

Book Review

Mothers and Daughters: Complicated Connections across Cultures

Alice H. Deakins, Rebecca Bryant Lockridge and Helen M. Sterk
(Eds). Plymouth: UP of America, 2012. 318 pages

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Academic conversation involving placement of the mother figure arguably began with Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born* in 1976. *Mothers and Daughters* enters this conversation but reveals a new voice, that of the sustained mother-daughter relationship. Through a "reflection on the role played by communication in creating, developing and maintaining mother-daughter relationships" (xii) the locus of *Mothers and Daughters* then becomes the way in which communication markers from language to cultural assumption to genetic heritage influence pre-existing mother-daughter relationships. *Mothers and Daughters* creates a shift in the scope of much contemporary "Mother" scholarship by its focus on the communication in pre-existing and contemporary mother-daughter discourse. In its execution it reinforces much of the personal, even anecdotal, voice of much mother-based scholarship. In no way ameliorating the effect of the scholarship of the piece, at many times this personal academic voice carries a touch of verisimilitude to claims related to mother narratives that are individual, communal and, in this book's content, even global.

The greatest strength of the book is its refusal to backtrack in scholarship. In doing so, most essays present an intriguing outcome from pre-existing mother-daughter related research. For example, in Sterk and Feikema's "Birthing: Daughter's Transitions to Motherhood" the creation of the "Birthing Project" foregrounds the essay. The ultra-modern take on birth and the birthing process results in discussion of the folklore of the mother, with mothers in the birth process assuming roles of "experience sharers," "information givers," "situated helpers," and " 'Ghostly' helpers." The scholarship's forward motion results in

constantly evolving motherhood rhetoric that paints mothers in a malleable light dictated by her relationship with her daughter.

Each essay focuses on contemporary issues of motherdom and the ways in which that state is communicated by and within daughters. Though somewhat anecdotal in scope, the collection of essays includes discussions of motherly embodiment, motherly desertion, and the at times the indefinable state of “motherhood.” Only rooting itself in a global perspective about halfway through the collection, *Mothers and Daughters* discusses the progression of culturally dictated mother-daughter relationships within peoples such as Peruvians, contemporary Asians and Central Americas. Although there is an overarching discussion of mother-daughter communication in a global sphere, there exists a significant amount of dialogue of Western motherhood. The exploration of the Western mother serves as a useful bridge into the cross-cultural dialogue of motherhood. In inadvertently layering the communication of the American mother-daughter against the Chinese mother-daughter relationship a dialogue between cultures forms. The evolution of the cross-cultural dialogue offsets any tendencies towards Eurocentricity and instead allows for a fulfilling analysis of the expectations, marginalizations and outcomes of a continuous focus on mother-daughter interaction.

The single essay that subsists for “Section IV: Mother-Daughter Connections Around the Thought” seems somewhat an afterthought, a kind of apologia to the at times quasi-subjective work previously presented by means of a seemingly random listing of maternal traditions throughout the globe, ranging from dowry in India to maternal lineage in Japan. This essay, “Mothers in Daughters in a Global Village,” is indicative of the range of material within the collection. It is well-researched, innovative, though at times cloyingly personal, but does not create a complete logical correlative with the rest of the collection’s essays. The theme of mother-daughter relationship and communication is present in the essays, but the unpacking of each essay’s information seems tenuously related. Overall, it is the thematic organization of *Mothers and Daughters* that takes most away from its mother-daughter insight. Perhaps a collection less grounded in and colored by personal accounts of motherdom and nostalgic memories of mother-figures but instead grounded in an objective, systematic discussion of sustained

cross-cultural mother-daughter relationships would be more affective.

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