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Literature proscribes and prescribes ethically. When stories reinforce a society's unhealthy prejudices, responsible readers should find others. The *Bildungsroman* has fostered the perspective that women are expendable, that coming of age terminates in adult identity formation, and that acculturation is the access to happiness and success. "Cinderella" is the current American companion tale for female coming of age. In both, male success trumps female success, female happiness depends on attachment to a male, adult coming of age is the end to human development, and happiness depends upon social acculturation. Such tales diminish females unacceptably.

Although many critics have challenged the ethical merits of perpetuating the *Bildungsroman* and "Cinderella" agendas, none have proposed an alternative. This dissertation explores that possibility in the new genre of the "self-actualization novel," a nomenclature highlighting the importance of Abraham H. Maslow's famous concept. Frequently written by marginalized authors, this genre avoids the pitfalls of the *Bildungsroman* and the American "Cinderella" marriage master narrative. The novels of Jade Snow Wong, Julia Alvarez, Lisa Alther, Ntozake Shange, and Fannie Flagg explore family, education, friends, work, community, and love as alternatives for enriching women's lives and their worlds. Although these self-actualization novels vary in their approaches to characterizing ethical females, they all promote a lifelong journey of self-fulfillment and social responsibility (*Motivation* 217). The self-actualization novels of

marginalized authors offer great hope that all women can establish their voices and places—for themselves and for others.

LEAVING CINDERELLA IN THE ASHES:
THE SELF-ACTUALIZATION NOVEL

by

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To Richard Walsh, my husband and rare best friend.

To the memory of Lawrence Edward Rohrer, my father.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
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PREFACE

I write about this topic for several reasons. I wanted to convey my belief in the importance of stories. I also wanted to caution Americans about stories that are shortchanging females. Most importantly, I wanted to find better stories.

We live in a world where science reigns: I need data to prove that I can teach, and I need data to prove that my students have learned. But the reality is that when a student asks, “What did we do when I was absent,” my students usually respond with stories. Like them, we tell stories all day long without consciously becoming narrators. Consider these examples: When husbands ask, “How was your day,” wives tell stories. When officers ask for accident reports, drivers tell stories. When grandmothers inquire about the family, granddaughters tell stories. When congregations wait for eulogies, widows tell stories. In sum, when we confess or deny, report or amend, and praise or criticize, we tell stories. Therefore, we should carefully compose, interpret, and pass along stories.

Although narratives can save, they can also destroy. Currently pervasive stories cheat American women of their potential. Based on the “Cinderella” agenda of “marrying well” and the *Bildungsroman* agenda of coming of age, these tales demand acculturation. What intrigues me about this situation is that not everyone participates in this master narrative. Many marginalized women write fiction about females who strive beyond marrying well. When I first read *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe*, I found such a narrative.

Many years later, I began to read Maslow’s work on self-actualization. Maslow’s case studies reveal self-actualizers—people who pursue something they deem “bigger”

than themselves, associate with people they truly respect, develop their creativity, detach themselves from hypocrisy, fight injustice, love fiercely, exude spontaneity, and laugh loudly. They carefully select with whom and on what they spend their time, energy, and resources. If unpopular, they do not care and probably do not even notice. They stand against assimilationist and coming-of-age agendas and, therefore, against the agendas of “Cinderella” and the *Bildungsroman*. I began to ask myself why America does not prize such individuals and their stories. I asked myself why America prizes, instead, coming-of-age tales that terminate in adulthood; tales restricted to heterosexual marriage as the only path to happiness; and tales devoid of ethical concerns. I asked myself why women should concede their freedom and creativity to the master narrative of “Cinderella,” which is designed to frustrate them for the rest of their lives.

Having found no good reason, I searched for more stories by marginalized women and found many who portray self-actualizers instead of Cinderellas and *Bildungsromane* heroes. I determined these non-traditional stories to be a new genre: the “self-actualization novel.” For my dissertation, I have chosen self-actualization novels by Ntozake Shange, Julia Alvarez, Lisa Alther, Fannie Flagg, and Jade Snow Wong. These novelists are concerned with how women can thrive throughout their lives as family members, learners, workers, friends, community members, and lovers. Further, these stories espouse the self-actualizing dual focus of improving yourself and improving your world.

Stories reflect, reveal, and construct our lives, as well as our world—for better and for worse. I hope that this study discourages perpetuating profane stories and encourages embracing sacred stories.

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INTRODUCTION:
TIME FOR A CHANGE—
THE *BILDUNGSROMAN* AND “CINDERELLA”

And the first step, as you know, is always what matters most, particularly when we are dealing with those who are young and tender. That is the time when they are easily moulded and when any impression we choose to make leaves a permanent mark. . . . Shall we therefore readily allow our children to listen to any stories made up by anyone, and to form opinions that are for the most part the opposite of those we think they should have when they grow up? . . . Then it seems that our first business is to supervise the production of stories, and choose only those we think suitable, and reject the rest.

(Plato *The Republic*, 2.377a-c.)

As Plato cautions, story molds our lives.¹ In *The Power of Story*, Jim Loehr proclaims that when we give energy to “bad stories,” we can become damaged, disengaged, unhealthy, and ineffectual (9). While we seek to mature, our story selections are ethical choices. As Plato suggests, the ethical impact of what has become known as “coming-of-age” stories, like the *Bildungsroman*, is particularly important.

¹ Recently, in his Preface to *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes, validates Plato, adding that people become that to which they are repeatedly exposed. Barthes grounds his *Mythologies* essays with this statement: “For while I don’t know whether, as the saying goes, ‘things which are repeated are pleasing,’ my belief is that they are significant” (12).

The *Bildungsroman*

According to Fritz Martini, the idea of “cultivation (*Bildung*) through a harmony of aesthetic, moral, rational, and scientific education” has flourished since the Enlightenment (5). Jeffrey L. Sammons traces the genesis of *Bildung* to a German bourgeois agenda of coming of age (41). For Wilhelm Dilthey, *Bildung* implies “a total growth process”—not a checklist of lessons learned—and reflects the “bourgeois humanism” that controls the “German imagination” (in Swales 14-15).² In essence, *Bildung* is culturally constructed and perpetuated—annihilating individualism.

The *Bildungsroman*, a genre focusing on a young male’s development, arose as a literary component to the “intensely bourgeois” agenda of the *Bildung* (Sammons 42).³ During the course of the *Bildungsroman*, the initially individualistic narrative voice metastasizes into a socio-cultural proclamation, which subsumes the male protagonist into his cultural destiny. The hero matures as he adopts the cultural norm.

Unfortunately, the traditional *Bildungsroman* genre is not an appropriate literary vehicle for modern American female self-fulfillment for three reasons: 1) it features only a male protagonist and his physical trials; 2) it demands acculturation to a male-dominated bourgeois society and forbids resistance; and 3) it poses a stagnant view of

² According to Edward Stewart and Milton J. Bennett, “Germans, valuing history, conflate personal identity with German ideals” (130).

³ Sammons notes that although literary criticism attributes the origin of the *Bildungsroman* to nineteenth-century Germany, in general, and to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, in particular, literary criticism fails to identify many modern examples (31).

coming of age. For the bourgeois male, to come of age means to become aggressive and competitive with each other (Endicott 42). As a result, women are expendable, peripheral characters.⁴ When he comes of age, she is gone. This agenda outlaws women from the typically male “pissing contests” and ignores more important struggles like those against prejudice.⁵ This male-dominated bourgeois nationalism also excludes the proletariat and the subaltern.⁶ In relation to the protagonist, all other characters connect and disconnect “in a remarkably providential way” (Swales 30).⁷ The *Bildungsroman* depicts an adolescent coming-of-age process that stagnates in adulthood, ultimately portraying an allegedly stable self.⁸ The rest of life merely plays out upon that “true” self as

⁴ According to Bonnie Hoover Braendlin, the *Bildungsroman*'s protagonist positions himself against his “sexual *other*, the woman” (5), who contributes to his development through her foreignness.

⁵ Further, female characters' auxiliary positions reveal the typical masculinist artistic and literary image of “woman as devil or angel, hindrance or helpmate,” valuing females only in relationship to the male protagonist without a meaningful future of their own (Braendlin 5).

⁶ Esther Kleinbord Labovitz notes that the *Bildungsroman*'s male protagonist is “groomed for a ‘calling’” (53) by his culture. According to Mark B. Tappan, cultures sculpt stories that mold their citizens, providing what K. Gergen and M. Gergen term “common discursive ‘forestructures’” that guide individuals' interpretations of their behavior and systematize how they organize their lives (10).

⁷ Critics, like Paul Gilroy, object to this agenda as fascism. In *Against Race*, Gilroy connects nationalism to fascism and the “New Racism”—all of which are reductionist and essentializing agendas. Like Gilroy's “camps,” the traditional *Bildungsroman* stratifies society's members outside the bourgeoisie.

⁸ The plot of the typical *Bildungsroman* constitutes a journey similar to Arnold van Gennep's three-stage coming-of-age cycle: 1) societal separation triggered by physical and emotional turmoil; 2) transition with obstacles, mentors, successes, and failures; and 3) aggregation into the adult world. Like the hero quest tale that eventually leads to a return to the original culture, as outlined by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, the *Bildungsroman* avoids questioning and rejecting the merits of the status quo. Tracy Nashel worries about the dismemberment of life into stages; fears that nostalgia for adolescence is attached to adult nostalgia for power; objects that social

individuals try desperately to understand who that would be and remain “true” to that self—truncating any future maturation.⁹ In summary, the *Bildungsroman* agenda mandates a one-time, male acculturation while excluding women (and other marginalized citizens) from important social roles.

“Cinderella”

The female complement to the *Bildungsroman* is the “Cinderella” tale. According to its plot and agenda, the female protagonist obsesses over luring a successful male into a marriage proposal and acculturating into his society. “Cinderella” is a tale of patriarchal expectations, sibling rivalry, abandonment fears, and sexual anxieties, which is hardly innocent (Behrens and Rosen 300).¹⁰ Karen Rowe correlates the tale’s glorification of female “passivity, dependency, and self-sacrifice” with the culture’s economic need for a woman’s acceptance of domestic and maternal roles. This political agenda, she contends, assures masculine power and marriage as the only appropriate model by which to secure the estate (239).¹¹

definitions of identity are “inherently male” (9); and promotes teen fiction as “a necessary feminist tool” (34).

⁹ This is even more problematic for Americans who have no defining parameters and rituals for the end of childhood and the advent of adulthood.

¹⁰ Rowe traces the fairy tale genre to this romance, contending that the popularity of the marriage mandate reveals both a youthful and adult fascination with the romance of fairy tales (238). Laurence Behrens and Leonard J. Rosen claim that far from being innocent tales, “Cinderella” and “Snow White” constitute adult attempts to inculcate children with “culturally approved values” (300). Rowe concurs: societies have always employed folktales as “primary mechanisms for inculcating roles and behaviors” (238).

¹¹ Ideally, these stories were designed not only to subjugate women, but also to afford women comfort and stability that is, an acceptance of their subjugation and coming of

The “Cinderella” agenda poses two problems: 1) it affords women only one rite of passage, ending at the altar; and 2) it subjugates females to males. Cinderella’s only option is to leave the home of one subjugator (the stepmother) for the home of another (the prince) through a marriage contract. Obviously, such a restricted view of success and happiness—even if it could guarantee that—demeans female intelligence, creativity, and agency.¹² For Janet L. Surrey, “Cinderella” depicts females’ “fear of owning [their] power” (166).¹³ Cinderella’s servile life reinforces her perception of her insignificance and leads to an expectation that mere upright misery will guarantee rescue (Kolbenshlag 353). What happens to Cinderella after the slipper fitting is anyone’s guess because she fades into princely oblivion.¹⁴ Having lived under her stepmother’s thumb, she now lives under the prince’s foot.¹⁵

age (239). One recalls, perhaps, Plato’s Noble Lie that to fit into social expectations guarantees happiness.

¹² Carole M. Kortenhuis and Jack Demarest, after conducting over a dozen studies during two decades, conclude that children’s literature does not present authentic representations of gendered adult behavior. Kortenhuis and Demarest beg for a variety of gendered roles (231). Elizabeth Durtro recognizes the difficulty of exposing polarized gender notions found in stories for youth because these notions seem “natural.” Barthes attributes this perception of naturalness to myths—culturally-constructed and culturally empowering stories (131). Obviously, this can be dangerous for readers. Today, as more adult women than ever (fifty-one percent) live without a husband, the American female marriage master narrative fails to depict the reality of many American females’ lives.

¹³ Madonna Kolbenshlag notes that “Cinderella” attempts to replace these fears with a forced “*abasement* as a prelude to and precondition of *affiliation*” (353).

¹⁴ Philip Wylie asserts that once at the palace, Cinderella does not conduct any meaningful business or exact any substantive decision (52). The power of the mass-market publishing industry promotes this unhealthy agenda. According to the 2007 report of the Romances Writers of America, the romance industry’s sales exceeded one billion dollars and constituted almost fifty-five percent of mass market fiction sold and almost forty percent of all fiction sold. It is no surprise that publishing companies inflict narrative scripts on their authors and, by extension, their readers. Jane Yolen blames the

The “Cinderella” system of mandatory marriage sets up women for failure and unhappiness, restricting their options and concluding their coming of age with marriage.¹⁶ The marriage mandate reflects an agenda requiring rescue and deception.¹⁷ Further, the system restricts what constitutes happiness, privileging women who are either “sexy, sassy sirens” or “doomed victims” (Nashel 1). Thus, this system fails readers as a thoughtful guide for lifelong female self-fulfillment.

As the “Cinderella” narrative continues to dominate the depictions of women in novels and the mass media, American females at the turn of the twenty-first century still

mass-marketed American version of “Cinderella” with advocating the dangerous dream of a “passive princess,” the ‘insipid beauty waiting’ for her Prince Charming that has acculturated millions of males and females (363). According to Yolen, the American female marriage master narrative novel has adopted the fairy tale’s financial and political agendas (352), which have become the American female marriage master narrative.

¹⁵ Linda K. Christian-Smith speculates that the popularity of the marriage mandate lies with conservative politics (*Becoming* 2). She is convinced that these novels perpetuate imbalanced male-female power relationships, which advocate female subjugation as they desperately try to “accommodate themselves to whatever autonomy they can secure” (42). As such, these modern novels reflect a lucrative biased agenda. However, for Nashel, the fairy tales’ guarantee of happiness is based on beauty while the modern American romance further pollutes with its racism (78).

¹⁶ Christian-Smith catalogues the marriage mandate agenda in prominent modern romance novel themes: Romance depends on a financial relationship and heterosexuality, privileging nongenital sexual relations, and purports to transform a woman’s life by endowing her with prestige although it mandates male domination and female subordination at the personal, private level (*Becoming* 18). Christian-Smith traces these themes back to the elements of teen romances based on the “code of *beautification*,” which requires class-based beauty routines to project the appearance of natural beauty, constituting the main female attribute as the lure for romance. This code objectifies women as it sexualizes female bodies (*Becoming* 45).

¹⁷ Christian-Smith’s cataloguing reveals that these tales organize a set of culturally gendered expectations into thematic and narrative patterns for establishing social guidelines. Janice A. Radway concurs that the romance is no simple love tale but an “exploration of the meaning of patriarchy for women,” an exploration of how “men possess and regularly exercise power over them in all sorts of circumstances” (75). No wonder the system ultimately fails.

learn to desire marriage to an economically thriving male. A modern example illustrates the deficiencies of the “Cinderella” agenda:

Imagine Susan, a 28-year old woman, who has been exposed all her life to the American marriage female master narrative, whether it is vis-à-vis Disney, Lifetime, Nora Ephron, Nora Roberts, or Hollywood in general. Imagine that she is consistently promoted, is considered for a top-level government clearance, is awarded a Masters’ degree from Johns Hopkins University, volunteers for a charity, invests in local and national politics, invests in her Roth account, protests war, travels, socializes, practices her faith, respects her parents, enjoys a good laugh, attends cultural events, exercises, eats well, makes sushi, and self-examines. Despite these accomplishments, many of her co-workers, friends, and family members reduce her life to the nagging question, “Aren’t you engaged yet?”

“Cinderella” has co-opted not only this woman’s life, but also those of many others.¹⁸

For millions of mainstream American females, like Susan, this becomes their dominant desire.¹⁹ For too many, this becomes their only desire.²⁰ One wonders why this bleak narrative still pervades.²¹ Of course, it need not.

¹⁸ Before the romance, the dilemmas associated with love and sex have been played out in ancient stories, such as Plato’s *Symposium*, where Socrates develops the myth of the ill-fated other halves searching for each other only to find ultimate disappointment. Similarly, Vivian Gornick frequently sees love in addiction terms--“necessary but insufficient” because we should complete ourselves and wake up to the realization that the “idea of love as a means of illumination” has become anticlimactic (296). One has only to recall Ovid’s *Ars Erotica*, Geoffrey Chaucer’s “The Knight’s Tale,” Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, Dante Alighieri’s *Inferno*, Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*, Charles Dickens’s *Great Expectations*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* to recall the bounty of romance and sex tales that disappoint.

¹⁹ Karen Horney’s case studies confirm that many women are “possessed with a single thought”—“I must have a man” to the extent that “by comparison all the rest of life seemed stale, flat, and unprofitable” (211). Specifically, publishing companies have perpetuated the “Cinderella” agenda through romances. Nashel sees the romance genre’s

The “Self-actualization Novel”

Even though readers—whether inside or outside the power structure—cannot avoid exposure to the master narrative’s lure, they can resist it and establish their own values.²² In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault discusses how the self transforms itself amidst cultural constructs:

What I mean by the phrase [“arts of existence”] are those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to

emphasis on sex projected in the media’s prevailing image of adolescent females as “seductive, self-confident girls” with plenty of opportunity and freedom but who, nonetheless fixate on lingerie shopping (1). The American media behind the romance sexualizes adolescent girls, reducing self-actualization to objectification.

²⁰ Antonio Gramsci explains how dominant groups create and maintain their power of consolidation and persuasion (7) through narrative. Moreover, Gramsci theorizes why readers, like citizens, acquiesce to power structures, such as the publishing industry.

²¹ Curious as to why so many thousands of American women purchase and read romance novels, Radway interviewed the “Smithton women” and catalogued their responses: Most read for restoration (62); to raise their spirits (66); to “become the heroine” (67); and to escape by identifying with a fantastic heroine (90). Radway was both impressed with and disturbed by their attachment to romances and their subsequent guilt over their attachment. Radway soon discovered that these women were desperately searching for certain heroines to admire and emulate—those who transform “an inadequate suitor into the perfect lover-protector” (214). Surprisingly, the Smithton women viewed their romance reading as a protest against society’s prejudice against the romance as low culture (208). For these readers, romance permits them to feel supported and deludes them that they are “reconstituted” (97). Radway worries that instead of inciting these women to alter their own lives, reading romances may deter women from contributing to the real world because they are satisfied with the virtual world. Another study, by romance writer Diane Palmer, reports that romance readers claim that the books helped them surmount “anguish and grief.” For them romance fantasy provides a “safety valve, a way of letting off steam without boiling any water” (353). In “Mass Market Romance: Pornography for Women Is Different,” Ann Snitow credits romance with easing the boredom, disappointment, and frustration of many women’s lives (313).

²² Michel Foucault defines power as “the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (93).

make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria. (10-11)

With intentionality, society establishes conduct codes through its master narrative. However, with the same degree of intentionality, we can reject those master narrative codes and privilege others. When we voluntarily privilege stories apart from those socially imposed, we can reconstruct new identities.

Charles Taylor defines identity as “the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon” for determining “from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done.” For Taylor, when we view life from our horizons, we establish the vision from which we are “capable of taking a stand” (*Sources* 27). In an Aristotelian manner, Taylor grounds his view of identity construction and re-creation on ethical choices. We create and re-create who we are in accordance with our “horizon,” which constitutes our ethical worldview. Stories incarnate such horizons and ethics and, hence, have the possibility for change.²³

Kwame Anthony Appiah helpfully reminds us of the social component of our identity. As our identity depends on our functioning as social beings, a “shift in normative stereotype” not only changes us but also, allows for “the alteration of a social identity” (198-199). As readers, we participate in this shift if we continually choose stories that upset and challenge power imbalances.

²³ Of course, we live in a world that tries to influence our identity creation. For Richard Walsh, it is important to realize that we can know our master narratives “in part” and “escape cultural captivity in part” (174). For Walsh, “in part” is crucial because without acknowledging that limitation, “we fall back into the popular view of myth and lose all hope of self-knowledge and self-creation” (174).

Erich Fromm claims that after the age of six, a significant emotional experience can inspire value change (*Anatomy* 370). Stories can supply us with such a significant emotional experience. For Soshana Felman, female readers glean their values from female-authored texts as “only women can *empower* women’s story to become a story” (126). According to Bonnie Hoover Braendlin, such authors have looked “beyond the literary mainstream, beyond the patriarchal, white male system” (86). Unlike the perpetrators of “Cinderella,” many marginalized female writers proscribe male-dominant political agendas and prescribe female agency. Several examples illustrate possibilities here: Jade Snow Wong’s *Fifth Chinese Daughter* inspires female economic and creative power; Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies* searches for female power to overthrow an oppressor and reject patriarchal strongholds; Lisa Alther’s *Kinflicks* examines female power to choose alternative sexual orientations and reject the “Cinderella” agenda; Fannie Flagg’s *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* depicts individual and collective female agency against ethnic and class prejudices; and Ntozake Shange’s *Betsey Brown* emboldens women to redefine their mother-daughter relationships as independent females who self-actualize (*Motivation* 90). These five novels expose power dilemmas that explore unethical imbalances and characterize females as their own agents of lifelong reform.

Offering alternatives to the *Bildungsroman* and “Cinderella” tale, these five novelists illustrate Maslow’s self-actualization characteristics:

1. heartiness, lustiness, and “aliveness” (*Motivation* 208);

2. ability to see “reality more clearly” without “defensiveness” or “pose, hypocrisy, front, face, playing a game, trying to impress”; “judge people correctly and efficiently” (*Motivation* 208);
3. “quality of detachment,” a “need for privacy,” and a sense of autonomy (*Motivation* 212-213);
4. “continued freshness of appreciation” (*Motivation* 214);
5. “oceanic feeling” (*Motivation* 216);
6. “genuine desire to help the human race” (*Motivation* 217);
7. deep and “profound interpersonal relations . . . with rather few individuals” (*Motivation* 218);
8. ability to discriminate between “means and ends” (*Motivation* 220);
9. “creativeness” (*Motivation* 223);
10. “resistance to enculturation” (*Motivation* 226);
11. self-respect, self-esteem, the “esteem of others” (*Motivation* 90);
12. strength, achievement, mastery, competency (*Motivation* 90);
13. “confidence in the face of the world” (*Motivation* 90);
14. independence and freedom (*Motivation* 90);
15. rejection of “rubricizing” and classifying people (*Toward* 75);
16. “new discontent and restlessness” if not pursuing what one is “fitted for” (*Motivation* 91);
17. involvement in a “cause outside [one’s] own skin” (*Farther* 43);
18. selfishness and unselfishness (*Motivation* 91);
19. “individual and social” foci (*Toward* 91);
20. “rational and irrational” decisions (*Toward* 91);
21. “fusion with others and detachment from others” (*Toward* 91);
22. “[i]ncreased integration, wholeness, and unity of the person” (*Toward* 91);
23. “uniqueness” (*Toward* 157);
24. “increased spontaneity” (*Toward* 157);
25. “ability to love” (*Toward* 157);
26. “sense of belongingness” (*Management* 16); and
27. working at something that one perceives is “bigger” than oneself (*Toward* iv).

These twenty-seven criteria suggest two broad themes: lifelong self-examination and social responsibility without forced acculturation. Although many critics have challenged the merits of perpetuating the *Bildungsroman* and “Cinderella” agendas, none have proposed an alternative. This study proposes a new genre of the “self-actualization novel,” a nomenclature highlighting the importance of Maslow’s famous concept. This

genre avoids the pitfalls of the *Bildungsroman* and the American “Cinderella” marriage master narrative by embracing lifelong self-actualization, questioning or rejecting the status quo, considering a plethora of human dilemmas, appealing to all classes and ethnicities, and accepting rejection and failure. This study looks at the self-actualization novels written by five marginalized women who reject the acculturation mandates of the *Bildungsroman* and “Cinderella” in order to portray women who self-examine and socially contribute in a variety of ways. Through “a continual series of choices for the individual” (*Toward* 193), these five marginalized female novelists accept the “discontent and restlessness” that self-actualizers experience in their searches for peace within themselves and in their relationships outside the mainstream culture (*Motivation* 91).²⁴ Further, these novelists inspire women to develop healthy gendered selves and “general-human” selves (*Toward* 210).²⁵

A Female Self-actualizer’s Life

The following chapters demonstrate how these novelists espouse lifelong female self-actualization through family, education, friendship, work, community, and love. The chapters’ chronological order follows a female self-actualizer’s life. Chapter one depicts how family values, practices, and expectations contribute to but do not define female identity. *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, *Kinflicks*, *Betsey Brown*, and *In the Time of the*

²⁴ In fact, Maslow recognizes that “the *complete absence* of frustration, pain or danger is dangerous” (*Toward* 200). Further, Maslow respects that “[g]rowth has not only rewards and pleasures but also many intrinsic pains” (204), seeing self-actualization as a “dialectic between growth-fostering forces and growth-discouraging forces” (205).

²⁵ Maslow’s theory evokes the need to feel fulfilled, not only as a gendered individual, but also, as a member of a relationship or group.

Butterflies illustrate families that initially restrict their daughters' self-actualizations, but ultimately inspire their daughters to reexamine who they are—in relation to and independent from their female social roles. Chapter two considers the value of education for female development. *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, *Kinflicks*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, and *Betsey Brown* reflect the strengths and weaknesses of formal education, consider informal methods, and explore autodidacticism. As a cultural force, education has the potential to empower self-knowledge and self-acceptance, provide models for social responsibility, and suggest options for non-conformity. Chapter three analyzes the influence of friends for the female characters of *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, *Kinflicks*, *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, and *Betsey Brown*. These novels stress that self-actualizing extends beyond mere self-awareness; and they promote friendships that require reciprocity, responsibility, and loyalty—virtues sorely missing in “Cinderella.” Chapter four addresses the significance of work as females experiment with options for financial security apart from the “Cinderella” marriage contract. Shange, Alther, Flagg, and Wong portray characters who are either trapped or inspired by their work. Chapter five emphasizes Alvarez's, Flagg's, Shange's, and Alther's sense of the importance of communities as they affect their female characters' awareness of social responsibility. These novelists explore the potentials of marginalized communities to offer refuge and support for females who are unable or unwilling to assimilate into the marriage agenda. Chapter six looks at how each novel reconsiders the American marriage master narrative of “Cinderella” by investigating what love means on a daily basis for self-actualizing women within their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers, as well as outside those

roles. In addition, these female writers reevaluate the marriage goal by exploring alternative sexual orientations and loving relationships.²⁶ Through the influences of family, education, friends, work, community, and love, these self-actualization novels realistically portray the “disconnect” of younger and older marginalized women, distinctly challenge normative values, and promote social responsibility. As narratives have the power to affect identity formation, which is the “heart of human life” (Appiah 268), and identity formation has the power to affect society, self-actualization novels may not only promote diverse options for female identity development, but may also inspire responsible relationships and foster “human flourishing” (4).

In order to trace these influences on a woman’s entire life, we start with her family relationships. From her family, she learns who she wants to become and how she wants to relate to the world. We will see that some families nurture while others impede self-actualization. Ranging from King Lear’s wailing to Mother Mary’s comforting, these parents strongly influence their children’s lives. Like it or not, we are all “to the manner born” (Shakespeare, *Hamlet* I, iv, 15).

²⁶ Maslow explains his criterion for a loving relationship, devoid of sexualizing, stressing that love becomes “subjective or phenomenological,” not “objective or behavioral.” Similarly, in *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm promotes love as an affirming union between partners (287). Maslow’s self-actualizers display “tenderness and affection with great enjoyment, happiness, satisfaction, elation, and even ecstasy” (*Motivation* 236). Ideally, Maslow contends, loving another person fosters spontaneity and eschews roles (238). Maslow’s self-actualizers contradict the battle between the sexes (238) that prevails in the media. Maslow’s belief that self-actualizers “have the power to love and the ability to *be* loved” (241) comprises a healthier prescription for female self-actualization than the *Bildungsroman* and “Cinderella.”

CHAPTER I

WHEN MAMA AIN'T HAPPY, AIN'T NOBODY HAPPY: FAMILY AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION

What a mother sings to the cradle goes all the way down to the coffin.
(Henry Ward Beecher)

A man's life from birth to death was a series of transition rites which
brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors.
(Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* 122)

Because women begin their lives as daughters in a cradle, we begin with the influence of the family—an influence that often extends back to ancestors. The female characters of *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, *Kinflicks*, *Betsey Brown*, and *In the Time of the Butterflies* struggle to self-actualize within their familial roles of daughters, mothers, grandmothers, or sisters, establishing healthy relationships with family members when possible and extricating themselves from unhealthy relationships. Each novel approaches a woman's self-actualization as a family member in different ways and with different results. *Fifth Chinese Daughter* focuses on Jade Snow's attempt to find the "Middle Way" in her family relationships as a second-generation Chinese American daughter. *Kinflicks* addresses Mrs. Babcock's and Ginny Bliss's evolving adult mother-daughter relationship, in addition to Ginny's maternal role. *Betsey Brown* splits its focus between the protagonist, a middle-class African American daughter, and Jane Brown, her frustrated mother. *In the Time of the Butterflies* dramatizes the Mirabal family's

experiences of adultery, patriarchy, abuse, and machismo.²⁷ Each text brings a variety of issues to this discussion, proscribing and prescribing values and behaviors through the portrayals of those who do and those who do not self-actualize.

Fifth Chinese Daughter: Daddy's Little Girl No More

According to Maria Hong, texts that dramatize Asian Americans coming of age are “relatively scarce” (15). *Fifth Chinese Daughter* is one such rare text. Jade Snow Wong’s novel dramatizes the story of a self-actualizing, second-generation Chinese American’s childhood and adolescence, which is constrained and enhanced by her family.²⁸ Ultimately, Jade Snow succeeds outside the “Cinderella” agenda and Chinese Americans’ expectations of strict family loyalty.²⁹

For centuries, Chinese culture has been predicated on filial piety (*xiao*)—the “yardstick of morality by which the domestic power relationship was judged.” Although early Confucianism prescribed a simple and sincere father-child relationship, later dynasties married the filial piety code to a loyalty code (*zhong*), which has become the modern model, mandating family management in terms of governance and “absolute subordination” (Zhou 63). Chinese Americans during the 1950s continued this code, teaching their children to see themselves as only one link in a long family chain (Wang

²⁷ For a look at machismo and infidelity from a Latina perspective, see Alma Luz Villanueva’s *The Ultraviolet Sky*.

²⁸ The author is designated as Jade Snow Wong and the character is designated as Jade Snow.

²⁹ Published in 1950, Wong’s autobiography has been translated into many languages, disseminated around the world, embraced by her family and Chinatown residents, praised by the United States Department of State, and both denigrated and lauded by Chinese American critics.

182). Further, parents exerted a great deal of control even over their adult children particularly with respect to their sexuality (Connie S. Chan 91). Chinese American parents conveyed to their daughters what was considered “too overtly sexual” behavior (93). Well aware of their parents’ sacrifices, second-generation Chinese American teenagers often experienced the heavy burdens of meeting parental expectations, of maintaining the mother culture, and of assimilating into the American mainstream culture (94). In addition, females felt the added burden—promoted by Chinese principles and sayings—to raise proper children because a mother’s future was tied to their achievements (Ling, *Surviving* 128-129).

In addition to codes of Chinese family loyalty, the Wong family in *Fifth Chinese Daughter* operates in the context of American prejudices against the Chinese. The history of American immigration laws—from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 to its repeal in 1943—reveals the basis for much of the cultural tension that the Wong family and its Chinatown neighbors experienced.³⁰ As Jade Snow’s father arrived in America at

³⁰ In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act, blocked Chinese laborers’ immigration and denied naturalization to those already in America (Rubin 256). However, Congress allowed the immigration of merchants, students, and “visitors for pleasure.” This act was “the first law restricting the entrance of free immigrants” (Daniels 76). James Kyung-Jin Lee expounds further on nineteenth-century immigration restrictions, for example, those in San Francisco targeting Chinese laundrymen (178). The Immigration Act of 1903 excluded and deported foreigners “for reasons of previous criminal convictions or anarchist beliefs/affiliations” (Rubin 257). The Immigration Act of 1917 instituted an immigrant literacy requirement and continued to restrict Asian immigration (259). In 1921 The Quota Act limited a nation’s immigration to three percent of its group’s 1910 census population (258). In 1924 when the Immigration Restriction Act (Johnson-Reed Act) revised the quota to two percent of the group’s 1890 census representation, almost all Asians were denied entry (259). According to Mae Ngai, this law established the language that the United States still employs regarding immigrants and immigration,

the beginning of the twentieth century, the Wong family has had little certainty regarding their status in the U.S.

Positioning herself amidst these cultural limitations, Jade Snow Wong writes her autobiography in the third-person. She rejects the “I” voice because in the context of Chinese tradition, she explains, it lacks modesty.³¹ The effect distinctly distances the narrator from the character of her younger self and the narrator from the reader.³² To determine the quality and extent of Jade Snow’s self-actualization, it is important to

favoring some immigrants and establishing “race” designations (8). Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick report on the enduring consequences of the 1924 legislation: “With this one piece of legislation, then, the United States government set the agenda for a huge percentage of future discussions about American immigrants. In the most basic terms, this act organized a long-standing obsession with ‘good’ and ‘bad’ immigrants into a form that would dominate immigration policy for the rest of the century” (9). The 1940 Alien Registration Act called for “registration and fingerprinting of all aliens, and includes past membership in ‘subversive’ organizations as grounds for deportation or exclusion” (259). The Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed in 1943.

³¹ As Connie S. Chan explains, Asian cultures critically distinguish between the private self, shown only to intimate family and friends if at all, and the public self, displayed by its conforming to cultural roles of family and gender (89).

³² According to Kathleen Loh Swee Yin and Kristoffer F. Paulson, this third-person narration disrupts the autobiographical form; informs the reader of the narrator’s “divided consciousness”; and creates a “fragile balance” between character and author, who are one “identifiable human being” (114-115). Estelle Jelinek and Ann Rayson both reflect upon the mask of the “good face” by Asian Americans to Caucasians. Amy Ling remarks upon the text’s “subdued” tone as “polite” and “restrained” (116). Patricia Blinde notices Wong’s “naivete [sic] of a world that still believed in the truths of its own imaginative constructs” and a “distinct ‘once upon a time’ tone” (54). Moreover, this distancing, restraint, and innocence serve to foster what Leslie Bow calls “the substantiation of American ideas of Chinese modesty, by producing the illusion of a charming filial deference” (*Betrayal* 88). In addition, Bow finds Wong’s decision to employ her name as an English translation too deferential and reads it as a “pandering to white expectation by reinforcing the belief that submergence of self is typically Asian” (88). Even more damning, Bow argues that Wong writes in the third-person not because she subscribes to Chinese modesty but because she fails to “see herself as subject” (88).

explore the ramifications of Wong's third-person narration as she positions herself as Jade Snow—the fifth daughter of the Wong parents.

Until the age of five, Jade Snow's family is her world—"wholly Chinese" and "entirely concerned with what was proper or improper in the behavior of a little Chinese girl" (2). In addition to her parents, her family includes her older brother, four older sisters, one younger sister, and her grandmother. Wong recalls that "a little girl was never casual with her elders" (2) and that "she must always be careful to do the proper thing" (2). Her father explains the importance of family decorum: "the peace and stability of a nation depend upon the proper relationships established in the home" (15). At times, the nation is the United States, for example, when Mr. Wong mandates the address of "Daddy" because he deems it American.³³ At other times, the nation is China, for example, when Mr. Wong stresses female education in order that they can become "intelligent mothers" (14) as a basis for the Chinese national struggle. Thus, for Jade Snow, her duty to her father correlates with her loyalty to America and China.

Jade Snow's perception of this duty and loyalties begins to waver when she attends public schools. For example, in the fourth grade, when an errant bat strikes her hand, her teacher—not her mother, who is watching on the sidelines—comforts her. Reflecting upon that embrace, the narrator remarks that her parents had never physically consoled her. In fact, she keeps injuries secret to avoid parental criticism of "getting into

³³ Ironically, Mr. Wong wants to perpetuate Chinese filial codes with his children despite his insistence on the American greeting of "father." In Kin Ronyoung's *Clay Walls*, the Japanese American mother cautions her daughter that she will not remain special if she becomes like American girls. Amidst conflicting parental messages, second-generation daughters are caught between two cultural images of perfection.

such a situation in the first place” (20). Wong’s quick, apathetic third-person recollection creates a disparaging portrait of her parents without overtly disparaging them. This incident proves crucial to Jade Snow’s self-actualization as she grows uncomfortable with her parents’ methods compared to American ways. As her “World Grows” (chapter title), so does her awareness of her family’s coldness.³⁴

Being uncomfortable is an important part of the self-actualization process (*Motivation* 91). When we become disconcerted enough, we may stop to reassess our motivations, commitments, decisions, and actions. In such states of unrest, we experience a level of chaos that we cannot abide and we are ripe for change (*Motivation* 91). In this way, discontentment serves our self-actualizing if it causes us to reevaluate our non-self-actualizing decisions and behaviors.

In the next chapter, her baby brother Forgiveness from Heaven arrives, who is “another son to carry on the Wong name” (25). In contrast to the fanfare attending this birth, Wong recalls no celebration for a female baby’s birth. Girls are “unalterably less significant than the new son in their family” (27). Her grandparents and mother dote constantly on baby Forgiveness, who receives many “special gifts” (49).³⁵ The narrator explains that being the male baby of the family “qualified one for the sole honor of receiving special gifts from one’s parents or friends or relatives” (49).³⁶ The third-person

³⁴ In “Chang,” Sigrid Nunez also depicts an Asian American daughter who suffers from her parents’ lack of affection toward her.

³⁵ Chao His-Lin explains that a male’s birth is usually considered lucky because he may be able to perpetuate the family name (21).

³⁶ In *Kinflicks*, Joe Bob also expresses his preference for a boy, predicting that no matter how many pregnancies it takes, his wife must continue producing until a son is born.

narration signifies on his bias by juxtaposing her father's fawning on the baby with the older narrator's awareness of his gender preference, subtly highlighting his lack of appreciation for females and, therefore, Jade Snow.³⁷ This juxtaposing indicates Jade Snow's discontentedness, a necessary stage for her self-actualizing. Discontented with her father's gender bias, Jade Snow refuses to accept his "rubricizing" (*Toward* 75), another important self-actualizing reaction.

If there is any family member who pays attention to Jade Snow, it is her grandmother, who is "full of wonderful surprises and delightful stories from another world—the world she called "back home in China" (29)—and who allows for Jade Snow's faults and failures. Her grandmother's stories afford Jade Snow enough narrative snippets for her to piece together "a picture of Grandmother's former world" (29). These stories arouse in Jade Snow her "appreciation for growing things" (31), which the Chinese believe is "heaven's blessing" (33), and provide the basis for Jade Snow's growing need for escape and "detachment" (*Motivation* 212-213) and her attraction to a creative outlet (*Motivation* 223)—writing her autobiography. In these ways, her Grandmother's stories assist Jade Snow's self-actualizing.

With the recollection of her father as church treasurer, Jade Snow reports that when he was alone in America and saving money to transport his family from China, he wrote to his wife "who had little, two-and-a-half-inch, bound feet" to cease binding their daughter's feet. Respect and compassion do not inspire Mr. Wong's new decision not to

³⁷ Henry Louis Gates, Jr. explains that both the writer and the reader are aware of signifying and that it may provide the alienation necessary for self-actualization.

bind his daughters' feet. Rather, his inclination to appear American influences his decision. Readers can only wonder what he thinks of his Chinese wife's miniscule, broken-bone feet.³⁸ This scenario is paradigmatic of Mr. Wong's prevailing attitude that being an American Wong supersedes any individual family member's interests. Just as his gender biases disconcert her, his privileging of family over the individual stimulates her "restlessness" (*Toward* 75), which causes her to reevaluate the Chinese preference for family matters at the expense of her self-respect (*Motivation* 90) and inspires her need for independence (*Motivation* 90).

However, on a few occasions, one family member's personal turmoil eclipses the family's interests. First, Jade Snow's mother confides her fears for her husband's illness. Jade Snow marvels, "It was so strange—this unexpected and novel closeness to Mama. Here for the first time was a defenseless, criticized, bewildered, intimidated Mama, unburdening herself to her daughter" (81). Second, Jade Snow feels terribly sorry for her mother, who has become pregnant again.³⁹ In these instances (and a few others), Jade Snow—with growing sensitivity learned at school (discussed below)—discovers signs that her mother is distraught and conflicted. With this realization, Jade Snow begins to

³⁸ Bow wonders how this crippled woman could possibly take the walks Jade Snow describes and speculates that her father is a bigamist and that Jade Snow's sisters are really her half sisters as Mr. Wong has left their mother in China with bound feet (*Betrayal* 84).

³⁹ Bow complains that Wong's description is a missed opportunity for feminism (*Betrayal* 83). The nurse sympathizes with Jade Snow's mother's hardships as an older pregnant woman and insists that Mr. Wong enter the labor room to witness his wife's agony. The narrator comments upon his shock and immediate compassion. Thus, through the nurse's and narrator's voices, the text signifies upon his indifference. However, no voice chastises Mrs. Wong—who has uttered not one word of complaint—for her Stoicism.

establish a “profound interpersonal” relationship (*Motivation* 218) with her mother—an important step in her self-actualizing process.

For the most part, Mr. Wong does not abide such close relationships and confidences; rather, he discourages companionships that he feels might undermine his authority and refuses to give explanations that might conflict with obedience to him. Hence, he forbids Jade Snow to visit her married sister and to continue her friendship with a female classmate. Any association within or outside the family that might threaten his control is taboo. A young Jade Snow vows to “be a person respected and honored by my family” (93). Fortunately for her self-actualization, she breaks this vow because that position would stifle her independence (*Motivation* 90) and prevent her “resistance to enculturation” (226).

Upon entering junior college, Jade Snow’s determination to respect and honor her family wavers more significantly. Her sociology teacher lectures her that parents should not dictate their older children’s values and determine their behavior. Jade Snow listens to his lectures with rapt attention and becomes convinced that it is time for her to adopt an American perspective on her parents’ attempts to control her life. With this American influence, Jade Snow becomes determined to enjoy her free time without constant parental supervision. Readers see her first attempt to secure her freedom when she violates her father’s edict—typical of a Chinese patriarch—to stay home, declaring, “I am too old to be treated as a child. I can now think for myself, and you and Mama should not demand unquestioning obedience from me. You should understand me.” On a roll, Jade Snow continues her harangue: “There was a time in America when parents raised

children to make them work, but now the foreigners regard them as individuals with rights of their own. I have worked too, but now I am an individual besides being your fifth daughter” (128). The sudden first-person narration startles.⁴⁰ Jade Snow’s new speech triumphs over her customary restraint and decorum. Through the influence of her sociology teacher and her readings in his class, Jade Snow rebels. At this moment, her self-actualization begins. Watching her father prefer boy babies, abiding her mother’s coldness, and living amidst both of their loyalty codes, Jade Snow’s “restlessness” (*Toward* 75) hits a threshold and can no longer abide her parents’ control. From this point on, she will come and go as she pleases, establish friendships without permission, financially support herself, and decide her educational and occupational choices. In short, she begins to become a self-actualizer—someone operating within relationships but not confined and defined by them.

In her own mind at least, Jade Snow wins the argument and her freedom.⁴¹ Of course, her freedom comes at a price: “No matter how critical she was of them she could not discard all they stood for and accept as a substitute the philosophy of the foreigners” (130). By “foreign,” Jade Snow means non-Chinese American, indicating that she sees this decision to come and go as she pleases as a cultural preference for American individualism. Left on her own, two sets of voices—her parents and her sociology

⁴⁰ Gang Yue notes that “[i]t is this moment that the communicative distance is dramatically erased” (356).

⁴¹ According to Shirley Hune, as Asian Americans immigrated to the U.S., they were unable to sustain their “idealized multigenerational” family structure and their patriarchal codes (178).

teacher's American philosophies—guide her but do not dominate her. Although her parents no longer orchestrate her life, they remain a touchstone for her decisions.

As Jade Snow graduates from junior college, she delivers her salutatorian address with her parents in the audience. Her speech culminates by embracing her parents' loyalties to China and America. Readers might expect that Jade Snow's parroting of her father's ideology would please him. Indeed, Wong's autobiography guides them toward that speculation:

Thus Jade Snow—shaped by her father's and mother's unceasing loyalty toward their mother country, impressed with China's needs by speakers who visited Chinatown, revolutionized by American ideas, fired with enthusiasm for social service—thought that she had quite independently arrived at the perfect solution for the future of all thinking and conscientious young Chinese, including herself. (135)

The sentence's length and tone—which depart from her customary style of simple sentences and restraint—suggest that Jade Snow's enthusiasm is not authentic. Moreover, her father's unenthusiastic reaction to her salutatorian speech immediately deflates her enthusiasm: “It could be considered passable. For your first speech, that was about it” (135). Although readers may wonder why Mr. Wong is so stingy in his praise, neither the character nor the narrator voices that condemnation. However, the narrator signifies on his stinginess with her own assessment of arriving at the “perfect solution.” The narrator continues to signify on the father's stinginess when she announces his invitation to the teachers to join the family for a restaurant meal during which he focuses on them

and not on his daughter and her salutatorian address.⁴² Her signifying indicates her awareness of his hypocrisy (*Motivation* 208) and her ability to see “reality more clearly” (*Motivation* 208).

This is the first in a series of instances when her father privileges strangers whom he considers more important than his daughter. Jade Snow catalogues the food eaten and reports the guests’ enjoyment rather than her parents’ congratulations for her accomplishment. Wong ends the chapter (“A Measure of Freedom”) with Jade Snow’s assumption of her parents’ pride in her: “for the first time since her break with her parents, Mama and Daddy had *granted* her a *measure* of *recognition and acceptance*. For the first time they had met on common ground with her *American associates*. It was a *sign* that they were at last *tolerant* of her *effort to search* for her own pattern of life” [italics mine] (136). Their reaction may surprise readers until they look more closely at Wong’s words. At first glance, Jade Snow appears to have been so snowed by her father’s gesture of hospitality toward her teachers that she misinterprets it as his pride in her. However, a closer look at her words in the quote above indicates her signifying. She uses the word “grant,” which means to bestow. To narrate that he “granted” her recognition and acceptance implies not graciousness but power. She uses the word “measure,” which means a small amount, implying his stinginess. “American associates” implies his nationalistic valuing of her teachers. “A sign” indicates a lack of any overt evidence. Similarly, “recognition and acceptance” relies on speculation without a

⁴² Frequently, in *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, food bridges cultural gaps. Wenying Su explains that in a foreign environment, cooking aromas can arouse a feeling of inclusion (150).

supporting display of praise or affection. Thus, “recognition and acceptance”—without any behavior to substantiate that report—indicates her desire, not their actions. “Tolerant” lacks any enthusiasm and suggests, again, stinginess. “Her effort to search” highlights a lack of progress and faith in that progress. Wong could have recalled her triumph as salutatorian and faithful daughter much more enthusiastically except that her parents are not actually enthusiastic about her accomplishments. Rather, her diction signifies her awareness of her parents’ failure to support her and to focus on her achievement. Cloaking her autobiography in a third-person narration, Wong still manages to indicate disappointment in her parents’ coldness—a necessary reaction for self-actualization. Self-actualizers must size up a situation accurately; they are not confused by appearance. The rhetoric of Wong’s narration of her parents’ inability or refusal to extend her enthusiastic recognition reflects her own ability to see “reality more clearly” without “defensiveness”—a typical self-actualizing quality (*Motivation* 208).

With reserved enthusiasm, Jade Snow reports the promise of a financial scholarship that will allow her to attend Mills College. As she prepares to deliver this fantastic news to her father, she warns herself: “As in any conversation with Daddy, it was not pertinent to express a personal opinion; only the facts were required” (150). A good warning it is, for the conversation converges on her father’s expectation that she will be responsible for all of her future debts. In fact, when she reports the “indirect hint of Mama’s willingness to help if aid were absolutely necessary and of reasonable proportions” (151), Wong’s narration signifies on her mother’s minimal enthusiasm about her scholarship. Taking no interest in her financial status, her new friends, and her

education, her parents become involved in her college life only with the dinner for a quartet of musicians at the dean's house. Mr. Wong wishes to impress them, possibly, because he sees this as a step toward being recognized by those he considers more firmly established as Americans. Again, Jade Snow clearly sees reality (*Motivation* 208), which assists her ability to self-actualize.⁴³ During this situation, like the previous ones, Wong accurately—but not bitterly (*Motivation* 208)—reports that her parents focus on impressing strangers and not on supporting their daughter.

At her college graduation, Jade Snow proclaims that “the moment of triumph had come” (181) and contends that she has proven that her mother could raise her to be a credit to their family because Jade Snow has supported herself “without a penny” from her parents, graduating without debt.⁴⁴ After the ceremony and her own self-congratulatory thoughts, Wong's narration again dramatizes how Mr. Wong focuses on someone else whom he deems more important, asking for a photograph of Jade Snow with the college's president (181).⁴⁵ Once again, the text witnesses her father's detraction from her success. However, Jade Snow still displays no bitterness, which is how self-actualizers perceive life—accurately and without “defensiveness” (*Motivation* 208).

⁴³ We will also see this pattern of Mr. Wong trying to please non-Chinese Americans in the sections below dealing with education and work.

⁴⁴ In fact, she brags, that she has “one hundred of the original hundred and seventy-four dollars [she previously earned] still in the bank” (181).

⁴⁵ Again, the college president is a non-Chinese American and likely appears more culturally established than Mr. Wong judges himself to be. While Mr. Wong's consistent attempts for recognition from non-Chinese Americans is understandable given the lingering effect of the immigration laws of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, his determination still detracts from a portrait of a loving father.

Later, when her thesis about the Chinese novel is chosen for presentation at a conference involving three other colleges, her parents are more interested in hearing about the dean than about Jade Snow's work.⁴⁶ Aware of this displaced focus, Jade Snow mildly comforts herself: "But now she no longer felt stifled or dissatisfied, for she could return to another life in which she fitted as an individual" (168). Her reserved, third-person narration signifies upon her parents' coldness and her father's self-absorption. Jade Snow continues to console herself that although she can "find no sense of conquest or superiority" at home among her parents—who parent according to the Chinese value of filial piety—she no longer hinges her self-respect on parental approval (181). Several influences provide Jade Snow with the ability to recognize and accept her parents' conduct and attitude, while privileging her own self-respect (*Motivation* 90). Outside her family, her sociology teacher and the dean have consistently encouraged her to pursue her own interests and think critically. However, the Wong family also contributes to her ability to privilege her self-respect. Her father and mother have taught her the value of hard work and of financial independence. For Jade Snow, that financial independence fosters her pride in her ability to support herself and contributes to her overall sense of independence (*Motivation* 90) and, therefore, to her self-actualization. When she no longer depends financially on her parents, she begins to reconsider their control in other areas of her life. With this growing reliance on her own assessment of herself (*Motivation* 90), Jade Snow increasingly detaches (*Motivation* 212-213) from her parents,

⁴⁶ Again, the dean is a non-Chinese American whom Mr. Wong wishes to impress.

allowing her the chance to size up her parents, accept her disappointment in them, and continue their relationship without bitterness (*Motivation* 208).

Although Jade Snow no longer depends upon parental approval, she does long for an emotional connection with her parents. This is typical of self-actualizers who on one hand detach themselves from others easily (*Motivation* 212-213), but on the other hand need a sense of “belongingness” (*Management* 16). Jade Snow detaches from relying on her parents’ approval to define her but never on her relationship with them. Self-actualizers are able to act in such a manner. We see this quality when Jade Snow pities her pregnant mother. Despite her mother’s detachment and coldness to her, Jade Snow sees her mother as a human being, as “another woman who was working away her life almost by compulsion,” even recognizing that Mrs. Wong, like her daughter, received “little affection” from the other family members (184-185). Seeing her mother outside her role as a parent, Jade Snow demonstrates a typical self-actualizing quality—viewing humans as individuals and not as personas (*Toward* 75). Although deprived of maternal affection, a twenty-year old Jade Snow affords her mother the love that she suspects her poor mother needs:

As if a veil separating her from her mother were lifted for a moment, Jade Snow saw clearly that at this time Mama did not need from her grown daughter the respect which she had fostered in all her children so much as she needed the companionship which only one woman can give another. . . . Jade Snow sensed that beneath her dignity and calm, Mama could be a troubled and frightened woman. (185)

Jade Snow has worked inside several non-Chinese American wives' home and has learned that not all women endure with her mother's Stoicism. Through Jade Snow's speculation about her mother's needs, readers see the American influences on her appreciation of her mother's situation.⁴⁷ This is anathema to the Chinese code that the Wong family subscribes to—the strict filial piety that requires Jade Snow to see her parents as authority figures.

Jade Snow continues to see her parents beyond their authority. For example, on a rare occasion of parental emotional union, her parents hold hands and her father cries before he walks out of his wife's hospital room in the maternity ward. For Jade Snow, this “was a disconcerting shock to see Daddy and Mama no longer as respected dignitaries . . . but as human man and woman with problems for which they were now beginning to need her adult aid” (186). Although this kind of affection behind closed doors is consistent with their Chinese upbringing, their display in front of Jade Snow reveals a more Americanized worldview. Witnessing their coming of age as Chinese Americans, Jade Snow begins to see even her father as a compassionate and dependent person—not merely as the family patriarch.⁴⁸ In addition, when her father insists on accompanying her to the hospital, feeds her soup, and sends her flowers, Jade Snow feels “warmly grateful for this brief and affectionate companionship” and knows “who really

⁴⁷ Perhaps, her mother's suspected need is really what Jade Snow needs: It is interesting that no words are spoken.

⁴⁸ Amy Tan addresses this issue of perceived parental disappointment in *The Joy Luck Club*. After June Woo fights with Waverly, June Woo confronts her mother about a lifetime of maternal disappointment. Although her mother's consoling might be considered weak by non-Chinese American standards, to her daughter, it implies the first hint of a mother's love.

loved and cared for her” (204). For the first time in her life, she experiences paternal compassion and feels fortunate. Most importantly for her self-actualizing, Jade Snow eschews bitterness (*Motivation* 208) over past parental offenses and appreciates her father’s present, unexpected affection.⁴⁹ When Wong is writing this autobiography, she has attained an undergraduate degree, has become financially successful as a potter, and has been recognized by the American government for her research. Also, she is widely recognized in Chinatown as her neighbors see her driving the first postwar automobile. With these successes, Wong—as an older self-actualizer—comes from a position of confidence (*Motivation* 90), which affords her the stability to recall her parents without bitterness (*Motivation* 208).

Thus, despite her past disappointments, Jade Snow moves forward because her American setting and her successes allow her to humanize her relationships with her parents. When she starts her own pottery business, her father, at first, disapproves of her “assuming a position in the window above her spectator’s head” but eventually becomes supportive after her financial success, merely suggesting that Jade Snow drape her legs and hide “the crude piece of equipment” (245-246).⁵⁰ With his final words, he once again, refocuses the attention for her accomplishments onto himself: “And who would have thought that you, my Fifth Daughter Jade Snow, would prove today that my words

⁴⁹ We may be witnessing Wong’s self-actualizing, as well, as the older narrator.

⁵⁰ Her father acknowledges that her grandfather would have been proud of her establishing a successful business on her handwork, recalling his advice: “Remember carefully! With one penny of capital, buy eight bags of peanuts to resell, but do not seek a partner to begin a business” (246). Eventually, Jade Snow’s mother also joins her husband’s support.

of many years ago were words of true prophecy?” (246). “My words” and his “true prophecy” become his last words in her autobiography.⁵¹ Wong allows him his misplaced self-crediting but does not define herself by it because although these are his final words, they are not hers.

At the novel’s conclusion, Jade Snow feels contentment with her “niche” in society and with her parents, whom she envisions looking up from whatever they are working on, smiling at her, and welcoming her: “It is good to have you home again!” (246). An apparently harmonious ending, it is important to note that the parental welcome is her dream—not her reality—and, therefore, her gracious “true prophecy” for them, unlike her father’s selfish prophecy for her.

Some critics disapprove of the ending. For example, Bow views this conclusion as the last in a series of her achievements in the “Caucasian public sphere,” which require only parental recognition for the autobiography’s closure (*Betrayal* 85). Victoria Eng notes that writers criticize Wong for “promoting a need to reject Chinese culture” (1260-1261). Similarly, Leela Kapai chides that Jade Snow’s life is a series of attempts to impress her father (389).⁵² Bow complains that the end suggests that “parental indifference is transformed into affection,” finding the ending “forced” and “profoundly ambivalent” (*Betrayal* 89).

⁵¹ His-Lin correlates family with politics and religion (19), which is evident in her father’s last speech.

⁵² Only after *Fifth Chinese Daughter* is a financial and popular success, having been translated into Chinese, does Mr. Wong acknowledge Jade Snow’s contribution to the family’s (and the ancestors’) honor (389).

Other critics approve of the ending—with qualifications. Orville Prescott sympathizes with Jade Snow's admiration, love, and devotion for her parents while he still prefers "more affection and more recognition of individual personality in family relationships" (33). Lim praises the ending for its support of Jade Snow's self-actualization ("Tradition" 258).

Judged solely in terms of her self-actualization, the autobiography succeeds. However legitimate or illegitimate her concern for parental approval, their estimation of her worth does not define or limit Jade Snow at the novel's conclusion. She is no longer her father's little girl. She has paid for her junior college and Mills College education, has been rewarded for her academic achievements, has been recognized for her science research, and has learned to apply theory to her pottery craft. These accomplishments (discussed more fully in the sections on education and work below) contribute to her confidence (*Motivation* 90) and, therefore, to her self-actualizing. Her autobiography ends with her recognition of her father's pathetic self-crediting need for approval—and her hope for his future acceptance. Jade Snow struggles to find her "Middle Way" between the two cultures, as well as between herself and her parents. Consequently, she remains disquieted (*Motivation* 91) by her family relationships, which offers the hope of change and growth—necessary ingredients for self-actualizing. In fact, it is her struggling, her discomfort, and her anxiety that inspire her need to continue self-actualizing.

Kinflicks: Mother, May I? No, You May Not

“Disquiet” does not begin to describe the relationship between Ginny and her mother in *Kinflicks*. As Alther’s title indicates, family is more important to the self-actualizing of Ginny and Mrs. Babcock than any other influence in their lives. *Kinflicks* explores family life from the viewpoints of women as mothers, daughters, and wives. The main characters are Mrs. Babcock, an exhausted mother, and her daughter, Ginny Bliss, an angry daughter and frustrated mother. *Kinflicks* also explores the overwhelming sense of responsibility that new mothers feel. In addition, Alther reveals what happens with these relationships when daughters become mothers themselves. Lisa Alther dramatizes the self-actualizing of both women in their acceptance and rejection of their family roles.

On her deathbed, Mrs. Babcock wearily reflects upon her roles as homemaker and mother. As homemaker, she was on her feet from daybreak until sunset, a life, as Charlotte Perkins Gilman points out, that enervates self-actualizing far more than does the maternal role (20). Lee Comer notes that it is the housewife’s life of isolation (without the possibility of solitude) that demoralizes her (89), adding that to be a prisoner at home deprives mothers of almost everything meaningful in their lives (116).⁵³

⁵³Comer elaborates: “She is literally imprisoned, especially during the long winter months, within four walls, and the only prospect of escape is a trip to the shops, which, with small children, heavy bags and pushchairs and the effort of clambering on and off buses with such a load, makes it more of a test of endurance than a pleasant outing” (89).

In *Kinflicks*, neither mother nor daughter finds satisfaction in her maternal role.⁵⁴ Accordingly, Mrs. Babcock, like many mothers, projects her feelings of inadequacy onto her adult daughter.⁵⁵ However, readers see a break in the typical pattern in which mother-daughter disagreements foster self-actualizing for daughters while only frustrating mothers (Apter 97). Rather, Alther dramatizes “sharp exchanges” (97) between mother and daughter that inspire both participants’ self-actualizations. What begins as a dream to regain control of her life becomes reality for the elated Mrs. Babcock when she finally releases her maternal control and refuses to give Ginny the answers her daughter seeks (discussed more fully in the section on education below). When she rejects her maternal role, she releases herself from all of its accompanying expectations of herself.⁵⁶ In this way, Mrs. Babcock learns to eschew the “Good Woman Syndrome” whereby a woman devotes her life to her husband and children but eventually becomes a “clinger”—someone dependent on another for her happiness (Dowling 156). Rather, Mrs. Babcock embraces independence and freedom (*Motivation* 90) and resists enculturation (*Motivation* 226) to society’s expectations of motherhood.

⁵⁴ For as Christian-Smith reports, although “white society honors motherhood as a pure sanctified state,” it also “punishes individual mothers for being mothers” (“Young” 221). To make matters more confusing, gendered roles mandate that girls perfect their “interpersonal, particularistic, and affective” side whether they are inclined toward those characteristics or not (Chodorow 177). We hear echoes of the “Cinderella” master narrative in Chodorow’s discussion of culturally mandated gender roles.

⁵⁵ Terri Apter explains that mothers of adult females sometimes become wearied by their adolescent daughters’ compulsive needs to be heard while simultaneously being secretive (151).

⁵⁶ Ironically, this is the description that Comer gives of the typical female adolescent: “In the end she gives up trying to talk about her experiences because she comes to realize that they do not rate as experiences. She begins to understand that real events are defined by her non-participation in them” (100).

Kinflicks interlaces the passages where Mrs. Babcock recalls her maternal failings with those in which Ginny recalls her own failures as a daughter and mother. At Mrs. Babcock's bedside, Ginny wonders how their "shared past" could produce such different versions (152), creating such a cold mother-daughter relationship.⁵⁷ If Ginny is no prize as a loving daughter, Mrs. Babcock is no prize as a loving mother: "If I don't see you again, Ginny, I want you to know that you've been a very satisfactory daughter, on the whole" (23). Ginny does not quite see it that way. Although Ginny has entered the hospital exiled from her own home and family, she sanctimoniously believes herself superior to her mother. At this point, Ginny convinces herself to mother a reluctant Mrs. Babcock. Readers might wonder what exactly Mrs. Babcock could learn from a daughter who has failed in every relationship, suffered from depression, and obsessed about pleasing most people. Realistically, at this stage in her life, Ginny can teach her mother only by being a non-example—as a failed Cinderella herself—because Ginny's life constitutes everything that has become anathema to her mother's life.

However, non-examples are important to Alther who believes that we self-actualize through dialectics of opposing views (personal interview).⁵⁸ Alther attempts to employ Hegel's concept of an antithesis confronting a thesis and producing a synthesis. In that way, non-examples can serve in the antithesis stage and help produce a new synthesis. Hence, according to Alther, in order for Mrs. Babcock and her daughter to

⁵⁷ The question remains, at what point should people be held responsible for their actions? Ginny's friend Mona poses the inquiry: "But at what point do the obnoxious personality traits that have survived your childhood start being your own responsibility, rather than your parents'" (290)?

⁵⁸ Her concept of the dialectic is discussed more fully in the section on education.

self-actualize, they must dialectically discuss and understand how each has failed.⁵⁹ This is similar to Maslow's observation that self-actualizers fuse with each other and detach from them, according to their self-actualizing needs (*Toward* 91). *Kinflicks's* mother-daughter dialectic dramatizes this kind of push-pull relationship by which each considers herself in relation to but not defined by the other.

Amidst this mother-daughter dialectic, Mrs. Babcock rues her blind acceptance of a martyr's life, allowing her children's needs to become hers until she withers into "The Tired Years, that seemingly endless chunk of her life when the three children were little" (164). Turning to her own mother for guidance or at least comfort, Mrs. Babcock receives neither. Eventually, "The Tired Years" become her children's teenage years, which are even more difficult for Mrs. Babcock who "simultaneously loved and loathed" her daughter's body (341) although she does not explain why.

Fortunately, before it is too late for both mother and daughter, Mrs. Babcock lets go of her resentment (*Motivation* 208) and desire for control. Mutely staring back at Ginny, Mrs. Babcock wonders if "the generational spell had actually been broken" (418). They both wordlessly smile at each other, "their delight [at being dialectic partners] mixed with distress" (418). At this moment, like a healthy self-actualizer, Mrs. Babcock acts without "artificiality or straining for effect" but with the "simplicity and naturalness" (*Motivation* 208) of doing what is right for her self-actualizing.⁶⁰ Specifically, Mrs.

⁵⁹ Additionally, Braendlin recognizes the need to accept one's guilt if women wish to effect their own "salvation" (20).

⁶⁰ Alther notes that only on her deathbed does Mrs. Babcock realize that satisfying her children's needs in advance of their requests undermines their self-actualization (White).

Babcock transcends her role as mother and acts genuinely and vigilantly to restore her self-respect (*Motivation* 90) and establish some degree of self-care (*Motivation* 91), which she has become convinced is the right move for her to make in order to be happy. She forcefully tells Ginny that her daughter is on her own in terms of garnering advice on how to live her life. Further, she acts with a kind of naturalness (*Further* 273), privileging her concern for her own emotional and physical health over her concern for Ginny's. As Ginny witnesses Mrs. Babcock's retreat from her maternal role, Ginny witnesses her mother's attempts to self-actualize, which ironically, provide a healthy example for Ginny. Although this break is not easy for either mother or daughter, it is necessary for Mrs. Babcock's self-actualization. It is not clear if this retreat is Mrs. Babcock's gift to Ginny; however, it is clear that this is Mrs. Babcock's gift to herself. It is the permission to self-actualize, to become a person first, outside of a culturally mandated role (*Motivation* 226). According to her own testimony, this letting go—becoming “detached” (*Motivation* 212-213)—is Mrs. Babcock's first self-actualizing action since she subscribed to the “Cinderella” marriage master narrative.

During her last days, bleeding uncontrollably from an idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura disorder, Mrs. Babcock learns important self-actualizing lessons. She learns that her self-sacrifice has not served her children or herself well: “Not only were the children gone, they were more or less a flop” (90).⁶¹ She believes that all

⁶¹ For the opposite perspective, see Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*, which seems to advocate the ultimate self-sacrifice for a love relationship as George needlessly loses his life to save Cocoa's. Martyred, George leaves only his spirit to Cocoa, who is content to misprision his memory as she changes. The ultimate loss is not, therefore, his life, but his

her devotion has been wasted: “When she really faced up to it, Mrs. Babcock couldn’t place herself in the ‘vanguard of her profession of parenthood’” (91). What has gone wrong, according to Mrs. Babcock, is that instead of attending to her own self-actualization, she has “spent her entire life pampering other people’s egos” (151) and ignoring her own self-respect (*Motivation* 90). She also learns that she has been born in the wrong generation, concluding that while a child, she deferred to her parents, but while a parent, she deferred to her children. In short, no one has deferred to her (*Motivation* 91). Finally, she learns that although drilled by her own mother in the philosophy that mothers “mustn’t squelch the young” because it “might stunt their precious development,” this philosophy comes at the ultimate price—her own self-squelching. On her deathbed, Mrs. Babcock sarcastically complains to herself, “Never mind about your own development” (152). Finally, Mrs. Babcock begins to consider self-sacrifice no substitute for self-actualization.

In this mother-daughter dialectic, Ginny also self-actualizes. Trying to console herself after her hospital visits with her mother, Ginny attends to the birds trapped in her mother’s fireplace. When Ginny takes the birds outside, their mother neglects them. She adopts the birds, feeding and coaxing them to fly. To Ginny’s dismay, one of the birds does fly until it crashes into a window and dies. In her shock and disappointment, Ginny deems the bird ungrateful, just as her mother has called her an “ingrate” for not appreciating her mothering and blaming her for Ginny’s mistakes (163). However,

identity. *Mama Day* presents a sentimentalized view of male sacrifice for love that perpetuates the power imbalance of romance.

unlike Ahab, who misprisons qualities of sinisterism to Moby Dick, Ginny soon realizes that the bird is not ungrateful, but just confused. Thus, Ginny lets go of her “defensiveness” and sees “reality more clearly” (*Motivation* 208). From this botched substitute mothering, Ginny learns that she cannot guarantee her charges’ success but can only provide an appropriate escape route for their growth and freedom. With her bird-nurturing, Ginny learns that the ultimate freedom (*Motivation* 90) occurs when we are independent enough to fail—on our own terms.

In addition to her bird nurturing, Ginny’s ancestry contributes to her self-actualization. Recalling Darwin, Ginny reflects that “she contained within each of her cells the tiniest fraction of a germ of nucleic acid from the very body of the woman in this cracked yellow photo, delivered to her via the intercession of her mother and grandmother” (243). Consistent with Alther’s philosophy of returning to a universal “essence” (personal interview), Ginny attempts to understand her present in relation to her ancestral past—an “exhausting process” that mirrors an Hegelian thesis/antithesis opposition.⁶² Several scenes bear witness to these ancestral influences. For example, Ginny prizes the family clock, which is the only possession she takes with her when she leaves her mother’s deathbed. Also, Ginny recalls proudly announcing that she is part Cherokee to her Free Farm circle. Further, Ginny recalls that the relatives at her grandfather’s funeral in Sow Gap are proud of their hard-working ancestors. Next, Ginny is oppressively aware that she has moved into Ira’s house, which she refers to as his

⁶² Gayl Jones dramatizes just how exhausting it is to pursue the truth of one’s ancestry. At the end of *Corregidora*, Ursa wonders what price is paid for knowing who mistreated whom generations hence and how that impacts today’s affairs.

“ancestral manse” (370). Finally, *Kinflicks* ends when Ginny leaves her dead mother, carrying the ancestral clock in her backpack. However, Ginny’s “Sisterhood” t-shirt indicates that this ancestral clock rests on a non-conforming shoulder—privileging female agency and not the “Cinderella” role of wife. Ginny’s sense of ancestry gives her a “confidence in the face of the world” (*Motivation* 90) because it lends her a “sense of belongingness” (*Motivation* 16) and a place in something “bigger” than herself (*Toward* iv).

Failing as a wife, mother, lover, and bird savior, Ginny is desperate for her mother’s advice. Just before Mrs. Babcock’s death, both mother and daughter begin to see each other as struggling women rather than as contentious family members. This is Martin Buber’s hope to see each other’s face, Hans-Georg Gadamer’s conviction to view each other’s horizon, and Alther’s belief in knowing each person’s essence. This is also Maslow’s self-actualizing quality of judging “people correctly and efficiently” (*Motivation* 208). As a daughter, a biological mother, and a surrogate mother, Ginny determines that she is both formed by and responsible for her family relationships. It is not good enough for Ginny’s self-actualization to acknowledge the debt she owes her mother for who she is. It is also important that she reciprocates as a family member by extending to her mother an “esteem” (*Motivation* 90) beyond the role of motherhood and participating in her mother’s deathbed dialectic, which indicate her need to establish a “profound interpersonal” relationship (*Motivation* 218).

After weeks of listening to her mother lament her motherhood, Ginny reluctantly realizes that she has much to learn from her mother. At the same time, her mother

wholeheartedly realizes that she has nothing more to offer. Readers become aware that Ginny resents Mrs. Babcock's retreat: "Goddamit, her mother *owed* her some explanations!" (492). Wailing, "Mother!" Ginny is stunned by the ensuing silence. The next day, before she lapses into a coma, Mrs. Babcock leaves Ginny with a vague farewell but with no advice: "Look after yourself, Ginny dear" (494). Ginny is forced to realize that just when she has finally become receptive to her mother's influence, the "leading lady had magnanimously removed herself from [her] script" (496). Mrs. Babcock dies and intentionally leaves Ginny "on her own" (496).⁶³ Her retreat from Ginny's life forces her daughter to "become one's own mother and father to one's self" (*Farther* 273).

From her discussions with her dying mother, her inept bird raising, and her consideration of her ancestry, Ginny learns several self-actualizing lessons. First, Ginny realizes that mothering requires not just the right coaching but also a clear exit, affording children their independence (*Motivation* 90). Second, Ginny learns that at some point, mothers must release themselves from their maternal role. This should happen after mothers have provided their children with the appropriate preparation for their independence. Although Mrs. Babcock has determined that Ginny has the appropriate preparation for this maternal release, Ginny knows that she has not provided the appropriate preparation for her own young daughter, which is why Ginny decides to return to her. Her mother's exit has taught her the importance of being a nurturing mother (*Motivation* 217). Second, Ginny learns that Stoicism cannot foster self-

⁶³ Lisa Alther reports that this scene is her mother's favorite (personal interview).

actualization because it replaces her own self esteem with another's desires and needs (*Motivation* 226).⁶⁴ Through these lessons, Ginny begins to accept her past and eschew guilt and regret (*Farther* 271).

At the novel's end, Ginny, like her mother, moves toward self-actualizing, accepting that she is only one "fleck" in a long progression of mothers and daughters, which creates her "sense of belongingness" (*Motivation* 16). This acceptance inspires her return to her own daughter as a mother. *Kinflicks* shows that self-actualizing mothers should improve the world (*Motivation* 217) but should not become martyrs who harbor resentment (*Motivation* 208). Mothers who learn to balance their self-nurturing with their other-nurturing have a good chance of living happy lives; raising happy daughters; and most importantly, becoming self-actualizers.

Betsey Brown: To the (Manor) Born

Ntozake Shange's *Betsey Brown* focuses on another mother and daughter relationship and their individual self-actualizations.⁶⁵ Jane Brown struggles to know who she wants to become—as a mother, wife, and evolving African American woman. *Betsey Brown* also struggles to know who she wants to become—as Jane's daughter and

⁶⁴ We have seen Jade Snow learn the same lesson as she watched her mother struggle through her middle-aged pregnancy without a syllable of complaint. We will see *Betsey Brown* witness her mother's aversion to Stoicism, as well.

⁶⁵ Assunta Kent sees *Betsey Brown* as the "rhythm-and-blues-based story" of a middle-class female's self-actualization (151). Deborah E. McDowell points out that a photo of Shange "beaming down admiringly at her daughter" appears on the back flap to the first edition of *Betsey Brown* (94). One reviewer describes *Betsey Brown* as a "portrait of a loving family in transition" (Magill Review). It is not surprising, therefore, that Shange dedicated the novel to her family (McDowell 94).

African American young woman. Shange positions the Brown family within a volatile middle-class African American setting during the Civil Rights Movement. Shange, herself a middle-class African American woman, disrupts ethnic, gender, and class stereotypes in her portrayals of these two females, depicting their self-actualization as they transcend a “We-They polarity” (*Farther* 272).⁶⁶

In many interviews, Shange avows that young women should read female identity development stories.⁶⁷ Although Shange found it difficult to see life through the eyes of a thirteen year old protagonist while writing *Betsey Brown*, she recognized the importance of that perspective: “it was just so good and clean and asexual” (Lyons 689).⁶⁸ Her protagonist’s age affords Shange an opportunity to discover Betsey’s youthful possibilities (689). Unlike the traditional *Bildungsroman* and “Cinderella” stories, *Betsey Brown* focuses on possibilities for self-actualizing, rather than on a nationalistic program of assimilation through marriage to a successful male. Shange’s attraction to the story is primarily her attraction to Betsey’s potential as “a special child, full of dreams and fancies, half wise, half naïve” (Shorb 114), who may reflect Shange’s hope for the nation (Wheliss and Nelson 424). Her hope, according to the novel, is to

⁶⁶ Born Paulette Williams in 1948, Ntozake Shange changed her name in 1971 to adopt the African epithet, “She who comes with her own things.” Shange’s mother, a social worker, and her father, a surgeon, encouraged her higher education and travel. Exposed at home to the leading figures in African American literature and music, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Shange is a product of an upper middle-class life, complete with the family’s live-in African American maids.

⁶⁷ Neal A. Lester contends that stories about female development are necessary because women do not discuss their fears with each other (“At Heart” 720).

⁶⁸ Betsy Shorb acclaims, “This is a special book that captures a special time in a girl’s life and in the life of our country” (114).

discover and appreciate human diversity—males and females, “Negroes” and “whites,” and middle-class and lower-class people.⁶⁹

Betsey Brown dramatizes the self-actualizing of a wife and mother in the portrayal of Jane Brown. With all her highball drinking, nail filing, solitaire playing, and pity partying, it would be easy to crucify the integrity of Jane Brown as a mother, especially after she deserts her family during a national crisis. However, her character and her relationship to the protagonist are more complex. A closer look may establish that Jane is appropriately invested in motherhood—not only for her own self-actualization but also as a self-actualizing model for her adolescent daughter. In short, if Jane had been a Mother Mary figure, a “suprahuman,” or an “angel at the hearth,” Betsey may not have learned that there is more to African American female self-actualization than marriage and motherhood.⁷⁰

⁶⁹For readers, appreciating this diversity partially depends on realistically viewing the cultural situation of the Civil Rights Movement. Madhu Dubey recalls the 1965 Moynihan Report’s devastatingly negative and inaccurate portrayal of African American family life, portraying the “black woman as an active agent of the black man’s economic and social emasculation”; the resulting African American male’s need to “strut”; and far more highly contested data involving divorce, separation, deserting husbands, illegitimate babies, and female heads of family rates. In addition, Elderidge Cleaver accuses African American women of being the “silent ally of the white man’s oppression of African American men (162). Like the “model minority” stereotype imposed on Chinese Americans, Harris’s “suprawoman” stereotype deludes women into feeling worthy when, in fact, it restricts them into a life of disinterested self-righteousness, which will not afford self-actualization.

⁷⁰In *Saints, Sinners, Saviors: Strong Black Women in African American Literature*, Harris catalogues these stereotypes into 4 categories: “large black women who keep black men in line for white Americans”; “very large black women who are eternally happy to be in the kitchen”; “the mammy figures specifically conceived to provide broad bosoms of comfort for whites”; and the “hot mamma figures who were stereotypically considered to lead upstanding, Christian white men astray” (2). As a result, Harris concludes, the

Concerned for the family's image as middle-class African Americans, Jane becomes determined to temper her husband's enthusiasm for African American and African culture. Like her mother, Jane would rather not recall her slave ancestry.⁷¹ In addition, she blames her children's lack of "sense" on her husband's Africanizing, such as his "nasty colored music" (114). Most importantly though, she fears that his Africanizing jeopardizes their chances of economic "uplift."⁷² Unfortunately for Jane, a class-based valuing of life is anathema to self-actualizing because it does not resist enculturation (*Motivation* 26) and does not discriminate between the "means and ends"

"landscape of African American literature is peopled with black female characters who are almost too strong for their own good" and who have become "emotionally unaffectionate" (11). Aware of this "Suprahuman" stereotype, Shange demonstrates that the family does not come apart when the African American mother refuses to be a martyr to her family.

⁷¹ Vida demonstrates: "What a mess they've made of our genealogy, everybody knows we were freedmen" (98). Ironically, the narrator points out, Vida's statement implies an unfree past. To be fair, Betsey's grandmother is often a wonderful influence: Vida appears anywhere in the house at any time (14), shines as the "gem of the household" (28), protects the children from the "crazy ways" of "white" folks (47), imparts her own brand of African American prejudice, and monitors Regina's and Carrie's influences on the children. However, unlike Vida, Rita Mae Brown questions how we can know and help others without knowing their past—"personal or collective." She is especially concerned that we "must resolve the pain of our mothers" (144). In accordance with Rita Mae Brown's perspective, Jane should embrace her ancestral past and personal memories.

⁷² Paula Giddings verifies that such African American ambivalence has traditionally been a problem with the middle-class African American community (250). Mary C. Lewis stresses that the African American woman struggles to define her adolescent self because she must understand "what place her Blackness holds in her life, in her view of herself . . . and in what ways society influences her self-image" (10). Gloria Joseph concurs, insisting that it is "misleading and dysfunctional" to analyze the relationships of African American mothers and daughters without focusing on "the relevance of racial oppression and cultural differences" (97).

(*Motivation* 220). Thus, Jane's middle-class obsession impedes her self-actualizing (which is discussed in the work section below).

Although Jane is not comfortable recalling her slave ancestry, she is comfortable with her motherhood: she loves her children, exudes confidence, takes "pride in her womb's work" (27). Most of the time, she and Greer negotiate their differences in private and display a united parental front to their children. Jane is both a flexible and loyal wife. Eventually, however, she loses her flexibility and loyalty when she can no longer abide Greer's authoritarianism (when he insists on his children attending the protest rally) and when she can no longer support her children's associations with lower class women (when Betsey becomes enamored with Regina). However, rather than take the family down with her—pitting husband against wife—Jane opts to retreat. Fed up with Greer's Civil Rights crusading in general and specifically with his insistence that the children attend the protest rally although he cannot guarantee their safety, Jane runs away from the family in order to self-reflect outside of her roles as mother and wife. Readers can hardly accuse Jane of inflicting a "suprahuman" female model on Betsey. Rather, Jane Brown's departure from the home shows that she prizes self-care (*Motivation* 91) and privacy (*Motivation* 212-213). Although Jane may seem self-indulgent, she could also be judged self-nurturing. She is, like all self-actualizers, "simultaneously selfish and unselfish" (*Motivation* 91)—caring for her children but also insisting upon her own needs. Moments when she seems lacking as a traditional mother, such as her solitaire playing in her room while drinking her cocktail and admiring her wedding photos, may actually constitute times when she excels at self-actualizing and at a non-traditional version of the

maternal role. When Jane returns, she reconnects with her family, negotiates with her husband, and reinstates her authority as home manager. Moreover, Jane continues to self-actualize as a wife, a mother, and a daughter—in addition to developing as a woman outside those roles. This is a healthy portrait for Betsey to study.

As the title suggests, *Betsey Brown* focuses on the self-actualization of Jane's daughter, who struggles with family power tensions, class and ancestral debates, and conflicting advice about sexuality, (which is discussed in the section on love below). From her family, Betsey experiences several attitudes toward African American heritage and the American middle class. When Betsey hears Jane complaining about Greer's music, Betsey is a spectator to her mother's middle-class preference and ancestral rejection, in addition to her father's apparent unconcern for class and his affinity for African American and African cultures.⁷³ Because her mother privileges class and her father privileges ancestry, Betsey hears mixed signals, which confuse her but do not seriously threaten her confidence in her parents' mutual love and respect. Shange realistically portrays parents with different values, but mutual love for each other.⁷⁴

⁷³ Shange portrays a husband and father—a doctor—who does not define himself by his sexual prowess, which according to E. Franklin Frazier's study of middle-class families is unusual. In such families, the husband's financial status depends on his wife's, he will "play a pitiful role" and rely on his sexual prowess (182). Ann Allen Shockley explores the myth of African American males' sexual prowess in *Loving Her*. Describing her character, Jerome Lee, the narrator explains, "The black man was the superstud. The bed was his kingdom, the womb his domain, and the penis his mojo hung with black magic" (44). Unlike Frazier's study and Shockley's characterization, Shange does not define a middle-class African American male by his sexual prowess. Rather, Shange portrays Greer Brown as an approachable father who has dreams and love for his children.

⁷⁴ Hazel Carby notes that often the female African American protagonist must sever her ties with her past because the new class associations constitute personal success and

Betsey tries to reconcile her own preferences for her father's music with her mother's disdain for it, for as Terri Apter remarks, daughters wish to remain close to their mothers while trying to establish their separate identities (75-77).⁷⁵ However, Betsey loses her struggle to remain close to her mother because she is attracted to her father's ethnic music that symbolizes their African American heritage and his pride in that heritage.⁷⁶

“triumph over ties to and previous interpretations of history” (167), much the same way that Jane and Vida contend that there is no place for the ghost of slavery in their middle-class house. Sondra O’Neale explains that female African American authors have aimed to coordinate their fiction with a realistic African American woman’s experience, depicting heroines who struggle against “Black feminine images inherited from mothers, and often despicable expectations for Black women preordained by society” (26).

⁷⁵However, in the United States, rebellion seems to be the norm. Apter explains that mothers “tend to bear the brunt of conflict” because they discipline more frequently and more widely, such as dress, decorum, homework, etc. while fathers periodically bark and then burst away from the situation. Thus, maternal authority “is open to continuous questioning” (111). Just as society primarily defines women as mothers and wives, society defines women in relations to another person, unlike men who are defined “in universalistic occupational terms” (Chodorow 178). Western civilization perpetuates this double standard of parenting as it portrays fathers as “productive and growth-orientated” while it depicts mothers as “regressive and dependent.” Further, while society praises fathers for their parental involvement, it criticizes mothers who cannot exactly calibrate the precise amount of parental involvement, whether they are too distant or overprotective (Pipher 103). According to Mary Pipher, the odds that mothers feel like failures are high because the culture projects their “great power to do harm with their mistakes” while fathers have great power to do good. Thus, when daughters grow up to be happy and successful, society credits the father. Pipher contradicts: “But in my experience, strong daughters often come from families with strong mothers” (117). These double standards are played out throughout Shange’s novel as the background from which women need to escape in order to self-actualize. Rather, Shange ultimately portrays the kind of home that girls (and their mothers), according to Pipher, need to self-actualize, one that offers protection, challenges, affection, and structure while voicing an implied “I love you, but I have expectations” (284). This is not to say that Betsey and her mother do not fight, only that their fights, as Apter recognizes, increase both of their self-awareness (218).

⁷⁶Apter is convinced that even when parents appear united in their discipline and principles, their adolescent children will experience quite different relationships with the

When Jane extends her disapproval to Betsey, censoring that same music, Betsey's confusion turns to anger. According to Charles P. Toombs, Jane rejects this music, choosing to follow the model her mother has set for disliking anything from "the black masses" (51). Deprived of a voice, Betsey defends her decision to run away, detaching herself (*Motivation* 212-213) from her mother's disapproval and seeking her own independence (*Motivation* 90) in her attempt to confirm her self-respect (*Motivation* 90) because she is not like her mother—or so she thinks.⁷⁷

If it were not for her mother's censorship, Betsey would not experience—in a safe environment—a tension between the importance of her African American ancestry (as presented in Greer's music) and middle-class values (as presented in her mother's apparel, chandeliers, country club membership, domestic help, and leisure time). For Betsey, like all self-actualizers, tension is what fuels separation, which potentially fosters self-actualization.⁷⁸ Through her discontentment (*Motivation* 91), Betsey will come to know herself better—not as a replica of either parent—but as a unique (*Toward* 157)

father and the mother (60). However, Apter also believes that no matter what dissention exists, a girl's mother is the "measure" by which she judges herself (88).

⁷⁷ Betsey's music means so much to her because, according to Bernard W. Bell, music has displaced the importance of institutionalized Christianity as demonstrated in some African American novels (278). Maslow also notes the importance of music for "moving toward the discovering of identity" (*Farther* 177).

⁷⁸ Apter explains that "[o]nly when the daughter feels a great tension between herself and her mother does she see herself with clear boundaries" (109). Thus, tension and opposition are essential and, therefore, healthy for Betsey to self-actualize. Maslow notes that a "healthy aggression takes the form of personal strength and self-affirmation" (*Toward* 162).

hybrid of their influences.⁷⁹ For Betsey, this formula of class over ancestry proves problematic in several scenes—when she engages with her friend Veejay about how Betsey treated Bernice, confronts the “white” teacher about Paul Laurence Dunbar’s contribution to American literature, flees to Mrs. Maureen’s beauty shop and prostitution house, admires Regina for her passion, and idolizes Carrie for her confidence to speak up for yourself.⁸⁰ *Betsey Brown* dramatizes that privileging class is only a means to assimilate—something self-actualizers avoid because it replaces self-respect (*Motivation* 90) with enculturation (*Motivation* 226).

With her “othermothers”—Vida, Mrs. Maureen, Regina, and Carrie—Betsey reevaluates the importance of her African American ancestry relative to her economic class. For example, Carrie demands that the Brown children do their chores because her child raising philosophy contends that they need to be engaged in productive activity. Admiring their progress, she boasts, “Yeah, I’m growin me some chrren with some sense” (202). When Carrie leaves, “Betsey just took Carrie’s place in the house. Did everything like she would have done except she did use the regular bathrooms” (207), which is an important class-oriented departure from Carrie’s self-perception of being a domestic and the novel’s previous report that slaves had once resided in the basement. The novel ends with what seems to be Carrie’s exclusive influence supporting Betsey’s dreams of becoming one of Tina Turner’s Ikettes (207):

⁷⁹ The older narrator of Denise Chávez’s *The Last of the Menu Girls* holds a skeptical view that children will simply slide into the roles of their parents, becoming stuck like mannequins. This is a typical fear of teenagers depicted in coming-of-age novels. The trick seems to be balancing appreciation with criticism for one’s parents.

⁸⁰ These instances are discussed more fully in subsequent chapters.

Betsey lingered over her city making decisions and discoveries about herself that would change the world. In one way or another, anyone who could hear merengues and basketballs, feel loose and free in a comforting oak, was surely going to have her way.

But Carrie would have said there was nothing dishonorable about being an Ikette, either. (207)

At first glance, the narrator's final line seems to privilege Carrie's perspective. However, three words, which indicate comparison—"But," "dishonorable," and "either"—reveal that Betsey considers that perspective as only one among her other "decisions and discoveries." "But" indicates that Betsey can choose the first set of innocent options—dancing, playing basketball, and hiding out in her tree perch—or she can choose a more outrageous and daring option—as one of Tina Turner's backup singers. "Dishonorable" indicates that Betsey judges being an Ikette in light of being honorable—an important value that her father, in particular, has modeled with his philanthropy to the poor who need free medical care, in addition to his commitment to the Civil Rights Movement. "Either" indicates that she is considering the second option of being an Ikette in light of the first set. Betsey realizes that she walks in advance of the crossroads of her life. She can still dance, play basketball, hide out in a tree, or become an Ikette—possibilities from the many influences of her life.⁸¹

⁸¹ Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan note that "[t]eaching black girls to be 'strong, economically independent and responsible for family' is thus an integral part of the roles of mothers and other women in black communities" (79). For Apter, Shange demonstrates that "authoritarian parents in black families do not raise under-controlled or less self-confident or less self-responsible children, or passive and dependent girls" but rather "self-assertive, independent and generally competent girls" (207).

Although Betsey does not entirely espouse her mother's values, Betsey values her mother's nurturing as evidenced by her preference for sitting proudly in her mother's chair. Without Jane's influence, Betsey might be blindly swept away by her father's love of his ancestry.⁸² As Tejumola Olaniyan contends, Betsey's "unspoken challenge . . . is how to recognize all her traditions without blurring their differences" (124). That is, Betsey should decide to what extent she defines her identity and establish her self-esteem (*Motivation* 90), instead of accepting class and heritage codes that require assimilation without self-examination (*Motivation* 226).

Through these relationships, Betsey reevaluates her mother's preference for class. Should Betsey shun Veejay because her mother is a domestic worker? Should Betsey accept her teacher's prejudice because of her authority in a middle-class "white" school? Should Betsey scorn Carrie who likes to use the cellar's latrine? Should Betsey devalue her father because of his darker complexion or value him because of his economic status?⁸³ Juxtaposed to her mother's middle-class preference and African American ambivalence, these relationships create an uneasiness that escalates into Betsey's determination to "get out of the house and into the thick of life, the heat of it, not knowing what all one could do with whoever you happened to be" (151).⁸⁴ Having

⁸² Greer's ancestral pride stands against "white" American capitalism rooted in unethical slave holding and subsequent years of prejudice.

⁸³ Although Vida resents their hold on the family, Regina and Carrie serve as mentors to Betsey, often countering Jane's advice on prejudice, marriage, love, sex, and self-respect, which the chapter dealing with education discusses.

⁸⁴ According to Apter, every adolescent must "indulge in daydreams" because they provide a "tonic to uncertainty" and sooth anxiety (165). In particular, self-actualizers "positively like solitude and privacy to a definitely greater degree than the average

taught her both to express her opinion (*Motivation* 226) and to retreat (*Motivation* 212-213), Jane may not be to blame for Betsey's running away but may instead deserve credit for her rebellion (*Motivation* 226), which indicates the beginning of Betsey's self-actualizing.⁸⁵

From Jane, Betsey has learned to assert her voice (*Motivation* 226) and value her private time and secure place (*Motivation* 212-213). For example, she has witnessed her mother stick up for herself with Greer regarding integration and with Vida regarding raising the children. Further, Betsey has witnessed Jane capably handle the "white" police who come to the house. In addition, Betsey has witnessed Jane value the sanctum of her bedroom, surrounding herself with her beloved memorabilia and memories. Finally, when Betsey returns home and her father confides to her that her mother's hair texture is similar to her own, Betsey embraces a bond that reassures her of a much-needed connection (*Toward* 157) to both her mother and female African American ancestry.

person" (*Motivation* 212). This is why her hiding place is so important to her and why her mother so dearly prizes her bedroom retreats. Betsey's decision is both natural and typical for, as Geta LeSeur sees it, Betsey's hiding places are "stopping points on her journey to her own self-discovery," providing the solitude that Betsey needs to acquire self-knowledge. Thus, Betsey prizes her privacy, the loss of which triggers her lost innocence and autonomy (145). For Betsey, these are essential matters, which should be satisfied before she can self-actualize (*Management* 284).

⁸⁵ Shange, herself, espouses ancestral pride: "I don't want [children] to come into a world unannounced, with no past, with nothing to hold onto. I can't stand children's books. I want something ready for when they hit 18 or 20 or when they're 45 and they still haven't ever heard about themselves" (Lyons 690).

Jane Brown and Betsey Brown learn lessons about being a middle-class African American mother and daughter.⁸⁶ Jane's struggle to ascertain the level of her maternal investment and the effectiveness of her power negotiations with her husband reveal to herself and demonstrate to her daughter one way to balance the role of mother with other female adult roles and with female self-care: mothers need not sacrifice their opinions, abdicate their privacy, or abide their husband's edicts.⁸⁷ Jane's departure constitutes both a liability and an asset for both of their self-actualizing: a liability because Betsey feels deserted while Jane feels ashamed but an asset because Jane's retreat fuels both their needs for autonomy (*Motivation* 212-213) as they begin and continue to self-actualize.⁸⁸ Jane and Betsey see that self-actualizing is a lifelong journey for both mothers and daughters. More importantly, they learn self-actualizing lessons about being women who are independent of those roles (*Motivation* 90).

In the Time of the Butterflies: From Cocoon to Flight

The pairing of mothers and daughters also expands into relationships with father and sisters in Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Alvarez's novel narrates the self-actualizations of the four Mirabal sisters through their family experiences during the tyranny of Dictator Trujillo. Three of these young Dominicans died in that struggle; one

⁸⁶ Greer Brown also influences Betsey's appreciation of heritage as discussed. He counteracts his wife middle-class obsession with materialism.

⁸⁷ According to Apter's research, mothers often identify with their child's autonomy (110).

⁸⁸ In *The Last of the Menu Girls*, Rocío Esquibel, the young female protagonist, periodically, feels that she must retreat from and reunite with her mother. These escapes afford their relationship a respite from their mutual tensions.

survived and became a national legend.⁸⁹ Alvarez fictionalizes the legend of the Mirabal sisters because she finds it dangerously and inaccessibly deified.⁹⁰ *In the Time of the Butterflies* empowers each sister's voice as narrators of separate chapters during crucial times in the life of that sister. Further, one sister's view of herself is often subverted by another's account.⁹¹

In the Time of the Butterflies debunks some of the traditional roles for females as family members, even going so far as to suggest that the culture's myths of "Superwoman," patriarchy, and machismo debilitate women.⁹² In particular, Alvarez considers female family issues involving marriage, adultery, divorce, motherhood, sibling rivalry, childbirth, domesticity, and wife abuse. For Alvarez, becoming a successful female entails a frank awareness of these issues and a practical understanding of when to conform and when to rebel (*Motivation* 226), unlike "Cinderella" and the *Bildungsroman*.

⁸⁹ In addition to explaining her choice of genres, Alvarez identifies her intended audience—English-speakers who are unacquainted with the story of the four Mirabal sisters, as well as those from the Dominican Republic who are "separated by language from the world I have created" (324). For Alvarez, narrative affords her readers a better understanding of the Dominican Republic as the "novel is . . . a way to travel through the human heart" (324) and immerse in her national epoch.

⁹⁰ Even before the dedication, the text advises its readers: "This work of fiction is based on historical facts referred to in the author's Postscript on pages 323-324." Originally, Alvarez attempted to write a biography of the four Mirabal sisters, who joined the revolution against Dictator Trujillo. *In the Time of the Butterflies*, however, is not that biography. Failing to find enough documentation, Alvarez became attracted to a fictional alternative.

⁹¹ For example, contrary to her sister's opinion, Minerva discloses that her bravery is not natural but a pose and Patria confides that she is not a "model Catholic wife and mother" (155) as her other sister judges her to be. These insights challenge Gadamer's notion that we can know humans from within their horizon and from their environments.

⁹² Jennifer Pattison reports that for Dominican Americans, parties and important events center around family (personal interview).

Critic Judith Butler, like Alvarez, views female self-actualization as performative, meaning that “the ‘doer’ is variably constructed in and through the deed” (181). For its readers, *In the Time of the Butterflies* proscribes and prescribes female values and conduct within the family structure, viewing the female protagonists as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers, rather than as national heroes.⁹³ Moreover, the novel encourages readers to recognize the Mirabal women as female self-actualizers from within their horizons—to the extent that that is humanly possible. Through their struggles, Alvarez depicts successful and unsuccessful attempts to establish healthy relationships and to self-actualize.

Minerva Mirabal struggles with her family loyalty. With Dedé newly married and Patria a mother of two, Minerva’s father asks her to stay home and keep her parents company for three years. When she meets her father’s illegitimate children, she is shocked: “I kept seeing those four raggedy girls with Papá’s and my own deep-set eyes staring back at me” (85-86). Quickly, Minerva blames her father for his affair, for hurting her mother, and for cooping her up at home while “he went gallivanting around” (88). Minerva is unimpressed with her father’s defense: “Things a man does” (92). Obviously, he believes that once Cinderella has become a man’s wife in his home, she must suffer his unfaithfulness. As such, the “Cinderella” marriage master narrative affords him his philandering with impunity. But Minerva publicly confronts her father

⁹³ In the Postscript, Alvarez confesses her own agenda to avoid romanticizing the Mirabal sisters. Wisely, Alvarez recognizes the dangers of such sentimentality because it impedes learning from someone else’s story. As a form of Otherizing, romanticizing impedes human understanding.

and learns that adultery and machismo are not necessarily powerful positions. She rejects his defense and admonishes her father.⁹⁴ Her father's unfaithfulness and its effect on her mother anger Minerva to such an extent that she experiences a typical self-actualizing discontentment (*Motivation* 91). From this discontentment, Minerva privately (*Motivation* 212-213) reflects upon her female power to override her father's defense and upon her father's weakness as a man who does not remain faithful to his wife and who lives a pathetic secret life with his other family. These reflections facilitate her self-actualizing during future confrontations involving machismo and patriarchy with her own husband, which ultimately contributes to her self-actualizing as she rejects those socially constructed codes (*Motivation* 226).

In private, María Teresa (Mate) is also appalled at her father's affair and secret life. Soon thereafter, she declares that she hates men. Here, readers see the rupture—the “discontent and restlessness” (*Motivation* 91)—that adultery, patriarchy, and machismo cause in a family. Such discontentment assists Mate's self-actualizing because it signals to her that she has strayed from valuing her self-respect (*Motivation* 90) more than a cultural code (*Motivation* 226). Later, although privately frustrated that Minerva refuses the pardon from jail because that would leave other less fortunate women behind, she publicly aligns with her sister's decision and refuses her own pardon. With this tough resolution, readers see that María Teresa remains clear in her family loyalties: “But what

⁹⁴ Lilian Comas-Diaz and Beverly Green (1994) believe that *machismo* and *maríanismo*, “once linked to strictly defined roles of Hispanic male dominance and female submissiveness, have changed over the years” as American schools inundate Latino children and adolescents with “messages about individualism from the mainstream culture so that growing up is filled with contradictions” (in Taylor, et. al. 72).

was I supposed to do? Leave Minerva behind to be a martyr all by herself?” (236). With this characterization of María Teresa, Alvarez depicts the tensions—the disconnect (*Motivation* 91)—between familial and political loyalties as daughters and sisters attempt to self-actualize. These tensions contribute to Mate’s discontentment. When self-actualizers become seriously distressed, they stop and reevaluate their lives, asking if they have strayed from becoming the person they intend to be. Similarly, Dame Philosophy guides Boethius in his emotional, spiritual, and physical crisis to calm himself and reevaluate who he has become. Self-actualizers in a similar state of discontentment and distress need the same advice—reclaim a calm mind and reappraise the course of self-actualizing. In this way, discontentment can be a healthy stage in the self-actualizing process.

Patria’s story focuses on her family role as mother. When Minerva leaves with the resistance, Patria agrees to keep her six-month old baby: “Keep him? I, who treasured my children more than my own life, couldn’t believe my sister would leave her son for anything” (155). For Patria, the choice is clear: motherhood trumps politics. However, Patria does not copy her mother’s “old-fashioned” child rearing; rather, she consciously raises her daughter the “modern” way, “where she wasn’t kept cooped up, learning blind obedience” (157).⁹⁵ The problem for her self-actualizing is that Patria has become extremely judgmental of Minerva who is deserting her own children. Self-actualizing suffers when such judgments lead to too precise delineations of right and wrong without

⁹⁵ However, she does not discard all tradition: “Still, I wished she’d use her wings to soar up closer to the divine hem of our Blessed Virgin instead of to flutter towards things not worthy of her attention” (157).

tolerance and the possibility of change. As Patria looks down on her sister as a failing mother, Patria's self-actualizing suffers because she is "rubricizing" (*Toward* 75) her sister into a role—of mother—and not seeing her as a person. At this point in her story, Patria does not try to walk in another person's shoes as self-actualizers do.

Fortunately for her self-actualizing, Patria's neat divisions of family, religion, and politics erode as Padre de Jesus, the local priest, finally becomes involved in the revolution. Then, Patria realizes that "we were all brothers and sisters in Christ." Patria declares that a person "could not chase after a boy with [his] machete and enter the kingdom of heaven" (164). The battle with her husband, Pedrito, ensues over political associations that endanger their family. After she discovers that her son is working for the underground and she witnesses the SIM's horrors, Patria reevaluates her initial clear-cut privileging of motherhood over politics. Fearing for her son's life, Patria no longer feels desperately divided among her familial, religious, and political loyalties. Like María Teresa's story, Patria's story illustrates the need to negotiate old traditions—such as patriarchy, the "Cinderella" marriage master narrative, and machismo—that divide loyalties in order to continue self-actualizing by resisting enculturation (*Motivation* 226) and being true to herself and her world.

In the Time of the Butterflies portrays healthy and unhealthy family relationships that contribute to the sisters' self-actualizing either through examples or non-examples. Many of the novel's non-examples come from the older generation's actions: Trujillo, the father, and the priest. Witnessing their more traditional approach to family matters and loyalties, the Mirabal sisters become discontent (*Motivation* 91) and begin to reevaluate

the established ways. They are the new generation of women who are reconsidering female-male relationships and in particular, the “Cinderella” marriage master narrative. The novel realistically depicts those family relationships that restrict a woman’s self-empowerment—adultery, patriarchy, and machismo—as destructive to female self-actualization. Further, the novel insists upon the need for women to leave their cocoons (*Motivation* 226), rejecting these unhealthy family relationships, and fly away, recreating healthy situations as mothers, daughters, and sisters. Alvarez’s novel affords its readers examples of how they can transform their confused and guilty memories into positive lessons for their self-actualization. This is not an easy accomplishment.

Summary

If female readers wish to envision themselves beyond the culturally defined family roles of daughter, sister, mother, and wife, they need stories to incarnate these visions. Wong, Alther, Shange, and Alvarez—all marginalized women—dramatize self-actualizing amidst and against their cultures’ prejudices and expectations about women’s family values and roles. For Wong, a self-actualizer should find the “Middle Way” between traditional family loyalty and contemporary individualistic values. For Alther, self-actualizing mothers and daughters should confront and consult each other in order to understand when to embrace and when to let go—but never to cling. For Shange, a mother who self-actualizes is the best example for her young daughter even if it creates family tensions and maternal escapes. For Alvarez, females should recognize and avoid family codes of patriarchy and machismo, which license abuse, adultery, and

authoritarianism. In terms of the family's influence on its daughters, these female authors—composing outside the mainstream American marriage master narrative—offer their readers hope and strategies for becoming self-actualizers within their family relationships apart from being a dutiful daughter who “marries well.” In each of these novels, the self-actualizing female confronts an aspect of the “Cinderella” marriage master narrative that creates an imbalance of power in the family. As we have seen, when Jade Snow, Betsey Brown, Jane Brown, Ginny Bliss, Mrs. Babcock, and the Mirabal sisters witness such a familial power imbalance, they become discontented, which causes them to rethink the extent to which they will continue the previous generation's participation in the “Cinderella” marriage master narrative. We will see this pattern of discontent contributing to self-actualization in the remaining sections of this study.

From here, we follow the steps a girl takes to become educated. She is likely to learn much inside the school room; she is just as likely to learn much outside those walls. Recalling the lessons in front of the chalk board, in conversations with mentors, and at the home dinner table, these novelists remind us that education takes many formal and informal forms—including autodidacticism. We continue our journey in a self-actualizing female's life by exploring the potential for a woman's educational choices.

CHAPTER II
BEYOND THE ABC'S:
EDUCATION AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION

We may be able to tell the story of departed nations and conquering chieftains who have added pages of tears and blood to the world's history; but our education is deficient if we are perfectly ignorant how to guide the little feet that are springing up so gladly in our path, and to see in undeveloped possibilities gold more fine than the pavements of heaven and gems more precious than the foundations of the holy city.
(Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, "An Address Before the Brooklyn Literary Society")

As Frances Ellen Watkins Harper reminds us, formal education can debilitate or promote self-actualization, depending on its agenda, curriculum, pedagogy, instructor, and student. In order to foster self-actualization for women, formal education should allow for freedom from patriarchy, embrace lifelong self-fulfillment, abide resistance (*Motivation* 226), and promote open-mindedness. Too often, however, this is not the case.

Lee Comer contends that as children's reading curriculum progresses, the female characters recede until they fade away (20). Studies show that female students' voices also tend to fade away as they progress in the formal education process. Therefore, female students learn that the world expects them to be "passive, quiet, nurturing, surreptitiously bossy, incompetent ladies, wives, and mothers" (387) lest they become

“monsters” (Gilbert and Gubar 53).⁹⁶ In this vein, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar warn that stifling a girl’s imagination and imposing her “submissiveness” and “selflessness” train women to deny their urge to survive, seek pleasure, and assert their views—a process that often leads to ill health (54). The “Cinderella” marriage master narrative requires this stifling. Once a female utters her “yes” to a male’s marriage proposal, she must suddenly become thrilled to accept all his decisions without comment or complaint.

The formal education that perpetuates these patterns of stories indoctrinates girls and female adolescents into patriarchy (387), exerting “a major arm of social concern” (388), and encouraging girls to become “invisible members of classrooms” (Gittell 69). Marilyn Gittell believes that the American subtext of the official curriculum “prepares girls and women for second-class citizenship” (57). Part of this second-class status depends on restricting women’s sexual choices and creating self-images conducive to American mores: sexually active females are promiscuous “sluts” while their male partners are “studs” and “players” (Orenstein 57).⁹⁷ Stories told in American schools frequently attempt to convince females who have not yet been sexually active that their desires are shameful and attempt to convert their desires into “feelings of disgust” by labeling girls who explore sexuality as “untouchables” (55). Beyond gender

⁹⁶ Therefore, female students read the cultural vision of themselves as their own self-image (Ruth 387). Shirley Foster and Judy Simons note that the novels published during World War I reflect the uncertainties of women’s roles and education (192).

⁹⁷ As Peggy Orenstein quips, “In their youth, they may be snips and snails and puppy dogs’ tails, but by adolescence, boys learn that they are ‘made of’ nothing but desire” (57).

stereotyping, ethnicity and class biases in school can impede students' self-actualizing.

In 1970, Nikki Giovanni speaks about educational inequality for African Americans:

My grandmother lived in the South. They never spoke of neighborhood schools in the South 'cause all kinds of people could live in one neighborhood. In the North they did, however. The whole concept makes a lot of sense to me 'cause you just wouldn't want your little five-year-old running all across town to a school. In the South they just said, plainly, "We don't want no niggers in these schools." (133)

Have U.S. schools improved since then, or like the North, have they more covertly maintained their gender, class, and ethnic prejudices? According to Gittell, although America boasts of equality in education, the opposite is often true, especially, for those of a lower economic status (31-33). To make matters worse, a Eurocentric viewpoint contributes to this inequality as it sanitizes, minimizes, or ignores the histories of the marginalized in the United States (85). Individual teachers and administrators can help to transform American formal education through the careful selection of books, especially stories that promote equality and eschew the restrictive political agendas of prejudice and patriarchy.⁹⁸

When formal education fails, informal methods become necessary.⁹⁹ Recalling the work of Louis Althusser, Patricia P. Chu recognizes that although a literary education can convey a culture's dominating values—sometimes subjugating its citizens—

⁹⁸ For example, Gittell suggests that the classroom teacher rearrange the environment "to reflect a commitment to cultural diversity" (90).

⁹⁹ Maslow supports such alternatives, complaining that education has become "too exclusively abstract" and "bookish" while excluding the value of "raw, concrete, esthetic experience" (*Toward* 209).

reformers can also use education as a tool to subvert such domination, vis-à-vis “narratives of others’ struggles to survive in, or resist, oppressive public narratives” (10). Especially when written by marginalized female authors, these “narratives of others” can positively affect female self-actualization.

With the inclusion of female self-actualization novels, female students can experience a diversity of role models different from the “Cinderella” master narrative. This is a realistic goal, supported by many. For example, Roberta Seelinger Trites cautions against biased curriculum, embraces her memories of strong female literary characters, and pledges her support to assist teachers in their text selection process. She concludes her work, *Waking Sleeping Beauty*, with her criteria for “practicing feminist pedagogy”:

1. provide children with feminist texts that balance the sexist classics many of us still feel compelled to teach;
2. use nonsexist multicultural texts; and
3. validate female voices as clearly as they validate male voices in their classrooms. (141-142)

These goals would help to foster female self-actualizing at all educational levels.

Fifth Chinese Daughter portrays both formal and informal means of education. *Kinflicks* dramatizes the pedagogy that Trites warns against, ironically, featuring a female mentor. *Fried Green Tomatoes* proscribes formal education that requires conformity and prescribes alternative educational methods through conversation and story. *Betsey Brown* cautions against the acculturation of formal education and the mixed messages of

informal education. These four texts realistically investigate how education—in its many forms and with its many agendas—can influence female self-actualization.

Fifth Chinese Daughter: I Did It My (Middle) Way

No other novel in this study prizes formal and informal education more highly than *Fifth Chinese Daughter*.¹⁰⁰ Jade Snow’s informal education at home frequently conflicts with her formal education at elementary school, junior college, and Mills College. These conflicts fuel her rebellion and self-actualizing. To understand her rebellion and her parents’ reaction better, we should understand the climate of education for second-generation Chinese American females at that time.

Historically, stereotyping impeded the progress of many female students like Jade Snow. First, the seemingly positive labeling of Chinese Americans as the “model minority” (Odin 1987) restricted some Chinese American students’ self-expression. Second, the impression that Asian Americans were overrepresented in Ivy League schools hindered some of their acceptances into higher education (Gittell 89). Third, stereotypical views of Asian Americans as “narrow and technically oriented” often limited their choices and successes to the science and mathematics fields (89). Fourth, gender prejudices also limited females’ educational opportunities as many high school graduates opted out of attending college in order to remove themselves from the prejudices they had already experienced at the elementary and high school levels (Yung,

¹⁰⁰ In her Author’s Note, Jade Snow Wong acknowledges her teacher, Dr. Alice C. Cooper, as her friend and as her inspiration for writing her autobiography

Unbound 130).¹⁰¹ For these reasons and others, pre-World War II America failed to provide many Chinese Americans with educational equality (125).

Other impediments toward female self-actualizing through education come from within the Chinese culture and from Chinese American families themselves. Chinese American parents often believe that the better the education, the better the chances of “gainful employment” (Yung, *Unbound* 126). However, many second-generation Chinese Americans have become disappointed because despite their hard work in schools and impressive job qualifications, they are still overlooked and passed over for “white Americans” in the job market (135). Perhaps, sensing this inequality, Chinese Americans typically insist upon a separate Chinese education, intended to develop a student’s character and to instill “a sense of nationalist and cultural pride” (126). However, the greatest impediment to a female second-generation Chinese American’s education occurs if her parents refuse to support her education, sometimes, even at the high school level (114).

With these obstacles, female Chinese Americans, like Jade Snow, seize even unappealing educational opportunities—like junior college—in order to “shape new gender roles for themselves.” Often, these women cling to any education as an “accessible avenue of opportunity” because they are aware of social prejudices against their success (Yung, *Unbound* 125) and because their families often abdicate any financial responsibility and emotional support for their higher education. Amidst

¹⁰¹ Others, like Jade Snow, retreated to a pose of “passivity” as “a defense stance of accommodation that the second generation had been taught to assume when confronted by racial conflict” (Yung 129).

informal and formal educational opportunities, two of the hopes for female self-actualization lie in a self-actualization curriculum and with self-actualizing teachers.¹⁰²

Jade Snow's informal education occurs within her family. Uncle Kwok—a janitor, factory worker, lifetime scholar of Confucian classics, and private tutor hopeful—fascinates Jade Snow as a child. Jade Snow feels sorry for him and considers him “queer”; nonetheless, she searches to understand his drive and ability to educate himself. Uncle Kwok, readers later learn, is continuing the tradition of autodidacticism of her grandfather, an artisan.

Within the Wong family home, corporal discipline without instruction informally instructs: “Thus, life was a constant puzzle. No one ever troubled to explain” (3). Jade Snow learns through punishment only what is improper and by the absence of punishment what is proper. The rice barrel provides “double strips of flexible cane about three-eighths of an inch wide,” which her father straightens out in view of the children to make switches because he believed that “severe whipping” was the best means for raising “creditable daughters and illustrious sons” (60).¹⁰³ If the particular lesson is unclear, the overall agenda is always clear: obey your father. Jade Snow signifies on this method of informal education when she recalls Little Brother Forgiveness pleading, “Daddy, please

¹⁰² Judy Yung notes in her famous work, *Unbound Feet*, that through her reading of stories and philosophy, Jade Snow “discovered how different life was outside Chinatown” (118).

¹⁰³ The following line comments: “So it was no wonder that the Wong children always watched a delivery of new rice with sad eyes and heavy heart” (60). Apter explains what is ineffective about Mr. Wong's type of informal education: an “authoritative” parenting style should provide reasons behind the discipline, allowing for both growth and control (206).

don't buy any more rice!" (60). No judgment is uttered, but the passage ending the chapter "Learning to be a Chinese Housewife" disconcerts as readers imagine the children watching the unpacking of the rice and Jade Snow recalling not the rice but the beatings. Eating rice twice a day must have reinforced the ever-present possibility of violent discipline without any clear instruction.

Here again, we see that discontentment helps a budding self-actualizer question a traditional worldview of the older generation. This discontentment is part of the process that contributes to Jade Snow's self-actualizing because, as discussed earlier, it helps her question who she is and who she is becoming, in this case, in relation to her father's corporal informal educational methods. Despite the third-person narration and the polite rhetoric, the text's tension undermines filial piety and sets the stage for subsequent rebellions.

While Jade Snow learns discipline and deference at home, she also learns independence and freedom (*Motivation* 90). Although the absence of her parents' financial support limits Jade Snow's formal educational choices, it also frees her to choose the institution, classes, friends, and means of support. Therein, she explores philosophies and practices outside her Chinese American culture and deals with her failures and disappointments on her own terms, which contribute to her confidence (*Motivation* 90) and self-esteem (90).

When his daughter is in only the third grade, Mr. Wong informs her that he will not financially support her college education. As high school graduation approaches, he elucidates that sons "perpetuate our ancestral heritage" and, therefore, deserve advantages

(108-109). Putting it in bleak financial terms, her father declares, “If you have the talent, you can provide for your own college education” (109). Without emotion, the narration reports Jade Snow’s “new and sudden bitterness against the one person whom she had always trusted as fair to her” (109). Without overt criticism, the narration questions his authority and character more than his decision, signifying her disapproval and disappointment. However, the text is deliberately ambiguous as to whether she actually voices her irritation. The first set of her reactions appears in quotation marks but seems to be an internal dialogue. The next set of reactions consists of questions with the same address to “Daddy,” followed by her retreat to her bedroom. Even if Jade Snow voices neither set of complaints about unfairness and sexism to her father, she does reveal them to her readers, culminating with the damning, “Don’t the Chinese admit that women also have feelings and minds?” (110). Despite the daughter’s outward deference to her father’s decision, the text indicates her internal rebellion (*Motivation 226*), which is necessary for her self-actualizing.

This conversation (or monologue, depending on the interpretation of the quotation marks) begins a series of disappointments in her father’s lack of support for her education. These disappointments contribute to her discontentment and, therefore, to her self-actualization process of self-examination. The text repeatedly, although gently, reports that her father fails to acknowledge his daughter’s educational accomplishments unless someone else—whom he deems important—becomes involved. As the text continues to reveal Jade Snow’s awareness of her father’s failure to embrace her educational accomplishments, readers become increasingly aware of her growing

discontentment (*Motivation* 212-213). In this way, Mr. Wong's decisions and actions contribute to Jade Snow's self-actualization process. Specifically, she will accept that without the "esteems of others" (*Toward* 200), she should relinquish his hold on her.¹⁰⁴

Fifth Chinese Daughter also illustrates the self-actualizing benefits of formal education. Faced with no other financial options and "without much enthusiasm," Jade Snow decides to attend junior college (120). Her first year proves the turning point in her education as she listens to her professor declare that "[p]arents can no longer demand unquestioning obedience from their children" (125). So much does her first year sociology class impress her that Jade Snow changes her major. She is invited to join the Alpha Gamma Sigma Honor Society, is recognized as the "most outstanding woman student of the junior colleges in California" (134), and is selected as salutatorian of her graduating class.¹⁰⁵ Her salutatorian address parrots her father's views, indicating that she still allows him to strongly influence her worldview. When she finally determines this to be an unsuccessful approach, she will begin to self-actualize because she will be clearly identifying that he is merely posing for others (*Motivation* 208). Self-actualizers have no patience for such game playing and indiscriminant pleasing (*Motivation* 208). Jade Snow will ultimately realize that.

Left again with limited financial options, Jade Snow chooses Mills College because they offer her a full scholarship. Her former sociology teacher warns her of the

¹⁰⁴ Compared to the typical Chinese American father, her father's support of even her high school education was considered atypical and open-minded.

¹⁰⁵ According to Gerrye Wong, Jade Snow Wong originally aspired to be a Chinatown social worker (28).

cultural obligations of her continuing education: “But no matter how successful you may become never forget the fight you must make for racial equality” (153). Jade Snow’s friend predicts, “If you want to shine in your family, Mills will polish you to a more brilliant light” (152).¹⁰⁶ However, at first, Jade Snow is in the dark at Mills. Although she enjoys the seminars’ intimacy, their informality disrupts “her lifelong perfected system of learning” (161). Brought up with severe punishments, curtailed disagreements, and one-sentence paternal edicts, Jade Snow considers formal education the process for “disseminating superior information” until her professor explains that she is there to teach Jade Snow to think (162). Slowly, Jade Snow finds “that her curious mind was being disciplined to work quickly and to find relationships between problems” (163). Instead of being “tightly bound” with a concern for “facts and the Chinese absolute order of things,” she becomes concerned with the “reasons behind the facts, their interpretations, and the imminence of continuous change” (163). That is, as a budding self-actualizer, she becomes able to discriminate between “means and ends” (*Motivation 220*). Rewarding her academic successes, Mills College renews her full scholarship; and Jade Snow enjoys another year of “happy living and stimulation from liberal academic thinking” (168).

¹⁰⁶ Xiaojian Zhai remarks that the “liberal academic world was stimulating” for Jade Snow as she developed relationships with her peers, teachers, and administrators through seminar classes, social networks, and residence with the dean, participating “in a world in which she was well liked and her intelligence was recognized” unlike the “strict bounds of Chinese American society” (52).

To round out Jade Snow's education, the dean stresses the importance of exposure to the arts.¹⁰⁷ Jade Snow learns an important lesson in her self-actualization process from her art teacher who refrains from giving answers and encourages students to investigate the problems on their own. After hearing his "I don't know" response many times, Jade Snow becomes frustrated. Slowly, Jade Snow recognizes that although the professor's method "made learning slow and painful for it meant that students made mistakes," it also enhanced their learning and developed their "individual ingenuity" (176) (*Motivation 157*).¹⁰⁸ This pedagogy teaches Jade that good craftswomen are disciplined artists who are able to apply theory to the construction of their pieces. Jade Snow experiences a "freshness of appreciation" for art (*Motivation 214*). Again, this lesson affords her a new appreciation (*Motivation 214*) for being a craftswoman. Further, working on her crafts teaches her that "one learned more by seeing and feeling for oneself than by instruction" (178). Trusting herself, Jade Snow becomes more confident that she can extend her education beyond formal instruction. She graduates with honors, including membership in Phi Beta Kappa. Proud of herself, she is armed to self-actualize as an artist (which is discussed in the work section below).

Although she achieves impressive academic recognitions, her father values her achievements only when someone he considers important witnesses her recognition. For example, he becomes interested in her college life only when their family is able to

¹⁰⁷ This is the path that Maslow, himself would recommend, contending that the arts must become basic to education with an aim at investigating ethics (*Farther 179*).

¹⁰⁸ According to Maslow, education should be directed toward a "cultivation of controls" and a "cultivation of spontaneity and expression" (*Toward 198*).

impress the visiting quartet with Chinese cooking. Further, he neglects to recognize her college awards and honors, including her Phi Beta Kappa membership, because no one important validates her achievements to him.¹⁰⁹ When the family joins Jade Snow after her graduation, neither parent praises her. Instead of congratulating her, her father insists on a photograph of Jade Snow with the college president. As usual, the spotlight falls away from her.

The narrator signifies on her father's fawning by juxtaposing his attention to the college president with her awareness of her own achievements: "For Jade Snow the moment of triumph had come. She had proven that Mama could raise her children to be a credit to the Wongs." Jade Snow self-actualizes by insisting upon her own self-respect (*Motivation* 90) and accepting that she receives no esteem from her family (*Motivation* 90). Jade Snow continues to self-congratulate: "She had shown her father and mother that without a penny from them, she could balance her own budget and graduate from college, not in debt, but with one hundred of the original hundred and seventy-four dollars still in the bank" (181). Claiming "no sense of conquest or superiority," Jade Snow experiences only "an overwhelming flood of happiness and release" (181). In addition, Jade Snow experiences "an oceanic feeling" (*Motivation* 216) of pride (*Motivation* 90) in her educational accomplishments. Signifying without overtly condemning, the narrator identifies her parent as "the two who had no words of congratulation" (181). However, their silence does not define her self-worth because she is able to emotionally detach (*Motivation* 212-213) from them.

¹⁰⁹ In fact, he is only impressed with her pottery because consumers prize it.

As the book was heavily edited, readers can only wonder if these episodes were originally more critical of her father. As it stands, the text suggests that the older autobiographer recalls her young, unrealized, desperate hopes for her parents' verbal recognition. As such, the text suggests the self-actualization of the younger Jade Snow as an accomplished student who has learned to think critically and behave socially while simultaneously suggesting the self-actualization of the older Jade Snow Wong who does not forget her parents' limitations but who will not allow their failings to limit her own self-appraisal (*Motivation* 226). Nonetheless, the third-person autobiographical narration establishes an uneasy double voicing of the younger and older selves, as well as of their deferential and frustrated viewpoints. Without an "I," there is no clear distinction between the younger character and the older narrator. Without an "I," there is no insight into a personal, sincere inside voice, making it difficult to determine if the younger Jade Snow is self-actualizing, in addition to the older Wong as autobiographer.¹¹⁰

Both informal education—as autodidacticism and traditional Chinese family discipline—and formal education—as liberal arts education—contribute to Jade Snow's self-actualizing either by disturbing her traditional values (*Motivation* 91) or by promoting the self-examined life (*Motivation* 220). Jade Snow searches for what she calls the "Middle Way" (131), which lies between informal Chinese and formal

¹¹⁰ Frank Chin has correlated Chinese autobiography with the Christian confession but found Snow's story in the third person to be anything but confessional (11). Yin and Paulson disagree. They see *Fifth Chinese Daughter* as a fiction like Henry Adams' *Education* and admire the characterization of Jade Snow as a "fully rendered, fictional character" "who succeeds to balance "the forces of the fragmented world of Chinese-American women" (59).

American educational practices. On one side of the “Middle Way,” Jade Snow is unable to “reject the fatalism that was at the core of all Chinese thinking and behavior” (131), succumbing to her parents’ capital punishment. On the other side, she pursues a liberal arts education. While she successfully distances herself from her parents’ monitoring, she continues to struggle with how greatly they influence her life.

As the autobiography progresses, Jade Snow becomes more comfortable with searching—for herself and for the “Middle Way” between cultures. An informal educational encounter with the herbalist speaks to Jade Snow’s search as he cures her by restoring her body’s “balance and harmony” in accordance with her *yin* and *yang* (Zheng 17).¹¹¹ This encounter helps Jade Snow reconsider her search for the “Middle Way,” suggesting to her that she should strive for an internal balance—an internal “Middle Way”—while she attempts to balance her Chinese and American influences. Self-actualization demands both personal development and social responsibility. The herbalist teaches Jade Snow that she must attend to her own development—correcting her imbalanced body and spirit—while she attends to her commitment to find a cultural “Middle Way.” We have also seen this search for the “Middle Way” at school as Jade Snow searches for another balance to her life—incorporating her rote memory study habits with critical thinking skills. Also, she strives to balance her “changing interests with those of her family” (169), attempting to blend the traditions of the older generation

¹¹¹ Da Zheng explains further: “Each item in the *yin* or *yang* category contains an element of the ‘Other,’ and each undergoes continuous adjustment of the relationship with its opposite and may transform into the ‘Other’ should the need to do so arise” (17).

with the pursuits of the new generation. This need for harmony will contribute to her self-actualization as a potter (which is discussed in the work section below).

The novel's ending reflects Wong's philosophy of on-going self-actualization: "As for Jade Snow, she knew that she still had before her a hard upward climb" (246). Part of her "upward climb" is internal. Even though the U.S. State Department recognizes her, she graduates Phi Beta Kappa, she gives the salutatorian address, she establishes a successful business, and she writes the first autobiography of a Chinese American from Chinatown, Jade Snow struggles with her self-esteem (*Motivation* 90). Both her informal and formal educations guide her toward writing in order to enhance her self-confidence (*Motivation* 90) as it permits her to exercise her imagination and demonstrate her language acquisition and in order to create a "sense of belongingness" (*Management* 16) between her two cultures. Further, writing allows Jade Snow to become "involved in a cause outside [her] own skin" (*Farther* 43).¹¹²

Kinflicks: Discipleship Dooms

Unlike Wong's novel, Alther's novel looks primarily toward informal education to guide female self-actualization. As discussed earlier, *Kinflicks* explores the potential of dialectic in order to return to a core identity and self-actualize.¹¹³ This dialectic occurs

¹¹² As such, writing her autobiography provides a vehicle for Jade Snow's self-actualization.

¹¹³ Alther believes that every human being has a core identity and that self-actualization requires an individual to strip away at whatever or whomever in life detracts from returning to that core (personal interview). To Wayne Pond, Alther attributes this "notion that everything contains the same underlying essence" to the Cherokee influence and credits it with her ability to create metaphors. One is reminded of Plato's mandate

in several areas of the protagonist's life—pitting her philosophy teacher's worldview against her lover's philosophy and Mrs. Babcock's rejection of motherhood against her own embracing of motherhood—as they recall many stories from their past during Mrs. Babcock's final days in her hospital room. While Ginny pursues her education, so too does Mrs. Babcock pursue her education as an autodidact and through her dialectic with her daughter. For Alther, dialectic helps a character return to her core identity, which Alther considers to be a universal essence. This dialectic requires a series of oppositional associations that provide the discontentment (*Motivation* 91) that is a critical stage in Ginny's and her mother's self-actualizing as they confront their failed “Cinderella” lives. Maslow recognizes that this “inner core” is often “weak in certain senses” and “easily overcome, suppressed or repressed” (*Toward* 191). For Alther, participating in dialectics of opposing views, like working a muscle with resistance, can strengthen a woman's ability to return to her core.¹¹⁴ Participating in dialectics, Ginny attempts to strip the nonessential and destructive facets of her life to return to a more authentic core—one not predetermined by the social norms of romance.¹¹⁵ Alther explains this stripping process:

that to know oneself, one must shed life's corruptions and return to the Forms of birth. Further, this readjusting process involves what Labovitz calls “shedding, “a significant act whereby the heroines rid themselves of excess baggage as they proceed in their life's journey” (253). On the negative side, this shedding often involves discomfort and “guilt” (254). On the positive side, this shedding espouses “the idea that living is an art that one may learn as one passes through the various stages” (257). Shedding can continue no matter what age or stage, reaffirming a continually examined life.

¹¹⁴ Maslow sees this process similarly: “Authentic selfhood can be defined in part as being able to hear these impulse—voices within oneself, i.e., to know what one really wants or doesn't want, what one is fit for and what one is *not* fit for, etc.” (*Toward* 192).

¹¹⁵ This is probably why Alther frequently pairs her female protagonist with a foil (Buchanan).

A lot of my characters go through a kind of stripping process in which they are converts to whatever ideology surrounds them and they try their best to participate in it and then find that it doesn't answer those ultimate questions and so they have to shed it and move to the next one until finally they're stripped down to the bare bones, the essence. (Pond)

In a recent interview, Lisa Alther discloses that she mapped out the plot of *Kinflicks* according to Hegel's thesis/anti-thesis/synthesis philosophy, intending to show widely divergent alternatives for her protagonist's life (personal interview) but without a guarantee of progress. In an interview with Carol E. W. Edwards, Alther discloses how Hegelian philosophy specifically determined the structure:

In KINFLICKS, I wrote all the picaresque flashback scenes straight through and thought that would be the book. But I read back over it and thought, No, this just doesn't portray things as I see them. So I decided I would write the hospital scenes, and I wrote them all straight through and then went back and alternated them with the comic scenes. I intended for them to comment on each other, on the way in which comedy can shade off into tragedy and vice versa.

Prizing more than one worldview, Alther's self-actualization novel stands against the monotony of "Cinderella" and the conformity of the *Bildungsroman*.

Ginny's formal education is one instance of the dialectic in the novel—posing Miss Head's sanitized philosophy of liberal arts against Eddie Holzer's indulgence in an allegedly ethical approach to education. Although Ginny prefers to blame her father for forcing her to attend Worthley College, she reluctantly reflects that perhaps he did not care and wonders if she had "lived part of her life fulfilling parental wishes that had existed only in her imagination" (23). This moment at the novel's onset sets the stage for Ginny's later self-actualizing: Ginny should determine the dialectic of how her past and

her culture have legitimately influenced her versus how she has inappropriately blamed her failures on her past and current associations—that is, refusing to see “reality more clearly” and without “defensiveness” (*Motivation* 208).¹¹⁶ Regarding her educational experiences, Ginny comes to terms with herself as the dialectic product of opposing philosophies, eventually holding herself responsible for her own self-actualization as demonstrated in a few key episodes at Worthley College and thereafter with Eddie.

At Worthley College, Ginny struggles to understand philosophy because, she self-diagnoses, she is “incapable of sustained thought” (177).¹¹⁷ Enter Miss Head, whose influence extends beyond philosophy class because, she proclaims, “liberal arts should permeate every facet of life” (185). After reviewing Miss Head’s editorial comments on a course paper, Ginny learns that education discomforts, which provides her a self-actualizing opportunity (*Motivation* 91).¹¹⁸ Half-way through composing her next argument—about the existence of God—Ginny’s satisfaction withers as the “why” stumps her: “Every string of interlaced theorems I unveiled collapsed like a house of cards. Finally I chopped the ‘why’ off the topic and submitted a fourteen-page paper” (184). Thereafter, Ginny determines to eliminate all “whys” from her arguments, limiting herself to only the “hows.” Rather than explore a conflict (*Motivation* 91), Ginny submits a truncated paper, avoiding the discomfort inherent in liberal arts education and

¹¹⁶ *Kinflicks* could be required reading for a seminar on scapegoating.

¹¹⁷ Recalling high school, Ginny makes no mention of classes but revels in her flag swirler memories and romances.

¹¹⁸ Growth can comfort and inflict pain. Maslow acknowledges that growth frequently requires a “parting and a separation, even a kind of death prior to rebirth, with consequent nostalgia, fear, loneliness and mourning” (*Toward* 204).

self-actualizing.¹¹⁹ Ginny initially reacts to the discomfort of liberal arts education by rejecting critical thinking. This incident of rejecting the “whys” early in the novel is paradigmatic of Ginny’s later attempts to avoid neurosis in her relationships, truncating her self-actualization process.¹²⁰

Ginny has learned too well from Miss Head, a woman who touts aphorisms and allegedly supports liberal arts while leading an amoral life. For although Miss Head proclaims, “I’ve always felt that a person’s intelligence is directly reflected by the number of conflicting points of view he can entertain simultaneously on the same topic” (208), in actuality she allows for only her own unchanging points of view. Predictably, as Ginny keeps the examined life on hold, she relieves short-term stress but contributes to her long-term anxiety and disappointment. Although Ginny proudly proclaims that she “wasn’t doomed to repeat [her] mother’s patterns of behavior” (209), she merely trades her mother’s model for Miss Head’s paradigm without examining its self-actualizing potential for her. With each week, Miss Head becomes a stronger influence, even effecting Ginny’s decision to become celibate: “Miss Head apparently did without fulminating vasocongestion, and so could I” (197). As Ginny has abdicated her self-respect (*Motivation* 90) because she is “trying to impress” someone else (*Motivation* 208), she fails to self-actualize at this point.

¹¹⁹ Ginny’s approach to avoiding discomfort recalls Jade Snow’s initial reaction to liberal arts education, longing for the answers and avoiding the questions. Similarly, we will see that Betsey Brown feels forced to avoid confrontation when her teacher attacks the American literary authenticity of Paul Laurence Dunbar.

¹²⁰ For Maslow, it is important to confront such neurosis as a “defense against,” an “evasion of” or a “distorted expression” of one’s “inner core” (*Toward* 204).

Most dangerously, Miss Head convinces Ginny that academic study, according to Spinoza's philosophy, should eschew ethic. For Miss Head, she contends, personal involvement is anathema to scholarship (200). Further, pursuing Darwinian theory, Ginny comes to believe that, like every organism, individuals must forfeit their needs to the species' needs. Later, Ginny pursues Descartes' philosophy, from which she determines to conquer her desires rather than revolt. Next, Ginny reads Schopenhauer's assertion that all knowledge is only a perceiver's perspective. The list of educational influences goes on, including Einstein's theory of relativity. All of these philosophers eschew emotional responses to life. Only Nietzsche, whom Ginny rejects, offers an opposing view with his refutation of the Hegelian thesis/antithesis/synthesis theory. Ginny's adolescent rejections of the "whys" in general and of Nietzschean philosophy in particular demonstrate her inability to participate in "a dialectic between growth-fostering forces and growth-discouraging forces" (*Toward* 204-205) and her failure to self-actualize at Worthley College.

Because Ginny merely adopts or rejects views according to Miss Head's preferences and without appropriate analysis, she fails to self-actualize.¹²¹ Although Ginny accepts that she must take the classes that Miss Head designates, read the philosophers that Miss Head emulates, and draw the conclusions that Miss Head spouts, she does not judge her "correctly and efficiently" (*Motivation* 208) because she fails to see Miss Head as a brainwasher. At first leery of becoming irresponsible, Ginny

¹²¹ Maslow agrees: "We need a validated, usable system of human values that we can believe in and devote ourselves to . . . because they are true rather than because we are exhorted to 'believe and have faith'" (*Toward* 206).

convinces herself, “If you couldn’t trust your philosophy professor, whom *could* you trust?” (182). Soon, Ginny reduces formal education to a game.¹²² One of Maslow’s self-actualizing criteria asserts that self-actualization does not occur if we view life as a game to be played (*Motivation* 208). Thus, the better Ginny plays the formal education game, the more difficult it is for her to take her liberal arts education seriously and the more dangerously she prevents her self-actualization. Eventually, however, Ginny does realize that the game strategy dooms her chances of self-actualizing. At this point, Ginny fears that she may become her mother, “sacrificed to others’ whims for so long that I’d no longer know what I wanted” (209). In order to self-actualize, Ginny will need to learn that Miss Head is a failure at being a decent educator because she eschews social responsibility (*Motivation* 217). Ginny will also need to learn that self-actualization is no game and begin to value her own self-respect (*Motivation* 90) instead of pleasing another (*Motivation* 208).

Ginny’s pleasing strategy fails her again when she witnesses an attempted suicide. As immobilized voyeur, Ginny cannot decide if she should help or remain detached, simply watching the suicide unfold. While Ginny ponders the situation from various philosophical positions, the attempted suicide victim slumps lower and closes her eyes, eventually falling to the floor as Ginny merely watches in confusion and anxiety. Because Ginny—like her mother who has spent her life pleasing her husband and

¹²² Marion’s brother explains, “It’s a whole different vocabulary these professors have. They’re like a subspecies of the human race. The trick to getting along with them is to become schizophrenic: Talk their jargon when you’re with them, be yourself when you’re not” (202).

children—operates by pleasing others in order to avoid conflict, Ginny remains paralyzed in this situation. Unable to please the attempted suicide victim who is causing Ginny anxiety, she becomes immobile and distressed. Of course, this situation would distress most of us. However, what distresses Ginny during the episode in the bathroom (and later) is that she could not activate her usual pleasing strategy. Without her default strategy for attempting to alleviate anxiety, Ginny experiences a high level of discontentment—a potentially fortunate reaction for the self-actualization process (*Motivation* 91). This should be a crucial lesson for Ginny’s self-actualizing—teaching her that being a pleaser avoids self-actualizing (*Motivation* 208).

Enter Ms. Eddie Holzer. Eddie disagrees with Miss Head’s antiseptic approach to learning. She proclaims to a confused Ginny that all learning is political because all learning is propaganda.¹²³ To prove her point, Eddie contrives a bogus psychology experiment in order to unnerve Ginny’s complacency and to subvert Miss Head’s brainwashing. Determined to please her experimenter, Ginny vacillates between what she actually experiences and what she thinks she should be experiencing. It is a new version of the same educational game for Ginny, which she approaches with the same strategy of adopting and rejecting according to someone else’s standard in order to alleviate her own anxiety. Continuing the role of pleaser, Ginny becomes Eddie’s disciple.¹²⁴ Again, Alther shows her readers that pleasing (*Motivation* 208) affords no self-actualization opportunities. Through much of this novel, readers view a protagonist

¹²³ Alther also acknowledges that all writing is political (personal interview).

¹²⁴ Such a self-consciousness, typical of teenagers, prevents self-actualizing, according to Maslow (*Farther* 45).

whose conformity jeopardizes her self-actualizing—a lesson totally unlike those of “Cinderella” and the *Bildungsroman*. For Alther, compliance to another’s philosophy and to a society’s norms prevents returning to one’s core and self-actualizing.¹²⁵

Understandably, Ginny would like to allay the anxiety that self-actualizing mandates. Attempting to soothe her, Eddie rubs lotion on Ginny who feels as if Eddie is “rubbing life” into her (232). Immediately thereafter, Ginny rejects Miss Head, pals with Eddie, and abandons formal education, leaving college for good.¹²⁶ With her departure from college, Ginny is still rejecting and adopting someone else’s beliefs—just like her mother has done all her adult life. She has rejected Miss Head’s thesis of sanitized liberal arts education and adopted Eddie Holzer’s antithesis that all decisions and actions are ethical ones.

Perhaps, it seems to readers that education fails Ginny’s self-actualization. However, its influences will return to her amidst her dialectic with her mother and her reflections upon their conversations, ultimately assisting her self-actualization. Thus, it is important that the plot dialectically weaves Ginny’s past within the context of her later conversations with her mother, indicating that Ginny is returning to these experiences through memory in an attempt to return to a core essence and self-actualize.

¹²⁵In fact, Ginny is aware of her pleasing compulsion: “Once again I was shamelessly allowing myself to be defined by another person” (284). Rather, according to Maslow, a self-actualizer needs “a framework of values, a philosophy of life . . . to live by and understand by” (*Toward* 214), which is self-constructed—not imposed by another or society.

¹²⁶ However, years later, well after Eddie’s association has ended, Ginny will become saddened to learn that Miss Head rejects her apology letter. At least then, Ginny is willing to face discomfort, which is an important step for her self-actualization.

On her deathbed, Ginny's mother returns to the memories of her college experience: "And so she had gone to Bryn Mawr, her parents beaming approval as the train pulled out. *Their* daughter, with an ex-coal miner for a father, in the Ivy League!" (416). Later, Mrs. Babcock leaves Bryn Mawr to marry. Much later—on her deathbed—she rues her departure as a significant mistake. When faced with an empty nest, she becomes an autodidact, reading the encyclopedia (volume by volume) because she needs "to have something to do with herself . . . to round out her liberal arts education," which she terminated for marriage and motherhood (89). Mrs. Babcock claims that she reads "in search of labels" (90). Unfortunately after her nomothetic encyclopedia reading, a disappointed Mrs. Babcock concludes that the religions of the world are merely "training systems to instruct adherents in how to die" (412). Consequently, Mrs. Babcock rejects the encyclopedic system, which involves blind conformity and cannot fulfill her self-actualization needs. The novel dramatizes that she has paid a high price for leaving college and conforming to the American "Cinderella" master narrative.

Both daughter and mother fail to self-actualize vis-à-vis formal education for several reasons. First, both reject someone else's mandated educational content, instead of weighing the merits and weaknesses. Ginny becomes disillusioned with a sanitized approach to philosophy à la Miss Head, and Mrs. Babcock becomes disillusioned with theology à la the encyclopedia's editors. Second, both daughter and mother reject their formal education in favor of a romantic relationship. Ginny leaves because of her infatuation with Eddie, and Mrs. Babcock leaves because of a marriage proposal. *Kinflicks* shows that dropping out of college for a lesbian relationship is no more

promising than dropping out for a marriage proposal. Although college cannot guarantee self-actualization, dismissing it for another person impedes self-actualizing. Third, the novel dramatizes that pursuing an education just to please someone else prevents self-actualizing. Miss Head, like Mrs. Babcock's parents, can be enormously pleased with her protégé only on the condition that Ginny mimics her philosophy and fulfills her dreams. *Kinflicks* proscribes the dangers to self-actualization of seeking or rejecting education for a romance in particular and more generally for any reason other than pursuing self-actualization.

Does *Kinflicks* prescribe educational experiences? As the anti-thesis to Miss Head's amorality, Eddie insists that emotion and ethic play no part in philosophy in particular and liberal arts in general. For example, Eddie reveals the error of Ginny's ways during the attempted suicide, scolding her for her indecision and, more importantly, for her inaction as Eddie insists that each person's actions affect others. Eddie claims that the essence of liberal arts is social responsibility and not impersonal theory. Her position sets up a Hegelian opposition to Miss Head's antiseptic view of liberal arts. For Eddie and the novel, education cannot remain isolated in some antiseptic class or text.

However, just as Miss Head spouts clichés touting liberal arts to which she does not adhere, Eddie, who seems to care little about others, fails to live the life she advocates. In reality, Eddie is a woman with causes but without compassion. Applying political, sociological, and psychological theories to their private situations, as well as the country's, Eddie claims to be teaching Ginny that self-actualization must consider accountability to others. However, as the anti-thesis to Miss Head's thesis of impersonal

philosophy, Eddie Holzer values only the political implications—not the authentic personal impact—of the theories she has studied in college. Eddie eliminates personal relationships from her ethics, holding herself and others hostage to her own current political agenda while mistreating others personally. Gradually, Ginny realizes the weaknesses of Eddie’s crusading. While Eddie does not follow her own teaching, the novel—through Ginny’s later insights back in her hometown—insists upon the morality of education despite its accompanying anxiety. With Ginny’s thesis and anti-thesis dialectic complete, readers should learn that neither amoral nor immoral education can foster self-actualization. Moreover, they should learn that participating in an examined dialectic of opposing views—rather than adopting or rejecting conflicts and pleasing others—may foster self-actualization.

In addition to Eddie’s mentoring, *Kinflicks* looks at memory and story as informal education.¹²⁷ Through their dialectic, both Ginny and her mother struggle to self-actualize by recovering aspects of their earlier selves. As Ginny returns to her mother who is dying, Ginny returns to their thesis/antithesis memories of maternal influences. Amidst watching soap operas, listening to roommates argue, and dealing with the hospital staff, Ginny and her mother wrangle to determine how each of them has arrived at their disappointing traditional female roles. At one point, Ginny wonders, “Whose version of their shared past was accurate? And how could their versions be so different?” (357).

¹²⁷ This is a talent Alther attributes to being a Southerner. Alther is proud of the Southern tradition of storytelling, especially because “the schools aren’t very good, so people tend not to be abstract and analytic, but they are very intelligent, nonetheless. The way that they deal with theoretical issues, in my opinion, is via anecdote” (Edwards).

Ginny ponders Darwinian naturalism to determine how mother and daughter, as “flexible organisms,” can be “*this* flexible” and differ so drastically (360). Striving for some continuity amidst the thesis/antithesis pendulum of their experiences, Ginny and her mother search for who they were before they assumed their “Cinderella” role.

Alther interweaves the mother-daughter dialectic with Ginny’s remembrances of her life, juxtaposing first-person and third-person narrations, as well as past and present forces to highlight the point in Ginny’s life when “all the various traditional ties and beliefs had failed her” (Braendlin 19). Finally, seeing “reality more clearly” (*Motivation* 208), Ginny begins to take responsibility for her own self-actualization. This is the culmination of their informal dialectic education together.¹²⁸ Ginny and Mrs. Babcock begin to self-actualize while reacting to each other’s versions of their shared memories (in a Hegelian dialectic), as well as while privately remembering their own lives. (The self-actualization impact of their dialectic is discussed further in the sections on friends, work, community, and love below.)

Kinflicks proscribes education devoid of ethic and personal decorum and prescribes the benefits of education as long as an ethical component accompanies learning. Alther’s novel insists that understanding the conversations of philosophy, as well as one’s past, remains unethical without a personal moral commitment and with only a political agenda. Ideally, education, like Alther’s concept of “stripping,” assists its

¹²⁸ Alther explores Darwin’s theories and genealogy in order to understand her characters’ pasts for the purpose of assessing their present. Specifically, Alther desires to know “who came from where and in what characteristics they brought with them and transmitted to the family that have come down to present” (Pond).

learners to return to an essence that values social responsibility (*Motivation* 217) at both private and public levels. Illustrated through liberal arts and shared personal narratives, educational pursuits must strive to rediscover each human's goodness and extend that goodness to the treatment of others rather than "rubricize" (*Toward* 75) people into culturally defined gender roles. In *Kinflicks*, unlike the concept of *Bildung*, the role of education is to foster self-esteem (*Motivation* 90) and ethical behavior (*Motivation* 219) as each learner pursues self-actualization—not discipleship.

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe: To (Her), with Love

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe—probably the most widely read (or viewed) novel in this study—places the least merit on formal education, erudition, and autodidacticism.¹²⁹ However, valuing informal education, Flagg affords readers a healthy self-actualization guide through the models of its main female characters—the younger Idgie Threadgoode, the middle-age Evelyn Couch, and the older Ninny Threadgoode. Like all self-actualizing learners, these women leave comfortable environments and take risks. Specifically, Idgie, Evelyn, and Ninny leave the comfort of their families as they risk freedom, acceptance, and security while rebelling against

¹²⁹ For example, Mrs. Threadgoode boasts that after Buddy's death, Idgie wears his overalls in high school, never fits in, gives "everybody fits" (79), and runs off into the woods instead of attending school. Maslow would have no problem with this. For his self-actualizers, education means "learning to grow, learning what to grow toward, learning what is good and bad, learning what is desirable and undesirable, learning what to choose and what not to choose" (*Farther* 178-179). However, sometimes formal education fails to accomplish these goals. In fact, Maslow recognizes the "limitation of purely abstract thinking, of verbal thinking and of analytic thinking" (*Toward* 208). Further, Maslow complains that science and education do not address the "happenings inside oneself" (209). For these reasons, Maslow would embrace informal education.

authority, breaking taboos, suffering losses, accepting disappointments, and surmounting failures. Experiencing Maslow's "disconnect" (*Motivation 91*) in their initially safe environments, they take risks well outside their "comfort zone" in order to self-actualize vis-à-vis informal education.¹³⁰

The novel does not feature any character "well-educated" by formal education standards. Instead, *Fried Green Tomatoes* asks the question, "How can informal education afford self-actualization possibilities?" *Fried Green Tomatoes* advocates informal education in a woman's self-actualization process through the conversations and stories between Idgie and her mentor, Ruth, as well as between Evelyn and her mentor, Ninny. As informal teachers, these two mentors instruct, guide, and inspire their younger charge's self-actualization decisions.

Ruth serves as Idgie's mentor.¹³¹ While no degree or type of support by a mentor can guarantee self-actualization, mentors can offer lessons for the protagonist—and the reader, by extension—to self-actualize despite losses, frustrations, errors, and failures. The mentor may first appear to be antagonistic, as is the case with Ruth's chagrin at Idgie's antics; but ultimately, the student recognizes her mentor as wise and benevolent.

¹³⁰ Both the younger and middle-age women experience emotional disconnects. Idgie's disconnect begins with her brother's death, prompting her to leave her safe home environment. When she returns to her hometown, but not to her home life, she experiences freedom from old restrainers and restraints. Without strict parental control, Idgie ignores or violates more than one societal code and law; however, her adolescent euphoria predictably dissolves into adulthood dilemmas.

¹³¹ Like most adolescents, Idgie frequently rejects her mentor's warnings. Such rejections abound in, for example, most episodes of *The Little House on the Prairie*.

Then the protagonist's antagonism toward her mentor starts to dissolve.¹³² However, Idgie's crush on her mentor—which becomes love—does not prevent her from disputing and sometimes disregarding Ruth's level-headed advice concerning her private life and the community's tensions. Ruth is a typical mentor: older, more alienated, more prudent, more experienced, and wiser than her charge. As Idgie faces hardships related to the prejudices of her time and place (*Toward* 75) with the KKK, for example, Ruth is by her side to caution her against extravagant emotionality (*Motivation* 208) and violence, and to guide her toward more prudent behavior (especially discretion) than Idgie usually pursues. However, Ruth does not determine Idgie's behavior (*Motivation* 208), for example, with the disposal of Frank Bennett's corpse. Further, like a typical mentor, Ruth disappears from her pupil's life, dying of cancer, just when Idgie gains a solid foothold on self-actualization as a respected community member and activist. (Idgie's self-actualizing regarding prejudice at Whistle Stop is discussed more fully in the section on community below.)

Ninny serves as a similar mentor for Evelyn Couch. Addressing her nursing home mentor as "Mrs. Threadgoode," Evelyn elicits Ninny's instruction through her stories and commentaries. In these mentoring scenes, Ninny tells stories about Idgie's life, offering commentaries that suit Evelyn's needs. Like most of Maslow's self-actualizers, Ninny "fuses" with Evelyn, growing to care deeply for her, while remaining "detached," allowing her freedom to choose her own path (*Toward* 91). Although she

¹³² This is the case in *Legally Blonde*, when Elle Woods learns to trust the wisdom of her hardest teacher, Professor Stromwell, who eventually promotes Elle's self-actualization.

provides a “complete, loving, uncondemning, compassionate, and perhaps amused acceptance of the world and of the person” (92), Ninny inspires rather than directs.¹³³ Filled with commentary directed toward Evelyn’s problems, Mrs. Threadgoode’s stories become potential self-actualization lessons for Mrs. Couch.

Narrated in the nursing home environment, except for the final story, Mrs. Threadgoode’s tales recall a past that harmonizes with the present as each story has contributed to the self-actualization of Ninny, herself, and may contribute to Evelyn’s self-actualization. Through Mrs. Threadgoode’s stories of Idgie, Evelyn hears about rebelling against prejudices related to ethnicity, gender, and class (*Toward* 75); valuing self-respect (*Motivation* 90) more than a marriage contract; developing self-confidence (*Motivation* 90) in a business setting; and persevering despite unpopularity (*Motivation* 208) and heartache. These stories’ themes of non-conformity (*Motivation* 226), loyalty (*Toward* 91), self-assurance (*Motivation* 90), and gumption (*Motivation* 208)—unlike those of the *Bildungsroman* and “Cinderella”—are specifically designed for Evelyn’s self-actualization needs. *Fried Green Tomatoes* illustrates that self-actualizers often seek non-conventional educational forums, unlike that of the *Bildung* agenda. Mrs. Threadgoode, as mentor, selects tales tailored to Evelyn Couch’s self-actualization needs and conducts one-on-one seminars—as if on opposite sides of a log—in order to glean the self-actualization potential that each story has to offer her troubled middle-aged

¹³³ Maslow explains the difference using a clinical example: “What the good clinical therapist does is to help his particular client to unfold, to break through the defenses against his own self-knowledge, to recover to himself, and to get to know himself” (*Farther* 52), which he thinks is “the kind of communication . . . model for teaching, and counseling, for helping adults to become as fully developed as they can be” (48).

listener. In addition, Mrs. Threadgoode mentors Evelyn through an emotional menopause with advice about finding happiness in regard to her family, work, friendships, body image, and marriage. The narrator notes Evelyn's appreciation: "Nobody had ever believed she could do anything before, or had faith in her; least of all, Evelyn herself" (358). Ninny inspires Evelyn through the stories she tells about Idgie and their conversations afterward.

Fried Green Tomatoes depicts the self-actualizing merits of mentors as informal educators. These mentors narrate carefully selected stories and guide conversations that warn, inspire, and unsettle. Benefiting from these informal mentoring approaches, Idgie and Evelyn exhibit many of Maslow's self-actualization qualities: having a "more efficient perception of reality" (*Motivation* 208), "more openness to experience" (*Toward* 57), "increased spontaneity" (*Toward* 157), "aliveness" (*Motivation* 208), a sense of "wholeness" and uniqueness" (*Toward* 157), and the "ability to love" (*Toward* 157). Moreover, the novel's informal educational practices afford their charges necessary lessons about nonconformity (*Motivation* 226) and ethical behavior (*Motivation* 217).

Betsey Brown: "Spres yo' se'f"

In *Betsey Brown*, the educational alternative to "Cinderella" also combines nonconformity with ethical behavior. Shange, who "as a young black girl with an artistic bent . . . had no adequate role models in school" (Taylor-Thompson 656), attempts to balance the importance of formal and informal education. In an interview with Henry Blackwell, Shange divulges, "when I went to graduate school, and was studying Afro-

American art, I was made to feel like a traitor, because there's a huge strain of anti-intellectualism not only in the new Black Arts movement, but in Black America in general." Shange laments that "[s]tudying don't mean nothing. . . . Just because I had studied didn't mean that I had lost my voice" (136).

Betsey Brown investigates the tension between the tradition of intellectualism and the subversion of a marginalized voice. Shange plays out this tension as Betsey follows the advice of Paul Laurence Dunbar's "Encouragement" poem to "spress yo'se'f" during her contacts with teachers and principals. For example, Mrs. Mitchell who "like[s] children" and "young minds" (37), awards Betsey first prize but disapproves of her sexual interpretation of Dunbar's poem. However, Betsey rejects this criticism and refuses to feel ashamed (*Motivation* 206). Although Mr. Wichiten, the principal, walks the halls swinging his razor strap and demanding to be addressed as "Sir" (35), he encourages Betsey to divulge whatever is on her mind. Betsey puzzles over why and how she could possibly speak straightforwardly to a "white man" (36). Again, Betsey reassesses the opinion of an authority figure (*Motivation* 208) and refuses to allow his esteem of her lower her self-esteem (*Motivation* 90). These mixed messages continue when Betsey enters the integrated school as the "white" teacher denies the American authenticity of Dunbar. At public schools, Betsey learns that authority and tradition depend on cultural context and are subject to interpretation.¹³⁴ Who holds the power—to discipline and select the curriculum—depends on the institution's socio-economic and

¹³⁴ Maslow would explain that that self-actualizers know the difference between facts and values (*Farther* 276), influencing Betsey to determine her teacher's motivation and the truth.

ethnic power structure.¹³⁵ Thus, while Dunbar reigns in one environment, he barely exists in another. Even at such a young age, Betsey experiences the tension and discontentment (*Motivation 91*) of realizing that truth and values vary according to the authority that promotes them. This tension, a potential part of the self-actualization process, ultimately helps young Betsey Brown size up the educational hypocrisy (*Motivation 208*) that disenfranchises the marginal. Because she is so exasperated with her teacher's rejection of Dunbar, Betsey stops and reconsiders how important sticking up for Dunbar's accomplishments and talents means to her. As part of her reconsideration, Betsey—like Maslow's self-actualizers—sizes up the honest and the dishonest teachers (*Motivation 208*). Recognizing this distinction, Betsey Brown begins to self-actualize according to Maslow's criteria of being able to assess reality clearly (*Motivation 208*).

Mixed messages continue outside the formal classroom as Betsey experiences informal education with her mother and "othermothers." For example, as Carrie is determined that the Brown children should be "educated in the common everyday things of life," she sets out to give them "an inkling of reality in their lives" (173). Moreover, Vida's, Jane's, and Carrie's decorum lessons conflict. Add to this educational mix Mrs. Maureen's wisdom about being satisfied while still being protected against the heartache of an illegitimate pregnancy and Regina's cautions against romance. While some of her "othermothers" teach her that love and sex are better restricted to marriage, others

¹³⁵ "Thus it has turned out that Negro higher education has become devoted chiefly to the task of educating the black bourgeoisie" (Frazier 76).

privilege romance and passion but fail to advise about preventing unwanted pregnancies and broken hearts.¹³⁶ Understandably, these contradictory messages, which comprise Betsey's informal education, initially confuse her but ultimately empower her because she is able to sort through their opinions (*Motivation* 208)—apart from them (*Motivation* 212-213)—and consider them in light of her own self-esteem (*Motivation* 90).

According to *Betsey Brown*, both formal and informal education influences the self-actualization process. Her formal educators teach Betsey to evaluate the transmitter of information. Her informal educators teach her two important lessons. First, she learns that education often becomes confusing when applied to practical decisions and experiences. Second, she learns that she holds the power to respect herself and to demand respect from others (*Motivation* 90). As with Flagg's and Alther's novels, Shange's text supports the value of informal education for self-actualizing outside the constraints of the status quo (*Motivation* 226).

Summary

These four novels warn readers against subscribing to educational agendas and practices—whether formal or informal—that impose their ideologies and eschew critical thinking. Rather, these novels invite readers to shop around for better educational methods, stories, and teachers. Whether hampered by gender, age, or other cultural

¹³⁶ In the tradition of both W. E. B. Du Bois and Washington, “the Negro student should strive to be respectable” and to refrain from indulging in the “religious emotionalism of the black masses” (Frazier 70). According to Frazier, young women needed to be chaste because to “be detected in immoral sex behavior” resulted in school expulsion, especially for women. According to this cultural perceptive, engaging in premarital sex labeled participants, especially the women, as “common” (71).

prejudices, girls and women are still responsible for learning how to become better individuals and how to improve their world. Education is an important facet enabling a woman to know who she is, consider who she can become, and acquaint herself with others' worldviews.

These novels teach two broad self-actualizing lessons regarding education. First, women should carefully choose their education. If women participate in (or reject) their education without a critical eye and an invested heart, they may perpetuate the status quo's debilitating roles for females—like those of the *Bildungsroman* and “Cinderella.” Second, although schools, mentors, stories, and conversations can assist female self-actualization, they can just as forcefully destroy a woman's chances to think for herself. Thus, it is not so much which type of education—formal or informal—women pursue; it is how women pursue their education. When women approach learning with curiosity and hold themselves accountable for ethically applying what they have learned, their education can assist their self-actualizing. Wong's, Alther's, Flagg's, and Shange's novels testify to these crucial lessons about how education can promote self-actualization.

Outside the classroom at recess, friends gather to console, gossip, confide, compete, listen, brag, ridicule, and support. In a girl's life, as well as a woman's, many levels of friends influence her self-actualization. Most are acquaintances whom she enjoys for the benefits they afford her or for their personality traits. Perhaps, one is that rare kindred spirit whom Aristotle prizes (*Nicomachean Ethic*). We all need a friend who likes us just the way we are. If we have one such soul mate in our lifetimes, we are lucky

indeed. Our journey continues with a look at our self-actualizing female's diversity of friends.

CHAPTER III
PEOPLE WHO NEED PEOPLE:
FRIENDS AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION

Between men and women there is no friendship possible.
There is passion, enmity, worship, love, but no friendship.
(Oscar Wilde, *Lady Windermere's Fan* Act II)

Although Oscar Wilde's view may not be popular or accurate, it permeates Alther's, Alvarez's, Wong's, and Shange's novels, which value only female-female friendships. (However, Flagg's novel briefly depicts male-female friendships.) Aside from that major disappointment, these novels successfully guide female readers toward selecting and rejecting other females as candidates for friendships. For Lee Comer, a woman's choice of friends configures much of her identity (60).¹³⁷ Women sometimes extend their friendships for women into passionate relationships. Until the twentieth century, society has widely recognized and frequently tolerated such relationships. However, in the twentieth century, women who were attracted to other women experienced social compulsion to suppress their passion, for society harped that lesbians were morally "twisted" (Faderman 205). This change occurred as the "Cinderella"

¹³⁷ Accordingly, Pipher encourages women to become friends with both males and females (287). For Sharon Thompson, most female adolescents prize their friendships because their friends provide them with an audience for talking about disturbing issues. Thompson also notes that female adolescents who "embrace traditional gender divisions need female friendships even more acutely than most because, for them, being female is emphatically different" ("What" 228).

marriage master narrative gained popularity, ensuring that a woman's only love option was with a man.

Fried Green Tomatoes, *Kinflicks*, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, and *Betsey Brown* address female-female friendships. In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes among three kinds of friends: “those who love each other for their utility of some good which they get from each other”; “those who love for the sake of pleasure”; and “perfect friendship,” which exists among good people, “alike in virtue” (195-196). For Aristotle, friendships of the first two kinds easily dissolve when either the need or the pleasure fades away. Only the third type, which relies on ethic, is that rare type of friendship we often call “kindred spirit” or “soul mate” relationships. Each of these novels addresses friendships in the first two categories. *Fried Green Tomatoes* addresses the “perfect friendship” in the relationship between Ruth and Idgie. Further, Flagg, Alther, and Alvarez address lesbianism as friendship.¹³⁸ Only Flagg even briefly mentions female-male friendships. Each novel demonstrates the self-actualizing pitfalls and benefits of some of those relationships. According to these marginalized authors, the nature of the friendship—platonic or passionate—matters far less than the quality of the relationship. For them, friends contribute to self-actualizing when women can freely choose their friendships, when lesbian relationships are based more on friendship than sex, and when reciprocity occurs.

¹³⁸ Shockley's, *Loving Her*, looks at a failed marriage in the midst of a lesbian relationship and prejudice.

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe: I Get by with a (Big) Help from My Friends

Most female self-actualization novels emphasize friendships because reciprocal relationships with friends constitute one outlet for the self-actualization requirement of social responsibility (*Motivation* 90).¹³⁹ Ninny Threadgoode professes in the movie version of *Fried Green Tomatoes*, “I found out what the secret to life is: friends. Best friends.” The theme of friends pervades Flagg’s novel, and Idgie’s and Ruth’s pre-adolescent friendship is a good place to start because it represents that “perfect” Aristotelian friendship.

Idgie enjoys the company of several close friends, but especially that of Ruth. After Buddy’s death, Idgie is inconsolable and incorrigible until Ruth appears on the scene. As Ninny recalls, “when Ruth came to live with us, you never saw a change in anybody so fast in all your life” (79). This first association begins with Idgie’s crush on the older Ruth. From that first crush until Ruth’s death, Idgie remains faithfully attached to Ruth. Idgie needs Ruth’s reciprocity, which centers around Ruth’s help with the café and more importantly, her willingness to support Idgie emotionally. Idgie, as her part of this “perfect” friendship also acts with reciprocity, providing Ruth with moral support, protection, and risibility. Their reciprocity to each other as friends fulfills the social responsibility requirement of self-actualization (*Motivation* 217). They are friends of

¹³⁹ This was the case in many nineteenth century stories (Kornfield and Jackson 71) and has continued today as novels with female protagonists often emphasize female companionships. For example, a modern day Bridget Jones continually confers with and depends on her female friends (and one male friend) for her “urban summit” sessions.

character, whom Aristotle describes as rare in anyone's lifetime because they esteem each other for character (*Motivation 90*)—not utilitarianism or pleasurable benefits. Friendships based on character far exceed Cinderella's relationship with her prince, which is based solely on utility—economic status and security.

Because they are friends of character who see the best in each other and desire the best for each other, they must accept that sometimes they do not fulfill all of their friends' needs. To act ethically, therefore, as such friends is to accept that at times, they are individuals who need others or privacy outside the friendship (*Motivation 208*). We see Ruth self-actualize in this fashion when she allows Idgie to periodically escape from their relationship (*Motivation 212-213*), tramping around the wilderness or drinking and gambling in The Dill Pickle Club.¹⁴⁰ Ruth is initially dismayed and hurt by these associations (and others) but struggles to accept Idgie's need to be autonomous (*Motivation 212-213*). Through this struggle and eventual acceptance, readers witness Ruth learn to become a friend who is socially responsible—who wants the best for another person (*Motivation 217*).

Through friendship, Flagg dramatizes another important self-actualizing quality—the ability to “judge people correctly and efficiently” (*Motivation 203*). Although Idgie needs more friends than Ruth, Idgie selects her friends carefully (*Motivation 218*), including her male friends of Stump, Smokey Lonesome, and Big George. This pays off

¹⁴⁰ Flagg, unlike the other novelists, mentions female-male friendships. For example, Idgie befriends Ruth's son, Stump, through his dating career. Further, Idgie and Grady gamble together and secretly conspire to provide food for the poor. Moreover, Idgie and Smokey discuss personal dilemmas.

for Idgie as each friend remains loyal to her, affording her relationships based on social responsibility (*Motivation* 217). Standing against the “Cinderella” marriage master narrative based on utility, *Fried Green Tomatoes* continually values reciprocated friendships because they support one of the dual foci of self-actualization—social responsibility (*Motivation* 217).

In the novel’s present, Evelyn Couch enjoys the emotional support of a few friends at the “fat farm” who provide conversation, support, and guidance (which is discussed in the community section below). More prominently, the novel features her friendship with Mrs. Threadgoode, as they visit together at the Rose Terrace Nursing Home, sharing in each other’s memories and current lives (which has been discussed in the education section). Even after Ninny’s death, her presence influences Evelyn’s self-actualization, especially, enervating her fear of death as she recalls Ninny’s vibrancy (*Motivation* 208) as if she were “just standing behind a door” (387).

Fried Green Tomatoes affirms a female’s need to select a few friendships (*Motivation* 218) and to recognize a woman’s need to escape periodically from those relationships (*Motivation* 212-213). In fact, friendships are so important to this novel that it could be tagged a female “buddy story” in the vein of *Thelma and Louise*.¹⁴¹ With the Ruth-Idgie and Evelyn-Ninny friendships, *Fried Green Tomatoes* teaches its readers the lesson of a kindred spirit friendship, which Maslow defines as a “deep and profound” relationship (*Motivation* 218)—one that contributes to self-actualization because it is not based on the pleasure or utility that another can provide but on the mutual esteem

¹⁴¹ The friendship between Idgie and Ruth is discussed more fully in the chapter on love.

(*Motivation* 90) and social responsibility (*Motivation* 217) that friends of character afford each other. Without their friends and their friendship, Idgie, Ruth, Ninny, and Evelyn would have lived lonelier lives and would not have self-actualized so successfully.¹⁴²

In the Time of the Butterflies: (She) Ain't Heavy, (She's) My (Sister)

Unlike Flagg's novel, Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* does not stress the importance of friends for self-actualization except briefly, at school, and more significantly, in prison. In both cases, Alvarez addresses the issue of class as it affects friendship.

As friends, Sinita and Elsa influence Minerva's self-actualization. Minerva's school friend Sinita is a "charity student," from whom Minerva learns political activism, which becomes the major social responsibility component of her life (*Motivation* 217). Although Minerva originally considers Sinita to be from a lower economic class and "rubricizes" (*Motivation* 217) her according to class prejudices (*Motivation* 208), Minerva learns that Sinita actually comes from the same class until Trujillo wiped out her family's resources and status. Faced with this more accurate portrait (*Motivation* 208) of

¹⁴² The work of Alba Quinones Endicott reveals the need for female friendships. Analyzing five contemporary female stories, she concludes that (unlike their nineteenth century counterparts) the female protagonists act alone and that "[g]rowing up is not a group activity" because of the American proclivity toward individualism (47). Examples abound: *Ten Things I Hate about You* initially portrays its female adolescent protagonist, Katarina, as a maverick, a loner, who isolates herself from family and friends in order to sort out her affairs and ultimately, portrays her without female friends but united with her beau. Ellen Foster, Kaye Gibbons's female protagonist, overcomes hardships and survives with little or no assistance. However, such long-standing isolation does not foster self-actualization.

Sinita, Minerva has the opportunity to confront class prejudices—an important self-actualizing moment that cautions her against “rubricizing” (*Toward* 75). Much later in the novel, Minerva meets her old friend Elsa and experiences being the person rubricized. Looking not for Elsa’s idolization but for her compassion as a human being, Minerva finds herself stereotyped as a Miraposa—one of the “Butterflies” of the resistance. Instead of receiving consolation and being approached in an authentic face-to-face manner, Minerva experiences rubricizing” (*Toward* 75) as a member of a group. Although Minerva needs a friend, she finds a hero worshiper. Minerva’s dissatisfying encounter with her old friend illustrates how much Minerva has self-actualized from her earlier stereotyping of Sinita as a charity case. No longer the blindly enthusiastic rebel, she is unable to communicate with Elsa—an earlier version of herself. Through her brief reunion with Elsa, Alvarez depicts the extent of Minerva’s self-actualizing from innocent insurgent to a more thoughtful and ethical citizen (*Motivation* 217). Minerva no longer views the world as members of social class structures or as group members (*Toward* 75). Rather, she is becoming a self-actualizer who both identifies and avoids that kind of hypocrisy (*Motivation* 208). This recognition and action is important in order to become a socially responsible self-actualizer (*Motivation* 217).

María Teresa’s major association with women from a lower class occurs in prison. Gazing out the prison cell during her turn at the window, she is startled by another prisoner’s “grumbling about us ‘rich women’ who think we are better than the

riffraff” (229).¹⁴³ Just as Mate has maintained an “us against them” antagonism of the citizens against the government, these women maintain an “us against them” class antagonism. Like Minerva, María Teresa finds herself stereotyped and bristles against their insinuations that she maintains class prejudices. Discontent, Mate stops to review to what extent their insinuations may be legitimate. We understand this to be a part of the self-actualizing process—self-assessment during times of personal conflict (*Motivation* 91).¹⁴⁴ Further, when Kiki offers María Teresa her ten minutes of window time, María Teresa experiences a lesson in social responsibility. Although she refuses Kiki’s generous offer, she acknowledges that it “raised [her] spirits so much, the generosity of these girls I once thought were below me” (230). These women from a class below her influence María Teresa’s deep-seated class prejudices: “I keep mentioning the girls. I have to admit the more time I spend with them, the less I care what they’ve done or where they come from. What matters is the quality of a person. What someone is inside themselves” (230).¹⁴⁵ Despite accusations of class prejudice, María Teresa comes to depend upon her new friends (especially Magdalena), agrees with Minerva’s cautions against creating “a class system” in their cell, and considers that Dinorah is a victim of

¹⁴³ As Isabel Zakrzewski Brown observes, these daughters of a wealthy landowner are “unlikely feminist or political revolutionaries” (104).

¹⁴⁴ In Pam Muñoz Ryan’s coming of age novel, Esperanza faces a similar struggle between maintaining the class prejudices of her privileged childhood and accepting her current lowered economic status. Initially, Esperanza determines to maintain her childhood snobbery despite her poorer station but eventually rethinks her class biases in order to form new relationships with old acquaintances.

¹⁴⁵ Maslow contends that this perception of the Other is complicated and advocates that perception must be “gentle, delicate, unintruding, [and] undemanding” (*Toward* 41).

the “corrupt system” which Trujillo perpetuates (234).¹⁴⁶ As she develops a friendship with Magdalena—a woman from a lower class—Mate learns to reject stereotypes (*Toward* 75). To self-actualize, she must learn to select her friends on the basis of their individual merits—not on society’s class determinations, which demean those who stereotype and who are stereotyped. María Teresa reacts with a kind of *noblesse oblige*, which is typical of self-actualizers (*Farther* 308). Her story, more than any of the others, focuses on the need for classless friendships. Applying Aristotle’s categories of friends, we see that Mate and these women become friends based on utility while Mate becomes a friend to Magdalena because they find pleasure in each other’s company. Although Mate does not become a “perfect” friend to any of these women, her relationship with them contributes to her self-actualizing because she learns to eschew demeaning stereotypes (*Motivation* 90).

Through friendships, Minerva and María Teresa learn to value women outside their class. Both sisters acknowledge that although the dictatorship may have influenced their biases toward women outside their class, they should not perpetuate such stereotyping. However, no sister learns to value a friendship with a male probably because of the strict patriarchy of her culture.¹⁴⁷ Despite this shortcoming, Alvarez’s novel teaches the lesson that friendships can guide us to surmount our biases and assist us to self-actualize as genuinely ethical human beings (*Motivation* 217)—not merely

¹⁴⁶ According to David Howard, class issues throughout the Caribbean are based on skin tone, with the elites tending toward lighter pigmentation (54).

¹⁴⁷ Jennifer Pattison explains that male-female friendships are rare among Dominican-Americans. Females rely on female friends to talk about family and career (personal interview).

perpetuators of social norms (*Motivation* 90). *In the Time of the Butterflies* dramatizes that female-female friendships, if approached through personal, face-to-face encounters, may contribute to a female's self-actualizing.

Kinflicks: Friends With(out) Benefits

Unfortunately, face-to-face friendships do not assist Ginny Bliss's self-actualization except as self-actualizing cautions. In high school and at Worthley College, friends are not important to Ginny's self-actualizing. In high school, Joe Bob and Clem as lovers—but not as friends—influence Ginny. In college, Ginny's only friend for many months is Miss Head (as discussed previously). After Worthley, Ginny's friends consist of her female commune members, who are friends of utility. This novel, like Alvarez's, limits its exploration of friendship to females. *Kinflicks* depicts two categories of female friends: a one-to-one relationship and community relationships (which are discussed in the section on community below). This chapter explores Ginny's one-to-one friendship, asking why she fails to establish a healthy relationship with her friend (and lover) Edna Holzer.

In the chapter "Divided Loyalties," Ginny becomes attracted and attached to Eddie. At first enemies, they soon exist in a "time warp all their own" (264). They become lesbian lovers, attend war protests, reject their liberal arts education, demonstrate at Ginny's father's factory, and dislocate from her family while still accepting their funds. Ginny basks in their friendship: "This was where I belonged; at last after much searching I had found my niche—it was here in Eddie Holzer's arms" (316). Soon,

however, Eddie's arms begin to constrict Ginny's sense of "belongingness" (*Management* 16). Without this connection, their friendship produces a high enough level of discontent (*Motivation* 91) to cause Ginny to stop and reexamine who she has become as Eddie's friend.

Eddie replaces Miss Head as the latest brainwasher in Ginny's life. This time, however, Ginny recognizes her culpability as a participant in the brainwashing: "Once again I was shamelessly allowing myself to be defined by another person" (284). Unfortunately, Ginny continues to remain Eddie's friend. As the lights flicker from commune member Laverne's vibrator use, Eddie fights with Ginny about penis longings and mocks Ginny's avoidance of violence. Eddie is correct. There is no choice but to acknowledge the violence of the world, for she herself contributes to it. In fact, the novel suggests that when Eddie decapitates herself on the same wire that she has strung for the male snowmobilers, Eddie intends her suicide, as well as murder. As Eddie fails to self-actualize, Ginny recognizes the reasons for their unhappy friendship. More importantly, Ginny recognizes Eddie's hypocrisy. When Ginny begins to move past her discontentment with Eddie's insistence that everyone follow her plan to murder the Starks Bogg males, Ginny confronts Eddie's hypocrisy (*Motivation* 208), seeing the reality of their friendship more clearly (*Motivation* 208) and her participation as a pleaser (*Motivation* 208), which constricts her own self-actualization.

Their friendship disappoints for two reasons. First, it suffers because Eddie oppresses Ginny, demanding that she blindly accept her philosophy and decision (which is discussed in the section on community below). Briefly, Eddie demands that Ginny

hate the Starks Bogg men, isolate from the Starks Bogg women, embrace feminism simply because it rejects males, and live with her friends who provide a cheap residence. When Eddie rescues Ginny from the brainwashing of Miss Head, she does so for power over Ginny, which is evident in the staged psychology experiment that torments Ginny into giving dishonest answers just to please (*Motivation* 208) the examiner. Second, their friendship fails because Ginny accepts the role of victim. Again, this is a power imbalance. Rather than see each other as empowered women and more importantly for Maslow's concept of self-actualization, as empowered human beings (*Motivation* 90), Ginny and Eddie see each other in terms of who runs the show and who tolerates that control without any allowance for Ginny's autonomy (*Motivation* 212-213).

Although Ginny succeeds in recognizing Eddie's flaws, she fails to strip Eddie from her life. As a product of Mrs. Babcock's self-victimization and her mother's relentless Stoicism, Ginny has been conditioned to stay the course and to please others (*Motivation* 208). Ginny, herself, has touted this theory of conditioning when defending the Stark's Bog males: "It's not their fault," Ginny explains. "It's how they were brought up, with their masochistic mothers hovering over them anticipating their every need. They're macho, I'm bougie. We can't help ourselves" (290). Ginny might also defend her acquiescence because she has been raised by a hovering mother who has created Ginny's attraction to suffocating female mother figures. This explains why Ginny is as helpless with Eddie as she is with Miss Head and with her own mother. Ginny has been programmed.

However, as Franz Fanon contends in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the oppressed participate in their oppression. *Kinflicks* depicts Fanon's contention as Ginny chooses Eddie and continues with her despite the latter's violent, jealous, and malicious actions. The novel makes it clear that no one forces Ginny to tolerate Eddie's sanctimony; that no one forces Ginny to join Eddie's mistreatment of the Starks Boggers; and that no one forces Ginny to stay with Eddie after Eddie assaults her. In order to self-actualize, Ginny must move beyond blaming someone else for her decisions, actions, and relationships (*Toward* 91).

In order to self-actualize, Ginny should develop the ability to see "reality more clearly" (*Motivation* 208), that is, to recognize both Eddie's control over her and her own acquiescence to that control. This recognition comes when Ginny refuses to participate in Eddie's plan to murder the male Starks Boggers and thereafter, severs the friendship. Eddie's proposed cruelty provides enough discontentment (*Motivation* 91) for Ginny and becomes her significant emotional experience for rejecting an unhealthy friend. *Kinflicks* demonstrates that it is just as necessary to know who to reject as a friend as it is to know who to accept—when to be "fused with and when to be detached from others" (*Toward* 91). When friendships fail self-actualizers because of serious power imbalances, these friendships should be terminated because self-actualizers need a sense of autonomy in their lives (*Motivation* 212-213).

Although their friendship fails, Ginny's self-actualization succeeds to some extent because she stops acting as a pleaser who endorses Eddie's edicts, self-examines that she actually does not even like Eddie (*Motivation* 208), and acts ethically by refusing to

participate in attempting to murder the Starks Bogg men (*Motivation* 217). Further, rejecting Eddie's plan, Ginny exhibits "confidence in the face of the world" (*Motivation* 90). Walking away from this failed friendship is a self-actualizing moment for Ginny.

Fifth Chinese Daughter: Red Rover, Red Rover, (No One's) Com(ing) Over

For a different reason, friendships fail Jade Snow. It is important to realize why friendship is the least developed influence on her self-actualization.¹⁴⁸ At an early age and into her twenties, friendships pose problems for Jade Snow mainly because of her culture's expectations of filial piety and her parent's restrictions. Until Jade Snow leaves for college, her parents censor her friends, attempting to guarantee that no friendship threatens their parental control.

In grade school, she tries to make friends but is struck that the "very worst fate was to have your own crowd 'mad' at you" and that group leaders demanded "[u]nswerving loyalty" (19). She becomes confused when she realizes that the group's standards differ from her home training. Moving away from the peer group, Jade Snow singles out one friend (*Motivation* 218), Gold Spring, who becomes a sympathetic listener and confidant. However, her father forbids their friendship because it detracts from her more important pursuits. Moreover, when Older Brother shoots Gold Spring

¹⁴⁸ Lensey Namioka's *Yang the Third and Her Impossible Family* gives a similar look at a second-generation Chinese American female's difficulty with making friends. Although Yang meets many children at school without difficulty, like Jade Snow, she has no best friends.

with his BB gun, Jade Snow's attempts at friendship take a sabbatical until she attends Mills College.

The dean at Mills College encourages Jade Snow to form friendships with other students, which Jade Snow does, sparking "a pleasant interchange of visits" with the girls residing at Mills Hall (161). The dean also encourages Jade Snow to attend post-graduation summer school in order to enjoy residence life with her peers. While the narration implies that these are worthwhile experiences, it does not indicate their self-actualizing impact on Jade Snow. Jade Snow views them as merely a group of girls who live in the dormitory, enjoying their company. They are the type of friend, according to Aristotle's criteria, whom we enjoy for a pleasurable experience but not a kindred spirit friend whom we enjoy for her character. Although Jade Snow enjoys their company, she does not experience any significant "sense of belongingness" with them (*Management* 16). Thus, her college friends do not contribute to her self-actualizing.

Out of college, Jade Snow tries to reconnect with her Chinese American girlfriends who "opened their doors but not their hearts to her," having married without attending college (199). Their estrangement influences Jade Snow to establish relationships with "those who would share the interests that she had found in the Western world" (199). At this point, her parents refrain from interfering and become somewhat interested in one of her friends. They encourage their daughter to always find the "superior" friend to follow, casting aside the "inferior" one (200). Jade Snow's new friend's genuine interest in Chinese ways gains her entrée into the Wong home and the name "Jade Harp." (201). Still, the older narrator does not reveal that this friendship

influences Jade Snow's self-actualizing. Again, while she enjoys Jade Harp's company, Jade Snow does not establish a "profound interpersonal relation" (*Motivation* 218).

As Wong's autobiography concludes, a twenty-some year old Jade Snow is just beginning to learn the value of friendship—with Jade Harp. More importantly, with her family's acceptance of Jade Harp—unlike their rejection of Gold Spring—she sees that friends need not threaten her family loyalty. Compared to many female self-actualization novels, such as *The Color Purple*, Wong's novel only mildly values friendship. With strict parental restrictions on her choice of friends, Jade Snow is only beginning to establish herself as an "individual and social" human being (*Toward* 91).

Betsey Brown: Tell Me No Lies

Ignoring parental and grandparental disapproval, Betsey Brown enjoys the camaraderie of her school chums (Charlotte Ann, Susan Linda, and Veejay). However, her self-actualization depends more on her relationships with her "othermothers" and her mother. For the most part, while with friends her age, Betsey enjoys entertaining moments—taking trips to Mr. Robinson's ice cream soda shop to watch the boys and sharing in the girls' "anatomical explorations and beautification" (41).

Only two episodes with her friends contribute to Betsey's self-actualization by causing her to reconsider "rubricizing" (*Toward* 75). First, Betsey enjoys the company of Susan Linda although, according to Betsey's grandmother, Susan Linda is "po' white trash" (41). However, according to Susan Linda's mother, the Browns are not allowed in the house because they are African Americans. This predicament of juxtaposed biases

affords Betsey a potential self-actualization opportunity for sorting out prejudices among cultures, which is part of her self-actualization process to reconsider “rubricizing” (*Toward* 75). Second, Veejay influences Betsey’s self-actualization regarding African Americans and the middle class when she chastises Betsey for her mistreatment of Bernice, an African American domestic worker like her own mother. Veejay’s diatribe influences Betsey to reconsider classifying people (*Toward* 75), prompting Betsey to run home in order to save Bernice’s job. Amidst Veejay’s scorn, Betsey reconsiders her misguided sense of superiority and her treatment of Bernice, seeing Bernice’s situation as a human being more accurately (*Motivation* 208) and becoming worried that she has harmed another human being (*Motivation* 217).

These two friends contribute to Betsey’s self-actualization lessons regarding prejudices, forcing Betsey to reconsider the lie of her superiority. These friends contradict her mother’s and her grandmother’s values. Through these friendships, Betsey is better able to gauge the destructiveness of “rubricizing,” including her own family’s pride and prejudices.

Summary

One weakness in all of these novels is their failure to treat seriously a woman’s possible friendship with a man. It is important for girls and women to read about flourishing and failing male-female friendships. Flagg does portray healthy male-female friendships as Idgie relates with Smokey Lonesome and Big George, for example. Unfortunately, readers see only glimpses of their associations. Alther spends a chapter

(“The Mandala Tatoo”) on Ginny’s relationship with Hawk, describing in detail its warped imbalanced power relationship. But it would be difficult to esteem their relationship as a friendship. Alvarez and Wong pay no attention to male-female friendships probably because of their characters’ patriarchal background in which those friendships are not viable options. Shange also pays no attention to male-female friendships perhaps because Betsey is at that fragile age between innocent friendships and dangerous romances.

Otherwise, these novels are commendable in their realistic portrayals of a variety of female friendships. Flagg, Alvarez, Alther, and Wong dramatize why friendships fail and why they succeed. Friendships fail when they enervate self-respect and when there is no reciprocity of self-esteem (*Motivation* 90). They also fail when friends do not share equal power and, therefore, do not enjoy freedom and independence (*Motivation* 90). Finally, friendships fail when friends cannot abide another friend’s need for autonomy and privacy (*Motivation* 212-213). Friendships succeed when they reject “rubricizing” (*Toward* 75), inspire confidence (*Motivation* 90), and support self-respect and mutual respect (*Motivation* 90).¹⁴⁹ As the old song commends, “People who need people are the luckiest people in the world.”

When the Monday morning 7 AM alarm rings, friends are left behind, suits are donned, and a quick breakfast is snatched—unless, of course, a woman works at home. In that case, flannel is exchanged for fleece—as the 6 AM alarm blares. Whether a

¹⁴⁹Mary Pipher reports cases when females regard friends as their saviors from loneliness (273). However, being a savior violates the ethos of self-actualizing friendships because it implies a power imbalance.

woman works inside, outside, or inside and outside the home, she often works hard. She is usually underpaid. She is, however, frequently happy. How do women abide inequality and underappreciation as workers while becoming the best that they can be? Our self-actualizing female's journey will answer that question next.

CHAPTER IV

ALL PLAY AND NO WORK MAKES JILL A SAD GIRL:

WORK AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION

In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.

(John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* 349)

Although the plight of working women in America has certainly improved since Granma Joad's days, many handicaps still exist. Shange, Alther, Flagg, and Wong investigate different handicaps and pose self-actualizing solutions from the perspectives of marginalized women.

For American women, work tends to be bifurcated into two arenas: at home and outside the home. These designations crop up in typical answers to the ubiquitous question, "So what do you *do*?" A woman who works outside the home likely explains only her career or job even when she works as a household manager. A woman who does not work outside the home likely falters and then begins a catalogue of the number of children she raises and her daily, dull duties—carefully avoiding any mention of diapers, breastfeeding, and vomit. Stacked up against a resumé in the corporate world, the stay-at-home mom's account often feels awkward and embarrassing. The novels by Shange, Flagg, Wong, and Alther support a more balanced acceptance of working in both arenas and propose alternatives to demeaning "women's work" in the home. A brief study of the existing dilemma establishes a background for their contributions.

Working outside the home poses a gendered dilemma. Even “bright women,” Irene P. Stiver reports, buy into a polarization that credits masculine personality traits as “good” at the workplace while criticizing feminine personality traits as “bad.” She contends that many strive to minimize their perceived feminine traits, judging them, as do others around the board table, as “unprofessional” and dooming (229). Further, Stiver contends that women are particularly anxious to avoid a perception of competitiveness. For men, being competitive is “the American way.” However, for women, being competitive signals to others that she is “aggressive” and “destructive,” perhaps, even “castrating.” Consequently, women tell themselves (as society tells them) to be caring and concerned for others (230) and, above all, to be respectable, avoiding the perception of promiscuity at all cost (Peiss 330).¹⁵⁰ Competition poses other problems for a woman: competing with men, a woman no longer idealizes them; competing with other women, a woman no longer supports them (231). Germaine Greer offers an interesting alternative, suggesting that women choose environments atypical of their gender (142). This would, however, avoid only the issue of competing with other women (142).

A more holistic solution is to alter society’s dualistic image of male-female work traits.¹⁵¹ Instead of perpetuating this dilemma of male characteristics as good and female characteristics as bad, society should encourage a woman to pursue a career that can become a “cause outside [her] own skin” (*Farther* 43). In this way, we could convince

¹⁵⁰ This mandate to be respectable, concocted by reformers, the media, and social workers, pertains to middle-class working women, for whom “chastity” is equated with professionalism (Peiss 330).

¹⁵¹ Maslow notes that self-actualizers try to resolve dichotomies, such as “masculine” and “feminine” (*Toward* iv).

women that working outside the home is actually good for them. The studies of Rosalind C. Rivers and Caryl Rivers debunk the American misconception that working women are more stressed and that, consequently, suffer more health problems. Rather, they report, a job may reduce depression and stress as it affords opportunities for self-esteem, enhancing physical and emotional health (37).¹⁵² In addition, working outside the home often energizes women because it provides “adult companionship, social contact and a connection with the wider world” (38). Further, working outside the home affords a paycheck and sometimes recognitions and creative outlets. Finally, working mothers may be providing their children with a “less sex-stereotyped view of the world” (39).¹⁵³

Working inside the home often socially stigmatizes women. In *Women and Economics*, Gilman contends that unless a housewife contributes a paycheck, she is not in any sense considered to be a “business partner” (12). At best, she is a low-paid household helper (13). Gilman adds, “[a]lthough not producers of wealth, women serve in the final processes of preparation and distribution. Their labor in the household has a genuine economic value” (13). For Gilman, then, the wife of a poor man should be paid as much as the wife of a rich man (13-14). But the reality is that women who work the hardest at home benefit far less than women who work much less at home (15). Even the enormous work of mothering adds no enhanced financial benefits.¹⁵⁴ In her *Second Sex* chapter on

¹⁵² Their studies indicate that unemployment—not employment—poses a critical risk for female depression (37).

¹⁵³ Carol P. Christ turns to stories that portray the opportunities and achievements for empowering working women (5).

¹⁵⁴ As Gilman recognizes, the childless wife would have no more money if she were a mother (16), probably less.

motherhood, Simone de Beauvoir finds nothing natural about maternal duty, proclaiming that nature does not determine morality. Rather than inflict motherhood on mothers and their biological children when the match lacks love and fosters unhappiness, Gilbert and Gubar propose social childcare. Additionally, they stress that a woman's career is not incompatible with her motherhood demand. For these reasons, women need stories to empower their career choices and credit their contributions as mothers.

Shange, Alther, Flagg, and Wong present narratives that uniquely consider the merits and liabilities for women working both outside and inside the home as single women, wives, and mothers. *Betsy Brown*, *Kinflicks*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, and *Fifth Chinese Daughter* witness that woman's work—no matter where it occurs—can foster self-actualizing. Maslow reports that self-actualizers need something “bigger” than they are, something “to be awed by and to commit” themselves to in a “new, naturalistic, empirical, non-churchly sense” (*Toward* iv). Unfortunately, Maslow cites only male examples—Thoreau, Whitman, William James, and John Dewey—of such commitment (*Toward* iv). Hence, we turn to female authors—writing from outside society's economic and political base—to supply examples, non-examples, and strategical guides for happy female working models.

Betsy Brown: My Momma Told Me, You'd Better Shop Around

In addition to gender biases regarding work, Shange investigates what it means for a middle-class African American woman to feel fulfilled at work and at home, a subject that E. Franklin Frazier asserts has received little academic interest (250). Robert

E. Weems contends that the drive to be accepted by the American middle class has created a new version of Du Bois' "twoness"(170) and a discomfort enhanced by the newness of the "status of middle-class housewife/breadwinner" (Frazier 174).¹⁵⁵

Shange paints a complicated picture of how to be a happy African American middle-class woman—inside and outside the home. Shange focuses on the negotiations of Jane Brown as a mother and household manager—economic positions complicated by society's perceptions of her as a woman, a middle-class citizen, and an African American. *Betsey Brown* honestly poses the problems and posits the strategies for negotiating being an African American and a member of the American middle class. *Betsey Brown* looks at four career "choices": Greer Brown (Betsey's father) as a doctor; Jane Brown as a social worker; Mrs. Maureen as a beauty shop owner and prostitution madam; and Bernice, Regina, and Carrie as domestic workers. Of these six workers, some have more career choices than others, which is a concern for becoming involved in something that self-actualizers perceive is "bigger" than themselves (*Toward* iv).

Greer—as a male and a doctor—has somewhat more opportunities than the others, which he feels obligates him to help members of his African American neighborhood. Barbara Christian recognizes that such an altruistic African American often pays a price for his "social mobility" with his "allegiance to his less fortunate brethren" ("Gloria" 350). One price Greer pays is his wife's animosity and jealousy. Jane scolds, "Who do you think you are, St. Francis?" (49), objecting to Greer's

¹⁵⁵ According to Weems, African American males and females have always expected their consumption to help construct their "identity" (166).

philanthropy and insisting that it must come second to their family (50).¹⁵⁶ With Jane's animosity, Shange realistically portrays the dilemma between helping community members while still supporting a family. However, Maslow would defend Greer's philanthropy, asserting that self-actualization is "not only for the person within his own private psyche, but also for the same person as a social being, a member of society" (*Toward* iii). To self-actualize then, Betsey should realize from her father's example of social responsibility that she should experience the "impulse to do something good for the world" (*Toward* 113). Betsey models her father's concern for others when at the novel's end, she "lingered over her city making decisions and discoveries about herself that would change the world" (207).

The remaining workers in Betsey Brown are women. Kay Lindsey notes that work is often a requirement for African American women, but Shange attacks the "white" cultural perspective that "[a]mong the jobs open to women of all colors, it does not take long to realize that Black women are expected to be primarily mothers, domestics and prostitutes" (88).¹⁵⁷ Shange attacks those "white" American stereotypes in her portrayal of Jane Brown. Shange undermines these "white" cultural expectations through her

¹⁵⁶ A more drastic riff occurs between husband and wife over this issue in *The Wedding*. Dorothy West portrays a greedy wife who heartlessly badgers poor tenants for the rent and her generous husband who doctors them gratis. Unlike Shange's realistic portrayal of the tensions that would likely occur in such a marriage, West depicts them as a harmonious couple. To her credit, Shange legitimately examines how difficult it must be when one marital partner is more generous while the other is more preoccupied with economic status.

¹⁵⁷ According to Hune, the primary view of Chinese American females in American History is one of prostitutes, who are represented as "exotics." This view stems from the demographics at the end of the nineteenth century which reflects one Chinese woman for every eighteen Chinese male (166-167).

personalized characterizations of Mrs. Maureen as a prostitution madam and beauty shop owner and of Bernice, Regina, and Carrie as domestic workers. With all these workers—whether white collar, blue collar, or illegal—Shange portrays their characterizations against the culture’s demoralizing “rubricizing” (*Toward* 75) of them as inferiors. When Betsey races home to make amends with Bernice, consoles a pregnant Regina, and values Carrie’s advice, she illustrates her ability to appreciate these women outside the “white” culture’s stereotyping. When Betsey treats each of these women independent of that stereotyping, she self-actualizes (*Toward* 75).

Mrs. Maureen works outside the home. She is the owner of a beauty shop that fronts for prostitution. When Betsey arrives earlier in the morning than usual, she is shocked to see Mrs. Maureen in disarray, hear about the “numbers man,” and view a substantial pile of cash on the table (131). This is not Betsey’s first time at Mrs. Maureen’s; but it is the readers’. Realizing before Betsey does that Mrs. Maureen runs a whorehouse, readers hear a double message in her “satisfaction” lecture (122): “to be ‘satisfied’ was to know no wants or cravings and, hallelujah, never be in a envious state of mind. Be satisfied. Get what you want. Get somebody to get it for you, but have that sense in your soul, in your bones that ‘na’chel’ knowledge of what is satisfaction” (122).¹⁵⁸ Betsey becomes uncomfortable (*Motivation* 91) and wishes she were home. This is an important self-actualizing moment for Betsey who needs a “sense of belongingness” (*Management* 16) but realizes that Mrs. Maureen’s prostitution

¹⁵⁸ The narrator educates, “Mrs. Maureen also believed wholeheartedly that unsatisfied women were mean and just a mess of trouble. That’s how come she told Betsey to find her a man what could satisfy her every need” (123).

house/beauty shop will not afford her that sense. Betsey's disjointedness forces her to rethink literally and figuratively where she is headed with her life. She alters her plans and returns home but not before she has acquired a new image. When Betsey leaves the beauty shop after her makeover, she begins to self-actualize by exuding a "confidence in the face of the world" (*Motivation* 90), declaring herself "Queen of the Negro Veiled Prophet" (140).

Before the novel introduces the three characters who work as domestics, it positions Betsey's perspective on domestic help: "Betsey knew that colored women wore white only if they were maids, hairdressers, or nonsurgical nurses" (40). To wear white is to serve "whites."¹⁵⁹ When a spiteful Betsey sabotages Miss Bernice Calhoun's badly needed job, Veejay scolds Betsey, explaining that her mother "takes care of nasty white chirren who act up like y'all acted up this morning" (67). For Betsey's self-actualization, this is an important lesson: although society may "rubricize" (*Toward* 75) and devalue people because of their work status, Betsey should respect their hard work. We see the evidence of that self-actualization lesson when on the heels of Veejay's scolding, Betsey races home to try and save Bernice's job. Although it is too late for Bernice because Mrs. Brown has already dismissed her, it is hardly too late for Betsey's self-actualization. Betsey sees clearly (*Motivation* 208) that Bernice needed this job badly and that Betsey has failed to help another human being (*Motivation* 217).

¹⁵⁹Barbara Johnson laments that an African American woman is both "invisible and ubiquitous: never seen in her own right but forever appropriated by others for their own ends" (216). Foucault's response would remind that power resides with each insurgent.

Regina arrives. More infatuated with her man than someone else's children and house, Regina flagrantly entertains Roscoe, which is too much for Vida's tolerance: "I'd hoped Regina would elevate or gravitate to her potential, but it seems her bodily needs are more the essence of her background" (87). Although Betsey likes Regina, she later realizes that Regina has been foolishly "trying to impress" (*Motivation* 208) Roscoe and Betsey. Betsey's self-actualizing lessons continue: an imago of bravado does not mask a coarse manner. Her assessment is a clear example of what Maslow's self-actualizers who see "reality more clearly" (*Motivation* 208). When Betsey sees Regina pregnant with no Roscoe in sight and working for Mrs. Maureen, she realizes that Regina has abdicated her self-respect (*Motivation* 90) for temporary passion.¹⁶⁰ This is another important self-actualization lesson for Betsey.

Carrie is the last Brown domestic worker. She prefers to use the cellar latrine like her mother did in Arkansas, entertains Mr. Jeff, runs decorum classes for the children, establishes household routines, drinks brandy, and demands discipline. With six adult children of her own, Carrie raises another woman's children during that woman's absence. The household runs so smoothly that Vida suspects Carrie is conjuring. The spell is broken, however, when Carrie is arrested for assault. Her arrest discomforts Betsey, forcing her to stop and reassess her estimation of Carrie who has traded self-esteem (*Motivation* 90) for passion and companionship. The report of Carrie's alleged assault produces a "new discontent and restlessness" (*Motivation* 91), which will afford

¹⁶⁰ Regina's plight recalls Suggie Skeete's situation in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*. Suggie, is left at the stove with her codfish, abandoned by her unfaithful lover who wishes to avoid the scent of fried fish on his clothes as he dallies with another woman.

Betsey a chance to self-reflect and reconsider some of Carrie's advice and behavior. We see this at the novel's end when Betsey considers Carrie's advice to become an Ikette as only one of several possibilities, including sports and dancing. Through Carrie's influence, Betsey learns to judge people more "correctly" (*Motivation* 208) instead of mindlessly adopting their perspectives on how a woman should act. She also learns that trading self-respect for romantic and passionate thrills fails self-actualization.

Shange positions each of these women's influences on Betsey within a working environment and highlights their roles as workers. Each of these working women teaches Betsey that although she should treat others well—recognizing their authority and contributions—she need not emulate them. The novel characterizes these women as employees and employers whom Betsey should respect but not model because they do not sufficiently respect themselves and because they are not participating in something "bigger" than themselves (*Toward* iv).

A more important influence on Betsey's self-actualization regarding work is Jane Brown's influences as career woman and household manager. Outside the home, Jane Brown is a social worker, a job her mother wishes Jane would quit so she could "mind [the] chren more" (19). Jane's life is consistent with the restraints imposed on many African American middle-class working women. Despite her designer clothing and income, she is limited in her career choices and prestige.¹⁶¹ The novel highlights this

¹⁶¹ Michele Wallace establishes that such a dissatisfaction arises because "upwardly mobile black women" are "not motivated by a desire to improve the lot of their race, but by a desire to break away from all its accessories of humiliation and guilt" (174). Giddings explains that middle-class status for the African American "housewife/

limitation when Mr. Tavaner, the liquor storeowner, ridicules Jane's job: "Don't your mama work round to the hospital with them crazy folks?" (126). Disrupting stereotypes, Shange portrays Mr. Tavaner—not Jane Brown—as someone with an unkind and limited worldview. Moreover, Jane's job provides more than an income. She sets a professional standard for Betsey that counters the somewhat disturbing portraits of the other four women. As Jane hopes to influence Betsey, Shange intends to influence the future of young female African Americans (Lester, "Heart" 720). So too does Paula Giddings appreciate that "[t]he working mother also makes a significant impression on the next generation." Giddings also notes that daughters of working mothers display more autonomy and exhibit more defiance (353).¹⁶² Further, society, in general, and the family, in particular, rarely appreciate the working contributions of middle-class African American women (Higginbotham 95).¹⁶³

Working a job that is better than her employee's or Veejay's mother's, Jane is still unappreciated as a co-breadwinner. On one hand, when Betsey hears Mr. Tavaner demean Jane's career and sees Jane frazzled when she arrives home from her job, Betsey

breadwinner was a new experience for most" (251). Moreover, Mahalia Jackson cautions that it is a mistake for African Americans to believe that acquiring money will alleviate discrimination because "for a long time the Negro hasn't needed money to be happy" (584).

¹⁶² For O'Neale, female African American authors depict the African American woman's conflicts regarding her "racial identification," the culture's "gender definitions (in contexts of Black and not white experience)," and her sexual "awakening" (25).

¹⁶³ According to Giddings, most African American middle-class females come from lower-class backgrounds. Even though they struggled with being ambivalent toward "upwardly mobile achievement," they were also "propelled" toward it (243). Giddings suggests that the reason why Greer and Vida do not recognize Jane's professional contributions is because a middle-class female and housewife was an unfamiliar combination (251).

sees a non-example of self-actualizing—working a job that does not constitute something “bigger” than daily life (*Toward* iv). On the other hand, despite the limitations of her career choice, Jane’s job allows her the autonomy (*Motivation* 205) of working outside the home and the confidence (*Motivation* 90) to defy the “Cinderella” marriage master narrative that restricts her to a man’s home and, by extension, to motherhood.¹⁶⁴ Thus, she provides a strong countercultural example for Betsey’s self-actualization through a career. Unlike the *Bildungsroman* and “Cinderella,” *Betsey Brown*’s portrayal of Jane does not demand fulfilling cultural expectations for “women’s work” at home.

Echoing the author’s life, Jane Brown lives in a comfortable middle-class house and neighborhood, which her job has helped make possible.¹⁶⁵ Part of the Jane’s identity consists of their Victorian neighborhood, which Betsey recognizes as distinct from Mrs. Maureen’s whorehouse and beauty shop and the Browns’ domestics’ backgrounds. Like many novels of Shange’s era, *Betsey Brown* focuses on African American women who have moved from one class to the next (Christian, “Black” 183). Shange illustrates a typical class consciousness and African American ambivalence experienced by African American middle-class women.¹⁶⁶ The novel features many indications of how important

¹⁶⁴ As Appiah notes, “To have autonomy, surely, is to have the capacity to resist” (199).

¹⁶⁵ Nicole King contends that uplift “presumes a certain racial solidarity” (51).

¹⁶⁶ Attempting to establish a respectable middle-class lifestyle amidst national prejudices frustrates Greer and Jane. However, Vida experiences no such anxiety, smugly boasting that “From Langston Hughes to Sojourner Truth, her children’s worlds were hardly deprived” (90).¹⁶⁶ Although Vida disapproves of Jane’s marriage to a dark-complected man, Vida prefers the lifestyle he helps provide, taking Jane to Paris and Havana. But Toombs notes that Jane herself risks nothing that would jeopardize her life replicating a “white” middle-class woman’s (51). Jane’s life depicts, what Christian sees as “a distinct

class—more than her career—is to Jane. She disapproves of Regina’s razor-shaved neck, scolds Charlie for his language, distrusts Mrs. Maureen’s assistants because they may make Betsey appear “too grown or colored” (123), prizes her chandeliers as “the hallmark of her move south” (141), refers to the back stairs as the “servants’ staircase” (194), and admonishes Betsey because she always “picked the most niggerish people in the world to make her friends” (206). Conversely, Vida condemns her daughter for putting “too much store by making money” and not looking after the children (46). Giddings sees this issue positively: “Much of what has been interpreted as mere imitation of White values among middle-class Black women was a race-conscious mission” (99). However, Giddings also recognizes that many middle-class African Americans imposed a responsibility on themselves to foster a better life for those less fortunate than themselves in their community.¹⁶⁷ Unlike Greer, Jane does not feel compelled to help others. Perhaps, being the more class-fragile, Jane clings to her job, which contributes to her coveted middle-class lifestyle without a sense of social responsibility (*Motivation* 217).

Because Betsey sees her father being involved in a “cause outside his [own] skin” (*Farther* 43) and her mother’s disapproval of his involvement, Jane’s career and middle-class obsession serves Betsey as a self-actualizing non-example. We see the evidence that Betsey becomes “detached” (*Toward* 91) from her mother’s perception that a

African-American middle class” (“Gloria” 350)—affording her domestic help and a modicum of luxury although demanding a supporting professional job.

¹⁶⁷ For Dianne Johnson-Feelings, it is important for middle-class African Americans to decide if and how they should fulfill their social responsibility to their community (156).

working woman bears no social responsibility when Betsey finally resolves to “change the world” (207). Through her mother’s non-self-actualizing example and her father’s example of duty (*Farther* 277), Betsey learns to value social responsibility (*Motivation* 217).

Even though Jane works professionally, she is also in charge of the house—whether that means running it herself or supervising. Jane frequently complains about this burden while Greer comes and goes as he pleases.¹⁶⁸ According to Apter, Jane’s frustration at home is paradigmatic of working mothers with well-respected careers who must “switch on and off” with more difficulty than do fathers (111).¹⁶⁹ Although Jane finds great satisfaction in being a mother, she finds little satisfaction in working as a household manager.

However, at the end of the novel—at the end of Betsey’s thirteenth year—Betsey comfortably establishes herself in her mother’s chair, eager to temporarily stand in as house manager. Why would Betsey want to work at running the home when she has seen her mother dislike that role so much? What motivates Betsey is her desire to achieve and to become competent: “Betsey just took Carrie’s place in the house. Did everything like she would have done . . .” (207). Like most self-actualizers, Betsey yearns to acquire

¹⁶⁸ For example, Greer poses as a ringleader in a morning Africanizing parade with the children; and then he merrily departs for his office and the hospital, leaving Jane to settle down everyone. Apter sees this as a familiar pattern leading to family tension (111). Frazier suspects that in “their fierce devotion to their children, which generally results in spoiling them, middle-class Negro parents are seemingly striving at times to establish a human relationship that will compensate for their own frustrations in the realm of human relationships” (184).

¹⁶⁹ Elizabeth Higginbotham expands this dilemma, reporting that society often criticizes African American women who help financially support their families (95).

what Maslow describes as “the ability to master the environment, to be capable, adequate, effective, competent in relation to it, to do a good job” (*Toward* 170). Enthroning herself on her mother’s chair could be considered a “peak experience” for Betsey—seeing her life in a different way, experiencing a revelation and understanding (*Farther* 178). At the novel’s end, Jane’s disdain for working at home, as a house manager, does not dominate Betsey’s life. Betsey reconsiders her mother’s perspective that work—in this case, running a home—is a nuisance in light of Carrie’s pride in that endeavor. As the novel ends, Betsey—taking Carrie’s place and relieving her mother of the housework—prefers the “sense of autonomy” (*Motivation* 213) and social responsibility (*Motivation* 217) that her new role as the Browns’ house manager provides.

Shange prevents Betsey from merely adopting the working values and lifestyles of each of her influences by highlighting their conflict with one another. From Vida, Regina, Carrie, and Mrs. Maureen, Betsey hears advice, which conflicts with her mother’s, about how she should see herself, how she should act, and who she should become as a working woman. Betsey decodes their messages in order to apply them to her own self-actualizing agenda, sitting in her mother’s chair at the novel’s close. Betsey considers her father’s lesson of philanthropy versus family obligations, Vida’s middle-class lesson of colorism versus family loyalty; Mrs. Maureen’s lesson of self-satisfaction without self-pride in her career; Regina’s lesson of neglecting her job for a romance based on self-indulgence; Carrie’s lesson of decorum, which she promotes at work, without personal self-control; and her mother’s lesson of middle-class values without social responsibility. *Betsey Brown* distinguishes among a shopping list of

improvements—a set of manners, a sense of class, and a sense of personal worth—all involving women’s attitudes toward work. The novel suggests that Betsey should determine for herself how she wants to look and act as a working woman. Betsey clearly chooses work that involves social responsibility (*Motivation* 217) in her desire to “change the world” (207).

Kinflicks: Keeping the Cradle from Falling

Like *Betsey Brown*, Alther’s *Kinflicks* explores how women succeed and fail at self-actualization in their roles as workers. Unlike *Betsey Brown*, however, the subject of women working is not so clearly defined in Alther’s novel. In fact, when asked why none of the women “work” in *Kinflicks*, Lisa Alther immediately responded that she had not realized that none held jobs, but quickly retorted that Ginny and Mrs. Babcock “work” at the hardest job in the world—motherhood (personal interview). The novel supports Alther’s contention that motherhood and running a house constitute work but also warns against females defining themselves solely by those occupations.

Although initially, the American female roles of marriage, domesticity, and motherhood appeal to Ginny Bliss, the enormous workload, with its endless string of days and nights running a house, quickly repulses her. *The Second Sex* prepares readers for Ginny’s discouragement with the futility of housework. To her husband’s dismay, a disgusted Ginny explains that she “had simply stopped trying to keep up with it all.” He complains, “It’s not that you’re asked to do very much” (399). Ginny feels beleaguered raising her daughter, Wendy, without her father’s emotional support, without his physical

assistance, and amidst his criticism. With each day, Ginny becomes more physically and emotionally wearied by the demands and isolation of running a house, in addition to raising a daughter. Ginny laments that now her husband's and daughter's schedules define her own without regard for her independence (*Motivation* 90), her "uniqueness" (*Toward* 157), or her "aliveness" (*Motivation* 208). With her life in self-actualization chaos, Ginny neglects Wendy who wanders the street until Ira finds her and confronts Ginny with his rifle, raging in confusion, "I just don't understand you, Ginny." "If you're not going to be my wife, if you're not going to cook my meals and clean my house, if you're not going to share my bed and raise my children—what are you going to do?" (466). Unsuccessfully, Ginny tries to bolster her spirits by recalling her mother's preference for fulfilling her duty over maintaining her self-esteem. However, the daily boredom of housework and motherhood dooms Ginny to frustration and dissatisfaction (*Motivation* 91) until her affair with the wanderer Hawk and Ira's subsequent eviction notice at the end of his shotgun.

Similarly, when Mrs. Babcock reflects upon her own mothering, she summarizes that "she had spent her entire life pampering other people's egos" (151). Reflecting upon her self-sacrificing life, Mrs. Babcock feels no pride at having been a martyr to her children's demands and needs during "The Tired Years" (164). Born in the wrong generation, Mrs. Babcock has deferred to her parents and then to her children with the result that no one respects her (*Motivation* 208). Predictably, she ends up one day on the couch worn out and wailing, "I'm just so tired, Mother. I can't stand it anymore. What should I do?" The answer she hears from her own mother fuels her remaining years of

Stoicism: “You must do your duty” (416). What happens to the stoical Mrs. Babcock is exactly what Trudier Harris worries about in regard to the African American female “suprawoman.”¹⁷⁰ On her deathbed, Mrs. Babcock experiences a discontentment (*Motivation* 91) and detachment (*Motivation* 212-213) so intense that it inspires her to assess her life and finally reject her Cinderella imago. Of course, this is only the first step toward self-actualizing, which has come very late for the dying Mrs. Babcock.

Motherhood has worn on Ginny as it has worn out Mrs. Babcock. However, unlike her mother, Ginny recognizes the failure in plenty of time to effect changes in her “suprawoman” lifestyle. When asked why Ginny happily intends to return to the work of motherhood, Alther unwaveringly affirms that she simply must return to being a mother (personal interview). Perhaps, this is best understood by Maslow’s observation that for self-actualizers, “‘I want to’ coincides with ‘I must’” (*Farther* 303). If so, if Ginny must return to motherhood for the sake of her self-actualizing, she must not return to a debilitating sense of female duty.

Kinflicks depicts women as house managers and mothers who suffer the pitfalls of being self-sacrificing females. The novel asserts that self-imposed and socially-imposed martyrdom fails women’s sense of accomplishment (*Motivation* 90) simply because they always privilege another’s welfare over their own. In this way, the novel exposes the non-self-actualizing hazards of a worker who does not pursue something that is “bigger”

¹⁷⁰ Harris blames “white” Americans for imposing stereotypes on African American females in order to create an “extrahuman” imago that modeled “animals who cared unconditionally for their offspring” (3). Although admirable by some standards, women who attempt to adopt the imago of the superwoman fail to self-actualize.

than herself (*Toward* iv). However, while the novel decries that running a house is meaningless and thankless work, the novel does not demean the value of a woman raising a child. Although *Kinflicks* acknowledges the difficulties of motherhood, it affirms that creating life mandates responsibility. However, as *Kinflicks* ends late for Mrs. Babcock's self-actualization and as Ginny Bliss's is just beginning hers, the novel gives no practical prescription for women who work at motherhood. Instead, the novel only proscribes, warning against mothers becoming Stoics and martyrs. In this area of a woman's life, *Kinflicks* offers readers merely a self-actualization invective.

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe: More Than 9 to 5

Fortunately, there is no room for martyrdom in Flagg's portrayal of women working. Her novel ethically considers to what extent employment contributes to female fulfillment. According to *Fried Green Tomatoes*, a career demands hard work, long hours, risk-taking, and diverse skills. In addition, the novel associates work with self-esteem (*Motivation* 90), generosity (217), and a sense of "competency" or "achievement" (90).¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ For Maslow, "This business of self-actualization via a commitment to an important job and to worthwhile work could also be said, then, to be the path to human happiness" and virtue (*Management* 9). However, this is not usually the case in tales for youth as Kortenhaus and Demarest's "Gender Role Stereotyping in Children's Literature" indicates. These critics investigate the dispersal of activity roles in children's stories and note that while the "instrumental role of females in children's literature has increased twofold between the 1960s and 1980s," there is still too great of a discrepancy, especially as girls are "busy creating problems that require masculine solutions" (233). Renae Poarch and Elizabeth Monk-Turner are more specific in their comparisons of female and male activities, noting that the major difference is that males are not featured performing home maker chores (1).

According to Flagg's novel, whether employment is viewed as a vocation or simply as a wage-earning job, females should determine for themselves its role in their lives. Not only do Ruth and Idgie comfortably survive during the Depression, they also extend their generosity to society's marginalized (the "hobos," the African Americans, and other poor people) who arrive at their back door, despite growing antagonism from the KKK. Idgie's solution to the dispute is to post a separate menu with reduced prices for their backdoor customers. This is a clear example of what Maslow means by participating in a "cause outside [one's] skin" (*Farther* 43). Next, when Smokey (with the DTs) cannot feed himself, Idgie quietly ushers him out back, offers him whiskey to calm himself, and distracts him with a fantastical story. This example of her respectful treatment is one of the many simple but meaningful acts that illustrate how being a restaurant owner is about more than being financially successful for Idgie. She is happy at her work and strives to enrich the lives of those whom she serves and employs. In short, through her job as café owner, Idgie daily attends to the self-actualization requirement of social responsibility (*Motivation* 217). When Idgie works to serve her customers generously and treat her employees respectfully, she works as a happy self-actualizer—whose self-fulfillment and altruism mesh well. For Idgie as a worker, there is no dichotomy between self-interest and selflessness (*Management* 286). In Greek fashion, Idgie chooses the good because the good makes her happy. Opening with the first customer and closing with the last, Idgie coordinates serving food with her compassion for her guests.¹⁷² Through her work, Idgie establishes a sense of

¹⁷² Maslow praises work as an opportunity to establish identity as working "becomes part

“belongingness” (*Management* 16). Owning the café and serving the less fortunate define Idgie’s self-actualization because it demands social responsibility (*Motivation* 217). No wonder that Idgie’s café is the social center of Whistle Stop.¹⁷³

Other characters also provide work models. Without a complaint about her long days, Ruth works as a mother and as Idgie’s helper in the café. Big George, despite the heat from the sun and flames, cheerfully cooks the barbecue. His wife, Onzell, not only cooks, but also nurses Momma Threadgoode and Ruth when they become terminally ill. At age ten or eleven, Sipsy arrived at the Threadgoode home to help raise their children and in her eighties still cooks for them.¹⁷⁴ Like Idgie, these characters find work ennobling.

So too does work ennoble the present day Mrs. Couch, who begins to surmount a menopausal depression by launching her career as a Mary Kay salesperson. The Mary Kay pink Cadillac sales lure inspires Evelyn not only to work but also to refashion her appearance. As a result of her cosmetics sales career, Evelyn discards her alter ego, Tawanda, and its corresponding aggressive behavior. Her sales job helps Evelyn to have “confidence in the face of the world” (*Motivation* 90), inspiring her to address her weight, marriage, and loneliness. As a successful salesperson, Evelyn joins the fat farm and begins to lose weight, renegotiate her marital desires with her husband Ed, and develop friendships. Inspired by her career success, Evelyn becomes increasingly less needy in

of the self” (*Farther* 306).

¹⁷³ In fact, Dottie Weems, the newspaper editor, remarks that when the café closes down, the town dries up.

¹⁷⁴ At the end of the novel, readers discover Sipsy’s continued generosity—her recipes.

her conversations with Ninny Threadgoode, expecting less advice and contributing more. In summary, working contributes to a heartiness and “aliveness” (*Motivation* 208) that we see in Evelyn’s relationships at the fat farm, with her husband, and with Ninny at the end of the novel.

In *Fried Green Tomatoes*, even though most of the characters work out of necessity, no one works just for the money. As Idgie proclaims, “money will kill you” (29). This is an important message: people should find satisfaction in their work (*Toward* 17) because they are participating in something “bigger” than themselves (*Toward* iv) and should enjoy the company of their co-workers. Most importantly for a female self-actualization novel, Flagg’s story provides a rare portrayal of financially independent women. *Fried Green Tomatoes* affirms females’ need for their own financial independence, generosity, and job satisfaction. In particular, Idgie and Evelyn fit Maslow’s idea that self-actualizers match themselves with a task, professing that “an easy medicine for self-esteem” is to “become a part of something important” (*Management* 11). In an America too strongly allured by *The Lion King*’s land of “Hatuna Matata,” this lesson—that female self-accomplishment leads to social responsibility and happiness—cannot be heard enough. Instead of reinforcing Disney’s land of “no worries,” Flagg requires hard work and altruism for female self-actualization. Rather than escape life’s problems—through a “Cinderella” reliance on a successful husband—Flagg challenges readers to seek work that fulfills them and benefits others.

Fifth Chinese Daughter: Molding the “Middle Way”

Although Wong’s novel begins with female financial dependency on males, it concludes with female independence. Beginning with Jade Snow’s early childhood, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* dramatizes that Chinese American daughters are typically expected to manage the house with the help of their brothers (Yung, *Unbound* 116). Further, these daughters are often expected to work in the family business, if there is one, which often adjoins the home—further confining their freedom. While these family-owned businesses offer financial flexibility and a buffer from “keen competition” from non-Chinese Americans (Wong, “Family” 212), these businesses demand that Chinese American daughters acquiesce to the patriarchal ideals of family loyalty.¹⁷⁵ Outside the home, Chinese American women have faced stereotypes that exceed the common American biases against working women.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ For Chinese Americans, family values and kinship codes are “intertwined with the values and ideology of the family business” (Wong, “Family” 215). Ideally, according to Chinese tradition, “[w]hen the family is cared for, it is believed, the society and community will be right. When the community is right, the nation will be right and when each nation is right, the world will be right” (216). Coupled with this is the Confucian belief of filial piety, which teaches children to be partly responsible for their family’s wealth (216). These factors contribute to the financial advantage that Chinese American family-owned business experience (Young 106). Thus, working at home for many Chinese American daughters and mothers means not only housework, but also, factory work just a few yards from their beds.

¹⁷⁶ Several non-Chinese American perceptions hindered their success and happiness in the workforce: they were members of the “model minority”; they were followers of the “Three Obediences” (Ling, “Jade” 121); and they were second-generation females who were eager to work but accepting that their success was a “slow, patient” process, requiring them to get to know others and follow the “highest ideals” (Wong, “Story” 306). Three stereotypes prevailed: “domestic servant,” “sex object,” and “asexual, unattractive, impersonal yet efficient worker” (Bradshaw). It is no wonder that so many—if given the chance—chose the latter. Like Jade Snow, many second-generation

For the Wong family, who live at the back of the factory they own, their family business is mixed with their home, becoming “an inseparable part of Jade Snow’s life” (52). At age 11, the Depression affects the family hard; Jade Snow takes over the housework so that her mother can work exclusively in their factory. Mr. Wong’s Christianity supports women working, including his wife who works at a machine most of her day.¹⁷⁷ Although she never complains to Jade Snow, she bitterly tells the story of receiving no money for raising her mother’s pigs—even after their sale. This puts a different light on Jade Snow’s chores; for at least she is paid something, gleaning fifty cents per week plus an additional fifteen cents for cleaning her brother’s room. Unlike her mother, she is able to accrue a savings—forty dollars by the summer’s end. At an older age, she cleans the homes of seven non-Chinese American families. Her “entire fortune” grows to \$167.68 (146). At this point in her life, Jade Snow’s working entails only earning a meager savings and, therefore, does not contribute to her self-actualization because as a worker, she has not “become a part of something important” (*Management* 11). However, the novel insists that her paid working life is an improvement over her mother’s unpaid situation.

females were happy to leave the family-owned business and were more concerned with securing their own financial security than with a social life (Yung 116). Unlike their mothers, who were restricted to menial labor, these second-generation, college-educated daughters could become secretaries (Ling, “Jade” 121). Mary Paik Lee’s “A Pioneer Korean Woman in America” catalogues the long hours of work for one dollar per week while the women are treated shabbily.

¹⁷⁷ Tracy Lai notes that “Asian American women are also stereotyped as having special dexterity and endurance for routine, thus making them fit for assembly work” (187).

At college, Jade Snow continues to work merely to earn money and without experiencing any personal satisfaction. As part of a college class, she tours one of the Caucasian workers' factories and is struck by their intensity—never stopping to chat or laugh. She recalls, “What a difference between the relaxed attitude of the Chinese pieceworkers and the frantic preoccupation of the Caucasians!” (165), thus, noting that work without a sense of “belongingness” (*Management* 16) debilitates self-actualization. When she takes one of her college classes to visit the Wong’s factory, Jade Snow again feels the gap between the cultures, preferring the “independence” (*Motivation* 90) that the Chinese factory affords its workers to relax and chat. Viewing the contrast between the Chinese American working culture of her youth and the non-Chinese American culture of her adulthood unsettles (*Motivation* 91) Jade Snow and, therefore, encourages her to reevaluate how crucial it is to work out something she considers to be “bigger” than herself (*Toward* iv).

Her discomfort continues when she graduates and a Caucasian male warns, “If you are smart, you will look for a job among your Chinese firms. You cannot expect to get anywhere in American business houses. After all, I am sure you are conscious that racial prejudice on the Pacific Coast will be a great handicap to you” (188).¹⁷⁸ This discomfort produces a discontentment and “restlessness” (*Motivation* 91) that is part of her self-actualization process, fueling her determination to pursue “the American work world—commonly known as ‘a man’s world’” (192). As she becomes bored at work, her

¹⁷⁸ Lai explains, “Businesses want docile, subservient workers . . . Many businesses purposely seek immigrant workers with limited English skills as further insurance against backtalk” (187).

discontentment increases, she determines a new path for herself (investigating the effect of vaccine programs), and is asked to continue her research at a full-time job in which she gains an assurance in “dealing and working with the men” (194) who gradually come to respect her as her confidence develops and contributes to her self-actualizing (*Motivation* 90).

After her prize-winning essay on the vaccine program is incorporated into a presidential congressional report, Jade Snow is chosen to christen the *William A. Jones* amidst photographers and journalists. Her father celebrates by funding another “family” dinner, which focuses not on Jade Snow’s honor, but on someone else he deems more important. Ironically, this time it is a stranger—the limousine chauffeur with whom Mr. Wong “lost no time in getting acquainted,” learning about “the man’s wife and children, his dog, and working conditions” (198). This is the only conversation described in the celebratory meal allegedly for his daughter. After the meal is ordered—“the best of everything”—it is only the enjoyment of the “chauffeur guest” that counts. Jade Snow’s concluding remarks reveal that for the first time the “Wong family was assembled in pride of the fifth daughter” (198).

However, those remarks simply do not match her previous description of the meal that centered on the English-speaking stranger. Once again, her father capitalizes on his daughter’s achievement in order to show off in front of someone he judges to be more important. The narrator recalls that the day seems to belong to the father—persuading a friend to open his restaurant, regarding the stranger “as a friend who was doing them a favor” (198), ordering every item on the menu, and offering not one “dissonant note . . .

to mar the harmony” (198). Wong’s retrospective description—seemingly harmonious—provides its own “dissonant note” (*Motivation* 91)—as she focuses on her father’s fawning. Avoiding overt criticism, the narration signifies her disappointment in her father when she muses that that if only the Chinese vocabulary included a word for “proud,” it would have been uttered (198).¹⁷⁹ Likely, readers understand that Mr. Wong’s self-pride pathetically overshadows any pride he should have in his daughter’s recent honor. More importantly, Jade Snow does not allow his inappropriate fawning to detract from her own sense of “mastery” and “achievement” (*Motivation* 90). She self-actualizes beyond her father’s need to “impress” (*Motivation* 208) and sees the reality of the situation more clearly (*Motivation* 208). She values her own self-esteem (*Motivation* 90) and acknowledges her own working accomplishment—just as self-actualizers are apt to do.

As a secretary, Jade Snow is limited in the choice of her work, being cautioned by her boss, that as a woman she cannot compete equally with a man for the same salary.¹⁸⁰ This is a perfect example of de Beauvoir’s contention that females suffer from “power envy, not penis envy” (in Pipher 21). She leaves this job because she is aware of its limitations—boredom and futility. It is puzzling why some critics, such as Judy Yung, view Jade Snow as an accommodationist to American capitalism; for given her limited options, becoming a successful writer and ceramicist could be considered savvy and

¹⁷⁹ Lim reminds us that this is a father who never supported Jade Snow’s education and constantly belittled her (“Tradition” 259).

¹⁸⁰ Bow contends that *Fifth Chinese Daughter* demonstrates that women must earn their “autonomous selfhood” through their accomplishments (*Betrayal* 80).

courageous.¹⁸¹ This becomes the turning point in her working life and an important step in her self-actualization: she learns that working as a secretary cannot facilitate her self-actualization because it entails only fitting into to someone else's agenda (*Motivation* 226) and earning a living without any sense of participating in something she considers "bigger" than herself (*Toward* iv).

Rejected by mainstream American business, Jade Snow self-actualizes as a writer and potter because she loves that work (*Farther* 307).¹⁸² Her attraction to pottery and writing is the freedom that they afford her to "call her soul her own" and "strike her own tempo as she carved her own niche" (236). She joins the Ceramic Guild, constructs over three hundred pottery pieces, and decides to start her own business.¹⁸³ Sitting in a storefront window in Chinatown, she attracts many spectators, who are "agog" (244). A newspaper article declares "that she had invented a new mousetrap" but predicts her failure (244). Other store owners chide, "Look, here comes the mud-stirring maiden" (244). Although her Chinatown neighbors deride her showroom window exhibition and shun her business, others outside Chinatown travel far just to buy her pottery. Even without the support of her Chinatown neighbors and family, three months later, Jade

¹⁸¹ Katharine Hanna explains that when Jade Snow realizes she has no place in the American military or corporate world, she opts for "doing what she loved most—potting and writing" (10).

¹⁸² Jade Snow Wong recalls, "In writing, a woman would not be competing against men" (235).

¹⁸³ Gerrye Wong records Jade Snow Wong's thoughts: "After World War II ended, having worked in American corporate offices, I knew that a young, Chinese female could never rise to the top in white male-dominated fields. Since I had learned to love making pottery why couldn't I make a living at it? For my whole life, I had been bound by the tenets of Chinese culture . . ." (28).

Snow drives “the first postwar automobile in Chinatown” (244)—a clear hallmark of financial success.¹⁸⁴

The critical debate about the merits of Jade Snow’s working life centers on her pottery business—not her childhood and college years of working or her writing career. Debaters argue that on one hand, Jade Snow becomes a capitalistic accommodationist and on the other hand, Jade Snow works hard and deserves the success she achieves.

On one hand, critics, with Frank Chin in the forefront, berate Wong’s concession to sit as an object on view in a Chinatown storefront window, crafting pottery for tourists and selling every piece only to non-Chinese Americans. Gang Yue objects to Wong’s portrayal of Jade Snow’s storefront potting as “offering herself up for the American feast” (351). Yung contends that Wong is an accommodationist because she deliberately chooses careers that avoid “ethnic, gender, and class prejudices” and competition with men (*Unbound* 141). These critics and others view Wong’s life as a loss of self and a denial of culture. Working in front of and selling to non-Chinese Americans, Wong receives criticism for “selling out” and catering to the “consumer culture’s image of stylized race and ethnicity” (Ana 19). These critics construe Jade Snow’s attempts to create and sell her pottery as attempts to assimilate (*Motivation* 226) and, therefore, a threat to her self-actualizing.

¹⁸⁴ Eng confirms that after Wong’s graduation with a B.A., she becomes “an autonomous businesswoman” (1260). Later, after Wong marries another Chinatown resident and artist, they collaborate together on their art (Gerrye Wong 28).

On the other hand, some critics applaud her gumption, determination, and savvy. Tracy Lai notes that working hard, according to the American capitalist model, should guarantee success (182). This is a good match for Jade Snow, who has been brought up on the pride of hard work and the need for financial security with illustrations from her family, including Uncle Kwok. Jeffrey J. Santa Ana explains that marginalized women were forced to refocus their desire for political acceptance and rights to a desire for objects and consumption (16). Da Zheng believes that she could both establish her own successful business and retain her Chinese American identity (27). Readers, following Zheng's lead, could see this dual accomplishment as part of her self-proclaimed agenda for finding her "Middle Way."

From a self-actualization perspective, Jade Snow promotes "the best of Chinese culture and rejects the worst." More importantly, she truthfully "assesses American culture" (Zheng 56) while not rejecting her Chinese cultural values. Jade Snow realizes that as a woman and as a Chinese American, she is trapped amidst many stereotypes.¹⁸⁵ If working hard has not granted her recognition, approval, and financial support from her Chinatown neighbors and her family, then it is no wonder that Jade Snow is eager "for acceptance into white society, on American terms" (Grice 5). Admirably, she is practicing the advice of her pottery instructor to persist, to learn through error, and to progress to more demanding techniques (Hanna introduction). F. Carlton Ball's advice to perfect old methods and to explore new techniques stands as a metaphor for Jade

¹⁸⁵Lai notes that feminists should address the imbalance of profits inherent in the capitalistic structure, as well as other exploitations and oppressions of women (189).

Snow's endeavors. As a writer, she retunes her Chinese value of deference through the methods of the third-person narration and signifying techniques. As a researcher, she relies on the Chinese value of the thoughtful herbalist with the "American" value of innovation. As a potter, she blends Chinese methods and styles with an "American" market.

This blending could be seen as a self-actualization strategy. The novel's end finds Jade Snow launching a new career of potting, poised to continue her self-actualization, which will bring her closer to more Americans, without losing respect for her Chinese American family and neighborhood. Jade Snow comes to accept that both her parents and her Chinatown neighbors have supported her financial endeavors as much as they could or wish to do. With that level of support, Jade Snow accepts the responsibility for her own work fulfillment as a potter and writer—professions that allow her to touch the lives of other people. Readers can judge Jade Snow's potting and writing as establishing her independence (*Motivation* 90), pursuing her creativity (*Motivation* 223), and achieving a "mastery" and "competence" (*Motivation* 90), in addition to fulfilling her social responsibility as a mediator of "The Middle Way."

Summary

For these authors, work should mean more than a paycheck. Without demeaning those who work only out of necessity, these novels prefer working as a creative outlet (*Motivation* 223) and a means to help others (*Motivation* 217). Instructing readers to find joy and reward (*Motivation* 208) in work—whether at home or outside the home—

Shange, Alther, Flagg, and Wong also recognize that work demands diligence, patience, loyalty, and humility. As women strive against biased working environments (*Toward* 75), women tell stories to affect cultural prejudices about job status, work behavior, career opportunities, and class expectations. These novels portray women who are aggressive, competitive, and competent in their jobs without portraying them as “castrators.” With more stories like these self-actualization novels, America might reconsider its dualistic stereotyping of men’s work and women’s work.

As women grow, they join groups to expand beyond their network of work colleagues and circle of friends. But even before they become Junior Leaguers and members of the League of Women Voters, women are born into communities. Obviously, when they are older, they can choose their group memberships. Otherwise, they are stuck with their hometowns, their nations, and their neighborhoods—at least until they can escape if they desire to do so. Whether chosen or not, communities are a significant part of a woman’s self-actualizing. We stay on the path with our self-actualizing female as she establishes herself within imposed and chosen communities.

CHAPTER V

IF IT LOOKS TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, IT IS:

COMMUNITY AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION

An individual without isms is more human, and for an individual not to be committed to some ism is more in accordance with human nature.
(Gao Xingjian "Without Isms" 27)

Nobel Prize winner Gao Xingjian is not a great supporter of joining organizations and adopting causes. He determines such practices dehumanizing. Similarly, Alvarez, Flagg, Shange, and Alther wonder to what extent women can become community members and still self-actualize.

By contrast, many American women would agree with Isabel Zakrzewski Brown's maxim: "By identifying with other women, with ourselves, we gain a definite goal: Freedom" (146). Accordingly, Karla F. Holloway, *Codes of Conduct*, believes in the importance of female authors for women readers. Also, bell hooks proclaims an optimism for female solidarity through literature, claiming the need for African American women to work together through their hostilities in order to establish a political solidarity of collective principles and agendas, putting to an end the bourgeois model of "Sisterhood" based on shared victimization (*Feminist* 55).¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Trites remarks that the storyteller should recognize that her "subjects exist within communities" (123-124).

Self-actualizers bear witness to these concerns, expecting that their communal involvements require work, honesty, and autonomy and realizing that communities advocating crusades or promising quick fixes disappoint. *In the Time of the Butterflies*, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Betsy Brown*, and *Kinflicks* warn their readers against such dangers and illustrate how well-selected communities can assist self-actualization.

In the Time of the Butterflies: In the Line of Fire

Two communities impede and assist the Mirabal sisters' self-actualizing: the nation and the resistance movement. In tandem with each other, these community experiences affect the sisters' views on patriarchy, patriotism, and human rights.¹⁸⁷ Avoiding the simple dichotomy of an oppressive regime versus a liberating resistance, Alvarez depicts a more complicated view.¹⁸⁸ Just as Alvarez avoids falsely immortalizing the reputation of the "butterflies," she also resists idealizing the resistance and vilifying the government. In the vein of Xingjian's plea to eschew "isms" (25-31), Alvarez refuses to castigate and credit according to rubrics of gender, class, and political affiliations and thereby offers her most powerful self-actualizing lesson: we must authentically know ourselves and attempt to know others apart from stereotypes and affiliations (*Toward* 75). To do so is to see "reality more clearly" (*Motivation* 208) and

¹⁸⁷ Suzanne LaFont purports, "the future of gender and sexualities are tied into the future of politics, economics and even war" (360).

¹⁸⁸ LaFont and Howard J. Wiarda recall Trujillo's attempts to impose order and secure peace. One may recall *Monty Python's* encomium about Rome's contributions.

hold others in esteem (90). Gadamer suggests conditions necessary to establish such authentic relationships: suspend prejudices (302) and consider the cultural past (305).¹⁸⁹ For Gadamer, no horizons are fixed; and with the right approach, one person can understand another person's horizon (305). *In the Time of the Butterflies* affirms the need and portrays the attempt to understand others' horizons, but Alvarez does not suggest that one can ever truly know another person.

Dedé's narration to the interviewer (who comes to the museum and asks to hear the story of the Mirabal sisters) dramatizes her attempt to understand others. Dedé confronts her place among the citizens of her national community as she struggles against her public identity of "Mariposa #4." Her "Butterfly" label recalls Kwame Anthony Appiah's "normative stereotype" (195) as it remembers Dedé's resistance to the regime. When the interviewing stranger invites Dedé to explain when the "problems with the regime" began, Dedé returns to 1948 and begins with the story of the resistance movement against Dictator Trujillo. When Dedé describes her husband's insistence that she remain at home and not become a political activist, she reveals the "discontent" (*Motivation* 91) caused by aligning with her husband and not with her sisters who have joined the revolution. This discontentment will challenge her to reevaluate her loyalties to her sisters, her husband, her child, and her country. This scene exposes Dedé's growing tensions within herself, which become the catalysts for her self-actualization.

¹⁸⁹ Ross Poole explains that appropriating a national identity requires becoming responsible for the past (273).

Disturbed, the older narrating Dedé tries to comfort herself with a “Cinderella” defense: “Back in those days, we women followed our husbands” (171-172). Although she recognizes this as a “silly excuse,” Dedé recalls, “I followed my husband and didn’t get involved” (172). The novel, however, rejects this “Cinderella” philosophy, which enervates self-actualizing because it stifles voice and impedes social responsibility (*Motivation* 217). Fortunately, Dedé’s continuing anxiety eventually nudges her toward self-actualizing.¹⁹⁰ After the SMI roundup, Dedé’s life is “dismantled,” “violated,” “desecrated,” and “destroyed” (191), but she still does not join the resistance. However, her discontent grows: Dedé drops to her knees, tamps the grass back, and prays a credo while her sisters are clawed and clubbed to death. Later lamenting her inaction, she reluctantly recalls her father’s prediction that she would bury her sisters. Her husband, Jaimito, proclaims, “This is *your* martyrdom, Dedé, to be alive without them” (308). Other resisters die. Ultimately, Dedé finds her confidence (*Motivation* 90) only when she becomes the story’s teller.

In the Time of the Butterflies has no happy ending. Dedé bleakly assesses the resistance’s outcome. She wonders, “Was it for this, the sacrifice of the butterflies?” (318). *In the Time of the Butterflies* concludes with Dedé’s haunting speculation that their

¹⁹⁰ Even years after the murders, when her niece, Minou, asks why Dedé was not with her sisters when they were murdered, Dedé recalls that “when she saw her three sisters coming down the path that afternoon, she felt pure dread. It was as if the three fates were approaching, their scissors poised to snip the knot that was keeping Dedé’s life from falling apart” (175).

sacrifice was in vain.¹⁹¹ Perhaps, what proves wrong is that the revolution is too limited, targeting Trujillo and not seeing clearly (*Motivation* 208) the underlying social ills.¹⁹² To Dedé's utter disappointment, rampant capitalism—a new system of class oppression—has succeeded Trujillo's regime.¹⁹³ For those who have resisted one tyranny, its replacement with another constitutes a terrible loss.

Merely acknowledging loss, however, does not guarantee self-actualization. She also needs to understand the political situation clearly (*Motivation* 208), that is, the causes and effects of her loss, which Dedé still struggles to do. With this conclusion to Dedé's tale, Alvarez continues to avoid romanticizing the lives of the "Butterflies," making it clear that Dedé's failure to participate in the resistance on that fateful day of her sisters' murders is no self-actualization moment.¹⁹⁴ However, the older Dedé, like the older Briony in *Atonement*, refuses to let herself off the hook, holding herself

¹⁹¹ A similar ending with a disillusioned protagonist occurs in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* as Selina exits her childhood neighborhood, eyeing the place where her mother's coveted brownstones have been "blasted" to make room for an urban project (309).

¹⁹² Maslow notes, "societal change comes about by attack along the total front, by efforts to change simultaneously every single institution . . . within the entire society" (*Management* 279). Maslow clarifies that because "social change must be" it must be "complex" (281). This recalls Fanon's call to resist through a similar means.

¹⁹³ Sadly, as Wollem H. Vanderburg reports, a society's collapse often results in "the establishment of a strong state" (287). Thomas Hobbes and Albert Camus would concur.

¹⁹⁴ In her Postscript, Alvarez divulges that rather than portray the "sisters of legend, wrapped in superlatives and ascended into myth" and, therefore, "inaccessible," she portrays them fictitiously in order to avoid dangerous "deification." Alvarez contends that if portrayed as myths, their courageous examples fail to empower "ordinary men and women." Rather, Alvarez wishes to immerse her readers "in an epoch in life of the Dominican Republic," not as history but as a fiction, "a way to travel through the human heart." In the spirit of Appiah, Alvarez demands an ethical analysis of the Dominican Republic's political nightmare. For other fictional works, told by another marginalized female author, see Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*, *Behind the Mountains*, and *Breath, Eyes, and Memories*.

accountable for her younger, cowardly, and confused self. At best, Dedé as an older woman speaking to the interviewer and later, to her niece Minou, begins to self-actualize as she constructs her memories into a cohesive narrative of self-examination—trying to “see reality more clearly” and recognize hypocrisy (*Motivation* 208).¹⁹⁵

The other three sisters self-actualize more successfully amidst their community places and displacements.

The stories that Minerva hears regarding Trujillo’s corruption and violence set the stage for her determination to humanize her persecutors—instead of stereotyping them as oppressors (*Toward* 75)—despite her family’s and friends’ loss of status and respect.¹⁹⁶ Papá, Trujillo, and the SIM see Minerva as the “Other.”¹⁹⁷ Regardless, she refuses to see them as Others. Minerva’s troubles begin when, disgusted by Trujillo’s advances, she exits the gathering without his permission; subsequently, she endures the guard’s vulgarity while the General instructs, “Watch your you-know-what!” (108); and ignores

¹⁹⁵ Rajiva Verma addresses this issue of reshaping the “significant events” of our past experiences into stories in order to reshape identity (171).

¹⁹⁶ Minerva’s situation recalls Jacques Derrida’s observations about those who lose their community membership by “the brutality of a unilateral decision,” never to regain their status (*Monolingualism* 15).

¹⁹⁷ According to Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and Martin Buber, dealing with the Other is the problem of ethics and demands sacrifice. For Buber, when the world is divided into Us-Them, it is divided into “the children of light and the children of darkness, the sheep and the goats, the elect and the damned” (13). For Buber, I-You speech demands the whole person (54), a struggle that demands sacrificing ego and power. For Derrida, reflecting upon Levinas, “war, hostility, even murder, *still* presuppose and thus *always* manifest this originary welcoming that is openness to the face . . . [and] the prohibition against killing, the ‘Thou shalt not kill,’ . . . is the very origin of ethics” (*Adieu* 90). Obviously, such a prohibition during oppressed times demands sacrificing a natural emotional tendency to retaliate.

his warning that she must regard him as her protector.¹⁹⁸ In this mutation of “Cinderella,” Minerva leaves the ball without permission, rejects the “prince,” and causes the downfall of her family. However, she refuses to vilify (stereotype) Trujillo as the “devil.” She also refuses to vilify Dr. Vinas, recalling him as a former family friend and not regarding him as her present persecutor. This is what self-actualizers do: they authentically attempt to view others, beyond their own prejudices and emotions.

Minerva’s story illustrates that being a member of a group that exists in opposition to another group does not license Otherizing and “rubricizing” (*Toward* 75). Through Minerva’s story, Alvarez empowers readers to resist vindictiveness even as community members opposed to oppressors.¹⁹⁹

The national and resistance communities also influence María Theresa’s self-actualizing as “*Mariposa #2*.” At first, she is enamored of Trujillo: “I feel so lucky that we have him for a president” (37). However, when she hears about girls visiting Don Horacio’s house for secret meetings, she becomes suspicious and paranoid.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ After El Jefe finally agrees to a private conference, Minerva refuses to sleep with him, her father suffers a heart attack in his prison cell, the family sends a letter of apology, and Minerva and El Jefe scrape over her dream of going to law school.

¹⁹⁹ Consistently shaken by the injustices of a national patriarchy, Minerva publically fakes courage before her unsuspecting sisters. Pretending to be brave, she creates a courageous character. (cf. Aristotle’s concept of character development and Hamlet’s advice to “assume a virtue.”)

²⁰⁰ For example, every time she sees a guard, she wonders whom he has killed. In addition, she fears the President’s picture’s eyes are following her. After Hilda is caught and Minerva buries all her poems and papers, María Teresa accepts the danger and buries her diary. María Teresa is still disturbed by Minerva secretively listening to radio broadcasts of Castro’s speech. Her ignorance surfaces again, describing a march in the capital: “It looked like the newsreels of Hitler and the Italian one with the name that sounds like fettuccine” (131).

Reluctantly, she joins the resistance movement and is shocked when she sees Minerva cry for the only time in her life after being stripped in front of naked male prisoners. Privately, María Teresa does not see herself as a natural rebel. Perhaps, her self-image is what allows her to see her guards as victims; for even after they rape her, she imagines that “they were all ashamed of themselves” (256).

María Teresa learns courage without learning retaliation (*Motivation* 208). Although some readers may consider her the weakest of the “Butterfly” rebels, María Teresa is probably the greatest risk taker. More than her sisters, she dares to relate to the “Other” on a personal level (*Toward* 75). María Teresa self-actualizes into a courageous woman who survives with dignity (*Motivation* 90), refusing to allow her communities—the national guards or the resistance movement—to define her (*Motivation* 208).

Finally, Patria learns self-actualizing lessons as a community member of the church, her nation, and the resistance. After the priest’s conversion to rebellion, Patria begins to feel that “life in general is worthwhile” (*Toward* 101) and becomes a political activist.²⁰¹ Thereafter, she self-identifies as “*Mariposa* #3,” joining the mission “to effect an internal revolution rather than wait for an outside rescue” (167). With this decision, she feels “more integrated” (*Toward* 104).²⁰² Nonetheless, facing the new obligatory picture of Trujillo in their home, Patria prays to him instead of the Good Shepherd “not because he was worthy” but because she “wanted something from him, and prayer was

²⁰¹ Poole explains that we discover our nation and ourselves through “bed-time stories we are told, the songs which put us to sleep, the games we play as children, the heroes we are taught to admire and the enemies we come to fear and detest” (275).

²⁰² Charles Taylor contends that such “common action can bring a sense of empowerment and also strengthen identification with the political community” (*Ethics* 118).

the only way [she] knew to ask” (203). Like María Teresa, Patria is able to treat her enemy, not as an “Other,” but as a human being, seeing his face and appealing to him personally—avoiding “rubricizing” him (*Toward* 75). Idealistically, Patria hopes to turn El Jefe toward his better nature. Despite the innocents murdered, the attacks on the churches, her sisters’ imprisonment, the bugging of their house, El Jefe’s intent “to whiten the race” (215), and her fears that her young son will be drafted, Patria still prays for El Jefe instead of stereotyping him as an oppressor. Further, Patria’s “fighting is not an excuse for hostility, paranoia, grandiosity, authority, rebellion, etc., but is for the sake of setting things right” (*Further* 308). Although Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and Martin Buber would not sanction that excuse, Maslow reports that most self-actualizers do. However, years later—like Levinas, Derrida, and Buber—Patria has grown weary of fighting. In the midst of her worst fears for herself and her family, Patria ethically assesses her communities (*Motivation* 208): “I don’t know, I wanted to start believing in my fellow Dominicans again” (222).²⁰³

Patria, like María Teresa, learns to face her potential “Other” as a human being.²⁰⁴

For Maslow and for Alvarez, self-actualizers reject classifications, stereotypes, and rubrics in their on-going attempts to understand others (*Toward* 75) even when they

²⁰³ This is important to Maslow’s concept of self-actualization: “But if we perceive a person without abstracting, if we insist upon perceiving all his attributes simultaneously and as necessary to each other, then we no longer can classify” (*Toward* 94).

²⁰⁴ Further, as she watches the General, the “devil” she so often imagined disappears, revealing instead “an overgrown fat boy, ashamed of himself for kicking the cat and pulling the wings off butterflies” (217). After her imprisonment, she encounters the creepy Captain Victor Alicinio Peña. Although the captain controls the conditions of her imprisonment, she suddenly realizes her own control. Patria’s newfound “creativity, spontaneity, [and] expressiveness” (*Toward* 104) also indicate her self-actualization.

belong to communities defined by their opposition to others. Although it would be understandable for Patria to conform to the resistance community's vilification of Trujillo and his supporters, Alvarez shows how being a community member still entails both an "individual and social" (*Toward* 91) ethical code for acknowledging an oppressor's humanity.

In the Time of the Butterflies depicts the need to remain ethical despite community membership in a political group opposed to others. Alvarez repeatedly illustrates that although it is convenient to establish oneself as an imago against others, it is never ethical to do so. For Alvarez, being an ethical member of a community means maintaining autonomy (*Motivation* 213) from a group's vilifying and avoiding its stereotyping (*Toward* 75).

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe: Cooking (Against) a Storm

Autonomy is also an issue for Flagg. Idgie and Evelyn struggle to maintain their independence amidst group associations (*Motivation* 90). In addition, *Fried Green Tomatoes* explores the importance of choosing appropriate groups: for Idgie, the town of Whistle Stop—especially its café—comprises her important community; for Evelyn, the "Complete Woman" organization, the Woman's Community Center group, her high school reunion, and her "fat farm" buddies comprise her significant communities for self-actualizing lessons. Amidst these communities, Idgie and Evelyn attempt (and

sometimes, fail) to self-actualize as individuals and community members.²⁰⁵ *Fried Green Tomatoes* challenges and empowers females to become resourceful and happy women within chosen marginalized communities.

To a great extent, the community of the Whistle Stop Cafe helps Idgie self-define. This community divides into established powers—the bigoted “whites,” including Grady and the KKK members—and those without such recognized power—Idgie, Ruth, and the poor.²⁰⁶ As the Depression worsens, the town members’ prejudices escalate; and the connections between Whistle Stop’s main culture and its subculture deteriorate.

Idgie remains loyal to the subculture community. For example, while Idgie reduces her prices for poor customers, the KKK members fume that African Americans are served in a “white” establishment. Ruth, the more timid of the pair, inclines toward avoiding their wrath. Idgie, the bolder of the pair, confronts the KKK and Grady, protecting both her customers and her rights as the café owner. As Idgie befriends those down on their luck, she is careful to respect them.²⁰⁷ For example, she views Smokey

²⁰⁵ Trites remarks that a “critical stage” in a storyteller’s growth is her recognition that “subjects exist within communities” (123-124).

²⁰⁶ At times, the novel romanticizes their hard luck. For example, the narrator remarks that “[t]hings were especially bad that year, and at night the woods all around Whistle Stop twinkled from the fires at the hobo camps, and there wasn’t a single man there that Idgie and Ruth had not fed at one time or another” (28).

²⁰⁷ Stump explains, “Aunt Idgie always let them do a little something, so as not to hurt their pride. Sometimes she’d let them come sit in the back room and baby-sit with me, just so they’d think they were working” (329). Influenced by Idgie’s attitude and behavior, even as a boy, Stump realizes that “they were mostly good guys, just fellows down on their luck” (329). Reaching past her town to the outskirts where the even less fortunate live, an anonymous Idgie, whom the town calls “Railroad Bill,” “would sneak on the government supply trains and throw stuff off for the colored people,” jumping off before she was caught (330).

Lonesome—whom many would label an “old hobo”—as a righteous man: “God, you could trust him with your life. Never took a thing that didn’t belong to him” (329).

Idgie’s loyalties pay off. In addition to Ruth’s mentoring (discussed previously), this community of employees and customers serves as Idgie’s support. For example, when Idgie is on trial for Frank Bennett’s murder, the minister lies for her. Further, when Idgie needs Frank Bennett’s body disposed, Big George barbecues it. Idgie reciprocates their support time and time again, comforting Big George, Smokey, Stump, and Ipsey. Despite her rebelliousness, Idgie needs this marginalized community for her “sense of belongingness” (*Management* 16). Like self-actualizers who disregard flattery, applause, popularity, status, prestige, [and] money” (*Farther* 308), Idgie needs these community members for other reasons—their love and respect. Idgie’s subculture community helps her feel “more integrated” (*Toward* 104)—even as a marginalized woman.

Flagg shows the importance of loyalty and maintaining one’s self-esteem (*Motivation* 90) in the non-example of Grady. Unlike Idgie, Grady is riddled with ethical doubts, caught in the middle of two factions—as a friend, trying to persuade Idgie to keep a lower profile, and as a loyal KKK member. Unlike self-actualizers, Grady needs to be loved by everyone (*Motivation* 208) and cannot abide Idgie’s refusal to compromise her loyalties in order to avoid trouble.

However, for Idgie, people are either for her or against her. Accordingly, if she extends her loyalty, she expects it to be returned. In this way, she maintains her self-esteem and extends her respect to others (*Motivation* 90). Her carefully selected community of Ruth, Smokey, Sipsie, Stump, Onzell, and Big George fulfill her self-

actualization needs of “a sense of belongingness” (*Management* 16) and allow her to enjoy deep and “profound interpersonal relations . . . with rather few individuals” (*Motivation* 218).

Ninny narrates these events to Evelyn, proudly recalling that independent and successful women can share in the reciprocity of being community members as long as women have chosen these communities well. Ninny’s narration highlights that Idgie lives a happy and ethical woman’s life, which exists far beyond Cinderella’s marriage goal and continues well beyond the coming-of-age stage of the *Bildungsroman*. To a great extent, Idgie’s self-actualization depends on her expectations of and relationships with her community members and the payoff of a “sense of belongingness” (*Management* 16).

Evelyn Couch also participates in a community that contributes to her self-actualization and others that do not. Although some disappoint her, they all contribute to her self-actualizing, even as non-examples. First, after Ed’s affair, Evelyn joins the “Complete Woman” organization. Their uncredentialed leader, who believes that female happiness depends upon dedicating their lives to pleasing men, informs them that “all the rich and successful career women out there who appeared to be so happy were, in reality, terribly lonely and miserable and secretly envied them their happy Christian homes” (41). Just as Evelyn realizes that the “Complete Woman” community does not fit her needs, ironically, so does their group leader, who divorces, goes to work, and deserts her group. This experience teaches Evelyn a well-needed skepticism (*Motivation* 208) about group involvement. Unlike her gradually developing friendship with Mrs. Threadgoode, the

Complete Woman group has attempted to supply its members with instant intimacy. After its abrupt dissolution, Evelyn starts to realize that community so easily formed provides no assurance of loyalty and authentic support. Next, the Women's Community Center group influences Evelyn until the leader assigns the members to bring a mirror in order to study their vaginas. Again, Evelyn must determine that such intimacy cannot be so quickly established. Further, at her thirteenth high school reunion, Evelyn hopes to find "someone to talk to about what she was feeling," but discovers that "all the other women there were just as confused as she was"—members of a generation "on a fence [and] not knowing which way to jump" (42). Although Evelyn has made no attempt to keep in contact with her high school classmates, she unrealistically expects to find soul mates in one weekend. For the third time, Evelyn faces the dissatisfaction of quick-fix attempts to secure community support and allegiance. However, when she joins the "fat farm" and sacrifices to lose weight and genuinely attempts to understand her comrades, Evelyn self-actualizes toward an authentically healthier social and physical life because she is willing to do the work necessary for self-examining and establishing meaningful relationships. With this community, she reestablishes her self-respect (*Motivation* 90) and learns to judge others authentically (*Motivation* 208). In addition, she develops a "confidence in the face of the world" (*Motivation* 90).²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ For Maslow, one must understand one's physical nature in order to self-actualize as "there is a synergic feedback between the pursuit of mental health and physical health" (*Farther* 21). Maslow connects the physical and emotional as he discovers that one must become aware of one's "constitutional, temperamental, anatomical, physiological and biochemical needs, capacities and reactions, i.e., one's biological individuality," which is "also simultaneously the path to experiencing one's specieshood, one's commonness with

Fried Green Tomatoes illustrates that self-actualization can occur amidst community support and responsibility even when these communities exist outside the status quo. In such cases, the involvement with the marginalized members does not demand acculturation (*Motivation* 226) as does the *Bildungsroman*. Conversely, through communal associations with other marginalized societal members, women may learn self-actualizing lessons of generosity, loyalty, and perseverance, in short, social responsibility (*Motivation* 217). These associations are based on reciprocity: at times, the community members support the group; and at other times, the group supports its members. During times of class, age, ethnic, and weight discriminations, *Fried Green Tomatoes* illustrates that a woman needs more than herself and more than a successful male partner to self-actualize. When the status quo communities of established power threaten, the novel bears witness to the individual's need for a chosen alternative community (*Motivation* 218) whose power is based on self-respect and mutual esteem (*Motivation* 90).

Betsey Brown: Happy Days Are(n't) Here Again

As a pre-adolescent, Betsey Brown is not so fortunate to be able to choose her communities. *Betsey Brown* vacillates between the innocence and the danger of Betsey's established communities—her neighborhood and the nation. Shange acknowledges that “in the Midwest with those factory towns, everything was very separate and I think in a

all other members of the human species” (*Toward* 185). Maslow espouses no Manichean body-soul dualism.

way that protected us and let us be a little freer” (Early 25).²⁰⁹ Victorian houses dot Betsey’s street, children abound, African American families thrive, and St. Louis civilization compares favorably to New Orleans. When Betsey leaves Mrs. Maureen’s shop, she proclaims that “she reigned on her own streets for the first time in her life. She wasn’t afraid anymore. The city was hers” (140). At that moment, Betsey achieves a “confidence in the face of the world”—typical of self-actualizers (*Motivation* 90).

However, St. Louis is no utopia but a “city rankled with poverty, meanness, and shootings” (14).²¹⁰ As the fear of integrated schools looms, Mr. Tavaner cautions, “You’ll find out soon enough St. Louis is a dangerous place” (127). For him, “[t]he city is going to the dogs these days” because it “might as well be below the Mason-Dixon Line” (143). Betsey learns where to find comfort and where to avoid trouble in suburban St. Louis during a national turmoil.

A neighborhood community of “othermothers” assists Betsey’s discrimination between innocence—her Victorian neighborhood—and danger—the national Civil Rights Movement crisis. Vida, Mrs. Maureen, Regina, and Carrie generously and compassionately extend their wisdom and experience to Betsey, affecting her self-actualization lessons. These “othermothers,” according to Hillary S. Crew, “supplement the mother and adolescent daughter relationship” when something is lacking. For Betsey, her “othermothers” become “supplementary voices” who mediate between mother and

²⁰⁹ In *Betsey Brown*, Shange praises the “Negro-owned businesses” (91). Shange’s fond memories recall Maya Angelou’s town of Stamps, which becomes a symbol of order amidst poverty and prejudice in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.

²¹⁰ Louise Meriwether’s *Daddy Was a Number Runner* portrays a similar pairing of safe family with dangerous neighborhood.

daughter, offering alternatives for the daughter struggling against the “confining strictures of her mother” without disrupting family allegiances and values (93).²¹¹ In *Betsey Brown*, these “othermothers” offer Betsey new insights and advice, in addition to instilling in her a sense of community and extending her sense of family.

Grandmother Vida is one such “othermother.” Vida constantly tries to wield a strong influence on the Brown household in general and Betsey in particular. Sometimes, this influence is prejudiced; other times, it is grandmotherly. Again, Betsey hears a mixed message of danger and innocence. Displaying her colorism, Vida disapproves of Jane’s lustiness because Greer is dark-complected. Displaying her grandmotherliness, Vida receives hugs and kisses from the children. No matter which persona she displays, Vida is the poster child for Dunbar’s “spress yo’s’e’f”: she criticizes Jane for the family’s chaos; threatens to tattle on Betsey; refutes Jane’s judgment of Regina; admonishes Roscoe; badgers the children; dismisses Jane from her own kitchen; reproves Jane for yelling at night; and proclaims Jane to be “too frail” (148).²¹² For good or for bad, Vida verbally exhausts herself—trying to be grandmother, substitute mother, and household manager to the Brown family.²¹³

²¹¹ For Rosalie Riegle Troester, these “othermothers” “guide and form the young girl, thus relieving some of the pressure on the mother-daughter relationship, “often, with lives and values “divergent from the biological mother” and “provide a safety valve and sounding board” for the adolescent female (163).

²¹² Vida is dumbfounded that Jane “had run off crazy mad. Just up and gone.” (175).

²¹³ Vida tries to wield her influence over the household, but her marginalized role restricts her power. Lindsey reminds us that “the dominion of the kitchen” is not a powerful arena (89). Vida’s dilemma replicates what Joseph contends are many grandmothers’ frustrations: being seen as “strong, competent, self-reliant, and dominant” but also, at the “bottom of the occupational and economic ladders” (98).

Betsey learns several important self-actualizing lessons from Vida. First, Betsey learns that certain women—by the nature of their appearances and actions—are not of the same class as are her grandmother and mother. Although they are not considered appropriate models for a middle-class African American female adolescent, Betsey should reconsider Vida’s biased perspective (*Toward* 75) for the sake of her self-actualization. Second, Betsey learns the importance of expressing herself (*Motivation* 208).²¹⁴ For the most part, the Brown household is like the barbershop where everyone can freely express opinions. Vida contributes to that climate and helps Betsey learn to develop her voice and establish her self-esteem (*Motivation* 208).

Mrs. Maureen is another member of Betsey’s “othermother” community. Repeatedly, Mrs. Maureen assures Betsey that her mother misses her and fears for her. Mrs. Maureen listens to Betsey’s complaints that her mother censors her music and hopes that Jane will begin to see Betsey as a “growing girl” and start to “pay attention” to her (138). Mrs. Maureen’s philosophy that every woman should be satisfied in every aspect of her life tremendously appeals to Betsey although she does not grasp the full implications. Further, as Virgil guides Dante away from pitying those who have erred, Mrs. Maureen mitigates Betsey’s sympathy for Regina by informing Betsey that Roscoe is in Chicago for too many weeks to indicate he is returning to Regina. In this way, Mrs. Maureen forces Betsey to see “reality more clearly” (*Motivation* 208). Mrs. Maureen equips Betsey with a mature physical (beauty) transformation, suitable for her triumphant

²¹⁴ Even though Vida often infuriates her, Betsey “understands that her grandmother’s ability to express herself is what she, Betsey, has all along been wanting to do” (Toombs 51).

return home as “Queen of the Negro Veiled Prophet” (140)—instilling in her a sense of “confidence” (*Motivation* 90) and “aliveness” (*Motivation* 208). In addition, this member of Betsey’s community of “othermothers” facilitates Betsey’s self-perception of being unique (*Toward* 157) and of her self-esteem (*Motivation* 90).

Yet all is not well at Mrs. Maureen’s beauty shop as Betsey slowly grasps. Without her professional smock and glamorous makeup, Mrs. Maureen looks pitiful and a bit scary to Betsey in the early hours. So too does her brothel. Discomforted by what she sees, Betsey wants to run away until she realizes that she is already running away from home. As she becomes even more discontented and restless (*Motivation* 91) by what she hears and sees at Mrs. Maureen’s brothel/beauty shop, Betsey finally stops to reconsider that the beauty shop—unlike her home—will not provide her with a “sense of belongingness” (*Management* 16). Also, Betsey learns from Mrs. Maureen that while appearances may contribute to an aura of self-confidence, they cannot mask a life of degradation and provide true self-respect (*Motivation* 90). In this way, Betsey begins to “judge people correctly” (*Motivation* 208).

Mrs. Maureen’s self-actualizing lessons continue. This member of Betsey’s “othermothers” community teaches her that sex is not like “playing a game” (*Motivation* 208): “Looks to me like you saw a bit too much ‘fore you came prancing through my front door, missie. Don’t you be holdin me responsible for your behavior” (133). Mrs. Maureen condemns Regina as “a fool gal [who] got herself knocked-up and left behind”

(134).²¹⁵ Betsey learns that if you play, you may pay society's price for sex outside of marriage. Again, we know this to be an important self-actualizing lesson—being able to see “reality more clearly” (*Motivation* 208). For Betsey, this means distinguishing between what is dangerous—the threat of pregnancy—and what is innocent—a kiss with Eugene.

Regina is another “othermother” who contributes to Betsey's understanding of sexuality, love, and romance. At home, Betsey revels in Regina's sexual dalliances. As Regina accommodates Betsey's voyeurism—allowing her to watch her passionate kissing—Regina and Betsey form a female camaraderie unlike the “cult of true womanhood.”²¹⁶ However, at Mrs. Maureen's shop, reality restructures their relationship. From what Regina reports, Betsey accepts that Regina is unloved, alone, and desperate. In addition, Betsey learns that sex without love—but especially, without marriage—is a dangerous game for a woman to play. As Betsey realizes that participating in premarital sex is not merely “playing a game” (*Motivation* 208), Betsey also realizes that she must be responsible for the consequences of sex. Most importantly though, Betsey learns that Regina is not a bad person: “She'd never see Regina again, but they'd never be separate, either. Women who can see over the other side are never far

²¹⁵ Bell hooks wonders, “Why do Black women reserve a particular voice of fury and disappointment for each other? Who is it we must destroy when we attack each other with that tone of predetermined and correct annihilation (*Salvation* 110)?” Perhaps, these attacks are perpetuations of the negative images of African American women, which Alice Walker catalogues: “the *mule* of the world,” “Matriarchs,” “Superwomen,” “Mean and Evil Bitches,” “Castraters,” and “Sapphire's Mama” (“In Search” 237).

²¹⁶ According to the “cult of true womanhood,” female activities were restricted to childrearing, husband nurturing, and home management (Collins 43).

from each other” (139). Betsey refuses to “rubricize” (*Toward* 75) Regina as an “unwed mother.” Betsey, unlike Mrs. Maureen, can see Regina as a human being (*Motivation* 208)—flawed but deserving love.

Carrie rounds out Betsey’s community network of “othermothers.” When Carrie appears, Betsey stops praying for her mother’s return, the house runs beautifully despite Vida’s complaining, the children master their chores, and confidences are gained. Carrie seems to be what has been missing from the Brown household—a 24/7 mother. For the most part, Carrie gives Betsey lessons on being a good African American woman who can secure herself a good African American man à la the “Cinderella” tale. However, Carrie juxtaposes those lessons with her more important self-actualization influence, encouraging Betsey to express herself—as Dunbar invites—during the altercation with her “white” teacher. Thereafter, Carrie’s image becomes flawed as Betsey witnesses her daily brandy drinking with the ubiquitous Mr. Jeff. Even the young Betsey realizes that Carrie has overstepped an employee’s boundaries. Betsey accurately assesses (*Motivation* 208) that being a housekeeper, playmate, and drinking partner is an unsatisfying lifestyle. Although she admires Carrie, Betsey prefers sitting in her mother’s chair, a symbol of Betsey’s preference for her mother’s values. In addition, Betsey prefers a strong sense of social responsibility (*Motivation* 217) by taking care of the Brown family.

Betsey Brown assesses many influences of the African American community on its daughters.²¹⁷ Shange does not idolize this community but fairly recognizes its support

²¹⁷ Many critics of African American culture attest to the importance of the community in raising a child, ascribing to an “it takes a village” mythos. Pin-chia Feng stresses the

and its animosity. Her honest portraits of Betsey's "othermothers" community reveals authentic lessons involving romance, sexuality, self-pride, defiance, self-expression, and social responsibility. All of these are variations of the lessons Betsey has learned from her mother. The influences of these "othermothers," in conjunction with Jane's influences, contribute to Betsey's self-actualizing as a female middle-class African American adolescent during her thirteenth year.²¹⁸ Independently, each of these women's influences is insufficient. Collectively, as a community of female mentors, their advice and behavior afford Betsey a different worldview—detached (*Motivation* 212) from her mother's—through which Betsey can develop her own values (*Motivation* 208).

The broader community of the nation also influences Betsey's self-actualization in two ways. *Betsey Brown* fairly analyzes "white" prejudice against African Americans, carefully asking how different these groups really are. The novel also explores African Americans' colorism toward each other. Together these influences afford Betsey conflicting information and perspectives, fueling her discontentment (*Motivation* 91) and ultimately requiring her own synthesis.

First, *Betsey Brown* considers African American "uplift" against "white" prejudice. Throughout the second half of the novel, integration disrupts the Brown home

importance of such a community of mothers (77). Gunilla Theander Kester believes that "all mothers are supposed to be the guardians of the left-overs" (142). Sometimes, as in the case of Betsey's mother who resents Regina's and Carrie's influences, it is not always easy to accept this support. In *Feminist Theory*, hooks laments that when people without children try to help in childrearing, mothers and fathers often resist the help (145).

²¹⁸ Jill McLean Taylor, et. al. comment on the importance of the relationships between older and younger women in the self-actualizing process (6).

as it disrupts the nation during the Civil Rights Movement. Amidst the music of Bo Didley, Ben E. King, Jackie Wilson, and Smokey Robinson, the Brown parents disagree on what members of the family can do about “the Negro problem” (47). Insisting upon “Negro,” not “colored” (95), Greer proclaims that the “work of the Negro is never done” (105). However, Jane wonders if “[N]iggah is not the same as Negro” (90). Betsey shouts, “White folks wish our feet didn’t even touch their holy ground” (98). For Betsy, “whites” had “never seen colored who didn’t work for them or playing in some part of town nobody wanted to live in” (100). Betsey bolsters herself: “It was absolutely impossible for the colored to have somethin so much akin to the ways of white folks” (71). More determined and idealistic than Jane, Greer supports their children attending integrated schools, convincing Betsey that “[s]he was gonna be in the trenches for the race” (101) and that “she’d win the dance trophies, put the white folks in their place” (117). Jane disagrees: “my life is worth more to me than peeing after white folks!” (159). Moreover, Jane fears for her children’s safety.²¹⁹ Jane and Greer compromise on attending integrated schools but fall out over the children going to a protest demonstration. This parental wrangling mirrors the climate of the national community: there are no easy decisions. Further, the tension in the Brown house reduces the nation’s prejudices to the personal level as the children participate in school integration. *Betsey Brown* realistically wonders how African Americans can step forward without stepping

²¹⁹ In Gwendolyn Brooks’ *Maud Martha*, we see another mother desperate to protect her child against prejudice in the scene where Maud Martha determinedly insists that Santa Claus recognize and address her daughter, scolding, “Mister . . . my little girl is talking to you” (173).

on their own feet. The Brown house members, like Betsey, wonder where they belong (*Management* 16) and how they can develop as individuals and social beings (*Toward* 91).

Second, the novel criticizes colorism as part of the national community's tensions. Juxtaposed to national prejudice, African American colorism pervades the novel. Vida disapproves of Greer because he looks like a "monkey-man" (30) and plays "nasty colored music" (114).²²⁰ Vida talks of Frank, her dead husband, and reminisces about his light skin and gentle ways (28-29). Valencia Williams notes that Vida's nostalgia reflects "a black caste system where skin shade and hair texture indicated 'breeding'" (81), which grandmother wishes to continue. Jane laments, "Why does my child have to live round all these niggahs and talk so low?" (96). In addition to Vida's colorism, others speculate about degrees of being an African American. For example, Betsey wonders if Mrs. Leon is "passing" or is one of those "well-meaning white people" (99). In addition, Carrie admonishes, "Calling yourself a nigger means you don't believe in your own self" (184), demanding that Betsey maintain her self-respect (*Motivation* 90). Also, Regina informs Betsey, "It's hard to explain, but there's all different kinds of colored folk. You're one kind and I'm another, that's all" (136). No wonder that Betsey must keep secrets from her mother who thinks that she always picks "the most niggerish people" (206). *Betsey Brown's* attack on colorism rejects "rubricizing" people (*Toward* 75) and establishes an ethical basis for Betsey's "uniqueness" (75), which is partly based on her ability to

²²⁰ The Black Arts Movement highly esteemed the creativity and "virtuosity" of African American musicians, especially the jazz soloists (Mullen 214).

reconsider who she is as a member of the national community and her conviction to “change the world”—establishing herself as a self-actualizer who self-examines and becomes socially responsible (*Motivation* 217).²²¹

To self-actualize, Betsey struggles to adopt pride in being a member of the African American community while confronting the national community’s prejudices. Toward this end, *Betsey Brown* examines colorism within the African American community, as well as prejudice against African Americans outside it in the larger national community. Betsey blames prejudice on ignorance when she realizes that other children do not hate her so much as they do not know her.²²² Jane assures Betsey that not all “whites” are evil and that every group has evil people—regardless of their ancestors or complexion.²²³ Trumping “the race card” for Jane is a more humanistic philosophy: “They are not ‘those people,’ they are just some other people” (107). Greer concurs with Du Bois that it is necessary to listen to everyone, including “whites” (111). Regina helps Betsey recognize that being an African American community member does not define her attributes and determine her potential, confiding that her skin color is not what makes her special and in this way, modeling to Betsey how to avoid superficially

²²¹Frazier notes that the “repressed hostilities of the middle-class Negroes to whites” are directed to other groups but also themselves (186).

²²²In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois articulates his Platonic belief that we err out of ignorance: “And herein lies the tragedy of the age: not that men are poor,--all men know something of poverty; not that men are wicked,--who is good? Not that men are ignorant,--what is Truth? Nay, but that men know so little of men” (139-140).

²²³Maslow repeatedly calls attention to the destructiveness of seeing the world in terms of a “system of rubrics, motives, expectations, and abstracts” (*Toward* 41).

classifying people (*Toward* 75).²²⁴ Countering others' prejudices and stereotyping, Greer's, Jane's and Regina's espousals of humanism (*Motivation* 216) contribute to Betsey's self-actualization.

These philosophies coincide with Maslow's observation that self-actualizers exhibit an ability to judge people accurately—not stereotypically (*Motivation* 208).²²⁵ As the novel does not solidify Betsey's identity in terms of what exactly it means to be an African American community member, Shange affords Betsey a far greater range of self-actualizing possibilities, which contribute to Betsey's sense of "wholeness" (*Toward* 91) as a community member of a nation and the African American community.

Betsey's communities—her St. Louis neighborhood, her "othermothers," and the nation—teach her self-actualization lessons about respect, prejudice, pride, and humanism. The novel progresses away from prejudice and stereotyping (*Toward* 75) toward humanism (*Motivation* 17), ultimately wondering, as Betsey does, what, if anything, authentically distinguishes an African American community member from an American community membership. By the novel's conclusion, Shange portrays prejudice and stereotyping from all sides, instructing Betsey that such biases impede self-actualization.

²²⁴ Being special is often a characteristic of adolescent teenage protagonists. For example, Lena McPherson, the protagonist of Tina McElroy Ansa's *Baby of the Family*, is special because she was born with a caul at birth and has magical powers. So too is Isabella Rios's character Vally born with a caul in *Victuum*. Betsey Brown's specialness is far vaguer. Readers do not hear why Mrs. Maureen and Regina think Betsey is special; they know only that Betsey believes their assessment.

²²⁵ Maslow recalls that self-actualizers are able to ignore "other people's evil" "even when this is directed toward oneself." Self-actualizers transcend the opinions of others and create their own (*Farther* 273).

Kinflicks: Auld Acquaintances Should Be Forgot

Prejudices also abound in *Kinflicks*. Ginny belongs to several communities, which all define themselves more by what and who they stand against rather than what and who they stand for. As oppositional forces, these communities impede her self-actualization until she begins to reflect upon their immorality. In high school, with her commune members, and in suburbia, Ginny consistently chooses poor candidates for community membership. However, upon her reflection during her time back home, these poor choices—as non-examples—serve her self-actualizing. In high school and college, communities bear little influence on Ginny’s self-actualization although after college, Ginny’s communities contribute to her self-actualizing.

When Eddie’s two Vermont friends invite Ginny and Eddie to rent a prefabricated log cabin on their farm, Ginny becomes consumed into a daily communal lifestyle. Intending to “leave behind the American capitalist-imperialist economy altogether” (280), this community of women attempts to live off the land, make their own clothes, and “wean” themselves from “that corporate enemy of The People, the Westwood Chemical Corporation” (280). The town folk of Starks Bogg label these four women the “Soybean People”; however, these four women call their community the “Free Farm.” The female community members become increasingly hostile toward the Starks Bogg men. Despite their claim to want to bond with the community of townspeople, Ginny and the other commune women attempt to run off the hunters and later, the snowmobilers—who have all been enjoying the land for many years before these women showed up. As the tension with the male town members escalates, the commune women

misprision themselves as “victims of the exploitative patriarchal society.” As Ginny participates in this “rubricizing” (*Toward* 75), she fails to self-actualize at this point. Their “Bohemian or authority-rebel” attitude and actions are typical of those who, according to Maslow, fail to self-actualize because they make “great issues of trivial things” and “fight against some unimportant regulation as if it were a world issue” (*Motivation* 209). At this point, Ginny fails to self-actualize because, once again, she thoughtlessly adopts one set of values and disregards another—ignoring her own self-esteem (*Motivation* 90). Just as Ginny has succumbed to Miss Head’s brainwashing and then Eddie Holzer’s politics, Ginny now succumbs to the female commune members’ worldview—adopting all things feminist and rejecting all things masculinist. This is not the path toward self-actualizing. It is important to realize that the failure lies with Ginny who perceives that being a community member means abdicating her freedom (*Motivation* 90), her self-esteem (90), her sense of autonomy (213), and her resistance to acculturation (226).²²⁶

For the second time, the commune’s solidarity fractures for Ginny, this time with Eddie’s jealousy and suspicions—when she strikes Ginny and screams, “God *damn* you, Ginny! . . . Don’t you *ever* turn your back when I’m talking to you, you fucking bitch!” (308). Ginny accepts this abuse, thus, abdicating her self-respect (*Motivation* 90). Rather than cool down and separate or discuss their differences in a healthy dialogue, Eddie proposes to expand their group into the “Third World Women’s Commune” at the Free

²²⁶ Maslow’s self-actualizers “contradict . . . the age-old theory of intrinsic hostility between the sexes” (*Motivation* 238).

Farm. Not sold on the plan, Ginny wonders how they could “get along with unknown blacks and Puerto Ricans when we couldn’t even get along with each other” (310). During the Free Farm Women’s Weekend, Ginny bounces from Eddie’s workshop on “Women and Politics” to Laverne’s session on “Women and Their Bodies” to Mona’s seminar on “Women and Rage” and so on. Avoiding genuine philosophical and political commitments and, therefore, demonstrating no “genuine desire to help the human race” (*Motivation* 214), Ginny vaguely flirts with each workshop’s discussion. More importantly, Ginny conducts no workshop of her own; for Ginny only reacts against someone else’s position. In terms of her self-actualizing, Ginny demonstrates no creativity (*Motivation* 223), prevents her own “sense of belongingness” (*Management* 16), and exhibits no sense of autonomy (*Motivation* 213). In contrast, Laverne, Mona, and Eddie are able to form their personal positions. Thus, the community does not stifle women’s voices; however, the community does provide an escape for someone who wishes to avoid her own self-actualizing. In this way, Alther’s novel strongly warns against the escapist lure of joining communities, especially those established by oppositional agendas.

Because Eddie and Ginny avoid discussing their differences and difficulties and instead impulsively and emotionally orchestrate a weekend of seminars and celebrations for female strangers, nothing is settled among the women. Soon thereafter, Ginny muses in a rare moment of solitude that she is “sick to death of sharing with the sisters” (320). So it is not surprising that after the festival workshops and after the subsequent male invasion into their cabin, the women disagree about how to handle their problems. Eddie,

acting independently, attempts to murder the men, which results in her own decapitation. After her death and Laverne's vibrator fire, the commune dissolves. At this point, Ginny begins to accurately recognize (*Motivation* 208) that Eddie was never a nice person because she treated her friends and neighbors poorly. With that recognition, Ginny is more concerned with the human race (*Motivation* 217) than pleasing Eddie. Ginny also realizes that this commune's brand of feminism for its own sake disappoints because it reduces humans to gender and therefore, "rubricizes" them (*Toward* 75). As a result, Ginny finally understands that no group—like the Starks Bogg men—is categorically despicable (*Toward* 75).

The Free Farm community dissolves for several reasons. First, the community fails because it privileges a theoretical obligation to strangers without actual ethical practices. Just as Miss Head and Eddie purport an idealism they do not follow themselves, this female community claims its political rights but ignores authentic humane action (*Motivation* 217). Second, the community fails because it contends that embracing female strangers is more important than compassionately treating female friends (*Motivation* 217). Third, the community fails because it Otherizes—mainly males but also the townspeople in general—failing to see them without stereotyping, (*Toward* 75).

Ginny's self-actualizing lessons with the Free Farm community demonstrate to her that she cannot improve if she allows herself to be treated poorly and if she treats others poorly. Through this community experience, as with her educational and work

experiences, Ginny recognizes that self-actualization requires both self-respect (*Motivation* 90) and social responsibility (*Motivation* 217).

However, Ginny's self-actualization process falls prey to another unhealthy worldview—the “Cinderella” agenda—when she moves into Ira's home and accepts his marriage proposal, living amidst the townspeople. Finding herself an outsider in his Vermont community, Ginny frantically tries to establish a “sense of belongingness” (*Management* 16). Again, Ginny continues her pattern of either blindly rejecting or adopting someone else's perspective. Although she finds the women to be boring and predictable, Ginny indiscriminately desires everyone's acceptance (*Motivation* 208). She has exhibited this same pleasing tendency with Miss Head, Eddie, and the Free Farm community. As Mrs. Ira Bliss, Ginny attends Tupperware parties and fashion shows where the conversation topics seem pre-approved, reducing her life to mindless social conformity (*Motivation* 226). Once again, Ginny fails to be a successful community member because she abdicates self-respect (*Motivation* 208) in favor of social conformity and approval (*Motivation* 226).²²⁷

However, *Kinflicks* does not mandate seclusion from others in order to grow. Rather, *Kinflicks* mandates dialectic connections with the “Other.”²²⁸ While Ginny does not self-actualize within these communities, her experiences as a community member

²²⁷ Gwen White believes this to be Ginny's downfall—trying to “find her niche in society, in a family, or in the human scheme” without self-examining and without separating from the “Other.”

²²⁸ This lesson recalls Buber's conviction that in order to understand ourselves, we should strive to understand others (*I and Thou*). Maslow also observes that self-actualizers strive toward a “perception of the unique individual” (*Toward* 75).

contribute to her later self-actualizing proscriptions of pleasing and conformity. For example, her mother's stories of pleasing the family provide Ginny with parallels to her own pleasing amidst these communities, which also, enervate her self-respect and autonomy (*Motivation* 90). In addition, amidst the religious debates of her mother's hospital roommates, Ginny hears contrasts to the politically correct conversations of the Starks Bogg women. These comparisons teach Ginny that it is because she incessantly tries to win the approval of both female communities (*Motivation* 208) that she fails to see the individuality and humanity of the members as individuals.²²⁹ Ginny fails to self-actualize amidst the Free Farm and Starks Bogg women because she fails to approach them as human beings (*Motivation* 217). Although Ginny cannot see them through their horizons, she should at least try to know them.

After her failed marriage with Ira, Ginny visits Clem's church and is surprisingly enthralled by the snake handling community. Ginny recalls from PSY 101 the Incipient Conversion Syndrome. At this crucial point in her self-actualization preparation, Ginny begins to process her susceptibility to quick fixes presented by one community after the next.²³⁰ While witnessing others' conformity and Clem's desperation to please her, Ginny reflects that he has lost a sense of himself just as she has been losing her

²²⁹ Maslow observes this absence of pleasing and conformity in self-actualizers: "they seemed to be less afraid of what other people would say or demand or laugh at. They had less need of other people and therefore, depending on them less, could be less afraid of them and less hostile against them" (*Toward* 140).

²³⁰ How ironic that Ginny exits the novel wearing a "Sisterhood is Powerful" T-shirt.

connection to her essence (*Motivation* 208). Readers see that Ginny has processed the parallel stories with her mother and advanced away from being a community pleaser.

While some novels feature communities as supports, such as *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *Betsey Brown*, *Kinflicks* proscribes communities that can debilitate because they offer self-actualization escapes. With each opportunity for community, Ginny ultimately reacts against someone else's worldview and gradually formulates her own. Recalling her participation in these communities, Ginny participates in an Hegelian thesis/antithesis/synthesis process. In this way, her failed community memberships furnish her with the necessary counterpoints for self-actualizing. Serving as non-examples, these community involvements have taught Ginny about self-respect (*Motivation* 208), autonomy (*Motivation* 212-213), "rubricizing" (*Toward* 75), and the need to belong (*Management* 16). Further, this dialectic encourages Ginny to strip away her attraction to quick fixes for social corruptions, reflecting Alther's philosophy of returning to one's human essence as one attempts to self-actualize.

Summary

Impressively, these marginalized female characters do not succumb to a blanket advocacy of "sisterhood" in their approach to the influences of community on a woman's life. Flagg is the most enamored with communities, but her communities are only of the marginalized. Not surprisingly, these communities have no formal agendas, titles, rituals, or memberships. They are based solely on mutual respect and ethical interactions. Shange, Alvarez, and Alther take a more thorough look at female communities—faulting

some and praising others. In particular, they warn against expecting quick fixes, immediate confidences, and easy ethics. They illustrate the pitfalls of a woman expecting to know herself better simply because she has joined a community. They also illustrate the destructiveness of communities that position themselves against others. What all of these marginalized authors have in common is the belief that selectively well-chosen community participation (*Motivation* 218) can afford crucial support and guidance for a woman's self-actualizing.

With these five influences—family, education, work, friends, and community—a woman lives an impressive life. But something is missing. While “all you need is love” falls short in assessing a woman's lifelong self-actualizing needs and goals, to decry romance is not to disparage love. We should not toss out the baby with the bath water. We should not discard the enriching experiences of being loved and loving someone else. We end our journey with a self-actualizing female's struggle to reject romance and embrace love.

CHAPTER VI

LOVE—NOT A PRINCE—TO THE RESCUE:

LOVE AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION

But she was fond of his blood, while he was alive. She was fond not of him but of the abstract notion that, to her, meant “him.” I am not sure that this is the best idea.

(Donald Barthelme, *Snow White* 186)

There is good news and bad news regarding love and self-actualization.

The bad news is that the romance and the “Cinderella” American marriage master narrative still restrict women’s lives. Over one hundred and fifty years old, the Western concept of romantic love (Gornick 293) continues to flourish.²³¹

Linda K. Christian-Smith has neatly dissected the romance’s “code of sexuality”:

1. Romance is the only proper context for sexuality.
2. Sexuality is defined as heterosexuality.
3. Genital sexuality is mostly reserved for adults.
4. Girls respond to boys’ sexual overtures but do not initiate any of their own.
5. Sexual definitions reside within a network of power based in romance and the family.
6. Resistance to genital practices is encouraged.

(“Young” 210)

These codes demand discipline but make it impossible to understand when to assent to and when to reject partners. As Mary Pipher laments, “Paradigms collide within each of

²³¹ Even farther back, Gornick reminds us of Aristophanes’ fable about “our fated ‘other half’—the one true love that would rescue us from loneliness” (295).

us as we make decisions about our sexuality” (205). Existing in a culture “deeply split” about sexual mores and practices, America’s daughters become even more confused as the media illustrates sophisticates who are “free and spontaneous” while simultaneously warning that sex kills. Thus, America’s daughters are “trapped by double binds and impossible expectations” (Pipher 206). In addition, the romance novel—the best-selling genre in America—erodes females’ confidence in stepping back and evaluating the appropriateness of the American marriage master narrative for their lives. After reviewing recent statistics about female romance purchases, Stevi Jackson laments that she has “the uneasy feeling that romance is being rehabilitated” (262). If as children, American daughters read books aiming them to the wedding chapel (O’Keefe 142) and as adults read magazines that scold them “not to let the romance die out of [their] marriage” (Greer 196), in addition to consuming millions of romance novels, then it is no wonder that the message that remains clearest for American women is the old female cry, “I must have a man” (Horney 211).

Unfortunately, when she snares that man, reality comes crashing down. No more can she pretend that sex, romance, and marriage are “a series of marvelous adventures” (Thompson, “Search” 184). She realizes that a “Cinderella” view of marriage is “primarily an economic arrangement, an insurance pact” (Goldman 52) and that, for Cinderella, the “institution of marriage makes a parasite of woman, an absolute

dependent” (55).²³² Although that judgment may seem singularly negative, it is hard to argue against it.²³³ Marriage in its current state—based on the “Cinderella” master narrative—too often requires “a strict but fairly unconscious regime of self-denial for women” (Comer 62). It does not take a woman long to realize that, as Cinderella, the “silly romantic girl” has become a dutiful, exhausted wife. Ironically, she often turns to romance as an escape (Greer 196) from the very situation it perpetuates.²³⁴

The good news is that there is a better way. Pipher guides: girls “must discover moral and meaningful ways to express their sexuality in a culture that bombards them with plastic, pathetic models of sexuality” (258). Suzanne Juhasz offers hope: “True love as I have always imagined it is mutual, nurturing, unconditional—and forever” (69).²³⁵ Even Greer—who describes love as merely a “swoon, possession or mania”—acknowledges it as a “cognitive act, indeed the only way to grasp the innermost core of personality” (129). Greer credits Maslow with giving us the perfect model: “If we could present an attainable ideal of love it would resemble the relationship described by Maslow as existing between self-realizing personalities” (151). Love must replace

²³² As such, she realizes that love has become “the enemy of unequal social structure” (Rita Mae Brown 145).²³² For Ti-Grace Atkinson, if the “Oppressor” still holds a contract, such as a marriage contract, he holds the power over his subordinate (139).

²³³ For example, Shere Hite’s contends that patriarchal societies establish securing the marriage contract as a challenge to women—the only means by which they can prove their worth (273). Shulamith Firestone asserts that as long as love is predicated on an imbalance of power, it will remain “complicated, corrupted, or obstructed (121).

²³⁴ However, women often recognize this irony and become ashamed, guilty, and confused, for to “confess disappointment is to admit failure.” Instead, they need to investigate the myth of romance itself (Greer 228).

²³⁵ Firestone realistically reminds us that true love partners should accept their “mutual vulnerability” (121).

romance. The “ability to love” (*Toward* 157)—not romance—contributes to self-actualization.

The self-actualization novel guides readers toward healthy love relationships while guiding them away from the false promises and inequality of the “Cinderella” marriage master narrative. Alther demonstrates that both heterosexual marriage and lesbianism will fail unless partners respect themselves and expect respect from each other. Wong illustrates the pitfalls of patriarchal rule within a marriage. Alvarez bears witness to adultery, machismo, and patriarchy while exploring female agency within and apart from those codes. Flagg takes on wife abuse and warns against denying true love for a partner because of a social stigma. Shange shows readers that vibrant women enjoy sex with their husbands, insist upon respect as a marital partner, and cater to their personal needs outside the role of wife. Bringing to the table different, marginalized perspectives, these authors afford their readers alternatives to the romance and proclaim that self-actualizers enhance their own integrity and support the dignity of others in love relationships.

Kinflicks: Don't Go Changing to Try and Please Me

In *Kinflicks*, the third chapter sets the tone for the novel’s anti-romance and anti-“Cinderella” message with Ginny’s recollection: “Mother assured me that what was happening was indeed horrible—but quite normal. That bleeding like a stuck pig every month was the price exacted for being allowed to scrub some man’s toilet bowl every week” (33). *Kinflicks* follows the romances and sexual exploits of Ginny: first, in high

school with two males; second, in college with one female; and third, in Vermont with a husband and a tatterdemalion vagabond. Although each relationship fails as a romance, in retrospect, each provides Ginny with important self-actualization lessons regarding self-esteem (*Motivation* 90) and resistance to the acculturation (*Motivation* 226) of “Cinderella.” In addition, the novel occasionally focuses on the failed “Cinderella” agenda that Mrs. Babcock has followed after she left college (which has been discussed earlier), sacrificing her desires and goals for her families’. Despite its anti-“Cinderella” agenda the novel does not dismiss the importance of love.²³⁶ Finally, *Kinflicks* clearly illustrates that pleasers fail because pleasing replaces respecting ourselves (*Motivation* 90).²³⁷ According to *Kinflicks*, pleasers—like all Cinderellas—fail to self-actualize.

Gwen White calls attention to the fact that Ginny’s mother is identified only in her role of wife and that neither the narrator nor any other character reveals her first name.²³⁸ Accordingly, Mrs. Babcock’s represents a “Cinderella” non-example for self-actualizing: “Mrs. Babcock had returned to Hullsport, had married a Harvard graduate, had begun a family. All according to the plan, *improvements* on the plan” (416). Unfortunately, the improvements are for her husband’s life, not hers. In particular, Mrs.

²³⁶ *Kinflicks* could be making the case for self-love and self-gratification, for as Ginny claims, “It is possible to generate an orgasm at any spot on the human body” (44).

²³⁷ Braendlin notes that Ginny’s degeneration “thwarts daily functioning and causes misery and indecision” (19).

²³⁸ In *The Color Purple*, Celie renames her husband, omitting his first and last names, calling him “Mr. ___.” For Celie and the readers, he is only an impersonalized title. Her renaming of her husband indicates both formality (using his title) and indifference (neglecting his first name). He is any man to her, not any particular one. He is without a lineage and a family. Alther makes a similar point with Mrs. Babcock. Without a first name, she is known only by her role as wife.

Babcock has never experienced “any really fervent sex for—God, for years and years, if ever at all. Sex for her had always been complicated and confused and permeated with every emotion and motive imaginable” (160).²³⁹ In addition, Mrs. Babcock has become a martyr to her family during “The Tired Years” (which has been discussed earlier). Thus, Mrs. Babcock has found precious little satisfaction whether in bed or out. Her life lacks the heartiness and lustiness that self-actualizers enjoy (*Motivation* 208).

Kinflicks also stands against the “Cinderella” romance agenda with Ginny’s high school heterosexual relationships as Joe Bob’s and then, Clem’s girlfriends. When Joe Bob, “the Sparkplug of the Hullsport Pirates” (28), gives Ginny his class ring, he opens the floodgates for more advanced—but disappointing—sexual advances. Like her mother, Ginny experiences no heartiness, lustiness, or “aliveness” with this relationship (*Motivation* 208). These are important qualities because self-actualizing is not just about doing the good but also about enjoying life—appreciating life and developing deep and “profound interpersonal relations” (*Motivation* 218), which in the Greek model, ensures our eudaemonia. We witness that Ginny’s life lacks luster when she reflects that she was “enacting the ancient sexual drama in which a daughter makes the break with her father, her true love since infancy, by taking a man her own age” (49). Because this is not a self-

²³⁹ Alther explains, “[s]ex is one aspect of being homosexual or heterosexual, but it’s not the main thing” (Edwards). Rather than bank on sex as a panacea to a woman’s dreary life as wife, mother, and housekeeper, Alther banks on female self-actualization: “The female psyche is the great unexplored continent, in my opinion” (Edwards). Jan Hokenson notes that Alther’s fiction begins with heterosexuality “only to turn wildly experimental in gay and lesbian follies” until the protagonists realizes that they “must strike out of their own, working their way through gender stereotypes and discarding conventional wisdom.”

generated plan—one that reflects her “uniqueness” (*Toward* 157)—it will not contribute to her self-actualizing. Further, Ginny’s high school fear of pregnancy ruins any chances she may have for enjoying her sexuality and experiencing a self-actualizer’s “lustiness” (*Motivation* 208).

Concocting a plan to elude her father and Joe Bob’s coach, Ginny dates the most unlikely replacement—Clem Cloyd—the “crippled hood about town” (64). Knowing that he does not subscribe to the “Cinderella” mandate, Ginny—who has refused sex with Joe Bob for months—quickly and thoughtlessly loses her virginity to Clem and regrets it: “It hadn’t been unpleasant, except for the first pain, but I couldn’t exactly view it as the culmination of my womanhood. Frankly, the rupturing of my maidenhead had been just about as meaningful as the breaking of a paper Saniband on a motel toilet” (127). Like her mother, Ginny finds little satisfaction in and out of bed—no lustiness, heartiness, “aliveness” (*Motivation* 208).

Although both of these encounters fail as romances, they provide Ginny (upon reflection and after participating in a dialectic with her mother) self-actualizing lessons about self-respect and sexuality. From Joe Bob, Ginny experiences that depending on someone else’s popularity (as the high school football star) will not facilitate her self-actualizing because she prizes someone else’s reputation over her self-esteem (*Motivation* 90). Self-actualization does not depend on the public assessment of those with whom we associate. Rather, self-actualization depends on the personal assessment of our character (*Motivation* 208) and our achievements (*Motivation* 90). Another self-actualization lesson presents itself to Ginny regarding these high school relationships with males:

others should not dictate her behavior (*Motivation* 212-213)—in her case, her sexual boundaries. When Ginny merely reacts to her father’s and the coach’s taboos instead of considering her own desires for her sexuality, she abdicates her “independence” and “freedom” (*Motivation* 90) to them. Rather, Ginny’s self-actualizing within love relationships depends on her realizing that no one else can guarantee the satisfaction of any relationship. She is responsible for her own happiness, and her “ability to love” (*Toward* 157) depends on her participating in “profound interpersonal relations . . . with rather few individuals” (*Motivation* 218).²⁴⁰ Finally, from Clem, Ginny learns that rebellion will not enhance her relationships with males. Just as conforming to others’ whims will not guarantee success, neither will rebellion for its own sake guarantee her happiness in a relationship. In order to self-actualize, Ginny should realize that “trying to impress” others (*Motivation* 208) is just as enervating to self-actualizing as trying to incite other’s angers because both positions transfer the power and responsibility for self-actualization onto another, leaving her with no sense of autonomy (*Motivation* 212-213) and no sense of heartiness for the art of loving another (*Motivation* 208). At this point, these self-actualization failures have impeded her “ability to love” (*Toward* 157).

As Ginny arrives at Worthley College, she has become disenchanted with both romance and heterosexuality. However, she has not yet learned to respect herself and demand respect from others (*Motivation* 90). Ginny turns to biology for guidance: “But it was quite possible that what was beneficial to the species might *not* be beneficial to the

²⁴⁰ Understandably, everyone has a “desire for reputation or prestige”; however, Maslow’s self-actualizers define this as “respect of esteem from other people”—not popularity (*Motivation* 90).

individual organism. And in such a case, the interests of the individual were ruthlessly forfeited to those of the species” (204). This biology lesson pits the individual against the social, which is anathema to self-actualizing (*Toward* 91). Ginny is bothered by this conflict and becomes discontented (*Motivation* 91), which we have seen is necessary for self-actualization. In retrospect (while back at home), Ginny takes a hard look at her biology lesson and recalls her dissatisfaction for her high school heterosexual relationships. She realizes that if she does not develop her own self-respect (*Motivation* 208) and sense of “mastery” (*Motivation* 90) by pleasing herself, she might become like her mother—“sacrificed to others’ whims for so long” (209).

Continuing her recollections, Ginny follows her pattern of rejecting and adopting others’ view. All her celibate bravado about the unimportance of sex fails Ginny when she meets Eddie and declares herself a lesbian to a shocked Miss Head. Because she has merely rejected and adopted another’s worldview, Ginny remains confused about self-respect and love (*Motivation* 90). In addition, as she merely reacts to other’s worldviews, she loses her sense of independence (*Motivation* 90). Adopting Eddie’s sexual preference for lesbianism without reflecting upon her own desires, Ginny pathetically concentrates on “trying to impress” (*Motivation* 208) Eddie. Sensing Ginny’s ambivalence, Eddie becomes suspicious, jealous, and violent, smacking Ginny and then trying to make amends. However, Ginny remains disturbed (*Motivation* 91), which is her self-actualizing opportunity to stop her pleasing and to reassess her relationship with Eddie. This is an important self-actualizing moment for Ginny because instead of continuing to merely adopt or once again, reject another person’s views, she

detaches from the group, finds some privacy, and considers how to develop some sense of autonomy (*Motivation* 212-213). During her retreat—caused by her discontentment—Ginny realizes that she has not demanded Eddie’s respect (*Motivation* 90) and that she does not love Eddie. Further, Ginny takes an authentic look not only at how badly Eddie has treated her and others, but also at why she tolerates Eddie’s actions. This level of self-examination contributes to Ginny’s newfound self-respect (*Motivation* 90). Reevaluating her self-respect—not just as a lesbian but as a relationship partner—Ginny extricates herself from Eddie’s ethnocentrism and sexism by deciding to act ethically toward others (*Motivation* 216). Privileging her self-respect (*Motivation* 90), Ginny takes her first self-actualizing step and detaches (*Toward* 91) from Eddie’s unethical behavior (as discussed earlier).

The last romantic preference available to Ginny is marriage. After Eddie dies and the cabin burns down, Ginny leaves with Ira Bliss because she “felt the need for some order in [her] life” (338). After all, she is new to self-actualizing, which Maslow admits is a great deal of work: “Cultivating one’s capacities can be hard work . . .” (*Management* 288). Ginny’s attempts at finding order in marriage and then motherhood fail to provide a lustiness for her life (*Motivation* 208). Worn out as a mother, bored as a housewife, and disappointed in bed, Ginny fails to self-actualize as a wife and mother because she assimilates (*Motivation* 226) into the “Cinderella” dream instead of doing the hard work of self-actualizing. Later, instead of taking responsibility for her own happiness, she banks on finding some kind of transcendental sexual experience with Hawk, a Vietnam War deserter who arrives on her doorstep emotionally distraught and without resources.

Once again, Ginny tries to impress someone else (*Motivation* 208), which will not lead to self-actualizing because she loses her self-respect (*Motivation* 90) in the process. Readers should not be surprised that Hawk's final sexual ritual—complete with Southern Comfort, crackers, Chicken of the Sea tuna, and bologna—fails to afford their mutual sexual transcendence and Ginny's self-actualization. Discovering them together, amidst the bourbon and bologna, Ira erupts: "I thought I could change you into a decent God-fearing woman" (476). Once again, as with her high school and college relationship partners, Ginny fails because she continues to fixate on being a pleaser instead of developing her "ability to love" (*Toward* 157).²⁴¹

Rejected as a pleasing wife and lover, Ginny is exiled from her lover, husband, daughter, and home. Readers might expect her to be ashamed, but she is not. Rather, she feels a modicum of empowerment because she is released from pleasing her family and this stranger: "Ginny knew that even before she was born, she had been fated to neglect her child and her housework, to be driven from her home at gunpoint" (243). Unlike her mother, who has become neurotic about the guilt of mothering, Ginny, like self-actualizers, refuses to be "crippled by guilt and/or shame and/or anxiety" (*Motivation* 206). Filled with a sense of destiny, Ginny reconsiders the romantic lure of marriage and adultery, leaving both Ira and Hawk behind. This is another important self-actualizing moment for her because she sees her love relationship more clearly (*Motivation* 208).

²⁴¹Braendlin concurs: "In trying to be all things to all people, Ginny finds herself in a 'muddle of loyalties'" (19). Braendlin compares this "fragmentation" to the "various roles captured in her mother's home movies, her 'kinflicks'; if she is not 'Ira's wife, Wendy's mother, her mother's daughter, she fears she will have no identity" (*Alther* 19).

Later, after her mother dies, Ginny phones Ira who demands a “*real* wife” (495). Not particularly surprised, Ginny decides to divorce him, determined to learn from her mother’s unhappiness as a self-sacrificing “real” wife.²⁴²

Ginny’s disastrous romances, in addition to her subsequent conversations with her mother provide her with potential self-actualizing lessons. First, when back home during her mother’s illness, Ginny reflects upon her high school “Cinderella” expectations, viewing Doreen (Clem’s wife) as an unhappy woman who conforms to the socially mandated “Cinderella” roles of marriage and domesticity and lives a daily mindless existence as a homemaker. Second, back home, Ginny recalls that in college, she had become increasingly aware that Eddie’s version of lesbianism forced isolation from her parents and neighboring community members and that sex with a woman did not guarantee freedom. Finally, in retrospect, Ginny realizes that her marriage, romance, matrimony, and motherhood do not guarantee order or bliss as Ira’s last name had promised. These options fail Ginny because she fails herself: she either rejects or adopts these options only to please another—without thought to her own self-actualizing (*Motivation* 208). Although she has moments of revelation—that her life fails to afford her happiness and that she fails to become socially responsible—Ginny has continued her pattern of becoming seduced by the next offer, the next quick fix, especially in terms of romance.

²⁴²This is not a difficult decision for Ginny. In *It’s All Dixie Cups to Me*, Brown discusses the American “Dixie-cup mentality” of such disposable relationships (143).

However, in the present, amidst their mother-daughter hospital dialectical discussions, Ginny reconsiders that the options of romance, sex, marriage, and motherhood cannot replace her own self-actualizing. What Ginny needs to develop in herself is the “ability to love” (*Toward* 157), the strength to maintain her self-respect (*Motivation* 90), and the need to cultivate a sense of heartiness, lustiness, and “aliveness” (*Motivation* 208). In the present day, Ginny rehashes the love failures of her mother and her own life. We know that Ginny acknowledges that she cannot self-actualize as Cinderella because of her decision to divorce Ira. When Ginny decides to return to parent her daughter Wendy—a task that she already knows demands hard work—we witness another important self-actualizing lesson that she has learned: she must work hard on her “ability to love” instead of following some culturally prescribed romance agenda.²⁴³

Fifth Chinese Daughter: God Bless the Child That's Got (Her) Own

It is not that Chinese Americans do not tell their “Cinderella” version; it is just that the Wongs give up on Jade Snow as a Cinderella candidate. *Fifth Chinese Daughter* portrays a family that does not demand a daughter’s marriage not because they value her more highly but because they have other financial expectations for her. However, Jade Snow’s parents do demand sexual propriety. When her mother commands, “Of course we will not permit you to run the risk of corrupting your purity before marriage” (129), readers know that a “hot button” has been pushed.²⁴⁴ But her mother need not have

²⁴³ Noting a trend in Alther’s fiction, Braendlin concurs that Ginny longs to be a good wife and mother, as well as an independent woman (19-20).

²⁴⁴ For most Chinese Americans, sexuality is a private matter, sometimes so guarded

worried, for sexual freedom is the last thing on Jade Snow's mind. Although schooled by the whippings at home and left to guess right from wrong, the reader knows that Jade Snow has learned sexuality boundaries and marriage expectations because she suffers no confusion when her parents expect sexual propriety. She is typical of Asian Americans who without "open and frank discussion" are still able to discern their parents' "strong and direct messages" of inappropriate and appropriate sexual behavior in their daughters (Connie S. Chan 93). The narration indicates that without such conversations, Jade Snow figures out her parents' sexuality parameters for her when she witnesses her older sisters' courtships, weddings, and marriages, which conform to her parents' expectations.

Jade Snow's parents are products of traditional Chinese marriage customs in which "a professional master of necromancy and astrology" established the wedding date (138) and the parents arranged the selection of bride and groom.²⁴⁵ Traditionally, the

that "a person may choose never to reveal a private self to anyone" although sexuality is most often "taken as a very normal part of life and a very integral part of existence" (Connie S. Chan 89). In clinical studies, fewer Asian American teenagers report less sexuality activity than other ethnic groups. Perhaps, this is because their parents are stricter (92) or perhaps, the teenagers are less inclined to report sexual activity. According to Chan, Asian American girls typically express little interest in pursuing sexuality activity without a "serious emotional attachment and commitment in a long-term relationship" (92). In addition, a 1985 study shows that Asian American teenage girls were less satisfied with their physical appearance than their non-Asian counterparts (93).

²⁴⁵ When Westerners wonder how love can come when the bridal couples are strangers, His-Lin's friend responds, "Occidental marriage is like a kettle of boiled water to be taken from the fire and cooled" (20).

bride was “merely a sort of decorative, noneating, nondrinking, nonspeaking accessory to the wedding celebration” (144).²⁴⁶

The chapter titled “Marriage Old and New Style” vacillates between Chinese traditions and Chinese American practices.²⁴⁷ Accordingly, when Fourth Older sister marries, Jade Snow recognizes that her sister is no longer a Wong daughter but a member of her husband’s family.²⁴⁸ Her parents hope that Jade Snow will also marry—adhering to the Chinese version of the “Cinderella” marriage master narrative—and become a part of her husband’s family because “if she died unwed, she would have established no family and would belong to no home” (228). Her mother insists, “Do you realize that since you have finished college, it is obligatory for us to find you a suitable person who has comparable education and tastes?” (232). However, her parents’ one attempt to find her a suitor falters because as Mama declares, Jade Snow was “born too tall!” (232).²⁴⁹ Thereafter, her parents quickly relent as Jade Snow is so obviously not interested in romantic matters.

Significantly, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* ends when Jade Snow becomes an adult without a marriage proposal. Chu notes that “Asian American texts tend to avoid the

²⁴⁶ His-Lin disagrees with this interpretation, assuring that the wife enjoys her status as “an equal participant with her husband in marriage and home life” (21).

²⁴⁷ For example, explaining the tradition of firecrackers in the bed chamber, terrifying the young bride, Mama speculates that it is designed “to prepare the bride for her new role of submission” as “her personality will be completely submerged” (145). While the firecrackers no longer blast away in the bed chamber, the mindset of submission lingers.

²⁴⁸ Karen Shepard’s *An Empire of Women* offers a different take on family loyalty versus loyalty to a lover.

²⁴⁹ Lai believes that the “doll-like” features of Asian American women project their desirability, in addition to being “unassuming,” “quiet,” and “non-threatening” (186).

utopian ‘well-married hero’ plot, in which the male or female subject’s moral and social progress is figured in terms of romantic choices that culminate in marriage.”²⁵⁰ Viewed from the “Cinderella” agenda, *Fifth Chinese Daughter* has no “happily-ever-after” ending as Wong’s autobiography eschews that marriage master narrative trap. However, viewed as a self-actualization novel, as Wong seizes the pen instead of the veil in her attempt to write her own on-going self-actualization journey, the ending is a happy one. Jade Snow, although not engaged, is engaged in life (*Motivation* 208)—as a potter and a writer. Her “ability to love” (*Management* 16) fuels her work and her relationship with her parents. Writing her autobiography—as an attempt to find the “Middle Way” between her Chinese American and the non-Chinese American cultures—constitutes her act of love for herself and her readers as she follows a “cause outside [her] own skin” (*Farther* 43). Although Jade Snow is not “in love,” she is full of love—for her art, her cultures, and her parents.

In the Time of the Butterflies: Bésame Mucho

Alvarez, seizes the sword instead of the veil. *In the Time of the Butterflies* portrays romance and marriage as deterrents to self-actualizing, preferring political activism—which like Jade Snow’s writing and potting—leads to a love for a cause that is “bigger” than herself (*Toward* iv). With Papá’s adultery, Jaimito’s machismo, and El

²⁵⁰ Chu also grants that “[i]n America marriage is a key site for representing the immigrant’s Americanization,” implying “the completion of the protagonist’s moral education” (18), typical of the *Bildungsroman* and “Cinderella.” Chin directs readers: “If any Chinese fairy tale taught male dominance and the inferiority of women as a moral universal, it would be, as in the Bible, the marriage story” (7).

Jefe's womanizing, Alvarez warns against marriage in a patriarchal culture. Each sister narrates stories proscribing the traditional stereotyping of female neurosis, inferiority, and failure while prescribing female self-actualizing outside the master narrative of Cinderella's rescue. However, Alvarez does not condemn marriage. As each sister negotiates her self-actualizing amidst the cultural climate of patriarchy and machismo in her relationships with men, *In the Time of the Butterflies* compliments its romantic prohibitions with marital prescriptions.

Even before Dedé's marriage to Jaimito, she compromises with her intended. Not surprisingly, once married, the power imbalance escalates while her husband boasts that "[i]n his house, he was the one to wear the pants" (176-177), demonstrating what Maslow terms "D-love."²⁵¹ At this point, readers see Dedé avoid confrontation and lose some of her self-respect (*Motivation* 90), which takes its toll on her self-actualizing. For a long time, as her sisters rebel against their husbands, Dedé continues to submit to her husband, losing more of her self-respect (*Motivation* 90) as she abides his mandates and criticisms while trying to alleviate her growing "restlessness" (*Motivation* 91). She defends herself to her sisters: "It's only fair. He's the one farming the land, he's responsible for this place" (176). When Patria insists that Dedé make up her own mind and simply inform Jaimito of her commitment to the resistance, Dedé counters, "I don't have that kind of marriage." Patria's rebuke stings: "What kind of marriage do you have?" (176).²⁵²

²⁵¹ "B-love (love for the Being of another person, unneeding love, unselfish love) and D-love (deficiency-love, love need, selfish love)" (*Toward* 42).

²⁵² Although the dialogue sounds hostile, Dedé's narration notes that "Patria looked at her with that sweetness on her face that could always penetrate Dedé's smiles" (176).

Unable to withstand the criticism, Dedé defends her cowardice: “Her life had gotten bound up with a domineering man, and so she shrank from the challenge her sisters were giving her” (177), which increases her feelings of alienation (*Motivation 91*).

With her freedom and independence lost (*Motivation 90*), Dedé remains plagued with private doubts about why she does not side with her sisters. The tension and discontentment (*Motivation 91*) that overwhelms her is an important stage in her self-actualization process because it alerts her that she is not pursuing what she is “fitted for” (*Motivation 91*). As this tension increases, Dedé incrementally detaches (*Toward 91*) herself from Jaimito’s rule and participates in the political discussions with her sisters, in addition to taking care of their children. This is another important self-actualizing moment for several reasons: she privileges her self-esteem (*Motivation 90*) over her husband’s orders, becomes involved in helping the human race (*Motivation 217*) in the resistance against the dictator, and allows herself the independence and freedom (*Motivation 90*) to participate in political activism. Dedé has been missing these important self-actualizing qualities while she has adhered to her culture’s strict code of patriarchy.

Unfortunately, her confidence wavers and she returns to her husband despite his continuing adultery. Soon thereafter, the SIM provides the ultimate catalyst for Dedé’s self-actualizing outside of her marriage. This significant emotional experience finally allows Dedé to begin coordinating her private life with her public life (*Toward 91*)—

serving as the catalyst for her self-actualization in which she becomes the active subject of her own life and fully committed to something “bigger” than herself (*Toward* iv).²⁵³

Minerva’s ultimate decision to commit to something “bigger” than herself—and not a romantic view of marriage—begins at school when she witnesses Lina Lovatón, a sophisticated girl, swept away from the nuns by Trujillo to become his mistress. When she becomes pregnant, Trujillo’s wife, Doña María, tries to knife Lina—not her husband, Dictator Trujillo. Later, Minerva learns that Lina—unlike Cinderella—lives alone, waiting for Trujillo’s call, which will not come. Minerva sees that Lina has exchanged her self-respect (*Motivation* 9) for the hypocrisy (*Motivation* 208) of a romance.²⁵⁴ Another episode contributing to Minerva’s commitment to participating in something “bigger” than herself and helping other human beings (*Motivation* 217) occurs in 1949, when she is confined to her childhood house, keeping her parents company for three years, complaining, “here I was, a grown woman sitting on my father’s lap” (85). Minerva suffers an irreconcilable distortion of her impression of her father when she discovers his four illegitimate daughters (86). With this clearer view of reality and more accurate assessment of another person (*Motivation* 91), Minerva faces the hypocrisy

²⁵³ Of course, she is not truly yet independent. In her chapter titled “Independent Woman,” de Beauvoir contends that a woman needs economic freedom before she can attempt her independence. Even then, she is only partially independent. Unlike a man—whose independence does not run counter to his male destiny—a woman must construct herself to be a subject. An emancipated woman deals with the continual conflict of being seen by society as an object, for example, as a wife. Howard contends that for Caribbean women, especially mothers, their sexual unions influence their positions in a patriarchy (79).

²⁵⁴ Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* and Estela Portillo Trambley’s *Trini* illustrate this type of patriarchal abandonment in several scenarios.

(*Motivation* 208) of marriage confined by patriarchy that abides male adultery. Another jolt to her delusional idolizing of men occurs when she hears stories of drugged young women whom El Jefe rapes and when she witnesses him fondling the senator's wife's thigh under the table. After Minerva refuses his dance invitation, leaves the ball without permission, and witnesses her father's incarceration, all her romantic illusions have died. Cinderella has left the ball never to return again. Minerva realizes that male adultery and machismo enervate a woman's "aliveness" (*Motivation* 228) and sense of autonomy (*Motivation* 212-213).

What is interesting about Minerva's participation in the resistance is that it is inspired not so much by politics as by her personal and accurate judgment of Trujillo as a vulgar womanizer and adulterer. Assessing him (and her father) more accurately (*Motivation* 208) contributes to her more authentic view of love—and not the "Cinderella" master narrative. Minerva, like all self-actualizers, must confront hypocrisy (*Motivation* 208) in order to develop a true "ability to love" (*Toward* 175) and not simply participate in the game (*Motivation* 208) of romance. She does this when she negotiates her commitment to the resistance with her husband. Hearing about Lina's seduction and witnessing firsthand Trujillo's womanizing become the catalysts for her newfound vision that patriarchy and machismo are flawed love formulae. Rejecting both, she views her marriage as a partnership in which she and her husband join as resistance members. However, their partnership dissolves when Minerva learns of her husband Manolo's adultery. Hearing Minerva's wracking sobs, María Teresa inquires, "Another woman, right?" (140). At this point in Minerva's story, Alvarez warns readers against a certain

kind of man—a womanizer and cheater, which the novel distinguishes from a loving husband. But the story does not end there. Alvarez depicts Minerva’s ultimately successful marriage after her husband becomes faithful, she forgives him, and they both re-commit to the same cause as partners—with an equal share of the power—depending on each other for information and support in the resistance movement. In their renewed mutual commitment to each other, they create a sense of marital “belongingness” (*Management* 16).

María Teresa also navigates the “Cinderella” romance and marriage highway. Attending her father’s funeral, along with his illegitimate daughters, María Teresa expresses her disgust for men: “I hate men. I really hate them” (118).²⁵⁵ Of course, lumping all men into one category is classifying them (*Toward* 75), which Maslow warns against because that approach fails to see people as individuals. She repeats the same lament when she discovers Minerva sobbing over her husband’s adultery. However, her man-hating days are numbered when she falls “*deeply* in love!” with Palomina after they kiss (145). They marry and readers pick up her story two years later when she has resumed her diary writing in her cell, informing readers of her rape, humiliation, and torture at the hands of the male guards. Now, however, she refuses to classify all men as people she hates. With this final glimpse of Maria Teresa, readers see that she has changed from hating all men to realizing that gender issues are more complicated and more personal than a gender-line division of oppressor and victim. Further, she realizes

²⁵⁵In *Annie John*, Jamaica Kincaid explores what happens when daughters experience the wrath of their father’s lover. Obviously, things could be worse for the Mirabal family.

what Fanon believes—that to be a victim is to participate to some extent in one’s own victimization. Despite how badly she has been treated, Maria Teresa develops her “ability to love” (*Toward* 175) by refusing to “rubricize” others (*Toward* 75) and by concentrating on establishing a few “profound interpersonal relations” (*Motivation* 218), including one with her husband.

With Patria, Alvarez introduces the most religious sister. Born with a “pearl of great price” in her heart, Patria sees herself as loving God and “everything that lives,” being “[o]ne of those spirit babies” with her mind, heart, and soul “in the clouds” (2). Soon her perfect worldview begins to crack with her private realization of her sexual desires, her beauty, and her lack of a religious calling.²⁵⁶ Confused, but not agitated, Patria meets Pedrito Gonzalez, the son of an old farming family, and becomes attracted to him out of a self-acknowledged sense of pity. They marry, she miscarries, and she loses her faith. Her mother contributes to her disillusionment, declaring, “they’re all scoundrels—Dominicans, Yanquis, every last man. . . . Yes, your father too” (57). Repeating María Teresa’s speculation over the cause for Minerva’s heartache, Patria inquires about the source of her mother’s distress, “Another woman?” (38). After Patria witnesses firsthand a boy’s murder and determines to join the resistance, she privately fights with God and publically fights with her husband—the two dominating “male figures” in her life.

²⁵⁶For Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, “Desire is not bolstered by needs, but rather the contrary; needs are derived from desire. . . . Desire then becomes this abject fear of lacking something . . .” (413).

However, of all the husbands, Don Pedrito proves the best example of a responsible father and faithful husband.²⁵⁷ For de Beauvoir, full development in a sexual union requires reciprocity of desire, respect, and generosity of soul and body (448-449). Such is the case for this Mirabal sister. Although Patria and Pedrito González experience some disagreement over their involvement in the revolution versus their commitment to their family, they resolve these differences while respecting themselves and each other (*Motivation* 90). In fact, in addition to the non-examples of her father and Manolo, the struggles with Pedrito contribute greatly to Patria's self-actualization regarding her marriage. Like most self-actualizers, Patria resists being "rubricized" (*Farther* 273) as a dutiful wife and establishes her self-esteem (*Motivation* 90). Refusing to be subordinate as a wife and mother, accepting her responsibility as a citizen, and valuing her marriage and family, Patria successfully mediates her private and public identities—what Maslow calls her "individual and social" beings (*Toward* 91). Thus, she self-actualizes as an independent (*Motivation* 90) but loyal woman and as wife.

Alvarez shows readers that the best marriages depend less on romance and more on the "ability to love" (*Toward* 157), which requires self-respect (*Motivation* 90), affords freedom and independence (90), and eschews "rubricizing" (*Toward* 75). As such, *In the Time of the Butterflies* rejects the "Cinderella" master narrative's agenda that perpetuates a culture's gender stereotypes (*Motivation* 226) and enervates a woman's self-actualizing. Moreover, the novel espouses a happy marriage—not a "happily-ever-

²⁵⁷ Feminists note that living in an alien culture pressures the mother to maintain the culture of the family in the home. However, these practices often perpetuate sexism, limiting women's options for exit (Levy 54).

after” marriage—based on self-care and contributing to a better world (*Motivation* 217)—as that something “bigger” (*Toward* 91) than ourselves. These dual foci of self-knowledge and ethical behavior are the constant goals of self-actualizers.

Betsey Brown: What the World Needs Now Is Love, (Good) Love

As middle-class African Americans, the Browns’ lives are more complicated than a “happily-ever-after” romance promises. Several characters influence Betsey’s understanding of love, sex, and marriage. Her mother is, perhaps, the most influential.

Jane influences Betsey’s youthful perceptions of marriage. As a passionate woman, Jane conveys to Betsey that wives enjoy sex and love. That is, to be “in love” for self-actualizers requires a heartiness and lustiness (*Motivation* 208). Further, Jane shows Betsey how these two aspects of a woman’s life ebb and flow. Everyone in the Brown house—the children, grandmother, and employees—recognizes that Jane is a passionate woman in love with her husband. When Betsey decides to practice dancing, she models herself after her mother because she sees the “aliveness” (*Motivation* 208) and “confidence” (*Motivation* 90) that her mother’s sexual dancing conveys to her father.²⁵⁸

Jane temporarily abdicates her role as wife because she has lost the standoff over the rally and opts to leave. Jane deserts because, to some extent, she cannot cope with being a Cinderella-type wife whose decisions are overridden by the authoritarian male—losing face, credibility, and agency. Betsey sees that Greer Brown’s authority as husband

²⁵⁸ Self-actualizers “tend to be good and lusty animals, hearty in their appetites and enjoying themselves mightily without regret or shame or apology” (*Motivation* 207).

and father trump Jane Brown's authority as wife and mother. Their fight is a classic example that what is at stake is not the issue being debated but a more crucial issue at its root. That issue for Jane is her status as a respected wife and, more importantly, as a respected woman (*Motivation* 90)—not her status as the princess to a prince. Ironically, Jane leaves because she loses her voice and her independence (90)—to protest the protest rally.²⁵⁹

Jane, feeling inadequate because her voice to protest the rally is silenced, takes a break from being Greer's wife, replicating her daughter's running away. Jane displays a "resistance to enculturation" (*Motivation* 224)—in this case, of the Cinderella/good wife role. Jane's departure models for Betsey that if a woman is not satisfied, she should not allow herself to remain in a position that enervates her self-respect (*Motivation* 90). Betsey sees her mother stand up for herself the only way the situation allows her to—detach (*Motivation* 212) herself from a husband who rejects her authority.²⁶⁰ Mothers, Apter contends, are more distressed—discontented (*Motivation* 91)—by tension and often suffer "a loss of self-esteem" (*Motivation* 90), finding themselves "more prone to psychological symptoms of stress" (110) than fathers. Betsey knows that her mother is discontented despite their middle-class lifestyle.²⁶¹ When Jane returns from running away, she loves "with a passion"—a lustiness (*Motivation* 208)—that "Greer had to

²⁵⁹ Jane is typical of the "independent" African American woman who, Dara Abubakari believes, has not been allowed to make important decisions and who still suffers cultural oppression as a woman (587). However, Jane, like Betsey will not accept such limitation.

²⁶⁰ Maslow reminds that it is hard work to self actualize (*Farther* 50). Feng notes that often female novelists chronicle "the mother's struggle for self definition" (121).

²⁶¹ For LeSeur, "Jane . . . touches her daughters and molds them without seeming to take a proactive part in their lives" (140).

change his style for.” The narration informs us that she “wanted him to know the difference between wife and Jane, Mommy and Jane, social worker and Jane” (154). Jane has self-actualized beyond the “Cinderella” role. Jane’s departure and self-actualizing typify the African American journey, according to Houston Baker: “To revolt, to leave, to withdraw to a separate and autonomous existence are also part of the journey back” for African Americans (125).²⁶² With her departure and return, Jane has staked a great deal on achieving satisfaction as a respected female—not a participant in a “Cinderella” romance.

Jane provides Betsey with a model of how a wife self-actualizes in terms of her love relationship with her husband even if that means running away in order to be a satisfied wife and mother—and more importantly—a satisfied woman. Although Betsey misses her mother and frequently sits enthroned on her mother’s chair, Betsey never castigates her mother to Carrie, her grandmother, or her father. Jane’s refusal to become Cinderella and her insistence on living a more fulfilled life than romance promises affords Betsey a guide for being a happy wife. The trick, according to Jane, seems to be that daughters should expect love and sex but only within the culturally sanctioned bounds of marriage, which demands acculturation—something that the self-actualization novel (unlike the *Bildungsroman* and “Cinderella”) does not support. Jane understands

²⁶² Betty Taylor-Thompson praises, “In all her works, Shange suggests that black women should rely on themselves, and not on black men, for completeness and wholeness” (657). In her plea for autarky, Shange’s *Betsey Brown* departs from the “Cinderella” and *Bildungsroman* agendas.

this concession. However, Betsey, as a thirteen year old, is not as convinced, weighing these sanctions against other examples, as we see when we examine her closing words.

Mrs. Maureen, Regina, Carrie, and Vida also instruct Betsey about the pitfalls of sex without marriage. As discussed earlier, Mrs. Maureen's "satisfaction" proclamations and philosophy confuse Betsey's sense of sexual agency, especially in light of her mother's "birds and the bees" talk late in the novel. Regina also gives love and living advice, assuring Betsey that she is both beautiful and special (*Toward* 157). Betsey watches Regina and Roscoe and then, Carrie and Mr. Jim negotiate their romances. Although Betsey knows she will never see Regina again, Betsey is convinced that "they'd never be separate, either. Women who can see over the other side are never far from each other" (139). Carrie also offers Betsey "lessons on what a good Negro woman was supposed to know if she wanted a good Negro man" (172). For Carrie, "what a good Negro man appreciated most in her ever-loving heart" was "a finely pressed dress shirt. Simple as that" (172).²⁶³ Rounding out these perspectives is Vida's. Reminiscing about her husband and horrified that Regina's and Carrie's influences will sanction sex without marriage, Vida keeps a watchful eye on her granddaughter's virtue. Unquestionably, for Vida, sex equals marriage. However, as her memories indicate, within marriage sex

²⁶³ In *Maud Martha*, Gwendolyn Brooks addresses a similar issue as the narrator is convinced that there should be a "special technique" for "dealing with a Negro man." Unlike Carrie, Maud Martha longs for "more than—than singing across the sock washing, the cornbread baking, the fish frying" (113). Expecting more, unfortunately, does not guarantee her more.

promotes a strong relationship.²⁶⁴ From Vida, Betsey hears a traditional middle-class African American female perspective on how sex, romance, and love should wait for a marriage contract.²⁶⁵ Some of what she hears conflicts with Maslow's self-actualizing traits, for example, "a resistance to enculturation" (*Motivation* 226) and lustiness (208). These women round out Jane's influence on Betsey's assessment of the importance of love and sex as a woman self-actualizes.

Experiencing her parents' give and take, considering Mrs. Maureen's espousal of satisfaction, witnessing Regina's exploits with Roscoe, observing Carrie's relationship with Mr. Jeff, and considering Vida's reprimands, Betsey begins to explore her sexuality, kissing Eugene behind the garage. At thirteen, "Betsey was getting to that stage where a girl's body is way ahead of her brain" (176). Aware that "Eugene was looking for some of the same things Mr. Jeff was looking for," Betsey is confused. Stepping in to clarify matters sexual and romantic, Jane and Carrie give Betsey competing versions of the "birds and the bees" explanation.

Jane instructs Betsey about premarital behavior. With Betsey, Jane discusses "the facts of female life"—a talk that quickly focuses on "how to be a lady" (194) and emphasizes that a marriage contract should accompany a serious sexual advance. Until that contract is signed, Betsey understands that she must keep her "knees locked" (195).

²⁶⁴ Jessie Bernard contends that sex is more romantic for African Americans than for "whites" (138).

²⁶⁵ In this respect, as Giddings explains, "Black men and women need each other too much to be separated" (356). This study disagrees with those who accuse Shange of attacking African American men (Lester, "Shange's Men" 320). Rather, in *Betsey Brown*, Shange portrays African American women's need for intimacy with African American men.

Next, Jane gives Betsey a vague menstruation talk. However, Betsey is not listening but watching the boys outside her mother's window.²⁶⁶ On the surface, Betsey's distraction indicates that Jane's "sex talk" fails her daughter's needs. Carolyn Heilbrun recognizes the reasons why Jane might have given the talk and why the talk appears to be so unsatisfying: a mother's "mission was to prepare the daughter to take her place in the patriarchal succession, that is, to marry, to bear children (preferably sons), and to encourage her husband to succeed in the world." Heilbrun concedes that the struggle is for the daughter to take control of her life "without the intrusion of a mother's patriarchal wishes" and without endangering their relationship (118-119). Jane's sex advice focuses on manners and virginity: "Your manners, you see, will attract the nice young men who don't respect girls who come across too easily" (195). After a brief discussion of menstruation, a frustrated Jane truncates her sex talk: "Just keep those panties up, you hear?" (197).²⁶⁷ Jane fails Betsey's self-actualization when her maternal talk regresses to the "Cinderella" dream of an economically stable married life that focuses on image, acquisition, opportunity, and security. However, Jane's actions model a contradictory set of expectations—be passionate, sexually confident, and satisfied (*Motivation* 208).

To understand Jane's contradictions regarding what she advises about romance, sex, love, power, and marriage and how she acts, it is important to look at the scholarship focusing on middle-class African American women. Jessie Bernard recalls the "belief

²⁶⁶ At that moment, Jane, herself, is preoccupied with sex as she revels in her post-coital satisfaction and sexual pride.

²⁶⁷ In her poem, "II Mommy," Shange outlines the advice that her mother *should* have given her after her second menstrual period because she "thought Christ was calling me to be a saint."

that marriage without love is no better than prostitution, and that sex outside of marriage—but with love—was not wrong” (138). However, when class is factored into the equation, Bernard notes that middle-class mothers often taught their daughters to prohibit male sexual advancements, even to the point that “normal sexuality is impaired” (137). Without the expectation of satisfying sex and with typical “Cinderella” promises—unlike Betsey’s mother—these other women are doomed to unhappy marriages.

While Jane gives Betsey a lecture on how to hook an African American man, how to be a lady, and how to tolerate menstruation, Carrie gives sex advice: “a kiss or two can undo all that mama talking. Go on ahead and enjoy being a girl, but be careful.” She continues, “Just hold off from those no-good niggers with the devil in they eyes” (196).²⁶⁸ Betsey is relieved that, according to Carrie, “it was okay to have feelings like that. Special feelings that tingle and rush through the body” (207). Carrie advocates a lusty, hearty (*Motivation* 208) approach to love

In addition, Mrs. Maureen and Regina weigh in on the premarital sex debate. Everyone’s messages—although not always their examples—prohibit premarital sex. Betsey’s impression from their unified lesson is that she is a “nice girl,” who must determine how that plays out in her encounters with boys. But the novel’s message is more complicated than that. On one hand, if Shange had intended a “party-line” for romance, sex, love, and marriage, she would not have depicted Betsey’s obvious

²⁶⁸Holloway recalls that looking “common,” according to her grandmother, was the “ultimate sin” (*Codes* 16).

disinterest in Jane's and Vida's comically canned speeches and Betsey's obvious interest in Carrie's variation on that "party line." On the other hand, if Shange intended a wholehearted rebellion against that "party line," she would not have illustrated the dangers of promiscuity, premarital sex, and the "Cinderella" fantasy with Mrs. Maureen's whore house, Regina's pregnancy, and Carrie's indiscretions.²⁶⁹ All these influences leave poor Betsey to determine for herself if, when, and why she is keeping on or taking off her panties. What is important for her self-actualizing, according to the novel, is that amidst all this advice, Betsey needs the freedom (*Motivation* 91) and the privacy (*Motivation* 208) to consider these love matters for herself.

The novel is clear on one point: marriage does not guarantee happiness because no assimilation system (*Motivation* 226) can replace the hard work of developing our "ability to live" (*Toward* 157). Amidst financial worries, threats against African Americans, improper influences, and family demands, *Betsey Brown* realistically depicts the pitfalls of "Cinderella": "What she didn't know and wanted very much to understand was why if you're really in love there's never enough. It seemed to her if you were really in love there would be more than you needed" (90). Betsey wonders about the connection between sex and marriage: "So their love got all divided up into little pieces among the whole family. But Betsey knew her mama and papa were really in love cause they'd said so, and though they'd never kissed like Roscoe and Regina they kissed in

²⁶⁹ Ironically, Jane's fear of her daughter being sexually active mirrors the romance, which often illustrates that the heroine's "real and imagined involvement in sexual intercourse creates a series of 'moral panics' in families" (Christian-Smith, "Young" 215).

some kinda way” (89-90). As she witnesses things “getting out of control for Jane and Greer” because the “melody of their first years together was wearing thin” (113), Betsey bemoans, “there’s never enough when you’re really in love, is there Mommy?” (109). A discontented (*Motivation* 91) Betsey stops to reevaluate all these influences to her perception of love: Jane’s running away and premarital sex sanctions, the parental arguments, Mrs. Maureen’s brothel, Regina’s illegitimate pregnancy, Carrie’s cavorting, and Vida’s disapprovals. *Betsey Brown* validates a lusty (*Motivation* 208) approach to marriage as both husband and wife learn to renegotiate power, love, and sex. *Betsey Brown* succeeds in portraying female self-actualization because many conflicting messages—by good people—force Betsey to determine on her own if she will conform, rebel, or compromise sexually, thus, allowing for her independence (*Motivation* 90) and her sense of autonomy (213) as she self-actualizes as a loving female.

Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe: I’ve Looked at (Love) From Both Sides Now

Conflicting messages also occur in Flagg’s exploration of heterosexual and lesbian lovers. Flagg’s novel wonders how women can self-actualize within a love relationship but not within a romance and not necessarily within a heterosexual marriage. Because this is not a typical American exploration, it is a much needed perspective.²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰Nineteenth century female authors recognized that for most nineteenth century adolescent females, marriage was the reality. For this reason, these *Bildungsromane* storytellers often married off the female protagonists yet eschewed romantic views of marriage as the panacea to an unexamined life. For them, duty to the family, “the drudgery of housework,” and a life of boredom portrayed married life (73). For a

Americans need novels like *Fried Green Tomatoes* to offer a realistic perspective on marriage and other alternatives for loving another.²⁷¹

Flagg offers a damning marital portrayal with Ruth and Frank Bennett. From the onset, their marriage is doomed as readers realize that Ruth would much prefer to remain with her adoring Idgie Threadgoode. When Ruth's suppressed feelings for Idgie come "flooding through her," she knows that she loves Idgie "with all her heart" (88). In fact, Ruth feels she must leave Idgie because she loves Idgie so much—"more than anybody else on this earth" (89).²⁷² Guilty about her secret love, Ruth accepts Frank's beatings, insults, and rapes "because she thought she deserved them" (196) until Idgie confesses to her, "I still love you and I always will and I still don't care what anybody thinks—" (179). Gone is any illusion of a prince and a comfortable life. Instead, female friendship (or perhaps, lesbian fantasies) take center stage. The narrator confides—but not Ruth, herself—that "[t]here had not been a day when Ruth had not thought about her" (179). Although rescued, Ruth's life is defiled in public as the prosecutor accuses Idgie of breaking up "the most sacred thing on this earth—a Christian home with a loving father

humorous look at the issue of dirt and dearth, see Lisa Paul's essay, "The Politics of Dire: or, Mucking Bout With 'Piggybook,' 'Harry the Dog,' and 'Cinderella.'"

²⁷¹ One particularly offensive example is *Pretty Woman*, which demeans a not-so-very hard-working prostitute who pines for a not-so-very hard-working but extraordinarily affluent male "john."

²⁷² The narrator dramatizes Ruth's love: "But sometimes, in the middle of a crowd or alone at night, she never knew when it was going to happen, Idgie would suddenly come to mind, and she would want to see her so bad that the pain of longing for her sometimes took her breath away" (194).

and mother and child” (339).²⁷³ However, the novel ultimately approves of the breakup of the Bennett’s marriage through Ninny’s admiration for Ruth: “It took real courage in those days, not like today, honey. Back then, if you were married, you stayed married. . . . Everybody was always treating Ruth like a china doll, but you know, she was a lot stronger than Idgie in many ways” (193). Clearly, *Fried Green Tomatoes* will not abide a conventional (*Motivation* 226) stance that remaining with an abusive husband protects the sanctity of marriage. Even more unconventionally, the novel rejects a “Cinderella” ending and promotes a sense of “belongingness” (*Management* 16) based on self-respect and mutual esteem (*Motivation* 90).

Fannie Flagg portrays a second troubled marriage, that of Evelyn and Ed Couch. Evelyn does not enjoy sex because “[e]very time she would start to relax, the bad-girl image would pop into her head” (39). Evelyn confesses to Ninny that when Ed had an affair with a female colleague, Evelyn joined the Complete Woman group to try and save her marriage. Confused even ten years later, Evelyn confides in Ninny that although she “wasn’t sure she loved Ed all that much . . . she loved him just enough to not want to lose him. Besides, what would she do?” (40)—a typical “Cinderella” assimilation (*Motivation* 226) to the marriage master-narrative.

Readers have witnessed other female characters implicitly answer that question with a variety of alternatives: education, work, family, friendship, community

²⁷³ His diatribe continues with accusations of defiling “the sacred and holy marriage between a man and a woman, a marriage sanctioned by God in the Morning Dove Baptist Church,” and causing “a good Christian woman to break God’s law and her marriage vows” (339).

involvement, and love. However, Evelyn is trapped by the cultural illusion of a “Cinderella” romance—pathetically attempting to revitalize her marriage by cooking gourmet meals, greeting her husband at the door wrapped in only cellophane, and dutifully trying to complete her feminist consciousness-raising group’s homework to inspect her genitals. Naturally, these strategies fail her because she fails to self-reflect (*Motivation* 90) and contribute to society (*Motivation* 90). Instead, she has continued to adhere to the “Cinderella” promises (*Motivation* 226) that still fail to fulfill her expectations. It is no wonder that Evelyn complains that she has become lost and that “[w]omen’s lib” had come too late for her” (66). Eventually, Evelyn finds her path through Ninny’s mentoring (which has been discussed). Ninny advises Evelyn that “her problem is just a natural thing that happens with couples after they’ve been together so long” (256), joking that “young girls are funny. They want dash and sparkle and romance” (144).²⁷⁴ Through Ninny’s eyes, a middle-aged Evelyn is inspired to see herself as more than a wife—as a successful saleswoman and unique friend who demands self-respect (*Motivation* 90) and develop the “ability to love” (*Toward* 157).²⁷⁵ With the

²⁷⁴ Even Ed, who is a bit of a slug, begins not to take his wife for granted as she dramatically calls his attention to the fact that she is not happy, best exhibited in the Towanda scenes when she rams some snotty teenage girl’s car seven times and takes a sledgehammer to the living room wall. Even a lifetime in the insurance business does not prepare Ed Couch for filling out his wife’s claims forms—so bizarre is his wife’s behavior, especially on paper.

²⁷⁵ Actually, Ninny projects a somewhat condescending attitude of husbands and romance, remarking that it is better that her husband died first because “a man can’t live without a woman. That’s why most of them die right after their wives do. They just get lost” (135). Later, she admits, “I realize how lucky I was to have gotten Cleo. I couldn’t have asked for a better husband. Didn’t have a roving eye, didn’t drink, and was he smart” (144).

portrayal of Evelyn Couch, Flagg rejects the “Cinderella” romance and *Bildungsroman* ending in favor of on-going self-actualization.

The happiest and most admirable couple is Ruth and Idgie. From the first moment that the male-appareled Idgie lays her eyes upon Ruth, Idgie is smitten. Thereafter, Idgie becomes a lovesick adolescent, trying her best to impress Ruth with her fishing catch, jokes, lies, and outrageous antics. Ruth is impressed but also so frightened by her feelings for another woman that she marries a man she barely knows, suffers quietly, and blames herself for his abuses. When reunited, Idgie continues to cross gender boundaries in her dress and behavior; and Ruth falls more in love with her.²⁷⁶ Idgie wants Ruth all to herself, wants to have a secret between them, and professes she would kill for her. When Ruth is around, Idgie’s heart pounds (86). With Ruth, Idgie—the “bee charmer”—is “as happy as anybody who is in love in the summertime can be” (87). At this point, Idgie begins to know who she is and why she does what she does—running the café to secure a financial base and help others less fortunate—which both contribute to her developing “ability to love” (*Toward* 75).

²⁷⁶ Sometimes, these cautions against romanticizing and stereotyping appear with gender boundary crossing, as is the case in many nineteenth century female self-actualization novels where the masculine male world offered little appeal in their power or wealth. Kornfield and Jackson report that an appreciation for personalized gender identification surfaces when “[t]raditional gender boundaries are crossed . . . by ‘feminized’ men, if not by masculine’ women” (74). Idgie represents such an example of a masculine woman. In fact, she is mistaken for a man as she stands in her overalls offering honey to strangers. Trites cautions against portraying strong females by relying on stereotypical female characteristics of “nurturing, communicative, and sensitive” (82). This is definitely not the case with Idgie who stands up to the KKK, assists in a murder, threatens an abusive husband, perjures herself to protect a friend, and speaks her mind without concern for decorum.

Although the novel does not reveal a physical intimacy between Idgie and Ruth, it implies a strong attraction that extends beyond friendship.²⁷⁷ Further, the novel depicts that Idgie's and Ruth's relationship is fraught with typical love relationship problems: Idgie lies to Ruth because she wants to be alone (*Motivation* 212-213); Idgie feels "kind of trapped" and needs her freedom (*Motivation* 90); Idgie resents accounting to someone else all the time; and Ruth leaves "because she's hurt" (259). Idgie mends her ways after Eva cautions Idgie that Ruth could have her choice of suitors. Advising Idgie to "think long and hard before . . . flying off" (259), Eva talks sense into Idgie and the couple reconnect—committing not only to their relationship, but also to their individual independence (*Motivation* 90)²⁷⁸

Idgie learns to self-actualize in her relationship with Ruth as an autonomous individual (*Motivation* 212-213) who strives to develop the best in herself, as well as a committed partner who strives to promote the best in her companion (*Motivation* 217). Unlike "Cinderella," which is concerned only with snaring a successful husband, *Fried Green Tomatoes* embodies the dual concerns of self-actualization—to improve oneself and to improve one's relationships.

²⁷⁷ Even others verify this attraction: Momma Threadgoode calls Idgie's feelings a "crush" and Poppa Threadgoode warns Ruth that she may not know how much of a handful Idgie will prove to be. Both parents treat the reuniting of Ruth with Idgie as a romantic one.

²⁷⁸ Self-actualization necessitates such independence and dependence. According to Maslow, in a love relationship, a self-actualizer will feel "less jealous or threatened, less needful, more individual, more disinterested, but also simultaneously more eager to help the other toward self-actualization, more proud of his[her] triumphs, more altruistic, generous and fostering" (*Toward* 43).

Successful female self-actualization novels should not categorically reject heterosexual marriages in favor of homosexual relationships.²⁷⁹ However, female self-actualization novels should caution women that marriage is only one option—therefore, eliminating female freedom of choice (*Motivation* 90) and should warn them against selecting inappropriate partners (*Motivation* 208) and expecting too much from any one relationship (*Motivation* 212-213). *Fried Green Tomatoes* supports Maslow’s concept that self-actualizers’ love gives “self-acceptance” and a “feeling of love-worthiness” (*Toward* 43). Idgie contributes to Ruth’s self-acceptance, which fosters her confidence (*Motivation* 90) to leave Frank Bennett while Ruth contributes to Idgie’s self-worth as a generous and compassionate community member instead of the rebellious tomboy whom Ruth first encounters. Commendably, Flagg’s self-actualization novel eschews the trap of the sole “Cinderella” option and supports an alternative—Maslow’s self-actualization of lovers who contribute to their own and each other’s happiness (*Motivation* 208).

A successful female self-actualization novel should project realistic views (*Motivation* 208) of love—no matter the partners’ genders. *Fried Green Tomatoes* realistically characterizes the loves of men and women. As potential love partners, males are not portrayed as particularly powerful or successful. For example, Grady Kilgore, the sheriff, successfully keeps the KKK in check but unsuccessfully attempts to claim Idgie’s heart. In addition, Big George exudes a heart of gold for his wife but is no match for the town’s KKK members. Further, Frank Bennett subjugates his wife but ends up being the

²⁷⁹ Although Flagg portrays other marriages positively—Momma and Poppa Threadgoode, Ninny and Cleo Threadgoode, and Big George and Onzel—the novel depicts them only in passing.

main dish in the women's new batch of barbecue. Also, Ed Couch is an adulterer and a neglectful spouse. Each of these men is realistically flawed. In addition, *Fried Green Tomatoes* realistically depicts its female characters as members of love relationships: Ruth is too frightened; Idgie is too impulsive; Ninny is a bit condescending; and Evelyn is too lost. *Fried Green Tomatoes* does not glamorize the lives that coupled men and women lead. Rather, it realistically judges them (*Motivation* 208), portraying their good and bad traits along with their successes and failures, which they bring into their love relationships.

The novel also addresses the time in a woman's life—like Idgie's—when she has concluded that either marriage has passed her by or she has chosen the single life—an indication of her freedom (*Motivation* 90). In the nineteenth century, these women were called “spinsters” and were often portrayed as emotionally fulfilled, financially independent, and mentally stable women, proving that a single woman can achieve a rewarding life (Kornfield and Jackson 72). However, after the nineteenth century, many Americans viewed the woman who has never married as someone who “must have missed her chance” (Greer 209). Thus, it is not so easy to find a contemporary American novel or film that portrays a single woman's rewarding life without resorting ultimately to romance. *Fried Green Tomatoes* fervently values the rewards of a single life as Idgie—a woman of character and accomplishment (*Motivation* 90)—continues to self-actualize after the love of her life dies. Idgie is the model single woman—financially independent (90), socially acceptable among the marginalized (*Toward* 91), free-spirited (157), resilient (*Motivation* 214), self-effacing (208), and compassionate (*Toward* 157).

With Idgie's character, Flagg's novel begins, continues, and ends with one of the most positive portrayals of a "spinster" in American literature.

Summary

Each of these novels offers good news for women in love. The good news is that with self-actualization novels that depict reciprocated love relationships, the days may fade away when women depend on men for financial stability instead of achieving a sense of personal accomplishment. As the "Cinderella" marriage master narrative mindset still exists in America, it is crucial that female self-actualization novels continue to depict decisions and strategies to achieve financial stability, maintain personal integrity, and fulfill social responsibility in a woman's love relationships. These novels depict self-actualized women apart from and in addition to a marriage contract—but never defined by it.

CONCLUSION:

YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY:

THE SELF-ACTUALIZATION NOVEL

My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.

(Taylor, *Sources* 27).

I think it's possible to grow, and change in positive ways, and learn, but I don't think it's easy. In fact, it seems to take a lifetime for most people.

(Lisa Alther interview with Gwen White)

Stories reflect but also reshape societies' and their members' horizons.²⁸⁰ Stories can change people by affecting their self-image and can change the world by changing the master narratives. The *Bildungsroman* genre has significantly impacted the perspective that individual development culminates in a once for all coming of age. The "Cinderella" tale is the current American master narrative for female coming of age— affecting many aspects of a female's upbringing, adolescence, and adulthood.²⁸¹ However, these stories disappoint women because they promise what they cannot

²⁸⁰ Mark B. Tappan and Lyn Mikel Brown discuss how narrative can impact morality and ethical development in "Stories Told and Lessons Learned" (183).

²⁸¹ The "Cinderella" marriage master narrative influences what to wear and when to remove it; how to talk and to when to silence oneself; when to participate and when to withdraw; where to socialize and with whom; when to excel and when to fade away; and how to appear intelligent and when to appear ignorant.

fulfill.²⁸² If America continues to tell these tales of male success trumping female success and happiness, of female success depending on attachment to a male, of coming of age as the end to human development, and of the essential need to fit into society to be accepted and happy, America will continue to diminish females. Of course, the master narrative could change.²⁸³

The Need for Public Voices

To effect such a cultural change requires public voices. For example, a pair of enlightened parents may attempt to override these master narratives of *Bildung* and “Cinderella,” using the rhetoric of female possibilities. These parents say, “*If you marry...*” They encourage their daughter to evaluate her own worth on her own terms—not theirs or society’s. They model healthy alternatives to the master narratives. They suggest that their daughter’s happiness does not depend on another’s approval—including theirs. They encourage their daughter to be passionate about her career, her friendships, and her community involvements. They inspire her to be generous, compassionate, loyal, trustworthy, hardworking, patient, creative, and tolerant. They treat her as an individual,

²⁸²These narratives falsely misguide that social acculturation guarantees success; that to be happy is to be rescued by a financially successful male; that coming of age into adulthood concludes identity formation; and that “women’s work” and motherhood essentially satisfy women.

²⁸³Sandra Cisneros’s chapter “The Family of Little Feet” is a good example of such a narrative departure. When Esperanza and her friends wear grownup shoes and find themselves the object of much male attention on the street, trouble follows. A disgusted Esperanza declares, “We are tired of being beautiful” (42). They discard the shoes, and her mother throws them away without a complaint from anyone. The lesson seems to be that if becoming a woman means simply (and only) attracting males, it is not very satisfying and sustainable.

without adoration and without hyper-criticism. They support her but do not rescue her. They guide her but do not define her. This mother and father who parent with their daughter's self-actualization in mind—her own self-awareness and her own sense of social responsibility (*Motivation* 217)—may still fail to override the master narratives.

More powerful cultural forces will probably sabotage their efforts. Movies, television, magazines, and romances often attempt to indoctrinate females into submission to the cultural messages of “Cinderella” and the *Bildungsroman*. How can these parents convince their daughter that an engagement and marriage are not appropriate for everyone when most significant American influences refute that? How can these parents convince her that even if she marries, there is more to her life before, during, and after marriage than being a wife when the media—especially capitalistic advertising—often denies that? How can these parents, existing in mainstream America, inspire their daughter to become what Maslow calls a “self-actualizer”?

The case studies of Abraham Maslow's self-actualizers offer hope for a woman pursuing on-going self-development and embracing a lifelong social ethic. Published marginalized authors who narrate stories about self-actualizers offer an even more public contribution and, therefore, greater hope for inspiring females to recognize and prize their own choices and create their own opportunities as lifelong self-actualizers creating a better world. These marginalized authors often tell non-conforming stories, which do not subscribe to the pitfalls of the *Bildungsroman* and the American “Cinderella” marriage master narrative. Jade Snow Wong, Julia Alvarez, Lisa Alther, Ntozake Shange, and

Fannie Flagg turn to alternatives of family, education, friends, work, community, and love—by which women can enrich their lives and their worlds.

The Need for Personal Choices

Family may or may not promote female self-actualization. These novels investigate issues of parental support, compassion, and tolerance, which empower female self-actualization, as well as issues of patriarchy, adultery, divorce, machismo, and abuse, which imperil female self-actualization. More importantly, these novels teach readers that no matter how much a daughter's family fails or succeeds to support her, she is ultimately responsible for her own self-actualization. Wong, Alvarez, Shange, and Flagg show how biological families can debilitate female self-actualization. Wong is the most damning. How to self-actualize without and within a family's strong influences proves to be a young woman's hurdle in *Fifth Chinese Daughter*. For Wong, a young adult female may remain disappointed in her parents' lack of sympathy and support but through a process of self-actualizing—developing her self-esteem (*Motivation* 90), confidence (*Motivation* 90), and independence (*Motivation* 90), as well as engaging in something “bigger” than herself (*Toward* iv)—relinquish her bitterness toward them even as she attempts connections with them. Alvarez guides readers to release themselves from familial expectations (*Motivation* 226) of the good daughter, wife, and mother when abuses exist. Alther condemns Stoicism and self-sacrifice (*Motivation* 208) as maternal models. According to *Kinflicks*, a long-suffering mother cannot self-actualize because she sits as a passenger—not a driver—in the prince's carriage that exits at his castle,

which is soon filled with cribs over which mother Cinderella must hover. Both *Kinflicks* and *Betsey Brown* see ancestry as a tool for self-understanding but not for self-definition.²⁸⁴ Shange sanctions escape from the family—even a mother’s escape—when power imbalances necessitate it. Shange also comforts readers that family disagreements and conflicting loyalties may actually promote the discontentment and subsequent disconnect for self-actualization (*Motivation* 91, especially when “othermothers” are available. Flagg—like Wong—seems disenchanted by families. Although *Fried Green Tomatoes* briefly portrays a family that abides non-conformity (*Motivation* 226), the novel highlights the destructiveness of families that mandate obedience, smother independence, promote adoration, and condone abuse. In addition, the novel invites readers to look beyond their parents for wise mentors.

According to these authors, a self-actualizer should experience her family’s recognition (*Motivation* 90) of her accomplishments (*Motivation* 90) but not rely on them. Further, families should promote and accept non-conformity (*Motivation* 226). Thus, parents who wish to guide their daughters to become self-actualizers should avoid stifling them, rescuing them, and martyring themselves for them. In addition, the viewing of parental conflicts and the realistic realization (*Motivation* 208) that parents are sometimes weak individuals can greatly assist daughters to recognize that motherhood is only one facet of a woman’s life. In sum, these novels teach readers that self-actualizing

²⁸⁴ In *Kindred*, Octavia Butler also grapples with how ancestry can enhance a woman’s self-actualizing without defining her as only an African American woman.

daughters are hybrids—not replicas—of their ancestors and parents. Ultimately, females should become their own fathers and mothers—nurturing themselves (*Farther* 273).

Fifth Chinese Daughter, *Fried Green Tomatoes*, *Kinflicks*, and *Betsey Brown* prize education as a viable female alternative or addition to marriage and coming of age. *Fifth Chinese Daughter* prizes formal education when parents articulate no practical guidance and explanation for obedience, confusing and frustrating their children. In such cases, the novel relies on formal education to teach important self-actualizing lessons: education exceeds fact-finding, inspires practical theoretical applications, disturbs worldviews, requires risk-taking, accepts mistakes, fosters life-long autodidacticism, and encourages social responsibility (*Motivation* 217). Courageously, Wong acknowledges that when a family fails to instruct clearly and practically, a liberal arts education can succeed, offering hope for its female readers who—like the Velveteen Rabbit—may feel unloved and confused at home. By contrast, *Fried Green Tomatoes* derides formal education, preferring informal means in which marginalized self-actualizers can find the non-conventional mentoring forums that suit their individualization best. Flagg illustrates that a pupil can still self-actualize when she adapts—rather than merely adopts—her mentor’s positions. *Kinflicks* establishes a Hegelian dialectic between formal and informal education in which both sides produce similar pitfalls to self-actualizing and the careful synthesis of the two affords self-actualization opportunities. Most importantly, Alther warns against education that requires conforming for the sake of acculturation (*Motivation* 226). Both *Kinflicks* and *Betsey Brown* demonstrate that

formal and informal education should combine personal development (*Toward* 91) with social responsibility (*Motivation* 217).

In summary, these novels teach three self-actualizing lessons regarding education. First, women should carefully choose their education in order to self-actualize. For if women subscribe to either formal or informal education without a critical eye and an invested heart, they will merely continue to perpetuate someone else's agenda (*Motivation* 208).²⁸⁵ Second, women should live the self-examined life as students. Although public and private schools, mentors, conversations, and stories can assist female self-actualization, they can just as forcefully destroy a woman's chances to think for herself. To avoid such destruction, women should continually critique their own education (*Motivation* 208). Third, for education to assist self-actualization, it should foster curiosity (*Motivation* 223) and hold students accountable for ethically applying what they have learned (*Motivation* 271).

These marginalized authors feature friendships as self-actualizing influences, depicting women who learn how to become true friends—loyal, generous, assertive, and honest. Wong, Alvarez, Alther, Shange, and Flagg show an array of reasons for needing friends and the types of friends who may help women self-actualize. While friendship figures minimally for the female self-actualization in *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, the novel does contribute to the discussion on friendship by portraying how difficult it is maintain a friendship amidst strong parental censorship. Julia Alvarez's novel explores another difficulty—accepting friends outside one's class. The novel teaches readers that

²⁸⁵ Ironically, conforming to someone else's idea of non-conformity is still conformity.

“Othering” and “rubricizing” are unethical and, therefore, unhealthy for self-actualization (*Toward* 75). Lisa Alther cautions readers against a third problem: power imbalances within friendships that empower oppressors and condone victimization. In her attempt to distinguish ethical and unethical behavior, Alther dialectically opposes friends. Shange and Flagg strongly endorse the need for female friendships as women self-actualize. For Shange, friends become important to a young self-actualizer because they function as maternal foils, rounding out a mother’s influences so that her daughter may determine her own views. In *Fried Green Tomatoes*, the paramount criterion for a healthy friendship is reciprocity. For Flagg, a rare kindred spirit friendship requires both autonomy and commitment, balancing the dual foci of self-actualizing: improving one’s life and another’s (*Motivation* 91).

These novels afford their readers important lessons about the roles that friends can play in female self-actualization. First and foremost, a woman intent upon self-actualizing should be able to choose her own friends—apart from anyone else’s opinion (*Motivation* 208), including her family’s preferences. Second, a woman must eschew stereotyping when choosing her friends because “rebrucizing” humans is unethical (*Toward* 75). Third, friends should contribute to or challenge a woman’s existing viewpoints (*Toward* 91)—not merely replicate them. Fourth, friendships should foster

balanced power relations (*Motivation* 212-213).²⁸⁶ Finally, friends should enhance their friends' self-confidence and self-actualizing potential (*Motivation* 90).

Work is another lifetime venue for female self-actualization available to women. Wong's and Shange's novels distinguish between work that enervates and work that energizes. When a job is merely a paycheck; when society demeans the worker's contribution; and when ethnic, gender, and class prejudices restrict career choices, work enervates female self-actualization. Yet for Wong, Flagg, and Shange, when a woman can choose her career, when her career consists of participating in something "bigger" than herself (*Motivation* 223), when her career affords her a creative outlet (*Motivation* 223), and when she contributes to a better world (*Motivation* 217) as a worker, she will self-actualize through her work. For Wong, work involves risk-taking and skills development in order to establish a sense of one's "achievement" and "mastery" (*Motivation* 90). Alther focuses on the liabilities and assets of the domestic life of "women's work." *Kinflicks* contends that being a home maker is boring, unpredictable, frustrating, and confusing work. However, being a mother, although not glamorous, is the most important job that a woman has because it, unlike the domestic life, affords her an opportunity to "help the human race" (*Motivation* 217). Flagg's novel recognizes that a career demands hard work. More importantly, the novel dramatizes married and single females who strive toward a humanism that promotes generosity to the less fortunate with gifts, enthusiasm, attention, tolerance, and patience.

²⁸⁶ Although at any time, one friend is the caretaker of the other friend (or the relationship), it is important that such a power pairing can switch if one friend requires that.

These novels repeatedly connect the individual's work to the individual's sense of social responsibility (*Motivation* 217) although they do not demean women who are deprived the chance to self-actualize because of their limited work choices. For Maslow, there is no dichotomy between selflessness and self-interest (*Motivation* 91). Accordingly, these novels stress the importance of being loyal to co-workers and patrons and of valuing work as a tool to surmount depression and create self-respect and self-satisfaction (*Motivation* 90). These novels afford readers rare portraits of financially independent (*Motivation* 90) single females—as well as married women—who do not rely on a husband's financial resources and security. In summary, these novels illustrate that although work should not define a woman, work can ennoble female self-actualizing if chosen well and performed ethically.

In the Time of the Butterflies, *Kinflicks*, *Betsey Brown*, and *Fried Green Tomatoes* either value healthy community associations or caution against unhealthy ones. Unlike Alvarez's and Alther's warnings against community entrapment, Shange's and Flagg's novels insist upon the value of healthy female community relationships among the marginalized. Flagg's novel extends that value to female-male community relationships. *Fried Green Tomatoes* instructs women to join communities that they choose, that demand genuine reciprocity, that do not promise quick fixes, and that serve as resources and support at different stages of life. *In the Time of the Butterflies* teaches that romanticizing one's community members, vilifying those outside one's community, and adopting personas as replacements for self-examining detract from or impede self-actualizing (*Toward* 75). *Kinflicks* proscribes belonging to any community that defines

itself with an “us against them” mentality (*Toward* 75), defines loyalty as pleasing its leader (*Motivation* 208), values theory over ethical behavior (*Motivation* 220), and challenges a member’s self-respect (*Motivation* 90). Although Shange writes within an impressive tradition of espousing the value of the neighborhood community, her novel takes a hard look at what happens when community members (like nations) base membership on gender, ethnicity, and class distinctions that denigrate humanist values (*Toward* 75).

Readers who expect marginalized female authors to subscribe wholeheartedly to any available female community—on the grounds that women thrive on “sisterhood”—will be disappointed with these novels. These self-actualization novels offer advice to women for carefully avoiding communities: do not expect a female community to be a quick fix for problems nor supply instant intimacies (*Motivation* 218); avoid discipleship (*Motivation* 208); and reject communities based on stereotyping and Otherizing (*Toward* 75). In addition, they offer advice for carefully selecting communities: value reciprocal relationships over agendas and rituals (*Management* 16); respect members as individuals more than as followers (*Motivation* 205); and promote individual freedom (*Motivation* 90) and creativity (*Motivation* 223).

In addition to demonstrating how these five areas of a woman’s life may serve to empower her lifelong self-actualization, these novels by marginalized female writers caution against the traps of the “Cinderella” tale. In the American version of “Cinderella,” according to Philip Wylie, “the object of Cinderella is to get into the Social Register,” which confuses the goals of the original version, “to mind her business and

perform her drudgery well” (47).²⁸⁷ Although the American version may seem to be an improvement, it still demeans women—limiting success to women who marry the wealthy and forcing alignment to a cultural agenda. Ultimately, the promises of “Cinderella” disappoint.

Of all the novels in this study, Wong’s avoids the “Cinderella” trap the most. *Fifth Chinese Daughter* illustrates that a father’s inappropriate valuing of his daughter’s financial success may ironically bode well for her ability to elude the American “Cinderella” marriage master narrative. For Alvarez, the worst of the “Cinderella” mindset is that it condones male adultery and perpetuates patriarchy—dehumanizing wives and daughters. Although the novel debunks the estimation that a woman is damn lucky to have a wealthy male’s attention, it cautions females—even the raped and abused—against misanthropy and hopes for a healthy sexual union based on reciprocal love. Alther brilliantly blasts the promises of romances—whether it involves a heterosexual or homosexual relationship—that mire in jealousy and domination, which enervate self-respect. In *Kinflicks*, when marriage fails to provide stability and order, it creates a self-actualization chaos because it has become a system that frequently relegates women to pleasing others without regard for their self-worth (*Motivation* 208). Shange also worries about marital power imbalances—warning that a woman should first

²⁸⁷ Wylie elaborates on these versions: “The important factor to us is Cinderella’s conditioning. It is decidedly *not* to go on dutifully sweeping the floor and carrying the wood. She is conditioned to get the hell out of those chores. . . . Better, says our story, go out and make the guy. In other words, we have turned the legend backwards and our Cinderella now operates as her sisters did” (49).

establish her own self-respect (*Motivation* 90), which entails finding what ensures her self-“satisfaction,” and then participate in reciprocal “satisfaction”—a term with several meanings. The novel ultimately teaches that each woman must decide for herself—not a man or the culture (*Motivation* 226)—the importance of sex, love, self-respect, and power in her relationships with men. *Fried Green Tomatoes* dramatizes the manner in which “Cinderella” promises fail to fulfill female self-actualizing because they assume a finality of identity development (*Motivation* 214). Flagg’s message is clear: beware marriages that mandate power imbalances, thereby restricting women to only culturally mandated roles (*Motivation* 226).

These novels fault the “Cinderella” plot that deceptively subsumes a female’s life to the role of wife to a financially successful husband. Even if all women were able and inclined to marry their princes, such unions would likely not offer them self-actualizing opportunities, which demand independence (*Motivation* 90), accomplishment (*Motivation* 90), and social responsibility (*Motivation* 217).

The Need for Lifelong Self-actualization

Unlike the *Bildungsroman* writers, these marginalized authors extol the on-going possibilities of lifelong self-actualization. Without allowing for a lifetime of change and possibilities, a woman cannot self-actualize. *Fifth Chinese Daughter* espouses on-going self-actualizations as the older narrator concludes with her recognition that this is just the beginning of her “hard upward climb” (246). So too does the older narrator of *In the Time of the Butterflies* struggle to make sense of her younger life. In *Kinflicks*, even the

deathbed is not too late to begin or to renew one's self-actualizing. Subscribing to an Aristotelian view of incremental and habitual changes in one's decisions and actions, Alther promotes the potential and need for self-actualizing through every stage and during every day of a woman's life. *Betsy Brown* courageously espouses on-going self-actualization even if that means suspending maternal obligations to children. Shange demonstrates that without the illusion of the happily-ever-after "Cinderella" tale, women must continue self-actualizing throughout their lives and no matter what their roles. With the portrayal of eighty-six-year old Ninny Threadgoode, *Fried Green Tomatoes* depicts the oldest self-actualizer in this study. Convinced that female identity development continues well into old age, Flagg departs from the master narrative that prizes female youth, thinness, and allure as the criteria for social admiration. All these novels contend that self-actualization occurs not in one walk down the aisle—as the romance and "Cinderella" tale suggests—but in a "lifetime business" (Maslow in Frick 36) of self-improvement and social responsibility (*Motivation* 217)—all of which require determination and entail frustrations, disappointments, failure, anxiety, and confusion. Even in old age, women should reach out to others—as mentors, friends, community members, and lovers (*Farther* 271).

Unlike the *Bildungsroman's* coming-of-age ending and acculturation agenda, these self-actualization novels teach their readers that self-fulfillment occurs throughout life. Unlike "Cinderella," these self-actualization novels undermine society's prizing of only young, attractive, and compliant women who compromise their voices, bodies, and choices for tenuous and temporary social approval and economic security. Instead, these

novels endorse Maslow's concept of self-actualization, which prizes female independence (*Motivation* 90) and social responsibility (*Motivation* 217) throughout a woman's entire life. As self-actualizing is a daily process, women should not expect rare transcendent moments, but rather a lifetime of steady effort as they try to know themselves and improve their world. These self-actualization novels afford readers a variety of proscriptions and prescriptions for that struggle.

The Need for Social Responsibility

These marginalized writers inspire changing the world as females change themselves because self-actualizers have a "genuine desire to help the human race" (*Motivation* 217). *Fifth Chinese Daughter*, as the title suggests, focuses on being a responsible member of a culture and a family. Jade Snow Wong proclaims that she intends to find a "Middle Way" between Chinese American and non-Chinese American cultures—writing not merely to understand herself better, but also to help the mainstream culture understand her marginalized culture. Readers of *In the Time of the Butterflies* may finish the novel still wondering if the older female narrator has become a better person—someone who knows herself more clearly and acts toward others more responsibly—and if she should have focused less on overpowering the powerful and more on understanding why people need to overpower. However, readers are clearer about the ethical development of Patria and Mate, who have grown to eschew vilification and "rubricizing" (*Toward* 15). *Kinflicks* promotes the view that through memory, narrative, and sincere dialectic, females can begin to understand their past relationships in

order to pursue their present self-actualizing and contribute to future social responsibility (*Motivation* 217), especially as mothers. Shange's novel promotes self-reliance and self-satisfaction not just so that women will be happy, satisfied, and empowered but also so that women can serve as admirable and emotionally healthy guides for others. Flagg's novel is unique for this study because it promises, in a Greek sense, that being ethical guarantees one's eudaemonia.

Rather than support crusades for human rights, these self-actualization novels prize treating individual people—whether they are strangers, friends, family members, co-workers, acquaintances, or lovers—with dignity. Rather than proclaim one's generosity and convictions, these marginalized novelists believe that ethical behavior often occurs privately between one person and another—without any proclamation of a good deed being done and received.

A Final Plea

It is important that literature be ethical. Although these novels by marginalized authors vary in their approach toward characterizing ethical females, each commits to the belief that literature can help improve the world. For L. A. Kauffman, identity construction empowers when it actively affirms “the experiences, dignity, and rights of historically marginalized or excluded people” (29). As marginalized writers, Wong, Alvarez, Alther, Shange, and Flagg illustrate that “the values and norms that lead to stable and compliant behavior over time can be attacked, and will be, if the moral code that legitimates and organizes the compliance is violated” (Weinstein 7-8). As published

writers, they garner their own authority, attempting to transgress “the binding evaluative standards” of the “Cinderella” marriage master narrative and the *Bildungsroman* tales of coming of age through social acculturation. This study’s novels provide new desires, dreams, and goals for female self-actualization, which when “conscious and intellectually organized,” can “provide the basis for social action” (7-8).

Such social change exceeds political agendas and academic aphorisms. In fact, self-actualizers eschew what society mandates as the requirements, agendas, and approaches to changing the world (*Motivation* 226). Rather, self-actualizers independently (*Motivation* 90) and authentically view others as human beings, attempting to know them better but not expecting to see the world from their horizons (*Toward* 75). Treating everyone as individuals—not as strangers or as the “Other” supersedes following a group’s cause and addresses the underlying social good and evil in us all. Further, although social responsibility requires risk-taking and often results in alienation, it should not abide self-sacrifice, demean self-respect (*Motivation* 90) or exclude self-nurturing (*Motivation* 91). That is, self-actualizers are not martyrs. These novelists advocate social responsibility (*Motivation* 217) for their readers because being ethical leads to self-actualization.

In order to change the American female marriage master narratives of “Cinderella” and the *Bildungsroman*, women should hear the voices of marginalized female authors who espouse and illustrate a variety of ways for female self-actualization through the self-actualization novel. Without the limitations of the master narrative, the self-actualization novel promotes the enriching and empowering characteristics that

Abraham Maslow has discovered among his clients who spend their lives struggling to know themselves and to improve their worlds. This study's self-actualization novels demonstrate healthy alternatives to the stagnant and stifling agendas of the "Cinderella" female marriage master narrative and the *Bildungsroman*. In addition, these narratives promote a lifelong journey of self-fulfillment and social responsibility (*Motivation* 217). These marginalized writers offer great hope for altering the existing American female master narratives so that all women can establish their voices and places—for themselves and for others.

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