

ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to understand the place of the body in the mother-daughter relationship. The mother-daughter relationship has long been recognised as important in understanding female identity. The current research explores young women's relationships with their mothers, as well as with their bodies, and seeks to comprehend how these two forces interact in the shaping of the daughters' identity. Within the broad framework of qualitative research, this investigation can further be characterised as utilising a psychosocial approach. This approach recognises social and psychological elements of the human subject as necessarily interdependent. The data for the study was collected using a purposive sample sourced from a convenient sampling group. The criteria for selection concerned the participants' ages and, to some extent, their ability to represent South Africa's population diversity. Female students from the School of Human and Community Development at the University of the Witwatersrand were approached. The final sample comprised six participants, with equal numbers of black and white women. All participants were between the ages of 21 and 25 and had no children of their own. The interviews were transcribed and subjected to a narrative analysis using psychoanalytic techniques. What emerged from the analysis were the multiple and varied ways in which unconscious desires and fantasies – many of which are rooted in the mother-daughter relationship – shape a woman's relationship with her body and inform her unique engagement with dominant social discourses of the body. This study illustrates that the critical triangle of “self, mother and body” is a messy one that demands a complex and dynamic understanding.