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Feminist Identity of Young African-American Girls in Virginia Hamilton's Novels

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the children and young-adult fiction produced by Virginia Hamilton between 1967 and 1999 represents African-American girls' feminist identity through five thematic divisions—upmothering, adolescent friendship as sisterhood, historical trauma, adolescent leadership and empowering representations of the Black female body. I believe that this scrutiny of Hamilton's fiction is significant to the exploration of critical and theoretical implications in post-colonial children's literature. The exploration of Black girls' connection to feminism in Hamilton's books is carried through an interdisciplinary framework of Black society, history, psychology, literature and visual arts by analysing the selected narratives of *Zeely* (1967), *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* (1982), *Justice and her Brothers* (1978), *Cousins* (1990) and *Bluish* (1999), through which the cultural, social and visual representations of Black girls' feminist identity are manifested and explored. The findings of this thesis contribute to post-colonial feminist trends in children's literature by highlighting how feminist identity is created in Black young-adult and adolescent fiction. My analysis of the selected novels reveals Hamilton's creative liberating consciousness that celebrates intersectional feminist identity by denoting empowering cultural models of upmothering as a limited division of Black othermothering practices. She also reintroduces other influential children's practices such as adolescent friendship as sisterhood, historical trauma as a communal concern, adolescent leadership as a collective work advantageous to children while cooperating in groups, and finally, empowering representations of the Black female body as an able-bodied cultural agent. The findings of this research facilitate in understanding a genre of literary racial contexts of resistance, resilience, empowerment and multiculturalism in children's literature. Furthermore, they include an extension of theorisation regarding Black othermothering, as well as sisterhood and leadership concepts, which serve to enrich the theorisation of Black children's literature.

Key words: Virginia Hamilton; Children's Literature; Black Feminism; Upmothering; Disability.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Chapter 1

Introduction and Context

1.1 Thesis Statement and Research Objectives

This study aims to develop an understanding of African-American feminist identity in Virginia Hamilton's children's novels by drawing on the theoretical perspectives of Black feminism. To explore aspects of feminist identity through Black girls'[1] adolescence, I examine five novels by Hamilton. All of my protagonists are aged 10–14 years, corresponding approximately to the period of adolescence defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "following the onset of puberty during which a young person develops from a child into an adult". Therefore, I use the term 'adolescence' throughout this thesis, acknowledging that Hamilton rarely describes her protagonists that way, or refers to their puberty. Moreover, my thesis covers five major feminist aspects critical to Black girls' identity formation, and their racial and cultural conscience, a strong trend in Hamilton's representations of Black people's distinctive experience since the publication of her first novel *Zeely* in 1967. To achieve this, I select *Zeely* (1967), *Justice and Her Brothers* (1978), *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* (1982), *Cousins* (1990) and *Bluish* (1999), while my structure investigates a general thesis of feminist identity in girlhood via five major themes—Black upmothering, friendship, historical trauma, social leadership and the representation of Black female bodies through beauty and ability—each discussed in a separate chapter. The analysis that I provide for such themes celebrates literary redefinitions of social and political practices crucial to our understanding of what it

[1] In this thesis I employ the capitalised 'Black' and 'White' as proper nouns to designate racial and ethnic groups, as opposed to the uncapitalised forms that refer to colour as a reference.

means to be a Black girl and a feminist. In fact, the five redefinitions are merely social practices of empowerment, reaffirming that feminism is for everybody, including Black adolescents.

I intend to develop an explicit discussion of the methods and methodology of acquiring empowerment, through which Black girls' experiences are central to cultural studies. The consideration of methods for examining how feminism in the prolific body of Hamilton's fiction enriches Black children's literature is justified since to date, limited investigation has been carried out on aspects of feminist identity in Hamilton's books for children. My representation of her innovative approach to feminist children's stories is essential for our understanding of Hamilton's literary interdisciplinary feminist canon. Hamilton celebrated Black children and young-adults' experiences as a renowned folklore scholar, biographer, essayist and prolific author during the thirty-three years of her writing career. Contributing to almost every genre for children,[2] she produced folktales, social realism, Black legend, fantasy, historical fiction, biography, myth and picturebooks, through a literary legacy engaged across four significant decades of African-American children's literature spanning from the late 1960s until 1999. Hamilton was the first African-American author to win the Newbery Medal in 1975. She also received numerous awards including the Coretta Scott King Book Award, the Edgar Allan Poe Award, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, the Hans Christian Andersen Award, the National Book Award and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award for lifetime achievement. Hamilton introduces ideas in a 'Hamilton-like' way, creating a guidebook for feminism in Black children's literature that succeeds in commencing revisions and/or redefinitions of social constructs such as gender, race and class.

[2] For an overview of Hamilton's various genres, see Nina Mikkelsen's *Virginia Hamilton* (1994).

Although Hamilton has a particular feminist 'style', I believe that she has a changing approach to feminism, one that begins with a precursor to Patricia Hill Collins's intersectionality to include age and gender, while moving to body-image feminism and including disability. In my study, such a shifting approach is explained through five key contributions connecting feminism to Black adolescents' literature, and which includes redefinitions of othermothering practices into 'upmothering',[3] Black sisterhood into feminist friendship, trauma into positive resilience, political leadership into social young adolescent leadership, and Black female's bodies as sites for celebrating culture, beauty and ability.

1.2 Hamilton as a Black Feminist Liberationist in Children's Fiction

Hamilton always represents herself as a liberationist children's author. Reflecting on the interdisciplinary use of her fiction, Nina Mikkelsen and Joan Kaywell argue that many of Hamilton's novels offer Black girls opportunities to develop distinct forms of identity as they explore a realistic sense of self (110-111). The process of defining her Black liberationist fiction requires addressing the challenge of empowering young girls through narratives that associate them with their own Black culture.[4] Hamilton's liberating approaches, from the perspective of my research, redefine the identity of Black girls through the multiple forms of social pressures they confront while rediscovering their own empowering feminist standards. I assume that the

[3] Othermothering is essentially an African and African-American communal practice based on the premise that authorising one person with the full responsibility for the mothering of a child may not be prudent or feasible. Rosalie Riegle Troester defines othermothers as women who assist bloodmothers by sharing the mothering responsibilities of the biological mothers (13-16). Black feminist and social activist Stanlie James also reflects on the origins of the historical emergence of the term, stating that othermothering was a survival mechanism for the Black family through providing support for a child's nurturance as the Black mother invariably had to work (45).

[4] Rudine Sims Bishop asserts in *Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's Fiction* (1982) that Hamilton's fiction presents a substantial contribution to the image of African-Americans in children's fiction that has appeared since 1965 (42).

connection Hamilton brings to feminism[5] is recognised through challenging boundaries believed necessary to enable Black girls to establish and develop identity. This individuality emerges from what Hamilton is known to write about as liberation consciousness, which liberates Black girls by identifying their African-American experiences within intersectional forces of gender, class and race. Such identity aspects ought to guarantee equal social and political rights for all Black girls. Through language and discourse that applies to both adults and children, and can be comprehended by children, Hamilton questions the role of social categories like othermothering, friendship or leadership in establishing identity at a young age, particularly for girls.

Why is it important for my contribution to dwell on adolescent identity as a core theme? How important is it to elaborate on Hamilton's choice to write about Black girls' identity in childhood? Hamilton generally writes for those of a school age (e.g. 6-to-18 years), a stage from which the basis of identity and social values emerge and formulate. Erik Erikson's discourse of identity during adolescence in *Identity: Youth and Crisis* affirms the importance of adolescence as a stage in which a child has partially begun to form an identity through a self-reflectiveness that ranges between individualism and a desire to join significant social groups, culture and society (208). In my research, Hamilton's female adolescents (aged 8-to-14 years) struggle in the identity formation experience regarding influence and role models, commencing with *Bluish*'s Willie, Tuli, Natalie and Dreenie; before moving

[5] My argument here is based on the type of feminism that Hamilton adds to the potentiality of children's literature in general, and Black children's literature in particular. The connection between feminist theories and children's literature is discussed at length in Roberta Trites's article "Feminist Subversions", through which she states that "[i]t is especially over this matter of voice that feminism has changed the face of children's literature" (1). Trites revises many children's books pre- and post-1960s such as Hamilton's *The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl* to reflect on Black girlhood in constructing a feminist identity.

on to *Zeely*'s Elizabeth; *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*'s Tree; and *Justice and Her Brother*s' Justice; and concluding with Cammy and Patty Anne in *Cousins*. Nevertheless, the themes analysed in feminist terms are presented within social models of adolescent experiences that develop from individualistic into group efforts, particularly in Black girls' friendship, leadership and historical trauma.

Hamilton's girls encounter challenges of identity formation and competence—two terms, as explained through Erikson's psychosocial theory[6] of development, which can explain why aspects of empowerment are critical during adolescence. In outlining the impact of external factors such as society on the personality development of the child, Erikson refers to competence, industry versus inferiority in the 6-to-11 age range, and identity versus role confusion in the 12-to-18 age range. As in the early developmental stage, children compare their self-worth to others. Erikson believes that the role of the child's society (e.g. the family and teachers) plays a significant part in the child concluding their own identity and avoiding identity crisis caused by the manifestation of role confusion. The same impact weighs on adolescents' future choices concerning employment, relationships and families, as it teaches them roles present in society. According to Hamilton's narratives, the early implications of feminist empowerment shield young Black girls from identity crises resulting from accepting the stereotypes of Black women through history. This process, constituting a major part of their feminist identity, is offered through a thematic prospect discussed in the five-chapter analysis across the body of this study, which explores the different aspects of feminist identity in

[6] See Ericson's *Childhood and Society* (1963).

Hamilton's selected novels while examining the profound association of such identity within social, literary and cultural contexts.

1.3 Selection of the Primary Texts

It is significant to locate my selected texts as part of Hamilton's wide-ranging literary heritage. Hamilton (1934–2002) is an African-American author of more than forty-one books that include mysteries, folktales and realistic children's novels. Therefore, her contribution to African-American children's history appears to be too prolific to be neglected. Hamilton's books are rich with diverse Black and universal cultural and social themes that engage with both Black girlhood and boyhood. Correspondingly, the literary scrutiny of various types of feminist identity is inextricably associated to the terms undertaken by contemporary Black feminists of the twenty-first century, and thereby indirectly dedicated to a new generation of African-American girls who seek existing feminist empowerment. On another level, Hamilton does not write about race *per se*, but rather writes in reference to its aftermath. When she states, "One will find in my books no documentary history of non-White America in the 1970s . . . What I am compelled to write can best be described as some essence of dreams, lies, myths, and disasters befallen a clan of my blood relatives" (Eccleshare), she reflects through this fantastical mode on a tendency towards painting peaceful images of Black people in a manner whereby race seems to melt away with her positive representations of four generations of Black adolescent experiences.

In this research, I investigate specified representations of Black girlhood feminism in Hamilton's fiction, encompassing the dichotomous models of othermothering, adolescent friendship, historical trauma, adolescent leadership and representations of Black bodies' beauty and ability. The disposition of this thematic

arrangement is enriched by Hamilton's extensive history of writing since the late 1960s, which provides a literary body that allows the writer's development of social and literary concepts to be traced across time. The historical and socio-economic references provided in Hamilton's books such as African Watutsi tribes during the 1960s, Patawatami women, Southern slaves' escape through the Little River, and many others, help in further exploring feminist concepts in a social framework. Hamilton's post-colonial writing, like many African-American women writers, draws attention to the themes and concerns that emerge from women's experiences, such as motherhood, identity subjectivity and family relationships (Wisker 4). They also create connections between Black feminism and childhood from the late 1960s to the early twenty-first century. This factor explains why I am particularly interested in Hamilton's narrative of social realism as opposed to science fiction. At some points of my analysis, certain elements of Hamilton's science fiction that appear as supernatural powers for time-travel, or possessing sensory communicative means, are discussed because they are lead subplots of the more social-realist themes introduced by the narrative.

Some of Hamilton's most popular books celebrate feminism in Black adolescent fiction, such as *The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl* (1983) and *Arilla Sun Down* (1976), but these are excluded from my analysis for the following reasons. Although *The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl* carries indications of Black girls' othermothering and bodily beauty, the novel's use of mythology pulls this representation away from a realistic depiction of Black girlhood. Hamilton's character is a god who has a mission to accomplish in Mount Kenya, while she also incarnates a mother role referred to as Mother Pearl. Pretty Pearl fails due to her lack of strength, while Mother Pearl succeeds in her guidance mission in the narrative,

which sows confusion because of the difficulties of drawing lines between the adult and child roles. Similarly, the theme of the Black girl's body transforming and carrying the wisdom of narrative is difficult to examine, because my argument is based on social realist representations of Black beauty and ability, rather than myths of deific superiority.

Arilla Sun Down is also not discussed here, despite its inclusion of references of Black beauty and feminist identity. The core discussion of the book is focused on the bi-racial identity of Arilla and her brother Jack Sun Run, as half African-American and half American Indian. The bodily beauty manifested in the narrative describes the charm of Jack Sun, who recognises himself as native Indian rather than half-African. Although aspects of identity can be explored concerning Arilla's challenges in patriarchal tensions, the bi-racial factor creates difficulty in determining what each character represents regarding race.

Since I only consider Hamilton's realist works, I focus on five novels—*Zeely*; *Justice and Her Brothers*; *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*; *Cousins* and *Bluish*—as Hamilton's most powerful exemplars of the recurring themes of empowerment. My focus on texts that depict social realism, or what Hamilton calls "moral realism" (233), is bound by my commitment to exploring Hamilton's feminist positions in Black children's literature, which requires an exploration of the historical and social milieu through ethnic, cultural, generational and egalitarian reflections. This selection benefits from representing her earliest and latest perspectives, ones that engage directly with the social issues of her time.

1.4 Summary of the Chapters

In the second chapter, I categorise African-American othermothering practices intersectionally with age, alongside voluntary upmothering in *Sweet Whispers,*

Brother Rush and *Bluish*. One of the major contributions of this chapter is introducing the socio-historical concept of 'upmothering' as a term in Black children's literary studies. Linking the term to empowerment and liberation, I aim to examine the Black feminist connection to the identity of young African-American girls in Hamilton's narratives. The discussion is based on tracing the socio-economic circumstances that influenced African-American females' mothering, and consequently its impact on the initiation and assigning of the role of 'upmothers' during the slavery era and until as recently as the twenty-first century. Black teachers and maids' roles as othermothers are considered for the sake of elaborating on Hamilton conveying the positivity of the structured but temporary net of Black practices of contemporary and communal mothering.

In the third chapter, the theme of Black girls' upmothering is followed by Black female adolescents' friendship, as bound to aspects of Black feminist identity in *Justice and Her Brothers* and *Bluish*. This chapter traces Hamilton's dichotomous gendered model of African-American female adolescents' friendships. Both feminocentric[7] and mixed-gender friendships reveal how young Black girls' formation of identity can manifest through establishing friendships with both boys and girls. The power of my analysis in this regard is concerning how the connection between mainstream feminism and friendship or sisterhood is a liberating approach that Hamilton utilises to break the chains of the intersectional oppressive forces of sexism encountered by Black girls.

[7] In their discourse about women's writing in the eighteenth-century literature, Aleksondra Hultquist and Elizabeth J. Mathews refer to the term 'feminocentricm', which was first used by critics of early eighteenth-century women's writing. However, the word 'feminocentric' was not coined by feminist critics until the 1980s by Nancy K. Miller.

In the fourth chapter, I analyse Hamilton's representation of African-American girls' feminist empowerment, as learnt from the consequences of Black historical trauma. My examination of Black girls' trauma is focused on two of Hamilton's coming-of-age novels—*Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Cousins.* The discussion critically evaluates Black girls' capability to accept the consequences of trauma as a means of empowerment to regain control over their lives. I consider the theme of trauma after the previous chapters of Black upmothering and sisterhood because the traumatic experiences of Hamilton's adolescents occur during their social encounters with upmothering practices and/or sisterhood, but are not necessarily caused by them. In the course of my critical evaluation of what I consider to be Hamilton's 'positive resilience to trauma', the use of both Joy DeGruy's Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome and the trauma theory of Dominick LaCapra is appropriate because they explain the transference of Black trauma from a historical perspective, and the emergence of its symptoms in generations of Black women.

Hamilton's literary canon of girlhood empowerment continues within social practices such as adolescent leadership in the fifth chapter, which interprets social leadership as a semi-mature option for Black girls to pursue and consolidate to reshape their Black feminist quests. *Justice and Her Brothers* and *Bluish* are discussed to clarify how Hamilton's narrative embodies African-American adolescents' practices of leadership. The feminist leadership paradigms explored educate young girls to employ their own voices as a means of empowerment and self-affirmation to confront social injustice. I also introduce Hamilton's novel definition of youth leadership that strikes a balance between the individualistic and collaborative experiences in her earlier and later fiction. While *Justice and Her Brothers* is occupied with discourses of gender equality developed from mainstream

patriarchal oppression during the late 1970s, *Bluish* examines domestic oppression while encouraging feminocentric bonding and solidarity as sources of Black youth power. To examine the notion of children's leadership in Hamilton's novels, the Black feminist social theory of Collins is supported by Roberta S. Trites's *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels*, a discourse that calls attention to children's voices. The voices of Black girls are integrated in the analysis of children's leadership because their feminocentric experiences facilitate shaping the identities of such girls as young social leaders.

In the final chapter, I examine Hamilton's feminist redefinition of Black girls' bodies through a socially dichotomous pattern of the body beautiful and the body able. I explore how Hamilton introduced *Zeely* and *Bluish* as feminist narratives of Black girls' body images. The chapter also explains her process of empowerment as being essential to the decolonisation of Black women's bodies from the distorted stereotypes they have been bound to through history. As Hamilton deconstructs the stereotypical bodily images, she also reflects on the collective lived bodily experiences of Zeely and Natalie in both novels. She consequently offers alternative positive representations of Black female bodies incorporating Black adolescent characters who are appreciative of both the beauty and the ability of their own Black bodies. The analysis I offer deploys two social theories—Black feminist epistemology and narratology, and Black feminist disability theory. Each is used for one category of analysis. Collins's *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* helps to explain Black girls' feminist standpoints in Hamilton's narrative of *Zeely*. Collins introduces an epistemic approach that counters negative images of Black female bodies from the underlying consequences of such distortion. To decolonise Black female bodies, we

need to examine their historical objectification and colonisation during the slavery era and provide counter-knowledge for that purpose. Thus, the folktale narratology carried by Zeely represents the cultural knowledge that empowers images of Black female bodies, particularly as explored through reflections of Trites's perspectives on narrators. The Black feminist disability theory of Moya Bailey, as extended from Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's feminist disability theory, is further applied to examine Black disability in Hamilton's *Bluish*.

1.5 Literature Review

A review of the critical articles written about Hamilton's young-adult novels reveals that research on her literary, social and educational purposes has a short tradition. Critics began to show limited interest in Hamilton's fiction from 1983, sixteen years after she started writing in 1967. It is also underwhelming to observe the decline of published literary criticism about the body of Hamilton's books for the almost two decades since 2003, although the Virginia Hamilton Conference on Multicultural Literature for Children has continued to run for thirty-five years.[8] Feminist analysis is particularly sparse. The only book of length study is Nina Mikkelsen's *Virginia Hamilton*, which focuses on Hamilton's different genres while largely ignoring race and only lightly discussing gender. Therefore, I have classified the scholarship below using a wider thematic structure, pointing to overlaps with feminist approaches. The themes included are narratology, identity, racial/bi-racial identity and feminist identity, the creative geography, the mother–daughter relationship (or Black

[8] The Virginia Hamilton Conference on Multicultural Literature for Youth continues into its thirty-fifth year in the winter of 2020. The event is held annually in Kent State University in the United States to focus exclusively on multicultural literature for children and young adults. Honouring the author, the conference reflects a commitment to promoting cultural awareness and affirming cultural pride, while addressing the array of issues that surround the concept of culture.

mothers), radical existentialism, implications of mythology and science fiction in declaring 'otherness' in Black children's literature.

1.5.1 Identity: racial and feminist

Mikkelsen and Kaywell examine Hamilton's interdisciplinary fiction, claiming that her writing—until 1997—covers wide-ranging genres. In their article, "Young Adult Literature: Hamilton and the Interdisciplinary Use of Her Literature", Mikkelsen and Kaywell praise Hamilton's reflections on issues of gender and cultural identity. *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, for instance, appears to include the significance of feminist identity in ethnic storytelling and culture. In my study, the same novel is discussed from a different feminist perspective, one that deals with Hamilton's rewriting of the Bildungsroman and its relevance to young-adult practices of upmothering.

The article categorises Hamilton's thirty-three book legacy into four major categories—male and female coming of age stories, through *Planet of Junior Brown* (1971), *M.C. Higgins, the Great* (1974), *Junius Over Far* (1985), *A Little Love* (1984), *A White Romance* (1987), *Plain City* (1993) and *Arilla Sun Down* (1976); stories of psychic realism in The Justice Trilogy (1978–1981) and *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* (1982); folklore collections through *The People Could Fly* (1985) and *Her Stories* (1995); and liberation literature, featuring fictional stories of suffering whilst in the pursuit of freedom in *Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave* (1988), *Many Thousand Gone* (1992) and *The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl* (1983). The article calls for more attention to the interdisciplinary literature that Hamilton introduces to be used in life-centred and literature-based classrooms.

The theme of identity in Hamilton's young-adults' fiction is also discussed by Janice Dressel in "The Legacy of Ralph Ellison in Virginia Hamilton's Justice Trilogy". According to Dressel, Hamilton shares common interests with Ralph Ellison's nameless protagonist in his adult novel, *Invisible Man* (1958), through her writing about similar themes such as identity and the growth from innocence to experience and optimism. Dressel describes Hamilton's creation of identity in The Justice Trilogy as a portrayal of the contemporary Black-American community through female and male self-declaration (47). She affirms, "In the Justice series, Hamilton maintains the motif but makes the protagonist powerful rather than powerless. Her four adolescent protagonists are each well-developed characters who can choose to join their separate identities into one powerful entity known as the "unit". (45) Dressel explains how Justice is called the Watcher over her 'unit' that consists of her twin brothers, Thomas and Levi, along with their neighbour Dorian. Nevertheless, Justice appears as a powerful young girl who controls the boys' unit, leading them as a team. Furthermore, the development of Justice's feminist power grows stronger as she identifies and utilises her growing powers over the male group (45). Dressel's article is important because it compares Ralph Ellison's and Hamilton's battles regarding identity. Dressel highlights the commonality between the authors' lives, with both growing up in the North or mid-United States rather than the South—Hamilton in Ohio and Ellison in Oklahoma—and both recalling their childhood as a positive rather than repressive experience. Meanwhile, parallelism also exists in fascinating thematic and stylistic approaches. The journey towards identity includes the themes of survival, social responsibility and basic optimism. What Dressel labels as feminist power held over the unit by Justice is refined concerning social feminist leadership in the fourth chapter of my study. The

type of leadership discussed in my work is dependent on girls' power, but also requires communal effort in consideration of cumulative leaders.

Regarding racial and bi-racial identity, Anita Moss proposes another feminist approach in Hamilton's *Arilla Sun Down*. In "Frontiers of Gender in Children's Literature: Virginia Hamilton's Arilla Sun Down", Moss utilises reader-response theory to investigate African-American girls' self-image while struggling within the confines of the family. The young bi-racial Arilla's quest is to discover her true racial identity, unlike her brother Jack Sun who prefers to identify himself as a Black Indian, like his father, instead of Black-American. Twelve-year-old Arilla shows a progressive attitude towards discovering her identity when she decides to save her brother's life. Moss explains how Hamilton reveals this 'androgynous vision' of the self by endorsing liberation from excessively rigid gender norms that have imprisoned both men and women in the past, where her character need not settle for confinement and enclosure. Hamilton's Arilla reveals that integrity of the self lies in a movement away from sexual and racial polarisation towards a state in which individual roles and modes of conduct may be freely chosen.

Moss reveals that Arilla's experience of achieving identity, a true name and a secure sense of self is perhaps more difficult than that encountered by the majority of adolescents. Arilla's struggle to recover her past experience through memory and transcendent power is confronted by battles of domestic oppression, namely by the restrictions imposed by her brother and mother to create an identity through her own literary talent as she breaks out of fixed images of race and gender to enable her to aspire towards a wholeness of being that may be called androgynous. Moss also explains how Arilla decisively rejects the attempts of Jack Sun to fix her, to name and define her, just as she resists dancing because she does not wish to be a shadow

of her powerful mother. She also resists the names of 'Moon Child' or 'Moon Flower' because she does not wish to be a mere diminished reflection of the sun. In *Arilla Sun Down*, Hamilton shows that such a spirit of reconciliation between sexes through androgyny can help to heal gaps between cultures, races and gender. I similarly believe that Hamilton's liberation works to free girls from all rigid forms of oppression, including patriarchal and maternal attitudes.

Moss continues by exploring female identity in Hamilton's other novels. In "Mythical Narrative: Virginia Hamilton's The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl", she praises Hamilton's ability to weave strands of African myth and folklore with social and family history to create an image of a powerful quest for Black female identity, as an artist valued by her own community. Moss also compliments how Hamilton incorporates folk poetry and song, using such typical African-American literary devices as repetition, call-and-response and creative improvisation as she describes the magical adventures of her female hero, Pretty Pearl, "god chile", who comes voluntarily down from Mount Kenya to help Black people (51). Moss further claims that Pearl's journey "features a linear quest and a fall from innocence into painful experience", yet the protagonist can still tell "the joy of belonging to the human community" (51-52). The connection that Moss makes between the incarnation of the mother's spirit by Pearl who splits herself into two manifestations, creating a mother out of her own being, ultimately marks the value of Black upmothers in my notion of feminism and mothering. Moss proclaims that the Black female protagonist Pearl the goddess or 'god chile' endures a painful separation from both her mother and her brothers in Mount Kenya to locate her own voice and to secure her identity through assisting others. Hamilton enables her protagonist to create Mother Pearl within her for protection. Although Mother Pearl and Pretty

Pearl are one, the underlying principle of the powerful impact of a mother trait supports the limited othermothering practices connecting Black girls to feminist empowerment. This is what Mikkelsen describes as “Hamilton's most ingenious choice”, claiming that Hamilton excels in engaging the parent ‘role’ within Pearl rather than over her, as should be the case with a real parent (53). Moss provides further empowering practices of othermothering in Hamilton’s *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, asserting that the protagonist Tree “literally slides into her mother’s skin in order to feel and to know her mother’s experience” (56). However, my investigation of Tree’s upmothering experience in the second chapter represents two different experiences. Such power can be compared to Mikkelsen’s account of the powerful child–mother Pearl in “But Is It A Children’s Book?: A Second Look at Virginia Hamilton’s The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl”. Her conceptualisation of potential power in the world accredits Pearl with more than most child characters, alone and far from home on a humanity-saving voyage. Mikkelsen concludes, “Having a powerful parent figure within helps to broaden even these powers, helps to provide great potential for inner (self) control” (137).

1.5.2 Narratology

Across two critical articles, Trites shows great interest in the literary reflections of narratology in three of Hamilton’s children’s novels—*Arilla Sun Down*, *The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl* and *Zeely*.

In “Feminist Subversions”, she explores young females’ ability to articulate themselves and gain agency through voice in *Arilla Sun Down* and *The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl*. According to Trites, African-American girl characters in both novels celebrate their own feminist subjectivity through the empowerment they gain from their roles as metafictional narrators. Black female adolescent narrators,

Trites claims, represent the "female story-tellers [who] self-consciously reflect on narration as a form of identity-formation" (4). Trites's reflection on narrators exemplifies the Black girls' ability to form independent and conscious feminist identity through the art of storytelling. My research also reflects on manifestations of Black girls' subjecthood and feminist statements in cultural representations of knowledge and the Black female body in *Zeely*.

Trites discusses narrative in *Zeely* in ""I Double Never Ever Never Lie to My Chil'Ren": Inside People in Hamilton's Narrative", where she examines the female protagonists' inclusion and exclusion through the perspective of feminism, narratology and children's literature theories. Trites discusses *Zeely* and *The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl* in a structure that communicates ideologies of race, gender and age. According to Trites, the possession of cultural knowledge through storytelling encompasses power relationships, with narrative distance being a key factor in inclusion and exclusion. In the analysis of *The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl*, she investigates inclusion and exclusion in specifically racial terms. Five diverse racial groups are defined in the novel—African gods, Black 'inside folks', Black 'outside folks', Native Americans and European Americans. As Hamilton introduces the adult guidance in the form of a child–mother dual identity in the character of Pearl—Pearl herself and Mother—Trites argues that the mother image exists to show that "children have wisdom within them that they cannot possibly access as children" (153). Trites projects the reincarnation of Mother Pearl into the protagonist's Pretty Pearl as a reflection of the adult guide that manifests wisdom within a child, the type of knowledge that children typically cannot access independently. Significantly, the cultural narrative as a social and cultural ideology is embedded in the sixth chapter of my thesis, where I employ it to discuss the role

of Black girls' bodies in carrying the generational Black narrative. My analysis of the roles of Zeely and Elizabeth as storytellers reveals the power of the feminocentric bond of not only these two girls, but also their mothers and foremothers, and the powerlessness of Black children as they rediscover themselves.

1.5.3 Creativity of time and place

Hamilton's literary perceptions of time and place have been of interest to several critics. Hamilton herself declares the core significance of both elements in her article "Ah, Sweet Rememory!", when she notes:

> Place and time are at the heart of the fiction I write. The place being a miniscule, unlikely piece of southern Ohio, where I was born. The time is the period of my early life that is transformed and heightened to uniqueness through the creative process. Or it is the rememory of my life or my mother's memory of her life as told to me, revised by me toward rememory; or it is that of her mother's and her. (95)

Hamilton introduces Yellow Springs, the small Ohio town where she was born, into many of her stories such as *Zeely*, The Justice Trilogy, *M.C. Higgins, the Great*, *The House of Dies Drear* and *Arilla Sun Down*, where the impact and recreation of the natural environment on the children's quest for identity is unique in each.

In "Creative Geography in the Ohio Novels of Virginia Hamilton", Marilyn Apseloff discusses Hamilton's use of the geography of Ohio and New York, whereby Hamilton's creativity emerges from utilising realistic settings to create scenes of landscape and mood for the plot and characters. She explains:

> The rural summer setting in *Zeely* is languid, but the tempo picks up in *Dies*

> *Drear* with its Gothic overtones. The hills of the Higgins family sing a different song with an ominous note as the slag heap inches closer, and with the shift to the town setting in Arilla, there is an echo of drumbeats. More discordant music is felt throughout the *Justice Cycle* with its strained relationships and looks to the future, to survival. Finally, *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* combines harmony and dissonance as mood and situation change. (20)

As Apseloff clarifies, *Zeely* enjoys the vivid descriptions of the Yellow Springs setting, the actual farm fields behind Hamilton's home in adulthood. She draws connection to Hamilton's own farm life in childhood, when her parents had raised pigs and chickens, and grown vegetables, to Uncle Tom's farm in *Zeely*.

I argue that Hamilton's magic of transforming the Yellow Springs settings extends beyond reflecting on an individualistic experience of an author's childhood. At one stage in my study, Ohio settings are employed to reconnect cultural references between Hamilton's young protagonists and their foremothers, a notion pinned in the sixth chapter of my research where Black girls create those connections to transcend the cultural knowledge of the narrative. On another stage, areas around the Ohio river such as Quinella Road—probably derived from Grinnell Road in Yellow Springs—are used in the fourth chapter to reflect on social leadership by young Black girls in Hamilton's fiction. From a feminist perspective, I tend to use the term 'safe spaces' to reflect on the impact of place on female characters. Hamilton chooses to relocate, not only Justice, but also the rest of the unit members to break free and explore their inner powers before returning to the unit to time-travel in the second book of the trilogy, *Dustland* (1980). Similarly, Apseloff connects Hamilton's experience of living in New York to the influence and the

settings of the two Jahdu books and *The Planet of Junior Brown*. When Apseloff wrote this article in 1983, almost twenty-three of Hamilton's books were yet to be written or published. *Bluish*, for instance, includes the settings of Fifth Avenue in New York, and Hamilton represents these differently to all of her other books. Amsterdam Avenue, Broadway and the Bethune Cookman School are all involved to portray aspects of the girls' daily lives in the city. In my discussion of leadership in the fourth chapter, and also of friendship in the third chapter, settings are examined to explore the liberation process of young Black girls in their quest for feminist ideologies of identity.

The relationship between urban spaces and the personal development of Black girls is discussed by Naomi Wood in "Walk-in Closets and Blood-Red Buicks: Urban Space and Personal Development in Virginia Hamilton's *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*". Wood argues that Hamilton blends together two recurring thematic elements of African-American literature—classic rural themes and the challenges of urban life—to create a contemporary form of African-American young-adult literature. Wood's article communicates a crucial principle in my study, the impact of safe spaces on both upmothering in the second chapter and transgenerational trauma in the fourth chapter. Wood examines Hamilton's protagonist, the fourteen-year-old Teresa ('Tree') who lives in a small apartment and seeks refuge in a walk-in wardrobe that offers safety and a space to draw while fantasising about a different kind of life. Wood adds that Tree also dreams about her family owning a car, as a form of movement. She concludes that despite the alienating atmosphere in which Tree lives, Hamilton's norm of character development requires 'confined spaces' (2). In the period when the young Black girl confronts the great responsibilities and overburdening pressures because of her mother's continuous absence, the wardrobe

provides a safe space for Tree to rediscover her lost identity. Wood's notion of identity and safe spaces backs up the experience of upmothering by African-American girls. In her claim, "it also confines women to the home. For young girls who are still establishing their identities, this confinement can stunt. Tree's reaction to the realities of her environment underscores the problematic status of safety in the urban environment" (164), a concise message is conveyed about the ability to balance the domestic security in safe spaces and prevent it from becoming an obstacle in the passage of identity formation.

1.5.4 The Black mother–daughter relationship

In my research, feminist theoretical approaches consider the Black mother–daughter relationship as critical to the determination of feminist empowerment that develops within the norms of Black girls' identity. Hilary Crew makes several pertinent points in this regard, where in her "Feminist Theories and Voices of Mothers and Daughters in Selected African American Literature for Young Adults", she briefly explains several of the different feminist theoretical positions, such as the work of Nancy Chodorow, Adrienne Rich and Patricia Hill Collins, from which the mother–daughter relationship has been studied in both Black and White critical literary studies, and the relevance and limitations of recent feminist studies on female adolescence and the mother–daughter relationship. The limitations in the wider theory here validate the significance of my thesis, and specifically the second chapter since it discusses upmothering practices from the perspective of Black mother–daughter relationships. Additionally, Crew follows with an analysis of how the mother–daughter relationship is constructed in the context of various Black family structures in different settings (1-2). *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* is included amongst various African-American young adolescents' novels analysed in this

regard.

Crew declares two important aspects relevant to my work on feminist identity. First is that a line is drawn between establishing a framework for Black mother–daughter relationships and their White counterparts, due to the cultural issues being addressed. The work of Black feminists such as Gloria Joseph and Collins echoes the approach in my study, because it connects the mother–daughter relationship to the shared experiences of racial inequality and the collective history of slavery.[9] The second crucial aspect of Crew's study is the analysis of different mothers' and daughters' voices, and how the comparison she creates between different Black girls' voices assists my discussion of Tree's upmothering practices as a form of othermothering. Crew presents this comparison as "the double consciousness of being both daughter and mother as Tree moves between past and present" (13).

1.5.5 Radical existentialism

Kirby Farrell writes about radical existentialism in "Virginia Hamilton's "Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush" and the Case for Radical Existential Criticism", reviewing the novel as explicitly celebrating a young woman's personal autonomy, while the plot dooms the majority of the male characters and marginalises the mother's role. Farrell's inclusion in this literature review is intended to present existing arguments about Tree's care provision, explained in my second chapter as othermothering. Farrell claims the overburdening tasks of the mothering, particularly in terms of

[9] In terms of the limited material available on Black mother–daughter relationships in general, Gloria Joseph provides biographies, novels and poetry of Black women that have functioned as primary data from which to explore this relationship in "Black Mothers and Daughters: Their Roles and Functions in American Society". Hilary Crew also offers *Double Stitch* as a recent anthology of fiction, essays and poems on the Black mother–daughter relationship and Black women's and girls' experiences within this relationship.

nursing and confronting the death of her brother, in the absence of her at-work mother. In fact, my second reading of Farrell's study encountered reflections of romanticism that alienate the experience of the child Tree from social factors. Farrell borrows Chodorow and Janice Radway's theory in the analysis of Tree from the adults' perspective. Farrell's reflection on Radway's *Reading the Romance* results in deciding that for adult women, progression in identity is hindered by vicariously fundamental anxieties. My analysis of othermothering practices by Tree is presented through Hamilton's social realist approach in demonstrating Black adolescent experiences during the early 1980s. Viewing the protagonist's othermothering tasks as both assisted by another communal mother, Miss Pricherd, and then subsequently and conceptually corrected by Tree's biological mother, my analysis suggests that Hamilton's approach emerges as criticism of exaggerated adolescent othermothering social practices.

Farrell's critique of Tree's burdened life as an adolescent is logical, given the account of her overwhelming mothering tasks. When he comments, "the budding fourteen-year-old is already tacitly burdened with motherhood" (162), mothering as a reference becomes somewhat vague because it implies the role of the mother, Viola, as part of the entire Black mothering institution.[10] In her argument about the Gothic in Hamilton's novels, Moss discusses a similar perspective about the alienation of Tree and Dabney, claiming that Hamilton provides, "intense apprehension of the central character's claustrophobic existence".[11] When comparing

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[10] Motherhood is also defined according to Adrienne Rich and Andrea O'Reilly as a mode of patriarchal institution that is male-defined and oppresses women.

[11] In her "Gothic and Grotesque Effects in Virginia Hamilton's Gothic Fiction", Anita Moss investigates Hamilton's use of Gothic conventions in the Drear series, *The Planet of Junior Brown* and *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*.

Hamilton's novel to Edgar Allan Poe's famous Gothic tale, "The Fall of the House of Usher", Moss agrees with Farrell that Tree's extremely enclosed home and her brother represent the beginning and the end of their existences.

Hamilton sheds light on the connection between the terms of othermothering as a practice, rather than a historical institution, and the repression of childhood. The depiction of the consequences of excessive upmothering practices is an area on which she shines a light to draw attention to whatever practices may lead to stereotypes of children's oppression.

1.5.6 Supernaturalism, sci-fi and 'otherness'

Hamilton excels in science fiction, especially in The Justice Trilogy. Gregory Hampton and Wanda Brooks analyse Hamilton with Octavia Butler for the relationship between culture and science fiction in their work. Both authors use time-travel and characters who live in worlds where evolution is not automated or technologically influenced. Hampton and Brooks elaborate on the themes of the alienation and marginalisation of African-Americans through the medium of science fiction. This suggests further situating the possibility of 'otherness', acting as a voice that reminds humanity of the depth of alienation experienced by people of colour. The analysis is concerned with the last two books of the Justice sequel—*Dustland* and *The Gathering*. Since my research focuses on Hamilton's more realist novels, these two books are excluded, and only *Justice and Her Brothers* is discussed in this thesis to connect Black girls' identity to forms of social realism. In addition, Hampton and Brooks assert Hamilton's ability to create narratives infused with historical context, while bringing to life those characters who are dually situated in multiple time periods, thus emphasising Hamilton's record, in many novels, of affirmation of the generational connections of youth to their foremothers.

Concerning the supernatural elements in *M.C. Higgins, The Great*, David L. Russell's discussion highlights the symbolic presentation Hamilton employs to portray Black individuals forging a path for themselves in life. Russell's critique of Hamilton's symbolism describes how such portrayal is merely a mythic enactment of the African-American means for survival. He points out the confusion encountered in *M.C. Higgins, The Great* when myth and realistic interpretations collide at the emergence of M.C. owning a forty-foot pole, his neighbours, the Killbums, having six fingers and toes, or the snake hoop. It also occurs when M.C. himself moves away from childhood by building defences to protect his house and family (73). Perry Nodelman refers to a similar confusion in the novel, particularly when comparing its ambiguities to Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. In "The Limits of Structures: A Shorter Version of a Comparison between Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon and Virginia Hamilton's M. C. Higgins the Great", Nodelman employs structuralist views to show how children's novels tend to have a different structural focus than those for adults, an approach that is confused in *M.C. Higgins, the Great*. My study has no concerns with Hamilton's symbolism, boyhood or supernatural[12] elements, but Russell's use of the reader's response, primarily to interpret aspects of Black boys' survival or coming of age, neglects the many empowering experiences of the protagonists that I consider.[13]

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[12] Gail Sidonie Sobat has an interesting interpretation of Hamilton's employment of supernatural elements such as ghosts in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, to enhance the development of her female character, Tree. By questioning concepts of reality and insanity, she considers the appearances of Brother Rush's ghost as essential to the protagonist's mythic quests for selfhood, identity and ultimately, survival. Borrowing from Freud, Sobat sums up that Hamilton suggests the visitations of the ghost are a means by which women may cure phobias, conquer fears and pain and come to terms with a traumatic past (168-173).

[13] Russell's article, as the only critical study of the Newbery Award-winning book, exemplifies the lack of critical and literary studies, when considering that *M.C. Higgins, The Great* is one of Hamilton's most celebrated books and the winner of the Boston Globe–Horn Book Award for Fiction in 1996, the international Hans Christian Andersen Medal in 1992, and the Newbery Medal for

This literature review of critical responses to Hamilton's novels provides clear insight into the status of Black female adolescents in children's literature scholarship. No study to date has directly examined the connection between Hamilton's fiction and feminism within social realist frames of narrative. Although Trites's implications of feminist aspects encompass voice and agency, her selected novels *Arilla Sun Down* and *The Magical Adventures of Pretty Pearl* are examined from a metafictional perspective. Nevertheless, Trites's notion of narratology and culture weaves together Black girls' art of storytelling, beauty, ability and feminism. My thesis details such connections, in addition to other proposed themes, while suggesting new frontiers for future studies that may explore feminism from other literary and social perspectives. Hamilton's legacy, according to my literature review, is ready for examination in the light of gender, race and culture.

Previous research shows the literature gap in the critical studies concerning Hamilton as a Black children's literature author. As I have shown, no study has discussed in depth feminist identity in Hamilton's novels. It also reveals that most of her canon is completely excluded from the critical studies arena. Amongst my selected texts, *Bluish* and *Cousins* are excluded from any feminist discussion. Regarding other novels, *The Gathering* (1981), *Willie Bea and the Time Martians Landed* (1983), *A Little Love* (1984), *Junius Over Far* (1985), *The Mystery of Drear House* (1987), *A White Romance* (1987), *Anthony Burns: The Defeat and Triumph of a Fugitive Slave* (1988), *In The Beginning: Creation Stories from Around the World* (1988), *The Bells of Christmas* (1989), *Drylongso* (1992), *Plain City* (1993), *Second Cousins* (1998) and *Time Pieces* (2001) are excluded from any critical examination.

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excellence in American children's literature in 1975. It also won the National Book Award in the category of Children's Books.

1.6 Methodology

My study of feminism and girlhood in Hamilton's books requires a qualitative literature-based approach. The analysis utilises existing data of selected texts from Hamilton's children's novels, historical accounts of the lives of Black girls during and after slavery, and in one chapter, the images supporting the texts in illustrated novels such as *Zeely*. I use the method of content analysis in categorising the themes and ideas, and narrative analysis by investigating the themes explored to interpret their meaning and literary value. My critical approach benefits from social theories of Black feminism and other social theories of leadership, trauma and psychological models of friendship in adolescence.

My analysis leads to a contribution to the field of children's literature because it answers the question—What are the facets of Black feminist identity explored in Hamilton's novels? In the context of a field continually critiqued for a lack of engagement with Black authors, my study revivifies one of the most significant early voices, and one who continually works at the intersections of race, gender and childhood across a thirty-year period.

My choice of theoretical focus on five feminist ways of understanding Hamilton's books is largely influenced by the nature of Hamilton's fiction itself. Because she efficiently crosses disciplines including science fiction, social sciences (e.g. the history of trauma, Black families enmeshed with slavery, and gender tensions), cultural studies, oral and literary traditions of storytelling, art, folklore and music, my approach to analyse feminist aspects in her work is also interdisciplinary. Believing that there is no one feminist method of inquiry (Harding 1-2), my theoretical framework approaches feminism in Hamilton's fiction through the beneficial lenses of social sciences, socio-political, literary and historical

theorisation.[14] Part of the difficulty in theorising feminism criticism is including Black girlhood at the age of adolescence and pre-adolescence in response to existing social analyses. In certain chapters, the theorisation requires originality in defining and introducing concepts for the first time such as 'Black upmothering', which is considered an extension of the socio-literary theory of Black othermothering.

Collins's feminist social theories are substantially utilised throughout my study. In the second chapter, where I introduce the concept of Black upmothering practices in the lives of Black girls, as explored in Hamilton's literature, I employ two articles as basic theorisation—"The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Mother-Daughter Relationships"—and also as a sub-theorisation approach—"Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood"—in my critical analysis of othermothering. Suggesting that upmothering is a social practice that diverges from Black othermothering, I use the historical definition and roles of othermothers that Collins underscores in both articles. Collins's discussion of 'motherwork' includes liberal divisions of these roles that are broken down into individual, community, private and public experiences. Central to my upmothering argument is the lack of theories about girlhood practices of othermothering. This approach is supported by Collins's premise in "Shifting the Center", so that the shifting of context in which contemporary African-American mothering occurs, also shifts our perceptions of motherhood. The feminist empowerment in Hamilton's *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Bluish* is framed by Collins's standpoint of

[14] Published by the Modern Language Association in 1992, *Teaching Children's Literature* contains articles by critics who practise new historicism, structuralist, feminist, psychological, mythic and response criticism. The breadth in scholarship by critics in children's literature has affected academe's attitude towards the genre. Courses on children's literature are offered in several disciplines today, including American studies, education, English, foreign languages, library school, sociology, philosophy and women's studies (May 81).

othermothering, as part of the broad Black motherwork, concerning symbols of power, survival and identity.

In the fifth and the sixth chapters, I deploy Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* to discuss two other aspects of feminist identity in Hamilton's books. The fifth chapter argues for a model of adolescent leadership in Black girlhood, as presented in Hamilton's narrative from the 1970s and 1990s in *Justice and Her Brothers* and *Bluish*, respectively. My argument about Hamilton's concepts of individualistic and cooperative leadership is connected to Black girls' subjecthood, which is celebrated by Collins's notion of Black feminist activism. Collins's activism intersects with subjecthood, which is central for my analysis of two aspects of Hamilton's leadership, particularly in *Justice and Her Brothers* where the protagonist struggles with gender oppressions and ends up exploring her qualities as a singular group leader. Collins outlines the connection between Black female subjecthood and the oppression that turns them into subjected individuals by stressing the need for leadership as a form of resistance. To explain this subjecthood through a literary analysis, I borrow Trites's perception of this subjugated form of identity and how young female adolescents articulate voices in *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels.* In fact, Hamilton's narrative in both *Justice and Her Brothers* and *Bluish* includes texts of leadership that reveal how Hamilton's girls gain power and subjecthood through their own voices. Trites's critical standpoints on adolescents' voices explain both the individualistic and feminocentric experiences of Black girls' leadership experiences.

Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* includes a major epistemological standpoint that supports the representations of Black female bodies in the sixth chapter. Because the chapter is divided into two basic representations of the Black

female's body—beauty and disability—I utilise Collins's perspective in the feminist empowerment of Black beauty carrying the Black cultural knowledge of narratology in *Zeely*. This argument is not presented in my work to solely value the physical beauty of Black girls, but rather to decolonise such bodies from dehumanising images long associated with them. One chief foundation of Collins's theory is the importance of examining the history of Black women's bodily objectification and colonisation during and after the period of enslavement to recreate anti-objectification methods against their bodies. To achieve this, Collins claims that Black women need to inspire and generate epistemological venues as an approach to challenge such images. Such a premise supports my stance of Zeely symbolising both beauty and knowledge.

The second part of the chapter's thesis is explained through the empowerment of Black girls' abled bodies. Not all disabled bodies introduced in Hamilton's books are empowered, but providing agency to Black female bodies in *Bluish* suggests the possibility of empowerment within disability through resilience. This agency is speculated through Bailey's framework of Black feminist disability, which provides the notion of Black women's disabilities as being empowering when considered through the intersectional nature of oppression. Employing Bailey's Black feminist disability framework in the experiences of Black girls in *Bluish* facilitates our understanding of the benefits of considering the historical, social, cultural, political and economic effects of disability in Black girls' empowerment.

The theoretical framework in the remaining chapters approaches feminism through other social and psychosocial theories to explain two major themes connected to Black adolescent feminism—friendship and trauma. In the third chapter, adolescent friendship is interrogated through two different modes of Black

childhood friendship—mixed-gender friendship narratives during the 1970s in *Justice and Her Brothers*, and the sisterhood model at the end of the twentieth century in *Bluish*. In the first model, I analyse how feminist aspects in Black girls are manifested through gender, class and the inevitability of patriarchal oppression through Joyce Ladner's sociological study of Black girls growing up in cities during the 1970s. Ladner's study, in which she spent four years interviewing more than 100 Black girls, critically investigates the misrepresentations of the microcosm in Black female adolescents, including interactions with family members and friends, and the Black community at large. This socio-historical reality assists in explaining how the mixed-gender friendship in *Justice and Her Brothers* struggles through gender tensions. Hamilton's contribution regarding Black cross-sex friendship during the late 1970s is explained in this chapter through the abilities of girls to break through gender boundaries and represent themselves through skills and abilities.

In regards to the second part of the friendship model, I explain how sisterhood as a feminocentric bond is scrutinised through Bonnie Thornton Dill's account of Black sisterhood in "Race, Class, and Gender: Prospects for an All-Inclusive Sisterhood". Dill provides a racial view of inclusive sisterhood that explains Hamilton's paradigm of Black girls' friendship. The promising effect of group solidarity on Black females' bonding justifies Hamilton's feminist perspective of communal friendship. For *Bluish*, I argue how social structures of class and race intersect with girls' experiences of bonding in small groups, an explanatory factor that Dill indicates as influential on both girls' behaviour and perceptions of themselves in society. In both models, the psychological approach of Thomas J. Berndt's model of processing friendship is used as a sub-theorisation as it explains the impact of the social environment on adolescent friendship.

The fourth chapter explains the adaptation of historical trauma theory in Hamilton's narratives of the 1980s and 1990s, represented in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Cousins*, respectively. My analysis of both novels argues for the consequences of the historical transformation of this trauma by using DeGruy's Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome. DeGruy's study is the culmination of twelve years of research developed through the Black cultural and social perspectives of the clinical Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder theory. As I propose, the chapter's thesis suggests presentations of Black girls as being directly and indirectly influenced by their mothers' and othermothers' traumatic experiences in Hamilton's selected books, while DeGruy's theory explains how complex racial, social, economic and traumatic factors influence the formation of girls' feminist standpoints. To explain the transference of this form of trauma through history, my theoretical framework also considers LaCapra's historical perspective of trauma in his 2004 publication, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*. In fact, traumatising cultural agents such as Black mythologies of death and ghosts can be interpreted through LaCapra's work.

Each chapter deploys a different theoretical framework. These are often underpinned by overlapping theories, but because of the variety of approaches I take, I devote substantial time in each separate chapter to the relevant historical, social and theoretical models.

Drawing upon theoretical strands of research into Black feminism and literary criticism in children's fiction, this study explores the structural themes through which Hamilton creates feminist identity in early adolescent fiction. This thesis also determines the extent to which Hamilton unveils gender, race and class in children's literature from a feminist perspective. The thematic structure of the thesis

aims to investigate the representations of Black othermothering, and particularly in terms of upmothering, Black adolescent friendship as a communal form of sisterhood, personal trauma as relatively historical trauma, Black leadership as a form of communal adolescent leadership, and the representation of Black female bodies through beauty and ability. This study contributes to growing literary and theoretical domains in children's literature, while the critical analysis that I provide regarding Black girlhood offers new and important insights into the interpretations of feminism in books for Black children.

Concerning literary criticism, my discussion of Black girlhood traces Hamilton's changing approach and its development from the late 1960s and 1970s, through to the late 1990s, a crucial period of Black history that witnessed various social and political changes that influenced children's literature. In addition, the findings offer an important contribution to the field of feminist and social theorisation in Black children's literature.

When Hamilton began to write in the late 1960s, the Black author and activist Toni Cade Bambara pressed for attention to Black girls' representations in literature. Bambara asserts, "The initiation or rites of passage of the young girl is not one of the darlings of American literature. The coming of age for the young boy is certainly much more the classic case. I wonder if it all means that we don't put a value on our process of womanhood" (247).[15] Hamilton's feminist reflections in children's books thus offer an opportunity to respond to the gap in the literature regarding Black girlhood. The social-practice models she offers such as adolescent leadership or

[15] During an interview in 1979, Bambara expressed her concerns about Black girlhood appreciation in the literature. She also published a collection of short stories in *Gorilla, My Love*, through which she depicts Black girls' experiences.

othermothering manifest social realist accounts of Black girls' lives, and also the connections of these practices to the Black community and culture.

Chapter 2

I Know Who Your Mama Ain't:

Empowerment in Black Girls' Upmothering Practices

2.1 Introduction

The formation of feminist identity in Virginia Hamilton's young African-American girls' fiction is connected to the cultures of African-American mothering and othermothering.[16] In this chapter, I explain how such roles become empowering when passed on to young Black girls as part of the othermothering network. In *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Bluish*, Hamilton introduces the concept of othermothering roles for Black girls. Although taking over an active mothering role would appear to be particularly demanding for ones so young, these situations reflect an undeniable social reality of Black girls because they mirror social practices rooted in the Black culture of West Africa. Othermothering as a social and individual practice refers to women in the African-American community who assisted biological mothers in raising children by sharing the responsibilities of child rearing, centring on those non-biological mothers located at the core of the Black motherhood institution (Troester 13-17). In fact, Black othermothering practices are a product of the institution of African-American motherhood throughout American history, a matter that paves the way for the inclusion of othermothers as a site of

[16] The term othermothering was introduced as a practice of social mothering in 1974 by Carol Stack, in an anthropological study of support for the notion that the lower-class Black family is not necessarily weak or productive of a culture of poverty. Stack suggests that the 'swapping' of caregiving roles entails the provision of a system of kinship. In 1984, Rosalie Troester introduced the term as central to Black communities. Moreover, Andrea Hunter and Stanlie James researched the tradition of othermothers during the 1980s and 1990s, with Hunter primarily exploring the role of Black grandmothers in parental support. In terms of the ground-breaking theorisation of othermothering, Patricia Hill Collins draws on Black women's history to allow further studies of othermothering as a symbol of power.

power for contemporary Black families (Collins 347, O'Reilly 11, Rich 42).[17] My main thesis in this chapter highlights how Hamilton reintroduces othermothering practices in a historical age-free pattern, one I refer to as African-American 'upmothering' practices undertaken by African-American girls. Hamilton's distinct nature of African-American feminist identity for young girls is created through her novelty in confronting the phenomenon of African-American mothers losing their mothering role due to their absence from the home, while empowering younger generations through upmothering practices.

In this thesis, the term 'upmothering' refers to Black girls' experiences in sharing the responsibilities of caregiving for other children in the family. Thus, this chapter investigates how Hamilton's narratives in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Bluish* expand the concept of Black othermothering by introducing the Black girls' upmothering.

This chapter's sub-thesis determines Hamilton's narrative as a Black Entwicklungsroman, with Trites describing the term Entwicklungsroman[18] in 2000 as being relevant to upmothering experiences as an empowering relationship for both Black mothers and girls.

In the following sections, I introduce the concept of upmothering, and those theories that explain why the experience is introduced as an empowering process in Hamilton's work when offered as a constructive practice for young Black girls. However, prior to conducting an in-depth analysis of *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*

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[17] See Patricia Hill Collins's "The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Mother-Daughter Relationships".

[18] The German terms 'Entwicklungsroman' and 'Bildungsroman' were originated by the philologist Karl Morgenstern in 1819. John C. Tibbetts suggests that whereas Bildungsroman refers to the development of the personality and mind, Entwicklungsroman indicates the development of the whole person through experiences both in the mind and reality.

and *Bluish*, I make two critical points. First, the definition of Black girls' upmothering practices in Hamilton's selected narrative is introduced for the first time through this research. The term represents two levels of upmothering practice, as demonstrated by the two protagonists, Tree and Dreenie, whose relationships to their biological mothers are also explored. Second, based on my theoretical framework of Black feminism, I interpret the practice of upmothering in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Bluish* as a feminist empowering practice. To explain how I reach this conclusion, I investigate the socio-political history of African-American women's mothering, where a primary factor to consider is Black women's work during the slavery and post-slavery periods. Black mothers' work produced patterns of othermothering, including Black girls taking on the role of upmothers. In the following section, I include the definition of Black upmothering as an experience, while I explore and build upon the social theories that explain how othermothering, as a general concept, is an empowering experience for young Black girls.

In this chapter, I discuss how othermothering as a practice can be empowering for African-American girls. First, I trace the history of othermothering from Africa to approximately the period of sharecropping, and then clarify how Hamilton negotiates that history in two very distinct periods—1982 and 1999. My intention is to trace the history of othermothering, and to supplement this history with the category of upmothering, which Hamilton negotiates in two distinct ways across two specific periods of time. In the first, she shines a light on a broken family and how a young girl copes with a disabled brother and an absent mother. In the second, she explores how those upmothering practices affect a more affluent urban household in the late 1990s. For this purpose, I select two texts for the analysis—

Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush and *Bluish*—and also to fill the cultural gap in between. *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* is something of an outlier. It depicts one of the most broken homes in Hamilton's stories, and therefore provides an interesting test case for modes of upmothering. *Bluish*, at the other end of the spectrum, is a rather comfortable household to consider for analysis. Enjoying the socio-economic stability of a middle-class Black family in New York, Dreenie in *Bluish* is a ten-year-old girl who lives with both parents.

The major contribution of this chapter is extending Collins's concept of othermothering through upmothering, leading to a distinct category in theoretical frameworks of African-American mothering. While the dynamics of socio-economic circumstances in the two books are partially discussed in this chapter, the urban versus rural divides, racial factors and middle-grade versus early teens and girlhood with sexuality are not discussed. Despite the socio-economic and urban factors, and even the family dynamics and the type of parenting within the house differing greatly between these two novels, I believe that these influences are not deeply connected to Hamilton's representations of the psychosocial dynamics of upmothering experiences.

2.2 African-American Upmothers and Black Feminism

2.2.1 What is Black upmothering?

The term 'upmothers' is a one that originates in my research, and as far as I have been able to determine, it has never been used previously in literary, critical or sociological studies. It is divergent from the social network of Black communal mothering or othermothers.[19] This establishment has been recognised, as Collins

[19] All of these roles of "Other-mothering/Community mothering", "motherhood as a social activism" and "Nurturance as the resistance" are ascribed with empowerment to Black mothers because they transformed Black mothering into a site of power (O'Reilly 11).

implies where she asserts that, "Young women are often carefully groomed at an early age to become othermothers" (180), as playing a major part in the mothering network in African-American culture. Relatively, and as far as Hamilton's fiction reveals in the selected novels, the concept of upmothers can be defined as limited practices conducted by young Black girls in the temporary absence of their biological mothers, primarily through taking care of other siblings and occasionally members of other families. This definition is developed through two socio-historical considerations critical to children's fiction. First, upmothering is a limited adolescent practice in which temporariness is a key factor. Respectively, the distinctively 'experiential' upmothering practices are opposed to biological mothering or to motherhood being institutional or patriarchal.[20] Feminist theorists Fiona Green, Adrienne Rich and Andrea O'Reilly sustain a lengthy argument to praise the power of mothering as a liberating experience compared to the oppressive institution of motherhood. In *Of Woman Born*, Rich clarifies that, "To destroy the institution is not to abolish motherhood. It is to release the creation and sustenance of life into the same realm of decision, struggle, surprise, imagination, and conscience intelligence, as any other difficult, but freely chosen work" (280). This liberating notion of mothering as a varied practice is accepted by some Black feminist theorists who recognise communal Black mothering as supportive to bloodmothers. This has resulted in the appreciation of othermothers who traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood (Collins 195, Troester 13-16). As Collins

[20] To comprehend the notion of oppressive motherhood as an institution, it is comprehensive to note O'Reilly's "Mothering against motherhood and the possibility of empowered maternity for mothers and their children", where she reports that women's mothering is defined and controlled by the larger patriarchal milieu in which they live. This is because across many cultures, most women mother from within the institution of motherhood. When O'Reilly reflects on Rich's *Of Woman Born*, she indicates that patriarchal systems/cultures enforce rules and roles on both mothers and daughters in terms of the roles that they are expected to play.

affirms, othermothering is recognised in Black communities as powerful and influential, due to its contribution to the well-being of their communities—othermothers "uplift the race" on behalf of the Black community (346-347). The second factor is the reoccurrence of such a pattern of othermothering that makes it a social experience worthy of examination, although the term 'upmothering' has never been used by literary or social theories. Yet, the tracing of motherwork carried out by Black community females through history indicates the existence of othermothers as female children in West African agricultural life, prior to the era of American Slavery (Sudarkasa 50-59). Young Black girls stayed at home while mothers worked, usually assisting biological mothers by sharing the mothering duties. The likelihood of such social practices with sufficient age became inevitable due to the increasing demands on Black mothers during slavery. Due to slavery and sharecropping, Black girls would remain at home completing chores, and even after the great migration to the North between 1915 and 1930,[21] Black girls moved to Northern cities to help their relatives or work for other Black families. Since this chapter defines upmothering as an extension of previous forms of Black othermothering networks, Hamilton's feminist girlhood empowerment includes upmothers as an invoking symbol of power extracted from Black culture. To conclude, it is crucial here to distinguish Black girls' upmothering from Black children's parentification. The latter is defined as a boundary distortion where the parent–child relationship becomes altered or reversed (Wells and Jones 331-339). It is typically an overburdening[22] role assigned to children under harsh social

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[21] See Eloise Greenfield's descriptive poetic account in *The Great Migration Journey to the North*.

[22] Patricia Mika, Raymond Bergner and Michael Baum suggest the following conditions in which parentification becomes problematic: "(a) when the parent becomes dependent upon the child and assumes the role and/or behaviors of the child, (b) when the role become a burden for the child and inhibits the child's personal development, (c) when the role goes beyond what the child is capable of doing, (d) when the child is exploited in the role and is prevented/discouraged from acting in age-

circumstances leading to a dependence on children within single-parent families to provide emotional, practical and sometimes financial support to their family (Jones and Wells 145-150). In her fiction, Hamilton provides two levels of empowering upmothers' experiences, without jeopardising the young girls' social and personal growth. She highlights possible undesirable developments that may turn a child from being a practitioner of caregiving tasks into a full-time parent. Moreover, the practices of upmothers are limited to temporary roles that create self-identification with the power of giving rather than overburdening young girls with excessiveness of practice.

2.3 Upmothering in Theory and the Black Mother–Daughter Relationship

The authentication of Black feminist identity in upmothering experiences is formed through subsets of othermothering theorisation in Black feminist theory. The impact of Black mother–daughter relationships is also discussed within Black Entwicklungsroman. In this section, the discussion of Black Entwicklungsroman is significant because I conceptualise it within Black girls' upmothering—demanding priority for the focus on Black girls' experiences regarding the mother–daughter relationship during childhood and prepubescence. The Entwicklungsroman is essentially a type of novel that describes the growth and development of a child or an adolescent, which is portrayed through an experience that characters undergo prior to reaching adulthood (Trites 9-10).[23] The feminist theory typically centres on Black women, while Black girls' experiences are neglected, leaving such minors without

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appropriate behaviors and activities, and (e) when children are punished for acting out the role as the parent, even though they are expected to do so" (qtd.in Gilford and Reynolds 57).

[23] Roberta S. Trites differentiates the terms of Bildungsroman and Entwicklungsroman in *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, by determining the time span of the child/adolescent experience. "For purposes of clarification", she declares in her introduction, "I tend to refer to Bildungsroman as novels in which the protagonist comes of age as an adult. If I refer to a novel as Entwicklungsroman, that is because the protagonist has not reached adulthood by the end of the narrative" (10).

role models to evaluate their own experiences. These experiences cannot be addressed without analysing the Black mother–daughter connections, and in this chapter, the othermother–daughter relationships. In addition, to consider both of Hamilton's novels as Entwicklungsroman is to consider other intersectional factors of both mothers' and daughters' experiences such as gender, race and class. To consider both of Hamilton's novels as Entwicklungsroman is to consider other intersections of the experiences of both mothers and their daughters. Hence, the focus on the psychological and moral growth of both protagonists is appropriate as they travel similar journeys of upmothering in their childhood. Most of the experiences in their lives emerge through interactions with their biological mothers and othermothers, which help them to identify with upmothering practices. During both fairly complex journeys, the Black girls gain maturity gradually. The American sociologist Virginia Beane Rutter argues:

> Mothers can raise girls with a vital, intact feminine spirit . . . [The] mother–daughter relationship is the ground for teaching, talking, and sharing the feminine experience and the more we empower that experience, the healthier our girls will be. We need to secure our daughters' sense of self-worth, in their mind and their bodies, so that they will not turn away from us and from themselves. (qtd. O'Reilly 163)

Rutter's notion of the mother–daughter relationship, similar to Rich's, emphasises how a robust mother–daughter connection is what makes a strong female self possible for girls. Rich adds that a woman can reflect on her daughter's life when she believes in herself and develops a liveable space around her to demonstrate the existence of such possibilities to her daughter (247). In the context of Black Entwicklungsroman, the literature allows room to investigate the effect of racial and

gender oppression on young girls at an early stage, as an influential facet of the experiences analysed. Furthermore, it enables them to understand the limited space they occupy in childhood. Subsequently, the Entwicklungsroman provides Black girls with opportunities to deal with and reflect upon how such oppressions are encountered.

The mother–daughter relationship is explained in this chapter as being supportive and nurturing for upmothering practices, and an empowering force for African-American girls' feminist identity. This relationship also sheds light on how Hamilton suggests exchangeable roles of power through this bond in both novels. The critical examination of both the Black girls' upmothering and the mother–daughter relationship in this chapter is developed through the tradition of Black feminism and mothering, with a particular consideration of Black girls' practice of motherwork. In her classic Afrocentric mothering theories, Collins argues in favour of the convenience of Black girls participating in communal mothering. She further identifies major characteristics of empowerment resulting from mothering practices for all the Black females involved in the women-centred mothering community. Both of her standpoints in "Shifting the Center" and "The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Mother-Daughter Relationships" suggest aspects of empowerment in motherwork, while of particular relevance for this chapter are those tasks performed by young Black girls.

Upmothering practices can be perceived as a facet of the Afrocentric ideology of motherhood when considering how the challenges of Black motherhood have intersected to generate Afrocentric forms of othermothering. In terms of African-American practices for children, Collins claims that mothers empower daughters with skills of independence through training. For instance, in *Sweet*

Whispers, Brother Rush, the absence of Tree's mother reveals her as being less protective, but Viola actually wants to keep Tree away from the street, and independent as she develops maternal thoughts.

In both othermothering standpoints, Collins highlights factors that led to the emergence of such images. She draws upon gender, class oppression and empowerment, and the powerful images of othermothers through tracking the socio-economic record of Black mothers and daughters in African-American history. Therefore, understanding the different factors behind the change in this role facilitates in explaining the significance of the contemporary articulation of Afrocentric upmothering in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Bluish*. Nevertheless, when Collins discusses the significance of othermothers in Black communities, she justifies the social forces leading to the acceptance of othermothers' authority inside the Black family. She states that African and African-American communities recognise that assigning one person with the full responsibility for mothering children may not be practical or even possible given the socio-economic circumstances of mothers' work. She concludes that, "As a result, "othermothers," women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities, traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood" (342).

The second dimension of Collins's theorised subject relevant to this chapter is how her standpoint grants access to Black girls' participation in othermothering as upmothers. In manifesting the connection between young girls' practices of upmothering and feminist empowerment, Collins asserts in "Shifting the Center" that:

> Despite policies of dominant institutions that place racial ethnic mothers in positions where they appear less powerful to their children, mothers and

> children empower themselves by understanding each other's position and relying on each other's strengths. In many cases, children, especially daughters, bond with their mothers instead of railing against them as symbols of patriarchal power. (55-56)

The inclusion of Black young daughters as children is pertinent to this chapter due to two significant factors. The first is the exchangeable support between mothers and daughters, where the bonding works to empower the confrontation of several oppressions, including patriarchy. In this reciprocal relationship, the power position is acquired through mothering acts. Black mothers prepare Black girls for both worlds they have to live in—childhood and adulthood—as Joyce Ladner assumes, in an attempt to ensure that their children's lives will be better than their own (66). Second, when Collins specifies this bonding "especially [for] daughters", she revisits the feminist empowerment of girls in particular, a source of power generated in this mother–daughter relationship (347). In my analysis in this chapter, I present Hamilton's protagonists, Tree and Dreenie, as empowered by the exchange of authority, primarily enabled through their upmothering training. An extension of this framework is how this relationship expands to include community othermothers in addition to biological working mothers.

2.4 The Socio-Economic History of Black Mothering and the Mother–Daughter Relationship

The connection between othermothering and upmothering is a comprehensive one when viewed through the lens of the socio-economic circumstances of Black mothering history. In fact, the theorising of the othermother ideology emerged through the exploration of the nature of Black mothers' work in different periods of history. Collins's theory of mothering as a social value is discussed within a

nourishing, large network of females. The existence of this mothering paradigm is created because of the nature of the mothering role as communalised by Black mothers' labour. She comments:

> Mothering was not a privatized nurturing "occupation" reserved for biological mothers, and the economic support of children was not the exclusive responsibility of men. Instead, for African women, emotional care for children and providing for their physical survival were interwoven as interdependent, complementary dimensions of motherhood. (341)

In this context, the Black mother's work became the main factor affecting the family structure due to the economic pressures in African-American families, particularly in the twentieth century, which forced them to seek employment in the homes of White families. Accumulating since the beginning of American slavery, this phenomenon has produced Afrocentric mothering practices that are inclusive to family members, relatives and other community females. Collins asserts that for Black women, labour has been an important and valued dimension of Afrocentric definitions of motherhood. On another level, their experiences as oppressed mothers and workers had a considerable influence on the type of mothering relationships bloodmothers and othermothers had with Black children (Collins 344, Hook 184). Therefore, African-American women's labour is central to social studies investigating Black feminism and mothers' roles in African-American culture. Consequently, the passage of Black girlhood is also affected, a matter that led to a more empowering mother–daughter relationship in Black families during the twentieth century. In fact, the comparison of the type and consequences of Black women's work in West Africa, American slavery and the post-slavery era until the twentieth century explains the change in some Black motherhood practices. This

includes the devastating aftermath of mothers' work under slavery, including mother–child separation, sexual exploitation and the changed dynamics of the mother–daughter relationship. Hamilton's narrative of Entwicklungsroman does not completely overlook such consequences, but rather explains how Black mothers exploit the learning acquired from negative experiences to empower their Black daughters to handle such encounters. That, in turn, helps them to understand and confront multiple socio-economic pressures.

Since the beginning of slavery, women's labour had basically become a form of dehumanisation performed to maintain the institution of slavery in the United States. Demothering percolated into Black women's lives as the oppressive political economy of slavery placed mothers under the multiple pressures of economic and physical exploitation. Black motherhood in the early years of slavery was a form of socio-political manipulation, whereby the majority of African-American women remained exploited as agricultural workers (Collins 344). The erosion in motherhood started because, as Diana Paton puts it, African-American women, as mothers, were not of great value to the slave masters. Accordingly, reproduction by Black mothers who worked as slaves was not encouraged by their slave masters, who preferred importing new male slaves instead of handling the cost of reproduction and raising children in the plantations (1-2). Nevertheless, this attitude towards reproduction shifted as the politics of importing slaves from Africa changed. When the importation of slaves was prohibited in 1807, reproduction became an obligatory process advantageous to slaveholders for the purpose of increasing the number of slaves. Motherhood under this condition is then separated from the role of childbearing because slave women were not allowed to mother their own children, although they were forced to have as many children as possible (Allen 139-149).

Consequently, the bond between Black mothers and their children was broken because of the dictatorship of oppression and torture. Having to complete colossal volumes of work, African-American mothers could not prevent their children from being sold[24] at any age, such as the childhood experiences of both Fredrick Douglass and Booker T. Washington. In addition, those biracial children born out of the White master's rapes of slave women were often sent to the slave market to be sold as new members of the workforce.[25]

Considering Black motherhood and the mother–child relationship before this period, work did not conflict with mothering. Prior to American slavery, the West African and agricultural communities depended on women's work in the field and yet, as working did not detract from West African women's mothering. Instead, being economically productive and contributing to the family-based economy was an integral part of motherhood (Sudarkasa 60). According to the nature of the African family, the willingness to work and exchange roles constituted the family structure, which suggests the acceptance of young girls participating in the othermothering process. During that period, a woman's labour was a fundamental component of her role, whereby African children received the care they needed even if they had to accompany their mothers into the field. Mothers could also ascribe this role to their older daughters or sons at home when they had extra work to complete (Collins 55-56). The evaluation of this role by young girls suggests the early participation of

[24] The sale and auction of children in slave markets was not the only reason to lose them. Herbert Covey reports on the rates of Black children's mortality during slavery, stating that the average mortality rate was four times of that their White Southern counterparts, and nearly 50% of Black children died for reasons primarily connected to their Black mother's work. Many Black children were born malnourished due to the undernourishment of their mothers during pregnancy. Once born, children were not provided with proper diets, rendering them vulnerable to anaemia or cholera, and eventual death (8).

[25] Ironically, only the elite infants who survived the harsh conditions of Black mothers' pregnancy tended to be taken into the workforce in plantations.

Black girls in othermothering, even before such responsibilities were attributed to older female relatives or communal mothering.

In terms of othermothering as a concept of elderly women's practice, this manifested during slavery, creating a social connection to the Black motherhood institution. One social paradox is that Black mothers became othermothers to the children of White masters as 'Mammies', which is why they needed other Black mothers to care for their own children. While the heavy load of plantation work excluded mothers from the caregiving role, they were forced to othermother the children of their White masters when they were located domestically. Referred to as Mammies, enslaved women took over the job of the White mother, in addition to the household chores. The regime of slavery thus turned women's work into a demothering mechanism, as the inclination for parenting was imperative to their existence as slaves. As a product of the biological mother's obligations to work during slavery, othermothers became dominant cultural figures who were historically strengthened through the social network of African-American extended-family members. One of the principle duties of elderly slaves was to spend time with children and slave children, usually in their homes. Such demands of enslavement, according to Collins, changed the relationship and objectives of mothering and work.[26] It became even more degrading to the point that, "By denying enslaved women marriage, citizenship and even humanity, slavery provided no social context for issues of privatized motherhood as a stay-at-home occupation" (Collins 50). On the contrary, enslaved mothers had to relinquish the role of nursing their own children to older women or older siblings at home, which cemented the maternal

[26] Work under slavery became more beneficial for slaveholders than for Black families and children, where enslaved women did not have any agency regarding the amount, nature, time or even the recompense for their labours in both the plantation and the home.

practice of othermothering into African-American culture.

African-American girlhood reciprocated with the Black mothering wave of the sharecropping period. The harsh circumstances of Black women's motherhood affected African-American girls and expanded their role as caregivers. Charles S. Johnson's investigation of the Black oral narrative explores the strains of youthhood in the rural South of America during slavery, where Black children were impacted by the nature of agricultural Black families' lives in this region.[27] Johnson's account draws attention to the multitude of responsibilities that Black children had to assume, affirming that, "their personalities are profoundly influenced in a more realistic way by their familiar round of work and play, by the character and composition of their immediate families and their cliques" (38). While living in the Southern states, young Black girls were trained at an early age to carry out household errands and to care for their younger siblings in the mothers' absence. Black girls were also influenced by the wave of work and migrations of African-American mothers who moved to the Northern states. After travelling to the North to share mothering responsibilities with other relatives who worked domestically, several years later they would find their own domestic day jobs.

The Black mother–daughter relationship improved in the post-slavery era, but was still fragile as during the first half of the twentieth century the demothering of Black women by White employers continued. Mothers were required to leave their children for two weeks at a time and live in the houses where they worked (Johnson 66-71). Black girlhood of that time confronted similar race and gender tensions to those of their mothers during slavery,[28] and even post-slavery periods such as

[27] Black people in the South represented almost one-quarter of the farming population.

[28] During slavery, the oppressive system allowed sexual abuse as a legal right of the slaveholder, and

exploitative work conditions and sexual oppression. In the course of investigating Black and White Southern girlhood during the Jim Crow period (1885–1965), Jennifer Ritterhouse reports that young Southern children worked at an early age, contributing to the well-being of their families. Young girls toiled in the field at the age of seven or less, helping their mothers to pick cotton; as they grew, their workload increased accordingly. In addition to their inclusion in planned labour, they also suffered sexism, although gender functioned as a minor oppression in comparison to the racial oppression. Such challenges commenced at the field, offering girls more space for self-development. According to Ritterhouse, African-American girls in the South worked fewer hours because the tasks of ploughing and gathering crops were devoted to boys, which gave the girls the advantage of attending more hours at school (185). Yet, some Southern girls challenged the gender tensions by insisting on learning boys' tasks, such as Sara Rice who demanded her brother teach her ploughing, whereby, "she and Albert exchanged clothes when they were alone in the field so that all anybody standing on the hill would see would be the pants plowing and the dress hoeing" (185).

The practical work experiences of African-American female adolescents enhanced both their self-fulfilment to confront social tensions, and also their ability to perform upmothering practices. Despite many African-American girls' pursuit of

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thus enslaved women were subjected to sexual exploitation by their masters. In *A History of Women in America*, Hymowitz and Weissman explain how slave women were deprived of the right to defend themselves against the abuser and that, "to oppose the rape of black women in effect meant opposing slavery" (51). Their expected role as concubines to the White master was seen as one of their daily duties, and since they were treated like 'objects' or 'animals' instead of human beings, they had no choice but to accept the sexual assault, or even rape and violence, by their masters. Thelma Jennings distinguishes Mammies from the sexually active stereotypes of the 'Jezebel' who were forced to have sexual interactions with both White masters and slave men. Jennings explains that, "some white men did not feel responsible for the [biracial] children they fathered since, according to their justification, the black, promiscuous Jezebel had initiated the sexual relationship" (64). The sexually abused Black women, whether single or married, thus did not have the choice to reproduce voluntarily because they were forced to practise mandatory sexual acts.

financial gain, their work was often carried out to support their families. The type of non-farming employment included skills they had acquired from their work with their own families, and which formed a constituting facet of their home identity. During their work under slavery, and even the post-sharecropping period, young girls handled the responsibility of the household in the absence of their working mothers. In *Sweet Pea; A Black Girl Growing Up in the Rural South*, Jill Krementz illustrates the life of a girl who lived in Montgomery County, Alabama. Like many other Southern Black girls during the latter part of the twentieth century, her mother went to work in the field, leaving her at home with her brothers. According to Barbara, known as 'Sweet Pea', her father Henry Anderson rarely visited as he worked away from home at the Vestry Hospital. Sweet Pea participated in the household chores, fetching of water, cleaning and the bathing of her siblings. She also enjoyed her hobbies such as playing the flute, as well as attending school (see Figs. 1-7 in Appendix 1) (Krementz 18-53). Sweet Pea is merely an example of the experiences of many Southern girls who grew up handling the domestic responsibilities inside their homes. The self-affirmation that such young girls gained facilitated their working at another level of challenge—upmothering at a young age.

In the 1980s, the structure of the bloodmothers' and othermothers' communities began to face challenges. According to Collins, the entire Black civil society was altered by racial desegregation, and the emergence of class divisions in Black neighbourhoods. Therefore, the theme of bloodmothers', othermothers' and woman-centred networks' endurance in the newly diversified African-American experience was questioned after Black people found themselves in novel residential, educational and employment settings (181). During the 1980s, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* was published, demonstrating Alice Walker's

eloquent defence against the sexism, racism and classism of Black women. Furthermore, coping with the shifting currents of the late 1970s, the Civil Rights Movement, according to Walker, needed the wide-ranging support of human liberation. Walker's prose is a reminder of our mothers' and grandmothers' lived experiences. It is also a call to appreciate the ability of their conditioned emotions and thoughts to include anything other than hard labour and forced servitude. She points out the hidden talents that may have helped those mothers to blossom into singers, actresses and poets because they had never really had the opportunity to explore their natural abilities. Like most other Black-American authors, Hamilton appears to be influenced by this type of Black feminism of the 1980s, in which she attempts to express the struggle of African-American women to define themselves in the social milieu. The Black women's struggle during that period is witnessed through their efforts to recognise themselves, with feminism acting as a scaffolding to help them understand the world by reaffirming themselves as women of colour through different channels like work. In addition, the 1980s, according to Gloria I. Joseph, is a period that featured novelists', poets' and researchers' prolific focus on Black women's experiences, although "within this body of works there still remains a critical dearth of resources on mother and daughter relationships" (94).

In the late twentieth century, both African-American working mothers and their daughters continued to encounter pressures in their mothering roles. Part of the pressure Black mothers experienced was because they identified "the pain of knowing what lies ahead for black children" (Collins 196). The dilemma of African-American mothers was how to fulfil the social demands while coping with certain dominant concerns such as unwanted or repeated pregnancies, or single mother's duties, which might lead to crises such as child mortality, substandard housing and

social pollution such as HIV/AIDS. One component of the mothers' challenge was that Black single and married women had to work far from their neighbourhoods, and regardless of the income gained, single working mothers were always classified as poor working women. Those living in low-income inner-city communities were significantly affected, with children being increasingly exposed to illegal drugs and associated criminality.[29] Moreover, Black women had to deal with more aggravating and complex issues related to the issues arising from their young daughters' involvement in teenage pregnancies, and being mired in poverty and poor health. Collins explains, "Black mothers emphasize protection either by trying to shield their daughters as long as possible from the penalties attached to their race, class, and gender or by teaching them how to protect themselves in such situations" (350). Collins's assumption of protective mothers reveals Black mothers' anticipation of potential threats to their daughters' health and well-being. With all the complexities of their daughters' work outside the home, Black mothers learned that although the sexual exploitation decreased during the new economic era, their daughters were still exposed to the risk of rape. Informed by their mothers' history, young Black girls were able to identify with their ancestors' history of sexual oppression, and thus they sometimes rejected working as paid servants to avoid the White man's assault, especially given the low wages offered. Black girls also learned to accept the realities of mothering practices without idealising Black motherhood's demands, thus handling the inherent contradictions as, "Black girls have long had to learn how to do domestic work while rejecting definitions of themselves as Mammies. At the

[29] Patricia Hill Collins explains how the late 1990s witnessed the involvement of many Black men and women in the illegal drugs trade, coinciding with the federal policy of a 'War on Drugs' that disproportionally affected those from impoverished inner-city neighbourhoods and essentially became a 'war on Black communities'. Collins concludes that, "drugs became a major employer of young Black men, and young Black women looked for these men for financial assistance" (59).

same time, they've had to take on strong roles in Black extended families without internalizing images of themselves as matriarchs" (Collins 348). Moving towards a more vivid vision of race and gender pressures associated with work, Black girls established different standards of mothering care provided and expected from them.[30]

In my analysis of Hamilton's selected feminist novels, Black girls are seen through the power acquired from these new standards, where providing care to other members of the family or friends is a role and a site of influence connected to their identity. The feminist power that develops as they grow arises from the challenge of multiple pressures interlaced with their roles as upmothers. Considering Hamilton's African-American mothers and othermothers between the 1980s and 1990s, I assert that Hamilton positively changed her perspective of othermothering to account for the increasing realities of urban modernity, as depicted in *Bluish*. There are other differences present in both narratives as I allude, such as country versus city, nuclear family versus the more secure intergenerational family network, and poverty versus class.[31]

2.5 Hamilton's Feminism in Adolescent Motherwork: From Demothering to Upmothering

Hamilton's *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Bluish* incorporate African-American othermothering as a social practice of upmothering. The thematic patterns in both books examine Black girls' experiences of upmothering as an empowering and

[30] Due to the overall situation of teenage pregnancy, children associated with drugs and girls exposed to sexual assault, Collins remarks on the contribution of othermothers in the Black community given the situation of Black mothers' and daughters' work.

[31] Here, I signal that while I am aware of all these distinctions that the narratives are set on, I have no concerns in discussing them in terms of the impact on upmothering roles.

enabling practice. In the following analysis of both novels, I focus on how Hamilton denotes modern twentieth century African-American othermothering as a division of upmothering—an exceptional form of Black othermothering in Black culture. Such a backdrop introduces young Black girls as they upmother other members of the family and occasionally other members in the Black community, similar to the social tasks performed in West Africa and the post-slavery period. This practical concept is seen as integral and influenced by conventional socio-cultural forms of othermothering such as those by school teachers, maids and grandmothers. The discussion of upmothering practices in this thesis also contributes to Black children's literature and feminist studies as it explains how upmothering can be an empowering practice for young girls. It helps them develop a feminist identity that confronts patriarchal, matriarchal, gender and sexism oppressions amongst African-Americans and other communities. Central to my feminist analysis of Hamilton's adolescent upmothers is how the complexities of interactions between African-American girls and their biological and non-biological mothers are a provocative force that exposes a special reading for Black Entwicklungsroman.

The resurgence of interest in Black practices of motherhood in Hamilton's *Sweet Whispers*, *Brother Rush* and *Bluish* indicates the empowering upmothering roles performed by the young female protagonists. In order to investigate mothering work as a practice by Black girls in African-American communities, a sociological definition of mothering theories as 'practice' is required. This investigation is based on a hypothesis that postulates young African-American adolescents' ability to practise upmothering is empowering to them. This hypothesis, based upon Hamilton's representations, downplays the negative practices of parentification—the overburdening roles imposed on young girls, by which parenting is overtly and

exclusively transferred onto Black girls. Moreover, as this chapter considers two different patterns of upmothering, the social theorisation to argue such assumption is based on certain theorists' mothering grounds related to feminism. To contextualise Black mothers' historical experiences, race and gender comprise the criteria of the theory, a matter that calls for Afrocentric mothering theories, and primarily those forwarded by Collins. All the theories applied in this regard reflect aspects of mothering or maternal caregiving as a limited practice, because they are derivative from socio-economic conditions—the absence of biological mothers due to their commitments to work or education. This locates all the social theories that carry manifestations of empowerment limited to biological mothers outside of my theoretical frame.[32]

As a basic theorisation, I borrow Collins's standpoint of Black othermothering from "The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Mother-Daughter Relationships", and also as a sub-theorisation approach, "Shifting the Center". Both imply the practicality and flexibility of othermothering roles in Black culture. Accredited by their communal history of practice, young females are referred to as being capable of performing such roles in their childhood. Sociological approaches of Black mothering and othermothering are used here to justify the actualisation of upmothering as feminist practices, and their role in enhancing Black

[32] Some feminist theorists who address the uniqueness of mothering as an experience point out the powerful correlation between feminism and contemporary mothering, such as O'Reilly's claims that, "these girls, connected with their mothers and motherline (awareness of heritage), develop a strong sense and proud identity as black women and secure empowerment" (14). Similar to O'Reilly's notion of Black girls' alignment with their foremothers' heritage, Ruddick suggests that, "they achieve empowerment through this identification because motherhood is valued by and is central to African-American culture and because the motherline bestows to the daughter affirming and empowering lessons and images of black womanhood" (15). Both O'Reilly and Ruddick provide the fundamentals of feminist powers transcended to Black girls through bonding with their own mothers. They stand a very short distance from Hamilton's notion of Black mother–daughter relationships. For one aspect, Hamilton's upmothers accept turns of caregiving because it is part of their cultural practice.

girls' power and agency. Collins's view of othermothering also regulates the influence of matriarchal factors such as Black mother–daughter bonding. This should explain how mothers partly pass on their own responsibilities to their daughters, whereby the impact also includes the influence of community mothering.

In applying Collins's othermothering theorisation, it is important to define the distinction between her standpoint of othermothering and my upmothering theory. While Collins provides interrelated general definitions of Black othermothering that help to understand Black motherhood as an inclusive practice of motherwork for many Black females, I am able to add another layer to her theory of othermothering that is specific to young Black female adolescents and children. This extension of theory is based on Black female children being upmothered in West Africa long before even the theorisation of othermothering by Troester and Collins was established. When Collins declares, "Young women are often carefully groomed at an early age to become othermothers" (180), she clarifies the existence of this form of practice in the lives of Black girls, although she omits to provide it in an established framework. Therefore, I essentially utilise Collins's standpoint of othermothering and build upon it, since upmothering is an extension of othermothering culture. The approach to expressing such expansion of theory is by taking the two major facets of Collins's othermothering—mothering and othermothering as a site of power, and social learning theory in Black mothering behaviour—to analyse upmothering as an experience, which are used in my analysis of Hamilton's patterns of upmothering in both novels.

Although the maternal caregiving experiences of Hamilton's protagonists with their biological mothers are different from one another, the mother–daughter relationship continues to be integral to their identity formation. Hamilton's pattern of

feminist upmothering incorporates a dual image of the social practices of upmothering to characterise the proper caregiving practices of young females both in private and public spheres, which should lead to feminist understanding of empowerment. Both Tree and Dreenie demonstrate elements of empowerment as young African-American girls who can operate against negative social and economic circumstances to their own advancement, but the degree to which they develop is evaluated through the intensity of the experience itself, and the mother–daughter relationship.

2.5.1 Upmothering as a site of power

The narratives of both *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Bluish* represent the training of Hamilton's protagonists as they achieve a concept of power by temporarily practising to share preservative care and nurturance with others as children. In *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, fourteen-year-old Teresa Pratt, known as 'Tree', plays the supportive role of a caregiver for her sick, older brother Dabney, who they refer to as 'Dab', with minimal help from the maid, Miss Pricherd. What appears to be a ghost story and adventure of a girl discovering her family history, is actually a layered plot about African-American mothering and othermothering. As she appears to be mothered by either her biological mother, Viola, Miss Pricherd, the maid, or the school teacher, Mrs Noirrette, Tree experiences multiple levels of othermothering training as she sometimes also appears to overlook Viola's role as a mother. Tree's experience of caregiving is the frame of the narrative, which suggests that an upbringing through upmothering is possible, but without turning a child into a parent. Hamilton clarifies this by offering Tree's experience in Black upmothering within difficult circumstances. As the first chapter opens, in her after-school time Tree upmothers Dab, her seventeen-year-old brother and a somewhat cognitively

impaired young man suffering from porphyria, a rare genetic disease that affects both his skin and behaviour. His condition is directly explained in relevance to Tree:

> It was alright between her and Dab. He was seventeen and he was not smart. There. She'd thought it. Some days his head hurt him so bad, he never got off the couch in the living room, lying there in his ratty robe, curled in a ball. Saying that whenever light gets on certain places on his arms, it made him feel like he would jump out of his skin. (13)

Hamilton draws attention to Dab's suffering and fragility from the first appearance he makes, as specifically Tree's object of concern and nurture. Further, his physical distress has apparently influenced his state of mind and has isolated him.[33] Always seen through the presence of his 'Upmother Teresa', he is involved in her humane mission, which requires effort to care for an older sibling immensely dependent upon her.

Tree's experience of upmothering requires intense physical care for a young teenager because her effort is directed to a disabled family member. The care and provision she provides require tolerance, the type that Sara Ruddick refers to as the 'rationality of care' and the patience attached to caregiving, stating that, "patience takes on distinctive meanings for mothers, nurses, teachers, and adult children who engage in these tasks" (47). Ruddick's conception emerges from the care-sharing by the caregiver, which she affirms as "exemplifying many of the alternative ideals of reason formulated by feminists" (46). In the case of Tree's maternal practices, care

[33] This separation is seen in his escape from 'light', a symbol of life and/or hope in the wider world, and which initiates a link to the outside world that represents the source of both his physical and emotional pain. Hamilton's symbolic Blackness, as a common symbol in literature, is employed to convey a dramatic visualisation of Dab's distress. Darkness is often used to convey negativity—evil, death or the unknown; the anticipation of a young man's decay, as strictly implied since life as we know it cannot exist in darkness.

labour is essentially a role that Tree performs substantially in Viola absence from Dab's life, one that creates a bonding between the caregiver and receiver. Nurturing for Tree encompasses everything she has been taught by her mother, such as preparing and feeding Dab his favourite meal of mush and spaghetti. Owing to her own realisation that Dab's sickness renders his behaviour child-like, she provides the logical means to survival that is inaccessible to him. When she asks, "You don't know if you hungry", she continues to enquire in the simplest manner, "Dab, you can't tell really? Think about your tummy-tum. It feels empty yet?" (38). The narrative of Tree's domestic responsibilities demonstrates the power she gains as she advances with preservative love and nurturance in everyday care rituals such as watching over him while he dresses and irons his clothes. In addition, Tree is engaged with specific details of Dab's inability to care for himself. Being different, Dab needs her reminders for caution, such as sitting down often to avoid fainting, or the need to suddenly kneel down. Likewise, as soon as she runs the water for his shower, she reminds him to undress before getting under the running water, which has always been an important step. On a primarily familial level, she reminds herself to play with him and pay him attention or, as she always supposes, "he would become younger and unable to do much" (37).

Notwithstanding being the principal, yet not the sole othermothering figure, Tree is more persistent as she maintains Dab's home education. Although aware that, "Dab ain't smart. No way", and that he "didn't bring home report cards", Tree expresses devoted enthusiasm in teaching him geography and mathematics. She continues to seek small aids that can help him develop, giving him a calculator and even "talked M'Vy into buying him one Christmas" (14). He looks forward to the reading hours given by Tree as she always picks his favourite book by Warren

Miller, *The Cool World* (1959), and specifically "The Time I Got Lost" chapter that describes the lives of boys in the streets. When Tree reads for him, she knows the pleasure he gets as he "loved for her to play like that, as though she were his private teacher and teaching no one else, ever" (80). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the excessive upmothering that Tree handles devalues her being a student, with the reader never exposed to any scene in which Tree is carrying out any school tasks or discussing her own educational development.

The development of cognitive skills through upmothering is observed to be a source of empowerment to Tree. She demonstrates a sense of protectionism, which manifests as development in the cognitive skills of caregivers. Reflecting on the choices of the caregiver and how mothers can possibly develop the necessary cognitive skills in their practice, Ruddick confirms, "I identify some of the specific metaphysical attitudes, cognitive capacities, and the conceptions of virtue that arise from mothering" (60), claiming that maternal work engenders a distinctive kind of thinking. By being protective, Tree displays a protectionist sense that African-American othermothers apply in their communal children, and which gradually develops as progress in Tree's attitudinal and cognitive capacities, with cognitive skills concerned with the individual's ability to perform the numerous processes associated with learning and problem-solving. The protectionism she embodies is identified by what Ruddick refers to as 'scrutinising' sense and defines as follows, "Attentiveness to a creature who preserves in its own being and at the same time is perpetually at risk is peculiarly demanding. In the service of protection, mothers develop a cognitive habit or cognitive style which I call "scrutinizing"" (71-72). Ruddick explains that the practices of mothering are types of training required for "making decisions, manipulating behaviour" (109). In fact, Ruddick's stance of

training can be interestingly viewed as central to Tree's decision of accepting the authority passed to her, and empowering herself while upmothering. Initially, she offers emotional protection seen in the genuine empathy for Dab's reactions during pain. She is always capable of sensing his suffering when he is unable to express his skin or gastric discomforts. Moreover, although she never knows the efficacy of her attempts to soothe, she helps him with heated pads to reduce the pain every time she perceives he is struggling. Becoming fully aware that Dab's cognitive condition hinders him from proper verbal expression, Tree continuously checks that her brother is asleep to gain reassurance that he is still, in fact, alive. Later, Tree's sensitivity towards others' sympathy to Dab's condition reveals nurturance that she articulates enthusiastically. In one incident, Miss Pricherd claims that Dab's actions are unpredictable, to help her understand the threats in his behaviour, and therefore his likely future status. Miss Pricherd's anticipation that Dab's attitude might lead him to be imprisoned, since he has no control over his manners, causes Tree to erupt with shockingly extreme distress, "Don't be cutting on my brother. I'll hurt anybody" (52). If, worse still, someone such as one of Dab's female friends would call him names, Tree would fire back a fierce defence, "An if I ever hear you say loony tune about my brother again, I'll make your nose never be the same- you know what I'm talking about, too" (43). Thus, Tree's conception can be taken as a consequential development in her cognitive abilities. Continuing to upmother, Tree is able to articulate cognitive development, albeit only spontaneously. That shows in the emotional encouragement and psychological support as key facets of Tree's behaviour towards Dab. Although involuntarily performed, she is able to perceive the immediate effect of her words in Dab's reaction. Whenever she pats his back or uses a phrase like, "Proud of you, Dab", to praise the way he attempts to dress

properly, her reward is noticing his immediate joyful attitude. She intentionally induces the confidence of being able to perform simple daily tasks, even though she realises that he will never master them.

Although preservations apply to Tree's intensive upmothering experience, empowerment can still be speculated through the type of responsibilities that she develops as an upmother. Hamilton takes Tree's emotional and cognitive progression further, to levels where Tree also empowers her bloodmother. In one example, Tree decides to modify her mother's daily instructions for housework by deliberately reinstructing Miss Pricherd's to-do list of cleaning work, knowing that, "Miss Pricherd didn't do much" (48). On another occasion, Tree reminds Viola about the house grocery list. When Viola returns home, Tree exchanges roles with her. It is actually through Tree that Viola learns about the severity of Dab's health condition, despite being fully aware of his medical history. On a personal level, Tree's comprehensive analysis of her mother upon her arrival at the house reveals how much she knows of her as a person, particularly in regards to her relationships with men. When Viola mentions owning a car, Tree is immediately able to deduce that her mother has a boyfriend as she queries, "When I'm getting to meet this secret Silversmith?" (96), despite Viola not suggesting the idea when she told her daughter about Silversmith. As per her attentiveness towards Dab, the greater part of Tree's concerns about her mother arises from the love she has for both, "She patted M'Vy's shoulder the way she sometimes patted Dab when he was down" (98). Later, Tree confronts her mother with the reality about Brother Rush and his demise through the world of family ghosts, as she leads Viola to meet the phantom of her sibling Rush in the walk-in wardrobe, "The door was closed and the room was dark. M'Vy shivered behind Tree; Tree reached back, taking her hand. Viola's hand was wet with cold

perspiration. Tree let go and cautiously went forward" (100). Suggestively aided by her previous adventures in the little room, Tree's reaction shows greater maturity and confidence than her mother's. She walks calmly to introduce her mother to the resolution of the family's mystery—secrets revealed by the ghost of her uncle Rush.

Hamilton introduces the same preservative love and nurturance suggested by Ruddick in *Bluish*, where a more promising upmothering experience of a younger African-American female protagonist is presented in the narrative. The experience of Dreenie is also considered as a site of power, as suggested by Collins' othermothering stance. The fifth-grader Dreenie undertakes a part-time upmothering role for her younger sister and for two other female figures, schoolmates Tuli and Natalie. Differing from the direct contact to suffering in Tree's traumatic othermothering experience, Dreenie's rituals of mothering are less burdening and more advocating for the personal and social development of the ten-year-old female protagonist. Concerning impact, Dreenie's role as an upmother is also a site of feminist power, for it shapes the intellectual impulses of the young girl who finds upmothering to be a path to forming a feminocentric bond with other young females.

As is typical of Hamilton's young upmothers, their practice is viewed from the first few pages of the narrative. Similar to Tree's caregiving to her brother, Dreenie's upmothering attention at the most basic level is caring for her younger sister Willeva, who everyone called Willie, usually in the absence of her parents. In an attempt to train girls for a future caregiving role, African-American mothers pass on responsibilities to their daughters. The sisterly pattern is historically originated with and even before slavery when mothers left their children in the hands of their older sisters, who provided childcare while "assuming responsibility for one another" (Shaw 253). The watchful caregiving suggested by Ruddick is manifested

in Dreenie's practices of upmothering in the domestic and public domains. Every appearance of Willie in the novel is connected to Dreenie's sense of protectionism. Outside the house, Hamilton explains it is Dreenie's job to keep a watchful eye over her little sister Willie on the streets of New York. Dreenie is permanently concerned about her sister's physical safety, "older women of the neighborhood with their shopping carts acted afraid they would be pushed. They went so slow! Dreenie eased around them so her little sister wouldn't tumble into them" (12). The scene symbolically depicts, in addition to Dreenie's protectionist behaviour, the tensions between both generations of othermothering. Such an image of the young girls being avoided by older female shoppers is a scenario exemplified and accepted by the logic of the context that follows. The public sphere appears to respond to Dreenie's demonstration of upmothering when the 'slowing down' by female shoppers from the neighbourhood, who could themselves be othermothers for Willie, represents the superiority of upmothering as sharply induced by Dreenie, who appears applicable because, "[She] was muscled and tall for her age. She often looked angry, even when she was not. She could pretend to be really tough" (12). Dreenie is aware that being physically superior makes her visually distinguishable and employs it to protect her younger sibling. Trapped between her protective sense towards her younger sister, through which she acknowledges the power of pretending to be sturdy, and the questioning of her responsibility for a sister who is only two years' younger, Dreenie's strongest upmothering moment is noticing Willie's 'hurt face' after being knocked to the ground. Involuntarily, Dreenie helps her sister as she, "took hold of Willie by her coat sleeve, pulling her along" (13), with a certainty that Willie will complain about this. Willie's rejection is made possible by the narrow age gap between the sisters and being only two grades apart in the same school. On another

public occasion, Dreenie's watchful sense reminds her to warn her sister axiomatically, "Watch out, Willie . . . There might be ice under the slush" (24).

Although Dreenie's experience of upmothering is less difficult than Tree's in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, it tests other boundaries. Unlike the dependent Dab, Willie is an independent eight-year-old girl who acknowledges being classified as a studious 'nerd' in class. Dreenie's challenge is slightly elevated by the stubbornness of Willie, who has a tendency to reject constructive guidance from her older sister. Furthermore, as Dab's submission to instructions requires less effort due to his ailing condition, Willie's companionship, albeit not to the extent of Dab's, is more confrontational. Conflict between the two sisters emerges when Willie is confronted by Dreenie's upmothering acts. Willie reminds herself and Dreenie, stating, "I know who your mama ain't, Drain", before continuing, "Because you sure ain't one of us Anneva and Gerald Browns, Drain!" (13). Such affirmative statement is introduced in the first few pages of the narrative, as if Hamilton aspires to signpost the type of upmothering that manifests, one that is indicated by limits of practice and the acknowledgment of real parents. This limitation is reasserted shortly afterwards, when Willie threatens Dreenie, "Mommy'll give you kitchen duty for a week" (20). Yet, Dreenie demonstrates tenacity in handling Willie's stubbornness. In one incident, Dreenie understands her sister's strategy of asking to buy hot chocolate, so she offers to make her some when they arrive home since she acknowledges that, "Their mom didn't like them fooling around on Amsterdam when school was out" (18). Even if Dreenie occasionally has to deceive her younger sibling, she always has the ability to invoke proper manners, such as using her 'false magic spell' at times when she needs to quieten Willie.

The development in Dreenie's cognitive skills demonstrates a communal

empathy towards other females in her community like her schoolmate, Tuli. Hamilton introduces Tuli's fragile image and the low self-esteem to provide the borderline of Dreenie's upmothering practice. It compels the protagonist to project the limits between upmothering and incompatible friendship. Her participation in supporting Tuli promotes the active role of othermothers, as Collins claims the late nineteenth century Black feminists suggest, to "uplift the race" (346). Dreenie's upmothering of Willie provides her with awareness to sense other girls' psyches. She detects Tuli's lack of biological or non-biological maternal care. Tuli lives with her grandmother Gilla who works long hours, which leaves Tuli feeling isolated, and therefore she explains how much she enjoys the time after school in Dreenie's house. As a consequence, Dreenie realises that her schoolmate desires to be cared for like Willie, both domestically and publicly, as she creates scenarios where she seeks attention from Dreenie, such as falling in the street on their way back from school. With the remark of the street lady mocking Tuli, "You look very comfortable there, darling. You taking a rest?", Dreenie's rethinks, knowing full well that, "She must not've been hurt" (25). The protagonist develops a deeper empathy with Tuli's condition as she suggests that a "Tuligram" is only "a message telling them that Tuli needed to be someplace, with somebody in a normal life for a little while" (25-32). The narrative suggests that the communication medium represented here has been previously established between Dreenie and her mother, and that it is a 'Tuligram' because Tuli sends a cognitive message to Dreenie expressing her needs. In return, Dreenie responds by maintaining careful observation of Tuli whenever she visits her house, becoming aware that Tuli is reluctant to return to her own home. Considering her mother's remarks about Tuli, Dreenie is able to understand that Tuli prefers their house as she wants to be 'around a family' rather than returning to her lonely

grandmother's house. Tuli feels the freedom to express such desire by predicting her grandmother's response to her wishes, "I can call her. She'll want me to stay", showing how she seeks Dreenie's attention by making up excuses to stay, "But I promised Willie I'd read to her" (32), even though she is aware that both Dreenie and Willie recognise her fictitious justifications.

At home, Dreenie carefully handles the care and attention provided to Willie and Tuli. While preparing snacks and drinks for both girls, conveying a constructive manner that results from continuous practice, she continues to help Tuli to manage her business with determination, ""Take off those wet clothes before you sit, Tuli. You can leave on your sweater," Dreenie said. "I'll put them in the dryer so you can wear them home." She took out some pajama bottoms for Tuli to wear" (28). She also oversees the table manners and cautions Tuli and Willie as they follow to, "be careful, don't spill anything" (30). The support Dreenie provides appears to find its way into Tuli's behaviour when, as a response, Tuli adopts Dreenie's table manners.

2.5.2 Upmothering, social learning theory and Black mothering behaviour

The second crucial part of Collins's othermothering standpoint is Black mothering behaviour regarding social learning theory. The empowerment that O'Reilly validates, and which I refer to in the theory section, comes from the protagonists' ability to converge the motherline of their biological mothers, even where the mother is absent. The identification with Black culture that O'Reilly promotes is created through connections with the history of Black mothers. Collins incorporates this identification with both biological and communal mothering, and explains the influence of their relationships with their biological and/or communal daughters. In this section, I associate this aspect of theory to my investigation of this relationship and Black girls' experiences of upmothering, which is itself part of the whole culture

of othermothering. The core of Collins's thought here presents one route to progress—adult to child—but what Hamilton offers to the social behaviour is a two-way progress that is creatively mutual between the daughter and her mother(s). This sub-thesis of the chapter concerning Hamilton's rewriting of Black Entwicklungsroman reveals the positive influence that the author injects by representing functioning feminist empowerment under social and economic oppressions. Collins asserts:

> Black mothers emphasize protection either by trying to shield their daughters as long as possible from the penalties attached to their race, class, and gender or by teaching them how to protect themselves in such situations. Black women's autobiographies and fiction can be read as texts revealing the multiple strategies Black mothers employ in preparing their daughters for the demands of being Black women in oppressive conditions. (350)

Collins claims that the balance that Black mothers seek to create in the lives of their daughters develops through preparing them for pre-tested oppressive conditions. Viola as a Black mother oppressed by the long working hours away from her home is aware that her mothering role is divided between the tasks handed to her daughter, and to Miss Pricherd as an othermother. This compound matrix of mothering is caused by the socio-economic impact of Viola as a single mother. Viola keeps Tree in the house as a means of protecting her from 'dudes in the streets', a sense of Black mothers' protectionism that seems prevailing because, as Joseph proclaims, "Black mothers are often described as strong disciplinarians and overly protective parents; yet these same women manage to raise daughters who are self-

reliant and assertive" (120).[34] Made necessary by Black girls' need to cope with contradictions, Collins explains, "In raising their daughters, Black mothers face a troubling dilemma. To ensure their daughters' physical survival, they must teach their daughters to fit into systems of oppression" (348). Collins also believes that it is the training that makes the difference, the one they do domestically while rejecting the negative stereotypes of their foremothers such as Mammies (348). Reflecting on Collins and the social background of both Tree's and Dreenie's mothers, such young protagonists are then expected to carry responsibilities in their families and communities because they acquire those skills essential for their own survival, and also of those for whom they will potentially and voluntarily be responsible. This notion is analysed through the mother–daughter relationships in both novels.

Concerning the biological mother–daughter relationship, Tree's caregiving experience as a whole provides the type of behaviour influenced by her appreciation of her biological mother's mothering circumstances. With the help of the ghost's adventures that explore the family past, Tree learns what type of teenage mother Viola used to be while mothering. In addition, the young Viola's ill-treatment of Dab as a sick child remarks on her inadequacies towards the mothering of her own biological children, compounding her excessive absence through work that permeates Hamilton's narrative of mothering. This type of harsh mothering behaviour appears to be commonplace, with Earl Smith and Angela J. Hattery suggesting that patterns of African-American mothering include young mothers who are more likely to engage in child abuse due to the lack of parental experience, a matter that negatively impacts their abilities in child rearing (67). Naomi Wood

[34] See Gloria Joseph's "Black Mothers and Daughters: Their Roles and Functions in American Society".

disagrees with such a standpoint as she assures Viola's sins, concluding that Hamilton creates an evil character who, "has never been able to love her son" (167). For Tree, Hamilton suggests that Viola's poor parenting skills are overwhelming to her daughter, and the young child's upmothering practice provides Viola with an insight of what is required to care for a sick child. Viola's approach as a teenage mother starts with abuse and concludes with her relinquishing a huge share of responsibility in raising Dab. The confrontational moment in the mother–daughter relationship ruptures the boundaries between them. Tree's knowledge of the past and present mothering provided by her biological mother becomes Viola's breaking point. Enraged by the tragic death of her brother, Tree's fury silences Viola's justifications of her abuse of Dab, "You, afraid? Big you and tiny him. He was really tiny. Stunted tiny and skinny legs. You beat him tiny. Brother Rush show me you and Dab way back then. You own brother, come to show me. You kill Dab. You kill him. You can never lie and say you cared" (174). Although Tree realises that porphyria is a non-curable disease that develops from the late teenage years onwards, the intention of crushing her mother is to force the latter to admit her culpability in Dab's demise. In addition to considering the intentional disregard for the needs of a physically and cognitively impaired child such as Dab, Tree knows that Viola concealed the family secret of the hereditary disease responsible for the deaths of many of her brothers. In Tree's statement, "You don't even think of Dab, when all the mens die off" (173), appears a spontaneous concern for a long-neglected matrilineal tradition. Tree's cognitive ability is developed as she evaluates Viola's justifications for her past aggression. She clarifies the condition of porphyria to the nurse upon their arrival at the hospital to save Dab's life, "I'm only tryin to explain what I alone happens to know. My boy is acute intermittent por-phyria, or porphyria

cutanea tarda, or symptomatic, they hard to classify. But they happens to them between ages seventeen and fifty" (148). Viola speaks as though the words are memorised, "Porphyria may be precipitated by alcohol or by drugs, but Dab not no druggie . . . The medical histories of my four brothers is in that folder" (148-150). Moreover, Viola acknowledges her full awareness of Dab's inherited deadly disease, but she denies responsibility for his perilous state. This leads to Tree's breakdown as she expresses her shock:

> Shoot! Shoot! Damn you, it your fault! You did it. You beat him. You beat him up. He didn't die; you killed him, M'Vy! He ain't dead, he ain't dead, unh-uh. My brother, Dab. He didn't, no he didn't, it's a lie! How come you didn't do something sooner? (173)

Viola's admission that she is the only one in the house who knows the full reality of Dab's condition is proof of all Tree's logic in accusing her. The upmother child rejects her mother's irresponsible attitude as she has failed to learn the required maturity from her historical mothering behaviour. Nevertheless, after Dab's funeral, the mother–daughter relationship gradually undergoes a more promising change. Because Tree understands Viola's selfishness, frivolity and ignorance as a teenage mother during her own childhood, their bonding witnesses the change that Viola requires to reconstruct her relationship with her daughter. Tree is later able to reconcile with her mother as she develops an appreciation of their shared grief, showing a trace of maturity through her experience.

In *Bluish,* Hamilton represents different patterns of bonding with biological and non-biological mothers. While the fragility in Tree's relationship with her biological mother is compensated by her othermother, Miss Pricherd, Dreenie's upmothering experience is enhanced by the relatively abundant presence of her

biological mother. To underscore the naturalistic value of her presence as a mother, rather than an individual, Hamilton refers to Dreenie's mother as 'Dreenie's mom' or 'her mom' throughout the narrative, instead of using her proper name or nickname like 'Vy' for Viola in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*. In addition, the existence of two working mother figures, Dreenie's mother and Tuli's grandmother, Gilla, is an experience that serves to shape Dreenie's understanding of when and how to share care responsibilities. While Gilla's responsibilities are indirectly passed on to Dreenie, her mother is aware that the tasks she receives are crucial to her growth. Such errands are justified by Dreenie's mother's absence due to college until the early evening each day. Thus, she compensates by engaging in regular evening conversations and offering guidance to Dreenie. These casual one-to-one discourses exemplify her motherly commitment to her daughter's personal and educational development. She can instinctively sense her daughter's shift in mood over the family supper and intentionally asks, "Dreenie, if you have something to tell me, then tell me, don't fool around", and the moment Dreenie decides to change the topic to Willie's name-calling, her mother again insists to know the truth (37). Dreenie's mother's keenness on talking to her daughter shines a light on a young girl's need to share her thoughts with others, especially family members. Therefore, she succeeds in encouraging Dreenie to speak about the sick girl at school. In her dialogic relationship with her mother, Dreenie expresses her thoughts freely. She finds no embarrassment in confessing her fears and confusion that arise due to Natalie's appearance. The mother's response conditions such paleness and hair loss to terms of chemotherapy and stresses, "Being really sick is no fun for any child, Dreen-boat. And you mustn't be afraid of her because she looks different. You could be nice to her–what's her name? I mean, treat her like you would treat any other school friend"

(40). The impact of her mother's words soothes the emotional intensity in Dreenie's consciousness about her new classmate and creates the space for a new potential friendship in her life. When the next remark Dreenie makes is about Tuli, her mother reconstructs the same thoughts. Their conversation is driven by the influence of upmothering practices:

> [Dreenie:] No! It means that her granmom Gilla won't get to eat until later. Tuli has to fix food for her granmom! She gets on my nerves sometimes. I get tired of worrying about her.
>
> [Mother:] Oh, Dreenie. You sound so old. She just wants to be around a family. (41)

The mother–daughter exchange here denotes the layered characteristics of Black mothering, othermothering and upmothering, actually describing an interactive network of othermothering. Dreenie's full understanding of Natalie's personality and health condition, as provided by her mother, enables her to appreciate and act accordingly with a friend's empathy. In fact, the role that Dreenie's mother plays promotes the well-being of Black girls in the community in general. Her call for young girls to assist one another, such as cancer-inflicted Black children and the less economically fortunate orphans, is a reflection of growing through temporary othermothering practices.

The mother–daughter relationship is a significant factor in developing cognitive capacities associated with upmothering practices and therefore with the formation of identity at a young age. In their argument of the identity transformation of African-American teenage mothers, Sarah Jane Brubaker and Christie Wright claim that a person's identity is connected to the care given by others. The presence of biological mothers in early adolescence can facilitate their daughters'

understanding of human relationships and the appreciation of responsibility. At a young age, the change in a girl's identity can be profoundly influenced by the parents' guidance and care.[35] Dreenie's practices are monitored by her biological mother, who explains the healthy potential influence of upmothering tasks for young girls as it helps them to mature. This bond also enables Dreenie to distinguish the care her sister requires from the empathetic friendship she attempts with Natalie, which can also include sympathy-free caregiving. Adapting qualities such as a sense of self-awareness and appropriate judgment are initiated through the practical responsibility resulting from the practices that girls adopt as upmothers, and are further maintained through the biological parents' corrective guidance.

Communal mothers also participate in the well-being of the mother–daughter relationship. Othermothering forms a social network, as explained by Collins, which supports African-American mother–daughter relationships. She claims that blood or non-blood females in the Black community such as neighbours, teachers, maids or friends are included in this network and that "othermothers were key not only in supporting children, but also in supporting bloodmothers who, for whatever reason, were ill-prepared or had little desire to care for their children" (343). Moreover, "[They] often help to defuse the emotional intensity between bloodmothers and their daughters" (204). The tendencies they produce compensate for the possible gaps created by the absence of biological mothers. Domestically, Miss Pricherd obviously attempts to resolve conflicts that may manifest due to Viola's only partial presence within the home, weaving a soothing influence into her words with Tree. The

[35] Brubaker and Wright include a sample of teenage mothers receiving care from both parents or single parents, to assist such mothers in constructing a positive self-image. They show that many teenagers with such a self-image report a positive relationship with their mothers, advocating accordingly that, "Teenagers become responsible, mature, and good mothers. Teenagers also described a rediscovery or redirection of self that transformed their damaged identities into positive identities" (1224).

influence of the maid's interaction with Tree comes from her daily informal presence in the home, which has a direct impact on Tree. The sixty-seven-year-old woman's vision as an othermother carries a wisdom with which she speaks, paying attentive concern to both Tree and Dab. She confronts Tree with moments of realisation regarding her burdening responsibilities towards Dab, "Shouldn't be somebody lak you in charge of some retarted", and when Tree does not realise the meaning of her words, she continues, "You know that boy ain't got good sense . . . He gone rape somebody, then they put him where he belong" (51). Miss Pricherd's words highlight two major conflicts. First, she redirects Tree's thoughts to the obvious social cues of handling a sick young man with responsibility. Then, she presents a scene that calls for the normalisation of the upmothering practices passed on to younger members of the family. After Dab's death, the presence of Miss Pricherd eases the emotional distress between Tree and her mother. It is her presence and promise to stay that soothes a distressed Tree who, "had let the old lady put her arms around her. Couldn't find the strength to stop her" (191). Miss Pricherd's major role at the end of the narrative serves to reduce the tension between Viola and Tree as she reminds Tree that Viola is "not feeling too good, either" (191). In addition, she recalls her past homeless life as a warning to Tree to stay home, "Don't go out there, Tree . . . Young girls fall into down time, all kinds of trouble" (195). Viola is aware that Miss Pricherd is an elderly lady who spends less time working than eating in the house, but values her as a churchgoer who began to work at the age of nine. Miss Pricherd's living experience and empathic attitude preserves Tree from a life on the street. She uses the excuse of preparing for Dab's funeral to convince Tree to stay and attend his service. Despite Tree's traumatic shock, the change in her articulates the power of Miss Pricherd as an othermother. In the act of Viola's escape from the

post-mortem scene, the pain of the Dab's trauma is initially and effectively soothed by Miss Pricherd's words.

Other communal mothers such as Mrs Noirrette, the English schoolteacher, influence Tree's experience. Although referred to only once at the beginning of the narrative, Mrs Noirrette emphasises the role of education in the life of African-American girls. Representing the Black, educated female, she promotes what Collins considers a "vehicle for advancement" or "self-definitions and self-valuation" for all Black girls as they oppose oppression (198). After pointing out Tree's excellent grades, she advises her to take Black Achievement tests. She asserts, "I am telling you truth, deah, Teresah. Yah could be getting full scholarship monies for deh entire college program when you graduate. Yah have dat ability, chad . . . All what is needed is deh cone-fee-dahnse, deah, in yah-self" (21). Hamilton sets Mrs Noirrette's powerful declaration at the beginning of the novel as a force that creates a constructive atmosphere for Tree's cognitive advancement and appreciation for formal education.

In *Bluish*, teachers also represent communal mothering figures such as the young educated female African-American teacher, Ms Baker. The image of Miss Pricherd as formerly homeless during the early 1980s in *Sweet Whisper, Brother Rush* is replaced in *Bluish* by the friendly New York teacher of Bethune Cookman School, Ms Baker, who enthusiastically plays a motherly role for all of her students, especially those traumatised such as Natalie. When she welcomes Dreenie in the morning, "We're both the first ones today. I don't know what I would do if I didn't see you or Tulithia near the front of the morning" (47), she breaks the formal teacher–student educational interaction that manifests her othermothering role in two basic ways—helping to provide intensive care to Bluish, while creating a resilient

generation that believes in the power of cultural diversity. As for the caregiving to Natalie, Ms Baker maintains a watchful eye on her in class, always being the first to notice the child's severe moments like dozing off or vomiting. She handles the child's traumatic incidents by calling her parents or cleaning the vomit, while disciplining other children who bully Natalie. Ms Baker's nurturing is wrapped with emotional support as she publicly praises all the activities that Natalie participates in, such as knitting hats for her classmates and excelling in the school project with Dreenie and Tuli. In addition, Ms Baker's arrangement of the educating plan, beginning with the three girls' project at school, invests in strengthening and promoting African-American girls into a new standard of multicultural identity.[36] Moreover, the feminist bond that the four females collect through the teamwork is fully productive due to the individual understanding of each member's respective task. Nevertheless, the value of such an urban teacher's othermothering is cohesive to the old rural Ohio of the 1980s' English teacher, Mrs Noirrette, who affirms to Tree how important Black Achievement is for African-American girls' scholarship. On the other hand, Ms Baker's cultural celebration of holidays is unique in the sense of embracing the students' own preparations for Christmas, Hanukkah and Ramadan. The Kwanzaa preparation is a reminder for her multiracial girls to celebrate their own unified African-American heritage, regardless of their religious and social backgrounds. Such liberation is a fundamental facet of Hamilton's fiction, a "liberation literature" through which young African-American females are free to create their own minds, while delineating the African-American culture into its

[36] Hamilton's inspiration for the girls' Bethune Cookman School was Cookman's College, which was established during the early twentieth century and cooperated with national and international organisations to support Black people's education. For more information, see *Poverty and the Government in America: A Historical Encyclopedia, Volume 1* (2009) by Jyotsna Sreenivasan.

social development and tradition (Scholastic).

2.6 Hamilton's Upmothering Patterns Explained

In discussing the realm of Hamilton's upmothering experiences for Black female adolescents, I mention in the chapter's introduction that the author provides two different experiences in her fiction—the excessive upmothering experience and the liberating contemporary upmothering practice. The change in Hamilton's tone of upmothering experiences is explained by the difference in tensions from the time of *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* in 1982 to *Bluish* in 1999. Hamilton's mothering and upmothering in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* is influenced by the 1980s Black feminists' revival of working Black mothers' empowerment and the exploration of talents. Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* reflects some of the 1980s' concerns that influenced many Black women writers. Considering Walker's experience of being raised by hardworking parents and living in poverty, she witnessed her mother's artistic sense in the garden, in addition to the talents of other Black females like Phillis Wheatley and Jean Toomer. Hamilton's depiction of upmothering reflects such concerns as the narrative takes the Entwicklungsroman experience of Black adolescence from the perspective of the impact of the mother's work commitments rather than the social and developmental aspects of a child's life. Furthermore, although Tree's experience is not entirely oppressive, the extensive responsibilities handed to her explain the imbalance related to excessive caregiving by young Black girls. After seventeen years, Hamilton's liberationist feminism retains the upmothering agenda in *Bluish*, but under more positive and socially accepted arrangements to reflect the time period of 1999. Hamilton's narrative in this, one of her last books, introduces upmothering as a vital and assisting practice, provided that it is carried out within the limits and abilities of Black adolescence, as

opposed to adults' ambitious standards of responsibilities. Therefore, the mother–daughter relationship in Dreenie's experience is one of enabling rather than disabling girls' advancement in whatever experiences they bestow.

The paradigm of Hamilton's pattern of upmothering integrates conveniently with the history of African-American mothering. That the intensive work of a single mother may appear as a socially undermining value of Viola's mothering practices is actually an explanation, yet not a justification, of Tree's upmothering. The upmothering practices performed by Tree compensate, to a certain extent, for the absence of the mother figure, but only for her sick brother. In fact, the maternal absence in the novel is a social pattern rooted in the post-World War II era. Sociologist Leith Mullings explains how single mothers' work led them to relinquish not only the child's upbringing, but also the emotional support to other mothers in their family network, which placed such families under enormous strain. The form of stress means, "The household formation itself as an indication of decline in the Black family organization misreads a more complex situation" (74). Although realistically reflecting the image of contemporary working-class African-American mothers, it somehow seems exaggerated in the case of Viola as she has a sick child. According to Hattery and Smith, economic dependency related to race and gender has laid African-American women under the hardships of earning a living in very difficult circumstances. Statistically, when such single women head their families, 70% of them are poor (95). Work is essential for Viola as a single African-American woman, but the imbalances she confronts jeopardise her mothering role. Due to her excessive physical and emotional absence from home, Viola transfers her mothering duties to the youngest female member of the family. Despite this creating a space for Tree to experience othermothering, it ultimately works against the family ties and

control. It is true that Hamilton creates the character of a young Black girl who is blessed with extraordinary qualities such as strength, responsibility and social intelligence, but she is thrown in at the deep end and left to fend for herself. Hamilton's narrative of Tree as an upmother explains the Black girl's ability to function as an assisting upmother, but also warns of the cognitive and social consequences of casual and random mothering, particularly in a single-mother household.

The model of Tree's upmothering experience demonstrates wide-ranging and extensive responsibilities that isolate her domestically. Suffering the daily challenges of providing care for a sick child-like sibling, Tree is continually reminded by Viola that her sole focus must be to care for her brother. Hamilton makes it explicit that struggle and pain may be attached to upmothering, particularly when the child is sick or cognitively impaired, which can be devastating or destructive for an isolated child. The physical work leads Tree to eventually become emotionally drained at a young age. Apart from school, Tree appears to lock herself away in the house to take care of her brother, where the narrative suggests no friends or even relatives visit. Slowly dragged into a world of weariness, Tree has to silently face the daily anguish as she witnesses Dab's suffering, ignorant to the reality of Dab's inherited disease or his addiction to barbiturates. Early in the novel, Dab's childish joy for wearing light-emitting diode (LED) shoes fails to make Tree happy, or even to smile as "she had forgotten how" (35). The narrative suggests that the protagonist's escape by drawing in her wardrobe and thinking about the ghost is a means of creating a world in which she exists as a girl. Her breaking point is Dab's death, a moment full of disappointment for her mother's maternal instincts.

In order for Hamilton to remind her readers that Tree is only a young

adolescent, she creates a plot where Tree is able to share activities with Dab, as a sister. On the occasion of taking Dab on her second journey back in time with the phantom Brother Rush, Tree is aware that Dab will be intrigued by the spectral adventure. Knowing him deeply, and the type of stories that he likes, she is aware that Brother Rush's usual appearance in the middle of the table will not terrify Dab since he does not fear inanimate objects, and so she purposefully takes him to the small room to share her secret. Upon their return from the ghost ride, Tree learns from Dab's intermittent statements that he sees an alternative scene to hers. She immediately attempts to ease Dab's confusion, ""It's all right," she told Dab. "You in here with me, and we good people." She smiled at the proper sound of her words" (78). When she confirms, 'You in here with me', Tree assures Dab that he will be safe since she will be by his side. Her whole attempt to visualise ghosts and share her thoughts about them with Dab reflects a child's innocence in risking the cognitive condition of a sick child rather than an upmothering practice.

As for the pattern of upmothering in *Bluish* two decades later, different concerns of Black feminism emerge with an emphasis on the consideration of Black children's literature in the milieu. Trites claims in "Feminist Subversions" that by showing particular representations of gender, race, or class, Black children's literature processes approaches in which Black girls can express their own abilities to manifest a voice that changes the face of the genre (1). Furthermore, when providing definitions of 1990s feminism, Trites stresses the significance of incorporating feminist views more directly because, "It is a time when respect for choices about self and about others can have serious import" (2). As Trites continues, "It seems only natural that so many writers for children have adopted a set of values that allows their characters to have freedoms that writers in previous generations were

unable to grant their characters" (2), she participates in Hamilton's girlhood liberation in children's literature. The changing demands of feminism create a space for Hamilton to infuse upmothering practices as a part of Black communities through limited practice. Yet, the practice has left the confined isolation of the house in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* behind to embrace the streets of New York, classrooms and the freedom to be found in the trends of education and city life. According to Dreenie's site of upmothering, Black girls can establish a strong embodiment of individuality that enables them to provide care both domestically and publicly, without being drowned into isolation. What appears to be a moment of loneliness and disappointment in the narrative, is actually a change of insight to terms of bonding:

> She sighed and finished her food. Then she carried the plates and the glasses into the kitchen. Dreenie stood a moment at the sink, clearing up. She could hear Willie and Tuli in the bedroom, laughing about something. *I'd love to have some girl as a friend. Not like Tuli. But a girl I could talk things over with. Do special things with*, Dreenie thought. (33)

Dreenie's thoughts run in the direction of individuality as she pays greater attention to her needs. Observing the company of Tuli and Willie, she is able to conclude that they are less suitable candidates for what she considers to be 'some girl as a friend'. The protagonist's final realisation of superiority in handling an upmother's physical and psychological work is a mechanism for establishing self-consciousness and the urge to acquire more nourishing female friends. It is the closeness and motherliness that Dreenie delivers as an othermother that enables her to have a vision of an ideal girlfriend at her age, probably resembling her personality and intellect. She obviously acknowledges her need for social advancement in the

search for other more mature females with whom she can connect. Dreenie's growth through her complex experience of upmothering is hedged by her reliance on her relationship with her biological mother. Despite her mother's absence to attend to her college education, she succeeds in detaching Dreenie from the impact of this absence and reassuring a track of school reports, socialisation and further solidifying Dreenie's relationship with her younger sister and school friends.

Tree and Dreenie grow and develop through bonding with their biological and non-biological mothers. It is actually a characteristic of both novels that the protagonists' maintaining of connections with their mothers keep the Black girls on course for development. Notwithstanding the differing intensities and pace due to the mothers' absence in the two time periods, Hamilton's narrative delivers a message about the impact of this on Black motherhood and mothering. Motherhood as an institution had not changed particularly from the slavery era to the twentieth century as sexism, gender and racial oppressions still exist, but the intensity is lessened by creating an atmosphere of survival in both novels. Hamilton's narrative introduces the positivity of this bonding in different sites of resistance. The mother–daughter relationships are depicted to empower both biological mothers and daughters. It is an interactive relationship that benefits both children and adults, and its usefulness is connected to young girls' experiences of upmothering. Tree and Viola both develop a positive attitude after their reconciliation. Unlike the traditional adult-to-child guidance, Hamilton provides a young girl to attend to the guidance and corrective behaviour of her mother, Viola. With Dreenie, the process of growth comprises other females like Tuli, Natalie and Willie. Regarding the impact of this relationship on Black girls as adults, we have no record in Hamilton's characters as the selected narrative is not Bildungsroman, but maintaining mother–daughter bonding has

proved beneficial in sociologist studies. In comparing Black and White girls' responses towards the attitudes of their mothers, Joseph reports Black girls' responses as:

> What was expressed was undeniable respect and admiration for their mothers' accomplishments and struggle against overwhelming odds; their economic ability to make ends meet; their personal relationships with men; for having raised their families as a single parent or a head of the household and having encouraged them to be independent and get an education. (96)

Even in the harsh circumstances offered and bitter experiences of bonding with mothers, Black mothers' relationships with their daughters remains a stable factor influencing their personalities and future. The optimum relationship is when Black mothers, as Collins theorises, introduce themselves as role models to their daughters.

In both novels, Hamilton's patterns of upmothering outline a common parallelism of young female adolescents' creativity, self-discovery and identity quest. To both protagonists, the caregiving experience causes a shift in thinking and the young girls' approach to feminist identity. This change is reflected by what Trites ascribes to young girls' experiences with introspection—a mechanism for "turning inward" in a "search for identity" due to certain environmental pressures of handling permitted gender roles (2). During the process, Tree and Dreenie exploit their contact with other females such as biological and non-biological mothers by implementing feminist thoughts regarding the consideration of caring for the needy relatives in their circles. Their utmost personal and intellectual development occurs gradually, and in different forms, including the ability to multitask the compound roles of upmothering and community mothering.

As an advanced approach of coping and improvement, Hamilton introduces how change in the cognitive skills of upmothers extends into a coherent development of other personal skills. On another level of identity exploration, it is possible to perceive Hamilton's young protagonists as developing personal skills that integrate with upmothering practices. Dreenie and Tree enjoy talents, which improve along with their own advancement as upmothers, particularly in the writing and drawing domains. Dreenie writes journals about her family and Natalie, while Tree draws people, trees, houses and sometimes herself from within the wardrobe. For Tree, the drawing process is an escape from the isolation caused by encountering ghosts and having overwhelming responsibilities. Hamilton's narrative interrupts the action of upmothering with the death of Dab, which leaves Tree in a motionlessness void, neglecting all of her previous activities including the household errands. Yet, Tree soon returns to her senses when confronted with her new identity. On the other hand, most of Dreenie's intellectual advancement, which is not led by school work, is produced through her unspoken self-reflection. The ten-year-old writer prefers to record her thoughts and observations in her journals, elaborating her opinion of different themes that constitute the narrative. Dreenie's recorded thoughts of Ms Baker's care work, existing and potential friendships with other females, and her own insight of her personal sense of upmothering blood and non-blood females express the creative sense that she develops throughout the narrative. Hamilton sets Dreenie's statement, "Then I'll do mine", as the final words in the narrative that underscore the promising potential of further creativity, probably to all African-American young girls who may take the option to upmother and support those around them, while improving their abilities of self-identification and individuality.

2.7 Conclusion

Essentially, Hamilton's distinctiveness in the creation of African-American feminist identity for young girls is generated through the originality in challenging the demothering of African-American mothers, while drawing upon the empowering upmothering of younger generations. She excels in aiding young African-American adolescent females with a realistic image of their private and public communities, while introducing personal qualities of coping and improvement. The protagonists in both novels are eventually able to display mature behaviour and adapt by establishing unique feminist identities. The development of cognitive skills, for both girls, emerges through major acquisitions of independence and power, and the ability to fully appreciate the value of reconciling with other female figures, which empowers all females involved regardless of their age or the depth of connection. In Hamilton's paradigm of feminist empowerment, where the practice of care-sharing attitude exists with young African-American adolescents, younger generations can lead the innovative impact. In such terms, the pattern of the young adolescents she provides helps to explain how young African-American girls embrace the gap and furnish the practice necessary for improvement. The stereotypical patriarchal communities and prevailing male dominance exemplify Tree's experience and gender challenges. The provision of care to fragile or ill males is accompanied by resistance through pursuing education and personal achievements. Nevertheless, Dreenie demonstrates the ability of the children's narrative to illuminate the role models of Black girls, who can participate in the quest for improving the well-being of other Black girls in their surroundings. The feminist understanding of both protagonists enables them to establish their empowering place in society, in a temporariness of experience during adolescence or pre-adolescence—to care about

others, and also themselves.

Chapter 3

A Pack of Boys Was Not Much Different from a Bunch of Girls!

Sisterhood in Hamilton's Black Girls' Adolescence

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the significance of female friendship in the shaping of the feminist identity of young Black girls during pre-adolescence, as represented by Virginia Hamilton. The analysis presented here introduces two different modes of Black childhood friendship—cross-sex friendship narratives during the 1970s, and friendship within a sisterhood model at the close of the twentieth century. Each of these modes challenges restrictive manifestations of feminist identity such as the norms of gender, class and the inevitability of patriarchal oppression. In both models, young Black girls are integrated into a feminist quest for their identity as they establish friendships with groups of boys and girls. My analysis of two outstanding feminist young-adult novels, *Justice and Her Brothers* and *Bluish*, reveals how African-American feminist identity is shaped by the different patterns of friendship during adolescence. Through what Hamilton refers to as 'liberating literature', she represents her young protagonists as eager to free themselves through social bonding, not only with other females, but also by making a significant impact in their cross-sex friendships.

In writing about the significance of friendship in the lives of Black girls during early adolescence, Hamilton excels in shining a light on two friendship cultures from the 1970s and 1990s. While retaining the essence of empowerment through peer influence, she shifts from cross-sex friendship in her early and late 1970s narratives, *M.C. Higgins, the Great* and *Justice and Her Brothers*, to develop

a model for empowering feminist friendship through *Bluish*. To explain the connection made to young girls' feminist quests in friendship, different theorisations are considered, since two distinct friendships are discussed in this chapter—cross-sex friendship and Black sisterhood. Although the focus of this chapter is placed on Black sisterhood during girls' adolescence, I begin with cross-sex friendships for two reasons—first, their predominance in history during the 1970s and 1980s; and second, according to Hamilton's narrative, cross-sex friendships represent only the early stages of other developmental or psychological journeys that Black girls encounter through their later forms of friendship.

In adopting the approach of developing Black girls' pro-social practices during her writing career, Black sisterhood is a mode of resistance Hamilton developed through a thematic authorship period of twenty-six years. Commencing with the award-winning novels[37] *M.C. Higgins, the Great* and *Justice and Her Brothers*, Hamilton writes about friendship between Black girls' and boys' protagonists while significantly, *M.C. Higgins, the Great* describes an incomplete friendship cycle since the friendship plot is not central to the narrative. In fact, the type of boy–girl bonding presented in the novel is intended as a method of expanding a boy's circle of cognitive and social (with hints at sexual) development. M.C. seeking friendship with the mysterious Lurhetta Outlaw is a subplot of his self-discovery in the mountains, which prepares him to begin his journey of personal growth. Similarly, *Justice and Her Brothers* demonstrates a young girl's quest to break gender and social oppressions to form a bond with a group of boys. And, although she succeeds, Justice discovers her potential to become more of a leader

[37] *M.C. Higgins, the Great* was the first book to win three prestigious awards: the 1975 Newbery Medal for excellence in American children's literature, the National Book Award in the Children's Books category and the Boston Globe–Horn Book Award.

than a friend in the group, as the fifth chapter of my thesis clarifies at length. On the other hand, in *Bluish* Hamilton represents Black sisterhood during adolescence in 1999 through the lens of a small group of Black girls empowering one another as a continuous practice that conveniently begins in pre-adolescence. Hamilton's adolescent sisterhood, as a positively feminist-established concept formed during early adolescence, is derived from the intensity[38] of girls resisting social forces in the context of Black communities.

The structure of this chapter includes three main sections. In the first part, I explain the theory and analysis of cross-sex friendship, and its relevance to Black girls' empowerment in *Justice and Her Brothers*. Next, a section is presented that explains Hamilton's realm of adolescent friendship during the 1990s, particularly in the context of *Bluish*. In both sections, I highlight the primary texts' inclusion of both friendship terms. At this stage, it is vital to emphasise that Hamilton's achievement concerning feminist friendship completes its cycle with her later writing about sisterhood in 1999.

3.2 Cross-Sex Friendship in Theory and in Hamilton's Narrative

Hamilton's writing about cross-sex friendship in *Justice and Her Brothers* and also *M.C. Higgins, the Great* is visited by the fundamental social transformations experienced in Black-American societies during the period of nonviolent resistance

[38] Douvan and Adelson discuss the intimate relationship in terms of gender difference in their book, *The Adolescent Experience*, where they suggest that sex differences affect the level of intimacy in friendships, with girls having closer and more intimate friendships than boys during early adolescence.

that followed the Civil Rights Movement during the 1960s[39] and 1970s.[40] Her novels ride the wave of social change that began with resistance to private and public patriarchy, and which influenced the male–female friendship in early adolescent novels that deal directly with sexism. To understand this historical connection between the lives of Black girls during that period and friendship, Joyce A. Ladner's sociological research model regarding Black girls' lives in *Tomorrow's Tomorrow* is appropriate as a historical theorisation to evaluate how racism shapes Black girls' and women's roles in their families, and therefore their communities. I utilise Ladner's model in explaining the connection between cross-sex friendship and young Black girls' growing up as they challenge the oppression of sexism. Similar to many socialisations during the 1970s and 1980s, Black girls' bonding is not a form of sophistication but rather a method of survival and self-affirmation. Furthermore, bell hooks relates females' gender oppression to the type of sexist thinking they adapt, referring to it as "the enemy within", or "our internalized sexism" (13). She showcases this sexist oppression in the dominant approaches to perceiving women's relationships:

> We all knew firsthand that we had been socialized as females by patriarchal thinking to see ourselves as inferior to men, to see ourselves as always and only in competition with one another for patriarchal approval, to look upon

[39] Socio-political movements such as Civil Rights (1954–1968), Black Power (1968) and Fair Housing (1966–1968), as well as others emphasising racial pride and economic empowerment, were exclusive to male leadership and were followed by a decade that encouraged Black women's inclusion in feminism and in sharing the political act. Shirley Chisholm was one of the early Black women to work in Congress and to make a bid to become President of the United States in 1972.

[40] The 1970s also witnessed the increase of 'affirmative action', which referred to policies and initiatives aimed at compensating for past discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, religion or national origin.

> each other with jealousy, fear, and hatred. Sexist thinking made us judge each other without compassion and punish one another harshly. (14)

The internalisation of sexist thoughts created the patriarchal oppressions led by Black males inside and outside Black families, and even in Black activism where women were allowed to participate but not lead. Bonding at that time was a means through which validation came by familiarising with males as authority controllers. Hamilton's friendships in her early books correspond to similar challenges of sexism that manifested during early adolescence at that time. Black girls' ability to bond with males strengthens their selfhood and eases their internalisation of inferiority. Hamilton's protagonist, Justice, is confined by the patriarchal repression of her brothers and parents. Befriending a group of boys, Justice determines a means to overcome oppressive forces. Hooks also asserts that bonding at that time was more natural to men than women because, "Female bonding was not possible within patriarchy; it was an act of treason" (18).

Cross-sex friendships were challenging in the 1980s, and were influenced by a more prominent transformation within the second wave of feminism. Both political and social activists of the women's liberation movement promoted women's bonding as a source of power to their common stance regarding gender and race[41] (hooks 18, Dill 131). In addition to the historical theorisations of cross-sex friendship, I reflect on Berndt's behavioural model of friendship as a secondary understanding that is essential to my research. Designed in 1982, Berndt's psychological model of 'processing friendship' corresponds in many of its facets to Hamilton's patterns in

[41] In *Sisterhood Is Still Powerful*, hooks promotes feminist sisterhood, the type of bonding that women struggled through with the feminist movement that advertised the context of female bonding in order to protect their interests as Black women (17).

both novels. Berndt's "The Features and Effects of Friendship in Early Adolescence" includes two characteristics that are critical to the conceptualisation of friendship's role in the establishment of young protagonists' feminist identity—the social environment of friendships and the change in cognitive ability (1448). Berndt's model will only aid in the analysis of Hamilton's cross-sex friendship. The broader impact is necessary for my investigation of Black girls' early adolescent lives concerning the change in social environment as a dominant impulse in patriarchal communities.

Regarding Black girls' lives in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, socialisation and mobility via friendship is restricted to the nuclear and extended family. Ladner elaborates on the lives of Black girls from the second half of the 1960s until 1971 in *Tomorrow's Tomorrow*. She features her perspective concerning the early patterns of social learning of preadolescent lower-class girls growing up in the inner city (49), while her research on Black adolescent girls' lives reveals a controlling factor in their relationships. When she defines girls' social behaviour as, "the period when the individual learns specific forms of behavior through interacting with others in her environment in order to facilitate effective functioning within the social group" (49), Ladner points to the limitations that existed. She further explains, "In the Black community the primary agents of socialisation for the preadolescent girl are her immediate and extended family" (50). This situation is evidently reflected in Justice's and M.C.'s plots. In both novels, friendships between a female and a male adolescent are highlighted. In *Justice and Her Brothers*, the formation of a strong feminist persona of the protagonist Justice Douglass is moulded through bonding with her oppressive sibling Thomas, the more compassionate Levi, and her neighbour Dorian. Justice's challenge is identified in two types of tension—at the

realistic level, whereby Justice fiercely anticipates the boys' types of activities; and the control that she possesses over her supersensory skills. The latter is based on her approach for bonding with her older twin brothers, Thomas and Levi. Justice's quest for an interactive friendship with a group of males develops into a more challenging form of leadership. Conversely, M.C.'s encounter with Lurhetta is revolutionary as the young girl continues trekking through the wilderness during the summer. She is a rebel who presses forward against the flow and drives M.C. to think and act differently. Her relationship with M.C. ends as she disappears without a trace, but the young boy's journey of self-discovery is significantly affected by Lurhetta's presence in his life. In my analysis of cross-sex friendship, *M.C. Higgins, the Great* is excluded as it only superficially discusses the dyadic form of the incomplete friendship bond.

Hamilton's plot of cross-sex friendship in *Justice and Her Brothers* combines both Ladner's historical model of Black girls' bonding with Berndt's focus on the value of change through the bonds in a social environment. The feminist empowerment of adolescent Black girls living in harsh socio-economic circumstances, according to Ladner emerges from their ability to grow through social and economic oppression into more resourceful and robust women (275). Justice's motivations as a Black preadolescent living in the early 1970s is to seek bonding with a group of boys to liberate herself from oppression. This is directed by social norms, ones that Ladner determines in the effect of peer groups during childhood. In the context of Black girls trapped within restrictive family contexts, "Another important agent of socialisation for the younger Black girl is the peer group. During preadolescence girls become strong participants in peer group activities" (50). Justice pursues peer groups to break free from the shackles of the oppressive gender

and social pressures and form bonds with others. The bonding reflects a means of liberating herself by embarking on an individual journey of exploration through cross-sex friendship. As Hamilton introduces Justice, tension is sensed in the eleven-year-old's attempts to impress those she aims to befriend. Justice's aspiration to develop a healthy friendship with boys becomes a quest of liberation for the young girl who wants to gain acquaintance. In this quest, Justice employs her cognitive and physical abilities, in addition to her supernatural telepathic forces, to reinforce her self-affirmation towards the end of her journey.

The change in social environment in Justice's circle unfolds when she breaks the gender pressures in her environment, primarily after her disconnection from her parents. Due to her parents' absence for work and study, their caregiving role is transferred to Thomas and Levi. Justice realises that the accumulation of fear from Thomas is exacerbated by her mother's absence while completing her degree programme in Marks College. Justice becomes confused and longs for her mother's power of presence, "But that she's gone for hours and hours . . . And not here to help. To be on my side from Thomas" (12). Since the absence of Justice's mother is deconstructive, Justice considers bonding as a social alternative. Her psychological pain increases as she remembers the security of her mother's presence and concedes that, "she enjoyed every minute of it. She knew nothing could hurt her, threaten her, with her mom so close" (22). The change in Justice's social circumstances leads to a shift in her thinking as she considers filling the void caused by her parents' absence with an alternate social bonding. The troubling abandonment that Justice undergoes motivates her to seek friends for social empowerment. As the only girl born to the Douglass family, she has no choice but to cope with the company of boys and the difficult circumstances. Hamilton creates an inevitable option for the protagonist, as

the narrative suggests nothing about Justice's relations with female friends. The limitations over whom Justice befriends are described, "And why couldn't she find girls her age to be friends with? Poor Ticey. It wasn't that she couldn't find any, it was that he and Tom-Tom couldn't keep her away from what they were doing or planning to do" (60). Justice continuously encounters the gatekeeping both brothers enforce, in addition to Thomas's unceasingly repressive behaviour. His daily interactions with her include every possible disruption, "The tone of his voice and those whirring [drum]sticks had caused Justice to suspect he would hit her deliberately. She had screamed at him, "I truly despise you!" And, unreasonably, she had burst out with, "If you ever touch my bike…!"" (11). In another frustrating incident, he effortlessly sabotages her appetite:

> Until her stomach began to hurt with a deep, cold feeling. Something tore at her insides with slithers of ice. She felt death-weak and knew suddenly that she was about to lose consciousness. But even before she could panic, she had seen a fleeting look of caution come into Thomas's eyes. Quickly, she took up the sandwich and, for strength, hurriedly ate it. (58)

Allowing Justice to eat only when he commands, Thomas symbolises excessive patriarchal control that increases her internalisation of sexism. And although she embodies a strong sense of self that controls her accumulating anger, she experiences that 'deep, cold feeling' caused by his irritating manners. Justice's next move ultimately reveals that her plan to overcome domestic oppression is grounded in liberation bonding. However, the sexist environment Justice suffers is plainly depicted by Hamilton as, "she knew why. She never could pull herself away when the boys were gathered. She could not help herself, for, like a moth, she was captured by their light" (89). Although the light metaphor implies the fragility of the

female adolescent who perceives her ultimate strength to be attained through a group of boys, the final realisation demonstrates otherwise. The young protagonist's transformation at the end of the narrative, turning friendship into leadership, explains how cross-sex friendship features as an important stage in her development as a young Black girl.

According to Ladner, Black girls in the preadolescent ages of five-to-eleven years engage in the process of social expansion in a 'meaningful way'. She explains, "It becomes very important for her to judge and be judged by other children her age. The family begins to slowly lose its position of primary importance. It is also during the preadolescent developmental phase that the Black child begins to engage in conflicts with her family" (50). Justice encounters daily struggle because she wants to belong to a group that represents power in her social circle. These forces ultimately become empowering as they hone her skills in overcoming the oppressive challenges required to join the boys. This helps Justice to elevate her quest from the desire for a primary attachment to the boys, to acting with superiority over other male children later in the narrative. As a start, the conflict that Ladner highlights emerges from the protagonist's urgency to judge and be judged by other adolescents. Justice's primary challenge becomes evaluating and dealing with social and behavioural contradictions in her close circle of boys. The nearest two male members she connects with, her twin siblings, have conflicting attitudes. This contradiction is explored as they represent the extremes of both caregiving and repression. Although Thomas is controlling and authoritarian, Levi presents as a kind sibling who continuously defends her against Thomas's assaults. While Thomas unceasingly projects harm with his habitual practices of noise and verbal disturbance, such as the affected stuttering and the sound of the drumsticks that he

plays as instruments of torture, Levi is a guardian figure. Thomas intentionally enjoys vexing her with his reactions. For example, when Levi initially takes over the caregiving role towards his sister, preparing the food and arranging the table in their mother's absence, Thomas ruins their moment with his dominating behaviour.

Hamilton soothes Justice's social and psychological tensions by creating a parent-like character in Levi. In Justice's temporary transformational period, he symbolises movement from patriarchal tension to parenting mode that balances Justice's internalised self-inferiority. Justice's convenient proximity with Levi provides the potential for a standard friendship with a boy. Domestically, Levi represents all kinds of support. Even when she is in the field surrounded by boys, Justice is not denied the company of a boys' group with the excuse of protecting her. Instead, Levi monitors her even while she rides her bike near him and the other boys. The gatekeeping he performs appears to be less intense in comparison to Thomas, who in gatherings grudgingly accepts her presence, following his parents' instructions that Justice remains in close proximity, "Thomas wouldn't allow other girls around—not to say that they were much interested. And he tolerated Justice because his folks made him" (63). Witnessing glimpses of Justice's attachment to Levi, such as selecting a bicycle parking spot next to his, or even hiding behind him as she carefully observes the boys in the field, are her unspoken appeals to the need for an older supporting friend to help with her endeavours. Levi's attention forms the secured friendship, which stimulates her courage to confront Thomas and advance in her quests, Thomas's oppressing acts encourage her to confront the challenge, grasping survival and positivity out of pain. Justice's intellectual skills continue to develop as she becomes fully aware of the twins reflecting each other in appearance only.

Consequently, Justice goes the extra mile to prove her validity for boys' friendship by demonstrating equal ability and strength. Ladner's study includes such activities of Black girls during the late 1960s and early 1970s as part of the developing socialism. She explains, "Although preadolescent Black girls are very much involved in activities, sibling rivalry, school and a host of other preoccupations that characterise children in other social, ethnic and racial groups, there is a strong cultural phenomenon directed toward sharpening roles" (51). Ladner's reference to roles involves the challenges of Black girls at pre-adolescence. Justice's Great Snake Race becomes the axis of her greatest challenge to prove her skills and become worthy of boys' friendship. Stimulated by Thomas's acts carried out intentionally to bother her, she believes that his actions are, "another reason I have to win The Great Snake Race" (17). The majority of the subsequent narrative revolves around Justice's attempts to capture a large snake, with the assurance that catching one big garter snake will fulfil the terms of the competition. During the race, she places herself under immense pressure. She bravely makes many journeys to the riverside in Quinella Place, a semi-isolated rural location in Ohio, independently checking for snakes and experiencing fear as she imagines creatures attacking her feet from within the dark waters. The scene of the snake search is loaded with tension as she senses a multitude of crawling animals, "hearing her own panting breath, Justice clamped her own mouth shut. Breathing too hard and fast, she stopped a moment to calm herself. Fear weakened her inside, and she found she was shaking" (44). Steadily, her horror increases as Justice discovers many snakes and expresses her fear, "I am scared. Scared to death, Justice thought. Oh, find one and do what you came to do!" (45). However, when she becomes confused about where she left her bike upon leaving, she clearly states how she has learnt from her own fear, "That's what happens when

you panic" (51). Although fear surrounds her distressing encounters beside the river, it is critical because it illustrates the depth of Justice's motivation to form friendships. It is highly likely that Hamilton intends to create a challenge at a more significant personal level, which enables the protagonist to mature as she seeks to win the race. Justice is able to recognise her desire to win, and the inherent risks, and she realises that the challenge she is preparing for, as her initial approach to form friendships with boys, means confronting her fears is worthwhile.

Justice's attempts to overcome patriarchal oppression are Hamilton's way of representing a 1970s Black girl who is determined to redefine herself in a repressive community. Ladner's discussion of Black girls facing multiple oppressions indicates that Black girls of that time developed a common sense of dealing with male domination at an early age:

> Thus, an important factor in this analysis is the extent to which they perceive themselves as individuals who could deal with their problems with their own resourcefulness for whether they turned it to the external world—whether they relied upon someone from the outside world to aid them in fighting their battles with the world. (78)

Justice chooses to manifest her confrontational ability by turning outwardly to reconnect with her external social environment. She is noticeably decisive about her abilities and potentiality, which she reaffirms to her mother even before she learns about the boys' snake race, "Moth-er! What do you think I am? Girls are different from what you were like as a kid- you know? And probably smarter, and they can do anything boys can do! I could do wheelies by third grade, for chrissakes!" (16). Justice's solid feminist statement underscores egalitarian, if not superior norms that control relationships with boys. The articulation of this early

manifestation of power is shown in competing with boys while developing a higher level of self-esteem. Justice's final realisation of the person she is becoming supports her advancement of harnessing friendship to achieve superiority. Her self-confidence increases as she realises her exclusive ability as a girl to master boys' skills, a technique that helps to facilitate her understanding of boys' ways of bonding. Notwithstanding her awareness of her differences, she persistently expresses pride in what she does, asserting powerful developments in managing her challenges. She acknowledges that, "Thomas wouldn't allow other girls around-not to say that they were much interested. And he tolerated Justice because his folks made him" (63). Adapting to new friends begins inside Thomas's group, primarily with her neighbour, Dorian Jefferson. To her, Dorian is not a parental figure like Levi, nor an overbearing commander like Thomas. He uniquely appears to be permanently overflowing with energy, but soon Justice realises how comparable they are. First, empathy works best when she learns that Dorian lacks parental care, probably with less intensity, but similar to how she misses her mother. Second, as he also possesses extrasensory powers, Dorian becomes a distinct choice of friend for Justice, one who becomes an active part of her future leading unit.

Justice develops an individualistic cognitive ability, attained after overcoming friendship challenges such as winning the snake race and learning bike stunts. She is able to identify her inner sensory ability, a power that was not previously recognised. Her telepathic power adds a sense of originality as she feels new, manifesting a fresh notion of identity through which she generates her enabling feminist sense of confrontation with boys. This identification contributes towards the development of the type of cognitive ability that benefits from friendship. Exercising the power gifted to her takes place directly after she wins the race and embraces

confidence through her equality with the other sex. The new time-dimension enables Justice to employ her skill freely to protect herself and her new unit of friends. As she absolutely recognises the damage that Thomas can cause, she directly allows herself to log into his mind and hinder his attempts at harming Levi. She powerfully sends him illusions to compel him to experience the pain he would wish on Levi. She intentionally disrupts his communication with Levi, showing Thomas the boundlessness of her own power.

Justice and Her Brothers unveils empowering feminist friendship approaches that can exist through forms of cross-sex bonding. The breaking of gender oppression patterns fits the context of feminist thinking in the 1970s and 1980s. As young African-American adolescents, Black girls live up to changes in social and environmental status to grow as they establish the proper communication needed in terms of bonding. The accumulation of Justice's power is reflected in the development of her cognitive power as she rediscovers her sources of hidden knowledge. Her advancement in self-discovery expands to include skills of communication that extend beyond telepathy:

> Sentience. Telepathy. Telekinesis—motion produced without the use of force. And clairvoyance—ability to see objects or actions beyond the natural range. The four of them each had one or more of these capacities. But Justice's power was exotic, giving her the energy to combine these forces. (273)

As she advances, she acknowledges abilities that extend beyond bike stunts or confronting Thomas's teasing. Each of the friends' unit members wields only a part of the powerful knowledge she acquires. Ironically, she employs such capabilities to finally become not only a good friend of Dorian, but also the caregiver

for Levi and Thomas. Eventually, Thomas is able to express a positive attitude in response to Justice's partnership of the group. His response to the talk with Justice after he strongly rejects joining the group reflects the change in his attitude, as the narrative explains, "Thomas had already thought of this and he nodded agreement. *But you could stop anyone, Justice*, he traced" (278). When, afterwards, the group recall Justice winning the snake race, "Thomas had to smile, they all did, when it flashed through their minds what a shock it had been seeing all these baby snakes" (281). Just as she has an impact on Thomas's attitude, Justice influences others into progressive group attitude. Justice, as the group's 'Watcher', spreads her impact further to reach Dorian, "On the other side of the fence, Dorian waited for them in high weeds. His alert, intelligent stare greeted Levi . . . He and Dorian stayed a pace behind Justice" (261). With the powers that she discovers, Justice is able to exchange energetic bonding with Dorian, which in turn inspires her to help him rediscover his sensory abilities, and the social intelligence he shares with the group. Peace and the accumulation of power co-exist, by which point Justice acknowledges that her objectives of friendship have been fulfilled. Through this social experience of bonding with boys, lessons of diligence and determination are learned the hard way. Her steely determination results from the gender-oppressive challenge she must break to liberate herself and feel included in other children's groups as an equal. With her new powers, she elects to immediately develop her connection with the boys into another challenge of leading the group into future quests. The strength she carries from her friendship journeys reveals new possibilities for future time-travel missions, as she traces at the end of the first sequel, "The way to the future has to be learned . . . [That] will take time. But I can show you some of it" (274). Her final

statement, in which she stands as the Watcher for all children, conveys the constituting concept of youth's relevance to the future.

Justice wins the race and the power that accompanies it, but the question that remains is, how smooth is the type of bonding she seeks with the boys as a Black girl from the late 1970s? Although she apparently achieves a level of feminist power and cognitive development, a model of success through hardship that Ladner believes in, in the wider cultural context, to be "worthy of emulation" (257) she has overcome considerable challenges to the development of her extreme determination and diligence to achieve her goal of bonding. It is a harsh and complicated form of socialisation that Hamilton's protagonist is indulged in for the sake of creating friendships with boys. Hamilton's confrontational friendship between Black boys and girls during the 1970s changes over the following two decades, as epitomised through the publication of *Bluish* in 1999.

3.3 Hamilton and Black Sisterhood in Adolescence

Hamilton also writes about adolescent friendship in a form of Black sisterhood in *Bluish*. Black adolescent sisterhood revolves around a form of mutual support and communication to all the members of the small groups encompassed. Because friendships are particularly significant in the developmental stages of preadolescents and adolescents, Hamilton's sisterhood group provides a sense of belonging and relief from trauma and oppression. The sense of Black girls' inclusion in a friendship group is linked to their resilience in terms of coping with and improving upon their individual lives. To explain Hamilton's adolescent friendship in theory, I devote some attention to the history of Black sisterhood as an important feminist concept since its emergence in the 1970s, and then move on to Black forms of sisterhood that are notoriously different, as conveyed by hooks in *Feminism Is for Everybody*,

Collins in *Black Feminist Thought*, and Charmaine Williams in "Notes on feminism, racism and sisterhood". In addition, I explore the meaning of adolescent sisterhood in contrast to activist sisterhood and adult sisterhood. However, despite representing different paths to feminist empowerment for Black women and females, both principles of sisterhood impact upon one another. Activist sisterhood is concerned with a communal shared interest of listening to the different experiences of women, valuing them as experiences, and creating a common platform for the advancement of the sex. Meanwhile, adolescent sisterhood is not necessarily about gendered empowerment, but rather mutual affirmation and support. Because both Collins and hooks discuss sisterhood regarding activist sisterhood/political agenda, I need to assert my stance on these theories with respect to Hamilton. While activist sisterhood entails the manifestation of political change, adolescent sisterhood concerns psychosocial development, which is the focus of this chapter. Since I acknowledge that adolescent sisterhood in Hamilton's fiction is not attempting to realise (direct) political change, I create my own space by noting that Hamilton's sisterhood is an important concept influenced by Black sisterhood since the 1970s. Therefore, adolescent sisterhood is not depoliticised, and is considerably focused on the development of the individual as opposed to realising broad social change. I choose to define Hamilton's adolescent sisterhood as a small group of Black girls who voluntarily bond through friendship and challenge class and socio-economic norms. For all the girls involved, such bonding creates a sense of individual empowerment that also reflects on the power of the group in children's communities. The power that Black female groups generate for young girls is identified by Black feminists as linking directly to Black sisterhood.

The interpretation of adolescent sisterhood that I present in this chapter is influenced by Collins's non-political grounds of Black sisterhood in *Black Feminist Thought*, Trites's feminist views of adolescent friendship in "Feminist Subversions", and also Lugones's notion of pluralist friendship in "Sisterhood and Friendship as Feminist Models". Trites introduces a prominent analysis of literal and metaphoric sisterhood in children's feminist literature. She resembles Hamilton's adolescent friendship in providing an argument that re-establishes this type of bonding in children's literature, by poignantly highlighting the impact of constitutive aspects such as interdependency and the flexible meaning of belonging or recreating a community. Meanwhile, despite Trites's argument pointing to Black adolescents as friends in other novels such as Rosa Guy's *Friends* and the interracial sisterhood in *Homecoming* by Cynthia Voigt, this intersection is made particularly meaningful when explaining Hamilton's Black sisterhood, which Trites does not consider. However, Trites's critique of Black girls' friendship celebrates two-peer relationships as a form of sisterhood, a concept that Hamilton expands into small groups of girls. To comprehend how the analysis of sisterhood members is revealing in terms of creating or reacting to communities, Berndt's model of adolescent friendship continues to explain girls' psychosocial developments.

3.4 Hamilton's Black Adolescent Sisterhood in *Bluish*

Hamilton represents her most polished form of adolescent friendship in a form of Black sisterhood during the 1990s. This representation is especially important because it demonstrates feminist attachments that sisterhood offers for girls of colour. Black sisterhood as a separate notion is generally perceived to be an under-researched topic because Black females have always been referred to in this regard through comparisons with White women's sisterhood. According to Charmaine

Williams, “There is less theoretical engagement with what it means to develop sisterhood among those who have been racialized” (289). Black women’s lesser inclusion in the notion of sisterhood means that Black girls are also overlooked. This calls for a specific theorisation of sisterhood in Black adolescence, similar to how those girls are involved in many socially interactive activities such as communal mothering and work. In *Bluish*, Hamilton introduces Black sisterhood that congregates three Black girls who symbolise the varying social and ethnic backgrounds of New York. The friendship plot in *Bluish* also involves several social and personal challenges for the three protagonists, with Natalie, Dreenie and Tuli forming a small friendship group to support one another.

Although Collins and hooks discuss sisterhood from a political agenda, I need to borrow certain aspects of their theories for two reasons. First, both Black theorists discuss the emergence and expansion of sisterhood as a feminist model through history, which developed to join the Black political agenda as an advocate for Black women’s rights. Such history is an important factor in understanding the social significance for Black girls. In addition, in their primary introductions, these theories explain the social and developmental aspects that emerge from the power of Black females in a group. Collins establishes the emergence of Black sisterhood as an informal non-political practice, “In the comfort of daily conversations, through serious conversation and humor, African-American women as sisters and friends affirm one another’s humanity, specialness, and right to exist” (102). As a socialisation act performed within the informality of Black women’s communication, sisterhood friendship in Black culture is a means of support and solidarity in the face of daily tensions. Collins develops her activist concept of Black sisterhood, supporting other Black feminist socialists and historians such as Bonnie Thornton

Dill, Paula Giddings and Cheryl Townsend Gilkes. Her primary discussion of the emergence of sisterhood as a concept promotes the sharing of its values with younger Black females:

> In traditional African-American communities Black women find considerable institutional support for valuing lived experience. Black women's centrality in families, churches, and other community organizations allows us to share with younger, less experienced sisters our concrete knowledge of what it takes to be self-defined Black women. (260)

It is within the same context that Collins suggests generalisations of the historical concept of Black sisterhood, asserting, "Though not expressed in explicitly political terms, this relationship of sisterhood among Black women can be seen as a model for a series of relationships African-American women have with one another" (Gilkes, Giddings, qtd. in Collins 260). Reflecting on different histories of sisterhood before it is depoliticised, Collins recommends it as a 'model' to be employed in terms of promoting support, as I interpret here through Black girl's friendship in Hamilton's groups. Collins's sisterhood also promotes self-definition as a primary knowledge concept in this model, a perception that aids Hamilton's girls in their friendship in *Bluish* without neglecting its positive impact on the group.

Despite partially addressing what appears to be one of the major sources of theorisation, I am not focusing here on political sisterhood. Acknowledging that difference between adolescence and activist sisterhood, I choose to write about adolescent sisterhood and the kind of psychosocial development it generates in the lives of Black girls during the 1990s' narrative. Meanwhile, because I recognise that adolescent sisterhood in Hamilton's fiction is not attempting to forge political change, I have created my own concept by noting that Hamilton's sisterhood is an

important concept with its formation influenced by Black sisterhood since the 1970s. By my definition, Hamilton's adolescent sisterhood represents a small group of Black girls bonding through friendship and facing numerous social challenges together, with the power of this friendship transferrable to all the group members. An inspired sense of individualistic psychological development empowers each member and leads them to share with the others. The group influence is a major plot of my narrative of *Bluish*'s Black adolescent sisterhood. Similarly, other Hamilton friendship narratives like *Cousins* are not included in my analysis because the friendship theme suggests potential bonding from two-girl group contexts. While Hamilton's *Bluish* is a story about three Manhattan girls—Dreenie, Tuli and Natalie—forming a friendship during Christmastime, the two-part sequel of *Cousins* and *Second Cousins* focuses on two Black girls' unsuccessful friendship. As her final published novel, Hamilton infuses an enthusiastic Black friendship model in *Bluish* in a different perspective from that typical of the 1970s and 1980s, one that accumulates power in a group of girls. Nevertheless, this presentation is framed by the inclusion of social factors that influence girls' interactions. Dill insists on the value of social dynamics in Black girls' socialisation. In researching sisterhood and perceptions of self in Black societies, she insists that, "we must examine on an analytical level the ways in which the structures of class, race, and gender intersect in any woman's or group of women's lives in order to grasp the concrete set of social relations that influence their behavior" (138). In my discussion of Black adolescent sisterhood, it is helpful to link the kinds of narrow friendship groups that emerge in schools or community contexts, where three or four friends come together to support one another, to the social factors affecting their behaviour within groups. This enables us not only to gain insight into how racial, class and socio-economic factors

function, but also to generate conceptual categories that facilitate in extending our understanding of feminist sisterhood to Black girls' lives. Nonetheless, some aspects of Berndt's theory of friendship features are also utilised to examine the psychosocial and developmental influence of race, classism and personal trauma on Black adolescent sisterhood.

Although I am not interested in how sisterhood developed politically, I believe that setting the scene for how sisterhood groups were initiated by Black women through history will help in understanding Hamilton's participation in that context. Apparently, Hamilton's canon is politics-free, in the sense of not engaging directly with activism, or local or national political movements or figures, while remaining connected to communal social strands that influence Black girls as adults. Sisterhood, for example, as a social practice in African and African-American communities, began early during the 1790s in certain private women's clubs, but developed into political power for Black women before and after emancipation. Hamilton's narrative of adolescent sisterhood explores the diversions or the social channels that sisterhood emerged through to represent an empowered Black girls' group. Social channels such as class, race and socio-economics have influenced Black women's struggle to establish feminist quests. Through Hamilton, the same factors are demonstrated as influential and empowering in adolescent bonding at an early age and without any political venue.

Sisterhood has constituted the centre of women's associations throughout history. Between 1793 and 1830, twenty-seven Black female societies were established and run by Black women.[42] Commencing as religious advancement in

[42] According to African-American mutual aid societies in their "Institutions for Mutual Relief", published in the *National Gazette and Literary Register* on 1st March 1831.

churches when a Black woman was referred to as 'sister', sisterhood's central goal was reinforcing nurturing relationships among women, and despite its communal and political agenda, Black sisterhood channelled its purpose through social and familial ties. Research by historians reveals the significance of female kinship-bonding in extended families to create stable families and communities (Dill 134). Black women and children visited and participated in these communities. In discussing Black sisterhood during the 1970s, Dill explains how the concept of sisterhood joining the contemporary women's movement has enabled Black women to emphasise social and political struggle.[43] She indicates, "By stressing the similarities of women's secondary social and economic positions in societies and in the family, this concept has been a binding force in the struggle against male chauvinism and patriarchy" (131). Part of Black women's predicament during the 1970s was not only their inability to fully participate in political activism, but also the domestic pressures they suffered with their own daughters, sisters or neighbours. While examining how the concept of sisterhood is applied to women of colour in only a limited manner, Dill draws attention to the connection between such social tensions burdening women, and the power of sisterhood. In doing so, she shines a light on Hamilton's constructive group in *Bluish*, where sisterhood between Black girls is pluralist in purpose, but not in political orientation. This pluralism allows sisterhood in adolescence to perform many tasks, as that narrative of *Bluish* includes a collective

[43] Black women's bonding was still considered in comparison to the majority of White women in America, who were involved in 'Sisterhood is powerful'. Dill confirms, "As we review the past decade, however, it becomes apparent that the cry "Sisterhood is powerful!" has engaged only a few segments of [the] female population in the United States. Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian American women of all classes, as well many working-class women, have not readily identified themselves as sisters of the white middle-class women who have been in the forefront of the movement" (131).

girls' group that is less bound by the limitations of gender and ethnicity that existed during the 1970s.

During the 1980s and 1990s, sisterhood continued to represent Black women in a communal quest of powerful self-definition. The strength of women's groups, according to many Black feminists, comes through collective collaborations to manifest women's voices organised for an enhanced collective sisterhood (Williams 286) and collective liberation (Davis 81-98),[44] and whether these groups existed in Black churches (Gilkes 678-88) or in informal daily gatherings (Collins 34). The Black female activists' struggle to construct political empowerment through Black sisterhood is inseparable from social roles that start with the family's female connections. In her discussion of the role of safe spaces for feminist Black activists to empower women's bonding, Collins draws attention to the adolescent friendship space, asserting, "One location involves Black women's relationships with one another. In some cases, such as friendships and family interactions, these relationships are informal, private dealings among individuals" (97). The connection she creates links the roles of young Black girls to adolescent sisterhood in this chapter. Informality in bonding between Black girls is a source of power as it occurs involuntarily in homes, schools and Black neighbourhoods. Such groups can feature a blend of mothers, sisters, daughters and friends who support one another.

3.5 Adolescent Sisterhood in *Bluish*

To understand Hamilton's model of adolescent friendship as a feminist empowering concept, we need to comprehend the group pattern presented in *Bluish*. The novel

[44] See Charmaine Williams's "Notes on Feminism, Racism and Sisterhood" (2007) for collective sisterhood and Davis's "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community Slaves" for collective liberation.

involves three girls that play significant roles in changing each other's perspectives about their lives. Hamilton creates a small girlhood community that is grounded in same-sex friendship. Maureen T. Hallinan, a theorist who represents outstanding structures of friendship in early adolescence, suggests that the similarities between adolescence concerning age, sex and race are mere points of attraction in the process of forming friendships (193-210). In this group, Dreenie helps Natalie, her new classmate, in gaining power through the trauma of her sickness. She also supports Tuli through her identity crisis by asserting the importance of respecting her true self. In turn, Natalie reflects her inner power on her friends by sharing knowledge, games and handicraft skills instead of her traumatic illness. Tuli, the weakest of the three, represents the frailty of low self-esteem and how friendship compensates for it. In this model, Hamilton incorporates a powerful exchange of feminist empowerment in a group of Black adolescents. The exchange of power intersects with classism, the cultural diversity of Blackness, and colourism, thus providing diverse communication during early adolescence. This helps girls to explore themselves by comparing the different cultural contexts of their respective lives.

Such interactions in diverse groups of Black girls who share the commonalities of race and ethnicity in the Black community forge similarity between friends as common ground. Friends that share groups tend to be similar in age, sex and race (Tuma and Hallinan 1265). Dreenie and Natalie are both African-American girls who both belong to middle-class Black community and religious groups; Dreenie is Christian and Natalie is Jewish. The narrative suggests that Tuli, who lives in a poor ghetto, is African-Hispanic American. The light brown skin, curly hair and the Spanish words and songs she intentionally uses reveal Latin-American origins that are indirectly addressed (see Fig. 15 in Appendix 1). Those

girls learn to construct their own social realities for confronting the oppressions that exist in Black communities. The emerging social realities that Black girls must seek are a response to the stereotypes of Black women in social bonding. Black girls' renewed vision of adolescent friendship can include Lugones's feminist use of friendship or sisterhood to liberate themselves from the oppressive forces of sexism (135). The bond between the three girls in *Bluish* is established by the common interest that girls share in terms of socialising in Black communities. Collins explains this mutual identification by asserting, "This process of trusting one another can seem dangerous because only Black women know what it means to be Black women. But if we will not listen to one another, then who will?" (104). The feminocentric bond in Hamilton's *Bluish* enriches the girls' ability to understand the social value of being in a group of Black girls. The contribution of her thematic presentation of friendship as a medium for a feminist principle of identity exposes the significance of establishing friendship at an early age, and how this is essential for the cognitive and social development of African-American girls.

Hamilton's *Bluish* incorporates the culture of feminist strength into a pluralist form of girls' bonding. Pluralist friendship is a term introduced by Lugones to define sisterhood and friendship as feminist models, which relates to the structure of differences in Hamilton's adolescent sisterhood in *Bluish*:

> Pluralist friendship is a kind of practical love that includes a multivocal communication, a dialogue among multiple selves. A dialogue among people who are fluent in the ways of their position in the racist and ethnocentric state and in the ways of people who are differently positioned than themselves. (143)

According to Lugones's pluralism in friendship, sisterhood is powerful and creates room for special communication between females who feel different from others in the same sisterhood group, such as the diverse social realities that constitute differences between Dreenie, Natalie and Tuli. For example, Dreenie and Natalie come from Christian and Jewish middle-classes, and yet discover the bonding power of friendship instead of struggling against it. Tuli, as the third member of the group, belongs to a lower socio-economic class, lives with her elderly grandmother and finds her space with both Dreenie and Natalie. Trites describes such active bonding as a mutuality that proves its usefulness in girls' friendship. "Interdependency", according to Trites, "involves a mutual dependency that emphasizes equality. The purpose of this interdependency in a feminist novel focuses more on the child's or adolescent's development as an individual than on her being inculcated into a prescribed social role" (83). Trites's trajectory of adolescent friendship explains the power of unity in a Black girls' group in *Bluish.* It also places Hamilton's adolescent friendship in a feminist context that promotes individual change because that interdependent friendship, as Jean Piaget asserts, arises from flatness caused by the informality of the relationship between children and their peers, which helps them to develop 'egalitarian' relationships as adults (109). Trites describes the power generated from girls' bonding by making generational and social connections:

> Rather than relying on her family or community to teach her how to continue in the repressed roles that women have so long been forced into, the protagonist of a feminist children's novel will learn from relationships how to take the subject position as a strong and independent person. (84)

Not only does Hamilton's protagonist learn from the exchange of power, but also all of the girls involved in the friendship circle. The level of identification and/or

autonomy that Dreenie, Natalie and Tuli encounter as they bond influences the formation of their feminist perspective. This exchange of power is conducted through their collective work to overcome societal racism, classist divisions and develop greater empathy to one another inside their group.

In *Bluish*, the adolescent sisterhood contemporary model highlights Black girls' struggle in ethnic and interracial social tensions before they embrace personal autonomy for the value of difference. In Hamilton's narrative, the process of bonding between female friends shows the young girls' ability to excel, via their unity, to challenge these norms, instead of through the conventional one-to-one approach. Remarkably, Hamilton's group of friends embrace race, ethnicity and class differences. She presents these differences among young adolescents living in multicultural communities, offering ethnic and social factors for young readers while acknowledging the psyche of middle-grade students. Concerning race, she carefully initiates an ethnic visual preparation of the young audience, starting with the cover of the novel and the title, *Bluish*. The appearance of the girls on the cover (see Fig. 15) proposes different levels of positive and inclusive 'Blackness', revealed later in the narrative as the African-American and African-Hispanic girls' roots. Despite Hamilton's descriptions of the three characters providing only sparse details of the families' racial backgrounds, the superficiality proposes a link between colour and the sub-racial group within the broad scale of African-American race. Further, the use of the word 'Bluish' in the title allies young African-American students with the image of 'Blewish' in their own culture, as the name implies Black-Americans born to Jewish parents. In school, the children call Natalie 'Bluish' since she is, "so pale you see the blue veins all over" (8), which introduces her as an outcast and oppressed from the beginning of the narrative. It is not until the absence of Natalie in the

middle of the novel that readers learn her pale skin colour with a blue hue results from receiving chemotherapy to treat leukaemia. Later, Hamilton's purpose for the name is adverted as Natalie's mother expresses resentment of the name regarding the cultural context of the Black-American prospect of domestic prejudice, ""Don't call her Blewish. That's not nice. That is derogatory." I stood up. I must have shook my head. "Don't you know it is not nice?" her mom asked. "Would you like her to call you bad names?"" (70). As Natalie clarifies to her mother that the name is coined due to her pale skin rather than any link to a Jewish Black-American background, it becomes evident that Natalie's inclusion of the friendship unit is a mechanism to allow the rejection of domestic ethnic racism. Those female members are both aware of their differences, and that this contributes to the unifying approach in their sisterhood. Dreenie explains in one of her journals:

> Her mom has dark hair and creamy skin. She is not brown. I've seen Bluish's dad. Mr. Winburn is brown. I'm sorta sweet chocolate color. Tuli is more honey color. Bluish would probably be the combined creamy and brown—her mom and dad—if she wasn't sick. But she is this ill color not like anybody. (69)

Dreenie's thoughts introduce the interracial differences amongst the social circle of the three girls, but as a connection between herself, Natalie and Tuli, as opposed to any boundary. Although the three girls never argue about their interracial subcategory, mixed-race communication is created between Dreenie and the other two girls as a mechanism for breaking the racial boundaries that represent different Black ethnicities. Hamilton refers to interracial experiences depicted in their New York school, while indicating the approach of the sisterhood group in dealing with them for the favour of children. As the students in the class inconsiderately degrade a

wheelchair-bound Black girl by racialising her presence as blue-ish, Dreenie connects with her on a human level. She helps Natalie when everyone else shuns her, and also includes Tuli in the bonding. Starting as friendship, Dreenie turns this bonding with both girls into a connection of sisterhood as the three members of her unit become a sisterhood group. Tuli also pays attention to Natalie's condition, providing company and assistance in moving the wheelchair, even though she understands that Natalie is able to manage that independently.

In the course of challenging societal racial victimisation, classism is also highlighted. Compared to the representations by other African-American authors of the 1970s, Hamilton's empowering adolescent sisterhood invests more in class and race. In *The Friends* (1973), for instance, Rosa Guy offers a friendship pattern that confronts the superficial level of girls dealing with classism in friendship. The impact of bonding is only seen through Phyllisia, an outsider who grows emotionally as she befriends Edith Jackson, who provides her with the support needed to overcome social tensions. Unlike Guy's plot of friendship, Hamilton refers to the classist Black community in New York, but represents it as reality instead of a confrontational concern for the Black female adolescent. Phyllisia in *The Friends* is deeply pressured by her family's classism, particularly her father's, and struggles to pass through it as she understands that it hinders her friendship with Edith, who belongs to another social class. *The Friends* narrative consequently determines female friendship as a form of sisterhood, but one that struggles with the strictures of any societal authority that would deny others power because they belong to a less powerful class, such as Edith. On Hamilton's side, classism, like racism, is not completely neglected, but its thematic presence is less intense. To Dreenie and Natalie, Tuli is an African-Hispanic girl who belongs to the lower socio-economic

class in the Black-American community, which Dreenie encounters as she takes Tuli back to her house. Dreenie observes that she, “could hear people in their apartments. Radios. Television. There was no one like Mr Palmer to greet them as they came in. No Christmas tree” (79). Furthermore, Tuli’s social environment lacks parental figures. The absence of not only basic parental guidance, but also family members is an excruciating factor that marks her ability to bond and furthers Dreenie’s understanding of Tuli’s need for inclusion. Tuli’s social isolation and loneliness is magnified by her only having her grandmother Gilla, who is elderly and spends long hours at work. Notwithstanding the challenges this creates, it allows room for Tuli to consider bonding in a social group, and the connection that she establishes with both girls through sisterhood provides the security she needs as an adolescent.

Interdependent sisterhood is a consecutive factor in *Bluish.* Through discussing sisterhood in adolescence, Trites distinguishes the term from dependency as a destructive characteristic in sisterhood. She thus claims, “Dependency implies a hierarchal model with one person more dependent on (and therefore less powerful than) another” (83). Both Dreenie and Natalie are capable of understanding that Tuli, despite being the oldest among the three, is fragile and dependent on others. Dreenie is also able to appreciate how bonding with Tuli can support her development of a mature behaviour. Despite never planning to befriend Tuli, Dreenie is always able to sense Tuli’s need for a wise friend-figure to communicate with, as opposed to being entirely dependent on. Dreenie is also able to determine that Tuli, referred to as ‘Tulifoolie’ by her schoolmates, does not appear to mind the reference as she keeps “jumping, shoving, hugging, running, talking. And most of the kids enjoyed her bopping sillies” (23). Prior to joining the friends’ group, Tuli always signified her lack of self-esteem by attention-seeking behaviour though a joyful ‘Chica-chica

boom' melody and attempting a cool Latin accent. Tuli's pursuit of attention signifies an identity crisis for African-American girls in metropolitan New York, a matter that creates more chaos in the absence of parents. Before the two develop an interrelationship through sisterhood, Dreenie feels the burden of safeguarding Tuli to be outweighed by the benefits, with the short distance between them stimulating the following conclusion:

> Given enough time, Dreenie was sure Tuli could learn the names of everybody in New York City someday. So what if she tries to be Spanish at times, Dreenie thought. Tuli wanted to be somebody. She wanted to be friends with everybody. (78)

Dreenie's realisation is a key factor in their sisterhood bond. She is able to comprehend that Tuli is attached to her presence because she seeks company. Despite Dreenie believing that Tuli wants to be more sociable and 'be friends with everybody', creating a one-way friendship is probably unsatisfactory for both of them. Dreenie acknowledges that although Tuli is less than a friend to her, she still needs a wider social group to ensure exchangeable communication. Tuli's shift into friendship with both Dreenie and Natalie is reflected in the school activities shared with the friends' unit.

3.6 Adolescent Sisterhood and Community in Hamilton's *Bluish*

The value of community is vital for girls' development when bonding through sisterhood, because adolescent sisterhood creates a community. One benefit of this community is that it functions as a site of power for young Black girls. The impact of community on children's literature is discussed by children's literature critics and authors such as Trites and Gail Gauthier. However, I believe that addressing behavioural factors such as the influence of community in sisterhood will help

facilitate our understanding of the development in girls' approaches of self-affirmation, as represented in Hamilton's sisterhood. Berndt's psychological method of 'processing friendship' is constituted on children developing cognitive skills through the change or amendment in community. More significantly, Berndt claims that the interactive relationship between adolescents is determined by the intimacy of the friends' conversations and their mutual knowledge, and their responsiveness to their needs and desires (1448). Thus, the shift in Dreenie's, Natalie's and Tuli's personal perspectives of self is influenced by such changes. The study of social cognition in early adolescence by John P. Hill and Wendy J. Palmquist reveals that adolescents obtain a renewed self-awareness of their own identities as a consequence of developing cognitive abilities (3-28), while the impact of such factors can be further studied through terms of identification.[45] In arguing for the dynamics of female friendship and identity, Elizabeth Abel also praises "the process of identification", affirming that it shapes the emotional and philosophical core of the female's identity (418).

Community, whether symbolised through the surrounding environment or the space created by children in bonding, is a vital space through which to experience identification, and then autonomy. As their friendship develops, Hamilton's girls are enabled to identify with one another and achieve such autonomy. One major step in this process is identifying with the negative stereotypical roles assigned to Black females at all ages. Through the identification with the community created by bonding, they can establish autonomy that assists in decision-making to help and

[45] See Abel's "(E)Merging Identities" and Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978).

support one another. The connection between community and friendship in children's feminist literature is generally validated by Trites as follows:

> Some feminist children's and adolescent novels focus on community as a general concept important to children of both genders; others focus on strong females within heterosexual relationships; and still others work actively to advocate the strengthening of female bonds between friends, between sisters, and between mothers and daughters. But whichever of these foci a feminist text takes, its child or adolescent protagonist is likely to assume a subject position that allows her or him to value community without sacrificing his or her selfhood. (83)

The sisterhood model in *Bluish* is based on the concept of the three individuals valuing the friendship community they create, and their interaction and/or separation from their previous community. Instead of losing their selfhood through interactive communication, the three girls come to identify a level of understanding and sharing within this new community that infuses power to all of them. The creation of enablement for Black girls in adolescent sisterhood community is characterised by Collins as a nurturing environment. Similar to Trites's reaffirmation of selfhood in a group of girls, Collins asserts that the type of power characteristic of such community resides in self-definition (97). Friends, mothers and sisters can affirm each other's selfhood in the safe spaces they create in a small group,[46] such as the community created by Dreenie, Natalie and Tuli inside and outside of school. As I deploy a community argument, two types of influence are considered concerning Hamilton's sisterhood in *Bluish*—first, the force of the social environment

[46] See Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* (2000).

surrounding the three members of the group; and second, the type of nurturing environment they create for themselves. Both communities are interdependent and integrate one another through what Berndt terms as the friends' intimacy[47] that develops from their knowledge of each other, and their responsiveness to each other's needs.

As a controlling factor in the formation of early adolescent friendship, the mother–daughter interrelationship constitutes a major impact of the girls' social environment. The change in this relationship plays a significant role in explaining the proposed sisterhood model in *Bluish*. In this regard, Berndt explains how this shift in the nature of children's attachment to their parents enables the formation and influence of peers from the surrounding environment:

> Social relationships with parents are transformed as adolescents acquire greater independence. This independence is fairly limited, however, because the social status of early adolescents is a marginal one. Early adolescents are not treated as children, but they are not treated as adults either. (1447)

The movement towards the act of forming of new bonds, in such a sensitive and transformative period of growth, creates the necessary space for young adolescents to explore themselves through others, although Hamilton's girls' detachment is more complex. While Tuli is already detached from any parental figure, her speculation of social attachment is aligned with Dreenie as Tuli is welcomed into her friend's family. Natalie suffers from a deeper detachment from

[47] Intimacy is referred to here as the closeness young adolescents acquire from the knowledge they gain about each other. Shmuel Shulman and others provide two empirical studies in "Adolescent Intimacy Revisited" that describe how intimate friendship is first found during early adolescence, with the conclusion that friendship intimacy emphasises the increasing significance of self-disclosure, closeness and mutual assistance during the adolescent years (597).

her social surroundings, owing to her struggles with leukaemia. This separation is exacerbated at school since all her classmates mock her appearance, except for Dreenie. As for Dreenie, she detaches herself from her mother, the only source of bonding available at that time. In fact, the frailty in Natalie's case causes the spark of identification between the two girls. Natalie's process of identification involves her mother, with Dreenie's gradual development of thought then shown. As she instinctively voices her thoughts to her mother about Natalie, her mother's response soothes her confusion. Before she expresses them, she confesses to herself, "Bluish, I hate her", and describes her as, "Scary sickness, and I was afraid it'd rub off on me. Maybe she can still be my friend, but I don't know how" (38). Her initial thoughts are a fusion of apprehension and a willingness to bond. As she identifies with Natalie's sickness, which might have represented a boundary initially, the young girl already considers attachment, but her confusion is caused by 'how' to start. Her puzzlement is gradually eased by her mother's encouragement to accept 'the difference' in a form of empathy towards a fragile condition such as Natalie's. The role of the mother's words, in this stance, is primarily constructive to her daughter's existing interest in the new girl. When her mother advises, "Just because she's in a wheelchair—Dreenie, don't single her out because of it" (41), Dreenie is finally able to realise the appropriate reaction of inclusion she needs with Natalie. Here, the detachment from the mother is exemplified in the development of Dreenie's personal judgement to attach herself to a female friend. Domestically, she feels mid-placed between friendship and upmothering. The confusion she confronts emerges because she knows that Tuli is not an ideal friend, and that her upmothering tasks for Willie, her younger sister, are temporary. Thus, her detachment from her mother and the family in general allows her to rediscover herself in a group of girls with whom she

shares compassion and school activities. The space she creates is signified through her writing, where her journals rationalise the confusion she encounters and her final resolution regarding friendship.

The influence of the geographical environment on friendships is an extension of Berndt's broad psychological scale of environmental impact and the development of cognitive abilities. Considering the influence of place on Hamilton's early childhood and later years, it is critical to investigate her philosophy of the geographical impact, and potentially add this as a third dimension to Berndt's prospect on friendship. Regarding her narrative, the change would manifest in the cognitive processes with regards to the spatial influence on young adolescents and how it affects decision-making. It appears that part of Hamilton's focus on creating realistic characters is influenced by the nature of the cities they live in. This link provides Black girls with a better understanding and acceptance of others. In "Ah, Sweet Rememory!", Hamilton admits, "Place and time are at the heart of the fiction I write . . . subject matter is for me derived from intimate and shared places of the hometown and the town's parade of life and all that is known, remembered, and imagined" (95). Young children's relevance to place in Hamilton's fiction is the focus of Apseloff's article about Hamilton's Ohio novels. Apseloff elaborates on the inspiring and creative Ohio settings in some of Hamilton's award-winning novels, including *Zeely*, *The House of Dies Drear*, and *M.C. Higgins, the Great*. The article stresses that a realistic sense of place adds to the strength it vibrates, and therefore makes the characters more authentic (18).[48] Despite Apseloff briefly outlining the

[48] Although the article's focus is on the influence of Ohio in adding realism to the creation of characters, it only briefly outlines the effect of Hamilton's connection to New York. The author explains, "Hamilton moved to New York City for a few years, and during that time the urban setting made a deep impression on her and influenced the settings of her two Jahdu books and *The Planet of Junior Brown*" (18).

effect of Hamilton's connection to New York, the spirit of the city is patent in some of Hamilton's novels.

In the spatial connection, Black girls and boys develop a new sense of decision-making skills through friendship. While the Ohio novels attach the characters' bonding to their ancestral history, the multicultural city of New York detaches them from the oppressive histories of their ancestors. More significantly, the characters' attachment to New York liberates them from both personal and social restrictions, creating a new perception of 'the other'. The sisterhood members meet in Bethune Cookman School in New York, a 'magnet' school that attracts children from all over the city. The choice of city is echoed in the enthusiastic attitude of the young adolescents in the school, and prepares them to accept and appreciate 'otherness', including different individuals joining such as Natalie. The children's fascination with their own city begins with Dreenie, "*Sounds of my city*, Dreenie thought. She loved New York. Every kid she knew loved New York. It scared them sometimes. But now, in their slow time of enjoying a snack, the city sounds didn't upset them" (31).

Part of the general change in the young children's perception is the acceptance of place. The narrator initially suggests that it scared them on occasion, before the city's hustle and bustle becomes ordinary as a sign of belonging and settlement. Also, the inclusion of every child she knows makes Dreenie's classmates and friends become part of a more universal attachment to the excitement of metropolitan cities. The protagonist's inner thoughts reflect a child's instinctive fear, blended with the eagerness to measure up to adventurous places, typical of the boundaries they need to overcome on their journey to liberation. In addition, the acceptance of Dreenie to New York is symmetric to her existence, privately

practising daily activities in the house with her only schoolfriend, Tuli. In fact, after encountering Natalie in school in a wheelchair but prior to bonding with her, this influence of New York prepares both Dreenie and Tuli for embracing Natalie's condition.

Hamilton's choice of New York as a contemporary place connects Black adolescent girls to the urge for inclusion in new friendships as their school prepares them for such universal exploration. Equipped with modern Black teachers, Bethune Cookman School becomes an institute for a new standard of liberated children who can explore themselves and others through friendship bonding. The friendly Ms Baker encourages Dreenie, Natalie, Tuli and Paula, another Black classmate, to participate in the Broadway Project in the city's Fifth Avenue, not only to explore the city but also to reflect on their collective work. When Natalie comments after the project is submitted that, "Ours is the best . . . but don't tell. It's not a competition" (75), she reminds her class of Ms Baker's counsel to not brag about their accomplishments. The narrative suggests that the three girls' efforts to be close friends is supported by the harmonious way they carried out their tasks, "They'd worked so closely together, no one remembered now who had thought of what and which part" (76). The essence of this group effort is found in each girl's personal work being motivated and supported by another girl's encouragement. The cognitive abilities that the girls manifest in accomplishing the school project of touring Fifth Avenue, taking the photographs, choosing the group logo and finalising the group presentation represent the progress in each one's cognitive ability to accomplish goals through benefiting from friendship with other girls.

The school also represents the challenging space of identification and autonomy for sisterhood members in *Bluish*, where the group of friends spend the

majority of their interaction time while developing intimacy and closeness. Their school is the first setting for the three female adolescents to meet outside of their homes, which also represents the preparation for social detachment. Although Dreenie is the only group member who realises the need for true friendship, all three unconsciously struggle in their quest for it. Dreenie challenges her fear in pursuing a friendship with her new classmate Natalie, who has a frightening appearance because of her battle with leukaemia. Natalie, on the other hand, is a fifth-grader who despite her physical weakness strives to be independent and identify with her new classmates. This process of identification is difficult at first. Dreenie finds it challenging to identify with Natalie's condition, but not with her as a person. As Dreenie's mother soothes her confusion about Natalie's poor health, Dreenie develops the motivation to bond with Natalie and share activities, which begins with the school project. Since the impact of the mother–daughter relationship is inseparable from the external environment, Dreenie's relationship with her mother bridges the impact of domestic community to the external effect of friendship.

3.7 Adolescent Sisterhood as a Private Community for Black Girls

Hamilton's model of sisterhood is nurturing to all the group members. The actions of the three girls forming a group enable them to heal and process their personal growth towards positive self-definitions. Although Collins praises the nurturing capacity of sisterhood, her conception is primarily derived from the slavery trauma and the rejection of stereotypical images about Black women (93). I believe that valuing the notion of Black women's survival, as Collins promotes, helps in understanding its significance for smaller groups of Black girls such as those in *Bluish*'s multiethnic and racial society. Girls in such societies connect through trauma and classism and the need to understand the worth of supporting one another at a young age.

Dreenie's group develops support and understanding through humanist forms of intimacy that emerge, according to Berndt, from the insight into a friend that is attained during interactions or activities with her or him (1449). This awareness promotes closeness due to the exchange of thoughts and experiences. Such mutual collaboration only exists if young adolescents come together in what Berndt claims to be a 'mutual responsiveness'. She explains, "The responsiveness of friends to each other's needs and desires has usually been equated with the degree to which they share and help each other" (1452). The possibility for progression in cognitive ability can aid Black girls' selfhood as they receive affirmations from their friendship group. Hamilton's narrative represents intellectual abilities in three major domains—the change of perception of social relationships, upmothering practices and overcoming the psychological impact of physical trauma. For the leading figure of the unit, Dreenie, this ten-year-old female uses her child's curiosity from the beginning of the narrative to enthusiastically perceive the world. She observes Natalie and thinks, "this girl is like moonlight into a moonlight girl. So pale you can see the blue veins all over. You can tell though, once she had some color" (8). Dreenie sees moonlight despite her realisation of the deteriorating pallor and weak physicality of Natalie in the class. Aided by her creative writing skills, she immediately documents her inner thoughts in journals, keeping an emotional and cognitive record of the development of her own social experiences in friendship. On the second page of her first journal, Dreenie's perception of the new classmate is tinged with confusion, "I watch her all the time. She looks real tired". She continues, "Never seen anyone like her up close. This girl. Bluish closes her eyes. Her hands look like moonlight fishes about to dive and flop off the arms of her wheelchair" (8). She is able to shift her initial interest in Natalie from the superficial difference in

appearance caused by leukaemia, into the realisation of her desire to create new friends besides Tuli. The narrative provides Dreenie's confession of her own realisation in the closing scene of the third chapter. There, Dreenie is cast aside in a world of her own thoughts. As she cleans the dinner dishes, she actually enjoys being isolated from both Tuli and Willie. This separation enables Dreenie to comprehend the limited commonality that exists between herself and those two young girls. She remembers to re-identify herself with both of them as her daily company for the purpose of reconsidering the type of friends she connects with. When Dreenie thinks, "*I'd love to have some girls as a friend. Not Like Tuli. But a girl I could talk things over with. Do special things with*", the narrator then immediately adds, "Having Tuli around was like having a slower Willie. Yet she was Dreenie's only close friend" (33). Dreenie's reasonable evaluation of the friendship options is justified by the narrator's closure of her thoughts with, "And why?", which suggests the possibility of bonding with others, especially with Tuli lacking the key characteristics of a friend. Realising that she has nothing in common with either Tuli or Willie, Dreenie concludes that personal bonding with just a company of girls is not her own definition of friendship. In her terms, bonding is one of the special personal and intellectual qualities she possesses. Therefore, the protagonist's modified conception about friendship is one that comes from Dreenie's own observations and judgments of those she accompanies. The change in Dreenie's cognitive processes is typical of Hamilton's mature protagonists. In the case of Dreenie, it promotes developing intellectually compatible friends, an aspiration that Dreenie accepts is unachievable with Tuli.

The three girls of the sisterhood group develop a sense of selfhood, in addition to exchanges of support, as a consequence of their improved cognitive

skills. Dreenie maturely develops selfhood that manifests in solely relying on the personal judgements of ‘the other’ inside the friendship circle. The impact of her own evaluation begins as she joins the school project group and prepares their tasks. At this stage, she cautiously approaches her quest, manifesting responsibility to her decision and considering the consequences within. Dreenie acknowledges selfhood, and thus concludes that with Natalie she should be, “Never too close, never too far away. Never to put on being friendly, but always be yourself” (53). At this point, Dreenie is aware of the limitations she ought to accept in her attachment with Natalie, aware that the reaction of the latter should make a difference in the bonding reaction. Dreenie’s consciousness of the significance of her value as a member in the friendship group is represented by her acknowledgment of the importance of being an extrovert, unlike Natalie’s withdrawn attitude and Tuli’s random socialisation. Natalie also affirms the strength reflected in this friendship, harnessing it to confront her traumatic health condition. Because of the empathy she receives from Dreenie, she grows from introspection as a newcomer to the act of generating a positive environment through her unit of friends, and subsequently to all children in the class. Central to Hamilton’s feminist approach of empowering young female adolescents, she articulates the ability of African-American females to challenge oppressive forces as they empower themselves through circulating positive bonding in their social environment. The shift in Natalie’s mood is noticed directly after she acquaints herself with Dreenie and Natalie, particularly when recalling the class’s initial rejection of her for being sick and wheelchair-bound, undoubtedly an unpleasant experience for a newcomer who is emotionally and physically frustrated. Her ability to operate positively in her class and among her group of friends while struggling with leukaemia is consequential to her close bonding with Dreenie.

Following the improvement of her cognitive skills, the young girl's choice to practise social responsibility is another manifestation of friendship's effect. This places Dreenie in a position of comparing the options available in her social reality to make informed decisions for sisterhood bonding, as Hamilton offers many forms of social practices for young Black adolescents that influence their feminist understanding such as upmothering during early adolescence. Dreenie's upmothering practices towards Willie constitute not only a strong feminist quality, through which she develops social responsibility, but also provide her with a new vision as a caregiver. The understanding of the depth of her cognitive and behavioural attitudes towards those she nurtures enables her to empathise with those who need help, like Tuli. Through identification with both, she gains clarity on the type of friend she needs to connect with, and also those who need to connect with her. Furthermore, it is through the same mature sense that she identifies with the other young female's traumatic conditions. Before they even become friends, Dreenie defends Natalie's weakness against the bullies after she vomits in class. In her second journal, Dreenie describes the children's response to her defence of Natalie, "When they get rowdy they listen to me telling them to quit it, even though I haven't been in school that long . . . So I told all of them to shut up and sit down. And most did!" (35). Dreenie takes advantage of her own power, not only to defend Natalie, but also to advocate for her while doing her writing tasks or even playing her Game Boy console. When in the same journal Dreenie says, "I sit next to her when we do writing" (35), she represents a further advanced sense of knowing that the best support she can offer Natalie is intellectual. In the narrative closure, Dreenie announces, "This journal never was about me. This record of Bluish is YOURS" (126), a recognition of her personal assessment of the friendship experience. She is able to understand that her

bonding with Natalie depends on her personal adjustment to the circumstances that she investigates from the very first moment she meets Natalie as a stranger. Her final statement in the journal confirms her personal and cognitive achievement with Natalie, “GFF, Good Friends Forever!” (126).

According to Natalie, the gradual development in cognitive logic takes place as she develops friendship as sisterhood. This cognitive and emotional development exists within a process of healing that she discovers in bonding with other Black girls. The healing course in adolescent sisterhood is necessary for those like Natalie who have encountered trauma and struggle to establish independent behaviour to represent themselves. Trauma and sisterhood are two interconnected themes in Black sisterhood. When Audre Lorde published *I Am Your Sister* (1985), she made an association between sisterhood and cancer survivors like herself. In dealing with isolation after cancer, she compares herself to Angelina Weld Grimké, a Black-American poet and playwright who died alone in her New York apartment in 1958, and concludes, “I think of what it could have meant in terms of sisterhood and survival for each one of us to have known of the other’s existence: for me to have had her words and her wisdom, and for her to have known I needed them! It is so crucial for each one of us to know she is not alone” (101). Likewise, Natalie’s participation in sisterhood enables her to avoid retracting from social inclusion and to prepare to overcome repressive forces such as trauma. When Natalie receives care from Dreenie, she begins to overcome the dominating negativity due to her illness-induced physical fatigue. The steady development in their friendship is immediately reflected in Natalie’s attitude. Anthony P. Mannarino suggests that such intimate relationships between friends contribute not only to their self-esteem and self-worth, but also to other children since those with high self-esteem attract other children and

form more stable relationships (280-284). The mutuality that Mannarino and Berndt refer to exists in the friendship, depicting Dreenie as an influential member. And since Dreenie has such a powerful impact in the friendship, Natalie consumes her influence to turn negativity into accomplishment. Although disappointingly named 'Bluish' on her first arrival in class, Natalie does not appear to be troubled by this. She is thoughtfully able to appreciate the assistance offered by Dreenie at times when the rest of the class seek to avoid her gaze because of the frightening appearance of her blue pale skin. The classmates' hurtful manner is confronted by the encouragement that Natalie receives from Dreenie, resulting in enhanced self-esteem for the whole class. The consequences are seen in the young child's attempts to gain the trust of her classmates as a means of proving herself equal to others. As she participates in more class activities, Natalie progressively demonstrates that she is superior to others, especially since the activities she includes herself in are within the group of her friends. Similar to the writing skill that Dreenie develops in her journals, Natalie is gifted with the useful skill of knitting. Aided by her warm personality and the desire to give, she starts expressing her gratitude to her closest friends Dreenie and Tuli by knitting them half-a-bowl woollen hats, like her own, and thus offering a symbolic attachment, similar to hers in appearance, before continuing to knit such hats for others in the class. The chain of achievement continues as Natalie's cognitive improvement is seen through her appreciation of inclusion into a greater group, in addition to her friends' unit. The child's call for inclusion as she offers the hat is also a call for the sharing of her suffering, beginning with her small unit of sisterhood group. The choice she makes in choosing what to share reveals her emotional intelligence. Through knitting a hat for everyone, an object with which she covers the part of her body most affected by the

chemotherapy, Natalie promotes inclusion and acceptance. The hand-crafted gifts she offers prove to be an ideal catalyst for friendship, representing giving as a response to kindness. Reflecting on the rewards of her giving attitude, Natalie broadens her scale when she knits hats for all her classmates and teachers, expressing her consent to belong to the larger unit.

Adolescent sisterhood is a safe place, where the dynamics of friendship continue in favour of all individuals involved, including frail friends. Showing few signs of improvement, Tuli's existence as the group's weakest member enhances the cognitive skill development of both Dreenie and Natalie. Tuli's loss of identity serves Hamilton's purpose of revealing the powerful influence of the friendship bond as a unit. Both Dreenie and Natalie are aware that Tuli is dependent and lacks self-confidence, so they offer genuine understanding and acceptance. They are also aware that Tuli's limited cognitive capacity and emotional maturity have never been an excuse to exclude her from the group. On the contrary, Hamilton places her in the middle of the sisterhood unit to present an opportunity for each of them to benefit from the potential friendship. By the time Dreenie admits her desire to befriend Natalie, the latter questions her desire to maintain her support of Tuli. Dreenie's response reveals her acknowledgment of the type of friendship that connects her to Tuli, "I wish she didn't need me all the time. I wish she'd depend on herself. Maybe I am wrong" (115). Her unspoken thoughts reflect the type of friendship she lacks, a feeling that Natalie senses and immediately expresses in frank terms, "I think you and I are a lot alike", with Dreenie's swift concurrence of, "I think so, too" (115). Intimacy and closeness between the two are developed through the knowledge of the gain in each other's motives and the development in their personalities. They obviously advance in motivating mutual responsiveness to power. Natalie expresses

her early pain before she meets Dreenie and Tuli when she declares, “When I was real sick, I didn’t care about anything . . . I thought for sure I wanted everything to be over” (115). Her thoughts indicate the shift of feelings and individuality she experiences. Concerning Dreenie, her own confession is a mechanism through which she balances her connection with the unit, and despite believing that she and Natalie have more similarities, she retains her bond with Tuli.

It is possible to suggest that the final outcome of sisterhood friendship influence concerning change in the young girls’ cognitive abilities is seen properly through a feminist bond. Such a bond is reflected on each in a form of feminist identity affirmation. In addition, the drastic change should ultimately reflect their individual and communal sense of liberation. The narrative closure is attractively schemed to display the unit’s expression of freedom they enable in one another. The most significant facet of this liberating process is the approval of ‘the other’, articulated through care-giving gestures. The gifts that Tuli receives from Dreenie and Natalie are hair clips, symbolising not only their appreciation of her core interest in the physical beauty and her fascination of her own hair, but also their willingness to raise her self-esteem as she learns to appreciate what she has. Moreover, the brightly coloured Morpho butterflies that Dreenie and Natalie receive from one another embody their desire to mutually provide boundless freedom. As symbolised through the butterflies, the gifts stimulate Dreenie’s final realisation that she needs to spread comprehensive signals of how they should establish themselves as a sisterhood unit of young adolescents, not only to Natalie, but also to Tuli. She allegorically signifies the feminist power that a young Black girl can explore within herself and use to overcome the fragile destructive elements of loneliness or trauma, as Dreenie herself achieves with both Tuli and Natalie.

3.8 Conclusion

Hamilton's representation of young adolescent liberating friendship demonstrates different, yet inseparable feminist cultures in both *Justice and Her Brothers* and *Bluish*. In conducting social practices for young Black female adolescents, Hamilton's success features the strength that they acquire through different types of friendship challenges. In both models of cross-sex and adolescent sisterhood, all protagonists pass through different challenges, breaking a range of social and gender norms that might hinder their quest for identity through friendship. Hamilton's young protagonists counter such factors as they work against the boundaries of race and gender. While Justice's quest challenges gender oppression and transforms it into motivation, Dreenie's journey is centred within a group of female friends motivated by racism and classism inside the Black community to secure their individual selfhood and firm feminist bonding terms.

To Justice, the pattern of cross-sex friendship is engaged with a term of equality that young Black girls sought with boys during the 1970s. The protagonist's engagement follows her efforts to conquer social egalitarianism. She validates her ability to gain equality by accessing the world of boys and proficiently imitating their skills to prove her point of merit. On the other hand, Justice's confrontation of the longstanding and patriarchal family pressures manifests courage. Typical of Hamilton's young girls from the 1960s to the new century, Justice is prepared to cope with the pressurised behaviour and creates the sense of challenge as a defence mechanism. Although Hamilton's model of forming feminist principles by bonding with cross-sex friendship is realistically and steadily established, it presumably suggests the difficulty, if not the impossibility of cross-sex friendship bonding before the 1980s. This is reflected in three major aspects of the narrative. The first is Black

girls' limitations in surpassing the patriarchal rules of socialising. The dominant mode of the narrative is patriarchal, whereby Justice's presence is always attached to her twin brothers, and even when she participates and wins the race with a large boys' group, her friendship is limited to the only neighbour she witnesses, Dorian. The second aspect is that the friends' unit headed by Justice provides her with superiority through supersensory powers, instead of realistic social skills such as the early bike stunts or the snake race. The last and most noteworthy aspect is the dependency of the term 'friendship' in the novel. Hamilton narrates at length how and why Justice wishes to establish a male friendship, and once this manifests, this short-lasting connection is deliberately taken to another level of social practice that separates it from the true meaning of bonding—leadership. Justice wins and empowerment continues, but no longer under the terms of friendship. The later demonstration of the 1990s' same-sex friendship that Hamilton adapts reveals more prominence as an uninterrupted self-determining practice.

The resistance of Hamilton's girls in the 1970s' friendship becomes the acceptance and appreciation of Black girlhood, and the potential for bonding. Broad meanings of inclusion are raised, while underscoring the behavioural and cognitive changes through girls' bonding. It is also a dynamic aspect in the process of bonding that allows the young girls' appreciation of their own broad feminist blending, which results in an empowering sense of feminist identity. In *Bluish*, this tolerance is reflected in the ethnic and cultural liberation model that Hamilton articulates in the friends' unit. It unfolds through promoting the courage to accept others regardless of their racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds. Hamilton recreates a constructive liberating education through friends' interactions with classmates during the holiday period. Christmas class preparation in *Bluish* is a Black yet multicultural celebration,

since Ms Baker and Natalie prepare for Kwanzaa, and further, “they had books in the bookcase about each holiday, Christmas, and Ramadan, too” (48). The children’s final realisation of the influence of New York on their acceptance and appreciation for one another is established upon their final gathering for a Christmas celebration. Hanukkah, Kwanzaa and Christmas customs in the gathering assure that, “It was New York; they saw all kinds of people. They easily picked things up about one another” (77). Max, the teaching assistant, elevates their freedom about religious beliefs, adding more liberal appreciation as he comments, “it’s all right if you celebrate more than one—or none” (77). The inspiration of his words is seen immediately afterwards, when Dreenie and the other children burst into expressions of their respective family celebrations. The final outcome of Dreenie’s challenge in this stance is to accept ‘the other’, as she overcomes ethnic and religious boundaries. Hamilton, through the quest of Dreenie and her friends, promises the vast scale of identity formation on feminist terms. Those African-American girls can identify with one another as they share grounds of social and ethnic aspects to arrive at a certain understanding of how African-American friendship should evolve as an empowering process. The shared effort in facing the traumatic condition of one member of the bond, and other ethnic conflicts, educates each girl’s belief in the nature of power. The prominence of constituting one’s identity is aligned with the effort made to form bonds with other females.

In conclusion, Hamilton’s representation of young African-American girls’ social practices responds to different types of friendship, and how they can deal with such bonds to develop Black feminist identity. Although Hamilton proposes two different models of gendered interrelations, the primary focus is always exhibiting the ability of young Black-American girls to identify themselves as strong females

and to work on establishing such feminist sense of identity at an early age. Whilst Dreenie finds her own strength among the group of young females with whom she bonds and shares the philosophy of giving, Justice decides to confront a more challenging quest held within competitions and oppressive social and gender forces. In conducting two different patterns of quest, Hamilton offers differing bonding options for girls' empowerment as they confront oppressive social and gender forces. The ability to form friendships from both genders and prove their existence as distinguished members represent the ideal of how young girls cope with the social and personal necessities of friendship. It also concludes with the capacity of African-American girls to proceed with friendship to form African-American feminist identities in the face of continued patriarchy, and classism and racial pressures.

Chapter 4

Black Girlhood and Transgenerational Trauma: The Reaffirmation of Feminist Empowerment

4.1 Introduction

The transgenerational trauma discussed in this chapter constitutes one of the most significant themes in Black children's literature. Virginia Hamilton represents a post-colonial narrative of the trauma of slavery, highlighting Black children's exposure to multiple traumas and further connecting personal trauma to the suffering histories of genocide, humiliation and inferiority. Hamilton's contribution to the field of trauma in children's literature is surprisingly constructive, focusing on well-being and resilience, a perspective that is very difficult to apply in such a sensitive theme targeted at a young age group. It is challenging to revive the memory of historical trauma with its communal sense of suffering and pain, without revisiting the same pain on young readers. Hamilton achieves this balance through healing approaches, making the experience of traumatic experiences beneficial for both sexes of Black children. In addressing the connection to slavery trauma, Hamilton provides the necessary exposure that helps young readers prepare for their futures through an enhanced understanding of the mental and physical socio-economic impacts of three hundred years of institutionalised oppression. In this chapter, I argue that Hamilton offers a feminist representation of traumatised Black female adolescents and their connection to the historical trauma of slavery. In *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, *Cousins* and *Second Cousins*, Black girlhood and cultural trauma are connected through representations of personal experiences of death. The understanding of how devastating catastrophes can potentially be healed and invested into a positive

outlook is the standpoint that empowers young Black girls. The transgenerational trauma thesis in this chapter responds to questions such as:

- What types/levels of traumas are introduced within Hamilton's historical narrative context?
- How is the transmission of transgenerational trauma developed?
- How does Hamilton's trauma narrative empower Black girls' psyches with feminist identities?

4.2 Overview of Hamilton's Post-Colonial Trauma

Hamilton introduces a coarse Black trauma fabric that entwines the influence of historical trauma with personal traumatic experiences. In Hamilton's selected fiction, the historical trauma is accentuated in measures of transference from older generations of Black women into the lives of the next generations of Black girls. The plots of *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush, Cousins* and *Second Cousins* expose young readers to the traumatic experiences of young female adolescents experiencing the death of family members. However, another layered plot is contained within that deals with larger historical references than familial death catastrophes. Viola Pratt and Aunt Effie are two Black women who suffer from dysfunctional behaviours during the 1980s and 1990s, causing destruction to their respective families, the Pratts and the Colemans. The next generations of the families include two girls, Tree and Cammy, who encounter personal traumas of relatives' deaths while simultaneously struggling with the distressing social behaviours of both Tree's mother and Cammy's aunt. Subconsciously, both women internalise what Joy DeGruy, Alvin F. Poussaint and Amy Alexander refer to as Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome. That pattern of trauma implies an intergenerational series of

deconstructive behaviours or symptoms by Black people that reflect their internalisation of racial and human inferiority (DeGruy 105-108). Adult women in Hamilton's narrative are associated with the undesired and deconstructive example of identity in Black women's culture, as explained by LaCapra, whereby, "Along with disempowerment, trauma may bring radical disorientation, confusion, a fixation on the past, and out of context experiences (such as flashbacks, startle reactions, or other forms of intrusive behavior)" (45). While both women in the narrative tend to repress their trauma, the young adolescents Tree and Cammy are still affected by their fraught and consequential behaviours. Hamilton's provision of slavery's impact, which LaCapra describes as "founding trauma",[49] orients Black girls to conceptualise the trauma of their ancestors to seek opportunities for positive reaffirmation.

Furthermore, because intergenerational trauma has an extensive generational scope, it can influence many social and personal instances in Black adolescents' lives, and therefore interfere with their identity formation. According to Hamilton's narrative, trauma itself as an experience should not be part of the identity of generations of Black girls. However, identity can be formed with the post-traumatic healing outcome that makes a positive difference and becomes part of the new identity. When such a venue of selfhood is inspired by overcoming the pain of long or short periods of internalised suffering that produce patterns of inferiority, self-hatred and socio-economic racism, it becomes a major component of the feminist identity of Black girls.

[49] In *History in Transit* (2004), LaCapra defines the founding trauma as the actual or imagined event (or a series of extreme, limited events) that concretely centres in the premises of identity (56).

This chapter begins by examining the presence of traumas that, although historically external to Tree and Cammy, are still passed down from previous generations of Black male and female suffering. Hamilton depicts this transference through the traumatic 'rememory' of foremothers or the suffering of Black men. In *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, I argue that the origin of Viola's crisis is the subconscious accumulation of men's deaths in her family and further, the internal traumatisation that results. Instead of confronting the reality of her son's inherited disease she chooses to repress it, inflicting other levels of trauma on herself and her family. This represents either the direct or indirect influence of passing trauma onto children through adding a layer to trauma (porphyria disease) or acting through trauma (Aunt Effie's classism). In *Cousins*, the historical trauma narrative is connected to both memory and traumatised Black females' domination, such as Aunt Effie's. Foremothers and othermothers become one and can narrate death and survival through memories of freed Black slave women. Hamilton draws from both sides of post-traumatic slave women to meet with the memory of Black women's death in order to provide meaning to foremothers' traumatic rememory and protect young girls from future harm. By exploring how Hamilton's girls heal at the end of the chapter, I represent how Black textual healing through trauma fiction offers Black girls a recovery narrative that contextualises feminist identity formation.

Hamilton's post-colonial narrative contributes to Black children's feminism. The positive facet in Hamilton's trauma is introduced in the aftermath of Black girls' painful losses of family members. I believe they are introduced to a new lens through which to consider the past, and a new language to discuss the recentness of memory. Instead of falling prey to devastating psychological, social or economic consequences, Black girls show aptitude for growth through personal and social

trauma to comprehend their worth as Black individuals, and also as Black girls in their own communities. *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Cousins* revolve around the capability of young African-American girls to accept the consequences of developing trauma for empowerment and agency. In both novels, trauma is destructive at the outset before the young girls develop a strong sense of self through painful experiences. Hamilton's representation of post-traumatic growth experiences is inclusive to Black girls' acceptance of tragic events. My contribution in this chapter comes in exploring the connection of Black culture to Hamilton's young adolescent experiences with both historical and personal death traumas. Meanwhile, the chapter reveals how the child protagonists' experiences with catastrophic events and learning about their ancestors' trauma assist them to replenish resilience to traumatic experiences in empowering feminist terms.

4.3 Historical Trauma in Theory

The literary analysis of historical trauma is arguably more sensitive in African-American children's narratives than any other literature, as it includes heavy representations of adult and child characters belonging to traumatised societies.[50] Similar to the historical traumas of the Holocaust (LaCapra 35-52), the 9/11 attacks on the United States (Estévez-Saá and Pereira-Ares 268-278), and the Rwandan genocide in 1994 (Montesano 88), African-American communities consist of descendants of slavery who carry intergenerational suffering on multilayered humanist and cultural levels. Social, psychological and physiological concerns emerged that led to vulnerable lifestyles for many Black people. The 1980–1995 period witnessed a doubling of the rate of suicide from 2.1 to 4.5 per 100,000

[50] Trauma has been phrased by many social and cultural theorists such as Ann Cvetkovich, Cathy Caruth, Nicholas Abraham, and Jennifer Griffiths as an unclaimed experience.

population among Black adolescents,[51] reflecting only one aspect of deprivation in Black youth. Such social contexts are indicators that the adoption of trauma theory in Hamilton's narratives of the 1980s and 1990s requires an interdisciplinary theoretical approach to understand the indirect impact of transcended trauma on Black children. While closely recalling almost three hundred years of slavery atrocities including torture, death, rape and vicious dehumanisation, the first generation of slavery was not exclusively affected. In fact, many subsequent generations of Black people continued to suffer from the aftermath of enslavement, long after it had been abolished. In Hamilton's *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Cousins*, she also positions trauma within memory and the Black cultural spirituality of ghosts to facilitate in the exploration of the family history of trauma. The author's purpose of remembering is to empower children with the means of coping better than their parents have, since as George Santayana cautions, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (284).

My analysis of *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Cousins* depends on the socio-psychological impact of the historical trauma, and because I argue for the historical transformation of this trauma, Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome by DeGruy is implemented. DeGruy's theory is a major social extension of the Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome that introduces the behavioural patterns explored in generations of Black people, particularly the females in Hamilton's narrative, and how this leads to dysfunctional attitudes towards younger people. Although displayed in the form of individualistic patterns, my explanation of them takes rather an accumulative distinction to redirect young adolescents' understanding of the presence of youth

[51] See the *United States Center for Disease Controls*' "Suicide Among Black Youths -- United States, 1980-1995".

mortality in their culture as a memory reference. In this regard, the Black socialist DeGruy provides *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* (2005) as a privatised Black cultural and social perspective of the clinical trauma theory, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. DeGruy's theory is the result of a twelve-year study of Black individuals' experiences with racial, social, and economic factors that resulted in dysfunctional and negative behaviours by Black youth. The theoretical framework also considers LaCapra's historical perspective of trauma transference in his book, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (2004). He makes the connection between identity and historical trauma in a manner that aids our understanding of the formation of Black girls' identity in Hamilton's narrative.

4.4 Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome Explained

Explaining behavioural patterns by Black women in Hamilton's Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS)[52] will help to clarify how the consequences of repressed trauma by those women affected the next generations of daughters and nieces. Furthermore, because the young protagonists Tree and Cammy represent the centre of the trauma narrative in both novels, I explain how they encounter the pressure of other historically traumatised attitudes that influence their reception of the personal trauma of relatives' death, and therefore their post-traumatic development. To do so, we need to understand the pattern of trauma that has affected groups of Black women for generations. DeGruy defines aspects of Black people's psyche in this matter as, "a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to

[52] The abbreviation PTSS is used henceforth in this chapter's analysis to refer to Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome, and to distinguish it from the basic clinical term, Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome/Disorder.

experience oppression and institutionalized racism today" (105). Poussaint and Alexander describe the same concept of PTSS in *Lay My Burden Down* (2000) as, "the persistent presence of racism, despite the significant legal, social, and political progress made during the last half of the twentieth century, [which] has created a physiological risk for Black people that is virtually unknown to white Americans" (15). DeGruy adds that the condition is attached to traumatised individuals' real or imagined belief that the benefits of the society in which they live are not accessible to them (105-106). PTSS is a combination of both historical trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and both terms are rooted in Sigmund Freud's late trauma theorisation in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). The merit in Freud's work at this stage is his affirmation of the prominence of losing trauma over time, and then regaining it through history that leads to a national catastrophic concern (122-123). Following Freudian psychoanalysis, Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) draws attention to the need to explore the uncharted experiences of women depicted in the traumatic narrative technique. Caruth claims that the approach explains the accumulation of trauma in the literature and furthers the exploration of voices. Moreover, the texts help in tracing the development of an entire culture and explaining the social reoccurrence of trauma. As for optimism in post-traumatic change, Paula T. Connolly[53] contributes to the same influence concerning traumatic natural catastrophes. With children's experiences included, Connolly suggests a psychological approach not only to understand trauma in young-adults' fiction, but also to help in raising post-trauma's 'sense of optimism' to help them survive (5). Connolly's interest in optimism for

[53] Connolly offers a psychological approach in a study that deals with the trauma produced by the 2005 Hurricane Katrina and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.

children recovering from trauma aligns with my theoretical approach of studying positive trauma in Hamilton's narrative, but with recovery as young African-American girls' feminist empowerment. Through the summing up of the previous three aspects of trauma transition through history—that include the claiming of textual analysis found in the narrative, optimistic coping and understanding the symptomatic attitude of PTSS—DeGruy's theory becomes applicable in Hamilton's books and her PTSS can be applied in analysing the social influence of death trauma in children's narratives. Scholars have pointed out the need to conduct more cultural trauma research on children's literature. In 2014, Kelly Wissman drew attention to the lack of studies about historical and contemporary African-American traumatic experiences, which has led to a disregard for the accumulation of racial trauma across many generations. Wissman analyses Marilyn Nelson's sonnet "A Wreath for Emmett Till" to reflect on the lynching of a fourteen-year-old African-American boy in 1955 as a historical trauma. Probably the most crucial part of the study is the attention paid to the history of racial oppression and how remembering or forgetting affects new generations of African-Americans in the United States.

The feminist outlook that Hamilton creates is reflected in developing self-definition through the direct and indirect Black history of trauma. In this stance, the use of DeGruy's PTSS theory helps in explaining the post-traumatic growth from a Black perspective, specific to Hamilton's narrative that yields empowerment through childhood trauma. As a counterargument to the disempowerment of Black traumatised women, LaCapra argues, "With respect to identity formation one should make special mention of the founding trauma in the life of individuals and groups", and how the founding trauma can become, "the very question of identity [,] yet may paradoxically itself become the basis of an individually or collective identity" (55).

Hamilton's narrative of empowerment through healing responds to LaCapra's consequences of this history for future generations as he cautions of "a past that intrusively invaded the present and may block or obviate possibilities in the future" (56). Hamilton's narrative manifests how Black girls can still gain empowerment through historical identity by rejecting individual or collective identity that attaches Black women to the traumatic events themselves.

4.5 *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*: Historical–Personal Trauma

The significance of this sociological approach is that it reveals the behavioural patterns in Hamilton's historical and personal trauma narratives. DeGruy identifies but does not limit behavioural patterns to three categories—vacant esteem, ever-present anger, and racist socialisation (105). In the catastrophic death narrative of *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, the manifestation of the post-traumatic consequences of the slavery and post-slavery periods is seen in the two main aspects of vacant esteem and ever-present anger. The narrative covers two interwoven plots of traumatised female characters, Teresa Pratt and her mother Viola. While Viola suffers an internalisation of the historical trauma of slavery and racism, Tree endures the outcomes of her mother's trauma, and consequently the death of her brother Dabney ('Dab'). Thus, the mother's trauma is connected to children through the social learning theory, since Black children learn to normalise these behaviours of contempt and self-loathing from their parents or families (DeGruy 101-102).

Hamilton represents the impact of Viola's internalisation of trauma through two generations of Black females. Both struggling through social traumatic occurrences, their experiences are marked by the death of a common family member, Dab. After witnessing the traumatic death of her brother, Tree confronts her personal trauma, one continued from the start of the narrative as readers are introduced to her

as the main companion of her sick older brother. Although the primary plot of the book initially appears to narrate this individual trauma from a Black girl's perspective, the trauma is ultimately seen from a larger transgenerational cultural circle. In *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, this transference of trauma is associated with Tree's mother, Viola. Being herself affected by the historical trauma of not only slavery, but also the family crises of many deaths, Viola demonstrates behaviour that undervalues and jeopardises the lives and mental security of her children, Tree and Dab. Thus, Viola's attitude of internalised self-hatred and inferiority is expressed in her treatment of both children. The emergence of self-loathing and lost hope reflects two aspects of PTSS behaviour that lead to the devaluation of one's life, and also the lives of fellow Blacks (Poussaint and Alexander 14). The reserialisation offered in Poussaint and Alexander's warning indicates the risks of such destructive behaviours on a large social scale. As part of this social scope, Tree's family is profoundly threatened. Tree herself is scared by her mother's attitude of neglect, with Dab's early decay caused by physical childhood abuse and then experiencing unsatisfactory healthcare as a diseased young adult.

Hamilton establishes the hereditary disease as a means of connecting the historical trauma to the social counterpart through personal experiences. The purposeful representation of porphyria in Tree's family fits symbolically as part of the Black trauma. Hamilton's prospect of including a 'symbolic' history of disease as a traumatic event that killed Tree's uncles exists in the novel as a threat to the survival of her brother Dab. Connolly suggests that the transference of porphyria into Dab reflects a 'transnational perspective', one she introduces through connecting Black heritage to the powerful faith of elderly othermothers, such as the faith of the grandmother Mama Ya-Ya in Jewell Parker Rhodes's *Ninth Ward* (2010), whose

strength comes from personal and cultural survival despite slavery. Connolly's model of the remaining cultural power of the past echoes that provided by Hamilton, who offers the transgenerational reoccurrence of Black people's trauma in the form of diseases that target Black men.

The levels of trauma reception vary in the book, but Tree undoubtedly is at the centre of all traumas. Tree and her mother, as the remaining members of the Pratt family, are traumatised by Dab's death, but because of the close relationship between Tree and her infirm brother the young girl is primarily traumatised because of the straining efforts of having to watch over him, and her tender status as a child. In her "Trauma Theory Abbreviated. The Final Action Plan: A Coordinated Community-based Response to Family Violence" based in Pennsylvania in 1999, Sandra L. Bloom describes children's most critical point in trauma, whereby "Children are traumatised whenever they fear for their lives or for the lives of someone they love" (2). Tree's loss of a family member makes her central to our understanding of PTSS theory, as we come to realise how Dab's death is historically connected. His loss also strengthens Tree's beliefs in coping with the trauma that has been central to the suffering of many generations of her family—the Pratt family is historically traumatised, and the narrative works carefully to explain this. Hamilton establishes the connection of the family to their history of suffering through the symbolisation of porphyria cutanea tarda, which primarily affects the skin causing photosensitivity and potentially resulting in death. According to medical reports from Cape Town University, some form of porphyria was introduced into South Africa in 1688,[54] and

[54] Introduced when two Dutch settlers, Gerrit Jansz van Deventer and Adriaantje Ariens, married and moved to Cape Town. This has now been proven, since most South African patients carry a single founder mutation, and haplotype analysis of the ancestral chromosomes has confirmed a relationship with Dutch families and variegate porphyria. See the University of Kwazula-Natal's "Variegate Porphyria".

in the subsequent years the disease spread widely throughout the South African population. Therefore, it is common amongst South African ancestries regardless of their race or language. In Hamilton's narrative, porphyria killed many of Tree's uncles, the last being Rush, followed in the novel by the death of Dab, Tree's brother and Viola's only son. In fact, the emergence of the disease through African descendants and its attack of the skin is another racial link to the historical trauma in the narrative. The following section includes the textual analysis of the impact of trauma exposure on both Tree and Viola. This should be read through the lens of the narrative's empowerment, suggested by Hamilton in terms of healing and coping.

The struggle that Viola faces, the confusion and the insufficiency of her role as a mother, represent symptoms of PTSS that are articulated in her attitudes towards life and death. Viola's behaviour since her youth represents what DeGruy identifies as 'vacant esteem', a form of reaction to how a person perceives the worth of themself and life in general. She explains, "Vacant esteem is the state of believing oneself to have little or no worth, exacerbated by the group and societal pronouncement of inferiority" (108-109). Moreover, in reassuring that this self-degrading image is only a belief about one's worth, individuals like Viola are unable to reflect that in their realities, which consequently affects others connected to them. Vacant esteem, being a consequence of PTSS, is transmitted from one generation to another through the family, community and society (108-109).

Viola represents the centre of traumatic transformation in the lives of her Black children. Before she is introduced in the Pratt home, she is introduced in Tree's visions of the family past that she encounters with Brother Rush, the ghost of Viola's brother who emerges to reveal the family secret of death. Tree is exposed to the truth about Viola's past mothering practices, whereby Viola never wanted nor

loved her sick child Dab since his infancy. Viola admits it in her prayers saying, "Bless it! thought Vy. Thank thee for the worthy and good. Take that boy out of my life! She thought of her firstborn, wretched son, her cross to bear through life. And as she climbed the stairs, she could hear the thump-thumping of that boy" (26). At the same time Viola the mother expresses her love for Tree as a healthy baby girl, "Vy held her close all the way up the stairs, feeling the warm breath on the side of her neck and feeling the soft baby face against her flesh. There was nothing on earth as dear as a fresh, sweet girl baby child" (26). Viola initiates a connection to her child's decay, wishing God to take her son out of her life, complaining that he is a burden due to his ill health. The narrative's cues that Dab's disease is hereditary from his mother's side are ironically provoking, while also raising the question of why Viola accumulates hatred for the sick child. Her expression of love is conditional, and therefore she neglects her frail son. The narrator closely guards Tree and Dab as nameless characters by referring to 'girl' and 'boy' throughout Tree's recollection. Although the children's characters are only nameless in the ghost's exposure of the past, it can be interpreted as the author's approach to detach them, as also seen in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), from the identity of their mother or group, and to leave the focus on their experience as children. The ghost suggests the mother's preference of girls to boys, "As long as the little girl rode on the woman's hip, the woman would forget the boy for hours at a time" (73). Consequently, this neglect continues as the little boy grows older and sicker. The gender reference symbolises Viola's fear and resentment of the condition of men in her life, and continues to manifest on other levels such as abuse.

Viola's abuse of her son is a critical moment in the narrative that underscores reflections of racial pain. Viola beats Dab violently as a child. The visualisations

brought by the memory text provided through Tree's journey inspire slavery and the lives of Black people as chattels of the plantations. The first image is the already traumatised child being harshly whipped by his mother:

> The woman bent down and came up with a stick. She struck the boy's legs back and forth, whipping, back and forth. The boy's scream rang out. She, the girl, saw his thin legs in short pants tremble and kick. His legs were up the front seat where his head should have been. She was forced to see his toes curl as they were struck and struck. She watched his legs stiffen like boards. The man, Brother, tried to get the stick out of the woman's hands. All this in silence, as sunlight of the high place filled the car. The two of them struggled. Don't hit him anymore, said Brother. One of these days you gone hurt him bad, too. (69)

Viola's brother Rush has more sympathy for the child and tries to save him, while Viola's excuse for beating the child is preposterous as she claims, "You saw him, said the woman. You saw what he did, trying to provoke me. He was only tryin to get in front with his baby sister. He just wanted to see everything in front. You know how he loves to hold the wheel" (69). The image of the child's beating continues to be captured in detail. Similar to the slave's torture, Dab's wounds are witnessed, "Brother took his handkerchief from his breast pocket and wetted it from a mason jar of white liquid he kept under his seat. He touched the boy's legs with the wet handkerchief where welts had risen. They looked like red worms wrapped around his legs. The boy winced and stiffened at the touch" (70). The painful image drawn by Hamilton creates the repetition of trauma within an even deeper level experienced by a child and his younger sister, too. The compulsive repetition of the oppressed, as LaCapra's analysis of trauma through the Holocaust describes it, is

activated through the mother Viola who pays no attention to its existence or its destructive human and social consequences. Moreover, Viola may be unconscionably masking Dab's trauma by leaving marks on his body—to hide the disabled body that reminds her of her brothers' deaths. The disguise of illness itself can be justified, as Mark Jeffreys connects it to self-image, "We understand that if our disabilities were framed, our disabilities would frame us, and we wanted to exclude them so we wouldn't vanish behind them" (37). Viola's son's body, due to the genetic dermatological condition, frames her family, where her beating of him is comprehended as an act of defiance against being framed by the body, its colour and its inherent disability. She thus disguises the disability by beating him so that they do not vanish behind the disability. The pain and shock passed on to Tree through the phantasmal travels come from the realisation that Dab is being punished for his disability. Therefore, he carries within him an inherited trauma and then a personal one for daring to expose that trauma through his disability. This personalisation of trauma is passed to Tree because she has to suffer his illness, death and the exposure of his own suffering at the hands of Viola.

The socio-economic circumstances of Viola are connected to the psychological confusion she experiences. Her excessive absence from home for work and many other unknown reasons is more of an escape. Viola avoids confrontations with her reality and those of her traumatised children. The devastating consequences of such absence cause more destruction to both the physical and mental conditions of her children. They were left to care for themselves and by the old Miss Pricherd because Viola, "lived in at people's houses. She was into practical nursing. She made side bets on the street having to do with the daily lottery . . . She would come by to Tree and Dab on a Saturday. She'd have money" (16-17). Upon

her return, Tree tries to state the obvious to Viola regarding Dab's deteriorating health, while being completely ignorant about the seriousness of his porphyria condition. However, Viola is covertly aware of this. Even in one of his worst moments of pain, Dab cannot source the compassion he needs from his mother. When Tree panics about this she warns Viola, "But M'Vy, no kiddin, Dab be so sick. He can't keep his food down", while Viola's response unexpectedly causes concern, "That's nothin but a stomach upset" (92). The stomach pain that Viola suggests reveals her knowledge of Dab's addiction to the barbiturates that ease his pain, a moment that changes nothing about her denial to disguise his inherited trauma.

Prior to that, Hamilton's narrative suggests another level of Dab's physical abuse as an adolescent. Due to Viola's absence, Dab engages in sexual encounters with different and sometimes random women. Young Tree is affected as she sometimes wakes him in the morning, only to find a different woman beside him. Tree's resolution is incomplete as she has an opaque understanding of his condition, "This one was older than Dab and liked him because of that sweet, empty look that could take over his eyes, and because he was young and so pretty" (16). The image is replete with confusion for a young adolescent. In Viola's continuous absence, Tree plays the role of an upmother figure for Dab, who lacks knowledge not only of his serious condition, but also of Tree's discomfort due to her older sibling's sexual encounters. Dab's mental condition is clearly recognisable when he is active in the house. Possessing limited motor abilities, Dab cannot perform simple tasks such as setting the table, sitting or eating, taking a shower or even expressing the type of pain he encounters when he breaks down. Dab laughs at the most insignificant things, "She would then push in at each end and the white, steamy, cooked potato would puff out. It made Dab laugh every time" (44), as if his brain had stopped

developing back when he was a child being abused. Such description of Dab demonstrates an obvious impression about his condition as a young man with a mental disability. This should have limited any physical human relationships, including those with other women.

As an adult, Viola is bound by the disempowerment brought about by her deeply rooted trauma. LaCapra characterises such confused experience and the fixation on the past as, "A disorienting or diremptive feature of trauma and the post-traumatic symptom is that they are out-of-context experiences" (45). Hamilton's trauma narrative works against such paradigms of disempowering Black females through trauma. In fact, her texts aim at decolonising all Black women through teaching culture or healing as an empowerment to young girls. In reclaiming the same prospect, Black feminist scholar Lynette D. Myles states, "I wish to recuperate Black female history; take it back from the hands of the coloniser and redefine Black women's histories of trauma as collective, transgenerational, and unmediated" (5). Myles reclaiming Black women's experiences thus has the same purpose of redefining their own history and exploring a collective identity.

4.5.1 Accumulated and ever-present anger

Viola's previously explained lifelong low self-esteem is connected to the lack of compassion she shows to Dab. To consider ever-present anger as a product of PTSS's impact, Viola's moments of anger in the narrative are undeniably shocking. In this regard, DeGruy's research creates possible social interpretations of the unexplainable fury of many Black people by claiming that the human trauma of slavery is established through anger and wrath, which is where it was initially transferred to Black people:

> Individuals were forcibly captured, chained, and regularly beaten into submission over hundreds of years. Any group of people living under such harsh conditions would eventually learn the ways of their captors. Thus, Africans learned that anger and violence were key ingredients necessary to insuring that their needs were met. It was anger and violence that created and maintained the institution of slavery and this anger and violence continued long after slavery was abolished. (114-115)

The oppressive violence of enslaved Black people in general included more than the unpaid labour, family destruction through sale and physical abuse. It also resulted in legal practices such as the Casual Killing Act,[55] legal rape[56] and medical experiments.[57]

Moreover, in "The Angry Black Woman: The Impact of Pejorative Stereotypes on Psychotherapy with Black Women", Wendy Ashley emphasises at the research level the impact of historical trauma on the attitudes of some Black women, where the resulting socio-economic and political effects have driven them into stereotypical forms, whereby:

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[55] The Casual Killing Act in Virginia State during the slavery years declared that the killing of Black slaves for punishment or discipline was not considered a criminal act, inclusive of lynching and burning. In pathologising some enslaved people's behaviours, Black people's desire to be free was considered a syndrome, called Drapetimonia by Dr Samuel A. Cartwright. Ironically this syndrome was diagnosed by a single symptom, namely the uncontrollable urge to escape from slavery. Following that Act, many White women beat Black children to death (See, for example, "Notes on the State of Virginia M" in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson* (1975) (Peterson 192-193).

[56] In Rachel A. Feinstein's historical account of slavery, *When Rape was Legal: The Untold History of Sexual Violence During Slavery* (2018), The Rape Law regulated during the slavery of the 1600s and 1700s stated that no White man could ever rape a slave woman. For the purpose of this chapter's thesis, it is important to understand that rape was not only carried out for economic reasons, but also for imposing greater control/domination over Black people and to remind them of their servile status.

[57] According to L. Lewis Wall in "The Medical Ethics of Dr J Marion Sims: A Fresh Look at the Historical Record", Dr Sims conducted experiments on Black children's childbirth without any anaesthesia between 1845 and 1849, which resulted in the deaths of many Black infants (346). Dr Sims reasoned that slave women were able to bear greater pain because their race made them more resilient, and thus they were well suited for painful medical experimentations (DeGruy 337-338).

> Such stereotypes include the myth of the angry Black woman that characterises these women as aggressive, ill tempered, illogical, overbearing, hostile, and ignorant without provocation. Symptoms presented by Black women during mental health treatment may reinforce this myth. However, many of the negative characteristics of the angry Black woman developed in response to external stressors and historical factors. (27)

The historical factors in Ashley's study are indicated by the oppression and accumulative ill-treatment of these women, causing mental, psychological and physical issues that were repressed both during and post-slavery, and without any patterns of clinical intervention or treatment. The transference to the next generations simply passed on these unresolved issues, and in Viola's case the demonstration of her fury entailed physical abuse, and the deprivation of care for her children.

Personal trauma and social learning also impose anger in Tree's behaviour, whereby the transition of Viola's contempt and internal trauma into Tree's behaviour occurs through her limited socialisation with her mother. In this stage of suffering, where Tree expresses vicious anger towards everyone except Dab, the young girl begins a new cycle of personal trauma as a consequence of the larger catastrophic consequences transmitted by the mother. The personal traumatic condition accumulates in Tree, as Dab's and Viola's traumas develop. In *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush,* and the painful experience of the young female protagonist in the pre-death stage, Tree is presented in a special yet traumatising sister–brother relationship. Tree's upmothering practices for her mentally disabled brother Dab, in their working mother's absence, prepare young audiences for the major concept of understanding the trauma that is narrated. Tree is the main witness of her brother's suffering due to the short distance and intense care she provides, which makes her as

a child, a victim too. Hamilton clarifies, “Within the confines of never having a father and no mother present for most of the time, she had carved out a narrow life for the two of them. Her and Dab” (136). Dab’s poor health, in addition to the short distance between the siblings, triggers her intense feelings and occasional reactions towards his daily routines. Thus, Tree’s love for her brother is moulded with great sympathy for his poor health. When Hamilton continues, “Going to bed tired, with some amount of emptiness she allowed herself to realise. Getting by. She, knowing quiet for years, the way other children knew noise and lots of laughter” (136), she implies a deeper level of personal suffering that Tree undergoes as trauma within trauma. Moreover, both effort and pain are magnified as Tree provides the distressing daily care while she tries to form a strong sibling bond. Furthermore, the act of witnessing is intensified by the secrets revealed through the flashbacks of childhood with Dab, when Tree witnessed him being beaten by their mother.

Tree shows signs of anger only in relation to incidents relevant to Dab’s mental health; for example, she bursts with anger whenever he is mocked or demeaned by others. Miss Pricherd’s remark to Tree is harsh but precise, “Ought to put you brother where they puts people lak him . . . Shouldn’t be somebody lak you in charge of some retarded . . . You know that boy ain’t got good sense . . . He gone rape somebody, then they put him where he belong” (51). Tree’s first response brims with both sadness and anger. Attempting to retain her self-control, “Tree turned away, ready to get the day started. Then she turned back. “Don’t be cuttin on my brother. I’ll hurt anybody, on account of Dab being so good and kind”” (52). Tree’s reactions of rage continue, and include passers-by in the street. In one incident Tree’s anger manifests in physical violence, where she fiercely beats a girl for referring to Dab in cruel terms, “She roughed the girl some and had to use some bad

language, something she would rarely do. “An if I ever hear you say loony tune about my brother again, I’ll make your nose never be the same—you know what I’m talkin about, too”” (34). The narrative continues to describe the aggression intended by Tree, stating that she, “Would have taken her wide-toothed Fro pick like a weapon and raked it across that tender piece of skin under the nose between the nostrils. And would have stood there as that girl fell to her knees, helpless. There was no defense against the lightning pain of a comb raking” (43-44). Despite Tree showing no regret or reconsideration for her furious reactions, in each incident she makes the connection to her feelings towards Viola. This starts with her encounters with the many girls in Dab’s room, “girls he brought home with him. The thought would never enter her mind. Think he retarded, Tree thought . . . Tree suddenly felt angry at M’Vy. It smoldered, then passed to the back of her mind as more pressing considerations came to the fore” (92). Tree’s anger emerges from the sympathy she feels for her brother, acknowledging Viola’s responsibility in Dab’s damaging lifestyle. She is consumed by the recognition of all of the flaws in the connections and responsibilities of her small family, headed by Viola. Witnessing the demise of her brother through the apparent symptoms of the illness is magnified by the knowledge that he is left by his mother to navigate the abuse and attention of the random women he encounters.

4.6 *Cousins*: Historical–Personal Trauma

Cammy Colman in *Cousins* embodies another version of a Black girl fractured by a slavery-traumatised family relative, where her traumatisation is framed in a sort of racist socialisation projected by her Aunt Effie. Differing slightly from Tree, Cammy’s experience with the death of her cousin Patricia (‘Patty’) Ann, Aunt Effie’s daughter, is more closely connected to her own traumatic feelings of

inferiority. The racist socialisation intended by Aunt Effie signifies the complexity of historical trauma in Black communities. DeGruy describes the internal racism of Black people to one another as "an adaptation of the slave master's value system" (116). This pattern, according to DeGruy is further consolidated because, "Some African Americans project an image of inferiority through their behavior, thus confirming the views of white racists who believe themselves superior" (116). Hamilton's narrative initiates the racist behaviour through incidents of internal classicism in Black communities. In the reoccurrence of slavery trauma, Cammy's vacant esteem is a commodity of this classist attitude. She despises her cousin Patty Ann and her obnoxious mother, Aunt Effie, because they treat her as inferior. Cammy encounters a loosely prejudiced attitude from her extended family that generates hatred for her cousin, who eventually drowns in a river, compounding Cammy's confusion and sadness. Hamilton's cultural connection to Black spiritual beliefs returns in *Cousins*, affirming Black people's connection to death. Both the emotional and psychological burdens caused by the loss of a cousin's death may sound less intense compared to the loss of a close family member in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*. However, the two experiences are actually mutually significant for the understanding of personal trauma resulting from slavery's historical crisis.

To Cammy, vacant esteem and anger are often present, particularly regarding Patty Ann's presence. Every time Cammy meets her rich aunt's family, the self-hatred she feels is inflamed. Moreover, Aunt Effie adopts a meanspirited attitude in the presence of Cammy that worsens the relationship between the girls, while causing Cammy to feel inferior to everyone, particularly her cousin. She criticises Cammy's mother and her lack of care, "Even though they're none too clean. See that you tell my sister that your Aunt Effie took care of her child. I'd never work so much

that I'd have to leave my own child with just a sixteen-year-old *boy*!" (26). Aunt Effie's racist attitudes extend to criticise Cammy's mother's work, her mothering, and also Andrew, Cammy's brother. Aunt Effie's disparaging remark about the work of her single-mother sister is a social class norm that represents Black middle- and upper-classes' blend into White upper-class standards of women's work during the 1980s. In addition, Cammy absolutely believes that Patty Ann is superior to her because of the superior physical and mental qualities she possesses. On the same occasion, Patty Ann responds callously like her mother, "Patty Ann raised her eyebrows. "Ho-hum, I am relaxed," she said. "Some people I know wouldn't never know how to be relaxed in pretty clothes, if they ever had any pretty clothes"" (30). Cammy's anger accumulates as she is confronted by a racist attitude within her family, "Cammy's ears felt hot. Anger flashed in her eyes. "You know what you look like in that brand new dress?" "It's not so new," Patty Ann said. "I've had it a week. Mama says not every girl can have a dress like this because it costs high. You know, expensive. She says but I'm not just every girl"" (30). Because of this behaviour, Cammy reflects on the socio-economic circumstances that Patty Ann enjoys and ultimately realises the gulf in wealth and social class. The disappointment is driven by the frequent comparison to the presence of both parents in Patty Ann's life at that age, while Cammy's parents are divorced. The relationship between Cammy and her cousin is more challenging than convivial due to the competitive nature of the relationship of young female cousins in the same school grade. Although Cammy's mother attempts to explain to her daughter that the apparent perfection is only a reflection of pressuring practices in Patty Ann's life, being around her cousin only makes her feel "as angry as she could", although she confesses to herself that one of the reasons is that Patty Ann is "Good at everything .

. . In school, at home, at her piano. Miss Goody-goody. Well, I am also good in lots of things, Andrew says" (29). This accumulating tension in the cousins' relationship is a dominating mode of the pre-traumatic narrative, while the tension is also evident in Cammy's relationship with another cousin, Elodie, both of whom lack self-esteem and are dependent on one another, while being preoccupied by the perfect Black image of Patty Ann. The latter is centred like a magnet, not only in Cammy's thoughts but also in those of her cousin and only friend, Elodie. Cammy's resentment increases as Elodie leaves her to befriend Patty Ann, like other students in school. In fact, the negative feelings that Cammy holds towards Patty Ann reflect her confusion between befriending Patty Ann while trying to be her equal. Cammy's lack of self-esteem is compounded as the only opportunity to establish a friendship is with Elodie, which she considers unsatisfactory.

4.7 Personal–Historical Trauma and Black Culture

Hamilton blends the Black spiritual culture of voodoo beliefs in ghosts with Black people's traumatic death experiences to contextualise the historical trauma of slavery. In both *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Cousins* the return of death, the reoccurrence of disease such as porphyria, survival folktales of Black people through the river and haunting spirits are all dramatic connections to historical Black suffering. By historically and mythically revisiting Black trauma in adolescents' narrative, Hamilton challenges the myths of the lack of agency to prevent continuation. More significantly, Hamilton creates the resistance Black girls need to fortify to prevent the reoccurrence of such traumatising connections. The powerful impact of African-based spirituality concerning empowerment is researched by James Mellis in a 2019 study where he analyses *The Underground Railroad* (2016) by Colson Whitehead and *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017) by Jesmyn Ward. He claims,

"that both novels invoke African-based spirituality to create literary sites of resistance both within the narrative of the respective novels, but also within American culture at large" (1-2). Meanwhile, Mellis draws attention to the use of voodoo, hoodoo, conjure and rootwork as "protection and a locus of resistance to an oppressive society" (2). Literary references of resistance in such terms of early confrontations of historical trauma, and whatever traumatic situations that follow, are a robust feminist principle. The empowerment infused in the lives of Black girls following traumatic healing is what I appropriately consider to be a Black feminist identity aspect.

Cultural references in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* represent the association that Black girls establish with culture and family history. Furthermore, this connection extends from Black girls to other family members. Tree is influenced by this dramatic history that has transcended through many generations of her family. As a start, Brother Rush's ghost connects with Tree and later manifests himself to all the family members. However, she is the target of the ghost's presence since she represents a focal point in the narrative trauma as the daughter of a traumatised mother, Viola, the main caretaker of a traumatised young man, Dab, and a Black girl manipulated by both conditions. In fact, one of the most excruciating aspects of internalising trauma is that the traumatised individuals, like Viola, are unable to comprehend connections because their trauma is deeply contained and suppressed over many years. For Tree, the looming presence of death symbolised by ghosts is a means of justifying and accepting the oblique because, as a cultural norm, Black people have always believed in the resources of their ancestry. She confuses him at first with a young stalker, until his first presence in her house when Tree realises that he is a ghost as he centres himself in the middle of her table inside the wardrobe.

Why and where the ghost appears is what establishes the connection between the past and present traumas in the Pratt family. In his first appearance in the house, Brother Rush emerges in the only safe place for Tree, “For her, the little room was about the most comfortable, private place in the whole house” (22), the walk-in wardrobe where she hides to draw or seek solitude when weary. It is also the same place that Dab visits as he roams around the house, “When there was nothing left for him to see” (20) He would:

> [stand] there looking all around at the stacks and stacks of junk, like he had lost something. Then he would actually feel the absence of something the way Tree did, as if the painful lack were a living, breathing force. So it was the two of them had cleaned off the table for her. And that was why she had found out. The cleaned table. Brother Rush. (20)

Like a magnet, young people such as Tree and Dab are always attracted to places of mystery, the source of secret knowledge, and most sensitively the revelation of their trauma. The narrative reflects on this notion by claiming that Tree and Dab experience a ‘loss’, and an ‘absence’, that is a ‘painful lack’, alive like a ‘breathing force’. This force is the missing piece of the puzzle, the collective knowledge of both the family history of fatal illness, and their mother’s entrapment in the past. Their exposure arrives later in their journey with the ghost into the past, unravelling the truth about the origins of their shared trauma. In the walk-in wardrobe, “it was the two of them[,] they both had cleaned off the table for her” (20), they provide the space for this force to arrive, the painful force of Brother Rush’s spirit as he exposes the family truths.

In Black culture, the arrival of ghosts in the house is a mythical reference to a symbolic death invitation for a family member. Dab is already destined to die, but

before his demise, insight into his suffering and that of his sister's takes place through the ghost's visions. Tree shares her thoughts about Dab's life with Brother Rush upon his arrival, "I'm so glad to see you, Brother. My Brother be sick, too" (64), which is why he takes her into the oval-shaped mirror as a gateway into the past to witness the child Dab neglected and beaten by his mother. In the next incident, Brother Rush manifests his existence to a former homeless companion, Miss Pricherd, an elderly woman who according to her response would never have denied either his power or vision. When she encounters him with Tree, Miss Pricherd never accepts his presence and mocks Tree, "Bet you be careful about every closed door from now on. Hee! Fear you gone see something" (59). The reaction of Miss Pricherd establishes Tree's trust in Brother Rush. Tree and the old lady engage in better communication than she has with Viola, which re-establishes her belief in Brother Rush as a source of truth. The last individual to have an encounter with the ghost is Viola, after Tree's suggestion. In a transfixing confrontation, Viola realises the return of the unescapable past. The narrative at this point is transferred from negation and entrapment in the past, to a new level where Viola is ready to confront the devastating consequences of her actions.

The spiritual presence is also engaged by Hamilton as a means through which Black culture communicates with Black children. Ghosts generally represent a link to the dead, sometimes trying to connect with the living. Tree meets the ghost of her uncle as she recognises him while envisioning the past stream of family events. In doing so, the cultural connections made with the family histories of Tree's childhood with Dab and also porphyria are revealed. The knowledge she acquires prepares her to accept the upcoming challenges of familial and personal trauma, and the subsequent change that unfolds. In her critical study of *Ninth Ward*, Connolly

reaffirms the same impact of this belief with Lanesha, who also sees ghosts like her Mama Ya-Ya, “Seeing ghosts requires an acceptance of change and transitory nature” (7). According to Connolly, such spiritual beliefs, even if only accepted by African-Americans, are essential in their understanding of life aspects including traumatic events in the past and present. Being culturally realistic, Hamilton’s African-American girls are presented as deeply rooted in their culture, as they rediscover bonds between their personal experiences and their heritages. Tree is able to find connections with her culture, even before the dramatic death of Dab occurs. When she observes the “tired, old look in Brother Rush’s eyes” (26), she immediately recalls the face of her neighbour Mr Simms, who lost his wife and children in a catastrophic car accident and became a man who, “would not care more or less for anyone or anything than he cared at the moment” (26). From the beginning of the narrative, Tree’s entanglement with the ghost of Brother Rush is not only fearless but also communicative and informative, despite Brother Rush’s voicelessness. The ghost’s visions that Tree encounters are enlightening of her family’s secrets, and also like the ghosts’ presence in Lanesha’s life, “Their presence seem a symbolic harbinger of the deaths to come” (7).

The most anticlimactic moments in the revelation of the traumatic narrative emerge after Tree’s establishment of the connection with Brother Rush, who provides her with a visual account of the background of her current suffering and its relevance to the family past. Tree’s confrontation with death is a critical moment in the narrative, where personal and cultural traumas collide. The confrontation with personal trauma is divided between denial and accusation. The dramatic denial that Tree undergoes is represented in a more tragic manner than Viola’s, placing Tree at the heart of the traumatic death of Dab. The manifestation of her personal trauma

begins with her painful reception of the news of Dab's death from her mother, "Dab ain't gone no more funerals! He didn't die, he didn't die. No, he didn't, he didn't die! M'Vy, we prayed and everything, din we? He didn't. You said . . . You said it be all right! He didn't, n don tell me he did!" (171). Her hysterical reaction is the first stage of her comprehension of the situation. Soon enough, Tree gradually accepts the crisis when she hurls accusations at Viola, blaming her for the death of Dab. To do so, Tree recollects all the incidents from the family's past events that Brother Rush has revealed, and finally shouts out the truth, "Shoot! Shoot! Damn you, it your fault! You did it. You beat him. You beat him up. He didn't die. You killed him M'Vy!" (173). The confrontational scene between Viola and Tree is essentially one of a greater confrontation with reality; an exposure of the fragility of the mother–child relationship, and the traumatic web connecting the entire Pratt family. Tree, as a visionary witness to Viola's treatment of Dab, confronts her mother with the truth that she has contributed to Dab's death. She becomes furious, shrieking that, "she would will the witch out of existence" (137). Viola confesses to Tree that the reason she treated Dab violently is that she was 'so afraid', 'young' and that she lacked the 'smarts', while justifying, "But really all the time I was afraid he might have the sickness, like my brothers. I was so afraid, Tree" (137). Tree's response shows no compassion for her mother's motives, "You, afraid? Big you and tiny him. He was really tiny. Stunted tiny and skinny legs. You beat him tiny. Brother Rush show me you and Dab way back then. You own brother, come to show me. You kill Dab. You kill him. You can never lie and say you cared" (173-174). The trajectory of the consequences of the historical trauma narrative comes through Viola's feelings towards sickness, weakness and death. She has complete knowledge of the deadly thread of porphyria in her family, as she declares in the hospital, "My boy is a

porphyric", and continues, "for it most rare—p-o-r-p-h-y-r-i-c . . . My boy is acute intermittent porphyria, or porphyria cutanea tarda, or symptomatic, they hard to classify. But they happens to them between ages seventeen and fifty" (148-149). Viola's last words with the doctor reveal not only her knowledge of Dab's dangerous condition, but also the truth about the traumatic family history, and further, her neglect of it:

> Chin, Challie, Willie and Brother. Brother die in a car accident but he had it, too. He try to hide it. Doctors couldn't save any of them. They were treated with barbiturate sedatives, you know. Barbiturates make them go crazy. And make the porphyria ten times worse. Barbiturates is counterproductive. Your doctors better know that it can kill. That's why the boy took on so sudden. (150)

Viola acknowledges that Dab is not a trauma survivor, similar to her brothers, but she chooses to repress her fears and mask the trauma with abuse and negligence. His death marks the awakening shock and the confrontation with reality as it unmasks traces of family pain. The transference of the Black historical trauma is attached with a personal trauma caused by Tree witnessing the pain of her brother trying to work through his condition and ultimately suffering from his unexpected death as she is ignorant of the prognosis of his sickness. Dab dies and Tree discovers that Viola did not learn the lesson, even though all of the men in her family were traumatised. Tree's immediate connection to her culture recreates a level of resistance against traumatisation, which begins with her objection to Viola's treatment of Dab, and continues into a later stage of coping and healing.

In *Cousins*, the voodoo African spirituality is also functional. Similar to the ghosts and visions presented in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, Cammy meets

ghosts, but after death occurs. The presence of ghosts after Patty Ann's death implies another challenge for Black girls. The resistance that Cammy establishes after the confrontation with Patty Ann's ghost is a means of realising the internalisation of historical trauma passed by her Aunt Effie and Patty Ann. It is also an exposure to the truth about a catastrophe, which appears to be the personal trauma of Patty Ann's death, but shockingly presents as being historically connected to the Black culture of emancipation. Cammy also realises other strings to death in the family. The fear of death is a vacuum surrounding her life as she has always feared the loss of her grandmother, Gram Tut, who lives in a residential nursing home and suffers from poor health. The narrative thus suggests death references approaching through the elderly. In one incident, Cammy has to pass by her Aunt Effie's house, where she confronts Patty Ann. In this encounter, the superstitions of a death curse underpin their quarrel. Cammy accuses Patty Ann, "You look like death", and continues, "Like you are going to a funeral, which is your own" (30). Patty Ann responds by mocking their grandmother, "It's your loved one, Gram Tut, that smelly old bag of bones, that's dying" (31). Cammy intentionally mocks Patty Ann, who already looks skinny, to defend both herself and her grandmother.

Cammy encounters ghosts after she is exposed to trauma. Her actual moment of confrontation with her personal trauma of death comes in the last few moments before Patty Ann drowns while she jumps near the bluety[58] to help Elodie catch her sneakers. Furthermore, Cammy undergoes moments of fear and confusion before she absorbs the shock that Patty Ann is gone:

[58] According to the *Cousins*' narrative, this is the Little River where the waters were still. It is called 'the bluety' by the characters in the narrative because of its odd dark-bluish colour, which they also thought of as a blue mystery. Older people like Cammy's mother describe it as the bottomless blue devil, while all children of Cammy's age call it the bluety.

> When Cammy remembered, or stopped making herself forget about what could happen next, she looked. She couldn't see it. But it happened. It became part of the spinning wheel of sky and hillside, kids and blinding sunlight in her head, with no luck to it. A silence came over everything. It pinned this day to them forever. And Cammy to Patt Ann. Beautiful Patricia Ann. All alone. Her cousin. The bluety. Not a trace. (94)

Patty Ann drowns and Cammy unintentionally becomes an introvert. The entrapment with fear controls her and her daily memory is the scene of Patty Ann trying to save Elodie. The harsh period that Cammy lives after the funeral is an expression of internalising guilt because she always knew she hated Patty Ann. The readers are exposed to the fear that the little girl experiences when, "Cammy woke up, slippery with sweat. She was breathing so hard, her chest ached. Her mama, Maylene, had to come in, comfort her, and that made her feel ashamed. During the night, Cammy could barely swallow. Her throat was raw from her screaming" (95). It is not only witnessing trauma that leads Cammy to struggle with nightmares, as she also sees the ghost of Patty Ann speaking to her ghost against the dark, calling her the 'enemy' and trying to possess her. Even Cammy's visioning of Patty Ann's ghost is layered with the beauty she always admired, "Patty Ann was. Sitting on the cot, looking at her. That smooth face so full of beauty. Patty Ann. Not dressed in her day-camp clothes the way she had been that fateful time of no luck anywhere" (96). Cammy's recurring nightmares and ghostly visions connect her fear to her guilt for hating Patty Ann. "Cam, you're not to blame for anything. It is not your fault, none of it" (96), says her older brother, Andrew, after one the many times she wakes screaming or seeing Patty Ann. Maylene, her mother also senses the guilt that her daughter is consumed with:

"I never wanted her to die."

"Hush, baby."

"Did I say that?"

"Yes, but hush. Nobody blames you."

Moaning, "They blamed L-O-D." (102)

Cammy's individual traumas caused by Patty Ann's death become more painful and terrifying as her Aunt Effie uses the myth of spirits to threaten her. When she visits Cammy's house, she shouts from outside, "Nobody is going to forget! You think just because L-O-D is gone—my baby isn't gone. She's inside this house. You won't forget what you done" (105). To Cammy's father, Aunt Effie justified that his daughter caused Patty Ann's death the day she came to her house and cursed her. It is not only Cammy who is influenced by the spread of Aunt Effie's behaviour and the belief of the ghost's influence, as all the schoolchildren blame Elodie, "Kids said the ghost of Patty Ann visited Elodie one night and got inside her. Kids wouldn't talk to her anymore, wouldn't sit near her. They ran away every time she got close to them. Ms. Wells had a time. Kids would scream and vomit when Elodie came into class" (101). The children's reaction is only a response to the approach of the school itself, which celebrates the presence of Patty Ann's seat in class. Maylene, Cammy's mother, is infuriated, "I told them, Patricia Ann's desk shouldn't be made into a centrepiece for a costume party, like some carved Halloween pumpkin. And the little kids sitting around all dressed up and having punch and cookies. Staring at that desk. Can you believe it? No wonder they're all getting sick. And it's ten days after the fact" (99). Maylene's statement elucidates the danger of exposing Black children to what LaCapra labels as the 'fraught heritage'— the toxic aspect of death culture. LaCapra reassures this aspect as a "mythologized past" and describes it as, "a trauma

that has become foundational and is a source of identity both for those who actually lived through it and in different ways for those born into its aftermath" (57). Maylene expresses an understanding of the domination of ghostly beliefs in Black culture, but asserts communicating healthier ideologies with children. According to her, the celebration of a child's death is traumatising for Black children, just as Elodie, Cammy and other children in the school are victimised by this social behaviour demonstrated by the school teachers and the townsfolk.

Cultural and personal traumas meet one another in Cammy's life through the folktales narrated by Gram Tut. The grandmother's stories about the escape of her Patawatami grandmother unite the young girls of the family, Cammy and her cousins, to Black death and survival. Gram Tut narrates stories about the Union soldiers during the American Civil War, who helped many slaves cross the Little River into freedom, and that her grandmother Callie Cloud had drowned years before in the very same spot where Patty Ann died. Gram Tut's spoken words are the culture of survival and resisting decay, "River is history, flowing . . . Like holding to a rope line of time, you are its memory" (149). According to Gram Tut, there is no difference between those who are living and not. All are united at the reunion—in spirit. The reference of memory indicates the repetition of history and the value of embracing it as part of the culture. Her powerful message is that death is natural, but also that people came to realise the value of resisting to escape and survive. Moreover, death is appreciated because it is a union of sorts, which Connolly powerfully addresses:

> Seeing ghosts requires an acceptance of change and the transitory nature of life—people die. It also bespeaks a faith that death does not extinguish one's love. It is a spiritual belief that balances notions of life and death; here, it has

> and will continue to help Lanesha survive the death of loved ones. It further argues a collective power; the dead are not fully gone, and one must believe in possibilities far beyond the obvious. (7)

Gram Tut teaches the survival stories to younger generations to lead them towards a powerful acceptance of the neutrality of death. The symbolic meanings in the Little River break the limitations of the myths of ghostly hauntings and provide a new sense of what Connolly claims to be, "possibilities beyond the obvious" (7). The power of collectivity they promote is essential because it links many generations of Black people to the understanding of resistance and struggle through historical trauma.

In the eight years of writing between the publishing of *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and the *Cousins* sequel, Hamilton develops her cultural and supernatural references regarding the historical trauma theme. The difference between Tree's and Cammy's connection to the supernatural as part of African-American culture can be noted in how she connects each experience to the slavery trauma, but while Tree's experience resists death, Cammy creates a direct connection through her grandmother in which she accepts death and uses this acceptance to appreciate life and her ancestors.

In addition, Hamilton conveys the direct and indirect influence of PTSS on the Black young adolescents. In *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*, the appearance of the ghosts of the dead enables Tree to relate to the past and the future of her family, which includes the destiny of the family's men, and the possibility of repetitive death trauma in future generations of the Pratts. In doing so, Tree as a Black adolescent is able to understand the traumatic experience of her brother Dab, and the irrational behaviour of Viola. This tolerance is essential for Tree since it paves the way for

healing from death trauma, and consequently the larger historical trauma of Black women. Ultimately, death is inevitable, but the personal trauma caused by slavery is avoidable. Tree is able to comprehend that Dab is victimised by both the family bloodline that gave him the porphyria, and also by his mother Viola. On the other hand, Cammy's entrapment with ghosts serves as a psychological path through which she releases her emotions regarding the death of her cousin. Cammy is already pressured and scorned by her Aunt Effie and Patty Ann, because she does not hail from a wealthy family and her parents are divorced. *Cousins* also directs attention towards other traumatised Black adolescents, such as Elodie who embodies a voiceless trauma in the novel, where consideration is brought to her condition through the community's belief in ghosts. Furthermore, in similarity to Cammy, Elodie is influenced by Aunt Effie's attitude and the traumatisation she transfers to Black girls. Following the death of Patty Ann, bullies in school start to chase Elodie, blaming her for the death of Patty Ann. Elodie is believed, by the school and the townsfolk, to be haunted and possessed by Patty Ann's ghost, and therefore is expelled from the town. According to Cammy's mother, "it was my own sister, Effie Lee, who started that awful business about her Patricia Ann's ghost walking inside L-O-D", and then elucidates the condition of Elodie, "That poor, poor child. As though not having a family wasn't enough. Then she has to get saved by the most loved and envied child in town, who gets drowned herself" (102). Although Elodie is only a secondary character, it is plausible how she becomes a victim to other, larger victimisation. The social and individual trauma that Elodie experiences reflect how the transference of historical trauma can create harsh internal classism in Black communities.

4.8 Black Adolescents' Post-Traumatic Healing and Identity

One important role of young-adults' fiction is to offer mediums to consider how past wounds shape the identities of specific groups. In Hamilton's canon of girls' trauma, healing is liberation that arrives through acceptance. Through social realism, she encourages girls to accept trauma itself, but to resist any subsequent damage. An aspect of this social realism is the possibility that Hamilton offers in the confrontation of trauma by children. Children's literature scholar Kenneth Kidd explains the potential for positive prospects of trauma and children's ability for confrontation, claiming that:

> It's almost as if we now expect reading about trauma to be traumatic itself—as if we think children can't otherwise comprehend atrocity. Just how new is this faith in exposure, experience, and confrontation, and how do we assess its significance with respect to contemporary children's literature and trauma studies? (120)

Although Kidd's statement is derived from the impact of the historical trauma of the Holocaust, it generally suggests that contemporary children are always capable of understanding messages about suffering embedded within books that address the theme of suffering. Kidd suggests an education of trauma in literature that is not necessarily traumatic in itself. Children's ability to relate to catastrophic events when reading of trauma is socially and/or historically germane. Thus, the exposure that traumatised girls encounter with their painful past and present experiences through post-colonial texts is significantly motivational to avoid the personal, social and political trappings of their ancestors through internal racism, suicide and the ideologies of classism.

To suggest a textual healing process of Black girls' cultural trauma, a broad perspective is required because its transgenerational reverberations have reached many Black generations. To consider Black girls' culturally and personally healing from traumas within their own Black communities, one must consider the fragility in the post-traumatic period. It is critical at this stage to point out that classism and internal racism emerge in the Black community as a result of historical trauma. In Hamilton's narrative, the transference of traumas through traumatised mothers, aunts or even young adolescents demonstrates how anyone can become complicit in initiating or causing trauma on other levels. It is important for young adolescents to be reassured regarding the necessity of mastering pain and later avoiding similar experiences. The sensitivity of the "learned helplessness" stage, introduced by Martin Seligman, is used, "to describe the interference with adaptive responding produced by inescapable shock and also as a shorthand to describe the process which we believe underlies the behavior" (407). Seligman's theory, followed by other scholars,[59] concludes that individuals tend to produce passivity in the face of trauma, and also that they are unable to learn that responding is effective. In the young adolescents' post-colonial trauma in Hamilton's fiction, such a phase can be defiant because they tend to be, although spontaneous, less able to deal with traumatic shock than adults. Hamilton's fiction pays deference to children's need for role models to help them heal and avoid helplessness or the assumption that nothing will change. In both novels, she introduces the role of powerful cultural symbols such as othermothers in supporting young girls in their healing process, a role that is almost

[59] The term 'learned helplessness' is coined from Seligman's *Helplessness: On depression, development, and death* (1975), while many others followed such as Lyn Y. Abramson's "Learned Helplessness in Humans: Critique and Reformulation", Adele Thomas's "Learned Helplessness and Expectancy Factors: Implications for Research in Learning Disabilities" and Sandra L. Bloom's "Trauma Theory Abbreviated".

inevitable, even with the presence of biological mothers. Collins describes this resilient role of othermothers as they, “were key not only in supporting children but also in supporting bloodmothers who, for whatever reason, were ill-prepared or had little desire to care for their children” (343). In the times when those girls ran or hid aghast, othermothers provided guidance to transform helplessness into what DeGruy claims to be “learned self-efficacy”, whereby, “There is a way to mitigate the effects of ‘learned helplessness’ through ‘learned self-efficacy,’ by demonstrating through action the ability to effect positive change in one’s life” (164). This change is disseminated through othermothers in addition to other influential factors. Healing influence can be induced through peers, teachers, family, cultural and social views, and most importantly, the child’s temperament (Connolly 5), as well as by a wider perspective of family and the broader community of Black adolescents, including social and health service systems (DeGruy 161). Hamilton’s approach in valuing the role of community and family in embracing the painful experiences of young adolescent females is critically advocative, because this communicative approach involves many Black people. DeGruy also suggests approaches that benefit from community and family support to cope with trauma, where she asserts that, “Since the injury resulting from intergenerational trauma occurred on multiple levels, it follows that we need to heal in multiple ways and on multiple levels” (158).

In emphasising the role of family in healing, DeGruy signifies the external support provided to help a family in crisis, “Every family is different with different issues and challenges and different strengths and gifts. Some families are faced with seemingly insurmountable odds and require considerable assistance from members inside of the family and additional assistance from others outside the family” (160). Even with the presence of Tree’s and Cammy’s biological mothers, the influence of

Miss Pricherd and Gram Tut provides the emotional support for the young girls. The inclusion of othermothers is also a cultural connection that Hamilton reaffirms, as they symbolise knowledge about the past that bridges youth to their ancestors and to their future (See the discussion on othermothering in the second chapter). The understanding that Miss Pricherd and Gram Tut provide is thus the approach that Black girls use to heal.

Although Hamilton's healing approach is focused on othermothers as a major influence, she provides room for pain recognition and settlement first. The girls' temperamental attitude after the crisis takes the form of a common psychological reaction of introversion, but it is also the withdrawal that creates the space for their minds to slowly normalise the death shock. Further, Tree's initial withdrawal provides the space necessary to accept any family intervention. As a community mother to Tree, Miss Pricherd connects with the child's pain and reorients her aggressive thoughts about Viola. The role of the old lady in Tree's grief is critical, as she converts denial into the acceptance of reality, thus preventing the child from hurling herself into street life in an expression of fury. As Miss Pricherd explains, "Don't go out there, Tree. Young girls fall into down time, all kinds of trouble" (195), Tree realises that the decision is life-threatening. As a socially detached young adolescent trapped domestically, Tree's fear of 'the street' is justified. Miss Pricherd's advice creates a space for reconciliation with Viola as she appeals, "Don't do it. Wait least till they buries the boy. Do that much for your muh. I'm telling you, this is breakin her" (196). Typical to the role of old othermothers in defusing intensity between blood mothers and their daughters, the old lady intends her final words as an attempt to bring Tree closer to her mother during the funeral. It is the

point from which the traumatic effect starts to lessen, preparing Tree for her final mental and social reconciliation.

Similar to Hamilton's representation of the othermothers' role in regard to the historical and personal trauma narrative, traumatised Black girls are introduced to healing with the help of old othermothers in *Cousins*. The model that Hamilton demonstrates in Cammy's healing process is more entangled with the social impact of a larger family community. Cammy receives more family support than Tree, as if Hamilton compensates by providing all the family power absent in Tree's life. In her post-traumatic phase, Cammy's father returns despite the divorce, Gram Tut comes from the nursing home regardless of her poor health, while Cammy's biological mother is always present and her elder brother Andrew is also there to help.

Unlike the fragility of the men in Tree's life, Andrew Coleman and his father Morris are introduced as strong empathetic male figures in Cammy's life. This reverse of Hamilton's 1980s' narrative depicts a patriarchal participation that supports Black females' traumas. Men are not stereotypically frail, as seen in the Pratt family, which probably extends from the enslaved image of men, captive, sold and tortured. On the contrary, Andrew is a substantial provision in Cammy's life. Although the novel scope covers only a short period of the family life before the crisis, the care that Andrew offers his sister is evident. As his first introduction in the narrative, "Andrew was Cammy's big brother. She was usually in his charge, when he could find her. He never told when she slipped off. It was his fault anyway, for not watching her closely enough" (16). Andrew's presence is mostly manifested in appreciating his younger sister's feelings. Part of this is knowing how much she loves her grandmother, and he strives to reassure Tree regarding her health with comments like, "I swear, Gram Tut not about to go anyplace just yet", when they

talk about death, or even, “You just go visit Gram Tut anytime you want to. Anybody bother you, tell ’em to come see me. Tell Gram Tut I said hi and I miss her, too” (40-41). Hamilton creates a real adult brother who can sometimes be mean to his mother when she talks about her sister, Aunt Effie, but still defends his sister against Aunt Effie’s sarcasm and snobbery when he comments, “Yeah, well, Cammy’s okay. She’s the most sane kid I know. And sweet, and her own mind, too. Don’t you take Aunt Effie’s side” (55). Andrew’s care is observed intensely through Cammy’s post-traumatic sessions of sadness and fear. As Cammy suffers during the night, Andrew represents a guardian figure, knowing how much it means to have company during those difficult moments.

The post-trauma presence of Cammy’s father offers an unexpectedly accurate confrontation to Cammy’s confused reality. The divorced parents realise the impact of the cousin’s death trauma, and so the whole family is brought together for Cammy’s cause. Upon his return, the father’s words to Cammy help not only in comforting the child, but also in releasing her confused feelings of guilt. Cammy realises that she internalised hateful feelings towards Patty Ann before her death, and those were repressed by the shock of tragedy, rather than resolved. When confronted by death, these feelings turn into unexplainable guilt. The confusion is only eased by her father’s words, “You are my daughter. I am your dad and I say you’re not to blame. No child drowns to hurt somebody”, while Cammy responds with an admission that she witnessed the death accident, “You didn’t see her face” (107), which is the moment where she cannot handle the truth herself and faints. This confrontation is followed by another attempt by Cammy’s family to reconcile her with pain by offering a visit to Elodie’s house as part of their responsibility towards the poor cousin. Moreover, the visit offers a means of bringing Cammy together with

the only friend she has had, providing both girls with some means to overcome their shared experience of pain.

Most importantly, Hamilton delivers the significance of Black othermothers as essential cultural and familial aspects in Black girls' traumatic healing. Cammy's familial reunion is only supportive when Gram Tut returns from the nursing home. To Cammy, death has always been connected to her grandmother, and her fear is exacerbated after the loss of Patty Ann. Hamilton evaluates girls' feminist bonding sources by exploring the loss of friendship versus othermothering. In this traumatic stage, Cammy is unable to maintain friendships, but it is also the point in the narrative where Gram Tut returns, providing Cammy with the supportive bonding she needs. The emotional support she provides soothes Cammy's suffering and fear, not only because they are both connected, but also because Cammy continually fears her death. From the opening of the narrative, the reader is informed that Cammy is closely connected to Gram Tut. Despite the distance and the often-poor weather, the young girl keeps visiting her grandmother at the nursing home. The physical presence of Gram Tut in the same house, at the close of the first book, reassures Tree regarding the survival of her loved ones while easing her fears. The healing effect is viewed through the first encounter with the grandmother in the house:

> Cammy slid from the couch and came over next to her blessed Gram. "Oh. Oh," she murmured from somewhere deep in the heart. She came as close as she could, leaning on hard metal to plant a gentle, sweet kiss on Gram Tut's sagging cheek. Cammy's chest was just full of love and her eyes filled with it, too. "You came all this way?" she whispered. "Just to see me!" (116)

Cammy realises that her grandmother has visited to ease her pain, which highlights the contrast between Cammy's mother compared to Gram Tut. Even with

the presence of Cammy's biological mother, her othermother Gram Tut represents a stronger emotional bonding while displaying the connection she needs to establish with her culture. In addition, Cammy reveals signs of self-reconciliation only to her grandmother. After denying that she witnessed the drowning of Patty Ann, she confesses to Gram Tut, ""I saw her go down. The bluety just took her out of sight. Where is she, Gram?" She'd been worried about that" (119). As Gram Tut expresses that Patty Ann is never coming back, she also explains how Tree should release herself from the sense of guilt, ""Nothing for you to worry over. You've been dreaming, is all. Scared yourself. Don't take on so anymore. She's gone. We live. We die." Gram Tut smiled, looked off, dreamily" (119). The impact of Gram Tut's clarification enables Cammy to see the truth about her fears and how to deal with them, as the narrative closes with the young girl showing more appreciation of the family around her, specifically her relationship with her father. The last of Cammy's thoughts speculates on her understanding of healing and coping with trauma, "Things. Go down deep. Patty Ann. And all the feelings I liked to buried. But sometimes, they come up again. They come clean" (125). Cammy realises how important it is to share traumatic experiences with the family, and also Elodie, as part of her community. Hamilton's trauma narrative harnesses the traumatic experiences for healing. It is difficult to revisit trauma without suffering, but Hamilton's healing approaches enable Black girls to recall and reflect on it. Cammy's fear of remembering Patty Ann's death is seen as turning a page, as the memories become less threatening. Moreover, in *Second Cousins* Hamilton closes with Aunt Effie also healing in the family reunion. To Cammy, Aunt Effie's renewed attitude is seen as a reconciliation with the grief of both present and past historical trauma, and a potential recovery of racist acts she always manifested on Cammy's family. This

reconciliation is reflected in Cammy's tendency to feel inferior, as Hamilton demonstrates Cammy's post-traumatic peace by her returning to rekindle her friendship with Elodie.

By involving the family and community in the healing process, Hamilton's texts furnish us with the answer to why healing is collectively targeted. We are provided with Hamilton's textual 1980s' and 1990s' trauma healing for Black girls, and I believe that addressing the same type of narrative is necessary for world children's literature. This is critical because the process of healing with children, and sometimes adults, can be complex, and as Farah Jasmine Griffin articulates beautifully, "the healing is never permanent: it requires constant attention and effort . . . of course, the body never can return to a pre-scarred state" (524). Scholars in this regard suggest larger communities of continuous healing processes. On a communal level, DeGruy reports, "In the PTSS Study Guide I discuss the need to create the virtual Village, meaning to develop a network of individuals that will support, guide, and protect its members" (159). A global example of DeGruy's suggestion is the networks co-operated by the Association of Black Psychologists in partnership with the Community Healing Network, which conduct Emotional Emancipation Circles (EECs). The aim of these self-help groups in the United States and United Kingdom is to focus on overcoming the falsehood of Black inferiority, and the emotional and psychological aftermath of enslavement and racism.

4.9 Conclusion

My feminist scholarship of Hamilton's intricacies of Black women's and adolescents' traumas targets empowerment by positioning selfhood through what may appear as taboo narrative. *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* and *Cousins* are infused with multiple cultural traumas that engage Black girls with healing

experiences as an approach of personal identity reaffirmation. The texts depict young Black adolescents such as Tree, Cammy, Elodie and Patty Ann, and adults like Gram Tut, Viola and Aunt Effie in traumatisation and healing phenomena that are appropriately demonstrated concerning gender. Zarina Akbar and Evelin Witruka indicate this correlation where they state, "Posttraumatic growth was believed to be related with gender. Females tend to report greater levels of posttraumatic growth following the experience of traumatic event[s] than males" (1036).[60] Tree's and Cammy's coping and healing occur at the core of the fundamental feminist politics of identity. Tree, for instance, represents a young girl who gradually copes with deeply traumatic situations despite a lack of family support. Ironically, family is central to Tree's trauma because Viola's mothering practice is entangled with her traumatic historical and familial experiences. Furthermore, although Tree inherits the same psychological traumas from Viola, she gathers empowering feminist principles defined by her ability to support Black males' fragility. In addition, Tree's courage is seen through her acceptance of life's uncertainties. Her recovery embodies a shift from personal acceptance into coping with trauma during the post-traumatic period of Dab's death. In one of the major consequences, she develops the resilience needed to move forward. The loss of Dab, although a tragedy, provides Tree with the space she requires for self-exploration, where she begins to understand her mother and, furthermore, the larger community of traumatised Black women. After Dab's death, Tree heals not only from the pain of his loss, but also the impact of caring for a sick young adult. As a result, the space created by Dab's death allows the distance necessary for the healing and strategies for growth that she requires as a young girl.

[60] Zarina Akbar and Evelin Witruka's study, "Coping Mediates the Relationship Between Gender and Posttraumatic Growth", refers to the lack of gender and post-traumatic studies, and that a paucity of research has been conducted to explore such associations. Their research examined this relationship of growth in 100 disaster survivors of both sexes in order to mediate coping behaviours.

Tree is finally able to forgive her mother, and to welcome people into her life again. After being isolated and immersed with ghosts rather than humans, she is able to communicate with other traumatised young adolescents, such as Don Silversmith, the only son of Viola's boyfriend. In this new bond, Hamilton summons socialisation regarding trauma as Don shares the distressing loss of his mother. As a social learning behaviour of communicating personal experiences, the two adolescents come to an understanding of the background of Tree's parents' divorce. As Don explains, "Tree, that wasn't the way it was. According to your mom, she left plenty of forwarding addresses. He could have found her if he wanted to. You have to face that maybe he didn't want to" (209), Tree comprehends Viola's blamelessness concerning the divorce, which prepares her for the next level of consolation in her relationship with her mother. Tree further provides Viola with the opportunity to heal as well, and Viola finally admits, ""All these years, I been wrong. I admit it. I should've taken less money and stayed with you and your brother," and continues to justify being ignorant about Dab's condition, "Call me a fool. Been so busy workin, making our lives–I'll take a lot of the blame, I'll have to live with it"" (213-214). The narrative provides no evidence of Viola's coping or healing, but implies that the mother–daughter relationship changes its direction.

Cammy also struggles with establishing a conceivable identity formation based on empowerment. The formation of the feminist identity is possible through establishing her true internalised inferiority as a traumatic experience. The confrontation between friendship and social excellence breaks Cammy's self-esteem and the quest for friendship with Patty Ann, a sophisticated and talented Black girl, turns into hatred because she is forced to feel undeserving and inferior to her own kin. The primary pathway of identity formation as a young adolescent is by

identifying her own confusion, coping with the death of Patty Ann and realising her own worth and priorities. The feminist hypothesis for a young adolescent's struggle with trauma is divided between the two aspects of trauma she encounters—first, Cammy's realisation of her own worth that is not linked to a standardised friendship in which she is considered inferior; and second, her acceptance of a larger meaning of life, with the help of her family, in which she embraces death as a natural cycle of life, even for her beloved Gram Tut. Cammy's healing guides her into another level of appreciating the reconnection with people for their true qualities, as opposed to their excellence or social classes. This positive communicative consequence is explained by Collins, who states that, "Through serious conversation and humor, African-American women as sisters and friends affirm one another's humanity, specialness and right to exist", and then elaborates, "Another theme concerns how Black women's relationships can support and renew. Relationships such as those between Celie and Shug in Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple* . . . provide cases where Black women helped one another grow in some fashion" (113, 114-115). Similarly, the relationship between Cammy and Elodie is revived because of their shared experience of witnessing tragedy. That both have been traumatised magnifies their potential to appreciate one another's pain, so when the shock of witnessing death occurs, that same pain brings them together. It further helps both girls to psychologically grow through pain, which manifests in their acceptance. Cammy's final words with her cousin convey her complete understanding of the situation, which she tries to pass on to Elodie as she confidently assures her, ""It wasn't your fault . . . She wanted to save you, so she did." Elodie nodded. "But I thought she'd save herself, too," She said. They locked arms, walking a ways around the little house. They were like true friends" (112). Cammy further confesses, "I saw her go

down. I told everybody I didn't but I did. It was just–I couldn't believe it was happening. She looked right at me", while Elodie responds in an affirmative tone, "She was just looking at us all. I looked back and saw her. She knew all us was too far away to help her. Then she forgave us" (112). The girls' final understanding of their commonality of pain, which also forms part of Black mythology as narrated by Gram Tut, is a pathway into the initiative of resistance to traumatic events, devastation, fear and captivation in the histories of Black culture, in a stereotypical manner of the collective falsehood of mythology.

In conceptualising their personal traumas within a larger cultural realm of commonplace oppressive structures, Black girls can become resilient to social and emotional tensions. Moreover, through an understanding of other females' struggles in the histories of trauma, they will be able to evaluate how the historical and systematic captivation of pain, shame and silence will only reproduce further distressing experiences. In representing trauma, Hamilton offers Black female adolescents individualistic opportunities to confront internalised hate, shame, and the self-destructive image of inferiority. Hamilton shows that healing methods can be successful if public attention to childhood presentational trauma is shared through codes of memory as a revival of power, as opposed to forgetting as repression.

Chapter 5

Black Girls and Social Leadership

5.1 Introduction

Virginia Hamilton reflects the significance of Black adolescent leadership to girlhood by participating in what Rudine Bishop identifies as 'Black social cultural conscious literature' (49).[61] Through unconventional young African-American girls who struggle to liberate themselves from structural and individual oppression, Hamilton, "speak[s] to Afro-American children about themselves and their lives" (Bishop 49), as she represents empowering practices of leadership that have been limited by sexist and racist mores during the early and subsequent eras of Black activism. In this chapter, I propose that Hamilton compensates for limited fictional role models of Black female leadership by not only creating patterns for Black girls' leadership, but also by manifesting direct rebellious practices into a liberating feminism. This feminism educates young girls how to harness their own voices for empowerment and self-affirmation. Hamilton's narrative of leadership includes the types of social injustice encountered by young Black girls both domestically and in public while they are redirected, through the same narrative, to break the oppressive silence by appreciating the power of their own voices in The Justice Trilogy and *Bluish*. I purposefully select these books to explain Hamilton's movement from a

[61] In *Shadow and Substance: Afro-American Experience in Contemporary Children's fiction* (1982), Bishop refers to the culturally conscious literature as the body of African-American children's books by Black authors, which reflects the social and cultural traditions associated with growing up Black in the United States. According to Bishop, the major characteristics of these culturally conscious books are the specificity of depicting major characters who are African-American and deliver their perspectives of setting, community, physical descriptions, language and traditions, mostly arising during the 1970s and 1980s.

single-leader model in the late 1970s to collectivism in the 1990s, as inspired by the political and social changes across almost two decades of Black activism.

In this chapter, I consider Hamilton's leadership narrative from a literary and cultural tradition, which is derived from the history of Black leadership and its connections to Black feminism. My analysis introduces Hamilton's leadership, presented as both preparation and inspiration for young Black girls navigating their way through social challenges. I am particularly interested in how Hamilton's fiction is able to portray Black girls as young leaders or those who practise leadership, as a form of social behaviour introduced at home or school. To understand how she develops contemporary forms of leadership in children's stories, I signpost certain key theoretical assumptions about the history of Black leadership and feminism such as those of Collins and hooks, while the methodological approach that underpins my discussion of girls' voices in Black children's literature is framed by reflections on subjecthood such as those of Trites. Thus, both theorisations serve to explain Hamilton's feminist initiative leader's model in The Justice Trilogy, and the leader's model in *Bluish*. I begin with a brief discussion of the historical prospects of Black leadership to locate Hamilton's contribution of leadership and activism in children's fiction. I then consider how the protagonists in Hamilton's novels embody and articulate rebellious power through their voice and collectivity of action. These powerful representations of Black girls are interpreted through a lens whereby such texts might be employed in the leadership preparation of young adolescents.

5.2 Hamilton's Adolescent Leadership Defined

Hamilton's concept of leadership in both models is connected to Black girls' subjecthood. Based on the power of their own voice and self-representation as terms of subjecthood, this concept can be defined as the individualistic and cooperative

endeavours of Black girls to practise leadership. Hamilton underpins the principles of individualistic and collective leaders in The Justice Trilogy and *Bluish*. In both models, female subjecthood is a key factor in Black girls' experiences, while rebellious girlhood modes are introduced to highlight African-American resistance. Because she is silenced in the first book of the trilogy, the protagonist Justice is gender-oppressed, with the narrative representing her ability to articulate an individualistic voice that she utilises to understand her ability to lead. The power she acquires through self-affirmation is represented as a means of strength through egalitarianism rather than her superiority over other boys, such as her brothers. By including social elements of resistance to gender oppression in Black girlhood, Hamilton broadens basic definitions of leadership, such as those forwarded by Jon Pierce and John Newstrom who define it as, "a sociological phenomenon involving the intentional exercise of influence to guide others toward some mutual attainment of goals" (10). Hamilton extends meanings of influence to include Black girlhood power and agency.

Hamilton's presentation of leadership qualities can be mapped onto developments in feminism, particularly Black women's feminist activism during the late second and third wave. Her narrative of leadership practices is inspired by the contexts of the micropolitics of Black feminism during the period from the late 1970s to the 1990s. She introduces young females performing roles of juvenile leaders who guide small groups of boys or girls, and therefore learn to demonstrate multiple feminist identities. Despite the histories of feminism in *Justice and Her Brothers* and *Bluish* being empowering, the former is more engaged with discourses of gender equality and radical feminism, while *Bluish* encourages Black female solidarity through feminocentric bonding in schools to empower youth as leaders.

Hamilton develops the protagonists' approaches from individual efforts to communal ones by harnessing the fundamentals of literacy and the group education of Black girls. Filomina Chioma Steady's transformational social model of African women's feminism and leadership in *Women and Collective Action in Africa* (2005) relates to the terms of Hamilton's liberating approach through freedom of oppression, and the creation of more just, social communities. Hamilton's narrative is not concerned with national politics, but rather promotes local activism and Black girls' practices of both leaderships, incorporated by creating their own small communities through which they explore leaders' positions, qualities and the significance of both individual and collective voices. Meanwhile, Steady promotes "women's collective actions" that prove to be "instructive" (91), and likewise Hamilton's latest narrative of leadership in *Bluish* emulates similar concepts of collective leadership actions.

To understand how this notion of Hamilton's definition of leadership and resistance relates to Black feminism, the models of individual leadership by Black girls must be perceived through the agency these girls obtain when overcoming repressive forces that typically silence the voice of children. Hooks's perspective of Black feminism in *Feminist Theory: from margin to centre* (1984) determines the impact of specific domestic oppression[62] on Black females, where she argues that, "Unlike other forms of oppression, most people witness and/or experience the practice of sexist domination in family settings. We tend to witness and/or experience racism or classism as we encounter the larger society, the world outside

[62] The philosopher John Hodge stresses the role of family in allowing such adaptations and social beliefs in children's lives. In "Dualist Culture and Beyond" (1975) he asserts how the family, both traditionally and legally, "reflects the Dualist values of hierarchy and coercive authoritarian control", and that influence is transferred through different intra-family relationships such as the parent–child and husband–wife. Children in particular imitate such forms of authoritative attitudes and sometimes learn to accept group oppression and male supremacy (233).

the home" (36). Hooks reaffirms the domination of such oppressive hierarchy in Black communities during the 1990s by explaining, "Even in families where no male is present, children may learn to value dominating, authoritative rule via their relationship to mothers and other adults, and strict adherence to sexist-defined role patterns" (36-37). Hamilton's narrative of individualistic leadership practices through Justice's experiences responds to such views of familial oppression. She thus breaks both gender and age boundaries, since Black girls as children are exposed to domestic repression within Black communities.

In *Bluish*, the author expands her leadership codes of individualistic feminist agency by introducing the cooperative sense of leadership. As a communicative group, Dreenie, Natalie and Tuli practise a form of collective action that is initiated by school activities. In a modern pattern of leadership, *Bluish* exemplifies Girl Power[63] as an action in a group of girls who appreciate the acceptance of 'the other' as a girl, primarily those traumatised by illness and the neglected. As one active member of a group of leaders, Dreenie partially represents greater efforts to assist others in articulating their own voice. Donovan Branche[64] explains, "The illustration of African-American women leadership is not an attempt to bring about a competing model of leadership, instead it attempts to show that existing models need to be more inclusive. It serves to broaden the lens of feminine leadership studies" (2). A form of feminine leadership is introduced in the cooperative efforts of a group of girls, which results in communal benefits and cooperative decision-making rather than those

[63] Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet and Amy L. Mentz's reference to Girl Power (originally developed as a slogan by the Riot Grrrl movement in the 1990s) refers to the resistance of patriarchy and passive consumerism that Riot Grrrl advocates, but it has since evolved into a multivalent term with implications and applications that often conflict with one another.

[64] Branche's research is a mixed-methods dissertation about the leadership styles and resilience of female African-American leaders in nonprofit organisations. Branche concludes that African-American women represent an undiscovered resource who bring transformational characteristics and resilience that are vital to the increasingly complex world of nonprofit leadership.

resulting in the singular role of a leader. This, in turn, connects to the power of Riot Grrrl culture, which focused less on laws and political process, and more on the individual and collective identity of women from all nationalities, races, ethnicities, and cultural and social backgrounds.

5.3 Literary and Theoretical Approaches in Hamilton's Adolescent Leadership

From my perspective, this model must be considered and analysed through both African-American children's fiction and feminism due to the significance they offer for both literary fields. In this regard, it is critical for my application of theory to relate to the connection between mainstream feminism and leadership, and whether young African-American girls' leadership associates, concerning their rebellious actions, with such terms of 'adult' feminism. It is my belief that postmodernist feminism shares social and literary potentials. According to Steady:

> In this regard feminism has two long-term goals which still have to be fulfilled (1) Freedom from oppression involving not only equity, but also the right of women to freedom of choice and the power to control their own lives within and outside the home (2) This removal of all forms of inequality and oppression through the creation of a more just social and economic order. (95)

This feminist lens is appropriate for Hamilton because of her focus on female subjecthood, justifying how I see Black females' history as an attempt not only to connect young Black adolescents to their ancestors, but also to the social and political conditions that hindered their development. Subjectivity is the approach that facilitates women's comprehension of their history, and to further understand their roles as "contributing (or not) to her identity and meaning", while asserting that "women's conciseness should be taken seriously when studying subjects- women"

(Lewis 1).[65] In addition to the notion of suggested roles, modes of values, beliefs, values and linguistic expressions can be acknowledged as being empowering to the complex nature of female creativity and action (Steady 90).

To analyse and theorise this chapter's thesis of Hamilton's collective and individualistic leadership, two major points are considered. First, both adults' and children's Black literature lack narratives of Black leadership, and only the modes of the non-fictional accounts of famous activists' biographies and speeches such as Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Sojourner Truth are dominant, even in contemporary children's picturebooks.[66] Second, the absence of Black women's leadership role models in Black fiction mirrors the general paucity of Black women in Black social and political activism during the period of the late 1970s to the 1990s. In fact, the Black liberation movements were unjust to Black women's participation in activism and leadership. In a significantly prolonged study of charismatic leadership in Black history, Erica Edwards speculates on the impact of African-American cultural production (from World War I to the contemporary era) on Black-American politics of leadership, that is, freedom is best achieved under the leadership of a single charismatic leader. In her critique of the emergence of post-civil rights Black leadership, Edwards denotes a frustration of Black leadership because, "the post–civil rights disappointment with leaders is part of a larger cultural milieu of mourning and melancholia for civil rights leaders that circulates both a salable celebratory mourning for leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and a

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[65] Jone, a humanist minister specialised in women's history from an international perspective, affirms that connection in regard to post-colonial studies.

[66] See, for example, Innosanto Nagara's *A is for Activist* (2013), Ilyasah Shabazz's *Malcolm X: The Boy Who Grew Up to Become Malcolm X* (2014), Vashti Harrison's *Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History* (2017), Charles R. Smith's *Rounds to Glory: The Story of Muhammad Ali* (2007), Nic Stone's *Dear Martin* (2017), Carole Boston Weatherford's *Be a King: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Dream and You* (2018) and *The Undefeated* (2019) by Kwame Alexander, in which he equally promotes Black female leaders.

melancholic refusal to let them go" (xxii). In theorising the omission of Black female leaders from history, and their subjection to violent gender policing or classification as masculinised, she states, "charisma participates in a gendered economy of political authority in which the attributes of the ideal leader are the traits American society usually conceives as rightly belonging to men or to normative masculinity: ambition, courage, and, above all, divine calling" (21).

To look closely at the absence of Black female leader models regarding the histories of Black activism, it is important to establish their specific positioning in Black activism after the reconstruction period. Many Black women were initially part of organisations like the Civil Rights Movement, Black Nationalism, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Black Panthers group, fighting for equality during the 1970s. The suffering of Black women in the United States during the 1960s, particularly during the Civil Rights Movement, is a continuation of the previous forms of oppression. The hierarchal system of the Civil Rights Movement placed men in the top leadership positions and included only a small number of Black-American female leaders, with less authority than their male counterparts. This led those female activists to become a symbolic influence during the last three decades of the twentieth century, where they fulfilled an assisting role compared to the dominant Black male activists. Elaine Brown, for example, worked with Martin Luther King and joined the Black Panther Party after his assassination, contributing to its outreach programmes; Shirley Chisholm was recognised in 1972 as the first African-American woman elected to Congress, who declared that the dismissive treatment of her candidacy was due to her status as a Black woman; while Septima Clark, who became a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), commented that the SCLC's male community did not particularly respect

women, except Mr King who “really felt that black women had a place in the government” (McFadden 86). Clark also actively participated and educated people of colour through the National Association of Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), where despite being less numerous than the male activists, the Black feminist activists paved the way for momentum in social and organisational justice. Radical feminism, as Sally Alexander points out, restored social formations and social relations between the sexes (128). Such conflict between what women wanted and social patriarchy is inferred to in the leadership narrative in *Justice and Her Brothers*, where Hamilton reflects on Black feminists’ concerns regarding gender tensions in the United States during the 1970s. My lens of focus is primarily placed on gender oppression in the Black-American community during the period, exemplified in the novel by Justice who struggles with sibling pressures. Hooks notes, “Many black women who had endured white-supremacist patriarchal domination during slavery did not want to be dominated by black men after manumission” (92). Hooks’s statement justifies why many of the supporters felt their voices were not being heard and thus they continued to press for gender equality concerns to be addressed to maintain societal and organisational respect. In “The Feminist Leadership of Ericka Huggins in the Black Panther Party”, Mary Phillips affirms:

> The leadership of women, including Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, Gloria Richardson, and Amy Jacques Garvey, influenced radical female activists of the late 1960s and early 1970s and laid the foundation for Black women’s activism in the Black Panther Party (BPP). (189)

Lorraine Code adds that Angela Davis, Lorde and Steady began to voice their concerns over the lack of feminist knowledge to validate their own experiences (169). Voice and authority are at the heart of Hamilton's leadership narrative, particularly in *Justice and Her Brothers*. It reflects similar awareness of Black women's consciousness that Black women's concerns can be exemplified in young girl's lives, as adolescence represents females' early opportunity to find and strengthen their voices so that they can ensure they will be heard as adult African-American women. Furthermore, although Hamilton's early fiction of leadership is highly influenced by the history of Black women's early activism, by the time she came to the writing of *Bluish* in 1999, these difficulties were resolved through the theme of leadership potentiality in early adolescence. The evolutionary liberating feminist leadership she infuses in *Bluish* coincides with the evolvement of Black feminism during the third wave, and which was much more inclusive of women and girls of colour, in addition to the movement's reflection of women as assertive and powerful, rather than weak and passive. According to Code, the 1990s witnessed the voices of Black feminist scholars who elevated the "Interconnections between knowledge, claim and power" (169). From a feminist perspective, young girls' preparation for leadership benefits from practices of empowerment that are at the core of the feminist tradition in the face of oppression. The self-expression through images of powerful leaders in Hamilton's later fiction shows young African-American girls' need to establish their own voices through cooperation rather than resistance.

In the 1990s, Hamilton's decision to write about girls' cooperative power in leadership reflects a renewed perception that lessons from earlier decades should be learned and passed on to young girls regarding collective leadership patterns. She

introduces Black rebellious girls in a leadership mode during a period of decline for powerful girlhood images in children's literature compared to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This falling-off in the latter years of the twentieth century is noticed by critics like Trites who reflects that it is a contemporary concern in children's literature to reform images that have historically represented female rebels (10).[67] The potentiality of a futuristic vision of girlhood and the ability to achieve was revisited several years after the publication of *Bluish* by Anita Harris's conception of future girlhood in *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century* (2004). Harris explains, "Young women today stand in for possibilities and anxieties about new identities more generally. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the creation of the contemporary social order and citizenship is achieved in part within the spaces of girlhood" (2). The achievements of girls contribute to identities that challenge social intricacies and participate in radical feminist ideologies, whereby allowing such possibilities is one of the most crucial and influential participations of feminism in children's literature, which Trites refers to as liberation from "inevitably growing into passivity" (11).

5.4 Hamilton's Theoretical Framework of Leadership

My socio-literary approach is intended to understand the psyche of girls who recognise their voices as agents of Black feminist power that leads them and others towards powerful changes. The textual analysis I propose of Hamilton's protagonists articulating voices concerning subjecthood does not (as conventional terms may do) contradict conceptualisations of 'identity' regarding stability/instability. Chris

[67] The analysis of girls' rebelliousness by Trites is based on protagonists such as Roseamonde in *Early Lessons* (1801) by Maria Edgeworth, Jo March in *Little Women* (1868–1869) by Louisa May Alcott, Mary Lennox in *The Secret Garden* (1911) by Frances Hodgson Burnett, and others who show their rebelliousness, take charge of situations or act bravely or instinctively whenever they encounter dilemmas.

Weedon claims that, “As individuals inserted within specific discourses, we repeatedly perform modes of subjectivity and identity until these are experienced as if they were second nature. Where they are successfully internalized, they become part of lived subjectivity” (7). Following Weedon, young adolescents can potentially still form gender-related identities as they mature if the terms of subjecthood are moulded by the individuals themselves, since they allow certain modes of subjecthood to be temporarily maintained by identity politics. I hence allow my theorisation of young girls’ leadership to take place through analysing the power positions that those young girls can obtain as they express their own voices.

Due to the complexity of the topic and the lack of sources on Black leadership for female adolescents, my theory is primarily supported by Black social theorists of adult experiences. Such theories help me examine the proposed aspects of young Black females’ individualistic and collective activism, particularly Collins’s *Black Feminist Thought*. Hamilton’s paradigm of feminist identity thus focuses on subjecthood, a principal feminist perspective celebrated by Collins’s notion of Black feminist activism and which is central to my analysis for two reasons. First, because it intersects with subjecthood, it facilitates in understanding the individualistic and cooperative or collective action of Black females’ activism. The elaboration of Hamilton’s leadership relies on stressing the role of Black female activism and individualistic epistemological efforts in the face of social oppression. Collins’s notion of Black activism explains how this happens, “Because clarifying Black women’s experiences and ideas lies at the core of Black feminist thought, interpreting them requires collaborative leadership among those who participate in the diverse forms that Black women’s communities now take” (19). Outlining the connection between Black females’ subjecthood and the oppression, Collins points

out the need for leadership as a form of resistance, a stance that Hamilton infuses in girlhood leadership. Second, the theory stresses the dialectic of oppression and activism, and takes deep interest in the epistemological significance of its core themes, including activism through leadership (Collins 6-7).

My leadership analysis is supported by Trites's perception of this subjective form of identity[68] and how young female adolescents articulate their voices in *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels* (1997). In fact, the literary analysis of children's voices, particularly females', is critical to comprehending the feminocentric experiences of Hamilton's young adolescents[69] in social leadership as aspects of feminist identity. Silence and power are interwoven terms that have begun to be considered by critics such as Lissa Paul, who calls for attention to the destructive silencing of children by comparing it to women's silencing, claiming that "children, like women, are lumped together as helpless and dependent; creatures to be kept away from the scene of the action, and who otherwise ought not to be seen or heard . . . It is almost inconceivable that women and children have been invisible and voiceless so long" (187). Hamilton's young protagonists, struggling to own a form of individual responsibility for the performance and articulation of the voice, experience empowering terms as they demonstrate a rebelliousness against social structures. That rebellious form enables them to eventually value individualistic and communal power, and thus they strike a

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[68] This subjective form of identity is celebrated by theorists who appreciate both terms of identity and subjectivity as being virtually synonymous (Benwell and Stokoe 28, 116). Lissa Paul explains this interconnected relationship between both terms as the transformation, whereby in accordance to the critique of children's literature she states, "Critics who work in feminist theory, post-colonial studies and children's literature all find themselves interested in common grounds: in the dynamics of power, in ideology, in the construction of the subject" (150).

[69] Lyn Mikel Brown and Carol Gilligan describe the transformation of adolescent girls from being outspoken and confident at the age of eight or nine, to being so concerned with being socially acceptable that they have learned to silence themselves by the age of thirteen or fourteen (4-6, 20-21).

balance between accepting and rejecting various norms. This, in turn, explains their subjecthood as measures of the individual's positions through the articulation of individual or collective voices. In applying Trites's critique of voice articulation, I explore how the girls[70] in Hamilton's leadership narrative reject pressure, voicelessness and the passivity that accompanies it. My exploration of their powerful rejection of such terms is analysed through exploring how they learn to speak out in liberating voices, and sometimes through artistic skills that contribute to their development as adolescents. Trites examines African-American girls in an emotional crisis of voice recovery.[71] Similar agency is adopted by Hamilton's other female protagonists, Dreenie, Natalie and Justice, who engage their voices towards feminist empowerment. This requires a literary investigation into two stages of personal development in early adolescence—the authorisation of agency, and then the approaches to leadership.

It is important for my analysis to understand the interrelation between the individualistic and collaborative suppression and voicing, which Collins initially asserts in her preface as:

> Like African-American women, many others who occupy societally denigrated categories have been similarly silenced. So the voice that I now seek is both individual and collective, personal and political, one reflecting

[70] Trites draws attention to the loss of voice by Black teenagers and how it influences their emotional crisis by examining Talley Barbour's rejection of oppression and establishing voice in Hamilton's *A White Romance* (1987). Trites explains how she accepts that their relationship objectifies her (35). Although Trites analyses voice in an oppressive romantic and interracial affair, she presents a perspective of Black girls' agency in terms of subjectivity that cannot be ignored. Trites observes the agency of the Black protagonist, Talley, as she is able to finally reject oppression and move forward to make the choices that end a relationship that she has long waited for.

[71] Trites discusses subjectivity in Black adolescents in Hamilton's *White Romance*. The analysis deals with girls' claiming their subject position within heterosexual mixed-race romantic relationships, and not social activism.

> the intersection of my unique biography with the larger meaning of my historical times. (37)

She claims that Black women's leadership and Black feminist thoughts are interlocked, and that while this connection is inclusive of all women, it particularly defines their reality as people who live it (37). Collins's assumption reveals how being involved in leadership can inspire females' inner voices, while helping them to both gain and express knowledge from their own experiences of activism. On the other hand, Trites concentrates on how and why adolescents are silenced in children's feminist fiction. While Paul calls for literary attention to the silencing of youth, Trites suggests the approaches of vocal repression and how young females create their own strategies to overcome it. She explains the characters' methods of personal vocalisation that emerge through self-reliance and expression as a means of strength because, "Often characters recognize the dialogic nature of voice: their voices exist only in dialogues with other people", while in her analysis of books by a number of young-adult novelists such as Patricia MacLauchlan, Mildred Taylor and Minfong Ho, Trites assures that, "whatever strategies lead to their recovery of voice, the feminist characters in these four novels ultimately gain an awareness of the primacy of language in defining themselves as subjects. They recover their voices because they recognize the power of language" (48). Trites also draws attention to the significance of the 'dialogic nature of the voice', developed by the philosopher Mikhail M. Bakhtin to investigate textual subjectivity. This principle can be applied in Hamilton's feminist fiction, selected to identify the dialogic nature of girls' voices, which as Trites affirms may help the protagonists "gain awareness of the primacy of language in defining themselves as subjects" (48). The verbal expression that Trites indicates is feminist as it furthers our understanding of how young female

adolescents employ dialogue with others and themselves, to exploit the power of language. Since subjectivity is Trites's central point of identity formation through linguist communication, this valuable connection between individuals' subjectivity and verbal expressions is researched by the philosopher Francis Jacques in *Difference and Subjectivity: Dialogue and Personal Identity* (1982), where he declares, "As soon as we begin to think about it, subjectivity seems deeply bound up with linguistic communication. It is as if language had solved in one stroke the twin problems of communication and subjectivity" (1). In Hamilton's books, this premise helps in terms of articulating this expression of voice as connected to action, and how action leads to agency. Speech as an expressive approach to leadership motivation has long existed as a robust instrument for impact by Black leaders, who changed the face of Black activism[72] during and after the Civil Rights Movement.

5.5 Black Girls' Rebellious Subjecthood and Individualistic Leadership

In *Justice and Her Brothers*, Hamilton introduces an individualistic leadership model that credits a rebellious young girl with a leader's role. Within Hamilton's representation of a young African-American adolescent leading a group of boys, Justice struggles with gender-oppression, and the aspiration to represent herself as a rival to her brothers, Thomas and Levi, in all activities restricted to boys. The resistance by a young female to the patriarchal power positions symbolised in Justice's twin brothers was a stereotypical mainstream concern in Black feminist

[72] In this section of theory, I outline the power of speech to young girls in their utterance of self-definition, but it is also vital to consider the influence of speeches by Black women, inclusive of children as an audience. In Sojourner Truth's speech *Ain't I A Woman?* (1851) at the Women's Rights Convention delivered in Ohio, the original script commences, "Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter" (See Olive Gilbert, Frances W. Titus and Susan B. Anthony's "Narrative of Sojourner Truth"). In 2005, Erykah Badu included children in her *Millions More Movement* speech by declaring, "I came representing all the mothers . . . the fathers . . . the sisters, the brothers, the children".

society during the early waves of the feminist movement.[73] Justice, as the main female protagonist, in addition to Trites's suggestions of 'how' and 'why' young adolescents can be silenced, displays the role of one's voice in establishing individualistic identity. Trites emphasises young girls' individuality while expressing subjectivity *en route* to acquiring social leadership. Regarding voice, Justice's is not fully recovered until she is completely aware of her internal powers of communicating her thoughts through different channels, including speech. Prior to Justice being able to understand her own subjecthood, she identifies the liminality of agency caused by the roles assigned to her as a girl in a boys' community, where she realises that engaging her agency begins when she articulates her inner voice.[74]

The transition from silence to voice is Justice's battle into subjecthood. Silence is enforced by the fear of confronting her sibling's oppressive behaviours, which hinders her capacity for expression. The manner in which Justice is silenced varies, as she develops the resistance necessary to confront each type of subjugation. Fear caused by family circumstances that enhance the patriarchal practice such as her mother's absence and her brothers' guardianship and/or irritating manners obstruct Justice, temporarily, from the ultimate expression of rejection or acceptance. Between the inability to defend herself against the verbal agitation of her brother and the lack of support for her own plan to compete in the snake race, the dialogic nature

[73] In an early refute to patriarchal sexism, hooks discusses at length how reformists and revolutionary thinkers in the earliest inceptions of the feminist movement emphasised gender equality as a response to all patriarchal systems, as well as race and gender oppression.

[74] In the early Mildred Taylor feminist novels *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976) and *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (1981), girlhood and voice resistance are introduced as Cassie Logan recovers her voice. Although Cassie's experience represents a Black girl's journey through aphasia and voice recovery, her experience differs from Hamilton's Justice since it deals with racial oppression as opposed to social and patriarchal tensions. Taylor's protagonist is encountered with the ferocity of the American South during 1933 and the Jim Crew period, depicting the horror of adolescents witnessing lynching and torture by the Whites.

of Justice's voice insufficiently supports her at the beginning of their summer trip because she, as a timid girl, chooses to silence herself. Fear creates limits to Justice's development as a young girl. While she seeks individuality, she is restricted by conformity, and while seeking empowerment she is sometimes retracted by passivity. Lorde denotes the sense of responsibility towards one's actions that follows the articulation of voice, which is likely to be commonplace where young girls like Justice are stripped of responsibility and controlled by patriarchy. As she points out, "Of course I am afraid, because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation, and that always seems fraught with danger" (42). Lorde normalises fear as part of the process of voice articulation that may extend, even after words are uttered. Justice's fear is to be understood within the time frame of a young adolescent, which as Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry position is a liminal space (10), for the young protagonist is close to breaking the social norms established by authoritative adult figures such as her parents. The breaking of such fear and oppressive boundaries manifests in agency and authority that the narrative translates into friendship, and then the leadership of a group of boys. The implications of radical feminist acts by the young protagonists are demonstrated in the young girl's understanding of what it means to resist social patriarchal oppressions, and transforming this understanding into powerful acts of communicative voice.

As she is being introduced to fear, the approach that she considers to deal with her internal distress is summed up by her final realisation of the source of fear. She assumes that her fear typically exists because of her mother's absence, which enhances Thomas's malevolent attitude, knowing that she does not "recall feeling [apprehension] before this summer" (6), when her mother started college education.

The young girl, struck by fear, withholds her unspoken words in a continuous tolerance of panic. By doing so, she puts her thoughts in order at this early stage so as to understand her own condition and prepare to confront it. When the young girl decides to shift from ultimate silence to speaking out, the confusion between preparing for the boys' snake race and her anger at her mother causes her words to stumble. The mother–daughter dialogic scenes reveal the tension that restricts Justice from fully expressing herself. Statements such as "I don't *want* any breakfast" and "You used to remember where I thro—put things, before" (10) are confused messages through which she attempts to declare, with voice, the attention she needs from her mother. Justice's use of 'before' indicates her realisation of how the change from her past to present relationship with her mother is actually representative of the transition from childhood to adolescence. This change is entangled with the limited responsibility Justice has for herself, with the role of responsibility primarily carried out by her brothers rather than her mother. Relating 'before' to the period of time prior to her mother commencing her college study, Justice is also exposed to a further dimension of responsibility—the limitations of her mother's choices concerning educational development as a female. In this sense, Justice only speaks to herself about her mother's education, before returning to silence in a tight resistance moment. When Viola asks if she dislikes her pursuit of a college education, Justice states, "No", while explaining to herself that it is not her mother's education that bothers her, but rather that "she has gone for hours and hours . . . and not here to help. To be on my side from Thomas" (12). Resistance and fear continue because Justice apprehends that she is subjected to her sibling's continuous torment, in part because her mother is absent, and in part because she provides Thomas with the authority to control her.

Black female adolescents' confrontation of fear to break silence establishes a major challenge in Hamilton's leadership narrative. The recognition of the need for self-expression arises gradually, with the protagonist's realisation of the necessity for individualistic action after overcoming her fears. Justice thus navigates her rejection of oppression and accumulation of fear in her attempts to challenge powerlessness throughout the narrative. Hamilton justifies Justice's panic with Thomas's first presence, "She had a cold, uncomfortable feeling whenever she was alone and came across something belonging to her brother, like that drumstick" (4). Moreover, although this fear in particular is expressed by the narrator and not Justice herself, it still focalises the child's identification with her own fear, "Maybe it just feels different, she thought, with Mom out of the house each day for the first time this summer. No grown-ups around from morning until way late" (4). Her moments of confusion do not prevail for long before she recognises that although she is alone, she can begin to organise her thoughts into a perspective of action, and informs herself, "saying out loud, whispering, "Justice is as Justice does." It seemed to help a little. Putting her thought in order helped even more" (5). When her words are spoken, they represent interlayered meanings of rebellious thoughts that fuel her strength—the path of social representations for personal justice. For adolescents, this would appear to be a typical attitude, as Sara Day, Miranda Green-Barteet and Amy Montz propose in a recent literary survey of girls' rebelliousness in young-adult literature from the 1700s until 2014, whereby the "characters occupy the role of active agent rather than passive bystander. Simply put, by tangling with the risks and rewards of female rebellion, these girls (and these authors) illustrate the ongoing challenges of redefining what it means to be a young woman" (4). Girls like Justice identify with active roles through taking risks to facilitate the change required.

The emergence of a stronger voice occurs in the same safe space between Justice and her mother. In arguing for the safe spaces Black adolescents may utilise to find their voices, Collins suggests that the mother–daughter relationship provokes words and thoughts from young girls' consciousness. She explains, "Countless Black mothers have empowered their daughters by passing on the everyday knowledge essential to survival as African-American women" (102). Hamilton creates this space for Justice with her mother. In this encounter Justice resists her mother's gender stereotypes, positing a strong feminist principle. When she confronts her mother's opinion about imitating boys' bike stunts, she robustly reaffirms her actions by confirming that her she shares the same activities with girls of her age, which is what distinguishes her generation from her mother's. The mother–daughter dialogue is the type of discourse that Trites describes as metaconversation, one that influences the scene or the idea discussed. Justice's rejection of her mother's stereotype of courage explains the space that Hamilton creates for young girls to express their own individuality. According to Justice, practising the bike stunts is an expression of liberating power because she eliminates any differences between the abilities of the sexes. In her affirmative statement, Justice speaks of gender equality in early adolescence and later turns her words into social reality. In identifying herself as part of a larger community of girls, she speculates, "they can do anything boys can do", and expresses an individualistic sense of self and excelling at performing wheelies at a young age. Justice's belief in girls' power of transformation is stated after the comparison she places between generations of Black women. In profoundly reflecting on her mother's perspective as dated and conventional, she calls for a new generational perspective that affirms her understanding of how females, from her generation, uplift themselves to comprehend their own individualistic powers. In a

later process of demonstrating this prowess, she practises discreetly so she will be able to compete against the boys in the snake race.

Although Justice is aware of the power of her spoken words, she develops a selectivity to voice or silence. Still tolerating silence as resistance at several moments of the narrative, young Justice realises the connection between her silence and the aggressive behaviour she is subjected to. She also believes that her voice can break this pattern and defuse her previous perceptions of powerlessness. The thoughts she passes to her own consciousness are part of her personal means of empowerment. Despite her mother being "impressed by her daughter's ability to express herself", Justice chooses to remain silent when being interrogated about her continued absence from the house because in her view, "it best not to answer" (16). In addition, she remains silent even while confronting the good-natured and caring brother, Levi. Although Justice remains silent with her mother, and also with Levi, she sometimes expresses her concerns about his passivity towards his twin, Thomas. When she concludes, "Do you ever want to be like Thomas?" (55), she expresses her concern about Levi's silence subverting him. On another occasion, when witnessing both brothers smoking marijuana, the tone and objective of her expressed words change when she urges opposition towards the destructive attitude of Thomas. As soon as she begins to warn the boys about smoking, "But if Mom ever found out–", her threatening tone changes into a plea to Levi, "Please make Thomas stop that drumming. I can-not stand so much noise" (98). Impact and purpose are explained, as the narrative suggests that "looking very dramatic—pitiful, actually—she covered her ears" (98). Justice's linguistic expression following different moments of silence in the narrative rationalises the influence of her words and the timing of her speech.

Hamilton creates the movement of inner voice into articulation in another dimension of safe and provocative spaces—nature—with the movement from silence to voice being attained partially through nature and the empowerment relating to natural and supernatural elements. The emancipating impact of nature on adolescents and children has been a source of interest to some critics such as Megan McDonough and Katherine Wagner, who highlight the presence of liberated young girls in contemporary dystopian novels such as *Uglies* (2005) and *Matched* (2010), as they bound themselves to nature. Much like Justice's narrative in the much earlier book, "these novels suggest that a female protagonist's awakening is catalyzed by her experiences within nature and that these experiences shape nature into a place ideal for claiming her agency" (157). By insisting upon placing her female protagonists in liminal existences that retain them under the watch of their brothers or inside their homes, relocating these female protagonists into natural spaces provides subjecthood through the liberating freedom of choice, decision-making and the agency they gain. In Hamilton's creation of bonds between children and nature, she suggests the constraints of society that girls escape from occur as their safe spaces in the home are not guaranteed. On the contrary, home shelters oppression and strict modes of activities enforced by family members. The protagonist's quest for individuality in the heart of Ohio's nature represents an escape from city to nature. As seen in the norms of Hamilton's preparation of characters' quests, the inspiring nature of Ohio promotes new frontiers of self-expression. The tranquillity of nature and the calming of children's minds is a medium that permits thoughts to reorder. For instance, Justice identifies with the cottonwood tree's silence, while simultaneously reflecting on its strength. When she first sees the tree, her impression manifests how her words relate to gender power, "You grand, you tall woman, she thought. Better than a

hundred and fifty years old, I bet" (31). Upon her second encounter with the tree, Justice identifies the tree with a female gender more directly after she recognises her silence, "She saw again the great cottonwood tree on the east boundary. Cottonwoman, so silent. She'd caught hold of the darkening" (90). She is able to recognise helplessness through the silence of the tree, a concept that she can reverse, "Justice could hardly realize that she had a special feeling for it only a couple of days ago. "Cottonwoman" sounded faintly somewhere inside her, but her delight was all but gone . . . They had come outside as soon as the east showed the change of dawning" (235). In fact, nature connects Justice to meanings of resistance created by the power of trees. When she initiates a conversation with her mother early in the narrative about challenging the stereotypes of the gender-classification of activities, Justice recites a quote she memorises from Levi when they both were sitting on the tree:

> "And I know 'They have tormented me, early and late, Some with their love and some with their hate. The wine I drank, the bread I ate, Some poisoned with love, Some poisoned with hate . . .'" (13)

From Justice's discourse of torture and motifs of love and hate emerge the messages she tried to communicate to her mother about her true feelings regarding her brothers' overprotective behaviour. This could also be viewed on a larger scale of the familial and social structures of Black girlhood during the late 1970s, where for Black girls such patriarchal controlling restrictions were authorised by the family. Black writers of the period such as Hamilton subsume nature as a liberating space within the culture, while McDonough and Wagner suggest, "from the Transcendentalists' reverence for nature to the environmental revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, a strong interest in nature has been historically a shaping force in

American culture" (157). Justice does not express this directly to her mother, but rather implies it when mentioning Levi as the source of her quote. The connection between Justice and the cottonwood tree is simply a reconciliation with sources of power inspiration, since Levi used to climb up into the tree and read to her from the boughs. When Justice reads the same lines to her mother, she actually reaffirms Levi's probable reference to oppression. He is overprotective, but he also realises that she is oppressed by Thomas. Levi himself identifies the means to connect Justice to this liberating notion in nature from within the boughs of the giant cottonwood, using an excerpt from Walter Scott's poem for historical empowerment.

Justice's final familiarisation with the cottonwood's representation of strength is connected to a principle of communist and egalitarian power. She strongly expresses a Black feminist understanding of girlhood oppression, "Cottonwoman for ever stand alone. You'll find a black walnut tree nearby to stand as tall as she" (31). The powerful expression that Justice speaks to the tree reflects her feminist thoughts. Her call explains the significance of finding other Black males and females on a quest for power, a standard of breaking gender distinctions into unity, similar to the leader's mode developed while roaming around the river and the tree.

5.6 Leadership and the Breaking of Gender Roles

The power that Justice articulates breaks the conventional gender roles of the 1970s and 1980s through communicating an ideology of role reversal and capital power between the sexes during adolescence. The shared activities she voluntarily engages with create the resistance point to her challenge. A more challenging activity than bike stunts, the snake race becomes a turning point in Justice's reluctant silence, from internal speech for personal encouragement to the influential voice of a leader.

Intrigued with nature on the Quinella Road she began to rediscover her inner power, feeling that, “She was listening to herself inside. She had a notion of something with her, within her” (116). Justice immediately realises that “[she] took great pleasure in playing follow the leader on them. Following and imitating an imaginary self, she had risked thorn wounds to walk the branches” (117). To her, the Quinella is not merely the location for a summer’s adventure where she enjoys the challenge of the snake race, since the space where she enjoys activities free from her brothers’ control provides her with the vision and practice of individuality. She is aware that she owns the vision, and that she can only prove it by accepting the challenge, thereby becoming eligible for a position of power. The young protagonist’s self-esteem and control increase the more she maintains her distance from the repressive atmosphere of the house. Her patriarchal family atmosphere in which she suffers oppression and silencing thus drives her into nature. In the Quinella River, where her unspoken words are re-ordered, “she felt confident, as if some sure and certain luck would keep her safe. And the roll and coast of the Quinella thrilled her to her heart” (34). The young girl is able to locate her own space to prepare for the challenges that lie ahead. The practices of the bike stunts and the search for the snakes evidence her claims of individualistic ability to enforce the exchange of the leadership role with Thomas.

A charismatic leader arises in Justice when she is able to recognise the power of action and voice, versus the distress of noise. Since the beginning of the narrative, she is aware that Thomas’s noise is a means to confuse and enforce control over her, Levi and the rest of the boys. In her first challenge to draw upon the potential leadership terms, she points out Thomas’s insincerity towards Levi. When Levi confesses to her that smoking was not his idea, she takes the opportunity to draw his

attention to Thomas's unreliability, '"That just makes it so much worse," she said. "Follow the leader"" (102). The mockery she highlights regarding Thomas's leadership is intended to reaffirm his fragility as a person incapable of a leadership role. Even in her later telepathic exchange of thoughts with Levi, she succeeds not only in revealing how he is also oppressed by Thomas's repressive behaviour in the group, but also underscores Levi's silence as weakness, "Just imagine what . . . what it's like not being able to . . . to say anything you want. That's why Tom-Tom drums" (104). She is thus able to explain the rationale for the atmosphere that Thomas creates with his drumming and disturbance. In clarifying to Levi that their brother plays drums noisily, she points out his weakness. In addition to the drums, Justice further understands that her brother's stuttering is part of his control through which he manipulates and silences them, just like his incessant drumming. She reveals that, "sometimes [she] thought he stuttered just to annoy her. But she was used to his demanding ways" (57), but then later, "She recalled Thomas pounding his fist and spitting words at her. In the dim past when she was much younger, before Thomas ever played drums, he had seemed to pound and stomp his way through her life" (105). The contrast between her attitude and that of Thomas reveals his inability to articulate linguistic expression, one he replaces with intentional stuttering, screaming and noise. Such a comparison provides young readers with all the possibilities of expression compared with the agency gained through proper attitudes towards communication through speech. Therefore, Justice's capacity for powerful verbal expression is reflected in the self-assertiveness she gains after winning the snake race. She rebels against her reluctant silence and redefines herself in a shift away from the previous liminal existence as a girl.

The new Justice, who wins the snake race, represents herself as an active leader of the same group with a new perception that also includes the group members. This new outlook affirms the potential of the gender boundaries she crosses as a victor in the boys' race. The young adolescent-leader finalises her egalitarian thoughts because, "she guessed a pack of boys was not much different from a bunch of girls", in a focal moment that enables her to practically sense the limitlessness between genders' abilities regarding action and agency. Justice's thoughts are mingled with the adolescent world and the notion that a difference remained, which is probably essential in competition, since for boys, "It was just harder getting their attention" (247). She is finally able to overcome the helplessness caused by Thomas, and he eventually loses his control over her. She boldly sends him telepathic messages to reaffirm her powerful existence, "I am . . . something . . . I am . . . new!" (249). The power reversal in the large group occurs immediately after Justice announces a new sense of identity that follows her catching of a pregnant snake, and therefore winning the race:

> Gracefully, she rose to her feet. Boys gave her their full attention, as though suddenly she had grown tall. They watched as she gathered up her knapsack full of snakes and cut straight across the circle past Thomas. *I win it*, she traced to Thomas. *I'll lead the boys back to the Quinella.* (250)

Having won the competition, Justice the leader appears more affirmative and less timid. The admiring reaction of not only Thomas, who calls her by her first name for the first time, but also the boys who follow her to the Quinella, places her at the top of the group she chooses to lead. Leadership to her is holding a position of power acquired through achievement and planning. In everyone's conclusion, Justice is now, "smart enough to win The Snake Race" (250). After breaking the boundaries

of silence, the distinction drawn between power and powerlessness is through the realisation of voice versus noise. Acknowledging how fear is broken by voice, Justice the leader includes herself within the group by explaining their own fear. She explicitly communicates fear as worthless in her first comments to the boys, ""You all afraid to go to the Quinella again? What's the matter with you!" She whirled and disappeared on her bike, successfully breaking Thomas' hold on the boys" (254). Her intentions are not to abandon Thomas as an individual, but merely to recognise that he is not leadership material. Her words with her unit members include a scale of power that she announces, "*I am new*, she said in his mind. *I am power*", and even when providing leads, she explains to Levi, "Now, follow close to me. And never get between me and Thomas" (259). Sensing her own ability to generate powerful influence, "she led the way" (216).

Justice's leadership is inclusive of a symbolic social reform. As a Black girl she is able to develop what Collins promotes as empathy, as opposed to oppressive control over the members in her unit. Thus her group includes the weak, the strong, the fraught and the sensitive, who approve of joining her unit and who will serve her universal ambition in time-travel. Furthermore, although the objectives are not explained in the sequel, she selects Levi and Dorian, who "accepted the unit she had made of them", and "Unquestionably, they knew she would never use it against them" (277). Justice accepts the fool figure Dorian's inclusion in the unit, who likely symbolises a certain class within larger communities. Although she knows that, "Dorian never had lunch money", and that, "In school, kids give him nickels and dimes, or they gave him part of their own lunches" (82), she includes him as a valued member of her own new community. He is so neglected by his own family that he appears 'dirty' and 'ragged', but the empathy she conveys helps, like her siblings, to

manifest Dorian's own sensory skills. In breaking the gender role, Justice also ruptures traditional passive images of girls in children's literature. In her revisions of girlhood in children's literature, Lissa Paul suggests that power and personal growth can be obtained by young girls challenging traditional gender stereotypes when playing roles associated with both genders, and unfolding them with actions (186-188). By providing Justice with the characteristics to challenge boys' roles such as those seen in the snake race, Hamilton manipulates gender roles and renders them available to girls, while extending them to incorporate rebellious actions. While Thomas enjoys only the lead, Justice confronts fears and achieves a task that should only be possible by a whole group of boys—catching a great number of snakes. Moreover, she befriends members of the group instead of oppressing and silencing them, in contrast to Thomas's practice.

Hamilton's literary use of science fiction tropes in the continuation of The Justice Trilogy provides another space for a young audience to imagine further powers that young girls can own and wield, most of which cannot be possessed in their social reality. With the hardship of creating such possibility in social realist settings seen in the first book, this would appear to be both appropriate and acceptable. Although both *Dustland* and *The Gathering* resume with the same individualistic pattern of the young female leader in Justice, they are excluded from this chapter for two reasons. First, Hamilton's adolescent leadership continues in the mode of a single leader who overpowers all other members of the unit, which represents a continuation towards the empowerment of the radical feminist approach found in her first book. Second, both books represent the dystopian world in which Justice's leadership struggles with what symbolically appears to be racial elements of Black people's diaspora, and the continued suffering in different hypothetical

worlds. For children, comprehending the protagonist's intense efforts to gain disciplined control over the boys and the human-like Miacus may lead to misperceptions—Justice and Miacus present like a master–slave relationship, while both the brother Levi and the healer Dorian wonder if they are considered her slaves at a certain point of the narrative. Such confusion seems natural to the children in the story, who are being led from the adventures in the Quinella in Ohio to face the dust, where isolation and death are threats to all creatures in the new land. Similar in purpose, the third book, *The Gathering*, stresses the group's ability to maintain unity after severing their psychic bond at the end of book two in the trilogy. More than leadership, the focus of the group is placed on the children's fantasy of seeking new revolutionary worlds, in which they encounter other groups with similar patterns of communication or social arrangements. The unit finds its way to tortured exiled people seeking salvation, which represents one of Hamilton's strong references to slavery and its relevance to African-American adolescent science-fiction.

Although the last two books of the trilogy still celebrate adolescent leadership, Hamilton re-examines the connections of leadership terms and African-American ancestors. This prospect is implied in the unit's future journey of survival, headed by Justice, to the imaginary Dustland. Similar to contemporary books of the late 1970s, such as *The Girl Who Owned a City* (1975) by O.T. Nelson, Hamilton represents young girls' participation in saving humanity that involves planning by a young American girl. Nelson's narrative includes the siblings' and family's entrapment in the adventures, as Hamilton's infusion of domesticity impacts on the girl's quests. In *Dustland*, the unit led by Justice mind-travels to the future for a similar mission, which is almost accomplished in the third book. Justice continues to resist Thomas as the illusionist of the group and the reference to male oppression,

who continues to express resentment of her powers and the psychic visit she leads to the Dustland. As a mental leader, Justice manages to tame one of the dog-like t-creatures of the Dustland and gives her the name Miacus, while she further wields her telepathic powers to control the time and place of the travel. In both books, the stressing of control and the enforcement of power to lead develop from the first book of the trilogy, but this tension of powerful influence through role reversal is reoriented in Hamilton's leadership at the turn of the century. In celebrating collective leadership in *Bluish*, she creates more possibilities of activism through groups of leaders.

5.7 *Bluish* and Collective Leadership

In *Bluish*, published at the end of the twentieth century, Hamilton presents a greater acceptance of the social order concerning voice articulation for leadership purposes. The feminist frame she introduces for the next model of young leaders is less resistant to social or gender oppression. In fact, she innovates a model that depends upon feminine inspirations, which circulates among a group of young African-American girls. In presenting Black girls' collective leadership, Hamilton positions associated practices that influence the formation of identity to Black feminist activism. Feminocentric relationships between women, such as the friendship in *Bluish*, are considered part of feminist safe spaces. Collins stresses the emergence of activism through similar bonds:

> Traditionally, U.S. Black women's efforts to construct individual and collective voices have occurred in at least three safe spaces. One location involves Black women's relationships with one another. In some cases, such as friendships and family interactions, these relationships are informal, private dealings among individuals. (102)

Thus, Collins's suggestions of inspirational friendship are interconnected with leadership foundation in both models of The Justice Trilogy and collective activism in *Bluish*. Unlike the 1970s' model of individualistic adolescent leadership in The Justice Trilogy, the narrative of *Bluish* suggests a collective form of activism through which many Black girls can participate. Justice's primary intention through bonding with boys is to befriend them by revealing herself as an equivalent. On the other hand, in *Bluish* Dreenie, Natalie and Tuli locate one another as friends in a feminocentric bond before they realise how they can lead as activists. Resistance to silence prevails in Dreenie's group, but the narrative suggests that the suppression of girls' voices is controlled by other social tensions. In the leadership narrative explored in *Bluish*, Black girls are not confronted with gender oppression at home or school, but rather they encounter social tensions of other types. This does not imply that Black activism in the 1990s had totally overcome gender tensions. On the contrary, Hamilton's depiction of the micropolitics of oppression such as oppressed girls with disability in Natalie's case, or those with a traumatic condition of identity crisis like Tuli, demonstrate broader forms of social oppression. Hamilton's leadership narrative provides fewer sources of the larger circle of oppression or its origins, yet highlights the significance of various tensions regarding Black girls' identity and empowerment.

In *Bluish*, the narrative redefines conventional standards of voice articulation into agency, including Hamilton's own previous forms of leadership from the late 1970s' period. Dreenie and her group represent a communal agency that benefits from the power of the group. Placing Dreenie as the central figure in the unit, Dreenie is able to realise Natalie's and Tuli's need for verbal communication and to facilitate their process of voice recovery. Each member of Dreenie's leadership

group encounters resistance to silence. As the centre of the group, she notices elements of social helplessness in Natalie's and Tuli's behaviour, and helps them to articulate their own voices to achieve an enhanced understanding of themselves and the group's support. In observing the social behaviour of many Black students at school, Dreenie is able to understand how neglect and bullying towards the already traumatised Natalie, in addition to her physical fragility due to leukaemia, drive her into silence.

In *Bluish*, like many of Hamilton's coming-of-age novels, the connection between young Black girls' feminism and representations of artistic skills is explored. For example, while Tree in *Justice and Her Brothers* draws in her walk-in wardrobe, Dreenie writes her own journals and Natalie knits beautiful hats. Both protagonists in *Bluish* appreciate their own artistic skills for overcoming oppression or manifesting voice. Trites identifies feminist Kunstlerroman, a sub-genre developed by the German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethewhich that explores the development of children's talents into artistic skills such as drawing or poetry, as a means for young girls to communicate feminist aspects in children's literature. Dreenie owes her appreciation of other people's voices in communication to the strong set of ideas she acquires from writing journals. The robust stream of consciousness she documents in her journals emboldens her ability to articulate an affirmative voice. The book includes five of the ten-year-old protagonist's journals, with Hamilton opening the narrative by justifying, "This journal, excuse my mistakes. This is not for school. I'm not looking for a grade. Just all about Bluish" (8). In her first journal, Dreenie documents Natalie's undermining by others, "Natalie is this girl's name. But that's not what kids call her. Call her Bluish and grin and look at her hard" (7). Natalie is verbally bullied and nicknamed 'Bluish' because

of her illness, which leads to her blue-tinted skin. Understanding that the name signifies paleness and 'the blue veins all over', Dreenie begins to re-evaluate the callous labelling by the school community. In attempting to find a connection to herself and other healthy children, she declares that, "You can tell though, once she had some color" (8). In addition, Dreenie's description of Natalie marooned on the wheelchair after break, "Right in the middle of the hall. So when the buzzer rang we all had to go around her in her chair" (8), is a textual reference to Natalie's physical helplessness and although some children tried to push her wheelchair, it would not move because the brakes were set. The description of the need to 'go around her in her chair' implies the detachment of Natalie in the wheelchair as the children in the school hall move around her while ignoring her needs, "Because everybody is pretending not to see her" (9). Even before Dreenie realises that Natalie's silence is connected to her fragility caused by the physical trauma of leukaemia, her reflections on Ms Baker's words, "Natalie, do as much as you feel like. Don't try to do everything" (7), signify an understanding of Natalie's struggles with vulnerability. In her second journal, Dreenie writes about other kinds of objectification towards Natalie as one of the children shouts, "Who needs a vomiting kid in the class?" (35). She understands how even Natalie's continuous absence or vomiting in class is not sufficient to realise the empathy of others.

Dreenie's voice is also articulated through words, whereby in rejecting the passivity of her classmates in the classroom scene where Natalie vomits, she sounds robust and firm as she articulates a strong rebuke against the bullying children, "Shut up, Dassan!" (35). She recognises the power of her voice as she writes in her journal:

> When they get rowdy, they listen to me telling them to quit it, even though I haven't been in school that long–because I'm the biggest girl. Mommy says

> it's not my size, but that I have the way of a leader. So I told all of them to shut up and sit down. And most did. (35)

Dreenie explores how resistance to oppression can manifest through voice. Moreover, although Dreenie herself is not the one being directly oppressed, she is able to recognise the repressive acts towards another young female classmate and act accordingly by being defiant and expressing verbal rebukes. In addition, the representation of a leader being controlled by their size is shown to be a dubious form of subjecthood. Dreenie is informed through the dialogic connection to her mother that size, even if evaluated by schoolchildren as powerful, is irrelevant to a leading figure. The mother's role promotes the true expression of Dreenie's unspoken thoughts to reshape her impression of her self-image concerning impact, which Dreenie infuses into leadership terms after the school project ends.

In *Bluish*, the dialogic approach that Trites suggests in young-adult fiction functions as a collaborative effort by both Natalie and Dreenie. The discourse between the young girls explains how communication releases the strength within them, and particularly the powerless Natalie. In their first dialogue, Dreenie senses Natalie's wish to communicate with her when the latter offers to accompany her home. She interprets Natalie's reaction as an appeal for friendship, which empowers Natalie with the courage to start to speak for herself. The recovery of Natalie's voice manifests gradually as her friendship with the group develops, and more significantly with Dreenie's choice to include her in the school project despite her illness. In the school project Dreenie is the leading figure, allocating the tasks of going out to Broadway and photographing the streets of New York, distributing them equally between Natalie, Paula and Tuli. Dreenie's enthusiasm to include Natalie in actual cooperation helps the latter to develop her own voice. Thus, the accomplishment of

the school project is followed by Natalie releasing her own voice not only to Dreenie and the project team, but still further to include other classmates, and those who had formerly oppressed her.

Natalie's articulation of a voice reflects the impact of the activism in a girls' group on the voice of fragile members, where the voice of such traumatised or silenced members is either recovered or corrected. Natalie has a confused voice; one she uses to face bullies. In one incident after returning to class from the hospital, she responds with anger to Kevin Smith, a schoolboy who mocks her 'clinic smell', where she responds directly, "Airhead! Your pea-brain's crawling out the door!" (58). Most of the children in the class do not understand her responses nor cease bothering her, even though, "She always had something peculiar to say back when a kid was nosy or dumb-acting" (59-60). This miscommunication continues to confuse other children and misleads Natalie, who tries to express her deep resentment on different occasions. In the Christmas preparations in class, Natalie prepares a written message for the others in the class, "She clipped them to the sign and put the sign around her neck. The letters were squiggly, not as bold as on the other sign. I was born human. I'm named Natalie. Underneath that were tiny printed words: But you, can call me Blueish" (58-59). Natalie identifies both her own sense of individuality and also the need to clearly clarify this to others. She demonstrates courage in showing how flexible she can be regarding her nickname, provided that it only refers to her appearance and "not black and Jewish, B-l-e-w-i-s-h, like a bad word" (70).

Natalie's approach in communicating her voice with others changes following the inspiration of cooperative achievement in her school project. When Natalie decides to articulate her voice, she gains the agency of a leader who draws not only the group members together, but also the other classmates. She manifests

the possibility of gaining agency through disability. As Ms Baker announces, “Class. Natalie has something to tell you”, everyone expects a verbal expression from Natalie, who states, “So, since I’ve been home, we finished making knit hats for everybody here. My mom helped me” (65). As Dreenie documents the scene in a journal, she celebrates the triumph of Natalie by reflecting, “Can you believe it? Every kid smiled at her. And walked up to her, to give her five” (66). A more powerful expression of individuality is spoken out by Natalie at a later stage. After witnessing her classmates wearing the colourful hats she knitted, she softly declares, ““We’re a field of flowers . . . We are all the same; we’re different, too. Now you all look just like me.” She smiled, faintly” (80). Her previous sense of being long-suffering because of her fragility is no longer affecting her. On the contrary, she becomes occupied by an individualistic sense of power as she enforces influence that transforms her not only into an equal classmate, but also a source of inclusive strength and inspiration. Feeling empowered, Natalie’s statement, “Now you all look just like me” (80), is a reaffirmation of resemblance and inclusion in a large group of members and the breaking of a form of social tension that indirectly disregards children with special conditions. Through exploiting the skill of knitting to express a feminist will of inclusion, Natalie progresses by ensuring a power of expression that her classmates did not own.

The collective leadership pattern in *Bluish* is flexible and empowering, as it enables many individuals to participate in leading through influence. Dreenie, Natalie and Tuli are involved in a leadership pattern that expands to include more than merely a school project, by taking into account how the subjecthood of all the involved Black girls is demonstrated through the shared responsibility. Each one of them is enabled to play the role of a cooperating leader, who is able to inspire larger

groups of female and male adolescents. Natalie's role in the practice of girls' cooperative leadership unfolds in two ways. The first is demonstrated in her partially leading the classmates in the school project, while the other is focused on the power of influence and making an impact on her classmates by representing an emotional leader who establishes the means of resisting personal and physical weakness caused by trauma. Moreover, in similarity to the inclusion of Dorian in Justice's leadership, Tuli represents a fraught member of the group who is still given her share of responsibility. Assuming the role of a communal leader, Dreenie encourages Tuli to express her voice along with all the other children in class, and, "Tuli clutched her hands together, really tight. Dreenie saw her. "Come on, Tuli," she murmured. She knew what Tuli was thinking. Something like, "I get nothing, so why celebrate anything?"" (77). On another occasion and during the group work of The Big Apple Project, Tuli declares, "Max, ours is done. Look at that! First thing I ever helped make. Looking good!" (75). And although she often appears to be the most superficial in the group, they assign her to what they recognise as her special social skill:

> "Tuli's good at seeing everything on the street, and she can tell Paula a lot of things to write down."
>
> "I know everything between here and 113th Street," Tuli told them.
>
> "I kid you non!" "Knows everything and everybody. I've seen her," Dreenie said, matter-of-factly. (55)

As the closest to all the group members and the central figure in the leadership, Dreenie is able to comprehend that Tuli has something to share and always strives to learn, even when she does not understand everything. Dreenie also recognises Tuli's weakness concerning shared responsibility. Their development also

involves the role reversal of capital power from patriarchy to feminocentric power within their own oppressing communities.

The three girls' group work results not only in a successful school project, but also in the manifestation of a social level of activism within groups of students at school. The friendship they form with empathy and exposure to good communication leads them to channel their mutual impacts into communal activism, in which each of them leads by influencing others, while remaining cohesive. To consider the project, the major success is the communal understanding of achievement, which is signified in an understanding of the meaning of group work, ""Ours is the best," Bluish said, then whispered, "But don't tell. It's not a competition." They all agreed not to brag" (75). Supported by Ms Baker's guidance not to hurt anyone's feelings, the girls reflect on the essence of the project as social value that depicts the charm of New York's Broadway.

The impact they have on others after the completion of their project is also communal. The children in class are significantly influenced by the bravery of Natalie, who challenges her ill health by knitting hats for them all. The change she inspires is manifested in the positivity it triggers:

> Kids acted up, making faces. In spite of themselves, they admired themselves in the mirror on the wardrobe door. "We're a field of flowers," Bluish said softly . . . They looked at one another, looked at her. Nobody disagreed. Nobody laughed. (79)

Natalie's leadership power is manifested in the emotional impact she has on the other children, including those who had bullied her. They now admire their appearance because she has made them look fashionable and alike with the hats she

has knitted. On a larger scale, Natalie establishes terms of equality—sick and healthy, able-bodied and disabled—because they all have the ability and skills to achieve and make others happy, despite their differences. Nevertheless, in one of the final moving scenes in the novel, the group appears not only as one, but they also reveal to Natalie how she is instrumental in the group's power, "Dreenie made one for them: "Bluish is, because we are; we are, because Bluish — is — us!" "We, us," Willie said. "We, us." They all said it. Bluish whispered it, "We, us." Then they lifted their hands and let go" (122). The girls' power that Hamilton promotes in such scenes is meaningful to children because it depicts how difference may have an underlying power that can be found in a group's unity, where groups have and make an impact.

5.8 Conclusion

Girls' leadership is unfortunately a neglected topic, and leadership is not easy to define in children's literature, since it has experienced a changing history. This chapter seeks partially to redress this gap in knowledge. The process of Hamilton's young girls recognising their own subjecthood both individualistically, as in *Justice and Her Brothers*, or communally through *Bluish*, in the face of oppression constitutes feminist girlhood identity through adolescent activism. Transformed from being silenced to outspoken and from being socially challenged to becoming leading figures, Dreenie, Natalie and Justice are young adolescents who illustrate Hamilton's purposeful social realism in depicting models of young female children who "enact the agency that children in real life may not have" (Trites 29). The same protagonists cross into areas of leadership through completing the social circle that commences with friendship in both novels, whereby friendship in The Justice Trilogy creates connections with male figures, from which rebelliousness and influence can take

place. On the other hand, Dreenie's friendship with Natalie and Tuli establishes a feminocentric bonding in which the exchange of intellect, empathy and support become freely available to all. Through this exchange of power, the group members share concepts of influence. Whereas the traits of leadership are combined into one incredibly powerful girl who leads in *Justice and Her Brothers*, *Bluish* demonstrates a collaboration that does not need to be framed into a 'super girl'-type character. In a more realistic pursuit, the power of a group of girls represents the required strength, the everyday power of leading, and collective terms of Black communities. From the practices of telekinesis, clairvoyance or bike stunts in an imitation of boys, to the knitting of hats or accomplishing a multicultural project, young female adolescents have a more accessible gateway to power. The soothing movement from supernatural elements to socially realistic approaches provides a clear route for young African-American girls in their pursuit of leadership practices.

As Hamilton writes *Bluish*, she outwardly appreciates the literary value of contributing to the feminist foundation of the new century, one that associates with post-modern and post-colonial feminism. The transformed concept of young girls leading serves as a convenient standard, since young African-American females' quests need not require exotic efforts to have a voice and be resilient. Hamilton implies that there are lessons that have been learned from the previous decades, which are embodied in the understanding of how cooperative power presents a new style of leadership for young African-American girls. Such lessons echo the shifts in the Black-American community, such as the proclamation of Davis that, "We must climb in such a way as to guarantee that all our sisters, regardless of social class, and indeed all of our brothers climb with us. This must be the essential dynamic of our quest for power" (5). This wider perspective of inclusion is examined in Hamilton's

leadership narrative with the inclusion of voiceless Black children such as Dorian, Levi, Natalie and Tuli, adding another level of feminist understanding to childhood leadership. From this perspective, all children can participate in social or school-based activism.

Resistance through feminist adolescents' voice and leadership interrelates, to some extent, with powerlessness. The power gained by such silenced children teaches them how acquired power can be utilised to establish voices for all subjugated members. In The Justice Trilogy and *Bluish*, Hamilton's protagonists find their voices and overcome their own passivity to achieve leadership, while they strive to decode domestic and social tensions. The articulation of the protagonists' challenge is dragged from their own perceptions of social markers such as names, ethnicity and also their inner Kunstlerroman. In *Bluish*, both female protagonists—Dreenie and Natalie—experience moments of silencing, but continue to use art to express subjecthood and further make an impact on other children. Both girls share leadership roles in their unit. On the other hand, in *Justice and Her Brothers*, *Dustland* and *The Gathering* Justice socially and imaginatively advocates individualised girl power that is appropriate to the cultural conditions of the 1970s in order to lead a group of boys, including her twin brothers.

Chapter 6

Black Girls' Bodies in Hamilton's Fiction: Beauty, Culture and Ability

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine how Hamilton's narratives of the Black body in *Zeely* and *Bluish* decolonise Black women's bodies from the dominant distorted bodily images that have prevailed in the United States. I also explain how Hamilton's deconstruction of the stereotypical distorted bodily images takes place alongside alternative positive representations of Black female bodies. Regarding feminist identity, Hamilton's narratives incorporate Black adolescent characters who are appreciative of two social aspects of the Black body—beauty and ability. Such a rewriting of the Black body generates a socially dichotomous definition, one that includes the intersection of the body beautiful and the body disabled with Black feminism. These two basic categories of bodily lived experiences are discussed specifically within social discourses of race, age and gender, and the history of African-American females' bodily oppression. In this chapter, discourses of Black beauty and disability are discussed, as both are rooted in historical bodily representations of Black women. Bodies, according to Hamilton's narrative, are sources of resistance to raise or maintain powerful feminist identities, particularly through valuing the racial, cultural and personal identity developed within the beauty and/or pain of Black female adolescents. Both *Zeely* and *Bluish* include sources of resistance through beauty and disability. Hamilton creates empowering feminist principles in part by showing other body images than the stereotypes. These images are represented within narratives of beautiful Black bodies and/or bodies with

disabilities, where Black girls emerge as cultural agents of Black knowledge. Across thirty years of writing for Black children that commences with her first novel *Zeely* in 1967, and ends with *Bluish* in 1999, Hamilton adopts what transpires to be a detailed concern for the Black child's body, including gender, age and positive racial identity.

This chapter's analysis is shaped by two separate aspects that have influenced Black American girls—beauty and ability. For each part, three main sections are included. The first section encompasses the theoretical framework of the chapter, which addresses a number of Black feminist theories of both beautiful bodies and epistemology, and Black disability theory. The second is a historical discussion of the social and political contexts of Black girls' lived bodily experiences during the 1960s and 1970s. These historical accounts reflect on the social theories applied in the chapter. In the third section, the illustrations of both novels are analysed, both for the content of the illustrations and the narrative physical descriptions of female protagonists. For the sake of maintaining the thematic structure, I arrange the three sections for each category—body beautiful and body disabled. The first part is assigned for the discussion of beautiful Black bodies.

Because *Zeely* is an illustrated novel, I conduct an analysis of the illustrations included. Whereas for *Bluish*, illustration only appears on the front cover, displaying the diverse physical description of three Black girls' skin colours. In analysing the images in relation to the narrative content I intend to explore, I apply certain theorisation of picturebook illustration. The work of Perry Nodelman, which is grounded in children's illustrations, and also Desiree Cueto's and Wanda M. Brooks's critiques of Black children's books, help me interpret how representations of beauty and skin Blackness are important in Hamilton's narrative of the Black

female body. The analysis of image content, in both *Zeely*'s illustrations and *Bluish*'s cover, is essential to the narrative intended to illustrate features of the Black body. Working on image analysis in children's picturebooks, licensing and digital rights consultant Clare Painter explains how visual character attributes can challenge social stereotypes, stating that, "The depiction of story participants is generally a relatively straightforward matter and can be used to convey non-verbalized details of age, family role, ethnicity, social class, and gender through a human character's size, skin color, clothing, and hairstyle" (28-29). All the aspects Hamilton ascribes to the character's role are significant for breaking stereotypical images of Black women's bodies concerning identity formation through girls' beauty and colourism.[75] To address the centrality of beauty and children's confrontations of colourism in the narrative, Hamilton is selective in introducing visual factors that serve her purpose, whereby the illustrations in *Zeely* and *Bluish* convey explicit signposts of age, gender, race and status through clothing. The analysis in this chapter links the role of such factors to Hamilton's representations of feminist power.

6.2 The Black Beautiful Body and Black Feminist Epistemology

6.2.1 Beautiful Zeely and Black feminist epistemological narratology

Collins considers Black feminist epistemology in *Black Feminist Thought*, where her social theory presents an epistemic approach that defies images about Black women's bodies. It also creates a lead to protect Black girls' bodies from the underlying consequences of such distortion. The application of Collins's approach facilitates in understanding Black girls' feminist standpoints in Hamilton's narrative

[75] In *Search of our Mother's Garden* (1983), Alice Walker define colourism as the "prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color" (290). Walker's notion of colourism is a social criticism of Black communities' preference for a light-skin colour.

of *Zeely*, particularly through the presentations of beautiful Black bodies. In this chapter, Hamilton's decolonisation of the Black female body is read through Collins's epistemic approach because the latter explains the subjugation of Black women's bodies during slavery and post-slavery, and the need to reverse these negative images that prevailed and have been used against Black women. As a critical race theorist, Patricia J. Williams supports a similar stance to Collins regarding the imagery of Black women's bodies, where through her legal scholarship she claims, "Increasingly, I hear about cases that reason away part of living human bodies as "assets" that may be willfully disposed of; I read about judicial pronouncements that refer to women's wombs as "fetal containers"—as though we were packing crates or petri dishes or parking lots" (232). Williams shares Collins's view that such derogatory images infuse a range of social issues such as patriarchy and oppressive paternalistic intrusion. Social views of Black girls' bodies are affected by such cultural conditions. In a groundbreaking 2017 study[76] at Georgetown Law's Center on Poverty and Inequality, data reveals that adults view Black girls in the 5-to-14 age range as less innocent and more adult-like than their White peers (4). Through the police reaction to an incident via the violent restraint of a 15-year-old Black girl, the study exemplifies the bias that lies at the heart of the utter adultification of Black girls. One observer commented that Black girls' bodies are dehumanised and sexualised before they even reach puberty because of the continued stereotyping, which makes them a site of past and present traumas. The police officer saw himself confining a 'Black woman', with all the associated stereotypes and stigma, as opposed to a 'helpless teenage girl' (16).

One major premise of Collins's theory is that the best strategy to oppose the

[76] The study was conducted by Rebecca Epstein, Jamilia J. Blake and Thalia González in 2017.

objectification of Black women's bodies is to examine the history of their objectification and colonisation during the slavery era. Decolonisation[77] can be employed in social studies to investigate different perspectives regarding Black bodies. Audre Lorde's crucial place in the decolonisation discussion with the notion of needing a different set of tools to dismantle oppressive structures supports Collins's standpoint of the decolonisation of Black women's bodies. Lorde explains:

> Survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support. (19)

Lorde's understanding of 'tools' encompasses racial and patriarchal oppressions. She urges Black people to understand that they cannot use the oppressor's logic, which justifies their own historical oppression, to disrupt their own. In other words, challenging the limits of oppression and reclaiming their own tools of power over their lives and bodies is the road that leads towards decolonisation. Chandra Mohanty and M. Jacque Alexander define the process as one that "involves thinking oneself out of the spaces of domination, but always within the context of a collective or communal process" (xxviii). Accordingly, the

[77] The term 'decolonisation' was first coined by the German economist Moritz Julius, who established it as an academic concept in his article 'Imperialism', published in the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* in 1932 (Gardinier 1968).

connection between Black women's bodies and agency is that colonised bodies become producers of knowledge through the authority gained over their identities (xxviii). Shirley Anne Tate[78] reaffirms the same decolonial epistemic project by developing a decolonising approach to review the representations of Black women's bodies within popular culture as a corrective to this continuing coloniality of power. Tate's approach explains how the impact of colonialism still affects "the knowledges on/ of, power over and positioning of Black women's bodies" (8-9). I find the conceptualisation that the body is the primary site of power useful for the evaluation of the social agency of Black girls, because it is a method for liberating them from patriarchal oppressions and dominant cultural images if we consider Black female bodies as being influenced by the social constructions of biology (Grosz 3). Collins's theory offers the deconstruction of the dehumanising social images that Black women's bodies were bound to through history, by valuing the cultural knowledge that Black women gain, carry, express and transfer through their bodies. To reflect on Collins's theory, I consider two important factors that are critical to my analysis of Black girls' bodies in this section of the chapter. The first is that Collins's theorisation of Black epistemology addresses the intersectionality of oppressive social powers, ones that determine the positioning of Black women's bodies as either oppressed or empowered. Significant to the theme of this chapter, age is important as an intersectional factor when determining how Black female adolescents interpret these representations of female bodies regarding empowerment. The second factor is the type of cultural knowledge young Black girls empower themselves with. That is

[78] In *Black Women's Bodies and the Nation: Race, Gender and Culture* (2015), Tate explores Black women's bodies within popular culture in the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Caribbean in terms of the racialisation and descriptive analysis of muscle, bone, fat and skin colour, utilising the figure of the Sable-Saffron Venus.

to say, the type of knowledge analysed in this chapter is those Black stories narrated by Black girls, and which they heard from their mothers and foremothers, a perspective that Trites views as an element of cultural inclusion for Black girls, and which I explain in the next section. Collins justifies Black women's need for epistemological venues as an approach to depart from the challenging position in which they have long been historically located, "Living life as Black women requires wisdom because knowledge about the dynamics of intersecting oppressions has been essential to U.S. Black women's survival. African-American women give such wisdom high credence in assessing knowledge" (257). In considering both factors, Collins's theory will support my interpretation of the empowering role Black adolescents acquire through valuing their Black beauty and redefining themselves through knowledge.

Hamilton's *Zeely* includes a similar process of knowledge transformation by engaging young Black girls as knowledge presenters, and connecting that to their appreciation of Black beauty. One aspect of Collins's theory suggests that the optimum approach to negate the objectification of Black women's bodies is to scrutinise the histories of objectification during the periods of enslavement. A fundamental step in this process is the demonstration of knowledge embodied within Black women's bodies, a promising representation that challenges the distorted image of Black women. Collins asserts the impact of all exploitive practices including hard labour, sexual abuse and enforced breeding during slavery, and how this led to the objectification of bodies, and therefore misrepresentations of the feminist view of Black women's bodies. She indicates that Black women's bodies have been objectified and commodified under capitalist class relations in the United States. In reflecting on the current terms of how such history continues to create

demeaning bodily images, Collins explains that Black women's bodies have been exploited in many ways, such as, "employment discrimination, maintaining images of Black women that construct them as mules or objects of pleasure, and encouraging or discouraging Black women's reproduction via state intervention, [whereby] Black women's labor, sexuality, and fertility all have been exploited" (132). Accordingly, various positive representations of body/mind serve the purpose of deconstructing stereotypical images of Black women's bodies. Utilising the epistemological standpoint here is critical for this chapter's thesis, since my major investigation is how Black females, and particularly girls, need to confront bodily oppression and validate their own cultural knowledge. As Collins affirms, "I present Black feminist thought as subjugated knowledge in that African-American women have long struggled to find alternative locations and epistemologies for validating our own self-definitions" (269). Since the majority of Collins's discussion of intersectional oppression in her epistemology theory is concerned with bodily oppression, advocating Black females' knowledge suits the agenda of Black feminism in this chapter because its core interest is how knowledge bridges feminist terms like 'self-identification' and 'empowerment'. In Collins's theory, a solid connection between body and the authorisation of power emerges from Black adolescents representing their bodies as mediums and agents of knowledge. Post-colonial research of women's bodies refers to such knowledge carriers as "texts of culture" (Bordo 2360).[79] Susan Bordo explains their experiences as different, and she labels them as texts because, "different bodies are assigned to different locations, are

[79] Susan Bordo utilises this terminology in particular to discuss gender differences and their capacity to influence bodies' appearance and physical activities, arguing that rather than featuring "a fixed and enduring nature . . . bodies are plastic and change in response to the social demands placed on them", and female bodies are no different (Leitch 2360).

represented differently in prevailing cultural codes, and are accorded different authority as producers of knowledge" (2360). Borrowing from Bordo, the more that Black women's bodies can be decolonised, then the more positivism, intellectuality and Black heritage can prevail, which can then be used to gain agency.

In *Zeely*, bodily agency provides authority for an African-American adolescent, Zeely Tayber, allowing her to expose knowledge through her body of beauty within by introducing herself to other children as a beauty and cultural icon. Hamilton offers this agency in the power Zeely gains from her role as a narrator of Black folktales. In doing so, Zeely links Black girls of the 1960s and 1970s to their culture, while displaying iconic Black beauty herself.[80] Narratology and Black beauty connect through the adolescent Zeely, who recounts the Black version of Adam and Eve to young Elizabeth in the rural South during summer. The use of narrative to induce cultural aspects into Black children's feminist books seems appropriate, as it helps children to explore gender inclusion in the knowledge representations carried by Black beauty. Trites describes Zeely as an "intradiegetic"[81] narrator who is internally connected to the story but carries knowledge of only a portion of the narration. She celebrates the use of a female child's role as an interior narrator as a method to "employ narrative structure to communicate ideological discourses of race, gender, and age to the implied reader" (148). Zeely's stories narrated to Elizabeth are part of the Black mythical culture that reflects the pride in both Black beauty and Black knowledge. Furthermore, while

[80] This period represents a transition for the author through moving to New York and nationally witnessing the media's embrace of new images of Black beauty and Black power activism in children's literature. Moreover, even after the more than fifty years since the publication of *Zeely*, the author's evaluation reflects the contemporary public's reception of the current image of Black women's bodies in popular culture.

[81] This term was coined by the French narratology structuralist Gerard Genette in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (1988).

Zeely narrates the story, she represents codes of Black culture in clothes, thus inflecting ethnicity in her stories.

6.2.2 Zeely and Black girls' bodies in the 1960s and 1970s

The following account of Black women and girls' experiences during the second half of the twentieth century is intended to historicise the misrepresentations of Black bodies as inferior and unworthy. The reflection of girls' experiences is significant for those social theories considering Black women's bodies concerning oppression. The influence of the social and political movements of the period on the lives of Black girls in Hamilton's narrative includes two major factors—the dehumanising experiences of Black girls' bodies under the socio-economic circumstances continuing in post-slavery periods, and the influence of the political and socio-political movements on the reclaiming of Black bodies' pride and reaffirmation. The first factor is critical for Hamilton's reflection on the feminist identity in the children's narrative and how this is processed in the light of resistance and the memory of bodies. During the 1960s, the period when she wrote *Zeely*, the social and economic facets of Black people's lives changed significantly, primarily in the Southern states, due to the Jim Crow laws and the Civil Rights Movement (1954–1968). Because Black children encountered harsh social and political circumstances, the exploitation of female children's bodies under work in the plantations or even excessive work in their homes or those of their relatives was typical and continued until the early 1960s. Jennifer Ritterhouse's *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (2006) explains how Black adolescents often had to work before they had even reached adolescence, such as Geraldine Davidson

who started to work in the field at the age of seven.[82] In the context of Black girls who had to work in other roles, Ritterhouse adds, "Like the majority of adult black women who worked for wages outside agriculture, African American girls most often found jobs as maids, babysitters, or cooks in white homes" (187). In addition to the exploitive work Black girls suffered, Ritterhouse's documentation portrays the intersection of race, class, age and gender. The distinction in the interpretation of children's gendered experiences helps to understand how young Black girls were discriminated against. Along with the interwoven consequences of Black girls working domestically in the houses of Whites, such young girls were exposed to sexual assaults and violence at a young age. Ritterhouse declares when discussing girls' work, "With all the problems black women and girls faced as domestic servants, none was more difficult than the problem of sexual exploitation by [the] white male" (196). She later adds, "black, as well as white men could pose a threat to black women and girls who had little protection from sexual assault regardless of the assailant's race" (203). The situation in Black urban centres was also devastating for Black children who in addition to the pressures of labour suffered racial oppressions, as depicted in Venus E. Evans-Winters's *Teaching Black Girls: Resiliency in Urban Classrooms,* Ladner's *Tomorrow's Tomorrow* and Ritterhouse's *Growing up Jim Crow*. Racial hierarchies, as described by Evans-Winters, caused suffering in Black childhoods during the 1960s, "For blacks, sheltering necessarily began (although it certainly did not end) with protecting children from racist whites" (62-63). Regarding work, Ladner claims that the absence of child-labour laws in the United

[82] Ritterhouse also documents the impressions of girls about their experiences, such as Geraldine who states, "I had twin brothers and I had a baby brother, and [my mother] would have me staying home with them during the time when they were chopping cotton" (184). Ritterhouse also explains other responsibilities of the young child such as pumping water and bringing it to the field, killing any snakes she encountered with a short-handled hoe provided by her mother, and eventually being promoted to cropping the cotton in the field (184).

States from 1870 to around 1910 led to a paucity of protection for primarily lower-class Black children in urban areas, who were responsible for the household maintenance (45). Evans-Winters[83] concludes that the impact of Black children's physical and mental oppressions in the context of working-class backgrounds had linguistic and cognitive implications, whereby strong academic attainment was not possible. Reflecting on such historical account, it is plausible to interpret Hamilton's narrative as an attempt to transform such childhood history into a pragmatic action towards young girls' redemption of the true value of their previously or subsequently exploited bodies. Such an intersection of age serves to shape Collins's theory, and my analysis of Hamilton's adolescent bodily experiences.

The connection between oppressive work and bodily objectification imposed an additional burden on Black girls from lower classes. They lacked satisfactory education and self-worth opportunities from the 1950s through to the 1970s, while the Black middle-classes in the same societies began providing formal education for their children (Ladner 45). When considering Black girls being pushed to the knowledge periphery, the link to Collins's standpoint emphasises the notion that the multiple pressures faced by Black females, including race, gender and class oppression, provided Black women with a level of resistance to challenge their marginalised status. Concerning economic abuse, she reveals how exploited Black bodies can seek empowering knowledge and discard any type of knowledge that degrades and objectifies Black women. The educational conditions of Black youth during the 1970s resulted in demeaning education, or as Ritterhouse describes, rural

[83] In *Teaching Black Girls: Resiliency in Urban Classrooms*, Evans-Winters describes that "By the 1950s and 1960s, concepts like cultural deprivation, cultural deficit, and disadvantaged emerged in the educational literature, the concepts were used in psychological research to claim, because of linguistic and cognitive deficits, groups of children mostly children of color from working class backgrounds, were incapable of high academic achievement" (11).

children were hindered from ‘proper education’ because of the intersecting oppressions including the long hours of labour (186). Johnson describes Black children’s education approaches of discipline as destructive to the intellectual development of Black students, who most likely found it unappealing to attend school (122), whereby “A traditional, lifeless curriculum; the harsh, unintelligent disciplinary punishment; and the emphasis upon rote learning must share the blame with poverty for excessive retardation, and for the unrest and dissatisfaction of Negro youth” (134). This is typical of the type of degrading knowledge that Collins denounces. Hamilton’s narrative in both novels draws attention proportionally to the significant epistemic role that emanates from educational and non-educational institutions. In involving the role of the New York magnet schools[84] in the 1990s narrative of *Bluish*, as I explain later, Hamilton stresses the significance of structured public education devoted to children of colour. Moreover, these roles are linked to Black adolescents witnessing intersecting elements affecting their bodily practices such as beauty and disability.

The socio-political movements of the 1960s and 1970s also connected Black girls to ideologies of the Black body. The Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s integrated the social movement of Black is Beautiful, where many of the ideas of Black is Beautiful originate, and a demand for the equality of the Black body. The movement broadly correlated with the Black feminist identity[85] in regards to the

[84] Magnet schools appeared during the 1960s and 1970s as a reaction to the segregation in the American South’s educational institutions.

[85] Hazel Carby criticises the movement of Black Power that emerged from the Civil Rights Movement for being too masculine. In *Race Men* (1998), Carby scrutinises the writings of early representatives such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Cornel West and Henry Louis Gates, claiming that their work and political activities determined codes of masculinity, which thus led to the movement being dismissive of Black women as leaders and intellectuals.

representation of the Black body. Black is Beautiful[86] itself developed from the heart of the second feminist wave to generate a broader meaning of beauty and the reconstruction of body image. According to hooks, the Black Power movement of the 1960s was interwoven with the slogan as it, "intervene[d] in and alter[ed] those racist stereotypes that had always insisted Black was ugly, monstrous, undesirable" (120). It is important to consider hook's intervention regarding the self-definition and self-esteem of Black children. Hooks also claims that Black children were, "psychologically wounded in families and/or public school systems because they were not the right color" (122). This social campaign aimed at celebrating Black pride through beauty and fashion, and was primarily educational and instructive to young girls growing up in the challenging racial climate in the United States, and the standards of beauty that ignored people of colour. Black is Beautiful as a movement established not only the celebration of Black body, hair and skin as an opposing response to the dominant White beauty standards, but also targeted the reconstruction of self-image amongst Black girls for the purpose of stimulating Black pride. Miss Black America (1968), for instance, was started by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as a reaction to the exclusion of Black girls from the Miss America beauty contest during the 1960s. Maxine Leeds Craig affirms the power of the contest, claiming that, "When the NAACP staged the first Miss Black America contest, they challenged centuries of stereotypically racist depictions of black women as ugly and vulgar" (93). Such

[86] Black is Beautiful is a slogan of power and achievement involving, particularly in Hamilton's *Zeely*, feminist perspectives of Black pride power that emerge from the challenging beautiful representations of Black women's bodies. The movement also celebrated the variety of beauty in Black women's bodies by promoting large and tightly curled black hair, facial features, and dark skin. In enfolding the characteristics of power, Hamilton adds the superior size of Black girls as influence and power, while in a later section her size-superior Black females are discussed to explain the continuous political impact of the movement.

intervention is focal as it led to new representations of beautiful Black women as educated and representative of their culture, and their inclusion in feminist discourses. Meeta Jha underscores the role of the movement:

> Dominant beauty standards in the US have positioned and continue to position black girls and women as less beautiful, less feminine, and less human if they possess darker skin and African hair texture and facial features. For generations of black women, the choice of hairstyle such as an Afro was part of political action challenging the devaluation of Blackness, black bodies, and black women's beauty. (31)

Black girls feeling inferior and having low self-esteem regarding their bodies was considered in the literary domains with the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement and the efforts of many Black feminists such as Davis, hooks, Collins and others to affirm the racial and feminist identity of Black girls. Jha also affirms the role of Black intellectuals and artists in recreating a Black cultural aesthetic that gives new meaning to Blackness. This is achieved by defying images of Black people as subhuman and uncivilised, while reconstructing Black culture, ethnicity, and identity through the mobilisation of historical knowledge (37).

The movement's orientations towards such impact on Black children is carried by Hamilton's first book during the 1960s. Representing the start of her narrative career, Hamilton opens with the publication of *Zeely* in 1967 as a reflection of the needs of Black girls to recognise the powerful reality of the Black female's body. Hamilton's participation in the decolonisation of Black adolescents' bodies comes as part of the Black feminist conscience. The 'mobilising historical knowledge' in addition to 'Black culture' and identity are the components of the epistemic knowledge that Black girls can articulate through positive bodily image,

one that Collins defends against the objectification of Black women's bodies. Therefore, in a major section of her feminist epistemological standpoint theory, Collins praises the role of all Black females as 'agents of knowledge'. She explains, "Compared to the past, many more U.S. Black women became legitimated agents of knowledge. No longer passive objects of knowledge manipulated within prevailing knowledge validation processes, African-American women aimed to speak for ourselves" (266).[87] Concerning the resistance of oppression, being a cultural knowledge agent Zeely also resists domestic oppression, which enables new definitions of Black girls' bodies through both beauty and culture.

In addition to the socio-political and socio-economic contexts of Black females' adolescent lives, Hamilton's vision of rewriting the Black body as a source of power and knowledge is influenced by the lack of literary representations of Black children's bodies, skin and race during the 1960s in children's books. Hamilton's narrative of Black girls' bodies is thus reasonably pioneering when considered in the context of the paucity of books concerning Black children in general. While images of Black children declined from the late 1930s[88] through to the late 1950s, with virtually no subsequent representation through to 1964, a dramatic increase from the late 1960s to the early 1970s was experienced (Pescosolido, Grauerholz and Milkie 443-446). Black authors who wrote for Black children during the 1960s were rare.

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[87] In explaining her thought, Collins affirms the role of social movements during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s in stimulating an enormous shift in the intellectual and political climate in the United States concerning Black women's knowledge power.

[88] While early twentieth-century publications by White authors like Mary White Ovington's *Hazel* (1913) and *Zeke* (1931) praised middle-class and rural Southerner African-Americans in terms of physical beauty and education, the nineteenth-century books written by White authors were particularly problematic. Harriet Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) depicted Black female bodies as essentially inferior and later at last 1890s Helen Bannerman published *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (1899) representing degrading and ugly images of Black children's physical features.

Probably the most critically celebrated publication is *Stevie* (1969) by John Steptoe, but the social realism the book is celebrated for involves a young Black boy baby-sitting, and is thus not a direct approach involved in race, colour or the Black body. The first popular attempt to represent the Black child is ascribed to a non-Black author, Ezra Jack Keats in *Snowy Day* (1962), who introduces race-free illustrations of a child, Peter, joyfully playing in winter. The careful representation of the Black child's body in 1967 by Hamilton is in a somewhat similar manner to Keats, but on a gendered level. Her narrative conveys messages to Black girls but without directly involving them in political tensions. Also similar to Keats, Hamilton's narrative depicts Black children in a race- and antagonism-free zone. Keats's book is one of the early picturebooks that illustrates a Black boy as a single character playing in the white snow without any racial implications, conflict or hardship. The positivism of the pureness and innocence of the Black child appealed to many Black activists of the (much earlier) Harlem Renaissance and was revivified in the 1960s.[89] Hamilton further reviews the body of the child and childhood as a social construct rather than a material being controlled by physicality and materialism.[90] Thus, even when she makes the cultural connections to the history of Black women's bodies in colonial and post-colonial literature to determine identities, Hamilton does so to explain identity reshaped or determined by resistance, and by rearticulating cultural knowledge. A small number of African-American authors of that period or shortly

[89] According to Tyler Sasser, responses by activists and authors like Langston Hughes, Ellen Tarry, Grace Nail Johnson and Charlemae Hill Rollins confirm the emergence of the political uses of Black childhood innocence. Published several years later, Hamilton's novels probably came as a reaction to the influence of peaceful innocence in Keats's work, as other Black authors attempted. Sasser, for instance, indicates that Tarry's attempt to parallel her efforts and those by other Black writers of children's literature corresponds to the impression of Keats's impact, as his work, "participates in the positive representation of Black children" (373).

[90] See Gavin's "The Child in British Literature: An Introduction" (2012), Horne's *History and the Construction of the Child in Early British Children's Literature* (2011) and Lesnik-Oberstein's *Children's Literature: Criticism and the Fictional Child* (1994).

thereafter depicted the Black body in children's literature. *Color Me Dark: The Diary of Nellie Lee Love* (2000) by Patricia McKissack featured skin colour representations in the form of the eleven-year-old Nellie's experience of colourism by her inner Black community during her family's migration to Chicago in 1919. Meanwhile, Rosa Guy wrote about Black girls and colourism in the life of a young Black adult, Desire, in *My Love, My Love: Or, The Peasant Girl* (1985).[91] In a different representation of racism in Mississippi, Mildred D. Taylor wrote many books depicting the victimisation of many Blacks because of the colour of their skin.[92]

6.2.3 The representation of Black girls' bodies in Hamilton's Zeely: illustration and narrative

On a general scale, many of Hamilton's novels represent young female African-American characters who are associated with distinguished physical characteristics such as superiority in size and height, which she purposefully promotes in introducing Black role models. The principle notion of initiating role models for young children is the recognition of the importance of drawing attention to attractive figures and young girls achieving power.[93] As an early African-American children's author, Hamilton pays attention to the psyche of children's bonding, in addition to

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[91] Guy's story is inspired by *The Little Mermaid* (1837) by Hans Christian Andersen and represents Desire, a Black girl who suffers rejection by the family of the aristocratic young man whose life she saves and then falls in love with, because she is too dark and poor for him.

[92] See Mildred D. Taylor's famous series comprising *Song of the Trees* (1975), *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976), *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (1981), *The Road to Memphis* (1990) and *The Land* (2001).

[93] Karen K. Dion and Ellen Berscheid examine the relationship between physical attractiveness and peer perception at an earlier period of peer interaction, in an environment where children initiate personal acquaintance. The study reveals that young children from the age of four favoured and selected those peers who exhibited particular social behaviours, and that unattractive children were relatively less popular than attractive children. In fact, attractive children tended to be perceived as more self-sufficient and independent in terms of behaviour than their less attractive counterparts (1).

enforcing the positivism of Black girls' images. She employs an African-American role model that serves the dual purpose of enlightening female children of African beauty and the force of culture she carries within. In addition to promoting broad standards of the physical beauty of skin Blackness and hair, Hamilton generally creates feminist role models who enjoy superior height. The fourteen-year-old Teresa Pratt, for example, is known as Tree because she is taller than the average adolescent girls in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*. Meanwhile, the consequent upmothering practices she performs for an older brother become somehow plausible to the child audience of the 1980s, who might find such behaviour somewhat overbearing for a young adult.[94]

Hamilton's feminist canon avoids gender imbalances by creating narratives of the Black body celebrating the ability of the male body,[95] and the power of the communal body. Nevertheless, in *The People Could Fly*, Hamilton's rewrites African-American folktales in terms of defining Black people's powerful bodies. The narrative suggests both the natural and the supernatural ability of Sarah and Toby, who exploit the power of their physical bodies and fly. Sarah's bodily abilities are challenging as she combines work and mothering tasks, "Now Sarah carried a babe tied to her back. She trembled to be so hard worked and scorned" (5). The physical price Black women paid as mothers during slavery is ameliorated by the futuristic ability of the same women, liberating themselves from oppression by

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[94] African-American physical beauty is also used as the frame for a friendship plot in *Cousins*, where Cammy dislikes her cousin Patty Ann because she is very pretty and too perfect to be a friend. Although the theme of bodily beauty is not resolved in the first book of the series, it introduces the concept of Black role models for female adolescents and how physical beauty can be appealing to young girls, in a similar manner to that seen in *Zeely*.

[95] Hamilton represents Black pride through glorifying the physicality of Black male athletes, both juvenile and adult, in terms of achievements. In writing biographies like *Paul Robeson: The Life and Times of a Free Black Man* (1975), she reveals the role of the Black male's body, specifically as a fugitive slave who becomes a famous athlete and communist.

taking to the air (a common metaphor for feminist liberation in the 1960s and 1970s).[96]

Concerning specific illustrations of physical descriptions depicting Black girls' bodies in *Zeely*, Hamilton employs cultural camouflage[97] to recreate the presentation of Black girls' knowledge through beauty. The Black art through visual images created by Syeomn Shimin in the novel are important in exploring beauty as a prefatory lead into the theme of knowledge. As beauty representations are commonly concrete, this makes the phenomenon integral to the reader's experience and understanding of Zeely as a beautiful and a knowledgeable agent. To support Black girls' appreciation of the beauty of Black girls' bodies, she provides what Bishop refers to as "dignifying images of Black people's images in children's literature" (11), which help them to understand how cultural sharp edges such as the rejection of Black bodily beauty can be identified and shifted into positive representation. Following Kristofer Hansson's notion that, "the individual must learn to know when it is important to blur these edges—which can be either a conscious or unconscious process" (122), Hamilton discloses not only the charm of Black female bodies, but more significantly the knowledge they can produce while presenting as beautiful.

In *Zeely*, Hamilton concentrates on the visualisations of the Black beauty of skin, size and fashion as the thematic map for exploring African-American cultural

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[96] The illustration of the superpowers of women's labour and the ability of the communal body represented in a group of people in flight facilitates our understanding of Hamilton's general attention to decolonising Black female bodies.

[97] The term 'camouflage' is used broadly by Kristofer Hansson with many connotations and synonyms such as 'disguise', 'mask', 'hide', 'conceal', 'obscure', 'cover-up', and 'to create a façade or smoke-screen'. What the terms have in common is that they underscore how something can be concealed from recognition. Camouflage therefore helps to convey how an individual can mask and hide differences, stigmas, or abnormalities.

knowledge. Hamilton associates the manifestation of Black knowledge and culture to Black girls' feminist identity, which is best interpreted through the cultural camouflage she offers as the knowledge claimed by young Black females' travels through tiers of resistance to cultural forces such as race, gender, class and age. In the narrative and illustrations of Zeely's character, Hamilton utilises body beauty as an attraction to young girls who are typically fascinated by role models. Regarding illustration, the first edition of *Zeely* by the Macmillan Publishing Company in 1967 includes, in addition to the book cover (see Fig. 8 in Appendix 1), a total of six images of the protagonist Zeely's body and face by the great illustrator Shimin (see Figs. 9-14). The rest comprise four images of Elizabeth and her brother, John. In the interpretation of the raw physical descriptions, the significance of the Black female's body carrying beauty and knowledge simultaneously leads to terms of feminist gender and intellectual challenges.

The images intersect with the descriptive narrative of the beautiful Zeely and the powerful image she reflects through her appearance. Such reflections are scaffolding for the support of Blackness in children's books. Cueto and Brooks advocate for Black authors and illustrators' efforts in "Drawing Humanity: How Picturebook Illustrations Counter Antiblackness" (2019), claiming that although less recognised, "illustrations created by Black artists commonly challenge societal norms that promulgate antiblackness through portrayals of Black children in previously unseen lights" (41). Zeely's images highlight different aspects of a dignified Black female adolescent living on a farm, but still represent a new image of Black girlhood that fractures Black women's stereotypes that arose during slavery and sharecropping. The visual illustrations of the novel are therefore classified into two main feminist principles—the gender challenge, and the power and pride that

Black beauty generates.

The familiarisation of the powerful beauty of the Black body is Hamilton's initial approach for introducing epistemic cultural knowledge by a Black female adolescent. Embodying Black adolescent beauty in the character of Zeely, Hamilton introduces Black women's skin and height as attractively associated with the racial pride effect presented on the front cover. The size of the six-foot-tall Black female Zeely has a direct impact on other adolescents around the same age, initially Elizabeth and her younger brother John, as they appear with her on the cover (see Fig. 8). The stolid expression on Zeely's face reflects a neutral powerful impression of pride of her black, tall, and slender structure as she strides purposefully forward. The impression of a Black girl, who appears to possess the height, neck and posture of a modern African model on a catwalk, is one that carries cultural meanings of beauty, power and pride for Black girls and boys. The influence of Zeely's appearance as a dark Black adolescent[98] develops to provoke thoughts that appear with the first imagery of Zeely on page 28 (see Fig. 9). Captured during the night, her ghostly appearance emphasises the Blackness of her skin as she is glimpsed by Elizabeth from a distance. The contrast between Zeely's Blackness, the night and the whiteness of her long robe makes her more visible, yet ambiguous as a human. The explicit referencing of race power is manifested in attaching the white colour to the black skin shade. The contrasting backgrounds, and the dress as a white object, force the reader to first appraise the white fabric adorning Zeely's body. Zeely's tall body appears in a traditional white African dress. Symbolically, 'white' exists in the scene only to enhance the beauty of the black skin and height, as opposed to overwhelming

[98] Hamilton's beautiful Zeely resembles the contemporary twenty-five-year-old African-American model Nyakim Gatwech, referred to in the media as the 'Queen of the Dark' for having the darkest skin colour and being the most highly paid model.

it in the social terms of Black-versus-White racial tensions. If we are to consider whiteness as a pointer to White race affecting the life of all Black people, it would be appropriate to interpret the night scene as race-empowering, particularly in the light of the earlier emergence of the Civil Rights Movement and Black is Beautiful.[99] Advocates of the use of Black critical race theories, such as Dumas and Ross in "'Be Real Black for Me': Imagining BlackCrit in Education", suggest that race can be drawn into visual communication with critical theory to allow the portrayal of Black children to challenge antiBlackness (11).[100] Symbolically, a white dress as a reference to White dominance is benign and the sense of Black beauty is magnified, without being obscured. The image further displays Elizabeth's astonishment as a viewer, with the textual narrative explaining that, "something tall and white was moving down the road . . . The white, very long figure made a rustling sound when she held her breath" (29). As Zeely's black and white shadow appears softly and then disappears, Elizabeth is depicted as overwhelmed by the abstract beauty she encounters. Elizabeth's encounter, although tinged with fear regarding the vague white shadow, leaves her impressed and motivated to create night tales about travellers passing by. When she meets Zeely the following day, she immediately admires her, "Thin and deeply dark as a pole of Ceylon ebony. She wore a long smock that reached to her ankles. Her arms, hands and feet were bare" (31). Elizabeth is so amazed that she "couldn't say what expression she saw on Zeely's

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[99] According to Maxine Craig in *Ain't I a Beauty Queen? Black Women, Beauty, and the Politics of Race* (2002), the appreciation of the skin blackness is a reflection of the national pride of acceptance of the dark skin tone, even before Black is Beautiful emerged during the mid-1960s.

[100] Michael J. Dumas's work on Black critical race theory in illustration is primarily covered in "Against the Dark: Antiblackness in Education Policy and Discourse", Dumas and Nelson's "(Re)Imagining Black Boyhood: Toward a Critical Framework for Educational Research" and Dumas and Ross's "'Be Real Black for Me': Imagining BlackCrit in Education". I only refer to it in this chapter because Dumas focuses on the educational purposes of the theory, instead of the analysis of images.

face. She knew only that it was calm, that it had pride in it, and that the face was the most beautiful she had ever seen" (32). Pride and beauty comprise Elizabeth's initial thoughts about Zeely, and as a girl from the late 1960s Elizabeth expresses an intuitive reaction that is neither biased nor tainted by other forms of skin-colour stratifications. Although she is not yet introduced to what lies beneath Miss Tayber's skin, Elizabeth's first impression informs her later thoughts to make connections to Zeely's cultural messages. The appearance of Zeely on both the cover and in Figure 9 is aided by strong impressions of empowerment and positivity. The lateral movement in both images conveys the protagonist's movement from left to right, which indicates the value of time and text's language. Nodelman suggests that the convention of such movement in illustrations is powerful and implies the progress of characters (164). In Western culture, the movement from left to right indicates, in addition to chronological progress, an orientation to the future. Pictorial direction is connected to the direction of the language (Schwarcz 30), since in books, video games and line graphs time progresses along with the momentum from left to right. The movement of characters, particularly of those protagonists like Zeely who control the action of a story, expresses the normality of progression. Such a mechanism in the context of a children's narrative is critical to Black children's racial and cultural progression.

The second and the third illustrations decode Zeely's feminist resistance to domestic oppressive patriarchy as a young Black girl. This begins in the farm (see Fig. 10) when she appears standing tall feeding the pigs. While fulfilling her chores, Zeely towers over everything around her. Physical size and muscle tone matter in the scene, as this reaffirms the strength in her posture. The narrative reflects Elizabeth's inner thoughts when she first caught sight of the farmer Zeely, where "she stood tall

and straight, with a long shadow of herself thrown by the sun towards the animals" (44). In addition, it mirrors a more fashionable and confident version of Black women working in plantations, as she wears a long robe and stands straight while fulfilling her tasks. Her decision to engage as a pig farmer appears to be her own choice of work because she defends it against her father's violence. Resistance is displayed in the next illustration (Fig. 11), when Zeely appears confronting her father, Nat Tayber, in a defensive posture whereby she grips his wrist, pushing him and his hold of the pole away. Although Zeely's father is taller, her strength in the scene emerges from the use of her body to defend herself and the pigs. Challenging repressive patriarchy via the power of the body reaffirms the Black body's value as a form of resistance. Zeely's confrontation, witnessed by other girls on the farm, delivers a visual lesson of young adolescents' ability to oppose domination and control regardless of the physical superiority of the oppressor. Her success in overcoming her father's grip and control challenges the social norms and appears incredible to the Black people of the town, who accuse her of being supernaturally empowered with witchcraft.

African fashion frames Hamilton's narrative of Black beauty and power. Authentic and contemporary adolescent styles are engaged in the self-representations of both protagonists, Zeely and Elizabeth, with the purpose of such demonstration not to limit Black adolescent girls to certain trends, but rather to provide Black styles that revive cultural codes relevant to the Black body image. Although Zeely represents a typically African dress code, which links to racial identity, Elizabeth's fashion is more rebellious and gender neutral, emphasising a feminist principle that deals with the freedom of choice and the ability to break common norms of gender representation. Later, Elizabeth introduces her own impression of Black beauty as

she explores the cultural connections of fashion in history (see Fig. 12), showing a magazine photo of a Watutsi queen to the town girls, and justifying the resemblance between the royal Black woman and Zeely, with the latter thus having royal progeny. In fact, Zeely's Black beauty standards that Elizabeth proudly relates to the town's adolescents were those dominant during the 1960s and 1970s. Hamilton promotes the beauty of black skin and features that was beginning to be commodified in the media and fashion worlds during the 1960s. The role of the media during this period of celebrating Black beauty and culture emerges through its influence on Elizabeth and the other girls closely observing. As the magazine distinguishes the traditional Black beauty with its orthodox fashion, black skin beauty attracted the business of modelling to include many Black supermodels. The interest actually began during the 1950s with the emergence of the first Black model in France, Dorothea Towles, one of the top models favoured by elite names in fashion such as Pierre Balmain and Christian Dior. Many other Black models appeared in the media during the 1960s and 1970s, and enrolled themselves in knowledge endeavours.[101] Hamilton's description of Zeely's character provides a role model that connects Black girls such as Elizabeth and the town girls to the level of universal recognition that the beauty of Black girls attain. Hamilton also creates the association between Zeely and the collective sense that hook and Collins advocate in their feminist theories.

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[101] Black supermodels Sara Lou Harris and Donayale Luna were considered as some of the world's most beautiful women during the 1960s. Many of these models appeared before Hamilton's publication of *Zeely*, and probably aided her cause in advertising the epistemic goal of Black women gained through beauty. The role that these models played extends beyond exhibiting or carrying beautiful Black bodies. Towles, for instance, adopted the role of educating Black girls about the Black beauty lines and trends by organising fashion shows at Black colleges, displaying her own couture line. The confession she makes five decades after her retirement to WWD magazine is that, "For once I was not considered Black, African-American or Negro. I was just an American". Moreover, in holding a master's degree from Columbia University in New York, Harris was the first African-American model to be selected for a national advertisement, changing the perception of Black women's faces from one of slaves and housemaids, to elite examples of beauty.

On the other hand, the scene in Figure 13 suggests that urban Elizabeth is dressed in a rebellious manner, even when taking into account the emerging feminist wave during the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement era. As a period when fashion truly became a means of visual communication,[102] the fashion trends were short dresses and miniskirts as a sign of rebellion, in addition to the African-American dashikis, while women wore geles[103] over their heads to express Black pride during 1965.[104] In keeping with the same sense of African pride, Zeely wears the same attire as a cultural symbol all the time. Her conventional sense of fashion associates with the type of knowledge and cultural narrative she carries. In Figure 13 she wears a long varicoloured silk wrapped around her tall body and left to drape over her shoulder, with her head styled with a silk band and her appearance rendering Elizabeth amazed. Although the illustration promotes the cultural dress codes of Black adolescents, the confrontation of the two girls offers Elizabeth's rebellious appearance as a counter-option for Black girls.

A critical moment whereby the impression of beauty shifts into an impression of cultural knowledge through storytelling, is the second encounter between the protagonists seen in Figure 14. This transformation is explained in the narrative, but the image suggests a smooth bonding between the two. The girls meet in a gap in the forest and Zeely retains the traditional long African robe, knowing how it impresses Elizabeth. Shown as she sits calmly to face Elizabeth with both hands settled on her

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[102] See Mary Vargas's "Fashion Statement or Political Statement: The Use of Fashion to Express Black Pride during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the 1960's".

[103] Also see Maxine Craig (2277).

[104] An explosion of culture within the African-American community during the late 1960s caused some to begin wearing dashikis and other types of African-American clothing, made of the African-American textile known as kente cloth. The afro hair style, blue jeans, the miniskirt and the dashiki are just some of the fads that defined one of the greatest eras of all time; the era where the revolution was born.

knees, Zeely maintains a subtle look of pride on her face, indicating that she leads the conversation. The girls meet at Zeely's request after the news spreads of Elizabeth speculating about Zeely's royal roots. This bonding is identified by Cueto and Brooks as a means through which social distance, orientation and the attitude of characters evoke the reader's antipathy towards antiBlackness, which facilitates the opportunity to sense Black children's worth and dignity (53). When Zeely meets Elizabeth, the social distance is controlled by the change from previous images; they are sitting together, and Elizabeth approaches in close proximity to Zeely. The visual expression indicates the bond established between the two girls, enabling the ease of communication through dialogue, while the impression of Black beauty becomes the power ruling and constituting a transformation of thoughts. During their meeting, Zeely exposes herself to Elizabeth as a storyteller of Black folktales, a pivot point in Hamilton's narrative that redirects Elizabeth's thoughts regarding personal and cultural aspects.

The narrative of *Zeely* connects the illustrations of the Black girls' bodies to the cultural knowledge they embody. The epistemic power that Collins advocates depends on two major interwoven elements explored in Hamilton's narrative—Zeely's narratology and the ideology of the shared collective experiences of Black girls through dialogic relationships. Thus, the connection between the Black girls' beauty and African culture is manifested through Elizabeth's appreciation of the knowledge exchange with Zeely, where her body becomes the source of Black culture. In regards to storytelling, Zeely carries the knowledge of stories involving Black women's experiences, which also contain messages about female's bodies. Trites's identification of Zeely as an intradiegetic narrator (150) is helpful here in understanding the role of the past in moving Black culture forward. The stories

narrated privately by Zeely infer Black cultural knowledge and individualistic feminist elements in regards to the female body. The first is an African-American myth about the beginning of the world, while the second story depicts a time when Zeely thought herself to be a real queen and was met by a woman believed to be a witch. Neither story can be culturally interpreted without feminist epistemic elements, especially the latter. On the other hand, Collins establishes the shared experiences of Black women and girls to create sense in their lives, and the knowledge owned by individuals such as Zeely represents the knowledge they acquire about Black people's tradition of storytelling. In praising the exchange of Black knowledge, some feminist scholars claim that women as a group are more likely than men to employ lived experiences in assessing knowledge claims (Collins 259).

Zeely constitutes an epistemological bond through cultural narratology, which becomes her approach for expressing feminist identity, and particularly African myths and narratives of the body. Being an intradiegetic narrator, as Trites describes her, Zeely shares two stories with Elizabeth, where both reflect powerful expressions of the female's body on both cultural and personal levels. The first story of creation/beginnings explicitly implies the resistance of Black people's bodies and the violent consequences for the Black diaspora. Typical to the folktales and the challenges of Black people, even the beginning-of-time setting engages those who endured the costs of slavery and the post-slavery period. In general, Black cultural signs such as the spiritual interlude focus the plot on the Black body; for example, "The Voice High Above had commanded them to wait for a message that would tell them their station in life. They were to sing while they waited so they could be found more easily" (98), carries a typical reflection of the Black people's rituals of torment

under slavery. David Cunningham praises the role of oral tales for African-Americans in enabling the preservation and continuation of African culture, emphasising the oppression of slavery.[105] The role that Zeely plays in transforming cultural knowledge is part of a greater epistemic consideration of Black people towards their culture that could have been lost because slave masters, as Cunningham adds, "forcibly suppressed the languages, customs, and cultures of the individuals they enslaved. Black slaves often turned to singing and storytelling for expression, as they had traditionally done in Africa".[106] Zeely's tale continues to depict the endurance of the first Black man created, "Cold wind whipped at him, causing him to feel much pain. He was lonely, travelling so far by himself. It wasn't long before he realized that the country in which he found himself wasn't his own" (101). This first story signifies the intersection of both Hamilton's first story and Zeely's also, namely the narrative of the Black diaspora. Nevertheless, such narrative continues to perform feminist standpoint terms. Zeely's tale itself conceptualises the life of a young Black girl, supposedly Mother Eve, concerning future expectations and the beauty of the first Black woman. Zeely's tale, although typically a conventional part of Black spiritual culture, includes Collins's feminist epistemology that can be understood from two different dimensions—the celebration of the beauty of Black female's bodies since the beginning of creation, and self-exploration. The first two lines of the story conceptualise the myth of creation as initiated through the life of a single Black woman, "It was about the beginning of the world and it told of a young woman who waited for a message to come. The message would tell her who she was and what she was to do" (98), while the later part of the story describes the

[105] See the *Encyclopedia Britannica*'s entry on "African American folktale".

[106] See the *Encyclopedia Britannica*'s "African American folktale".

beauty of the same Black girl in the narrative, “At last, he looked up and there he found her, high above him on a green hill. Her finger against the deep blue sky was the most perfect image he had lived to see. Most pleasing of all to him was that she was tall and dark as he” (103). When Adam and Eve finally meet, the motif of Black beauty is employed to validate the resemblance between them, both beautiful, both Black. The celebration of the Black body’s worth embodies racial pride and the cultural appreciation of what it means to be Black and beautiful. Moreover, Collins signifies the importance of dialogue as the source from which knowledge begins, particularly in social sciences:

> A *dialogical* relationship characterizes Black women’s collective experiences and group knowledge. On both the individual and the group level, a dialogical relationship suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness. For U.S. Black women as a collectivity, the struggle for a self-defined Black feminism occurs through an ongoing dialogue whereby action and thought inform one another. (30)

Accordingly, the collective lived experiences of Black women, as the source of historical and cultural knowledge, are exchanged through the dialogic relationship of women’s groups or generations. Communicating such experiences constitutes a major feminist concept of crafting knowledge through feminocentric connections. Black girls such as Zeely can use these connections to carry and extend knowledge, placing Black beauty as the symbol of a body that embodies culture. The transcendence of such knowledge from one generation of Black women to another manifests through the formation of feminocentric bonds, or the positivistic value of accumulating Black feminist knowledge, as Collins promotes it. Upon meeting,

Zeely explains to Elizabeth that she carries Black knowledge of different generations, starting from the Black woman in her first story and ending with her mother who acquired it from Zeely's great great grandmother. Elizabeth, on the other hand, is an explorer of cultural knowledge. In fact, she participates in the knowledge-sharing when she notices the resemblance between Zeely and the Black Mututsi[107] tribal queen on the cover of a magazine, and she begins to appreciate African-American women's beauty and its historical presence. Elizabeth's reaction, although influenced by external bodily beauty, is easily translated to the others in the town. The impression Zeely creates is charismatic, rendering Elizabeth speculative of the connection between Zeely's beauty and the African ancestries. Although ambiguous, it certainly implies a common racial pride of Black women that the narrative describes. Hamilton's ability to link Black adolescents to their Black heritage unfolds in the frame narrative she creates in *Zeely*. Creating a communal sense of generational pride in beauty enhances the rejection of the hegemonic standards imposed upon Black women's bodies. Cultural connections are made within spaces that reflect the Black history of bodily suffering on farms and plantations. The interactions in a certain 'place' in Hamilton's narrative are a source of power to Black girls. *Zeely*'s narrative of the body such as the protagonist's meeting suggests a site for ordinary Black females, one that reflects their foremothers' location for the interaction and exchange of thoughts—the plantations. In Hamilton's *The People Could Fly*, for example, the old man Tobey uses "the magic words of Africa" (2) whispered to Sara and the young men in the field, reminding them that they can fly away like the ancient people of Africa. The power of words spoken, and primarily

[107] The specific inclusion of women from Rwanda articulates the effect of studying the Black diaspora in terms of Black girls encountering the identity crisis of African immigrants, since Zeely herself is an immigrant from Canada.

those embodied within African myths of power, prepare Hamilton's characters for the transformation necessary to overcome oppression. The influence of Zeely's words of culture on Elizabeth is manifested after their meeting ends.

The feminist understanding manifested during the protagonists' meeting is critical for young Black girls' understanding of the appreciation of self-worth through progressive cultural ideologies. Regarding racial recognition, Zeely enlightens Elizabeth about what it means to be beautiful and belonging to Black culture, while she confesses, "I wore my robe all the time, for I thought it beautiful and I wanted the children to believe about me what you have come to believe" (96). She acknowledges her Black beauty, her appreciation for her racial background and also that she purposefully represented herself as a queen. Zeely's statement is supported by her urge to pass on the cultural knowledge through communicating with other girls in the town. It also inspires, in addition to her feminist and racial identity, those of other girls, too. The ability to recognise Elizabeth's curiosity towards the roots of Black beauty and the cultural connections the young girl makes drives her to inspire them through her experience. The second story Zeely narrates is an important statement of the racial and individual affirmations that a young child might conclude. Zeely describes her childhood in Canada at a time when she believed herself to be a queen. Back then, as she was enjoying a swim at night she encountered an old woman, likely a witch, who transformed a rock into a turtle and a vine into a snake, and told Zeely, "you have made a poor soul happy. You are the night and I have caught you!" (112). Knowing that her skin is very dark, Zeely believes she knows why the woman called her 'the night', and she expresses to Elizabeth the empowerment of the transformation she sensed, "I was stunned by what she had said to me and I stood there in the darkness for many minutes. All at

once in my mind everything was as clear as day. I liked the dark. I walked and swam in the dark and because of that, I was the night" (112). Zeely concludes her story with a reconstructive statement, one in which race intersects with gender and defuses her mother's opinion that, "since the woman was not quite right in her head, she had decided that I was the night because my skin was so dark" (113). As Zeely feels deflated by her mother's words, she also comes to concede that, "no pretty robe was able to make me more than what I was and no little woman could make me the night" (113). Her mother also opposes her extreme insistence on expressing her culture solely through her attire. When she exclaims, "Zeely, you must wear clothes like other children, you must play and be like other children!" (97), she challenges young Zeely's self-expression. Zeely's mother is aware that her daughter's insistence on wearing African clothes emerges from her desire to look different, but she implies that young Black adolescents should avoid seeking validation through clothes or others' opinions. From that point, the conversation between the two girls becomes positivistic. Elizabeth responds, insisting that Zeely is 'the most different person' she has ever engaged with and that she aspires to be more like her. Realising Elizabeth's confusion about her own racial identity and the lack of self-affirmation, Zeely redirects her self-perception by suggesting that Elizabeth rediscover herself by assuring, "The person you are when you're not making up stories. Not Geeder and not even me, but yourself– is that what you want, Elizabeth?" (114),[108] and then confessing, "I stopped making up tales a long time ago . . . and now I am myself" (114). Zeely concedes that she had the same misconceptions as Elizabeth regarding the true and broad meaning of Black beauty, namely that while Black bodily beauty

[108] 'Geeder' being the fictional name that Elizabeth creates for herself when she arrives at her uncle's farm. She also includes her brother John in her imaginative name-creation, giving him the title of 'Toeboy'.

is important, it is an incomplete representation without knowledge to support it. Her words awaken Elizabeth's logic of herself, who immediately recalls her rejection of thoughtlessness or playing foolish games at the beginning of her summer trip to the farm. In addition to reconstructing her individual thoughts of Black beauty's perception, the final realisation presents an important feminist statement for Black girls in regards to their bodies. It introduces a reverse of the negative stereotypical bodily images of African-American females by reaffirming racial identity, body image and empowerment through cultural and personal knowledge.

In processing the lessons learned from Zeely, Elizabeth realises that Zeely' beauty, although conveying the cultural history of Black women, is also a frame of the entire knowledge she owns. As Elizabeth becomes another narrator, she appreciates Zeely as a knowledge transformer and producer. It is such a body that Foucault asserts, "also produces power that facilitates resistance, rebellion, evasions and disruptions" (173). Elizabeth is able to appreciate the epistemology Zeely interprets through the carrying of Black people's folktales, more so than merely focusing on her external beauty. Upon her return from her meeting with Zeely, Elizabeth undertakes the role of a feminist knowledge agent, sharing the stories she acquired with Uncle Ross and her brother John, and thus acknowledging the importance of passing such cultural knowledge on to the other sex. In commenting on Uncle Ross's acceptance of Zeely's lesson concerning identity, Trites comments, "She need not be royalty to be special because she has racial and cultural identities that make her unique. The direct, explicit ideologies of these embedded narratives pertain clearly to racial pride" (151). In addition, Elizabeth's appreciation of Zeely's knowledge is manifested in her Black thoughts that transform into a new understanding of what beauty, royalty or a lady's manners represent. She participates

in passing such knowledge to others, particularly when introducing Zeely to Uncle Ross and her brother John, while acknowledging her recognition of Zeely as a real queen:

> But would you think Miss Zeely was anything but a lady? I mean, working with hogs, having to feed them and walk through them and handle the babies! And having to stay close to old Nat because he is her father and because he gets mean with the hogs sometimes. She wouldn't ever think folks could be as silly as to think she had bewitched those animals. She does her work and I bet she does it better than anybody could. (120)

Hamilton's cultural camouflage is finally unpacked following the encounter between Zeely and Elizabeth, and is particularly evident in Elizabeth's final understanding of girls' bodily beauty. By providing Elizabeth with an opportunity to explore the roots of Zeely's beauty, Hamilton seemingly calls for attention to a young girl's physical beauty. The discourse between the two Black girls reflects how the symbol of beauty transpires to be a royal descendant who works on a farm, like most of the Black women during the colonial and post-colonial periods. Fulfilling the farming tasks, handling livestock in a patriarchal environment controlled by her father, and being the narrator of a nation's tales explains the intersectionality of gender, class and race portrayed as an experience of a young Black female in the rural South. The expression of African cultural knowledge Zeely inherits and transforms from Rwanda to Canada, and finally to the United States, becomes the agency that provides her with affirmative action through story telling. Similar in agency, Elizabeth learns to overcome the flawed belief in the true definition of beauty as previously and socially constructed. This agency emerges from the wisdom that Elizabeth acquires from seeking knowledge both by reading and through

engaging with Zeely. Trites indicates the power of wisdom provided through a young Black woman like Zeely, "It is from within the confines of powerlessness that people rebel and discover their own power. Thus, if Zeely is appropriating the child's power, is it possible that this repression is one avenue that will eventually force Elizabeth to discover what means of power are available to her" (151). The universal awareness that Hamilton advocates through knowledge of power is essentially to encourage young Black girls to extend their thoughts beyond those constructed and disseminated by social institutions that connect images of women to the biology of body. My interpretation builds upon Trites's by tracing the importance of Black bodies in Hamilton's vision of feminist girlhood. Being a liberationist of Black children's bodies, Hamilton identifies the powers necessary to maintain the beauty of Black bodies, aided by the knowledge of Black heritage as a means of decolonising Black girls' bodies.

6.3 Black Girls' Disability and Feminist Empowerment in *Bluish*

This section explores Hamilton's narrative role in representing the power of Black girls' bodies concerning disability and within the social norms of race, gender and age. Hamilton's narrative suggests that the case of Natalie, or rather Bluish's disabled body, implies that disabled African-American girls' bodies are circumstantially abled bodies that work through social forces to gain social empowerment. As Hamilton provides such ideology, she makes an early critique of disability research by challenging the exclusion of Black children from the critical studies and theories of disability. To encourage more attention to feminist representations of Black girls' ability, this section discusses Black disability portrayed in Hamilton's *Bluish*, employing the Black feminist disability theory such as Moya Bailey's, in addition to the historical extractions of Black women's

disability. Bailey's thinking is extended from Garland-Thomson's feminist disability theory to facilitate understanding of disability's intersectionality with race, gender and age. The discussion of Bluish's disability represents Hamilton's purpose of exploring the self-representation of Black adolescents as strong and able-bodied. As the most intersectional book of all Hamilton's canon, *Bluish* describes the social reality of Black girls' disability at deeper levels than skin, height and hair. My argument regarding disability also includes an element of Hamilton's representation of colourism within her Black school community. Colourism as a form of discrimination or prejudice against individuals with a dark skin tone, usually among people of the same ethnic or racial group, has been a concern in both Black feminist studies[109] and critics of children's literature.[110] Hamilton's provocation of skin colour hierarchy in the 1990s confronts the discussion of colourism in children's fiction. *Bluish* is not Hamilton's first attempt to create hidden meanings of skin colour for Black girls. While in *Bluish* Natalie's disability causes the loss of colour tone because she is leukemic, the eleven-year-old Buhlaire in *Plain City* feels isolated from her school community because her skin is a light carrot-golden tone and not brown like others. Thus, this discussion of Black girls' disability engages Black women's disability history with the theoretical framework and reflections of colourism as an analysis of disability in *Bluish*.

6.3.1 Black women's bodies as disabled in history

The historical scrutiny of Black women's experiences with bodily impairments

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[109] See Collins's *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) and Margaret L Hunter's *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone* (2005).

[110] See Bishop's *Free Within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature* (2007) and Brooks, Browne and Hampton's ""There Ain't No Accounting for What Folks See in Their Own Mirrors": Considering Colorism within a Sharon Flake Narrative".

reveals some Black women who were not intellectually impaired by their disability, a matter that presents opportunities for evolution and growth. Black women who had a powerful impact on the image of Black disabled women as being abled represent suitable material for the intersectional analysis of race, gender, class and disability, particularly certain women famous in the history of Black activism who became disabled through or because of slavery. Bailey echoes the value of Black women's history, stating:

> By reassessing our heroes of the past with the lens of disability, we can provide more texture and more humanity to our portrayal of our ancestors. Whether it is the painful epileptic seizures of Harriet Tubman that helped her stay ahead of bounty hunters or the Mississippi appendectomy that spurred Fannie Lou Hamer's activism, the intersections of disability and race in the bodily praxis of historical Black figures needs to be more deeply addressed. (16)

On the one hand, the depth of Black women's disability analysis that Bailey demands is relevant to the intersectional analysis of *Bluish*, as the factor of the age of disability in the novel contributes to Black children's fiction. On the other hand, reviewing the bodily experiences of Black women, starting with the case of Sojourner Truth (1797–1883), reveals influential Black women's patterns that challenge disability and ableism to provoke power and distinction. (See Table 1 in Appendix 2, which includes a selection of Black women and explains how disabled bodies can develop strength and participation in a variety of fields including politics, activism, Black social and civil rights, writing and literature.) The number of influential Black disabled women excluded from the feminist intersectional studies regarding theory and criticism underscores the significance of this section. Hamilton

draws attention to the notion in *Bluish*, reaffirming other social factors like age in the literature of Black disabled children. Moreover, some Black women have gone further by intentionally eliding their physical disability to maintain their image of strength. Sojourner Truth, a powerful figure in early Black history, subdued her disabled right hand because she wanted to preserve the robust image she had acquired as an abolitionist during the early years of slavery. Meredith Minister explains that the heroine's figure of Truth in popular Black culture and in children's books proves her strength as a Black woman:

> This is not all scholars know of Truth's body. According to her Narrative, Truth's body was not only black and female, but also disabled. While representations of Truth called attention to the reality of her black, female body, no representation directed attention to Truth's disability. Indeed, just the opposite occurred as pictures of Truth directed attention away from Truth's disability, often portraying her disabled hand performing tasks such as knitting. One painting even "corrected" her "disfigurement"! In brief, Truth, marginalized on account of her race, gender and disability, is represented as strong and able-bodied. (2)

According to Minister, Truth purposefully redirected Black people away from her disability to ensure the focus was placed on her female and Black body's appreciation concerning achievements. Similarly, Hamilton turns attention to the presence of Natalie in the narrative, without debating her illness. She initially appears in the school as a wheelchair-using newcomer, and on the story cover as an anonymous shade of Blackness, a matter that Hamilton manipulates later for the intersectional unpacking of disability with racial and religious conflicts. Her disability is muted in the conversation of the book, and greater articulation of self-

representation is manifested by Natalie herself. Thus, Hamilton's narrative places more focus on the social perspective of a Black girl's disability, regarding Natalie's views and how she represents herself, and her perception by others concerning ability and skin colour representations.

The slavery period and its aftermath resulted in the socio-political degradation of the Black body. Black girls' experiences extended to witnessing homicides and the torture of Black adults. In the history of the United States, public displays of Black bodies being lynched emerged in horrific ways by White dominant groups during the Jim Crow period and the start of the Civil Rights Movement. Black adolescents' coming of age internalised that public subjection and dehumanisation by the dominant White gaze.[111] This documented record serves to explain how such brutal experiences dominated Black society and became commonplace in the social constructs affecting the Black child's perception of body deprecation, suffering and pain. The psychological impact was immediate for Black children growing up as they perceived themselves inferior because of the racial objectification. Adeyemi Doss asserts that the act of observing lynching has psychologically enabled the construction of Black bodies as 'inferior beings'. He suggests that the physical Black body being consciously objectified by 'the other' White is then *a priori*, a matter that retains the bodies trapped in the image produced by the White as 'the other's' bad faith (15-16). Bishop rationalises the role of slavery's oppression, claiming that it caused many Black people to internalise negative perceptions about their appearance and skin colour, which then led to new

[111] According to NAACP reports, 4,743 lynchings occurred in the United States in the 1882–1968 period, where 3,446 of them involved Black victims. While these figures may seem large, it is also accepted that not all of the lynchings were recorded, and the few Whites who helped the Blacks or held anti-lynching sentiments were attacked by mobs.

strands of skin colour perception during the 1980s and 1990s, because:

> lighter skin color and straight hair have often been more highly valued even among Black people than darker skin and kinky hair. The tradition of using [African-American children's] literature to counteract such negative self-images and promote self-esteem among Black children has continued through the end of the twentieth century. (231)

The provision of Black children affiliating with the inferiority of their bodies leads to more complicated issues for Black girls in particular. With the perception of Black bodies being held under the White man's authority, resistance does little with the Black body being intrinsically objectified.

6.3.2 Black girls' bodies and the theory of feminist disability

Since Hamilton Black girl's disability is embodied within a fundamental social system, the theoretical framework of this section probes the notion of Black disability as a social construct rather than a mere physical impairment. Garland-Thomson introduces the same principle to the social studies in "Re-shaping, Re-thinking, Re-defining: Feminist Disability Studies". In this section, I use Garland-Thomson's in addition to Bailey's extension of Black feminist disability, in which Bailey particularly discusses the intersection of race with feminist disability studies. On the broad scale of defining disability, Garland-Thomson provides ideological categorisation for disability such as, "sick, deformed, ugly, old, maimed, afflicted, abnormal, or debilitated – all of which disadvantage people by devaluing bodies that do not conform to certain cultural standards" (2). In this chapter, such a definition justifies Hamilton's pattern of introducing dichotomous adolescents' bodily empowerment in calling attention to both beauty and disability as social elements of

empowerment. Garland-Thomson continues, “Disability functions to preserve and validate such privileged designations as beautiful, healthy, normal, fit, competent, intelligent – all of which provide cultural capital to those who can claim such status and reside within these social identities” (2). Such body binary denotes the societal origins of disability and individuals’ approaches to its articulation. The empowering element in her theory is resourced by the notion of articulating disabled bodies as a term of “temporarily able-bodied” (3). Regarding feminist disability, Garland-Thomson’s theory is fundamental for interpreting Hamilton’s perception of disability for two reasons—feminist disability studies a) translate disability as a cultural rather than a purely medical issue, which interrelates with examining power relations rather than investigating disability as a flaw or inferiority when considering cultural representations of minority groups; and b) seek to extend and correct traditional feminism, which sometimes ignores, misrepresents, or creates conflicts for disabled women (5). In *Bluish*, Hamilton employs disability to reconceptualise the societal perception of Black girls’ disabled bodies as abled. The inclusion of adolescence and race is a substantial extension to the analysis needed in children’s literature, due to the interwoven factors that disability generates in Black girlhood. That is to say, not all children’s discourses of disability can be discussed from a racial perspective, but Natalie’s is encountered with disability in addition to discrimination because of her bluish-Blackness, which imposes another level of social oppression.

Bailey provides a racial intervention to Garland-Thomson’s perception of feminist disability theory, where she includes a Black feminist framework that allows analysis of further intersectional forces of race. The opportunity for including other factors such as age are confirmed, as Bailey suggests that, “By employing a Black feminist disability framework, scholars of African-American and Black

Studies, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and Disability Studies have a flexible and useful methodology through which to consider the historical, social, cultural, political, and economic reverberations of disability" (1). Black feminist disability studies are thus defined as the enhanced critical engagement of Black studies, Black feminism and Black women's disability. Bailey's provision of such intervention is aided by the space created due to the omission of disability studies in Black and feminist studies. By reflecting on Kimberlé W. Crenshaw's principle of intersectionality, Bailey connects to Black feminism when she claims that, "our intervention requires intersectionality to explicitly attend to disability. It is our contention that racism, sexism, and ableism share a eugenic impulse that needs to be uncovered and felled" (3). Engaging all relevant factors of race, gender, disability and age, the theoretical framework of this section is intended to explain two major points in my analysis—the social perception of Hamilton's disabled protagonist, Natalie, as a wheelchair-using leukemic Black adolescent; and her self-representation as an empowering young girl for other females in her community. By employing this theoretical framework and reflecting on the historical examples of Black women with disability, my analysis identifies positivity in Hamilton's liberation approach in children's fiction. In fact, Hamilton's presentations of various models of Black bodily empowerment through beauty, size superiority and disability defy the myths that degrade and confine Black female bodies. One of the myths, according to Bailey, proposed the notion of exceptional strength, endurance of pain and the ability to survive difficult circumstances, and thus, "Black women are disallowed disability and their survival is depoliticized" (3). In Hamilton's paradigm, Black girls may have disability and survive it, and they can also have abled bodies that challenge terms of ableism.

6.3.3 Bluish: the disabled, abled body

Hamilton's development of Black girls' liberating approaches advances from the attraction of beautiful figures of the Black female body to what appears to be the extremely dichotomous model body representation—disability. Working through disability to empower oneself reflects an aspect of the feminist power of Black girls' bodies in *Bluish*. This inclusion of disability is amended by the social changes preceded by the enactment of laws like the 1990's Americans with Disabilities Act, a goal of the Civil Rights Movement. The author's involvement, as a Black children's writer, calls for attention to be directed towards disabled people, and younger ones in particular. This intersectional representation Hamilton attends to in *Bluish* achieves attention on multiple levels of minority inclusion. In the following analysis, the perceptions of both the protagonist and the broader community are analysed in depth, reflecting on both ableism, colourism and self-reaffirmation through challenging disability and manifesting power.

Hamilton's empowerment approach is directly connected to the inclusion of the disability of Black girls, one that begins with the story cover (see Fig. 15) that displays a reference to black skin colour as a controlling factor in the illustration, without highlighting any disability. Young viewers encounter three shades of Blackness that demonstrate the racial identity of three different Black girls, a matter that places race centrally as the pivotal intersection with girlhood. The illustration's gradual movement from left to right emphasises positivity and advancement, as Nodelman previously stated. Showing only their faces, the darkness of the skin is exhibited as moving from the bluish-black of Natalie, to the honeyish-black of Tuli, towards the darkest black tone of Dreenie. Dreenie is born to African parents, while Tuli is assumed to have a Latin-American background. Meanwhile, despite her blue-

black skin tone, Natalie is considered to be African-American as she also presents with the characteristic facial features, while she is placed in the forefront for multiple purposes that serve Hamilton's integrational pattern. Natalie's face exemplifies the intersection of the various identity variables of race, gender, age, disability and religious background. Learning later that she is born to Jewish parents, the bluish-black skin symbolises the divinity and pureness of the colour blue in Judaism. The situating of Natalie's blueness creates a balance between other shades of black, with blue suggesting an equilibrium between white and black. Furthermore, although the blueness of humans signifies an uncharacteristic flesh tone that is associated with ill health, psychological research by Kendra Cherry reveals the tranquillity it may inspire in children due to its association with nature.[112] Despite the skin colour differences, the appearance of the three girls on the cover suggests harmony and unity. The cover further links young readers to the disability narrative by provoking thoughts regarding the difference in skin colour and how it creates solidarity. In addition, the movement of shades travels forward to Blackness, thus forming a reference to racial identity while also embracing other stratifications of colour. As readers are exposed to the narrative, the bluish-Blackness gains acceptance as a part of the girlhood narrative.

The role of the textual narrative is to explain the connection between racial factors and disability. Young readers are also exposed to the pressures that Natalie encounters because of her unfamiliar skin colour, where she is bullied by other students in the school for being Black bluish and Black Jewish. Collins draws

[112] According to Kendra Cherry, a psychosocial rehabilitation specialist who helps children suffering from emotional disturbances to overcome maladaptive behaviours, the colour blue has a positive impact on the cognitive psychology in childhood. See Cherry's "Color Psychology: Does It Affect How You Feel?".

attention to this new form of racism in Black communities, stating that, "Colorism in the U.S. context operates the way that it does because it is deeply embedded in a distinctly American form of racism grounded in Black/White oppositional differences" (90). Collins asserts that institutionalised racism produced colour hierarchies amongst American women and has resulted in harmful consequences for Black-American women in many aspects of life, to the extent that even having light-brown skin can be troublesome. Harriet Jacobs, for example, was sexually harassed because of her looks as an enslaved light-skinned and straight-haired young woman, which made her attractive to White men. In Natalie's initial devastating encounter, Hamilton demonstrates only one side of the story where the community of children are ignorant of the factors leading to sickness or the change in people's skin colour.

The interaction of the students in the school community with Natalie's condition as an appearance signifies the perception of 'the other' concerning disability, which also relates to the fundamental method in this chapter that considers the intersectional analysis of disability as a social construct. Garland-Thomson's proposition of a "culturally fabricated narrative of the body, a system that produces subjects by differentiating and marking bodies" (1), is critical for my analysis of *Bluish*. We need to study and interpret disability in the same social context (e.g. the socio-educational environment), where disability can be tested and challenged. As a Black disabled girl Natalie exists in a social environment that, despite its initial resistance and dismissal of her condition, delivers the feminist bonding necessary for her to regain her strength and challenge ableism. The most influential space of her existence in the narrative is in school with her classmates, and its relevance to the feminist bond as a crucial component of the social perception of disability. The magnet school she attends plays a vital role in her bonding with classmates and

expressing her self-worth. As intellectual institutes, they provide every possible support for Black students as part of the multicultural and multiracial diversity of the enrolled students, including those with disabilities.[113] According to term 4/C of the Ministry of Education in the United States, the aim is, "to continue to desegregate and diversify schools by supporting magnet schools, recognising that segregation exists between minority and nonminority students as well as among students of different minority groups". Hamilton's selection of a magnet school is not only focal for the racially integrational role they perform, but also to facilitate the study of Black children's perceptions of the disability of a Black girl.

The social perception of Natalie as a Black girl with disability is manifested in two aspects—the classmates' and friends' receptions. Her first appearance is more awkward than welcomed by Dreenie and the other classmates. As the first person to report the arrival of Natalie, Dreenie's description, although confused, carries a questionable impulse about her condition, "This girl wears a hat, like half a bowl. Sometimes, trying to stand up and walk. Ms Baker said, "Natalie, do as much as you feel like. Don't try to do everything"" (1). The first impression Dreenie provides is not related to the serious illness that Natalie suffers, but rather her strength in challenging her impairment. Although she lacks insight about the newcomer's condition, she continues, "This girl is like moonlight. So pale you see the blue veins all over. You can tell though, once she had some color" (9). This pallor of human skin is a multiple indication of disability and racial identity, and Dreenie's thoughts about both are vital for Natalie's inclusion in the class. The exclusion of Natalie continues as boys bully her with the name 'Blewish', for being both Black and

[113] See the full record at the U.S. Department of Education's "Magnet Schools Assistance. Sec. 5301. Findings and Purpose".

Jewish, and snatch the hat she puts on to hide her hair loss. Sharon G. Flake depicts similar painful circumstances of Maleeka Madison's exclusion in *The Skin I'm In* (1998), because of her skin colour:

> It's bad enough that I'm the darkest, worse-dressed thing in school. I'm also the tallest, skinniest thing you ever seen. And people like John-John remind me of it every chance they get. They don't say nothing about the fact that I'm a math whiz, and can outdo ninth graders when it comes to figuring numbers. Or that I got a good memory and never forget one single, solitary thing I read. They only see what they see, and they don't seem to like what they see much. (5-6)

Flake introduces how peers in school can perform colourism towards disability. This group action considers skin colour, clothes, and certain physical traits as social status markers. Because of her weary blue skin colour, the result of chemotherapy, Dreenie expresses deep repulsion for Natalie on her arrival at school and labels her 'Bluish'. The children at school know little about Natalie aside from her being a wheelchair user with bluish skin, and yet they associate her with social values that are connected to her physical features, which Margaret L. Hunter describes in *Race, Gender, and the Politics of Skin Tone* (2005) as the stage for skin colour stratification (3).

The narrative also uses the mother–daughter relationship as an influential perception of Natalie's disability. Dreenie's acceptance of Natalie reflects her mother's stance early in the narrative, sustaining a strong multiracial and feminist identity affirmation. The subsequent dialogue is initiated by Dreenie's mother linking Natalie's intellect to the bonding created at school, where she responds to Dreenie's shock at Natalie's awkward appearance by assuring, "Well, then, she is

sick, Dreenie. I mean, bald, her hair is falling out, or already fell out . . . Maybe a childhood leukemia. You know? It happens" (39). The mother also fosters normality and acceptance when she reassures, "Being really sick is no fun for any child, Dreenboat. And you mustn't be afraid of her because she looks different. You could be nice to her–what's her name? I mean, treat her like you would treat any other school friend" (40). Dreenie's mother creates a communication that encourages a collective intellectual and social sense of Black females bonding to accept people in different conditions, such as the disabled. Her spoken words help girls like Dreenie to transform perceptions about disability.

The inclusion of the disabled child begins with the influence of the girls bonding with Natalie. This starts during the school project grouping when, "*Bluish*! Dreenie had asked for her when none of the other groups had" (53). The moment in the narrative when Dreenie realises that the name she gives Natalie is not the only name she is mocked by, establishes a new realisation of the cruel treatment Natalie receives from the school community, starting with Dreenie herself. Once her dilemma about her peer's condition is revealed, Dreenie's thoughts about Natalie and her disability are transformed. Hamilton offers a melting pot of girls' unity in which such boundaries seem trivial and the emphasis is on the person's self-worth and knowledge rather than the fragile or ambiguous appearance of the skin. The narrative suggests no influence from Natalie's cultural or religious background, and not even her friends. Dreenie and Tuli only know of it when Natalie's mother shows her resentment at the nickname, "Don't call her Blewish. That's not nice. That is derogatory" (70). Natalie immediately explains the misconception to her mother, ""Mom, it's not black and Jewish, B-l-e-w-i-s-h, like a bad word." She spelled it out for her mom. "But because I am so pale–from the chemo–I'm a somewhat bluish

color, get it?"" (71). The group's rejection of the hurt caused to Natalie is an admission of her worth as a child. Dreenie describes the realisation in her journal by affirming, "To me she is just Bluish child, Bluish ill serious. Bluish close with us. Someday Bluish just like us" (72). The acceptance of Natalie's suffering as equal to everyone else prepares her for amending the image of fragility by sharing her knowledge and skills with the school community and friends. Nevertheless, the bonding created in school includes an affirmative feminist principle of support. Similar to the substantial Zeely, Hamilton involves Dreenie as a strong Black girl's body supporting others, who is superior in size to the average girls in her age and community. She embodies the strength that compensates for Natalie's bodily weakness at her first arrival, "Dreenie was muscled and tall for her age. She often looked angry, even when she was not" (12). Her great height supports the positive representation of Black females' differing body shapes. In a discussion of Black women's bodies from a Eurocentric comparative approach, Tate explains how challenging the slenderness of European standards of women's bodies can show how Black women embrace their own bodily beauty (116).[114] Hamilton's linking of the body size to girls is another perspective of inclusion to different images of Black girls' bodies.

Hamilton uses camouflage in *Bluish* to reflect empowerment from within girlhood disability. Natalie's self-perception is expressed to defy illness and direct attention away from her disabled body. Bailey's Black feminist disability principle

[114] Contemporary figures of Black-American celebrities such as Venus Williams, Serena Williams and Michelle Obama caused different responses in the media due to their strength and size. In response to Vogue's 2009 commentary on the Williams sisters' build, Tate asserts, "Both women were unashamedly muscular wearing the mark of their athletic approach to their sport and profession. Their muscles and prowess, though, have never drawn questions" (99). Tate's notion affirms the same concept that muscular Black women can be significantly skilled and knowledgeable, and representative of their race as powerful.

includes the same element of power, where she claims, “This is not a project of posthumously assigning people a label that they wouldn’t have chosen for themselves but looking critically at the context of a life and thinking through disability as an equally powerful force in shaping a person” (16). Bailey’s prospect of Black disability depends on the social exchange and spaces given to disabled children in Black societies. Like race, class and gender, age and disability are not only human conditions but also offer a means to communicate power from within. Although the traumatic appearance of Natalie’s skin suggests less expectation of any powerful expression of the self or skills, she projects power through the union of the multicultural friendship with Dreenie and Tuli. While Natalie continues to suffer until the end of the narrative, she never ceases to express and transfer knowledge and power to her friends and classmates. All the abilities she has perfected that include the quilting, the school project, knowledge of the natural history museums and the exchange of cultural play in Black Jewish games place her on a pedestal in the eyes of her friends and her classmates. The exposure of knowledge and skills demonstrates the reflection of the empowered disabled body that both Garland-Thomson and Bailey promote. Such positivism in Natalie’s actions has an impact on the three Black girls’ circle through the exchange of knowledge about their school project, and the sharing of experiences. The opportunity given to Natalie to explore herself is stimulated by the space created by her inclusion in the females’ circle, which includes her friends and school teachers. An individual’s vulnerability thus transforms into communal empowerment as soon as Natalie decides to ignore her disabled body and share her skills. The impression she creates after giving her classmates the knitted hats exemplifies the authority she gains over her traumatic situation, and with her female friends, ““Bluish made us special,” Dreenie said. And

got a smile out of Bluish" (81), is preceded by Natalie's conclusion, "We're all the same; we are different, too. Now you all look just like me" (80). This sharing of skills by Natalie is followed by the cultural celebration of Hanukkah, in addition to Kwanzaa and demonstrating a Jewish game with her classmates, reaffirming both African-American culture and Jewish beliefs as a significant sign of inclusion of what seemed a short while earlier to be unacceptable. The powerful intellectual impact that Natalie leaves is finalised by Dreenie's statement, "Bluish is, because we are; we are, because Bluish–is–us!" (122). Natalie's exposure of inner power becomes communal as she manages to reflect it on everyone around her. Instead of remaining isolated and fragile, she reintroduces herself as a source of power, notwithstanding her physical impairment.

6.5 Conclusion

Hamilton's *Zeely* and *Bluish* explore the connection between African-American girls' bodies and their abilities to form empowering Black feminist identities. My argument in this chapter regarding the deconstruction of the distorted stereotypical images of young Black girls' bodies is enabling and challenging as it points to the social and literary significance of Black female bodies, and the appreciation of the knowledge and power they embody and share with other Black women.[115]

Hamilton serves a contemporary upswing across three decades of narrative that explains the tensions between images of Black beautiful and disabled bodies. The beautiful able-bodied model introduced in *Zeely* and rationalised in *Bluish*

[115] Nevertheless, future argument can be further settled regarding the racial and feminist representations of hair, as relevant to trauma and beauty standards. Such racialised debate of hair is not entirely convenient to be included in this chapter, as hair in both novels is promoted by less vibrant figures like Tuli, or implicitly referred to by Zeely and Natalie. Moreover, Hamilton's final conceptualisation of Black girls' collective epistemic exchange and inclusion of disability promotes other sociological and psychological implications of the bodily practices than the superiority of Black beauty alone.

begins with promoting power through Black beauty and the vulnerability of pain. The strength of the beauty and/or disability narrative arises from Hamilton's liberating approach in discussing conditions of childhood disability without condemning girls to victimisation, while introducing Black beauty without objectification to its external physicality. Hamilton's empowering model never deviates from the racial and gender power of beauty and pain necessary in feminist texts for Black girls. We can employ Hamilton's work as feminist children's records that communicate positive ideologies of inclusive feminism, since all the bodies in her body narrative are dignified—children, boys, and girls, beautiful and disabled, all together.

The representations of Black girls understanding the cultural value and ability of their bodies are a rebellious power that Hamilton employs in challenging patriarchal oppression, to transform culture and challenge demeaning socially established bodily perceptions of child (dis)ability. Natalie, for instance, is a resourceful Black girl who has the ability to isolate herself from the impact of disability, and ultimately to articulate and share her source of power with other girls. Her experience, without being fetishised or 'cured', offers a literary canon in which young Black girls can live through vulnerable health conditions and pain without the distress of exclusion or failure. Moreover, the vision introduced by Hamilton since the late 1960s, which promotes the urge to literary discourses of Black girls' bodies, has been more recently adapted in social media movements such as #Blackgirlmagic, which was founded by CaShawn Thompson in 2013[116] and spread through Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. While Hamilton does not neglect the total reality of

[116] See Jalondra A. Davis's "Power and Vulnerability: Black Girl's Magic in Black Women's Science Fiction".

disability, she prefers to discuss the conditions essential for growth and to empower other identity aspects such as feminist bonding and seeking self-affirmation through tolerance and persistence.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

7.1 Reflections on Virginia Hamilton's Feminism

In her 1993 lecture "Everything of Value: Moral Realism in the Literature for Children", Virginia Hamilton declared:

> I took what had been neglected or absent from the canon, which would be the black child, and ran with it. I soon became aware of historical literary prototypes of my children—that of the diminutive adult, the mirror-image child with its incomplete reflection. As types, there came the puritan child, the angel, the brat, the athletic one, the manly one, the weak sister or a brother. I have been aware of these shifting ideas in early and late visions of childhood, while searching the heart of the child within myself. (230)

The findings of this research are an exploration of Hamilton's contribution to the canon of Black children's literature. While obviously being inflected with earlier work such as W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Brownies Book* (1920-1921) in encouraging representations of racial pride in Black history and achievements, Hamilton's race-consciousness is associated to later movements of feminism in both girlhood and boyhood. My work considers Black girls' strengths, vulnerabilities, and ultimate empowerment that extend Hamilton's primary explorations of the child's puritanical, angelic, and troublesome images, amongst others. In this research, these representations are introduced in a historical framework that traces the exploration and development of empowered young female adolescents. Feminism in Hamilton's fiction is not solely introduced through girlhood regarding acceptable practices of upmothering, adolescent sisterhood, collective leadership, the understanding of

Black historical traumas and the worth of Black bodies' beauty, knowledge and ability. Her terms of feminist identity provide children with the empathy for a mentally disabled young man enjoying shuffling light shoes in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush*; a leukemic ten-year-old girl knitting hats, telling stories and introducing games with her classmates in *Bluish*; and the opportunity to compare intelligent leadership in *Justice and Her Brothers* to the fraught emotions of the leader, Bambnua, the huge and ugly winged Slakers on an earth a million years hence in *The Gathering*. These images, and many others, are provided for children to draw self-comparisons and explore commonality in both weakness and power, showcasing the varied ways in which Hamilton writes of human experiences, and of Black experiences through children's books.

The forms of empowerment introduced in this study reveal Hamilton's positive approach in demonstrating Black girls' power without neglecting their race and culture, nor being burdened or pressured with the early scholarship of Black children's education during the early twentieth century. Scholar and educator, Silas X. Floyd, for example, promoted representations of etiquette for Black girls to feel empowered or deserving in *Floyd's Flowers: Or, Duty and Beauty for Colored Children* (1905). Stressing that dressing well and proper behaviour are essential for Black children's visibility compared to White children, Floyd inspires Hamilton's illustration of Black body beauty as a resisting knowledge agent rather than only a comparative to White children.

As Black girls are examined in Hamilton's empowering feminist narratives, they are allowed novel spaces where new theorisations can be appreciated in greater depth. The interpretations of the multiple roles played by Hamilton's female protagonists beget new dimensions in the established theorisations of Black feminist

views in children's literature. Moreover, the overlapping roles throughout the analysis chapters of my thesis continue to link Black girls to empowerment amongst social groups in both individualistic and communal patterns. Social binaries such as friendship versus leadership, upmothering versus childishness, and the Black body's ability versus disability underscore the potential for optimism within the realm of Hamilton's moral and social realism. Identifying how Hamilton achieves this in children's books enables her literary, social and historical strengths to be appreciated, as she declares, "morality and values are expressed in themes encompassing ideas of ethnic, cultural, generational, environmental, and egalitarian concerns. I rarely write single-idea books, unless they are nonfiction" (233).

I present the analysis of this literary research of feminist identity in Black girlhood in five analysis chapters that incorporate the major themes bridging Black girlhood in literature into a framework of empowerment strategies. Due to the challenges of including the various themes represented in Hamilton's fiction, I focus on feminist representations of empowerment to address the most prominent topics—Black upmothering, gendered friendship and adolescent sisterhood, historical trauma, leadership, and the representations of Black body concerning pride, cultural knowledge and ability. Through the realisation of Hamilton's manifestations of Black girls' abilities to pursue and form feminist selves, I believe this discussion generally locates Black girlhood within Black feminism and invites further research. Hamilton's girls as young adolescents receive powerfully able representations amidst the vulnerability of social isolation, illness, patriarchy, classism, colourism, ableism, internalised anti-Blackness, and on occasion, simply constrained familial relationships. Hamilton's provision of cases such as Tree in *Sweet Whispers, Brother Rush* exposes the frailty in Black communities' practices of upmothering that

overburden Black girls, while similar experiences by Dreenie in *Bluish* keep Black girls in their social circles and encourage them to understand family connections and discipline without jeopardising their childhoods.

Another empowering contribution shown across my five analysis chapters is how Hamilton provides Black girls with assertive voices, creating additional layers to Bildungsroman and girls, and ideologies of feminocentric bonds. In the second chapter, Tree speaks the truth loudly to Viola as a means of evaluating the role of her biological mother in parenting, which is deficient. Meanwhile, in the third chapter, I show how Justice learns to appreciate the power of her voice to communicate her frustration and oppression. Similarly, Justice, Natalie and Dreenie express their voices as terms of subjecthood in the fifth chapter, where they lead individually and through cooperation. Then, while Black girls' voices are overwhelmed by traumatic experiences in the fourth chapter, they are confidently represented in the sixth chapter as Zeely documents the cultural and racial aspects of Black narratives. Such powerful voices demonstrate the importance of Black adolescents being heard and appreciated in both social and literary studies.

My major goal in this research is to explore how feminism and Black girlhood, particularly in early adolescence, intersect in a selection of Hamilton's novels that includes her first and final works. The specificity of this selection assisted in illuminating the comprehensive structure of Hamilton's feminism as attached to Black girlhood in the shape of social models informed by the waves of feminism commencing in the 1960s when Hamilton began to write. The findings of this research are summed in the facets of African-American feminist identity embodied in Hamilton's novels. The structural themes that Hamilton creates through the feminist identity she develops in early adolescent fiction are found in

representations of Black othermothering, partially as upmothering; Black adolescent friendship as a communal form of sisterhood; personal trauma as relatively historical trauma; Black leadership as a form of communal adolescent leadership; and the representation of Black female bodies through beauty and ability.

These representations are not entirely independent from one another, since some are intersectional practices that influence or lead to other phases of identity formation. The experience of Tree, as a case in point, presents a multilayered empowering perspective of a Black girl from the 1980s, who confronts the aftermath of her mother's historical trauma while practising upmothering. Hamilton creatively draws a silver lining between adultification and upmothering by imparting the intermitting dramatic death of her young brother Dab, which changes the course of Tree's coming of age. The reconciliation of the mother–daughter relationship after the crisis changes both the parenting perspective of Viola, Tree's biological mother, and the young reader, who might be confused with the true meanings of mothering and othermothering.

On another intricate level, Natalie embodies the most intersectional form of feminist identity shaped through racial, multicultural and multiethnic prospects in *Bluish.* As an urban Black girl of the 1990s' New York, Natalie achieves levels of subjecthood as she is influenced by her experiences with adolescent sisterhood, cooperative leadership and the ability to refine herself through illness. Centring on Natalie's experience with disability and framing it with social classism, colourism, and multiculturalism, Hamilton offers young girls a means of articulating the power of both resilience and agency. The reader is fundamentally introduced to the vulnerability of girlhood through the struggles of illness and suffering, which carry

the protagonists though narratives of constructive friendship and empowered leadership to elicit meanings of resilience, achievement and racial pride.

The experiences of Black girls developing feminist identities through social practices in the late 1960s and the 1970s are also part of this research's outcome. Through the analysis of my thesis, Justice, Elizabeth and Zeely manifest as powerful images of Black girls who represent Hamilton's early introductions of feminism in children's novels. They validate the positive value of gender by challenging sexism and gender oppression, while revealing powerful self-expressions. Zeely and Elizabeth exchange a cultural narrative of the Black folktales that both informs the racial pride of Black beauty, and the free will of their foremothers. On the other hand, Justice rejects the traditional gender roles of her society that place her in a tier of status inferior to that of her brothers, seeking connections through friendship and social leadership that enable a new powerful stature. Identifying with the value of their Black culture, the three Black protagonists articulate their agency without being culturally oriented.

This research explores feminist models in children's literature that inform social and literary feminist approaches. As the second chapter engages Black girls' upmothering practices, young readers and adults learn to appreciate Black girls' participation in their communities, which were underappreciated in both Black feminism and children's literary studies prior to Hamilton's contribution. As she continues to represent Black upmothers in the 1990s, Hamilton develops her literary approach to include the limitations of such practices, demonstrating that feminism is a flexible movement that can facilitate our understanding of important narratives of childhood.

This research represents a resource for scholars, educators and historians of children's literature. In all five analysis chapters, my interpretations reveal how part of Hamilton's scholarship of feminist children's books contributes to growing literary and theoretical domains in children's literature. I believe that one of the most significant contributions of this research is its demonstration of Hamilton's reflections of the importance of Black girls' experiences throughout history, and the challenging histories of the 1960s and the 1970s. In my analysis, Hamilton continues to represent Black girlhood in feminist frames until the close of the twentieth century, but what distinguishes her contributions is how she reflects on her Blackness without anger or bitterness. Thus, the positive identification for Black girls with their culture and community provides them with a profound understanding of the empowering racial, ethnic, cultural and historical facets of being empowered Black-American girls.

7.2 Recommendations for Further Research

Future research on Hamilton's feminist terms in children's fiction might benefit from literary criticism that explains the direct impact of social functions of children's fiction. These include ways in which race is a particular concern in children's fiction today, such as the reproduction of interracial and intercultural harmony (Grzegorczyk 6-7). The centrality of Black girlhood in forms of science fiction, post-humanist, cultural and comparative studies is essential in children's novels, too. The results regarding the literary and social analysis of Black girls' representations in this research can stimulate further expansion of Black children's literary and social theorisation. The upmothering practice, for example, is a cultural experience that can be revisited to obtain theoretical perspectives on Black paternal practices in boyhood.

Considering the rich heritage of Hamilton's children's books, expanding analyses of her broader canon can facilitate in providing further analysis and critical evaluation of unexplored themes. However, the limitations occasioned by the scope of a single doctoral thesis give rise to new dimensions and interpretations that connect Black children to the world of literature and race. These social contexts in children's literature present opportunities for further research, including:

1. The impressive liberationist influence of the Ohio River, Kenya's nature and even Mayo Cornelius Higgins's fictional creation of Mount Sarah, which have been scrutinised concerning girlhood. How does Hamilton speak to boyhood and Black families about nature?
2. Hamilton paying equal attention to Black girls' and boys' literacy through education. How is this notion connected to historical accounts of Black children's education and upbringing when considering Hamilton's writing through four decades of Black history?

It is my hope that these and other questions arise out of my research. Virginia Hamilton deserves greater scrutiny both for the power of her narratives for children, and the positive ways she reimagines race and gender.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Illustrations[117]

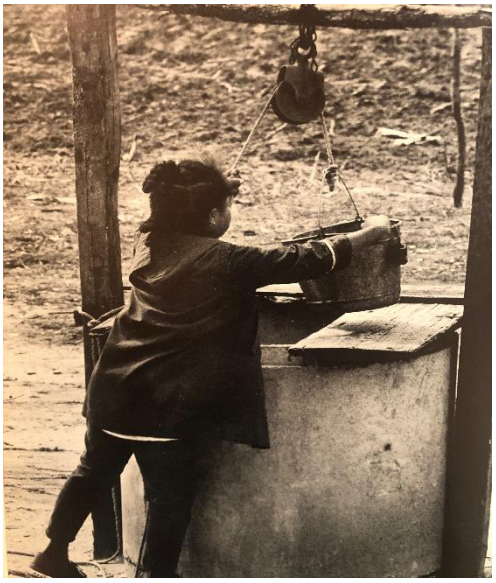

Figure 1: Barbara (Sweet Pea) fetches water from the well

Figure 2: Barbara at her local school

Figure 3: Barbara ironing her church dress on Sunday

[117] Figures 1-7: photographs by Jill Krementz; Figures 8-14: illustrations by Syeomn Shimin; Figure 15: illustration by Diane Dillion and Leo Dillion.

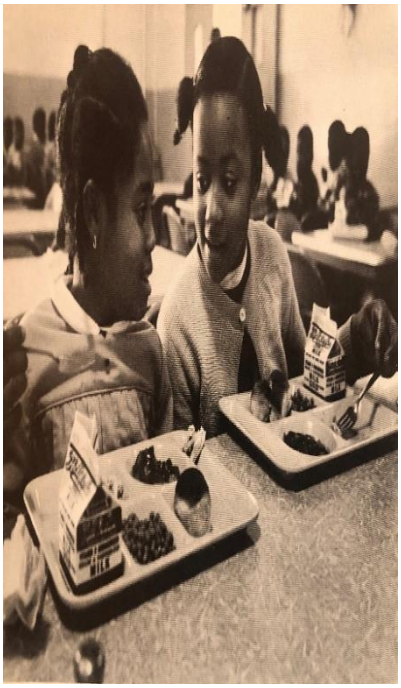

Figure 5: Barbara with her school lunch

Figure 6: Barbara playing the flute after dinner

Figure 4: Barbara helps her mother clean the dinner dishes

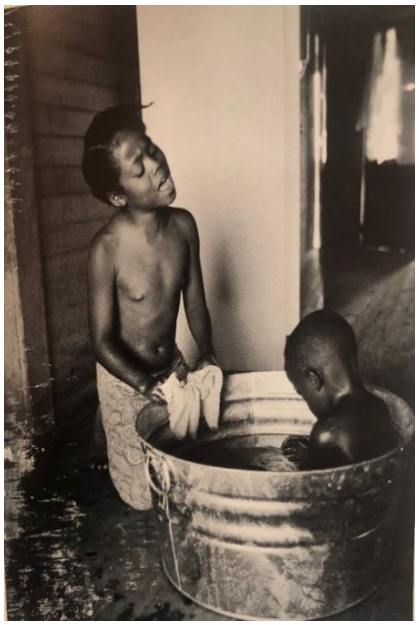

Figure 7: Barbara bathing her brother after dinner

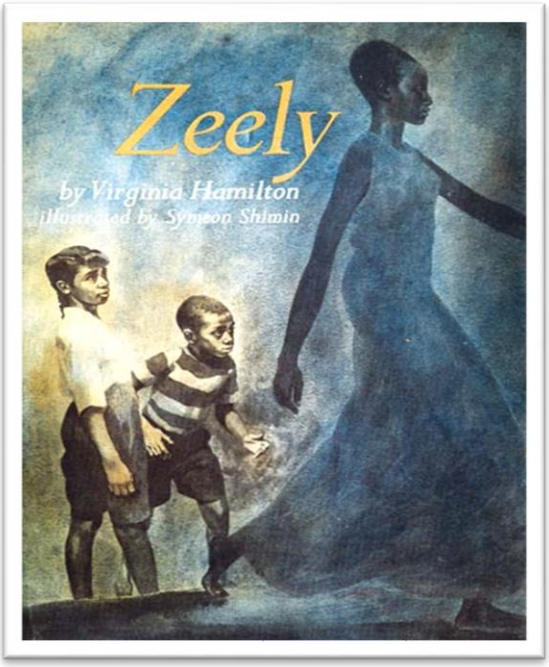

Figure 8: Cover of the first edition of Zeely (1967); published by the Macmillan Publishing Company

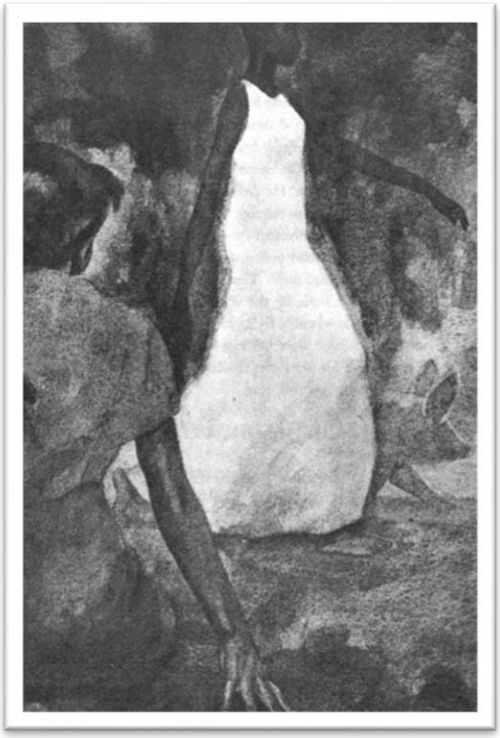

Figure 9: Zeely's appearance for the first time in the narrative

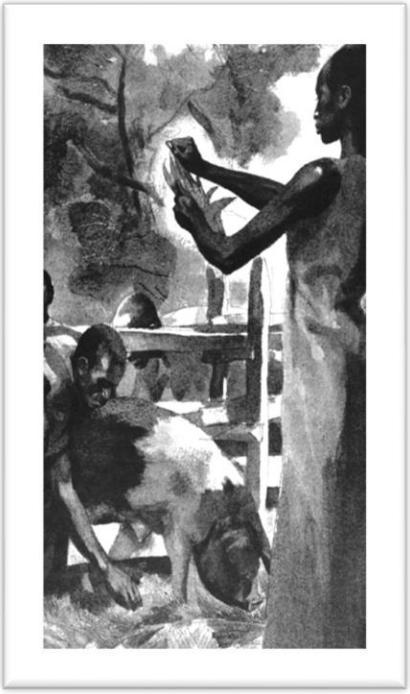

Figure 10: Zeely on the farm

Figure 11: Zeely and her father Nat Tayber

Figure 12: Elizabeth and the adolescents in town

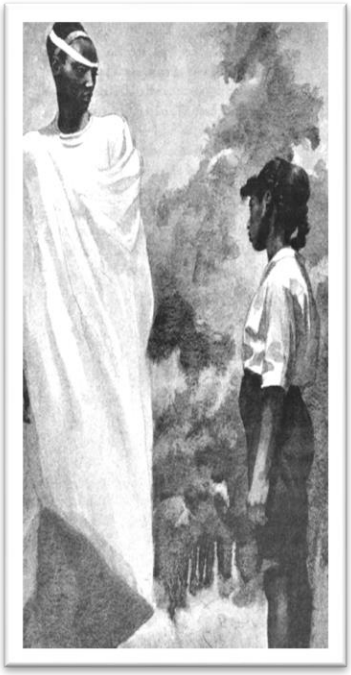

Figure 13: Zeely's African dress

Figure 14: Zeely and Elizabeth's final encounter

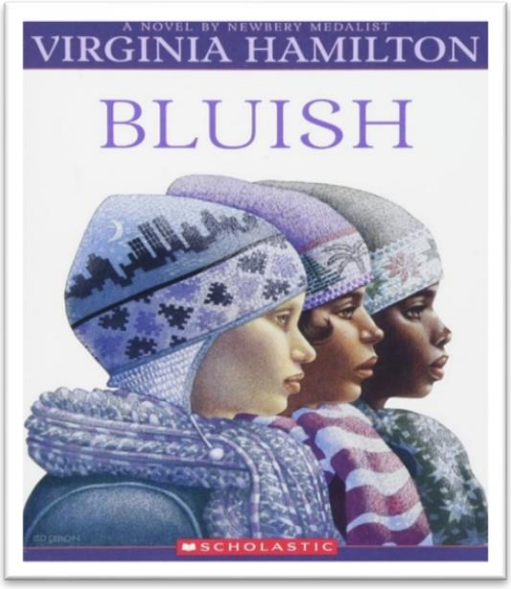

Figure 15: Cover of Bluish (1999)

Appendix 2: Tables

Table 1: Achievements of influential Black women with disabilities

Name	Disability	Achievement
Harriet Ann Jacobs (1813–1897)	Jacobs details in her biography how her confinement in an attic room as she attempted to steal herself away from slavery caused her pain and impaired her body long after she gained her freedom.	Jacobs was an African-American writer who escaped from slavery and was later freed. She became an abolitionist speaker and reformer, and wrote an autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, first serialised in a newspaper and published as a book in 1861.
Harriet Tubman (1820–1913)	As a slave teenager, Tubman developed epilepsy and suffered seizures, headaches, and visions. She also had narcolepsy and was considered disabled by slave traders.	Tubman helped Blacks escape from slavery in the South to freedom in the North. She also became a 'conductor' on the Underground Railroad, leading slaves to freedom before the Civil War, all while carrying a bounty on her head. She was also a nurse, a Union spy and a women's suffrage supporter.
Fannie Lou Hamer (1917–1977)	Hamer was sterilised without her knowledge or consent, and had polio as a child. She protested in the face of heavy opposition and was beaten in a Mississippi jailhouse, which caused kidney damage and a limp. She is known for stating, "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired!".	Hamer was a civil rights activist who helped African-Americans to register to vote and co-founded the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. She was also involved in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.
Dr Maya Angelou (1928–2014)	As a child Angelou was abused and sexually assaulted by her mother's boyfriend. When she spoke up, he was convicted, released, and then found dead. "The fear that her	Dr Angelou was known for her incredible writing, such as *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969). Although the source of her selective mutism was devastating, it was the silent years where her admiration for books and literature grew; and skilful listening, observing, and memorising abilities flourished.

	voice could be used for harm . . . triggered a period of selective mutism", a form of anxiety marked by a child's discomfort in speaking in certain situations. In Angelou's case, she refused to utter a word for 5 years.	Angelou's sharing of her experiences with selective mutism revealed that speaking and silence are compelling actions within their own right. Neither is weaker or stronger than the other, since both can be utilised to make a statement that grips us long after the moment is over.
Audre Lorde (1934–1992)	Lorde struggled with breast cancer. After she had undergone a mastectomy, she refused to wear a prosthesis, stating, "Either I love my body one-breasted now, or remain forever alien to myself".	Lorde defined herself as a Black lesbian feminist mother warrior poet. She wrote *Sister Outsider*, *The Cancer Journals* and several other works of poetry and prose.
Barbara Jordan (1936–1996)	Jordan had multiple sclerosis, which bound her to a wheelchair. She was also diagnosed with cancer.[118]	The first African-American to serve in the Texas Senate in 1967, in 1973 Jordan became the first African-American woman from a Southern state to serve in Congress. She was also the first Black woman to give the keynote address at a Democratic National Convention. Jordan worked for voting rights and minimum wage laws, and was considered a Civil Rights Movement leader.
Sylvia Walker (1937–2004)	Walker was blind.	Director of the Center for Disability and Socioeconomic Policy Studies, and the Howard University Research and Training Center, Walker also served as Vice-Chair of the President's Committee's on the Employment of People with Disabilities. She was a champion for disability rights and her research helped lead to the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990).
Johnnie Lacy (1937–2010)	Lacy had polio and was paralysed from the waist down.	Lacy was a leader in the independent living movement and fought for the rights of people with disabilities, especially people of colour. She led Community Resources for Independent Living, a nonprofit organisation in Hayward providing services and advocacy. Lacy spoke of being excluded from the Black

[118] See *History.com*'s "Barbara Jordan: Early Life and Education".

		community due to her disability, and from the disabled community due to being a person of colour. As a Black woman in a wheelchair, she educated her communities about race and disability.
Pat Parker (1944–1989)	Parker had breast cancer.	Parker wrote about identity and pride. She was involved with the Black Panther Party, the Women's Press Collective, and gay and lesbian organising.
Dr Nathie Marbury (1944–2013)	Marbury was deaf.	The first Black deaf woman to enter the National Leadership Training Program for the Deaf at California State University, Northridge, Dr Marbury was also the first Black deaf female teacher at the Kendall Demonstration Elementary School for the Deaf in Washington, D.C. Through her teaching and advocacy, she shared her passion for American Sign Language and deaf culture.
Jazzie Collins (1958–2013)	Collins was an HIV-positive African-American transgender woman.	Collins was a powerful fighter for social and economic justice, and a San Franciscan Black transgender activist who fought for the rights of seniors, people with disabilities, the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/transsexual) community, and people of colour. She served on San Francisco's first LGBT Aging Policy Task Force, was active with Senior & Disability Action, and previously with the Senior Action Network.
Hydeia Broadbent (1984~)	Broadbent was born with HIV.	An HIV/AIDS humanitarian and activist, during her childhood in the 1980s and 1990s Broadbent spoke about how she was stigmatised and ostracised for having AIDS. An activist by the age of 6, she identifies as the first African-American youth to speak out about HIV/AIDS.[119]

[119] See Senior & Disability Action's "Disability History".

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