

MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE IDENTITY FORMATION OF THE
DAUGHTERS IN *THE BONESETTER'S DAUGHTER*

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Approval Form

This research paper attached hereto, entitled “Mother-Daughter Relationships in the Identity Formation of the Daughters in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*” prepared and submitted by Goh Vern Ann in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) English Language, is hereby accepted.

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Abstract

The novel *The Bonesetter's Daughter* can be examined from the perspective of the mother-daughter relationship where it plays a crucial role in the identity formation of the daughters from childhood to adulthood. The qualitative methods that were used include close reading and thematic analysis whereas the theoretical framework encompasses the object relations theory and the personality development theory. For the object relations theory, the daughters undergo the stages of attachment, frustration and rejection before they can build stronger identities. Their self-structures are greatly influenced by their mothers' upbringing. The mothers also play a big part in guiding their daughters towards a fuller life. For the personality development theory, only the Adolescence stage is highlighted. It is analysed in relation to how culture interferes with Ruth's character development. It investigates how she struggles with her mixed heritage before coming to terms with it. This study is performed as there is comparatively little research done on the mother-daughter relationships in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* from the perspectives of these theories. For further research, one can explore the many symbols in the novel. In a nutshell, the mothers participate actively when it comes to shaping the characters of their daughters.

Declaration

I declare that the material contained in this paper is the end result of my own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic or personal.

Chapter 1

Introduction

“And then I realized that the first word must have been: *ma*, the sound of a baby smacking its lips in search of her mother’s breast. For a long time, that was the only word the baby needed. A mother is always the beginning.”

(Tan, 2001, p. 299)

Every person is branded with an identity. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, an identity basically refers to the distinguishing character or personality of an individual (*Identity*, 2011). This personality is unique to us alone and it is honed along the process of growing up. Identity development starts with an infant’s discovery of self and continues throughout childhood before becoming the focus of adolescence (*Identity Development - Aspects of Identity*, 2010). *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* emphasizes the importance of the mothers in defining the identities of the daughters. Spanning three generations, it centers on the lives of three women which include Precious Auntie or Gu Liu Xing (the grandmother), LuLing Liu Young (the mother) and Ruth Luyi Young (the daughter).

The author of the novel is Amy Tan. She was born on 19 February 1952 in Oakland, California. Tan’s parents were Chinese immigrants. When her father and older brother died from brain tumors, the family moved to Switzerland where she finished high school (Tan, 2003, p. 23). Tan majored in English and Linguistics at the San Jose State University in the 1970s. Her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, received awards like the Commonwealth Gold Award and Bay Area Book Reviewers Award (*Amy Tan Biography*, 2010). Tan’s other works include *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, *The Hundred Secret Senses* and *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*.

Statement of Problem

Mothers play a significant role in determining the identity formation of their daughters from childhood to adulthood in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. In this story, it is the mothers who enable the daughters to create fuller identities than before. Although there are dyads like father-daughter in a family institution, most daughters seem to relate better to their mothers. They are more likely to open up to their mothers especially when it comes to sharing feelings. Mothers continue to affect the way daughters feel about themselves even when the daughters have approached mid-life (*Conflict?*, 2010). This study will investigate the mother-daughter relationships in the identity formation of the daughters based on *The Bonesetter's Daughter* from the perspectives of the object relations theory and personality development theory.

The object relations theory will be employed to explore the mother-daughter relationships in the story. It is a psychoanalytic theory which centers on human relationships as the main motivational force in life (*Object Relations Theory*, 2010). This theory is more inclined towards the relationships within a family, especially between a mother and her child. The concept of “object” can consist of people like a mother, father or things like transitional objects to which an attachment is established. Klee (2007b) claimed that these objects and the developing child's relationship with them are incorporated into a self which subsequently organise the building blocks of the self-system.

On the other hand, the personality development theory advocates that the course of a person's development is determined by the interaction of body, psychological and cultural influences (Harder, 2009). Erik Erikson, who contributed greatly to this theory, believed that ego exists from birth and that behavior is not totally defensive (Harder, 2009). People typically develop through a predetermined unfolding of their personalities in eight different stages. Boeree (2009) asserted that a person's progress through every stage is dependent on

his or her success or lack of success in the previous stages.

Purpose of the Study

I chose to examine *The Bonesetter's Daughter* because it is an emotionally engaging novel. Tan's ability to effectively stir up the emotions of the readers makes the story a success. For instance, in the second part of the novel, LuLing finally discovers that Precious Auntie is her real mother after she commits suicide. Tan (2001, p. 243) portrayed the scene as such: "I found the pages Precious Auntie had written for me. At last, I read her words. *Your mother, your mother, I am your mother.*" The words hold a powerful impact on the readers as it evokes heartache and grief. Tan is brilliant at playing with language and this skill allows her to enhance the mood of the novel.

This study aims to discover how the mothers in the story are responsible for determining their daughters' personalities through their upbringing. According to Cherry (2010b), Erikson stated that identity involves many different aspects like physical and sexual identity, occupational goals and ethnic background. This research will focus on core identity and ethnic background. It also strives to create an understanding of how the object relations theory and personality development theory can be incorporated into the mother-daughter relationship context based on the novel. Besides, it will also explore how culture interferes with the development of the daughter's identity and how it subsequently affects the relationship between mother and daughter.

Significance of the Study

According to the object relations theory, children who fail to form successful relationships with their parents will have trouble handling future relationships. Early trauma like abuse can cause a pathological delay of the developmental sequence (Klee, 2007a). This

leads to personality disorders such as schizoid and the narcissist. Similarly, the personality development theory asserts that interference in the natural order of the eight stages will affect the development of a person. Boeree (2009) stated that each stage consists of certain development tasks that are psychosocial in nature. These tasks are known as “crises.” Both theories can be applied to *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* as the story fits the identity context. Owing to their mothers’ behaviors, the daughters grow up facing difficulties in managing their relationships with other people. By conducting this study, I will provide further insight about the mother-daughter relationships based on these theories.

There have been numerous research conducted on *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*. However, most of it revolves around spirituality or the effect of silence on mother and daughter. Although there are studies about the mother-daughter dyad, there is relatively little research done on the mother-daughter relationships in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* specifically from the perspectives of the object relations theory and personality development theory. This study will benefit students of literature as I am offering them different angles of looking at the novel by applying these two theories.

Research Questions

The three research questions for this study are listed as follows:

1. How do the mothers play a role in shaping the identities of their daughters in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*?
2. What does the object relations theory advocate when describing the mother-daughter relationships in the novel?
3. How does culture influence identity development in relation to the personality development theory?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This study comprises an analysis of the mother-daughter relationships in the identity formation of the daughters in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* from the perspectives of the object relations theory and personality development theory. The novel centers on the complicated yet enduring relationship between three female characters. The daughters are portrayed as uncertain individuals who plow through life without much meaning. In the end, it is the mothers who liberate them from despair and thus, enable the daughters to emerge stronger than before and construct more solid identities.

I shall begin by providing the definition of keys terms like “mother-daughter relationship” and “identity formation”. I will then proceed with the theoretical framework of this study where the object relations theory and personality development theory will be employed. Certain stages of each theory will be elaborated in detail. Besides, information on the past research of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* shall be studied to give the readers a clearer idea of what has been done on the book so far.

Definition

Mother-daughter relationship. The mother-daughter relationship is defined as the connection that exists between a mother and daughter. Whether it involves a close or estranged bond, all daughters have an affiliation with their mothers to some extent. Day and Fisher (2010) asserted that previous research on mother-adult daughter relationships revealed that daughters possess a stronger desire to obtain support from mothers than sons. A mother-daughter friendship exceeds other relationships because it integrates all the years spent intimately studying each other and learning to interpret each other's behavior (Day and Fisher,

2010).

According to Hirsch (1981), the mother stays a crucial object throughout an adult daughter's life. Despite the many changes that occur in the relationship as the daughters enter midlife, some emotional qualities remain the same. Most mothers identify more strongly with female infants because they view them more as extensions of themselves while boys are urged to become separate and independent (Hirsch, 1981, p. 206). Therefore, it is natural that mothers hold a strong influence when it comes to the identity development of their daughters.

Identity formation. Ryckman (2004) stated that identity formation is a process where a person develops a distinct personality which is viewed as a persisting entity in a certain stage of life. It generally refers to a conscious sense of uniqueness and direction, derived from a variety of psychosocial experiences that are integrated by the ego (Ryckman, 2004, p. 182). These experiences include all of our previous identifications learned as a participant in a variety of groups (family, school and peer) and all our self-images. As we interact with these people, we may unconsciously incorporate certain parts of their behavior into our own.

Some researchers strongly emphasize the importance of early relationships in the development of adult self-perception and behavior. Alder (1927) described a set of individual differences that collectively formed as "style of life". He stated that people's characters are shaped through interactions with others. Factors like associated family roles form the scaffolding in which the child's style of life is developed (Alder, 1927). Two theories that appropriately explain the development of a child's character include the object relations theory and the personality development theory.

Theoretical Framework

The object relations theory and personality development theory will be applied to investigate identity development in the novel. Both theories are extensions of Freud's original view of the role of ego in personality functioning (Ryckman, 2004, p. 175). They will discover how the daughters' identities are influenced by their mothers in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*.

The object relations theory. The term "object relations theory" was coined by Ronald Fairbairn in 1952. It was pioneered by British psychologists Fairbairn, Melanie Klein, D. W. Winnicott and others in the 1940s and 1950s (*Object Relations Theory*, 2010). Klee (2007b) stated that Sigmund Freud originally used the term "object" to mean anything an infant directs drives toward for satiation. He maintained that there are two types of drives which include sexual and aggressive drives. However, many theorists like Klein and Fairbairn emphasized a relational or structural model of the psyche where an "object" is the target of relational needs in human development (Klee, 2007b). Modern theorists deemed that humans have an inborn drive to develop and secure relationships.

The object relations theory is a psychoanalytic theory which emphasizes a social view of psychological development (Kernberg, 2010). Its basic notion is that people are motivated to establish successful relationships with others and that failure to do so will lead to problems later in life. The relationship within a family is particularly stressed, especially between a mother and her child. According to Marshall (1998), the concept of "object" refers to the people with whom a subject is involved emotionally. Disturbances during the maturing process lead to a pathological delay of the developmental sequence. As a result, the child fails to mature emotionally and does not have the ego strength required to maintain healthy relationships (Klee, 2007a).

Marshall (1998) asserted that this theory involves the steady differentiation of the self through the reflections of experiences of real people from earlier infancy. It is these interactions with important people that determine how our genetic inclinations will be expressed. As we grow up, our relationships with significant people enable us to incorporate parts of others and eventually develop a self-structure which would be later known as personality (Klee, 2007b). However, trauma to our early self-object relations can lead to resistance to change later on. A person generally goes through three stages in life. These stages include attachment, frustration and rejection (Riso and Hudson, 2000, p. 315).

Attachment, frustration and rejection.

The object relations theory has three fundamental “affects” that can exist between the self object and the other object (*Psychodynamic*, 2011). These “affects” are attachment, frustration and rejection. They are universal emotional states that are the crucial building blocks of a person’s identity. They are also mutually dependent which means having one is to have them all (*Q & A on Object Relations*, 2010).

Attachment refers to the desire of the ego to sustain a comfortable and stable relationship with people or things which they identify with. People of this category have trouble with attachments that are deeply held with people, situations or states that are “working” for them (*Q & A on Object Relations*, 2010). Some tend to alter their self-image to become more acceptable and be appreciated by others. Others learn to become attached to a comfort zone which they associate with independence and freedom (*Q & A on Object Relations*, 2010).

Riso and Hudson (2000) believed that people of the frustration stage feel that their comfort and needs are not being sufficiently taken care of. The self is described as “hungry” and there are traits like being uncomfortable or dissatisfied. These feelings are the result of

deeply conditioned patterns from an individual's childhood. Some people of this group are aggravated that their parents have not properly guided them and involuntarily expect others to defend and nurture them (Riso and Hudson, 2000, p. 317).

In the rejection group, the self is viewed as weak and potentially victimized while others are considered powerful and abusive. People of this stage expect to be rejected anytime and thus, they protect themselves in different ways (Riso and Hudson, 2000, p. 317). They often hide their own actual needs and vulnerabilities, employing some ability or resource to defend themselves against further rejection. According to Riso and Hudson (2000), people of this category also feel that they must have a particular skill so valuable to others that they will never be rejected.

The personality development theory. Krementz (1997) stated that the personality development theory was explored by Erik Erikson. He was born in 1902 in Frankfurt, Germany.

Erikson became interested in the influence of society and culture on child development when he started studying child psychoanalysis (Krementz, 1997). He believed that a person's development is shaped by the interaction of body, mind and cultural influences (Harder, 2009). In this theory, human development is controlled by the epigenetic principle. This principle asserts that development occurs in a series of stages which unfold according to a genetically predetermined sequence (Schultz & Schultz, 2005).

Harder (2009) stressed that a person's character develops in eight stages which include Infancy, Early Childhood, Play Age, School Age, Adolescence, Young Adulthood, Middle Adulthood and Late Adulthood. Each stage is marked by a crisis which involves a change in perspective, forcing us to refocus our instinctual energy depending on the needs of each stage (Schultz & Schultz, 2005). This crisis is responsible for the changes in our

behavior and personality. There are two ways to respond to a crisis. We can either resolve it in a maladaptive (negative) way or an adaptive (positive) way. If a crisis is resolved properly, we will acquire the strength needed to proceed to the other stages. However, if we fail, we are less likely to be able to adapt to problems later in the future (Schultz & Schultz, 2005). It could also lead to certain behavioral tendencies or mental problems. Resolution of these crises allows the construction of stronger self-identities (Ryckman, 2004, p. 176).

Although there are eight stages in this theory, I will incorporate only the Adolescence stage for my study. I have chosen this stage as it is relevant to my analysis. It is also the most prominent phase that can be found in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*.

Adolescence: Identity versus role confusion.

The Adolescence stage takes place from the ages of 12 to 18 (Schultz & Schultz, 2005). Adolescents have a growing sense of self-identity as they are experiencing more independence and personal efficacy (*Erik Erikson: Theory of Personality Development*, 2011). Boeree (2009) stressed that the task during this stage is to accomplish ego identity and keep away from role confusion. The term “ego identity” refers to knowing who you are and how you assimilate into the rest of society. It requires people to take all that they have learned about life and themselves and combine it into a unified self-image (Boeree, 2009). In contrast, role confusion is the absence of identity where people cannot see who they are clearly and how they can relate positively to their environment (Chapman, 2010).

Harder (2009) maintained that life gets more complicated when adolescents try to discover their own identity and struggle with social interactions. It is common to experience an identity crisis at this stage where a moratorium occurs. A moratorium is a period where people are exploring various identities but have not made a commitment (Cherry, 2010b). During this period, individuals attempt to solve special problems. If these problems are not

solved properly, the search for identity will start anew, even right up to old age (Ryckman, 2004, p. 183).

To cope with the uncertainties of life, youths may over-identify with cliques or heroes (*Identity/Identity Formation*, 2011). Some become very clannish and intolerant in their exclusion of others who are “different.” Their behavior is characterised as totalism—a setting of absolute boundaries in one’s values, belief and interpersonal relationships (Ryckman, 2004, p. 184). Successful resolution of the crisis at this stage evokes a sense of fidelity. Boeree (2009) emphasized that fidelity refers to loyalty and the capability to live by society’s standards despite the imperfections. It also means that individuals have found a place in the community, a place which enables them to contribute.

Past Research on *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*

Extensive research has been carried out on Amy Tan’s works, most of it centering on her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*. When it comes to *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, there is only a handful of research which comprises the construction of ethnic identity, spirituality and the role of silence in the novel. I have chosen three works to be compared for this study. Generally, they share the themes of ethnic identity reconstruction and the concept of silence.

Fidder (2004) believed that though all mother-daughter relationships are vital to the daughter’s developing sense of self, this connection is even more important when there is a cultural, linguistic and historical disconnect on top of the usual generational issues. She explored how story and interaction in the novel are utilized to link the cultural and generational gaps between the mothers and daughters. The daughters, in their ignorance of the Chinese culture and context, “misread” their mothers all of their lives and are unable to develop a viable Chinese identity because of it (Fidder, 2004, p. 8).

Wu (2008) agreed with Fidder that it is the mothers who help the daughters to reconstruct their Chinese identity by sharing their memories with them. He believed that the

Chinese character of the American-born daughter (Ruth) is tied to the Chinese mother's (LuLing) memory of the past. Hence, it is only after LuLing reveals her past to Ruth by writing her story down in a memoir that Ruth begins to accept her Chinese-ness (Wu, 2008, p. 3). She is also able to comprehend her mother's erratic behavior and fascination with death. Mother and daughter finally reconcile and Ruth manages to establish her ethnic identity.

Pu (2006) used the concept of *Chi/Ori*, a person's inner spiritual guiding force, to describe the relationship between a mother and her child. A child relies on the mother for nourishment which is parallel to the way a person depends on the *Chi/Ori* for maturity (Pu, 2006, p. 12). However, similar to the supplicant and *Chi/Ori* which are not always in harmony, the mother-child relationship may get strained occasionally. Conflicts sometimes make the relationship stronger as mother and child are experiencing difficulties together and grow to know each other better (Pu, 2006, p. 12). This situation is reflected in the novel where despite having constant conflicts, mother and daughter eventually learn to accept each other.

Besides, the works emphasized the concept of silence in the novel. It is Chinese tradition to know what not to talk about due to the fear that bad things would happen. The mothers' stories often indicate the requirement to hold one's tongue. Fidler (2004) pointed out that Precious Auntie's suicide becomes something "too bad to say" and LuLing becomes unable to speak on her behalf. According to Wu (2008), the three silenced women must speak for themselves to gain their self-consciousness. Precious Auntie is silenced because she is a ghost and thus, she lacks a concrete figural form to speak for herself. For LuLing, it is her Alzheimer's disease that consumes her memories (Wu, 2008, p. 9). On the other hand, Ruth is silenced because of cultural gaps. In Pu's work, she maintained that Ruth is invisible in various stages of her life. During her childhood, LuLing disciplines her in an authoritarian way that renders Ruth silent as she is forbidden to speak her mind. Ruth's sense of silence

and oblivion follows her into adulthood (Pu, 2006, p. 20).

In summary, all three works agreed that the mothers have a vital role in shaping the identities of their daughters, especially when it comes to ethnic identity. For the daughters, a new level of maturity emerges when they discover how much their mothers have endured. Their mothers' bravery and resilience in facing life's challenges imbue them with the strength needed to face their own lives. As they now understand the reasons behind their mothers' mentalities, the daughters learn to accept them. Mother and daughter reconcile as they walk the path of forgiveness and redemption.

After reviewing most of the research conducted on *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, I discovered that majority of it centers on the development of ethnic identity, spirituality and also the effect of silence on mother and daughter. While there are theories like dialogism that have been employed, relatively little research have used the object relations theory or personality development theory to explore the novel. Hence, for my research, I am going to study the mother-daughter relationships in the identity formation of the daughters from the perspectives of both theories.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this study, qualitative methods will be used to analyse *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. I have chosen several methods which include close reading and thematic analysis. These methods will be employed to provide in-depth information regarding the mother-daughter relationships in the identity formation of the daughters in the story. Besides, I will incorporate the object relations theory and personality development theory as my theoretical framework.

Qualitative Research

Ereaut (2007) stated that qualitative research is concerned about the “why” not the “how” of its topic through analysis of unstructured information. Several examples of unstructured information include interview transcripts, open ended survey responses and videos. Qualitative research rarely uses statistics or numbers which are common in quantitative research. Flamand (2010) believed that it emphasizes methods that aim to discern the quality rather than the quantity of the subject. A qualitative research also offers complex textual descriptions of how people experience a certain issue. It provides data about the “human” side of a topic which includes contradictory behaviors, beliefs, emotions and relationships of individuals (*Qualitative Research Methods Overview*, 2010). According to Patton (2002), a qualitative research can be described as a naturalistic inquiry as it studies real-world situations as they take place naturally. It also makes use of purposeful sampling where the cases for study are chosen because they are rich in information and illuminative (Patton, 2002). One of the qualitative methods that I will use for this thesis is close reading.

Close reading. Close reading is the most crucial skill especially when it comes to literary studies. It refers to paying close attention to what is written on the page (Kattenburg,

2010). However, it does not simply mean reading and comprehending the meanings of the words. Close reading also includes making oneself sensitive to all the nuances and connotations of language as it is used by skilled writers (*What is Close Reading? – Guidance Notes*, 2010). It can include anything from a work's particular vocabulary and sentence construction to the themes that are involved. McClennen (2001) asserted that “reading closely” means developing a profound understanding and an exact interpretation of a literary passage that is based primarily on the words themselves.

According to Kain (1998), when people close read, they might notice all the prominent features of the text like rhetorical features and structural elements or they might take note of only selected features of the text such as oppositions and correspondences. In general, a close reading involves a thought process that shifts from small details to larger issues (McClennen, 2001). Close reading has four different levels of attention which consist of the linguistic, semantic, structural and cultural level (*What is Close Reading? – Guidance Notes*, 2010). For this study, I will also be analysing the prominent theme of mother-daughter relationships in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*.

Thematic analysis. Flanagan (2010) defined a theme as the dominant idea that a writer strives to convey to his readers in a work of literature. A theme is also the meaning that is produced by the work when we take all aspects of the work in its entirety into account (*Literary Analysis Guide*, 2010). One can discover a theme by being aware of the relations among the parts of a story and of the relations of the parts to a whole (*Literary Analysis Guide*, 2010). This can be achieved by analysing the characters, plot, motivation, style and other aspects of the work.

Thematic analysis occurs when data is analysed by theme (*Thematic Analysis*, 2010). It is highly inductive where the themes surface from the data and are not given by the

researcher. In a thematic analysis, the collection of data and analysis occurs at the same time. Background reading can also make up part of the analysis process, especially if it helps clarify an emerging theme (*Thematic Analysis*, 2010). According to Davis (2007), the analysis of a theme involves working the concept, opinion or belief that the author conveys. He stated that the theme can be found by reading through the work and searching for topics that appear repeatedly.

Object Relations Theory

Apart from qualitative methods, I will employ the object relations theory to study the mother-daughter relationships in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. It is a theory of relationships between people where the ties within a family are emphasized. This relationship especially applies to the relationship between mother and child. The “objects” can be divided into internal and external objects. Internal objects refer a memory, idea or fantasy about a person, place or thing (Daniels, 2007). In contrast, external objects refer to the actual person, place or thing where emotional energy has been spent. According to Daniels (2007), the residues of past relationships can affect a person in the present. Relationships or even conflicts from early childhood will contribute to creating the blueprint of how the self-system will be shaped. This situation influences how relationships will be handled and maintained later on in life. Trauma, however, can cause a setback in the developmental order (Klee, 2007a).

Personality Development Theory

Erik Erikson's personality development theory will also be used to study the mother-daughter relationships in the novel. This theory focuses more on cultural and social aspects instead of biological or sexual aspects. Chapman (2010) stated that Erikson was concerned about how behavior is influenced after birth and how nurture and experience shape a person's

character. This theory claims that personality develops in eight stages called the epigenetic principle. They unfold according to an innate scheme where each stage builds on the preceding stages, determining the way for subsequent stages (Davis & Clifton, 1995). Every stage is distinguished by a psychosocial crisis which is not only based on physiological development, but also on demands placed by parents or society. In order to effectively overcome each crisis, a healthy balance has to be achieved between the two opposing dispositions that signify each crisis (Chapman, 2010). Solving the crises will enable us to develop stronger identities.

Chapter 4

Findings and Analysis

I will be analysing the complex mother-daughter relationships faced by all three female characters in Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. This study attempts to explore how the mothers play a crucial role in determining the identity formation of the daughters from childhood to adulthood. The object relations theory and personality development theory will be incorporated to clarify the circumstances that exist between mother and daughter. For the object relations theory, I will further explain its three stages which are attachment, frustration and rejection whereas for the personality development theory, I will focus on the Adolescence stage in relation to the influence of culture on identity development.

The Object Relations Theory: The Role of Mothers in the Identity Formation of Daughters

The Bonesetter's Daughter features a prominent theme of mother-daughter relationships which extend three generations. The story revolves around the lives of three women which include Precious Auntie or Gu Liu Xing (the grandmother), LuLing Liu Young (the mother) and Ruth Luyi Young (the daughter). It tells of how miscommunication leads to strained relationships between mother and daughter. Both parties suffer because the mothers opt to conceal their pasts and intentions from their daughters. Nevertheless, it is through the mothers' guidance that the daughters liberate themselves from desolation and construct stronger identities.

Alder believed that the mother is particularly important in shaping a child's distinctive style of life as she is normally the first person to have extended, intimate contact with the child (Rickman, 2004, p. 119). The novel especially adheres to this concept as the daughters

grow up with only their mothers by their sides. LuLing's father (Liu Hu Sen) dies on Precious Auntie's marriage day whereas Ruth's father (Edwin Young) dies in a car accident when she is just two (Tan, 2001, p. 61). Both mothers play the role of single mothers. Thus, the mothers' influence on the daughters is inevitable as they have the most contact with them.

According to Kim (2010), the object relations theory advocates that the process of developing a mind happens when a person grows in relation to real others in the environment. It places importance on early interactions with primary caregivers as this determines one's relationship with others in the future. This statement is relevant to the novel as the mothers play a significant role in shaping the identities of their daughters. I will begin by examining the mother-daughter relationship between Precious Auntie and LuLing followed by the relationship between LuLing and Ruth.

Precious Auntie and LuLing. The object relations theory uses the concept of "objects" which refers to the people with whom a person is greatly involved emotionally (Marshall, 1998). In the novel, the "objects" are the mothers. Precious Auntie is LuLing's mother and they share a strong yet tragic relationship. Precious Auntie is the daughter of a famous bonesetter. She is an outspoken woman who learns to read, write and ask questions (Tan, 2001, p. 186). However, tragedy strikes when her husband and father are murdered by Chang, the coffin maker, because she refuses his marriage proposal. Pregnant and consumed by sorrow, she attempts suicide but the Liu family nurses her back to health and tells her to stay as the baby's nursemaid. The first daughter-in-law claims the baby as hers and comes to be known as "Mother" to LuLing.

Precious Auntie is LuLing's "object" as she is very much involved in her upbringing and personality formation. Although LuLing has Mother, it is Precious Auntie who raises her. It is these initial experiences with her mother that structure LuLing's relationships with Ruth

and other people later. Since Precious Auntie is unable to speak, LuLing reveals that “hand-talk, face-talk and chalk talk were the languages I grew up with” (Tan, 2001, p. 2). LuLing also states that “Precious Auntie taught me to be naughty, just like her. She taught me to be curious, just like her” (Tan, 2001, p. 188). Precious Auntie teaches LuLing to see the world through her eyes. For instance, she insists that there is a more significant meaning to writing Chinese characters. When she teaches LuLing the character “heart,” she says, “See this curving stroke? That’s the bottom of the heart, where the blood gathers and flows. Whose dead heart gave shape to this word?” (Tan, 2001, p. 173). She makes LuLing question the origin of the word. As a result of Precious Auntie’s upbringing, it becomes part of LuLing to see Chinese characters as containing a greater meaning. She may have grown up ignorant of the art of writing without her mother’s influence during her childhood.

The object relations theory asserts that a child incorporates many aspects of the relational environment such as parental behavior into the developing self-system, internalizing much of the family drama into their personality (Klee, 2007c). Since LuLing grows up watching her mother’s determination, she ingrains it into her own character. Precious Auntie is a strong woman despite her tragic past. As LuLing puts it, “I was the reason she stayed, her only reason to live” (Tan, 2001, p. 199). LuLing faces her life’s tragedies with a determination as fierce as her mother’s own. This strength enables her to move on with life after her mother’s suicide and first husband’s execution by the Japanese. She also takes up different jobs to buy herself a ticket to America. LuLing tells herself “. . . I would find a cheaper house. . . . If GaoLing got me the visa, fine, I would make my way back to Hong Kong. If she did not, fine, I would stay and be a teacher” (Tan, 2001, p. 327). In short, LuLing internalizes her mother’s behavior into her own self-structure as she has been observing her mother’s resilience since she was a child.

Klee (2007b) stated that disturbances during the maturing process cause a

pathological delay of the development process where a child fails to mature emotionally. Subsequently, the child will not be able to retain healthy relationships. LuLing undergoes a great trauma when Precious Auntie commits suicide. She fails to “mature emotionally” as she becomes so caught up with her guilt and sorrow that she is unable to accept love from others. In America, she regularly gets into fights with people and refuses to get close to anyone. She even fails to maintain a healthy relationship with her own daughter. As LuLing fervently believes that her mother’s ghost is still around, she frequently asks Ruth to communicate to her and makes death threats whenever Ruth defies her. Her misery has an inevitable negative influence on Ruth’s personality later on.

Nonetheless, Precious Auntie’s choice of revealing her past brings a positive effect on LuLing’s character formation. When she discovers the truth behind her mother’s life, LuLing is filled with a new sense of identity—that she is the daughter of a strong and brave woman. This realisation enables LuLing to construct a fuller identity. She is proud to be Precious Auntie’s daughter and this can be seen when she consummates the relationship with Kai Jing—“I felt wild and new . . . and if this was bad fate, let it be. I was the daughter of Precious Auntie, a woman who also could not control her desires, who gave birth to me” (Tan, 2001, p. 279). All in all, Precious Auntie participates actively in determining the course of LuLing’s character development. This is relevant to the object relations theory which emphasizes the influence of primary caregivers.

LuLing and Ruth. Ayers, Baum and McManus (2007) stated that irregular development occurs when early caregiver containment is insufficient or when there is major stress on development like trauma. Ruth goes through a significant amount of trauma caused by LuLing’s bitterness and frequent threats to end her own life. Ruth describes LuLing’s death threats as “earthquakes” where she will be “upended and flung about, unable to keep

her balance” (Tan, 2001, p. 54). Even as an adult, her mother’s threats still “never ceased to grab her by the throat” (Tan, 2001, p. 111). Parallel to what the object relations theory advocates, LuLing has a huge influence on Ruth’s identity formation. Enduring her mother’s erratic behavior from childhood to adulthood makes Ruth a reserved person who usually opts to keep her feelings to herself. In addition, her relationship with Art deteriorates due to her over-accommodating attitude, causing Art to take her for granted (Tan, 2001, p. 21). Later, he tells Ruth—You keeps secrets inside of you. You hide (Tan, 2001, p. 387). LuLing’s depressed nature forces her to deviate from normal and healthy parenting. This drawback has a harmful effect on Ruth’s personality.

Daniels (2007) believed that our relationships with important people allow us to incorporate parts of others and construct a self-structure. Although LuLing and Ruth share an unstable relationship, Ruth does integrate parts of her mother’s behavior into her own character. For example, she shares LuLing’s strong resolve to achieve her goals in life. When Ruth discovers that her mother’s memory is being ravished by dementia, she is determined to learn about LuLing’s past. She hires a translator to decipher her mother’s memoir which is written in Mandarin and tells herself that “she would ask her mother to tell her about her life. For once, she would ask. . . . She would sit down and not be in a hurry or have anything else to do” (Tan, 2001, p. 168). Ruth even moves in with LuLing to take care of her despite the fact that it will threaten her relationship with Art. Although she does not realize it, Ruth is very much like her mother in the sense that once she sets a goal, she will not stop until she achieves it.

Despite inheriting some of LuLing’s attributes, Ruth avoids picking up the depressed attitude that her mother displays. At times, Ruth “becomes resolute in wanting to be the exact opposite of her mother” (Tan, 2001, p. 155). She is in fear of becoming irrational and angry at the world like LuLing. During arguments, she constantly reminds herself to “sound

reasonable and unassailable like Art” (Tan, 2001, p. 21). Ruth inexorably develops a strong urge to detach herself from LuLing. She begins to keep secrets which range from smoking to thinking that she was pregnant at eleven. It also becomes part of her nature to stay away from her mother when she is an adult. She does this to avoid being overwhelmed by LuLing’s depression.

Schachter and Ventura (2008) believed that parents are identity agents as they actively interact with children with the purpose of participating in their identity formation. LuLing contributes immensely by revealing her past to Ruth, enabling her daughter to discover a side of her which she has never acknowledged—her ethnic identity. After reading the manuscript, Ruth is able to relate positively to her Chinese heritage and embraces it more willingly. It also bridges the gap between mother and daughter as understanding blossoms between both parties. At last, Ruth learns the reasons behind LuLing’s erratic behavior and obsession with Precious Auntie. As she now sees her mother in a new light, she wants to tell her, “I’m sorry and I forgive you too” (Tan, 2001, p. 353). All in all, LuLing saves her daughter from despair and gives her an opportunity to improve her life. She can be categorized as an identity agent because her actions help strengthen Ruth’s identity.

Attachment, Frustration and Rejection

The object relations theory includes three fundamental “affects” that make up the crucial building blocks of a person’s identity (*Q & A on Object Relations*, 2010). These “affects” consist of attachment, rejection and frustration. The daughters in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* undergo all three stages before they can construct fuller identities with their mothers’ help.

Attachment. At this stage, the ego yearns to carry out steady relationships with others with whom they identify with (*Q & A on Object Relations*, 2010). The daughters have some

sort of attachment to their mothers. LuLing always regards Precious Auntie as her mother although she is unaware of it initially. She reveals that “I thought the words “Precious Auntie” were the same as what others meant by “Ma” and I could not bear to be separated from Precious Auntie for even one moment” (Tan, 2001, p. 205). Precious Auntie continually guards LuLing’s welfare, thus, LuLing identifies greatly with her. In Ruth’s case, there is an attachment to LuLing as she is the only parent present. Hence, despite sharing a difficult relationship, Ruth identifies to some extent with her mother. When she breaks her arm at six, Ruth sees tears streaming down LuLing’s cheeks. She realizes then that her mother is not angry with her, that she is worried and full of love (Tan, 2001, p. 78). Ruth often wishes that they had a less complicated relationship, implying her desire for more attachment.

People of the attachment stage have trouble with attachments that are intensely held with people or situations that are “working” for them (*Q & A on Object Relations*, 2010). LuLing falls into this category when she becomes obsessed with Precious Auntie. Blaming herself immensely for her mother’s death, LuLing becomes a miserable and overly superstitious woman. She regularly speaks of death and curses that will return to harm her family. She even believes that her mother’s ghost is still around. When Ruth suggests to LuLing that she may be depressed, she retorts back “Of course depress. When Precious Auntie die, all happiness leave my body” (Tan, 2001, p. 109). This statement clearly indicates how deep her attachment is to her mother and that she is unable to let her go even after so many years.

Frustration. Riso and Hudson (2000) stated that people of this stage think that their comfort and needs are not taken care of sufficiently. The self is depicted as “hungry” where there is discomfort or dissatisfaction. At certain points in their life, the daughters in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* experience frustration towards their mothers. For LuLing, it happens when she turns fourteen and starts looking down upon Precious Auntie—“The bigger I grew,

the more she shrank in importance” (Tan, 2001, p. 205). She is “hungry” for the attention of the Liu mother. She yearns to belong to the Liu family and wants them to favor her more wholeheartedly. Since Mother is the number one ranking lady of the house—“She decided what we ate, how much pocket money we received . . .,” LuLing increases her respect for her (Tan, 2001, p. 206). She is frustrated that Precious Auntie is an outcast in the Liu family. She is also dissatisfied with her life as she is taken care of by Precious Auntie instead of Mother, who showers attention on GaoLing, her younger “sister”.

In Ruth’s case, she is “hungry” because she feels that LuLing fails to see to her comfort and immerses her in an environment full of despair instead. Ruth is extremely traumatized by LuLing’s uncontrollable behavior—“She used to wish that her mother were more like Auntie Gal. She didn’t talk about ghosts or bad luck or ways she might die” (Tan, 2001, p. 52). In short, Ruth is “hungry” for a normal life where there is no need to fret about her mother’s state of mind. Besides, she is frustrated of her mother’s poor command of English. She is forced to serve as LuLing’s mouthpiece since English is the mainstream language of America. By the age of ten, she was the English-speaking “Mrs. LuLing Young” on the telephone and the one who made appointments for the doctor (Tan, 2001, p. 50). Ruth is extremely dissatisfied with her life because her mother is too Chinese for her liking. She desires to lead an American life where life is not bound by superstitions or strict traditions.

Rejection. According to Riso and Hudson (2000), the self in the rejection group is involuntarily seen as victimized while others are categorized as abusive and controlling. There are times where the daughters view their mothers as abusive as they think that they are deliberately going against their pursuit of happiness. When LuLing receives a marriage proposal from Chang to marry his son, Precious Auntie begs her to reject it. She writes down her past when LuLing ignores her, hoping that she will change her mind after discovering that she is her mother. However, LuLing lies that she has already read it and says—“Even if the

whole Chang family were murderers and thieves, I would join them just to get away from you” (Tan, 2001, p. 241). She is angry that Precious Auntie is so controlling when it comes to the major decisions of her life. She believes that Precious Auntie wants to ensnarl her in her world of misery. Precious Auntie then commits suicide to protect her daughter. LuLing discovers the truth a step too late and regrets it for the rest of her life.

People of the rejection group expect to be rejected and hence, they protect themselves in various ways (*Q & A on Object Relations*, 2010). Ruth suffers greatly because of LuLing’s despondent behavior. To protect herself from her mother’s frenzy, Ruth trains herself to be immune to her mother’s frequent outbursts. She is sometimes portrayed as shockingly rude and insensitive to LuLing’s feelings. At sixteen, Ruth is horrified to discover that her mother is secretly reading her diary. Filled with rage, she scribbles harsh words into her diary, knowing full well that her mother will read them—“You talk about killing yourself, so why don’t you ever do it? Precious Auntie wants you to, and so do I!” (Tan, 2001, p. 159). This is a method of protecting herself because writing those words make Ruth feel a sense of freedom where she can finally admit openly that she wants to hurt her mother as much as her mother hurt her. This detachment from LuLing continues into adulthood where Ruth hardly finds time to visit her. It is another way of defending herself as she does not want to be engulfed in the hopelessness that LuLing radiates.

The Personality Development Theory: How Culture Influences Identity Development

The personality development theory emphasizes that human development occurs according to the epigenetic principle where there are eight stages. Cherry (2010a) claims that every stage has a psychosocial crisis and one needs to handle it well to gain the ego strength required to proceed to the next stage. Failure to do so will cause a sense of inadequacy, mental problems or certain behavioral tendencies (Schultz & Schultz, 2005). I have selected

only the Adolescence stage for my study because *The Bonesetter's Daughter* does explore this phase. I will simultaneously explain how culture interferes with the identity formation process and how it disrupts the mother-daughter relationship between LuLing and Ruth.

Adolescence: Identity versus role confusion.

The Adolescence stage takes place during puberty where individuals are trying to discover who they are while struggling with social interactions and developing a sense of morality (*Erikson's Stages of Development*, 2008). The objective of this stage is to achieve ego identity and avoid role confusion. In the novel, the occurrence of role confusion is most prominent in Ruth, who is of American-Chinese parentage. Her mother, LuLing, is a native Chinese who migrates to America whereas her father, Edwin Young, is American. Her mixed heritage causes Ruth some woe as she is more inclined towards the American culture and is rather unappreciative of her Chinese roots.

Chapman (2010) believed that role confusion happens when people cannot see who they are clearly and how they can relate positively to their environment. Ruth experiences this throughout her adolescence as she can neither identify herself for sure as Chinese nor American. Although she is American by birth and desperately wants to lead an American life, Ruth cannot completely deny her Chinese heritage. LuLing, for one, is a constant reminder of her ancestry. A native from China, LuLing refuses to assimilate into the American culture and adamantly stands by the Chinese ways of thinking (Tan, 2001, p. 49). She leads a very Chinese life and brings Ruth up according to the authoritarian Chinese parenting style. LuLing's attitude frustrates Ruth greatly as she is unable to relate optimistically to a Chinese environment. The clash of cultures generates many misunderstandings and this causes a rift in the relationship between mother and daughter.

Erikson maintained that youths would try forming their identities by over-identifying

with cliques or heroes (*Identity/Identity Formation*, 2011). Ruth shuns her Chinese-ness during her adolescence and commits herself wholeheartedly to being American. Her reluctance in embracing her heritage can be attributed to the fact that she is surrounded by a different and more dominant culture. Ruth is practically immersed in an American lifestyle since she was born. She has American friends, an American education and thus, an American mentality. Like any other teenager, Ruth is filled with the huge need to fit in the crowd. Since she identifies with the American society, she avoids integrating any of the Chinese behaviors that her mother displays. Ruth even has a habit of associating her mother's "embarrassing" attitude with the Chinese culture. Hence, she views her racial background in a very negative light.

Ryckman (2004) emphasized that most teenagers become very clannish and intolerant of others whom they deem as "different." Therefore, the only way for one to join in is to assimilate into the group's culture or customs. Ruth adheres to this concept by adopting the American ways of life. At sixteen, she begins smoking which is a norm among American teenagers. Most Chinese parents, however, would probably frown upon such behavior. When LuLing discovers that Ruth is smoking, she launches into an angry tirade. Ruth then shouts back "I'm an American! I have a right to privacy . . ." (Tan, 2001, p. 158). This declaration indicates Ruth's deep desire to be recognized as an American. At fifteen, she also begins stealing money from LuLing to buy "forbidden things" like mascara, movie tickets or Marlboro cigarettes (Tan, 2001, p. 155). Such things are common among American teenagers. She refuses to be Chinese because it is "different." Thus, she adamantly does things that are deemed as "normal" by American teenagers.

The personality development theory proposes that teenagers behave in a way that is characterized as totalism. This means that there is a setting of absolute boundaries in one's values, belief and interpersonal relationships (Ryckman, 2004, p. 184). During her

adolescence, Ruth staunchly believes that anything American is better. She often thinks herself as deprived of an American life because of LuLing's Chinese upbringing. She is never allowed to have Western food like chocolate milk, doughnuts and ice-cream sandwiches (Tan, 2001, p. 40). While LuLing counts her fingers in the Chinese style by pointing first to her baby finger and bending each finger down towards her palm, Ruth keeps her own fingers open and splayed, American style (Tan, 2001, p. 20). She even "falls in love" with her American neighbor named Lance at the age of eleven. Therefore, it is clear that Ruth has set up a boundary where she believes that Chinese values are of a lower standard compared to American values.

Davis and Clifton (1995) stated that when one successfully resolves role confusion, ego identity is achieved. For Ruth, this happens when LuLing reveals her background story to her. As she now sees her mother in a different light, Ruth realises the value and reason of LuLing's survival mentality. She becomes aware of her mother's heroism and hence, is less resistant to identifying with LuLing and more receptive to her wisdom. Instead of seeing herself as the daughter of an embarrassing Chinese mother, she changes her perception and now views herself as the daughter of a courageous and resilient mother. This newly found perception reinforces her identity in a positive way as it makes her stronger. Ruth eventually admits that her grandmother and mother "are the women who shaped her life, who are in her bones. They caused her to question whether the order and disorder of her life were due to fate or luck, self-determination or the actions of others" (Tan, 2001, p. 402).

Resolution of crises allows people to build stronger self-identities (*Identity/Identity Formation*, 2011). It also enables a person to achieve a sense of fidelity. LuLing's past enables Ruth to accomplish this sense of fidelity where she finally finds her place in the community. Before the revelation, she is reluctant to accept her Chinese roots and only desires to be known as an American. After learning her mother's story, however, a new

awareness emerges and it prompts Ruth to appreciate her own heritage. She is now able to see the beauty behind the meaning of Chinese traditions and words—“Ruth had once thought Chinese was limited in its sounds and thus confusing. It seemed to her now that its multiple meanings made it very rich” (Tan, 2001, p. 398). Boeree (2009) emphasized that ego identity occurs when people take everything that they have learned about life and themselves and merge it into an integrated self-image. This is exactly what Ruth does when she incorporates the lessons that she learns from LuLing’s past and combines it to establish a more solid ethnic identity. These values also empower her with the courage to mend her unsatisfactory life and relationship with her mother.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Ann Oakley once said “Women as the guardians of children possess a great power. They are the molders of their children’s personalities and the arbiters of their development” (*Mothers Quotations*, 2010). This quote clearly reflects the importance of a mother’s role when it comes to the identity formation of her children. Research from Pennsylvania State University revealed that the tie between mothers and daughters is so enduring that 80 to 90 percent of women in mid-life state that they have a good relationship with their mother even though there are conflicts and complex feelings (*Mother Daughter Relationship*, 2011). Along the process of growing up, a daughter observes her mother’s actions and may consciously or unconsciously integrate some of those traits into the developing self. Therefore, mothers have the power to set the course of their daughters’ lives.

Summary of Analysis

In *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, the daughters have to confront secrecy and cultural barriers in their quest to make peace with their mothers. Precious Auntie and LuLing share a tragic yet enduring relationship. Upon discovering that Precious Auntie is her mother, LuLing is able to fill the gap in herself and reinforce her identity. Her mother’s suicide, however, haunts her and makes her a miserable woman. LuLing’s uncontrollable behavior affects Ruth’s personality in a negative way. Ruth grows up reserved and regularly accommodates to other people’s wants. As she is unable to situate herself in her mother’s world, a host of misunderstandings occurs. But after learning about her mother’s past, Ruth finally sees the reasons behind LuLing’s mentality with renewed clarity. This new understanding enables mother and daughter to reconcile. They also discover the value of forgiveness and learn how

to accept each other.

The influence that the mothers have on the daughters' characters is illustrated by the object relations theory. Marshall (1998) claimed that early interactions with one's caregivers, especially parents, shape one's identity. It is relevant to the novel as the mothers are ones who determine the personalities of their daughters. This theory has three main "affects" which include attachment, frustration and rejection. The daughters undergo these stages before they can build more concrete identities. The attachment stage is where the daughters identify with their mothers despite having a complex relationship. The frustration stage occurs when the daughters begin to feel dissatisfaction towards their mothers. At this stage, they start to retaliate against their mother's wishes. Finally, the rejection stage takes place when the daughters begin viewing their mothers as abusive and defend themselves in various ways.

The issue of culture and identity development in the novel can be explained from the perspective of the personality development theory. This theory emphasizes that human development unfolds in eight stages. There is a psychosocial crisis in every stage and one needs to resolve it appropriately to proceed to other stages (Cherry, 2010a). For the Adolescence stage, the job is to achieve ego identity and keep away from role confusion. Ruth is sent spiraling into role confusion due to her mixed heritage. Being a teenager, she yearns to fit into her surroundings. Thus, she embraces the American ways of life and stubbornly denies her Chinese heritage because she links it to LuLing's "humiliating" behavior. At the end of the story, however, Ruth succeeds in achieving ego identity and acquires a sense of fidelity after learning about LuLing's past. Once she acknowledges her mother and Chinese ancestry, Ruth is able to build a stronger ethnic identity.

Recommendations for Further Research

For further research, one can explore how symbols are used to further enhance the storyline of *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. A symbol is when a person uses an object to stand for something else or to mean something else (*Literary Devices*, 2001). There are several symbols in the novel that stand out. One of these symbols is the un-translated or unread manuscripts. Cujec (2003) stated that the manuscripts symbolise how misunderstood the mothers are by the daughters in the story. Just like how the manuscripts are left ignored by the daughters, the mothers are blindsided by them most of the time. The daughters also often use words like “miserable”, “embarrassing” and “incomprehensible” to describe their mothers. Therefore, it is apparent that there is a huge gap between mother and daughter due to the frequent conflicts and misunderstandings that occur.

The object relations theory and personality development theory can be employed to Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*. This novel's storyline shares a similar theme with *The Bonesetter's Daughter*—the mother-daughter relationship. It is the story of four immigrant Chinese women and their respective daughters. The mothers, who have experienced war and famine back in China, find themselves suffering from cultural alienation in America. In contrast, the daughters are middle aged women who are facing uncertainty in relationships and depression. Like Ruth, they cannot fathom their mothers' behavior. For Jing-Mei Woo, she resents her mother's determination to prove that she is a prodigy. From calling her a Chinese Shirley Temple to forcing her to play the piano, Suyuan Woo does everything she can to discover her daughter's “talents” (Tan, 1989, p. 132). Her mother's relentless attitude causes their relationship to sour. The theories can be used to study the complicated mother-daughter relationships and how the daughters manage to construct stronger identities with their mothers' guidance.

All in all, the mothers participate actively when it concerns the identity formation of

their daughters. They have a great influence on the daughters' developing personalities even though their relationships are not smooth sailing all the time. The daughters in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* are given the opportunity to uncover another side of themselves with the help of their mothers. This revelation gives them a new lease of life and imbues them with the courage needed to face challenges. The mothers' choices of revealing their pasts also enable both parties to fix their difficult relationship. There is reconciliation and healing as mother and daughter put behind past disagreements and begin anew.

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