

Constructing  
Motherhood  
AND Daughterhood  
Across THE Lifespan

Allison M. Alford AND  
Michelle Miller-Day,  
EDITORS



## ***Constructing Motherhood and Daughterhood Across the Lifespan***

explores the complex dynamics between mother and daughter over the lifespan. The editors believe that these vital family roles are socially and communicatively constructed, shaped, and molded as mothers and daughters navigate, respond to, and negotiate cultural and familial discourses. Aimed at undergraduate students, this timely book includes course activities and discussion questions in every chapter and a complete term syllabus to enhance a professor's teaching, providing a smooth route for adoption as a course text. The book also builds on and contributes to the critical and theoretical research in family communication, media studies, and gender studies, delving into the nuanced communication surrounding motherhood and daughterhood in the United States.

**Allison M. Alford** (Ph.D., The University of Texas at Austin) is Clinical Assistant Professor of Business Communication at Baylor University. She has been teaching communication courses at the post-secondary level since 2005.

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"Whether adopting the book for a whole course or a specialization within a family course, this collection will be a treasure for students, scholars, and practitioners."

**Dawn O. Braithewaite**, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

"This trailblazing book is unparalleled on the current market. [It] deftly translates cutting-edge research on mother-daughter communication for the undergraduate and graduate classroom."

**Elizabeth A. Suter**, University of Denver

"Overall, this book is rich with insights that are easily accessible and clear about the way communication functions to yield a better understanding of the mother-daughter relationship."

**Sandra Petronio**, Indiana University – Purdue University, Indianapolis



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*Advance Praise for*

# ***Constructing Motherhood and Daughterhood Across the Lifespan***

“In this volume, editors Allison M. Alford and Michelle Miller-Day and the chapter authors explore communication and negotiation of mother-daughter dyads in a breadth of family types and across all points in the lifespan. This insightful array of chapters points to the centrality of daughters and mothers in the network of primary and external family relationships and the different challenges of family identity and enactment from parenting, to navigating change, to later years as families, and often daughters, provide care for family members. Editors Alford and Miller-Day share a goal of stimulating courses focused on the topic and end the volume with practical resources as a starting point. Whether adopting the book for a whole course or a specialization within a family course, this collection will be a treasure for students, scholars, and practitioners.”

**Dawn O. Braithewaite**, Ph.D., Willa Cather Professor of Communication Studies  
and Chair, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

“This trailblazing book is unparalleled on the current market. This highly accessible compilation deftly translates cutting-edge research on mother-daughter communication for the undergraduate and graduate classroom. The inquiry-based format of the imminently readable chapters invites students into researchers’ processes of discovery and meaning-making. Moreover, this volume pedagogically advances the communication discipline. Based on fifteen years of teaching experience, the final chapter provides an invaluable guide for instructors interested in developing their own courses on mother-daughter communication. I heartily recommend this text!”

**Elizabeth A. Suter**, Director of Graduate Teaching Instructors, University of Denver

“This book offers important insights that illustrate the significance of how mothers and daughters interface with each other. Often, books either emphasize the mothers’ points of view or concentrate on the daughters’ perspectives in relation to the mothers. This book, crafted by Allison M. Alford and Michelle Miller-Day, gives the reader a different vantage point to understand a complicated relationship between mothers and daughters. The authors advocate for examining motherhood and daughterhood as socially constructed.

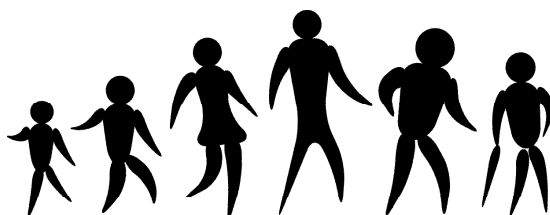
“The perspective Alford and Miller-Day ascribe allows fluidity in the way relationships between and among mothers and daughters are defined. Through the element of communication, the authors illustrate the meaning of motherhood and daughterhood across the lifespan.

“To accomplish these goals, the book presents a number of contexts that reflect multiple aspects of change and recalibration of mother-daughter relationships in everyday life. For example, this book helps readers consider outside influences such as the significance of media representation of mothers and daughters and new technologies. Contributors identify life issues such as coping with pregnancy and disabilities, as well as navigating difficult conversations such as sexuality and stages of life.

“Overall, this book is rich with insights that are easily accessible and clear about the way communication functions to yield a better understanding of the mother-daughter relationship. This is a must-read for the general public and for researchers interested in this area of inquiry.”

**Sandra Petronio**, Director, Communication Privacy Management Center;  
Senior Affiliate Faculty, Charles Warren Fairbanks Center for Medical Ethics;  
Professor, Department of Communication Studies, School of Liberal Arts,  
Indiana University – Purdue University, Indianapolis;  
National Communication Association Distinguished Scholar

Constructing  
Motherhood  
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Across THE Lifespan



# LIFESPAN COMMUNICATION

*Children, Families, and Aging*

Thomas J. Socha  
GENERAL EDITOR

Vol. 14

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The Lifespan Communication series  
is part of the Peter Lang Media and Communication list.

Every volume is peer reviewed and meets  
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xerography, microfiche, microcard, and offset strictly prohibited.



We dedicate this book to amazing women everywhere:

May we know them,

May we be them,

May we raise them,

May we care for them.

In honor of Allison's mom, Pamela Sparkman McGuire, who showed us that,

In all seasons, her love for us will flourish.

In memory of Michelle's late mother, Donna Miller Hodan,

She left fingerprints of grace on her daughters' lives.

Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored to give birth to the other. The materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement.

—RICH (1976, p. 226)

## REFERENCE

Rich, A. (1976). *Of woman born: Motherhood as experience and institution*. New York, NY: Norton.

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# Preface from THE Series Editor

THOMAS J. SOCHA  
Old Dominion University

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In *Constructing Motherhood and Daughterhood Across the Lifespan*, Allison M. Alford and Michelle Miller-Day elegantly remind us that all communication is developmental and unfolds across the entire human lifespan. As a developmental and lifespan phenomenon, each and every communication transaction builds upon what has come before in order to create what is to come. In the unfolding narratives of mothers and daughters, like all family relationships, the heart and soul of “family” lives, literally, in the stories of our lives. In particular, Alford and Miller-Day’s volume sends a clarion call that in the course of human history mother-daughter narratives are a primary, central, and powerful force in human development. They and their team of accomplished authors have assembled a most excellent overview of the various aspects of this important genre of family discourse. Peter Lang’s *Lifespan Communication: Children, Families and Aging* series seeks to illuminate significant aspects of human communication development, and certainly mother-daughter communication is among life’s most significant aspects of communication. To understand human development and to empower families, the discourses of all of society’s primary forces is needed. The volume is a must-read for those in family communication, family studies, women’s studies, gender studies, as well as human psychological, sociological, and communicative development. Like all volumes in this series, and indeed all the volumes published by Peter Lang Publishing, this volume showcases world-class scholars sharing cutting-edge scholarly work for the benefit of us all.



# Acknowledgments

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We would like to acknowledge the carefully cultivated contributions from our many authors and the participants in their research that made this manuscript possible.

Thanks to our respective departments for generously supporting the time and travel allocated to this project.

Thank you to Tom Socha for believing in this work and graciously allowing us to join his growing anthology. We are honored that our work is available alongside the many terrific texts in the *Lifespan* series which highlight the essential features of communication in families.

Thank you to our reviewers who gave critical feedback that surely made this manuscript better.

And thank you to our partners, whose unconditional support provides the platform from which we take big leaps.



# The Social Construction OF Motherhood AND Daughterhood

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Clever men create themselves, but clever women are created by their mothers. Women can never quite escape their mothers' cosmic pull, not their lip-biting expectations or their faulty love. We want to please our mothers, emulate them, disgrace them, outrage them, and bury ourselves in the mysteries and consolations of their presence. When my mother and I are in the same room we work magic on each other ... It's my belief that between mothers and daughters there is a kind of blood-hyphen that is, finally, indissoluble.

—SHIELDS (1987, p. 127)

## REFERENCE

Shields, C. (1987). *Swann*. New York, NY: Viking Press.



# Introduction

ALLISON M. ALFORD\* AND MICHELLE MILLER-DAY†

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## OVERVIEW

The social construction of motherhood has been well-documented for years (e.g., Heisler & Ellis, 2008; Ruddick & Daniels, 1977; Tardy, 2000). Media representations of maternal relationships have constructed an array of complex and contradictory messages about mothering girls, promoting archetypes of “best friends” or “sacrificial mothers” while creating social norms and expectations for how women should enact these roles and perform their relationships (Walters, 1992). Tardy (2000) argues that over time, the construction of motherhood in public and private spheres has led women to feel an exorbitant amount of guilt and blame that can ultimately affect their opportunities and choices. The ideology of motherhood is powerful in shaping the lives of women over the lifespan (Cowdery & Knudson-Martin, 2005).

In contrast to motherhood, there is less research on the social construction of daughterhood (Baruch & Barnett, 1983; Hampton, 1997; Korolczuk, 2010). Daughters are often relegated to a passive, backseat role, while mothers are “semantically overburdened” in their role (Walters, 1992, p. 10), or as van Mens-Verhulst

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† Michelle Miller-Day, professor, Chapman University, [millerda@chapman.edu](mailto:millerda@chapman.edu).

(1995) describes it, our language is missing a verb: “to daughter” (p. 531). What it means to be a mother or daughter is cobbled together “not only through the exigencies of family life, economic survival, and social policies, but through the systems of representation and cultural production that help give shape and meaning to that relationship” (Walters, 1992, p. 10).

As communication scholars, we believe that mother and daughter identities and roles are socially and communicatively constructed over the life course (Braithwaite, Foster, & Bergen, 2017). Relational connection between mothers and daughters is characterized, above all, by communication (Jordan, 1993). Women describe communication as the prime source of establishing their relational identity with their mother or daughter (Mann, 1998) and it is through “mutually responsive communication that mothers and daughters establish patterns of relational communication that link them to one another, shaping each woman’s sense of self” (Miller-Day, 2004, p. 10). Indeed, mothers, daughters, daughters who become mothers, and mothers who become grandmothers are women co-authoring their lives across the life course, co-authoring personal stories within the context of the mother-daughter relationship.

This book will explore what it means to be a mother and daughter across the lifespan in Western society and how both parties navigate, respond to, and negotiate cultural and familial discourses defining motherhood and daughterhood. The book will address the following questions:

- How is motherhood and/or daughterhood socially constructed at different points in the lifespan?
- What master narratives, counter narratives, assumptions, and myths surround talk about motherhood and daughterhood?
- What communication processes are central to the construction of the mother and/or daughter identity and enactment of the mother-daughter relationship?
- What language do mothers and daughters use to describe their identities/roles?
- What are the turning points that mothers and/or daughters experience across the lifespan?
- What is the impact of relational storytelling on mother-adult daughter relationships?
- How can mothers and daughters communicate about health issues?
- What are salient issues surrounding pregnancy, caregiving, and end-of-life experiences for mothers and daughters?
- What are the future directions for conducting lifespan research on motherhood and daughterhood?



## BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK

The idea for this book was born out of discussions with a group of mother-daughter communication scholars who recognized the need to answer the above questions. In early 2015, on a whim, Allison reached out to the very best mother-daughter communication scholars whose work she admired, and the group agreed to present a panel on mother-daughter communication scholarship at the 2015 National Communication Association conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. That is where Allison and Michelle finally met in person. We both agreed that the best way to promote this important work and to encourage other educators to lead courses on mother-daughter communication would be to create a compilation of the emerging mother-daughter communication scholarship. Our backgrounds, though different, have led us both to pursue this area of study.

I (Allison) was raised by a mother who became a marriage and family therapist during my adolescence. I like to say that I was raised talking about talking. Indeed, my conversations with my mother have always been about more than facts; we discuss the tone of what was said, the intentions of saying it, and the ramifications of the communication. It took well into my adult years to realize that other mothers and daughters don't dissect their talk in this way. And while my mother and I have an undeniable connection, and in general I tend to focus on the positives, I cannot help but notice that there are days (sometimes months) where we have a B+ relationship at best. That garden won't tend itself; I must work diligently to keep it growing. As a mother of a son and daughter, my studies on relationships have transformed the way I raise my little people. Learning more about social construction, I quickly realized that I must plant messages before the world does, and I must carefully tend to the ideas that I want to take root. Spurred by my love of talk and fascination with relationships, I returned to graduate school with the goal of learning more about these complexities and the desire to share that knowledge in an accessible way. The result is this book.

I (Michelle) am both a mother and a daughter; I have been a stepmother to a stepdaughter; and I am currently the mother of two biological sons. These multiple roles have colored how I view the world and have influenced my scholarship. I first became interested in studying mother-daughter communication when I wrote a play on the topic. To write the play I interviewed more than 100 women about their mother-daughter relationships and the stories that emerged from those interviews provided insight into broader relational processes, highlighting the centrality of communication in managing, maintaining, and repairing relationships across the lifespan. In 2004, I published a book titled *Communication among Grandmothers, Mothers and Adult Daughters: A Qualitative Study of Maternal Relationships* (Miller-Day). I soon discovered that people were hungry for this information. While research on mother-daughter relationships existed in the disciplines of

psychology and women's studies, it was virtually non-existent in the discipline of communication. Since that time, I have continued my scholarly interest in the topic of mother-daughter communication; but, it was not until recently that felt—in a visceral way—the importance of the topic. In 2017 my mother passed away and I am now a motherless daughter. I look at what I have written in the past and what I write in this current volume and I can see clearly how much my communication with my mother over the years has created who I am as a person now.

These backgrounds are part of what shaped and molded us into the mothers, daughters, and researchers we are today. The topic is important to mothers, daughters, and anyone who has a female in their life. We are excited to bring you a book that provides insights for readers into salient topics central to understanding mother-daughter communication across the lifespan.

## FEATURES OF THIS BOOK

For ease of reading, you will find that all chapters in the book have been organized similarly. Toward the end of every chapter you will find the heading *What does all this mean?* Here the authors have synthesized the materials from the chapter into reader-friendly concepts. Following this, you will see a bulleted list labeled *What do we still need to know?* This section describes future directions that scholars indicate we need to explore. You will also see the bulleted list *How does this work in real life?* which describes application of the ideas in the chapter to relationships in real life. Each chapter ends with a section recommending ideas for *Classroom Activities*, suggesting discussion questions, class activities, and projects to reinforce learning from the chapter. The intention of this volume is to make information accessible and allow readers to put results of scientific research into practice in their everyday lives.

## INSIDE THIS BOOK

This book is organized into three parts. The first part, introduces readers to the concept of social constructionism and the social construction of social roles, reviewing literature on the social construction of motherhood, daughterhood, and cultural constructions through media. The second part is the majority of the book and it addresses a number of topics that scholars are currently studying in the area of mother-daughter communication, from pregnancy and maternal identity to end-of-life communication. Finally, the third part of the book is comprised of a single chapter that is intended to equip a course instructor to design and teach a course focusing on mother-daughter communication.

## Part One: The Social Construction of Motherhood and Daughterhood

Chapter 2 explores the role of adult daughters in relationship with their mothers. Alford looks at social construction as daughter's work and asks us to think about the value of daughtering to a mother and to society. While motherhood has received the lion's share of attention in our scholarly literature, she asks us to consider where ideas about daughtering come from and explores the nature of daughterhood, or shared daughtering experience. Of note is a discussion of role performance as labor; for example, the emotional, love, mental, and kinkeeping effort that goes into daughter work.

In Chapter 3 motherhood and mothering are discussed from a social constructionist perspective. Frameworks and definitions are provided for motherhood and mothering, questioning the origins of these concepts. Alford describes how roles are communicatively constructed and points us to consider our views on birth mothers, social mothers, and caregiving mothers. In addition, she calls attention to the concept of mothering as valuable work product (labor) and explores how our valuation of mothers' work lays a foundation for the labels we use to discuss it. Mothering styles such as tiger mother, bad mom, and free-range parent are explored, along with a discussion of good enough mothering. As you read, consider if daughtering is parallel to mothering? Can we distinguish between the characteristics of each and is it necessary to do so?

In Chapter 4, you will find a discussion of media representations of mothers and daughters from the 1950's to 2017. Miller-Day, Tukachinsky, and Jacobs explore how media representations help give shape and meaning to the mother-daughter relationship. Media such as television and film provide societal cues for performing the roles of mother and daughter, while also socially constructing ideals. The authors point out that motherhood, daughterhood, mothering, daughtering and their meanings are not fixed nor inevitable. They convince us that seeing a woman outside her role of mother is an important stepping stone in making progress for women who may embrace several identities in their lifetime.

Chapter 5 is the final chapter in this section and it uncovers a variety of relational turning points in the mother-daughter relationship. Miller-Day discusses how memorable events between mothers and daughters over the life course can trigger an increase or decrease of intimacy in the relationship. These memorable moments, or turning points, signal a change in the status quo of the mother-daughter relationship. This chapter takes us through the most common types of relational turning points and provides an in-depth discussion of the role of social support as a turning point. Miller-Day found that both emotional and tangible forms of social support were most likely to serve as a relational turning point for daughters. It is important for both mothers and daughters to remember that social support communication is key to maintaining strong bonds. Daughters feel closer

to their mothers when mothers talk with them, listen to them, and are present for them during hardship. Equally, daughters feel closer to mothers when they can reciprocate and provide emotional and tangible support to their mothers.

## Part Two: Enacting the Mother-Daughter Relationship over the Lifespan

In Chapter 6, Lawler describes the intersection of pregnancy and disability. She reveals how women with disabilities have constructed a view of self since childhood, particularly incorporating messages from their mothers. Through their support, women with disabilities may create positive disability identities, which incorporate their disability but do not view it as a hinderance to a good life. Later, when she becomes a mother, a woman's view of self can enhance her experience of pregnancy. Though there are many hurdles and communication challenges from those who see her as incapable, a woman with a disability can advocate for herself to be seen as independent and capable, rather than being seen as secondary to her disability. Lawler calls for us to question how we see ourselves and others related to our abilities, especially in relation to mothering.

In Chapter 7, Colaner, Horstman, and Butauski apply critical feminist theory to the topic of adoptive mothers' ritual communication. They describe how family rituals honor past, present, and future, creating a valuable base for families to communicate about events, create family identity, and generate a sense of home. These rituals are particularly valuable for keeping a birth family connected to the life of their biological child who was adopted into another family. The work of rituals serves as relational maintenance, and can often be invisible, so is therefore undervalued for the effort it takes. Done primarily by adoptive mothers, this work, on behalf of an adopted child, is a unique aspect of mothering labor.

Chapter 8 dives deep into the topics of sex and sexuality, describing how these are communicated between mothers and daughters over a life course. Both conversations and silence are key forms of communication in family talk patterns, which is the primary site for sex education. Faulkner and Watson reveal the use of "metaphoric boundaries" in sexual discussions to mitigate risk and embarrassment. Additionally, they urge families to communicate both positive and negative information about sex and sexuality for the best outcomes related to health and healthy relationships. Daughters engaged in open conversations, the authors found, when their mothers offered reciprocal relationships, but remained quiet when there was a family pattern of ignorance, fear, or silence. Additionally, the authors explore how communication about sex may change as both mothers and daughters age. The unique relationship between mothers and daughters makes this an important space for disclosing personal details.

Continuing this discussion of health, Chapter 9 explores how mothers and adolescent daughters communicate about HPV, sexual health, and HPV vaccination.

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the U.S. affecting approximately one in four Americans throughout their lifetime. In this chapter Hopfer, Duong, and Garcia provide a thorough review of the research literature and discuss how mother-daughter conversations play an important role in the decision to vaccinate adolescents against this disease. Valuable insights for providers and mothers of adolescents are offered.

Chapter 10 begins the discussion of later adolescence and emerging adulthood. Emerging adults are those entering adulthood and often move away from home for college, a job, or a relationship. If you are a student, we ask you to grab your cell phone and look at your recent calls. When's the last time you phoned mom? Or maybe you texted instead. Meadows and Harrigan discuss the various technological methods daughters use to communicate with their moms. Especially in situations where daughters are geographically distant from their mothers, technology becomes increasingly important. Coupling the many changes occurring in a daughter's life during emerging adulthood with the increased geographic separation requires a renegotiation of communication methods. In order to explore how daughters use technology to communicate with their mothers and share (or conceal) private information, the authors report the results of their study investigating adult daughters' choices when conveying information to their moms. They found that daughters who reported less everyday talk with their mothers had a greater perception of positivity about the mother-daughter relationship and reported less conflict.

Chapter 11 explores the mother-daughter relationship once the daughter is married. As daughters age and experience many changes in life, many will marry and thus experience changes in the relationship with their mother. This chapter examines closeness and distance in the mother-married adult daughter relationship. As daughters age, they experience a tension between having both a friendship and a parent-child relationship with mothers. Miller-Ott discusses the negotiation needed to manage that tension. She found that when mothers try to cross into the "friend zone" with daughters, and share information daughters feel is inappropriate or too friend-like, daughters report more distance. Additionally, after marriage, adult daughters in this study reported concern with mothers' reactions to any shared information about their marriage or family life. Daughters reported being afraid of mothers' unhelpful feedback and the possibility of promoting negative perceptions of their spouse. The chapter addresses the slippery slope of calling our mothers our friends.

Speaking of calling your mom, Miller-Ott and Kelly in Chapter 12 examine the preferred technology for communication between mothers and daughters. Not surprisingly, use of technology can be frustrating and cause some conflict. However, it is also a useful tool to maintain connection. With technological advances, there are many media for mothers and daughters to choose from. In their study, Miller-Ott and Kelly asked both daughters and mothers to report on preferred

method of communication and describe the best and worst aspects of communicating via technology. They found that mothers and daughters seem to have a love-hate relationship with using technology to communicate with one other, and these opposing feelings seem to relate to autonomy and connection. Tension arose around perceptions of the benefits of constant contact versus uninhibited access.

In Chapter 13, Kellas, Holman, and Flood detail the many ways storytelling is at the heart of families and the mother-daughter relationship. Families tell stories to socialize one another to the beliefs, values, and norms that come to guide daily life, creating meaning-making maps of their shared relationship terrain. The authors conducted a study exploring meanings, values, and beliefs mothers pass onto their daughters about relationships and love in the stories they tell. Using the backdrop of mother-daughter shared connection and talk, the authors revealed the importance of mothers' messages about love in the lives of their adult daughters.

Continuing along the life course, Chapter 14 explores daughters' perceptions of their full-time working mothers in the United States and South Korea. Harrigan, Hosek, and Yang argue that ideas about motherhood in general and about effective mothering, in particular, are socially constructed through discourse. How daughters make sense of and evaluate their mothers could affect how the daughters enact the role of a mother, when they become mothers. The authors examine the identity construction of working mothers through the talk of their daughters and the role of culture in discussions of mothering. Through original research, the authors show how daughters' talk about their mothers may impact how mothers see themselves. Whether daughters realize it or not, the things they say have an impact on their mothers. Talk about mothering may also impact how daughters behave in the future when they themselves become mothers. Notably, the authors report a great deal of positivity and pride when daughters' talk about their working mothers.

In Chapter 15, Rittenour and Odenweller explore the underbelly of mothering, enumerating the challenges and complexities of this role. Social expectations can sometimes crush mothers in their paths. Many women combat these tensions by cultivating a feminist identity in themselves and their daughters. With this in mind, it is possible to fight against the Mommy Wars that divide mothers and see the underlying causes of the divisiveness. The authors review previous research and discuss how generativity and support networks enhance the experience of mothering.

Chapter 16 explores mother-daughter communication and health, specifically within the experience of breast cancer. Fisher and Wolf discuss a script of responsible womanhood that represents a blend of social discourses that inform family members' expectations of the "right" way for mothers to cope with a breast cancer diagnosis. The authors show that the ways women react to—and fight—breast cancer are tied to greater social expectations of womanhood. Though it may surprise you to learn that even illnesses are subject to gendered ideologies, it is at the heart of breast cancer battles because this disease is so inherently feminine. The

authors thoughtfully provide lessons learned from their research and offer potential responses for each.

In Chapter 17, Seurer explores the complexities and subtleties of communicating about mental health within the mother-daughter dyad. The chapter reveals how daughters of mothers with depression come to understand the meaning of depression and subsequently the meaning of motherhood. Through a discussion of struggles found in her study, the author takes a nuanced look at how notions of motherhood intertwine with embedded social ideologies. The author takes a look at ways the problem and the person can be disentangled, creating more supportive family relationships.

Even for those who have lost mothers, the identity of a daughter still beats inside her. In Chapter 18, Miller-Day and Grainger explore what it means to be a motherless daughter. Maternal loss is something experienced by most women as they age and out-live their parents. The authors examine digital messages shared by motherless daughters on Mother's Day. Findings of this study suggest that while daughters post several different kinds of messages to help cope with a difficult holiday for them, the ties that bind mother and daughter are enduring, even past a mother's death.

Though death is a challenging topic to explore, in Chapter 19 the authors allow us a personal view inside the difficult, but necessary, conversations mothers and daughters may have leading up to death. Whereas, in Chapter 20, Keeley, Lee, and Generous take us to the end of a mother's life and explore final conversations (FCs) at the end of life (EOL). In their interviews with adult daughters' who had these FCs with their mothers, the authors found six themes of FCs revealing that, while challenges exist, FCs leave adult daughters with lasting gifts from their departed mothers.

### Part Three: Moving Forward to Develop Mother-Daughter Communication Courses

The third part of this book is a single chapter providing a guide for developing a mother-daughter communication course. With course instructors in mind, Miller-Day provides a sample course description, objectives, sample course outlines, weekly topics with accompanying readings from this text, and suggested course assignments.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Each of the following chapters has a section titled *What do we still need to know?* These sections point out future directions for research and ideas for future scholars



to pursue. These recommendations mirror our own suggestions for future research directions including the need to examine the role of culture and diversity in motherhood and daughterhood, additional attention to the dark side of mother-daughter communication, increased attention to different developmental periods of the mother-daughter relationship across the lifespan, and the need for communication theory and clearly defined measures in mother-daughter communication research.

In soliciting chapters for this book, we approached male and female scholars from a variety of cultural backgrounds, inside the United States and outside, able bodied and disabled, and who study various family forms such as foster families, single-parent families, and blended families. Yet, the chapters in this volume are by and large not highly diverse. Happily, there are several exceptions including Lawler's chapter on disability and pregnancy, and Harrigan, Hosek, and Yang's chapter on discursive constructions of full-time working mothers from both American and South Korean daughters. Yet these authors also point out the need for more multicultural and multinational research attention to examine the role of culture in motherhood and daughterhood. Additionally, diverse perspectives are needed on the variety of family forms that exist, including but not restricted to multigenerational grandmother-mother-daughter relationships, mother-daughter communication in single, blended, and foster family forms.

Much of the mother-daughter communication research that exists tends to presume relational positivity and relational satisfaction between mothers and daughters. Scholars are encouraged to continue these investigations on communication to develop and maintain high levels of mother-daughter relational quality; yet, additional work is sorely needed on the darkside of mother-daughter communication. The research in many of these chapters point out that emotional distance, maternal criticism, conflict, familial obligations and expectations negatively impact relational quality. More research is needed to further examine imbalanced family systems, estranged mother-daughter relationships, and mother-daughter communication as a potential risk factor for negative physical and mental health outcomes. This also requires scholars to examine the darkside of mother-daughter communication across the life course.

There is still a great need to examine mother-daughter communication over the lifespan. As pointed out elsewhere in Socha and Punyanunt-Carter (in press), Miller-Day, Pezalla, and Chesnut (2013), Socha and Yingling (2010), children have occupied a marginal status in the field of human communication studies. We believe that truly taking a lifespan approach involves investigating the communicative experiences of children and adolescents along with emerging adults, mid-life adults, and older adults. This, of course, introduces complications with research ethics but we encourage communication scholars to join our colleagues in psychology, family studies and other disciplines who regularly include children's development in their areas of inquiry. Communication is central to



mother-daughter bonding, nurturing, discipline, and socialization, investigating emotional neglect and physical punishment are all issues that can be addressed by communication scholars. While there is growing research on mother-emerging and young adult daughters, research on newly married daughters such as that conducted in the chapter by Miller-Ott is still needed. What is the role mother-daughter communication plays in fertility and pregnancy decisions, decisions to divorce, family system adaptation once a daughter starts her own family, and relational maintenance using technology? Mid-life is a time when daughters and mothers may experience emotional distance and unexpected stress (Miller-Day, 2004). Research efforts are needed to examine how the relationship is recalibrated in mid-life to withstand this stress, especially if mothers are “sandwiched” between the needs of her daughter and her own mother. Lastly, as Faulkner and Watson point out in their chapter, there is a necessity to know more about women’s sexuality and sexual health in later life and the role that daughters play in that sphere of her mother’s world.

Finally, all future research endeavors would be well served to closely consider the theories guiding mother-daughter communication research and the clarity of definitions used when conducting that research. As Alford points out in her chapter on daughterhood, we have not had the language to describe the relational work conducted by daughters in the mother-daughter relationship until now. Our eyes have previously been focused on motherhood and mothering. It may require formative, qualitative research to explore daughterhood more fully before operationalizing this as a construct. Yet, we believe that scholars should look closely at the theories being used to guide mother-daughter communication research or test hypotheses. Are those theories being borrowed from other disciplines? Are family communication and interpersonal communication theories sufficient to explain and predict what occurs in mother-daughter communication or should new theories be developed to extend our knowledge? These are all ideas, recommendations, and hopes for scholars conducting future research in the area of mother-daughter communication. We are excited to see what you can accomplish!

## SUMMARY

All told, *Constructing Motherhood and Daughterhood Across the Lifespan* is designed to build upon the publications of a range of scholars doing work in this area. This book takes up where these authors’ current published manuscripts leave off, synthesizing this body of work and moving in new directions, and linking this work to theories and concepts central to the understanding of relationships across the lifespan. Moreover, in addition to its focus on the mother-daughter relationship, we are hopeful that this book contributes substantially to an understanding of

broad relationship processes. For theorists, therapists, and the rest of us, this theme is of immense significance.

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# Daughtering AND Daughterhood

## Adult Daughters in Communication with Their Mothers

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I recently met my mom for lunch at a favorite spot where we routinely split a burger and the check. We laugh with each other, catch up on happenings in our lives, discuss various family members (such as my kids or my dad) and reconnect. Doesn't that sound idyllic? In addition to these lovely things, I usually fix some settings on her phone, bite my tongue about a strange recommendation she has for my career, probe for medical updates and suggest healthy substitutions, respectfully listen to advice about parenting (it's 50/50 whether I put it into practice), and one or both of us says, "It is so frustrating when you do that to me" or "Let's not get into this today." Sound familiar? Adult daughters have relationships with their mothers that are complex, beautiful, and frustrating; like other close relationships, this one is not immune to difficulties. Despite these convoluted issues, by and large, adult daughters find the relationship with their mothers to be valuable, imbuing it with meaning and sometimes angst. Whether or not you, reader, are an adult daughter, I bet this sounds familiar if you've seen mothers and their adult daughters in action.

The most enjoyable people in our lives require an investment of our time and energy and often require that we make sacrifices to keep the relationship going. Whether it's our romantic partner, friend, child, or boss, we get out of a relationship what we put into it. However, for too long the mother-daughter relationship has

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been thought of in two categorically different ways—imagined as either a perfect pair who never argue or as bitter opponents. Do either of these characterizations describe the mother-daughter pairs in your life? It's more likely that the mothers and daughters you're picturing fall somewhere along a continuum between the two extremes of bliss and brokenness. Why don't we see more examples of mother-daughter relationships that fall between the two extremes in contemporary media and scholarship? Although more attention has been paid in recent decades to the mother-adult daughter relationship across a variety of disciplines (e.g., Fingerman, 2001; Fischer, 1986; Fisher, 2010; Miller-Day, 2004; Scharlach, 1987; Schwarz, 2006), it remains an area ripe for further inquiry (Shrier, Tompsett, & Shrier, 2004).

As investigations of the mother-daughter relationship grow in number, our knowledge base expands, and we gather a complete picture of the intricacies of communication between mothers and daughters in adulthood. However, despite the increased attention to this family dyad, there remains a lack of attention paid specifically to the adult daughter's role—not as one-half of a dyad—but as an individual. Relatively few studies foreground adult daughters' experiences over mothers' experiences. Rather, studies sampling adult daughter populations tend to solicit data on dyadic relational interactions, with this commonly resulting in more discussion dedicated to mothers' past experiences and future outcomes than daughters'. The findings of these studies tend to provide us with information about the mother or about interactions between mother and daughter, rather than a sharp focus on daughters' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Contemporary scholarship about mother-daughter communication is still lacking investigation of daughters' communication and their lived experiences in the mother-daughter relationships. I propose that it is time for a shift in the way scholars investigate daughters within families.

Consider the many investigations of mothers' experiences of mothering which have resulted in data and recommendations for improved experiences of mothering, wellbeing, and role satisfaction (See for example, Arendell, 2000; Chodorow, 1999; O'Reilly, 2010; Ruddick, 1995). If daughters' experiences are as salient as mothers', scholars must first match the template for investigating daughters to the same employed for investigating mothers. Then we can begin to offer the best, most practical solutions to improve adult daughters' everyday lives.

To be clear, the robust and ongoing investigations of mothers and daughters contribute a wealth of information about mother-daughter dyads, as you will read in the following chapters. However, when scholarship focuses primarily on the mother's value-add, we miss a crucial component in our understanding of family roles when we deny daughters leading-lady status as an agentic member of the relationship. Much of what you may hear, see, or read (in scholarly or popular works) present daughters as vessels ready to be filled by their mothers; we think

of daughters as waiting around, reacting to mothering when it crops up. Likewise, many portrayals of daughters nurturing their mothers rely on caricatures of the perfect daughter or the disgruntled daughter, leaving little room for common, humdrum daughtering. In this chapter, I offer some alternative ways to consider the daughter role and suggest preliminary definitions for the communicative behaviors that daughters demonstrate. Because these are nascent ideas, I solicit feedback to add, shape, change, and test these definitions to ameliorate and expand existing notions of daughtering.

## DAUGHTERING

Imagine a 30-year-old daughter's cell phone rings, she looks down and sees that it is her mother. In your mind's eye, how does she react? Personally, when I see my mom's name I might be curious (Oh, what's up with her today?), concerned (Uh oh, what's wrong?), dismissive (Well she can wait until I call her back later), or happy (Aww, it's so nice of her to reach out to me)—Yes, these are all MY reactions to MY mom at various times. When I answer that call, I am prepared to contribute to an interaction, but first I think about ME. What am I willing to give to this person today? I imagine that, when receiving calls, you do that too. Whether it be a call from your mom or your friend, you must assess what you're willing to give of yourself to that conversation before you pick up the phone (or ignore the call). When a friend is on the line, these giving behaviors are called "friendship." If a child, partner, or boss is calling, you might be performing "parenting," "loving," or "working." Thus far, there's no adequate word for what a daughter is doing when interacting with her mother.

The first to state the need for new verbiage was van Mens-Verhulst (1995), who said that the language we use is missing the verb: "to daughter" (p. 531). Over the past two decades, some scholars have begun to take up her request and use descriptors like "to daughter" or its accompanying form of "daughtering" when describing behaviors daughters enact. But, what is that? The current go-to word for those who are caretaking others is "mothering" (whether male or female, older or younger relational partner)! Lucy Rose Fischer, who was in the vanguard of mother-daughter scholars (1986) said that behaviors enacted by daughters and mothers toward each other that showed reciprocal responsibility were "mutual mothering" (p. 58). This term has proliferated and leads a frustrating neglect toward daughters' role participation.

Co-opting the behavioral term associated with the mothering role continues the cycle of subordinating daughters' experiences to mothers'. Daughters, then, have no label for the behaviors they enact or the ways they put effort toward relationships with their mothers. Daughters have been relegated to a passive, backseat

role, while mothers are “semantically overburdened” in their role (Walters, 1992, p. 10). What’s more, when we use the word “mothering” for other role descriptors, we oversaturate and therefore devalue, this descriptive as well.

Toward the goal of agreement on the nature of adult daughter behaviors, I propose the following description for the term *daughtering*, which highlights the many behaviors an adult daughter employs in the relationship with her mother.

Daughtering is shown through the many behaviors done by a daughter in relation to her mother to fulfill the social requirements a daughter understands as ascribed or inherent to the role of adult daughter, including the management and avoidance of conflict necessary to maintain a positive—or at least bearable—relationship; protecting herself from possible adverse outcomes; considering and managing her mother’s emotions (including emotion work and emotional labor); giving respect to her mother and demanding it for her from others; deciding to fulfill or ignore obligations, whether implied or stated; management of closeness or distance within the relationship with her mother inclusive of decisions to include the mother into the daughter’s daily activities; the mental work of thinking about her mother’s well-being and future care; carrying out kin work including visits, phone calls, social media communication and assisting in the maintenance of extended family relationships; teaching and training her mother in contemporary ideas and methodologies; and eliciting mothering for herself or her family of creation.

This description illustrates the many ways daughters perform their roles and portrays the active enactment of the adult daughter role. Daughtering, used as a verb to describe the behaviors enacted by a woman in the adult daughter role, is a crucial element that we have been missing in descriptions of the adult daughter role and which ties together the various behaviors and labors of this role. The true value of this description will be revealed through future testing and evaluation of it in research studies. The advantage of outlining daughtering—naming, labeling, and outlining the role—adds to our overall understanding of the place of an adult daughter within a social system (Galvin, 2006). This term provides a way for us to discuss the many ways women can daughter their mothers.

As individuals, there are many roles that we play in our families and relationships and we do not often take the time to consider and evaluate these roles carefully. We occasionally spend some time thinking about our contributions to our relationships and imagine how we can do more or do better. For example, we sometimes think of ourselves as friends and ponder what it means to be a friend and subsequently attempt to be a good friend to others. We evaluate ourselves as romantic partners and put thought into bettering ourselves for our partners. We may have also thought about the ways we want to be good parents (now or in the future). When relationships are important to us, we put energy into them. However, do you know any women who talk to their friends about their efforts *to daughter* their mothers? Do you know of a daughter who asks her mother if she is *daughtering* her well enough or do you know of a mother who gives unsolicited

kudos to her daughter for her excellent *daughtering* efforts? If these questions leave you scratching your head, you're not alone. It's clear that we are leaving a topic out of our conversations and have forgotten to notice a vital role that women play: daughter.

The description of daughtering I present above emerged from my qualitative investigations of mothers and daughters (Alford, 2016). After obtaining permission from the Internal Review Board (IRB), I interviewed women aged 25–45, with a living and healthy mother aged 70 or younger, where daughters were asked to talk about themselves and their role as an adult daughter. Participants completed both an information sheet and IRB study agreement form at the outset of the study. For confidentiality, all names and identifying information for participants has been changed in this discussion. Exploratory objectives of this study included discovering what daughters say about the adult daughter role and identifying the everyday role behaviors that constitute *daughtering* in the mother-daughter relationship once they reached adulthood. To better understand the role of adult daughter in these interviews, women were asked not only to discuss the nature of their relationships with their mothers and how they communicate but to discuss the nature of the role itself.

The questions and topics that arose in these discussions surprised many of the daughters interviewed. While they anticipated discussing their mothers, when asked to think about *themselves* and *their* communication in the relationship, many women began thinking about the relationship in a whole new light. For most of us, a social label we identify with is “daughter”; but we often fail to consider how “daughter” is also a role that we play. Thanks to the insightfulness of those interviewed, together we co-constructed a preliminary description of the essence of daughtering, including emotions associated with daughtering, and assumptions about what it means to be an adult daughter. The experience of *daughtering* has some commonalities.

Building on those early interviews, I have continued to ask women about daughtering. At first, an interviewee may experience some awkwardness or confusion, thinking about what actions she performs and realizing that I am asking her to be vulnerable and open up to talk about herself. As daughters become accustomed to this shift in the thinking, they also experience a frustrating inability to precisely describe their daughtering actions; instead of demonstrating their points, daughters often resort to borrowed language from other relationship depictions.

These discussions often take some time for the cognizance of identifiable adult daughter role behaviors to emerge, yet eventually, daughters moved from uncertainty toward growing awareness and, eventually, to an eagerness to discuss their lived experiences. Daughtering, it turns out, is being enacted every day in social situations, but because it is not usually pinpointed as a role, the idea of daughtering stays somewhat invisible. Though daughters report that their mother-daughter



relationships have unique, distinguishing features—taken collectively, daughtering is a socially embedded performance.

How is it that daughters can easily report that they “do things” for their mothers, but cannot find the exact words to express what they do or how much it means? Why is it that women can productively work on being better at their roles as Wife, Girlfriend, Friend, and Mother, but don’t notice the ways they evaluate and produce the Daughter role? Strangely, our social notions of daughtering exist as a backdrop in the lives of most women and in their relationships. This occurs to such a degree that daughtering efforts go unnoticed, uncategorized, and undervalued. These queries led me to a burgeoning awareness that in order to enable scholars to accurately study family roles, there must be preliminary work done to collectively clarify terms related to daughters. Clarifying terminology around “daughter” as a construct as well as her role in “daughtering” will enhance our accuracy in studying similar phenomenon and allow scholars to more deeply understand a daughter’s role in a family system.

## The Daughtering Construct

For a rich understanding of the social construction of daughtering, we must first consider daughters as independent agents of change. The prevailing cultural representations of “daughter” allow only for understanding daughters referentially as either their mother’s peer or their adult mini-me (see chapter 11, this volume, for a discussion of mothers as best friends). The social construct of mothering as an empowered and skilled performance has traction, but daughters have come to be considered an artifact of their mothers’ production. It is an unfortunate reality that roles of women are differentially constructed, but those constructs are linked (Glenn, 1994), creating a dichotomy between mother as an agent of control and daughter as an object of control. This stance allows us to consider daughters only as objects rather than agentic beings. This point of view is often reflected in the language of the women with whom I speak. They frequently consider “daughter” as a label rather than a job with job functions. Additionally, daughters tend to borrow language from other relationships when describing their role, including words like *friends*, *mothering*, and *caregiving*. The result of this borrowed language is daughters fall back on terminology that describes a similar kind of role, but not exactly the daughter role. In turn, the use of somewhat imprecise language to talk about daughtering continues the misperceptions associated with daughters’ contributions.

If we understand that “A rich vocabulary on a given subject reveals an area of concern of the society whose language is being studied” (Schulz, 1975, p. 64), then it becomes clear that lack of communal language for describing the vital family job of daughtering means daughters remain in a marginalized status in family