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Big Paper 2

A mother-daughter relationship is described as a unique and unconditional bond. However, most of the time, that relationship is tested and goes through a rocky patch, which is usually during the time, the daughter is going through puberty and becoming a woman. Adolescence is the developmental period where youth crave independence. The roles of mothers during this time is critical in fostering healthy development (Fix). As a woman themselves, mothers instill in their daughters, what it takes to become an established woman in the future. Furthermore, the terms, “mommy’s boy” and “daddy’s girl” come from the fact that mother-son and father-daughter relationships are usually easier and more comfortable. Jamaica Kincaid’s “Girl” presents the harsh admonitions from a mother to her adolescent daughter. Although it’s not implicitly stated, it is assumed the mother was probably raised in an area or time period where the mothers catered to the fathers of the family. Kincaid reveals through her story a mother who believes a woman’s duty is to behave a certain way and be a proper woman.

The story’s plot centers around a conversation between presumably a mother and her daughter. We don’t know their names nor where this conversation is taking place. The mother is telling the daughter how to do things, such as cook, wash and iron clothes, and set the table. Most of the conversation consists of the mother telling the daughter, “This is how you...” repetitiously. The mother accuses the daughter of singing Benna at Sunday school a few times throughout the story. The daughter interrupts her mother twice with a statement and question throughout their conversation, but the mother brushes it off or takes offense. The conversation doesn’t indicate that the two have the best or healthiest relationship by the mother’s choice of words.

One reason that the mother has found herself having this conversation with her daughter is that the girl seems to be entering womanhood. In the story, which is told from a first person narrative, the mother mentions, “soak your little cloths right after you take them off” (Kincaid). This implies the adolescent girl is old enough to have started her menstrual cycle and is going through puberty changes. The mother also wants to make sure her daughter is a proper lady and is concerned her unladylike actions will reflect on the mother. “There’s a concurrent and equally strong cultural belief that motherhood is the sole determining factor in children’s lives and wellbeing. If children do well, their sainted mother is to be credited” (Durham). This shows that the outcome of children’s lives as adults depends and is credited to how the mother raised them, whether it be good or bad. As previously mentioned, the mother accuses the daughter of singing benna, which is an Antiguan folksong, which symbolizes sexuality and used to spread rumors and gossip. The mother explains that “On Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming; don’t sing benna in Sunday school; you mustn’t speak to wharf-rat boys” (Kincaid). The mother views this is un-ladylike, disrespectful, and discourages it as she mentions it a few times throughout their conversation.

In an interview with *Goodreads* in 2013*,* Jamaica Kincaid says while referring to the girl in her short story “Girl”, "She's given all these instructions. The ordinary, traditional way to do it would have been to say, my mother said to me...my mother was a very controlling woman and was trying to form me into this thing” (Interview). The mother is giving all these orders to her daughter and basically telling her how she should live her life. The daughter interrupts her mother’s lecture twice by saying “but I don’t sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school” and “but what if the baker won’t let me feel the bread?” (Kincaid). The mother seems to ignore the daughter’s comment about singing benna and continue her instructions. However, she takes the offense to the daughter’s question about bread and responds, “you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won’t let near the bread?” (Kincaid). This exchange shows the conflict between mothers and daughters, as they hit adolescence. Maternal control and parent-adolescent conflict are related, especially in African American mothers and the daughters (Gonzales).

The story concludes with the mother’s response to the daughter’s question about bread. The last line, “you mean to say that after all you are really going to be the kind of woman who the baker won’t let near the bread” is fitting considering the mother’s fear and concern that her daughter will turn out to be a slut and not a proper woman, that the baker won’t even allow her near the bread. It shows the mother lacks sympathy towards the young girl, who still has a lot of maturing to do. After the last line, questions arise on if the daughter grew up the way mom planned? What happened after the conversation? Whether the daughter respected her mother and took the advice given? The conversation could have been a turning point in the young girl’s life, a normal lecture from her mother, or the start of resentment towards her mother for her harsh admonitions.

The story isn’t a conventional story, as we are not introduced to characters, setting, or given a standard plot, with exposition, action, or climax. “Girl” is a representation of a mother-daughter relationship as the daughter enters womanhood. The mother believes the daughter should behave in a certain way and be a proper woman. The story is loosely inspired by Kincaid’s real-life experience as a teenager. As each of Kincaid’s younger brothers arrived, she began to feel alienation from her mother and longed for reconciliation with her, which is a recurring theme in her work. As she aged, she was aware that black Antiguans were expected to serve the British; however, she rebelled in and out of school (Girl). The overall purpose of the story is to give readers that sense and a look inside of parent-child relationship as they are growing up, instead of narrating about a girl and her mother’s relationship.

Works Cited

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