approach in general will then be described, including the qualitative research design selected, its implications for the role of the researcher, and the sampling, data collection, and data analysis methods undertaken in this study.

From Modernism to Postmodernism

The modern era began around the 15th and 16th centuries (Sampson, cited in Nagar, 2002), when the empirical scientific paradigm was born. The modern era was based on the following assumptions:

- ➢ **Linear causality**: Everything has a cause and an effect, the direction of which is always linear and one-way without any reverse or circular impact (Becvar & Becvar, 2001).
- ➢ **Reductionism**: The best way to understand and study anything is to break down or reduce the object/subject being studied into its smallest parts (Auerswald, 1985; Hibberd, 2001; Zukav, 1979).
- ➢ **Objectivity**: It is possible to observe the 'external' world without prejudice and subjectivity (Auerswald, 1985; Gergen, 1997; Hibber, 2001).
- ➢ **Universal laws**: By means of systematic study one can discover universal laws that are applicable across all situations, persons, and periods (Gergen, 1992).
- ➢ **Single truth**: There exists a single reality that is knowable and true for all and this reality is fixed throughout time (Auerswald, 1985; Gergen 1992).

Modernism comprised the framework within which Western patriarchal colonialism existed. This predominant cultural worldview was consistent with the modernist and positivist approaches of reductionism and linear causality. Like the Western male-dominated culture (see Chapter 2), modernists perceived the self as separate, self-contained, and independent. According to this perspective, the self develops linearly through developmental stages and once identity is formed, it is fixed and remains constant throughout life (Thoo, 1998). Modernism also incorporates the scientific culture where logic and reasoning prevail, and therefore reason and observation comprise central ingredients of modernist human functioning (Gergen, 1991). Objective truth and control over nature are not only the aim of scientific inquiry but also represent the masculine ideal. The direct, observable relations of connections and correlations between phenomena are accorded ultimate importance (Babbie & Mouton, 2002). This empirical stance has provided us with many revelations and discoveries but has simultaneously resulted in arrogance, inflexibility, and elimination of other 'truths' and 'realities' (Jordan, 1993). These Cartesian-Newtonian principles allowed for prediction of the future based on observed laws, which gave those in possession of information and scientific 'laws' immense power and control (Zukav, 1979), but at the same time, disempowered those not in positions of power.

With the advent of Max Planck's *Quantum Theory* in the 1900s, the premises on which modernism was based and the empirical scientific principles were challenged. Together with Albert Einstein's revised *Theory of Relativity* and Heisenberg's *Uncertainty Principle*, a new worldview began to emerge. Planck's quantum theory challenged Newtonian physics, which is not applicable in the subatomic realm, and means that we cannot predict subatomic phenomena with any certainty but only estimate their probabilities. Einstein discovered that light can be both a particle as well as a wave, thus creating the wave-particle duality and challenging the singular, either/or reality. His relativity theory further states that the speed of light remains constant regardless of the motion of the measuring instrument (Zukav, 1979). Heisenberg discovered the limits of measurement, which implied that we can never perceive things as they 'really are', but only in terms of how we choose to see them. This means that,

> *[w]e cannot observe something without changing it* (Zukav, 1979, p. 134).

The implications of these discoveries have created a paradigmatic shift from modernism towards postmodernism. They include some of the following:

- ➢ **No universal laws**: Predictability is not possible, even in principle, because we cannot know enough about the present to make a complete prediction about the future. There will always be variables that we cannot know about or control.
- ➢ **Circular causality**: A does not only cause B, but B has an effect on A as well, and both A and B impact on their environment, which also impacts on them.
- ➢ **Reductionism revised**: Sometimes the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
- ➢ **No objectivity**: Reality is created by those who choose to perceive it and objectivity is not possible since all perception is filtered through subjective lenses.
- ➢ **No single reality**: A single reality does not exist, but rather a multiverse of worldviews.
- ➢ **Unknowable world**: Reality might exist 'out there', but we cannot 'know' it because our minds can only grasp the ideas we hold about the reality and not the actual reality itself. Something is more true to us if it is more consistent with our experience, regardless of how close it is to the absolute truth.

(Zukav, 1979).

Another argument for the shift from modernism to the postmodern paradigm is based on the difference between the natural and human sciences. The distinction between natural science and human science can be dated back to Aristotle who indicated that human actions and behaviours are variable and unpredictable and should therefore not be approached in a scientific manner. In other words, human phenomena are different to physical phenomena since while physical phenomena can be explained by mechanistic science, human phenomena cannot (Terwee, 1990). However, all observations and conclusions about the physical world involve human participants. It can therefore be stated that all phenomena are more likely to be unpredictable and infinite in their manifestations, making postmodernism seemingly a more suitable worldview that incorporates both the natural and the human sciences.

This new worldview does not replace the Cartesian-Newtonian way of thinking, but rather includes it. The postmodern worldview seeks to expand the range of understanding, voice, and variations in human experience (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Circular causality implies that knowledge is inter-relational and interwoven in networks. Knowledge results from our interactions with the world and therefore does not reside outside in the world nor inside the person (Kvale, 1996). In other words, 'truth' is a matter of perspective, which is a by-product of social interchange. Empirical science based on Cartesian-Newtonian principles does not 'improve' our knowledge of the world, but rather, represents only one way to perceive the

world (Gergen, 1992). The term *postmodern* is descriptive in that it depicts what comes after modernism. It is not synonymous with 'anti-modern' and does not imply that its proposed relativism is better than modernism's objectivism; in fact, to polarise and dichotomise is in itself a modernist premise (Kvale, 1992a). The 'new' or, rather, alternative vision of reality, as stated by Capra (1982, p. 285),

> *…is based on awareness of the essential interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomena – physical, biological, psychological, social, and cultural.*

As mentioned previously, modernism afforded tremendous power to those who possessed access to knowledge and scientific proof. In Western societies, this meant that middle-class, educated, white, and male values were dominant. The feminist movement is therefore consistent with that of postmodernism. By reclaiming their power, women demanded attention to their different worldviews, that are as equally valid as those of their male counterparts. By listening to women's voices, Gilligan and Rogers (1993, p. 125) announced that a paradigm shift in psychology had occurred:

> *[a] psychology premised on a view of human life as lived ultimately in separation has given way to a psychology that rests on a view of human life as lived essentially in relationship.*

The relational model of female development also appears to fit well into the postmodern paradigm because it is interrelated and contextual, emphasising flexibility and fluidity (see Chapter 2). Essentially,

> *[p]ostmodern thought moves toward knowledge as a discursive practice, toward a plurality of narratives that are more local, contextual, and fluid; it moves toward a multiplicity of approaches to the analysis of subjects such as knowledge, truth, language, history, self, and power. It emphasizes the relational nature of knowledge and the generative nature of language* (Anderson, cited in Walters, 1999, p. 294).

Since 'realities' are socially constructed, the ways in which we make sense of these realities become vital. Postmodernism therefore includes a strong focus on social and linguistic constructions of perspectives (Kvale, 1992b). Language operates as a mirror of the world we perceive; it constitutes reality, and yet it is limited by the underlying discourses of our society

because language cannot mirror what society does not allow it to. It is to this point that the discussion will turn next: the importance of language and its role in social discourses; a postmodern epistemology known as social constructionism.

Social Constructionism

Postmodern thought has given rise to many different conceptualisations of how we come to know what we know about the world. Most of these epistemological frameworks share similar assumptions with slightly different views. Constructivism and social constructionism are two such conceptions and are often confused or used interchangeably. A brief discussion will be provided on constructivism in order to avoid further confusion and ensure clarity. This will be followed by an elaboration of social constructionism and its implications.

Constructivism preceded social constructionism and refers to knowledge and understanding as enclosed within an individual's thought processes. A person therefore makes and attributes meaning within him- or herself and all understandings are therefore seen as subjective and personal (Hoffman, 1993). According to constructivists, people are active creators of their reality and the created realities are based on previous experiences and the subjective meanings attributed by people to their experiences. In line with postmodernism, constructivists believe in the existence of multiple realities. However, unlike postmodernism, constructivism proposes that all constructions that work for individuals are equally valid (Doan, 1997). Constructivism fails to recognise the influences of social processes and the prevailing societal discourses on meaning making.

Social constructionism shares with constructivism the underlying premise that reality is subjective and that the 'real' world is not knowable to us except through our subjective constructions of it. Social constructionism however takes constructivism one step further by embracing the cultural and societal context in which we exist. Rather than seeing knowledge as created only by the individual, social constructionists view it as arising from social interchange and being mediated through language (Hoffman, 1993). Therefore, in addition to creating one's own meaning, one also interacts with the world around one and co-constructs meaning with another person with whom one is interacting. As stated by Schwandt (2000, p. 197),

[w]e do not construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language, and so forth.

Essentially, social constructionism examines the social interactions and processes in society that give rise to people's common understandings of the world. While constructivists question the possibility of a world independent of the observer, constructionists focus on the social basis of what we take to be knowledge (Gergen, 1992). In constructivism, reality is perceived as created by ourselves and is based on our own perceptions of the world, that is, reality is what is in our minds (Becvar & Becvar, 2000). Social constructionism adds the dimension of social interactions or the social and cultural context, and proposes that reality is constructed through our interactions with others, that is, reality is socially invented (Speed, 1991).

Social constructionism therefore does not view all interpretations as valid. It believes that there are certain dominating discourses in society that are embedded in our language, which influence our perceptions of the world. Social constructionists challenge those stories that are not respectful of differences amongst people such as race and gender (Doan, 1997). Therefore, social constructionism is more consistent with the postmodern paradigm. White and Epston (cited in Speed, 1991, p. 400) state that,

…the particular meanings we impose on behaviour are dictated and organized by whatever 'dominating analogies or interpretive frameworks' are currently available.

According to social constructionism, meanings and interpretations change over time, and these meanings are constantly negotiated and reconstructed. It is partly through identifying the dominant discourses prevailing in our society and challenging them, that new meanings and understandings can emerge.

Given its emphasis on social influences and discourses, it follows then that social constructionism places considerable importance on language, in terms of what it actually represents and how it is used to convey meaning. Social constructionism questions 'core' beliefs or assumptions, also known as 'discourses' that, whether consciously or without awareness, influence our understandings of the world as well as how we talk about the world. For example, the beliefs that females are physically weaker than males or that women are naturally more caring than men often pervade the manner in which we speak about gender differences. These can be presented as overt generalisations and stereotypes or covertly

implied messages. Either way, they influence how we perceive women and men, and how behaviours and activities are related to gender. As Schwandt (2000, p. 263) states,

[w]e are self-interpreting beings and language constitutes this being.

The exchange of language therefore becomes a symbolic interaction where we exchange and learn social conventions and rules. An individual, according to social constructionism, is therefore defined in terms of an ongoing flux of social activity, and his or her self and thoughts are actually social processes (Babbie & Mouton, 2002). This implies that all knowledge is value-laden and subjective, and that objective neutrality is not possible. As individuals, we must therefore take cognisance of our values, intentions, and personal agendas and consider how these may affect our way of perceiving the world. At the same time it is important to acknowledge that these personal values and purposes are embedded within the larger social and cultural context (Hoshmand, 1999). Therefore, social constructionist inquiries aim to understand both individuals, in terms of their own interpretations of reality, and society, in terms of the meanings which people ascribe to the social practices in that society (Babbie & Mouton, 2002).

The preceding section has offered a discussion of the movement from modernism to postmodernism, as well as a brief explanation of social constructionism. The present research study is couched within the postmodern paradigm and approached in terms of a social constructionist epistemology. The following section will sketch the methodology used.

Qualitative Research Methodology

According to Durrheim (1999, p. 29), a research design can be described as follows:

…a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or implementation of the research.

It is therefore essential that there should be a match between the execution of the research and the research questions in the study. In other words, the way a study is conducted must be appropriate to its aims.

In modernist, positivist, and empirical research, the researcher is expected to separate him- or herself from the phenomenon under inquiry and be objective. This corresponds with the quantitative research paradigm. This research approach employs the Cartesian-Newtonian principles as its basis and emphasises strict adherence to the rules and laws of scientific research. Most quantitative research requires the assignment of numbers to objects under study so as to represent quantities of attributes (Durrheim, 1999). It is a tradition principally concerned with objectivity, measurement, outcome, and generalisation of the outcomes (Wassenaar, 1987). Quantitative research is based on the outsider perspective, which is believed to be objective and unbiased, thus allowing researchers to observe and study the 'real' world as it is.

In postmodernist, interpretive, and social constructionist research, on the other hand, researchers co-construct realities with research participants and actively acknowledge their impact as researchers in the research process (Rennie, 1999). The emphasis falls on the mutually agreed-upon meanings and on how these meanings or discourses shape individual constructions (Sciarra, 1999). This approach is included more aptly in the qualitative research paradigm, which has its departure point as the '*insider perspective on social action*' (Babbie & Mouton, 2002, p. 53). Hence human behaviour is understood from the perspective of the participants or in terms of participants' worldviews. According to McCarter (1999), an underlying assumption of qualitative research is that reality is seen as holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing. Qualitative research approaches usually do not seek to find the single 'truth', but rather attempt to understand individual 'truths' and discover multiple realities of human experiences. For the qualitative researcher, what is regarded as true are the meanings agreed upon by individuals within a given society (Sciarra, 1999). Indeed, as Rennie (1999, p. 9) states,

> *[i]t is impossible to achieve absolute truth, instead people increasingly approximate truth, and at any given moment truth is a matter of consensus.*

The interpretivist philosophy, the basis of most qualitative approaches, holds that human or social action is inherently meaningful and that we constantly interpret the world we experience through meaning making (Schwandt, 2000). Qualitative research therefore has the goal of describing and understanding rather than explaining and predicting social behaviour. It also aims to understand experience in the way its participants feel or live it (Sherman & Webb, cited in Ely, 1991). According to Bogdan and Biklen (cited in Glasman, 2001), this

method of trying to understand participants from their own point of view, although not perfect, is that which least distorts the participants' experiences. In qualitative research, the researcher creates collaborative, reciprocal, trusting, and friendly relations with those studied, rather than adopting the distanced and unaffected attitude taken by quantitative researchers (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

The key features of the qualitative approach have been described by Babbie and Mouton (2002):

- Research is conducted in the natural setting of the participants or social actors.
- The focus is on process rather than outcome.
- The insider's or actor's perspective is emphasised.
- The primary aim is to achieve thick or in-depth descriptions and understanding of actions and events.
- The main concern is to understand social action in its specific context and not to try to generalise to some theoretical population.
- The research process is often inductive, resulting in the generation of new hypotheses and theories.
- The researcher is the 'main instrument' in the research process.

To correspond with the selected epistemology of social constructionism as well as with the purpose of exploring the experiences of the mother-daughter relationship, a qualitative research paradigm is adopted in this study. A quantitative study of cause-effect and linear causality would not be consistent with the postmodern framework nor the aims of this research, in terms of searching for themes and patterns in the relational experience. As Babbie and Mouton (2002) indicate, the comprehensiveness of the perspective provided by qualitative research is one of its main strengths. They assert that,

> *[b]y going directly to the social phenomenon under study and observing it as completely as possible, they (researchers) can develop a deeper and fuller understanding of it* (p. 309).

It is hoped that by making direct contact, building trusting relationships, and holding meaningful conversations with mothers and daughters, the researcher will be able, as fully as possible, to understand the processes operating within mother-daughter relationships, as well

as to comprehend how these processes form part of, and are facilitated or restricted, by the larger social system.

The Process-Oriented Element

This research contains a process-oriented element that will now be briefly discussed. Cummings and Davies (2002, p. 32) point out that:

> *[t]he aim of process-oriented research is to describe the specific responses and patterns embedded within specific contexts, histories, and developmental periods that account for effects over time.*

This is consistent with the goals and purposes of qualitative research approaches, but adds the dimension of time and of observing and describing changes over time. The focus in process-oriented research falls on the process at dynamic levels of analysis. It refers to a person's functioning in terms of individual organisations of social, emotional, cognitive, physiological, and other processes that reflect his or her interactions or functioning over time (Cummings & Davies, 2002). Process-oriented research is directed by questions about process and structure, or regarding how a series of events or course of action such as a relationship, is organised and how it changes over time; the fundamental question being 'What's going on?' (Katz & Mishler, 2003).

In this study, the mother and daughter relationship is explored and observed to note changes over time and to determine whether the intervention of individual reflection followed by reunited reflection can assist in enhancing the relationship. It is hoped that by attributing meaning to them, lived experiences of participants can be altered and shaped (Denzin, 2002). Changes are observed at various levels of analysis and the effects of the research process on the relationship are particularly noted and analysed.

According to Cummings and Davies (2002), three possible themes for process-oriented research exist:

- ➢ Identifying and understanding the dynamic organisations of social, emotional, physiological, genetic, cognitive, and/or other processes that underlie the social event being studied.
- ➢ Explicating the broader causal net of influential factors and the nature of the interrelations between these factors as causal agents.
- ➢ Identifying the familial, community, ethnic, cultural, interpersonal, and other contexts that influence causal processes and the interrelations between the various dimensions and levels of social contexts.

The above themes appear to correlate with the social constructionist framework chosen for this study as well as with the qualitative research approach to be applied. However, in this study, the emphasis on causal factors and processes is slightly less, and the focus will rather fall on how various influences can possibly impact on and perturb or shift the mother-daughter relationships in this study.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative research approaches conceptualise reliability and validity differently from quantitative research approaches.

In quantitative research, reliability concerns the consistency of research findings. However in a qualitative study, in each step of the research process, researchers continuously exert an influence in that they always bring in their own subjectivity. The same research under taken by another researcher, even if it is possible to conduct it in exactly the same manner, will most likely yield different findings due to the other researcher's own subjectivity. Thus Merrick (1999) proposes that in qualitative research, the aim of replication is thrown out because there is no one 'truth' and all knowledge is perceived as constructed. In fact, Merrick (1999) states that not even the same investigator can repeat a study.

Validity in quantitative research refers to the research being conducted and to findings being collected and presented in a truthful and accurate manner (Kvale, 1996). However in qualitative research, validity cannot be established quantitatively and truth or accuracy cannot be scientifically proven. This is particularly so in interpretative research since any interpretation is subject to infinite revision as well as to multiple versions of the same action,

not one of which is objectively superior (Gergen, 1988). According to Ricoeur (cited in Moore, 1990), the validity of an interpretation is not a matter of empirical verification and proof, but rather the result of a rational process of argumentation and debate. Gergen (1988) similarly adds that the fundamental basis of any given interpretation is not empirical but rather relies on a network of interdependent and continuously modifiable interpretations. In other words, the interpretation validates itself. The aim is to generate truthful and credible inter-subjectivities (Babbie & Mouton, 2002).

According to Ely (1991), reliability and validity in qualitative studies have been replaced by trustworthiness, meaning that the methods used have been carried out fairly and that the products of analyses accurately represent the participants' experiences. Gherardi and Turner (2002) also include the broader concept of authenticity in addition to trustworthiness. Qualitative researchers therefore emphasise '*the plausibility and trustworthiness of a coherent interpretation*' (Katz & Mishler, 2003, p. 36).

Merrick (1999, p. 30) discusses the elements of '*good practice*' that must be present throughout the research process in order to ensure trustworthiness. Various other authors of qualitative research studies, as indicated below, have consensually agreed upon these elements. Such elements include the following:

➢ **Disclosure of the researcher's orientation** in the study, which refers to the researcher's expectations of the study, preconceptions, values or theoretical allegiance (Stiles, 1993).

➢ **Intensive and prolonged engagement with the material**, which includes the researcher's relationship with the participants in the study as well as with the material. It is essential that the researcher establish a relationship of trust in which to understand the world from the participants' perspective (Stiles, 1993).

➢ **Persistent observation** of both the participants' as well as the researcher's own internal processes and awareness of how these processes may be impacting on the research (Stiles, 1993).

➢ **Triangulation**, which involves the use of multiple methods in the research to achieve convergence and ensure some level of accuracy and trustworthiness (Babbie & Mouton, 2002; Ely, 1991).

➢ **Discussion** of and working towards **reaching consensus** regarding findings and processes with others, particularly the participants, which will ensure the credibility and accuracy of interpretations (Ely, 1991).

Merrick (1999) further proposes that researchers should engage in an **iterative cycle** between observation and interpretation or between dialogue/conversation and text, and should also **ground interpretations** by using individual examples from the data to support identified themes and patterns.

In this study, trustworthiness will be achieved by adhering to the above elements suggested by Merrick (1999). This process will involve the following:

➢ The researcher will **disclose her orientation** and make clear her expectations, preconceptions and any values that may have an impact on the research and its findings.

➢ The researcher will be involved in **prolonged and intensive engagement** with research participants by establishing a close and trusting relationship with them. She will also engage with the research material by reading and rereading transcripts, identifying promising ideas, extracting key themes and passages, and moving back and forth between quotations and full texts (Nagar, 2002).

➢ The researcher will **persistently observe** the processes occurring in participants, between participants and herself, and within herself throughout the research, and take note of how these processes and observations may impact on the research process, findings, and interpretations.

➢ **Triangulation** will be achieved through the use of multiple voices or perspectives, data sources, and collection methods.

➢ The researcher will **discuss** her findings with peers and supervisors, thereby validating her interpretations and their appropriateness. Also, built into the research process is the attempt to **reach consensus** with participants with regard to the researcher's interpretations of their stories, though this is not always possible.

➢ The researcher will engage in a dialogue with the material in the research, which includes audio recordings and transcripts, and enter into an **iterative process** where she will listen, read, conceptualise, re-read, re-conceptualise, thus evolving and altering her observations in the process (Stiles, 1993).

➤ The researcher will **ground** her **interpretations** by linking them to excerpts from the original text and the context in which they occurred (Rapmund, 1996).

Social Constructionism and the Present Study

As Gergen (cited in Schwandt, 2000) contends, language is accorded its capacity to mean something through human interchange and must therefore stand as the critical locus of concern in social constructionism. This view of social interaction and language use constitutes a relationship theory of social meaning, which is consistent with the relational identity of women.

Given the social constructionist epistemological framework chosen for this study, the manner in which women come to understand their identity, speak about their relationships, and perceive their relationship with their mothers/daughters is vital for interpretation and meaning making. Social constructionism was further deemed appropriate to this research study because the self and one's identity is very much a socially constructed concept, and the way in which mothers and daughters relate to one another and the mother-daughter relationship itself, form a crucial part of and are also largely influenced by women's sense of identity. In Chapter 2 much of the socio-cultural history and many of the discourses that have been identified as having exerted an impact on the constructions of female identity and the mother-daughter relationship have been discussed.

Using social constructionism to study mother-daughter relationships has allowed the researcher to analyse the manner in which the mother-daughter relationship is constructed, and how it may reinforce other discourses and achieve various social ends. It also enabled an exploration of the range of discourses that underlie meaning-making amongst women and therefore allowed the researcher to challenge these discourses, hopefully to bring about new ways of understanding and interpreting women's experiences in the mother-daughter relationship (Walters, 1999). In addition, since postmodernism and consequently social constructionism emphasises relationships in context, fluidity, and connection, it is more consistent with the relational nature of women and more appropriate for the study of relationships such as the mother-daughter relationship.

Keeping in mind the previous discussion of social constructionism, the implications of this epistemology and theoretical perspective for the current study embrace the following:

- The researcher is part of the research and must be included in the description of the system.
- The researcher and participants are rooted in a social and cultural history that plays a role in how they perceive the world and thereby attribute meaning to their stories.
- Through interaction with the participants, the researcher becomes part of what is being observed and therefore exerts an influence on and will be influenced by the participants' perceived realities.
- The researcher and the participants co-construct a reality through language in conversation that involves story telling (Rapmund, 1996).
- The co-constructed reality will be true for that particular context, at the specific time, and may be interpreted differently by each of the individuals present, although attempts should be made to arrive at as similar a worldview as possible.
- The researcher's interpretations of her experiences and her perception of the participants' experiences are coloured by her values, biases, and experiences, and she can never be free of her own subjectivity.

Social constructionism allowed the researcher to focus on the relationship between the mothers and daughters in the study and to recognise that their relationship and the meaning they make of the relationship are embedded within a larger social system and culture. At the same time, meaning making, although influenced by relationships and social interaction, is also an individual phenomenon. Therefore it may be useful to keep in mind the premises of constructivism in this study with regard to the way in which mothers and daughters individually interpret their relationship. Constructivism assumes that people are the origin of their thoughts, feelings and experiences, while social constructionism views people's thoughts, feelings, and experiences as the products of systems of meaning that exist at a social rather than an individual level (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Therefore, although social constructionism is the fundamental epistemological framework in this study, it also incorporates constructivism.

Role of the Researcher

According to Ely (1991), qualitative research is an intensely recursive, personal process for the researcher. In every aspect of a qualitative study, the researcher must be constantly aware of her own values and biases and of how these may be influencing the research process. Therefore, the researcher or observer can never be neutral. This is in line with the constructionist perspective where the observer must be included in his or her observations. As Levine (cited in Ely, 1991, p. 59) indicates,

> [w]e will never be entirely free of our own preferred ways of viewing situations and our own biases. We can, however, be more self-aware.

It is therefore extremely important for qualitative researchers to be aware of their own biases and blind-spots; to be conscious of their personal relationship to their research, and not to let these elements unfairly colour what they observe and interpret. Biases are impossible to escape; they are part of who we are, and the point is therefore not to exclude or do away with them entirely, but rather to understand and come to terms with them as honestly and completely as possible, thereby not distorting the research data (Ely, 1991). Reflexivity is thus essential in the qualitative researcher. In other words, the researcher must realise that he or she is part and parcel of the research setting, context, and culture he or she is trying to understand and represent. Everything about the research therefore must be reflected upon and critically evaluated (Merrick, 1999). It follows then that what the researcher observes or reports, says as much about the researcher as it does about the participants (Keeney & Morris, cited in Nagar, 2002), since it has as much to do with their identity as it has to do with the research itself (Merrick, 1999). Ely (1991, p. 225) asserts that '*consciousness raising*', for both the researcher and the participants, is an inevitable part of the qualitative research process.

Just as the researcher influences her own observations, the observations also in turn impact on the researcher, which may or may not alter her observations and interpretations. Similarly, participants in the research constantly exert influence on the researcher and vice versa. It is therefore important for the researcher to 'let go' enough to allow the process itself to unfold, but at the same time, to be aware of the processes occurring at any point during the research. Letting go also implies to relinquish control over the research process and be able to become a flexible instrument in the research, yet at the same time take responsibility for it (Ely, 1991).

The researcher should also honour tacit knowledge; in other words he or she must believe that the participants are experts on their own experiences and that they know a great deal about the research topic. Social research is an interactive rather than a controlling process, and it is only through relinquishing control that the researcher truly enters the world of another (Sciarra, 1999). It will thus be important for researchers to maintain a learning attitude where the participants are the teachers. The congruency between the researcher's attitude and personal beliefs will be important in establishing a trusting and close relationship with participants.

Part of a researcher's role in ensuring the trustworthiness of a study includes clearly stating the purpose of the study before the project begins. In the present study, the researcher informed the participants of her interest in mother and daughter relationships and that she was hoping to research this topic from their subjective perspectives. She also told the participants that past research on mother-daughter relationships had seldom included both mothers' and daughters' accounts and that it was her wish to provide a more comprehensive and holistic view on the subject by including both mothers and daughters. The researcher also let the participants know that she was not looking for the perfect mother-daughter relationship, but rather for 'real' relationships as experienced by everyday, 'normal' people. They were also told that their stories might assist other mothers and daughters who could be struggling to connect or who are wanting to improve their relationship. Furthermore, participants might also enhance their own relationship as a result of the research process. In addition, the participants were alerted to the fact their stories could add to the literature on mother-daughter relationships and provide deeper knowledge and understanding of the dynamic processes within and underlying these relationships.

To the participants, the researcher's role was made clear and she introduced herself as an investigator interested in exploring mother-daughter relationships. This role and its implications were described and explained to the participants. The participants were assured of their anonymity if they so wished and of the researcher's ethical practice. As Rubin and Rubin (1995) indicate, the research role taken and how it is perceived by the participants affect the quality of the conversation which the researcher and participants share. The researcher must therefore work to define a mutually acceptable research role. To achieve this, the researcher's empathy, sensitivity, humour, and sincerity are essential tools (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

In this study, the researcher's role also included a therapeutic element, in terms of which she sometimes made therapeutic interventions in an attempt to enhance the mother-daughter relationships being explored. The role of the therapist is related to and similar to the role of the researcher in that the therapist as well as the researcher is part of the system in which she interacts. The researcher's psychotherapeutic orientation is also consistent with that of postmodernism and social constructionism in that she believes in a multiverse of realities and in the client as the expert on his or her worldview and life story. Therefore, many of the qualities required of a qualitative researcher and interviewer previously discussed are coherent and consistent, and often overlap with the role of the therapist in this study. Like the interviewer, the therapist is asking for openness and personal trust from the participants, which is not likely to occur if the therapist is closed and impersonal rather than sincere, empathic, and accepting (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

The inclusion of the therapist's role altered the researcher's goals slightly, in that instead of simply researching the subject of interest and allowing it to remain as it would have done without explicit intervention, the researcher now purposefully intervened, with the goal of positively influencing the mother-daughter relationship. It should be said, however, that the very act of participating in a research study, conversing and telling one's stories is in itself an intervention that may affect the participants and their relationships, and this effect may indeed be therapeutic in itself without any purposeful therapeutic intervention (Babbie & Mouton, 2002). Therefore it is possible that therapeutic effects may have occurred in the participants in this study owing to the research act itself and not to purposeful intervention by the researcher as a therapist.

Like the findings in Mattingly's (cited in Katz & Mishler, 2003) study of psychotherapy sessions, the major meaning of this research is shaped by the quest for a narrative that therapist/researcher and client/participant can both embrace and understand. The suggestion by Real (1990) is that therapists should always be respectfully engaged with the multiple realities they encounter, and that they must exhibit humility in taking personal responsibility for themselves within the system. The main goal for the researcher in acting as a therapist in this study conforms with White's (1995, p. 20) purpose in psychotherapy, which is to open up a space for clients, and in this study, for mothers and daughters to

> *…perform the alternative and preferred stories of their lives, and for the acknowledgement of many of the alternative claims associated with these performances.*

A Personal Statement

The researcher now wishes to make a personal statement about her background in order to shed light on how her interests in mother-daughter relationships came about. This will also, it is hoped, make explicit some of her biases and subjectivities.

The researcher's is an adult female of Asian origin. She has been married for four years and currently has no children of her own. The researcher feels that since adolescence, she has experienced some difficulties in her relationship with her mother where the relationship oscillated between being extremely enmeshed and over-identified, and totally distanced and rejecting. Although the researcher experiences the relationship as having improved as years have gone by, and as she has become older, she still does not feel that she fully understands and appreciates her relationship with her mother.

One particular event that assisted the researcher in relating to her mother occurred when the former undertook a previous study in which she chose her mother's experiences as a research topic. During this period, the researcher came to learn about her mother and was able to perceive her in different, more liberated ways. This enabled the researcher to appreciate her mother more fully and gain insight into her behaviours and interactional style.

The researcher's interest in this study was therefore born out of this experience, and led to her desire to find out how other mothers and daughters experience their relationship. She wished to gain a better understanding of the dynamics and processes underlying such a relationship and of how it can be enhanced. She hopes that this study will not only provide further insight into mother-daughter relationships in general but also assist in her own understanding and interpretations of her own relationship with her mother, and possibly also facilitate her future relationship with her own child/children.

Sampling and Selection

In qualitative research, small samples are usually selected owing to the richness of the data collected. The number of participants is also not important since generalisability is usually not a goal of qualitative research, and it is indeed not a goal in this study.

As Wilson and Hutchinson (1991) indicate, research participants must be willing to provide complete and sensitive accounts of their experiences and possess the ability to articulate them. This therefore constituted one of the criteria for selecting participants for this study; they needed to be fluent in the English language and able to express themselves comprehensively and willingly. Another criterion was that both mother and daughter should agree to participate in the research and be willing to be interviewed individually as well as together. The daughters were also required to have reached adulthood in that they should be 18 years of age or older. This was to ensure some level of consistency in the accounts of the mother-daughter relationships.

In this study, the sampling method used was that of purposive and convenience selection. The researcher advertised her research and criteria for participants on the internet websites of universities and also wrote an e-mail with the relevant information to people she knew.

Various people responded to the invitation and at the end, three pairs of mothers and daughters were selected to participate in the study, based on convenience and availability. These participants expressed their willingness to discuss their mother-daughter relationships openly and to have their relationships analysed. They also agreed to the interview method and committed themselves to full participation throughout the research. Although this was not to be the case for the third mother and daughter pair, who did not complete the research process, the decision was made to s include them in the study nonetheless owing to the valuable information obtained.

Consent was obtained from the participants to tape record interview sessions and to use the information solely for the purposes of research. Although participants were given the option of anonymity, all six participants chose not to alter their identities for the research report. However, in order to protect the participants' identities and privacy, only their first names are used while all other personal details have been omitted or replaced by others.

It is worth noting that all the participating mother and daughter pairs had only their husbands/fathers as male figures in the family. In other words, none of the participating mothers had sons, which means that the participating daughters did not have brothers.

Data Collection

Personal data, such as name, age, address, marital status, the number of dependants, occupation, and educational level was gathered throughout the interview, but was not deliberately collected. The researcher felt that important and relevant information would surface as the conversations occurred and stories were narrated.

The interview constituted the method used to obtain information in this study. A qualitative interview can be described as

> *…an interaction between the interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order* (Babbie & Mouton, 2002, p. 289).

In line with the above, an unstructured interview format was utilised to allow for a natural flow of conversation and dialogue. The researcher did, however, gently direct the interview towards topics relevant to the research. It was important that the researcher did not place pressure on participants by asking too many questions, which may have implied expectations and thus distorted the participants' responses. Rather, the researcher allowed the participants to speak freely. As indicated by Guba and Lincoln (cited in Babbie & Mouton, 2002), participants' subjective experiences and 'insider' perspectives cannot be pursued using a set of predetermined questions that are based on the interviewer's 'outsider' construction.

Open questions were used in the interviews so as not to restrict the participant's responses; in other words, 'what' and 'how' questions rather than 'why' questions were mainly used (Stiles, 1993). The interviews also remained flexible and were adapted to each participant's requirements, needs, and situation. The researcher constantly checked participants' meanings and her own understandings with them, and misunderstandings were duly corrected and clarified. The researcher and the participants were therefore engaged in an exploration of shared meanings and were co-constructing a specific reality applicable and true to the

particular interview context. This is consistent with social constructionism where meanings are socially constructed. The researcher and the participants were further regarded as conversational partners and the active role of the interviewee in shaping the discussion was acknowledged (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Researchers or interviewers are increasingly being perceived as active participants in interactions with research respondents, with the interview itself being seen as shaped by the contexts and situations in which the interview takes place thus resulting in a negotiated achievement shared by both interviewer and participants (Fontana & Frey, 2000).

Interviews can be powerful instruments in that they allow for reflection and retelling of life stories. Particularly for people who have never articulated their beliefs and values before, they are now given an opportunity to verbally objectify them and present them for examination. Once this happens, the setting has already changed and something has shifted (Ely, 1991). By asking participants to recount and tell their stories, they are essentially engaged in a meaning-making process whereby they select details of their experience, reflect on them and give them order (Seidman, cited in Glasman, 2001).

In this study, the researcher also offered reframes or alternative stories during the interviews in order to provide participants with, and alert them to other, available versions of their story. Since relationships in families tend to operate in fixed and entrenched patterns, it is the therapist who can offer alternatives that may shift these interactional styles (Rapmund, 1996). It was therefore important in this study that the researcher/therapist not accept the mother-daughter relationship at face value or as the only truth since this might block alternative ways of perceiving the relationship.

Interview Method

The interviews were initially not fixed in terms of length and time, and the only criterion was that there would be at least three interviews per mother and daughter pair; one with daughter, one with mother, and one with mother and daughter together. As the interviews progressed, the participants as well as the researcher decided together whether additional interviews were required to gain more information or obtain further insight. As it transpired, each mother and daughter were interviewed individually once, and each mother and daughter pair were also interviewed together only once. This was the case for Althea and Nicola, and for Marie and Estelle. However, for Mona and Charmaine, they were only interviewed individually, each

once, but were not interviewed together as they were not willing to participate together in the last interview. The interviews were conducted at venues convenient for the participants, which were mostly at their residences.

During the individual interviews, the participants were asked to reflect on their relationship with their mother/daughter and discuss the transitions the relationship had gone through. They were asked to recount significant experiences in their lives and describe how these events impacted on their mother-daughter relationships. The participants were also asked to provide contextual information surrounding their mother-daughter relationships. The mothers in the study were asked to discuss their relationships with their own mothers and how they think these might have influenced their current relationship with their daughters. The daughters in the study were asked to discuss how their relationship with their mothers might have influenced or would influence their relationship with their current or future daughters.

After the completion of individual interviews, summaries were compiled and forwarded to the relevant mother and daughter pairs. Consent was obtained from all participants for their mother/daughter to read these summaries without any correction by the interviewee. These summaries served as a point of discussion for the joint interviews, in which the issues raised in the individual interviews formed the initial focus. The main aim of the joint interviews was for the mother and daughter pairs to interact actively and co-construct alternative realities of their relationship. As mentioned previously, the third mother and daughter pair, after receiving their individual interview summaries, were not willing to participate in the joint interview to discuss their relationship together and this was respected. An effort was however made to encourage them to participate in order to have an opportunity to discuss any misunderstandings or misinterpretations in the summaries. These efforts were met with non-compliance and silent resistance.

Data Analysis

In data analysis, the researcher attempted to impose order, structure, and meaning on the data collected. This is often done by establishing categories derived from the qualitative data and organising it into meaningful units. Ely (1991) describes this as a simultaneous 'left-brain right-brain exercise' in that one must distil categories and at the same time keep hold of the larger picture so that the categories are true to it.

An interpretive approach was selected for data analysis in this study. In other words, how participants understand their worlds and how they create and share meanings about their lives are central to the data analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Interpretive understanding sees the world in terms of what is meaningful to human life rather than as a collection of objects. It emphasises the description and interpretation of experience (Sciarra, 1999). In interpretive analysis, over-arching themes that run through the data as well as themes representative of specific sections of the data are identified, discussed, and interpreted. In this way, meaning is accorded to the mass of data obtained and the central patterns in the data illuminated (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997). The data analysis technique chosen to arrive at themes and patterns in this study was that of hermeneutics.

In line with the postmodern paradigm in the social construction of reality through language, hermeneutics encompasses the study of the interpretation of texts and believes in the possibility of knowledge outside the realm of an objective empirical-analytical approach (Terwee, 1990). Originally employed as an interpretative technique for understanding religious messages, hermeneutics has been extended to the interpretation of human action (Meichenbaum, 1988). Correlating with the interpretive approach, in hermeneutics one reflects on the mode of understanding of human experience and interprets it to reach a co-understanding of the meaning of the experience (Kvale, 1996). Hermeneutic understanding cannot be achieved out of context, since it asserts that context is critical to the understanding of human behaviour, and these contexts change (Meichenbaum, 1988). The rationale is that:

> …*the social world is made up of individuals who speak and act in meaningful ways; these individuals create the social world which gives them their identity and being, and their creations can only be understood through a process of interpretation* (Moore, 1990, p. 111).

Heidegger (cited in Woolfolk, Sass, & Messer, 1988) also indicates that human existence is not one of detached knowing, but rather one of engaged activity; a relational world view.

Terwee (1990) has identified the following characteristics of hermeneutic understanding:

- ➤ The hermeneutic circle – Interpretation begins with a preconception and interpretations are attempted where details are understood from the whole, while the whole is understood from the parts.
- ➤ Internal relations – There is a search for relation of meaning between units of analysis.
- ➤ Individual cases – Generalisation is not essential and thus individual insight is sufficient.
- ➤ Fusion of horizons – The intention of the final interpretation is to bring together the world of the individual being interpreted and that of the interpreter, so as to reach a shared understanding of the experience.
- ➤ Application – The interpreted meaning is applied to the present situation.

In summary,

> *[h]ermeneutics means the philosophical reflection on the practice of interpretation, whereby phenomena are understood as dependent parts of larger contexts* (Terwee, 1990, p22).

As mentioned previously, story telling is a meaning making process for participants; this implies that the study of human science therefore involves a double hermeneutic – the researcher and the participants are both self-interpreting (Rennie, 1999). Although the circles of the researcher and the participants will never become one, they do overlap to the degree that the researcher is able to live his or her way in the participants' personal experiences and stories (Denzin, 2002).

The use of hermeneutics as a data analysis technique is therefore appropriate to the chosen epistemology of social constructionism as well as to the qualitative research design. It is congruent with the method of reconstruction and co-construction of stories. Social constructionism is also often referred to as '*critical hermeneutics*' (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 148). In critical hermeneutics, attention is focused more fully on the socio-political aspects of knowledge and the deconstruction of cultural texts. Particularly, it involves an intentional effort to uncover cultural and political assumptions, aiming to empower the less vocal and those subjugated by existing social structure and dominant discourse (Hoshmand, 1999). In terms of this study, hermeneutics was utilised to interpret and arrive at an understanding of the mother-daughter relationship. It was also employed to reach a shared understanding between mothers and daughters, and between the participants and the

researcher herself, through the co-creating and co-construction of their stories and finding themes in them. Furthermore, critical hermeneutical analysis was employed to uncover dominant societal discourses relevant to the mother-daughter relationship.

The data analysis steps followed in this study were based on the above discussion regarding the interpretive approach and hermeneutical data analysis technique:

1. The audio-taped individual interviews were first transcribed.

2. The researcher carefully listened to the tape recordings whilst reading the transcribed individual interviews. Units of meaning were elicited from each individual interview, from which a summary was formulated by the researcher and forwarded to the relevant mother and daughter pair.

   The researcher alerted the participants to the point that these summaries were constructed by the researcher and did not represent the ultimate truth. The researcher colours the way the individual stories were told because of who she is, her experiences, and her biases. The researcher nonetheless tried to reflect these stories as accurately as possible. The participants were asked not to discuss their summaries with one another until the joint interview.

3. During the period in which the participants were given to review the individual summaries, the researcher again read and reread the original transcriptions, and identified patterns and themes that were relevant and appropriate to the research context, individual participants, and the particular mother-daughter relationship.

   The researcher began a hermeneutic circle, which involved continuously alternating between the details and the overall picture of the data; jumping back and forth between the parts conceived through the whole which motivates them and the whole conceived through the parts that actualise it (Geertz, cited in Schwandt, 2000). This process was engaged in by the researcher throughout the data analysis task.

4. A joint interview was then conducted with the two willing mother and daughter pairs, and these interviews were also transcribed. The mothers and daughters were offered an opportunity to correct any misinterpretations of their worldview by the researcher and

to express them to each other. The third mother and daughter pair became avoidant and evasive after receiving their individual summaries and consistently failed to schedule a time for the joint interview. After several attempts to request their participation, their resistance was respected and acknowledged.

5. The researcher repeated step 3, but now analysed the data obtained in the two joint interviews. The main focus here was placed on the interactional style between the mother and daughter during the combined interview, and themes and patterns related to their interaction as well as their relationship were elicited. For the last mother and daughter pair, the researcher engaged in a process where she integrated their individual interaction styles and analysed this combined interactional process for themes and patterns that were likely to characterise their relationship.

6. The researcher then engaged in a circular interpretive process where she moved between the individual interview transcripts and the joint interview transcripts, and tried to develop a meta-perspective on each of the two mother-daughter pairs. This process also allowed the researcher to check, recheck, and check again the applicability and accuracy of the identified themes, both for individual participants as well as the mother-daughter relationship. A similar process was undertaken for the third mother-daughter pair, except that instead of the joint interview transcripts, the researcher used the integrated data obtained from their individual interviews in step 5.

As Gergen (1988) observed, interpretations can be subjected to infinite reviews and each review might result in a different version of the event described. The interpretations offered by the researcher are therefore only one possible version of each of the mother-daughter relationships in this study. Again, the researcher's values, beliefs, and biases are always present and influence her interpretations of each mother-daughter relationship.

7. The researcher also needed to take note of her relationship with the participants, which formed part of the participants' as well as the researcher's world of experience. This relationship is part of the research study and cannot be excluded from analysis. The participants were asked to reflect on how they experienced the research process as well as the researcher. These reflections were analysed and compared with the researcher's own experiences, and elements that were helpful or unhelpful to the

participants were identified. Although the third mother and daughter pair agreed to provide reflections on their research experience after being reassured that they did not have to participate in the joint interview, these reflections were not received by the researcher. The researcher nevertheless reflected on her own experiences with this mother and daughter pair.

8. The researcher then recounted the story of the participants, first individually, then interactionally as a mother and daughter pair. For the last mother and daughter pair, the researcher recounted their relationship as integrated and perceived by her and as based on their individual stories. The participants' reflections on the research process were also presented and discussed, linking these to their individual and relational themes. This was not possible for the third mother and daughter pair. The researcher also included her own reflections and experiences with the mother-daughter pairs, and her role in each relationship was also sketched and analysed.

    Qualitative descriptions emphasise 'thickness' in that descriptions should be rich in detail and capture the sense of actions as they occur (Babbie & Mouton, 2002). The researcher has therefore provided as rich a description as possible so that events are placed in their contexts and are understandable to the participants as well as the readers. However, as noted by Ely (1991), researchers often have difficulty maintaining the balance between reporting fully and deeply, and invading privacy. In this study, the researcher has made a considerable effort to be as respectful as possible in her interpretations of the participants' stories.

9. The researcher undertook a comparative analysis between the common themes that emerged in the mother-daughter relationships in this study and the literature.

    As would be expected, there are countless themes that can be identified within any body of data, and not all can be presented and reported. The researcher has therefore selected those that seem most salient and relevant to the story she has chosen to tell (Ely et al, 1997).

10. In the final chapter of this report, an evaluation of the study was provided and recommendations for future research were also proposed.

Ely (1991, p. 140) states that,

> *[t]o analyze is to find some way or ways to tease out what we consider to be essential meaning in the raw data; to reduce and reorganise and combine so that the readers share the researcher's findings in the most economical, interesting fashion. The product of analysis is a creation that speaks to the heart of what was learned.*

It is hoped that this research report will provide the readers with a solid understanding of the lessons learnt by the researcher in her study of mother-daughter relationships.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to provide justifications of the research design selected for this research. In view of the above discussions, the epistemological framework of social constructionism, the qualitative interpretivist research approach, and the hermeneutical data analysis technique appear to correspond with one another and share similar underlying premises: those of the importance of language, meaning making, and context.

The information obtained in this study assists in the understanding of the participants' subjective and inner experiences of their mother-daughter relationship, of how they make sense of it and attribute meaning to events around it, and of how they interact with and impact on their mothers/daughters as well as their world. The study further attempts to illuminate the social and historical world in which the participants exist and to show how predominant societal discourses and expectations influence the experience of mother-daughter relationships.

The stories presented in this study and the themes identified in each mother-daughter relationship contain pragmatic value in that they shed light on how mother-daughter relationships are being and can be experienced and interpreted. This does not however imply that these experiences are the 'absolute truth' or the 'only truth'. As Hoshmand (1999) contends, social interpretation implies an irreducible plurality and culture is always multi-vocal. There are many other stories that can be told by mothers and daughters about their relationship that this study has not presented, and they remain to be discovered and narrated. In addition, whether the descriptions and interpretations presented are true or false is not the

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study's primary concern, but, rather, how they fit together and form a coherent story for the mother and daughter in question. Schwandt (2000) remarks that there is never a finally correct interpretation, but that when successful, interpretation and understanding leads to growth in inner awareness, which enters into and enriches our mental experience.

It is furthermore important to refrain from judgement and recognise that there are no good or bad perceptions, stories, or worldviews. As Rapmund (1996, p. 124) has stated,

> *[w]e also need to respect the integrity of the system and judge it as neither good nor bad.*

The mother-daughter relationships presented in the study therefore are not meant to be perceived as standards by means of which to compare other mother-daughter relationships, but rather as adding to what we currently know and to how we have conceptualised and experienced mother-daughter relationships, and as another description of possible patterns providing alternative ways of viewing such relationships in our society.

Chapter 4

My Perceptions of Althea's and Nicola's Relationship

Introduction

This chapter is based on the transcribed interviews conducted separately with Althea, the mother, and Nicola, the daughter, as well as the last interview conducted with both Althea and Nicola together. Each participant's background will be sketched, followed by a description of the interview setting and the researcher's impressions. Subsequently the themes that emerged from each interview will be discussed. The combined interview will then be considered in terms of the themes emerging from it as well as the general themes of this mother and daughter relationship. Althea and Nicola each provided reflections of their experience throughout the research process and these will be elaborated on. Finally, the researcher's reflections of her participation in the process will be included.

Following the completion of the interviews and the transcription of the interviews with Althea and Nicola individually, summaries of each of their interviews were compiled and given to both mother and daughter. These interview summaries are provided in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. A joint interview was conducted to discuss these summaries as well as their relationship.

The themes identified and discussed were arrived at by the researcher as a result of in-depth analysis of the two individual interviews and one joint session. The researcher's own lens coloured the way she has interpreted the participants' stories and their relationship.

Althea, the Mother

Background

Althea's parents immigrated to Kenya from the United Kingdom before she was born. She is the second youngest of six siblings, all of whom were schooled at home by their mother

throughout their primary school years, and only began attending formal schooling in high school. Since formal schools were far from their home, all the children boarded at school and came home only during holidays. All six siblings have moved away from Kenya, encouraged by their parents to look for better opportunities elsewhere. Althea's parents however, chose to remain in Kenya owing to their love for the country. Althea's mother passed away two years ago in Kenya and her father has chosen to remain there.

Althea had enrolled for a university course after completing school, but her boyfriend at the time, now her husband, wanted to move to South Africa to complete his pilot's training. Althea arrived in South Africa at the age of 19 with her boyfriend and married him at the age of 21. At the age of 22, Althea had her only child, a daughter named Nicola. Althea was unable to fall pregnant again after giving birth to Nicola and did not seek any medical intervention to conceive again. Althea's husband worked as a pilot and was often away from home. Althea looked after Nicola most of the time and did not seek employment until Nicola was in Standard 8. Althea has always maintained many interests such as gardening and music, and often planted nurseries and gave piano lessons during her years at home. Althea also completed her Bachelor of Arts degree through the University of South Africa during this period.

When Nicola was old enough, Althea began working for a marketing research company in the mornings, and as Nicola became more independent, Althea began working full-time. She has remained with this company and achieved prestigious positions over the past 14 years. Althea is also a marathon runner and has been running marathons since Nicola's primary school days. Althea, who is currently 53 years old, presently lives in a townhouse with her husband in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg.

The Interview Setting and My Impressions

The interview with Althea took place in a meeting room at her offices. The office environment was professional and sophisticated. I was slightly concerned about the type of rapport that would be established in this environment owing to the personal nature of the topic at hand, and wondered whether such an environment would be conducive to trust and non-defensiveness. My concern was fortunately unfounded.

Althea was professionally yet comfortably attired. She was friendly and inviting, which made the atmosphere much more relaxed than I had expected. Althea appears young for her age, with a lean build, typical of a marathon runner. She spoke rapidly yet comfortably, making jokes throughout the interview. However I sensed some anxiety and nervousness in Althea during the interview. Althea was enthusiastic about the research process and eager to participate. She tried hard not to be defensive and did not appear to be holding back, volunteering information freely, and truly seemed to enjoy the research process.

Themes Emerging from Althea's Interview

The following themes were identified from Althea's interview.

Aiming to be the Perfect Mother

The theme of aiming to be the perfect mother embodies the enormous burden that Althea never allows herself to be wrong or perceived as inadequate in her mothering. It further indicates how seriously she takes this role in wanting to do the best for the daughter she adores. This leads to tremendous responsibility in always having to do the right thing, resulting in extremely cautious behaviour. Trying to be the perfect mother involves adopting the right attitude, perspective, advice towards motherhood, daughterhood, and life. In addition, much guilt is aroused for any action or thought that does not fall within the 'perfect mother' ideal.

Althea is concerned about always doing the right thing for those around her. She is particularly aware of the different roles she plays in Nicola's life and tries to play each role as effectively and as correctly as possible. It seems that doing the right thing is Althea's way of maintaining control in her life and she believes firmly that as long as she has done the right thing, what is then meant to be, will be. In this way, once she has fulfilled her ideas of perfection, she feels free to let things be and relinquishes control. Althea's need to be a perfect mother also encompasses strong underlying beliefs about life and motherhood, most of which are quite traditional and fundamental. For Althea, motherhood is instinctual and automatic, and remaining at home with children is one of the basic things a mother should do. The following statement illustrates Althea's belief:

Being an old-fashioned Mom, I think a mother should be at home when her kids come home from school. Because that's when they're frustrated or want to tell you about stuff.

It appears that Althea believes she has been the mother she should be. This is also evident in her parenting style where she seems to be an authoritative parent who allows her child to be autonomous yet provides guidance at the same time. Althea describes her parenting style as easy-going and non-directive. She believes that she has always allowed Nicola her space to explore life and make her own decisions, but she has also provided direction and guidance when it was needed. Althea prides herself in having let Nicola 'be herself':

… I mean we never dictated to her, you know… [her husband] used to come in and say this kid's got no ambition. I'd say, that's fine, you know.

The ideal of the 'perfect mother' also includes, for Althea, being the perfect grandmother. Balancing the roles of mother and grandmother has also been quite challenging for Althea. She feels she needs to be there to support and advise Nicola, but she cannot allow herself to interfere with Nicola's parenting. Althea is therefore extremely cautious in how she conducts herself around Nicola and her grandchildren, wanting to maintain her image of the perfect mother and grandmother. Althea comments:

With my grandchildren, I am the goodie, I'm allowed to be, I don't do anything… it brings out the playful side of me…But at the same time,…I don't want to spoil it for them. I remember a friend of mine; he said he doesn't like leaving his child with his mother, because she comes back a total spoilt brat. Now I don't want to do that because it's not fair on the child and it's not fair on the parents. I have, actually, I have made a conscious effort not to get involved in how they discipline…we actually make a conscious effort not to interfere in their lives, which hopefully we don't.

Aiming to be the 'perfect mother' hopefully results in near-perfect children. Although Althea admits to Nicola's 'bossiness', she nonetheless reframes it in a positive light as part of Nicola's self-confidence, which she admires and which is part of the picture of a perfect child. Althea says:

I actually envy her confidence she had because I never had that. I was glad for her and that was really fantastic for her. But she was very much more confident at 17, 18 than I was, and she's still got that confidence going through... to the point, but you know I share it with her, she's almost a bit bossy sometimes, and I tease her about that...

From the above comment, it appears that Althea, in teasing Nicola about her bossiness, tries to be as open as the relationship will allow her to be. It seems that she is however unable to discuss it openly, possibly in the interests of maintaining a good relationship with Nicola. She softens her criticism of Nicola by identifying with the trait herself.

Althea seems particularly concerned about her lack of emotional expressiveness towards Nicola and this appears to arouse much guilt in her as it does not chime with her ideal of being the perfect mother. Althea feels that, as part of her own upbringing in a very proper English family, she did not receive much physical affection from her parents. As a result, she has passed this trait on to Nicola and feels that she could have been more affectionate and expressive than she was in rearing Nicola. Althea's concern is evident in the following comment:

I think the one bad thing is, my mother was very English and very proper and you didn't show a lot of emotion. And in some way I've carried that over... and even now, you know, we (Nicola and her) don't hug enough or say we love each other enough, that kind of thing. And I think that's a legacy from my Mom, or the English way of being brought up.

In addition to feeling guilty about not having provided sufficient emotional nurturing, Althea also feels that she may have been slightly selfish in having developed her own interests that did not include Nicola. These interests and activities have been very important in maintaining a sense of self in Althea and her passion about life. However, it seems that possessing a sense of self is almost not allowed in the 'perfect mother'. Althea talks about her uncertainty concerning how her own interests may have affected her mothering:

I think in some ways, I've always been no..., the word selfish is a bit strong, but I've liked my, I've got so many of my own interests... I perhaps, I've always wanted to do those. I haven't been the real doting, attentive 100% mother...I'd like to think there

wasn't, but I would like to know the answer to that, if there was any resentment (from
Nicola).

Although Althea acknowledges the possibility of her behaviour having exerted a negative effect on Nicola, she hopes that Nicola did not resent her for pursuing her own interests. It appears that this was not a thought that bothered Althea when Nicola was a child, but it does seem a concern to her now in retrospect. It is possible that Althea has met her own needs, which may not be part of her 'perfect mother' ideal. However, Althea appears to have been a successful mother and she further reframes her possible 'neglect' of Nicola as 'building her independence'. In the following comment, Althea indicates that she has done the right thing in leaving Nicola to her own devices as she has become independent and comfortable in her own company:

> *I like to think, being an only child, she hasn't turned out like being an only child. But*
> *in some ways, I say to people, I think she almost thrived on neglect. It sounds dreadful,*
> *but when she was small, I never sat, I might have played a bit, but I let her find her*
> *own company, which I think is paying its dividends now. She enjoys being on her own,*
> *or she's always been able to entertain herself...*

Althea therefore seems to exhibit a strong need to always do the right thing, to make the correct decisions, to be in control by making sure her part has been completed in the most non-offensive manner, and to couch those times that she did not achieve this, in terms of positive outcomes for Nicola. This has allowed Althea to be well-liked and easy to get along with, but it also places much pressure and responsibility on Althea always to be perfect in her behaviour, responses, and mannerisms. The need to be a 'perfect mother' may have resulted in over cautiousness in Althea's interactions with her daughter, almost immobilising Althea in the relationship. This perfection arouses guilt and constant insecurity, causing Althea to doubt herself in her role as a mother. However, Althea apparently possesses the ability to reframe events positively, allowing her to hold on to the belief that she may just have been close to perfect.

The Dependent Pacifist

This theme refers to two patterns that have become interdependent. Althea, the pacifist, avoids conflict, dislikes disagreements, and tries to keep the peace at the expense of her own

desires and wishes. However, this causes tension and frustration, resulting in less satisfactory relationships since little mutual communication takes place. Althea thus turns to another relationship where she feels acknowledged and loved and in the process becomes very dependent on this relationship in order to hold onto her sense of self, although she still plays the role of the pacifist in this relationship. However, it is by adopting this passive role that Althea believes she is still being included in the relationship, and so the cycle continues.

Althea describes herself as someone who has always preferred to back away from conflict and avoid confrontations. It is possible that Althea's pacifism has played a part in the pattern displayed in her relationship with her husband. Althea describes her husband as domineering and demanding, although she loves him dearly. He is quite dependent on Althea and she appears to mother him completely and does everything for him. She acknowledges that she has dug her own grave and, after 32 years of marriage, cannot see this pattern changing. This very pattern in Althea's marriage seems to have also affected Nicola and Nicola's choice of marriage partner as can be seen in Althea's following comment:

> *… I tended to do everything for him (her husband)… and Nicola's watched this and I think she's even put it into words saying, 'I will not let my husband be like that'. And I think she's actually made conscious steps, because she's very firm with [her husband].*

Owing to the difficulties with her husband, Althea finds solace in her relationship with Nicola and often confides in Nicola when she has had an argument with her husband. Althea admits to Nicola playing the role of the mediator in order to console Althea and to keep her parents together:

> *If I have a fight with [my husband], or he upsets me because he's not an easy person, Nicola can see it straight away, and I confide in her. So then she just says, explains it… so she has been an intermediary sometimes, which is good. And she's the only one I can go to because no one else understands…*

Althea therefore appears to be quite dependent on Nicola to provide the understanding that she is not receiving in her marriage. There is also the assumption that since Nicola is the only other person in the nuclear family, and therefore the only other person who understand the dynamics, she is the only one Althea can turn to. This places Nicola in a difficult position in

that she may possibly feel unable to reject Althea's pleas for help, and obliged to play the role of the mediator.

Being the pacifist she is Althea also does not often disagree with Nicola. She insists that only minor irritations existed in their relationship which were resolved quickly and without the raising of voices or demonstrations of anger. This forms part of Althea's need to try to be the perfect mother in that she minimises aspects that do not match the perfect mother ideal. Althea also makes use of conventional stereotypes, such as Nicola being a teenager, to normalise her conflicts with Nicola, as she says in the following response:

> *You know, I can't even remember (any disagreements), so they couldn't have been that bad. You know, I'm sure Nicola must have stomped off to her room a few times when she was a teenager, but it's not an active memory in my head.*

Althea's passiveness causes some frustration for her and seems to have resulted in a negative perception of herself. She envies the self-confidence of Nicola, which she herself took much longer to develop. Althea illustrates her perception of herself in the following comment:

> *I think I used to be quite…quite weak and snivelling almost. And I actually have grown out of that. But it's taken me a long time to get there. And luckily, Nicola hasn't had that. I like to think she hasn't, that process of self-doubt, I don't think she's had… whereas I've had to weather that, quite a lot… perhaps it's not going out to work or whatever it was, or having a very domineering husband.*

Althea attributes her lack of confidence partly to her demanding husband and since she is unable to find her own self-esteem in her marriage, Althea turns to her confident daughter and to their relationship as mother and daughter. In order to hold on to her relationship with Nicola and in line with her pacifist nature, it appears vital for Althea to minimise any ripples in the relationship. To do this, Althea often uses humour to defuse situations and trivialises conflict. This seems to make the situation easier for Althea to handle and confront, since it is more difficult to become angry when the emotion is veiled by humour. The following response from Althea shows how she perceives and handles negativity:

> *I think it's just that every now and then she (Nicola) does get a bit bossy. But I've accepted that as part of her character… it's something that I laugh and tease her*

about... We have the nice open family kinds of jokes that we can share, and stuff like that. Things we tease each other about.

Althea therefore apparently continues her passive role in her relationship with both her husband and her daughter. It is possible then that in her marriage, Althea plays the mothering pacifist who looks after her husband as a good traditional wife should. And in her relationship with her daughter, Althea seems to play the dependent mothering pacifist, who is dependent on Nicola for emotional support and, fearing Nicola will reject her and therefore cut off her source of emotional life, continues her passive mothering role to gain love and acceptance. Althea's passive nature may prevent her from honestly expressing her frustrations and irritations in her relationship with others. It can be hypothesised that Althea experiences her relationships with others as fragile and easily broken and is therefore unwilling to risk losing these relationships, particularly her relationship with her daughter, by being more assertive.

Faithful Avoidance

This theme attempts to highlight the process of how placing so much faith and trust in a relationship sometimes leads to the avoidance and denial of any negativity in the relationship. By always seeing the positives in the relationship and trusting the relationship always to be good, no space is allowed for the relationship to be inadequate in any way. Nevertheless, perhaps owing to such a perspective, the relationship is also accorded the space to thrive regardless of any obstacles.

Althea describes her relationship with her daughter as one characterised by mutual support, interdependence, trust and closeness. For Althea, the relationship with Nicola has gone through different stages, and yet during each stage, Althea believes that they both knew it would only get better, no matter what. By weathering these various phases of their relationship, Althea feels that both she and Nicola have learnt to play a diverse array of roles for each other and have provided support for one another. During Nicola's teenage years, the relationship went through a period of disconnection where Nicola rebelled against Althea's rules and guidance. Althea remembers feeling antagonistic during this time but faithfully believed that this was necessary and would eventually pass; again reaffirming Althea's 'perfect mother' ideal. When Nicola entered varsity, her rebellious phase came to an end, and

mother and daughter connected again on a different level. Althea describes her experience of the different stages in the relationship in the following comment:

…one, you're dealing more with a child, where you're still disciplining to a certain extent, and the other one, you're now dealing with an adult.

When Nicola began working at the same firm as Althea, their relationship moved onto another level. Althea recounts this period as one when they became friends and colleagues, relating as two adult women, rather than as mother and daughter. Althea says:

I often say to people, my daughter is like my friend. You know, I'll go to her and I'll say how does this hair style look or clothes and stuff like that.

Althea also showed complete faith and trust in Nicola by not questioning her decision to take a year off after school to travel, or to get engaged and be married at the age of 23. However, this possibly takes away Althea's role and influence as a mother in guiding and advising Nicola concerning her life choices, even though the ultimate decision would still be Nicola's, considering her age. Althea therefore denies any disappointments she may have felt towards Nicola by holding onto her faith in Nicola.

Althea further believes that she is an important part of Nicola's life. She trusts that she is playing her various roles well and that these will ensure the continuation of the good relationship she perceives she now enjoys with her daughter. Althea indicates this in the following comment about how she has adjusted her role since the birth of her grandchildren:

…I'd like to think I'm very supportive. Especially now the children have come along, my role has actually changed… It's shifted more from being a relationship where we used to talk about work and clothes and friends and ambitions and fear, and things, to more talking about the children.

It seems extremely important for Althea to believe that she has a very good relationship with Nicola. Therefore Althea must have complete faith in the continuation of this perfect relationship. This is not to say that Althea and Nicola do not share a trusting and interdependent relationship, but rather to emphasise that this strong need for the relationship to remain cohesive and positive may result in Althea not allowing space for open discussions

about disagreements and negative feelings in the relationship. The insistence on a good relationship may be a heavy burden for both mother and daughter.

Summary of Althea's Themes

Apparently Althea's self-concept revolves very much around aiming to be the perfect mother. It seems that Althea tries her best to adopt the right attitude, perspective, and parenting style. She believes that she has fulfilled her role as the good mother but easily feels guilty about perhaps not having been that 'perfect mother' she expects herself to be.

Althea is by nature a passive and unassuming person, which has resulted in her playing the submissive role in her marriage. Unable to receive acknowledgement and possibly acceptance from her husband, Althea turns to Nicola for emotional support, thus becoming quite dependent on Nicola. Althea's interaction with Nicola is characterised by the same passiveness and understanding, but exhibits an added sense of dependency.

Althea appears extremely proud of her daughter and loves her unconditionally. Althea believes their interaction is one characterised which is by trust and interdependence. However, owing to her need to believe in her good relationship with Nicola, she tends to deny any negative aspects of the relationship. She does this in the same way she handles conflict, backing away, avoiding it, and trivialising and defusing it through humour and positive reframes. Although Althea's behaviour may remove some of the intensity of the conflict that arises between Althea and Nicola, it may have also allowed them to connect deeply without fearing retribution or attack.

Althea's world appears fragile and easily threatened. She therefore works hard at keeping everything in place by not rocking the boat. Her need to be the 'perfect mother' and her nature as a pacifist all play into her need to deny the negatives in her life and to demonstrate complete faith that everything will be all right.

Nicola, the Daughter

Background

Nicola is a 32-year-old mother of two young children: a daughter of two years and a son of six months. She is a successful businesswoman, currently working at a major cellular company as a new products development manager. She married her husband, a business consultant, at the age of 23.

Nicola was born in South Africa and grew up as an only child mostly in Gauteng, moving only within the suburbs of Johannesburg. After completing Standard 10, Nicola took a year off studying and went on a Kontiki tour of Europe. She returned, enrolled at the University of the Witwatersrand and completed her Bachelor of Commerce, majoring in marketing. She met her husband while they were students together. During her varsity years, she began doing part-time work at the company where her mother works, and after completing her degree, she joined the company permanently as a research analyst. Nicola furthered her studies through the University of South Africa, a distance learning institution, and completed her Honours in marketing whilst working full-time.

Nicola worked in the same company as her mother for five years before moving on to the organisation where she is now employed. She presently lives in the northern suburbs in a three-bedroomed cluster home with her husband and two children. Since having had children, Nicola works flexi hours, mostly in the mornings, and is at home in the afternoons with her children. She plans to continue working and takes on the challenging role of being both mother and working woman.

The Interview Setting and My Impressions

After considering our options for interview venues, we decided that Nicola's home would be the most appropriate as it would provide the privacy we needed and also allow Nicola to oversee her young children. Nicola's home was comfortable and homely, littered with toys and children's items, exuding a sense of warmth and childlike innocence.

Nicola welcomed me warmly into her home. We made some coffee and played with the children a little while before beginning. The atmosphere was comfortable and intimate, and Nicola appeared enthusiastic about the process we were about to undertake. Nicola is a tall and slim woman and was dressed comfortably in loose clothing. Although a little hesitant at first, we settled comfortably into her living room and conversation soon flowed freely. Some prompting was required as Nicola tried to remember certain information, but she was open and honest and showed trust and willingness to let the interview flow naturally.

Themes Emerging from Nicola's Interview

The following themes were identified from Nicola's interview.

Independence versus Disconnection

This theme refers to the pattern of being separate but in the process becoming disconnected. However, the separateness is framed as independence and individuality while the disconnection is hidden behind objectivity and rationality. These processes also highlight the need to possess positive perceptions of self and the relationship of others to self.

Nicola seems to see herself as very much of an individual with a separate identity, and feels that she has become her own person and has not modelled herself on anyone. In a way, Nicola almost denies the role Althea played as her mother in the following comment:

> *I don't know about this whole mother, role model thing. I don't really have like a role model …I don't really believe in role models….*

Nicola feels that she has always been allowed to be herself; not enmeshed in any way with her family. She seems to have very much individuated and is content to just let things become what they are meant to become, including herself. Nicola describes her parent's child-rearing style in the following comment, which although sounding autonomous, also reflected a feeling of disconnectedness:

I wouldn't say they've ever said, you know, you must do this or you must do that. They've very much left me on my own...so they, they've never tried to push me into one direction, or another...you know, actually now that I think about it, we're very much individuals, in the family unit.

From the above statement, it can be seen that there is recognition of the individual and yet there is also acknowledgement of the family unit. This non-directive way of parenting has allowed Nicola to develop a strong sense of self-confidence, helped by the underlying belief that she would succeed. Nicola says:

I think my self-confidence has come more from the fact that they (her parents), they just had faith that I would do well.

Apparently Nicola experienced her parents as accepting and trusting. Although Nicola indicates that she is very grateful for her parents' trust in her life decisions, it appears that she may have also experienced this as a lack of concern and care from her parents. It seems that Nicola felt her parents did not cherish high expectations for her and that she would have liked some pushing and assertiveness. The following comment shows Nicola's regret at her parents' non-directiveness:

...my parents never, ever pushed me to do well at something. As I said, I would have liked to have done sport. To push me into say, you will do one sport, whether you like it or not. And that's something, that maybe it would have been better... I'm not ambitious and I think that's potentially something that..., because they never really pushed me, I never really strove for anything.

For Nicola, being objective and making correct decisions are important and perhaps serve as her way of controlling her environment. Her sense of self is also often arrived at through objective reflections and rationalisations, thus at the same time disconnecting her from her emotions and feelings. Nicola speaks of her sense of self in the following objective and rational manner:

I'd say, I look into myself quite a lot, but I don't, I don't try to aspire to be someone else, or try and change a lot of, you know, things...I'm quite an equal person...I think probably 80% of it is what's in your character and probably then the other 20% is

through watching and realising which ones you want to enhance, and part of which ones you don't.

This ability to self reflect in an objective manner has allowed Nicola to view herself as quite a balanced person and enables her to make rational decisions in her life. However, this tendency may also result in Nicola being hesitant to acknowledge her emotions and express her true feelings in difficult situations. By seeing herself as separate and individuated, Nicola portrays the 'perfect' self that is usually aspired to in the Western culture. To be consistent with this perfect image, Nicola also needs to deny any possible inadequacies in her surroundings and environment. In order to be a controlled individual, Nicola's response to conflict is also to rationalise it away and see it objectively as not affecting her personally. This is illustrated in her slightly evasive explanation of how her family handles conflict:

Normally, we just talk about it and we both (mother and daughter) cry and then it's done… But I think we're a very easy-going family and we get along really well. So I think in that way, you know, if they irritate you, you just don't see them for a couple of days. And if something does particularly bug us, then we just say it. But…I can't even think of when we've had to like sit down and say, I didn't like it when you said x,y,z.

Nicola's need to maintain her perceptions of perfection is also evident in her reluctance to acknowledge any negativity in her perceptions of her mother, and she positively reframes flaws in her mother or trivialises them into petty characteristics. She contradicts herself in the following response with regard to her mother:

I mean, there is nothing negative that I can say about my Mom. But I wouldn't want to have her characteristics, you know. Or you know, her lack of financial skills…you know, that's the kind of thing that we're different. I'm very money-oriented, she is not money oriented, you know?

Nicola appears to express a strong need to be separate and individuated from her mother. However, this could be a response to her parents' parenting style which may have been perceived by Nicola as not being caring enough or experienced as perhaps being rejecting. She therefore seems to disconnect for fear of being rejected, but in the name of independence and individuation at the expense of emotional expression and connection. Being an intelligent

woman, Nicola probably finds it easy to rationalise the process diplomatically without blame and hurt, thereby maintaining the status quo of avoidance and disconnection in the family.

Frustration and Immobilisation

This theme attempts to illustrate the process whereby Nicola's perception of Althea's passiveness leads to guilt when she becomes frustrated by it. When passivity is framed within niceness and compromise, it is even more difficult to express any hostility towards it. This results in immobilisation in terms of not being able to comment on the passivity, and the only way out of this is to perceive the latter as unconditional love.

From the previous theme, it is clear that Nicola is an independent and assertive individual. She attributes her sense of self-confidence partly to her parents' stability. Nicola illustrates this in the following comment:

> *I think both my parents have been quite solid. So even if I've gone off…I've never felt that, my Mom has never really been an up and down Mom.*

Nicola's stable sense of self allows her to be more assertive and demanding in meeting her own needs and desires. She is therefore more strong-willed and persistent than Althea. Although both mother and daughter exhibit a tendency to please and help others, Althea's passiveness can frustrate and also instil guilt in Nicola. Nicola feels strongly that Althea often over-commits herself for the benefit of others and therefore does not protect herself against other people taking advantage of her. Nicola has the following to say about her mother:

> *My Mom will go and she will help everyone and anyone. You know, if someone needs help, if someone needs a lift, she will do that. She will help them, no matter what. …it's also a negative trait and you sometimes let the other people down, or you know, or you take on too much, or something like that…*

Nicola obviously becomes quite frustrated with Althea's over-accommodating behaviour, perhaps more so when it is directed at her specifically. However, it is very difficult to become angry with someone when they are being nice to you. Nicola herself is sometimes in awe of how accommodating and compromising Althea can actually be. Whilst working with Althea,

Nicola constantly expected her mother to become defensive or competitive; however her experience was otherwise:

> *…if anything, I would have thought that would have been difficult for her, because you know, it's her company. I'm treading on her ground. You know, and maybe if I was achieving and she should have been the one achieving…and if it was anything, she should have been a bit, if anything, she was just supportive.*

With Althea being so forgiving and loving, Nicola feels that she is not allowed to be angry with nor hostile towards her mother; how reasonable can it be if she clashes with someone who is not fighting back but is seemingly on her side? Nicola explains in the following statement how she perceives her mother:

> *My Mom is very easy going, and very forgiving and very giving as well. So, she is not the kind of person that you could have a grudge against, or dislike for a long time, or something like that. …And my Mom has never, she doesn't ever have anything negative to say, really.*

Nicola therefore appears to be immobilised by Althea's non-confrontational and all-accepting style. She cannot show hostility against the very factor that places her mother in such a positive light. Nicola seems to deal with this dilemma by turning it inwards on herself and consequently feels guilty about her assertive and judgemental ways. She criticises herself in the following statement:

> *…I can sometimes be judgemental, so then I would judge her…like knocking her down, you know and not building her up instead… with hindsight, if I was her, I would have been a little bit…more upset. You know, but she wasn't.*

It seems that Nicola's assertiveness hits a brick wall when it comes to her mother because instead of criticising her 'bossiness', Althea encourages it by accepting it. However, by accepting this behaviour without a challenge, Nicola is led to feel as if she is not allowed to be so demanding of such a nice person who is doing the right thing by being accommodating and understanding. This cycle will possibly perpetuate itself since Nicola's frustrations are not addressed. To try and express her irritation, Nicola becomes a little assertive towards her mother; her mother accepts it and embraces it instead of acknowledging it as frustration. This

further frustrates Nicola, who then feels guilty about being unreasonable and internalises the guilt as her inability to be as loving and giving as her mother.

Motherhood and Connections

This theme indicates that becoming a mother leads to many new experiences and realisations. It also enables understanding and therefore connection to one's mother. Entering motherhood seems to allow daughters to relate to their mothers both as mothers and as women.

Since the birth of her children, Nicola has experienced her mother differently and her appreciation of her mother has increased greatly. Nicola relates her experience in the following response:

> *I think what happens when you have kids, is that you one, appreciate your mother more, and I think the second thing is that you rely on them so much more, so you do, your bond grows stronger. Because she's so helpful, you're more grateful.*

Nicola is also now experiencing herself as a mother and seeing her mother emerging in herself, with which she is very comfortable. This has apparently allowed Nicola to feel a sense of connection with Althea, which was possibly absent previously. It would seem that Nicola is only now perceiving her mother as a role model. Nicola says:

> *I never pictured myself as a mother. So I never pictured myself what kind of mother I would be… Now having kids, I can see more of my Mom coming out in me… So I see what kind of Mom she is, and I'll probably be a similar Mom.*

It is interesting to note that previously, it was apparently more important for Nicola to view herself as different from her mother, whereas now that she has become a mother herself, she is more comfortable in identifying with Althea.

Watching her mother with her children has made Nicola realise how much she was loved when she was a child and what her mother used to do for her when she was little. This has increased Nicola's appreciation and respect for her mother, allowing her to understand her mother in a different way from previously. Becoming a mother has possibly enabled Nicola to

understand her mother's passiveness differently and more compassionately. Nicola comments on her appreciation in the following statement:

> *You know, I love her and respect her and admire what she's done, and the patience that she has. And seeing her with [my daughter], that's another thing, is that I think seeing her, the way she is with [my daughter] is, brought in a new light in how you see your Mom... then you realise how much she was the same with you, and then you realise how much they give up on and that sort of thing, and you have more admiration and respect of them.*

At the same time, Nicola is eager to hold onto her own identity and not become completely immersed in motherhood. Nicola's sense of independence and need for separateness still come through strongly, as well as her need to be different from her mother. This pattern is in fact quite similar to Althea's in that she also developed many personal interests and tried to maintain a sense of self separate from that of 'mother'. The following statement demonstrates that it is important for Nicola to continue working and maintain her sense of self as an individual, as a woman, and not only as a mother:

> *The only thing is that I would probably keep a little bit more of my independence than what my Mom did. I think my Mom sort of gave up a lot for me... I probably won't be as..., I don't think I've got the patience like she has.*

Becoming an adult, together with becoming a mother, has allowed Nicola to perceive Althea differently and more individually as a separate person. Nicola says:

> *I think more and more, I'm seeing her more as a person than just a Mom...that she's not just a Mom who fetches and does x, y, and z. She's now that special person in your life.*

Having children of her own appears to have allowed Nicola to soften slightly and be less assertive and more accommodating, i.e. to be more like her mother. In particular it has enabled Nicola to relate to Althea in a different way and has added an emotional connection to the mother and daughter relationship that Nicola possibly did not feel existed previously.

Summary of Nicola's Themes

Nicola is an extremely independent individual who appears to be well balanced and individuated from her family. She possesses a clear sense of self and allows her individuality to develop naturally one day at a time. Nicola's separateness however seems to keep her disconnected emotionally from her surroundings. It is possible that Nicola employs objectivity and rationality to overshadow her deep sense of disconnection and fear of rejection. Nicola's cognitive style of interacting prevents her from becoming irrational and therefore emotional and out of control.

Possibly Nicola's independence and self-confidence also make her more assertive, particularly compared to her mother's passiveness. However, since Althea's passivity is portrayed through niceness, Nicola is prevented from expressing her frustration at being unable to provoke Althea in any way. Nicola then appears to internalise her frustration and experiences it as guilt, resulting in her feeling inadequate and not good enough.

Experiencing motherhood has allowed Nicola to relate to Althea in more diverse ways and has also seemingly enabled Nicola to understand Althea better, leading to feelings of connection and willingness to compromise.

Nicola appears currently to be connected intimately with Althea, and at the same time to be clearly individuated as her own person. However, this could further entrench the pattern of avoidance and denial of possible conflict in their relationship.

The Coming Together of Althea and Nicola

Introduction

After providing Althea and Nicola with a summary of each other's interviews, a combined interview was conducted to discuss the summaries and the mother-daughter relationship together. The main goals in this last interview were to clarify and confirm the summaries of individual interviews, to correct any misinterpretations or misunderstandings in the individual

summaries, and for Althea and Nicola to create their own narrative of their relationship together.

The Interview Setting and My Impressions

This last interview took place at Althea's home. I arrived a little early and Althea welcomed me in; Nicola soon followed and brought along her baby boy. The baby was very cooperative and mostly slept through the interview, and I think that in a way, he helped all of us to relax as he became our focus and seemingly elicited our maternal instincts. We settled in the comfortable couches in the lounge and made some coffee before starting the interview.

Both mother and daughter appeared relaxed and unperturbed. They were a little uncertain at first about how to discuss the summaries, but Nicola soon began with her interview summary, pointing out phrasings and sentences that she felt came across too strongly or meanings she wanted to elaborate on or explain. Althea had no qualms about either of the summaries and accepted and acknowledged Nicola's explanations and objections. Overall, mother and daughter exhibited similar perceptions and there were no big surprises in each other's individual interviews. The collaborative interview was emotional and touching, with Althea and Nicola becoming quite open and accepting towards each other and affirming their close relationship.

Themes in Althea's and Nicola's Relationship

The following themes were identified in the joint interview with Althea and Nicola.

Respect and Acknowledgement

This theme refers to the strong sense of respect in a relationship where each party is actively acknowledged and recognised. Although this is particularly affirming and empowering, it can also become quite avoidant regarding aspects not consistent with the general theme. These aspects are rationalised and reasoned away in such a relationship, and are not provided with the space possibly needed to enable further growth in the relationship.

Throughout the interview, a strong sense of respect between Althea and Nicola for each other was evident. They spoke to one another in a way that was respectful, sensitive, and loving. This respect for one another allowed both Althea and Nicola to acknowledge each other as individuals, as separate from each other, but intimately connected at the same time. The sense of respect and individuality was also acknowledged by both mother and daughter as existing prominently in their family:

> *Nicola: There is really a sense of respect and awareness of each other's roles...*
> *Althea: ...and identity.*

There seems to be truly a sense of an equal relationship between mother and daughter, especially from Althea's side. As a mother, rather than being in the expected asymmetrical relationship usually found in that of a parent and child, Althea is accepting and non-directive, and places no overt expectations on Nicola as a daughter or even as a friend. Althea considers feedback from Nicola seriously and does not become offended or defensive. Althea constantly acknowledges Nicola's positive traits, as is illustrated by her following comment:

> *Althea: And Nicola was quite intuitive at one stage. Do you remember at Halfway House, because as Nicola said, it was isolated, we didn't see a lot of people. And I remember you once saying to me, somebody wanted to come for tea or something, and I said no. And you said, 'you're becoming a recluse', which I was... I have never forgotten that remark, because it kind of shook me out of myself... and that was a good wake-up call.*

Nicola also acknowledged her own assertiveness and her mother's passiveness in contributing to how they relate to each other, particularly in times of conflict. She takes much of the responsibility on herself and in this way avoids focusing on emotions that could have been felt by both mother and daughter in conflict situations. This can be seen by the following statement where Nicola describes her assertiveness as a 'short fuse' and blames herself for being less patient than Althea:

> *Nicola: I think just probably one of the reasons why we haven't had as much conflict as we could have, is that you are more of a pacifist... You could get quite upset or confrontational you know, if you did take offence to certain things or whatever...But I also know that I've got more than a short, a shorter fuse with my Mom, than with*

anyone else. So if chaos is happening, especially with the kids, I'll snap at my Mom or [my husband] very quickly.

Althea and Nicola appear to truly recognise and see each other as individuals in themselves. Neither seems to be enmeshed with the other and clear but intimate boundaries are maintained. It is possible that this may contribute to their stable and close relationship, but could also lead to avoidance and evasiveness, particularly with regard to aspects, traits, or characteristics, even events that might suggest conflict or negativity.

Avoidance through Rationalisation

This theme illustrates the previously identified patterns of employing reasoning and rationalisation to avoid conflict or acknowledge inadequacies. With a sufficiently good and plausible reason, negativity is reframed positively or normalised and therefore need not be addressed or given attention.

This theme echoes the themes observed in both Althea's and Nicola's individual analyses, that of avoidance of conflict and reluctance to acknowledge any negativity. In their interaction, this theme again emerges and plays strongly into how they rationalise and intellectualise potential difficulties. Perhaps owing to not wanting to hurt each other, Althea and Nicola tend to tread softly on what they perceive as sensitive issues, and are unwilling to come across too strongly with any negative comments or criticisms. There seems to be a particularly strong need by Nicola to take away the intensity of any 'criticism' towards her mother and she was concerned about Althea taking offence at particular comments. Althea, on the other hand, is unassuming and accepting, not deliberately imposing her perceptions or defending them. The following excerpt serves as an example:

> **Althea**: *Ja, it made me seem a little bit as though I've... I don't have my own character, which I would like to think I do, even though I've adopted the role model of a wife who does look after her husband.*
> **Nicola**: *But I didn't actually mean that at all. What I was trying to say there, was more that I think Mom has got her own identity, like her running and her work and things like that... I'm saying that she's got a life, but I do think that she made a lot of sacrifices for myself and for Dad, yes.*

> *Nicola: You didn't feel offended?*
> *Althea: No, because I could see behind it.*

Both Althea and Nicola perceive their relationship as non-conflictual and consider that their way of handling disagreements is rational and non-explosive. They constantly provide logical reasons for not disagreeing or arguing, highlighting their possible need to maintain their perception of their relationship as good and stable. Mother and daughter provide the reason for the absence of conflict in their relationship partly as having no time for it:

> *Althea: Decisions have to be made quickly.*
> *Nicola: You've got to get over it.*
> *Nicola: I think that's what's different about our relationship, in that it's a..., with Mom having her own life, her own family, and me having my own life and my own family, you actually don't have time to delve into very petty things.*
> *Althea: (Others) internalise everything, we don't have time, because there's too much going on externally.*

It appears that mother and daughter tip-toe around each other in order to maintain their relationship. Even the only instance of negative feedback which Nicola provided in her individual interview, regarding wanting to have been pushed to play sports, was retracted and its impact minimised by her following comment:

> *Nicola: I think the reason, one reason why I didn't do sports, because also I had to catch a bus to high school. So Halfway House to Wendywood...is quite a far drive. That was one of the reasons that I felt, that's why I didn't do extra murals because then my Mom would have to come and fetch me and that would be a big schlep. So I felt... I could have, I would liked to have been pushed into doing some sports, but then it would have meant more schlep.*

Althea and Nicola are a sensitive mother and daughter pair who are very in-tune with and sensitive to each other's thoughts and feelings. This facilitates their understanding of each other yet at the same time limits their communication with each other regarding their individual needs. At the same time, Althea and Nicola are grateful for each other's sensitivity and understanding. With regard to Nicola's assertiveness and bossiness, both are glad that

Althea takes on a more understanding and passive stance, as the following interaction illustrates:

Nicola: Ja, otherwise Mom would have a huge issue.
Althea: I would ja, I'd have a chip on my shoulder that's so big, I wouldn't get through the door.

The above excerpts also indicate how aware Althea and Nicola are of the possible impact they would have on each other if they allowed themselves to express the intensity of their emotions. However, even the foreseeable impact is externalised and objectified as something completely unthinkable, therefore making it impossible. Interestingly, by commenting on the process, mother and daughter have neutralised any potential tension and have instead given the issue a humorous angle.

Both Althea and Nicola rationalise and reason away the possible difficulties that would arise in their interaction with each other. They therefore avoid potential conflict by internalising issues as part of their individual characteristics and do not allow conflict to manifest itself within their relationship. Although one could read dysfunction into such an interaction pattern, it also has a neutralising effect and enables mother and daughter to interact without causing pain and hurt in each other. It appears then that for Althea and Nicola, their relationship is more important than the issues that could plague it.

Eagerness to Connect

This theme refers to the connection in the relationship as women, as mother and daughter, as mothers, and as friends. There is an eagerness to relate to one another on all these levels through affirmation of the different roles played and the influence these roles have exerted on each other.

As much as they tend to avoid conflict which may lead to their disconnection, Althea and Nicola also eagerly emphasise their closeness and connection. Both Althea and Nicola agree that their connection to each other has been important in both their lives, in their individuality as a person, and as mother and daughter to each other. The following excerpts illustrate this point:

Althea: You don't have to cut the umbilical cord emotionally, completely; you carry some of it with you throughout your life.
Nicola: No, not at all.

Althea and Nicola have experienced many stages in their relationship and have played various roles for each other in their relationship as mother and daughter. These roles were actively acknowledged and affirmed by both women. Although Althea is the mother and the nurturer, there were instances where Nicola played the supportive role, such as when Althea's mother fell ill:

Nicola: Anything about when we went up to visit Gran?
Althea: No that was nice, that was nice, ja, I mean I really appreciated you, I needed your support there.

Althea and Nicola also affirmed their respective roles as mother and daughter, and expressed their appreciation of those roles they each played for one another. In becoming a mother, Nicola relates to Althea on an added and different level, thus enhancing their connection to each other as mother and daughter, as well as both being mothers. The following exchange shows how the mother-daughter pair understood each other:

Althea: …because you never see your mother as a mother when you're growing up, you know, when you are small.
Nicola: I think when you're growing up, you expect so much from your Mom, or from your family. It's almost like you expect them to always be there, and you expect them to do this and you expect them to do that. When you have kids yourself, then you realise, well, actually it's not just an expectation and that's why they are put on this planet – just to serve you. It actually is a sacrifice having children.

Nicola's explanation of the expectations that a daughter has of her mother also reflects an awareness of the pressure she may have placed on her mother, as well as the societal discourse that places mothers under the tremendous responsibility of always being available and accessible, physically and emotionally. Becoming a mother herself has allowed Nicola to realise how and what Althea felt and experienced as a mother to her. Also having becm the

mother of a daughter, Nicola further acknowledges Althea's challenging task in raising her. The following comment illustrates her understanding:

> **Nicola**: …daughters are a lot more complex, a lot more emotionally draining, whereas boys are pretty much, you know…

Mother and daughter constantly recognised each other's roles as mother and daughter, and were eager to show one another that they understood the other's experiences, and also to frame their own experiences as positive and satisfactory. Althea explains the fulfilment of her needs as a mother in the following comment:

> **Althea**: …The word 'sacrifice' is too strong, and I think Nicola is in a different era. I stayed at home, because I didn't question it. It wasn't a sacrifice for me… not even expected, it was just what I wanted.

Nicola acknowledged Althea's role as a mother and complimented her on how well she had managed things and showed confidence in what she was doing, as indicated in the following exchange:

> **Althea**: It (self confidence) might have been there (before), but it's definitely grown, I was a late developer…
> **Nicola**: I think you had that self-assurance, like being able to set up your own nursery. You always had like, you set up the nursery, you had the knowledge, you spoke authoritive, you were then, you did it well… I didn't see you as kind of a, like a weak person. I wouldn't have said that you… If I were asked, I wouldn't have said that you didn't have self confidence when I was growing.

Throughout the interview, it was important for Althea and Nicola to acknowledge and affirm one another, illustrating their strong need to feel connected to one another through the different roles they had played in each other's lives. This enabled the mother and daughter to feel intimately close and therefore secure enough to work through issues and conflict that they had previously avoided.

Working through Conflict

This theme illustrates the space created by means of the interview for mother and daughter to voice their deep-seated issues and concerns. A contained and secure space was provided for the relationship to endure some perturbations and provocations safely.

Amongst the respect, acknowledgement, avoidance and hesitation, openness and genuineness between Althea and Nicola also increased as the interview progressed. Their interaction with each other, although sensitive, was honest and congruent. Both mother and daughter were ready to acknowledge their feedback from each other. The following excerpts illustrate this acknowledgement where each commented on their individual summaries:

> *Nicola: Then there it says '...her mother has never ending persistence and energy, partly because Nicola herself cannot always find the energy and this makes her feel bad about herself.', but that we know.*

> *Althea: (about her tendency to over-commit to others) Ja, it is a trait of mine I have to watch.*

Althea and Nicola also attempted, and in my opinion, succeeded in reconciling certain events and reached understandings about issues that were bothering them individually. Althea discussed her worries regarding having been emotionally restricted with Nicola in the following exchange:

> *Althea: I do sometimes feel bad, because like sometimes, like with my friends, I had once gone away on holiday and I hugged her when I come back, and yet I don't hug Nicola enough.*
> *Nicola: It's okay, don't stress...I felt secure, so that was enough, and I think I'm more emotional with [my daughter], more expressive.*

Feeling more comfortable to voice her worries, Althea was able to tell her daughter how she was afraid that Nicola and her family would move away from them. In the following responses Nicola acknowledges Althea's concerns sensitively, yet is honest and realistic:

Althea: And look I stress you know – just so that Nicola knows – that I stress they're going to move somewhere… People say: 'Don't follow your children', I keep saying you know, you can't say that, you know; your family is important.

Nicola: I'm afraid we're going to move somewhere. [My husband] is the only one who knows…(laughing), but then there comes a time when you have to consider if we stay in the country to be by my parents, then our children leave us.

The working through of conflict is also evident in the following excerpts where Nicola was straightforward concerning her past resentment with her mother over-committing to other people and yet not to her. Althea listened, acknowledged, and apologised:

Nicola: I remember the music lessons, is me wanting, but then you never being able to do it.

Althea: That's right, I remember you saying that, and I've always felt bad about that.

Nicola: So there was a conflict… she gave music lessons to kids and then I wanted to learn the piano. But every time we'd make a lesson, something else would come up and then we missed and we missed and eventually I just used to give up, or whatever. We both just…it just fizzled out and we never spoke about it again.

Althea: Ja, I think that's the problem, because you don't prioritise it, you don't put time aside, as I should have done.

Nicola: But that goes back to the over-committing to other people.

It could not have been easy for Althea and Nicola to speak so diplomatically and respectfully about what could have been a very sensitive issue. But they persisted and remained with it, holding onto the belief that it would result in enhanced understanding and improved interaction between them. It appears that they felt comfortable enough in the space provided for them in the interview to be open and honest to each other about their emotions and feelings.

The interview was an emotional process for both mother and daughter, and although conflicts were brought to the surface, a new understanding was also reached. Both Althea and Nicola were pleasantly surprised at the similarities in their individual interviews and reflected positively on the process. This is evident in the following comments:

Althea: But it is, I found the two (summaries) did complement each other.

> *Nicola: It's almost uncanny, which is good. I mean, it shows that each one corroborated with the other.*
>
> *Althea: I found it quite nice, because it's almost a cathartic process. I enjoyed it in a sad kind of emotional way. And I had a good feeling for the rest of the day, which was nice.*

It appears that the interview space allowed Althea and Nicola to connect with each other on a new level by enabling them to work through some past resentments and conflicts. It also allowed both mother and daughter to reflect on one another's perceptions of themselves and to acknowledge their own inadequacies and flaws in the safe environment created.

Summary of Themes in Althea's and Nicola's Relationship

Althea and Nicola interact respectfully and in a way that upholds each other's individuality. However, by constantly acknowledging and reassuring one another, they do not allow any recognition of negative qualities in their relationship. Rather, issues are internalised as individual flaws rather than as problems in the relationship itself.

Since the theme of avoidance and distance surfaced in both Althea's and Nicola's individual interviews, it is not surprising that their interaction is also characterised by the same theme. Mother and daughter are both reluctant to recognise any conflict and in their interaction, use reason, logic, and everyday practicalities to avoid potential confrontation.

Althea and Nicola's avoidance of conflict appears to feed into their eagerness to connect with one another. There seems to be a fear in both mother and daughter that any form of confrontation would threaten their relationship. Hence, both Althea and Nicola eagerly emphasise their connection by affirming one another's roles as mother, daughter, and as friend and also the positive impact their different roles have had on their relationship.

The affirming of roles appears to have been necessary in order for Althea and Nicola to feel secure enough in the interview context to explore the disagreements and resentments they had experienced in the relationship. As the interview progressed, both Althea and Nicola were more able to voice their concerns and allow their emotions and feelings to surface. They were able to acknowledge one another's feelings and take responsibility for having contributed to

one another's pain and hurt. Mother and daughter were provided with the space in this interview to enter into a new arena of understanding and connection with one another. They have created a new narrative of their relationship.

Althea's Reflections

Althea was asked if she could provide a reflection on the way in which she had experienced the interview process and whether the process may or may not have changed her perceptions and experiences of her relationship with Nicola. Althea provided the following reflection via e-mail five months after the last interview.

> *Overall, I found this process to be a very rewarding experience. Susan was extremely professional in her handling and conducting of the interviews between myself, my daughter Nicola, and then the follow-up process. Susan asked questions that were often of a personal nature, in a subtle and non-intrusive manner that encouraged one to answer 'from the heart' and not to be defensive or evasive as to the true reply.*
>
> *Once the interviews and transcripts were completed, I felt that this was almost a cathartic process that I had gone through; it made me realise my own shortcomings and achievements in the way that I had raised Nicola and made me go through a process of reflection and introspection in the way that I would be a mother to Nicola in the future. These thoughts would also extend to the manner in which I would interact with my grandchildren.*
>
> *During the interview process, I apologized to Susan that we had a most 'normal' mother and daughter relationship but she kept reassuring me that this was a good aspect and yet she still managed to probe and touch on points or issues that were under the surface and yet still needed to be articulated. There was also a further benefit from the process for my husband to hear of the interviews and read the transcript as this shed some light on the relationship between myself and Nicola and made him also go through a process of self-evaluation as a father.*
>
> *Once the processes were completed, I spoke highly of the event to my friends and encouraged them to try and conduct a similar exercise as it would only create benefits*

and understanding in the role of parenting while still maintaining one's own identity and interests. I keep the transcripts in the drawer next to my bed and often read the content to remind and guide me in the future years with my daughter and grandchildren.

Once again, Susan conducted this process extremely well and I wish her all the best of luck in this field for the future.

Althea's experience of the research process appears to have been positive and rewarding. She participated fully and welcomed the process as allowing her to gain a deeper understanding into her relationship with Nicola. It seems that the experience provided her with insights into herself and into Nicola, and it has allowed her to reflect on the way in which she has been interacting with her family and to enhance how she would like to interact with them in the future.

Althea's reflection matches the themes that emerged in her individual interview. She perceives matters in the best light possible and detracts from any comments that might be perceived as negative. She also indicates that she has integrated and incorporated the feedback effectively and positively, again illustrating her style of always doing the right thing. Generally, Althea's reflection demonstrates that the research process has had a genuine impact on her, in both an affirming as well as an enlightening manner.

Nicola's Reflections

Nicola was also requested to provide some thoughts and reflections on how she had experienced the interview process and whether the process had affected the way in which she sees and experienced her relationship with Althea. Nicola provided the following reflections via e-mail five months after the last interview.

I found the process extremely enlightening even though my Mom and I have such a close relationship and none of the things that were bought up were new to me it was still refreshing to discuss the relationship. I think the interviews have brought my Mom and I closer together and I am a lot more aware of when I am being 'bossy' and try to relax. Because we have such a close relationship with no issues it was more of a

reflective process, than learning anything new. I think the process made me appreciate my Mom more.

I feel that Susan dealt with the whole process very effectively and professionally, I didn't think the initial meeting would be so long because there was not much to say but Susan managed to make me think of things that I had never really thought of before. Susan led the discussion very well and managed to somehow open doors to new topics.

The only recommendation is that I would have liked to have reviewed the analysis before it was passed onto my Mom. Although I did approve for my Mom to read the summary I would have preferred to have read it first, commented/ corrected some misunderstandings and then have allowed my Mom to review it before our final meeting all together.

I think the process was very interesting and I believe it would be useful to do something along these lines every five or ten years. Life goes by so quickly and sometimes it is nice to take note of special relationships. Neither of us are very vocal about our emotions for each other and it was nice to be able to express it and hear the words back.

I would be very interested in doing a similar review with my husband and would love to do one with my daughter when she is older.

Thanks Susan for a wonderful and very unique experience.

It appears that, like Althea, Nicola also experienced the research process positively and was rewarded with confirmation of Althea's love for her. As a result of the process, Nicola was able to become even more aware of her interactional style and its impact on her mother. This seems to have provided a platform using which Nicola can further reflect about herself and her interaction with and influence on other family members such as her husband and children. Nicola however felt that some of the wording used in the summary came across too strongly and may have offended or been misunderstood by Althea. Nicola therefore would have liked to been given the opportunity to make these corrections before the combined interview.

Nicola's reflection illustrates her fear and guilt in possibly having threatened her relationship with her mother. Congruently with her individual theme of disconnection through rationalisation, Nicola framed her possibly honest feedback regarding her mother as misunderstandings, thereby wanting to minimise the possible impact of her opinions. It appears important for Nicola to emphasise that she was already in possession of the information which had surfaced in the interviews, and that she did not experience any new realisations. This would seem to confirm Nicola's sense of self as a rational and self-aware individual. However, Nicola did feel an enhanced sense of connection with her mother resulting from this research process and acknowledged that even though she had always perceived her relationship with Althea as close and positive, the interview process perturbed her perceptions and provided a space which enabled some underlying and possibly suppressed issues to surface.

My Reflections on My Participation

I had met both Nicola and Althea owing to my previous employment at the same company for which they both worked, and it was an extremely interesting process to come to know them on a more personal and intimate level.

Althea and Nicola both perceive their relationships as very close and generally good, and it was initially quite challenging to encourage both mother and daughter to discuss more intimate issues in order to elicit their patterns of interaction. Both Althea and Nicola were reluctant to criticise one another in any way, since this would be contradictory to their perceptions of their relationship. It was however emphasised to both women that the process was meant to enhance their understanding of each other as well as their relationship, and that any 'negative' feedback needed to be seen in context and recognised for the function it serves in a particular situation.

Once the process began, conversation flowed easily. In the individual interviews, many similarities in terms of perceptions of each other and core beliefs surfaced, which were reconfirmed in the last combined interview. As Althea and Nicola themselves noted, they corroborated and collaborated with each other almost all of the time, and not many misunderstandings or disagreements existed in how they viewed themselves as well as each

other. Even Nicola's concern over the possible misunderstanding was mostly unfounded but simply accepted good-naturedly by Althea.

I was constantly amazed at the degree to which Althea and Nicola were in tune with each other and at how their relationship was based on so much willingness to show compassion and understanding. There was however a sense of cautiousness and tip-toeing throughout my interaction with this mother and daughter pair. They were extremely hesitant to discuss in depth any issues that might be perceived as conflictual and negative. This avoidant and denying pattern of interaction was so strong that as a researcher I almost became part of the pattern. I became just as cautious in my interaction with Althea and Nicola and avoided any negative interpretations in my analysis of their relationship. In this way, I may have met them 'where they were at'. In retrospect, I believe a more assertive and aggressive manner of interaction with this mother and daughter pair would have been more intimidating and therefore more restricting, thereby denying the opportunity for more openness and honesty. I was therefore most pleasantly surprised in the combined interview where Nicola became firmer in asserting some of the resentments she felt towards Althea, and particularly observed how both mother and daughter handled the situation with respect and acknowledgement.

In the individual interviews, I did a lot of prompting and asked many open-ended questions, whilst in the last interview, my main role was that of summarising and clarifying. I was also constantly aware of my presence in this mother-daughter relationship and of the influence which my being there might have exerted on what they disclosed and how they interacted. I was particularly concerned that my presence in the last joint interview would hinder Althea and Nicola from interacting naturally. However it seemed that instead of being restricting, my facilitation enabled the mother-daughter relationship to unfold in a richer and more congruent manner. The relationship was perturbed and, for a moment, slightly fragmented, but it was guided towards reconstruction, in a different form that created space for future growth with stronger foundations.

Receiving Althea's and Nicola's reflections was particularly exciting and it was very satisfying to know that they had both found the experience positive and rewarding. I believe that through the interview process, and especially in the joint interview, a space was created that felt sufficiently safe and contained for Althea and Nicola to explore the deeper underlying aspects of their relationship.

I experienced genuine care and sensitivity in Althea and Nicola for each other, and I believe that it is as a result of this respect and compassion for each other, as well as their willingness to be open and genuine, that they have found this research process helpful and enlightening.

Conclusion

As mother and daughter, Althea and Nicola interact in ways that can be characterised by respect, cautiousness, and avoidance. It appears to be extremely important for both Althea and Nicola to perceive their relationship in a positive light, making them equally reluctant to acknowledge anything that might threaten this perception.

Althea's need to be a perfect mother is perhaps so strong that Nicola plays into the same theme in her interaction with her. Both mother and daughter tread around potentially conflicting issues by rationalising, being evasive or avoidant, thus defusing and minimising the intensity of possible problems. This pattern of avoiding issues may have contributed to both Althea's and Nicola's emotional disconnectedness with both specific issues and with each other. Althea hides behind her passive nature thereby avoiding confrontations and therefore emotional intensity, because she perceives this as simply not her personality. Nicola utilises her independence and self-confidence to justify her separateness and therefore rationalises her 'bossiness' as simply her assertiveness; attributing it also as part of her personality. Negative aspects are therefore quickly internalised individually by both mother and daughter, allowing their relationship with each other to remain intact.

Althea's passiveness and Nicola's assertiveness appear to cause rifts in their relationship, albeit initially unrecognised and unacknowledged. Althea's seemingly strong need for their relationship to be perfect, therefore affirming her image of herself as the perfect mother, places much strain on Nicola. Nicola's sense of herself as independent and individualised runs counter to Althea's need to be emotionally dependent on her. Ironically, it is possibly Althea's need to be a perfect mother and her non-directive parenting that has led to Nicola becoming independent and disconnected. Nicola becomes frustrated with Althea's tremendous needs and pulls away by becoming assertive and more independent. Althea, fearing losing Nicola, becomes even more accommodating and understanding, never challenging Nicola's 'bossiness'. This reaction from Althea instils guilt in Nicola because she feels she has hurt Althea and is inadequate in her ability to return Althea's seemingly unconditional love and

acceptance. This immobilises Nicola in that she is unable to free herself from such a situation without hurting Althea and is left with little option but to see herself as unreasonable and bossy. Consequently, Nicola becomes even more frustrated and the pattern of interaction is continued and perpetuated.

Despite the postulated cycle of frustration and immobilisation in their interaction, Althea and Nicola show a compelling willingness to respect and accept each other. One notices constant approval and acknowledgment of one another in terms of the various roles they play for each other, as well as the positive confirmation of those roles. Again it is ironic that their need to connect is the very characteristic preventing them from deeper connections owing to their avoidance and denial of conflict.

The interview process perturbed the way Althea and Nicola perceived one another as well as how they perceived their relationship. Although both insisted on theirs being a 'boring' relationship and constantly apologised for having no elaborate conflicting situations to relate, both were able to bring up some areas of concern and possible disagreement whilst narrating their relationship together. Once they had been given the opportunity to think differently about their relationship, the combined interview provided the space for mother and daughter to communicate about the former. By means of reassurance and affirmation by the researcher of their connection as mother and daughter, Althea and Nicola were able to allow several resentments and areas of unresolved conflict to come to the fore. In this contained and safe environment, mother and daughter were able to work through some of their conflicts and unresolved issues in a non-threatening manner.

It appears therefore that even in the most 'perfect' of mother-daughter relationships, there are underlying issues that can be addressed to enhance the relationship and bring mother and daughter closer to one another. It also seems that when such excavations and discoveries are being made, it is beneficial that a safe emotional space is made available to contain the process and, at the same time, allow the tension to surface and resolve.

In terms of both women's reflections, it would seem that this research process has brought about a new understanding of each other as well as a slightly different perspective on their relationship as mother and daughter. Hopefully, the process has created the opportunity for Althea and Nicola to open the door to a more open and honest expression of their emotional selves, allowing them to connect in the way they both desire.

Chapter 5

My Perceptions of Marie's and Estelle's Relationship

Introduction

This chapter is based on the transcribed interviews conducted separately with Marie, the mother, and Estelle, the daughter, as well as on the last interview conducted with both Marie and Estelle together. Each participant's background will be sketched, followed by a description of the interview setting and the researcher's impressions. This will in turn be followed by a discussion of the themes that emerged from each interview. The combined interview will subsequently be considered in terms of the themes emerging from it as well as the general themes to be perceived in this mother and daughter relationship. Marie and Estelle each provided reflections on their experience throughout the research process and these will be elaborated on. Finally, the researcher's reflections of her participation in the process will be included.

After the completion and the transcription of the interviews with Marie and Estelle individually, summaries of each of their interviews were compiled and given to both mother and daughter to read and as a point of discussion for their joint interview. These interview summaries are provided in Appendix 3 and Appendix 4.

The themes identified and discussed were arrived at by the researcher as a result of in-depth analysis of the two individual interviews and the single joint one. The researcher's own lens coloured the way she has interpreted Marie's and Estelle's stories.

Marie, the Mother

Background

Marie is the eldest of five children and grew up in a small Afrikaans town in South Africa. After completing high school, she enrolled in college to become a domestic science teacher.

However, her family's financial situation was not secure and Marie had to give up her dream. She began working at the age of 19 to supplement the family income.

Marie met her husband, a policeman, and married him at the age of 21. She has continued working throughout her life, albeit only part time after her children were born. Marie had her first daughter at the age of 25, her second daughter three years later, and her last daughter, Estelle, was born when Marie was 35 years of age. Owing to the demands of her husband's occupation, Marie was often required to take care of her daughters on her own. However, she was still obliged to continue working as they could not rely solely on her husband's salary. As a result, Marie's daughters are all independent and were able to look after themselves from a young age. Marie and her husband have worked very hard to provide for their daughters and to offer them as much comfort and as many luxuries as possible.

Marie is currently 58 years old and has recently retired. Her husband has also retired from the police force and has started his own property business. Just one month before this interview took place, Marie's husband suffered a heart attack and was bedridden for several weeks. This has placed much strain and pressure on the family.

The Interview Setting and My Impressions

The interview with Marie took place in her comfortable 3-bedroomed townhouse. I had interviewed Estelle first and took a break before speaking to Marie. We settled into the same living room where I had first spoken to Estelle and began the interview.

I felt that Marie was a little apprehensive and hesitant at first. I explained the research aims and goals to her again and asked her if she had any questions. Marie came across as authoritarian and wore a stern expression on her face. Her body language was initially quite guarded and she sat upright with her legs crossed and arms folded in front of her chest. As the interview progressed, Marie relaxed more fully and although keeping her legs crossed, unfolded her arms and began gesturing with her hands as she spoke.

I found Marie to be slightly intimidating, but at the same time friendly and eager to help. She was dressed casually and looked younger than her age. Marie spoke quite quickly and

preferred to provide examples of what she was talking about; paying much attention to seemingly trivial detail.

Themes Emerging from Marie's Interview

The following themes were identified in Marie's interview.

The Obligated Nurturer

This theme refers to Marie's sense of obligation that seems to have surfaced following her disappointment and the loss of hope. In order for her to be able to cope with not being able to pursue her dream, she shifted her focus from her dreams to caring for others. However, since everything she does is now no longer for herself but for others, she perceives tasks and roles as obligations and duties; something she must simply perform and complete without questioning, since it is for the good of other people. Blocking out her own needs and desires has resulted in a hard and stern exterior; which could be described as authoritarian and which protects a brittle and emotional interior. Being strong and rational therefore becomes a defence against intense emotions such as disappointment and resentment.

Throughout Marie's interview, a strong theme persisted regarding the need to control and fulfil her duties. Marie appears to perceive motherhood and family as an obligation that she is compelled to fulfil. It seems imperative that she do what she must do and leave no room for mistakes. The following excerpt illustrates Marie's sense of obligation and duty:

> *I've got to be there all the time, for my husband, and I've got to have decent food... they've got to eat right, they've got to eat healthy, and I know lots of people don't do it, but that's how I want it for my family. If they've got something wrong with them, overweight or what have you, it mustn't be my fault... It's my responsibility, they're my kids, it's my husband and I'm responsible for their health, looking after them. That's my first job.*

Marie's beliefs concerning how life should be lived and how a person should behave seem conservative and traditional; and almost rigid and inflexible. She appears to exhibit a strong sense of responsibility towards her family and feels that it is important for her to take good

care of them. Marie's description of taking care of her family as her job further illustrates her sense of obligation. She views her family as her priority and considers that it is her sole responsibility to look after them. Marie's strong belief in what is expected of her as a mother seems to place her under much pressure and leaves her no room to be anything different from a responsible mother who does everything right.

Marie's sense of obligation possibly has its roots in the disappointment she experienced in her late teenage years. Being the eldest of five children, Marie was obliged to give up her dream of becoming a domestic science teacher to begin supplementing the family income at the age of 19. Taking on part of the financial responsibility of the family at such a young age may have forced Marie to develop a resilience that enabled her to let go of her dreams and face a harsh adult world she was probably not yet ready for. This might have somehow extinguished the passion and hope that Marie had nurtured for her life and resulted in her developing a sense of obligation and responsibility towards others. Making others her priority may have contributed to Marie's outlook on life. Her sense of obligation and duty appear to be her way of coping with her disappointment and possible resentment. The following comments illustrate her regret in not having achieved her dream:

> *I started studying as a domestic science teacher and I never completed it. And I stopped and I went working, and I should have finished that because that was something that I really liked and...I'm very sorry I couldn't finish that.*

It seems that Marie's life has been characterised by situations where she has been required to sacrifice her needs, which has resulted in regret. She has been 'forced' to be strong and independent; sometimes hard and unemotional. Marie was often obliged to hold the fort at home alone since her husband was often away, and this may have also contributed to her sense of obligation and her need to keep everything under control. Marie relates in the following excerpt how she was required to shoulder heavy responsibilities and therefore was obliged to remain calm and rational at all times:

> *...my husband was in the police force, and I suppose when I was younger it was easier for my heart to take over. But he was out of the house very often...and I had these three little kiddies ...and I was sort of responsible for them, and it was hospital, and it was tonsils and it was all that. I had to see through all by myself... Yes, you've got to be strong and logical to cope with everything by yourself.*

Perhaps, in order to cope with the uninvited independence and the accompanying loneliness and sadness, Marie had to construct a tough exterior and became strong and authoritarian in her manner. This allowed Marie to feel a sense of control in her adult life. Marie's authoritarian manner is evident in her following statement:

> *I was very strict; my 'no' was my 'no'…And just the way that I say it, they (children) will look at me and if I said stop, and they'll stop, without hitting or killing the child.*

It is possible that Marie has felt quite lonely with no one to share her burden. Consequently, Marie has had to learn to detach herself emotionally in order to cope, which she has done successfully. She journeys through life fulfilling her duties and obligations, telling herself that there is no other choice but to complete each task that comes her way since it is for the good of her family. Marie therefore may have neglected her own emotions and needs by not allowing space for them to surface. For Marie, not coping was simply not an option and she persistently, and perhaps stubbornly, continued to handle everything on her own. She placed tremendous pressure on herself to be strong for her family because she felt obligated to do so in their interests. Breaking down and unravelling would have meant failure for Marie, which would more than likely have triggered the feelings of disappointment and regret that she has been suppressing. Marie's need to cope and unwillingness to admit defeat is evident in the following excerpt:

> *…especially not if you've got young kids, can you imagine what will happen to them if you crack down and cry hey?*

Marie's avoidance of emotions is further illustrated by the recent trauma experienced in the family when Marie's husband suffered a heart attack. Marie kept up a strong front and she felt it was her duty to do this, no matter how hard it was. Marie had the following to say about her reactions:

> *…I know other people would have cried, and they would have screamed, but I was fine.*

Marie's experiences in life have contributed to her role as the obligated wife and mother. She has replaced her dreams of becoming a teacher by her role as nurturer and caregiver. There

appears to be a pattern of being the obligatory nurturer in Marie's life in that she nurtured her parents as well as her husband and children. Although Marie treasures her family and indicates that they are her priority, by making them her main focus she has not cherished herself or allowed herself to experience life freely. It seems that by giving up her dream, Marie denied herself and has dedicated her life to caring for her family. Marie's own family situation has also made Marie stern, rational, and authoritarian, because she was often the only adult to take care of three children. Although things appear to run smoothly without hiccups because Marie keeps everything, even her emotions, under control, she may be suppressing and thereby avoiding many intense feelings. It seems then that Marie has denied aspects of herself and is not a 'whole' person where all the parts of oneself are allowed into being.

Denial and Externalisation/ Projection

This theme refers to Marie's defence mechanisms of denial and externalisation. Denial refers to one's tendency to ignore or suppress the knowledge of one's own shortcomings by insisting that the faults do not exist or did not lead to negative consequences. Externalisation or projection, similar to an external locus of control, points to a tendency to attribute cause and thus accountability to others and thus not take responsibility for one's own actions. Both these defences form part of Marie's interactional pattern with her daughters and enable her to cope with her unspoken needs and possible flaws in herself as a mother.

Owing to Marie's experience of her parents as unjust and unavailable, she seems to have based her own mothering role on fairness and physical availability. Marie wants to believe that she has always done the right thing as a mother and has made the correct decisions when it comes to her family. Since being a good mother and fulfilling her role dutifully are so important for Marie, it is likely that it would be difficult for her to admit to any inadequacies. She appears to be fearful of being blamed for not being a good enough mother or a good enough wife.

Marie therefore seems to experience much ambivalence when it comes to her authoritarian style of parenting; admitting to it but denying it at the same time. She seems to be consciously aware that she might have been too strict on her daughters, but is unwilling to acknowledge that her daughters may have experienced this negatively. Marie becomes quite defensive about and protective towards her parenting style and maintains that it is something beyond her

control and inherent in her character. In the following statement, Marie denies the possibility of change because she sees her personality as beyond her control:

> *Yes, I think so. I sometimes think I was quite hard on them (her daughters)...that's why I say sometimes, I must have been too strict. But it's too late to change it now...I'm afraid that's part of my personality.*

In terms of emotional availability, Marie seemed a little unsure as to how her daughters may have perceived her, but was again unwilling to entertain the fact that she might have come across as less emotional than she could have been. Marie's defensiveness is evident in her hesitant response as to whether her daughters wished she was more emotional:

> *No, I don't really think so. I've cried before with them, when they're in terrible positions and they're heart sore, and what have you. I will take them and I'll hug them and I'll have a good cry with them. It's not...mmhmm no, I don't think so...I don't think so, mmhmm.*

It seems difficult for Marie to accept any failures or possible inadequacies as a mother. This is conceivable since her sense of self is based on the role she plays as mother and wife. If one questions the success of how these nurturing roles have been performed, it is possible that Marie's self-concept might crumble. As a result, Marie often externalises her own needs, wishes, and inadequacies regarding her daughters onto others, particularly onto her husband. By projecting her own needs and desires onto her husband as if they were his and not hers, Marie is relieved of the responsibility to meet them in herself as well as of the disappointment when they are not met. Marie therefore appears to take and yet not take responsibility in her daughters' lives. Negative and intense emotions seem to be projected onto her husband, and Marie's own involvement is minimised or excluded. The following comments illustrate Marie's externalisation and projection onto her husband:

> *No, I wasn't (happy) but her dad was worse!... sometimes it's very stressful, especially for my husband.*

It is very likely that both Marie and her husband wished to have some say in their daughters' lives. However, it seems extremely difficult for Marie to own her feelings and take

responsibility for her actions towards her daughters. In the following excerpt, Marie's tendency to displace her needs and even project her behaviour on to her husband is again clearly evident:

> *And he (her husband) still wants to rule the kids' lives. He wants to tell them where to go and when to go and what to go...things like that. I won't, I don't like interfering, but he likes interfering.*

Marie's experience of being mothered was disappointing and hurtful, and therefore she is determined to be a different mother; a better mother than her mother was. Consequently, anything that may threaten her perception of herself as a good mother is experienced as threatening and is therefore avoided. Marie seems to protect her sense of self by using denial and projection as defence mechanisms. Perhaps admitting any inadequacies would lead to Marie's self-concept becoming threatened; leaving her with a poor sense of self. Marie therefore appears to be unable to own or take responsibility for her emotions and fears, resulting in her becoming quite rigid in her ways and projecting her needs and desires onto others. However, her attributing her possible inadequacies to her inherent personality contradicts her need to be the all-good and always-right mother. It is furthermore ironic that, although Marie tried to make right what she felt was a disappointing experience with her absent mother, she may have very well repeated the same pattern by possibly having been emotionally unavailable to her daughters.

Yearning for Connection and Closeness

This theme attempts to illustrate Marie's need for connection and feelings of closeness. This need can sometimes be so strong that it leads to desperation, resulting in ineffective ways of manoeuvring for intimacy. It seems that instead of trying to achieve interdependence and understanding through honest and direct communication, she attempts to re-establish dependency and enmeshment via intrusive and indirect messages.

Marie apparently maintains a special connection with Estelle because she is the youngest of her children and suffered ill health in childhood, which required much time and care from Marie. Marie appears to define closeness in terms of fulfilling her responsibility towards her daughters and being physically present at events in which they participated, rather than in

terms of emotional connection. Marie explains her unique relationship with Estelle in the following excerpt:

> *…I think what made me sort of closer to Estelle than to the other kids because I had to spend hours and hours with her, battling with breathing and things like that… and she was a 'laat- lammetjie' as well… I think because she was so sickly when she was small, we were most probably at a stage, much closer than the other daughters were.*

Currently though, Marie feels that her relationship with Estelle is unsatisfactory. She does not feel that Estelle depends on her and opens up to her as she did before and this seems to be very hurtful to Marie. Marie further feels that the main reason for this change in their relationship is because Estelle has a boyfriend. She says:

> *At the moment, I don't think our relationship is very good. She's got a friend, and I think she runs with all her problems to the friend, at the moment, and very seldom comes to me with a problem.*

Marie feels that Estelle distances her as Estelle now shares her problems with her boyfriend and no longer with Marie. Marie's desperation to connect with Estelle is evident in her following response:

> *But she does…, yes, I feel left out, because she can talk to him for hours and she will walk in and out here, 'hello how're you', she'll do something in the bedroom, 'bye, see you in an hour's time'.*

It seems that it is very difficult for Marie to be excluded from Estelle's life. For Marie, closeness with Estelle seems to include close physical contact and a return to child-like dependent behaviour on Estelle's part. It is possible that Marie has not acknowledged Estelle's emerging adulthood and wishes for her to remain a child. This would reinforce Marie's nurturing role as mother and allow her to feel needed and loved. Marie reminisces fondly about their special moments together; times that reaffirmed Estelle as child and Marie as mother:

We also had good talks and she loves getting into bed with me when... that's the best time of course... when it's quiet and dad's not here, and she's upset and she crawls into bed with mom and discusses how she feels and how she sees things...

In her desperate attempt to regain the closeness she had experienced with Estelle, Marie turned to indirect ways of communication. She badly wanted to reach out and connect with her youngest daughter and perhaps was quite afraid of 'losing' her last child to adulthood. Maybe Marie was aware of the unreasonableness of her request in wanting Estelle to remain a child and therefore she chose to communicate indirectly through hints and subtle remarks that she hoped would deliver the message: that she wants the same close relationship with Estelle as previously. Marie expresses her belief in open communication and yet finds it so hard to apply, particularly when it comes to connecting with Estelle. Marie describes how she tries to communicate with Estelle in the following excerpt:

And you're sort of scared to ask questions and why... okay now and again you sort of drop a penny, but you can't say, 'look I don't like this'... so you've got to be very, very discreet... You've got to be very, very conscious of what you drop and what you don't drop. Otherwise it takes her closer to him instead of seeing why mom thinks it's not right... She's not a child anymore but you can just now and again drop a penny and the thought that you're thinking.

Marie appeared to be struggling to communicate with Estelle and was most of the time uncertain as to how to approach a subject. However, the communication style Marie has opted for may be experienced as intrusive by Estelle because it is not open and direct. This might have led to Estelle withdrawing since she may have been confused by Marie's messages and did not know how to respond to them. It is extremely disconcerting for Marie that Estelle likes to keep things to herself, as she comments in the following statement:

…I sometimes wish she will, you know, argue with you and talk back, but that's not her nature… Sometimes it's very difficult to know whether she accepts or…, because she doesn't express herself. She keeps it to herself and then, it might pop up one day in a conversation, that she didn't particularly like that point you've made…She bottles things up and that's why, and I don't know how to get her to open up.

Marie's desperation is quite clear in the above statement. Her feelings of the relationship not panning out the way she had expected seem to cause much anxiety and helplessness. Marie may be immobilising Estelle by sending out mixed messages: remain a child, be an adult, listen to me, and be yourself. By experiencing these expectations and desires, Marie in turn may feel stuck herself and this may account for her indirect and at the same time intrusive communication style. In the following excerpt Marie discusses how she wants her daughters to feel free to come to her with their problems:

> *But I don't want to be too intimidating. They've got to be, feel free and when they've got a problem, they've got to be able to come to you. So you've got..., you shouldn't be sort of nagging!*

Marie seems to be facing difficulty adjusting to Estelle's journey into adulthood. She feels disconnected and excluded from Estelle's emotional life. Marie does not appear to realise that perhaps a different connection is required rather than the dependent and enmeshed one that had existed previously when Estelle was still a child. Marie's desperation to reconnect with Estelle has possibly culminated in her choice of subtle hints instead of direct communication. This may also be owing to Marie's ambivalence in desiring Estelle to remain a child and at the same time wanting her to become independent. Therefore both Marie and Estelle may have become immobilised, leading to Marie's desperation and Estelle's withdrawal.

Summary of Marie's Themes

Marie's life may be characterised by strength and dutifulness on the exterior, and ambivalence and uncertainty on the interior. Marie's life experiences apparently resulted in her becoming quite resilient on the outside, enabling her to face many adversities. Being obliged to give up her dream appears to have affected Marie immensely even though she has refocused by prioritising her job as the nurturer of the family. Even though her duties as nurturer are fulfilled in the interests of others rather than herself, they nonetheless provide Marie with a sense of control in that everything she does is for the good of her family and is therefore justified. She feels obliged to be the nurturer, and to see to the well-being of her family.

Because Marie has undergone negative nurturing experiences and thereby not had her needs met by her mother, being a good nurturer who sees to everyone's needs seems to have

become extremely vital for Marie's sense of self. Anything that could threaten her perception of herself in these nurturing roles becomes strongly defended and at times denied. Marie holds together her sense of identity by either denying any inadequacies, confirming possible shortcomings as inherent in her nature and therefore out of her control, or projecting her needs and desires onto others.

In line with Marie's need to hold onto her identity as mother, she seems to be struggling to separate and reconnect with Estelle as an adult. On the one hand, Marie wants Estelle to be independent while on the other hand, she desires Estelle to remain a child. Marie's definition of closeness remains one that is tied to child-like physical intimacy rather than to adult interdependence. Her attempts to reconnect could be the very thing that is pushing Estelle away since they may constitute a request for a relationship that Estelle no longer wants or has outgrown.

It is possible that Marie may be in a transitional phase that is characteristic of the relationship between parent and child; a change process that requires parents to adjust how they relate to and interact with their adult children.

Estelle, the Daughter

Background

Estelle is the youngest of three daughters and is currently 23 years old. She is seven years younger than her second eldest sister and ten years younger than her oldest sister. Estelle grew up in an Afrikaans family and has lived in Johannesburg most of her life. She currently lives with her parents in their townhouse in the northern suburbs.

Estelle completed high school and then travelled around America for several months before returning to start her Bachelor of Commerce degree, majoring in Marketing and Psychology. Estelle has also completed her Honours in Psychology and is qualified as a Psychometrist registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa. Estelle would like to eventually complete her Master's degree in Psychology and become a practising psychologist. She is currently working as a marketing consultant for an insurance company until such time as her Master's application is successful.

Estelle was previously engaged, but she broke off the engagement. This was a traumatic time for her and affected her deeply. She has since been in several relationships and has been involved in a stable relationship for the past six months. One month before this interview, Estelle's father suffered a heart attack, which as remarked earlier, placed much strain on the family.

The Interview Setting and My Impressions

I interviewed Estelle in her parents' home. The house was neat and richly decorated with family photos and ornaments. Estelle welcomed me warmly and introduced me to her mother. We decided that we would conduct the interview in the lounge where we would not disturb her sleeping father.

Estelle had just returned from work and was dressed professionally, making her look quite mature and older than her 23 years. She was friendly and helpful, seemingly excited about the research project. She spoke softly and unassumingly, and often laughed self-consciously. Estelle thought hard about things before saying them and tried to find the correct phrase to ensure that I understood her correctly. There was some hesitation, particularly when it came to negative or sensitive issues, but Estelle did not avoid them and was able to express her difficulties with the issues as well as communicate them.

Themes Emerging from Estelle's Interview

The following themes were identified in Estelle's interview.

Differentiation and Formulating a Sense of Self

The process of individuation and separation is not an easy one, and is often accompanied by confusion and guilt. The shift from being a child to becoming an adult involves not only a change in how one perceives oneself, but also in how one is perceived by others close to oneself. It is difficult to formulate a sense of self that is different from what others have always expected, and especially when expectations contain double messages and intentions.

Differentiating and becoming an individual can at times feel like betrayal in that one is confirming oneself but also disconfirming others, often leading to much guilt and confusion.

Estelle appears to be at a stage in her life where she is trying to integrate who she is and who she wants to be. This is a very challenging time that requires persistence and courage. Growing up in a family of three other women, Estelle has experienced many role models who serve as examples of being a woman as well as of being a differentiated self. Although Estelle's sisters have very much been her role models, she is also discovering her own sense of identity. Estelle elaborates on and confirms her current search for identity in the following statement:

> *I think my sisters at one stage did (act as role models), both of my sisters actually. But I've grown out of that. I'm starting to create, I've started to create my own thing of who I actually think I want to be and what I want to achieve.*

Perhaps owing to Estelle being the last born in her family, she is finding it particularly hard to attain her independence. The age gap between Estelle and her mother as well as between Estelle and her two elder sisters often results in Estelle being perceived as the baby in the family. This seems to place Estelle in a box: always being the child in the family and therefore not being allowed to grow up. As a result, the family often leaves Estelle out of family discussions and does not value her contributions in what they perceive as 'adult' conversations. In the following excerpt Estelle explains how she feels in the family:

> *I feel very separate always, you know, as if everybody in the family still sees me as this little girl you know.*

It seems ironic that in the process of trying to separate and individuate, that is to grow up, Estelle finds herself left out within her own family and not being given the opportunity to become an adult.

Establishing a sense of identity also involves distinguishing herself from her mother. Although Estelle acknowledges that she is in some ways similar to her mother, she desires to be more different than similar. This indicates that Estelle is working actively through the process of individuation, even though it seems extremely difficult. The following comment illustrates Estelle's efforts to separate:

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Sometimes it's good (that she is like her mom), sometimes I want to change certain things. I want to be, I think, more my own person, more my own identity. I have a lot of patience, and she doesn't, and like I love children, working with children and the kiddies, and she gets so…she gets very stressed.

Interestingly, Estelle seems to believe that she is similar to her mother only in terms of negative traits and not positive traits. Estelle views the indirectness and spitefulness in herself as being part of her mother's traits that she has taken over, and yet the traits that she admires, such as Marie's authority and assertiveness, she feels she desperately lacks. This may be an indication of a lack of self-confidence in Estelle, which is to be expected considering the process she is going through, of trying to formulate who she is. Estelle discusses her mother's positive traits in the following excerpt:

I think in certain instances, she is authoritative…, people have respect for her…and she can be very spontaneous as well… You know, she has leadership qualities, that's the authority thing, where I come in. Sometimes I have doubts with it in myself.

Estelle also realises that it may be hard for her mother to accept her independence and the latter may find it difficult to let her go since she is her *'little soft spot'*. This often causes Estelle to feel guilty about wanting to become more independent and be different from Marie. As mentioned previously in terms of Marie's themes, it is possible that Marie is finding it difficult to shift the relationship with her youngest daughter from that of parent-child to adult-adult. This struggle is perhaps what elicits guilt in Estelle, making her separation more difficult and emotional. The following statements indicate Estelle's understanding of her mother's similarly challenging position:

…maybe that I'm becoming a bit more independent, but it's, I think it's also hard for her, because I'm the last-born. I think that's difficult for her also to let go.

Ambivalence appears to exist in Estelle's process of finding herself, particularly when it comes to the messages her mother may have imprinted on her regarding who she thinks Estelle is or should be. Marie appears to transmit double messages to Estelle about becoming an individual. Estelle feels that although Marie encourages her to be who she wants to be,

Estelle also senses that Marie has some expectations of who this person should be. Estelle elaborates in the following comment concerning her mother's expectations of her:

I think she's happy for me to be my own individual. But it can be quite, it can get hard for her. I don't think necessarily that she wants me to be more like her. She wants me to be my own individual, but she has her own set ideas of what that individual should be, which makes it a bit tricky...

It appears clear that Estelle is currently working through the process of individuation and separation to form her own identity. Although she recognises the various role models in her life, Estelle is making a huge effort to find her own uniqueness and individuality. A major part of becoming an adult involves her differentiation from her mother and recognising their similarities and differences. However, this process also seems to be one that disconfirms and rejects Marie, which arouses guilt in Estelle. Not wanting to hurt Marie, Estelle is also drawn to remain connected to her mother. This need for individuation as well as not breaking connection causes much frustration and confusion for Estelle, and it may be exacerbated by the fact that Estelle seems to be unable to decipher the double messages from her mother.

Avoidance of Conflict and Rejection

This theme refers to Estelle's pattern of interaction where she avoids conflict and thus rejection. Conflict is typically anxiety provoking and is often unaccompanied by the guarantee of resolution. Hence, especially for someone with a poor sense of self or who lacks confidence, conflict represents disconnection and rejection of the self as well as of the relationship since it threatens loss of the relationship and thus of oneself. It is to be expected therefore that one would interact in a way that avoids conflict and therefore minimises feelings of rejection.

Estelle seems to perceive herself negatively as soft and weak. She views herself as too sensitive and is therefore afraid of rejection as she is hurt easily. It is possible that since Estelle is still unsure about her own identity, she is unwilling to have it threatened or doubted in any way by anyone. Experiencing rejection may further reinforce Estelle's doubts and insecurities. Her wariness of other's judgements and in particular, her mother's opinions,

makes Estelle extremely hesitant to communicate directly and openly, as is indicated in the following excerpt:

Maybe when something bothers me, I will talk to her (mother), but I'm very wary of what I talk about. I think it's also a part of me, I'm very protective, so I just, I'm worried about rejection and things like that.

Estelle appears to experience her mother as authoritarian and intimidating, which further discourages her from communicating directly with Marie. Possibly Estelle often feels rejected by her mother because her sensitive nature is easily injured by Marie's strong reactions. Consequently, Estelle feels her needs are not being met by Marie and she is not receiving the holding and containment she desires from her mother. The following comment illustrates how Estelle is overwhelmed and therefore intimidated by the latter:

I think that my mother does have a kind of…; her nature might come forth as…, she seems sometimes a bit intimidating…

Her mother's style of communication appears similar to her own; indirect and avoidant. Estelle feels that although her mother is more outspoken and quick with her words, she also tends to avoid direct conflict with Estelle, and prefers to make only brief comments and remarks from time to time. Although the communication method is indirect, Marie's messages are clear. This could be perceived negatively as manipulation on Marie's part and perhaps indicates a weakness on Estelle's part as she just accepts the messages without question. However, they have come to accept this pattern of communication with each other and immediately understand what each other is trying to communicate despite the indirectness. Estelle describes how she experiences Marie's communication style in the following statement:

We don't really have a lot of fights…I think both of us tend to avoid direct conflict…I think she's more outspoken, but in a funny (meaning strange) way. She has a funny way of, she would say something that she doesn't like, but maybe she'll be busy cooking dinner and I'll just walk past, and she'll just kind of say something, you know. But then you'll know what she's referring to.

Due to her fear of rejection, Estelle does not seem to trust easily; fearing that she will be emotionally hurt and disregarded. This lack of trust appears to extend to her interaction with her family and particularly with her mother. Estelle therefore tends to avoid direct conflict and confrontation with her mother. She is however dissatisfied with having to compromise her needs and is attempting to voice her opinions. In the following statement, Estelle indicates her more congruent behaviour:

> I don't like conflict. So I'm not going to start a fight unnecessarily. I won't easily say when I don't like something, but lately I'm trying to say to her (mother), listen, I don't like this, or..., so but it's hard for me to do that... I'm more the soft person and I'll just take on what you're saying.

In trying to become more congruent with her feelings, Estelle appears to be working very hard to be more assertive and direct in her interaction with Marie. This is extremely difficult for Estelle although she persists in her efforts. However, her attempts at being more direct and voicing her opinions have not always been rewarded but are instead responded to with surprise and helplessness. Estelle explains in the following excerpt how her mother reacted to her directness:

> But I'm trying to be more direct. But I find it a bit difficult... and I get very nervous. I find that when I do confront her, it feels to me, at one stage it felt to me like she's almost scared of me. Not that I think she is scared of me, but the way she, she actually would cry or she would just avoid or she will get very emotional, and take it very personally.

Owing to her sensitive nature, Estelle is very aware of other people's emotions and feelings. She therefore tries not to judge Marie's sometimes hurtful responses and, instead, rationalises them by trying to understand matters from her mother's perspective. In the following excerpt, Estelle expresses some disappointments with Marie, but minimises her feelings by justifying her mother's behaviour:

> She can always be quite... a lot of times, says things that really hurts people, but not intentionally... but I think also because she's under a lot of stress, she tends to just maybe kind of burst now and then. I think she is probably protecting herself or

something… it's easy to say that that's just the way she is. I think maybe there's a lot that we don't know about.

Although Estelle describes herself as disliking conflict and being afraid of rejection, she wants to take more risks in the hope of being heard and understood. Estelle is apparently quiet and sensitive in nature, making her susceptible to feelings of rejection and disapproval. In addition, she also experiences Marie as authoritarian and unapproachable, further enhancing her fears of being pushed away and not supported. In her attempts to become more assertive and congruent, Estelle has faced some confusing reactions from Marie. Possibly Marie is finding it difficult to deal with the changes Estelle is trying to make and in addition, perhaps Marie does not know other ways of communicating except indirectly. However, Estelle appears compassionate towards her mother and 'where she is at'. Perhaps it is also difficult for Estelle to acknowledge that her mother may be unwilling or unable to meet her in her personal journey to open and honest interaction. Estelle therefore rationalises and justifies Marie's behaviour by putting it down to situational factors and providing reasons. This may minimise Estelle's disappointment and at the same time provide her with a sense of hope that things could be different in the future.

Disappointments and Hope for Connection

This theme illustrates that despite a series of disappointments in the relationship, Estelle is still hopeful of better and closer connections in the future. These disappointments include not having her own needs met by her mother, the role model her mother provided for her, and the feeling that she has disappointed her mother. These disappointments may have stemmed from the unrealistic or high expectations set by Estelle for her mother as well as for the relationship itself. However, Estelle retains hope that certain events, circumstances, as well as time, can alter the relationship to one that is more intimate and connected; one that is closer to that which was expected and desired.

Like Marie, who was disappointed by her mother, Estelle also feels disappointed by Marie. Currently, Estelle feels emotionally distant from her mother and does not seem satisfied with their relationship. Estelle's definition of closeness appears to be centred on deep emotional sharing and intimacy rather than on simply the sharing of activities and time. It is possible that Estelle cherishes high expectations of her relationship with Marie and desires more

closeness than they currently share. Paradoxically, Estelle does not allow for this closeness as it seems that her current boyfriend has taken her mother's place. Estelle describes her present relationship with her mother in the following excerpt:

I don't think we really have a very, very close relationship. We have our usual chats and we do little things together, maybe go to the movies now and then. But I think otherwise we don't really talk very intimately and openly really about things.

Estelle expresses some disappointment in the amount of nurturing she has received or felt from Marie. It is possible that she experienced Marie as emotionally unavailable and therefore as not meeting her emotional needs. In Estelle's opinion, all three sisters would have liked Marie to have been more emotionally and physically nurturing and loving. Estelle says:

But I think something that all three of us daughters felt that we missed out, is that emotional, that.., what do you call that? Nurturing...yes more nurturing of, maybe just being held, you know, physically and emotionally.

This sense of a lack of nurturance may contribute to Estelle's feeling of being unable to connect with her mother more intimately and emotionally. This disappointment may also play a part in Estelle's hesitation to share matters with her mother since she seems to have experienced her as unavailable and rejecting. Estelle may therefore avoid confronting her mother out of fear that she will not be heard.

Estelle further feels disappointed in Marie for having given up her dreams and dedicated herself to motherhood. It appears that Estelle believes in her mother's capabilities and sees it as a pity that she did not reach her full potential. For Estelle, this is a compromised existence filled with regrets, and one that she herself would not be prepared to live. Instead of being grateful for Marie's dedication to her family, Estelle seemed to be critical without compassion. Perhaps, rather like Marie, Estelle is also struggling with the transition that the mother and daughter relationship is undergoing and has not yet acknowledged Marie's choices and affirmed her existence. Estelle speaks of her mother's sacrifices in the following excerpt:

I don't want to; I think she could have been much more successful than she has been. But she sacrificed it for a lot of wrong reasons (implying marriage and husband),

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which I think is not right. It's not something I want to do. I am not prepared, I think in a relationship there should be mutual respect. And you shouldn't be expected to give something up that you are dreaming of... I think there's things she regrets.

Disappointment appears to constitute a theme in Estelle's family. Not only has it been prominent in Estelle's life, it is also present in her parents. Estelle feels that her parents have been disappointed in her and her sisters' life choices and that therefore they perceive themselves to have failed as parents. This sense of failure may possibly have placed much pressure on Estelle, making her feel inadequate and not good enough. This probably contributes to her struggles in becoming autonomous and self-assured. Estelle explains her view of her parents' self-perceptions as follows:

They see themselves, I think, in many ways as failures as parents because of certain choices that we, each of us, make which they don't always agree with.

Despite the disappointments, particularly with her mother, Estelle holds on to glimpses of hope that their relationship will improve. Although she does not feel that she as yet enjoys the ideal relationship she would like to have with her mother, she does feel that it has improved over the last year. Especially during the recent trauma of Estelle's father's heart attack, both mother and daughter have become more supportive of each other. This is indicated in Estelle's comment:

I think there's a..., not extremely closer but, you know, it has moved up a step I think. And it's more supportive of each other.

It seems that Estelle is hoping that this connection may provide a platform on which to build a stronger and emotionally closer relationship between herself and her mother. Her need for the relationship appears to be one which is based on mutual sharing, understanding and respect, without judgment and rejection. In essence, it appears then that Estelle wishes to be unconditionally accepted and loved for who she is, whoever that may be. Estelle illustrates in the following excerpt her needs and wishes for the relationship:

I think in the future I would like to see us become closer and definitely more accepting of one another's differences and ways. I would like my mom to become more, that I can feel I can just talk to her, if I have a fight, one day, with my husband and things

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*like that. That she won't reject me that she would try and understand and comfort me
more.*

A strong theme of disappointment appears to exist in Estelle's life. She is currently disappointed with her relationship with her mother, was disappointed in the lack of nurturing she experienced as a child from Marie, and feels disappointed and helpless in having let down her parents. Although Estelle has experienced some negative features in her relationship with her mother, she has also held onto some positive experiences and hopes. Therefore in spite of the potential despondency that could have resulted, Estelle continues to value her relationship with her mother and wants it to become closer and more emotionally connected. Through her own self reflections and desire for closeness, Estelle hopes that her mother will reciprocate and that together they can achieve a closer and more connected relationship.

Summary of Estelle's Themes

Estelle appears to exhibit self-doubt and uncertainty, and the insecurity that results is prominent throughout the themes that emerged from her interview. She is seemingly working through the process of separation-individuation and is currently in a difficult and challenging space. Being the youngest in the family, she seems to be struggling to shrug off the label of 'the baby'. Becoming independent and differentiated means becoming a mature and respected adult, something she is not experiencing in her home environment. Estelle's process of formulating her sense of self is further complicated by her mother's mixed messages; telling her to grow up and make responsible choices yet at the same time implying she must remain a child because Marie constantly, albeit indirectly, wants to control Estelle's decisions. In addition, guilt at perhaps having to deny her mother in order to become an individual also makes the process of formulating her sense of identity more difficult.

Perhaps owing to Estelle's sense of self-doubt, she is extremely unsure of herself and rejection is therefore experienced as quite traumatic for her. She seems instinctively to avoid all situations that may threaten her fragile self. Estelle's quiet and sensitive nature may also contribute to her avoidance of conflict and disagreement. Estelle's communication style is therefore usually indirect and hesitant, which seems to correspond with Marie's also indirect but more explosive interactional style. In line with Estelle's current process of creating her identity, part of which includes assertiveness and congruency, she is working very hard at

identifying the traits she wishes to possess. She is making attempts to acquire them by engaging in more direct and open communication, even when her attempts have seemingly failed and left her confused.

Much of Estelle's lack of self-esteem and consequent self-doubt appears to be rooted in her disappointing experiences. It is possible that Estelle's experience of her mother as insufficiently nurturing and emotionally holding has contributed to her feelings of uncertainty and her poor sense of self esteem. In addition, her perception of Marie as having sacrificed too much of herself for her family has resulted in her determination to be different and exhibit the drive to be more than she feels she currently is. Estelle's quest for individuation also implies that change must occur in her relationship with her mother. It seems particularly difficult for Estelle to express compassion and understanding for Marie during this transitional period.

Despite her disappointments with her mother, Estelle values their relationship and is aware of many needs that she hopes will be fulfilled by Marie. Estelle remains hopeful that her relationship with Marie will improve in the future and will gradually evolve into an emotionally intimate, containing and mutually accepting interdependence.

The Coming Together of Marie and Estelle

Introduction

After providing Marie and Estelle with a summary of each other's interviews, a combined interview was conducted to discuss the summaries and the mother-daughter relationship together. The main goals in this last interview were to clarify and confirm the summaries of the individual interviews, to correct any misinterpretations or misunderstandings in the individual summaries, and for Marie and Estelle to create their own narrative of their relationship together.

The Interview Setting and My Impressions

This last interview was again conducted at Marie and Estelle's residence. We made ourselves comfortable in the same couches where I had interviewed Marie and Estelle individually.

Both mother and daughter looked a little anxious before the interview and while Estelle was ready with her summaries and written corrections, Marie was searching around the house for her copies. It seemed important for Marie to appear untroubled and not make a big fuss about the interview. Estelle began with her list of issues where she wanted to explain herself and elaborate on the sentences in her summary to ensure Marie understood her meanings correctly. Marie, however, did not want to correct anything herself.

The interview began with some hesitation from both mother and daughter and became quite emotional, with both Marie and Estelle crying and comforting each other at one stage. This seemed to be both an enlightening and a cathartic process for them.

Themes in Marie's and Estelle's Relationship

The following themes were identified in the joint interview with Marie and Estelle.

Inflexibility and Double Messages Leading to Rigidity and Helplessness

This theme refers to the pattern of unwillingness to compromise, resulting in helplessness and immobilisation. Although mother and daughter acknowledge their different perspectives and opinions, neither one seems willing to understand and accept the other's views. Both parties therefore become stuck and feel quite weary about their interaction, since it appears as if nothing can change their situation. Owing to the assumption that nothing will be different no matter what happens, many issues remain hidden and unspoken in the relationship even though awareness exists that these issues are present. The relationship also seems to be laden with double messages which often confuse and frustrate the two women.

Marie and Estelle both appear to have a very deterministic and fixed outlook on their relationship. It seems that mother and daughter feel that they are both rigid in their ways and

are unable to reach compromise on certain issues. Marie recognises that Estelle is now old enough to make her own choices but often disapproves of her decisions. Estelle refuses to compromise her needs and stands by her decisions, knowing that her mother does not approve. Although they acknowledge that communication is important and at times helpful, they do not perceive it as beneficial to their relationship. The following exchange illustrates Marie's and Estelle's inflexible and helpless view of their relationship:

> *Marie: Talking won't change it in no way.*
> *Estelle: There won't really be a conclusion… okay as she said, but I am an adult and I make my own choices now.*

Marie's and Estelle's helplessness and weariness about their relationship result in many unspoken and underlying issues and emotions. Although both were aware of these unspoken matters, they avoided them, hoping that they would blow over and sort themselves out. This mutual decision to avoid issues is possibly owing to both mother and daughter feeling helpless to change each other's opinions. It appears that Marie and Estelle possess very few options when it comes to dealing with problems in their relationship. It is further possible that a fixed pattern of communication has become entrenched in their interaction and that it is difficult for them to change the pattern. By means of facilitation and encouragement in the interview, some underlying issues came to the fore. Marie and Estelle discuss an unspoken issue in the following excerpt:

> *Marie: Because they (Estelle and her boyfriend) are going to the Beacon Island, to a hotel, two of them, they're not married, they're not engaged. I understand she's grown up, I can't stop her doing it, but we're not happy and she knows it. But she…*
> *Estelle: Nothing has been said, but I know this, because if it was okay for me to go on holiday alone with my boyfriend, then it would be also okay to move in with him, and I know it's not okay. So it's just in the sense that, you know they can't really be happy about it.*

Once the issue emerged into the open, Marie's responses indicate that she has been suppressing much underlying anger and frustration. Marie's strong reaction could indicate of why Estelle chooses not to communicate with her. At the same time it may be the same reason why Marie opts not to speak about issues. Both mother and daughter might be overwhelmed by and afraid of Marie's intense emotions. In the following statements, Marie describes, in

quite a vehement and guilt-inducing manner, her feelings about Estelle going on holiday with her boyfriend:

> *Marie: I would say talk, talk, talk won't change it. It's not going to change our (Marie and her husband) attitude, that's the way we see life. Okay, she might marry this chap, but she might not. How would her future husband feel like if she's been on holiday, all over sleeping all over the show with another man? How is he going to feel?... It's (talking) not going to make a difference, it's just going to cause a fight, and what is the good of it? She's grown up, if she wants to waste her life that way, I can't stop her.*

Marie's disapproval is clear and strong, yet at the same time she makes mention of Estelle's adult independence and freedom of choice. This places Estelle in a dilemma – she can go because she is grown up and can make her own decisions, yet if she chooses to go she is wasting her life, meaning she is making the wrong choices as an adult and is therefore not mature. It appears that Marie is considerably opinionated and judgmental about Estelle's behaviour and actions and she gets her messages across strongly and forcefully. This possibly immobilises Estelle, as she is afraid of her mother's criticisms and disapproval and therefore becomes quiet and withdraws into herself.

Marie's mixed messages are not limited only to her verbal communication but extend confusingly into her behaviour and actions. It seems quite obvious that Marie is not happy about Estelle going on this holiday with her boyfriend; however, she is the one who is making it possible, since the accommodation is provided by the time-share she and her husband own. Marie therefore allows her daughter to use her time-share, but then shows her disapproval in that, in her opinion, Estelle is making incorrect life choices. Marie is possibly actively trying to change Estelle's mind and wishes Estelle to make the choice she wants her to make. Marie further tries to do this by instilling guilt in Estelle, and implying that her decision is improper and is a poor reflection on her upbringing. Marie says:

> *Marie: They're going to see all the family. The family is going to 'skinner' again about Marie and [my husband] allowing daughter going with boyfriend on holidays... so ja.*

This theme illustrates the challenges involved in reaching compromises in relationships. It clearly shows the struggle between Estelle's need to become independent and autonomous

and Marie's need to retain control over Estelle's life. Marie appears to communicate confusingly and negatively, attempting to control Estelle's behaviour by inducing guilt and fear. This may contribute to Estelle's unwillingness to talk about issues since she fears Marie's intense and strong reactions. Both mother and daughter are also adamant about their respective views and opinions, resulting in stubbornness and inflexibility. This inability to reach compromise and understanding consequently makes them feel quite helpless and immobilised.

Reconciling Perceptions of Closeness

This theme refers to a coming together in discussing different and sometimes contradictory definitions and perceptions of closeness, and being able to find compassion and understanding in one another by reconciling the differences. Such discussions seem to facilitate the process of arriving at a complementary narrative of the mother and daughter relationship.

Marie and Estelle appear to exhibit somewhat different perceptions of what defines closeness and intimacy. Both also demonstrate preconceptions about what the other can or cannot tolerate or accept in terms of closeness. For Marie, closeness means sharing everything, from everyday trivia and physical activities to personal issues and emotions. It is possible that Marie wishes for her relationship with Estelle to remain that of mother and child; one in which Estelle is completely dependent on her. She is apparently rather disappointed and hurt that Estelle seems to have reached a stage in her life where this intimacy and dependence is no longer needed or possible. Marie indicates in the following statement that Estelle is now uncomfortable with public displays of affection and would reject her advances if she was to be more affectionate:

> *Marie: No, she's reached a stage…, oh yes, get onto mommy's lap and what have you, but then they reach the teenage stage, they sort of, you go to the shopping centre, she rather walks behind you than next to you, and you accept that.*

Estelle, on the other hand, appears to be seeking for a deeper level of connection with Marie; one characterised by emotional intimacy and understanding, with respect and acceptance for individual boundaries. Instead of the previous dependent relationship she had with Marie as a child, she desires for a relationship that will allow her to grow and become independent, and at the same time allow her to feel contained and unconditionally accepted. Estelle does

however acknowledge that such a relationship may not be possible and that this is only her ideal. It seems that Estelle herself is confused with regard to what she wants. Estelle struggles in the following excerpt to explain what she desires in the relationship with Marie:

> *Estelle: ...I wouldn't say it's not a close relationship or... I just made a note that it's not the ideal, what I would... the ideal that I've had in my mind... I think it's just, we go for coffee and we go to the shops and you know I come back from work and I will moan about everything that happened that day, you know we talk, normal things, but it's not, you know, ..., that intimate... certain things.*

It seems that Marie may have reservations about connecting on the deeper level Estelle is asking for or about allowing a certain amount of independence in the relationship. Marie appears to want to insist that it is Estelle who does not desire affection any more because she is now grown up and no longer a child. Perhaps Marie herself is not ready to connect at such an interdependent level and has not even connected with herself on that level. Opening up on a deeper level may bring up unresolved past issues for Marie that she is not yet ready or not willing to deal with. Whereas Marie feels that Estelle does not desire expressions of affection and in fact rejects them, Estelle indicates that she is looking for a different type of affection and closeness. In the following exchange, Marie and Estelle attempt to speak openly about what they would like from each other:

> *Marie: Ja that is how you, I think, she sometimes feels that I'm not that motherly and hugging and whatever. I feel, if she feels uncomfortable walking next to me, why should I force her into doing things like that? Hug her in front of other people and she feels uncomfortable...*
> *Estelle: No, it's not about that... it's not about being in public and... I think it's... public situation is different than when we're alone.*

It appears that Estelle's needs are constantly not being met by Marie as Marie seems unable or unwilling to hear her pleas and requests. A seemingly important turning point in their relationship may have occurred when, during the interview, Estelle, with extreme difficulty, recounted a painful experience where Marie had disappointed her tremendously and where her fear of rejection by Marie in fact materialised. Marie, although initially defensive, acknowledged Estelle's pain and apologised. This may have served as an important moment

of corrective emotional experience for both mother and daughter. The following excerpts illustrate this experience:

> *Estelle: …I think there's a situation that I eventually told my mom about… She constantly wants to know why I'm seeing a therapist… and I never really wanted to say exactly why. So the one day …I eventually told her why. But I never wanted to tell her, because of two reasons, or especially now at my age. Because I think it's a sensitive issue and it involves family and a lot of people and I think …I will handle it myself and I will get through it and I will be happy one day… and then also I was afraid of rejection,…if I do tell her, how was she going to respond? Because what I really need,… I would want her just to hold me and say it's okay, or… (Estelle begins crying softly) and my fear was true.*
>
> *Marie: I can't remember. I don't think I was shocked at all, it wasn't her fault… it was all his fault, as far as I can understand.*
>
> *Estelle: I felt like…she didn't look surprised…But she didn't really say much, and just kind of 'there's nothing we can do about that now' you know, it's like…*
>
> *Marie: Sorry man,… (Marie goes to hug Estelle), ag mommy se kind, mommy sal [this man's] nek afkap hoor?… Jy's nog my baby, okay. Gelukkig het daar niks groots gebeur nie nê? Hulle bodder met jou, die mislike man! (Translation: mommy's child, mommy will chop off his neck you hear? You're still my baby okay. Luckily nothing serious happened hey? They pestered you, these miserable men!)*

Both Marie and Estelle desire to be close, but express different ideas about what this closeness entails and means to the other person. Marie feels that she has done her duty and carried out her responsibilities and now expects Estelle to come to her with her problems, while Estelle on the other hand feels Marie can be judgmental and at times insensitive to her needs, which causes her to hold back and choose not to share. An apparent pattern exists where Estelle is asking for intimacy and closeness, but Marie rejects this request by implying that it is Estelle who pushes her away. The more Estelle senses Marie's rejection and unwillingness to meet her halfway, the more she withdraws, fulfilling Marie's initial explanation of why they are not close. During the interview, mother and daughter attempted to voice their needs, with Estelle clearly showing her unmet needs and their hurtful impact on her. It seems and is hoped that both Marie and Estelle have been heard by one another.

Finding Connection and Acceptance

Despite the difficulties in a relationship, when a relationship is important enough and desired enough, both parties will hold onto it by finding some kind of common ground and acceptance in order for the relationship to survive. This attempt at saving the relationship is what keeps it alive and also provides it with hope that the difficulties can be overcome and that things have a chance to improve in the future.

Although both Marie and Estelle felt that they did not enjoy a close relationship, they also acknowledged how much they actually shared in common in terms of perceptions and other similarities. In discovering their connection, they also furnished each other with mutual acceptance and affirmation. During the traumatic experience of Marie's husband's recent heart attack, mother and daughter provided support and comfort for each other and this fact was acknowledged by both. Marie and Estelle realised that they are connected through their love and concern for the same man. Estelle speaks of their support for each other during this difficult time in the following statement:

> *Estelle: I actually was, this supportive role… I just put in here…, vice versa…it's not just me now carrying my mom, but (her mother also carried her)….*

In reading each other's individual interview summaries, both Marie and Estelle also realised how similar they were and how often they view situations in the same way. This seemed to be corroborated by how Marie and Estelle perceived one another and how they thought they were perceived by the other. Apparently this allowed mother and daughter to realise the connection they did have and how well they knew one another. This connectedness and collaboration was voiced particularly by Estelle in the following excerpt:

> *Estelle: No, I would go, 'ha, good!' I'm not just seeing things. It's almost as if, it's supporting one another, what she is saying.*

During the interview, Marie and Estelle were also eager to affirm each other and to voice how much they actually like one another despite the challenges in their relationship. This was important because mother and daughter were essentially confirming their respective individuality and their respect for one another. This will facilitate Marie and Estelle in working on their relationship because problems its are not personal flaws but can be

overcome in their joint interaction. In the following exchange, Marie affirms Estelle positively, acknowledging her in a practical manner:

> **Estelle**: I'm not domesticated.
>
> **Marie**: You are!... Our wedding anniversary a couple of years ago, she cooked a fantastic meal! Starters, main, the whole tutti... ja, they're all very clever with cooking and entertaining and...

Estelle tried especially hard to affirm Marie and offered positive feedback. This sometimes diminished the initial impact of her more negative comments, but at the same time it offered both Marie and Estelle another perspective on their relationship, therefore making further options available to them in terms of becoming more connected. Estelle positively reframes her reluctance to be direct with Marie as a sense of respect for her:

> **Estelle**: What I brought in with that, with the respect to mom, that is the way that she brought us up. I think she has got respect from all of us. And she also said (in Marie's interview)... and I agree with that... I also see my mother as a person that has a lot of self respect.

This relationship that Marie and Estelle share, regardless of how close or positive it currently is, is evidently very important to both of them. Mother and daughter are both eager to praise and show their appreciation for one another. Estelle particularly tries to empathise with her mother and to see things from her perspective. Marie appears to acknowledge Estelle's efforts and voices her appreciation in the following conversation where they talk about dealing with Marie's husband's heart attack:

> **Estelle**: I think it's easier for me, because I can just get into my car and go to [my boyfriend's] place you know, where she has to stay, So it's much harder..."
>
> **Marie**: "Ja, the other day she said 'mom, come, let's go for coffee and cheese cake'... just to get out, relax and see other people and talk about other stuff instead of talking about your circumstances at home.

By finding various points of connection, Marie and Estelle became more able to connect with each other and accept each other on a more equal, genuine, and congruent level. Marie and Estelle began noticing the different roles they have played and can continue to play for each

other throughout their lives. Therefore despite their difficulties, Marie and Estelle demonstrated their commitment to the relationship they share and illustrated how important the relationship is to them individually by affirming and appreciating one another.

Negotiating and Changing Communication Patterns

As has been noticed repeatedly in this particular mother and daughter pair during their individual as well as their joint interviews, their communication style appears to be indirect and implicit. Both mother and daughter desire to be understood and accepted by one another but often minimise the impact of their messages by justifying them or taking on too much responsibility. This theme attempts to illustrate their effort in trying to change this situation by becoming more direct and explicit in their communication and negotiating an interaction style that is acceptable to both.

Both Marie and Estelle seem to negate each other's impact on one another. Estelle appears to want to communicate directly and congruently, but immediately after she makes a statement she rationalises her emotions and reduces the impact of her proclamation. Instead of allowing Marie to experience the full effect of her feelings, Estelle removes the responsibility from her mother. Estelle's following response illustrates this pattern:

> **Estelle**: …well, it's maybe not that my mom is maybe not approachable, it can be my own self as well. But I don't always feel that I can just go and talk to her about stuff that's really bothering me, especially about my relationship. I feel that's very sensitive.

Marie, on the other hand, perhaps because Estelle always seems to retract her statements and emotions, minimises Estelle's feelings by denying their importance and significance. Therefore, although Marie acknowledges Estelle's comments, she does not truly seem to hear them and is perhaps unwilling to realise how these feelings are affecting Estelle. Marie's way of minimising the importance of Estelle's emotions is shown in the following exchange where Estelle explains how she experiences her two older sisters:

> **Estelle**: …as I'm getting older, I feel the gap more. I really feel that they despise me.

Marie: No, despise is the wrong word, but I quite often hear if we've done something for Estelle: "'oh, Estelle kry weer alles' (translation: Estelle always gets everything). I quite often hear that...

As the interview progressed, mother and daughter tried to engage in more open and honest communication. Although Marie remains somewhat defensive, she seems to be making an attempt to communicate more directly and congruently. The following exchange indicates Marie's and Estelle's attempts to understand and be understood by one another:

Estelle: I also made a note..., not that I can't go to her, but I don't necessarily feel comfortable in doing so. I don't feel that there's an atmosphere created for that, the right atmosphere where I can... I avoid conflict, but I think it's more to get their acceptance and approval, to... I said here in brackets 'I'm a people pleaser'. I would rather see you happy than I be happy. I rather want to make them proud, you know...
Marie: Ja, I can sometimes see now why she don't want to discuss certain problems, she rather keeps it to herself. She must understand that she can talk about it, without me killing her...

Throughout the interview, Marie repeatedly invites Estelle to talk to her; to open up to her. Marie's need to further understand and be close to Estelle and her frustration at not being able to do so were often expressed. However, it is apparently difficult for Marie to be unconditionally understanding and accepting. In the following exchange, Marie lays down conditions for Estelle regarding their communication and interaction; Estelle bravely stays with the process and tries to explain to her mother what she really needs:

Marie: Ja, but then you also need to, if she says something about [her boyfriend] that I don't agree with and I don't like it, she must be able to accept it... and see my views and she might have her own views, fine, that's her right. Why is she afraid to hear what I think about a situation, I don't know.
Estelle: Sometimes I just, I just want to get just support... I don't want to hear what is wrong, I just want to just... you just want somebody just to cry on somebody's shoulder or..., you don't always want advice or...
Marie: You just want a little hug?
Estelle: Ja, I just want...
Marie: and carry on, just like that?

Estelle: Ja, sometimes you just need that, a bit of comfort.

From the above conversation between Marie and Estelle, it seems that Marie is a practical person who believes in fixing problems instead of just letting them be. She therefore found it quite difficult to understand that Estelle does not need solutions from her, but simply support and comfort. Although Marie appears to be puzzled by this, she also seems to be willing to compromise. Marie offers the following final invitation and also includes her feelings regarding how Estelle's silence affects her; a very direct and congruent moment for Marie:

Marie: Well, all I can say is try and test me. No, as I say, I would like her to discuss things like that with me and I probably won't feel so blocked out, as I feel at the moment.

Much avoidance and fear appear to exist in Marie and Estelle's relationship. Both parties seem to be afraid of rejection and therefore communicate indirectly. The underlying premise is that they will be rejected and disconfirmed. Estelle is concerned about the potential impact of expressing her feelings and therefore often undermines her emotions by justifying and owning them completely. Marie, perhaps following Estelle's pattern, also minimises Estelle's feelings by undermining their importance. At the same time, Marie is similarly afraid of expressing her emotions but unlike Estelle, she takes no responsibility for them. During the interview, mother and daughter seemed to be able to negotiate a different communication style and a more open and honest interaction. This was achieved by both mother and daughter voicing their needs in the relationship and communicating to each other about how they would like these needs to be met.

Summary of Themes in Marie and Estelle's Relationship

Marie and Estelle's relationship can be characterised by ambivalence and frustration. There seems to be a push and pull element in the relationship that is immobilising both mother and daughter. Estelle is becoming more independent and this is possibly threatening to Marie who tries to pull Estelle back, but in a manner that actually drives Estelle further away. Estelle often appears to receive double messages from Marie and she therefore chooses to stand her ground, both because she wants to and because she cannot decipher her mother's messages and therefore cannot respond to them. Both mother and daughter become quite inflexible and

uncompromising with regard to their views and opinions, which results in feelings of weariness and helplessness. Marie and Estelle were also quite convinced that talking and communication would not lead to understanding and acceptance.

Despite the challenges in their relationship, both Marie and Estelle, through their interaction, demonstrate that the relationship is important to them and neither of them wishes to lose it. Mother and daughter desire to be closer to one another, yet display different perceptions of what this closeness entails. During the joint interview, Marie and Estelle seemed able to communicate their feelings of distance and exclusion and to reconcile towards the kind of closeness they both wished for in the relationship. It was particularly important that Estelle was also able to express her unmet needs and have them met by Marie.

By communicating their needs Marie and Estelle were able to understand each other differently and also managed to identify their similarities and differences. By identifying individuality and also acknowledging their similarities, Marie and Estelle could become more accepting of each other and seemed to be able to discover common ground on which to build their connection. Estelle bravely attempted to communicate to her mother that a different relationship is now necessary and that the enmeshed parent-child relationship which they shared previously is required to alter.

Marie and Estelle also appeared to have made an effort to renegotiate and change their indirect communication style. Rather than minimising the impact of their communication and each other's emotions, both mother and daughter tried to invite one another into open and direct conversation by explaining what they wanted from the other woman.

Marie's Reflections

Marie was asked to furnish a written reflection on how she had experienced the interviews and the research process. She was asked to comment on whether the process had impacted on her perceptions of her relationship with Estelle and whether it had affected their relationship in general. I received a beautifully written card in the post with the following short message one month after the last interview.

Dear Susan

The mother and daughter interviews and the follow up interview helped me a lot in having a better understanding of Estelle and her periods of quietness.

It also made myself rethink my own behaviour towards Estelle as well as my reactions towards my other daughters and even my grandchildren.

Thanks again.

Love
Marie

The interviews appear to have initiated a reflective process for Marie and enabled her to see her relationship with Estelle and other family members in a different light. Marie also seems to have gained more insight into her quiet youngest daughter and the factors that may have contributed to her silence.

Marie's reflection appears to match her character; emotionally restricted and evasive. She seemed to avoid emotional details and generalised her experiences, thereby minimising their impact. There appears to be a tendency in Marie to avoid inner emotions and feelings, and focus instead on external behaviours and actions. Perhaps it is still too difficult for Marie to acknowledge her emotions at a certain level and possibly in her life to this point, she had also not been given the opportunity to learn how to deal with her emotions. The interview and research experience seemed to have been generally positive for Marie, who demonstrated her dedication to and interest in Estelle through her willingness to participate and remain in the process.

Estelle's Reflections

Estelle was likewise requested to write a reflection on how she had experienced the interview process and whether the process might or might not have influenced her perception of the relationship with her mother. I received the following reflection via e-mail three months after the last interview.

In the first interview I found it a bit difficult to express myself and at times things came out very different to what I actually was feeling or trying to say. I think this is because I find it hard to express myself especially when it comes to anger. During this interview and after I was worried that I might of been too open and honest about things. I still tried to do it the right way since I also know because of my own research experience and knowledge of the impact of social desirability.

I was also worried that my mother wouldn't be as straight about how she feels. I was also concerned about how she was going to take what I have said. I don't experience my mother as very open-minded. After the first interview I regretted some of the things I said and wished I could change it. I also realised how wrong some of the things came out when I was trying to express myself. I didn't look forward to the rest of our little journey.

After I received the interview copies I was even more hesitant and I didn't want to give my mom her copies. As I thought in the beginning after reading her interview, she wasn't as open and honest about things. She didn't really express her feelings according to me. This is what I predicted and felt after I read her interview. She touched on certain lighter things but it was nothing I didn't really know before the time.

After we both had a chance to read the interviews I felt very uncomfortable around my mom and I could definitely feel tension from her side. We didn't talk about it as was requested and I think it was a good idea not to. I think the second interview created a bit more of a safe environment to talk about things and everything felt more 'held'.

On the other side I was surprised with the realisation how similar we perceive and think about things. We read each other well. I think in some sense we have an underlying connection that I wasn't aware of before. I was surprised that my mother said she felt particularly connected to me. It made me feel a bit of guilt towards her and also confused because I have never really noticed anything in her actions towards me that seemed different.

I think we were both amazed to learn how similar we observe things and even with our struggle to communicate our emotions, how well we actually know and understand

one another. After this process I think I understand my mother better in the sense of her background, which she comes from. It makes it easier not to take the things she says so personal. I was also surprised by the way she handled the whole process.

These interviews definitely made an impact on our relationship. Every relationship has its process and we'll take it one step at a time. Although I still don't believe that we will have the relationship I would want. We are still different people with different needs, interests and desires. The way I think the ideal relationship with my mother would or should be is probably entirely different to what my mom thinks and feels. We also grew up in different 'worlds' so it is difficult to understand and adjust to a different concept of living.

In Estelle's reflection, her initial hesitation and fear of rejection are clear and these caused her to be very anxious throughout the process, as if waiting for her mother to roar in her face with disapproval. Yet Estelle was surprised to discover issues she had been unaware of before and this has brought a new understanding to the relationship between her and her mother. Estelle is however realistic, and does not want to be disappointed. She does not think their relationship will ever reflect her ideal because she recognises they are different people with different worldviews. Nevertheless, the interviews have facilitated Estelle's understanding of her mother and formed an additional connection to those bonds that already existed but which they just did not notice.

Estelle's reflection complements the themes that emerged from her individual interview. She is hesitant and afraid of being rejected. Since she is so sensitive, when her effort at congruency and openness is not reciprocated, she becomes hurt and perceives this to be a letdown, causing her to withdraw further into her sensitivity. The expectation of being disappointed appears to be strong in Estelle's life and although she hopes for a better and more connected relationship with her mother, she does not believe her needs will ever be fully met; perhaps she realises the unrealistic nature of her needs. The interviews and research process have however brought a new understanding to Estelle of Marie and therefore an enhanced acceptance of their relationship.

My Reflections on My Participation

I knew Estelle from when we worked together at a community healing centre, and I was extremely appreciative when she volunteered to participate in my research; also enlisting the help of her mother. Estelle and I had previously conversed about the difficulties she often experienced with her mother and therefore I had preconceptions about the relationship between this mother and daughter pair.

In both the individual interviews with Marie and Estelle, I mainly listened and asked for clarification, trying to understand the specific meaning behind what they were both saying. What emerged strongly for me in the individual interviews was the desperate need and desire of both Marie and Estelle to connect with one another, but that assumptions and perceptions from both sides were blocking the connection. I identified a great deal with Estelle, as her experiences often reflected my own. This made me particularly interested in Marie's behaviours and themes, perhaps wanting them to shed light on some of my own experiences. My identification with Estelle seemed to have led me to become more empathic towards Estelle and my analysis of this mother and daughter relationship often reflected this.

After writing up the summaries, I was a little nervous regarding the last interview as some negative comments and differences in opinion between the two individual interviews were evident. I was unsure about whether these differences and discrepancies could be reconciled in the last interview and whether I would be able to contain Marie's and Estelle's emotions. This should perhaps not have been my goal and I was probably placing too much pressure on myself to make things right for this mother and daughter pair; again reflective of my own needs in my relationship with my mother.

On the day of the last interview, judging by the atmosphere in the room, I could sense the anxiety of Marie and Estelle, as well as of myself. We were all very hesitant initially and seemed to tiptoe around sensitive issues. This last interview was particularly challenging and I played the role of facilitator as well as mediator, clarifying and reframing misunderstandings between Marie and Estelle. I felt this worked well and may have provided Marie and Estelle with different perspectives on their relationship. I was particularly struck by the amount of effort put in by both mother and daughter in trying to understand each other and in making themselves heard. I was especially touched by Estelle's courageousness in risking being so open and honest with Marie; putting her needs on the table despite her fear of being

disappointed. Marie's willingness to listen and attempts to connect with Estelle were even more surprising, since she was quite defensive and angry at one stage in the last interview.

I felt that Marie and Estelle's relationship is one that is currently characterised by ambivalence, cautiousness, and desperation to connect. Perhaps if they both undergo the process of individuation and separation, it will be possible for them to find reconnection. This is a difficult process for both mother and daughter but their willingness to stay with the challenges and discomfort may be crucial to developing a more intimate and deeply connected relationship. A space appears to have been created in the last interview for Marie and Estelle to experiment and negotiate different ways of interacting with each other. I felt them becoming more and more congruent as the interview progressed, both quite eager to express their feelings and opinions to each other.

I was very aware of my presence in this relationship and realised that in order to contain and create a comfortable space for Marie and Estelle, I could not merely be an observer of the process but was required to participate in it. My aim was to illustrate my unbiased understanding and acceptance of both mother and daughter so as not to isolate or side with either Marie or Estelle. I felt that this purpose was achieved and that mother and daughter were able to feel comfortable enough in my presence to reveal their vulnerabilities, perhaps even safer because of my presence; a third party who offered positive reframes and clarification of their interaction, allowing them to work through their feelings of being helpless.

Receiving their reflections on the process felt satisfying and confirmed my experience of having facilitated a more open and direct interaction, leading to a more connected and accepting relationship. It was extremely rewarding for me to know that the interviews seemed to have been therapeutic for both Marie and Estelle and to have brought them closer to each other, as well as having initiated a reflective process whereby both mother and daughter are becoming more aware of their impact on each other.

The interviews conducted with Marie and Estelle were much more process-focused compared to those with other mother-daughter participants in this study. This pair remained very much with the here-and-now of their relationship and worked through their current difficulties, rather than conversing or reminiscing about their interactions with each other. Their interaction, although complicated and demanding for them as well as for myself, also

highlighted how important their relationship is to one another and emphasised the effort they are willing to make to improve it.

Conclusion

There are several themes that occur consistently and persistently throughout the interaction between Marie and Estelle: that of fear of rejection leading to avoidance and indirectness, ambivalence and uncertainty, and need for emotional connection and intimacy. These themes appear to be prominent in both Marie's and Estelle's individual interviews, as well as in their combined interview.

Owing to her childhood experiences of rejection and possible abandonment, Marie may have become fearful of being hurt. She therefore appears to protect herself through emotional detachment and denial. Marie's parenting style is authoritarian and practical, leading to Estelle's experience of not having received sufficient nurturing from her mother. Marie further fears hurting her children by accidentally showing favouritism and therefore, instead of merely becoming more aware of her own behaviour towards each of her daughters, she seemed to have opted for almost no emotional expression. Ironically, this has in itself contributed to Estelle feeling rejected and disregarded. Both mother and daughter consequently appear to fear rejection and as a result avoid emotional expression and direct confrontation. Disappointment seems to have coloured both Marie's and Estelle's experiences with their mothers.

Avoiding the expression of emotions results in many underlying issues that remain unspoken in the relationship, which seems to create tension between Marie and Estelle. This tension appears to be released in seemingly small doses yet is felt as vicious attacks by both mother and daughter. Marie resorts to 'dropping pennies', which is possibly experienced as intrusive and frustrating to Estelle. Estelle on the other hand attempts to communicate openly and honestly, which also appears to be experienced by Marie as a criticism and a personal attack. Consequently, mother and daughter conclude that 'talking' does not seem to help their relationship as they appear to be unable to reach a compromise and understanding.

Both Marie and Estelle also appear to display negative self-concepts although Marie is more reluctant to admit this. For Marie, in having to give up her dream of becoming a teacher, she

dedicated herself to motherhood. Having lived most of her life as a mother, it was difficult for Marie to acknowledge any inadequacies and shortcomings in her role. This would have invalidated her entire life and the image that she had created for herself as a good mother. In particular because Marie had perceived her mother as not good enough, she was even more determined to be the good mother she herself never experienced. Marie therefore became defensive and did not receive negative feedback regarding this role well. Estelle is apparently at the stage in her life where she is attempting to formulate her identity and differentiate as an individual. She already appears to possess a fragile sense of self, which is exacerbated by the current process she is undergoing. This may make Estelle particularly vulnerable during this period where self-doubt and confusion are prominent. The difficulty that Marie and Estelle are experiencing in their relationship in terms of their unmet needs and indirect communication threatens both mother's and daughter's identity, which possibly results in both parties retreating further into their fixed pattern of interaction, afraid of trying alternatives in the possible event of rejection and disapproval.

However, since both Marie and Estelle feel so alone, it makes them even more desperate to find someone to understand them. Therefore both mother and daughter are eager to connect with each other and desire a good relationship, but do not seem to know how to achieve this. Continuing in their current interaction only seems to push each of them further away. It is from this point that the interview process was particularly helpful for Marie and Estelle. The last interview seemed to have provided a space for them to air their grievances with one another, but without this becoming a destructive process because a facilitator was available to contain and reframe their interaction and relationship.

In the joint interview, Marie and Estelle were able to communicate their needs to each other. Marie asked for connection and invited Estelle to risk direct communication. Estelle also expressed her desire for connection and specifically requested that her needs be met in a more non-judgemental and accepting manner. This was an extremely challenging and difficult process for both mother and daughter and throughout most of the interview, both spoke about each other indirectly, instead of directly to each other, and also through the facilitator. Although eye contact was made between Marie and Estelle, they seldom communicated directly to one another in the first-person narrative.

The hesitation in Marie and Estelle is also evident in their reflections. Although both acknowledged the positive impact of the interview process, neither have committed

themselves to permanent changes. The expectation of disappointment is clear in Estelle's reflection, in that she cannot conceive of her needs ever being completely met by her mother and in that the mother-daughter relationship she longs for may never happen. It is possible that both Marie and Estelle exhibit unrealistic expectations of their relationship and of each other in their respective roles as mother and daughter. It would possibly be more beneficial if both mother and daughter lowered their expectations and related to each other as human beings complete with both positive and negative characteristics. This would allow them also to accept their relationship as one that cannot be constantly flawless and intimately connected, but one that embraces love and resentment, affirmation and disagreements, and understanding as well as conflict.

Nevertheless, the interviews appear to have opened up a sufficiently safe space for the risking of direct and congruent communication. Both Marie and Estelle also seem to have been perturbed in their perceptions of their interaction with each other as well as in how they have conceived their relationship up to this point and the way in which they will view it in the future. Mother and daughter may therefore have embarked on a journey of self-reflection that will allow them to become more aware of their own processes as well as conscious of the impact of their interaction on their relationship.

Chapter 6

My Perceptions of Mona's and Charmaine's Relationship

Introduction

This chapter is based on the transcribed interviews conducted separately with Mona, the mother, and Charmaine, the daughter. As in the previous two chapters, each participant's background will be sketched, followed by a description of the interview setting and the researcher's impressions. This will be followed by a discussion of the themes that emerged from each interview. However, no combined interview took place as Mona and Charmaine were unable to come together for a final discussion of their summaries and of their relationship. Instead, an analysis of their relationship as perceived by the researcher from their individual interviews will be provided. Finally, the researcher's reflections on her participation in the process will be included.

Following the completion of the interview and the transcription of the individual interviews with Mona and Charmaine, summaries of each of their interviews were compiled and given to both mother and daughter. These interview summaries are provided in Appendix 5 and Appendix 6.

The themes identified and discussed were arrived at by the researcher as a result of in-depth analysis of the two individual interviews. The researcher's own lens coloured the way she has interpreted Mona's and Charmaine's individual stories as well as their relationship.

Mona, the Mother

Background

Mona grew up in the Northern Province and came from a respected family of Sotho chiefs and elders. Her mother, who was a nurse, passed away when Mona was 10 years old. Soon thereafter, her father remarried, this time to a schoolteacher. As Mona explains, in her youth

daughters often took after their mothers and followed in their footsteps. Mona therefore initially thought she would become a nurse like her mother, but when her stepmother entered her family, she was then encouraged to become a schoolteacher. Mona is therefore a school teacher by training, although she eventually became a news anchor in a television station. Mona has three daughters, two from her marriage, and one from her current relationship with a married man. Mona is currently 54 years old.

During her teenage years, Mona felt stifled and controlled by her stepmother, and was desperate to leave home. She therefore married at the age of 19 with the hope of establishing her own home and family. Mona's two daughters from this relationship are currently 31 years old and 28 years old. Charmaine is Mona's second daughter.

Mona divorced her husband after 16 years of marriage. The relationship had become abusive and burdensome since her husband had been unemployed for several years and was financially completely dependent on Mona. After the divorce Mona moved with her two daughters to Pretoria and started a new life. In Pretoria, Mona met the love of her life, who was unfortunately already married. With the full knowledge of her new love's wife, Mona and her boyfriend continued their relationship, and this has been the arrangement for the past 20 years. Mona's daughter from this relationship is currently 13 years old.

Although Mona taught as a school teacher for several years, she always cherished the dream of becoming a film star and appearing on screen. Mona became the first black woman to appear on South African television. She has been a news anchor for over 20 years and has recently retired from television and begun working behind the scenes.

Mona previously lived in a townhouse in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg with her three daughters and four grandchildren, but has recently sold the property and is building her own house in the south. Consequently, her daughters have all moved out with their children into their own residences.

The Interview Setting and My Impressions

Mona and I had arranged to meet at a fast food chain shop near her new house as I did not know the area well enough to go to her new residence. However, after meeting and

considering the sensitive nature of the interview, which needed to be recorded, we decided to meet in Mona's home to conduct the interview. Mona's house was in the process of being built, but was habitable. The furnishings were however still not complete, making the house look quite empty and bare. There was a constant echo in the house as we spoke.

Mona appeared to be a very friendly person with a warm and welcoming smile and was easy to talk to. She has a light-brown complexion, is of medium build, and spoke English fluently. Mona also spoke rapidly and in a very determined manner, constantly repeating and emphasising each point she made. It seemed that maintaining a positive and good image is important to Mona and she spoke mainly about strengths and did not refer to any weaknesses or negative issues. She also had very strong views on what it means to be a good and successful person. Although rapport was established with Mona during the interview, it appeared difficult for Mona to trust me, the interviewer, and reveal her vulnerabilities.

Themes Emerging from Mona's Interview

The following themes were identified in Mona's interview.

Loss and Disappointment Leading to Strength and Independence

This theme refers to the way in which experiencing loss and disappointment in one's life can result in a strong determination to overcome difficulties and become self-reliant. Through suffering hurt and pain, one may buffer and protect oneself by blocking off one's emotional sensitivity. Experiencing one's own pain and emotional intensity is therefore not permitted and instead the major focus becomes that of pursuing happiness and success. Although this certainly helps in achieving one's dreams and claiming one's rights, it may also comprise an obstacle to openness and sharing, because one becomes unable to acknowledge one's own feelings and emotions, and instead places much pressure on oneself always to cope and achieve. Strength and independence can therefore also become a defence mechanism against a vulnerable inner self.

Mona has experienced much loss and disappointment in her life, and instead of letting it affect her negatively, Mona chose to rise above it and found the strength to pursue her dreams and live life to the full.

Mona's first loss was that of her biological mother. Although Mona remembers her as having been a strict parent, she missed her tremendously and her death greatly affected Mona. Feeling intensely alone and hurt, Mona learnt to depend on herself, yet at the same time, it seems that she became unwilling to trust others. Mona said:

> *...my mom was very strict. As a little girl, growing up, I could see she was very strict... unfortunately my mom died when I was only 10 or 12, and maybe just from that it opened my eyes as a little kid. But in life, you are alone, you are not with your mom, you are not with your brother, you are not with whoever, even your husband. I mean, you are an individual.*

Mona's marriage and, finally, her divorce from her husband also brought disappointment and loss into Mona's life. Dreaming of a different life and wanting to escape from her stifling home and stepmother, Mona cherished very different expectations of her marriage as opposed to what she actually experienced. It was a difficult decision for Mona to make, but she eventually decided that her happiness was worth pursuing. In the following excerpt, Mona claimed her right to happiness:

> *So you can't just stick to that kind of life if you are not happy in it... You think, what's going to happen to these kids if I just leave? But at the end of the day you are there, you are yourself, you control your own life. The kids will just grow up and see for themselves that life, it's not a bed of roses. You cannot just stick to something that is, you are not happy about. You get out of it and for your own self, your self-esteem, for your own life, for your own health for that matter.*

Adversities in her life seem to have caused Mona to become stronger and even more determined to reach her dreams. She learnt not to rely on others but rather, to be independent. By resolving to achieve and be independent, Mona also placed pressure on herself to be self-sufficient and did not allow herself to depend on others, thereby making her strength a burden. The following statements show how she placed pressure on herself to be successful and to do it all on her own:

Because you cannot expect somebody to give you whatever you know... your life is your life. As people will say, life is too short. You want to be..., you want to see yourself happy, you want to gain something out of this life. You want to prove something out of this life...To achieve all those things, you must rebuild your life in such a way that you are not becoming a burden to other people.

The loss of her mother at a young age, and the disappointment of her abusive marriage and divorce, which brought shame to her family, only fuelled Mona's desire to achieve greater heights. She built on the adversities and developed strength and independence so as to prove to herself as well as to others that she could be and deserved to be happy and successful. Mona never gave up on her dream of becoming a film star and persisted in her attempts until she felt she had succeeded, as the following excerpt shows:

I started applying to the radios, to be a radio announcer you know. They rejected me, I said, okay fine. When television starts in 1975 I said, that's it. I'm going to be one of the people who are doing what they are doing on the screen. That was my happiest moment I've ever had in my life – they opened up a black channel. I was the first person to apply and fortunately I was accepted.... And I think I fulfilled my dream, as far as I'm concerned.

Mona feels that her message, that of defying obstacles in order to become strong and independent, has been passed onto her daughters and she continues to emphasise to them the importance of being able to look after and rely on oneself. Ironically, although Mona insists on believing in the need to be strong and determined, she does not perceive these attributes in herself. Instead, Mona feels that her daughters are strong because it is inherent in their characters, rather than acknowledging the role she might have played in their developing this strength. Mona describes her daughters as different from herself in the following excerpt:

...They don't, they're not like me, well I'm saying they are very strong... Maybe it's their own character. You know, it's the gift they got.

Mona seems to have experienced many losses in her life which could have led to feelings of disappointment and loneliness. Rather than allowing these adversities to get the better of her, Mona appears to have risen above them and claimed her right to happiness and success.

Although Mona's determination and persistence have assisted in Mona becoming who she is today: successful and independent, they may also have become a burden for Mona in that she places immense pressure on herself to become who she wanted to be. It is furthermore interesting that even though Mona preaches the need to be strong and independent and seems to exhibit these traits in her life, she does not believe she possesses these characteristics.

Rationalisation and Avoidance to Maintain Appearances

Following from the previous theme, one's strength and independence can often prevent one from acknowledging a more vulnerable side to oneself. This can lead to unwillingness to recognise weaknesses or negativity and to avoidance of potential conflict and disagreements. In this way one's façade of independence and success is therefore maintained and not threatened, since on the surface there appear to be no problems. Strategies used in denying problems or acknowledging only those weaknesses that are acceptable to oneself include direct avoidance, rationalisation, and emphasising one's own philosophy regarding how a person should be, thereby implying that one is the same as one's philosophy. This avoidance and rationalisation, and the effort made to maintain appearances, possibly stem from a poor sense of self and the need to employ external achievements to justify inner personal purpose and worth.

Mona admits to being a soft and easy-going person who is often seen as someone whom one can easily take advantage of. Mona appears to revel in her 'niceness' and is quite nonchalant about this attribute. In a sense, Mona may actually perceive herself as better than others because of the fact that she is able to be so nice. There is almost a sense that she is living in a different world from others or at least exists in a different mind-frame that is more removed from reality. She does not really take people seriously and just seems to handle them in the way that makes them happy. The following remark appears to illustrate her unique sense of self and how this makes her very different from other people:

> (Mona's daughters say) people will take you for granted. You know, I don't have that kind of a thing – people will take me for granted. To me people are just people.

Mona's perception of other people as seemingly different from and almost inferior to herself may be a compensation for her possibly ambivalent and fragile self-esteem. It would therefore

be necessary for Mona to protect herself by creating a certain perception of herself; one that is special. Mona's need to be strong and independent, to enjoy a successful life, coupled with her career as a public person, may have further led to Mona over-valuing the importance of appearances and image. Therefore, even though Mona seems to believe that others are inferior, she places great emphasis on how she is viewed by others. From the following statement, it is clear how important their perceptions of herself are to Mona:

> *That's what I teach my girls – be humble! Respect people before, people you know, you are a mirror. People will look into you and they will see the whole of you... don't try to be, you know, like a peacock... Whatever you do, try to be yourself and humble yourself and people will really lift you up.*

Mona often appears to externalise her needs to her daughters and expects her daughters to become what she herself aspires to be. Mona's emphasis on outer appearances and her own self image is again prevalent in the following excerpt where she speaks about her daughters:

> *They must just have their own way of doing things. And, but let that thing be correct. Let people say, 'okay, fine, are you Mona's daughter? I can see', you know. They mustn't say 'no, no, no! You don't look like your mother... your mother used not to be like this'. Not saying that I'm perfect, I mean, there is no one who is perfect in this kind of world we are living in, but we are trying to be.*

Mona appears to perceive her daughters as a reflection of herself; an extension of herself. It is important for Mona that her daughters reflect well on her by displaying to others the right way of doing things, of thinking, and of behaving. Given that appearances and impressions appear to be vital to Mona, it is logical to expect that she cannot allow for any inadequacies in these 'perfect' portrayals of herself and her family. This is likely to be more threatening to Mona herself than to those to whom Mona is trying to present a positive image. It is also possible that Mona finds it hard to be disliked or resented, even temporarily. She seems to struggle to view herself as someone who could also be 'bad' or 'negative' according to her own values. Mona's first and possibly most effective defence mechanism is direct avoidance. By admitting to her fear of conflict and negativity, she immobilises those who wish to confront her with issues, especially her daughters. Mona says:

I'm not a harsh person...you know, they (Mona's daughters) know me, because they know me, I'm a coward... I don't want the thing (meaning conflict) to come close to me you know... I can't handle conflicts... I cry and I don't want to see myself crying.

Mona also often avoids and denies negative issues in her life by trying to arrive at explanations that will make her feel better and self-righteous. This rationalisation allows Mona to justify her actions and thoughts, and even though she acknowledges her part in the relationship with her daughters, she also abstains from taking any responsibility for the part she plays. The following excerpt indicates how Mona avoids guilt and responsibility by rationalising her decision to divorce her husband:

Maybe..., maybe I did something to, you know, disappoint her (Charmaine) but with me, I don't see anything... When I divorced her father, she was still very young... so it can be something you know... It can be something that's okay, fine, if mama didn't divorce my, separate with my father or divorce, maybe we should have had this kind of a bonded family or whatever. I mean, it's a wish for every family or every child to have that bond families. But circumstances..., circumstances throw us away, you know... And she will realise that, okay, that's why mommy did divorce my father, it's because of this kind of character that he made... because she's seeing that as an example – okay, fine, it wasn't bad for mommy just to go away because she wanted to go away, it's because there were some circumstances that forced her to move out of this life.

Conflict apparently arouses so much anxiety in Mona that she indicates that she can react only by crying, as she feels helpless to resolve the situation. Mona therefore also employs denial as a defence against possible conflict and disagreement. She denies negativity to such a degree that she appears to have an unrealistic view regarding her relationship with others. In the following statement, Mona responds to my question of whether there was any conflict between herself and Charmaine:

Not really, it is just a smooth sailing life. Okay, as a person she will have her own moods, mood that day and I will come up with my own mood and immediately I will realise, no, she's not in a good mood. Okay, fine, I will talk to you later, and that's it.

When conflict becomes unavoidable, Mona handles it in the most avoidant manner possible. Through indirect confrontation and negotiation, Mona avoids having to face issues directly and therefore evades dealing with the other party's intense emotions. Mona describes in the following response how she handles conflict with her daughters:

> *…maybe I can't face Charmaine, I'll just tell her elder sister 'please talk to Charmaine about this', or Charmaine can't face me, she will talk to the elder sister 'please talk to mommy about this'… I don't want to shout at them, because like, shouting at them is like, I don't, I feel like, it's like I'm rejecting them you know. I don't do that, I don't want to…*

Avoiding conflict, the ugly things in her life, and possibly the truth, allows Mona to hold on to her dreams, her sense of who she is, and her perfect world that she has worked so hard to create. It is likely that Mona has a fragile self identity and therefore needs external appearances to convince herself and others that she is good and okay. Her exterior image and the way in which she views others as perceiving her is therefore extremely important and must be maintained positively at all times. Conflict and any hint of negativity or disagreement appear to threaten Mona's internal world and she seems to adopt any measures to avoid and deny this. Again, although Mona's need for perceived independence and success has helped her achieve, she may be disconnecting from her inner feelings and emotions, as well as from those of her daughters.

Motherhood and Womanhood

This theme emphasises the importance of motherhood and womanhood. By sharing their gender, roles, and experiences, mother and daughters also share a very special bond. A strong sense of family and connections is also present in this theme. Particularly in the absence of a male figure in the household, the females in the family have come to rely on one another and become mutually supportive. In addition, the recognition exists that individual spaces are needed within the relationship and that it is in allowing separation that this family of women can form an interdependent connection.

It appears that women have always played an important role in Mona's life; so much so that she seems to be slightly afraid of males. Mona therefore feels a special connection to her daughters partly because they share the same gender. For Mona, men are harsh and difficult

and she is grateful that she was blessed with three daughters. Mona talks about her desires for daughters in the following statement:

> *When I grew up, I used to tell myself, I used to pray that God must just give me girls. Because I thought I cannot handle boys. To me boys are tough, rough, you know. I can't handle that kind of situation…*

Mona appears to treasure her relationship with her daughters and views these relationships in an extremely positive light. A strong sense of sisterhood as well as motherhood emanates from Mona when she talks about her daughters, as the following excerpt illustrates:

> *My daughters are all, I mean, daughters are daughters. They tend to be friends to their mothers. We share whatever we have… Maybe because we are women, you know, we have the same thinking… If they were boys, I don't think they would have held this kindness, you know.*

Although Mona holds certain expectations of her daughters, there also seems to be a genuine connection and bond between the women. Mona speaks of her daughters lovingly, particularly Charmaine, since she feels Charmaine is most like her in terms of personality. In addition, Charmaine also seems to be undergoing very similar events to those that Mona herself experienced in her younger days: abuse, divorce, and being the single parent of two young children. By sharing similar experiences, Mona seems to find herself in a better position to be able to assist Charmaine. This also enables Mona to relate and identify more fully with Charmaine. Mona speaks about Charmaine in the following response:

> *She is very soft and gentle and you know, she will always listen, but very intelligent, I'm telling you…I was also wondering the other day that it seems to me this little girl is following in my footsteps. Maybe I will be able to help her, because I know what's there, or what's in there. Maybe she had cleverer ideas than me, maybe she can handle it better than me, you know.*

During the interview, a strong theme of the continuation of motherhood and sisterhood across generations was noticeable. At the same time, Mona also speaks of this continuation in a way that may be perceived as a blurring of boundaries and enmeshment. Although two of her daughters have become mothers themselves, Mona still views all her daughters very much as

girls instead of as grown women and treats her daughters, as well as her grandchildren, all as still her children. The following excerpt illustrates this:

> *I don't even think they are my grandkids, you know. To me it's just my kids... I'm the big mama. They don't even call me granny for that matter, you know, they just call me mommy, all of them, and they call their mothers their names, Charmaine and whoever.*

It appears therefore that no clarity of roles exists when it comes to distinguishing between mother and grandmother for Mona. She perceives herself as the principal caregiver, who is at the same time the person who wields the largest amount of power. Perhaps culturally, Mona and her family are more integrated and bonded. It is possible that what seems to be enmeshment and blurring of boundaries from a Western viewpoint, is actually interdependence and mutual support in the African culture. This reciprocal relationship is mutual and shared, and therefore the role that each party plays in the joint relationship is vital. Mona acknowledges the importance of her daughters in her life and expresses it in the following manner:

> *I'm their mother, I'm their father... I will care about my kids, it will never stop. I mean those are my closest families, those are my closest, they are companions you know. When I, whenever I do some applications, they want next-of-kin, they are the first people that I think of... Whenever I have problems, they are the first people that I contact.*

Owing to the recent move which has separated Mona physically from her daughters, each now possessing their own respective homes, the closeness appears slightly intrrupted. But Mona seems to recognise the importance of separation in order for reconnection to occur. Therefore as much as there are a blurring of boundaries and seeming mixing of roles, trust and respect for each other as responsible adults and for each other's individuality are also evident. Mona talks about her individual space and how having this space allows her relationship with her daughters to become stronger:

> *...I'm giving myself space and they also have, they will also have a chance to come to me one day... that's integration you know, and that strengthens our bond.*

It appears that for Mona, connection with women comes about much easier for her than with men. Mona seems to treasure their shared gender, which in her opinion allows them to bond as friends and as women. Mona's relationship with Charmaine is further connected through their apparently identical experiences. Rather than becoming concerned about the reasons and roots of their patterns, particularly Charmaine's, Mona perceives these positively by framing them as making herself more capable of helping Charmaine. There is also a strong sense of generational continuance through motherhood and womanhood. This may be characteristic of the African culture where continuation and community living were emphasised, leading to shared roles and responsibilities. Despite this, Mona also indicates Western values by claiming her need for her own space, and acknowledging that this enables her to connect with her daughters in a more intimate and integrated manner.

Summary of Mona's Themes

Mona's experience of loss and disappointments in her life may have contributed to her becoming even more determined to pursue her dreams and happiness. In order to leave behind her pain and hurt, it is possible that Mona has built a wall around herself that anncounced independence and strength. This strong message allows Mona to believe that she can, and deserves to, achieve what she desires and at the same time can push people away. Mona possibly places pressure on herself to be self-sufficient and autonomous, and never to allow herself to be dependent on anyone but herself. This could result in a lonely existence that offers her no comfort and safety, leading to increasing hurt and pain, and a sense of self that is vulnerable and fragile.

Because Mona is probably extremely sensitive and vulnerable in her inner self, she makes every effort to protect it by portraying a strong and independent external self. Relying on her image and appearance as being successful and happy, she suppresses her pain and suffering. Mona appears to employ all kinds of coping mechanisms to defend her external appearance, which is also her own perception of herself; one that she herself has come to believe. These defences include avoiding conflict through rationalisation, disliking and fearing negativity, and denying possible difficulties. Mona's emphasis on appearances extends to her daughters and it seems important for Mona that they are a good reflection of her as a mother and as a person.

Despite the above obstacles or challenges in Mona's relationship and self-concept, she truly seems to treasure her daughters and her relationship with them dearly. Mona's description of their relationship encompasses a strong theme of continuity and safety in womanhood, sisterhood, and motherhood. A cultural element of community and merging of the caring role also appears to be evident. Mona sees herself as the major caregiver in the family and insists that this will remain so. This could be viewed either as enmeshment and blurring of boundaries between mother and grandmother, or as a mutually supportive interdependence that appears hard to come by in most mother and daughter relationships. Mona however does apparently to acknowledge the need for individual space and how possessing such a space can enhance the relationship between her and her daughters.

Mona portrays almost everything in a positive light; even the negatives are explained, rationalised, or denied. Although being positive and optimistic is beneficial, and it definitely seems to have been so for Mona, it can also be perceived as slightly unrealistic and naïve. It is possible that Mona's sense of self is so powerless and defenceless that she needs to compensate by creating the opposite – perfection and faultlessness.

Charmaine, the Daughter

Background

Charmaine was born in the rural area of Polokwane and spent her childhood there. Her parents divorced when Charmaine was 12 years old and her mother moved to Pretoria, taking both Charmaine and her elder sister with her. Charmaine's parents have had a strained relationship since the divorce, and Charmaine's father remained unemployed and became an alcoholic. Mona strongly discouraged her daughters from maintaining a relationship with their father and often showed disapproval when they made attempts to do so. Charmaine first attended high school in a township outside Pretoria but during her last few years in high school, she attended a public school in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg.

Charmaine met a man and became pregnant with his child at the age of 19. They moved in together and Charmaine had to begin working to support her small family as her partner could never hold down a job. Charmaine managed to complete a course in tourism and currently works as a travel consultant at the TV station in which Mona is also employed. Five years

after Charmaine's daughter was born, she became pregnant again and this time gave birth to a little boy. Family pressure to legitimise the relationship was heavy and Charmaine and this man married when she was 25 years old. Charmaine is currently 28 years old.

Mona and Charmaine's elder sister got along well with Charmaine's husband and never suspected that he might have been abusive and aggressive. After two and a half years of abuse, Charmaine decided this was enough and began divorce proceedings. During this difficult period, a degree of conflict arose between Charmaine and her mother where Mona questioned Charmaine's actions and advised her against divorce. Fortunately they reconciled with each other, and as a sign of support and love, Mona invited Charmaine to live with her until her divorce was finalised. Charmaine and her children moved out on their own several months ago when Mona decided to sell her townhouse.

Divorce proceedings have unfortunately not yet been finalised and Charmaine's husband continues to harass and threaten Charmaine with violence. Charmaine currently lives in a small bachelor apartment with her two children and her 13 year old half-sister, who is lodging with her until Mona's house is complete.

The Interview Setting and My Impressions

The interview with Charmaine took place in her small bachelor flat. The apartment was on the second floor and was crammed with toys and furniture that seemed too large for the small space. Charmaine's daughter and half-sister sat watching TV while her young son roamed around the flat on his plastic bike. It was quite noisy and Charmaine tried her best throughout the interview to keep everyone quiet.

We decided to conduct the interview at the kitchen counter and perched on two bar stools with our glasses of water. Charmaine is of medium height and quite thin, looking slightly older than her 28 years. She was initially quite hesitant and unsure about the interview process, but as the interview progressed, Charmaine relaxed and began opening up more fully. Charmaine spoke slowly and in an uncertain manner, stopping often to rethink or re-explain her sentences and meanings.

Themes Emerging from Charmaine's Interview

The following themes were identified in Charmaine's interview.

Disappointments and Resentments

This theme illustrates how the disappointments experienced in Charmaine's life can lead to resentment and blame. These disappointments seem to centre around three main issues: that of her parents' divorce and the manner in which it was handled by her mother, the authoritarian parenting style she experienced, and the feeling of not being understood and supported by her mother. Essentially, the feeling that insufficient effort and interest had been made and shown by Mona seemed to have led to tremendous disappointment and external blaming. Excessive blaming can however prevent one from moving forward with one's own life and consequently one becomes stuck in one's own resentment and hatred. Nevertheless, one can learn from the experience and not repeat the same mistakes.

Charmaine's parents' divorce seemed to have taken her by surprise and saddened her immensely. Charmaine was unprepared for the sudden turn of events and felt particularly disappointed about the way her mother insisted that Charmaine and her elder sister were to have no contact with their father. Charmaine experienced this as extremely unfair and felt that Mona did not care about her emotions. In the following excerpt, Charmaine discussed how she felt about her mother's actions:

> *… you still feel that there's a part of you that was taken away from you, and it's you know, a relationship with your father… and because she felt this way about it, she didn't want, she didn't care what you felt about it, even now you know… So we couldn't even talk about our father.*

The sense of resentment is clear in Charmaine's tone of voice and she blames Mona for the current disconnected relationship with her father. Charmaine says:

> *He (Charmaine's father) was there all your life and all of a sudden you're cut from him and it was bad, even now… Even now, we're still very distant from him.*

Charmaine seems to have experienced Mona as extremely controlling and authoritarian while she was growing up, and she resented her mother's harsh words. For Charmaine, Mona was not understanding and approachable. It appeared that Charmaine was disappointed in not having received unconditional acceptance and love from her mother, and that Mona had failed to provide the nurturing a mother should have given. In response to Mona's seemingly unreasonable demands, Charmaine became quite rebellious and deliberately did things to anger her mother. The following response illustrates Charmaine's experience of, and defiance towards, Mona:

> She was very strict... so we used to fight a lot when I was a teenager... There were many times where she told us that it's her house, if you're not happy with her rules, get out. And one time I did. I moved out... in a way I was trying to make a point that if you keep on saying this, then this was not the right way to say, to discuss, you know.

Charmaine's disappointing experience with Mona's parenting style added to Charmaine's resentment and she attributed many consequences in her life to her mother's behaviour. Charmaine wished her mother had been more approachable and understanding and perhaps then, a closer relationship would have been formed during her teenage years. When Charmaine became pregnant at the age of 19, she felt Mona was not sufficiently supportive and was too harsh in forcing her to discontinue her studies and look after her child. Charmaine blames her mother in the following statements that relate to her pregnancy:

> ...there are little things that you, you'd want to blame her,...I think if I had been closer to my mother, I wouldn't have fallen pregnant at 19 you know...I'm thinking just a lack of communication, not being able to talk to each other and her not being approachable.

Charmaine felt that if she had been allowed to continue her studies, she would have achieved far more than what she has done today. It is possible that Charmaine's resentment towards Mona is so strong that her ideals regarding what she expects from Mona are quite unrealistic and avoidant of personal responsibility.

A more recent disappointment for Charmaine comprise the manner in which Mona reacted initially to her decision to divorce her husband. It seemed that Charmaine had expected her mother to understand, since Mona herself had walked down the very same path. Instead,

Mona did not believe Charmaine's claims about her husband's abuse and advised Charmaine to remain in the marriage. It felt to Charmaine as if Mona did not want her to be happy and that her advice was given in order to preserve her own image to the community and family. The following excerpt illustrates Charmaine's disappointment:

> *...so I was really disappointed with her... I was on my own, I was going through a difficult time. I was really disappointed with them, especially my mother. She went through the same thing but why was she trying to... she should know better that it's difficult, but you go through with it.*

Mona eventually saw Charmaine's point and offered her support throughout the still ongoing divorce proceedings, for which Charmaine is grateful. However, Charmaine hoped for an apology or acknowledgement from Mona, but again, she was disappointed. Perhaps Charmaine sets herself up for disappointment by nurturing unrealistic expectations of Mona. It is likely that from past experience, Charmaine has some idea of what to expect and not to expect from her mother, and yet she constantly hopes for the ideal to occur, and is disappointed time and time again when it does not. Charmaine talks about her disappointment when her mother finally accepted her decision to get divorced:

> *...when I was telling her about my divorce and I think I expected her to say, to come to me when we were now close, to say 'I was wrong, I shouldn't have done this, I should have listened to you'... she never came back to me and said, 'you know I was wrong'. It was like 'she knows, I'm sure she knows, I'm supporting her now, so it's okay'.*

Charmaine's blaming appears to have become absolute and instead of owning responsibility for her actions, she projects and transfers all the responsibility completely onto Mona. It is likely that such vehement blaming can become immobilising or even destructive because instead of moving forward towards the future, Charmaine dwells in the past and cannot let go. It is also possible that Charmaine disempowers herself by blaming Mona because this leaves her powerless to do anything about her disappointments and resentments. Charmaine acknowledges her struggle in trying to move away from blaming in the following statement:

> *You can't blame her (Mona) forever, but it's difficult, you know.*

Charmaine is also quite critical of her mother and is at the same time trying to learn from Mona's behaviour so that she does not make the same mistakes. Charmaine truly appears to feel that Mona has failed as a mother because she did not meet Charmaine's expectations and needs, and failed to offer the nurturing and understanding that Charmaine so desperately wants. Charmaine explains in the following excerpt why she does not look up to her mother:

> *...I'm learning, I've learnt from my mother, what my mother has done and that I wouldn't do, you know... There are some life-changing decisions that she's made that I wouldn't... and I will think but I will do better than that, you know... So I wouldn't say that I looked up to her... I felt she's failing on it. I wanted to tell her that, but I couldn't.*

Charmaine blames her mother for many things that have not turned out right in her life. It seems that as long as Charmaine keeps on becoming disappointed and resentful, she will continue to blame Mona for not being good enough as a mother and will attribute her sense of failure to the failure of Mona as a mother. Charmaine is seemingly attempting but finding it difficult, to own responsibility for her life and her decisions. Charmaine's disappointments in Mona and the underlying resentment may result in Charmaine not being able to let go or forgive Mona for her mistakes, and therefore also being unable to acknowledge her own strength and agency in her life.

Dancing Around the Unspoken

Often unspoken issues exist in relationships that all parties seem to skirt around. These are sensitive issues that may lead to seemingly catastrophic consequences if they are brought to the table. Therefore in order to protect oneself from being attacked, as well as to protect the other party from being hurt, these matters are never raised even though, most of the time, parties remain aware of them. However, suppressing issues this way leads to much frustration and anger, and further creates superficiality and non-genuineness in the relationship.

One of the many unspoken issues between Charmaine and her mother, and perhaps the longest-lasing, concerns her father. This is extremely difficult for Charmaine as she is torn between remaining loyal to Mona and wanting to connect with her father. She appears to exhibit a strong sense of loyalty towards Mona and whether this exists out of fear of

retribution or fear of hurting her mother, it causes ambivalence and frustration for Charmaine. The following excerpt illustrates Charmaine's ambivalent position:

> *…like it was just, you just couldn't raise it or talk about it or even think about it…you don't want to sort of betray her, by looking after him. So you have to be more on her side and just neglect the one… even when you go to family functions, which he attends because he's still family. He's there but you want to go to him but you can't, you know. You hold back, you check if you, if my mother's looking around and quickly go and say hello to him…*

Another issue that is extremely sensitive and not spoken about concerns Mona's relationship with a married man. Since Charmaine's divorce proceedings, she has herself become good friends with a man who is also married. Charmaine tries to emphasise that they are just friends but it feels to her as if her mother is encouraging the relationship. For Charmaine, it is as if Mona wants her to engage in this relationship in order to make Mona feel better about her own adulterous relationship. It appears that Charmaine truly believes that Mona does not have her best interests at heart and therefore becomes quite spiteful in her reaction towards Mona. However, Charmaine does not acknowledge her agency in this matter and allows Mona to possess full control over her life and the path it follows. Charmaine's anger and frustration are clear in her response:

> *I think I would feel better if she would sit me down and say, 'you know what, you are going through a divorce…, wait until this thing is finished before you start seeing other people', you know… it's as if it's okay for me to see this… she's so okay with this. 'It's okay to see a married man' because, as if to justify her own situation.*

Unlike Mona who seems satisfied with the way conflict is handled in her relationship with her daughters, Charmaine expresses strong resentment. In stark contrast to what Mona described: that she dislikes and avoids conflict, Charmaine speaks of seemingly strong and one-sided confrontations from Mona. Charmaine apparently experiences conflict management in the family as quite overwhelming and unfair because she feels that Mona is the only one that is allowed to make demands and raise her voice but as Mona's children, their voices and opinions are not heard by Mona. This further seems to add to Charmaine's experience of Mona as being selfish and uncaring. Charmaine describes one of the lectures she received from Mona:

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…she sat us down and all we did that whole night, we sat and listened to her. It was like, you can't do this, you have to support me, you are my children, you have to be on my side… at the end we didn't say anything and she didn't know how we felt.

Although one can empathise with Charmaine's experience, it also appears that she is quite fearful of confronting Mona with sensitive issues. Her chosen silence may represent an attempt to protect Mona by maintaining her 'perfect world' and not wanting to hurt her, a fear of her mother's possible explosive reaction, or fear of her own emotional intensity and concern over whether she would be able to control it if it was to surface completely. Charmaine's hesitation and fear is reflected in the following remark where she discusses how she perceives the possibility of talking to her mother about sensitive matters:

Although I would like to be able to talk to her more freely, whereas I'm thinking, oh no, what if I say this… how will she react you know. Then she would hate me forever and we'll stop talking and…You don't really want to know what the other one thinks about you. You don't want to know. There are some other things unsaid, I'd rather not say it.

This tiptoeing around issues seems to frustrate Charmaine immensely and she feels that there is really a need for Mona, her elder sister, and herself to communicate more openly. This avoidance of touchy issues appears to have resulted in a pretentious and superficial connection between Mona and her daughters: one where the issues hang like dirty socks in between them but the stench is studiously ignored. This is entirely different to how Mona seems to perceive the same relationship: one that in her opinion is characterised by open communication and total trust. In the following excerpt Charmaine illustrates their limited and constrained participation in the relationship:

And there'll be cosy moments, where we're all sitting and we're chatting and it's nice, but we're all holding back… I felt that you know there are more important things to discuss than what we're sitting and discussing. I would feel we should be discussing more important things than…, they are holding back. So it's only when the other one leaves and we start saying…but when we're together it's seems as if we're all happy.

Part of Charmaine's resentment of her mother seems to originate from a deep fear of as well as a sense of protection regarding Mona. Her fear of hurting her mother and making her angry seems to result in Charmaine avoiding conflict and disagreements. Those issues classified as sensitive in this family are clear, and a tacit rule appears to exist that suppresses open and honest discussion of any of them. It seems that the pattern into which Charmaine and her family have settled is to keep the peace and not rock the boat, and when sensitive issues arise, they just dance around them and wait for them to pass. This may be because no one knows how fierce the storm will be if they continue to acknwledge it and they are not sure whether their relationship is strong enough to weather the storm unharmed.

Need for Connection and Acknowledgement

This theme iterates the importance of connection and recognition in a relationship, and especially in a mother-daughter relationship. It seems that before Charmaine can become individuated and autonomous, she needs to connect with Mona as a separate and free individual rather than as an enmeshed and suggestible person who is at the mercy of her mother's faults and mistakes. Willingness to communicate and mutual understanding appear to constitute particularly important tools in facilitating this connection.

Charmaine would like a more intimate connection with Mona and desires her mother to acknowledge her pain and difficulties. She is however quite hesitant and appears actually to reject the possibility of such a connection. Charmaine seems to feel that if only Mona was a little more approachable, she would be able to talk to her more openly. In other words, Charmaine is perhaps saying that Mona must change before their relationship can alter. This renders Charmaine quite helpless since she is dependent on Mona's actions. The following contradictory statement illustrates Charmaine's feelings of being stuck:

> *…I feel she, she needs to be a little friendly so that she understands what you're going through… But we're okay now. We're… there's still some other things she's doing that I'm not okay with, but hey, I can't say it…*

Charmaine acknowledges that her mother appears to be making efforts to connect more intimately with her. In connecting with her mother, Charmaine also came to learn about Mona and her history. By talking about Charmaine's divorce, mother and daughter found a common

thread. Albeit not necessarily a positive one, it provided a platform on which to construct a connection between them.

> *She began to see my side, then I sat down with her and I talked to her and she, she understood my side... Then I could talk to her, because now she understood what I was going through... We talked about what happened in our life and she and I are going through the same route, that's exactly how, because she's divorced from my father as well. My father used to do that to her... and hence she said, you know we're going down the same path, we got married at an early age, and we got abusive husbands, and we're divorcing and we're falling in love with married men.*

Being understood and heard may provide Charmaine with a sense of identity and individuality, because it affirms her decisions and choices. It is however more probable that in recognising that they are sharing almost identical experiences, Charmaine may over-identify with Mona and feel that she is doomed to make the same mistakes. This could lead to Charmaine further blaming and resenting Mona. It therefore appears extremely important for Charmaine to realise that she is actually responsible for her own life and can make different choices.

Currently, Charmaine appears to be somewhat satisfied with her relationship with her mother. She appreciates Mona's support and is glad that there is someone to whom she can relate and talk. Although many unspoken issues exist, Charmaine is nevertheless glad of the connection that has returned in their relationship, following a painful period where she felt particularly betrayed and hurt. Charmaine comments as follows about her current relationship with Mona:

> *At the moment, it's, it's okay...we talk everyday. If there's anything going on in my life, she's the first person to know...I don't have too many friends and I consider her my friend. So we're more like friends than mother and daughter.*

Charmaine would like to take her relationship with her mother to a deeper level of connection and understanding, but she is also quite doubtful whether this is possible. Charmaine appears to feel that Mona's pride and inability to receive criticism will hamper the development of their relationship. It is possible that Charmaine is bordering on either completely rejecting her mother or completely identifying with her mother. At either extreme, Charmaine would not be able to develop her sense of self and identity, because both rejection of and identification with

Mona are based solely on Mona and contain no elements of Charmaine herself. Charmaine's and Mona's recent communication and sharing of experiences has apparently facilitated the relationship and this may have led to an understanding that did not exist previously. Although it is not ideal in her view, Charmaine is nevertheless grateful for this connection.

Summary of Charmaine's Themes

It seems that Charmaine's life experience and her experience of her mother have comprised a series of disappointments. This has resulted in Charmaine becoming quite resentful and critical of Mona's behaviour and decisions. Charmaine was particularly hurt by the way her mother disregarded her need to remain connected to her father, as well as by her authoritarian and seemingly unsympathetic manner of parenting. Charmaine appears to attribute her own failures and the disappointments in her own life to her mother and constantly blames Mona for having influenced her life so negatively. Although Charmaine indicates that she has learnt from Mona's mistakes, she finds it difficult to forgive her mother and to move away from blaming her.

Perhaps Mona's authoritarian style and unwillingness to communicate openly have instilled much fear and uncertainty in Charmaine. She is therefore afraid to raise sensitive issues with her mother; issues that seem to be constantly on her mind and act as obstacles to a closer relationship with Mona. Consequently, Charmaine feels that her mother does not have her best interests at heart and makes selfish decisions that meet Mona's own needs rather than Charmaine's needs. Tiptoeing around issues appears to have resulted in a superficial and pretentious interaction where all parties make an effort to appear happy and problem-free. This understandably becomes frustrating for Charmaine and fuels her resentment. However, it is also possible that Charmaine has built up so much anger and resentment that she is afraid of losing control if any disagreements come to the fore. It is therefore safer to skirt around sensitive topics in her interaction with Mona.

Despite Charmaine's disappointments and resentments, she yearns for unconditional acceptance from and an intimate connection with her mother. However, she is hesitant and does not appear to believe this is possible, at least not in the near future. It seems that Charmaine is unable to formulate her sense of self until Mona acknowledges her feelings and emotions. It may also be vital for Charmaine to let go of her resentments towards her mother

before she can see herself as an individual rather than as a result of her mother's mistakes. Regardless, rather than rocking the boat, Charmaine is satisfied with the current relationship she has with Mona; one that seems to be based on friendship and companionship.

Mona's and Charmaine's Difficulties in Coming Together

Introduction

It was quite difficult to arrange an interview with both Mona and Charmaine present. Every attempt was met with resistance and hesitation. Reasons given included busy schedules, going on holiday, and inability to find a time that suited both mother and daughter. It was decided that it would not be wise to force such a union and that the difficulty in getting together might itself be an indication of the current state of the relationship. Attempts at requesting reflections and feedback were also not successful and met with silent resistance. This further seems to indicate Mona's and Charmaine's unwillingness to participate further in the process of reflecting on their relationship.

My Impressions

Clearly, as the aforementioned emerging themes discussed illustrate, there were a number of discrepancies between Mona's and Charmaine's perceptions of their relationship. I had therefore been feeling quite anxious about the last joint interview. Mona and Charmaine more than likely felt the same way. Their difficulty in coming together for the last interview indicated to me that mother and daughter were not ready to bring a certain level of honesty and openness to their relationship. Their individual wounds appeared to be still too painful and arousing too much emotion for them to be able to discuss these calmly, without risking hurting the other person. In addition, my own resistance may have played itself out in not insisting more strongly on the last interview and accepting their resistance, since it mirrors my own.

Themes in Mona's and Charmaine's Relationship

Since there no last combined interview took place, the following themes were derived by combining the two individual interviews and hypothesising on the possible interaction

between Mona and Charmaine, based on their individual perceptions of their relationship. There are no process elements in the discussion of this mother and daughter pair as their interaction together, or any possible shifts in their relationship, could not be observed.

Perceptions of Conflict Handling

This theme discusses mother and daughter displaying similar perceptions of how the other handles conflict. This may occur because both appear to deal with conflict in similar ways, making them aware of each other's preferred style of avoidance and indirect communication. It is not unlikely that this is a pattern that has become entrenched in their interaction with one another and is perpetuated because it is functional and helps both mother and daughter avoid confrontation.

Mona and Charmaine are both conscious that it is difficult for Mona to face confrontation and that she rather prefers to use the phone and/or third parties to relay any such message. Mona calls herself a coward and Charmaine feels her mother is too stubborn and proud. Mother and daughter avoid conflict b their unwillingness to take responsibility for their respective roles in the relationship. Mona seems to deny problems and exists in an illusion of perfection while Charmaine appears to blame her mother for everything and perceives her life as so full of difficulties that it is pointless to do anything about them.

Although Charmaine describes incidents of strong confrontation by Mona, these apparently occurred only when Mona felt that her daughters had wronged her in some way. However, when the tables are turned and Mona suspects that her daughters may be angry with her for something, she avoids conflict and denies her daughters the opportunity to express their feelings. Therefore in some ways, Mona's 'outbursts' are more likely to comprise her form of defence and serve as a warning to her daughters that a certain limit has been reached and that they should go no further.

It appears that for Mona, directly confronting conflict threatens her sense of self and she therefore automatically becomes defensive when a disagreement arises. Her defensiveness becomes quite frightening for Charmaine, who is perhaps feeling her mother's fear of losing her sense of self. It is further possible that Charmaine may be afraid of her own emotional intensity and cannot predict how her mother would react to it. As a result, both Mona and

Charmaine avoid conflict and prefer to sweep issues under the carpet. This fear of oneself and of the other may contribute to Mona's and Charmaine's avoidance of direct conflict.

Different yet Similar Coping Strategies

This theme embraces coping strategies that are seemingly different in terms of external behaviour and actions, but are actually similar in terms of internal feelings and emotions. While coping by means of avoidance and naïvety allow a person to avoid responsibility, coping by blaming others also allows one not to be accountable for one's own choices. Both coping styles result in a denial of internal processes and inhibit personal ownership of responsibility and growth.

Mona seems to cope in terms of avoidance and naïvety. She denies there might be anything wrong in her life, or in her daughters' lives. Mona furthermore denies conflict and disagreements, and if there are any, she pretends they probably do not exist or that they had nothing to do with her. Mona appears to have created a world in which she believes that everything is as it should be and that, given her background and history, she has done what she needed to do to correct it. As long as no one confronts her with anything, Mona can continue to believe that others perceive her as she perceives herself – almost perfect.

On the other hand, Charmaine appears to cope by blaming others, particularly her mother. According to Charmaine, her life would have been totally different if only her mother had done her part as a good mother and made different choices. Charmaine wants Mona to take responsibility for her having become pregnant at 19, for having married the wrong man, for her divorce, and for not having received a better tertiary education. By doing so, Charmaine avoids having to face her own inadequacies and mistakes and can continue to believe that she was a victim of poor mothering.

Both Mona and Charmaine's coping strategies are external and non-self-reflective, which may block internal realisations and affirmations that would possibly assist them to move forward.

Contradictions Leading to Fear and Hesitation

This theme illustrates differences and contradictions in mother's and daughter's perceptions of their relationship as well as of themselves and each other. These contradictions appear to be quite extreme and difficult to reconcile, which may lead to fear and hesitation when the potential necessity of confronting them becomes likely. This results in both parties resorting to their respective coping strategies of avoidance and blaming.

Mona and Charmaine seem to have completely different perceptions of their relationship. According to Mona, '*smooth sailing*' characterises her relationships with her daughters, without any major problems emerging; she appears to have nothing but positive things to express about their relationship. Although she acknowledged possible disappointments, she minimised their importance. Charmaine views her relationship with her mother, although currently pleasant, as always being characterised by disappointments, disagreements, and tension. Whereas Mona minimises issues, Charmaine seems to exaggerate them and describes them with a sense of impending doom that is impossible to resolve.

Another contradiction occurs where Mona's preaching and philosophy are different from the person she is and is evident in how Charmaine sees Mona as a person. According to Mona's philosophy of life, a person must think about others before they oneself; be respectable and set an example to others. Ironically, Charmaine appears to experience her mother as having been too involved in her own issues to have maintained her daughters' best interests at heart. She also cannot look up to Mona as she feels Mona has set a bad example as a mother and as a woman, and has made various wrong choices in life. Furthermore Charmaine seems to disrespect Mona for her involvement with a married man, and for not being able to own up to her mistakes. Yet she feels herself to be the victim in her involvement with another man, believing that her mother should have intervened to stop her.

Both Mona and Charmaine are likely to be aware of these contradictions in their perceptions and both fear they will surface and result in irreconcilable disagreement and conflict. This may perhaps have contributed to their unwillingness to commit themselves to the final interview where they would have had to confront each other and acknowledge their differences.

Incomplete Individuals Resulting in Whole Relationship

Although individuals may be incomplete in the sense that they do not accept parts of themselves and struggle to perceive themselves as integrated people comprising both positive and negative traits, these individuals may come together to balance a relationship, thus making the relationship complete. Such a relationship, perhaps unhealthy and inhibiting in terms of individual growth, remains functional and precariously balanced, and, somehow, works.

Mona seems to find it difficult to acknowledge negative parts of herself and continues to believe that she is perfect, that her daughters are happy, and that her relationship with her daughters is as good as it can get. Mona lacks the acknowledgement of negativity, which Charmaine provides. Charmaine appears to have difficulty in being proactive and taking responsibility. She seems to project the feeling that everything about her life has been negative and it will probably continue being so since she can do nothing about it. Mona's optimism and Charmaine's pessimism somehow seem to keep both mother and daughter in check and balance their relationship.

Furthermore, Mona is extremely proactive and controlling. She believes in herself and shows much agency in her life by taking responsibility for her choices and making the best of her circumstances. Charmaine, on the other hand, appears to be reactive and accepting. She apparently makes no attempt to be accountable for her choices, perhaps believing that she has none, and perceives her life as a consequence of Mona's mistakes and negligence. It seems almost impossible that such two different individuals should manage to maintain a relationship, but at the same time, what they are lacking in themselves they find in one another.

Mona and Charmaine therefore seem to complement each other in their relationship together and yet as individuals they seem starkly incomplete and contrastingly different.

Summary of Themes in Mona and Charmaine's Relationship

When the researcher considered the individual interviews of Mona's and Charmaine's together, the following similarities and differences seemed to emerge.

Mona and Charmaine concur in their description of the way in which conflict is handled in their relationship, and although Mona is happy to continue this pattern, Charmaine feels frustrated and suppressed in not being able to voice her thoughts and opinions. This may result in misunderstanding and conflict between mother and daughter. However, since conflict is not dealt with directly and openly, both Mona and Charmaine must find alternative ways to cope and make their lives bearable. Mona copes by avoidance and pretending as if nothing is wrong, while Charmaine copes by blaming and not taking responsibility. Both mother and daughter's coping strategies indicate an external locus of control, and neither truly owns her emotions and feelings and therefore cannot act on them appropriately. It appears that Mona herself seems to have failed in the very principles and philosophies she tried to teach her daughters and that she herself tried to live by. It is questionable whether her daughters, or in particular Charmaine, would have internalised any of Mona's principles, as they did not perceive Mona as exemplifying them. Although Mona and Charmaine appear to be strikingly different, they also seem to complement each other in their relationship. Mona's proactive, demanding, and narcissistic ways seem to provide the perfect balance to Charmaine's reactive, accepting, and resentful manner.

My Reflections on My Participation

I was looking for a black mother and daughter pair as participants in order to be able to undertake a more culturally diverse analysis of the mother-daughter relationship. Mona's and Charmaine's participation was suggested by another pair of participants in this research and I was excited and anxious about interviewing participants I knew nothing about.

Over the phone, this mother and daughter pair sounded extremely willing to help and assist, although it should be noted that Mona agreed before I was even able to explain what it was I required her to do. With Mona's help enlisted, Charmaine easily agreed to participate. She was however slightly hesitant in the beginning and wondered whether her elder sister would be a better candidate. She finally agreed to set up a time to meet.

My interview with Mona consisted mainly of my listening and clarifying her messages. I remember wondering whether anything ever went wrong in her relationships with others, since she appeared so 'together' and seemed wise owing to all the profound insights and

philosophies she offered. I left the interview feeling in awe of the positive energy Mona generated and her optimistic view of life.

That very afternoon, I met with Charmaine. In the beginning I really felt that these interviews were going to mirror each other as Charmaine was telling me about how close she was to her mother. However as the interview progressed and I probed more deeply, endless issues began to emerge. I played the role of the curious listener and clarified and asked questions when I was confused. It felt as if Charmaine was relieved finally to have someone to listen to her feelings about her mother. I was completely drained by the end of the three-hour-long interview. I left Charmaine's apartment quite worried about the upcoming combined interview and wondered whether I would be able to contain the probably very emotional and possibly provocative discussion.

Writing up Mona's and Charmaine's interview summaries was also particularly challenging. I was constantly attempting to tone down the seriousness of their discrepancies while at the same time not wanting to omit any important issues raised. Even though I had tried to be as diplomatic and as unbiased as possible, when I finally despatched the summaries to Mona and Charmaine, I could not help but wonder whether this mother and daughter pair would allow themselves to come together for the last interview and reconcile their differences.

Even though I persisted beyond my own discomfort, I was in a sense relieved that we did not gather for the final interview. My hesitation is perhaps also a reflection of Mona and Charmaine's resistance. It seems apparent that both Mona and Charmaine were not ready to confront each other with their innermost emotions and feelings; that their relationship was not yet strong enough to withstand brutal honesty and painful confrontations. I hope and believe that day will come.

Conclusion

A strong theme of disappointment was seemingly present in both Mona's and Charmaine's individual interviews and it is likely that their relationship could also be characterised by the very same theme. Mona seems to have undergone numerous disappointing experiences in her life, yet, instead of allowing these adversities to overwhelm her, she turned her disappointments into determination and drive. Charmaine, on the other hand, also having

experienced much disappointment in her life, seems to be dwelling in her past and blaming it on Mona.

Both Mona and Charmaine appeared to have a very fragile and vulnerable sense of self, and this may have carried over into their relationship, which was also characterised by delicateness and cautiousness. Perhaps owing to her disadvantaged childhood and the amount of effort she has invested to become successful and make something of herself, Mona works hard to protect her sense of self. Although she has achieved and accomplished much in her life, these were only external affirmations that may not have made up for her inner feelings of inadequacy. Ironically, Charmaine also experienced an unsatisfactory childhood and as a result did not feel affirmed, accepted, or acknowledged. Both Mona and Charmaine may therefore compensate for their emotional emptiness by protecting their perceptions of themselves. Mona does so by avoiding, denying, and ignoring problems in herself and in her life while Charmaine achieves self-protection through projection and externalising her inadequacies onto Mona.

The relationship between Mona and Charmaine is also strongly characterised by various contradictions. Although Mona presents herself as problem-free and almost perfect, this is not how Charmaine experiences her. Instead, Charmaine indicates that her mother is authoritarian, demanding, and almost selfish; all of which are contradictory characteristics to what Mona herself preaches and aspires to be. It is ironic that the noble virtues Mona preaches, such as compassion, humility, and pride, do not seem to be lived out by herself; at least not according to Charmaine. It would therefore not be surprising that Charmaine does not view her mother as a role model from whom she can learn in a positive way. In addition, Charmaine seems to perceive herself as a failure who has been thwarted in actualising her true potential by her mother. Yet Mona is extremely proud of Charmaine and feels that she has used her resources wisely and achieved a great deal. In Mona's eyes, Charmaine is successful. Perhaps there is a pattern the of mother tending to see the positives while the daughter tends to notice the negatives.

It appears that both mother and daughter value their relationship and although Mona currently views it much more positively than Charmaine does, both enjoy the idea of having a close and intimate connection. However, their current personal and interactional processes do not seem to facilitate any shift in the direction of closeness. Rather, because of the amount and intensity of the unspoken issues and the tendency to avoid conflict, Mona and Charmaine seem to share

a relationship that can be characterised as superficially close, extremely cautious, and probably anxiety-provoking. Mona's unwillingness to confront and acknowledge difficulties and negativity may also mean that she does not take responsibility for her influence on Charmaine. This keeps her in denial and prevents her from engaging in internal reflections. Charmaine's apparent stuckness in resentment and blaming of Mona also prevents her from moving forward and reflecting on herself. Mona's stubbornness further feeds into Charmaine's tendency to blame her. By externalising and projecting onto her mother, Charmaine is similarly absolving herself from responsibility in her relationship with Mona. Both mother and daughter therefore seem to be immobilised and paralysed in their respective positions; unable to achieve internal realisations and hence mutual understanding and compassion.

The fear of irreparable consequences for their relationship may contribute to Mona's and Charmaine's unwillingness to move forward in the present research process and their relationship. Their current relationship, although far from perfect, appears functional and does at least exist. Perhaps an imperfect relationship is better than no relationship at all, and losing the relationship entirely might be the ultimate sacrifice feared by both should Mona and Charmaine choose to air their grievances and vulnerabilities with each other and within themselves. Their differences also seem to balance the relationship perfectly and are possibly part of the reason why it continues to operate and appears so difficult to shift.

The ideal situation for Mona and Charmaine would probably be for each to become a whole person, embracing all that comprises being human; including both the positives as well as some negatives. However, it seems clear that both Mona and Charmaine are unwilling and unable to risk losing their relationship. Even though many challenges exist in their relationship, they may at this point in time need each other more than they need to be autonomous individuals. It might therefore be preferable for Mona and Charmaine to remain in a seemingly enmeshed and unbounded connection rather than to work towards a more separate but interdependent relationship and possibly risk damaging their relationship.

Chapter 7

Comparative Analysis

Introduction

This chapter will offer a comparative analysis between the common themes identified in the three mother and daughter pairs, and the literature on the relationship between mothers and daughters. The themes identified in this study share similarities with, but also differ from, findings in previous research.

The researcher would like to distinguish between the words *separation* or *individuation* and the word *disconnection*, and clarify how they are used in this chapter. Whereas *separation* and *individuation* refer to a psychological process of establishing and forming an integrated, interdependent, and unique identity, *disconnection* refers to a psychological state where a person is cut-off or disengaged from another.

The following two meta-themes emerged in the three mother and daughter pairs, and seemed to characterise their mother-daughter relationships:

- ➢ The interdependence of individuation-separation and connection
- ➢ Fear of disconnection versus need for connection.

Other common sub-themes that were identified in the interaction pattern between the mothers and daughters in this study include the following:

- ➢ Avoidance of conflict
- ➢ Differences versus similarities
- ➢ Need for understanding and acknowledgement
- ➢ Power in the relationship
- ➢ Indirect versus open communication styles.

These themes will be discussed in terms of the literature review in Chapter 2 and in the order presented above.

Themes Characteristic of the Relationship

The following two themes dominated and were prominent throughout the participants' interviews, in their narratives of their relationship, and in the researcher's observations and analysis of their interaction. Just as the main melody that runs through a piece of music determines how the composition is played and sounds, these themes fundamentally characterise the three mother-daughter relationships and underlie, as well as colour, almost all of the interactions in the three relationships.

The Interdependence of Individuation-Separation and Connection

All three daughters in the study seemed to have expressed a significant need to be separated from and connected to their mothers; to be independent and individuated, and yet at the same time to remain interdependent and connected. This seemed to be a process that is crucial for the mother-daughter relationship itself and the manner in which this is resolved can impact strongly on the mother and daughter as well as their relationship. However, this negotiation of individuation-separation and connection also appears to be a continuous process that is dynamic and constantly evolving. Gilligan (1993, p. 151) proposes that,

> *[a]ttachment and separation anchor the cycle of human life, describing the biology of human reproduction and the psychology of human development.*

In line with Gilligan (1993), Aron (2003) also discusses the constant construction of the self. Josselson (1987) found that women's identity development appears to take place on the continuum of individuation-connection, and is dependent on the extent to which this process has been undertaken and accomplished. For the mothers and daughters in this study, it appeared that healthy individuation was necessary for meaningful connection and in turn, that intimate connection facilitated successful separation. Each of the three mother and daughter relationships in this study seemed to be working through different parts of this process and to

exhibit distinct balances between individuation-separation and connection in their relationships.

Althea and **Nicola** seemed to be the most individuated as well as the most connected of the three participating mother and daughter pairs. Both mother and daughter appeared to be content with each other's individuality and described a relationship that seemed supportive and interdependent. Mother and daughter appeared to be both emotionally close and behaviourally independent of one another, a finding also noted by Smith, Mullis, and Hill (1995) amongst young adult daughters and their mothers. Althea is dependent on Nicola for emotional support but is also quite independent of Nicola in terms of following her own interests and hobbies. As Lawler (2000) found, although motherhood and maternal narratives indicate a loss of the self, mothers often reinstate their selves through other narratives; those that inscribe them as more than just mothers, but also as complete persons. Phillips (1991) also indicated that the mothers who are most resourced in dealing with relationship changes are those who have maintained independent interests, as Althea has. McCarter (1999) concluded in her study that mature adult daughters are able to acknowledge the strengths in their relationships with their mothers and feel encouraged to take personal responsibility for their words and actions, and make positive decisions about their healing and growth. Nicola appeared to fit this profile. She seemed to be more independent in nature and has seemingly never consciously experienced Althea as encroaching on her personal space. She appeared to be dependent on Althea for support and assistance, but was at the same time not helpless without her mother. This finding concurs with that of Nice (1992), who suggests that women can develop a strong sense of self while being connected to others. There also appeared to be no underlying hostility between Althea and Nicola. As Nice (1992) indicates, it is healthy for women to strive to be different from their mothers and develop their own ways of being, but this need not result in hostility towards mothers nor does it need to lead to the abandoning of their connections to their mothers. Althea and Nicola seemed to relate to one another without enmeshment or over-identification, and instead appeared to be quite comfortable with their individual identities. This may indicate that mother and daughter are able to interact in a way that is respectful and compassionate. According to Gilligan (1993, p. 149) when women's self-assertions no longer seem dangerous to themselves,

> *[t]he concept of relationships changes from a bond of continuing dependence to a dynamic of interdependence.*

It appeared that Nicola and Althea have reviewed and renegotiated their relationship successfully, and through successful individuation have become intimately connected and interdependent. As Smith, Hill and Mullis (1995) discovered in their research, the mother-daughter relationship is not necessarily defined by conflict and can be experienced as rewarding and mutually beneficial.

Marie and **Estelle** seemed to be in the process of becoming individuated so that they can be reconnected at a more intimate level, where both mother and daughter become separate individuals and relate to one another as adults. As Josselson (1987) notes, the challenge in separating does not just concern becoming different, but, is at the same time, also about maintaining connection. Marie appeared to be experiencing difficulties letting Estelle go and acknowledging her as an adult rather than as a child. Flax (cited in Phillips, 1991) discusses the difficulty that exists in the relationship between mothers and daughters if the mother is ambivalent about giving up the dependent and symbiotic stage of the relationship. Perhaps because Marie felt so excluded from Estelle's struggle for independence, she seemed to want to counteract this by maintaining indirect, but nevertheless intrusive, control over Estelle's life. This holding on by the mother can actually result in greater aggression in the mother-daughter relationship because as the daughter struggles to separate, the mother tries to hold onto the daughter (De Kanter, 1993). Flaake (1993) further discusses the importance for mothers also to separate from their daughters since this furnishes the daughter with permission to become independent. This may constitute Marie's biggest challenge. Estelle appeared to have been trying extremely hard to establish her own identity and a sense of self. She seemed to be experimenting with different roles in order to test out who she wants to be. Nagar (2002) observes that it is important for women to psychologically separate from their mothers and shows how this process allows women to develop their sense of self. Partly owing to her struggle to be heard in her family, Estelle has been attempting to change the manner in which she communicated with them by trying to become more open and direct, particularly with Marie. As Buyss (1999) contends, daughters do not back away from mothers but rather learn to resolve conflicts within the context of the relationship. This seemed to be what Estelle is attempting to achieve. Perhaps because of her current struggles and feelings of inadequacy, she may be projecting many of her perceived negative traits onto Marie. By disconfirming her mother, Estelle may hope to affirm her own identity and also give herself the permission as well as the ability to be different. For Estelle, identity formation, as postulated by Josselson (1987), appeared to encompass both an intrapsychic and a psychosocial process.

Despite the demanding and often-painful nature of the individuation-separation process, Marie and Estelle have not given up on one another, thereby refusing to become disconnected. Buysse (1999) indicates that women desire authenticity rather than autonomy, and that their definition of independence is relationship oriented in the context of others. Marie and Estelle both expressed their desire for closer connection and their fondness for one another, but seemed simply to be at a point where they just did not know how to do so. As Glasman (2001) discovered in her research, even when there was positive regard towards mothers, daughters seemed to experience constant tension between maintaining connections with and individuating from their mothers. It may be that Marie and Estelle will need to allow one another to individuate and separate before they can come together again to reconnect, this time with deeper understanding of and more compassion for each other. It is also important to keep in mind, as Gilligan (1993) indicated, that not separating completely from one's mother is not pathological but is rather a valuable and important aspect of female psychology, and it in fact it forms part of women's psychological health. This is consistent with Aron's (2003) postulation that we think of ourselves in terms of relationships.

Mona and **Charmaine** seemed to be the least individuated as well as least connected mother and daughter pair in this study. Both mother and daughter seemed to be enmeshed in one another and yet in such opposing ways that reconciliation appeared to be extremely challenging. Nagar (2002) indicated that women need to separate psychologically from their mothers so as to perceive their mothers as separate individuals who exist in possibly different social and cultural contexts. This would allow them to differentiate from their mothers so as to develop their own boundaries and take ownership of themselves, and for their mothers to see them as adults and therefore alter their interactional style accordingly. Since Mona and Charmaine did not seem to be healthily separated and individuated, it is unlikely that they would have achieved any of the above. Mona seemed to have relinquished her responsibility as a mother regarding how her decisions might have affected Charmaine. By denying her own inadequacies, Mona did not appear to recognise her role in Charmaine's life, which in essence may have disconfirmed Charmaine as a person. Instead of trying to understand Charmaine as she views herself, Mona held onto her own perceptions of her daughter. Nagar (2002) discusses the way in which mothers often struggle to see their daughters as adults; as equals. It is also possible that Mona herself did not experience a successful and healthy separation-individuation process. Firman and Firman (1989) demonstrate that adult women who have not achieved emotional independence often experience themselves in childlike ways and feel like

a victim: frightened or helpless. They add that there is also a sense of pretence in that these women rely on a false front to hide their feelings of inadequacy. This explanation seems appropriate to Mona. Charles, Frabk, Jacobson, and Crossman (2001) discuss the transmitting of separation-individuation working models through different generations. Mona's unsuccessful individuation process may therefore have been transmitted to Charmaine. Charmaine appeared to hold Mona responsible for everything that happens to her, thereby also relieving herself of accountability and ownership for her own life. She seemed to have over-identified with Mona and yet at the same time resented this identification. It is possible that self-reflection and access to negativity may result in a blind spot so that similar patterns are repeated (Charles, Frabk, Jacobson & Crossman, 2001). In addition, Charmaine's seemingly total rejection of Mona and her possible inability to integrate parts of her mother into herself could lead to identity diffusion. Joselsson (1987) discusses this as a state characterised by difficulty in forming intimate relationships, anxiousness and over-dependence, yet avoidant of forming an identity. Phillips (1991) indicates that daughters who have not emotionally separated from their mothers are not sufficiently responsible to achieve independence, as they exist in a state of ambivalence between fury and closeness. Charmaine appeared to be existing in such an ambivalent state. By attributing almost total responsibility to her mother, Charmaine may have denied her own agency and autonomy, thereby resulting in her not being able to recognise her own individuality and uniqueness. This further inhibited Charmaine from connecting with Mona on a genuine and intimate level, which in turn disrupted the individuation-separation process. Gershenson (2000) indeed notes that often what looks like difficulty individuating is actually rooted in a failure to connect. Even though Charmaine was physically and financially independent of Mona, she did not appear to be either individuated from or connected to Mona. Josselson (1987) validly states that separation does not imply individuation, nor is it necessary for individuation.

Gilligan (1993) discusses the human experience as being paradoxical in that we can only know ourselves as separate by living in connection with others and that we can also only experience relationship if we differentiate others from ourselves. For Mona and Charmaine, since their selves were not clearly acknowledged and defined, they struggled to relate to one another in their relationship. Carlson (cited in Walters, 1999) makes the assumption that separation is best accomplished from a strong base of connection. It is likely that Mona and Charmaine lacked this very base of connection to start with. However, Mona and Charmaine have managed to maintain a reasonably pleasant relationship on the surface, albeit seemingly psychologically disconnected. This may be an indication that despite their differences and

denial of tensions, their relationship was important enough for them to keep it alive, regardless of its underlying frustrations and difficulties.

In terms of the above discussion, healthy resolution of the individuation-separation process appears to be beneficial to both mothers and daughters, particularly in facilitating intimate connection. This seems to support the findings of Smith, Mullis, and Hill (1995) that in Western culture, the mother-daughter relationship nurtures separation and individuation, but that at the same time, adult daughters continue to maintain their relationships with their mothers while establishing their own identities. It therefore seems, as Gilligan (1993) proposed, that women's identities are defined in a context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care. Mothers and daughters in this study seemed to wish to be connected and yet they also expressed the need to be separated, but they did not want to be disconnected. Caplan (1981) suggests that it is this very ambivalence between push and pull that apparently characterises women's relationships with their mothers. Glasman (2001) further concludes that for women, identity development continues throughout their lives: negotiating the feminine ideals of nurturance and caretaking with the masculine ideals of autonomy and achievement, and between connection and individuation.

Fear of Disconnection versus Need for Connection

Although the theme of 'fear of disconnection' seems to possess the same driving force as the theme of 'need for connection' in that they should both lead to connection, these themes in fact elicit very different behaviours, leading to equally different consequences. The themes are in fact conflicting and the interaction between them actually inhibits the goal of connection. The fear of disconnection tends to evoke overly cautious and hesitant interaction. Since the relationship is desired and treasured by both mothers and daughters, it is more easily threatened and consequently somewhat fragile. Mothers and daughters apparently tiptoed around sensitive issues and consciously suppressed intense emotions in order to maintain the relationship. The need for connection on the other hand was strongly expressed by all mother and daughter pairs and yet it was thwarted by the fear of disconnection. It appeared that the stronger the need to connect, the more strongly the mother and daughter pairs were motivated by the fear of disconnection. Consequently, these mothers and daughters find it difficult to ask for connection owing to the unspoken fear of disconnection.

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Althea and **Nicola** are an extremely respectful mother and daughter pair. They constantly acknowledged and reframed each other's actions and traits in a positive light. This seemed to have served the function of maintaining their current pleasant relationship and calming their fears of becoming disconnected from one another. However, both Althea and Nicola also wanted to be closer to one another and emphasised each other's importance in their lives. Althea seemed particularly careful about not overwhelming Nicola with her need for connection. She monitored her own behaviours to make sure that she was not crowding Nicola's personal space. Nicola appeared to be much less needy of her mother and seemingly more independent. This pattern of interaction confirms Smith, Mullis and Hill's (1995) finding that while mothers report a need for intimacy, daughters report a personal need for autonomy. In discussing her interviews, Caplan (2000) reported that even when women were close to their mothers, they were reluctant to admit it, as they feared that this closeness would mean that they had not individuated or reached autonomy. Therefore Nicola may similarly be closer to her mother than she was willing to acknowledge. The tendency displayed by Althea and Nicola to rescue one another by reframing negativity positively was also found in Fingerman's (2003) study where mothers and daughters were interested in protecting the other party in the joint interview. Fingerman (2003) concluded that this was suggestive of a sense of loyalty to the relationship. By protecting one another, mothers' and daughters' fears of disconnection are lessened, but seemingly at the expense of their need for deeper connection. Althea and Nicola may therefore be suppressing their individual needs by attributing little importance to them in their relationship and rationalising possible tensions in their relationship away by seeing the latter as not arising from the relationship itself. Research has however indicated that mothers and daughters who are able to view problems as an aspect of the individual person rather than an aspect of the relationship may circumvent tensions and dissatisfaction in their relationships (Fingerman, 2003).

Although **Marie** and **Estelle** seemed to respect and acknowledge one another to an extent, there were also underlying resentments that characterised their interaction. Marie particularly felt excluded from Estelle's life because she perceived Estelle as currently not very close to her. As research has suggested, mothers feel a sense of closeness to their daughters when their daughters confided in them and relied on them for emotional support, and that mothers did not experience this as intrusive or burdensome (Fingerman, 2003). By no longer confiding in Marie, Estelle's behaviour seemed to threaten Marie's sense of closeness with her youngest daughter, thus eliciting her fear of becoming disconnected from her. This may in turn have exacerbated Marie's need to connect with Estelle. An explanation for Marie's difficulties, as

suggested by Phillips (1991) in discussing mothers' challenges in allowing their daughters to become adults, is perhaps that since Marie's identity was dependent mainly on caring for her family, she was resisting Estelle's growing independence and redefinition of herself as an adult. Lawler (2000) also found that a mother's desire for her daughter to become independent might cause tension with her need for a close relationship with her daughter. In Phillips' (1991) research, she likewise concluded that what is most stressful for mothers is the conflict between themselves and their daughters rather than the daughters' separateness as an individual. This may be the case for Marie. Owing to her ambivalence, Estelle's style of interaction with Marie could thus be characterised by both pushing Marie away and coming closer to her, which may be confusing for the latter. However, as mentioned previously, Caplan (1981) indicates that it is this very push and pull that seem to characterise a woman's relationship with her mother. Phillips (1991) points out that daughters do not wish to abandon their mothers in order to establish their own identities, but that rather they are looking for a transformation in the relationship. Nice (1992) refers to this as a renegotiation of the mother-daughter relationship. Although Estelle seemed to experience her mother's interactional style as intrusive and manipulative, and thus as distancing, as indicated by Fingerman (2003) this intrusiveness may simply be a misguided attempt by mothers to improve the relationship and lobby for connection. Both Marie and Estelle therefore appeared to interact in ways that alternated between the fear of disconnection and the need for connection, and, coupled with Estelle's search for identity and individuality, this interaction may have resulted in a complicated and possibly quite stressful relationship.

The interaction between **Mona** and **Charmaine** appeared to be characterised more appropriately by the fear of disconnection, even though mother and daughter both expressed the need for connection. It is possible that Mona's fear of becoming disconnected from Charmaine led to her denial of any indication of negativity in their relationship and that instead she attributed disagreements to personal or situational factors that were short-term and coincidental. Fingerman (2003) discovered that mothers who were able to view faults in daughters impersonally, and not as embedded in the relationship itself, were more able to protect the sense of their ties to their daughters. Although this may be true for Mona, unlike Althea and Nicola this did not seem to prevent tension and dissatisfaction in Mona and Charmaine's relationship, particularly from Charmaine's perspective. Mona's need to connect with her daughters was clear, however her fear of disconnection seemed to prevent her from opening herself up to her daughters and thus allowing for a closer relationship. As mentioned previously, Charmaine seemed to hold many grudges and resentments against her mother, and

although her need to connect with her mother was overwhelmingly strong, her anger appeared to have stood in the way of expressing her need for connection. Phillips (1991) observes that daughters can sometimes be extremely demanding of their mothers to be perfect, partly because they are afraid of their own inadequacies as women. This may apply to Charmaine and seemed to have been evident in her critical manner towards Mona as well as in her despondent attitude towards how her own life has turned out. This is consistent with research findings that resentful daughters often describe their mothers as emotionally depriving and as having poor self-esteem (Phillips, 1991). As much as she was disappointed by her mother, Charmaine was also extremely fearful of becoming disconnected from Mona, so much so that she chose to withhold her resentments and disappointments from her mother and allow the relationship to carry on in a superficially pleasant manner. As Caplan (1981) has remarked, mothers and daughters may appear close but there is often an underlying ambivalence or anger in their relationship that must be denied and suppressed because it is too painful to be acknowledged. It seemed that for Mona and Charmaine, the fear of becoming disconnected outweighed their need for deeper connection, resulting in a strained and difficult relationship.

As with the results of the study conducted by Fingerman (2003), mother and daughter relationships in this research can be characterised by processes indicative of a fear of disconnection. Rather like the participants in this study, Fingerman (2003) also noted that mothers in general reported much less dissatisfaction than daughters in both individual and joint interviews, while daughters however reported more problems in their individual interviews but minimised them in the joint interviews with their mothers. Fingerman (2003) suggests that mothers want to maintain a positive relationship with their daughters and hold on to their motherly investment in their daughters, while daughters want to protect their mothers and assist in their wish to maintain a good relationship. It seemed then that both mother and daughter therefore interact in such a way that they are rooted in their need for connection, but engage in behaviours that feed into their fear of disconnection.

Themes in the Interactional Pattern

These themes represent sub-themes that were commonly identified as present in all three of the interactional patterns, although in different ways, between mothers and daughters in this study. They refer more specifically to the behaviours and styles of interaction during the interviews. These themes did not manifest themselves throughout the participants' interviews

but emerged prominently enough in relevant areas to be identified as individual themes and to be subjected to analysis. Using again the metaphor of the musical composition, these sub-themes comprise the various accompaniments and ornaments that colour and shape the quality of the music, and although they do not play the major part, they nevertheless contribute to and support the performance of the composition. The following themes correspond with the previous meta-themes discussed and form part of the individuation-separation-connection-disconnection process.

Avoidance of Conflict

All three participating mother and daughter pairs seemed to avoid conflict in one way or another. Conflict appears to be a huge threat to mother and daughter relationships and seems to represent an irreparable crack in the intimacy shared between mothers and daughters. Strategies of conflict avoidance differed in each of the mother and daughter pairs and led to varied consequences.

In line with their respectful ways, **Althea** and **Nicola** avoided conflict in a similar, respectful and cautious manner. Rather than dwelling on the negatives, both mother and daughter evidenced the tendency to invest considerable effort in positively reframing issues that might potentially lead to conflict. This tendency seemed especially pronounced in Althea, where everything that could be perceived with a negative slant was rationalised and cognitively explained. The use of reason is characteristic of a democratic and authoritative parenting style (Lawler, 2000), which Althea seemed to exemplify. Even when Nicola mentioned certain problems she experienced with Althea, Althea hardly challenged her daughter or became defensive. A similar pattern was found in Walters' (1999) study where mothers accepted without resistance their daughters' subjectivities. Nicola also displayed similar characteristics in that she tended to rescue her mother from any possible 'mother-blaming' by minimising her disappointments and owning responsibility for the part she played in the interaction or situation. As previously mentioned, this corresponds with Fingerman's (2003) study in that mothers and daughters share a loyalty to their relationship which is evident in their tendency to protect one another in their joint interviews. There seemed to exist a strong need in Althea and Nicola to make each other feel accepted by the other. Although such an interaction may culminate in an extremely stable and consistent relationship, it might also minimise emotional intensity and lead to a relationship that could be characterised as bland, monotonous, and restricted in emotional expression. Indeed, Lawler (2000, p. 87) indicates that,

[r]eason displaces passion, reducing desire to 'feeling'; the presence of reason indicates the absence of conflict.

Althea and Nicola appeared to use constructive approaches when dealing with potential conflicts, and although avoidant, this seemed to have strengthened their relationship as well as to have facilitated mutual understanding. Consistent with research, mothers and daughters who used avoidant strategies in their communication style have reported feeling good about their relationships and about themselves (Fingerman, 2003).

Marie and **Estelle** appeared to interact in a manner that acknowledged conflict but avoided direct confrontation. They therefore wanted to connect, but sometimes interacted in ways that led to disconnection rather than connection. This desire to connect may be partly confounded by the need for individuation-separation in Estelle. Marie appeared hesitant to provoke possible conflict, but could not restrain herself from indirectly communicating her dissatisfaction; hoping Estelle would somehow receive her message and make the necessary adjustments. This conforms to results in Fingerman's (2003) study, where mothers generally experienced less tension than did daughters in their relationship, but when they did experience tension they let their daughters know in one way or another. It appeared easier for Marie to blame conflict on her daughter's behaviour and therefore to expect Estelle to change rather than for herself to take on the responsibility to alter the situation. Estelle confessed that she disliked conflict because she feared rejection. This resulted in Estelle suppressing her emotions, which may have caused discomfort and resentment. Although Estelle voiced her resentments in the individual interview, she regretted this and tried to soften her complaints and minimise her feelings in the joint interview. Literature often indicates to the considerable guilt experienced by daughters about being dutiful, being sufficiently affectionate to their mothers, and being hurtful to them (Phillips, 1991). Phillips (1991) further concludes that daughters feel guilty about abandoning their mothers and also believe that they must rescue their mothers and solve their problems before they can separate from them. This could explain some of the difficulties Estelle faces in her individuation from her mother. In this study, all three daughters apparently expressed a certain magnitude of guilt, but this emotion appeared particularly immobilising and stressful for Estelle. For mothers as well as daughters, the avoidance of conflict may therefore be an attempt to minimise one's own guilt. Marie and Estelle appeared to be very aware of one another's style of conflict management, and this seemed to have resulted in both mother and daughter possessing quite pessimistic outlooks on

the possibility of resolving issues. According to Walters (1999), closeness and conflict between mothers and daughters are restricted by the available discourses that can be drawn upon when talking about the mother-daughter relationship. This may be the case for Marie and Estelle, who seemed to be trapped within power and gender issues such as the all-pervasive and perfect mother, and the good and feminine daughter, who possess no language for expressing themselves, leading to unwillingness in both mother and daughter to engage in conversation. Fingerman's (2003) research also apparently correlates with the pattern observed in Marie and Estelle; that of daughters avoiding expression of their sentiments to their mothers, and although they speak more openly than their mothers, they also seem to experience more tension than they allow themselves to acknowledge when discussing issues in the presence of their mothers. It has been postulated by Phillips (1991) that conflict between mothers and daughters enables them to define their boundaries more clearly, as well as to learn more about themselves as individuals. Particularly for a daughter, this process allows her to cast off her childhood and understand how she herself thinks and feels (Phillips, 1991). This seems to correspond with Estelle's current process where she is attempting to establish her emerging adult identity.

Both **Mona** and **Charmaine** also avoided conflict in their relationship, albeit in different ways. Although researchers have come to expect mothers and daughters to engage in both constructive and passive approaches to difficulties, and for mothers to be particularly passive and appeasing in handling conflict (Fingerman, 2003), this finding did not appear to apply to Mona and Charmaine. In fact, their interaction pattern seemed to maintain a surface connection but at the same time exacerbated the underlying disconnection in their relationship. Rather like Estelle, Mona also openly admitted to her dislike and fear of conflict and to the fact that she would do almost anything to avoid it. However unlike Estelle, who was apparently attempting to take greater ownership of her feelings and trying to find more congruent ways to express them, Mona seemed to be using her fear of conflict as an excuse to relinquish her responsibility in conflict-inducing situations. Mona also employed denial as a defence or coping mechanism and suggested that her relationship with her daughters was conflict-free. Some studies have found that mothers who hesitated to discuss problems rated their relationships more highly and felt better about themselves, and their daughters also rated their relationships more positively (Fingerman, 2003). It seemed that while Mona did in fact rate her relationship with Charmaine quite highly, Charmaine did not share the same sentiments. Perhaps since Mona did acknowledge certain possible conflicts she was not hesitant about possible conflict, but instead chose to be naïve and ignorant, because she

quickly disregarded the matter as resolved or trivial. Charmaine appeared to handle conflict in a confusing and contradictory manner. Although she raised many disappointments and resentments towards Mona, she could not discuss them with her mother. Fingerman (2003) has observed that problems viewed as irresolvable are less likely to be brought into the open, and it is possible that Charmaine faces a similar dilemma. Mona and Charmaine appeared to interact in a way that could be described as incongruent and superficial, which kept underlying conflicts at bay even though both appeared to be aware, to some extent, that these disagreements exist. In their intense fear of becoming disconnected completely, they remain only partially connected to but still emotionally disconnected from one another.

It seems therefore that by avoiding conflict, the mothers and daughters in this study suppressed their anger and aggression. Since anger is a natural human emotion yet is often perceived as 'unfeminine', negative, and not part of the feminine discourse, women who express it are often disapproved of and seen as 'bad' (deSousa, cited in Caplan, 1981). Hence it may be extremely difficult for mothers and daughters to express negative emotions such as anger, aggression, or competition without disconfirming themselves, one another, and their relationship. Avoidance of conflict is also likely to be a coping mechanism that helps to maintain a certain level of homeostasis in the relationship. Although rooted in the need for connection because of the fear of disconnection, avoidance of conflict may inhibit deeper levels of connection and thus the growth of the relationship.

Similarities versus Differences

As was reported in Glasman's (2000) research, mothers apparently exert a pervasive influence on daughters' self-development, manifested in whether the daughters wanted to be similar to or different from their mothers. Each mother and daughter pair in this research indicated that they were extremely similar in some ways and yet completely different in other ways. Probably it was important to acknowledge their differences from as well as similarities with one another in order to establish a stable sense of self and to journey successfully through the individuation-separation process that would ultimately end in interdependence and connection.

Althea and **Nicola** agreed that they were generally very alike in their mannerisms and interactional style with people, which corresponds with the findings by Peterson and Roberts

(2003) who noted that mothers and daughters share similar narrative styles. Both Althea and Nicola appeared to be comfortable with, and in fact seemed to cherish, their similarities. Welsh and Stewart (cited in McCarter, 1999) observed that daughters who perceived a similarity between themselves and their mothers also felt a positive regard for their mothers. Althea and Nicola also noticed similarities in their motherhood. Nicola, having become a mother herself, recognised Althea's parenting styles in herself, and indicated that she sees herself becoming the mother Althea was to her. This is consistent with Chodorow's theory that motherhood reproduces itself (Hyde, 1991). In terms of differences, Althea and Nicola acknowledged and accepted them good-naturedly, and always managed to see the good in one another's uniqueness. The main difference between Althea and Nicola appeared to be in terms of self-esteem; where Nicola is more assertive and confident, Althea is more accommodating and passive. It was interesting that both mother and daughter perceived Althea as having only passed on only positive traits to Nicola. Where Althea was perceived to be lacking, such as in confidence and money-sense, Nicola was seen to have acquired these traits somehow on her own or from her father. Glasman (2001) also reported that many daughters consciously perceive themselves to be more similar to their fathers, but that in reality, they are often more like their mothers than they are comfortable in acknowledging. This may be applicable to some extent in Nicola's case although she appeared comfortable with the similarities she shared with Althea. According to Caplan (1981), mothers' similarities to daughters comprise potential sources of conflict, because mothers represent for daughters the limits of what society allows women to become in terms of behaviours and aspirations. This point however did not appear to be applicable to Althea and Nicola, or rather they seemed to have overcome it by perceiving Althea as having transmitted only positive traits to Nicola. They did not seem to feel restricted by society's limitations and if they were aware of these limitations, it did not seem to bother them. It is possible that this mother and daughter pair possess a clear sense of self and are well individuated.

Marie and **Estelle** exhibited slightly different perceptions of the ways in which they were alike and different. Similar to Althea and Nicola, Marie acknowledged similarities between herself and Estelle, but only those that were positive, such as being domestically capable and independent. It may be particularly difficult for mothers to perceive similarities between themselves and their daughters because such recognition suggests an element of maternal culpability, especially if the traits are perceived negatively (Lawler, 2000). According to Marie, Estelle's negative traits such as bottling up her emotions, were more similar to those of her husband than to herself. Estelle, on the other hand, saw her positive traits as her own, and

unlike Nicola, identified with Marie mostly in terms of negative qualities. Estelle felt that she has 'inherited' her mother's negative ways of communication such as indirectness and spitefulness, but possesses none of her mother's confidence or sense of authority. Estelle caught herself reacting to her boyfriend in ways very similar to how her mother reacts to her father, and this troubled her. Such awareness in heterosexual relationships was also noted in Glasman's (2001) study. Estelle did however acknowledge that she seemed to be more caring and patient than her mother was and hoped to be a different mother herself; one who would be more approachable and understanding. Both mother and daughter appeared to be similar in that they tried to suppress much underlying resentment and disappointment, since they find them difficult to voice, but nevertheless still become transparent in their interaction. Therefore in their attempts to individuate and separate from each other, Marie and Estelle seemed to be engaged in a pattern of denying the other while affirming the self. It appeared that both Marie and Estelle would like each other to change and be different and have therefore not accepted their individual similarities and differences in each other as well as in themselves. Caplan (1981) points out that hostility owing to similarities often occur in mothers and daughters, and this seemed to apply to Marie and Estelle. Estelle may be particularly threatened by her similarities to Marie because she desires her own identity. It is rare for women to present themselves as determined by their mothers' mothering, but recognition and understanding of how mothers have impacted on them enables daughters to escape the patterns entrenched in childhood (Lawler, 2000). Marie possibly felt rejected by Estelle's repudiation and desperately wanted Estelle to affirm her by becoming more like her. This was confirmed in De Kanter's (1993) study where mothers held onto their daughters in their desperate attempts to maintain connection, thereby not allowing them to separate and individuate.

Mona and **Charmaine** appeared to be completely different individuals: Mona is seemingly happy and content; feeling that life could not be better, while Charmaine is bitter and pessimistic; feeling that life has wronged her and robbed her of a fair chance. In terms of similarities and differences, both mother and daughter at the very least acknowledged that they were the most similar out of all three daughters in terms of temperament and personality. Mona appeared to be happy to share similarities with Charmaine and identified with her easily, especially because Charmaine seemed to be repeating Mona's life story. Charmaine however seemed to be struggling between whether to completely identify with or repudiate her mother. She had difficulty acknowledging that her ways were similar to those of her mother and constantly emphasised that she would make different decisions if she were in her mother's position. According to Fischer (1991), such negation is common amongst educated

daughters: defining part of their identity by repudiating their mothers' identity. However, it seemed almost impossible for Charmaine not to identify with Mona or feel trapped in having to be similar to her simply owing to their strikingly similar life events. This has perhaps led Charmaine to feel trapped and doomed to live out her mother's life. Lawler (2000, p. 62) suggests that,

> [t]o see parts of the mother reproduced in the self can be difficult for women, since this reproduction suggests an inheritance which bypasses consciousness.

It is possible that Charmaine only perceived herself as what Lawler (2000, p. 58) mentions as the '*inherited self*'; meaning that she felt there is, through the tie with her mother, a fixity to herself that seemed unalterable. Charmaine therefore remains disempowered and unable to take responsibility for herself. She could not acknowledge the impact her own choices may have had independently of Mona, and therefore cannot experience a life of her own free will. A study by Smith, Mullis and Hill (1995) showed that more similarities existed than differences between mothers and daughters, and explained this as an indication of how mothers reproduce themselves in the process of interaction with and socialization of their daughters. In Mona's attempts to reproduce herself in Charmaine, she may in effect have denied Charmaine's individuality and separateness. This may have been frustrating for Charmaine who wanted to be connected and close to Mona, but was at the same time, threatened by over-identification with her.

Mothers in this study were apparently more comfortable with being similar to rather than being different from their daughters. However, daughters seemed to perceive this matter in the opposite way in that they were much more excited about being different from rather than similar to their mothers. This may be explained by society's paradoxical demands on mothers, which are impossible for mothers to achieve, and result in devaluing and pathologising anything associated with mother (Caplan, 2000). The way in which mothers and daughters communicate about these similarities and differences, and in which they react towards one another's individual traits seemed to be vital for both mother and daughter in maintaining an integrated and individuated sense of self. Although Lawler (2000) observed that traits which were perceived as 'negative' were more often understood as passing down from the mother to the self, or from the self to the daughter, this was not true for all three mother and daughter pairs in the present study. The mothers in the study only acknowledged passing on positive traits while only two of the daughters acknowledged possessing some of their mothers'

negative traits. This may be related to defence and coping mechanisms in that both mother and daughter were protecting their own sense of self as well as their individual perceptions of their relationship.

Need for Understanding and Acknowledgement

The mothers and daughters in the study seemed to express specific needs that they would like to be met by one another. Mothers appeared to want their daughters to show understanding for their life circumstances, choices and decisions, and also to forgive them for any possible mistakes they might have made in their role as mothers. Daughters on the other hand seemed to desire acknowledgement from their mothers in that they wanted to be seen as individuals and to be affirmed in their identity. There also appeared to be a need in daughters for mothers to acknowledge their inadequacies and the manner in which these inadequacies may have impacted on them as daughters. Mothers wanted to maintain their good relationship with their daughters by demonstrations of their 'good' mothering while daughters wanted to demonstrate their independence by presenting themselves as having individuated from their mothers (Walters, 1999). In essence, mothers and daughters wanted to be affirmed and loved for who they are, flaws and all, and this appeared to originate from the need for, as well as to facilitate the move towards, more intimate connection.

Although **Althea** and **Nicola** were generally happy with one another and with their relationship, upon deeper inward reflections, certain insecurities and disappointments were allowed to surface and became available for discussion. Althea was apparently insecure in certain aspects of her experience of her relationship with Nicola and when she allowed herself to acknowledge these uncertainties, she was able to verbalise to Nicola how emotionally dependent she was on her daughter. It seemed important to Althea that Nicola understood her fear and reluctance to face the possibility of living life without Nicola and her family, and that she wished to follow them if they were to relocate or emigrate. Furthermore, Althea also appeared to place much importance on Nicola showing an understanding and acceptance of her life choices and wanted Nicola to understand that being a housewife for 16 years was for her a personal choice rather than a sacrifice. Lawler (2000) suggests that this is one way in which women negotiate the tension between their own desires and those of their children, and between their belief in the ideal, autonomous self and their lack of autonomy as mothers; by reframing their life as a personal choice. Nicola expressed the fact that, although she felt

generally happy and content towards her mother and her childhood, she also wanted Althea to acknowledge that there were mistakes and inadequacies that have impacted on her, such as not pushing her to do sports and not having enough time to give her piano lessons. It seemed that although Nicola understood, or at least tried to understand, Althea's behaviour, it was nevertheless important for Nicola that Althea acknowledged her mistakes and, in a way, apologised for these failings as a mother. This experience of allowing issues to surface may actually have facilitated greater connection and intimacy between mother and daughter. From Althea and Nicola's interaction, it could be concluded that Nicola has reached what Blenkner (cited in Fingerman, 1997, p. 58) called '*filial maturity*' in that she understood Althea's humanity and womanhood, which may have facilitated a shift in the understanding of herself as well as of Althea in their relationship. Another study by Fingerman (2003) indicated that tensions between mothers and daughters decrease as daughters increasingly see their parents as individuals; while daughters in their 20s continue to perceive their parents as parental figures and as different from themselves, daughters in their 30s are aware that their mothers are complex individuals with weaknesses. Althea and Nicola's relationship seemed also to have corresponded with this study.

Unlike Althea and Nicola who were generally content with one another as they were, **Marie's** needs for understanding and **Estelle's** need for acknowledgement seemed to extend to a need for a change in the behaviour of each other. Marie and Estelle's current interaction did not appear to affirm either of them but seemed rather to disconfirm and possibly reject them. Marie appeared to experience difficulty acknowledging her inadequacies as a mother and although she raised certain behaviours where she may have been perceived in a negative manner, she did not want to entertain the possibility that these behaviours might have had certain adverse impacts on Estelle or her other daughters. It seemed that, albeit without explaining this, Marie wanted Estelle to display an understanding of her world and her limitations, and not to blame or judge her for her choices as a mother. It would possibly mean a lot to Marie if Estelle could show that she understood why Marie had to give up her dreams, why she was so strict, and why she felt so rejected by and therefore angry towards Estelle. Estelle seemed to desperately need confirmation of herself as an individual and was therefore looking for acceptance and affirmation from her mother. Like Althea and Nicola, Marie is seeking for understanding from Estelle while Estelle is hoping for acknowledgement from Marie. By understanding the social context within which their mothers exist as women, daughters are also enabled to attain subjectivity and individuality (De Kanter, 1993). Estelle's understanding of Marie may also assist in her becoming individuated since De Kanter (1993)

suggests that by understanding that mothers are also just women, daughters could become less resentful of the power-relations in which motherhood is organised, and that mothers are also subject to the same fears and insecurities as their own. Similarly, by acknowledging Estelle as a grown woman and no longer a child, Marie would then be able to adjust how she related and interacted with Estelle, hopefully leading to a more connected and integrated relationship. Therefore, as much as parents must 'let go' of their children when they reach maturity, children must also engage in a similar process whereby they 'let go' of their parents by appreciating that they are fallible characters who equipped their children as best they could, given the limitations of their environment and upbringing (Phillips, 1991). This letting go will enable daughters to grow emotionally and to individuate/separate from their mothers.

Mona and **Charmaine** also appeared to have a strong need for understanding and acknowledgment, seemingly stronger than that of Marie and Estelle, and yet neither mother nor daughter was willing to admit to their vulnerabilities. This resistance and maintaining of defences may limit the growth in this mother and daughter pair, and steer them away from individuation-separation and connection, and towards disconnection. Mona denied the existence of any problems and wished to believe that everything was fine. Somewhat like Marie, even though Mona was aware of certain inadequacies in herself as a mother, she expected understanding from her daughters for her possible mistakes and life choices, and did not even express a need for forgiveness. Perhaps if Mona did not assume that Charmaine already understood her, she would be overwhelmed by the guilt of having to face the true consequences of her divorce for her daughters. Feminist perspectives on motherhood indicate that the position of motherhood renders autonomy impossible from within and implies the sacrifice of personhood (Lawler, 2000). This seems to be contradictory to Mona's process where she appeared to have rejected motherhood and instead embraced personhood and autonomy. This might also explain the strong resentment felt by Charmaine because she may have felt rejected by Mona. Perhaps in her attempt to connect with Mona, Charmaine has resigned herself to repeating her mother's life story and thereby identifying with her. However, not unlike Estelle, Charmaine also appeared to exhibit an underlying desire to be different from Mona and for Mona to acknowledge her as unique and strong. Like the other daughters in the study, Charmaine also desperately wanted Mona to admit her mistakes, such as not allowing her and her elder sister to maintain contact with their father, and being too strict and unreasonable in their childhood. However, as much as Charmaine needs acknowledgement and affirmation from Mona, she could not allow herself to ask for it and instead blamed Mona for not offering it. Phillips (1991) points out that it is not unusual for

daughters to blame their mothers for their lack of assertiveness. It is possible that, only when these flaws and inadequacies become acknowledged and their impact on Charmaine is recognised, will Charmaine be able to let go of the past and move on with her future. For Mona and Charmaine, the desires for understanding and acknowledgement have become unspoken expectations. This lack of communication has possibly caused misunderstanding and tension in the relationship, resulting in neither understanding nor acknowledgement, thereby exacerbating their disconnection.

In every mother and daughter pair in this study, similar patterns were detected where mothers desired understanding and forgiveness while daughters wished for acknowledgement and recognition. Mothers tended to assume total responsibility for their maternal influence, and not many mothers can engage in the task of mothering as if it did not matter. The existence of other factors that shape a child's self provides mothers with little comfort in terms of the amount of influence they attribute to themselves (Lawler, 2000). Given the societal pressures on mothers to be 'good enough' and even perfect, mothers almost always fall short of expectations and as a result often carry with them intense and often-suppressed guilt. It follows then that it may be important for daughters to recognise the societal expectations of motherhood and to lower the pressure they place on their mothers to live up to these expectations. This will enable daughters to offer their mothers understanding and compassion. For daughters, especially those going through the transitional period of identity formation, it may be vital for mothers to offer support in affirming the person whom their daughters are trying to become and to acknowledge them as unique and separate individuals. This combined effort by mothers and daughters could possibly facilitate their necessary quest for individuation-separation as well as connection.

Power in the Relationship

Mothers display power in their parental status in terms of possessing authority and demanding respect and compliance. They further possess tremendous power in that they are usually primary caregivers who provide unconditional acceptance, love and a sense of belonging. Daughters have the power afforded to them by society in terms of their legal right to adequate parenting as well as by the greater societal discourses that prescribe 'good-enough' mothering. Society's expectations of mothers therefore allow daughters to criticise their mothers' behaviour. These two contradictory sources of power were identified in all the

mother and daughters pairs in this study and were consistently utilised in the relationship to achieve individuation-separation as well as to lobby for connection.

In the two mother and daughter pairs who came together for the joint interview, the daughters seemed to exercise their power by taking the initiative in the interview. Both Nicola and Estelle had made a list of issues they wanted to discuss and clarify, while their mothers, Althea and Marie, accepted, without objections, their daughters' attempts to justify their dissatisfactions and explain the complaints they had raised in their individual interviews. This could be indicative of how, in order to achieve an egalitarian mother-daughter relationship and maintain connection, mothers suppress their own power (Walkerdine & Lucey, cited in Walters, 1999). Lawler (2000) indicates that society's expectations of mothers and therefore daughters' demands can silence mothers, because they are regarded as wholly responsible for problems in their daughters' lives. Daughters' power therefore seemed to drive individuation-separation. Mothers however, are not powerless. Although Nicola and Estelle overtly seemed to exercise the power in the joint interviews, their efforts were mainly focused on softening their complaints and minimising their disappointments. The daughters seemed to experience considerable guilt in having attributed blame to their mothers. Mothers therefore appeared to display tremendous power in inducing guilt in their daughters and by means of their silence, possibly implying feelings of hurt and rejection. Mothers can retaliate by threatening to withdraw their love and reject their daughters, thus forcing daughters to lobby for greater closeness. Mothers' power therefore appeared to drive towards connection. Whether society's expectations or mothers' acceptance is more powerful will most likely depend on the mother and daughter pair and the context within which they find themselves. For **Althea** and **Nicola**, it seemed that mutual acceptance is ultimately more important to them than whether Althea met society's (and thus Nicola's) expectations as a mother.

For **Estelle**, it seemed that she experiences more difficulty in balancing her need for individuation-separation with her fear of disconnection. **Marie** is also more assertive than Althea and her power became apparent when she reprimanded Estelle harshly and often sarcastically in the interview. Ogle and Damhorst (2003) discuss how mothers and daughters constantly exert mutual influence on one another's sense of self, and add that mothers consciously try to influence their daughters, since they are aware of their power and influence. Although Marie became somewhat defensive when challenged and criticised, she eventually and, seemingly reluctantly, bowed down to maternal guilt and took some responsibility for her inadequacies as a mother. Singer (cited in Lawler, 2000) makes mention of the fact that,

given the attributes society places on mothers, mothers cannot pass on self-confidence to their children, since their own wishes and activities are perceived negatively and as selfish; therefore mothers must act as if they have no power, otherwise they will damage their children's self-confidence. It is possible that this was partly Marie's motivation in relinquishing her power. It seemed that Marie and Estelle are constantly engaged in a power struggle with both mother and daughter stubbornly refusing to take a subordinate position. This may represent a struggle for subjectivity as suggested by Juhasz (2000); a struggle for individual understanding and acknowledgement; for separation and connection.

Even though **Mona** and **Charmaine** did not manage to come together for a joint interview, their power relationship was nevertheless noted in their individual interviews. For Mona, she described the relationship as one in which power was shared and could be characterised by equality. However, Charmaine's strong resentments towards Mona has seemingly resulted in her handing over complete power and responsibility to Mona so as to make Charmaine's life successful and happy. Since society hands mothers the responsibility of ensuring that their daughters achieve, regardless of the existing social inequalities, daughters who fail to achieve are easily perceived as being the fault of their mothers' inadequacy (Lawler, 2000). Charmaine seemed to have subscribed to this view. Instead of using her power to empower herself and escape from her 'inherited fate', she seemed to have totally externalised or projected her power onto Mona and, in the process, disempowered herself. Lawler (2000) discusses how daughters can sometimes be overwhelmed by the opposing power of their mothers to reject and induce guilt as well as by their own power to demand and also induce guilt. Charmaine seemed to have succumbed to both and did not challenge either source of power, resulting in bitterness and resentment toward Mona as well as herself. Perhaps, as opposed to Lawler's (2000) recommendations that mothers should not show their self-confidence, Mona has made the mistake of strongly displaying hers. This may have 'damaged' Charmaine's self-confidence in that Mona was constantly more powerful and dominant. Furthermore, Mona's insistence on viewing the relationship as non-problematic was so strong that all her daughters interacted with her in such a way so as to make her perceptions come true. Mona appeared to have engaged in everything that a 'good' mother should not have done such as pursuing her own successful career and protecting her own interests. According to Lawler (2000), such behaviour would make mothers insensitive and selfish in society's eyes. Mona appeared to have utilised her power to insist on the illusion of connection, while Charmaine seemed to have relinquished her power, thereby sacrificing her need for individuation-separation.

As much as daughters attempt to wield their power and dictate their relationship, their mothers' powerful position cannot be underestimated. As Caplan (2000) found in her study, the influence of mothers on daughters appears to continue throughout life, even when daughters have fully grown children of their own. However, daughters also exercise tremendous power because the power of motherhood is dictated by and constrained in patriarchal societal expectations, and as daughters become aware of these expectations, they in turn gain the power to, dictate to their mothers how they should be as mothers (MacCullum-Whitcomb, 2000). The position of power seems to shift within mother and daughter relationships and to operate in complex ways that maintain the stability of the relationship.

It is interesting to note that all three participating mothers in this study did not display 'close' relationships with their own mothers. Neither Althea nor Marie were geographically close to their mothers nor kept in regular contact since their marriage, and Mona lost her biological mother as a child and was also distant from her stepmother. This may mean that none of the mothers have felt the direct pervasiveness of their own mothers in their lives and have missed out on an important connection and experience with their mothers. This may also have influenced how these mothers related to their daughters, such as being more dependent on their daughters, or lacking the knowledge of how to relate to their daughters in diverse ways and deal with power struggles.

Indirect versus Open Communication Styles

Indirect communication was evident, although to various degrees, in all three of the mother and daughter pairs interviewed in this study. There appeared to be entrenched patterns of interaction in which mothers and daughters seemed to engage without conscious awareness. These interaction patterns may have reinforced the indirect communication styles that both mother and daughter have come to accept. The two mother and daughter pairs who were able to come together for the joint interview were able to shift their communication style to include more direct and open expression of their thoughts and feelings in the interview. Although indirect communication perhaps resulted froom the fear of disconnection, it seemed that a more open and direct communication style improved, rather than threatened, the mother-daughter relationships and enhanced their connection to one another. However, during

the joint interviews, these mothers and daughters were apparently less reactive and rarely rejected comments made by the other. This behaviour was also reported in Fingerman's (2003) study and may have contributed to the apparent shift in communication pattern.

Althea and **Nicola** appeared to interact in a way that minimised possible problems and deffused tensions. Problems were therefore not directly addressed but indirectly dealt with, through 'playful' teasing by Althea and abrupt but controlled outbursts by Nicola. For example, Althea has never directly confronted Nicola about her assertiveness, but instead chose to bring it to Nicola's attention by means of humour. Fingerman (2003) argued that parents are less likely to become upset with their children, as they perceive more compatibility with their children than their children do with them. Furthermore, parents tend to behave in ways that strengthen the relationship when they become upset, which is what Althea appeared to have been trying to achieve. Althea's indirect communication therefore apparently represented an attempt to maintain and even enhance connection with Nicola. Nicola seemed more comfortable speaking about some of her disappointments toward Althea on her own than when she was with Althea. As mentioned previously, such behaviour is to be expected and was also supported by Fingerman's (2003) research and interpreted as exerting a positive impact on the relationship because it is the daughters' way of protecting their mothers. Therefore, in trying to maintain her connection with her mother, Nicola may have sacrificed her need to express her feelings. During the joint interview, as Althea and Nicola became more comfortable with the level of honesty in the conversation as well as with the interviewer's facilitation, they seemed more able to talk openly about their style of communication. Mother and daughter were able to engage in what Fingerman (2003) would deem as constructive communication, where both listened to the other, asked questions, accepted one another's limitations, and spoke about their feelings. O'Reilly and Abbey (2000) point out that narration in itself is a transgressive act and therefore it is possible that by speaking about their relationship Althea and Nicola were allowed to give expression and language to the processes in their relationship, thus enabling them to be brought into consciousness and be acted upon.

Over the past few years, **Marie** and **Estelle's** interaction patterns have seemingly become so familiar and entrenched that they appeared to have become masters in indirect communication. By engaging in such communication, mother and daughter wished to hold on to their connection yet at the same time exert their individuality and separateness. Marie appeared especially skilled at getting her messages across without expressing them clearly or

directly. Marie herself admitted to this and called this way of communicating 'dropping pennies'. Although this was not the preferred style of communication for Marie, she seemed to have felt that she had no other choice. As Lawler (2000) indicates, mothers of daughters face many contradictions in that they are caught in the tension between guiding and advising, and letting their daughters be themselves. This may explain Marie's indirect and contradictory communication. It seemed that Estelle has not been satisfied with the manner in which her mother communicated with her and was actually often hurt by it. Although Estelle has attempted to be more direct in her communication with Marie, Marie has not always reacted well to this. Mother and daughter therefore appeared to be engaged in a passive aggressive interaction where both parties were aware of tensions and resentments and of how their behaviours upset each other, but were also both stubborn and refused to compromise. According to Fingerman (2003), such interaction would be characterised as destructive behaviour as it involved communication that is hurtful to another and hinders resolution of difficulties. Fingerman (2003) would also categorise it as passive since it involved non-explicit cues that are idiomatic and unique to that relationship. As discussed previously, it is possible that the manner in which closeness and conflict between mothers and daughters are expressed and spoken about are restricted by the discourses that are available for women to draw on (Walters, 1999). The limitations posed by these discourses, such as that women are nurturing in nature and do not show anger, may contribute to Marie and Estelle's difficulties in communication as they perhaps lack the appropriate language to talk about their relationship and to deconstruct discourses that restrict their relationship. The joint interview seemed to have provided both Marie and Estelle with a safe space to voice their resentments and pain. As Caplan (1989) proposed, for some women reading and thinking may feel like sufficient preparation for talking to their mothers directly. Perhaps reading the individual summaries and taking a week or two to ponder over them had a similar result for Marie and Estelle. Mother and daughter both invited each other to open up, offering support, understanding, compromise, and a sense of security. Despite the possible lack of appropriate expression and the constraints of available discourses, it appeared that Marie and Estelle were able to use the discourses available to them to achieve some mutual agreement about the meanings of their relationship to each other. It is not unlikely that Marie's and Estelle's needs for connection were mobilised in the joint interview and shifted their previous indirect communication style, that could have led to disconnection rather than individuation-separation and connection.

Mona and **Charmaine** were not able to come together for the last interview, and in the process, may have denied themselves the opportunity to discuss their entrenched and possibly dysfunctional communication patterns. Mona's indirect style of communication can be characterised by denial and avoidance, where she refused to contemplate the possibility of problems in her relationship with Charmaine. Charmaine was extremely critical of Mona and seemed to harbour much resentment and disappointment for her mother, but could not imagine ever making these issues known to Mona. As previously mentioned, a daughter's rejection of her mother is often a rejection of the female role (Nice, 1992). This rejection may be difficult for daughters to voice since it would imply a rejection of the mother as well as of herself. Although Freud (cited in Gershenson, 2000) mentions that daughters must repress their resentment toward their mothers and identify with their femininity in order to acquire a man like their fathers, this may not be as simple for Charmaine since her father was rejected and cast out of the family. Although their relationship continues, it might be experienced as falsely strained for Charmaine and ignorantly smooth for Mona. Both mother and daughter seemed to perceive their relationship as extremely fragile and brittle, and to feel that it might crumble under any pressure. Caplan (1989, p. 161) indicated that,

> [i]mproving a mother-daughter relationship requires the efforts of both mother and daughter.

Therefore, Mona's and Charmaine's reluctance to come together for the joint interview could be interpreted as a lack of effort from both sides, which may be an indication of their fear and hesitation about the possibility of improving their relationship. It may further be evidence of their possible disconnection. It is clear however, that for any shift or improvement to occur, both Mona and Charmaine need to show willingness as well as courage to experience their relationship differently and more fully.

It is likely that indirect communication exists in most mother and daughter relationships. This may occur because the relationship is treasured but at the same time resented, which causes ambivalence in mothers and daughters, and leaves them confused in terms of how to interact with each other honestly without hurting the other. Indirect communication patterns also seem to play a role in maintaining a balance in these relationships and serve the function of keeping serious and possibly irreconcilable differences at bay. However, it appears that with therapeutic guidance and containment, mothers and daughters could be guided beyond their indirectness and toward congruence and higher levels of honesty. McNab and Kavner (2001),

using psychodynamic and systemic approaches in their psychotherapy with mother and daughter pairs who were in crisis, apparently achieved similar results: moving mothers and daughters towards transparency regarding shame, guilt and anger, and towards assuming responsibility. When the environment and atmosphere is experienced as safe, the relationship may be less threatened, therefore allowing tensions to surface without a sense of impending doom, and permitting the relationship to move towards individuation-separation as well as interdependence and connection. Nevertheless, this process cannot be forced if mothers and daughters are unwilling, as was the case with Mona and Charmaine.

Conclusion

It is quite evident from the above analysis of only three mother and daughter pairs, that the mother-daughter relationship is a complex one influenced by various internal psychological and external situational factors. The main difficulty and challenge in the mother and daughter relationship appears to be that of maintaining the balance between individuation-separation and connection, and protecting it against disconnection. The themes identified in this chapter all originate from attempts either to separate or individuate or to connect or relate, and highlight the ambivalence that seems inherent in the mother-daughter relationship. The discussion further illuminates the strength these women have shown in struggling through the ambivalence and remaining connected in one way or another.

The meta-themes that were prominent throughout the three mother-daughter relationships in this study comprised the interdependence of individuation-separation and connection, and fear of disconnection versus need for connection. Again the researcher wishes to emphasise that it is through individuation and psychological separation that mothers and daughters can connect meaningfully, and that successful individuation-separation needs to take place from a basis of strong connection. Thus the process of individuation-separation is circular rather than linear; one that emphasises both/and rather than either/or. Individuation does not imply disconnection, but is a necessary process towards connection. However, individuation can lead to disconnection if not worked through satisfactorily and successfully, and may result in resentment and unresolved conflict. It appears that once a mother and daughter interact in ways that move outside the circular process of individuation-separation and connection, the result is likely to be that of disconnection.

The sub-themes common to all three of the mother and daughter pairs in this study are consistent with and form part of the two meta-themes previously mentioned. These sub-themes relate to patterns of interaction and feed into the three processes mentioned above, those of individuation-separation, connection, or disconnection. The patterns of interaction identified as impacting on the mother-daughter relationships included a tendency to avoid conflict, recognising differences and similarities, the need for understanding and acknowledgement, how power operates in the relationship, and effective and ineffective communication styles.

Several themes have therefore been identified in this chapter that characterised the relationships of the participating mother and daughter pairs. It must be noted that these themes are a result of in-depth analysis through the researcher's lens, and that different observers would possibly identify different themes. In addition, although the themes are characteristic of mother-daughter relationships, they are interwoven uniquely in different mother and daughter pairs in the study. Therefore even if similar themes were identified in another mother and daughter pair, they will nonetheless form their own distinct pattern.

Chapter 8

The Role of the Researcher and Her Relationship with the Participants

Introduction

This chapter considers the role of the researcher and clarifies the processes involved in her relationship with the participating mother and daughter pairs.

Due to the nature of the study, being process-oriented, the researcher engaged in the dual role of both interviewer or researcher and therapist or facilitator. The activities and skills involved in these two complementary as well as sometimes conflicting roles will be discussed.

The participants' experiences of their participation in the research are also sketched and a discussion is provided to analyse the value of the research process in enhancing the participants' experiences and perceptions of their mother-daughter relationships.

Some unhelpful processes, as identified by the researcher, are also explored.

The Interviewer

As the interviewer, I focused on discovering as much information as possible about the participants' relationships with their mothers/daughters and on trying to understand how they experienced and perceived their mother-daughter relationship. The main activities and skills required in this role included listening and reflecting, clarifying and summarising, containing and facilitating a safe space, and providing ending and closure.

Listening and Reflecting

The most important and fundamental role that the researcher played in the interviews was that of an interested listener. Listening and attending is defined as the ability of interviewers to capture and understand what the participants are communicating, in which interviewers can be '*with*' their participants both physically and psychologically (Egan, cited in Van Dyk, 2001). The importance of intense listening is also discussed by Rubin and Rubin (1995). Listening without interrupting enabled the participants to speak freely without fear of judgment or reprisal. After having understood what the participants had relayed, it was important for the researcher to reflect her understanding to the participant/s. This reassured the participant as well as the researcher that the former's meanings were clear and had not been misinterpreted or misunderstood.

In addition, reflections often led participants to elaborate on the topic or even recount another relevant issue connected to the previous topic. Listening and reflecting were particularly important in the individual interviews in helping the participant as well as the researcher to understand what the participants were trying to communicate. Teyber (1997) argues that therapists must be able to enter into their clients' subjective experience or worldview by having the cognitive flexibility to decentre. This also applies to interviewers and their participants.

Clarifying and Summarising

Another important role of the researcher during the interviews encompassed that of clarifying and summarising what participants had recounted. This was particularly important in the joint interviews, where the researcher clarified to participants what the other party was trying to say, at the same time checking with the conversing party that the message was as it was intended to be. This improves communication and real understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This was especially critical when either mother or daughter were finding it difficult to get their messages across and were fumbling for words. The researcher would assist with words and phrases, thus clarifying the meaning of the message.

Summarising also played an important role in the joint interviews. The researcher, particularly after a lengthy and possibly confusing explanation or discussion by the participant/s, would summarise the key points of the discussion so that the main message of the conversation was

not lost and that participants remained 'on the same page' in terms of arriving at the same understanding. Summarising is particularly useful when the interview seems to be going nowhere or when the participants become stuck (Van Dyk, 2001). By the researcher showing the participants that she had a clear understanding of each of them as individuals and of their relationship together, the participant/s felt more comfortable in sharing, which enabled them to trust the researcher with their processes.

Containment and Providing a Safe Space

By the researcher listening, reflecting, clarifying, and summarising, the participants felt understood and heard, which put them more at ease with the researcher and opened them up to share more fully. An environment was created in which the participants believed they would not be misunderstood and that their messages and meanings would always be reflected back to them, clarified, or summarised, thereby allowing them to correct any misunderstandings. Showing empathy is extremely important in that it indicates to the participants that they will not be judged or perceived negatively, but that the researcher desires to try and really understand them (Van Dyk, 2001). Being able to relax and converse without fear or with less apprehension, the participants were contained in their anxiety and a safe space was provided in which to explore sensitive issues.

Other factors that contributed to providing containment and a safe space were the researcher's gentle tone of voice as well as her non-threatening manner of interacting with the participants. It was important for the researcher not only to interact and react to participants in a way that was non-judgmental and non-critical, but also in a manner that showed acceptance and compassion. Rubin and Rubin (1995) indicated that a researcher's empathy, humour and sensitivity are important during qualitative interviews. Containment and the provision of a safe space were vital in the joint interviews and care had to be taken, particularly in potentially eruptive circumstances. In these situations, the researcher found summarising and clarifying particularly helpful in allowing participants to gain a clearer understanding and sometimes a different perspective on what was being said.

A mother and daughter relationship, as discussed and researched in this study, is one that is quite intimate and private. Participants were therefore requested to open up their inner selves and speak about feelings they themselves had perhaps never acknowledged before. It was

hence vital for the researcher to contain the participants in their process of opening up, which may have resulted in feelings of vulnerability. The researcher provided containment through normalising the participants' experiences, reflecting and clarifying in order to ensure that the participants felt heard and that what they had to say was significant, and allowing the participants to stay with the difficult and painful emotions until they were ready to leave them.

Closure and Ending

Another role the researcher played was that of ensuring a safe therapeutic experience and providing the participants with a sense of closure in their experiences. At the end of each interview, the researcher highlighted key points raised, summarised the interview content, and suggested positive implications stemming from the interview and what was discussed. Rubin and Rubin (1995) also noted that it is important to help participants feel protected again after opening up, so that they do not feel violated. This process allowed the participants to make sense of their experience and hopefully to frame it in a beneficial light for the future of their relationship as mothers and daughters.

Asking participants to reflect on the interview process provided a safe and positive ending, and an opportunity was given for them to discuss any discomfort or confusions. The researcher's summaries were checked with the participants to ensure consensus and matched perceptions. The researcher also explained the benefits of further psychotherapy should the participants feel the need to discuss specific issues and problems. The aim was for participants to leave with a greater sense of self-efficacy and the ability to manage their relationships more successfully (Teyber, 1997).

The Therapist

In addition to the above roles as an interviewer, the researcher also partly engaged in the role of the therapist. As a therapist, my main focus was on attempting to improve the mother-daughter relationship through individual and mutual acceptance and understanding. Just as the researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research,

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> *[i]n any psychotherapy, the therapist himself is a highly important part of the human equation. What he does, the attitude he holds, his basic concept of his role, all influence therapy to a marked degree* (Rogers, 1951, p. 19).

The activities described regarding the role of the interviewer also form part of the therapist's role, while other activities specifically required for my role as a therapist included reframing and challenging fixed ideas, and facilitating understanding and shifts in the relationship.

Reframing and Challenging Fixed Ideas

At times it was helpful for the researcher to offer alternative reframes, particularly for the mother and daughter relationships. These reframes were mostly positive and enabled the participants to view their relationships from a different perspective, often seeing things they had not noticed previously. This was helpful in expanding the participants' ideas about their relationships, thereby allowing them to recognise the various options available to them in the future. Reframing and identifying patterns of communication and interaction were also extremely helpful in allowing the mothers and daughters to gain insight into their relationship and arrive at a different understanding of why they interact the way they do. Such reframes are also known as 'meaningful noise' (Keeney & Ross, 1992).

It was also helpful to challenge fixed ideas that the participants displayed regarding themselves and their relationships. Like reframing, challenging fixed ideas enabled the participants to review their conceptualisations of themselves as well as their perceptions of their relationships. It was particularly important for the researcher to be constantly aware of what would correspond with the participants' worldviews and what would not, and to respect the participants' perspectives rather than to discredit them. It was hoped that the main effect of such challenges as well as reframes would be one of encouragement and empowerment. Both reframing and challenging fixed ideas involved identifying repetitive relational patterns, problematic beliefs, and themes in emotional reactions (Teyber, 1997).

To be able to reframe and challenge effectively, it was important that the researcher try to understand the participants' worldviews as fully as possible. This was achieved by conveying a deep sense of empathy to the participants and by exhibiting an attitude that imparted to the participants the notion that the researcher truly believed in their sense of worth and

importance (Rogers, 1951). This allowed participants to experience a feeling of safety, since their expressed attitudes were understood in almost the same way they perceived them, and were accepted. It was furthermore vital for the researcher to take note of the time limitations in the research process and therefore to be aware of not offering reframes that were too alien to the participants' worldviews, or of challenging very fixed and functional ideas. The reframes needed to be meaningful and understandable to the particular participating mother and daughter pair and to be appropriate to their worldviews. Keeping in mind that the study remains a research project and is not psychotherapy, it would be unfair to the participants if the researcher perturbed their relationships without the available time and space to work through the issue(s) with them.

Facilitating Understanding and Shift in the Relationship

It was important for the researcher to ensure that mothers and daughters understood one another and this aim was achieved by asking mothers and daughters to repeat what the other had said and to confirm whether or not they agreed with the other. This seemed to have assisted the participants in listening to one another more carefully and at the same time, to have allowed them the opportunity to ask questions before reacting or responding. This appeared to have prevented participants from perceiving messages as offensive and therefore becoming defensive in their responses. Vaux (1988) emphasised the importance of the quality of relationships in experiencing support and understanding. The researcher's role was therefore to facilitate and, hopefully, to improve the quality of the participants' relationships with each other, as well as with herself. This purpose was however seemingly not achieved with Mona and Charmaine as they were not willing to participate in the joint interview. However, the researcher chose to honour their resistance and communicated tentatively with Mona and Charmaine in the hope of alerting them to underlying psychological processes in their relationship (Teyber, 1997).

It was also essential for the participants to undergo a therapeutic experience during the interviews that might further lead to a shift in their relationship. A shift can be characterised by any slight change in the relationship that alters the fundamental essence of how the relationship is perceived, constituted, or experienced. Fontana and Frey (2000) referred to this as 'epiphanies', which they defined as interactional moments that leave marks on participants' lives and exhibit the potential to create transformational experiences for the participants. The

researcher attempted to facilitate such shifts by utilising various skills and techniques, many of which have already been discussed above. Although the main shifts in the mother-daughter relationships in this study involved moving away from indirect and destructive communication styles towards more open and constructive ones, there were possibly many shifts that were not visible at the time of the joint interview nor observed by the researcher. The researcher facilitated changes in interactional styles by encouraging and modelling open and direct communication, alerting participants to societal expectations and stereotypes, and pointing out to participants the likely impact of their current interactional styles.

The Researcher's Understanding of Participants' Experiences

The researcher feels that she encountered different levels of resistance in the participating mother and daughter pairs.

Althea and Nicola both felt that the research process enhanced their relationship and provided an opportunity for them to affirm and voice their love for one another. For this mother and daughter pair, the research allowed them to express their emotions and feelings and brought to their awareness the importance of their relationship to one another.

Marie and Estelle were slightly more resistant and although both experienced the research process as beneficial, they did not point to as many valuable processes as Althea and Nicola. For Marie and Estelle, the research may have provided a platform on which to act out their struggle for individuality and intimacy, thus enabling them to become more aware of the processes in motion and how they were going to tackle these in ways that would be favourable and useful to their relationship.

It was interesting to note that both Nicola and Estelle, daughters of Althea and Marie respectively, indicated their discomfort at not being able to first correct their individual interview summaries; this being their only suggestion for improving the research process. Although the researcher takes heed of the suggestion, it is also felt that this reflects a larger process whereby daughters wanted to protect their mothers from their criticisms.

Mona and Charmaine were clearly the most resistant mother and daughter pair in the study. This was evident in their unwillingness to come together for the joint interview. The

individual interviews seemed to have brought to the surface too many painful issues, and perhaps reading the summaries alerted both mother and daughter to the underlying problems in their relationship. However, Mona and Charmaine were not ready to face their difficulties together and chose to avoid direct confrontation. The researcher felt that it was valuable to have opened up these issues and because they have been brought to light, Mona and Charmaine can no longer pretend that they do not exist, even if they choose not to speak about them. It is hoped that tensions will eventually build up that may lead Mona and Charmaine to deal with their problems, thus facilitating a process by means of which the falseness and superficiality of the relationship fall away and are replaced by genuine relatedness and connection.

For two of the three mother and daughter pairs in this study, the research process seemed to have been beneficial regarding the manner in which they experienced as well as perceived their relationships. It seems therefore that a process whereby individual narratives and thoughts are elicited, followed by a coming together of the individuals, may assist in enhancing the relationship in terms of mutual understanding and increased connection; a process where individuals can confirm themselves before reuniting in a relationship. This appears to correlate with the overarching theme of **individuation through connection** and **connection through individuation** in this study. The third mother and daughter pair who were not able to experience the full research process demonstrate that even when a process may be beneficial to a relationship, the individuals in the relationship need to be willing and ready to journey through it for it to be of any value. Therefore, a process that is beneficial for one mother and daughter pair may not be so for another. This further supports the paradigm of this study, that people and relationships need to be viewed taking into account the context and surroundings in which they exist, and that there can be no one law or rule that will apply to all mother and daughter relationships.

Nevertheless, for mothers and daughters who are ready and willing to analyse their relationships and view these in a meta-perspective, the valuable and rewarding process of reflecting individually on their relationships, followed by joining together to create a more acceptable narrative of their relationship with a facilitator, seems to strengthen and enrich the mother-daughter connection.

Limiting and Unhelpful Processes

Several processes were identified by the researcher as perhaps having been unhelpful and even limiting to the participating mother and daughter pairs.

It was recognised that there was a need in the researcher to make the participants feel 'okay'. This led to the researcher perhaps reframing slightly more than was necessary, and mostly in a positive light. This may have disempowered the mother and daughter by implying that they did not have the ability to 'make right' their relationship. The researcher's own need to avoid discomfort may have also played a part in this process, thus resulting in her taking on too much responsibility to 'fix' the mother and daughter relationships.

The researcher also may have interpreted more than was necessary in the interviews. In her need to make sense of the participants' experiences and relationships, the researcher may have provided interpretations that did not fit with the participants' worldviews. Nicola and Estelle's concerns over their individual summaries may have partly reflected this lack of fit, although other factors may also have contributed to their discomfort.

In addition, the researcher did not always bring contradictions and incongruence to light for the participants. This is partly owing to the researcher's own need to avoid discomfort as well as her concern for the participants in terms of harming them by forcing too much pain and hurt to surface. The limitation of restricted interview sessions and lengths in the research context was also a concern. This may not have been beneficial for the participants and may have limited their process in achieving shifts in their relationship.

As Rubin and Rubin (1995) noted, interviews are, more often than not, influenced by the researcher's personality, moods, interests, experiences, and biases. They further recognised that, particularly because of the depth of understanding required in qualitative interviewing, it is extremely difficult to remain value free or neutral. In this study, the researcher also sometimes played into the participants' patterns of interaction, thereby maintaining the status quo and not facilitating possible changes in the relationship. The researcher therefore became as cautious, tactful, and polite as the participants, which was the case with Althea and Nicola. The researcher also noted that at times, she tended to over-identify with the participants, such as with Marie and Estelle. This led to merging of roles and blurring of boundaries in that the

researcher was drawn to self-disclosure, which the researcher felt was not helpful to the mother-daughter relationship.

Being both interviewer and therapist can no doubt at times become conflicting and contradictory. Both roles had the common goal of finding out as much as possible about the participants and of providing a safe and contained space that allowed the participants to feel as comfortable and as unguarded as possible. However, the role of the interviewer role restricted the role of the therapist in that sessions were limited to the research needs and therefore a more trusting relationship as well as a longer time frame in which to facilitate the mother-daughter relationship was not feasible. This limited the amount as well as the depth of the interventions attempted, since time was not available to ensure the working through of processes if they were brought to light. Similarly, the role of the interviewer was confounded by the role of the therapist as it brought added expectations and aims, and may therefore have limited the amount of information that was available to be acquired. Despite these limitations, the roles of the qualitative interviewer and therapist often converge, as mentioned in Chapter 3, and are therefore more likely to be complementary rather than contradictory. The researcher therefore engaged with the participants in a manner that was acceptable and comfortable to them, using a combination of the role of the interviewer and the therapist. As Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 114) state:

> *What research role you take and how that role is seen by the interviewee affects the quality of the conversation. As part of negotiating a relationship with the interviewee, the researcher works to define a mutually acceptable research role.*

The above helpful and unhelpful processes were identified by the researcher in retrospect and might be labelled as helpful and unhelpful in many other ways. The processes identified would also have been perceived differently in terms of effectiveness in different contexts. It is therefore not possible to identify consistent and guaranteed effective roles played by the researcher, nor is it possible to point out specific and unfailing processes that are beneficial to the researcher-participant relationship.

Conclusion

Clearly, the roles that the researcher plays in an interview process may lead to major implications for a study in terms of its outcome and the information obtained. The way in which participants experience the researcher influences how and what they would be willing to reveal.

In this study, the crucial roles played by the researcher were that of the interviewer as well as the therapist, which included activities and skills such as listening to and reflecting what the participants had narrated, clarifying and summarising the participants' meanings and messages, containing the participants' emotions and providing a safe space to expose their vulnerabilities, reframing the participants' experiences and challenging their fixed ideas, facilitating mutual understanding and perturbing their relationships, and providing a positive ending and sense of closure after the often emotional experience.

The participants generally considered their experiences to be positive and therapeutic to their relationship. However, this cannot be generalised to other mother and daughter relationships as the readiness of the mothers and daughters and where they are in their relationship are critical in whether such a process would be useful.

The unhelpful and limiting processes in this study included possibly offering too much positive reframing, thus disempowering participants, over-interpreting and providing interpretations that did not fit for the participants, being overly sensitive to participants, thereby not highlighting incongruencies and contradictions, playing into participants' patterns of interaction, thus maintaining the status quo, and over-identifying with participants, leading to the meeting of the researcher's needs rather than those of the participants.

It is extremely important for the researcher to be aware of her own processes in order to acknowledge how her needs and biases may have influenced the research and the interview process (Ely, 1991). The results and outcomes of a research should always be viewed taking into account the researcher's life history, current context, and personal processes.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

Introduction

This concluding chapter will evaluate the present study in terms of its strengths and limitations. Recommendations for future research will also be offered.

Evaluation of the study

The research aims in this study were to allow mothers as well as daughters to tell their stories of their relationship, and in the process enable them to reflect on it and together co-construct a different and possibly more empowering narrative from which to view their relationship. The researcher believes that these aims were achieved in at least two of the stories narrated. The story of the third mother and daughter pair achieved the first aim of constructing their individual stories and perhaps of reflecting on their relationship, but did not complete the last aim of co-constructing their stories together. Nonetheless it highlighted the importance of this fragile relationship for both mother and daughter, and the necessity for the researcher to respect it as it is.

The following overarching themes emerged from the 'relationships' of the three mother-daughter pairs:

➢ *The interdependence of individuation-separation and connection* – This theme illustrated that individuation-separation and connection are mutually inclusive and form a circular pattern where one cannot occur without the other. Mothers and daughters need to be connected in order to individuate, and healthy separation in turn leads to intimate connection.

➢ *Fear of disconnection versus need for connection* – This theme elucidated the ambivalence prevalent in mother-daughter relationships that can lead to immobilization, thus restricting growth in the relationship. The need for connection is often inhibited by the fear of disconnection since behaviours in the relationship

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become tentative and cautious, which in turn hinders deeper connection between mothers and daughters.

Common themes that characterised the 'interaction' between the three mother-daughter pairs included the following:

> *Avoidance of conflict* – This theme showed that all mothers and daughters tend to avoid conflict, whether directly or indirectly. Although this theme originated from the need for connection it fed into the dynamics of the fear of disconnection in mothers and daughters.

> *Similarities versus differences* – This theme elicited different interactions in different mother-daughter pairs, and these were dependent on the level of individuation-connection achieved as well as on how willing mothers and daughters were able to be in terms of identifying with and being different from one another.

> *Need for understanding and acknowledgement* – This theme demonstrated that mothers generally desired understanding and forgiveness from their daughters while daughters generally wished for acknowledgement of their self-identities and confessions of inadequacies from their mothers.

> *Power in the relationship* – This theme highlighted the different power relations at work in a mother-daughter relationship, and indicated that mothers and daughter exercise forms of power that are rooted in different sources but both nevertheless elicited guilt in the other.

> *Indirect versus open communication styles* – This theme described the often indirect communication styles present in mother-daughter relationships, and emphasised how, through facilitation, these indirect styles of communication can be shifted to include other, more open and direct ways of interaction.

The researcher also discussed what she believed was helpful or unhelpful in her interaction with the participants. The following processes were regarded as helpful:

> Listening and hearing.
> Reflecting, clarifying and summarising.
> Containing emotions and providing a safe space to expose vulnerabilities.
> Positive reframing, challenging fixed ideas, and providing alternative ways of perceiving.

- Facilitating understanding and perturbing the relationships to expand the possibilities of interaction.
- Providing a positive ending and sense of closure.

The researcher believed that the following processes may have been unhelpful and possibly limited the participants' experiences:

- Offering too much positive reframing, thus disempowering participants.
- Over-interpreting and providing interpretations that did not fit for the participants.
- Being over-sensitive to what participants might have been feeling, thereby not highlighting incongruencies and contradictions.
- Playing into participants' patterns of interaction, thus maintaining the status quo.
- Over-identifying with participants, leading to the meeting of the researcher's needs rather than those of the participants.

The participants' reflections on their experience in the research process indicated that the following processes were felt to be beneficial:

- Being prompted to reflect on their mother-daughter relationship and to be able to perceive it differently.
- Being given the opportunity to reflect on their individual interaction styles and to recognise how these may have impacted on their relationships with significant others.
- Being afforded the space to voice their feelings towards their mothers or daughters and give words to issues they had not previously spoken about but were aware of.
- To solidify and affirm their relationship and state their love for each other.
- To recognise the possible consequences of their own interaction styles and thereby become more self-aware of their behaviour in the future.

This information could be valuable and possibly serve as guidelines to those working with women, and particularly those working with mothers and daughters or mother-daughter related issues. Even the relationship of the third mother-daughter pair provided valuable information relating to the fragility of this relationship. It also highlighted the need for the therapist/researcher to respect the mother-daughter system and their need for connection in this relationship, no matter how tenuous.

Strengths of the study

In line with the social constructionist framework within which this study is rooted, the co-construction of stories between mothers and daughters was emphasised and analysed. Since social constructionism asserts that knowledge is a product of social interaction and processes (Speed, 1991), the mothers and daughters in this study interacted with one another as well as with the researcher to create new knowledge and meanings. The themes and common themes articulated in this study were further rooted in the cultural context at a specific point in time. This means that the themes identified are not fixed and stable, and are likely to change as social relationships unfold across time.

Seeing that each participant possesses a different cultural and social background that shapes her experiences and thus her meaning making system, the accounts of the mother-daughter relationships are unique to each participant. Although there were similarities between the mothers' experiences, daughters' experiences, and mother-daughter pairs' experiences, differences were also evident, which supports the social constructionist claim that multiple realities exist (Becvar & Becvar, 2001).

This study contributes to the array of 'truths' in mother-daughter stories and is not intended to report the ultimate reality of how mother-daughter relationships are experienced. Therefore the stories of mothers and daughters in relationship provided in this study do not represent and therefore cannot be generalised to all other mother-daughter relationships. Such a view would presume the existence of a single 'truth' and consequently eliminate the possibilities of reinterpretation and new discoveries of meaning (Owen, 1992). A both/and approach is advocated here whereby multiple realities co-exist and enrich our understandings of the world (Rapmund, 1996), which this study attempted to embody.

The researcher joined with the participants in this study and in this way, became part of their social interaction system. The researcher therefore experienced the participating mother-daughter relationships as closely as possible from the participants' worldviews and she has tried to remain true to these worldviews in her interpretations. The researcher recognised the participants' expertise in their own experiences and therefore assumed a humble position by not imposing her own subjectivities onto the participants and being constantly aware of her own biases. The researcher further acknowledges that no objective description of her observations and participation is possible, since that which is observed alters as a result of the

observation itself. Therefore all discussions in this study have been perceived through the researcher's subjective lenses and are as much a reflection of the researcher as of the research process.

From a feminist perspective, traditional quantitative and scientific methods correlated with the modernistic paradigm, which has been predominantly male-oriented and rule-based, and therefore not suited to the exploration of women (Lawler, 2000). Rather, interpretive research approaches have been deemed to be more appropriate for research on women and was therefore chosen as the preferred strategy in this study owing to their suitability for the subject of mothers and daughters. The researcher belongs to the same gender as her participants and in addition, she is also a daughter herself, which adds to the credibility of the study.

In this study, the process-oriented element was emphasised, and the purpose of observing and describing dynamic process changes over time was also accomplished. Questions about process and structure, or how a series of events or course of action such as a relationship is organised, and how it changes over time, were considered in the researcher's analyses (Katz & Mishler, 2003). The mother and daughter relationships in this study were explored and observed for changes over time by means of the intervention of individual reflection, followed by reunited reflection, and this process apparently assisted two mother and daughter pairs in enhancing the relationship. The main changes directly noted occurred in the modifying of communication styles between mothers and daughters.

This study further takes into account the social responsibility of the qualitative researcher in working with participants so that they become more knowledgeable, active, responsible, and liberated (Ely, 1991). By engaging in conversation with the mothers and daughters in this study and offering alternative reframes for their perceptions, thus co-creating new realities, the researcher avoids seeing and treating participants as passive objects but rather attempts to empower them and alert them to new possibilities.

Trustworthiness, which replaces the concepts of validity and reliability in traditional quantitative research (Ely, 1991), was achieved in this study. The researcher disclosed her orientation and explained the social and cultural context of the investigation. Internal processes and biases belonging to the researcher were also mentioned and considered in the analyses. The researcher engaged intensively with the participants, and persistently observed and conceptualised each mother-daughter pair's interaction. Triangulation was achieved by

means of multiple checks of interpretation with various parties, including the participants in the study as well as the researcher's peers and supervisor, and consensus was attained regarding most of the interpretations made. It can also be asserted that multiple data sources were used since each mother-daughter story was related three times, by daughter, mother, and by mother and daughter together. The researcher, through the iterative process of participating in the hermeneutical cycle, grounded her interpretations by linking them to excerpts from the original data.

Limitations of study

The interpretations and meanings constructed by the researcher in this study are not the only constructions that could exist. The researcher is informed by her personal subjectivities, experiences, values, and biases, which influence her perceptions of the mother-daughter relationships in this study. The researcher is cognitively limited (Sadler, 2002) in that her mind tends to attribute meaning in ways that correlate with her worldviews and selects data that confirm the meanings she has identified. Researchers however can never really be 'fair' or objective since their subjectivity and biases will always colour their perceptions.

Since the researcher's interpretations of the participants' stories will always be subjected to her personal values and beliefs, all the portrayals of mothers, daughters, and their relationships in this study are second-hand accounts of stories, regardless of how close the researcher was to the participants' experiences. The researcher has however made attempts to remain faithful to the participants' worldviews, and selected excerpts from the interview texts have been provided to support the researcher's interpretations.

Owing to the time involved and the labour intensive nature of qualitative research, only three mother-daughter pairs were studied closely in this study. This small sample therefore merely represents a minor fraction of all mother-daughter relationships and the findings cannot be generalised to other mother-daughter relationships, or even to other contexts for the mothers and daughters in this study. This is not to say that the data gained in this study is not valid, but rather that the information gathered is applicable only to the mother-daughter relationships in this study at the time they were studied. This type of research therefore gains validity at the expense of generalisability (Moon, Dillon, & Sprenkle, 1990). The themes and patterns identified in this study can merely serve as guidelines for viewing and conceptualising

mother-daughter relationships and cannot be used as a formula for how mother-daughter relationships should be perceived and enhanced.

An additional limitation of this study is related to the ethical issues raised, due to the personal nature of the data elicited during the interviews. According to Ely (1991), three main concerns exist regarding participants: that of anonymity, awareness of the effect of the researcher's presence in the research setting, and involving participants as much as possible in the research process. Although the participants agreed to the use of their original names in the research report and declined the option of pseudonyms, only their first names were used in order to protect their anonymity. Details that might have led to further identification of the participants were also replaced or omitted. With regard to the remaining two concerns, the researcher attempted to deal with them as follows: she was constantly aware of and reflected on her own presence in each mother-daughter relationship and on how this may have influenced the participants; and she involved the participants in the review of their interview summaries. However, whether these concerns were fully addressed cannot be ascertained or guaranteed. Such uncertainty is inherent in and characteristic of qualitative research where, unlike quantitative methods, findings are subjective and context-dependent.

Although the participating mothers and daughters were provided with the opportunity to correct and thus validate their individual interview summaries, testimonial validity from the participants for the interpretations of their joint interviews was not sought. In addition, any disagreements and consensus with regard to their individual interview summaries were integrated into the study and perceived as part of their interactional pattern. The reason for not seeking complete testimonial validity is that the researcher believed that no complete consensus could be achieved with the participants, since the researcher and participants possess different lenses through which they perceive the mother-daughter relationships in this study. Ely (1991) also indicates that it is not always possible or feasible to attain complete agreement from participants regarding the researcher's interpretations, but that an effort must be made to remain as true as possible to the participants' stories. The researcher believes that she has indeed remained true to and respectful of the participants' stories in this study.

This study could also be criticised for using participants with whom the researcher has a previous relational history. Two of the participating mother-daughter pairs were acquaintances of the researcher and this previous history may have influenced the researcher-participant relationship, the interview process, and the data-analysis process. The absence of a

previous relational history may in addition partly account for the resistance in the third mother-daughter pair, since had it not been for the prior contact and familiarity with the researcher, the first two mother-daughter pairs might not have participated as willingly and disclosed as much as they did in the study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Most research on mothers and daughters has directed solutions to balancing contrasting dynamics in the relationship towards the individual rather than the relational level. Although the current research focuses on the relational processes within the mother-daughter relationship, more research that emphasises the improvement and enhancement of such relationships at the relational level will be helpful in facilitating the understanding, and providing higher-levels of conceptualisation, of this relationship.

Another area for future research would be, as suggested by Fischer (1991), to focus on looking beyond the stereotypes of mothers and daughters, and to gain a deeper understanding of both sources of variability and role strain in contemporary relationships between mothers and daughters. Although the way in which societal discourses and stereotypes impact on the mother-daughter relationship was discussed in this study, this was not an exhaustive examination.

It would be interesting to track the changes in mother-daughter relationship dynamics as society's thinking shifts from that of the individualistic self to the relational self. Also, as feminism becomes integrated into Western society's doctrines or ideology, and patriarchy loses dominance, the manner in which mother-daughter relationships would be conceptualised will also be worth investigating.

More research is furthermore necessary regarding mother and daughter relationships in less individualistic societies. Research on mother-daughter relationships where older women other than biological mothers are primary caregivers should also contribute to further understanding and provide insight as to whether the dynamics in the mother-daughter relationship are also present in other caregiver-child relationships.

Conclusion

This study has furnished valuable information regarding the processes and dynamics at work in the relationship between these specific mothers and daughters. It has demonstrated the complicated and ambivalent nature of this relationship and the significance of allowing both mothers and daughters to co-create their stories, taking into account the context within which they exist. Specific themes as well as common themes were articulated, and helpful and unhelpful processes in facilitating mother-daughter relationships were discussed. The qualitative research method employed in this study proved to be a valuable way to obtain the kind of information required, despite certain limitations. Some important areas for future research were also suggested. These included an additional focus on the relational level of the mother-daughter relationship, an emphasis on deconstructing stereotypes and social discourses that are limiting to the mother-daughter relationship, tracking changes in mother-daughter relationships following the shifts of thinking in society, investigating experiences of mothers and daughter in more collectivist cultures, and exploring whether other primary caregiver-child relationships parallel that of the biological mother-daughter relationship.

This study illustrates that mothers and daughters can understand how their relationship has become as it is, and that they can rebuild their relationships if they are aware of the pressures on the latter (Phillips, 1991); whether these are societal or self induced. There is not one particular mother-daughter story that is applicable to all contexts. Instead there are multiple stories, some with more socially accepted aspects than others, but all are functional for the mother-daughter pair in their particular socio-cultural context. O'Reilly and Abbey (2000, p. 17) suggest that,

> *[w]hat is required is a mother-daughter revolution so that we, as daughters and mothers, may in life and literature, in theory and practice, in public and private, secure connection to bring about personal empowerment and cultural transformation.*

The following poem captures the essence of the mother-daughter relationship in its interdependence as well as its continuation:

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Our heartbeats, notes
Each separate, but part of the same
melody.
The lyrics of our lives
Intertwined,
Composed of love,
Will be sung for generations.

The Mother-Daughter Song
Cheryl Morikawa
Mothers and Daughters: A Poetry
Celebration

As Baker (2000) inspirationally concludes, the conversation began with the advent of feminism and as we learnt from each other, as women, as mothers, and as daughters, we expanded our vision of social justice and allowed our self-knowledge to deepen. It is in these conversations and self-empowerment that healing takes place for ourselves, for others, and for the world. '*May the conversation continue*' (Baker, 2000, p. 210).

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Appendix 1

Althea's Interview Summary

Althea enjoys a very good relationship with her daughter and indicates that they have always been close. Althea stayed at home for a long time after her daughter was born, holding the traditional belief that mothers should be there for their children. She only returned to work when Nicola was in Grade 10, and even then only half days.

Despite her dedication to her daughter, Althea always retained and developed many interests. During her years at home, she studied through UNISA, taught music, and grew plants and trees. Althea also took up running when Nicola was in school and has been very involved in this activity ever since. Althea does not see that her interests affected her daughter in anyway, and hopes that they did not. She indicated that she would very much like to know if her daughter was ever resentful of her pursuits in any way. But having her own identity was important to Althea and particularly being married to a demanding husband, Althea required her own space and time where she could be alone, away from the demands of others. Althea is aware that currently, her interests and hobbies are admired by Nicola and her husband.

Althea's and her husband's parenting styles were that of not being too directive or demanding. They tried their best in providing for Nicola materially and emotionally, but never had any particular expectations. Although her husband was a little concerned about their daughter's lack of ambition, Althea was not bothered and wanted to just let Nicola be, in whatever she decided. Althea describes her own attitude as easy-going and did not place any particular expectations on her daughter to be or become anything. This may have been influenced by Althea's experience with her own mother, who although strict and proper, respected her decision to leave Kenya at a young age with her husband. Althea's favourite description of her daughter is that she "thrived on neglect".

Althea and her daughter had their normal difficulties during Nicola's teenage years where they grew apart for several years; a time when Nicola was searching for her own independence and identity. Althea believes that because she set a strong foundation and provided a stable and solid figure for her daughter, their relationship mended by itself when her daughter was in university. During her daughter's teenage years, Althea felt antagonistic and a sense of discomfort, but always believed that it was a necessary process that they both had to go through.

Generally, Althea has no major regrets in the way she brought up her daughter, but indicates that perhaps as a legacy from her own family, she was not as emotionally expressive as she should have been. Therefore although they are a very close family, they are not an affectionate family in terms of physical and verbal expression.

Since the grandchildren came into the picture, Althea feels that her role has changed in that she has become a grandmother and is playing more of a supportive role for her daughter. She is concerned that she may be too focused on the grandchildren and neglecting Nicola as a daughter. In addition, their interaction centres around the children and not adult issues. She thinks that this will pass once the children become older. With her daughter becoming a mother, Althea sees more of her own traits coming out in Nicola in terms of organising and planning ahead, which she did not do before. Althea sometimes feels undermined by her daughter in how much her daughter tells her what to do; "like I was never a mother", but she understands Nicola's concern as well as her character – they both like to have a sense of control over things.

Althea feels that Nicola is fine with having some of her traits, but says that her daughter has taken a bit of both of herself and her husband in terms of personality and characteristics. However, Althea feels that it was inherent in her daughter's nature to be who she is. Even if there were other brothers and sisters, Althea does not think it would have had much influence on Nicola's character – it is inherently strong and confident. One area where Althea feels that her daughter consciously made a different decision is in the type of husband she wanted. Althea tends to mother her husband a lot and does many things for him. Nicola on the other hand has done exactly the opposite with her own husband and expects him to do certain things for her. Althea thinks that her daughter may have viewed her as being too submissive towards her husband, which Althea agrees with but indicates that after 32 years of marriage, she has dug her own grave and cannot alter the entrenched pattern.

In terms of conflict and arguments, Althea cannot recall any major events. She feels that she and Nicola do not often disagree and when there are issues, they opt for a rational and open discussion, which is usually quickly understood and acknowledged by each other. Althea is extremely proud of her daughter and counts her blessing in how well things have turned out. Despite after leaving school all her daughter wanted was to have nice nails (standing family joke), she has become a successful business woman, married to a wonderful husband, and has two beautiful children. Althea would like to be geographically close to Nicola and her family and follow them wherever they decide to live, but she makes a conscious effort not to interfere in their lives and also especially not in their child-rearing practices. Althea is

extremely aware of the different roles she plays in various situations and thinks about her actions and words carefully, taking as much as she can into consideration.

In terms of similarities and differences, Althea feels that she and her daughter are very much alike in many ways, particularly in their mannerisms and expressions. However they are also very different. Althea admires Nicola's sense of confidence that she has displayed ever since her teenage years; something Althea took much longer to find and achieve. Althea feels that at times her daughter's confidence becomes bossiness and she teases her daughter openly about this. This appears to be a pattern or strategy in handling and preventing conflict; because both mother and daughter are sensitive, just by humour and gentle reminder, the other can monitor her own behaviour and restrain it before it becomes a big issue. Althea describes herself as a pacifist that avoids conflict or making big scenes whereas Nicola has a stronger character and will take confrontations further when she feels it to be necessary. Althea has never challenged her daughter's bossiness, whether it was out of admiration for the trait or avoidance of conflict, she did not see it as necessary and just lets Nicola be.

In terms of the future, Althea hopes that their relationship remains as close as it is now. She feels that they are a sounding board for each other, and also because they are such a small family and the only family they have in this country, there are not many people that understand their dynamics and patterns. Therefore Althea and Nicola confide in each other often. Althea also indicates that her daughter has a strong sense of responsibility as well as affection for her peripheral family and often suggested to visit extended family and keep contact with them on her own through letters and cards. Althea is very appreciative of this and feels that Nicola has definitely played her part as a grandchild.

Nicola's Interview Summary

Nicola is generally quite happy with the relationship she has had with her mother. She feels that they have always been close and gotten along well with each other.

Nicola denies ever having seen her mother as a role model, nor as mother or as a woman, meaning that she did not look up to her mother so completely that she wanted to be just like her mother. Nicola feels that her self-identity and self-concept have very much happened naturally without any particular conscious decision. She relates to her mother now more as a friend than as a mom, but with the arrival of her own children, she has come to appreciate and love her mother more so than before.

Nicola is an only child, but never felt that she lacked companionship. Perhaps being often in her own company has contributed to her self-reflective tendencies, where she likes to examine her own strengths and weaknesses in order for her to have a better idea of who she is and what she is like. This tendency allows Nicola to look at issues as well as people in quite an objective manner. This is shown in her analysis of each of her parents' traits and consciously deciding what she would like to have and what she would not like to have. Nicola feels that she has a good balance of both her parents' characteristics. Nicola's parents and especially that of her mother's, style of parenting was authoritative and autonomous. They provided solid and consistent figures but allowed Nicola her freedom to explore life and make her own choices. As a result Nicola never felt pressured to become or achieve anything she herself did not want to. There was a tacit agreement between Nicola's parents that no matter what Nicola did, she would be okay and do well. Therefore although Nicola would have liked to have received more active encouragement and assurance from her parents, she never felt that her parents doubted her abilities.

During her varsity years, Nicola went through a rebellious year where she pushed her boundaries with her parents and experienced them as controlling. Her parents tried to control but also let her get away with her explorations in life, thus allowing her to test her own boundaries and limits. Nicola sees this stage as normal and did not remember any major conflict that occurred during this time. She simply returned to being herself after realising that her parents were really okay with whomever she wanted to be, and that there was no longer any point in testing their boundaries.

After varsity, Nicola began working with her mother in a company that her mother has worked in for many years. It was felt that these 5-years were especially beneficial to their relationship as this is where Nicola began to see another side of her mother and also began to relate to her as a friend and as a colleague. It surprised Nicola that her mother was ever-supportive and ever-accepting, since she was concerned that there may be some feelings of competitiveness and awkwardness that might have come into the relationship because she was in her "mother's territory". However, even though Nicola sometimes judged her mother in what she did and criticised her, her mother never reciprocated with the same behaviour, but rather with compassion and acceptance. Nicola tried to keep the relationship at the office professional and addressed her mother by her name at the office. This hat was quickly and automatically taken off when they were away from the office environment and the relationship returned to that of mother and daughter.

Nicola was engaged at 21 and married at 23. Her parents love her husband and they get along well. Nicola feels this is an extremely important factor in continuing the good relationship between her mother and herself. In addition, her parents, like with her other choices in life, never questioned her decision to marry or her choice of partner. Nicola feels this particular attitude of her parents has been a firm foundation in her being able to have an open and honest relationship with them; because she knew they were not going to judge her, she was not afraid to share anything with them.

Several years back, Nicola's maternal grandmother became very ill and mother and daughter travelled together to visit her. This was a major shift for Nicola in terms of her relationship with her mother. It was here where she could also offer her mother what her mother has always offered herself – care and understanding, being there for her just to be her support. This event brought Nicola even closer to her mother, realising that it is not only she that needs her mother, but her mother needs her too. This assisted Nicola in developing diverse ways of relating to her mother.

The arrival of children in Nicola's life was another event that caused a shift in her relationship with her mother. She became more dependent and reliant on her mom and from watching her mother with her own children, realised how her mother had loved her. This results in a sense of even greater respect and appreciation for her mother. Nicola also finds that since having her own children, she has been able to let go of petty things that used to irritate her, to see that it does not matter as much. This is perhaps due to the shift of becoming a mother, one sees the bigger picture and what is more important. Nicola and her mother also see each other more and spend more time together. Becoming a mother, Nicola also begins to see more of her mother coming out in herself, and she is happy to become the mother her

mother was to her. Nicola does mention however that she would not be prepared to give up as much as her mother did for her children and husband; that she would like to retain some of her independence and carry on working and having a career. She feels that her mother might have been too self-sacrificing in her life and Nicola does not want to repeat the same pattern, even though she sees the same trait in herself; that of saying yes to everything and everyone.

In terms of similarities and differences, Nicola began to see traits of her mother in herself when she started working with her mother. She truly admires her mother for certain things, but is also adamant not to have certain characteristics. There is a feeling that her mother gives in too easily and is too submissive. Therefore Nicola tries to be stronger and sets firmer boundaries for herself. Although she is amazed at her mother's patience and tolerance, Nicola feels that this may infringe on her individuality and she also over-commits herself in order to meet other's needs. Nicola likes to be a little irresponsible and not always have to complete the "have-to-do" things, whereas her mother never rests and is always doing the right things. This causes some frustration for Nicola – her mother's never-ending persistence and energy, partly because Nicola herself cannot always find the energy, and partly because this makes her feel bad about herself. The same theme reoccurs when Nicola feels that her mother is trying to be younger than her age, which embarrasses and makes Nicola proud at the same time.

Generally, Nicola feels that she comes from a very easy-going and simple family; they do not make mountains out of mole hills and deal with issues as they come up. Conflict resolution in the family is very matter-of-fact, immediate, and honest, with no building up of grudges or resentment. In addition, due to her mother's character of acceptance and stepping back, Nicola cannot remain angry with her for long. There is a fundamental belief that doing good is enough, that things will fall into place as they go along as long as you are doing the right and good things. Nicola did not experience any major identity conflict and difficulties, which were always taken in her stride. She feels that she has been lucky in life and that things have turned out well for her without too much effort. She does not actively strive or pursue anything, but let things happen on their own. In this way, she would have liked to be a little more ambitious and feels that perhaps if her parents were stricter and pushed her a little more at school, she would have been more goal-oriented today.

Nicola feels that her relationship with her mother will remain more or less the same in the future, and she hopes that it will not change. She can only foresee some difficulties in their different opinions in raising her children, but she is not very concerned and believes that things will work out as they should.

Appendix 3

Marie's Interview Summary

Marie describes her youngest daughter as an easy child who never gave her any major problems. In fact, Marie feels that all three of her daughters have been obedient and good children who did not go through violent teenage rebellion phases. Because Estelle was a "laat-lammetjie" and also had asthma problems as a child, Marie feels particularly connected to her since she had to spend a considerable amount of time looking after her. However, because of the very fact that Estelle was so much younger than her sisters, Marie feels that she is more spoilt and enjoyed many luxuries that her older sisters did not have. In this sense, Marie regrets having had Estelle so much later than her other daughters because it seems unfair to them that Estelle was able to have so much more time, money, as well as freedom.

Marie came from a family of five children with herself being the eldest. She did not have a particularly close relationship with her own parents and because they were so self-involved, she had to take over many of the household responsibilities. One of the major regrets in Marie's life was that she had to give up her tertiary education to begin working at the age of 19, in order to support the family. Due to her own experiences with her mother, Marie consciously tried to do things differently, which to some extent she felt she succeeded. While Marie's mother was never available emotionally nor physically, Marie's first priority was that of being there for her daughters and to be actively involved in their lives and interests. Marie hopes that she has set a strong foundation for a close relationship where any of her daughters can talk to her when they need her.

Mari worked for most of her married life except for the first several years when each daughter was born. She is now retired after 35 years of working, at the beginning of this year. Marie feels that working is extremely important in anyone's life and women should not sit at home and become isolated from the world outside. Although she always had to work for financial reasons, she would not have chosen differently even if she did not have to supplement the household income. Marie feels that working has been beneficial for her children in that they have had to learn to be independent and fend for themselves. As a result all her daughters are self-sufficient and become domesticated since a young age.

Marie's husband is a policeman who was often sent out of town and Marie was left alone with the children. Although always a strong person, Marie had to become even more so in this

situation and adopted a rational, logical, and practical way of being. She also had to be in control and composed in order to handle all the daily activities and meet the children's needs. As a result, Marie feels that perhaps in some instances she may have been too hard on her daughters and too strict. She notices this by watching her eldest daughter being so lenient with her own children. However, Marie would not have changed this way of parenting as she believes in discipline and order, and that children must be given boundaries.

Now that her daughters are grown up, Marie tries to take on more of a democratic approach rather than authoritarian, and tries to communicate with them rather than instruct or command. Marie acknowledges that she cannot be always right, but can only speak out of experience, and therefore cannot expect Estelle or any of her daughters to always agree with what she has to say.

Marie feels that Estelle is very determined and persistent, but that she can be too soft and too easily feels sorry for others. Marie feels that Estelle is often involved in a relationship because she feels sorry for the person. However, Marie also recognises that Estelle can be strong when necessary and takes control of her own life when the situation demands it. Nevertheless, Marie becomes concerned because Estelle, by nature, is quiet and passive and therefore keeps much to herself. Marie also does not feel entitled to probe or ask since she does not want to come across as interrogative or as interfering in Estelle's life. But it worries her that she does not know how Estelle thinks or feels and sometimes wished that she would talk back to say whether she agrees or disagrees with something. Marie cannot recall any situation where Estelle explicitly disagreed with something she has said and does not know how she would handle it. However, she expects this to happen in the future and indicates that one can only react to the situation at hand when it arrives.

Conflict between Marie and Estelle is usually handled with "talks". Marie does not think that Estelle would ever "fight" with her as it is not in her nature. Rather, Estelle would walk away and return later to continue the conversation when she has thought more about it or has calmed down. Marie feels that Estelle is sensible and always ends up doing the right thing. However, Marie feels that her daughters do not always agree with her and acknowledges that this is inevitable since they have grown up in different worlds and today's youngsters face more pressures and problems than her generation. In this way, Marie tries to be open and understanding and indicates that even if their opinions differ, as long as Estelle can talk to her about it, she can then have the opportunity to try and understand it from her daughter's point of view.

Marie is glad that her daughters have taken on some of her traits and believes that she has passed on the values she wanted them to have, those such as having pride in your house, keeping one's temper under control, providing a healthy living for one's family. She feels that her eldest daughter is most like her and her second daughter the least, while Estelle is in between and possesses traits of both herself as well as her husband.

Marie feels that she has always enjoyed a close relationship with Estelle and that she has always been very involved in Estelle's life. Recently however, Marie feels that their relationship has taken a down spiral with Estelle being involved in a relationship. This has made Marie feel left out and excluded because Estelle no longer shares her problems with her, but only with her boyfriend. Marie does not feel that Estelle is making the right choice in being with the boyfriend since she thinks that Estelle is only feeling sorry for him. However, she feels she cannot raise the issue as she fears this would push Estelle further away from her. Her strategy in handling the situation is by making small comments here and there or "dropping pennies" as she phrases it, hoping Estelle will realise her mistake or perhaps talk to her about it.

Marie feels that their relationship will get better when Estelle is single again or if Estelle gets married, when she becomes pregnant and needs her for advice and guidance. This was her experience with her eldest daughter and feels that it will be the same for her other two daughters.

Appendix 4

Estelle's Interview Summary

Estelle is the youngest of three daughters and is the "laat-lammetjie" of the family. There is a 10 and 7 year difference between Estelle and her two sisters, meaning that Estelle grew up alone at home for most of her teenage years.

There is also a large age gap between Estelle and her mother (35 years), which she feels makes it that much more difficult for them to be close. For Estelle, her mother has always played more the role of care-taker rather than that of the nurturing mother. Estelle has always perceived her mother more as a woman rather than a mother. This is likely to be the influence of the large age gap as well as her mother's naturally authoritarian manner. The nurturers as well as role models in Estelle's life were filled by that of her two elder sisters. Although Estelle wished her mother was more emotionally available and nurturing, she acknowledges that she does not know much about her mother's upbringing and that her mother may have her own reasons for protecting herself by being in control and emotionally detached.

During Estelle's school days, she admired her second eldest sister's carefree and spontaneous manner, but now as she enters the world of work and womanhood, Estelle identifies more with her eldest sister's responsible, organised, and independent life. Estelle feels that in terms of her mother's expectations for them as daughters, her eldest sister has fulfilled these expectations most adequately, while the second eldest sister is seen as the "black sheep" of the family, whom the parents failed. Estelle's perception is that her mother takes many issues personally, particularly when it comes to her daughters – anything that goes wrong, every wrong choice, is a reflection of her as a parent. In some ways therefore, Estelle feels that she has betrayed and failed her parents, and may in fact be the second "black sheep" in the family.

Estelle feels that she is more similar to her mother rather than different. Estelle feels that they are alike in that they are stubborn, persistent, hard-working, responsible and independent, and she is happy to share these traits with her mom. However, Estelle feels that she has much more patience and is more passive and quiet compared to her mother. Estelle tends to keep things to herself whereas her mother will speak out, but in an indirect way that may be perceived as sarcastic or hurtful. Although this eventually frustrates Estelle and she then decides to confront her mom about it, Estelle also feels that this leads to her

mother being respected by others. Because of her mother's authoritarian manner, she is good at leading others, and she is also more spontaneous in her interaction with people, which Estelle admires. Estelle definitely looks up to her mom in terms of her confidence, leadership skills, and success as a business woman. These are characteristics Estelle deems to be absent in herself and would like to work towards in the future.

Despite her mother's successful career, Estelle feels that her mother had the potential to achieve much more, but that she gave up her dreams for her family. This is something Estelle appreciates but wishes not to repeat herself. It feels to Estelle that her mother has major regrets in life and she does not want to have to feel that in her own life. Estelle feels that this may link to her mother's hopes and expectations of her and her sisters, that of becoming an independent, successful, career women. Although her mother does not wish for her daughters to become like herself, she wishes them to become something she gave up the opportunity to become.

Estelle has done much self-reflecting and highlighted for herself characteristics in herself that she would like to change. She carefully observes all those around her and makes her own decisions on what kind of person she would like to be. Although she does not particularly mind being similar to her mother, she does feel a loss of identity and self when other people connect them too similarly. She sees the traits of indirectness and unintentional hurting of others with words also appearing in her own interactions with her boyfriend, and is concerned about it and hopes that she can change this automatic protective mechanism that she has learnt from her mom. Estelle would like her mother to be more direct in her interaction, especially about things that upset her. Estelle feels that she would be more open to that than the current occasional remarks thrown carefully by her mother which are laced with hidden meaning.

Another of her resolutions includes becoming more direct and outspoken with people around her. It is also, in Estelle's opinion, a necessary change that is required to foster a better relationship with her mother. This is however very difficult for Estelle, and she becomes quite nervous every time she wants to raise an issue with her mother. Although Estelle feels that her mother will eventually accept her openness and honesty, it has been a difficult process and one that Estelle feels intimidates her mom and makes her feel uncomfortable. Estelle indicates that her mother finds it difficult to apologise and often reacts with tears and helplessness at Estelle's confrontations. This instils guilt in Estelle and the matter is often left unresolved. This results in unspoken issues and therefore sporadic outbursts of confrontation.

Estelle feels that her parent's parenting styles has been authoritarian and controlling. Although they respect her opinions and choices, they do not hide their disapproval if she goes against their wishes. Estelle has tried to be obedient most of the time in order to keep the peace, but there are certain times when she chooses to stick to her own decisions, which upsets her parents. However, they eventually do show support for her choices. This is especially the case following the recent heart attack suffered by Estelle's father. The incident has brought mother and daughter closer in that Estelle feels she is playing a much more supportive role to her mother, thus diversifying how she can relate to her mother, and also it seems to have opened her parent's eyes to different perspectives.

Estelle's experience of her relationship with her mother has influenced her own outlook with regards to her future relationship with her own children. She would like to be more open-minded and accepting of her children's views, be emotionally available as well as approachable so that her children can come to her with whatever problems they may have. Estelle does not experience her mother as approachable and indicates that her mother has a very authoritarian air that leads her to fear possible rejection.

Another issue Estelle has is that of being the youngest at home. This results in a paradox for Estelle. She often still feels that others treat her as a child and not as a 23-year-old adult. She is still often expected to compromise at family functions because she is the youngest, which makes her feel disrespected and rejected. Furthermore, because she is the only daughter who is still not financially independent, she feels this contributes to her family treating her as still a child. As much as she would like to become financially independent, she feels the pressure from her parents to have her at home; that it is difficult for them to let go of the last child. Mention of moving out and being independent appears to offend her mother who takes it as personal rejection. There appears to be a perpetuating cycle of treating Estelle as a child so she does not leave home.

In general, Estelle does not feel that she has an extremely close and intimate relationship with her mother. Although they communicate and spend time together, she would like it to be closer than it is currently, and hopes that this will change in the future. However, despite the difficulties, Estelle feels that her mother can be very supportive and caring and she appreciates that. There is hope that things will get better, perhaps when she does move out of home and become independent, or perhaps when she has children of her own.

Appendix 5

Mona's Interview Summary

Mona grew up in the Northern Province where her grandfather was the chief of a large village. Her family was therefore well-respected and children were taught from a young age of what is appropriate and what is not. Due to her coming from a respectable home, keeping up this facet in her life remains essential and Mona tries to set an example to others so that she can be looked up to. She wishes that her daughters have inherited the same traits, that of being proud yet humble, and of being an example to the community.

Mona lost her mother at a young age and was brought up by her father and stepmother. Mona married young and had two daughters. She eventually divorced after sixteen years of marriage due to the relationship becoming abusive and aggressive. Mona feels that if there was anything she did that had a major impact on her two eldest daughters' lives; it was the divorce. She thinks that her two eldest daughters are disappointed with her decision to leave their father, but hoped that they would understand as they grew up and matured. It was an extremely difficult decision for Mona to make, but she decided that her happiness was important to her and that she deserved to change a situation that she was not comfortable with.

After her divorce, Mona was a single parent for several years. She then met someone, who has been with her for the past twenty years. They never married and always maintained their separate residences. Mona did this out of respect for her daughters as well as to keep her own independence and space. She did not wish to force her daughters to accept another male figure in their lives and treasured her time alone with them. Mona had another daughter with her new partner. The last daughter is quite some years younger than her two older sisters, and is currently going through puberty and struggling with adolescence.

Mona is an extremely loving mother who has strong ideals in terms of life philosophy that she wants to, and believes she has, passed onto her three daughters. She feels that all her daughters, particularly the two eldest ones, have become self-sufficient, independent women, who are capable of looking after themselves and who do not need to depend on other people to survive. Mona is tremendously proud of her daughters' achievements and becomes very excited when she thinks about it. They have filled Mona's life by becoming educated and employed.

Mona has always felt close to her daughters and feels that the addition of grandchildren in her life has increased their closeness even more. Of all her daughters, Mona indicates that Charmaine is the most like her personality wise, while her eldest daughter is tougher and "male-like". Mona describes herself as a gentle person who tends to avoid conflict at all costs. She is accepting of everyone, but this often leads to her being taken advantage of. Mona recognises that although Charmaine is soft and considerate, she can put her foot down when necessary and be strong and determined. Mona trusts Charmaine and therefore has entrusted the care of her youngest daughter to Charmaine during this period while she is moving into her new residence, which is still in the process of being built. Mona trusts Charmaine to be strict and to control her youngest sister appropriately, yet offer the nurturing and love needed by her sister.

Mona is a little concerned that Charmaine may be repeating her footstep in terms of also being involved in an abusive relationship and now divorcing her husband. Although Mona does not wish for her daughter to go through the same pain that she did, she feels that she may be able to help Charmaine because of her own similar experiences. In fact, Mona feels that Charmaine is extremely intelligent and will most likely handle the situation better than she did so many years ago. Mona asked Charmaine to come live with her through the difficult time of her divorce so that she could provide her daughter with support and comfort, and also assist with looking after the grand children. Therefore until recently, Mona, her three daughters, and her three grandchildren, were all living together.

Mona indicates that her grandchildren are just like her children. She does not treat them differently nor does she differentiate between different daughter's children, but rather see them as all her children. In fact, the grandchildren address Mona as "mommy" and call their mothers by their names. Mona is therefore very much the "mother figure" of the household, and perhaps the figure everyone tries to protect.

Mona feels that her daughters' strong characters have been a gift, one that they have needed to go through life. Mona does not feel that she herself is strong, and although she is silently without realising it, believes that her daughters could not have learnt their strength from her. Mona's daughters often try to protect her by standing up for her and letting her know that she is being taken advantage of. Mona however does not mind and feels that she is just soft that way and cannot say no to people. This aspect of Mona's personality is carried over into her relationship with her daughters, where conflicts are more often than not dealt with through indirect communication through an uninvolved party and not directly between the disagreeing parties. Mona prefers this way of handling matters as she does not wish to see her daughters being upset with her or be upset with what she has to say. She refers to

herself as being a coward in this manner, but is sure and glad that her daughters understand her and allows her to avoid direct confrontation.

Mona feels that she has achieved her dream of becoming a film star, by having a career in television presenting for the past twenty years. She was the first black woman to be on South African television and feels fulfilled in her career. Due to Mona achieving her own dreams, she does not impose any specific expectations on her daughters, but only for them to be educated and become independent. Mona tries her best to respect her daughters' opinions and decision, even though she wishes that they will eventually make the correct choices. In terms of her daughters, they have only made her proud and not once have they disappointed her. Mona wants her daughters to be happy and for Mona, finding happiness in others is finding it in oneself.

Mona has come a long way since her days in the rural village in Northern Province. She has pursued her dreams and succeeded. Mona is honest in admitting that she wants her daughters to be educated amongst the white people in order to have a good education and therefore have the same opportunities and be on an equal footing as other educated youngsters. However, she holds that her children and grandchildren must always remember where they come from and never feel that they are superior or different to uneducated black people in the homelands. It has been a difficult scale for Mona to keep balanced, but she feels that she has managed somehow. For being a Libra, she is supposed to be good at keeping a balance.

For Mona, her children have always been her first priority, and they always will. Although the future holds uncertainties, it will always include her children and their relationship will endure always through thick and thin – in Mona's words "I am their mother, I am their father, and I always will be". Mona is very grateful for her daughters and acknowledges the important role they play in her life. She is also very appreciative of their love and care as well as understanding for all the various things they allow just to be, and not to ask further questions. Mona has enjoyed her life as herself and as a mother to her daughters, and now continues to treasure her life as mother and grandmother.

Charmaine's Interview Summary

Charmaine currently enjoys a very good relationship with her mother. It was however not always so. Charmaine went through her teenage rebellious year where she resented her mother's strictness and control. On one occasion, Charmaine even ran away from home to live with her aunt. During her adolescence, Charmaine experienced her mother as authoritarian and controlling. She felt that her mother was not approachable and was often afraid to raise issues with her. Charmaine would have liked her mother to be more open and approachable during these years, which she felt may have helped her with various events in her life, such as her early pregnancy at the age of 19.

Charmaine's parents divorced when she was around 12 years old. Although now she understands a lot more about the situation between her parents, she did not know why her parents got divorced when she was younger. There was some anger and resentment towards her mother for having left their father so suddenly. Although Charmaine does not blame her mother for getting divorced from her father, she wishes that her mother held a more tolerant and open attitude towards the subject of their father. Because even though her father may have hurt her mother in various and harsh ways, Charmaine loves her father and wanted to maintain some kind of contact with him. Even now, Charmaine feels that bringing up her father upsets her mother, which leads to her feeling guilty that she has in some way betrayed her mother. Charmaine therefore feels quite torn between the love she has for both her parents and often feels stuck in not knowing what to do about it, particularly at family gatherings where both her mother and father are present. Charmaine wishes that her mother would realise that her love for her would never change and that connecting with her father will not in any way jeopardise her relationship with her mother.

Charmaine agrees that of all the daughters, she is the most similar in characteristics to her mother. She is more soft spoken and nice like her mother, while her eldest sister is less tolerant with others and adamant on her boundaries. Often, Charmaine finds herself in situations where she plays mediator between her mother and sisters, but this can also land her in trouble in that she cannot be on everyone's side at the same time. Charmaine now finds it easier to simply act as a listener and let issues resolve themselves eventually. Although Charmaine feels that she is similar to her mother personality wise, she also feels that there are differences. Charmaine maintains that although she is soft, she does not let others take advantage of her like her mother does. Charmaine feels that her mother is too

trusting of people and compromises her own rights and needs. But Charmaine understands that her mother is a public figure and therefore is in a way obliged to keep a certain reputation afloat. In addition to it being naturally in her personality, this is also the reason why her mother is always accepting and nice to others, because she has to.

Charmaine has looked up to her mother in many ways. For instance, her mother's glamorous public life excited her when she was younger, but as she grew up, she decided that it was not something she would like herself since she values her privacy and freedom. As Charmaine came into adulthood, her mother served and continues to serve as an example to her, in both good and bad. Charmaine takes her mother's advice and opinions seriously, but she also evaluates everything carefully before she decides on a course of action. Charmaine admits that there are certain life-changing decisions her mother has made in her own life that Charmaine herself would do differently. However, she respects her mother's decisions and does not judge her for them even if sometimes her mother's stubbornness frustrates her immensely. It is clear that both mother and daughter are strong characters in their own way, and not easily influenced by the other's opinions.

Charmaine is currently in the process of divorcing her husband of two years. She has two children with her husband, but after a stormy and abusive marriage, she has decided that the best decision is to end the relationship. Charmaine was initially very disappointed in her mother for not supporting her decision. Her mother rather wanted her to seek other avenues to try and repair the marriage. For Charmaine, she expected much more support and understanding, since her mother has walked the same path before. Things slowly changed and Charmaine's mother came to see the reasons behind Charmaine's decision and began supporting her fully. Since then, their relationship has become even closer because mother and daughter can identify with each other in their similar experiences. It was also then that Charmaine's mother explained more about the reasons behind her own divorce with Charmaine's father, and Charmaine gained a better understanding of who her mother is. Charmaine is extremely grateful for her mother's support during this time, particularly with her children as well as emotionally.

Mother and daughter both realise that Charmaine may be repeating the mother's patterns in life – getting married early, having two children, being in an abusive relationship with an unemployed husband, and now divorcing. Both mother and daughter hope that because of their similar experiences, they are more able to support each other in the best way they know how.

Charmaine loves her children very much. However, she does feel that if she did not make the mistake of falling pregnant so early in her life, she would have achieved more educationally and career-wise. On this point, she would have appreciated it if her mother offered to take care of her children while she pursued her studies, rather than encouraging her to start raising a family. Charmaine does not blame her mother and acknowledges that she must take responsibility for her mistakes. She realises that although it is tempting, she cannot blame her mother forever about everything, and that her life is in her own hands and she alone can uplift herself to where she wants to be in life.

It was only in the past two years or so that Charmaine began relating to her mother more as a friend than as a mother. Charmaine treasures the times spent with her mother talking and shopping. Her mother is the first person she turns to in times of trouble or happiness and she keeps in close contact with her mother on a daily basis. Although Charmaine describes herself as an introvert who does not have many friends by personal choice, and therefore her mother and sisters are her friends, she also indicates that she finds her mother easier to relate to and comfortable to be with. Charmaine's mother is much more of an extrovert and a socialite, and going out with her often attracts the public's attention, Charmaine has become used to this and does not mind it, knowing that she will have her mother's full attention later.

For the future, Charmaine believes that she will continue to have a close relationship with her mother. However, she indicates that her mother does not like confrontation and would do anything to avoid it. This often results in unspoken and unresolved issues that simmer underneath the surface, which blows up over and over again. Charmaine feels that this can be avoided if her mother was more willing to face issues and to talk about them openly. Charmaine acknowledges that her mother is a sensitive person who becomes hurt and defensive quickly, and this sensitivity causes Charmaine to tiptoe around issues that she is too afraid to bring up with her mother, in fear of upsetting her or causing an argument. Charmaine therefore would like her mother to be more tolerant and accepting, and to listen to all sides of the story before making a judgment and reacting. This would very much help their relationship in becoming more intimate than it already is.