IMAGES OF MOTHERS IN ADOLESCENT LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to discover if the images of mothers in realistic adolescent literature published since 1975 reflected real-life mothers. In the past twenty years many social and political changes have occurred giving women opportunities for better jobs, provisions for child care and assistance for education. Were the mothers in adolescent literature undergoing similar changes?

I selected the adolescent literature from the yearly list of "Best Books for Young Adults" published in Booklist by the American Library Association. I analyzed the images of mothers according to attributes derived from literature on mothers in present-day society. The attributes were: the mother's opportunity and ability to make decisions that affected her family; her rapport with and understanding of her teenage children; her relationship with her husband (if he was present); her effectiveness in a work situation; her ability to balance personal interests with family responsibilities. The analyses provided four categories:

1. Mothers in a period of transition.
2. Mothers who are passive and/or unable to cope.
3. Mothers limited to an adult perspective.

4. Mothers who are empathic, yet independent.

The results of my investigation showed that images of mothers were varied and realistic. Although some were described in negative terms, many were in a period of transition, trying to become more independent and responsible. A few books depicted mothers who were loving and supportive, with excellent self concepts. Many held responsible jobs and were learning to balance personal interests with the needs of their family. The images provided by the selection of books used in the study reflected the images in society more closely than did books published prior to 1975.

DEDICATION

to Bill and Becky

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to discover if the images of mothers in realistic adolescent literature published since 1975 reflect those of real-life mothers. Adolescence is a time when young people critically analyze their own beliefs and begin to define for themselves the roles they will assume as adults. Adolescent literature is one of the sources that may help young people decide who and what they will become. I chose realistic fiction for the study because the image of mother portrayed in this genre would be most apt to resemble mothers in present-day society. I analyzed the books to determine how the mothers were portrayed. Were they capable of making competent decisions and accepting responsibility for these decisions? Did they establish rapport with their children? Did they balance personal interests with family responsibilities and needs? Were they able to become independent and yet be loving, supportive mothers?

The procedure I used in analyzing the books was to examine several characteristics of the mother: her opportunity and ability to make decisions that affected her family, her rapport with and understanding of her teenage children, her relationship with her husband (if he was present), her effectiveness in a work situation (either in or out of the home), her ability to balance personal interests with family responsibilities. These attributes provided a

more complete description of the mothers than one provided by the statistical information on whether the mother worked outside the home or whether the family portrayed traditional role models. A mother may work outside the home and yet remain passive or dependent at home, or not work outside the home and be active and independent. Consequently I analyzed contemporary adolescent literature to ascertain if the mother was not only becoming more independent, but did she also retain a good rapport with her children. Information on the mother as wage earner does not present a complete image of her degree of independence or self confidence. A literary analysis of how the mother acts in relation to other family members seemed a stronger indicator of the type of person she was than a strict and systematic content-analysis approach.

I selected adolescent literature from the yearly list of "Best Books for Young Adults" in Booklist, published by the American Library Association. This annual list of books is compiled by a committee of the Young Adult Services Division of the American Library Association. The books are selected on the basis of each book's proven or potential appeal to young adult readers and provide a variety of subjects for different reading tastes as well as a broad range of reading level." (Booklist, March 15, 1984) The lists include non-fiction as well as a variety of fiction, but I chose only realistic fiction that had a contemporary setting and included a mother as one of the characters. Librarians rely heavily on the Association's recommendations when choosing

books for their libraries. The ALA's recommended books are usually available to adolescent readers in both their school and public libraries, thus, adolescents are likely to read these books. In order to narrow the list I examined lists published in Horn Book, English Journal, New York Times and reviewed bibliographies from books on adolescent literature. I chose only books that received the most favorable reviews not because they would be the best in a literary sense (although they may be) but that they would be the most widely read and therefore have more potential influence on young people.

Definitions of Terms

Adolescent literature is literature widely read by young adults between the ages of twelve to eighteen or in grades six through twelve and is published usually by the juvenile division of the publishing company. The books "may be found in either the adult or young people's sections of public libraries." (Donelson and Nilsen, p. 5) Some adolescent literature was not written primarily for adolescents, but because of the theme or characters the books become popular with young people. An example of this type of book is Ordinary People by Judith Guest. For purposes of this study, adolescent literature was further defined as those having adolescents as the primary characters.

Contemporary realistic fiction is fiction that is convincingly true to life; everything that happens in the story could happen in real life. Contemporary, in this study, refers to books published since 1975, with a setting no later than the late 1960's. No science fiction or fantasy was used because I wanted the images of mother to be similar to those encountered by the readers in their own lives.

Image, as used in this study, means the mental impression or visual picture the reader acquires from the text. The image could be formed from the way the mother character is described, what she says and how she acts, as well as her relationship and interactions with other family members, and what they say to her and about her. Image may also depend on nuance of tone, on heightened physical details, or on other techniques germane to a single work.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One is in two sections. The first includes a review of the literature concerning the changing roles of women in present-day society, and problems women face in acquiring roles that meet their needs without sacrificing motherhood. The second section is a review of the images of women, particularly mothers, as presented in literature.

Chapter Two through Five contain the literary analyses of the adolescent books, grouped into the four categories. The first category "Mothers in a period of transition" is in

Chapter Two. Chapter Three is "Mothers who are passive and/or unable to cope." Chapter Four is "Mothers limited to an adult perspective." The final category "Mothers who are empathic yet independent" is in Chapter Five. The conclusions derived from the study are in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER 1

WOMEN IN SOCIETY AND LITERATURE

Women's Roles in Present-day Society

Women's roles, and in particular, the role of mothers, have undergone gradual changes in recent years. Although today the media occasionally show mindless homemakers who have a consuming interest in cleanliness and are unable to act intelligently, more often mothers are portrayed as personable characters with the ability to make informed decisions. In commercials for home cleaning products, women wear slacks, men help with the housework, and the "I think I'll keep her" mentality has for the most part disappeared from the television screen. Are the mothers in adolescent fiction undergoing similar changes?

To establish a background for the changing image of mother, I turned to the work of sociologists and feminists who have been concerned with the problems and difficulties mothers have in meeting their own needs, as well as those of their children and husband. When Betty Friedan wrote The Feminine Mystique in 1963 she gave a name, the feminine mystique, to the guilt and frustration women felt when they wanted to become more than a housewife. There were, and are, women for whom this was not true, but as Friedan conducted studies she become increasingly aware of how widespread the

feminine mystique was. Her book became a classic of the feminist movement as women realized their feelings were not unique and they shouldn't have to be satisfied with a situation where they could not reach their full potential. Friedan's book was not a political statement, but a raising of consciousness; it was the beginning of the women's movement. Friedan founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1964 when it became clear that the federal government would not enforce the Equal Rights Amendment. In the twenty years since then many social and political changes have occurred, giving women opportunities for better jobs, provisions for child care and assistance for education.

Important as the women's movement became, radical change did not occur overnight. For most women the changes had to begin first in their homes, with their children, and, if married, with their husbands. Ten years after The Feminine Mystique was published, Friedan wrote "that the assumption of your own identity, equality, and even political power does not mean you stop needing to love, and be loved by, a man, or that you stop caring for your kids." (1975, p. 380) Many women sought this balance.

One of the most difficult stumbling blocks to a balance between a mother's needs and those of her family is the pedestal that mothers in our society have been placed on. Motherhood, as an institution, has been revered and veiled in sentimentality. Jessie Bernard in The Future of Motherhood described the idealized version of mothers as "loving,

gentle, tender, self sacrificing, devoted," almost a parody. (1974, p. 12) Other feminist writers agree. Angela McBride described this image of mother as a metaphor, a projection of an ideal with behaviors that no one could achieve. (1975, p. 117) In My Mother / My Self, Nancy Friday described the love that an idealized mother would have as different from other kinds of love. It would never be open to doubt, error, or ambivalence. (1977, p. 3) Adrienne Rich concurred: "Mother love is supposed to be continuous, unconditioned." (1976, p.29) These attributes characterized not individuals but an institution, and if taken seriously, mothers would always appear to be less than they should. Friedan claimed that once women took themselves seriously as real and fallible people with needs of their own, they could see that actually being put on a pedestal was being put down. (1973, p. 4) If mothers were idealized, they were therefore different from other people, and should not (or could not) engage in life as fully as men, e.g., be assertive, take responsibility, make decisions, earn money.

Even today many women perpetuate the myth that they are not capable enough to assume responsibility in an adult world. Colette Dowling called this attitude the Cinderella Complex, and described it as women "waiting for something external to transform their lives." (1981, p. 30) These women expect their husbands to take care of them, physically and psychologically. Dowling claimed that this attitude stems from the socialization girls receive as they learn

gender roles. If females are not taught to be assertive and independent, it is natural for them to believe they should be protected and cared for. This social conditioning is particularily dominant when women marry and become mothers. Throughout The Cinderella Complex, Dowling described case histories of intelligent, active career women who accepted passive roles once they married. She believed women have been programmed to prevent themselves from advancing. (1981, p. 103) To escape such a limited view, women must cast off the Cinderella role, learn to take chances and accept the responsibility for their own successes and failures.

The idea that mothers need to be competent and responsible is not a new one. Mary Wollstonecraft in Vindication of the Rights of Women, wrote in 1792:

> To be a good mother, a woman must have sense, and that independence of mind which few women possess who are taught to depend entirely on their husbands. Meek wives are, in general, foolish mothers. Unless the understanding of women be enlarged, and her character rendered more firm, by being allowed to govern her own conduct, she will never have sufficient sense of command of temper to govern her children properly. (p. 152)

And in our present-day society, a mother needs to have "sense and the independence of mind" to govern her own life so that her self worth and competence continue to develop.

Many feminists believe that for mothers to become more capable and independent they must work outside of the home. One reason for this belief is that child care is considered to be a very low-skilled job. In the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, published by the federal government,

22,000 occupations are rated on a scale of skill-level requirements (1 = highest, 887 = lowest). Homemaker, foster mother, child care attendant and nursery school teacher were all rated at 878. It seems surprising that the care of children is believed to require so little skill when competent mothers must be well versed in nursing, psychology, teaching, physical education, and nutrition, as well as what is usually considered child care -- feeding and dressing children, and keeping them out of trouble. If what mothers are responsible for is considered low in skills and, therefore, low in value, it is difficult for mothers to achieve a high self esteem.

Elizabeth Janeway in Man's World, Woman's Place describes mothers who remain homemakers as limiting their power. She believes mothers are better off as wage earners even if the job is boring with low pay because going off to work gives them control over their own lives. They have someone to talk to other than their children and gain a sense of independence. (1971, p. 178-9) Agreeing with this opinion, Nancy Chodorow characterizes a homemaker's life as one of isolation. All her energy is focused on her children, and she looks to them for her self esteem. (1978, p. 64) Relying on others for development of self worth is not a stable situation. For mothers to become competent assertive women, they must value themselves, not only as mothers, but as people.

However, for many mothers, becoming a wage earner

outside the home does not mean a lessening of home care duties. Jessie Bernard wrote that mothers usually remain the major caretakers of the families while they continue their former responsibilities along with the new jobs. If a husband does help, the mother is responsible for helping him to see the work and show him how to do it. (1975, p. 155, 161) Since the only sphere of influence a mother has had is in the house, it can be difficult for her to turn even a share of the responsibility for its maintenance over to other family members. In some families, no one may be willing to assume any of the household duties believing it is mom's job. With the necessary education and experience though, mothers can learn to see themselves as important members of the labor force, and begin to take themselves more seriously.

Not all feminists believe it is necessary to work outside the home to gain a sense of self worth. Sara Ruddick disagreed with Janeway and Chodorow, and described a mother at home as a member of a community. This community provides warmth and support far beyond other working situations. Also, the mother has control over her working day. (1980, p. 344) Child care rarely requires all of the time and energy of a mother. If a mother develops a sense of purpose for her life and values the work she does at home, she can have a strong self image and esteem.

In spite of the fact that writers in the field of sociology and women's studies disagree about the methods by which women should gain a higher self esteem, they all agree

on the desired attributes of women. In the introduction of her book, The Growth and Development of Mothers, Angela McBride describes the necessity for mothers to consider their lives in terms of their own needs. They must move beyond the romantic idealism of the motherhood mystique. "For a mother to mature she has to come to terms with society's expectations of her and the expectations she has for herself, her husband, and her children." (1975) Adrienne Rich wrote that a mother must believe in herself, become a fighter for her own needs and desires, and create "livable space" around herself. (1976, p. 250) Developing a strong sense of self is not a decree that mothers abdicate their rights and responsibilities for child care. What does it mean to become a strong person? Dowling summed up what many have written. It means to take on responsibility for one's own existence, create one's own life, rely on one's self and be self loving. (1981, p. 225)

Sociologists have described the present-day mother as being in a time of transition. There are more options available to women now than there were twenty, even ten, years ago. What is important for women is choice. If they do not have to become wage earners for economic reasons, their work at home should be valued. But every mother, regardless of her circumstances, should become competent as a person -- able to make thoughtful decisions and to accept responsiblity for her own life. Do the mothers in adolescent literature exhibit these characteristics? Do they reject

being idealized? Do they attempt to assert themselves in worlds beyond the household? And as they take on more responsibility for their own lives do they continue to be loving mothers?

Images of Women in Literature

During the 1800's a mother in young peoples' literature was depicted as being genteel, kind, well mannered, and at all times, a "lady". According to a study by Gordon Kelly of children's periodicals published from 1865-1890, the mother was the central figure in the family. By comparison, the fathers in the stories exerted little or no moral force. They were dead, dulled by alcohol, or never referred to at all. (p. 78) The family was the social microcosm with the mother being the dispenser of knowledge. All of the stories published in the 19th century centered around children discovering for themselves the truth of their "mothers' definition of the world as fundamentally ordered by benign law." (p. 105) Problems encountered by the young characters were caused by the mother dying and leaving the children bereft and isolated. (p. 41) Difficult conditions were never caused by actions of a living mother. On the contrary, mothers helped their children overcome danger and temptation. It was the mother who transmitted basic social values. (p. 109, 147) Kelly concluded that, "Mother was a lady -- vigorous, decisive, strong." (p. 166) Although the work of

the mother was limited to the house, because she was held in high regard, so was her work. Housework was considered a valuable occupation. Throughout the first half of this century, mothers continued to be depicted in literature for young people as having a stable influence on their children's lives, although their sphere of power was limited to the home.

Literature for adolescents did not come into its own until the 50's. Both mothers and fathers in this genre in the 50's were usually portrayed as loving and helpful. During the social upheaval of the Sixties the roles of parents in adolescent fiction were drastically changed. (Lukenbill, 1981) Sheila Egnoff explained the change this way:

> The stability of family life was taken for granted in children's literature until changes in life style and the liberated attitudes of the sixties made the convention seem mythical. (1981, p. 65)

Egnoff ignores the fact that although family life changed for some people, there remained many stable families. The acceptability of writing more realistic portrayals of parents in books for young people resulted in characterizing parents negatively light. In contrast to the characterizations during the 50's and before, Egnoff described parents in the adolescent novels published during the 60's as contributing to the teenager's problems, rather than as caring adults who helped their children. The parents were often portrayed as the enemy -- the major cause of the problems. They were

characterized as "confused, inept, insecure, self-centered, cynical, violent or sadistic." (1981, p. 69) In a study of family stories published during the 60's, Anne W. Ellis found a similar pattern. She summarized the overriding images of mothers as being more concerned with themselves than with their children. They appeared to be anxious for their children to reach the age of independence so that they might be free of them. (1970, p. 26-27) While mothers were depicted as being self-centered and heartless, their role in the family was not changing. Although more women were entering the work force, the mothers in novels for young people remained at home in traditional roles. And the traditional role of housekeeper had become less valued.

The Council on Interracial Books for Children, founded in 1966 for the purpose of affecting a change in books and media, deplored the rigid role structure of mothers. The Council claimed that the value system present in books for young people was "very contemptuous of females except in traditional roles." (1976, p. 2) And in that traditional role, mothers were responsible for tasks considered inferior. Housework appeared to have less value and importance than work outside the home.

Linguist Mary Ritchie Key reviewed several studies on books for young people conducted between 1969 and 1971. She concluded that all of these studies "overwhelmingly document discrimination and prejudice against females." (1971, p. 168) She discussed a study by Marjorie U'Ren of the basal readers

used in California schools. U'Ren found that 75% of the main characters were male, and, specifically, that the mother figure was presented as typically a "pleasant, hardworking, but basically uninteresting person. She had no effect upon the world beyond her family, and even within the family her contribution is limited to that of a housekeeper and cook." (p. 170) The mother plays foil to the father, setting him up for his line. She asks the questions; he gives the information and direction. The strength of the mother as depicted in the 1800's was lost. Key concluded that females in the late 60's and early 70's were shown as unimportant, non-productive, non-adventurous and unintelligent beings.

Mothers fared even less well in a study conducted by Diane Gersoni Stavn. She analyzed books known to be popular with boys, written by noted and prolific authors published since the mid 50's. The mothers were "almost always unrealized or unpleasant characters -- one-dimensional, idealized, insipid, bitchy, or castrating -- while sexually neutral characters, such as little sisters and old ladies, are most often well conceived and likable." (1971, p. 66) Good Old Mom was often depicted as:."an insipid lady who flutters around chronically worrying and inanely commenting." (p. 67) If the mother wasn't vapid, she is cruelly domineering or lax in her maternal obligations. (p. 68) Stavn laments the fact that fiction for young people was not keeping up with the changes in societal consciousness.

Feminists on Children's Literature, a collective of

women who prepare lists of non-sexist books for children, examined the Notable Book list for 1969, prepared by the American Library Association, the annual recommendations by the Child Study Association, and the Newbery Award winners. Few of the books from these prestigious lists featured females. The mother was defined by the man she married and the children she bore. (1971, p. 20) Women were shown as working outside the home only if they had been denied the status of wife and mother. This study was concerned with fiction books that young people would probably find in school and public libraries; that is, the books would not necessarily be required reading. Similar conclusions, though, were found in a study of elementary school readers, required reading for all students.

Women on Words and Images, a twenty-five member task force of the Central New Jersey National Organization for Women, conducted a study of 134 books published by fourteen major publishing companies. The majority of the findings centered on how boys and girls were depicted, but some conclusions concerning mothers were drawn:

> Mothers move through these pages like so much ectoplasm. (p. 167) In a story about a bully his abnormal behavior is attributed solely to the fact that his mother works in contrast to the good boy whose mother is home all day. (p. 171)

Adult males in the stories were job holders, as well as fathers. In all of the 134 books, only three working mothers appeared, though at the time of this study, the early 70's, the United States Office of Labor reported that thirty-eight

percent of all working women had children under eighteen. The group concluded that the mothers in the readers were limited and colorless, concerned only with housework, and showed no creativity in solving family problems.

In a comparable study of children's readers, conducted at approximately the same time, 1973, Marjorie Taylor, a librarian, came to corresponding conclusions. Her study concerned basal readers used in California for grades one through six. Looking at females across age categories, she found that they were portrayed in negative stereotyped roles. The females were "basically uninteresting, emotionally flighty or ridiculous." (p. 1045) When examining the mother role specifically she reported that mothers were "never portrayed as competent, efficient or showing concern with the world outside." (p. 1046) "Real mothers read books, move furniture, drive cars, work outside the home, go to school at night, balance the checkbook, participate in community affairs, and vote. Mothers in the readers do not do these things." (p. 1046) These studies of school anthologies illustrate the point that while real-life mothers were becoming more involved in the world beyond their homes through jobs, politics, volunteer work, and education, the literature young people were required to read in school did not reflect these changes.

However, adolescent literature published during the early 70's did begin to reflect some of the changes that were occurring in society, but only through the characterization

of young women, not adult women. Aileen Nilsen wrote in 1973 that during the past three years authors and publishers seemed to have made a concerted effort to modernize the concepts of young adult male and female roles. (p. 1035) Selma Siege found the same result when she examined fourteen books from the Notable Books List from the American Library Association that were published from 1960-1970. She concluded that there was an emergence of a new type of heroine that did not conform to the concept of the traditional heroine found in books published in the 50's. (1973, p. 1039) In other words, the girls were more assertive and were developing stronger self concepts than had formerly been portrayed. However, this change did not extend to the mother and father. In fact, the assertiveness the new heroines exhibited was usually a reaction to "the family situation or the quality of their homelife." (1973, p. 1041) Siege wrote that the parents in the selected books she studied were "confused, stubborn, self-centered, embittered, and rejecting." (p. 1041) Surely not all of the mothers were represented in this fashion. Siege doesn't report quantitatively, but the lives of fictional mothers were not changing as quickly as those of their daughters.

Although not all studies of adolescent literature concluded that mothers were as negatively represented as Siege claimed, many agreed that mothers were not portrayed in ways that reflected what was happening in the real world: more and more mothers were entering the work force, women, in

general, were becoming more assertive, opportunities for education were increasing. Yet, mothers in adolescent literature were not reflecting these changes. One of the more comprehensive studies of mothers in adolescent literature was conducted by Jane Jederman. (1973) She analyzed 301 books written for young teenagers by comparing the social roles of mothers in the books to the social roles of mothers in reality. Information from the books on the marital, maternal, and occupational status was compared to data from the United States Census Bureau and the Department of Labor. She concluded that a vast majority of mothers was portrayed as passive, stereotyped and uninteresting. In fact, only ten out of the 301 books had what Jederman defined as "realistic" portrayals of mothers, mothers who were becoming interested in the world outside their home.

The studies I reviewed indicated that the portrayal of mothers in literature had changed over the years. Mother was characterized as competent and loving in the 1800's, as kind, but having less power and competence in the early 1900's and up through the 1950's, and finally as passive and uninteresting at best, but more likely heartless or irresponsible in the 60's. Were real mothers changing for the worse as the fictional depictions would imply? Or was literature for young people ignoring certain realities in order to portray more "realistic" mothers? Historically, the portraits are out of balance, from overly strong nurturing mothers to self-centered heartless ones. There are

exceptions to this generality; however, the literature did not address the multi-faceted dimensions of mothers. I was interested in discovering if the adolescent literature published since 1975 reflects more closely the realities of mothers' lives. Are there mothers who take responsibility for their own lives without abdicating their responsibilities for their children? Are there mothers who are trying to expand their interests and competencies beyond their home? Is there more of a balance, and therefore more accuracy, between the very positive to very negative depictions of mothers in adolescent literature?

Analysis of Adolescent Literature

To understand the image of the mother as presented in contemporary adolescent fiction, I analyzed each book for several characteristics of the mother: her ability and opportunity to make decisions that affected the family, her rapport with and understanding of her teenage children, her relationship with her husband (if one was present), her effectiveness in a work situation (either in or out of the home), and her interests beyond the family responsibilities. These qualities provided an accurate picture of the characteristics of mothers in present-day society. According to the 1980 United States Census, 55.3% of all adult women who have at least one child under the age of eighteen are in the labor force. How do these mothers balance their work and

home responsibilities? Does working outside the home interfere with their effectiveness as a mother? Are these women becoming more assertive and better problem solvers because of their jobs? Do mothers who do not work outside the home find satisfaction and worth as a homemaker? These questions have been the focus of sociologists and feminist writers in order to better understand the attributes of contemporary mothers. By applying the same questions to adolescent literature, I could discover if real-life roles of women were reflected in the fiction.

I analyzed thirty-three adolescent novels for the image of mother. I chose realistic fiction published from 1975-1984 that appeared in the American Library Association list of Best Books for Young Adults. Since I wanted to compare fictional mothers to present-day mothers, I used books with a contemporary setting. A list of the books used in the study is in Appendix A.

In the chapters which follow, I describe the mother in each novel according to how that mother was portrayed in terms of her competence, independence, and relationships to husband and children. I classified the mothers according to the cluster of qualities that dominated the image created by the author. The groups are:

1. Mothers in a period of transition

Mothers in this group take on new responsibilities that

changes the direction of their lives. The reasons for the transitions vary considerably. For some it is a change from housewife to wage earner, for others an abdication of the mother role.

2. Mothers who are passive and/or unable to cope

The image of the passive mother is of one submissive to her husband. She allows her husband to make all the decisions that affected the family. Mothers unable to cope cannot function as responsible members of society because of alcohol or mental illness.

3. Mothers limited to an adult perspective

The image in this category is of a mother who has lost touch with what it is like to be a teenager. She cares about her children, but her understandings and expectations of them are from an adult view. The adult values are usually in conflict with those of the children. A gulf between mother and children is often created by insensitivity.

4. Mothers who are empathic yet independent

The mothers here are independent, wise, competent and understanding of their teenagers.

CHAPTER 2

MOTHERS IN A PERIOD OF TRANSITION

This category includes mothers who are in the process of change. Their life styles are changing either by choice or necessity and always involve a greater independence from other family members. Usually acquisition of new skills is necessary. Images of these mothers vary considerably because the category is defined by a change in their lives not by intent. Mothers in present-day society often face change partly because of increased education and career opportunities.

In two of the novels, _One Fat Summer_ and _Can You Sue your Parents for Malpractice?,_ the mothers are married and preparing to become wage earners. In _Divorce Express,_ the parents are divorced and the mother starts her own business. The mothers in _Tiger Eyes_ and _A Place Apart,_ are thrust into a time of transition because of the sudden death of their husbands. In _Notes for Another Life,_ the mother leaves her family to pursue a career. The mothers in _It Must've Been the Fish Sticks_ and _A Solitary Blue_ show a lack of maturity and an inability to accept responsibility. _Go and Catch a Flying Fish_ depicts a free spirit who doubts her ability to be a responsible mother.

Throughout _One Fat Summer,_ fourteen year-old Bobby's

mother Lenore is studying to be a teacher. She has not worked before, but stayed home to be a full time mother to her son and daughter. The family is middle class; the father is the sole provider, earning enough money to support the family. It is not clear why the mother wants to earn a degree and begin working as a teacher, but the writer suggests that circumstances of her family life could be the reason -- her daughter will be entering college in the fall; her son will be in tenth grade. Although the reasons for her wanting the job are not stated, the mother's determination to achieve her goal of preparing for a teaching job, in spite of opposition from her husband, is consistent throughout the book.

The setting for the novel is the family's summer home with the Dad coming out on the weekends. Lenore, the mother, is not taking classes as she stays at the summer home, but she is often studying, which points up her determination to succeed at her goal of becoming a teacher. Bobby, her teenage son, becomes aware that his father is using the appearance of the house to show his objection to his wife studying.

> Since my mother started studying to be a teacher he's really been complaining about how she sometimes leaves books out, open, with a pencil between the pages she's reading. (p. 54)

Bobby is only dimly aware of his parents arguments, with his own problems looming so large in his life. He hears the quarreling without knowing the reason, but then one weekend

the seriousness of his parents' disagreements becomes obvious. His dad doesn't come up to the summer home for the weekend. His mother avoids telling Bobby the real reason.

> She bit her lower lip. He won't be able to make it up this weekend. Business. (p. 64)

Lenore is concerned and upset with her husband's refusal to come home. She tries to not let his actions manipulate her into the reaction he wants -- her not studying. Bobby notices that she does continue to study:

> ...although she seemed to be walking around the house a lot, taking breaks for tea and stepping out on the porch to stare at the lake. (p. 67)

She does succumb to her worry and, probably guilt feelings as well, and drives into town to see her husband. However, she cannot admit to herself or to her son her reasons for going. Bobby asks if she will see Dad.

> Of course, I'll see him. But I'm going in to get some more books I need. (p. 70)

Her decision to leave behind what she knows is important for her own goals, does, at first, seem like a positive step to her. When she calls home to talk to her children, she seems almost carefree compared to her previous mood. She laughed, "Well, I feel a lot better now, believe me." (p. 86) And later, back home, tells her daughter that going into the city to see her husband was the best thing she ever did. (p. 90)

This euphoric feeling dissipates rapidly. Nothing has changed. Lenore has not given up her resolve to be a teacher. Her husband comes home the following weekend, but is withdrawn. Bobby describes his dad as being "quiet, extra

polite, complimenting Mom on food that wasn't all that great." (p. 97) Lenore's husband uses the age-old arguments to keep her from working outside the home. "I just don't think it's fair to the kids." (p. 97) When Lenore protests this argument because their daughter, Michelle, will be in college, their son in tenth grade, he insists the children "need to know someone's there for them." (p. 98) The "someone", of course, must be the mother. Both Michelle and Bobby are gone all day, every day now. Their father's concern is not with them; he rarely asks them questions or shows interest in his children's lives.

Lenore tries to turn the idea of her getting a job into an opportunity for her husband to quit his present job and go into some other line of work -- something he has wanted to do for awhile, but has not, because of the resulting reduced salary. Logically she points out that with her added income he can now afford to make the change.

> Quit Allied and take a gamble. At least that's what you've always said you really wanted.
>
> When I'm ready. After the kids are out of college.
>
> That's at least another seven years.
>
> By then you'll be Superintendent of Schools. I'll be able to retire.
>
> Marty, if my working is going to come between us I'll stop studying right now. I'd much rather spend the summer in the garden and down at the beach. I'll just forget the whole thing.
>
> Sure. And I'll have to spend the rest of my life hearing how I kept you from working.
>
> I'll never say another word.

> That'll be the day. (p. 98)

The conversation is based on emotion not logical facts.

Marty tries to push his wife into not working, but to assuage any guilt feelings, she must do so willingly, happily, not in anger or in reaction to anger. Lenore's offer to stop her program of study is satisfying to neither. She wants to continue her efforts to become a teacher, and, in fact does so. Her persistence, hard work, and her effort to become more independent reflects a woman in transition; one willing to take chances, and accept consequences for her own decisions.

Lenore's growing independence, a positive quality, is offset by her fostering dependent behavior in her son. She uses food and sympathy to delay Bobby's maturity. Lenore uses food in several ways. Food is used to interfere between Bobby and his father. Marty tries to talk to his son about Bobby's summer plans.

> Let him finish his breakfast, Marty. (p. 17)

> Marty, his eggs are getting cold, let him eat. (p. 18)

Food is used as a bribe.

> Ride into town with me. I'm going to do some shopping, we can have lunch out. (p. 18)

And, food is used to ease feelings of guilt. Bobby comes in interrupting a talk between Mom and Michelle. He knew it wasn't about him because, "she would have looked a little guilty and offered me a snack before dinner." (p. 64)

Food has become almost an obsession with Bobby. At

fifteen years, he weighs over 200 pounds. Because of his fat his self image is low and he has become introverted because of the constant teasing. He won't go swimming, although he was good at it, because a swimming suit exposes too much body. He eats because he is fat and unhappy. Yet, his mother continues to offer him food and encourages him to eat.

Another way she fosters dependency in her son is to treat him as if he were younger than fifteen and to worry excessively about his physical well being. She cautions him about traffic (p. 18), worries that he is working too hard (p. 89), constantly asks him how he feels, and reminds him that there is food in the refrigerator. Because he has been looking tired she decides to stop by where he is working. Michelle asks her not to.

> You shouldn't do that, Mom. It makes him seem like a baby.
>
> He is my baby.
>
> See, that's what I mean. (p. 89)

But Lenore refuses to see what Michelle means and continues to treat Bobby in ways more appropriate for a much younger child.

With the physically demanding work Bobby does all summer, he gradually loses weight and develops muscles. Looking at himself in the bathroom mirror he discovers a vein on top of his bicep and yells out in excitement. At once his mother is at the door.

> Bobby? Are you all right?

> I'm fine.
>
> You were yelling. It sounded like the word pain. Do you have cramps? Are you sick? (p. 110)

Yet for all of this attention, she seems unaware that he is getting in better shape, or she assumes it won't last.

Shortly before the end of summer the three, Lenore, Marty, and Bobby, drive to town to buy school clothes for Bobby. His father, proud of his son's improved appearance, wants to buy him a more expensive than usual pair of pants, but Lenore won't allow it. His father argues:

> Now that he's lost some weight, he should have some nice looking pants.
>
> [Lenore:] He might not stay at this weight. He might shoot up as soon as school starts and he's not getting as much exercise.
>
> [Bobby:] I'm not going to gain weight. (p. 124)

Lenore pays no attention to Bobby's remark, and, in fact, at no time has she acknowledged to him that he has lost weight.

Lenore and Marty have come to an agreement about Lenore working outside the home, albeit reluctantly on Marty's part. "I'm willing to give it a try. but I have a right to my opinion." (p. 126) At this point, Lenore has what she wants -- the okay from her husband. But emotionally she is not ready to accept responsibility for the transition from housewife to wage earner. She wants to hang on to what has made her feel important: washing, ironing, sewing, cleaning, mothering. She begins to argue that Marty is throwing up obstacles to her success, referring to his wanting to buy Bobby a good-looking pair of pants in his trimmed down size.

If she's working, she wouldn't have time to let them out. The obstacles are only in her mind. She is hanging on unnecessarily to the rituals of housework, hedging on her bet of being a successful teacher. If she fails, it isn't her fault, but her husband's. She is caught at the unpleasant crossroads of wanting to be independent, but afraid to try. In her failure to accept Bobby's growing independency and competent decision making, she has nudged Bobby's loyalties toward his father. The letting go will become easier for her if she does get a job, and perhaps she will develop into the image of a mother who is confident and mature.

In the novel, Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice? by Paula Danziger, the mother is making a transition from housewife to wage earner in the teaching profession. The family is organized along traditional lines: the father is solely responsible for earning enough money to support his wife and three daughters. In the first part of the novel the mother fantasizes about having more money by imagining herself on a quiz show or winning a lottery, "so we can all live happily ever after." (p. 12) Although the father worries about having enough money, especially now that his oldest daughter is in college, he does not want his wife to work. The girls realize more than a money problem would be solved by their mother working.

> If only Dad didn't think it's awful for women with a family to work, then maybe she could go to work and not be so bored. (p. 19)

The father plays a traditional role model leaving all housework to his wife and daughters. In reference to her dad helping out around the house, Lauren, the middle daughter and central character of the story, explains:

> Dad says that as breadwinner his job is finished once the groceries are paid for. (p. 21)

When he doles out Lauren's allowance he does so as if he is making a great sacrifice although she does her share of household duties.

> Don't spend it foolishly. You know how hard it is for me to earn it and to keep this family going. (p. 29)

The mother reacts to the domineering role of the father by trying to keep peace in the family, acting as a go-between for father and daughters. Lauren knows when she had her ears pierced against her parents wishes that:

> My mother will try to maintain the peace and tell me privately that it looks nice but that I shouldn't do things that upset my father. (p. 38)

As a peace keeper, something she rarely succeeds at, and as a prize winner, where she never succeeds, the image of Lauren's mother is not of a competent, effective woman making independent decisions.

Slowly, though, she enters a period of transition brought on first by the realization that her daughters are growing up.

> I feel like I always stay the same but my girls are constantly changing. I guess that's part of the deal when you're a mother. At least it is for me. (p. 27)

Ironically, what moves her towards independence and a period

of growth for herself, is a fulfillment of her quiz show fantasy. Feeling threatened by his wife stepping out of her role as a passive housewife, her husband reacts:

> 'Wonderful,' my father says sarcastically. 'A chance to look ridiculous in front of millions of people. Folks are going to think I can't take care of my own family without sending my wife on one of those dumb shows.' (p. 40)

He sees himself in charge when he speaks of "sending my wife" to be on a quiz show. She is not to be considered a free agent, one who can make decisions for herself. Because being on the quiz show has been one of her cherished dreams, she makes an effort to help him realize what it means to her.

> I just don't understand why you think this is so awful. It'll be fun for me, something different. Even if I lose. But I'm going to try to win. If I did, we could do so much with the money. Send the girls to college. Go on a trip. (p. 40)

But she is undermining her husband's authority.

> I want nothing to do with whatever you win. We'll take a trip with my money, from my salary. (p. 40)

This reaction of her husband's signals the beginning of a change in the mother.

The first apparent change is her refusal to go along with all of her husband's reactions to the girls. Keeping the peace is no longer her primary goal. When Lauren has her ears pierced, her father is furious; he and Lauren get into a shouting match. Her mother stands up for Lauren. "Really there's absolutely nothing wrong with Lauren getting her ears pierced. Everyone's doing it." (p. 42) The "everyone" includes the mother when, later, she decides to have her ears

pierced, too.

Even before the quiz show, the mother decides to try substitute teaching. She had taught before she was married and as she puts it, "I'm sick and tired of being home all the time." She has made a decision that her husband won't like, and it is the first step toward taking responsibility for her own life.

> Even if I do win all the money, I've got to do something more with myself. I know your father wants me to stay home, but you're all growing up so fast. You don't need me so much anymore. You're all growing...and I'm not. (p. 50)

In spite of Lauren's vivid descriptions of what happens to subs, her mother is unshaken.

> She smiles. 'I'll do all right, and if I don't like it, I don't have to do it. But I want to try. Your father and I discussed it last night and that's what we decided. He doesn't like it much, but he realizes how important it is to me.' (p. 50)

She is mistaken though about her husband's reasons for letting her go ahead with her plans for working. He believes it is just "a passing fancy". (p. 59) She has made a major step in becoming more independent.

Lauren understands now that there is more than money in her mother's desire to sub. When Lauren's friend, Bonnie, suggested that if her mother had been successful on the quiz show she wouldn't be crazy enough to become a sub, Lauren disagrees.

> Don't think so. She's going crazy at home. I think she'd do this anyway. (p. 57)

The "doing this" that Lauren's mother is embarking on is to

make decisions about her own life, to do something beyond the role of housekeeper. She no longer asks her husband's permission for buying her own clothes, but goes on a shopping spree to "finally buy myself some things" -- "to start subbing". (p. 69) The more independent decisions she makes the more threatened her husband becomes.

> Now that you're going back to work, I bet you're going to be spending like mad, living outside my salary. (p. 74)

Instead of playing her past role of peace keeper, she takes the offensive. "Why don't you just accept it and not feel so threatened?" It is difficult for her husband to accept the change in her; he senses he is losing his control over her. "Just because you won't have to depend on me, need me anymore, why should I worry?" (p. 74) But there is no going back for her. The most important decision she made was to create a new role for herself.

She is not able, yet, to always be forthright with her husband, and still goes behind his back in matters concerning their daughters. This is especially true when the oldest daughter, Melissa, moves in with her boyfriend, Mike. The father has demanded that the rest of the family have nothing to do with Melissa, but the mother continues to see her and help her out financially. (p. 112) The relationship between husband and wife becomes more strained as he remains adamant about Melissa and she continues to support Melissa's decision. Lauren describes her mother's behavior towards her dad as

> ...pretending he doesn't exist -- She hardly talks to him anymore. Maybe that's not the best way to act, but it's the only one that seems to work with him. (p. 106)

Lauren cannot understand her father's behavior and asks her mother:

> 'Why does he have to be so awful?'
>
> She shrugs. 'He really thinks he's doing this for everyone's best, that he's got to make everyone's decisions for them. For years I've been able to get him to do things by letting him think they were his ideas, but this time he's been impossible.' (p. 124)

She no longer allows him to make decisions for her, and she is accepting the responsibility for her own decisions. With her heightened awareness of her own worth her transition from a passive, dependent person to an active, independent one is almost complete.

The transition from homemaker to wage earner for the mother in The Divorce Express, by Paula Danziger, is prompted by a divorce. The mother makes the transition from homemaker to wage earner smoothly, opening her own business when she and her husband are divorced.

She is effective and competent at her work; often difficult to reach during the day as she is consulting with clients (p. 20), or she has gone on a business trip (p. 6). Money is not a problem for her since the divorce, not because she receives money from Phoebe's father, but because she has a lucrative business. This is evident in the clothes she buys, e.g., a sable coat for herself (p. 131), name brands

for Phoebe (p. 3). Phoebe explains to her friend that her mother is "into labels and names written all over clothes. Sometimes I think she looks like alphabet soup." (p. 34)

Having her own interior decorating service means a lot to Phoebe's mother. Her business has taken precedence over having Phoebe live with her, although she enjoys having her daughter visit. Phoebe knows that to live with her mother on a full time basis would be impossible because, "She's too busy looking for perfect antiques for other people's houses." (p. 11) When Phoebe does come to visit, her mother fills the time with shopping, dinner, movies. She has all of the plans made before Phoebe arrives. (p. 46-47) The planning and decision making necessary in her business carries over into the rest of her life, but at the expense of not taking her daughter's feelings and desires into account.

Although Phoebe's mother is caught up in her own life, she does come through in times of emergency. When a heavy snow storm delays the bus Phoebe and her friend are traveling to New York on, her mother, for the first time, meets the bus. She warmly hugs Rosie, Phoebe's friend, although she has never met her before. As they prepare to leave, her mother says:

> You two know all the kids who ride the bus alone. Are any of them not being met by their parents? It's not safe for them to be here alone. Let's make sure they're all right. (p. 20)

She checks on each child in a "very logical way" and Phoebe recognizes that this is typical of her mother.

> That's like my mother too -- superorganized and take-charge personality. (p. 120)

This image of a competent efficient woman changes some when she is with Duane, the man she plans on marrying.

At one point, she and Duane break up. She calls Phoebe to tell her how much she misses her, how lonely she is. None of this rings true because it is out of character for her. She did not have this reaction when she and her husband separated, and when Phoebe went to live with her dad. Phoebe's assessment of the situation is that:

> It's almost as if my mother's forgotten that I'm the daughter and she's the mother. (p. 99)

As competent as Phoebe's mother is, where Duane is concerned, she becomes more dependent as she relies on his decision making. The change as a role model angers Phoebe.

> I know that she can do lots of stuff by herself, but when she's with Duane, she lets him make all the decisions. And he treats her like a precious china doll. (p. 129)

Phoebe cannot understand why her mother is attracted to Duane. Her mother explains: He offers me love and caring and companionship. (p. 133) But there is more to it than that. She seems to be drawn to a man who does take charge, who does assume a male superiority.

She defends her right to love Duane when Phoebe accuses her of liking him for his money, and tells Phoebe:

> You don't have to understand. You just have to accept it. (p. 132)

What her daughter thinks of Duane is important to her, but she is not going to sacrifice her own happiness to satisfy

her daughter.

For the most part, the image projected in The Divorce Express is of a strong competent mother. Her weaknesses lie in her inability to make the transition from a woman who is taken care of by a man to one who can retain her independence in a relationship with a man. She loves her daughter, but often her actions reflect a self centeredness that limits the relationship between the two of them.

Gwen, the mother, in Tiger Eyes by Judy Blume is thrust into a state of transition by the sudden death of her husband. He was shot during a robbery of their store. When the period of shock and acute mourning is over, Gwen makes an attempt to carry on with life as usual, but her teenage daughter, Davey, has a difficult time adjusting to her father's death and to a new school. Davey stays in her bedroom; her mother tries to get her back to normal (p. 20), but when Davey agrees to go out with her boy friend again she realizes she can't go on as usual. Davey runs home, gets into bed and stays there for five days. (p. 21) The mother decides she, Davey, and her young son, Jason, will go out to New Mexico to live, for awhile, with her sister-in-law.

Once there, however, when Gwen knows she no longer has to take on the responsibility for her children, she is unable to cope with the sudden loss of her husband. She becomes distant from her children, seems unaware of what is going on around her. When Davey wants permission to ride a bike

around the area, her Aunt Bitsy asks Gwen:

> 'Is it all right with you?'
>
> 'What? Oh, yes ... fine,' my mother says. I get the feeling she doesn't even know what we are talking about. She seems distracted. (p. 45)

It's as if it is safe now for Gwen to step out of the mother role, and give herself over to mourning the loss of her husband.

Her marriage had been a happy one, filled with laughter and love. Davey remembers the last night her dad was alive:

> Mom and Dad had their arms around each other and were in one of their touchy-feely moods. (p. 115)

Gwen's sister-in-law, Bitsy, chides her because Gwen and her husband had made no provisions for their future. Bitsy asks:

> `What were you living on ... love?'
>
> `More or less,' my mother answers.
>
> Bitsy sighs. `Adam always was a dreamer.'
>
> `Yes,' Mom says. 'That's one of the reasons I loved him.' (p. 16)

Up to this point, she had been slowly adjusting to the traumatic change in her life. Although still grief stricken, the image she projects is not of a weak person. Gwen has had "plenty of experience in dealing with death" as both her mother and father have died, as well as her brother when he was only nineteen. (p. 61)

Gwen prepares to take the children back home, but then she learns that their store has been vandalized. Her carefully reconstructed strength is shattered.

The room is filled with the sound of a long, low

> wail. It sends shivers down my back. I look around, trying to identify it, then realize it is coming from my mother. (p. 67)

Gwen becomes hysterical, "raving and ranting around the room, pulling at her own hair, screaming and crying..." (p. 68) She had never lost control before, not when her husband was killed nor at his funeral. She finally collapses, crying.

> `I'm sorry,' Mom whimpers. `I'm sorry ... but I just can't take any more. I just can't ...' (p. 68)

She becomes withdrawn after this. "She can't decide what to do about the store. She can't decide what to do about anything." (p. 69) She spends much of her time resting or sleeping.

> Mom is stretched out on the sofa, twirling a rubber band around her fingers. (p. 79)

Davey tries to talk to her mother, but --

> Mom is asleep, her mouth half open. Her breath sounds raspy. (p. 96)

Later Davey tries again.

> I wish I could talk to my mother. But when I get back she is sound asleep again, the shades in her room pulled down, making it as dark as night. Sometimes I feel she has vanished from my life. And I miss her. (p. 99)

Gwen has begun to develop severe headaches (p. 84), and the headache medicine coupled with her depression creates a wall between her and the rest of her family. At this point she is overcome and unable to cope.

Her inability to cope is a grieving period she must go through. She had put the needs of her children first, and now must give herself over to pain in order to work through

it. Davey finds her mother:

> ...sitting on the bed, surrounded by old photos. She is holding one of my father. She presses it to her face and says, 'Oh, Adam ... I miss you so much.' She begins to weep quietly. (p. 87)

Gwen gradually realizes she must seek help beyond her own resources.

> 'I have to get myself together,' Mom explains that night at the dinner table. It is the first time in a week that she is joining us for dinner. (p. 107)

The first step she takes in getting herself together is to go to the family counseling center. Through therapy she gradually rebuilds her self confidence. She begins to go out again (p. 116), and plans on looking for work.

> I've got to get into a routine. I need some place to go every morning. A reason to get out of bed. (p. 151)

She is beginning to make decisions again, and to accept responsibility for them, even when Davey is upset. Gwen knows she is not ready or able to return home yet.

> 'I can't go back now,' Mom says. 'I'm not ready. There's still too much to deal with. I'm just beginning to get myself together. I have a long way to go.' (p. 140)

These are words from a thoughtful competent decision maker. She gradually assumes responsibility for the children again, although, too often, allows Bitsy and her husband Walter to make decisions regarding Davey and Jason. This is especially true when Davey wants to do something that might be considered dangerous -- skiing or driving a car. In the midst of a heated argument with Walter, Davey turns to her mother:

> Mom, please. I really want to take Driver's Ed. It's very important to me.
>
> Mom looks at me and we make eye contact for the first time in months. (p. 164)

At this point she is still allowing Walter to assume parental guidance. Because of the violent nature of her husband's death, she is timid about activity that may involve physical danger.

Her transition to strong independent mother continues as she decides to go out with a male friend, much to Davey's displeasure. In spite of Davey's anger, Gwen stands up for her right to date if she wants to. She explains to her daughter that she "needs the adult companionship." (p. 177) More than just adult companionship, she needs to see someone outside the family, someone to see her as a woman and not a broken-hearted widow.

When the time comes that she is strong enough to return home, she makes that decision on her own. Davey doesn't realize her mother has decided to leave the safety of Bitsy's and Walter's home.

> 'When are we going home, Mom?' I hold my breath, afraid that she will say, 'we're never going home, Davey.' Instead she says, 'I've been thinking we should leave as soon as school is over.' (p. 210)

Gwen could easily have stayed in New Mexico; her male friend has asked her to marry him. She has a job, and help and support from Bitsy and Walter. Not only strength was needed to make the decision to return home, but knowledge -- knowledge of herself: her own needs, strengths, desires. She

has decided, "It's time for us to start making a life on our own." (p. 215) At this point her transition to a competent thoughtful decision maker is complete.

As in Tiger Eyes, the mother in A Place Apart by Paula Fox is thrown into a transition by the death of her husband (the mother is unnamed, as is the case in many of the adolescent novels). Because he died suddenly of a heart attack, she and her daughter, Tory, had no time to prepare for the sudden loss and grief. They both retreated into a numbness, waiting for the pain to ease. Tory said that all the minutes hurt.

> Ma and I hardly spoke to each other. Every time I looked at her, she had a cigarette in her mouth. She was getting thinner by the day. (p. 6)

The mother was unsure of herself and their future. One night she came into Tory's room and shook her awake.

> We stared at each other, neither of us saying a word. I remember how terrible the feeling was that we weren't anywhere we had been before -- and morning wasn't going to come, and we were in danger. Suddenly, Ma had said, 'We'll be all right.' But that time she'd grabbed my hands and asked, 'Won't we?' (p. 4)

Because Tory's mother and father did not plan for the future, it is necessary to sell their house in Boston. Her mother explains to Tory, "Papa had not been practical." (p. 6) The mother is used to being taken care of. She assumes that planning for the future was her husband's responsibility. Her reaction is anger:

> She sounded angry, as though it was Papa's fault

> for not knowing he would die so suddenly and when he was still young. She sounded strange and hard, as though she were having a fight with someone and knew she was losing. (p. 6-7)

For a while she needs someone to lean on, and she asks her brother to come and stay. But she slowly emerges from her grief, and encourages her daughter to have faith that life will become better, happier, for them.

> 'We are going to <u>have</u> to make it all right here,' she said. (p. 10)

When Tory realizes their house in Boston will be torn down for an apartment complex she comments:

> 'We've burned our ships.'
>
> Her mother responds with a quiet 'yes.'
>
> Then she smiled at me, and I smiled back. It was as if a fever had dropped, a fever we had both had for the last two months. (p. 10)

The fever of despair does gradually leave, and the mother begins to take more control of her and Tory's future.

She had not worked outside the home before and is not trained for employment. She begins looking at college catalogues.

> 'I'd like to earn a living,' she said. 'I have to. But I'd especially like to be skilled at something.'

Tory tells her that she'll take care of her.

> 'I don't want to be taken care of,' she said, and she looked away from me at a table where my father's picture sat in a silver frame. (p. 14)

Accepting responsibilty for her own life is a major step towards independence.

Smoking becomes a symbol for her self confidence. The

better she feels about her ability to cope and make responsible decisions, the fewer cigarettes she smokes. Her dependence on tobacco is obvious even when she is trying to look ahead with optimism.

> 'Wait until spring! We can make it better. And the apple trees will bloom. Wait till you can see what fresh paint can do!' She put down her fork and lit her hundredth cigarette of the day. (p. 9)

Gradually she becomes a stronger, more competent woman. The image for her daughter is of one who takes charge and gets things done.

> Ma put her hand on my arm. I looked at her fingers, the strong clean nails, the skin reddish from all the painting and carpentering she'd been doing. (p. 24)

She constantly fights the battle of stopping smoking, which causes her to do some ridiculous things, like using a plastic cigarette (p. 23), hiding in Tory's closet to have a forbidden smoke.

> There was Ma, sitting on the floor among a lot of old sneakers, puffing away on a cigarette. I never saw anyone look so embarassed. (p. 103)

Sometimes the image of her mother as someone who relies on cigarettes is of a pathetic nature.

> When I got home, I found Ma in the kitchen. Ashes fell from her cigarette onto her sweater. She was slicing a potato so clumsily it was as if she'd never seen one before. (p. 36)

The cigarettes are with her constantly -- while playing the piano (p.52), refinishing furniture (p. 68) and riding on a bus (p. 79). As she becomes more competent she pushes herself to stop smoking.

> 'Witness this,' she said, and dropped the pack into a trash bin. 'Now, if you see me sneaking into a tobacco store, you can make a citizen's arrest.'
>
> 'Do you mean it?'
>
> 'I don't know,' she replied. 'But I'll try.' (p. 94)

Although she does smoke some later, she eventually gives it up and becomes more and more a person who is responsible for her own actions.

Accepting responsibility for behavior is evident when she meets Lawrence Grady, a man she eventually plans on marrying. From the first, Tory objects to her mother having a male interest, and the fact that her mother wants them to be friends.

> Mr. Grady didn't pay much attention to me, and I was relieved at that. Ma tried to get him to. I could see her trying and I didn't want her to. (p. 75)

Tory is happy to see her Ma cheerful, but she describes it as a "distant gladness." (p. 76) The feeling of distance comes from Tory, not her mother. To Tory no one can take her father's place. She cries out "He's not Papa," but her mother only responds, "No one is." (p. 77) Ma does not feel guilty about her growing love for Lawrence. She would like Tory to accept the relationship, but insists on her right to care, love, and even remarry if she wants to. When Tory acts unfriendly to Lawrence, her mother is annoyed.

> Ma was stern with me, speaking in short sentences like a telegram. I knew she wished I was more responsive. (p. 89)

Ma realizes she can't explain this relationship to her

daughter's satisfaction.

> But I can't explain it to you, and I'm not going to try. (p. 79)

She's not insensitive to Tory, rather the image of mother that develops is of one who believes she has a right to make decisions about her life and will accept responsibility for the consequences of the decisions.

She cares a great deal for her daughter, but will not let her daughter make decisions for her. "It's not really you who's taking the chance. Lawrence and I are." (p. 101) She wants Tory to know what is going on.

> 'What would you think if I got married again?" she asked. 'Would you find it very hard to take?'
>
> 'I don't know how I feel about your getting married,' I said. 'I guess its not up to me.'
>
> 'No. It isn't,' she said. 'But I care about the way you feel.' (p. 97-98)

Caring about Tory extends beyond if she marries or not. Tory knows she can rely on her mother for love and support.

When Tory and a friend earn money during the summer, her ma understands the feeling of independence that Tory is enjoying.

> It feels good, doesn't it? To earn your own money. (p. 78)

She is probably projecting her own desires, but she doesn't take away from her daughter's success. She is sensitive to Tory's problems and feelings. When Tory is distraught during a phone call, her mother goes to her immediately. Tory has the sense that her mother would never let her down; she's the

one person in the world she can always count on. (p. 118) Ma will take time to watch an old movie with her, go on a week's vacation, talk about problems, and discuss solutions. Tory knows her ma can help; "she always had." (p. 131) But Ma doesn't pretend to have all the answers, and explains that we never outgrow problems and the need for difficult decisions.

> Tory, it's as hard to be grown-up as to grow up. (p. 149)

Ma has grown much during this transition period.

From someone who was angry because her husband didn't provide for her, she has changed to one who is taking change of her own life. Although she plans on remarrying she is resolute about learning new skills so that she can take care of herself. The image is of a loving responsible mother not afraid to meet new challenges.

Karen, the mother, in Notes for Another Life by Sue Ellen Bridgers feels that she has made a mistake in marrying when she was young and an even bigger mistake in having children. Throughout the story she vacillates between feelings of guilt and justification for leaving her children in the care of their grandparents while she has pursued a career. It is not only the children she has left, however; her husband has a serious mental illness and he, too, lives with the grandparents when he is out of the hospital. The image that emerges is of a mother who gradually, but unerringly makes a transition from a woman who stays at home

caring for children and husband to one who is concerned only with her career.

From the first years of her marriage, Karen was uneasy about fulfilling the typical mother role. She had married because it was expected and easy.

> And then it wasn't what she wanted at all. How could she have disregarded so completely that familiar secret voice that has always demanded so much? How could this be such a desolate life when the days were so frantically busy? (p. 17)

Karen admits to Bliss, her mother-in-law, that she thought "being married would be everything." (p. 127) She had done what was expected, had made herself fit in. It had even been what she truly wanted. (p. 152) But even so, her feeling that she wanted more out of life continued. Being a homemaker was not sufficient; she yearned for something more. Karen believes that women are cheated by not being encouraged to find self worth and fulfillment beyond the family life. She describes to Bliss conversations she has had with men where they recount all the significant events of their college life and job, and then almost as an after thought will add, "Oh, yes, and I have a wonderful wife and three children." (p. 128) Karen wonders why women can't do that -- why husband and children are always the primary interest, and then if there is time and energy there will be a job.

Karen tries to explain to her daughter, Wren, her feelings of dissatisfaction with her life as a homemaker.

> I just couldn't manage it all. At first I didn't know why because I had a good husband, two beautiful children, a nice home. But slowly I

> realized I was more than a little discontent. It was as though I was misplaced and had to keep looking for myself. (p. 169)

The "looking for myself" meant finding something to do that she could attach value to. She wasn't sure of a career choice, believing she had no obvious talent, but did realize she had "a natural sort of taste, an instinct." (p. 169) Capitalizing on the sense of taste she sought work as a window designer. More important than what job she acquired though, was getting a job where she could use her talents. "I just knew I wanted to have a life that was uniquely mine." (p. 169) She admits to Wren that she now realizes she didn't know how to make decisions when she was first married. She just let things happen, and warns Wren to be more conscious about decision making that will affect her the rest of her life.

The first yearnings for a life different from the one Karen knew as a homemaker stirred before her husband, Tom, became ill, although his depression made her more anxious and impatient for a change. His illness had developed slowly, first appearing as lethargy, and then finally as acute depression. Karen felt helpless; she had always been so energetic, so in control. "She knew she couldn't stay with him like this." (p. 19) Her work outside the home became more important than either her children or her husband. The feeling of doing something that mattered, of being in control was possible only through her job. She came to realize that the kind of life her husband was attached to wasn't the right

one for her. "I couldn't just make do like some women can." (p. 169) She could not attach value to her life as a homemaker, so her self worth had to come from outside her home. When she accepted a job designing windows for a gigantic store six hours away, although she may not have realized it at the time, an important decision was made. She would leave children and husband behind to pursue the style of life she wanted.

> She had always wanted an apartment in an elegant old building with a doorman and no lawn to mow, no trash to take to the curb, no neighbors to be chummy with. She wanted all the things she'd never had, like take-out Chinese food and expensive Italian shoes and a season ticket to the ballet. (p. 17)

With her job these goals were attainable. But more than material things, she desired a life that could only be created by no family demands on her life.

For Karen it was impossible to juggle home and job. Having the type of life she wanted meant leaving her two children completely in the care of her husband's parents. She seems incapable of understanding how her children feel about her obvious preference to live apart from them.

Each time their mother comes for a visit, Wren and Kevin respond to her in spite of their resolve not to. Even though they are not part of their mother's life, what she does matters to them. "Her absence counted; it was a minus, a subtraction from the sum of their lives because it meant, no matter how they struggled to deny it, that she didn't need them enough, want them enough, love them enough." (p. 16)

Karen accepted their love, but would not give the outpouring of love her children needed and wanted. When Karen comes for a visit, she doesn't meet Wren at school but waits for Wren to come home and then merely turns "her chair and body slightly away from the table so that there was room for her daughter to come to her." (p. 15) Wren stayed in her mother's arms as long as she could, but "lingering there had embarrassed her a little, as if she were showing more need than was reasonable. She didn't want to make demands, knowing how uncomfortably they could be met." (p. 15) Kevin has the same sense of needing his mother more than she does him.

> 'Kevin!' Karen held out her arms to him. He came slowly, as if he would keep her there, arms outstretched to him for as long as he could. Why doesn't she ever come to me? he wondered -- she never touches first, never takes steps. (p. 22)

He goes to her and stayed in her embrace

> for as long as he dared, until he felt a sob grumbling in his gut, some pitiful savage cry of longing to be there forever. He pulled away then, knowing he was risking too much. He knew his mother could see it if she were willing to look at how his mouth trembled and his chest heaved to push down the sob. But she didn't look. (p. 23)

She never seems to really look at her children, to see beyond their welcoming hugs, to see their need for her. She flits in and out of their lives, acting the part of the loving mother and then quickly leaving with no remorse. When she had visited them last, it was at Christmas; she had stayed over Christmas Eve and left the next day. For her children, her visit has more significance "because her coming was a

happening as eventful to them as the arrival their faith celebrated." (p. 21) She sampled their holiday baking and exchanged presents, but holds herself apart from intimately sharing their lives.

When Wren graduates from eighth grade and is chosen to play the processional, Karen doesn't come to take part in this important event. She offers to buy Wren a dress -- "something soft and pretty with a lace collar and cuffs or those lovely little puffed sleeves the girls are wearing." (p. 82) To Wren, she sounds like an advertisement, not a mother. Wren realizes the distance between them is "untraversable" (p. 8) and that "there was no keeping her." (p. 25)

Kevin has a much harder time accepting this truth. He wants so badly to be with his mother that he risks exposing his need and vulnerability by asking her if he can move to Chicago with her. He waits for her answer. "How long did it take to say yes? Time ran slowly, running out. His vision was curiously blurred at the edges but her face was clear to him, as solid and contained as marble." (p. 144) When she does answer she agrees but the pause has stretched out too long. Kevin can't face the disappointment and attempts suicide.

With therapy, Kevin recovers and is able to accept his mother's absence without feeling rejected. He doesn't like her being gone but understands that her decisions do not reflect on him personally. The children believe that their

mother is closer to them now, reaching out to them more because her defenses crumbled, too, when Kevin tried to kill himself.

However, the image of a mother determined to complete her transition from homemaker to single career woman remains strong. She has decided to divorce her husband, Tom, for no apparent reason. He is too ill to interfere with her career plans, and since he lives with his parents and children she has no responsibility for him. She reassures Bliss that there is no other man she is interested in. Since there is no compelling reason for the divorce, Karen seems to want to be rid of old ties and past relationships.

She is not realistic about her own motivations or goals. When she first left the children with their grandparents she convinced herself it was temporary.

> She wasn't abandoning them. It was more a filling in of her life than it was a clearing out. When she was herself again, unhampered by the strain of Tom's helplessness, she would be the mother she wanted to be. (p. 20)

But she never arranged to have them live with her and she came back to see them less and less often. With her move to Chicago and the divorce she has moved out of their lives. Yet she holds on to the sentimentality of motherhood. She and Wren see a small child sleeping in her mother's arms. "'Oh look,' Karen said softly. 'Look at her.' But Wren could not." (p. 171) Wren knows her mother's reaction is only an emotional one, and for Karen, children are not allowed to be an integral part of her life. The image of a

woman in transition from homemaker to career woman unhampered by family ties is complete.

Although the mother in It Must've Been the Fish Sticks by Betty Bates follows the same pattern as Karen -- leaving husband and child to pursue her own life -- the image of mother is drastically different. Imogene, the mother, does not want the responsibility of being wife and mother, but her leaving is a sense of escape from, not a going to. She has no plan or purpose to her life.

Brian, her son, was very young when Imogene left, and does not remember her. In fact, he had assumed she had died, and is shocked when he discovers the truth. He fears that he is responsible, not able to comprehend any other reason she would have for leaving. He becomes convinced that he must show his mother, "that she didn't need to go off that way," that he is no longer "a real monster." (p. 29) Even when his father tells Brian that his mother has never asked to see her son since she left, Brian remains convinced that he must visit her. (p. 29) Part of his desire comes from his rebellion against his step mother, believing that his mother would let him do anything he wants.

He discovers his mother living with a boy friend in a run-down house. Her main occupation is welding large art objects together, but she has never been successful in selling any of her work. Although she seems capable and independent on one level, as in her ability to weld and to

handle a motorcycle very proficiently, on another level she is dependent with low self esteem. These latter qualities are evident in the relationship she has with her boyfriend, Kelsey. When she expresses concern for him, he replies: "I'm sick of you whinin' and carryin' on all the time." (p. 108) When drunk he is abusive and at one time attempts to hit her with a lamp. (p. 108) Imogene makes excuses for him and protects the relationship as if afraid she will be on her own.

Her leaving Brian and his father was not to become independent but because she could not accept the responsibility of a child and husband. She tells Brian:

> I've done everything. I mean, everything. I've been into ceramics, astrology, ballet, folksinging, mind control, poetry, and -- let's see, there was something else. Heck, it doesn't matter. I've experimented. I've lived. (p. 56)

But when her latest venture, the welded sculpture, falls through, her life is once again without purpose or direction:

> Maybe I could try upholstering. Maybe even make money with it. Maybe I could take a course somewhere. Maybe if I moved to Columbus. In Columbus I could go see that furnace man, the one who wanted to help me. Maybe I could... (p. 125)

Her lack of independence is obvious with her thinking of the future in terms of getting help from a man she knows only slightly. Although she claims to have made the transition from wife and mother to a single woman because she needed freedom, or as she explains to Brian, "I needed space. She throws her arms out wide. Space. Can you see that?" (p. 55), her life is limited and confining. Her effort in making

a transition to a independent capable woman was unsuccessful because she is immature and unrealistic.

Melody, Jeff's mother in A Solitary Blue by Cynthia Voigt follows a pattern of transition similar to that of Imogene. Melody leaves her seven year old son and husband. The image of Melody as a young wife and mother was of a frivolous light-hearted woman, one who didn't take responsibilities very seriously. She played the role of child more than adult, partly because she was fifteen years younger than her professor husband. Later, Jeff remembered his mother as sharing his childish fears and delights:

> ...Melody was sitting beside him, being scared and excited, laughing out loud when the car rolled down an incline, holding him within her arm. (p. 11)

Seeing her husband as rigid and unapproachable, Melody conveyed the idea to Jeff that his father was afraid of change, so after she left, Jeff "made sure that the Professor's life was what the Professor wanted." (p. 13) In an effort to keep his father's life worry-free, Jeff learns to cook and clean, tasks his mother had not been interested in. A friend, Brother Thomas, comments on Jeff's good cooking:

> 'He certainly didn't get it from you -- was his mother a good cook?'
>
> Jeff kept his eyes on his plate and his face still as he listened to what his father would answer.
>
> 'No, she hated housework of any kind.' (p. 13)

When Melody leaves Jeff and the Professor she returns to her family home in the South. It isn't until Jeff is twelve

that Melody asks him to come to visit. He is overcome with her beauty and outgoing warm nature.

> He felt like a man must who has been kept in a dungeon for years and years, and he steps out into the sunlight, for the first time. (p. 24)

It takes Jeff awhile to see his mother as she really is. He wants desperately for her to be the wonderful image he has constructed in his mind.

Actually Melody is quite different from Jeff's image of her. Her transition from wife to single woman was not one from being dependent to independent. She left her husband to live with her grandmother, a wealthy woman whom Melody hopes to ingratiate. (p. 37) Because Jeff is the last male in the family line he is in a position of acquiring an inheritance, the reason Melody invited him to visit. Melody's lack of interest in being a mother is evident in her relationship with Jeff. During the first visit she spends a moderate amount of time with him, but does not make an effort to take him places a boy might like. "I hope you don't want me to take you over the boats; I hope you don't expect that." (p. 33)

When Jeff is back home with his father, Melody does not write or call in spite of the letters and gifts Jeff sends to her. (p. 55) Melody has made a point of telling Jeff how painful for her his birth had been. (p. 35) Later, in anger, she tells him: "I wanted a girl. You didn't know that did you, but you should have figured it out. If you'd been a girl I'd have taken you with me when I walked out on him."

(p. 87) When Jeff asks his father about his mother's desire for a girl, the Professor tells him she is lying; she never was interested in having a baby in the first place. (p. 101) Melody's image is not that of a loving caring mother, not solely because she left Jeff, but because of her behavior when she is with him.

During the first visit Jeff and his great-grandmother developed a loving relationship, so that when Jeff arrives the following summer Melody no longer has to worry about Jeff being in Grandmother's good graces. As a result, she leaves with her boy friend the day after Jeff comes to visit and, although she tells him she'll be back in a week, is gone a month. (p. 75)

Melody's overriding ambition is to acquire money -- on a large scale from her Grandmother's inheritance through Jeff but in small petty ways, too. During Jeff's first summer with his mother, she has him pay for their lunch out. (p. 39) Later she turns in the return airline ticker his father purchased for a bus ticket, and keeps the difference in money. She doesn't give Jeff any of the money, and since Melody has spent all the money he arrived with, he makes the sixteen hour bus trip unable to buy food. Melody laughs it off. "Oh, Jeffie, what a bad mother I've been." (p. 45) In spite of her laugh, acquiring money is a serious concern of Melody's. She had always complained to her husband that her engagement ring wasn't large enough, and she wanted a bigger, fancier house. She ran up enormously high debts that, five

years after the divorce, her husband is still paying off.

Jeff finally gives up his childish dream of a wonderful loving mother who in some way couldn't help leaving her son. He realizes if he had to choose between living with his father or mother that:

> He wouldn't choose Melody, not now. He knew that, but he tried to think about why: he'd liked her being beautiful and the sound of her voice, but he didn't trust her and he didn't like the way she talked about need. He suspected that it made her feel good to feel sorry for people. She was dangerous, the way she pulled at your emotions.
> No, he wouldn't choose her now. (p. 134)

He understands now that Melody lied about her life with the Professor. The dissolution of the marriage came about, not because of her husband's rigidity, but because of her behavior. The Professor tells Jeff:

> When I found out how many lies she was telling me, I finally realized that she had always lied to me. About my lectures. About boyfriends; and even after she knew I knew, she'd still lie about it. I hated her... (p. 101)

With Jeff, too, Melody persists in lying after it is clear that he has seen through her charade of a loving mother.

Melody comes to see Jeff to plead with him to return to South Carolina with her. She insists she has broken off the relationship with her boy friend because he was jealous of Jeff, but Jeff can see his car hidden behind the trees. (p. 164) The real reason she wants Jeff to come back is that Grandmother is dying, and if Jeff were there he might be the recipient of her inheritance. As much as Jeff loves his Grandmother, he cannot agree to be used as Melody's pawn. "I

don't want to live with you. Not all the time, not for the summer, not for a week. Not ever." (p. 166) Melody is furious because Jeff refuses to help her acquire Grandmother's wealth. "You used to love me, I know you did. But you chose your father because he's the rich and famous one." (p. 187) She is incapable of understanding emotions unassociated with greed. The lighthearted immature image has changed to one of a mother obsessed with money. Her extreme self centeredness has destroyed her love for her son.

On the surface, the image of mother in Go and Catch a Flying Fish by Mary Stolz is exactly like Melody. She, too, decides the responsibilities of wife and mother are not for her, and she leaves behind three children. Yet, the image that emerges from the novel is one of a sensitive unhappy woman, insecure in her capabilities as mother, unsure of what she wants from life.

Junie feels dominated by her husband, Tony. Since he is the sole wage earner, she must depend on him for money, and money becomes a major topic for argument. Junie goes to auctions and estate sales, buying things Tony believes they don't need and can't afford. (p. 6) Junie's argument is that she always chooses beautiful items. But, then, she doesn't cherish them once she brings them home. Tony's mother comments:

> What's the point of June's buying a beautiful piece like that table...if then it's covered to overflowing with ashtrays and magazines and dear

> only knows what else, to say nothing of glasses and mugs being left on it all the time. There are water stains on it. And at least one cigarette burn. (p. 99)

Junie's compulsion to buy is symptomatic of her feeling of frustration, of being trapped by her marriage.

> I thought marriage was a partnership. Isn't that what you told me when you wanted so badly to have me for a partner? Share and share alike. (p. 9)

Her husband, Tony, continually uses money as a source of control. When he insists on returning an antique screen, Junie lashes out:

> Do you realize, do you ever stop to think at all what a humiliating, miserable, antediluvian, filthy position it puts me in, to have to share a checking account with you? Do you know what it does to me, having you know to the penny every damn penny I spend? Do you know what it makes me feel like? (p. 70)

Neither one makes any attempt to understand the other's position. Junie had been writing large checks so that the bank account was often overdrawn. Tony's response is to close out the joint checking account and open one in his name only.

> Tony: You are going to learn to live on what I give you for household expenses --
>
> Junie: Listen to me, you -- you imbecile. I'm not your household helot and I will not be doled out household expenses. (p. 71)

Junie's anger comes from being boxed in by Tony's control. He will not allow her to get a job, threatening to quit his if she works outside the home. Yet, he uses the fact that he is the wage earner to berate her: "Who earns the money around here?" (p. 71) Junie's emotional reaction is anger:

> Earns? Earns! I am fed fed up with your mingy tacky ways. And I'm tired while I'm at it, of Junie the cat threw up in the living room and Junie the bulb blew out in the bedroom and Junie we've run out of shaving cream and Junie the phone's ringing and Junie this and Junie that and Junie take care of everything. Earn? I'm the one who earns around here. (p. 71)

Junie sums up her feelings about housework when she tells her daughter, Taylor, "when a man marries, he gets a housekeeper. When a woman marries, she becomes one." (p. 82)

Although the three children understand their mother's frustration over the household work and the money, they also realize that Junie does not fit the image of mother that seems prevalent in society. To Jem, her son, she was beautiful:

> She was like a garden. She'd run along the beach with a kite string and get a kite into the air in seconds flat if there was a breeze at all. She looked like a girl, speeding down the sand in her bikini. Sometimes he wondered if it'd be maybe easier to have a mother like Dan's. Mrs. Howard wore stockings even in the summertime. Jem didn't think his mother even owned a pair of stockings. (p. 11)

Even Junie's daughter, Taylor, and the oldest of the children, doesn't understand her mother's unwillingness to become a "typical" mother. To Taylor, Junie's lack of coping with the limitations of marriage is a sign of immaturity. (p. 53)

Junie's individualistic approach to household duties was most apparent when Tony's mother came to visit. Grandmother enjoyed cleaning and mending. Junie either stapled ripped clothing or threw it out. When Grandmother visited, Junie

made an attempt, but once she left Junie's reaction was one of joy.

> Junie had thrown her shoes and shirt off the dock, tossed her arms in the air and shouted, 'there she goes!' (p. 44)

In spite of what Grandmother thought, though, Junie did many of the things mothers are expected to do -- cleaning, shopping, seeing that kids got to appointments, looking at report cards. "But it seemed she was left emptied of spirit and energy by the effort. More so each year." (p. 45)

Taylor wondered sometimes if her mother had really wanted children. Before B.J., the youngest child, was born Taylor had told her mother about a friend's mother expecting a baby. Junie's response was, "Is she, poor soul." (p. 65) And to Taylor it seemed that since B.J. was born her parents' fights had increased in frequency and intensity. Junie told Taylor once that some people "just shouldn't be mothers," and admitted that she was "not a good mother." Taylor asks, "then why did you marry somebody and have kids, if you think you shouldn't have been a mother?"

> Taylor, I want to tell you something -- lots and lots of women find that what they're least afraid of being is married and the mother of children. It seems such a normal, right, sanctified unrisky course to take. (p. 79)

To Junie, marriage is the end of a woman's personal growth. She explains her view to Taylor:

> Marriage is a compromise, Taylor. Always remember that. Two people get married, and the woman starts compromising. (p. 179)

Junie feels less and less able to make the compromises she

believes she must to stay in her present situation. Although she loves her home, she is often gone. (p. 42) To the children, she becomes more of a free spirit than a mother.

> She never walked anywhere. She ran. She never sat still but darted like a lovely lizard in and out of the house in and out of the water in and out of their lives. (p. 45)

She wants a change:

> I do not want a safe harbor! I want to do something that's fun. I want to go someplace and hear some music and look at paintings, I want to go someplace and dance. (p. 77)

After another fight with Tony, Junie does leave, but she will not admit to Jem that she is leaving for good. As Jem watches her pack he attempts to get an explanation from her, some sense of what his mother is doing. But she reacts in anger.

> Jem -- don't you think I have any rights? Don't you think a woman is entitled to do something on her own, just once in a while? (p. 154)

She leaves without saying goodby to Taylor or her two-year-old son, B.J. It takes B.J. two days to understand that his mother is not returning and he is devastated. Junie has become blinded by her own desire for a change in her life and has ignored her children's needs. However, she does not want her relationship with her children to terminate. After she is settled in New York City she writes telling them she wants to visit them in the future, and wants them to visit her. But she clearly has made a choice between her children and her life. She has put her own needs first, and either can't or won't look at other avenues for creating a

satisfying life for herself. She creates an image of a mother who believes she cannot succeed at personal growth if she remains in the role of mother.

These, then, are mothers who are in the process of making a transition from a homemaker to a wage earner. The balance between independence and dependence is difficult for each to attain. In struggling for this balance, their relationships with other family members are affected. How they achieve a compromise, satisfying to their particular needs, depends on their values. To some, family responsibilities are incompatible with the development of self interests; others find they can continue close relationships with their children while developing a career.

CHAPTER 3

MOTHERS WHO ARE PASSIVE AND/OR UNABLE TO COPE

The second category of images that emerges from the book analyses is that of women who are unable to make decisions and accept the responsibilities that will enable them to be competent mothers. Unlike the mothers in the first category they fail to make a transition to a more satisfying life. In some cases, because of alcoholism or mental illness, they are unable to function as responsible members of society. The mothers in all of the books in this category have a general lack of control over their own lives. They lack in Mary Wollstonecroft's words "sense and independence of mind."

In three of the books, Only My Mouth is Smiling, Homecoming, and Dicey's Song, the mothers are mentally ill. They are portrayed as alcoholics in Garden of Broken Glass, The Disappearance, and Pardon Me, You're Stepping on my Eyeball. The image in Very Far Away from Anywhere Else is the most positive one in this category, but she does not take responsibility for making decisions. The last three books, Second Heaven, Seems Like this Road Goes on Forever, and I Will Call it Georgie's Blues, all portray passive mothers who have no rapport with their children.

Elaine, the mother, in Only my Mouth is Smiling by Jocelyn Riley is mentally ill. She had two severe nervous

breakdowns in the past, but has been well for a while. "The first time, when we three kids didn't know about nervous breakdowns, was the scariest; it sort of made us wonder if we really knew who we were. You'd expect your own mother to recognize you, after all." (p. 10) The children, Merle, Ron, and Diana, had hoped that their mother was cured this time. "She'd even been working full-time as a bookkeeper for almost two years at the same job, a record for her. She'd kept her job, she seemed to be sleeping at night, her face was pretty clear, and she'd been paying rent to Grandma." (p. 13) But she had begun to refer to "they" again. They were playing Monopoly and as Merle handed her mother the play money she commented that her mother could buy more hotels for Park Place. "Ha!" Mother said. "My property. Fat funny joke. They'll take everything away from me if they get the chance." (p. 11) Merle's reaction is "Oh, God, not they again." Diana, who is nine years old and the youngest, says, "Don't say things like that, Mom," hoping that if her mother just tried hard enough she could keep from going crazy, and Ron reacts with cynicism, "Who is they?" he asks in his most obnoxious tone. (p. 13) The children are powerless; they cannot help their mother retain her sanity.

It is difficult to acquire a clear picture of what Elaine is like when she is not ill, because one of the main focusses of the story is the disintegration of her mental health. The novel concludes with her complete breakdown. The children are too caught up in the present situation, too

dependent on a mother not capable of rational thought, to reminisce and reflect on what life was like when she was healthy. They are more apt to remember her bizarre behavior when she was previously ill. The image of mother here was that of one who has a tenuous hold on reality.

Elaine had been deserted by her husband soon after Diana was born, and had been sharing a house with her mother since then, although the two women did not get along well. Grandma (she wasn't named in the novel) doesn't understand her daughter's illness, nor is she sympathetic. She ridicules Elaine: "I'm not the one who practically lives in a loony bin." (p. 18) Because of her lack of patience and empathy she often makes matters worse. Merle comments as she watches the two fight:

> Imagine two adults acting like that. Grandma thinking Mother would just stop acting crazy if she asked her to, and Mother screeching so she wouldn't have to hear what Grandma had to say. (p. 18)

The fight progresses until Elaine is on the floor and Grandma is kicking her. Neither her husband's desertion, nor her mother's agressiveness is the primary cause of Elaine's mental illness, but certainly both added stress to an already difficult situation. The children don't remember their father well enough to see any relationship between him and their mother's illness, but they do understand Grandma's contribution.

> If only she and Mother could have talked to each other like regular people, instead of acting as if they were each other's worse enemies. Besides, if Grandma is so sane, why doesn't she see that she

> always sets Mother off with the things she says? Grandma should try a little warmth on Mother; instead, she's cold toward her, and then she acts surprised when Mother stiffens up. (p. 65)

It is not until Elaine runs away with the children and, ultimately, has her third and worst mental breakdown, that Grandma better understands Elaine's illness and the necessity for the family to work out their problems together. Grandma wants them to come back home, but Merle objects.

> How can we come back and live with you after what we saw you do to Mother? You did kick mother. How do you know it's not your fault she ran away to Lake Lune and got crazy?

But Grandma is wiser now. She knows she could not prevent Elaine's illness nor did she cause it.

> 'I guess I don't know much about anything,' Grandma said. 'But I do know that a perfect saint couldn't keep your mother from going crazy, Merle, and I've never been a candidate for sainthood.' (p. 201)

Grandma had been talking to a social worker and had arranged for the family to get help from a family counseling center. (p. 202) She is ready to face their problems.

Elaine has had great difficulty in comprehending problems or understanding the reality of situations. She wanted life to be different, but seemed unaware and unable to make the necessary changes.

> We once saw a movie called "The Second Time Around" three times in a row... I think Mother just wanted to stay in the dark and imagine herself as the mother on the screen who was getting married a second time and would live happily ever after. (p. 21)

She seems incapable of taking charge of her life.

Among the many things Mother can't do, she's never

> learned to drive. Whenever she starts squirreling away money, she always says that she's going to buy a car, and she probably never will. (p. 21)

Elaine's expectations are that at some point things will work out for her. Being out of touch with reality, she and the children have reversed roles. The children protect their mother from the realization of her illness as long as they are able.

> As though Mother shouldn't know things that we know are true. As though for some reason we have to help her hang on to a sort of innocence that we aren't allowed to have. (p. 143)

But Elaine can't be protected from the ravages of her illness and is taken away, wrapped in a straight jacket. The children have been unable to help her. Grandma tells Merle:

> 'It's not easy to do what's best for someone like your mother, you know.'
>
> 'Yeah,' I said, 'before you can, you have to figure out what it is she wants...or needs.' (p. 203)

The image of Elaine as a mother is of a woman who can meet neither her own or her children's needs. She is unable to live a normal life or to function as an independent loving person.

The mother in Homecoming and Dicey's Song by Cynthia Voigt (the second a sequel to the first) also suffers from mental illness. The mother is unable to function as an independent capable woman, but the image is more sympathetic in the Voigt novels than in Only My Mouth is Smiling.

In Homecoming, Liza, the mother, is remembered with empathy and tenderness. One of the reasons for the difference is that Liza abandons her children, so they do not witness the deterioration of their mother's mental health except for the initial symptoms.

Liza had been a loving mother, one who played with her children and taught them songs. She is never portrayed as a strong confident person, but as kind and gentle, someone who will not fight back. (p. 296) One of her sons characterizes her as "drifty and moony." (p. 39)

She and the children's father never married, partly because she saw how marriage had changed her mother. Gram explained to the four children:

> "I loved my children. I had a lot of love to give in those days, to my husband too. But it got turned around. I got turned around. I let myself get turned around. (p. 29)

But not getting married didn't save Liza from losing the kind of life she had hoped for. Dicey, thirteen and the oldest child, remembers her father's anger when her mother became pregnant with Sammy, the fourth child. And before Sammy was born, her father left. They had not seen him since.

On her own, with four children, Liza tried to care for them, both emotionally and financially, too proud to ask her family for help. Her parents had told her not to come back until she was married, and either because of pride or shame, she would not ask for their help although she was desperately in need.

The image of one who lets life happen to her instead of planning and making decisions is most obvious when she leaves her children in the parking lot of a mall. Several weeks later she is discovered in a catatonic state, miles from their home. Because the novel begins with her leaving, the image is created only through other's viewpoints. Unlike the situation in Only My Mouth is Smiling, Liza's children view their mother sympathetically.

> Momma didn't talk to them any more, not even to scold, or sing, or make up games the way she used to. Except Sammy. She talked to Sammy, but even then they sounded like two six-year-olds talking, not one six-year-old and his mother. (p. 7)

Thinking back on those times, Dicey realized what it must have been like for her mother after she lost her job, and the responsibility of being the sole caretaker was more than she could bear. Dicey explains to her brothers and sister:

> I think she got so worried about so many things about money and us, about what she could do to take care of us, about not being able to do anything to make things better -- I think it all piled up inside her so that she just quit...and all the things that had piled up inside her head sort of exploded there. And she just forgot us. (p. 110)

The children defended their mother when authorities questioned their mother's marital state. "She didn't have boyfriends, she didn't even go out on dates. She's nice. She's good. She loves us." (p. 120) And later when a priest questioned their home life, "--but she (Momma) gave us a good home in Provincetown. She took good care of us, as good as she could." (p. 139) There was never any doubt in the children's minds that their mother loved them. Sammy tells

his grandmother that their mother wanted to return to them.

"How do you know that?"

"Because she loved me. Didn't she, Dicey?"

"Yes, she did. She loved all of us." (p. 65)

James, the oldest son concurs as he explains to Sammy: "...she might have been crazy in some ways but she was never crazy when it came to loving her kids." (p. 299-300) The image of a loving mother able to provide security and happiness to her children even against great odds changes to one of a pathetic woman overcome by life's difficulties. As Lisa left her children in the parking lot "she slung her purse over her shoulder and walked away, her stride made uneven by broken sandal thongs;, thin elbows showing through holes in the oversized sweater, her jeans faded and baggy." (p. 5) The next time Dicey sees her mother is in a photograph taken at the mental hospital.

> Her face looked so flat and empty, so far away, as if it hung miles above the earth and could not be bothered by anything happening on the little planet below. (p. 159)

In Dicey's Song, the children come to realize that their mother is critically ill. "The sadness of Momma lost to them, maybe forever, was something Dicey carried around deep inside her all the time..." (p. 18) The mother, however, remains free of blame. As Dicey explains to Sammy it was no one's fault that Momma was ill, "not even Momma's. It was just the way things happened." (p. 83) Through the process of writing an essay describing her mother, Dicey is able to

see her objectively, yet with the sensitivity that comes from love.

> She had reasons to turn into a mean woman, but Mrs. Liza just couldn't. She had long hair, the color of warm honey in winter, the color of evening sunlight in the summer. She walked easy, high narrow shoulders, but loose, as if the joints of her body never got quite put together. She walked like a song with accompaniment. (p. 111)

Then Dicey describes the changes in her mother:

> Her eyes stopped smiling first, and then her mouth. The holes in her sweaters got bigger. Meanwhile, people talked and she didn't know what to say so they could understand. Meanwhile, quarters and dimes got lighter, smaller. Meanwhile, her children were growing bigger and they needed more food, more clothes. Meanwhile, nothing she did seemed to make any difference. (p. 111)

This sense of hopelessness that Dicey describes never lifts from Liza.

Shortly before her mother dies, the doctor explains to Dicey:

> We did everything that could be done with the resources we had. She never really responded...She never tried. (p. 167)

When Dicey sees her mother for the last time, "Momma lay absolutely still, with her arms down beside her body." (p. 163) The image is that of a person who has quietly given up. Lisa was unable to withstand the harsh circumstances of her life.

Lisa had no inner strength to help her through difficult times. If she had been able to react with anger, to rebel against life's inequalities, perhaps she could have recovered. Her self concept must have been low or she would

have fought back. She, obviously, loved her children, but even they could not save her.

The three books in the study that portray mothers as alcoholics have very different images, although in each case the mother is seriously ill. None of the mothers functions normally. In Garden of Broken Glass the image of the mother is harsh and cruel, while the mother in The Disappearance is described with pity and understanding. The image in Pardon Me, You're Stepping on my Eyeball is of a person who's life was destroyed by alcohol and mental illness.

Brian, the teenager in Garden of Broken Glass by Emily Cheney Neville, lives in terror of his mother. She is abusive to him when drinking, and since that is a daily occurrence, he stays away from home as much as possible. When he discovers that his friend, Fat Martha, has a large family his response is: "It must be pretty tough living with all those people." But Martha defends them. "That's my family you're talking about." For Brian though, the concept of family is very different. "I hate my family. I hate my mother most of all." (p. 13)

Brian can't remember a time when his mother didn't drink. Martha asks him if his mother drank before his father left the family. "I remember it was before he left! She's always been that way -- you can't ever tell when she's going to holler and when she's not." (p. 23) Brian reacts the same way to his mother's drinking as his father did -- he often leaves. Once when his mother asks him where he is going he

answers, "Just out. I'll be back." Eve his older sister notices her mother's face tightening.

> It came back to her then, a quick picture from childhood: the screen door slamming behind her father, his voice calling, 'Just out.' and the hard line of her mother's mouth. (p. 107)

The father had left his three children and wife a long time ago, and for Brian there is only a remembered ache, not a clear mental image. (p. 6) Brian believed his mother, by her behavior, drove his father away.

Living with his mother becomes more difficult as her drinking increases. Brian makes friends with a stray dog, but his mother drives the dog away. Brian explains to Martha:

> I was on the floor, and she was kicking me, and then the dog yelped. You know, like he was really hurt. And then he ran away. (p. 59)

Through her cruelty his mother destroys, not only Brian's opportunity to befriend a dog, but his chances for a normal life.

He lives in a constant fear of her and is unable to feel pity towards her.

> The crazy laugh broke out again, scaring Brian, and then it suddenly changed to sobs...
>
> Finally he edged up the stairs. He looked down at her. Her eyes were half closed, and fat tears trickled down her cheeks. His fingers crossed on his cold, sweaty palms, and he stiffened all over. Even her tears couldn't make him feel sorry for her. He couldn't think of her as an ordinary person; she just meant danger. (p. 75)

The image of the mother as a source of danger is so strong that when she falls and is taken to the hospital, Brian's

primary reaction is one of relief. He has a momentary fear that she wouldn't return (p. 90), but that comes from the uncertainty of what would happen to them as a family without a mother. When he thinks about the possibility of his mother dying he, "didn't feel anything. Just blank." (p. 102)

Later when she returns home, only to begin drinking again, she continues to treat Brian badly. Finally he lashes out at her. "Go ahead, get drunk, why don't you? Go ahead and kill yourself!" (p. 172) There is no remembered tenderness from their mother for any of the children. Because she is their mother they are victims of her illness. Eve tells Brian and Andy that they have to make the best of it. "Sometimes she'll be better, sometimes she'll be worse." (p. 203) The children draw closer together protecting themselves from the image of a mother who offers no solace, only danger.

The mother in The Disappearance by Rosa Guy is, also, an alcoholic, but the image reflects a pitiful, rather than dangerous, woman. Imamu's mother has given her life over to drink since the death of his father. The apartment she and Imamu share is filthy, permeated by the smell of a "mixture of decay and stale wine." (p. 1, 69) As he goes to her room to look for her, he stumbles over empty wine bottles, unable to turn on the broken lightswitch. Her bed is in disorder, a pile of sheets that had turned dark gray. (p. 2)

Although Imamu needs and wants his mother's love, because he is an older teenager he is not dependent on her

for food and shelter. He feels he is the strong one and wants to protect and nurture her. Even when his mother makes abusive remarks to him, he reacts with pity and tenderness.

Imamu remembers a time when she was a loving tender mother, "putting him to bed, tickling his feet." (p. 7) Flashes of remembered happiness remind him of the good relationship they once had. But now he tries to protect her, to keep her home, away from her source of liquor. (p. 6) She not only resents him, but is afraid of him, and lashes out at every opportunity.

> When his mother sees him she says, 'What the hell you want here now?' His reaction is that he wants to embrace her, feeling her need for him. Like his father he wants to care for this frail woman. (p. 5)

Refusing to believe she no longer loves him, Imamu interprets her nasty comments as reflections of her caring. When he stops by to see her before going to a foster home she asks, "She done put you out?" (p. 6) He believes she asks because she loves him. "Yeah, she loved him, but she was too drunk to know it." (p. 7) Outside of Imamu's few remembrances, there is nothing about his mother that evokes tenderness. She never exhibits any understanding or sympathy for difficulties he is in.

When he is falsely accused of harming his foster mother's daughter, his mother, too, accuses him of harming the little girl, Perk. His mother arrived at the police station drunk, muttering, "No good -- no damn good. Keep in some damn trouble." She asks Imamu "who they got you for

killing this time?" (p. 134)

Although he defends her in front of others:

> This here a great lady. Great lady. She can't hardly walk, yet she made it all the way from Harlem to get me. The lady loves me. (p. 137)

he is defeated by her. Imamu has a desire to scream at his mother: "I didn't born myself. I didn't put myself in this crap -- I found myself here." (p. 140) He wants to drag her to the bathroom, push her face in the toilet bowl, washing it, force her to break the mountain of fear she hides behind and make her responsible for what she says. But he walks away, knowing he can do nothing. (p. 140)

He tries to see his mother as she was before -- "sweet-faced, clear-eyed, smelling of soap." Instead he could only see the abused face and smell the sour liquor. (p. 54) He cannot understand what she could be looking for in a bottle "that is greater than his loving and caring." (p. 203) He cannot turn his back on her though, and goes back to their apartment to take care of her. "Anyway, she needs me." (p. 245) The image of the mother is of a weak dependent woman, unable to care for herself or others. Since she is never sober, the image is blurred and distorted by alcohol. Unlike the mothers in Tiger Eyes and A Place Apart, she was unable to recover from the loss of her husband.

Of the novels in this study, Pardon Me, You're Stepping on my Eyeball by Paul Zindel, portrays one of the more negative images of a mother. Marsh has nicknamed his mother Schizo Suzy, and she is referred to in this manner throughout

the novel. She is an alcoholic; to her son, a drunk. (p. 25)

Marsh's descriptions create the image of a madwoman.

> It was like when she had just that little but too much that a buzzer would go off in her head and she'd become another person. (p. 9)

The "other person" Marsh is describing would raise her voice three octaves and then "start talking like she needed an exorcist." (p. 9) Marsh thinks his mother looks "like Lady Macbeth with half a load on." (p. 8) Marsh's girl friend, Edna, sees her, too, as changing in personality. Suzy chases Edna from her house.

> It was as if Schizo Suzy had suddenly become another person, -- yelling like a hysterical ventriloquist's dummy erupting filthy and obscene language. (p. 114)

What she is changing from is never made clear. When Suzy isn't screaming insults she is passed out, looking "like she was an extra from The Snake Pit. (p. 66)

There was no indication that Marsh and his mother ever had a close relationship. In one of her drunken rages, Suzy shouts, "You're a rotting, disgusting, revolting little son. And if you ask me, I should have had an abortion." (p. 10) For Marsh, there is no reciprocal feeling of anger. He describes Suzy as stupid, recalling a time when she had to call her husband for directions to return home when she was only a block away. (p. 76) Also, he believes she is "really useless" because she hated washing clothes, didn't do dishes, and never learned how to cook. (p. 77) He blames all this on the way she was raised.

> Her parents always told her she was this precious little thing, and everybody should take care of her. She couldn't wise up that she was supposed to take care of herself. (p. 76)

Because the image is drawn only from Marsh's point of view, the accuracy of Suzy's lack of abilities is left in question.

The relationship between Suzy and her husband, Pete, is seen, too, from Marsh's limited and biased view. He talks about his father protecting Suzy, but, also, relates physical abuse.

> One time he even kicked Schizo Suzy; and let me tell you, she was a lot better off for it. After that he used to kick her around regularly. It was kind of therapeutic. She'd be sweet for a week. (p. 53)

The image that is created is of a pathetic woman unable, for whatever reasons, to be a competent mother. Though her son dismisses her as worthless, a woman's life has been wasted; dependent first on a husband and then alcohol, she has abdicated responsibilities for herself, as well as her son.

These last three books portrayed mothers as alcoholics. None were able to function normally. All were a major cause of difficulty for their children, and they could not accept responsibility for them.

The next group of books in this category portrays mothers who allow their husbands to make all the decisions affecting the family. They do not cope with the responsibility of helping their children develop into mature, independent, well-adjusted adults. The more positive image in this group is the mother in Very Far Away from Anywhere

Else. Because of her belief in a traditional patriarchal family, she goes along with whatever decisions the father makes, whether she agrees or not. What saves the family is the father, who although dogmatic, loves his son and wants what is best for him. No so fortunate are the children in Second Heaven, Seems Like this Road Goes on Forever, and I will Call it Georgie's Blues, where the wives bend to the father's will, not only because of the structure of a traditional family, but because of fear. The fathers are extremely dominating, more concerned with a strict adherence to rules and behavior than with the well-being of their children.

The mother in Very Far Away from Anywhere Else, by Ursula LeGuin, is described by Owen, her son and only child, as a good wife and mother.

> She never lets my father down. ... What he does is right. And she keeps the house clean and cooks really well. She works hard and uses her head at it. (p. 19)

The division of work in the home is along traditional lines. Owen relates the jobs he has had around the house -- working in the garden, caring for the lawn, carrying out the trash.

> Male jobs only, of course. I never learned how to work the washer and dryer till the time she had to have an operation and couldn't climb stairs for two weeks. I don't think my father knows how to work them yet. That's woman's work. (p. 20)

What she does for relaxation follows the same pattern. "She can't even take off the time it takes to read a novel." (p. 19) Owen believes that any activity that would take her mind

off of her narrowly defined role, his mother would think was wrong.

> So all she ever reads are some magazines about food and interior decorating and one about extremely expensive holiday travel to places she doesn't want to go. My father watches a lot of TV, but she never pays much attention to it; she may be sitting there with him in the living room, but she's sewing or doing crewel work or figuring out household stuff or working on March of Dimes lists. (p. 20)

This type of limited life has an effect on her willingness to try new ventures. Owen believes she feels she always has to be there. It is the only life she has known since she was twenty. She married before finishing college and has remained a wife and mother, working at home.

She fears change and wants Owen to attend a nearby college, the one she went to: "She knew State. It was safe." (p. 23) Staying with the familiar is of such importance to her that she refuses to consider other college possibilities for her son, even though he is extremely intelligent and wants to pursue a career in science. What she wants is for her son to be healthy, normal, and happy. (p. 63) Changes for him or herself frighten her.

When Owen receives a scholarship for MIT and decides to go, his mother "began to get very upset, really angry, as if I was pulling a dirty trick on her." (p. 85) Relying, as she does, on the structure of their family life unchanging, she has great difficulty in accepting the new situation. She turns her uncertainty and dependence into anger. "My mother felt really betrayed and refused to go along with the plan

gracefully" (p. 85) But ultimately she had to go along with it because, as Owen explains:

> ... despite the fact that she runs our household, she had always played this game that the man is the one who makes the decisions, and so she has cut herself out from decision-making, ... (p. 85)

She is intelligent, competent, and thoughtful, yet because she accepts the role of woman as inferior to men she has limited her potential. "She left herself no option but resentment." (p. 86) Gradually she accepts Owen's decision to attend MIT, as she has before accepted decisions made by her husband. But the frustration of having no or little control in decision making probably remains just below her conscious thought. Although she is a responsible and effective worker, she has limited her growth as a person by not developing personal interests and independence.

The mothers in Seems Like This Road Goes on Forever and I Will Call It Georgie's Blues are both married to ministers, and have not only subjugated their personal interests and talents to their husbands, but to the church as well.

Louise, Mary Alice's mother, in Seems Like This Road Goes on Forever, by Jean Van Leeuwen, has devoted her life to the church. "She was just as involved with the church as Mary Alice's father." (p. 83) Mary Alice remembers from the time she was a little girl, her mother talking to the members after church, "her mouth frozen in a perpetual smile." (p. 49) "She always complimented them on their new clothes, always remembered to inquire about their illnesses, always

thanked them five or six times for anything they had done for the church. She was always so friendly, so nice." (p. 88) Her mother never missed a Sunday service, or a meeting of any of the church organizations. Yet, there is a sense that she does all of the church activities not because she enjoys it or has a personal interest in the people. She talked about the people on the way home from church:

> Did you see Marge Trumbull's hair this morning? I don't know how someone her age has the nerve to wear her hair like a teen-ager. ... I just couldn't get away from Gladys Rivlin. And all she wants to talk about is her arthritis. (p. 88)

Comments such as these make the care and interest she expresses when talking with members of the congregation seem shallow and dishonest.

Her mother's involvement with the church "seemed more on the outside." (p. 89) Mary Alice realizes that her mother never talked about religion, "only about the church." (p. 83)

> She doesn't talk about it like my father does. She does all the things a minister's wife is supposed to do, but -- I don't know. It seems like a ritual, like she's doing what is expected of her. (p. 83)

Her concern with the expectations of her role as a minister's wife affects her relationship with her children. She cares more about what people think of her than developing a rapport with Peter and Mary Alice. When she took the children shopping, when they were younger, she would be overcome with embarrassment if they crawled under the clothes racks pretending to hide in a cave.

'Come out of there this minute!' their mother would

> hiss, looking over her shoulder to see if any of the salesladies were watching, her face flushing bright pink. 'Whatever will people think of you?' (p. 84)

What she really cares about is the way people will judge her as a mother.

> Mary Alice could remember the first time they ever went to a restaurant -- it was on a Mother's Day, after church -- and Peter dropped his pickle in his milk. Their mother got all upset. 'I just knew we shouldn't have come,' she said to their father. 'They're too young to take to a restaurant. Now everyone is looking at us.' (p. 84)

She believed people watched them because they were the minister's family.

She carried the concern of what other people thought to an extreme. (p. 87) When Mary Alice is in the hospital, her mother cares about her daughter's physical condition, but still worries about other people's opinions. "Really, Mary Alice, you must do something with your hair. What will the doctor and nurses think?" (p. 17) She refuses to take Mary Alice's emotional breakdown seriously. Peter tells Mary Alice that "Mother thinks there is nothing wrong with you at all, it's just the shock of the accident." (p. 21)

Because of her over-riding concern with what others think, she cannot help her daughter, even by admitting there is a problem. "As she says, there have never been any mental problems in <u>our</u> family." (p. 22) Because the doctor believes that Mary Alice will have to be admitted to a mental hospital if her condition doesn't improve, Louise reluctantly agrees to having a psychologist treat Mary Alice. However, she

refers to the psychologist as a counselor, and is relieved that the congregation won't hear about it. Peter explains to Mary Alice:

> And the best part of it from Mother's point of view is that if you see her [the psychologist] while you're in the hospital here in Munson, there isn't much chance of the congregation over in West Greenville hearing about it. The disgrace and shame of it all won't get out. (p. 22)

Although concern for other's opinions is a primary factor for Louise's uncaring attitude towards her daughter, she manifested a lack of emotional support throughout their relationship. She refused to let Mary Alice help her with household tasks, using the excuse Mary Alice might hurt herself, but actually just wanting her daughter out of the way. (p. 24) Even when Mary Alice, as a young child, hurt herself, Louise's concern was not about her daughter.

> "Oh, my, just look at all that blood. I can't get it on my dress, Mary Alice. John, come quickly! Mary Alice has skinned her knees." Her mother looked down at the floor. "Oh, no!" Her eyes filled with horror. "It's dripped on the rug. And the Middletons are due here in ten minutes. Now what are we going to do?" (p. 96)

Louise has defined her role by the expectations of her husband and the members of his congregation. She is unable to create or restore any rapport with her children.

All Mary Alice's life, her mother has made assumptions about what her daughter thought or wanted. If Mary Alice said she disliked something, her mother would say, "Now, Mary Alice, you don't really." "Disliking things was frowned upon in her parents' house." (p. 36) Louise was overjoyed when

people would send over hand-me-downs, although Mary Alice thought the clothes were ugly.

> "They smell funny," she finally said one time, and her mother replied briskly, "why, it's just a little mildew. I'll put them through the machine a couple of times and they'll be as good as new." (p. 69)

The clothes she made for Mary Alice were dark colored and ill fitting. (p. 151) In spite of second-hand and dark clothing provided for Mary Alice, when she earned her own money and was able to purchase new pretty clothes "...they hardly seemed to notice, they were both so busy with her father's new Lenten Bible study course and preparations for the Spring Fair." (p. 151) Louise was unable to be empathetic with her daughter or even to see a little of what life was like for a child. She assumed Mary Alice didn't mind when she opened her mail. (p. 98) Both she and her husband assumed Mary Alice wanted to go to the university they had chosen for her, although Mary Alice hated the thought of going there. (p. 109)

Louise seems unable to cope with the simultaneous roles of wife and mother. She remains passive in her relationship with her children, never developing a strong independent image for herself.

The mother in I Will Call It Georgie's Blues, by Suzanne Newton, is married to a minister who is fifteen years older than she. (p. 13) Although she worries some about how the behavior of the children reflects on the community's view of them as a minister's family, she is not caught up in role

expectations determined by what others think of them, as was the mother in Seems Like This Road Goes On Forever. Her son Neal, through whose eyes we see her, believes, "She doesn't enjoy her life very much, I guess -- at least her mouth is set in a straight line most of the time." (p. 9) Her main reaction to the three children is irritation. When her seven-year-old son, Georgie comes home from school she never greets him in a warm loving way.

> Usually Mom is on his back as soon as he walks in. It's "tell me what you did at school," or "sit down and do your homework right now," or "why did you do what I specifically told you not to?" (p. 8)

Even with her older daughter, Aileen, there is no mother-daughter closeness. Aileen thinks her mother is concerned only with the possibility of being embarassed by her. "All you care about is that you've got to explain why your bright daughter didn't manage to graduate with others her age." (p. 19) Neal agrees that his parents "don't care about what we think or what we want or what we hope! All they care is that we don't act in any way that will disgrace them in this town!" (p. 30) Although the children feel the weight of the responsibility of being preacher's kids, that comes more from their father than their mother. "We just didn't fit Dad's idea of what a minister's family ought to be. None of us. Mom tried to conform, but she was losing heart." (p. 158) His mother explains to Neal, in a rare moment of comaraderie:

> I was determined to be the perfect minister's wife. I would do everything that was expected because I

> wanted him to be proud of me and I wanted the congregations to be satisfied. ... I don't suppose I've ever given up trying, but I've never measured up.
>
> [Neal:] Who could? It's unreal for regular human beings.
>
> [Mother:] I've come to that conclusion myself. (p. 74)

Her unhappiness with herself and her life is expressed in constant irritation with her children, always asking sharply where they have been, repeating the same admonishments over and over. Neal's reaction is "She says that every day. I hardly hear it anymore." (p. 9) It is not so easy for Georgie to ignore the unfriendly, unfeeling comments his mother makes, and he comes to believe that she does not love him. (p. 6)

Because she is afraid of her husband, she does not act irritated with him, but uses the excuse of a headache to separate herself from him. (p. 40) She admits to Neal once, "I'm planning to be in bed with one of my headaches." (p. 97)

Gradually as Georgie becomes more unhappy and withdrawn, she realizes her passive behavior can no longer continue. She has always been submissive to her husband, even when she disagreed with him. Neal realizes that his Mom "for some reason is afraid to stand up to him." (p. 103) She cannot cope with his anger. Knowing how ill Georgie is she has talked to their family doctor "to see whether he could recommend some help." (p. 127) Neal is relieved and asks what his father has said. "She clamped her fingers into a

fist, like someone who has a sudden, sharp pain. 'I haven't told him yet. I'm going to.'" (p. 128) But she puts off talking to her husband, letting her fear keep her from making an important decision to help Georgie. (p. 157) In spite of her resolve, when Georgie needs her the most she is unable to cope with the husband's anger.

> I kept seeing Mom crying while she watched Dad haul Georgie over the coals. As much as she hated it, she seemed powerless to act against him. (p. 171)

She knows she must take control over her actions for Georgie's sake, but not until he lapses into a trance caused by severe emotional depression is she able to accept the responsibility for her actions.

In Second Heaven, by Judith Guest, the mother is completely submissive to her husband, even though he is extremely abusive to their sons, doing great physical harm to them. The older son, Kevin, left home as soon as possible. So the father's cruel behavior is directed solely against sixteen-year-old Gale. Gale's mother never makes any effort to stop his father from harming him. Gale believes, "She's afraid of him. She does what he tells her." (p. 63) More than fear controls her behavior though. She has come to believe everything her husband does is right. "He never does anything wrong." (p. 300) She accepts no responsibility for caring and loving her children. Her life is lived through her husband. She believes what he tells her to. She sees what he wants her to see. (p. 346)

Even though she has always been present when his father

has injured Gale, she is incapable of knowing reality. When Gale was eleven, his father threw him down the basement stairs. On the way to the hospital, she tells Gale, "When they ask, you must tell them the truth, that you slipped and fell, because that's what happened, you know that." (p. 200) Whenever his father mistreated Gale, his mother's response was, "He loves you. He only wants what's best for you." (p. 199) She told Kevin after his father had slammed him against the wall that he was lucky to have a father who really cared about him enough to teach him these hard lessons. (p. 301)

Gale had run away several times; when his mother discovered where he was, she would call him. He heard "his mother's voice, tearful and pleading: you have to come home now." (p. 199) She had so submerged herself into her husband's personality, that the only times she felt emotionally involved was when her husband wanted something -- like Gale returning home. She believes that:

> Thomas is a good father. My husband is a man who loves his children very much. He has tried to teach them to be good citizens ... (p. 342)

Earlier images of her are not described, so it is unclear if she always ignored her children's needs, or if she had opportunities, at one time, to protect them. She has lost any ability to make decisions that would affect her and her children's lives, and seems to have no sense of responsibility for them.

None of the mothers who are portrayed as alcoholic or mentally ill are now married. In The Disappearance,

Homecoming and Dicey's Song, the mothers' problems probably stem from the absence of their husbands. In Only My Mouth is Smiling, Garden of Broken Glass, and Pardon Me You're Stepping on my Eyeball, there is the suggestion that the mothers' problems were the cause of their husbands leaving. The mothers who were passive and did not make thoughtful decisions important to their children, were all married. None of them were wage earners. They were submissive to their husbands, allowing them to control their lives and their children's.

Chapter 4

MOTHERS LIMITED TO AN ADULT PESPECTIVE

The mothers in the third category of images have a self-centered attitude. They relate with difficulty to their children, forgetting what it was like when they themselves were teenagers. Their personal interests and values take precedence over, and are usually in conflict with, those of their children. In Are You In the House Alone, Language of Goldfish, and Ordinary People, the mothers are more interested in themselves than their children. They attempt to control their children's lives and fit them to a preconceived idea of behavior. Confessions of a Teenage Baboon and Them That Glitter and Them That Don't portray mothers who are insensitive to their children's needs. In Bridge to Terabithia and Up in Seth's Room the mothers are less self-centered, but are limited to an adult perspective. They have difficulty empathizing with their children. The final book, Hey, That's My Soul You're Stomping On, characterizes the mother as irresponsible because of immaturity.

The family in Are You In the House Alone? by Richard Peck has a traditional format with the husband the sole wage earner for his wife and daughter. When he loses his job as an architect for a building firm, he doesn't tell his

daughter, Gail. Not until Gail cuts school and goes into the city to talk to him does she discover he has been laid off. She wonders then if her mother knows.

> And then I remembered that Mother was taking that real estate salesmanship course -- hoping she could bring in some money. (p. 67)

If there had been discussion about her mother becoming a wage earner, Gail had not been aware of it.

Rather than an image of a woman struggling to become a decision maker taking on responsibilities beyond caring for the family, Gail's mother is aggressive, a social climber, and more concerned with herself than her daughter. When Gail is invited to the Lawvers', the venerable family in town representative of "old" money, her mother is concerned only with Gail making an impression.

> While I was trying to get dressed for the ordeal, my mother was in and out of my room twenty times. (p. 11) [She] kept appearing in the mirror over my shoulder every two seconds. (p. 12)

She fusses around worrying about what Gail will wear, making the comment, "Well, at least you're not in Levi's", wanting her to wear a long black evening skirt. Gail had dressed appropriately in a blouse, V-neck sweater, and short skirt. Her mother does not make any favorable comment about Gail's appearance. (p. 11)

The mother's jealousy of the Lawvers is apparent in a conversation between her and her husband.

> 'Of course, it's very nice -- and gracious. (having the sixteen year olds over for a dinner party) I suppose we'd do the same thing if Gail was -- seeing -- a suitable boy.'

> 'I hope we wouldn't do anything just because the Lawvers do it.' Dad's voice sounded weary.
>
> 'I know we can't hope to copy the grandeur of people like them.' (p. 13)

The father wouldn't want to copy the Lawvers if they could, but the mother has a yearning to be part of that social scene, and since she hasn't been invited, she wants to vicariously have the experience. Thus, she wishes Gail were going with Phil Lawver instead of Steve, who is from a working class family. The mother has never approved of Steve, and Gail wonders sometimes if she is "going with Steve mainly to spite my mother." (p. 13) When she and Steve had first started going together, her mother had asked, "Would you be half as interested in this boy if he weren't the plumber's son? You surely know how clannish these local families can be." (p. 22) Gail could have turned the question around and asked her mother if she would be as against Steve if his family had money, or if his last name was Lawver. The mother's dislike of Steve has nothing to do with Gail's happiness, but stems from her own prejudices.

The mother's unwillingness to accept Steve as an appropriate boy friend for her daughter prevents Gail from confiding in her mother when Gail begins receiving the obscene notes. Distraught after finding such a note in her locker, Gail runs home; her mother's immediate reaction is to say "You're trying not to cry. What has that Steve Pastorini done to you?" (p. 50)

I couldn't tell my mother about that note. I could

> feel the filth of it smeared on me. And nobody was going to see that, especially her. (p. 51)

Gail had not confided in her mother for a long time and now when she should have, she couldn't. Her mother's "pulled-together coolness" (p. 51) put a distance between the two of them. Gail felt that her mother "had turned blind eyes and deaf ears to me." (p. 136)

"Uncaring" and "unsympathetic" describe Gail's mother's reaction to Gail's fright as a result of the threatening notes. Gail, alone at home, receives an obscene phone call, and in terror runs through the house locking all the windows and doors, very uncharacteristic behavior. But when her folks come home later, the only thing her mother says is:

> For heaven's sake, Gail, why did you leave the phone off the hook? It's absolutely squawking. (p. 55)

Afraid to stay at home alone now, Gail tells her mother that she wants to go out with Steve on a school night. Her mother does not respond to Gail's saying she does not want to stay alone.

> Oh, Gail, not on a school night. You know how your dad feels about --
>
> [Gail:] You're the one who doesn't want me going out with Steve, Mother. (p. 72)

The mother uses this dialogue to initiate a talk about whether or not Gail uses birth control pills. When she discovers Gail does take them, she describes her concern with the side effects. Gail responds to her mother's hypocrisy:

> But you take them, Mother. The only difference is yours are in the medicine cabinet in the bathroom,

> and I keep mine under my scrapbook in that drawer over there where you must have found them. (p. 73)

Gail's mother is more interested in who knows that Gail uses the pill than in any guidance she may give her. When Gail explains that Mrs. Raymond, a volunteer from Planned Parenthood, had talked to her, her mother responds:

> You don't mean Eleanor Raymond in my garden club! (p. 74)

All of her reactions during the conversation with Gail reflect only an adult perspective with no understanding of a teenager's point of view.

After Gail is raped, and she regains consciousness in the hospital she is aware of hearing a man crying, slowly realizing it is her father. He asks her if she is going to be able to talk to some people.

> 'What people?' I didn't think I could cope with anybody else. I just wanted Dad there. (p. 117)

In this time of great stress for Gail she doesn't even wonder where her mother is. Her father tells Gail that sooner or later she will have to talk to the police.

> 'Shall we get it over with?' I said, wanting to and not wanting to.
>
> 'Whatever you say, sweetheart,' he said in a husky whisper.
>
> 'No.' It was Mother's voice. 'She's not ready.' (p. 117)

Gail hadn't realized her mother was in the room, too. Gail's reaction was that she "wished she'd go away." But then she realizes her mother had been there all night -- there were smudges under her eyes and her hair wasn't combed. At that

moment Gail feels the closeness of her family, a sense of security. "It was the three of us, grouped tight." (p. 117) That closeness is shattered, however, when Gail tells them it was Phil Lawver who raped her.

> 'Not a word to anybody,' Mother said quickly, 'until we're sure.' (p. 118)

Gail was sure, but her mother withdrew, thinking not of Gail, but of how this would affect her own standing in the community.

Gail's mother had no remorse, no guilt about not listening to Gail when she was first trying to tell her about the notes -- the terror. Her mother didn't talk about the rape. "Mother limited her side of conversations strictly to concussion and scarless stiches." (p. 139) She didn't want Gail to talk about the rape, or tell anyone who had raped her. It was as if by hushing it up she could make it go away. She wants Gail to go away to a boarding school, which would be a plan, "we can all live with." Since her dad doesn't know about the plan and Gail doesn't like it, the only one she is concerned with is herself.

> Later in winter, Mother said, 'It could all have been worse.' I guess that was meant to sum everything up, file it neatly away. She'd made her first real estate sale. (p. 172)

For Gail's mother, the crisis is past. The gossip about the rape has died out. The image of this mother is of one who is detached from and uninvolved with the life of her teenage daughter.

The mother in the Language of Goldfish by Zibby Oneal interferes in the life of Carrie, her thirteen-year-old daughter, by making decisions that Carrie would rather make for herself. She seems to have an image in her mind of what Carrie should be like.

> "Carrie, we've got to do something about your hair," her mother said. "It needs a shaping." (p. 13)

Carrie only nods, but when her mother tells her she'll make the appointment for Saturday, Carrie says no; she will miss her art lesson.

> I can't miss my lesson. Drawing is very important to me.
>
> Well, I'm not asking you to give up drawing. Just one lesson, for Heaven's sake.
>
> I can't. (p. 15)

But her mother acted as if she hadn't heard her. She seems unable to understand why Carrie does not want her mother to arrange her life for her. Her mother wants what is best for Carrie, and she then decides, for Carrie, what is best. Some of those decisions, like the wallpaper her mother chose for her bedroom and Carrie hates (p. 11), can be tolerated. However, when her mother insists Carrie attend the school dances she looks at her mother incredulously. "But we talked about that! I didn't want to go to those dances." (p. 15) Her mother ignores the anguished plea. "I'm afraid Daddy and I are going to insist. It's time you began doing these things, Carrie." (p. 15) Her mother decides Carrie needs new clothes for the dances and takes her on a shopping trip.

> "Something simple," her mother was saying. "I don't mean it has to be elaborate, but there isn't a thing in your closet that't suitable..." "A nice bright color..." "Carrie, are you listening?" (p. 61-62)

Carrie's mother doesn't ask her what she would want or attempt to talk over what Carrie might like. Her adult-only perspective blinds her to what Carrie is really like. She tells a friend, "Carrie's first dance is next week," when Carrie has been adamant about not attending the dances. More importantly she doesn't hear what Carrie is telling her.

> "Saturday we're having people for cocktails. I was thinking that Friday we'd go into Saks and find you a dress."
>
> "I think I'm going crazy," Carrie said softly.
>
> "What?"
>
> "Something's wrong."
>
> "If you'd get to bed earlier and eat a proper breakfast, you wouldn't have these dizzy spells."
>
> "Why don't you listen to what I'm telling you?" (p. 57)

Carrie becomes so distraught, with the inevitable sexual changes occurring as she grows up and her inability to handle these changes, that she attempts suicide. Even an act as drastic as her daughter's trying to kill herself does not disrupt the mother's image that she has of Carrie. When she asks Carrie to tell people at school that she was absent because she wasn't feeling well, Carrie protests.

> "But it's not like a cold. You know what happened. I tried to kill myself." Her mother turned and walked to the window. "Oh, Carrie, I think it was more that you got mixed up, wasn't it? Thought you were taking an aspirin or two? That's what I

think." (p. 81)

She refuses to deal with the problems Carrie has. Her personal values and expectations of having Carrie be the kind of daughter she wants keep her from believing what has happened. As Carrie tries to make her understand, the following exchange takes place:

> "I took a whole bottle of pills," Carrie said.
>
> "Duncan got a ninety-eight on his spelling test yesterday. I was so relieved. I think he's finally learning something."
>
> "I took handfuls."
>
> "I meant to bring you a bed jacket. Remember the one with the blue flowers we bought at Saks years ago?"
>
> "I took them because I couldn't help myself any longer."
>
> Her mother turned to face her. Her hands were shaking, pressed against the window sill. "Carrie, I won't accept what you are saying." (p. 82)

When Carrie asks her why she won't accept the truth, there is no real answer, except that Carrie doesn't fit the program her mother has established for her. Yet she loves her daughter and they have tender loving moments together. (p. 104, 106) Carrie discovers later that her mother did acknowledge to herself and a friend that she was very worried about her. Carrie is amazed. "She won't even talk to me about it." "Maybe she will someday," Mrs. Ramsay said. "She loves you very much." (p. 117) Love, however, isn't enough to establish a rapport between mother and daughter. Never does Carrie's mother come to terms with the suicide attempt.

Instead she wants to put it behind them. "Let's call it an unfortunate incident." (p. 89) Only in this way could she handle the truth. Her image is of one who, although not unloving, cannot set aside her self-centeredness to be of any help to a daughter who is in great need.

The teenager in Ordinary People by Judith Guest also attempts suicide, and Beth, the mother, like the one in Language of Goldfish, does not want to dwell on it. Beth, however, is a less sympathetic mother and her motivation for not talking about the suicide attempt seems to come from a determination that her son will not interfere with her life.

Beth rarely talks with Conrad, except for superficial comments.

> She is almost to her door and he calls after her, "I swam pretty well today. Salan wants me to stay later and work out. I might be starting in the fifty." "Good." The door closes behind her. (p. 23)

She tries to pressure Cal into speaking for her.

> "Will you talk to him this morning? About the clothes. He's got a closetful of decent things and he goes off every day looking like a bum, Cal." (p. 6)

Her concern about the way Conrad dresses seems inappropriate considering his emotional condition. Jordon, his older brother whom he idolized, was killed in a boating accident the year before. Besides the terrible sense of loss that he feels, he is overcome with guilt. Conrad and Jordon were together when the boat capsized, and only Conrad was able to

hang on until help arrived. Conrad's inability to recover emotionally leads to the attempt to kill himself.

For Beth, too, the death of her older son has been traumatic. She has difficulty expressing grief, but it is her lack of empathy for Conrad that clouds an image of a caring mother. She wants this suicide attempt forgotten, and makes no effort to help Conrad become emotionally stable. Her major concern is that her life goes on as before.

Shortly after Conrad is released from the hospital, Beth discusses Christmas plans with Cal.

> "Listen," he says, "I don't think we should plan to go away for Christmas this year."
>
> She looks at him over the rim of her glass. "We go away for Christmas every year."
>
> ..."I know. But not this year. The timing just isn't right."
>
> "The timing isn't right," she says. "What does that mean?"
>
> "You know what it means." (p. 26)

She interprets Cal's concern as an expression of guilt. "I don't think it's a good idea for us to blame ourselves for what happened, Cal." (p. 27) Although Cal tries to explain that he is not talking about blame, but about being available if Conrad needs them, Beth will not accept this idea. To her, allowing a child to interfere with adult plans is inappropriate.

Beth is not cruel to Conrad; she is polite and mildly interested in what he does, but she wants life back the way it was. When friends inquire about Conrad she tells them he

is fine. "There is something final and forbidding about the answer." (p. 61) It is as if the suicide attempt never happened. "If things could just be normal again." (p. 44) For Beth, "normal" means not thinking about Jordon's death or Conrad's attempted suicide. Her sons are not an integral part of her life.

When the boys were small, she took good care of them, but even then her overriding concern was having control over how she ordered her life. For example, keeping the house neat, even with two little boys, was of paramount importance to her. Cal remembers:

> her figure, tense with fury as she scrubbed the fingermarks from the walls; she bursting suddenly into tears because of a toy left out of place, or a spoonful of food thrown onto the floor from the high chair. (p. 83)

As the boys became older they learned what to do to avoid her anger. When they were teenagers, Beth could arrange her life the way she wanted, playing golf and tennis, keeping the house immaculate, being the wife of a successful lawyer. What happened to her sons didn't fit into her overall plan.

Beth reacts with fury when her husband and son do not behave according to her preconceived ideas. When Conrad quit the swim team, he did not tell his parents, fearing that they would pressure him into continuing. Beth finds out from a friend and confronts Conrad who reacts with anger.

> "I'm sure I would have told you," Conrad says, "if I thought you gave a damn!" (p. 101)

Beth's reaction is not one of remorse or even sympathy for

her son. Her self-centered attitude allows her to see his pain only in terms of herself.

> "I wish I knew, Conrad, why it is still so important for you to try to hurt me!" (p. 101)

The fight between Beth and Conrad ends with Conrad rushing up to his room. Knowing how upset Conrad is and how much he needs his parents' support, Cal wants Beth to go up to Conrad's room with him.

> "Beth. Please. Let's just go upstairs!"
>
> "No. I will not be pushed! I will not be manipulated." (p. 103)

If she changes her life for her son -- staying home over Christmas, talking to him when he needs her, sharing his joys and griefs -- she feels she has lost control. Her self interest prevents her from being a loving, caring mother.

In Confessions of a Teenage Baboon, by Paul Zindel, the mother is insensitive to the needs of her teenage son, Chris. Helen, the mother, is a practical nurse and works in private homes. Her husband had left her and Chris some time ago. Chris explains:

> Once upon time I did have a father, and my father and Helen really loved each other very much for the first seven years they were married, and then after that they hated each other so much that my father pulled that old trick of saying he was going out to buy the evening paper but went to Mexico. (p. 6)

Since his father left when Chris was quite young, and Helen is described only through Chris, what broke up their marriage is not explained.

The image of Helen as a practical nurse is of one who is competent and assertive. Leaving with a new charge, she is told she can't take suitcases on the ambulance. "'I'll take whatever I want,' Helen blasted, and then both ambulance attendants knew they weren't dealing with any ordinary nurse's aide." (p. 7) Once at the home she establishes her role.

> Helen started some of her nursing chores just to establish her position right from the start that she was the nurse and nurses like to take charge. (p. 17)

Her main concern is her patient, and she cares for the elderly woman with empathy and patience. (p. 9, 18)

With her son, though, she is not so understanding. Because of her work, they live in other people's homes, and Helen does not like Chris to use the bathroom. To solve the obvious difficulty, she insists he uses a milk bottle that she packs and moves with them. Chris is fifteen and feels that:

> Maybe it's all right to make a kid do things like that when they don't know any better, but by now I was certainly old enough to know. (p. 34)

When he tries to convince his mother he is too old to have to continue using the milk bottle, she ignores him, successfully making him go along with her wishes.

In other ways, too, she treats Chris as if he were much younger. She orders him, in front of other teenagers, to go to bed. Then, "Helen backed me into the hall like a lion tamer rescuing someone from a cage," and 'shooed' him up the

stairs. (p. 65) Helen seems to equate her care of Chris with her care of her patients. For the latter she must make decisions for them and somewhat control their behavior, but she is unable to understand that Chris is no longer a child. He needs to break away from her to establish himself as an individual, responsible for his own behavior. Lloyd, the man whose house they are living in tells Chris:

> You can cut the power line your mother has plugged into you, and stop blaming her for your failures. (p. 117)

The image of the mother is of one who does not help her son to become independent. She uses him to bolster her own sense of self-worth. Because her perspective is only from her own view point, she is unable to help her son mature.

In Them That Glitter and Them That Don't by Bette Greene the image of the mother is of an extremely self-centered, woman. Consistently, in the novel, she uses her teenage daughter to further her own ambitions. Mama, as Carol Ann calls her and the only name she is given in the novel, is a Gypsy, and the family survives on what money she makes telling fortunes and presenting side shows. Carol Ann realizes that Mama is the force that drives the family.

> In a way that I had never before looked at her, I looked at her now. What I saw was that in spite of the long flowered skirt that went bouncing around her ankles, she wore the pants in this family. (p. 111)

Mama is able to convince her husband to go along with her schemes, even to the extent of digging up a grave to steal a

child-sized coffin. (p. 106)

However, Carol Ann is less and less willing to go along with Mama's plans. She no longer believes that Mama can see the future in her crystal ball.

> Mama was all the time wanting -- maybe even needing -- me to believe in her words and prophecies just like I used to when I was little. But I was no longer little, and so believing just seemed to all the time get harder and harder. (p. 3)

When Carol Ann asks why, if she did predict the future, they don't know what will happen in their lives, Mama tells her, "It's like ... like watching television. Sometimes you watch one channel and not the other." (p. 10) Mama explains that it is Carol Ann's lack of understanding, not her inability, that is confusing. The increasing doubt creates a gulf between the two of them. Carol Ann believes that Mama will "never forgive me for letting go of make-believe and I'll never forgive her for hanging on to it." (p. 10)

Throughout the novel, Mama is not responsible for her three children. If it weren't for Carol Ann, the two youngsters would often be hungry and always uncared for. Even Carol Ann "needed my mother to be that -- a mother. A caring, seeing-to-everything, taking-charge mother." (p. 13) Mama wasn't deliberately cruel to the children, but she ignored them and relied on Carol Ann to take on the responsibility for the family. (p. 30)

Even for events of major importance, Mama did not bother to fulfill her role as a mother. Carol Ann was asked to sing at her high school graduation but her mother did not attend

the ceremony. Carol Ann is distraught.

> Mama... Mama... there's been static aplenty between us, but just the same we love each other. Don't we love each other? And don't you know that without you, I'm both alone and lonely? (p. 173)

Her mother had no reason for not coming to the graduation. "Reckon I just didn't wanna." (p. 186) Carol Ann realizes then, that in some ways, her mother has deserted her. When she was little she had recurring nightmares about her family leaving town without her. (p. 72) Although her mother never physically left, she has in an important sense abandoned Carol Ann.

Mama's self interests have always come before those of her children. Her interest in Carol Ann's music is not because of Carol Ann herself, but because the music helps to attract customers. (p. 157) Her own ambitions are always first in her mind. When Carol Ann tells her mother that the son of a local farmer has asked her to marry him, Mama's first reaction is one of disbelief. Finally, "she began laughing."

> Through the marriage of her daughter, she would enter into the world of the respectable. But by the shrill sound of her laughter, I began to wonder just how she planned on treating all the others, all the outsiders ... Wrapping her arms around her body, she hugged herself tightly. "Mymymy ... now it's going to be our turn." (p. 137)

Because Carol Ann had not agreed to the proposal immediately, Mama becomes angry and demands that she accept at once. "... like I already done said, you ain't rich and you ain't pretty, so it sure ain't up to you to think things over." (p.

141) Mama does not seriously consider Carol Ann's ambition to become a musician, nor does she even wonder if Carol Ann would be happy as Will's wife.

The image of this mother is similar to the characterizations described by Sheila Egnoff in adolescent novels published during the sixties. The parent(s) contributed to the teenager's problems rather than helping their children. (Egnoff, 1981) Mama was concerned far more with herself than with her children.

The remaining books in this category portray mothers limited to an adult perspective. They all have difficulty empathizing with their children. However, the reasons for the lack of rapport vary.

In Bridge to Terabithia by Katherine Paterson, the mother is overworked, and because Jesse is the only boy out of five children, she expects him to do more than his share of jobs around home. Jesse is a quiet ten-year-old whose mother doesn't create problems for him, but she doesn't help with them either.

Jesse's mother favored the two older girls. They could always get Jesse in trouble by complaining to their mother about something he did or said. An example is when Jesse comes in from running and Brenda, his oldest sister, complains: "Oooo, Mama, he stinks. Make him wash." (p. 5) Mama's response is automatic.

"Get over here to the sink and wash yourself," his

> mother said without taking her eyes from the stove. "And step on it." (p. 5)

She always made the assumption that Jesse was in the wrong.

Although Jesse was a talented artist, his mother did not respect his need to have time to draw. In fact, his littlest sister, Joyce Ann

> ...got a devilish delight out of sitting smack down on his rump when he was stretched out working. If he yelled at her to get the heck off him, she'd stick her index finger in the corner of her mouth and holler.

Mama's reaction was always to yell at Jesse.

> Jesse Oliver! You leave that baby alone. Whatcha mean lying there in the middle of the floor doing nothing anyway? (p. 67)

His mother seemed incapable of understanding what life must be like for her son. She prefers yelling at him to helping him to find some time alone.

The bulk of the chores fell on Jesse's shoulders. The older sisters could usually talk their mother into letting them off for the day. Ellie pleads with her mother:

> Miz Timmons is coming by to pick us up. I told Lollie sunday you said it was OK. I feel dumb calling her and saying you changed your mind. (p. 6)

Mama not only let them go, but allowed them to wheedle five dollars from her. "Which left Jess to do the work as usual." (p. 7) As the girls left, Mama turned to him.

> All right, Jesse. Get you lazy self off that bench. Miss Bessie's bag is probably dragging ground by now. And you still got beans to pick. (p. 8)

By not making an effort to empathize with her only son, she

established a barrier between the two of them, so that Jesse saw her as someone to avoid as much as possible. He is especially wary of her anger (p. 1, 9, 78), although she never is physically abusive, just bad tempered.

When Jesse became close friends with Leslie, a new girl in the neighborhood, Mama scoffed at her. She referred to Leslie's clothes as tacky, her parents as hippies. She told Jesse that his father didn't like him to play with a girl. (p. 46) Jesse had needed a close friend desperately, but again his mother had not seen his need, nor did she share his pleasure at having found a friend.

Yet, when Leslie is killed, his mother does react with pity and understanding, although not with words, "her eyes full of pain, saying nothing." (p. 109) She stops the girls from harrassing him. "I'm telling you, Brenda, if you don't shut your mouth..." (p. 109) Because of the state of shock he was in, Jess forgot to milk Bessie, but his mother was not angry. "'Your daddy did it for you.' But it wasn't an accusation." (p. 108)

After the tragedy of Leslie's death, the image of an unsympathetic mother has softened because of her behavior at the conclusion of the novel; however, the composite image is of a mother who, because of an adult perspective, does not establish a rapport with her children, especially with her only son.

The mother in Up in Seth's Room by Norma Fox Mazer was

married and worked outside the home. The whole family had been quite close, until Maggie, the older daughter, moved out to live with her boy friend. At that point, the mother cut off all contact with Maggie. Finn, the fifteen-year-old daughter, tried to explain to Maggie that their mother missed her.

> "I've heard Mom crying at night."
>
> "Why doesn't she come over here?" Maggie said.
>
> "You know -- " Finn said.
>
> "She's afraid she'll be contaminated," Maggie said. "The sin I'm living in might be catching." (p. 8)

Their mother had expressed no understanding for Maggie. When her husband said he would tolerate no relationship with Maggie, she had agreed, at least by her actions.

It was not because of fear of her husband that the mother agreed to his ultimatum. They had an excellent relationship. "Her parents had one of the best marriages Finn knew. They really loved each other." (p. 18) The daughters had often seen them being affectionate with one another. The mother wasn't overly dependent on the father, either. Because of his job as a truck driver, he was often gone for days at a time. She ran the household by herself, as well as worked outside the home as a nurse. Refusing to see the situation from her daughter's perspective came from her traditional view of life. (p. 18)

When her youngest daughter, Finn, begins dating an older boy, the mother expressed the same lack of understanding.

Finn's past behavior had been above reproach, yet when Finn asked her mother if she could go out with Seth, the mother reacted with no thought or empathy.

> "I don't want to know him, Finn."
>
> "Jesus! You're so unfair."
>
> "Life's not fair," her mother said. "Look at what Maggie did -- is that fair to me and your father?" (p. 62)

Later she tried to explain to Finn why she refused to let her go out with Seth.

> I want you to understand that I'm not keeping you from seeing him to hurt you. I thought you understood that. I'm older and I look at things differently. I have -- well, call it wisdom, you don't have. (p. 66)

She used the truism that to be older meant to know more.

Ironically, the boy Finn's mother would have permitted her to go out with, because he was Finn's age, had a reputation for dating girls only for sex. (p. 162) She gave Finn no credit for knowing what the boys were like or for trusting her to use good judgment. Finn told her parents:

> "I can take care of myself. I'm almost sixteen."
>
> "You're not sixteen for a good while," her mother said.
>
> "What happens when I am?" she said.
>
> "Maybe we'll all be lucky, and you'll have better sense." (p. 94)

Frustrated by her mother's unyielding position and lack of trust, Finn fought back.

> "You don't let me pick my own friends. It's not right. I'm a person. You can't tell me everything to do or not do."

> "We leave plenty of things up to you," her mother said.
>
> "Sure!" Finn turned on her mother. "What to wear to school, and if I want a hot or a cold breakfast!" (p. 143)

By not making an attempt to understand her daughter's perspective, the mother destroyed the rapport she and Finn had once had. The image was of a mother, although competent and independent, unwilling to develop a close helpful relationship with her children.

Betty, the mother in Hey, That's My Soul You're Stomping On, by Barbara Corcoran, fits into the category of self-centered mothers because of her immature, irresponsible attitude toward her husband and two children. Because the arguments between husband and wife become serious, the father arranges for the daughter, Rachel, to spend the summer in California with Betty's parents.

Betty's self-centeredness is most obvious in the way she tries to claim her husband's and children's complete attention. Rachel describes her mother as "a big squashy quilt" that tried to smother their lives. (p. 2) She is a loving mother, but very possessive. (p. 118) If her husband doesn't tell her every move he made, everybody he spoke to throughout the day, every day, she is suspicious and angry. (p. 3) Rachel realizes that her mother is "a hungry kind of person," ready "to gobble up everybody around her." (p. 3) Yet, Betty wants to have a good relationship with her family.

She seems unable to understand how her behavior is destructive to the very thing she wants -- a close-knit family.

Rachel's grandparents explain, at least in part, why her mother behaves so irrationally. Betty had been engaged to marry. "The date was set, big church wedding, reception at the Bel Air," but the groom never showed up. (p. 18) When Rachel hears this, she believes her mother is "always kind of scared that Dad is going to melt away right under her nose, and I could never see why she worried. I mean he's always so there." (p. 19) Betty's inability to grow beyond this experience is reflected in other immature behavior.

For example, when she calls Rachel in California it is typical of her to call when the rates are high even though she criticizes people for throwing their money away at the slot machines in Reno. Knowing her mother, Rachel comments that, "It's a good thing she doesn't approve of gambling; the way she overreacts, she'd go broke in a couple of days." (p. 111)

Betty suggests that Rachel call her grandparents by their first names, an idea that makes Granddad react with anger. "all this stuff about trying to act younger than you are. I think it's sick." (p. 13) At no other time was there a suggestion of Betty's concern with age, so this too is an example of her immature judgment and erroneous conclusions.

Betty seems incapable of accepting the responsibilities of a mature, independent mother. After her mother and father

separate, Rachel worries about how her mother will get along.

> Mother loved to give orders, but she was not an organized person. It would be just like her to have dashed off to Reno without telling Mrs. Bagley (the cleaning woman). (p. 116)

When Betty loses her Diners Club Card, she has no idea what to do, and tells Rachel that "your father always took care of things like that." (p. 117) Rachel has no sympathy for her though, and believes that "she's got to face up things for herself, for once. Dad has spoiled her." (p. 96) The Grandparents agree that Betty is spoiled.

> Everybody spoils her, always has. We did. She invites spoiling somehow." (p. 96)

Betty has not grown beyond the spoiled child stage; has not accepted responsibility as a mature adult. She reflects the image of a self-centered, unfulfilled mother, unable to create her own happiness.

All of the mothers in this category are self-centered and have difficulty relating with their children. Even when their children because of special problems need their support, the mothers cannot empathize or, in some cases, admit there even was a problem. Most of them are unsure of themselves and hesitate to make decisions on their own. The two exceptions are the mothers in Are You in the House Alone and Them that Glitter and Them that Don't. In both of these cases, the mothers have not accomplished goals that might lead them to have such a high opinion of themselves; their self-centeredness alone makes them feel sure of themselves.

Similar to the mothers' images in books published during the 60's, these mothers contribute to the teenagers' problems because they are more concerned with self than their children.

Chapter 5

MOTHERS WHO ARE EMPATHIC, YET INDEPENDENT

The images of women in this final category are of competent loving mothers who also have interests beyond the family. They accept responsibility for their own lives as well as their children's. They try to make thoughtful decisions although they are sometimes mistaken. Yet because of their self respect they learn from these mistakes. Even though the mothers in this category differ in personalities, careers, and life styles, they all help their children learn to accept responsibility for their decisions and behavior. The mothers remember what life was like from the perspective of a teenager and through empathy help their children become independent and develop self-confidence.

The mother in Killing Mr. Griffin is loving and competent. She helps her daughter become responsible and independent. In Memo: To Myself When I Have a Teenage Kid, the mother successfully balances interest in her children with interest in her career. The mother in Long Time Between Kisses is also serious about her career. She is loving and capable, not afraid to make decisions. I Love You, Stupid portrays a mother who has a positive self-concept and is confident of her ability to make thoughtful decisions. In IOU's the mother is capable and independent, with a wonderful sense of humor. The mother in Happy Endings Are All Alike is

caring, supportive and assertive.

Mrs. McConnell, the mother in Killing Mr. Griffin, by Lois Duncan, is portrayed as competent and supportive. She manages the family with good humor and friendly bantering. (p. 6, 183) She has three sons and one daughter, Susan, the main character in the novel. Susan is shy and the target for her brothers' teasing. Mrs. McConnell helps her by keeping the boys in line, being supportive, but not exerting pressure on her daughter to be more outgoing.

When Susan is asked out for the first time, Mrs. McConnell is happy for her daughter. She has empathy for Susan, knowing what life is like from the perspective of a teenager.

> My goodness, Sue, who is this boy?
>
> He's the president of the senior class!
>
> And you're only a junior! How exiting! (p. 43)

She helps Susan plan and prepare food to take along for the picnic, and, more importantly, reassures her.

> Oh, Mother, what if it's awful? I mean, what if I can't thing of anything to talk to him about?
>
> You'll think of something. That's the sort of thing that takes care of itself. He'll probably have things he wants to talk about. He must like you, honey, or he wouldn't have called. (p. 44)

By treating the occasion of the date as a natural and pleasant occurrence, she helps Susan to gain confidence.

Later, Susan's behavior leads her to believe that Susan

is ill. Actually Susan is overcome with feelings of guilt and remorse for her part in the accidental killing of a high school teacher. Mrs. McConnell is solicitious at all times, concerned, but not overly anxious about her daughter's behavior. When David, the young man Susan has been dating comes to see if she will go out, her mother is encouraging.

> "Why don't you, dear?" Mrs. McConnell said. "You hardly ate any dinner. Go get a sandwich or something, and then come back and get a good night's sleep." (p. 91)

When Susan's condition does not improve, her mother becomes increasingly worried.

> Your cold must be worse, Sue. You look just awful. Are you sure you want to go to school? (p. 127)

However concerned she is, though, she allows Susan to decide for herself if she should go out or to school.

The wife of the teacher who died comes to the McConnell's house and accuses Susan of lying. Mrs. McConnell comes quickly to her defense.

> "That's ridiculous!" Mrs. McConnell said. There was a note of anger in her normally gentle voice. "Susan does not lie." (p. 156)

Even when she discovers that Susan has been lying, she remains supportive.

After the story is out and everyone knows her part in the accident, Susan retreats to her room, unwilling to discuss the events. Her mother allows her some time to recover emotionally, but eventually tells her:

> Sue, you can't go on like this. It's only by facing things that you ever put them behind you. (p. 217)

Mrs. McConnell is willing to assume some of the responsibility for Susan's situation. She and her husband have a counseling session with a psychologist, trying to understand how it had all happened. (p. 219) She never becomes angry with Susan, but tries to help her put the experience in perspective. She explains to Susan that they are going

> ...to get family counseling to help us all through this difficult time. We're in this together, aren't we? Whatever happens to you happens to all of us. (p. 221)

Instead of accusing Susan or worrying about what others think of them, Mrs. McConnell believes that the experience might help them all to understand each other better. The image of this mother is of a loving, competent woman able to make decisions which helps her children to become responsible and independent.

Memo: to Myself When I Have a Teenage Kid by Carol Snyder portrays a woman who is a caring, supportive mother, but is, also, very serious about her career as a writer. There are three children in the family, all girls; Karen, the main character is the oldest. The children know not to bother their mother when she is writing. "She has a writing rule about that, the only exception being cuts and bruises." (p. 150) She takes herself seriously, and consequently, so do her children.

Although Mrs. Berman tells Karen when to wear boots and

complains that her room is messy, she insists Karen accept responsibility for decisions appropriate for a thirteen-year-old. When they argue about Karen's wearing boots, her mother says, "Do what you want. But if you go out without boots, it's your decision." (p. 15) And she does not mention it to Karen again. When Karen invites friends over for a party without first asking permission she tells her parents that, "I seem to have made some big decisions all by myself." Her mother's reaction is supportive. "We encourage you to do that." (p. 13) Even after she hears about the party plans, and does not like them, she agrees to allow Karen to have her friends over "because we want you to make your own decisions..." (p. 115) She tells the two younger girls they are not allowed to come to Karen's party. "Karen's growing up and needs her own space." (p. 116) But she sets the parameters by telling Karen "And we'll let everyone know we're here, but then we'll stay out of your way. That's my rule." (p. 116) She does not hesitate to set guidelines for her daughters, and takes responsibility for their behavior.

If the children do not like a rule or have an important matter to discuss, they are expected to call a family meeting. This provides a forum where everyone has an equal opportunity to be heard. (p. 112) Thus, there is never an excuse for not talking things over. Because of the trust her

parents place in her, Karen is able to stand up to peer pressure when she knows she is asked to do something unwise. (p. 140)

Mrs. Berman becomes angry when she believes the children act foolishly.

> Okay, Karen. Only I want an explanation, and it had better be one heck of a story. I don't like this at all. (p. 100)

After she heard that Karen invited two more friends to the party, "she was not pleased. No more surprises, okay? Enough is enough." (p. 130) Her anger is always directed at a particular action, and once she speaks to Karen about it, the subject is dropped.

Because Karen is going through all the normal trauma of adolescence, Mrs. Berman gives her the diary she kept when she was as teenager. The diary makes Karen realize that her mother had many of the same experiences, and, also, it is a way of telling Karen -- I remember, I understand. (p. 31) By sharing that part of her life with her daughter, she expresses trust and empathy.

Although she loves fulfilling the role of mother to three young girls, she realizes the importance of their developing independence. "Karen, fight me if I hold onto you too tightly." (p. 151) The image of this mother is one of strength and intelligence. She recognizes the necessary balance between her responsibility for caring for her children and helping them to develop independence.

Sandra Scoppettone's Long Time Between Kisses, also has a positive mother image. Arley, the mother, is divorced; she has one daughter, a teenager named Billie. During the first years of her marriage Arley was a sculptor. Billie described her work as "huge wooden things." (p. 2) Her mother worked hard at her art but in Billie's words, "She just stunk." (p. 3) It occurs to Arley, too, one day that her work is not very good and she decides to become a carpenter.

> The father laughed. "You're not serious?" ...
>
> He never had much confidence in her or gave her much support, especially when it came to things she wanted to do that weren't things women usually do. (p. 4)

But in spite of the lack of support, Arley does become a highly successful carpenter. She is not afraid to make decisions that would change the direction of her life.

Arley and Billie are fairly close, but because of her work, Arley is not able to spend as much time with her daughter as she likes. Billie is at the age where she prefers friends to family. When a close friend of Billie's dies she does not think of her mother as a source of comfort.

> Oh, Billie, why didn't you come and get me?
>
> Get you? Why?
>
> Because I'm your mother. I mean, you needed help and I would have helped you. (p. 151)

Arley blames herself for Billie's not seeking help from her.

> You never thought of me. That's my fault. I guess I haven't been very present. (p. 151)

She holds Billie in her arms, and Billie is finally able to

grieve for her friend. Although they are rarely demonstrative with each other, Arley is a loving mother and gives support when Billie needs it.

Against her daughter's wishes, Arley starts a serious relationship with an artist. Billie notices that her mother seems happier.

> "So, it takes a man to make your life fulfilled," I said, baiting her. (p. 139)

But Arley has a strong self-concept and knows that isn't true. She explains to her daughter:

> If I didn't have a sense of myself no man could make me feel good. You have to have yourself first, and then another person enhances everything. (p. 139)

Arley's relationship with her friend is not based on a need to depend on someone. But, on the other hand, her independence does not prevent her from sharing her life with someone.

Arley projects an image of a strong capable mother not afraid of making decisions. She is responsible for her actions, and could admit to sometimes making mistakes. She is successful as a career woman without neglecting her daughter.

In I Love You, Stupid! by Harry Mazen the image is of a self-confident woman who enjoys being a mother. Sally divorced Marcus' father shortly after Marcus was born, and raised him by herself. (p. 25)

Sally gives Marcus guidance but allows him to make his

own plans and decisions, too. When he was fourteen he "spent a whole summer backpacking -- living outdoors, canoeing through Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada." (p. 9) Sally made sure he had the experiences appropriate for a boy, but uses discretion when Marcus has a wild scheme. With three months left in his senior year in high school, Marcus decides to quit school to become a writer. Her first reaction is to not take him seriously and the discussion ends with Marcus walking out. But Sally persists and brings the matter up again. She suggests that he rearrange his schedule.

> Drop the course you don't need, keep the ones you do need. Can't you take the classes you need in the morning, say, then have your afternoons free for writing? (p. 55)

She could have let the matter drop, especially because Marcus acts so immaturely, but she wants her son to have the opportunity to spend more time writing, if he doesn't have to quit school to accomplish this.

Marcus is hot-headed and cocky but Sally keeps calm and reasonable, and by doing so, encourages Marcus to become more mature. When his behavior is out of bounds, she refuses to argue.

> "I'm leaving," she said. "I'm not going to talk to you the way you're acting." (p. 54)

She is right about his inability to use the afternoons productively. Instead of writing he accepts a baby sitting job because he fantasizes about being in love with the young mother who hires him. Sally, though upset, takes a

reasonable attitude.

> You changed our agreement without consulting me. I don't understand why you've done this. Is it money you need? I'll be glad to discuss your allowance. (p. 78)

Her influence has an impact on Marcus. He rails at her in his mind, but he trusts and respects her.

Sally has a positive self concept. She knows she has done the right thing in divorcing Marcus' father. To bait his mother Marcus says:

> Just think how much better your life would have been if you'd stuck with George.
>
> It would have been stupid. I wouldn't have stayed with that unfeeling character, not in a million years. (p. 25)

Because of her self confidence, Sally does not respond to Marcus' inane remarks with anger.

Sally sets guidelines for her son and does not change them. For example, he has to help with dishes even when he invites a girl friend for dinner. (p. 154) And when he scraped the paint off the side of his mother's car he knew "there was no more borrowing his mother's car after that evening." (p. 159) Because her rules are fair, he accepts them without rancor. Sally is a competent mother, able to meet the demands of a career while raising her son on her own. She is confident of her ability to make thoughtful decisions and accepts the responsibilities of her actions.

Annie, the mother in IOU's by Ouida Sebestyen is capable and independent, although the circumstances of her life are

difficult. As a child, she had a close relationship with her father, but her younger brother gradually took her place. Her father vehemently opposed her marriage and refused to some to the wedding. Her brother did attend, but was killed in a car accident returning home. Annie's father held her responsible and broke off the relationship with his daughter. (pp. 85-86) Annie is a sensitive caring person and, although, hurt by her father's actions, understands and empathizes with his feelings.

She carries this ability into her relationship with her thirteen-year-old son Stowe. Although she does not always agree with him, she does understand how he feels. Stowe and his friend, Brownie, built a dam in a creek swollen by the spring thaw, creating a deep pool. They visualized using it all summer, but Annie discovers their project.

> "The Noah Brothers, I presume," she said. "Quite a flood you've got here." ... "An engineering marvel." (p. 43)
>
> She smiled at them. "The dam's got to go." (p. 44)

The boys argue and try to counter every reason she gives.

> "I know," Annie said. "So, okay, you guys have had your fun. It's a beautiful job, it really is. I'm sorry. But take it down." (p. 45)

Although Annie understands why they do not want to destroy their dam, she is adamant about her decisions, even when her son thinks she is being unreasonable.

Annie knows what it was like to have fun. Her sense of humor carries them through many difficult situations. For example, when Annie slammed on the brakes of her old pickup,

"the rearview mirror outside Annie's window fell off the door." (p. 8)

> Out of the silence came a sound Stowe loved. His mother's little whimper slowly grew into a snicker that finally jiggled into a laugh. (p. 8)

Her light heartedness allows her to have fun without worrying about fulfilling a stereotypical mother role. Once she and Stowe cut through a playground on their way home:

> Instead of detouring for the slide, Annie went right up the steps and down the sick slope. He stared at her, and slowly followed. Cool evening air rushed against his face. She stopped at the seesaws smiling. They got on opposite sides their weight balancing finally after the years of being unequal. (p. 68)

Another time, Annie plans an all-day outing in the mountains with Stowe and Brownie. After eating, the boys go off on their own. Stowe looks back and sees Annie at the top of the meadow.

> All at once she dropped to her knees and rolled down the slope like a shotgunned rustler in some old TV rerun. (p. 80)

Annie's life is often difficult, but she does not let that keep her from knowing the joy found in everyday occurrences.

One of the main difficulties is the family's shortage of money. She calculates the cost of every grocery item she chooses, but even then is often embarrassed because she doesn't have enough money to pay for everything.

> "Oh, damn," Annie exclaimed, whacking the steering wheel. "I hate these times. It's one thing to run out of money when you know it's at home in another purse, or waiting for you at the bank. But damn when it's not!" (p. 12)

Annie could have a job that brought in more money, but she

made a decision to work at home where she took care of children. She tells Stowe: "...I wanted a job where I could watch you grow up." (p. 65) Stowe, angry because he couldn't keep a puppy he found, asks her why she doesn't get a "real job."

> "Annie's face went flat. I somehow had the impression that I've got a real job," she said stiffly. "I don't keep kids just to break the monotony of my empty days." (p. 64)

She explains to Stowe that she likes what she does.

> I love kids, and I love homemaking, and making the quilts and all that. I'm living the kind of life I want to live. (p. 64)

She does not allow a lack of money to interfere with her independence, nor force her to make decisions that change the way she wants to live.

Annie's strong sense of independence affects the way she raises her son. She wants Stowe, too, to be responsible for his own decisions. "Think, Annie was always telling him." (p. 17) "Think ahead, he could almost hear Annie order." (p. 49) Because she refuses to do his thinking for him, and because she trusts him to make wise decisions, he is neither rash nor foolish. For example, Stowe and Brownie planned to pay a girl back because she had snubbed them. Brownie wants to know if Annie will let Stowe carry out the joke.

> "I didn't ask her," Stowe said. "I don't ask her stuff like that." The simple fact was that he didn't have to. He knew how she reacted to most things. He knew this was a think-about-it-carefully-Stowe situation. (p. 104)

In spite of his good intentions, he allows Brownie to talk

him into the escapade. Annie's reaction is: "It's you who have to know when something's going too far." (p. 116) She is angry, not so much over what happened, but more that he did not make a responsible decision.

Annie helps Stowe become mature, loving him but letting him grow away from her too. She explains to Stowe:

> "Maybe the way we love each other seems too close for some tastes." Annie turned her smile on him. "Even yours, Stowe. But spaces will come between us. You'll change into a father and a middle-aged man, and we'll love each other in a different way." (p. 179)

She is supportive and loving but not clinging.

Annie does not allow hardships to interfere with her strong sense of self worth. She has the strength to cope with many difficulties. Not only is she a competent mother, but a woman living her life with a joyful knowledge of self.

Happy Endings Are All Alike by Sandra Scoppettone, portrays Kay, who is caring and supportive to her two teenage children. The family has a traditional structure, with only the husband working outside the home. However, Kay is not a traditional woman but a feminist with a breezy nonchalant manner. Her husband, Bert, wanted her to work for him, partly because he knew she was efficient and competent, and partly "because he was madly in love with his wife." (p. 46) But Kay is happy working at home on pottery and painting, and dead set against working for her husband.

Kay and her eighteen-year-old daughter, Jaret, are good

friends.

> Jaret, from age fourteen to sixteen, had been at terrible odds with her mother and it had scared and hurt Kay until she remembered how she'd been with her own mother and how they'd later become friends. (p. 50)

She and Jaret are now very close, and she treats her daughter as an equal.

When Kay read letters written to Jaret by her lover, Peggy, she realizes for the first time that her daughter is a lesbian.

> Look, first let me say that I'm sorry I read them -- I mean, I know I violated your space and all that but I'm human. (p. 10)

She asks Jaret outright if she and Peggy are lovers. (p. 11) Kay's response to the answer is to ask if Jaret is happy. "I mean <u>really</u> happy, Jare?" (p. 13) As Jaret explains how she feels, Kay tells her that "if you're happy, that's all that counts" (p. 14) and accepts her daughter's homosexuality with compassion.

The relationship between Peggy and Jaret does come between mother and daughter, though. Kay struggles with her own concern over Jaret's happiness.

> The days of Jaret coming in from an evening out, talking and laughing about it were over. It made Kay feel old, lonely. She missed Jaret terribly. (p. 78)

It is difficult for her to believe that Jaret could be happy with a lesbian life-style. Her concern is for Jaret, not what other people will think, but "it was not something Kay could accept as normal, no matter how liberated she might

be." (p. 81) Although Kay is not happy with her daughter's decision she believes Jaret has a right to choose for herself.

When Jaret is raped, Kay puts all her ambivalent thoughts aside and fully supports her daughter, even though lesbianism is used as an excuse for the rapist, Mid Summers. The police chief explains that: "the Summers kid is gonna say that seeing them ... you know, intimate and all ... made him crazy." (p. 160) Kay's response is:

> First of all I don't think it's perverted, but that's neither here nor there. ... Secondly, no matter what their relationship is, it has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that Jaret was beaten and raped. (p. 160)

Kay's attitude is supportive throughout the ordeal of the police questioning and insinuations, and the public disclosure of Jaret's and Peggy's relationship.

Kay is upset by the attitude of the police toward her daughter, and, also, by the attitude toward rape in general. When the police chief insinuates the rape was probably done by a boy friend, Kay explains that rape is not a sexual act. The chief's response was: "Well, if rape ain't sexual then I don't know what it is." (p. 128) Rape is an issue Kay has strong feelings about.

> "Well, I have news for you," Kay persisted, her voice rising. "It ain't sexual. It's aggressive and it's violent and it's based on hatred of women, not desire for them." (p. 128)

Because of this opinion, Kay naturally wanted Mid prosecuted, but she trusts and respects her daughter to make that

decision herself.

Kay always believed that for children to mature they have to be given freedom and responsibility. She is independent, and wants her children to be so, too. Kay has always supported them.

> Jaret remembered a day in first grade when she had come home in tears because her teacher, Mrs. Ackroyd, had dashed her hopes of becoming a garbage collector. "You can be anything you want, kid," Kay had said. "You tell Mrs. Ackroyd that there are no limitations in this house." (p. 187)

Kay raised her children with that belief. As Jaret is packing to leave for college, Kay tells her: "You'll be anything you want to be, Jaret. You already are, thank God." (p. 188) That remark is for Jaret "her mother's gift" (p. 188), a gift of love and acceptance that will always strengthen and support her.

Although all of the mothers in this final category are depicted positively, the images remain realistic. That is, there are times the mothers make mistakes, lose their tempers, and make poor judgments. But they all recognize and admit mistakes, and accept responsibilities for their decisions. They vary in economic situations, employment and personalities, but have, in common, a willingness to listen to their children and help them, even when the children err in judgment.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

Results of the Study

This study of adolescent literature since 1975 revealed that mothers were depicted in a variety of ways. No one image overshadowed all others as was true in the earlier studies reported in Chapter One.

In studies of books published in the 60's, the mothers were described negatively. They were often viewed as contributing to their children's problems and being more concerned with themselves than with their children. This image was, also, present in the books I analyzed, but to a lesser degree. Of the thirty-three books, eighteen (55%) included mothers who could be classified as contributing to their children's problems. However, these images varied considerably. The mothers in six of the novels were mentally ill or alcoholic and posed a threat to their children's safety. Four mothers were portrayed as passive and unable to make decisions that would help their children. Six of the novels portrayed mothers who were self-centered. Their own interests came first, an attitude which contributed to serious problems for their children, such as suicide and mental breakdowns. Five of the novels depicted mothers whose involvement in interests outside the family tended to make

them insensitive to their children. They did not recognize the problems they could have helped their children with. Even when the teenagers asked for advice or help, the mothers rarely took the requests seriously.

The adolescent novels published in the early 70's were reported to show mothers in uninteresting roles; they were seldom portrayed as competent or efficient. I found that the images in the novels published from 1975 to 1984, however, did depict mothers in interesting roles. Though not all of the mothers worked outside the home, many did volunteer work, had interesting hobbies, and had good self-concepts. Several of the mothers, and in one case a grandmother, were shown to have loving relationships with their husbands. Even when the mother was portrayed negatively, she was sometimes shown as doing interesting things, as in the case of one who was a gypsy, and another who welded as a hobby.

In this study 39% of the fictional mothers were wage earners or were preparing to enter the labor force. This is considerably lower than the United States Census of 1980 that reported 55.3% of all adult women, who have at least one child under the age of eighteen, are in the labor force. However these fictional mothers reflect real-life ones more closely in this respect than shown in a earlier study by the National Organization for Women where less than 3% of the fictional mothers were in the labor force.

The mothers in the novels who worked outside the home held various jobs. Some were traditional, such as teacher,

nurse, secretary, or child caretaker. Other jobs included real estate agent, writer, window designer, and interior decorator. The most interesting job was that held by a mother who became a carpenter and opened her own construction company.

None of the books in this study portrayed an idealized mother. Even in the most positive images, the mothers at times lost their tempers, made mistaken judgments, and acted immaturely. The too-good-to-be-true mother who appeared in adolescent literature written in the 50's has apparently disappeared There were, however, mothers who were depicted as being loving as well as interesting and intelligent. These were mothers who were competent as homemakers and/or wage earners, made thoughtful decisions, and accepted responsibility for their own and their children's lives. Of the nine who fit this description, six were wage earners. Only four were married; the others were either widowed or divorced. Their personalities varied, as did their interests. Some were quite traditional, while others were feminists. There appeared to be no one pattern that described these mothers, thus no stereotype was created. A mother might work outside the home or not, be married, widowed or divorced, have several children or just one and still be described as competent, loving, and interesting.

Two patterns in the study, however, were consistent. All six of the mothers portrayed as alcoholic or mentally ill were unmarried. In three of these novels, the fathers

probably left because the mothers were alcoholics. In the others, the mothers become ill because the fathers left and they were unable to cope by themselves. The second pattern occurred in the four books where the mothers were characterized as passive and unable to cope. All the mothers were married and none worked outside the home. They allowed their husbands to make decisions affecting the children, even when it was obvious that as as a result the children were suffering. They seemed cowed by their husbands and unable to think for themselves.

Because of the diversity of mother images in the adolescent literature, I believe, as a whole, the fiction mothers realistically reflected real-life mothers. The images ran the gamut of personalities, experiences, interests, and dreams. The literature was not in keeping with society because of the lower percent of mothers in the labor force and the suggestion of a stereotype in the portrayal of every alcohlic or mentally-ill mother not having a husband. However, the images of mothers in adolescent literature are closer to reality than they were formerly portrayed.

Characteristics of the Selected Books

Of the thirty-three adolescent novels I analyzed, sixteen were published from 1975 to 1979, seventeen from 1980 to 1984. In the first group, five were written by men,

eleven by women. In the second group, all but one were written by women. Men wrote about both boys and girls as their main characters, as did the women; in thirteen of the books (34%) a boy was the main character. In comparing the books published during the first five years with those published the last five, I found the only major difference was that out of the nine mothers who were shown as loving and supportive to their children and either were or were becoming assertive women and decision makers, six appeared in books published after 1979. This, perhaps, reflects a trend toward the depicting of mothers as competent both in and out of the home. The characteristics are summarized in the following table.

Five authors were represented in this study more than once: Paula Danziger, Judith Guest, Sandra Scoppettone, Cynthia Voigt, and Paul Zindel, and interestingly, each of these authors was consistent in the characterization of mothers. For example, Scoppettone described mothers as competent, independent and loving; Zindel described mothers as incompetent, selfish and unloving. Whether this holds true for all of the novels written by the same author is an interesting question for future research.

Implications

A variety of mother images is important to adolescent readers. Adolescence is a time when young people are

Table 1. Characteristics of books. Category 1: mothers in transition. Category 2: passive/unable to cope. Category 3: self-centered/adult perspective. Category 4: competent/independent.

date of publication	1975-1979				1980-1984				
sex of author	female		male		female		male		total
sex of character	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	
category 1	2	0	0	1	4	2	0	0	9
category 2	1	3	0	1	3	2	0	0	10
category 3	2	2	1	1	2	0	0	0	8
category 4	2	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	6
totals	7	5	1	3	12	4	0	1	
	12		4		16		1		
	16				17				

critically analyzing their parents, as well as thinking ahead to roles they may fulfill as they grow into adulthood. Literature that shows mothers as active and interesting may be of help to them. On the other hand if young adults have mothers who create difficult home lives for them, reading of a similar experience may help them find ways to improve their situations. For all adolescents, learning about a variety of mother images through reading could broaden their social view and perhaps help them to become more empathic. Therefore, it

is important that mothers are not characterized as stereotypes, but that human experience is reflected in adolescent literature. However, I am not advocating any form of censorship. Although I would not recommend that adolescent literature which portrays mothers in confining, stereotypical roles be included in a curriculum, I would not make such books inaccessable to readers. I think young people should be helped to understand why the stereotypes appear in literature.

A study such as this one can help teachers and librarians choose literature both for curricula and adolescents' personal reading that gives young people an opportunity to understand the many dimensions of motherhood. We who recommend books and design curricula including literature should know how women are portrayed in the literature; we should make accessible a range of books so as to achieve a balance of images that reflect real life. Hopefully, an increasing number of books will have more realistic portrayals of mothers -- ones that reflect mothers' new and changing roles, increased independence, and ability to balance their own needs with those of their families.

One recommendation for further research is an investigation of relationships between mothers and fathers. Are love and respect shown as part of this relationship or are parents usually characterized as sparing partners? An analysis of behavior, as used in this study, would provide a better description of the relationships in the novels than a

count of the number of divorces or separations. Whatever the focus, though, adolescent literature deserves serious study. With paperback editions readily available, and with the increasing emphasis on literature in junior and senior high schools, adolescent literature will continue to be an important component of leisure and school reading. Teachers and librarians need to be familiar with the novels available for young people. This study, as well as others, can aid in the necessary knowledge.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

SELECTED ADOLESCENT LITERATURE FOR IMAGES OF MOTHERS

1. Bates, Betty. *It Must've Been the Fish Sticks.* (1982).
2. Blume, Judy. *Tiger Eyes.* (1981).
3. Bridgers, Sue Ellen. *Notes for Another Life.* (1981).
4. Corcoran, Barbara. *Hey, That's My Soul You're Stepping On.* (1978).
5. Danziger, Paula. *Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice.* (1979).
6. Danziger, Paula. *The Divorce Express.* (1982).
7. Duncan, Lois. *Killing Mr. Griffin.* (1978).
8. Fox, Paula. *A Place Apart.* (1980).
9. Green, Bette. *Them that Glitter and Them that Don't.* (1983).
10. Guest, Judith. *Ordinary People.* (1976).
11. Guest, Judith. *Second Heaven.* (1982).
12. Guy, Rosa. *The Disappearance.* (1979).
13. Le Guin, Ursula. *Very Far Away from Anywhere Else.* (1976).
14. Lipsyte, Robert. *One Fat Summer.* (1977).
15. Mazer, Harry. *I Love You, Stupid.* (1981).
16. Mazer, Norma Fox. *Up in Seth's Room.* (1979).
17. Neville, Emily Cheney. *Garden of Broken Glass.* (1975).
18. Newton, Suzanne. *I Will Call it Georgie's Blues.* (1983).
19. Oneal, Zibby. *The Language of Goldfish.* (1980).
20. Paterson, Katherine. *Bridge to Terabithia.* (1977).
21. Peck, Richard. *Are You in the House Alone.* (1976).
22. Riley, Jocelyn. *Only My Mouth is Smiling.* (1982).

23. Scoppettone, Sandra. Happy Endings Are All Alike. (1978).

24. Scoppettone, Sandra. Long Time Between Kisses. (1982).

25. Sebestyn, Ouida. I.O.U.'s. (1982).

26. Snyder, Carol. Memo: To Myself When I Have a Teenage Kid. (1983).

27. Stolz, Mary. Go and Catch a Flying Fish. (1979).

28. Van Leeuwen, Jean. Seems Like this Road Goes on Forever. (1979).

29. Voigt, Cynthia. A Solitary Blue. (1984).

30. Voigt, Cynthia. Dicey's Song. (1982).

31. Voigt, Cynthia. Homecoming. (1981).

32. Zindel, Paul. Confessions of a Teenage Baboon. (1977).

33. Zindel, Paul. Pardon Me You're Stepping on my Eyeball. (1976).

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