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This study describes a content analysis of young adult literature. Eight novels were selected and examined in regards to mother-daughter relationships and the presentation of daughters' individuation. The focus of this paper is the presence of emotional separation due to daughters' wishes to be independent from mothers.

Based on the findings, novels in young adult literature do not present the process of individuation for adolescent daughters; rather, characters are either fully individuated at the start of the narrative or they struggle to begin their self-actualization throughout the novel. While daughters begin their individuation, their emotional evolutions are marked by strained relationships with their mothers.

Headings:

Content analysis--Young adult literature/Identity (psychology) in adolescence

Young adult literature—Evaluation

Young adult literature--Psychological aspects

Adolescence in literature/Adolescence--Psychology

Mother-Daughter Relationships in Young Adult Literature: A Content Analysis of
Adolescent Individuation by
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Introduction

Ask any woman how she felt about her mother during her own adolescence, and chances are, she will respond with a grimace and gruesome stories about her painful transition, both for herself and her mother, into womanhood. Young adult literature often presents images and experiences of mother-daughter turmoil as a common theme, and readers are able to recognize themselves in the realistic portrayal of familial structure and common problems. Because so many young adult titles are problem-centered, readers can experience and react to characters and their emotions without having to actually go through the same events.

Although many young adult novels' topics include mother-daughter relationships, few are solely about the relationships (what fourteen-year-old would want to read an entire novel about a mother?). Instead, realistic works present mothers and daughters reacting to true to life events, such as discovering sexuality, the teen's changing peer relationships, achievement problems or successes in school, and decisions about drug and alcohol use. By watching mothers and daughters react to common problems, readers are able to process their own opinions about their relationships with their mothers.

Problem

There is much to be learned from young adult literature: what does it say about current mother-daughter relationships? While there is research on the mother-daughter relationship in the fields of psychology and women's studies, there is relatively little

presented on how current literature portrays this inevitable transition for women. When daughters try to assert their independence in adolescence, mothers react in a number of ways. Theorists present ideas about this individuation, but there is a gap in the ways in which young adult literature portrays this same event. Does young adult literature show the struggle for daughters' independence and separation from their mothers? How is this separation handled, and what could be learned from these fictional relationships?

Research Question

Is the process of individuation marked by strained emotional separation during adolescence? How is the process of adolescent girls' individuation presented in young adult literature?

Literature Review

The specific relationships between mothers and their adolescent daughters has only been recently examined in psychoanalytic and women's studies research. Though the second wave of feminism increased interest in women's relationships with each other, there is still relatively little presented about mothers and teenage daughters. What everyone seems to know is this: mothers and daughters have always had strained relationships, especially during the adolescent years. What they cannot agree upon are the reasons why this time is so emotionally volatile for girls and their mothers. Theorists who believe that the struggle is inevitable offer strategies to combat the worst of the adolescent years, while those who believe the turmoil is society's fault argue for a better appreciation of women, and in turn, a stronger idea of the good that mothers can do.

Many people believe that the transition from girlhood to womanhood, marked mostly during adolescence, is naturally a difficult time for all involved. In their book, *"I'm not mad, I just hate you!" A New Understanding of the Mother-Daughter conflict*, Roni Cohen-Sandler and Michelle Silver present a how-to manual for mothers that examines how mothers can relate to and understand what girls are going through to have more comfortable relationships. The authors present the developmental tasks that daughters go through to remind mothers what it takes to be an adolescent girl.

Daughters, throughout their adolescence, must face the following obstacles and overcome them before becoming self aware adults: physical maturation; finding identity; becoming independent; achieving in school; and establishing peer relationships. Teenage girls often become self-absorbed, assert Cohen-Sandler and Silver, because they have so much to deal with and overcome.

While teenage daughters are learning how to exist in the world, their mothers must also adapt. Evelyn Bassoff's book, *Loving and Letting Go*, is another resource meant for women to use to better understand the changes that occur for the mother-daughter relationship during the daughter's adolescence. According to Bassoff, until the 1980's, "developmental psychologists implied that while adolescents undergo their dramatic inner changes, their mothers stand by unchangeable, stable and resolute" (6). Bassoff rejects this notion and asserts that the mother must begin new parenting strategies to change her coping mechanisms, both for herself and how she helps her daughter to cope. She writes, "as parent she [(mother)] must give up earlier ways of mothering and learn new ones; as an individual she must enlarge her boundaries beyond the home by contributing in new ways to the world through political, social, occupational, or creative activities" (6).

Others believe that the relationships between mothers and their adolescent daughters would be less strained if societal norms were not harming the familial structure, particularly the relationships between women. Debold, Wilson and Malave argue that society "tells mothers that each child must separate to achieve autonomy. This is a lie. This distorted view of good mothering places a mother's feelings at odds with cultural perceptions of what is necessary for her child's growth and well-being. Moreover, this lie of separation leads mothers into an unintentional betrayal of daughters." 17

Indeed, parenting experts assert that parents must let their children go in order for them to assert their independence. Bassoff believes that even though it is difficult, the separation is of utmost importance:

The major task adolescents confront is to form an identity separate from that of their parents-- a unique, firm sense of self. This process involves discovering their beliefs and values, their wishes, desires, and dreams. They need to find their own way in the world and develop confidence that they are strong enough to survive outside the protective family. Ultimately, young women must answer the questions, "Who am I?" and "Where am I going?" To accomplish this task, they need to wrench themselves from their developing selfhood. Almost always Mother is the most threatening. 2-4

This, according to Debold, Wilson and Malave is the lie that mothers are told, and it is the myth that ultimately causes the strain upon the relationship between mother and daughter. The idea that mothers should force their daughters into independence, according to Debold, Wilson, and Malave, is perpetuated so that children may enter the patriarchal society of independence in which we live more easily. Because men and boys are expected to be strong and independent, mothers believe their daughters, too, should be separated from them. *Mother-Daughter Revolution* argues for interdependence over independence.

In *Language of Love and Guilt*, authors Wodak and Shulz agree that society's changing norms for mothers, specifically working mothers, does alter the way in which mothers and daughters react. However, they still believe that individuation and separation are requirements for the daughter. They write:

One would expect present mother-daughter relationships to reflect strongly not only the usual conflicts resulting from separation and individuation, and from the current social changes in how women appraise themselves and evaluate their femininity. Today much of a mother's lifestyle-- if she still lives according to traditional values-- must be rejected as the main female model for her daughter if the daughter is to create a non-traditional role for herself. 3

If the daughter rejects much of what the mother values, the likelihood of a strained relationship is increased.

Methodology

This study is a content analysis of young adult literature to examine the presentation of mother-daughter relationships, and to understand the presence (or absence) of teenage girls' individuation and separation in the novels. Content analysis is "the study of recorded human communications," (Babbie 320) and in this study the communications are recorded in young adult novels. Communications data is analyzed in terms of latent content, the "underlying meaning" (Babbie 325). Characters' reactions, in terms of emotional expression, are clearly presented and quoted. Latent content is used to further interpret characters' actions and opinions.

Procedure

The first step in this study is to define individuation. *A Dictionary of Psychology* defines individuation as "the act or process of giving individuality to someone or something." Carl Gustav Jung is quoted as describing individuation in this way: "Individuation means becoming a single, homogenous being, and, in so far as 'individuality' embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self". For the purposes of this paper, individuation will reflect this definition, with a focus on Jung's ideas that individuation reflects "becoming one's own self" (Dictionary of Psychology).

In regards to identifying acts of individuation in the novels, particular attention will be paid to attitudes, comments, thoughts and actions that either represent personal beliefs and values or that reject the mother's (or family's) expectations or values. This could be represented through verbal contradiction, rebelling against family guidelines, or asserting personal opinions and preferences. As adolescents begin to demonstrate

individual thinking and beliefs, quotations and passages from the novels will be explored. If characters do not demonstrate acts of individuation, self-awareness (a beginning to individuation) will be identified. In this case, if adolescents become further attuned to their emotional surroundings and to themselves, these examples will be recorded as well. Young adult literature is a broad term, and this paper will examine novels whose catalog records and Novelist entries cite the appropriate age range to be between 12 and 18, or Novelist entries whose reading levels are categorized “teens”.

After completing an independent study and survey of 30 young adult novels, 8 were chosen based on themes prevalent in the wider body of literature whose characters include one present mother and one present daughter. The themes selected are: friendship, self-esteem, sexuality, physical abuse, body image, grief, adoption, and religion and spirituality. Examined in chronological order of publication dates, the novels are:

Zindel, Paul. *The Pigman*. (1968)

Danzinger, Paula. *The Cate Ate My Gymsuit* (1974)

Blume, Judy. *Forever. . .* (1975)

Dessen, Sarah. *Dreamland* (2000)

Mackler, Carolyn. *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things* (2003)

Dessen, Sarah. *The Truth About Forever* (2004)

Reinhardt, Dana. *A Brief Chapter in My Impossible Life* (2006)

Wittlinger, Ellen. *Blind Faith* (2006)

For a brief synopsis of each novel, see the Appendix.

After each novel was read, the presentation of individuation in the mother-daughter relationship was recorded. They were then examined for similarities and finally, conclusions were made about the presentation of individuation and how it affects characters in young adult novels.

Results

The Pigman

Paul Zindel's novel presents innovative ideas about friendship, between adolescents who are the opposite sex as well as intergenerational bonds. Though his depiction of the unlikely friendship between John Conlan and Lorraine Jensen and Angelo Pignati is relatively progressive, the presentation of the relationship between Lorraine and her mother is fairly traditionally strained. Alternately narrated by John and Lorraine, the novel offers opposing viewpoints of characters and their lives independent from each other. These opposing viewpoints are noticeably about Lorraine and her mother, from almost the beginning of the novel.

In her first chapter, Lorraine quickly tells readers "you might as well know I'm not the most beautiful girl in the world. I'm not Venus or Harlow. Just ask my mother" (11). She goes on to relate frequent comments her mother makes, such as "You're not a pretty girl, Lorraine." According to Lorraine, her mother "has been nice enough to inform me on a few occasions (as if I didn't remember the first time she ever said it)," and she goes on to list other flaws her mother points out. Lorraine writes, "If I made a list of every comment she's made about me, you'd think I was a monstrosity. I may not be Miss America, but I am not the abominable snowwoman either" (11). Though Lorraine makes assertions that her mother is incorrect with her statements, it is clear throughout the novel that her mother's words do take their toll.

John knows that Lorraine does in fact worry about her appearance, and in his next chapter he defends her appearance: "The way her old lady talks you'd think Lorraine needed internal plastic surgery and seventeen body braces, but if you ask me, all she

needs is a little confidence” (19). Throughout the novel, Lorraine wavers between rejection of her mother’s opinions and acquiescence, which is typical of adolescent girls’ development. Lorraine admits “it’s not exactly easy being her daughter” (51), but she also expresses pity for her mother, saying “I often wonder how she got this way” (51), and feeling guilty for making her mother angry.

Lorraine presents this conflict of emotions when her mother wants her to skip school to clean the house. When she tells her mother she cannot skip because she has a Latin test and that she cannot make it up, she reveals she said no “quietly, hoping she wouldn’t explode. Sometimes it’s just the way I say one word that gets her going, and she’s so quick with her hand it’s hard to think of her being gentle with sick people” (53). Lorraine’s mother, who is a nurse, snaps with “I can’t go out and earn a living and keep this house decent. You’ve got to do something” (53).

Though it is reasonable for a parent to expect assistance in household maintenance, Lorraine’s mother is incapable of understanding her own responsibilities as a mother. Asking Lorraine to skip school, which should be her main priority as a 15 year old, indicates Ms. Conlan’s convoluted expectations. Instead of wishing to understand her daughter, she longs for a partner in life to help her.

Eventually, Lorraine learns to speak up, even though she still thinks “it was easy to feel sorry for her, to see how awful her life was-- even to understand why she picked on me so” (86). After Lorraine comes home from ruining Mr. Pignati’s house in the party, she finally confronts her mother by screaming, “No, Mother” (160). She continues her narrative, finally acknowledging her feelings about her mother and the way she is treated:

I wanted to scream the thoughts that were flashing in my mind at her. I wanted to tell her how she didn't know anything about me-- how she hadn't noticed I happened to be a human being myself... that I wasn't still the little girl that waved from the window when she stood at the bus stop. Look at me, I wanted to yell, can't you see I'm growing up and I've got to have friends? That I *want* to have friends-- that I need other people in the world besides you! 161

Though Lorraine does not share these accusations with her mother, they do sit down and discuss what has been happening in their lives. It is not a quick fix, but Lorraine's anger has allowed her to individuate herself from her mother. She finally understands her own needs, and she also understands why her mother resents her for her newfound independence. Zindel does not offer a quick or easy fix to the relationship, thus accurately portraying the mother-daughter struggle, but readers can feel satisfied that Lorraine is finally on the path to self-acceptance and individuation.

The Pigman is wrought with underage smoking and drinking, but it is, on the whole a lesson about responsibility: responsibility to oneself and to one's friends. John and Lorraine discover a respect for someone older than they and a deeper connection between each other, and Lorraine discovers the responsibility she has to herself as a human. Her individuation will lead her, hopefully, to a greater appreciation and knowledge of her true self.

The Cat Ate My Gymsuit

Paula Danzinger's novel about Marcy Lewis' struggle for self-esteem is a prime example of the mother-daughter relationship's changes during the second wave of feminism. While Marcy's mother, Lily, tries to rectify her feelings about her life and her thoughts, Marcy is busy hating her life: "I hate my father. I hate school. I hate being fat" (1). Though Marcy's narration focuses on Ms. Finney, her English teacher, and her

volatile relationship with her father, readers are aware of a much more present attention to her relationship with her mother.

Marcy's home life, as she sees it, is terrible. Early in the novel she explains how typical family fights begin and end. Her father critiques Marcy about her weight, saying he does not care if she makes good grades because she is inconsiderate and overweight, and when her mother tries to defend her, it starts a family fight. "My mother would try to tell him to stop, but he wouldn't listen. They'd get into a fight and she'd start to cry and then go get a tranquilizer" (26). Later, after Marcy storms to her room, she continues: "My mother would come in and hug me and tell me everything would be O.K., but that I really should lose some weight and look like everyone else" (27). Marcy's mother struggles throughout the novel to break away from her husband's beliefs, and she relies on Marcy to help her along.

Because of Lily's dependence on Marcy, readers are aware of a disjointed and unhealthy tendency in this mother-daughter relationship. When Lily sees what a positive influence Ms. Finney is having on Marcy, she worries that the teacher may take away her role and importance in life. She asks, "Honey, do you love Miss Finney more than me?" (46) Though Marcy replies that she does not, of course, love her teacher more than her mother, Marcy does know that the values Ms. Finney teaches, like respect for oneself and others, are more valuable to her than those of her mother. Instead of teaching her daughter to appreciate herself for who she is, Lily tries to show Marcy how to live in the misogynistic world she lives in, saying, "Honey, I'm sorry it's like this. You've got to learn to live with it. I'm sorry. I love you very much" (52). Marcy's desire for a new set of values, which were beginning to be more main stream in her society, threatens Lily at

first, but eventually Lily learns to accept a new and more respectful attitude for herself and women.

Once Lily begins to emulate the respect for herself that Marcy has found, she stands up for herself and contradicts her husband. Marcy's father does not take this new-found independence well, and he blames Marcy: "Are you satisfied now? Your mother and I never disagree" (84). Readers are certainly satisfied, because the women in the novel are finally learning to act like they have a choice in the way their lives are lived.

Danzinger's novel moves too quickly in terms of women's liberation and progressive ideas, but she does show a bit of the struggle for individuation. Though Lily is changing, Marcy still wishes her mother would stop caring so much about what other people think: "All of a sudden I felt horrible. Why did she always have to worry about what everybody else is wearing, and why'd she have to remind me that I have to do stuff to draw attention from the neck up because the rest of me is so glunky?" (97)

Both Marcy and her mother are struggling for individuation, but Marcy wishes to individuate herself without her mother's input, and she wants her mother to figure out her problems with someone her own age. When Lily confides, "Marcy, you're so important to me. I don't have anyone else to talk to" (117), Marcy thinks, "Why couldn't she understand? I mean, I'm just a kid. Why couldn't she talk to Mrs. Sheridan or something? Why me?" (118). By the end of the novel, however, Lily has begun to act like the adult Marcy wishes she would be.

Lily's individuation allows her to confront her husband, saying, "Martin, I'm still a good wife, probably better now that I say what I think. Please, let's not fight. I've made up my mind" (131). Later that evening, Lily begins to treat Marcy like the young

person she is, commanding “Want to or not, you must listen to us. There’s no use falling apart. That never solves anything. I’ve learned that” (143).

The Cat Ate My Gymsuit is about the mother’s and the daughter’s search for individuation, and even though both women find themselves, it is a bit unrealistic because of the speed at which they resolve their needs. Perhaps, once the novel is over and the characters go on living, readers can imagine that Marcy will learn more about individuation from her mother, now that Lily has found herself, too.

Forever. . .

In *Forever. . .*, Judy Blume shows that individuation can lead to interdependence between a mother and a daughter. While Katherine’s primary focus in the novel is her sexual activity, passages with her mother depict clear interdependence and appreciation.

When Katherine meets Michael, she immediately tells her mother that she met “a very nice boy” (19). Her sheer willingness to share information with her mother indicates that prior to meeting Michael, she and her mother have a close and open relationship. Katherine’s description of her mother sounds more like a girl describing a friend, with honest information that is not derogatory or charged with bitterness:

My mother’s name is Diana-- Diana Danzinger. It sounds like she should be a movie star or something. Actually, she’s a librarian, in charge of the children’s room at the public library. Mom is naturally thin, so she can eat four cupcakes at one sitting or polish off as much beer as she wants. We are exactly the same size-- five-feet-six and 109 pounds-- but she is sort of flat chested and never wears a bra. 19-20

Though Katherine is not completely forthcoming with information about her sexuality, she and Diana do discuss sex on the way to school one morning. Katherine asks if her mother had been a virgin until she got married, and Diana responds openly and

honestly about her sexual history. Diana then offers this unsolicited advice: “You have to be sure you can handle the situation before you jump into it . . . sex is a commitment . . . once you’re there you can’t go back to holding hands” (93). Diana goes on, “I’m not going to tell you to go ahead but I’m not going to forbid it either. It’s too late for any of that. I expect you to handle it with a sense of responsibility though . . . either way” (93). Katherine seems so grateful for this honest communication that before she gets out of the car, she shares: “We looked at each other for a minute and then I did something I haven’t done in a while. I leaned over and kissed my mother” (93).

By allowing Katherine freedom to individuate herself and make her own decisions, Diana ultimately creates an interdependence between herself and her daughter. The boundaries between them as parent and child still exist (Katherine still must follow her parents’ rules), they are close enough to have friend-like discussions. On Diana’s 40th birthday, she asks Katherine if she is getting fat. Without saying anything directly about her mom’s weight, Katherine offers to show her some exercises to slim down the waistline. They are comfortable enough with each other to know that each can ask questions of the other without fear or embarrassment.

Judy Blume’s portrayal of the mother-daughter relationship is relatively unique, either because it is unbelievable and untrue or because it is how she feels a mother and daughter ought to behave.

Dreamland

In *Dreamland*, Sarah Dessen presents a story about a daughter struggling to find herself while keeping her mother happy and whole. Narrated by Caitlin O’Koren, the

novel covers less than a year of the high school junior's life. When Cass, Caitlin's older sister, runs away from home, the family is thrown into immediate turmoil.

It is almost as if the family has suffered a death. Caitlin admits, "My mother kept Cass's bedroom door shut," as if she were "waiting for her. I was the only one who ever went in there, and when I did the air always smelled stale and strange, pent up like the sorry my mother carries in her shoulders, her heart and her face" (25). Though Margaret, Caitlin's mother, is too occupied to notice Caitlin's own grief, Caitlin sees and notices everything. She recognizes that in Cass's individuation, Margaret has lost much of herself: "now, in claiming her own life, Cass has taken part of my mother's as well" (26).

When Caitlin earns a spot on the cheerleading squad, Margaret temporarily finds herself in Caitlin: "My making cheerleader changed my mother's life" (41). Margaret comes to all the games, sends snacks for away games, and makes sure Caitlin's uniform is always clean and ready. "She had finally found something to concentrate on that was familiar and busy in the strange silence of Cass being gone. She was almost happy. And that should have been enough for me to keep at it" (41). Caitlin soon realizes, however, she hates cheerleading and wants to quit, but she is afraid to hurt her mother. She confesses, "It was like I'd somehow thrown her a life-line, without even meaning to, and to let go right now meant she'd fall back into missing Cass and just drown" (42).

Dessen presents this drowning motif in the beginning of the novel, and she continues it throughout the story to show how each of the female characters is struggling for the breath they need to live. Margaret tries to find herself, and some understanding of why Cass left, unable to believe Cass is really gone. "I still can't believe she could have been unhappy" (96), she tells her friend, and Caitlin, overhearing, knows "my mother still

couldn't fill the space left by my older, more dynamic, more everything sister. We might have felt like things were going on, seasons changing, months passing. But we would have been wrong" (96).

Once the O'Koren family begins spotting Cass on the sidelines of a talk show, Margaret's time is consumed again by Cass, waiting and watching for more glimpses. Caitlin reports, "my mother, now distracted with Cass's *Lamont Whipper* sightings, had eased off on her own involvement in my cheerleading: something that almost would have bothered me, had I really taken the time to think about it" (111). Caitlin is not thinking at all; she is floating, high most of the time with Rogerson.

Rogerson hits Caitlin for the first time in his car, in front of Caitlin's house. When she goes in, worried about "what story I would tell when my mother saw my face and flew into a panic," (147) neither of her parents even see her because they are on the phone with Cass, who has just called. Without even stopping to let it upset her, Caitlin leaves again and seeks the solace of her friend Corinna.

Rogerson begins hitting Caitlin more often, and she becomes accustomed to lying about her actions and hiding the bruises on her body: "it was strange that I didn't even consider telling the truth. I was just stoned and bleary, so cried out that all I could think of was curling up in my bed and going to sleep" (157). She keeps lying, but eventually, the lying takes its toll on Caitlin. She wants to tell her mother everything: "I could tell her right now and fix this. I could say that he hits me and I hate cheerleading and I miss Cass but I know why she left and I wish I could make everything better but I can't, I can't, I can't even tell you where it hurts, not now" (159). Caitlin will not tell her

mother, no matter how much she wants to, because she is still afraid of her mother's possible grief.

One afternoon, Caitlin thinks her mother has finally noticed her weight loss and her depression when Margaret comes in and says, "There are some things a mother can't help but notice" (192). Caitlin admits, "I wondered if this was how it would all end. That maybe she wasn't as blind as I'd thought and had been watching me as closely as she scanned that TV screen each day for a glimpse of her other lost daughter" (192).

Margaret tells Caitlin she is concerned, and Caitlin confesses:

I realized I was holding my own breath, bracing myself for what was coming next. Maybe I would tell her everything, roll up my sleeves and jeans to detail each bruise and blemish. Crumple into her arms and cry [. . .]. Swim up through that water, higher and higher, and burst out to grab her before I drowned. 192-193

Instead, Margaret is concerned about Caitlin's wardrobe, which recently has only consisted of heavy sweaters and dark clothing, meant to hide her spindly limbs and bruises.

Caitlin continues to struggle underwater, until her mother finally pulls her out. Margaret rescues her from Rogerson, when he is brutally beating her on the O'Koren's front lawn. She rocks Caitlin back and forth, "saying everything would be all right" (218), and even though Caitlin is finally safe, she still struggles to hold onto Rogerson: "I was worn out, broken: He had taken almost everything. But he had been all I'd had, all this time. And when the police led him away, I pulled out of the hands of all these loved ones, sobbing, screaming, everything hurting, to try and make him stay" (218).

Caitlin has to individuate herself not only from her sister's shadow and her mother's expectations, but also from her role as Rogerson's girlfriend and victim. In the clinic, she rips up a picture of herself and puts the pieces in a drawer. She is beginning

again in her room at the clinic, and she confides, “all I could think about was that girl, torn into tiny fragments, with nothing to do but sit and wait to be made whole again” (227).

Eventually, Caitlin does make herself whole, with help from her family and friends. She and her mother begin taking walks on the hospital’s grounds every Sunday. They talk about everything, “taking back our shared past gently, piece by piece” (230) and Caitlin begins to see her mother “more as a person, a woman, not just the queen of bake sales and lemon puffs” (244).

When Caitlin comes home, it is to a family reunion, and Cass is there. Caitlin has not completed her individuation, but she is making progress. The novel ends with these words: “I knew I had a story to tell now, that was mine, hers, and ours. But for that one instant, I concentrated on reaching the surface, feeling the water break across my face as I burst through it into the air to finally breathe on my own” (250).

Dreamland is about both Cass’s and Caitlin’s struggle to find themselves, and even though Cass’s transition is more comfortable, Caitlin’s is depicted more accurately with more complexity as the main character in the novel. Sarah Dessen shows a compelling side to the mother-daughter struggle through the character of Margaret. Just as Basoff writes of the mother’s need to change when the daughter individuates herself, Sarah Dessen expresses this stressful transition in *Dreamland*.

The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things

Carolyn Macker’s novel teaches readers that the daughter’s individuation can earn her respect from her mother. At the beginning of the narrative, Virginia makes it clear

that her mother does not respect her as a young adult, and she believes it is all based on her body image. She says, “I have this theory that I was switched at birth,” and she continues, “I just know there’s a stout, blond family out there, wondering how they wound up with a beautiful, slim, brown-haired daughter” (17). Though her mother, Phyllis, obviously has the same hair as Virginia, she still feels different because her mother adds darker streaks to it.

Virginia, the youngest of three, envies her older brother Byron for gaining acceptance from her mother. When Phyllis and Byron are leaving to go to an event, Phyllis stops in Virginia’s room to tell her she is going to a new doctor. They discuss both the dinner and the doctor simultaneously, and Virginia wants to know why she cannot ever go to her mother’s work events as well as why she needs a new doctor.

Virginia asks why and says she feels fine, and then

Mom gets an uncomfortable look on her face. I know what’s coming next. It’s about my weight. Mom has a hard time talking about my body. Her shrink side wants to reassure me that I’m fine the way I am, accept myself, all that self-esteem stuff. But her Mom side wants me to be thin and perfect, like the rest of the Shreves. 35

After her mom leaves, Virginia is upset. Though she tries to make excuses for her mother’s behavior, it is clear she is struggling. She says “I know Mom’s intentions are good, like she wants to help me feel better and look better and be a better person. But I can’t help but wishing she’d accept me the way I am” (35). Virginia equates looking better with being a better person, a skewed value she has learned from her parents. She goes on, “I can’t help wondering whether if I were thin, I’d get invited to those fancy dinners as well” (35). It is almost as if Virginia feels guilty for thinking these thoughts,

beginning each doubt about her mother with “I can’t help but...” instead of believing she has a right to her feelings.

When Virginia and Phyllis go to the nutrition doctor, Phyllis keeps the focus on Virginia’s weight, though the doctor wants everyone to focus on health and nutrition. For Phyllis, it is not about health but appearance, and she says, “It’s so hard being overweight. I want to do everything I can to make life easier for Virginia” (65). What Phyllis fails to see is that she could make her daughter’s life easier if she taught her to respect herself. Virginia, however, learns to make life easier for herself by gradually embracing her own needs throughout the novel.

Before she begins her individuation, though, Virginia tries to succeed according to her mother’s expectations. She begins to starve herself, and while her parents are out of town for the weekend Virginia puts cutouts of models from magazines on the refrigerator to remind her not to eat. She calls the models her “food police,” and when her parents get home her mother immediately notices the pictures. Phyllis beams about how proud she is of Virginia, and Virginia points out (in her thoughts) that her mother rarely notices anything about her. She thinks, “Since when did Mom become Ms. Observant Parent? A few weeks ago, I got an A+ on a language arts paper about *One Hundred Years of Solitude*” (73). She continues, “I stuck it on the fridge with a few magnets, hoping Mom-- a big Marquez fan-- would say something, but she never seemed to notice” (74).

The irony of Phyllis as a character is that she is an adolescent therapist, unable to help her own child. She tells a reporter: “What I always tell parents of my patients is that they must remember that their children aren’t children anymore. They’re complex,

independent individuals with needs and desires that must be acknowledged” (157).

Instead of acknowledging her own child’s needs, she ignores Virginia’s struggle for individuation until she absolutely cannot avoid her daughter’s evolution.

Virginia first rebels with an eyebrow ring, and Phyllis hates it. Virginia enjoys the feeling of independence so much that she tries to convince her mother to take her dress shopping at a store of her choosing. Phyllis refuses to go anywhere but Saks, but she does allow Virginia to look in the junior section instead of the plus sized Salon-Z. When nothing in the junior section fits, Phyllis and Virginia have a fight and Virginia explodes: “I’m fat, OK? F-A-T. But that doesn’t mean I have to hide beneath layers of fabric. That doesn’t mean I’m exactly like you used to be, ashamed of my body” (190-191).

Phyllis is so shocked by Virginia’s outburst that she ends the shopping trip. Later that day, Virginia goes to the store she originally wanted to shop in without her mother, and buys a purple dress she loves. When Phyllis tells her it does not look good with Virginia’s hair color, Virginia dyes her hair purple to match. This extreme outward transformation brings the inner Virginia-- spunky, creative and funny-- outward. Phyllis finally sees how happy Virginia could be if she were allowed to individuate herself. She admits to Virginia, “I wish I’d had the nerve to dye my hair purple when I was your age” (214). Their relationship is beginning to mend because Virginia has shown her mother, through her own individuation, that she is and will be able to be happy and confident because of who she is, not what she looks like. Virginia earns her mother’s respect, and more importantly, learns to accept herself.

The Truth About Forever

In *The Truth About Forever*, Sarah Dessen again presents two sisters' relationships with their mother, and the main character is, once more, the younger of the two. Macy Queen is quite aware of her dissimilarity to her sister Caroline, and she identifies their differences at the beginning of the novel: "When my dad died, we all reacted in different ways. My sister seemed to take on our cumulative emotional reaction: she cried so much she seemed to be shriveling right in front of our eyes. I sat quiet, silent, angry, refusing to grieve, because it seemed like to do so would be giving everyone what they wanted" (12). Deborah, their mother, chooses to organize everything in her life to deal with her pain.

Deborah and Macy establish a routine, sharing dinner duties, but it is only a routine-- there is no affection in their relationship: "When we'd been four instead of two, Caroline and my dad had represented the sloppy, easygoing faction. With them gone, my mother and I kept things neat and organized" (48). If her mother asks if she is okay, Macy responds:

As I did every time she asked this, I wished I could answer her honestly. There was so much I wanted to tell my mother, like how much I missed my dad, how much I still thought about him. But I'd been doing so well, as far as everyone was concerned, for so long, that it seemed like it would be a failure of some sort to admit otherwise. As with so much else, I'd missed my chance. 48

Neat and organized is the way Macy thinks she likes things, so that she can cope with her grief, until she meets Wes and the Wish Catering crew.

Macy knows her mother is stressed with her job, and when Deborah tries to talk to her daughter about her new friends from Wish, Macy believes her mother is too preoccupied to listen carefully. After a brief discussion that does not really address

anything, Macy climbs the stairs, knowing that “my mother had already moved on to the next challenge, this issue now filed under Resolved. But for me, it wasn’t that simple. Of course she’d think I could tell her anything: she was my mother. In truth though, I couldn’t” (222). Macy continues,

I’d been wanting to talk to her for over a year about what was bothering me. I’d wanted to reach out and hold her close, tell her I was worried about her, but I couldn’t do that either. I could be imperfect, but only so much. Human, but only within limits. And honest, to her or to myself, never. 222

As her relationship with Wes progresses, Macy learns to acknowledge her emotions, and finally she has to admit to herself: “I felt something ache inside my chest, and suddenly I knew I was going to cry. For me, for my mother, For what we’d had taken from us, but also what we’d given up willingly. So much of a life. And so much of each other” (294). Even after she has admitted the truth to herself, Macy is still not able to tell her mother how she feels.

When she is grounded for being late to an event Deborah is hosting for work, Caroline, her sister, tells Macy their mother will ease up. Macy, however, knows the truth:

But she wouldn’t. I knew that already. My mother and I had an understanding: we worked together to be as much in control of our shared world as possible. I was supposed to be her other half, carrying my share of the weight. In the last few weeks, I’d tried to shed it, and doing so sent everything off kilter. So of course she would pull me tighter, keeping me in my place, because doing so meant she would always be sure, somehow, of her own. 304

Macy is incredibly aware of her mother’s struggle to let her complete her individuation. She is a self-aware character throughout the novel, but her ability to understand her mother’s and her own actions throughout the novel reflect her wise soul. Though she has become her own self, with the help of Wes and playing Truth to acknowledge her

feelings, both Macy and Caroline work together to show their mother the way she could be living her life.

In a fight, Caroline tells Deborah that Macy is unhappy. When her mother responds that “Macy is fine,” (327). Caroline says,

God, you always say that, but she’s not. Have you even been paying attention to what’s going on with her? She’s been miserable since Dad died, pushing herself so hard to please you. And then, this summer, she finally finds some friends and something she likes to do...She was finally getting over what happened. Couldn’t you see the change in her? 327

The Truth About Forever is less about individuation than it is about the need for open and honest communication. Macy is already self aware, but what she needs is a mother to treat her more like a mother and offer affection and love. Her fear of showing a crack in her armor, and admitting that she needs her mother for support, is at the center of the problem. Deborah’s willingness to believe her daughter is “fine” is a result of her own self-centered nature.

A Brief Chapter in My Impossible Life

Dana Reinhardt presents a character who is completely individuated at the beginning of the novel. Simone Turner-Blume is as sure of herself as anyone can be at age 16, but her relationship with her biological mother allows her to know even more about herself and her feelings.

Simone rejects the idea of meeting Rivka at first, saying, “I just don’t want to know anything. And it’s not because I’m running from something; it’s because I don’t care. You may think I have some gaping hole in me [. . .], but I don’t feel like I’m missing something” (14). Simone, for the most part, gets along well with her parents,

even though she is a real enough character to get annoyed with them. She hates her “parents’ talks. I hate the way they look at me. Particularly Mom” (34), but she knows they love her and want what is best for her.

When Simone finally calls Rivka, she allows her parents to soothe her: “Finally I have my big cry. Out in the open. Right there on the floor. With the newspapers and my mother and father as witnesses. I have to admit that it feels really good. I think the word for this is cathartic. I feel such overwhelming relief” (69). Simone is fortunate to have such understanding parents, and she is never concerned that they are not biologically connected.

Rivka joins the family for Thanksgiving, and when Simone sees her, she is immediately struck by Rivka’s beauty. Like a grateful and traditional daughter, she thinks, “I have this immediate reaction that I’m embarrassed to admit to, but here goes anyway. I think: *Wow, maybe there’s still hope for me*” (97).

There is no denying the bond Rivka and Simone have, but instead of seeming like a mother and daughter, they seem more like friends. Rivka offers Simone advice after disclosing the entire story behind Simone’s conception: “Simone, I’m not telling you this as some kind of lesson on abstinence or anything. Sex is great. It’s amazing. And whenever you’re ready you should have lots of it. All the time. But be more careful than I was” (106).

When Simone is leaving to spend the night with Rivka, she sees how upset her mother is. Simone comforts her with affection and words: “I give her a big hug, get in the car and start it up, then roll down my window and say, ‘I love you, Mom,’ which isn’t something I’m in the habit of saying all the time, and then I put the car in reverse and

back out of our driveway” (118). Simone not only understands her needs, her wish to know her history, but the needs of her adoptive mother as well. Instead of believing she has to choose between Rivka and her mom, Simone knows she can love them both, and that doing so does not challenge her sense of identity.

At Rivka’s house on Shabbat, Simone receives a blessing from Rivka. It is a blessing for a mother to say over a child, and even though Simone is an atheist, as Rivka places her hands on her head, Simone reveals “She closes her eyes. I close mine and feel all the people, all the past, all the slowly unfolding mysteries rushing through me” (130). Though Simone and Rivka have the same eyes and the same appreciation for avocado milkshakes, each woman has her own values. Both learn from each other throughout the year, and when Rivka dies, both are at peace with their shared past. Simone learns to acknowledge the fact that her family tree is not, after all, bare, and Rivka is remembered after her death by the family she touched.

Blind Faith

Ellen Wittlinger begins her novel with Bunny’s, Liz’s grandmother, funeral. Christine, Liz’s mother, and Bunny had always been close, and Liz reflects on her mother’s relationship with her mother and her relationship with her daughter:

People always said how unusual it was that Mom and Bunny were so close, more like sisters or best friends than mother and daughter. Christine and Bunny are so lucky, they’d say. I wish I had such a wonderful relationship with my mother! Which always made me feel a little strange-- like, how come I wasn’t part of this chain of mother-daughter best friends too? 3

Liz admits to wishing her mother paid more attention to her, and reveals that Bunny worried that she had made Christine too self-centered to show her love for others. (4)

When Bunny dies, Christine is even more self-involved, and Liz worries about her mother's devastation: "In the three weeks after Bunny's funeral my mother didn't work in her studio at all; in fact, most days she barely got out of bed. She refused meals, saying she wasn't hungry," (11) and she stops taking care of herself.

Liz's father, Jack, tries to get Christine to come down for dinner, to at least sit with them one night, saying that he thinks it will make Liz feel better. Christine snaps, "Well, it wouldn't make *me* feel better" (13). Liz believes it is her responsibility to cater to her mother's needs, and does not stop to really question her mother's selfishness.

The only thing Liz wants is to be close to her mother, and one day they bond by complaining about Jack's atheism. Liz writes, "Suddenly I realized I was having a real conversation with my mother about important things. And we were agreeing about them too-- just like she and Bunny had!" (57-58). Liz is so glad to be connecting with her mother that she agrees to go to the spiritualist church to meet the mediums who contact the dead.

Her happiness is short-lived, and before they go to church, Liz is again reminded of her mother's selfish nature. Later that week, Liz has a piano recital. Her blouse is too small because her chest has gotten bigger, and while she is playing, the buttons snap and she has to finish playing with her bra exposed. After the recital, her best friend Roxy cannot believe she was allowed out of the house in such a tight blouse: "Didn't your mother say anything?" (75) Liz is embarrassed that her mother did not perform traditional mother tasks, such as making sure her teenage daughter's chest had not grown too much for her recital blouse.

Liz's dismay at her mother's inattentiveness increases when they arrive at the spiritualist church, someone says to Christine, "I see you've brought a friend," and Christine thoughtlessly responds, "Just my daughter" (96). Liz is hurt: "Okay, I wasn't her best friend, but just her daughter? That wasn't the way Bunny had felt about her!" (96) During the service, which Liz is uncomfortable with, she remembers, "Bunny had always been tuned in to me. It was my mother who was on another wavelength" (108)

A few weeks later, Christine buys Liz a new blouse while shopping with her spiritualist friend, Monica. Liz feels second-place, as always: "Not only had she not asked me to go with her to buy my new blouse, but she'd gone with the ever-present Monica and my clothing requirement had obviously been an afterthought. Still, she'd remembered that I needed the blouse-- I'd had to give her points for that" (124). Liz does not mean to hurt her mother's feelings, but she does after she tries on the blouse and hates it. She thinks, "Why did everything have to be so difficult with her? A blouse wasn't just a blouse-- it was a test. Did I love her enough? Did she love me? And there was never a simple answer" (126). It is almost as if Liz is the mother complaining about her daughter's mood swings and tests, and Wittlinger's dramatic narration continues more before either Liz or Christine learn to behave in healthy manners.

While Christine is searching for faith, Liz is wondering why her mother refuses to have judgment-free conversations about God. Again, Liz remembers her grandmother, thinking, Bunny came the closest to discussing faith with her than anyone: "She said that she felt closest to God when she was playing the piano," and when Liz asked her to explain, "she said we all had to find God inside ourselves, in the things we loved the most" (180).

When Liz decides not to go to the spiritualist church, Christine gets angry and accuses her of taking sides with her father. Christine says, "If your grandmother could see your disloyalty, she would be ashamed of herself," and Liz finally speaks for herself: "No, she wouldn't! Bunny loved me all the time-- not just when I agreed with her!" and she continues, "Don't you think I miss her just as much as you do! Why do you get to be the only one who's sad? I loved her as much as you did!" (196)

Unfortunately, Christine has still not heard her daughter, though Liz is finally listening to herself. In a fight a few weeks later, Christine tells Liz that Jack never understood the bond a mother and daughter could have, and Liz explodes: "The words that had lain dormant my entire life finally flew out of my mouth," and she says, "Well, I never understood it either! You always talk about this magical mother-daughter relationship you had with Bunny, but you never tried to be connected to me that way! I'm your daughter. Where's that bond? (230) She accuses her mother with the truth: "You only liked being the daughter, not the mother" (230).

Liz's anger allows her to find what is important to her in her views about herself and her mother, and she says to her, "You know, it's kind of amazing. You can't wait to go talk to your dead mother, but you can't hear a word your living daughter has to say" (265). Christine apologizes later that evening, saying, "I know I'm not as good a mother as Bunny was. I guess I don't. . . I don't know how to be. I'm sorry." (270) Their relationship is healing as the novel ends, and though Liz has achieved her individuation, Christine will have to become self-aware without Bunny or she will never move on with her life.

Conclusion

Though the novels covered in this study have publication dates that span over 35 years, much is relatively the same. Each novel is narrated in the first person, with the main focus on the daughter. Though the daughters are always the main characters, there does seem to be quite a bit of energy devoted toward the mother-daughter relationship. It is rare to find cases of active rejection or rebellion against the mother's values, though each novel is wrought with passive opinions and annoyances from the narrators.

There are only two novels whose daughters are individuated at the beginning of the novel: Katherine (*Forever . . .*) and Simone (*A Brief Chapter in My Impossible Life*). They are also the only characters whose mothers are at peace with the people they are. In the other six novels, the struggle for the daughter's individuation causes turmoil, but their mothers must also face their own demons and insecurities. Katherine and Simone, who live their lives as individuated young women, are already self-aware individuals at the beginning of their stories. They share interdependent relationships with their mothers, and are both comfortable discussing personal problems, though each daughter realizes she does not depend entirely on anyone else for her personal happiness.

Bassof's theory is supported in these examples of young adult literature: mothers must adapt as their daughters change. The literature reflects that women are complex and continuously evolving. Debold, Wilson, and Malave's work is also supported through this analysis, because the mother-daughter relationships that work are those that are interdependent.

As the daughters in the other novels struggle to individuate themselves, each seems to believe that in order to become her own self, she must separate herself from her

mother. Some daughters resist abandoning the mothers' expectations, like Macy in *The Truth About Forever* and Caitlin in *Dreamland*. Both of Sarah Dessen's heroines fear the consequences of rejecting their mother's expectations, but ultimately each must be honest with herself and with her mother in order to successfully and happily continue her emotional evolution.

While Macy and Caitlin perceive their mother's dependence on their following of the family guidelines, believing if they deviate from familial norms the mother will fall to pieces, two novels present mothers who truly do depend on their daughters. Lorraine and Marcy (*Pigman*, *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*) both live with mothers who make it clear that they expect their daughters to provide support for them, through housework or through emotional guidance. Lorraine and Marcy eventually reject their mother's expectations and the willingness to support their mothers.

With these two novels we see that interdependence may be a more successful pattern to follow. At the end of *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*, for example, Marcy and her mother still openly discuss their feelings, but each has taken on a more independent attitude than seen at the beginning of the novel. Marcy's mother is learning to individuate herself as well, which garners more respect, both from Marcy and from readers.

The most volatile relationships are those between Virginia and her mother (*The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big, Round Things*) and Liz and her mother (*Blind Faith*). Virginia chooses to rebel against her mother through her personal appearance, while Liz rejects her mother's behavior and accuses her of her own ineptitude as a mother. Neither daughter is willing to discuss her own insecurities, whether about weight or acceptance,

but each is willing to fight with her mother. These young women do not passively accept or reject their mother's values, but they actively express themselves. Though examples from the other novels indicate that individuation may be accomplished through open communication, Virginia and Liz accomplish more self-awareness by expressing their anger and hurt.

One noticeable factor in these novels is the fact that few of these characters have regular arguments with their mothers. Instead, daughters' thoughts are available to readers, but characters keep their emotions bottled up until they explode. This rare sighting of anger seems a bit unrealistic, considering the research and common knowledge of family confrontation in actual life.

It is clear that the main reason for turmoil in the mother-daughter relationships in young adult literature is the fact that mothers and daughters do not talk to each other. Every time a character has a revelation in these novels, it is within her head, and it takes some major catastrophe to let it out. If these daughters would share their feelings, their mothers would understand them. And if these mothers would foster open and honest communication, their daughters might tell them what they are thinking.

Based on these novels, we can conclude that mother-daughter relationships are marked by emotional separation unless the mothers and daughters already have a stable interdependent relationship. It seems that in order to create an interdependent relationship, mothers must be self-aware, individuated women who are willing to accept their daughters' actions and beliefs. When the mothers depend upon their husbands, daughters, or their own mothers, the daughters' individuation is met with frustration and,

often, anger. If daughters perceive their mother's dependence, whether it is actual or not, they are also less likely to openly assert themselves as individuals because of their fear of the consequences.

The focus rarely is about the actual process of individuation in these novels. Instead, individuated daughters react to life events (Katherine deciding when to have sex or Simone learning about her biological mother's past) or not-yet-individuated daughters struggle to begin self-actualization. At the end of these novels, daughters seem to be on the path to self-discovery, but the process of becoming one's self is not completed in any of these works.

Further Research

As mother-daughter relationships evolve, it will be interesting to note whether the young adult literature reflects the changes. The novels presented in this study are very similar, and the relationships are rarely marked by their context in history. Examining whether mother-daughter relationships have maintained a level of consistency in regards to turmoil and stress through individuation merits further research.

Another aspect of mothers and daughters in young adult literature to be examined is the absence of anger. Rarely do the characters become angry enough to yell, yet current research indicates that adolescence is a time when anger is to be expected from the changing teen. Does literature, on the whole, neglect the arguments many families have? Are authors uncomfortable or unable to portray the intensity of emotions required to express a real fight? Ellen Wittlinger presents actual fighting between the mother and the daughter, and she does it relatively well. Why are characters, on the whole, unable to express themselves with emotional force?

The end process of individuation and reaching self-awareness is not presented in these works. Are there young adult novels available that show the actual process of individuation, or are they all representations of adolescents' lives before or after the process is complete?

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Appendix

Blume, Judy. *Forever* . . .

This novel is the story of first love and first sexual encounters, and not about anything else. Katherine Danzinger is 17 and in love with Michael. Before having sex, Michael tells Katherine that he loves her. When she responds the next day that she loves him too, Michael asks, “Forever?” and Katherine replies, “Forever.” Their “forever” turns into a promise they share, and Katherine soon decides she is ready to lose her virginity. After an anticlimactic first time, Katherine visits Planned Parenthood to explore her options for birth control. Katherine and Michael’s love maintains its strength through the end of their senior year, but when they separate for the summer, the relationship quickly falls apart. They break up, and Katherine is okay.

Danzinger, Paula. *The Cat Ate My Gymsuit*.

Marcy Lewis is an overweight and unhappy thirteen year old with no friends: “I hate my father. I hate school. I hate being fat. I hate the principal because he wanted to fire Ms. Finney, my English teacher” (Danzinger, 1). The opening lines of the novel give everything in the story away, and there’s not that much to give. This poorly executed story of a tumultuous father-daughter relationship is boring, cliché and unsurprising. Marcy has never had friends or feelings of acceptance, but once Ms. Finney, the new English teacher, arrives at school her life takes a turn. She becomes a better student, fosters a healthy relationship with the popular Nancy Sheridan, and learns to refuse ice cream when her mother tries to substitute food for her father’s affection. When Ms. Finney refuses to say the pledge of allegiance, she is put on suspension and the school board must determine her fate as an educator. After her students gather for support and she wins her case, Ms. Finney quits because of her principles. The students learn the importance of taking a stance, and Ms. Finney leaves a legacy of happy, intelligent, inquisitive and introspective students and parents behind. Marcy even learns to stand up to her father a bit more.

Dessen, Sarah. *Dreamland*.

When sixteen-year-old Caitlin’s sister Cassandra runs away to New York City weeks before she is due to start at Yale, the O’Koren family is lost in the turmoil. Caitlin, used to seeing her sister as the family focal point, finds herself unable to get her parents’ attention while Cass is completely absent. After struggling to fill Cass’ place, by joining the cheerleading squad and “needing” her mother, and failing, Caitlin turns to drugs and Rogerson Briscoe. Rogerson is the ultimate bad boyfriend-- who, in a realistic way, does not seem bad at all until it is much too late. By the time Rogerson starts beating Caitlin, she has already become dependent on him and on their relationship. Caitlin needs the

steady numbness his drugs provide and the comfort of their physical relationship. Dessen's novel reaches its climax when Caitlin's parents discover the abuse Caitlin has suffered. She is institutionalized after Rogerson beats her in public and marijuana is found in her jacket. Caitlin gradually pieces her life back together, and hers is a story readers won't soon forget.

Dessen, Sarah. *The Truth About Forever*.

The summer after her father's death, Macy plans to spend her summer working at the library, writing emails to her boyfriend and trying to avoid real conversations with her mother. After meeting the Wish Catering crew, including new best friend Kristy and Wes, a boy with police charge on his record who has the ability to always speak the truth, Macy begins to acknowledge her feelings about her father's death and about her own wants and needs. Macy and her mother struggle through the summer, as Macy changes from being a quiet, reliable and miserable girl to an interested, adventurous and wise young woman, until they must both confront their feelings about the loss they suffered together. The novel ends with a new beginning, for Macy and her family at the restored beach house their father loved, and a new relationship between Macy and Wes.

Mackler, Carolyn. *The Earth, My Butt, and Other Big Round Things*.

Fifteen-year-old Virginia Shreves lives in Manhattan with her beautifully thin mother and father, while her gorgeous older brother lives in a dorm at Columbia. She is overweight, hates her clothes, and her best friend is in Seattle for the year. Just when Virginia thinks her life can't get any worse, her brother date rapes a girl in college and moves back in at home. Although Virginia had been wishing she could spend more time with her brother, now that he's back she doesn't want to talk to him. As Virginia struggles with her changing feelings about her family, she reassesses her wardrobe, coping mechanisms, and thoughts about herself. In this hilarious-- and at times embarrassing-- novel, readers will laugh and cry at their own recognition of themselves in Virginia. The novel's main detriment is Virginia's self-mutilation, which is glazed over and too quickly resolved. Over all, this is worth the read.

Reinhardt, Dana. *A Brief Chapter in My Impossible Life*.

Sixteen year-old Simone Turner-Blume is comfortably aware that she was adopted at birth by her liberal, fair skinned family. Although she has always known the name of her biological mother-- Rivka-- her interest has never peaked. When her mother and father suggest she return Rivka's phone call and invitation to get to know each other, she is hesitant and displays palpable sixteen-year-old anger and annoyance. Simone and Rivka do develop a relationship over the next months, and that relationship, in turn, brings Simone even more self-awareness than she had at the start of the novel. Rivka is dying of cancer, and after several tear-jerking scenes and gestures of love, she passes.

Wittlinger, Ellen. *Blind Faith*.

Fifteen year old Liz is trying to reconcile her feelings-- of grief at the loss of her grandmother and her jealousy of the relationship her mother and grandmother shared-- and she doesn't get very far in the novel. Liz's father is a devout atheist, and her mother, brokenhearted and lost without her own mother, is spending days in bed or at the spiritualist church outside of town trying to contact her dead mother. Liz is attempting to take care of both her parents when Nathan, a new neighbor, moves in across the street with his grandmother and his own dying mother. Nathan's little sister binds immediately with Liz, and most of the novel is emotionally driven, without much action. Liz goes to the spiritualist church with her mother, briefly questions her own beliefs, and falls for Nathan. The novel ends with yet another death (Nathan's mother) and the two families, Nathan's and Liz's, grieve for all the loss together.

Zindel, Paul. *The Pigman*.

John Conlan and Lorraine Jensen, best friends and sophomores in high school, alternate the telling of their most unusual friend, Mr. Pignati. After meeting Mr. Pignati by prank calling him, John and Lorraine form a fast friendship with the Pigman. They go to the zoo, the city (New York), grocery store, and have a wonderful time. He indulges them, and offers them the adult love and support each has been missing at home. After roller skating through the house one evening, Mr. Pignati has a heart attack and is sent to the hospital. John and Lorraine visit him and promise to take care of the house and his favorite baboon, Bobo, at the zoo. What starts as a so-called innocent get together on a Friday evening ends as a wild party of high school drinkers. Mr. Pignati comes home to find teenagers wearing his dead wife's clothing, drinking, skating and generally destroying his home. John and Lorraine are ashamed of their behavior, and try to make it up to him the following day with a trip to the zoo to see Bobo. Though it is clear that the Pigman has forgiven them because he loves them, the afternoon is strained as they wander the zoo. When they go to the monkey house and ask about Bobo, a zookeeper tells them the beloved baboon is dead. Mr. Pigman, who before meeting Lorraine and John seems to have had no friends besides Bobo, is overcome with grief and has a fatal heart attack in the monkey house.