



CHAPTER II

THE IMPORTANCE OF BLACK MATERNAL FIGURES ON THEIR DAUGHTER'S SELF FORMATION IN *THE COLOR PURPLE*

The Color Purple is a story focusing on female African American life during the 1930s mostly in rural Georgia. It addresses the black female life including the exceedingly low position in black social culture which contributes to the protagonist's difficulties in developing her self. In order to develop her sense of self, the protagonist needs the black maternal figure to help her redefine the concept of self in the areas of psychology and physical body, creativity and self dependence.

The word "self" employed by different theorists and used extensively in recent studies especially in the study of African American women, vis à vis the identity question, has different meanings and D. W. Winnicott's definition will be used in this chapter to explain the self formation and development of the characters in *The Color Purple*. Winnicott defines "true self" in *The Theory of the Parent- Infant Relationship* as "the ability to experience oneself as an effective emotional and interpersonal agent" (qtd. in Chodorow 60). Nancy Chodorow, a feminist psychoanalyst, explains Winnicott's definition of true self by maintaining that children who lack true self "may grow up without ego capacities sufficient to establish relationships, may not develop [...] verbal skills, may be psychotic, and, in extreme cases, die" (60). Moreover, those who cannot develop a true self may develop a "false self." The meaning of a "false self is described by Winnicott as, "emerge[ing] on the pattern of conformity or adaptation to, or else rebellion against, the unsatisfactory environment. Its aim is survival in minimum discomfort, not full vigorous spontaneous creative selfhood. [...]" (qtd. in Chodorow 60). According to these definitions of self, we can

assume that individuals with a healthy true self are more likely to establish good relationships with others, are able to communicate effectively, are able to adapt to the environment and display emotional stability and creativity.

The “true self” is formed in a healthy relationship with others where the first relationship in life is usually between the mother and child. Winnicott suggests in “The Capacity to Be Alone” that “a good relationship between infant and caretaker [who is usually a biological mother] allows the infant to develop a sense of separate self—a self whose existence does not depend on the presence of another—as it develops a sense of basic relatedness (qtd. in Chodorow 68). She also agrees with Winnicott’s point but she further emphasizes this important role particularly in the female’s self formation. The healthy bond between infant and its mother increases its importance especially when it is a mother-daughter relationship. A girl exclusively needs a close connection with her mother in order to attain her sexual orientation. Jeanne Lampl-de Groot proposes in “The Evolution of the Oedipus Complex in Women” that there is “an identification on the part of children with parents of their own gender. [...] a girl identifies with her mother in their common inferiority and in her heterosexual stance” (qtd. in Chodorow 113). Perry also shares other critics’ ideas about a child’s self formation where she believes that in developing one’s sense of self, individuals need the nurturing others in their lives. Perry’s theory will be used in this thesis study of the female characters and their self formation in *The Color Purple*. Initially, Perry explains the importance of the mother on the child’s formation of self as one who participates in the child’s experience because she is usually the first person the child encounters. She also provides the sheltered space in which the child can safely play, experiment and negotiate between an inner and outer reality. The mother can also serve as the mirror helping to verify the child’s behavior and feelings.

However, black mothers had difficulties in performing their nurturing role under the condition of enslavement. Black mothers have double burdens; they have to work on plantations—either labor or domestic works—and have to take all responsibilities in the household: cooking, cleaning house, laundering and definitely child-rearing. Fortunately, she does not have to face these burdens alone and receives support from the female slave network especially in childcare. The responsibility for raising children was shared among sisters, grandmothers, relatives and friends. Deborah Gray White illustrates in her book, *Ar'n't I a Woman?* that these women who provided the maternal care for a child whose biological mother and father could not caregive become a child's surrogate mother (128). At this point, Perry's idea can be used to explain the relationship between a surrogate mother and a child when the biological mother is unavailable because Perry expands the idea of the female network in raising children by opening up the possibility of the term mother to include everyone who possesses the nurturing quality without regard to their sex or the nature of their relationship (7). The relationship between maternal figure or the nurturing other and a daughter in a black community helps us understand the self formation of Celie, the protagonist in *The Color Purple*, in the areas of psychology and physical body, creativity, and self dependence which will be examined in depth.

Psychological condition, which is a significant indication of the "true self," is closely related to body image. Therefore, it is important to understand the influence of the body on psychological condition and the self. Winnicott suggests the importance of the body when the infant needs to develop a bounded body ego, a sense of the permanence of the physical separateness and of the predictable boundedness of the body takes place (qtd. in Chodorow 68). In other words, the infant needs to know its own body; otherwise, it cannot develop its self. Sheila Green also underscores the

importance of body especially on the female self formation, in her book, *The Psychological Development of Girls and Women: Rethinking Change in Time*, quoting Adrienne Rich's speech, "women are controlled by lashing us to our bodies" (94). Green explains this quotation by saying that the psychology of a woman is in relation to her own body and that changes in a woman's body affect her psyche. During childhood, Green suggests, "the physical attractiveness becomes more salient facet of women's lives. [...] Unattractive girls were more likely to be kicked and hit" (80). If this is accepted as fact, then a so-called ugly girl begins to adopt a negative attitude towards her body because it does not fulfill social expectations. Green suggests that these ideas can have an important effect on how a girl senses and perceives her body. She will have a tendency to view her body as either ally or enemy and this negative attitude toward her body will become extreme in situations where a girl has experienced physical or sexual abuse (81).

During pregnancy, many women, says Green, "feel unattractive [...], complaining of being fat and ugly" (88) and many women also suffer from negative images during middle age. Green insists that, "middle aged women are rarely presented as sexually attractive and desirable" (90). These negative images, together with the end of their procreativity, affect their psychological condition significantly, making them undesirable and useless. According to Green, we can make the assumption that a woman cannot effectively develop her sense of self and a healthy psychological condition if she is trapped in a negative attitude toward her body. Green concludes by quoting a part of Jane Usher's work, *Fantasies of Femininity*, confirming these assumptions, "what is depressing, after years of attempts to liberate women from oppressive models of their psychological ties to their reproductive and sexual function and from the tyranny of keeping up a youthful and conventionality

pretty appearance, is that so many women, from childhood to old age, are in thrall to these restrictive images of what it means to be a woman” (95). According to this conclusion, a woman’s self formation and her psychological are closely related to the bodies in three respects, body image, sexuality and the bodily functions, especially those related to reproductivity.

The psychological condition can be apparent in the verbal skills and the ability to communicate. Gerrilyn Smith suggests in “Children’s Narratives of Traumatic Experience” based on many years of working with adults and children who have experienced family violence, sexual abuse, rape and institutional abuse, that children with the traumatic experiences have a depressed emotional state and have problems in voicing their experiences. She also mentions that the individual who experiences trauma often refuses to talk openly about the traumatic experiences in the family (62). In other words, children who endure a depressed emotional state and poor psychological condition tend to lack verbal communication skills. In order to enjoy a healthy psychological condition, Smith suggests that patients need to be able to “voice and write their lived experiences, to operate cognitively and emotionally on that static encapsulation” (61). The ability to express their trauma is the first step toward psychological healing. After the patients hear and have their traumatic experiences reflected back accurately, they may be healed. To sum up, communication skills are strong indicators of psychological health as well as in self development.

Moreover, an individual can redefine the concept of self through creative expression. According to Winnicott’s definition of self, a woman who has found her true self should have a “full vigorous spontaneous creative selfhood” (qtd. in Chodorow 60). The importance of creativity is increased especially in the black female self formation. White states the importance of creativity in black female self

formation in *Ar'n't I a Woman?* that female work such as being a seamstress allows self growth and self-satisfaction because it gives the opportunity for self-expression and creativity (128). According to White, the black woman's self can be nurtured through developing craftsmanship. Creativity is defined by Raymond Pfeiffer as "the piece of work which is first to a significant extend new, *original and unique* and second show a high degree of success in its field" (emphasis added, 133). According to this definition, creativity helps an individual to express the essential self which is unique and does not conform to any traditional social patterns. As well as craftsmanship, the concept of self in blacks can be redefined through the blues. Singing the blues is a cultural practice of African-Americans that conveys the individual's feelings and is used to express traumas in their lives. Through these expressions, traumas can be liberated and the true self is formed more easily. In Maria V. Johnson's discussing of the role of blues in Walker's works, "African American women performers and their performances symbolize vitality and aliveness, and the will and spirit not only to endure but potentially to flourish. The blues woman, whose song is true to her own experience and rooted in the values and beliefs of the community, empowers those who love her and effects change in those around her" (222). Therefore, expressing the blues not only liberates the performer but also empowers others.

The concept of self can also be suggested by the individual's self-dependence which is also indicative of the true self because it demonstrates how the individual no longer depends on others; is not influenced or controlled either by authority or beliefs and has the ability to think, express and act out freely.

Based on the earlier discussion, the key factors signifying the "true self" are psychological well-being and physical body, creativity and self-dependence. These

three aspects and the development of Celie's "true self" will be examined. Her psychological problems and her negative attitude toward her body and their influences on the female self-formation, the importance of creativity in motivating the "true self" formation and, lastly, the effects of self-dependence on Celie's self formation will be explored in depth.

Celie is one character whose lack of her true self is suggested by an unhealthy psychological condition that is influenced by negative attitudes towards her own body. She lives under circumstances that do not allow her to develop her true self. According to the previous definition of self formation, Celie needs a close relationship with her mother or at least with a nurturing other in the case that her mother is unavailable to help her develop her self. Unfortunately, Celie's mother cannot help her to form her self and there is no nurturing other to facilitate the development of her self formation. After her father's death, her mother is no longer able to care for Celie or herself because she has been severely traumatized by the memory her husband's lynching and death. She becomes both physically and psychologically ill, lying half dead in bed. Celie no longer has a mother who takes care of the family in the same way as mothers in most families with mothers at the helm do. Celie cannot ask her mother to be nurturing and has no one in her family who is able to provide her with this mother-daughter relationship. Her family is scattered. Her loving father is dead. Her mother has become insane. Her only sister and her children are separated. There is no female network to provide this much needed nurturing relationship. Having no one to provide the mother-daughter relationship, Celie is unable to develop her true self.

Her lack of true self is apparent in her attitude toward her body and her psychological insecurity. Celie views her physical appearance negatively. This

attitude toward her body is partly the result of beliefs that physical beauty is passed congenitally by female ancestors. Her mother is a compliant member of the patriarchal society she is in that tends to value physical appearance as a priority. When her mother undergoes the traumatizing experience, she becomes mentally and physically ill lying in a vegetative state in bed. Her physical beauty has faded due to her illness and her insanity. She is no longer described as “a good looking woman” (171). At this point, Celie’s mother develops a negative attitude toward her body. As the situation becomes worse, Celie’s mother becomes ill, loses her sense of sanity and finally dies in that state.

Similar to her mother, Celie is not satisfied with her physical appearance. When it is not perceived as attractive, Celie develops a negative attitude toward her body. She views her self as ugly and as Trudier Harris claims in “On *The Color Purple*, Stereotypes, and Silence”, “Celie is a woman who believes she is ugly, [...] and makes a big deal of how ugly she believes she is” (157). Her negative opinion about her bodily image increases when she sees Shug Avery’s picture for the first time and immediately compares Shug with herself. Then, she elevates Shug’s beauty and in so doing denigrates her own body describing, “She [Shug] bout ten thousand times more prettier than me” (6). The way Celie compares her body with Shug’s makes her believe that she lacks all the physical attractiveness that Shug has. Celie’s negative attitude toward her own body is also evident when Shug arrives and Celie says, “[...] a new dress won’t help none with my notty head and dusty headrag, my old everyday shoes and the way I smell” (42). These two excerpts show that Celie is firmly convinced that she is ugly. She believes that a new dress cannot help improve her physical image. Moreover, her negative attitude toward her own physical body is emphasized by the way others look at her. When she gives birth to her son and her

milk runs down and dirties all her clothes, her step-father blames her for lacking a sense of decency. He accuses her, "Why don't you look decent?" At this point, her reproductive role is not glorified by her step-father. Therefore, Celie does not realize the importance and value of her reproductive role. On the contrary, she regards pregnancy as impropriety and views her body negatively. Her husband also thinks that she is unattractive. He states, "You ugly, You skinny. You shape funny" (203) and "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all" (204). His unkind statements serve to reinforce her negative view of her own body.

Also, Celie thinks that she is unattractive only because of the way she dresses. Celie always wears an old dress in the church-going style and thinks that it does not look attractive at all. Sweat and dirt appear on her face instead of make up. Comparing herself to Shug, she feels ashamed of the way she shabbily dresses as she mentions,

I [Celie] look at Shug and I feel my heart begin to cramp. It hurt me so, I cover it with my hand. I think I might as well be under the table, for all they care. *I hate the way I look, I hate the way I'm dress.* Nothing but the churchgoing clothes in my chifferrobe (emphasis added, 72).

Being obsessed about her ugliness, Celie develops a low self-esteem. The word "hate" is used to strongly suggest her negative attitude towards her own body. Celie cannot realize her physical attractiveness and value, regarding herself as an ugly and unattractive woman of no value.

Apart from her negative attitude toward her physical appearance, Celie also develops a negative attitude towards sexuality which obstructs her from developing her true self. Having had troubled relationship with her husbands, Albert and Alphonso, Celie develops a negative attitude toward sexuality. Her husbands regard

her only as an object for exchange between them. When Alphonso wants to sell Celie to Albert, he advertises her as if she were a commodity. He says,

She [Celie] Ugly. He say. But she ain't no stranger to hard work. And she clean. And God done fixed her. You can do everything just like you want to and she ain't gonna make you feed it or clothe it (8).

Celie is no different from an object. Her marriage is not based on love. Albert does not treat her as his wife but as a slave who works in the house.

Moreover, this attitude of self-denigration is confirmed by the way Celie confines herself only to that of a sex object. Celie is repeatedly raped and treated brutally by both Albert and Alphonso and never fights back. On the contrary, she seems to accept it as if it were a usual occurrence for a woman as a daughter and a wife. This acceptance may have been made possible through imprinting of her stepfather's insensitivity to her mother. Alphonso, her mother's second husband, did not cherish her the way that Celie's father did. On the other hand, he regards her as an insane woman from whom he could find sexual pleasure from her body. He also insists on having sex with her despite the fact that she is ill.

He was pulling her arm. She say It too soon, Fonso, I ain't well. Finally, he leave her alone. A week go by, he pulling on her arm again. She say Naw, I ain't gonna. Can't you see I'm already half dead (1).

Although she does not have any sexual desire, she cannot deny having a sexual intercourse. He treats her as his sex object. He does not care for her physical and mental illnesses but his own sexual appetite. The relationship between Celie's mother and her second husband devalues her. In these circumstances, she allows herself to be dehumanized.

In the same way, Celie allows herself to be treated as a sex object by her own husbands. *The Color Purple* opens with the scene where by Celie is raped by

Alphonso, her step-father. He treats her in the same way as he treats her mother as an object to quench his sexual gratification because he cannot receive it from her mother. E. Ellen Barker proposes that “[Celie is] viewed as a necessary replacement for her own mother who was too ill and too weary of sex to act on her own” (96). For Alphonso, Celie functions as nothing but an object for sexual abuse. Moreover, Alphonso never cares about her feelings as a receptacle of physical or emotional torment by being abused. “He never had a kine word to say to me,” (1) says Celie. The way Pa does not care if his abuses hurt Celie suggests the condition of a female who undergoes abuses and is treated as a sex object. In the same way, Celie’s husband, Mr. ____, is insensitive to her feelings. When they have sex, Celie says, “He never know how the difference. Never ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off and go to sleep” (76). Celie also adds that “He [Mr. ____] never ast me nothing bout myself. He clam on the top of me and fuck and fuck, even when my head bandaged” (109). Consequently, both Pa and Mr. ____ treat Celie as nothing but an object to quench their sexual desire.

Celie’s negative attitude toward sexuality possibly begins with the sexual trauma imposed on her through unwanted sexual advances from her step-father, Alphonso. Celie describes the injury caused by the incidence of sexual experience and traumatic rape to Shug by saying, “the blood drip down my leg and mess up my stocking” (109). The rape has the effect of causing her to lose her fertility as she says, “I don’t bleed no more” (5). This loss of reproductive capability affects her psychological condition subsequently because she is deprived of the ability to perform the most important duty of a traditional woman—making generation. Celie deems herself as useless and suffers from a low self-esteem. When Celie is given to Albert, she also has harrowing experiences with her husband and is repeatedly raped by him.

Each time she is engaged in sexual act with Albert, she confides to Shug that she “never” (76) enjoys it, rendering it nothing but a traumatic experience. Apart from violating her physically, Albert also violates her privacy by refusing to deliver Nettie’s letters to Celie. Although this violation does not affect her physically, it causes her deep emotional harm and affects her psychology irrevocably. As a result, Celie’s sexual response becomes deadened as she states, “My titties stay soft, my little botton never rise. Now I know I’m dead” (141).

Although the abuse she suffers does not drive her insane as it did her mother, it affects her psychologically and emotionally. Celie, after being sexually abused, denies her body existence as a whole and views it as fragmented. This is evidenced when she describes the rape scene, she refers to parts of her body instead of referring to her body as a whole: “First he put his thing up against *my hip* and sort of wiggle it around. Then he grab hold *my titties*. Then he push his thing inside *my pussy*” (emphasis added, 1). Referring to her “hip, titties and pussy” one by one instead of her entire body suggests her negative self perception and the denial of her body. Celie’s psychological condition, according to Susan Griffin, can be explained as “more than rape itself, the fear of rape permeates our lives [...] and the best defense against this is not to be, to deny being in the body, as a self, [...] to avert your gaze, make yourself, as a presence in this world, less felt” (83).

Moreover, Celie’s identity is no longer accessible after she is raped by her step-father. This denial of her self is suggested by Alice Walker’s writing technique, using the present perfect tense instead of using present tense subjectivity. At the beginning of the story, Celie introduces herself by using present tense “I am”. Because of the rape, she revises her subjectivity. She crosses “I am” and changes it into “I have [always] been” (1). Martha J. Cutter suggests that Celie denies her

present subjectivity because she feels that she is no longer a “good girl” (164). The experience of being raped by her step-father haunts her and she blames herself for a sexual assault which is also an act of incest because she believes she is bad and deserves all pain inflicted on her.

Celie’s denial of her body can also be seen by the way she numbed herself and assumed a lifeless posture. She says, “It all I can do not to cry. *I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, You are a tree*” (emphasis added, 23). Apart from her denial of self by associating herself with something inanimate like wood, without a heart to feel or a voice even to express her pain, Celie, knowing that “trees fear man” (22), also shares the fear of being disconnected with the passive tree. At this point, the woman can do nothing but internalize her pessimistic outlook and continue living in fear.

Furthermore, attention should be given to Celie’s poor psychological condition can be suggested through letters to God. Charles L. Proudfit poignantly suggests in “Celie’s Search for Identity: A Psychoanalytic Developmental Reading of Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*” which reveals much about her state of psychological torment that Celie’s letters are not written in an ordinary language. The sentence structure in the letters is short and choppy. The structure consists only of a subject, a verb and an object. The rhyme is halting and there are a lot of fragments (17). This kind of sentence structure suggests her unusual state of mind and depressed emotional state. It is nearly impossible for Celie to construct her true self with this state of mind.

Apart from her mental instability and negative attitude toward her body, her lack of self can also be suggested by her lack of creative energy. In the first part of the novel, Celie’s creativity seems notably absent. Devoting all of her time to housework chores and caring for her mother contributes to her stifling creativity. Celie’s first form of creative expression is presented after she knows Sofia and she begins quilting

with her. This piece of work cannot be properly regarded as Celie's creativity in full bloom because it is not something original or deviant from the norms or women's conventional social patterns. Moreover, the pattern, called "sister's choice," can be associated with the significance of the female network in the black community in general. She and Sofia establish a sisterly bond when they choose to become sisters, working together and helping each other. Although quilting is not a demonstration of Celie's creativity, it marks the beginning of her self development. Judy Elsley asserts in "Nothing can be sole or whole that has not been rent: Fragmentation in the Quilt and *The Color Purple*" that, "her quilting is the crucial initial act of redemption as Celie, working with pieces of fabric, begins to actively create herself out of the fragments of her life" (166). Elsley also adds that making quilt can help Celie in her self formation because it is the first time Celie asserts her right to choose. She claims, "By asserting her right to choose, even in such small ways, Celie takes the first step toward living autonomously" (166-167).

Furthermore, Celie is hindered from fully develop her true self because she is dependent. Although she was not dependent on her mother while growing up, she shared her mother's belief of being a dependent woman. Her mother remains a subjugated woman who accepts the patriarchal ideology and believes in the patriarchal family pattern, having a father as the authoritative figure, and a mother and children who depend on the father for every aspect of their lives. In her first marriage, her husband had full authority for the business. She took only the roles of a traditional wife and a mother. After the death of Celie's father, it is clearly stated that Celie's mother could not exist independently: she "still owned land, but there was no one to work it for her, and she didn't know how herself" (171). The mother needs someone on whom she can depend; therefore, feeling vulnerable, she plunges into her second

marriage with a stranger too soon after her first husband's death. Apart from the family business, Celie's mother also has to depend on Celie for tasks within the family realm. Plunging into physical and emotional turmoil, she has lost all her functional abilities including child rearing, the ability to help herself and remains in a state of passivity and inertia on her bad. She has abdicated all responsibilities for housekeeping and placed them on Celie.

Like her mother, Celie cannot be regarded as an independent woman and cannot have an independent existence because she is unable to make any money from her work in the field. She lacks financial means to buy anything for herself, even for the most basic needs. When her clothes are old, Albert's sister, Kate, has to ask Albert for money to buy Celie some new clothes. In this situation of complete subservience, Celie has no ability to earn a living and to take care of herself as she is economically dependent on Albert.

Moreover, Celie is regarded as a dependent woman because she has no voice—she lacks freedom and the ability to think and to act out. The novel opens with the scene in which Celie is being silenced by her step-father, "*You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy*" (1). Alphonso uses the authority of God to threaten Celie with the death of her mother. At this point, Alphonso does not threaten her with her own death but the death of her beloved. It is under this bond of love and attachment between mother and daughter that Celie succumbs to Alphonso's authority. The scene is followed by a description of how her step-father shuts her up saying, "When I hurt, I cry. He start to choke me, saying You better *shut up* and git used to it"(emphasis added, 1). This excerpt also emphasizes how her male counterpart exerts his authority by controlling her freedom and silencing her voice even when expressing pain. After that time Celie says very little. When she first meets

Shug, she is unable to utter any words even though she wants to. It is described in the story, “Come on in, I want to cry. To shout. Come on in. With God help, Celie going to make you well. But *I don't say nothing*” (emphasis added, 43). In the scene where she attempts to explain to her mother why male hair was found in her room, she ends up telling a lie. Moreover, Albert also tries to deny her a voice when she expresses her need to move out by emphasizing, “You too scared to open your mouth to people” (203) and “You can't curse nobody” (204). Celie fails every time she tries to speak. Without a voice, Celie is rendered a dependent woman who is incapable of expressing her thoughts or feelings.

Forbidden from revealing her trauma and express her feeling, in desperation, Celie decides instead to depend on the white male God to help her cope with her own trauma. After being raped and silenced by her step-father, Celie begins to tell God her story in the form of letters. Even though writing is used as a way to release her suppressed feelings, it goes no where. The communication between Celie and God through her letters fails because there is no response from God. This failure can be explained by Gerrilyn Smith's belief in the audience's importance during the psychological healing process. He proposes that,

All stories require a reader—they are written or told to be read and heard [...] This relationship between reader and writer, teller and listener, therapist and client is the creative transforming energy of change, motion and lively curiosity the impetus to be alive (65).

God is not and cannot be a nurturing other or her audience. The God she has put her faith in does not help her but ignores and abandons her. Having not received any response in her desperate plea for help, Celie comes to regard that she is not good enough even for God to help her and deserves to be in the unbearable situation.

Celie is unable to develop her true self because she has been deprived for mother and nurturing other to facilitate her process of self formation. Moreover, her mother also passed on a set of beliefs which she inherits and accepts that obstruct her from forming her "true self". It is obvious that Celie needs someone who can provide adequate mothering and can serve as her role model and facilitate her development of her true self. It is evident that Walker also realizes the importance of the nurturing other. In an interview with Paula Giddings, the writer points out, "I [Walker] don't think you can do anything without help. In order to see the back of your head you need a mirror to look into" (qtd. in Piffer and Stusser 56). Therefore, Walker introduces Shug Avery as Celie's surrogate mother. Shug is regarded as the most appropriate character to play the role of a surrogate mother because she has all qualities needed for Celie's self formation.

According to the theory of self formation, Celie's true self can be developed fully through a close relationship with a nurturing other. Shug emerges as her nurturing other and provides Celie with this much needed mothering. Shug recreates a family for Celie by having herself as its member. When they visit Celie's home, after finding the graves of Celie's parents, Shug proclaims, "Us each other's people now" (178). Maria Lauret states in her study on *Modern Novelists: Alice Walker*, that Shug's speech is her tantamount to begin a kinship and sisterhood (90-91). At this point, Shug is no more a stranger. She becomes a member of Celie's family. She fulfills and brings back all the love Celie has lost. The declaration of kinship can also be regarded as another way Shug can show her love to Celie.

Moreover, Shug also gives Celie the maternal care, the tatter she yearns for. When Celie is with Shug, she feels like Shug is her lost mother because Shug devotedly shows Celie with love and care. Shug also protects Celie from being beaten

by Albert. She says, "I won't leave [...] until I know Albert won't even think about beating you" (74). The way Shug protects Celie from being beaten is similar to how a mother protects her child from all possible danger.

Moreover, Shug loves Celie and makes her feel that she is also worthy enough to be loved by someone. Before Shug's arrival, Celie feels proignantly that she is not loved. She has lost all her loved ones: her parents, her sister and her children. Her feeling of not being loved is suggested through her conversation with Shug about her husbands who deliberately and continually inflict harm on her both physically and emotionally. She bitterly says, "Nobody ever love me" (109). Shug's arrival changes Celie's belief when Celie is given a chance to take care of Shug and help her recover from a serious illness. This nurturing role helps to increase Celie's self worth. It is the first time that Celie feels she is worthy and important enough to be in relationship with someone. This kind of feeling is confirmed when Shug responds to Celie's act of love by saying, "I love you, Miss Celie" (109). This is not the only time Shug expresses her love to Celie since she declares her love to Celie many times.

Shug also helps Celie to define her self through finding her roots. When Shug knows that Nettie, Celie's only sister, is "the only one yo [Celie] ever love" (115) and Celie feels that it is not worth living since she is separated from her beloved sister, Shug tries to help Celie to regain her self-worth by helping Celie to establish contact with her only sister. Shug is the one who discovers that Albert has hidden all Nettie's letters in his trunk and plans to retrieve the letters out of the trunk without his notice. Shug helps her to obtain all the letters, steam open all envelopes to get all the letters and put those envelopes back inside the trunk. After Celie has read all the letters and learns that she still has her loving sister and children who still love her, Celie can then liberate herself from the painful past. With this love, Celie not only is able to realize

her own worth, she can also extricate herself from her guilt about the incest because she learns that Pa is not her biological father and her children are therefore not the result of incestuous relationship. He is a stranger who raped her and took away her family's business. After Celie has liberated herself from all guilt, Shug brings Celie back to her family home to find her own roots and claims the largely unfounded property belonging to her. During the journey back home, Shug and Celie decide to visit Celie's parent's burial place. They find "nothing but weeds and cockleburs and paper flowers fading on some of the graves" (178) but they decide to make a marker. Shug is able to restore all Celie's love—the love of her parents, the love of her sister and the love of her children, which help to strengthen and validate Celie's own self-worth.

Moreover, Shug is also the one who always listens and provides the appropriate environment for Celie to tell other people about her trauma for the first time. According to Ruth Perry, one of the maternal figure's functions is "regulating the environment" (5). Being Celie's surrogate mother, Shug effectively performs her maternal function. When Shug asks to sleep with Celie, Shug raises a question about Celie's relationship with her step-father. This is the first time Celie reveals to another person of her painful experience. Her many pauses during the story-telling suggest the difficulty in expressing the trauma for the first time. After Celie ends her story, Shug consoles Celie with an embrace and sympathetic words:

Oh, Miss Celie, [...] And put her arms round me [...] I start to cry too. I cry and cry and cry. Seem like it all come back to me, laying there in Shug's arms. How it hurt and how much I was surprise [...] Don't cry, Celie, Shug says. Don't cry. She start kissing the water as it come down side my face (108-109).

In this bed room scene, Shug provides a safe environment that enables Celie to express her repressed traumatic experience. After revisiting the site of her trauma and narrating her painful experience of being abused to Shug, her self is able to develop. Proudfoot points out that the development of the self is evident through her use of language, “the increasingly grammatical, stylistic and tonal complexity of her letters” (26).

Apart from being a nurturing surrogate mother, Shug helps Celie develop her true self by mirroring certain aspects of self. Shug fulfills her maternal duty through mirroring, making her a perfect model. She introduces Celie to her own body and encourages her creativity and self-dependence. Shug becomes Celie’s model in changing her negative attitude toward her body. Shug has a very desirable physical appearance and her beauty is noticed by many people. She receives attention from everybody: her audiences, her husbands and our protagonist, Celie. Albert believes she is beautiful as he notes, “Shug got looks [...] She can stand up and be noticed” (203). In the same way, Celie once describes Shug’s beauty, “Shug Avery was a woman. *The most beautiful woman* I ever saw. She more pretty than my mama. She bout ten thousand times more prettier than me” (emphasis added, 6). This excerpt shows that Shug’s beauty is unquestioned for Celie. This marks the first time, Celie is impressed with a woman’s beauty and she begins to realize that a woman can have a positive attitude toward her own physical image. After Shug learns that Celie does not know and appreciate her own body, Shug introduces her to her physical body and makes her develop a positive attitude toward it. Shug explains parts of Celie’s body to her: “Listen, she say, right down there in your pussy is a little botton that gits real hot when you do you know what with somebody. It git hotter and hotter and then it melt. That the good part” (76). This excerpt not only introduces Celie to her physical body

but also carries sexual connotations to help Celie realize the positive part of sexuality. Apart from introducing Celie to her own body, Shug also shows Celie by giving her a mirror to know her own body. With this mirror scene, Celie sees her sexual organ for the first time. Shug also helps Celie to establish her positive attitude towards her own body by insisting that her sexual part is “cute” (76) and “a lot pritter than you [Celie] thought” (77).

Shug also has a positive attitude toward her sexuality and in turn introduces Celie to the joys of sexual pleasure. Her positive attitude toward sexuality is presented through the way she dresses and her sexual behavior. Shug’s very noticeable manner of dress makes a strong impression on Celie as described in their first meeting:

She [Shug] dress to kill. She got on a red wool dress and chestful of black beads. A shiny black hat with what look like chicken feathers curve down side one cheek, and she carrying a little snakeskin bag, match her shoes.

She look so stylish it like the trees all around the house draw themselves up tall for a better look [...] Close up I see all this yellow powder caked up on her face. Red rouge. She look like she ain’t long for this world but dressed well for the next(43).

This excerpt serves not only to show Shug’s attractive way of dressing that impresses Celie so much, but also suggests that she flaunts her sexuality. Her provocative red dress and red rouge suggest her sexual passion. Her bag and shoes which are made of snake skin can also be associated with sexual temptation. Moreover, the way Shug is referred to as a “strumpet” (41), a Middle English word referring to a prostitute, can also hint to her sexually flaunting manner. When Shug begins to sing at Harpo’s jukejoint, she also wears a revealing dress described in the story as a “tight red dress” (72) with “little sassy red shoes” (72). Her “tight” dress shows her intention of flaunting her body. The words “sassy” and the color “red” are again associated with sexuality. Another scene that describes Shug flaunting her sexuality is when “Shug

wearing a gold dress that shows her titties near bout to nipple. Everybody sorta hoping something break. [...] All the men got they eyes glued to Shug's bosom" I [Celie] got my eye glues there too" (78-79).

It is not surprising, perhaps, that Shug displays a positive attitude toward sexual relationships. She does not allow herself to be Albert's sexual object. Shug believes that she can give sexual pleasure to her partners and can also find her own pleasure from the affair. Shug once mentions to Celie about the pleasures in sexual intimacy. She says, "I got what you call a passion for him [Albert]. [...] He make me laugh" (75) and when Celie asks Shug whether she derives any pleasure in sleeping with Albert, she confesses, "I just love it" (75). Shug's passion for Albert can be explained by her relationship with her own mother. It can be assumed that Shug needs to be healed with love and affection and cuddled because it is something she never had in her childhood. Therefore, when she meets Albert, she loves to cling to him. She tells Celie,

She [Shug's mother] never love to do nothing had anything to do with touching nobody [...] I [Shug] try to kiss her, she turn her mouth away. [...] So when I met Albert, and once I got in his arms, nothing could git me out" (117-118).

Her view on sexuality is shown again in her conversation with Celie about her relationship with her mother. She bluntly says, "one thing my mama hated me for was how much I love to fuck" (117). We can see that sexuality to Shug is something to be expressed demonstratively and not repressed.

It is Shug who helps Celie alter her negative attitude toward sexuality. In the mirror scene, Shug introduces Celie to her sexual organ and teaches Celie to find sexual pleasure from her own body. When Celie touches her self, she feels "A little shiver go through me [Celie]" (77). The same feeling also happens when she looks at her own breasts. After this experience Celie no longer regards her sexuality as

something wicked or bad. Shug helps Celie change her attitude from being a passive tree with no feeling, to being a human being whose sexual feelings can be aroused.

In terms of creativity, Shug models how she used her creativity to deal with her traumatic experiences in order to develop her true self. Shug is a blues singer who uses the blues as her means to express her painful past, her feelings and her thoughts about her traumatic situation. Shug decides to sing Bessie Smith's song, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," in Harpo's jukejoint. The name of the song suggests that she has experienced abuse by men in the same way as Celie and other black women have. Accordingly, Shug associates the "Man" in her life with evil; therefore, it is difficult for Shug to view any of them positively. The way Shug would "look over at Mr. _____ a little when she sings that [song]" (71) seems to confirm that stance. Although Albert never abuses Shug sexually and seems to be a good friend, he is regarded as a man who abuses women because he cannot protect Shug's dignity when his father looks down on her. Therefore, she associates Albert with those men who abused her in the past. The song's title also brings to mind a song by Lillian Miller entitled, "You Just Can't Keep A Good Woman Down." Although the focus of the song is shifted from a man to a woman, these two songs reveal a woman's trauma which is suggested through the following lyrics:

But you can never tell, the trouble
sweet Mama have had.
I don't want no man that's gonna play
me and stall (don't mean maybe)
I don't want no man that's gonna play
me and stall (223).

Maria V. Johnson illustrates in "You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down: Alice Walker Sings the Blues" that the words "trouble" and "play me" suggest that the women referred to in the song are "women who struggle and suffer a great deal"

(223). It is noticeable, however, the women in the songs are not depicted as weak; Johnson explains, "They are women [...] who are oppressed but not defeated; women who command respect and reject the mistreatment of men [...] they insist on the value and beauty of themselves; they insist on being themselves, and they demand that their needs be accommodated" (223-224). In other words, these women are able to assert their independent selves, and Shug, the blues singer, is one of them.

Shug's blues also have an important effect on Celie. Firstly, this song connects Shug with Celie. After listening to the song, Celie realizes that Shug also has similarly painful experiences. Indeed, the two women share the same kind of trauma. Secondly, hearing this song makes Celie realize Shug's love for her. When Shug dedicates this song as "Miss Celie's song" (72), it is notably the first time Celie feels that she is loved and is a human being of value or worth. Lastly, the blues songs can, according to Johnson, "empower those who love the blues women and affects change in those around her" (222). This power of the blues is illustrated in Bessie Smith's "Preachin' the Blues":

Let me convert your soul.
 Just a little spirit of the blues tonight.
 Let me tell you girls if your mama ain'ttreatin' you right.
 Let me tell you, I don't mean no wrong.
 I will learn you something if you listen to this song.
 I ain't here to try to save your soul,
 Just want to teach you how to save your good jelly roll (413).

The lyrics in Smith's song show that a blues singer has the power to heal the audience's soul. Therefore, Shug, being a blues singer, can help Celie liberate her self from her trauma.

As a self-dependant woman, Shug becomes Celie's model for developing her own self dependence. Firstly, Shug helps Celie to be economically independent. Shug convinces Celie to reclaim her inheritance. Shug says, "Don't be a fool [...] You got

your own house now. Your daddy and mama left it to you. That dog of a stepdaddy just a bad odor passing through” (242). As a result of Shug’s persuasion, Celie decides to reclaim her family property which includes a house bigger than Shug’s, land, money and a store. At this point, Celie becomes economically independent and no longer dependent on Albert. Shug also helps Celie to get on her feet. When Celie decides to move from Albert’s house to live with Shug in Memphis, Shug refuses Celie’s need to serve her. She says, “You not my maid. I didn’t bring you to Memphis to be that. I bought you here to love you and *help you get on your feet*” (emphasis added, 209). Shug does not want Celie to depend on anybody even Shug so she urges Celie to start her pants business, selling pants in her father’s store.

Furthermore, Shug is an independent thinker as is reflected in her unconventional lifestyle that does not conform to the traditional roles assigned to women. She has no desire to be deemed a good wife in the conventional sense and does not take any responsibility for the household chores. Shug speaks up when she wants to and does everything she pleases though it goes against her husband’s will. She defiantly sings in Harpo’s jukejoint even though Albert does not approve. Eventually she eventually leaves him to have her own life with Celie without considering his feelings as Albert says that Shug is the one who can “speak her mind”(268) and he also adds that Shug is the one who “will fight [...] She bound to live her life and be herself no matter what” (268).

From the aspect of love, Shug can be regarded as a womanist. According to Alice Walker’s *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*, a womanist can also be “a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers woman’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counter-balance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men,

sexually and/or non-sexually committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health” (xi). Shug’s attitude towards love and relationships perfectly fits these tenets of womanism. She gives love both unconditionally and unconventionally. At the beginning of the novel, Shug is presented as Mr. _____’s lover and she seems to be satisfied with her relationship with him. However, she not only limits love and relationships to males or being heterosexual in nature but also has love relationships with women. Through the relationship with Celie, Shug’s womanist ideology is clearly presented. The love between Shug and Celie can be read as sexual because Shug once confesses that she loves Celie. Moreover, her love can also be seen through the way they love to kiss each other. Celie talks about their love in the story, “She [Shug] say, I love you, Miss Celie. And then she haul off and kiss me on the mouth. Um, she say, like she surprise. I kiss her back, say, um, too. Us kiss and kiss till us can’t hardly kiss no more. Then us touch each other” (109). Moreover, Shug “loves to hug up, period, she say. Snuggle. Don’t need nothing else right now” (141). Their relationship transcends beyond sisterly love and alters a sexual nature. They do not have an ordinary kiss but a kiss which can “hardly kiss no more.” They do not have sisterly embrace to give warmth or courage but they love to hold each other passionately. Nevertheless, this love between Shug and Celie had the added dimension of being a mother and daughter type of love. In the scene where Shug and Celie sleep together, Celie expresses her feeling that, “[it] little like sleeping with mama [...] It warm and cushion” (111). Even in a scene that can be read as describing the sexual affair between Shug and Celie, there is a sentence which suggests the daughter-mother relationship. Celie describes her feeling when they have an affair that, “Then I [Celie] feels something real soft and wet on my breast, feel like one of my little lost babies

mouth. Way after while, *I act like a little lost baby too*" (emphasis added, 110). At this point we can see that Shug has extended her relationship with her partners to include both sexes.

According to the tenets of womanism, Shug's sense of wholeness does not limited only to her unconventional relationship with others but also includes her nurturing quality. Shug extends her love and concern to almost everyone around her. Apart from helping Celie liberate her self from her trauma and develop her "true self," Shug also helps Squeak, Harpo's lover whose name is Mary Agnes, find her voice. She helps Squeak express herself in song and encourages her to sing in public, saying, "I mean, Mary Agnes, you ought to sing in public [...] listening to you sing, folks get to thinking bout a good screw" (112). It is at Harpo's place, therefore, that Squeak begins her singing career.

In addition, Shug's assertive independence is different because she does not rely on the white male God in the way Celie does. Celie subjugates herself under the dominance of both males in patriarchal society and the white male God of Christianity. Being enslaved, she can go nowhere and cannot form her "self." Shug, on the other hand, is not enslaved by males; therefore, she becomes free and independent. Her beliefs are also unconventional. She has her own version of God which is different from the conventional Christian God in that her God will be pleased by everything she does. Her God does not demand anything from his people but would rather they appreciate everything which can make them happy, including sexual pleasure or provocative music or dancing. As Shug mentions, "But once us feel loved by God, us do the best us can to please him with what us like" (188) and "God love everything you love" (191). All these attest to the fact that Shug has a very independent mind which does not subscribe to the conventional religion. After Shug

explains her understanding of God to Celie, Celie begins to understand that she is also loved by God and is a part of his creation. This enables Celie to realize her importance and finally has, what E. Ellen Barker defines as, “self-reckoning” (62). It is through these new realizations that she is able to love herself and others.

In conclusion, Shug is the most appropriate character to perform the role of Celie’s surrogate mother to help her face all the past abusive experiences and to form her true independent self. Shug can provide good enough mothering for Celie, can be Celie’s role model in all aspects: having a positive view of the body; having creativity and being independent; and helping Celie to develop her true independent self.

With the help of Shug, Celie is finally able to form her true self. In terms of her body, Celie’s negative view changes to embrace and satisfy with her physical body and sexuality. When Albert makes an unkind statement, she responds by saying, “I’m pore, I’m black, I may be ugly and can’t cook, voice say to everything listening. But *I’m here*” (emphasis added, 205). With these words, Celie no longer accepts the harsh words that previously invalidated her existence. She is able to accept her physical appearance as it is. She does not deny her body as she did in the past but, rather, she asserts her existence.

Moreover, Celie also views sexuality from a different perspective. After Shug introduces Celie to her own body, Celie learns to and becomes satisfied with her physical body and sexuality. She develops a positive attitude toward her sexual organ, comparing it to “a wet rose” (77), and most importantly claims possession of her sexual organ saying that, “It mine” (77). Celie no longer thinks that her body is mere a sexual object to serve man’s desire. This shifting attitude suggests the emergence of her “true self.” Molly Hite also discusses Celie’s changing attitude to sexuality. She indicates that Celie’s view which has emphasized the lack or something that was

missing, which is represented by a hole, is shifted to a “little button” which can be associated with the existence of the self. Moreover, intercourse is now stimulated by women’s fingers and tongues instead of men’s penis (266). In conclusion, Celie realizes that pleasure can be derived through her sexuality which is no longer dependent on men. From then on, Celie is no longer regarded as a “virgin” because she is contented with both her body and her sexuality.

In terms of creativity, Celie’s creativity is presented through quilt-making and pants-making. The quilt that Celie makes with Sofia is the first opportunity for Celie to assert her rights, choosing the pattern called “sister’s choice” (58). Not only does she choose the pattern, Celie also selects each piece of cloth and the color that is sewed into a pattern. Judy Elsley views the opportunity to assert her rights even in a very small way as being the “first step toward living autonomously” (167). In other words, quilt-making is the first step toward independence. Elsley also adds that the activity becomes a healing process because quilt makers are no longer passive victims who are torn. Quilt-making turns being torn into tearing, turns an object into a subject (167). Celie, through quilt-making, can also transform herself from an object to a subject. Another creative activity suggesting Celie’s self is pants-making. Sewing pants for women in patriarchal society is regarded as unconventional, therefore, making pants demonstrates Celie’s independence. The process of designing pants further reinforces Celie’s ability and rights in making decisions. She says, “I change the cloth, I change the print, I change the waist, I change the pocket. I change the hem, I change the fullness of the leg [...]” (209). At this point, Celie can design unique pants for everybody. Moreover, pants-making helps Celie to assert her rights to choose in the same way quilting does.

In terms of self-dependence, Celie, at the end of the novel, can be said to be truly self-dependent. Firstly, she does not have to depend on anyone economically as she has inherited a house, land, money and a business from her parents. Moreover, Celie becomes successful in her business when it is mentioned that, “[...] orders start to come in from everywhere Shug sing. Pretty soon I’m [Celie] swamp” (211). Shug acknowledges Celie’s success, “You making your living, Celie” (212). Up to this point, Celie can be self-reliant and get on her own feet. She can earn a living and no longer needs to depend on anyone. Secondly, Celie’s self dependence also is asserted when she finds her own voice. Actually, Celie begins to find her voice when verbalizing her painful past and using her voice to express her feelings. Later on, Celie not only can express her feelings but also is able to stand up for herself. When she decides to leave Albert to live with Shug in Memphis, it is the first time she has voiced a specific need. She announces, “You [Albert] a lowdown dog is what’s wrong, I say. It’s time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And you dead body just the welcome mat I need” (195). At this point, Albert no longer means anything to Celie and she insists on doing everything according to her own needs. Here is how Celie describes how her own voice was created, “look like when I open my mouth the air rush in and shapes words” (204). It is indeed an affirmation of her independence and selfhood. She regards herself as free and equal to men, no longer the passive wife who has no voice. Moreover, Celie is self-dependent because she can protect herself. At the end of the novel, Celie no longer surrenders to her husband or sees him as an authority figure neither is she a passive victim but she fights back when he beats her: “Mr. _____ reach over to slap me. I [Celie] jab my case knife in his hand” (196).

Celie also forms independent thoughts and no longer surrenders herself to patriarchal norms. At the end of the novel, she no longer believes in the white male

God of Christianity as seen when Celie stops writing letters to God whom she feels does not help her to cope with traumas. Instead, she begins to address her letters to her beloved sister, Nettie. In her last letter, Celie begins her letter, "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God" (286). Oddly enough, this address suggests her changing attitude toward religion. It can be read that Celie no more believes in the superiority of the white male God but she has turned to believe in the equality of all creations. Celie's new beliefs also do not conform with conventional Christian beliefs. She and Shug perform a ritual which is can be viewed as a supernatural practice. She explains:

"Then she [Shug] took some cedar stick out of her bag and lit them and give one of them to me. Us started at the very top of the house in the attic, and us smoked it all the way down to the basement, chasing out all the evil and making a place for good" (243).

This ritual suggests that Celie no longer thinks that Christianity is superior to supernatural practices. Celie also regards God differently when she does not address God with respect but she says, "I smoke when I want to talk to God. I smoke when I want to make love. Lately I feel like me and God make love just fine anyhow. Whether I smoke reefer or not" (218). Celie's irreverent way of treating God goes against the Christian belief. She no longer views God as superior but rather she treats him as if he were an ordinary human-being who also has sexual desires.

Celie has become a woman who no longer observes or accepts traditional patriarchal norms. She no longer thinks that life should end in marriage and expands her relationships beyond heterosexual ones. Celie confesses that she loves Shug but their love is beyond sisterhood, friendship, familial or sexual relationships. Celie's love for Shug is a mixed kind of love. They seem to be lovers because they have sexual affairs and Celie feels hurt when Shug loves someone else, but there is warmth

of the maternal love in this kind of love as well. To sum up, the love between Celie and Shug is unexplainable and unconventional. We cannot compare their love with other relationships. Celie also does not believe in a fixed gender boundaries. She takes to wearing pants and she gratefully accepts the way some men wear women's attire. She explains her idea to Albert:

People in Africa try to wear what feel comfortable in the heat, I say. Of course, missionaries have they own ideas bout dress. But left to themself, Africans wear a little sometimes, or a lot, according to Nettie. But men and women both preshate a nice dress (271).

This assertion suggests that Celie no longer believes in hierarchical systems but equality for everyone. Her beliefs about fixed gender roles in a patriarchal society have also changed. This is apparent when she no longer limits herself to household responsibilities and extends her role into the business realm. She becomes a business woman and owns the pants business. In the same way, Celie tries to extend men's role into the domestic realm. She urges Albert to sew. She tells Albert that men in Africa sew because they are not backward, sticking to patriarchal norms in the way men in America do. At this point, Celie expands both her own and Albert's attitude toward demarcation of gender roles.

Celie also shows her independence when she insists on using the black vernacular instead of Standard English. Standard English reinforces the norms of colonial and post-colonial patriarchal societies imposed upon African American. Celie, at the end of the story, refuses to use Standard English although she has a chance to practice it. When Darlene, the girl who helps Celie to run her pants business, tries to teach her how to speak properly English, Celie refuses stating, "only a fool would want you to talk in a way that feel peculiar to your mind" (214).

Finally, Celie can be regarded as a self-dependent woman because, she has become self reliant, no longer depending on anyone, not even Shug. Celie does not feel hurt when Shug decides to spend her life with someone else. Celie insists, “I can live content without Shug, [...] I be so calm. If she come, I be happy, If she don’t, I be content” (284).

In conclusion, *The Color Purple* ends with Celie attaining her self formation which is shown in three aspects – her psychological condition and physical body, her creativity and her self-dependence. In the aspect of body, Celie now views her body and her sexuality positively. Celie’s creativity helps her assert her individuality, freedom and her selfhood, and, finally Celie also becomes an independent woman, considering her own needs as a priority and free from the subjugation and norms of patriarchal society.

The Color Purple provides insights relating to the black female self and the nurturing other and mother’s influence on the daughter’s self formation. The novel reinforces the notion that a mother plays an important role in a daughter’s life. In the very first part of the novel, it is difficult for Celie to form her true self because she lacks a mother figure as her role model. When Celie meets Shug, who takes on that role and can provide her with good enough mothering, Celie’s self is developed gradually. By the end of the story, Celie has become an independent woman who is able to fully establish her true self with the help of a surrogate mother.

