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Analysis of *Girl*

Jamaica Kincaid wrote a short story about the conversation between a mother and her daughter entitled *Girl*. The mother dominates the conversation and primarily gives instructions to her daughter that include what to do and how to do it, what not to do, etc. Most of the instructions were related to how to act feminine and how to increase her sexuality. Although the mother had good intentions, she seemed to have a negative manner while having her conversation with her daughter. In Jamaica Kincaid’s *Girl*, tone is used to show the mother’s reproachable attitude towards her daughter.

Several times throughout the text, the mother refers to her suspicions of her daughter’s developing promiscuity in a negative and disapproving tone. The mother said, “on Sunday’s try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming.” The tone of this passage is quite cut and dry, straight to the point; because of this it shows the mother’s attitude quite well.

As well, the mother seems to have observed this in the past when she inferred to her daughters desire to become a slut when she said, “bent on becoming” from the previous phrase. Another phrase that indicates her mother’s suspicion is highlighted when she said, “you see the hem coming down and so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming.” This refers to the way that the daughter dresses, which the mother disapproves once again by trying to show her the “proper” way of dressing. This is again shown when the mother said, “this is how to behave in the presence of men who don’t know you very well, and this way they won’t recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming.” The repeated phrase of “bent of becoming” is the strongest indicator of her mother’s reproachable attitude towards her daughters developing promiscuity. The negativity and unfair assumptions of the mother are the most contributing factors to the tone of these phrases of this aspect of the daughters life, thus it shows the mother’s reproachable attitude of her daughter.

Second, the way the mother discusses the topic of church with her daughter indicates a reproachable attitude from the mother to the daughter. In the text, the mother says, “don’t’ sing benna in Sunday school.” The daughter replied by trying to explain that she has never sang benna in Sunday school, not Sundays at all. The reply from the daughter infers that the mother has, once again, made a false assumption based on her expectations of her daughter, which in turns leads to a negative and disapproving tone from the mother.

In general, the staccato style of language used by the mother indicates her attitude towards her daughter. The passage is constructed with a series of dos and don’ts from that are straight to the point. This causes the items of the list to seem commanding and forceful which adds to the overall staccato tone of the passage; since a staccato tone is used, it causes the mother to appear as disproving of her daughter and the actions that she chooses to engage in. The mother often times would critique the behaviors of her daughter, and while giving the instructions to her daughter in order to change the behavior, she would resort to the staccato tone which gave the impression of a disapproving and approachable attitude.

In conclusion, because of the numerous staccato phrases from the mother to the daughter in Jamaica Kincaid’s *Girl*, specifically those moments involving the mother’s suspicions of her daughters developing promiscuity and the benna singing at church, it can be seen that the mother possess a reproachable attitude towards her daughter.