

## chapter 5

### mothers and daughters: bonding and separation

*In spite of the problems and grief between mothers and daughters it seems that there are few women who do not still, at some deep level, long for their mother's approval.<sup>1</sup>*

An old proverb which was meant to offer joy and solace to mothers of girls, proposed: 'A son's a son till he gets a wife, a daughter's a daughter all of her life'. Although these words tended to ignore the ambivalence of the relationship, they drew attention to its special qualities.<sup>2</sup> Adrienne Rich, in her influential book, *Of Woman Born*, considered that her observations on mothers and daughters were at the heart of her work.<sup>3</sup> She explained:

Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other. The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement.<sup>4</sup>

Her words were a poetic evocation of a special biological relationship between two women; a mother who was both mother and daughter, and a daughter who was most likely to have the experience of being a mother.<sup>5</sup> Rich clearly believed that mothers and daughters were connected from the start in a rapport which, despite some pain, extended throughout both of their lives.

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<sup>1</sup>Rosalind Coward, *Our Treacherous Hearts: Why Women Let Men Get Their Way*, Faber & Faber, London, 1992, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>Although the relationship of mothers to their daughters was of crucial importance, the connection of mothers to their sons has been given priority in cultural and psychological discourses. Our understanding of history also privileged the relationship of mother to son, because of its predominantly masculine authorship which focused on men and their activities. Commenting on the pervasive influence of religion, theorist Margaret Whitford noted that Christian iconography emphasised the Madonna and her male child. M. Whitford, *Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine*, Routledge, London/NY, 1991, p. 76. Additionally, Edith Neisser referred to the preponderance of mothers and sons in literature, citing examples of Shakespeare, the Bible and poetry. E.G. Neisser, *Mothers and Daughters: A Lifelong Relationship*, Harper & Row, NY, 1967, pp. 331-2.

<sup>3</sup>Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Virago, London, 1981. (1976), p. 218. Rich it should be pointed out, was a mother and a daughter, but not the mother of a daughter. She had three sons.

<sup>4</sup>Rich, *Of Woman Born*, pp. 225-6.

<sup>5</sup>Sara Ruddick proposed that all women think maternally, whether they give birth to a child or not. S. Ruddick, 'Maternal Thinking', *Feminist Studies*, volume 6, number 2, Summer 1980, pp. 342-67.

Behavioural theorist, Edith G. Neisser, has observed that: 'During most of the history of the Western world, what two women in the same family felt about each other or how they behaved toward each other simply was not considered important'.<sup>6</sup> As though in support of Neisser's conclusions, filmmakers, especially during the early years, rarely made the mother/daughter relationship the focus of the narrative. On the other hand, they frequently included mothers and daughters as an integral part of the domestic life of the protagonists. Unwittingly, perhaps, and although not central to the story, filmmakers created images of the way the two women related. This chapter attempts to determine what those images were and to understand them in relation to theoretical views about mothers and daughters.

Research on women's relationships within the family has come from several areas including biological, sociological, feminist and psychoanalytic. The first part of the chapter summarises the most important findings, which because of their disparity, are useful in the compilation of a broad picture of the many aspects of a complicated relationship.

The second part of the chapter begins the examination of the films with reference to the first of four major positions of the mother/daughter relationship delineated in theoretical research. In summary, these are: mother-love, mother-blame, the maternal cycle and mother-bonding. This section considers those films which represent the mother's love because of their ease of communication, the passing on of the mother's skills of nurturance and her responsiveness to the needs of the girl, particularly to her marriage.

The third part of the chapter analyses the representation of mothers and daughters in those films which take the opposite position, which hold that the mother exerts a powerful and damaging influence on the girl. The mother, with her own selfish agenda, is shown as either interfering or unresponsive. The girl, who may have been psychologically impaired as a result of her mother's attitude, is at the least, resentful.

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<sup>6</sup>Neisser, *Mothers and Daughters*, pp. 331-2.

The fourth part of the chapter examines the behaviour of daughters of nurturing and non-nurturing mothers to discover if films represent a cycle of maternal behaviour. It is not concerned with whether daughters are close to and love their mothers, but concentrates on the influence of the mother as a role-model. Investigating if caring mothers are depicted as producing caring daughters, the study also looks at daughters of unresponsive mothers to determine whether they are portrayed as necessarily imitating their mother's lack of maternal love.

The final part of this chapter analyses representations in the films with regard to links between bonding and autonomy. It asks whether the closeness of the mother to her daughter is depicted as affecting the daughter's self-confidence or ability to act independently. As a postscript to this aspect of the mother-daughter relationship, a film made at the end of the 1980s is presented as an example of the use of new ideas which challenge the importance of autonomy to women and replace it with the, perhaps, more appropriate idea of flexibility and tolerance.

#### Theoretical Perspectives on the Mother/Daughter Relationship

The mother's unique bond with her daughter has been illustrated by studies of women in nineteenth-century America. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg found that the relationship marked the beginning of all female friendships, which at the time, were both prevalent and prized. Smith-Rosenberg found that daughters were born into a 'female world' where they were trained to be good mothers and wives. As a young adult, the daughter took over her mother's role when it was required; perhaps, when her mother was ill, or during a confinement. Their association was both mutually rewarding and without discord. Smith-Rosenberg admitted that perceptions about their love and support of each other could have been influenced by the cultural expectation that women were not given to aggression. She

could find, however, no examples of repression in their correspondence that might indicate undercurrents of hostility in the relationship.<sup>7</sup>

Nancy Theriot wrote about the 'bio-social' bond of women in nineteenth century households, where male and female roles were sharply divided and the father often adopted a commanding and authoritative stance over all the women in the family. Theriot made the point that although he was respected as the 'head of the household', the father's influence in family matters was relatively minor. This division of power provided a space for women's coteries to develop within the home, when the men were out at work. Theriot reported that the mother cared for her daughters in a loving manner, seeing her primary task as preparing them for marriage. Where necessary, mothers were resourceful and thrifty and continually sacrificed for the benefit of other family members. According to Theriot, adult daughters who witnessed this aspect of the mother's nurturing responsibilities, learned that they would also be expected to lead a selfless life in marriage.<sup>8</sup>

While acknowledging a biological connection, the work of Smith-Rosenberg and Theriot argued that the daughter modelled her behaviour on the mother, by imitating her attitudes and traits. Their work supported social-training or cognitive role-learning concepts, which referred to the cyclical component of mothering. Recently, Carol Boyd has concluded that the daughter's ideas of self, sexual behaviour, nurturing and occupations were related to the attitudes of the mother.<sup>9</sup> In this model, the women supported each other and each was sympathetic to the other's problems. The daughter's maternal abilities, which she learnt from her mother, were not only directed towards her own children, but in some cases, were transmitted back to her mother. She eventually reached a point where, as Lucy

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<sup>7</sup>Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between women in nineteenth-century America', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, volume 1, number 1, Autumn 1975, pp. 1-29.

<sup>8</sup>Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America: The Biosocial Construction of Femininity*, The University Press of Kentucky, Kentucky, 1996, p. 68-75.

<sup>9</sup>Carol J. Boyd, 'Mothers and Daughters: A Discussion of Theory and Research', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, number 51, May 1989, p. 299.

Fischer proposed in her book, *Linked Lives*, she moved between mothering and being mothered. Working on research from the women's actual experience, Fischer coined the term 'mutual mothering', which she explained was a 'sense of mutual responsibility and protectiveness'.<sup>10</sup>

Biological and cognitive role-learning theories offered an explanation of why many daughters were close to and imitated their mothers, although they did not reveal the whole story. Importantly, according to Boyd, role-model theories did not differentiate between male and female children and thus failed to account for the special union that mothers and daughters appeared to enjoy.<sup>11</sup> As well, as Nel Noddings proposed, the capacity for mothering was too powerful to be simply a result of biology or socialisation.<sup>12</sup> The notion of motherhood as an inherited or 'learning-by-imitation' process overlooked the psychological component which brought a different perspective to the role.

The daughter's subconscious relationship to her mother was examined by Sigmund Freud in his paper, *Femininity*. He argued that the daughter, as an infant, was closely bonded to her mother until she entered into the Oedipal situation. Freud's observations, notably from the daughter's point-of-view, claimed that the girl rejected her mother when she realised she was 'castrated' and blamed the mother for what she saw as her own lack. The girl's 'penis envy' forced her to turn to her father. From this time, the mother became her enemy, and her rival for the father's affection. According to Freud, the event marked the start of hostility and hate which continued throughout the daughter's life. Although eventually the girl replaced her wish for a penis with the wish for a child, Freud was doubtful that she ever satisfactorily resolved her Oedipal conflict. He believed that this incomplete resolution accounted for the ill-formed female super-ego, which resulted in her inferior strength of character and lack of independence.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Lucy Rose Fischer, *Linked Lives: Adult Daughters and Their Mothers*, Harper & Row, NY, 1986, pp. 58-60.

<sup>11</sup>Boyd, 'Mothers and Daughters', p. 292.

<sup>12</sup>Nell Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984, p. 128.

<sup>13</sup>Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Norton, NY, 1963, (c.1935),

Although feminists, such as Betty Friedan and Shulamith Firestone, were critical of the misogynist claim by Freud which implied that women were inevitably inferior to men,<sup>14</sup> the idea of mother-blame that Freud has espoused persisted. Psychotherapy was commonly sought to deal with relational problems and therapists and their female patients frequently held the mother responsible for all neuroses.<sup>15</sup> Jane Flax, for instance, claimed that the girl's inability to separate from the mother was at the core of her psychological problems.<sup>16</sup> Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach, in their clinical practice in the Women's Therapy Centre in London, argued that the relationship with her mother was central to the daughter's problems. They noted that in therapy, the daughter transferred 'feelings about her little girl self' to the therapist.<sup>17</sup> In their treatment, therapists did not find love and closeness between the women, and suggested that the daughter hated her mother and saw her as a rival who had the power to deny her separate existence.

Motherhood was seen by many feminist daughters as a source of their subordination. In the late 1960s and 1970s, they had the common aim of liberating women from a domestic role and the limitations to independence that such a lifestyle imposed. They wanted a different and less restricted life than their mothers and were vocal about what they saw as their mother's passive acceptance of the domestic role. Ann Kaplan described her own participation in a women's group, where she discovered motherhood issues became the primary focus of the attempt to understand women's lack of power in the society.<sup>18</sup>

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pp. 128-35.

<sup>14</sup>Betty Friedan, Chapter 5, 'The Sexual Solipsism of Sigmund Freud' *The Feminine Mystique*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1972, (1963), pp. 91-111 and Shulamith Firestone, Chapter 3, 'Freudianism: The Misguided Feminism', *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, Paladin, London, 1972, (1971), pp. 46-72.

<sup>15</sup>See Lynne Segal, *Straight Sex: The Politics of Pleasure*, Virago, London, 1994, p. 143.

<sup>16</sup>Jane Flax, 'Mother-Daughter Relationships: Psychodynamics, Politics, and Philosophy', in H. Eisenstein & A. Jardine, (eds), *The Future of Difference*, Barnard College Women's Center, Boston, Massachusetts, 1980, pp. 21-40.

<sup>17</sup>These theories were developed out of the psychoses and neuroses of women whose problems were attributed to their mothers. Although the women in therapy were often part of disturbed and dysfunctional relationships, their case studies tended to be extrapolated to apply to all mothers and daughters. Luise Eichenbaum & Susie Orbach, *Understanding Women: A New Expanded Version of Outside In...Inside Out*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1985, p. 91.

<sup>18</sup>E. Ann Kaplan, 'The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal issues in Vidor's *Stella Dallas*', in P. Erens (ed.), *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1990a, pp. 126-7.

According to Kaplan, feminism 'provided an arena for separation from oppressive closeness with the mother; feminism was in part a reaction against our mothers...we came to feminism as daughters, and we spoke from that position'.<sup>19</sup> Marianne Hirsch noted that the typical feminist voice was the voice of the daughter who was critical of her mother whom she saw as demanding or unresponsive to her daughter's needs.<sup>20</sup> In the 1970s, matrophobia, described by Rich as not the fear of one's mother, but the fear of becoming one's mother,<sup>21</sup> was rife.

One of the most prominent theorists, whose work was accommodated in the spaces between these theoretical, polarised, positions of mother-love and mother-blame, offered a way out of the dilemma. Nancy Chodorow noted the women's bonding and connection and also acknowledged the ambivalence in the relationship. Her work, according to Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, 'provides the most detailed and influential exposition of the place of motherhood in women's development'.<sup>22</sup> Chodorow, from her position as a sociologist, used psychoanalytic theory and Freudian insights about the unconscious working of the mind to construct a new understanding of mothering which did not have the misogynist foundation of Freud's writing. Chodorow pointed out that girls cannot be taught to be mothers, arguing that theories based on cognitive role-learning ignored the psychological role of the daughter's development.<sup>23</sup>

The crucial aspect about Chodorow's research into why women were subservient in society, was her emphasis on the mother-daughter relationship. She maintained that mothers treated girls differently from boys because of the link of gender and the mother's own experience of daughterhood. The mother sensed a double identification with her own mother and herself through the child, as she could relate to the daughter as an extension of

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<sup>19</sup>E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*, Routledge, London, 1993, (1983), p. 172.

<sup>20</sup>Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 1989, p. 164.

<sup>21</sup>Rich, *Of Woman Born*, pp. 235-6.

<sup>22</sup>Meryle Mahrer Kaplan, *Mothers' Images of Motherhood: Case Studies of Twelve Mothers*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 10.

<sup>23</sup>Nancy Chodorow, 'Family Structure and Feminine Personality', in M.Z. Rosaldo & L. Lamphere, (eds), *Woman, Culture, and Society*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1974, pp. 43-66.

herself. The roles were close and interconnected and, for some, the daughter was even seen as a substitute mother.<sup>24</sup> Chodorow's solution to the problem of the mother's over-identification with her daughter, was for her to share the parenting responsibilities.

Much of the interest in Chodorow's revelations came about because she offered an explanation for women's lack of autonomy in society. She emphasised Freud's proposition that the mother, in her pre-Oedipal role was, for both boy and girl, the first love 'object'. During the Oedipal conflict, while boys were forced to separate from the mother and turn to their father, girls remained attached; while the mother became 'the other' to the boy, for the girl, she remained the primary influence. The mother's role as the nurturer who was responsible for her family, and by extension, society, was internalised and repeated by the daughter. According to Chodorow, 'girls come to experience themselves as less separate than boys, as having more permeable ego boundaries. Girls come to define themselves more in relation to others'.<sup>25</sup> As a result, girls remained dependent and unable to achieve a sense of completeness, which led to a 'tendency in women toward boundary confusion and a lack of sense of separateness from the world'.<sup>26</sup>

Mindful of her own participation in women's groups, perhaps, Chodorow devoted part of her research to issues of conflict in the mother-daughter relationship. She acknowledged that the daughter wanted to remain close and became hostile when she saw the mother's lack of power. The girl turned to her father, whom she saw as symbolising freedom, culture and society.<sup>27</sup> Because he had no strong connection to the daughter in her pre-Oedipal period, the relationship with the father was not sufficiently powerful to be able to break her bond with the mother. The daughter, therefore, did not replace the object of the mother with the father, and defined herself in a triangular relationship.<sup>28</sup> The 'turn to the

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<sup>24</sup>Chodorow, *Woman, Culture, and Society*, p. 47.

<sup>25</sup>Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978a, p. 93.

<sup>26</sup>Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 110.

<sup>27</sup>Nancy Chodorow, 'Mothering, Object-Relations, and the Female Oedipal Configuration', *Feminist Studies*, volume 4, number 1, February 1978b, pp. 137-58.

<sup>28</sup>See Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 167 and 'Mothering, Object-Relations', p. 151.

father', which Freud saw as a hostile reaction to the mother, had an ambivalence according to Chodorow. While on the one hand, the daughter hated her mother, on the other, she tried to win her love. The girl envied the penis — or more properly, 'the phallus' — as a symbol of power and also as an object that the (heterosexual) mother loved.<sup>29</sup> Chodorow's insightful conclusion was that the girl did not give up her love for her mother, in spite of any overt hostility she might show.<sup>30</sup>

Antagonism between mother and daughter was also considered in recent writing by cultural theorist, Suzanna Danuta Walters. Reflecting on her own loving relationship with her mother, she concluded that psychoanalytic research which was critical of the mother, undermined the benefits offered by the women's solidarity. She pointed out that emphasis on the damaging power of the mother denied her love for the child and tended to position the daughter as a victim with little agency.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, the feminist writer and teacher, Sara Ruddick, eulogised her relationship with her mother when she wrote, 'With exquisite competence, my mother had created for me a childhood in which I was both held and safely moving, both secure and enabled'.<sup>32</sup> Ruddick drew attention to the complexity of mother-daughter relationships, in which good mothers nurtured and comforted their daughters, yet were not over-protective, lest they deprived them of autonomy.

The views which celebrated the bonding of mothers and daughters by seeing it as empowering for both women, were supported by empirical studies. Clinical social worker, Joan Goldberg, for instance, found that mutuality with the mother was a significant factor in the development of 'self-esteem and social adjustment' in the daughter.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Rosalind Barnett and colleagues found that the daughter's well-being and psychological

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<sup>29</sup>Chodorow, 'Mothering, Object-Relations', p. 148, p. 150.

<sup>30</sup>See Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering*, pp. 126-9 and 'Mothering, Object-Relations', p. 151.

<sup>31</sup>Suzanna Danuta Walters, *Lives Together/Worlds Apart: Mothers and Daughters in Popular Culture*. University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1992.

<sup>32</sup>Sara Ruddick, 'New Combinations: Learning from Virginia Woolf' in C. Ascher, L. de Salvo & S. Ruddick, (eds), *Between Women: Biographers, Novelists, Critics, Teachers and Artists Write about Their Work on Women*, Beacon, Boston, 1984, p. 147.

<sup>33</sup>Joan E. Goldberg, 'Mutuality in Mother-Daughter Relationships', *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, volume 75, April 1994, pp. 236-42.

health were consistent with a good relationship with her mother. They concluded from their research that a bad mother was rare and even when she did exist, she was not necessarily damaging to her daughter.<sup>34</sup> They particularly cited Nancy Friday's *My Mother/My Self*, which found a large audience from its position on the best seller list in the United States in 1977. Friday, although warning against blaming mothers for all ills, somewhat inconsistently, held her mother responsible for her own inhibitions and further, related other women's grievances to mothering deficiencies.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, in a radical and interesting variation on psychoanalytic theories which warned against close bonding, the long-held vision of women's desire for autonomy and separation was challenged. As Walters pointed out in 1992, psychoanalysis aims at 'separation, individuation, autonomy, [and] differentiation', which are dichotomous pursuits more appropriate to a masculine framework.<sup>36</sup> Clinical and health psychologist, Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, also concluded that the aim at autonomy was the result of influence of the male point of view.<sup>37</sup> In a recent article, van Mens-Verhulst argued that:

The bond between mothers and daughters is no longer automatically assessed as health threatening because the one and only proof of maturity could be found in autonomy and strong ego boundaries. What counts is the mutual flexibility in boundary management and bilateral capacity to tolerate ambiguities and ambivalences in the relationship.<sup>38</sup>

With undoubted commonsense, van Mens Verhulst drew attention to the possibility of acceptance of the viewpoints of both mother and daughter and the understanding and love that can continue beyond the inevitable difficulties in a close relationship.

### Loving Mothers

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<sup>34</sup>Rosalind C. Barnett, Nazli Kibria, Grace K. Baruch and Joseph H. Pleck, 'Adult Daughter-Parent Relationships and their Associations with Daughters' Subjective Well-Being and Psychological Distress', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, number 53, February 1991, pp. 29-42.

<sup>35</sup>Nancy Friday, *My Mother/My Self: The Daughter's Search for Identity*, Sixth Impression, Fontana/Collins, 1982, (1977).

<sup>36</sup>Walters, *Lives Together/Worlds Apart*, p. 158.

<sup>37</sup>Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, 'Introduction', in J. Mens-Verhulst, K. Schreurs and L. Woertman, (eds), *Daughtering and Mothering: Female Subjectivity Reanalysed*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. xiv.

<sup>38</sup>Janneke van Mens-Verhulst, 'Reinventing the Mother-Daughter Relationship', *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, volume 49, number 4, Fall 1995, p. 536.

It was, perhaps, to be expected, considering their centrality to domestic life, that mothers and daughters would be found frequently in the narratives of Australian cinema. In films until mid-century, however, although they were often included in the cast, their character development was minimal and the women's association with each other was rarely explored in any depth. Women were cast in supporting roles, their lives seen as secondary to the outdoor activities of the men. Filmmakers used men as the subject of the narrative, which was most often told from their point-of-view. Bushranging, convict escapades and the gold rush were the most common themes of the earliest moving pictures as filmmakers, before the construction of indoor sets, took advantage of rural settings and natural light.<sup>39</sup>

Concentration on the men, however, allowed a space for women, although it was created out of their absence from the main action. The women's place was the kitchen, where they prepared meals for the men in the family. The mother's nurturing vocation was crucial and she was called on to supply peace, comfort and support for her husband and sons. Her other duty was to care for her daughters; to train them to be pious, modest and honourable, as well as good wives and mothers in her own image. Generally, the mother was middle-aged, her daughter was grown up, and not yet married. The mother took charge of the household chores, and was assisted by her kind and considerate daughter.

In Kenneth Brampton's *Robbery Under Arms* (1920), for example, the mother peels vegetables in the kitchen and her daughter sits sewing contentedly under her watchful eye. In a diametrically opposite existence, her husband and sons ride wildly through the countryside in their attempt to evade the law. The women prepare a meal to celebrate Christmas and when they hear that the men will soon be home, they embrace with joy. Their difference from the men and the solidarity of the women's life together is emphasised by the intertitle, *The women suffered as is their lot*. The goals and attitudes of mother and daughter were indistinguishable and intertwined. They shared their domestic

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<sup>39</sup>See Andrew Pike & Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production*, Oxford University Press/AFI, Melbourne, 1980.

space and the daughter imitated her mother's behaviour and attitudes with such companionship that conflict between them was unthinkable.

Relations between the mother and daughter in *Robbery Under Arms* were typical of women in early cinema. From 1917 to 1940, in the time between the two world wars, the genial couple could be found in the pastoral comedies of life in the outback, a popular genre with both urban and country filmgoers. The plots of these films were frequently humorous tales about either the Hayseed or Rudd households.<sup>40</sup> They showed, as noted by Andrew Pike, 'Mum, [as] the figure who provided spiritual strength for the family, as well as the security of a comfortable and homely dwelling'.<sup>41</sup> The daughters were close and loving with their mother. If the mother helped the men in the field, sowing corn or fighting fires, as in Raymond Longford's *On Our Selection* (1920), her daughters were at her side. When she cooked, or cleaned the house, her daughters were always there to help her. The mother's most amicable communication, however, was saved for her oldest daughter. She reprimanded the younger ones, and taught them to behave, but showed real empathy with the one who was of marriageable age.<sup>42</sup>

The eldest daughter's marriage was a requirement of most film narratives, and its achievement formed a fundamental part of the women's relationship. It was the mother's job to evaluate the suitor and prepare her daughter to be a good wife. Typically, the mother was cast as a middle-aged, homely woman while the daughter was attractive, stylish and in her twenties, a suitable 'love interest' for the main male actor. The mother was constantly alert to making the best of any opportunity for the daughter's marriage. In Longford's 1920 version of *On Our Selection*, when her eldest daughter, Kate, brings a young man to the house, Ma and the other daughters make scones for his afternoon tea.

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<sup>40</sup>The first of these was, *Our Friends the Hayseeds* (1917) and the last was *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938).

<sup>41</sup>Andrew Pike, 'The Past: boom and bust' in S. Murray, (ed.), *The New Australian Cinema*, Thomas Nelson, West Melbourne, 1979, p. 22.

<sup>42</sup>See *On Our Selection* (1920) and (1932), *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938), *The Overlanders* (1946), *Into the Straight* (1949) and *Sons of Matthew* (1949), where the teenage daughters do not enjoy as good a communication with the mother as the adult daughter.

Later, an understanding Ma pulls the naive Dad inside to give Kate some time alone on the porch with her beau. Her daughter's marriage was also uppermost in the mother's mind in Charles Chauvel's *Heritage* (1935). She ceases her baking when the suitor's horse is heard approaching, to adjust her daughter's hair so she will look attractive when he arrives. Tragically, this good mother is shot just a few minutes later. On her deathbed, unmindful of her agony, she extracts a promise from the now-reluctant suitor, to honour his pledge of marriage to her daughter. Mothers were always on the lookout for suitors, and pain and suffering could not deter them.

One early film was unusual in that the mother/daughter relationship was central to the plot, rather than marginal as in the films described above. Lawson Harris's *Sunshine Sally* (1922), incorporated an amazing coincidence in its narrative to reinforce the notion of the connectedness of a mother and daughter. Sally lives with her execrable step-parents who have abducted her as a baby, so that she can support them and their alcoholic habits when she grows up.<sup>43</sup> The adult Sally gives them the money that she earns working in shocking conditions in a Chinese laundry. After she is sacked because she stands up for her friend, the mean, grasping, step-parents throw her out of the hovel they all call home. Soon after, by a marvellous stroke of luck, Sally is rescued from the surf by a handsome, wealthy lifesaver, named Basil Stanton.<sup>44</sup> Basil's step-mother happens to be at the beach and takes the poor sodden Sally home to her mansion. Mrs Stanton takes a liking to her and invites her to return for tea. Sally becomes a substitute for her own daughter who was abducted twenty years before. As one might have predicted, Sally is discovered to be the daughter, long lost and now refund. It is convenient that Basil is not Mrs Stanton's biological son, as he falls in love with Sally and they plan to marry.

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<sup>43</sup>Sally's stereotypical evil step-parents had origins in Victorian melodrama. Sadly, the first and last reel of *Sunshine Sally* are missing and the plot has been constructed from synopses.

<sup>44</sup>This seemed to be a good way to meet a future husband, as it was a device which recurred in Australian feature films, for example in Frank Brittain's *The Set* in 1970 and Ken G. Hall's *Tall Timbers* in 1937. The situation might reflect a national characteristic as Richard White made the point that women's role at the beach was to be decorative which was quite different from their place in the bush. R. White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity 1688-1980*, Tenth Impression, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1992, (1981), p. 155.

In the representation of the relationship of Mrs Stanton to Sally, the film made the point that mothers had maternal instincts about their daughters which were bound by a biological connection. Neither the corrosion of time nor the environment in which the child was raised could dissolve the maternal tie. From the start, Sally's character was shown to be at odds with that of her drunken step-parents. Her 'finer nature' was signalled when her working-class friend offered her a necklace to wear on her outing, but Sally refused because she knew it was cheap. The intertitle draws attention to the *tawdry jewellery* and explains that Sally is sympathetic to her friend's deficiencies. The pronouncement: *It's so terrible to be common*, somewhat condescendingly, sets Sally apart from her friend and infers that she is not a product of this lower-class domain.

Sally's 'fine origins', however, were not apparent from her behaviour at afternoon tea at the Stanton mansion. This was a silver service affair, complete with a uniformed maid. Sally, no doubt imitating the behaviour of her ghastly step-parents, blows on her tea and attempts to drink it from the saucer. While a casual observer might not be impressed by her manners, Mrs Stanton, her real mother, could not be deterred and is ineluctably drawn to her. Leaping with alacrity into her maternal role as pedagogue and adviser, she trains Sally to adopt her own upper-class stylish ways and behaviour. She managed to complete this traditional maternal role, arranging Sally's marriage and thereby ensuring that she takes her rightful name of Stanton. Mrs Stanton's sacrifice to her daughter could scarcely be surpassed: it was the gift of her own (adopted) son, and Sally, who now had a mother to love, could be a model wife.

Over the next few decades, while there were fewer films about mothers and daughters, those that were, followed the traditional loving relationship where the mother instructed the daughter in the skills necessary for becoming a wife and mother.<sup>45</sup> They supported and reflected biological and sociological theories which identified the cyclical or imitative component of mothering. They showed the women's easy and loving communication, the

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<sup>45</sup>See for example, *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1927), *The Sentimental Bloke* (1932), *Splendid Fellows* (1934), *Sons of Matthew* (1949) and *Robbery Under Arms* (1957).

teaching and learning of domestic skills as well as reinforcing the mother's influence on her daughter's marriage.

### Hateful Mothers

After almost seventy years of showing the love and connection of mothers to their daughters, there was an extraordinary shift in the relationship. The nasty mother who disliked her daughter began to be depicted in films. Freudian references and symbols were used to explain narratives which highlighted malicious or insensitive mothers and alienated daughters. The counterpart to the hateful mother was not the loving mother of yesteryear, but a woman who was over-involved with the daughter's life and had an unwholesome, suffocating effect. These two polarised versions of motherhood were explained by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English: 'Psychoanalytic theory identified two broad categories of bad mothers—the rejecting mother and the overprotecting mother—mirror images and equally malevolent'.<sup>46</sup> According to film analyst and critic, Marjorie Rosen, American and British films during the 1940s had replaced the kindly, empathetic mother with the controlling, powerful mother.<sup>47</sup> However, because the film industry in Australia was virtually non-existent for two decades, perhaps, the transformation was not seen until much later in Australia.

The malevolent mother and innocent daughter could be seen in Simon Wincer's *Snapshot* (1979). Nineteen-year-old Angela, played by Sigrid Thornton and aptly named because of her angelic appearance, is a hairdresser who wants money to travel. She is offered a job as a nude photographic model which she accepts although she knows that her sexually-

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<sup>46</sup>Barbara Ehrenreich & Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts' Advice to Women*, Anchor/Doubleday, NY, 1978, p. 205.

<sup>47</sup>Marjorie Rosen, *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies & the American Dream*, Peter Owen, London, 1973, p. 346, discussed the growing movement against women which situated the mother as malevolent, controlling and selfish. She related this to Philip Wylie's popular book, *Generation of Vipers*, published in 1942. For examples of this type of representation, see US and British films: *Now Voyager* (1942), *Mildred Pierce* (1945), *Vertigo* (1958), *Psycho* (1960), *Inside Daisy Clover* (1965) and *Rachel, Rachel* (1968). Interestingly, a film made in Australia in 1959, *The Siege of Pinchgut*, hinted at the end of the mother-daughter affinity, perhaps because of its strong overseas input. It was made by Ealing Studios, included US actors in the cast and was entered as a British film in the Berlin Film Festival in 1959. See Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 299.

repressed mother would be horrified. Celebrating her first cheque, she arrives home to find that the mother has locked her out. Distraught and rejected, Angela is forced to find accommodation in the house owned by her photographer. The mother has only one scene in the film and it is clear from it that she is irredeemably nasty. Coming to Angela's room on the pretext of bringing some clothes to her, the mother is disagreeable and instigates an argument. At this point the psychological subtext of the film becomes apparent. The psychotic mother, who has constantly referred to Angela as ugly and stupid, reveals that she has always preferred the younger daughter. After this revelation, the mother exits the room shouting, 'When things start to go sour don't darken my doorway — ever'. Her cruelty was clearly damaging to Angela's confidence and emotional stability.

Like *Snapshot*, many films made during the 1970s relied on popular Freudian-based theories. One of the first new wave films to be made with government support in an effort to restart the industry, was Brian Kavanagh's *A City's Child*, using funds from the Experimental Film and Television Fund and the Australian Council for the Arts. The film was shown at Film Festivals in 1971 and 1972 and won an award for its 'gentle exploration of a neglected territory—a mind cut off from love'.<sup>48</sup> This accolade was a reminder of the acceptance of the psychological foundation of the films at that time. *A City's Child* focused on repressed sexuality in its plot about a lonely, inhibited daughter who cared for her demanding, bed-ridden mother. The dreams and fantasies of the daughter were interspersed with real-life situations and sounds and it was not clear where her reality started and ended. It was apparent, however, that her mother's hatred had been the cause of her emotional problems. The father did not appear in the film and the daughter remembered him with affection. On the other hand, the mother was shown as a malevolent creature who made a victim of her passive daughter.

In the film's prologue, the mother is hysterically angry with the daughter because she has brought a small white kitten into the house. Calling her a 'stupid, ungrateful, simpering,

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<sup>48</sup>Quoted by Pike & Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p. 338 from the Australian Film Awards for 1971.

idiot', she screams 'the agony of bringing you into the world — my only consolation is that your father was disappointed'. Her tirade reaches a peak and she chokes and dies. The mother's bedroom, her prison and site of her sickness and death, is dark and over-furnished. The heavy wooden cupboards, the bedside tables laden with chocolates and pills, the voluminous bedclothes, all serve to draw attention to her obesity and her greed. The organ music with its powerful and portentous chords adds to the claustrophobia and oppressiveness. At her funeral, where her daughter is the solitary mourner, crows, traditional harbingers of doom, shriek and circle.

As the opening credits roll, the music changes to a bright rendition of a song apparently written especially for the film. The contrast with the organ music anticipates a more cheerful life for the daughter, although its message that 'a city's child' might find greener pastures proves ephemeral. The first images work against the bright mood set by the music and show the daughter's gloomy suburban house hidden away behind overgrown trees and bushes. She emerges in a dressing gown and timidly scurries to collect the milk, retreating terrified when she hears a passer-by innocently walking on the footpath.

The daughter, — she is given no name in the film — now alone, acts out her fantasies in an attempt to relieve the suffering and unhappiness she has received from her malevolent mother. She is desperate for someone to love and lacking a real baby, buys a 'Barbie' doll. She makes clothes for it out of an old dress in the same style she wore when she was a child. She creates her life around the doll, taking it with her on a picnic and into the garden. She talks to the doll about her father, remembering him in a loving, and regretful manner, confiding that he was hard to please, distant and stern. Although she reveals in a dream fantasy that her father wanted a son, her memory of him is couched in love and she does not blame him for his indifference to her. She makes the doll a bridal dress and brings a male doll home to be the bridegroom. Her doll couples have a child and she buys a life-size celluloid doll which she cares for lovingly, furnishing a nursery and washing baby clothes.

One day, a man comes to visit her and a sexual relationship develops. In bed with the man, she hears the dolls call her 'a filthy bitch' and a 'disgusting cheap little tart'. When the man discovers the three dolls, she introduces them as her daughter, son-in-law and 'our baby whom we love very much'. Eventually the man leaves her. She is unable to cope with the rejection and she searches for him in the streets, eventually collapsing in despair. At home in her own bed, in a startling announcement, which is confusing for those who have imagined that the affair is a fantasy, a male doctor announces that she is pregnant.

The daughter in *A City's Child* was clearly a misfit in society. She was without friends or relatives and was unable to communicate with the neighbours or shop assistants. The fantasies and voices in her head marked her as a psychotic victim of a mother who showed no sign of love for her child and on the contrary, appeared to despise her. Using the dolls to make sense of her life, the daughter acted out the mother/daughter role that she had been denied. She loved the dolls as if she were trying to make up for the harshness and neglect she had suffered. The ending of the film highlighted the film's use of Freudian theory. The way girls play with dolls had, for Freud, a special significance, and he argued that the daughter, 'could do with the baby everything that her mother used to do with her'.<sup>49</sup> In a symbolic and terrible scene, the daughter slowly dismembered the doll she has made in her own image.

While the rejecting, hateful mother could be seen in *A City's Child*, her counterpart, the overprotecting mother, was the focus of *The Night the Prowler*<sup>50</sup> (1979), directed by Jim Sharman. This film of repressed sexuality and fantasy was ambiguous, as it appeared to be a parody of bourgeois anxiety about manners and possessions, yet its overtones of hostility and problems of coming-of-age, made it a serious social comment. Film scholar, Brian McFarlane argued that in 'white-anting' Australian suburban life, it was a vindictive

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<sup>49</sup>Freud, 'Femininity', p. 128.

<sup>50</sup>The correct name of this film is *Patrick White's The Night the Prowler*.

satire.<sup>51</sup> However, the director, Jim Sharman spoke of it as a domestic comedy.<sup>52</sup> Their contradictory responses to the film indicated its complexity and, perhaps, explained the unfavourable reviews that devastated both Patrick White and Jim Sharman who had worked together on the script.

*The Night the Prowler* was an exploration of the relationships in a family consisting of a mother, Doris, a father, Humphrey and their only child, Felicity. Doris, a caricature of a housewife and mother, is obsessed with cleanliness and over-involved with her daughter. She spends her day dusting the furniture and talking on the telephone to her friend Madge, to whom she reveals intimate details of Felicity's life. The latter, in her late teens, is ungainly and ill-tempered.<sup>53</sup> At the start of the film Felicity claims to have been raped by an intruder, although there is something strange about her report and later in the film, it is revealed that she has been lying. Felicity's behaviour is neurotic and becomes increasingly bizarre: she spends her evenings attired in black leather, prowling the neighbourhood, breaking into the homes of her parent's wealthy friends and damaging their possessions. She is unhappy, lonely and desperate. Her eventual salvation comes with her encounter with an old, incontinent, naked man. He reveals:

I never expected anything, never loved anyone, not even myself. I'm nothing, I believe in nothing. Nothing is a noble faith. Nobody can hurt nothing, so you have no reason to be afraid.

She is able to help the old man, whose incontinence has figuratively returned him to infancy. His dying moments transform her life. Although film critic, Anna Dzenis, observed that the film, especially its closing sequence, was difficult to comprehend,<sup>54</sup> it could be understood in terms of Felicity's relationship to her mother. The old man was

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<sup>51</sup>Brian McFarlane, 'Patrick White's *The Night the Prowler*', [rev. art.], *Cinema Papers*, number 20, March/April 1979, pp. 301-2.

<sup>52</sup>Robyn Anderson & Sue Adler, 'Jim Sharman', *Cinema Papers*, number 20, March/April 1979, pp. 268-71, p. 318.

<sup>53</sup>Kerry Walker, in her late twenties was too old for the part, but both Jim Sharman and Patrick White thought that in all other ways, she was perfect. See David Marr, *Patrick White: A Life*, Vintage, Sydney, 1995.

<sup>54</sup>Anna Dzenis, 'Patrick White's *The Night the Prowler*', [rev. art.], in S. Murray, (ed.), *Australian Film, 1978-1992: A Survey of Theatrical Features*, Oxford University Press/AFC and Cinema Papers, South Melbourne, 1993, p. 46.

someone that Felicity could nurture and assist. He was a nihilist: he demanded nothing of her; he was the opposite of her mother.

Felicity's problems were directly related to her domineering manipulative mother. The appearance of mother and daughter was the first indication of incompatibility between the pair. Doris, with her bouffant, sprayed hair and neatly starched frock was contrasted with Felicity, who was relaxed, plump and unkempt. There were no signs of the loving companionship of earlier women of the cinema, and their encounters were marked with acrimony. In one confrontational scene Felicity declared, 'You make me sick — I'm suffering from the passive nature you forced on me'. While this outburst made it clear that she did not want to imitate her mother's life, Felicity's self-understanding was askew. Her behaviour was the opposite of passive, as she was violent and even criminally destructive for most of the film. Perhaps, the most significant demonstration of the rift between mother and daughter came when Felicity broke off her engagement to a man Doris thought was especially suitable. She did more than simply oppose her mother. She undermined a fundamental function of the cinematic mother to find and approve the daughter's suitor.

The Freudian sub-text of *The Night the Prowler* has been used to represent the mother as damaging to her daughter's mental stability. While the women clashed continually and seemed to have opposing personalities, from another point of view, they were both demanding, aggressive and selfish. Doris was destined to remain so; Felicity's redemption was only possible when she was able to move away from self-centredness, even madness, to a more traditional notion of motherhood with an unselfish, nurturing relationship with the old man.

### The Maternal Cycle

One important aspect of theoretical research explained that women continued to mother because they learned to internalise and repeat their mother's behaviour. The maternal cycle that this implied indicated that when daughters received good mothering, they would

become nurturers themselves and inevitably desire to marry and start their own family. Daughters of nurturing mothers imitated mothering skills, shown by the way they acted in society and by the way they treated other members of the family, in particular their own mothers. In this model, the mother and adult daughter roles were almost interchangeable: as the mother cared for her child, so the daughter, in turn, nurtured the mother.

Early films replicated the idea of a maternal cycle, a phenomenon evident in the narrative in F. Stuart-Whyte's *Painted Daughters* (1925). The film was especially salient, as it showed the mother's life spanning a period of about twenty years and her daughter both as a child and an adult. Mary, the mother, is left alone to raise Maryon, her young daughter, when her husband commits suicide after becoming bankrupt. However, *Painted Daughters* is not a tragedy and rather, celebrates city life where Mary lives in a luxurious apartment and drives herself about in a magnificent open roadster. Moreover, she is a dancer on the stage and her living conditions and appearance suggest she is successful and respectable. Maryon grows from an adored child who plays music to comfort her mother, into a responsible and loving adult. The notion of the child following the mother is continued in Maryon's theatrical career. Maternal replication reaches its height in the final scenes of the film, when mother and daughter joyfully make their plans for a double wedding.

Maryon in *Painted Daughters* echoed her mother in both behaviour and name, in a way which was typical of the mother and daughter mutuality of early cinema. During the 1970s, when demanding and unresponsive mothers burst onto the screen, daughters did not repeat maternal behaviour. Breaking the cycle, they reverted to a more traditional maternal role. In *The Night the Prowler*, as we have seen, Felicity's redemption came with her move away from her obsessive mother, to a nurturing motherly role with the old man. A similar, and more startling redemption came for the daughter in the final scene of *A City's Child* when she destroyed her doll/self. By removing the doll's head and its limbs, she showed in a symbolic way, how her mother had mutilated her life, leaving her unable to function in the world, without the ability to reason or act coherently. Interestingly, the

woman next turned to the celluloid doll, which in her fantasy, was her 'much-loved child'. It seemed as though she might dismember it as well, but instead she held it close and rocked it gently. She was playing the role of the traditional, caring mother. Her propensity for nurturing was signalled at the beginning of the film when she caressed the small white kitten, which she kept, despite her intimidating mother's demand for her to get rid of it. Tending to it with love and sacrifice, she saved the best part of the milk for the small creature. She was also shown 'mothering' her unlovable mother by cooking her favourite dinner, giving her medicine and reading to her. The daughter's 'motherly' attributes of love, kindness and selflessness were undoubtedly not learned from her hateful mother.

While in films of the 1970s, daughters had to endure mothers who were unresponsive, suffocating or demanding, the women in the next decade tended to be more loving toward each other. In each of four films, Ken Cameron's *Monkey Grip* (1982), Glenda Hambly's *Fran* (1985), Carl Schultz's *Travelling North* (1987) and Gillian Armstrong's *Hightide* (1987), the relationship was unconventional. None of the mothers had a partner at home to help them in child rearing tasks and they were not particularly involved with their daughters, although each was loving in her own way. These women could be seen as selfish, as they followed their own interests rather than devoting their life to raising their children. They were in some ways, and frequently by their own admission, bad mothers. The daughters on the other hand, displayed remarkable nurturing attributes, particularly towards their mothers. Like images of daughters in the 1970s decade, their maternal behaviour did not result from imitating their own mothers. Perhaps, Barbara Hudson's observation was pertinent to these films. She found that even when girls were badly mothered, 'they express culturally expected aspirations of home and family'.<sup>55</sup> The representations of traditionally maternal, selfless daughters countermanded, or at least, complicated, theoretical assumptions about a cycle of mothering passed from mother to child.

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<sup>55</sup>Barbara Hudson, 'Femininity and Adolescence' in A. McRobbie & M. Nava, (eds), *Gender and Generation*, Macmillan, London, 1984, p. 52.

The daughters in three of these films were at the threshold of their adult lives and those in *Travelling North* were married and had children. The earliest film, Ken Cameron's *Monkey Grip* (1982), produced by Patricia Lovell and based on Helen Garner's novel, examined the relationships of Nora to Javo, her drug-addicted boyfriend and to Gracie, her adolescent daughter. Nora worked on a women's newspaper, had many friends and enjoyed a sexually-free life in cosmopolitan Melbourne. Her private life was frequently at odds with what was best for Gracie, and the daughter survived and considering her youth, was surprisingly self-sufficient. There was no doubt that mother and daughter loved each other, although Nora's pre-occupation with her own life and affairs contradicted the usual, traditional, motherly role.

Issues of motherhood in this film were further complicated by its cast. Alice Garner, the writer's daughter, played Nora's daughter, Gracie, in the film. As Helen Garner's novel was based on her own life,<sup>56</sup> Alice's daughterly relationship with the writer, Garner, and her 'film mother,' Nora, were therefore somewhat blurred. The line between theatre and real life was challenged by actor Noni Hazlehurst (Nora), who spoke in an interview of the moments while they were making the film, when Alice 'provided me with comfort when nobody else could'. Their mutuality was mirrored in the film narrative where Hazlehurst noted that Nora and Gracie were like two sisters or two friends. Importantly, she recognised that the mother drew support from the daughter.<sup>57</sup> Film critic, Brian McFarlane was also aware that: 'sometimes [there is] an amusing sense of Gracie's being calmer and older than Nora'.<sup>58</sup> Not only, therefore, did the mother-daughter roles merge within the film, there was a crossover in the relationship which extended to the actors and filmmakers.

The idea of the 'calmer and older' daughter who coped with her indecisive, often inadequate mother, was continued in *Fran* (1985). Glenda Hambly, the scriptwriter and

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<sup>56</sup>Peter Lawrance, 'Monkey Grip', [rev. art.], in Murray, *Australian Film, 1978-1992*, p. 104.

<sup>57</sup>Noni Hazlehurst talks about *Monkey Grip* ...and acting, and films, and the future', in *Filmnews*, volume IV, number 10, October 1982, pp. 10-11.

<sup>58</sup>Brian McFarlane, 'Words and Images: *Monkey Grip*', *Cinema Papers*, number 44-5, April 1984, p. 21.

director of the film, was working for the West Australian Department of Community Welfare on a documentary about a new child welfare scheme. The scheme did not eventuate, however, and Hambly used the material to develop a script for a feature film which became *Fran*.<sup>59</sup> Hambly's commitment to the exploration of issues of child welfare was evident in the film, which provided a moving story of mother-daughter attachment between Fran and her elder daughter, Lisa.

Fran, a working class mother who lives in a house in the Perth suburbs, is struggling to support her three children, when her most recent husband leaves after a violent argument. Lisa, is about twelve, Tom, about ten and Cynthia, about seven years old. Fran is a well-meaning, and incompetent mother, whose daughter, though too young for the task, takes on the nurturing role. Lisa attends to the family washing when she comes home from school and makes dinner while Fran watches television and plays with the younger children. When Tom does not want to eat his cooked meal, it is Lisa who remonstrates with him while Fran sidesteps her responsibilities in order to keep the peace. Later, when Fran, in a drunken rage has tried to hit Cynthia, Lisa takes charge, comforts her sister and prepares a cup of coffee to calm her mother.

Her desire for a male companion serves to compromise Fran's love for her children and she complains that they restrict her lifestyle. Eventually, she leaves them in the house alone one night, while she drinks in a local bar. Taking advantage of a kind neighbour who cares for the children for several days, Fran moves in with a man she has recently met. When she decides to have a holiday with him, she abandons the children to a reluctant foster-sister, intending to be away a few days, and not returning for several weeks. Eventually, and, perhaps, inevitably, the children are taken from their mother and placed in an institution.

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<sup>59</sup>Murray, *Australian Film, 1978-1992*, p. 170.

Despite her sometimes horrifying neglect of the children, Fran was not an unsympathetic character. She explained her behaviour in her reminiscences of her appalling childhood. She revealed that she has spent much of her life in an institution as her mother was an alcoholic and her father who had left when she was young, was replaced by numerous 'uncles'. Although not openly stated, it was probable that Fran was a victim of sexual abuse. She relentlessly imitated aspects of her mother's lifestyle: she drank to excess, the children's' fathers all had left, she invited men home to fulfil her sexual desire and the children were placed in an institution.

In making the point that Fran was repeating her mother's mistakes, the narrative implied that in the maternal cyclical pattern, Lisa could also adopt Fran's habits and neuroses. The film's documentary base, perhaps, helped critic, Paul Byrnes to remark that the realism of the film left the viewer powerless and depressed.<sup>60</sup> His conclusion may have been appropriate in earlier films and in theories which hypothesised that the daughter internalised her mother's attitudes and sexual behaviour.<sup>61</sup> Representations of the ambivalence of mother-daughter relations in films of the 1980s, however, could be understood from newer feminist writing which indicated a more autonomous role for the daughter. At the end of the film, Fran is hysterical and depressed as she has lost her children, her lover and her friend and neighbour. It is, however, far from certain that Lisa will follow the same course. She has been portrayed as having many advantages over her mother. Besides her ability to care for Fran and her siblings, she is clever and at the top of her class. The film pointedly depicts her as conscientious about her education and eager to keep up with her schoolwork. Lisa is not like the ebullient, impulsive, impractical, Fran and is a sensitive, intelligent and quiet child, who understands her mother's actions with compassion. The social worker from the institution has shown he is sensitive and aware of her needs. There is a strong, though not explicit indication in the film, that she will not repeat her mother's intemperate behaviour.

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<sup>60</sup>Paul Byrnes 'Fran', [rev. art.], *Cinema Papers*, number 55, January 1986, p. 62.

<sup>61</sup>See Boyd, 'Mothers and Daughters', pp. 291-301.

The third film, *Travelling North* is unusual because the protagonist, Frances, is in her fifties and her children, Helen and Sophie, have their own families. Frances loves the recently-retired Frank and they plan to move north together, away from the cold of Melbourne to the sun of tropical Cairns.<sup>62</sup> Helen and Sophie, although adults, have not resolved their differences with their mother. Helen calls Frances 'irresponsible' and makes it clear that in her desire to move north, she is avoiding her grandmotherly duties. Most of the blame and acrimony, however, comes from what the daughters see as the mother's neglect of them when they were infants. It is revealed that Frances left her family to follow her own interests when the girls were quite small.<sup>63</sup> Frances admits to some mistakes: she says she did not love Helen enough and she regrets preventing Sophie from attending university. She remarks, 'you were both pains in the arse, but I shouldn't have left you with my brother'. Now about to leave them again, Frances does not capitulate, in spite of her daughters' pleas and is determined to enjoy as many years as possible with Frank.

Helen and Sophie are unhappy women, and while Frances's deficiencies in mothering may have left them insecure, they have become devoted and traditional mothers. In failing to mould their lives on Frances, they subvert ideas of mother-repeating behaviour. Despite their condemnation of their mother, they are constantly trying to care for her. Sophie discusses her future with compassion and Helen periodically sends her money. Additionally, in another role-reversal, Frances turns to her daughters when she is distressed that her relationship with Frank had reached an impasse.<sup>64</sup> Far from the traditional, sacrificing mother, Frances, even according to her own assessment, has put her own interests before those of her children. The daughters, on the other hand, while

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<sup>62</sup>This was an aspiration which was common to the four films: the desire to 'get away' mostly figured as a yearning for 'up north'. Perhaps this was a metaphor for the release from child rearing that most mothers desired at one time or another.

<sup>63</sup>It is difficult to understand the underlying point of this scene. It seems impossible to believe that Frances, now in her fifties, could be criticised by her middle-aged daughters for wanting to go away with Frank, because she had left them in their childhood. Perhaps, its purpose was to draw attention to the daughters' present unhappiness.

<sup>64</sup>When Frank became ill Frances had to look after him, although she displayed her antipathy for the nurturing role and left him to return to Melbourne and the daughters.

expressing extreme dissatisfaction with their marriages, remain within them with the stereotypical rationale of making a home for their children.

The fourth film of the decade to represent the relationship between a reluctant mother and a nurturing daughter was *Hightide* (1987). Produced by Sandra Levy and written by Laura Jones, the director, Gillian Armstrong wrote the script after the birth of her daughter and saw this film as her 'return to cinema as a working mother'.<sup>65</sup> The producer and scriptwriter had originally intended it to be a story of a male surfer, drifting from town to town, although Armstrong decided that it would be more interesting to have a female in the part.<sup>66</sup> This last-minute change in protagonist probably accounts for the unfamiliarity of the mother's actions in the film, in particular, her confused feelings about her reunion with her daughter. This, like the other three films, challenged the maternal cycle, and additionally, *Hightide* appeared at first to subvert the strong bond of mother and daughter. Armstrong's film moved away from the mother's usual representation and initiated a different way of thinking about motherhood.<sup>67</sup>

Lilli is a singer in a city-based rock band which is booked for a performance in a small New South Wales coastal town. Ally is a young girl who lives an idyllic, though disciplined life, in a caravan park in the town, with her grandmother, Bet. The opening of the film establishes the disparity in their lives. Lilli's introduction is frenetic, noisy and uncontrolled as she races her car in a masculine parody, at high speed along the highway. By contrast, Ally is first seen floating quietly and calmly in an 'amniotic' pool beside the sea.<sup>68</sup> Lilli's car breaks down and by chance, she moves into the caravan park to await its repair. When she sees Bet with Ally, she realises that Ally must be the child that she had

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<sup>65</sup>Anna Grieve, 'Gillian Armstrong Returns to Eden', *Cinema Papers*, number 63, May 1987, p. 33.

<sup>66</sup>Helen Barlow '*Hightide*', [rev. art.], in Murray, *Australian Film, 1978-1992*, p. 221.

<sup>67</sup>The difficulty of representing a women's point-of-view was clear from the paternalistic review of *Hightide* by film historian John Baxter, who, disparagingly, summed up the film as a woman faced with crucial career choice. He asked why Armstrong would concern herself with such a person - a singer who thought that a Bob Dylan song 'is a pinnacle of wisdom'. John Baxter, '*Hightide*', [rev. art.], *Cinema Papers*, number 65, September 1987, p. 45.

<sup>68</sup>Lucy Fischer noted the contrasting themes in *Hightide* of Lilli's theatrical career and Ally's association with nature in an 'amniotic' ocean. L. Fischer, *Cinematernity, Film, Motherhood, Genre*, Princeton University Press, NJ, 1996, p. 221.

abandoned twelve years earlier, when her husband, Ally's father, had died. Their first face-to-face meeting reverses their traditional roles. Lilli is drunk after losing her singing job, and is unable to find her way in the park. The responsible and caring Ally, guides her to her caravan.

At first Lilli is reluctant to risk her carefree existence, although gradually, she becomes drawn into a relationship with her long-lost daughter. In a pivotal scene of awakening, Lilli discovers Ally shaving her legs for the first time. She watches entranced, crouching unseen in the shower block, fascinated by this symbolic act of her daughter's coming-of-age. The orchestral music that accompanies this scene underlines the idea that Lilli, despite her intentions, has become emotionally involved. The experience for the daughter is similarly enigmatic. Ally finally asks: 'Are you my mother?' Although Lilli denies it, strangely, evoking some mysterious arcane bonding of mother to daughter, Ally knows the truth. Later, they discuss their relationship in an emotional scene which was unscripted. Ally is quite clear and unequivocal about her love for her mother, she says: 'Do you love me? I love you'.

When her car is repaired, Lilli, prepares to leave the caravan park to resume her itinerant life. Her maternal feelings are still unresolved.<sup>69</sup> Ally embraces her and impulsively Lilli asks: 'Do you want to come with me?' Ally is delighted. They leave together, although we are not sure that Lilli will be up to the demands of caring for a teenager. After they have driven only a few miles Lilli stops to get petrol, perhaps, to give herself time to think. She contemplates Ally through a window, significantly standing outside on the bitumen road of the service station. Ally in the domestic, warm interior world of the cafe, sits waiting passively for her mother, unaware of the turning point in her life that this scene indicates. Lilli is about to drive off and abandon her daughter. Had she done so, the myth of the sacrificing, available, mother would have been overturned and a particularly strong aspect

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<sup>69</sup>Lilli's dilemma could have been solved if she were to decide to live with, or near, Bet and Ally. Given the strain on Bet and Lilli's relationship so far in the film, this very practical solution would probably have been an impossibility.

of the cycle of mother-daughter connection, broken. She relents, however, and they leave together, perhaps, in affirmation of the mystical bonds that are supposed to unite all mothers and daughters. By bringing the mother back to her traditional role, the filmmakers undermined their own creative and, perhaps, courageous viewpoint.<sup>70</sup>

Nora, Fran, Frances and Lilli were limited in their maternal feelings. Their daughters did not repeat their behaviour and furthermore, were depicted as caring and nurturing. Not all unresponsive mothers in films, however, produced nurturing daughters. The contrast can be seen, for example in Gillian Armstrong's film of Miles Franklin's novel, *My Brilliant Career* (1979). Sybilla's mother has several children who, because of her poverty, are more a problem than a joy. She displays no hint of motherliness and is cold and hard with Sybilla, sending her away to become a servant. Although eager to avoid imitating her mother, Sybilla displays a similar lack of caring. She meets and deliberately entrances Harry, the most eligible bachelor in the district. Treating him in a rather cavalier fashion, she will not consent to marry him despite his entreaties, as the idea of being a wife and mother is an anathema to her. In her film, Armstrong has depicted a feminist challenge to motherhood and as the title suggests, Sybilla believes that marriage means submission and the end of her freedom to be a writer.

Another film in which the daughter had the same reaction to her suitor as Sybilla in *My Brilliant Career*, was the very different, *The Fringe Dwellers* (1986), directed by Bruce Beresford. Unlike Sybilla's mother, Trilby's mother was a sacrificing, traditional nurturer. *The Fringe Dwellers* was not well-received. It was criticised by Tim Rowse for having no social realism and no sense of politics.<sup>71</sup> Kathy Bail argued that the family's Aboriginality was ignored and differences of colour were given only marginal consideration.<sup>72</sup> Most criticism of the film tended to object to the stereotypical presentation of the Aboriginal

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<sup>70</sup>The consequences of abandoning Ally might have been too difficult to contemplate. Lucy Fischer, for instance, in her analysis of the film called it 'the ultimate female taboo after infanticide'. Fischer, *Cinamaternity*, p. 225.

<sup>71</sup>Tim Rowse, 'Black Heroines White Directors', *Filmnews*, volume 16, number 6, November 1986, p. 11.

<sup>72</sup>Kathy Bail, 'Fringe Benefits', [rev. art.], *Cinema Papers* number 58, July 1986, pp. 14-17.

men, who were seen as the cause of the economic problems of the family. The focus of the film was more properly seen as the relationship of the mother, Mollie to her elder daughter, Trilby. Mollie is loving and does her best to care for her family and despite her lack of money she is happy as the matriarch of her extended family. Trilby has a boyfriend and eventually becomes pregnant, although will not marry the father as she does not want to repeat her mother's life. Finally, after losing the baby, she packs a suitcase and goes away to enjoy what she sees as a more autonomous existence, leaving a sad but kind and understanding mother.

#### Bonding: Autonomy or Dependence

One particular theoretical position on the mother and daughter relationship suggested that the daughter's autonomy would be limited if she were close to her mother. In this model, the daughter saw herself in relation to others rather than as a separate and self-reliant person. This situation was represented in many early films, where young women imitated the lives of their mothers; their attributes were related to domestic life as they sacrificed their own wishes for the needs of others. The daughters did not have the confidence or capacity to deal with problems which arose when their lives deviated in some way from the mother's example. As a consequence, they were devastated if their mothers were not ready to assist them. These films represented the bonding of mother to daughter which was typical of nineteenth century writing. The daughters displayed the lack of ability to act independently that Chodorow and others like her have proposed.

Two loving, and dependent daughters can be found in Raymond Longford's *The Woman Suffers* (1918). Both became pregnant outside marriage. The first, Joan, is a dutiful daughter who helps her mother in the house. An innocent, she is easily seduced by the wily Ralph. When she realises she is going to have his baby, she has no way of dealing with her condition and throws herself into the river. Her mother, in anguish, sits by her dead daughter and weeps. In the city, in another family, Ralph's sister, Marjory, is seduced by Joan's step-brother, Philip, in an act of revenge. Marjory is also a dutiful daughter and

may have met the same fate as Joan, had her step-mother, Marion, not intercepted a letter she had written to Philip. Although she is disappointed and reacts with tears and anger when she realises Marjory's condition, Marion regains her caring and loving attitude. During the pregnancy, Marjory is taken gravely ill and according to the intertitles *her life hangs in the balance*. Marion confronts the seducer, Philip, who has deliberately brought the family to ruin.<sup>73</sup> He relents, hires a clergyman and marries Marjory at her bedside. Marjory's recovery is immediate. In the tradition of good mothers at the time, Marion has been able to bring about the daughter's marriage and resolve her problems. Marjory's life is transformed from shame and despair into the happiness of married life with her baby.

Although the film was commenting on the broad social stigma of unwed motherhood, on a personal level, both Joan and Marjory were unable to survive when they were confronted with the realisation that their lives were about to move away from the pattern established by their mothers. They had been raised in their mother's image, with a singular path towards housewifely and mothering skills. Their mothers were sober and respectable women and it was unthinkable to have daughters who would fail to live up to their own standards. At the time, pregnancy outside marriage could be seen as opposite to everything for which the mothers stood. Although Joan's suicide note explained that she chose to die rather than to bring shame to her family, the problems her death brought, would of course be many times worse. I would argue that it was not the public 'shame', but her failure to repeat her mother's circumspect behaviour that caused her unbounded grief. Marjory would have had a similar fate, had her mother not intervened and found her a husband, thus bringing her back to the straight and narrow path of decency.

The love and respect for their mother of daughters like Joan and Marjory, were shown to limit their own independence, making them unable to accommodate variations in their own lives. In other films, the daughter was close to her mother, yet was able to lead a different and independent existence. Perhaps, the best example of this phenomenon can be

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<sup>73</sup>This is a marvellously melodramatic film with a multitude of cross-family intrigue: Philip, for instance turns out to be Marion's long-lost son.

seen in the six Rudd family films,<sup>74</sup> which ranged from the Raymond Longford version of *On Our Selection* in 1920, to Ken G. Hall's *Dad Rudd M.P.*, in 1940. In a formula common to all the films, the oldest daughter returned to her rural family after time spent away in the city. She was always a sophisticated young woman who spoke well and was educated and stylish, in contrast to her gauche younger sisters. While the portrayal of an enviable, confident daughter in each film remained the same, her name was changed and the character became in turn, Kate, Nell, Jill, Betty and Ann.

In the first Rudd film, Ma Rudd is impressed with Kate's clothes, although not in awe of her, as she commands her to ride to a neighbouring farm to borrow flour. The 1932 Kate is profoundly grateful for the difference in her life from her mother's, and declares, 'You and Dad gave me a chance to get an education'. She is more confident than the earlier Kate and later warns, 'Don't tell me what to do — I'm a free agent'. Despite this, her relationship with her mother is loving and close, as they work happily together, preparing the table together under a tree at the Picnic Races. Ma looks tired and Kate, kindly, tells her to 'sit down and rest'. Jill, in *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938), is, perhaps, the most independent of these older daughters, as she manages the city dress shop Dad has inherited. Her famous admonition to the unscrupulous previous manager, 'Don't call me girlie'<sup>75</sup> became something of a catchcry in the 1970s women's liberation movement.

The independent daughter was increasingly common during the 1930s, when, despite her kindness and bonding with her mother, she began to have other capabilities outside the home. She was, for instance, adept mechanically, being able to drive the new family car or pilot an aeroplane.<sup>76</sup> In Hollywood and British cinema, as Andrea Walsh has pointed out, a 'thematic evolution' after World War Two, saw the emergence of a creative, independent

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<sup>74</sup>These are the two Raymond Longford productions, *On Our Selection* (1920) and *Rudds New Selection* (1921) and four from Ken G. Hall: *On Our Selection* (1932), *Grandad Rudd* (1935), *Dad and Dave Come to Town* (1938) and *Dad Rudd, M.P.*, (1940).

<sup>75</sup>*Don't Call Me Girlie* was directed in 1985 by Stewart Young and Andrée Wright. A documentary, it told of the strength and resourcefulness of women in the Australian film industry, particularly, Lottie Lyell, Shirley Anne Richards and Charlotte Francis, and their work until World War Two.

<sup>76</sup>See for example, *Splendid Fellows* (1934), *Heritage* (1935) and *Thoroughbred* (1936).

daughter who did not always need her mother by her side.<sup>77</sup> This description could be applied to the exceptional, confident daughters who made an appearance in pre-war Australian films.

In these films, mothers and daughters had mutually nurturing relationships, although the daughters were clearly in charge of their own lives. It should be pointed out, however, that the daughters were all married at the end of the film, almost as though that were the point of their appearance. Their close bonding with their mother had not resulted in their loss of autonomy, although the significance of the genre of the films should not be overlooked. The 'eldest daughter role' was used to create the love interest in the film and the filmmakers cast a beautiful young actress whose function was to attract an eligible young bachelor. Despite her protestations of independence, her purpose in the story ensured that she must marry at the end of the film. Throughout, she was strong and outspoken, although there was a possibility that this would change on marriage. Whether her fate was to re-create her mother's domestic life, or to make a new and different existence, was not clear.

Apart from the educated Rudd daughters there was another group of strong young women in early Australian cinema. These daughters of the outback were superb horse riders, managed properties and were active in rural life.<sup>78</sup> They had, however, one common peculiarity: they were all motherless.<sup>79</sup> Their amazing skills of strength and courage were associated with their fathers, as they were known as 'the squatters' daughters', often presented as stereotypical Australian girls.<sup>80</sup> These women had no mothers with whom to bond and grew to be independent and strong females. In some ways their representation

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<sup>77</sup>Andrea S. Walsh cited films for example, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945), *I Remember Mama* (1948) and *Little Women* (1949) in A.S. Walsh, *Women's Film and Female Experience: 1940-1950*, Praeger, NY/London, 1984, p. 103.

<sup>78</sup>See Pike & Ross Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, who noted twelve films from 1900 to 1936 which featured 'the squatter's daughter'.

<sup>79</sup>Andrée Wright made the point that they were 'motherless, sisterless and also lacked female confidantes of their own age'. A. Wright, *Brilliant Careers: Women in Australian Cinema*, Pan, Sydney, 1986, p. 97.

<sup>80</sup> See for instance, *The Squatter's Daughter* (1910) and (1933), *A Girl of the Bush* (1921), *Silks and Saddles* (1921) and *Tall Timbers* (1937) where the strong daughters were motherless.

could be seen to support notions which held that daughters without close bonds to their mothers grew up independent and autonomous. Additionally, they provided perhaps, an early example of the father taking responsibility for child care that Chodorow and others have later espoused. The role model for these powerful women was always a male figure.<sup>81</sup>

From the beginning of the 1970s, the mother/daughter role provided the dramatic focus of many film narratives.<sup>82</sup> The representations were usually from the daughter's point-of-view and told of a damaging and volatile relationship.<sup>83</sup> The lack of bonding in these films did not result in the daughter's freedom and strength as in the squatter's daughter films and, rather, told of her inhibited and crippled life. The daughters in *Snapshot*, *A City's Child* and *The Night the Prowler* have been discussed above, in the analysis of the hateful mother.

The 1980s brought a shift in which the dominating mother features of the previous decade were replaced with compassionate portrayals of the mother's relationship with her daughter. The films focused on the mother's life outside her traditional domestic space, and importantly, the narratives were often from her point-of-view. While mothers confronted issues that went beyond domesticity and encompassed ideas such as the environment and problems in the workforce, there was an odd twist in terms of autonomy and self-expression. Mothers stood up to restrictive husbands and moved into a life of single parenting. They also took their place in the public sphere, holding down jobs as well as rearing their daughters. On the other hand, their life was not shown as secure and

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<sup>81</sup>Gail Finney noted that it was common in nineteenth century fiction for motherless girls to grow to be strong-willed and independent. G. Finney, *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism and European Theater at the Turn of the Century*, Cornell University Press, NY, 1989, p. 107.

<sup>82</sup>There were few before this time. Exceptions were *The Woman Suffers* (1918), *Sunshine Sally* (1922), *Painted Daughters* (1925), *The Adorable Outcast* (1928), *A Son is Born* (1946), *Wherever She Goes* (1951) and *Jedda* (1955).

<sup>83</sup>See for instance, *Snapshot* (1979), *A City's Child* (1972) and *Patrick White's The Night the Prowler* (1979).

confident. Mothers were often confused, dissatisfied and introspective. Curiously — considering their youth — the daughters appeared to have more life-coping skills.<sup>84</sup>

The competent daughters of the decade have been discussed above in relation to the mother as a role-model. The daughters in *Monkey Grip*, *Fran*, *Travelling North* and *Hightide* were all self-confident and outspoken in regard to their own needs and aspirations. An additional episode in *Monkey Grip* serves to illustrate the strength of the daughter, who typically, functioned with confidence in spite of her closeness to her mother. The daughter's superior ability to deal with life is shown in parallel scenes in the film. When Gracie's young boyfriend, Raimondo, reacts to her birthday gift in a hurtful manner, Gracie copes with it without fuss. On the other hand, the life of her mother, Nora, is complicated by her lover's insensitive behaviour and constant rejection. Continually anxious, Nora is unable either to end the relationship or to arrange it to her satisfaction. Eventually, in a scene which draws attention to the role-reversal common in this decade, Nora seeks her young daughter's advice about her relationship. Gracie explains, 'Well, it's because he's a junkie. That's why he's so strange and won't talk. You should be nicer to him and leave him alone'. She continues to comfort her mother saying, 'Cheer up Mum, you'll get over it, remember when I loved Raimondo'. Conspicuously emphasising her transformation to the mother role, Gracie is knitting during this exchange.<sup>85</sup> This scene is presented in a matter-of-fact manner yet it is remarkable, considering Gracie is only ten years old. It adds to the role so far created for Gracie, who has coped with Nora's neglect of her traditional maternal role throughout the film.

#### Postscript on Flexibility and Tolerance

A more multi-faceted approach which reflected recent less polarised theories of motherhood was represented in a single film at the end of the decade. It is worth returning

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<sup>84</sup>Examples of this type of mother-daughter relationship, apart from those reviewed above, can be found in *The Coca-Cola Kid* (1985), *The Fringe Dwellers* (1986), *Jenny Kissed Me* (1986) and *Australian Dream* (1987).

<sup>85</sup>This was a stereotypical occupation of the mother whenever she was required to sit down. Disturbingly, perhaps, it seemed to occur in most films.

to it as it provides one of the most thoughtful investigations of a family. An unusual and intelligent film, Martha Ansara's *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1988), was set in Perth.<sup>86</sup> On the one hand it was a tale of a suburban family, and on the other, it was a documentary which exposed the evils of nuclear weapons. It was unsettling for some because of its combination of genres and indeed, has been criticised for its pedantic approach.<sup>87</sup> The film, however, cleverly used the internal conflicts of the family as a counterpoint to the public tensions about a visiting American warship and Perth's hosting of the America's Cup.

The mother, Anna, besides contemplating her association with her daughter, is reviewing her life as she approaches middle-age. Her husband, John, has just started his own business and wants Anna to assist him by entertaining his associates. Their daughter, Mandy, is fifteen years old and a political radical. The relational tension is reflected in the news of the day. John's reverence for capitalism is aligned to the extravagant yacht race and Mandy's very public anger is played out against the visit of *US Enterprise*. Their polarity places the mother at the centre of the storm.

Anna reaches a watershed where she acknowledges that her child rearing responsibilities are finished. Her daughter is grown up and wants to make her own decisions. Although Mandy has been 'the centre of her life for fifteen years', Anna realises that she no longer needs, or is able, to be responsible for her daughter. The prospect of moving away from her role as mother, prompts her to re-evaluate her life as John's wife. The tensions from the upheaval form the focus of the film. Anna and Mandy are very close, yet the women freely argue about issues which are important to both. Although the conflict is heated, it does no harm to the love each feels for the other. Significantly, in an indication of mutual respect, Anna accepts Mandy's point-of-view, and acknowledges that 'her way doesn't have to be mine'. Anna finally makes a stand against what she evaluates as John's

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<sup>86</sup>See chapter 3 for an analysis of the good mother aspect of the film.

<sup>87</sup>Reviewer, Anna Gul, calls it a 'didactic piece of mixed-genre cinema', *The Pursuit of Happiness*, [rev. art.], in Murray, *Australian Film, 1978-1992*, p. 255.

unethical business practices, and in contrast to her conflict with Mandy, they are unable to be reconciled. The impasse she reaches with John serves to highlight the special relationship of mother and daughter. John will not accept her criticism of his business activities and continues to insist that she entertain his associates. She has to leave him to prove her point. Mother and daughter, on the other hand, acknowledge each other's differences and in the final scene are happily together.

*The Pursuit of Happiness* was significant in the investigation of the mother's relationship with her daughter in films, because it offered an alternative to the need for separation and autonomy. It looked instead to acceptance of the differences between the women, to empowerment through flexibility and tolerance. In a radical departure from many previous film narratives, it explored both mother's and daughter's need for self-expression. While the daughter was a teenager who was about to leave the parental home, this was not a coming-of-age film, but one of a mother's transition to an acceptance of change and decision about her own life. The film celebrated the connection and closeness of mother and daughter and the importance of their unique relationship without giving either woman the power to make a victim of the other. Additionally, the film used the family as a metaphor of Australia. As the women were able to mature and find their own way in life away from the patriarchal capitalist husband/father, so the filmmaker hoped that Australia would be able to move away from the influence of the nuclear-powered capitalism of the United States.

### Conclusion

The diversity of the research on the association of the mother to her daughter provided a way to understand the complexities of the relationship as depicted in feature films. Biological, social-training and cognitive role-learning theories tended to argue that the women's relationship was close. They assumed that for the most part the mother was loving, or at least, had the daughter's best interest at heart. Psychoanalytic theorists, on the other hand, frequently found the mother responsible for irreparable damage to her

daughter. Feminist research used a plurality of approaches. Its conclusions were equally varied, as some described closeness and bonding, while others argued that the mother's power restricted the daughter's own self-reliance by preventing her from separating and seeing herself as an individual. Other feminists have recently questioned the necessity for autonomy as a goal, seeing flexibility and understanding as being healthier objectives.

Taking into account the whole period from 1900-1988, most films depicted the mother and daughter in a close relationship,<sup>88</sup> even if it was often peripheral to the narrative. The images followed empirical research and indicated, perhaps, real life experiences of the closeness of mothers and daughters rather than theories which looked for and found problems in the union. In early films, particularly, the pair exhibited a mutuality and commonality which meant that they were almost inseparable. The mother passed on her maternal skills to the daughter, prepared her for marriage and usually found her a suitable partner. On occasions, there was even an indication of a special mystical bond which united them. The expressions of love and companionship between the women in these films had its origins in nineteenth-century literature, and can be understood in relation to biological, social role training and cultural theories.

Exceptions to the loving mother/daughter relationship came almost exclusively during the 1970s with the onset of the popularity of a Freudian subtext in films. The typical 1970s film mother was suffocating, insensitive or malevolent. Whatever her depiction, at the base she was a selfish woman who lacked maternal feelings and skills. These films, seen from the daughter's point-of-view, portrayed the mother's influence on her daughter's life as profound and emotionally damaging. The representations of this aspect of the mother/daughter relationship were analysed employing those psychoanalytic and feminist opinions which challenged bonding theories and blamed the mother for the daughter's problems.

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<sup>88</sup>They are the opposite of the 'mother as a pest' which is common to recent cinema. It occurs in a typical scene in films where the daughter returns to her home. On her answer-phone there is usually a message from her mother, which the daughter greets with a grimace. This is normalised: her response is understood and the audience is meant to sympathise with her.

Questions of why women mother and undertake nurturing responsibilities more often than men, have been contemplated by many theorists from disparate fields. Many suggested that daughters internalised and repeated their mother's behaviour and manners. Theories which underpinned the role-model approach invested maternal behaviour with an ahistorical quality which insisted that a nurturing mother produces a nurturing daughter. The maternal cycle in films, to a certain extent, contradicted this approach, as the role-model paradigm was evident only in early films. It was, perhaps, surprising that in later films, daughters with non-nurturing mothers were not represented as imitating their mother's indifference or malice, and frequently found reward and redemption by moving to a traditional nurturing role.<sup>89</sup> Daughters almost without exception were caring and loving, although they did not learn their maternal skills by imitating their mother.<sup>90</sup> The films, perhaps, presented a point-of-view which indicated societal influence or more likely, the presence of an inevitable, unchanging, maternal instinct.

Finally, some theories postulated that daughters were too close to their mothers for them to effect the separation which would allow them autonomy and the ability to perform with confidence in their adult life. Theories that advocated separation and individuation implied that independent daughters could not be close to their mothers. Or, from another perspective, that daughters who were close to their mothers were unable to act on their own behalf. The representation of the daughter's lack of independence because of her closeness to her mother, appeared to be determined by historical context. In early films, the especially close relationships of the women was shown to limit the daughter's ability to act on her own accord. By the 1930s however, most daughters were represented as more educated and outspoken than their mothers, a trend that continued until the 1970s. In the hostile relationships which were a feature of the 1970s decade, the mother's insensitivity

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<sup>89</sup>One very important Australian film, *My Brilliant Career*, broke this pattern. Sybilla's mother was unresponsive and unkind and Sybilla, unlike other daughters, who turned out loving and nurturing, was violently opposed to motherhood.

<sup>90</sup>There was contradiction in Bruce Beresford's *The Fringe Dwellers* (1986) where the daughter of a loving, traditional mother declined motherhood, possibly murdering her baby daughter.

or malice toward her daughter was represented as responsible for her inability to function in society. During the 1980s, the relationship was again represented as close and although the mother was often unsure and dissatisfied, the daughters were outspoken and independent. With a refreshing new outlook, one film, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, rather than representing the daughter as more or less autonomous than her mother, depicted the women as loving and self-confident.