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About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of *gender forum*.

Submissions

Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

Article Publishing

The journal aims to provide rapid publication of research through a continuous publication model. All submissions are subject to peer review. Articles should not be under review by any other journal when submitted to *Gender forum*.

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Editorial

By Laura-Marie von Czarnowsky, University of Cologne, Germany

1 The Early Career Researchers Issue of Gender Forum provides a platform for emerging scholars who wish to critically engage with questions of gender in their respective areas of research. In order to present a wide spectrum, we selected papers by students who are still working on their first degrees (BA and MA) as well as by those who are already pursuing a PhD project. The articles are arranged according to the contributors' current position in their academic career starting with papers by students working towards their first and second degrees, and ending with essays by PhD candidates. What they all share is a keen interest in gender issues and in exploring and developing gender studies as an interdisciplinary field of necessary global importance and impact.

2 Because of its open call policy, the Early Career Researchers Issue negotiates topics as diverse as feminist authorship in contemporary commercial American television, an interrogation of the gendered nature of the preppers and survivors movement, Australasian ideals of femininity, genocidal trauma in Turkish-Armenian life writing, feminist undertones in early 20th century writing, holistic feminist health practices today, as well as negotiations of madness in Shakespearean and constructions of Black British identity in contemporary drama.

3 The issue opens with Esther Dolas, who examines the effects and after-effects of the Armenian genocide in the early twentieth century, which has been denied by the Turkish government and excluded from Turkey's official historiography. The essay takes up the issue of the so-called "leftovers of the sword", mostly female survivors of the genocide, who have been assimilated into Turkish society. Among the descendants of these survivors is human-rights activist and lawyer Fethiye Çetin. Dolas's article "Female Trauma and the Pursuit of Self in Fethiye Çetin's *My Grandmother*" examines cross-generational, post-genocidal transmission of trauma in life writing focussing on the construction and pursuit of self in the aftermath of traumatic experience.

4 The pursuit of self is also addressed in Sara Tewelde-Negassi's essay, "The Denotation of Room and its Impact on the Construction of Female Identity in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*". She critically engages with Virginia Woolf's plea for 'a room of one's own' (1929) to facilitate not only female independence and self-reliance, but also the opportunity

to write fiction. The article applies Woolf's thesis to the protagonist of Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* to show how exactly the notion of the room interacts with notions of identity.

5 In "Black British Women's Search for Identity: An Analysis of Jackie Kay's *Chiaroscuro* and Winsome Pinnock's *Talking in Tongues*", Eva-Maria Cersovsky analyses the dominant production patterns of British theatre and argues that black British women playwrights have not profited from the 'revolution' within British theatre – a development which Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge have attributed to the last decade. Cersovsky takes up the issue of black women's marginalization in British cultural and political discourses and regimes of representation, and links it to the continuous concern of black female playwrights about issues of identity.

6 "Love and Madness in Renaissance Tragicomedies – *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *The Winter's Tale*" by Daniela Kellermann addresses the complex interrelation of gender, love and madness on the Renaissance stage. The paper traces the representations of as well as the reasons for and treatments of madness enacted in the plays in connection to questions about gender and versions of a tragicomic love plot.

7 The second half of the Early Career Researchers Issue presents works from PhD students. In her article, "Who will survive? On Bodies and Boundaries after the Apocalypse", Lina Rahm explores the subculture of preppers and survivalists, who actively and practically prepare for the threat of a supposedly imminent apocalypse. Rahm's paper examines how corporeality structures survivalism using a theoretical framework that combines the notion of trans-corporeality with the performance of gender, sexuality and embodiment in virtual digital space.

8 Hanh Nguyen's article, "The Vietnamese Concept of a Feminine Ideal and the Images of Australian Women in Olga Masters' Stories", traces traditional Vietnamese ideals of femininity in Olga Masters' 20th century fiction. Identifying four decisive Vietnamese ideals of femininity (*Industriousness, Appropriate Self-presentation, Communication Skills, and Virtue*) in Masters' writing, Nguyen claims commonalities in Australian and Vietnamese women's struggles despite geographical and cultural differences.

9 Kate Hendricks and Sarah Plummer engage with the issue of fitness in feminist and post-feminist discourse. In "Re-thinking Wellness: A Feminist Approach to Health and Fitness", they critically discuss the often decidedly non-feminist approaches to fitness and wellness, with popular culture's emphasis on beauty and size detracting from the core benefit of any personal wellness practice – empowerment. The article thus questions feminist

critiques of sexist beauty norms and thinness mandates and analyses how these provide barriers to notions of holistic wellness in society at large, and within the feminist community.

10 The final contribution explores “Lena Dunham and the Imperfect Body of HBO’s *Girls*”. The authors, Stefania Marghita and Conrad Ng, address the ways in which Lena Dunham, the creator, head writer, producer, sometimes director, and star of the television series *Girls*, defies notions of traditional femininity, subverts representations of what Angela McRobbie named the 21st century “postfeminist masquerade”, and establishes a new form of authorship in television.

Female Trauma and the Pursuit of Self in Fethiye Çetin's *My Grandmother*

By Esther Dolas, University of Cologne, Germany

Abstract:

In 1915, the first genocide of the twentieth century was committed in the Ottoman Empire. Ever since, the Armenian Genocide has been denied by the Turkish government and excluded from Turkey's official historiography. Contemporary Turkish society has brought about the issue of so-called "leftovers of the sword", mostly female survivors of the genocide, who have been assimilated into Turkish society. Among the descendants of these survivors is human-right's activist and lawyer Fethiye Çetin. This article examines cross-generational, post-genocidal trauma transmission in the exemplary case of her memoir *My Grandmother*. Hypothesising that trauma can be overcome by means of narrative, this article focuses on the pursuit of self in the aftermath of traumatic experience.

"In life, as in this book, her first aim is to give voice to those whom history has silenced."

(Freely in Çetin xi)

1 Writing about genocide is always a highly political issue. In Fethiye Çetin's case, it is even a dangerous one. For nearly a whole century Turkey has not only been denying the Armenian Genocide, but actively prosecutes civilians who use the term to refer to the ethnic cleansing of 1915. The effect of this policy is the continuance of the genocide "on a psychological level" today (Boyajian in Voski Avakian 207), as it is preventing the development of a culture of remembrance.

2 In 2004, Çetin dared to publish her memoir in which she recounts the life of her grandmother, who – after decades of hiding – revealed herself to be an Armenian Christian with the name Heranush and not, as believed, a Turkish Muslim named Seher. Her grandmother is just one example of so-called "leftovers of the sword" (Bilefsky 2010), mostly female survivors who were saved from the death marches by Turks and Kurds. Although saved, these women were forced to assimilate into Turkish society. Giving up their identities as Armenians, some of the female survivors were forced to become servant girls in Turkish or Kurdish families or even prostitutes in order to survive. Heranush, Çetin's grandmother, who was torn from her mother's arms by a Turkish military officer during the death marches, became a servant girl, married a Turkish man and vanished from the surface of the Armenian post-genocidal narrative.

3 Why are these Armenian women of interest to a gender studies discourse? First and foremost because the execution of the genocide was clearly gendered. Derderian emphasises the gender-specific aspects of the Armenian case, stating that after the "murder of the

Armenian leadership and men of military age”, women and children were sent on death marches in the Syrian deserts where they experienced “kidnapping, sex slavery” and in the case of women “forced re-marriage” (1). Turkey’s policy of denial affects precisely and most severely exactly those survivors Çetin discusses in her memoir. Women, who did not and could not seek refuge abroad but were assimilated into Turkish culture, have been non-existent in diasporic narrative for decades and even suffered from discrimination among the Turkish as well as the Armenian communities. Derderian quotes an Armenian male genocide-survivor referring to the phenomenon of Armenian women marrying Turkish men:

Now there are many Armenian women among the Turks. They were taken in and remained with them and bore their children. They are all Turkicized [sic] now—gone from our blood. The children don’t know their identity, only their mothers do. . . [...] Everyone used to look down and find it shameful when an Armenian married a Turk. (13)

4 The trauma of these women is not merely rooted in the physical experience of genocide since the psychological consequences of their loss of identity are tremendous, ultimately rendering their voices extinct in Armenian diasporic communities throughout the world. Çetin’s memoir not only thematises these forgotten women but also targets an issue rarely talked about – the trauma of the women’s descendants and therefore Çetin’s own. I argue that the revelation of being partly Armenian causes a crisis of identity of successive generations which is traceable in the narrative of her memoir. Thus she writes about her grandmother’s trauma “in the midst of [her own] trauma” (Caruth 8). Based on Narrative Psychology, I suggest that her narrativisation serves as a by means by which she can work through her trauma and retrospectively reconstruct her and her grandmother’s disrupted identities.

5 By using a female focaliser and reconstructing the life of her grandmother, Çetin articulates a feminist statement. In her memoir, as this article will show, she manages to reconcile the image of the victimised female with a powerful and confident female matriarch. She creates through her narrative a way of overcoming the pain that these forgotten Armenian women, and herself, had and still have to endure. In an interview, she states: “When they recounted the truth of the past, it was always to other women, to female grandchildren, as only other women could really understand the pain” (in Ozinian 2012).

Female trauma and the fragmented self

6 Growing up a Muslim Turkish woman, Fethiye Çetin “was in a state of shock for a long time” (in Bilefsky 2010) when her grandmother revealed her secret of being an

Armenian genocide-survivor. For decades she was unable to articulate her confusion and shock since understanding and comprehending her grandmother's past proved to be a traumatic experience in itself. Trauma, as defined by Freud and rephrased by Caruth, refers to "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" through an "event that [...] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness" (4). Çetin experiences precisely this wounding of her mind in one of her grandmother's storytelling sessions. In her memoir, she admits to being deeply disturbed and on the verge of a breakdown when she is confronted with recollections of the atrocities her grandmother had to endure: "It was hard to keep myself from running out into the streets to cry and scream. I would never have believed any of this, unless it was my grandmother telling me" (65). This extreme emotional conflict following the traumatic testimony of her grandmother is so severe that the recollections are not "available to consciousness" (Caruth 4). The traumatic revelations leading to the emotional turmoil are as follows: the confrontation with the genocide as factual, her Turkish identity denoting identification with the perpetrator, her ethnic background being partly Armenian and the atrocities committed during the genocide against the people she learns she partly belongs to.

7 Thus she is not only "on the receiving end of a traumatic testimonial" as Chahinian states in her review of the memoir (Chahinian 2008) but in Çetin's reaction we can read "the story of the way in which one's trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with an other, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (Caruth 8). The denotation of Caruth's statement is clear. In the experience of listening to the traumatic testimony of Çetin's grandmother, she herself suffers a trauma. Her grandmother's stories about genocide are so atrocious, she has to phrase her instantaneous reaction to them in a very figurative language, struggling with the inadequacy of words to describe the traumatic revelations her consciousness cannot process: "What she told me did not fit with anything I knew. It turned the known world on its head, smashing my values into a thousand pieces." (66)

8 Values are fundamental for the integrity of self. The revelations following her grandmother's testimony, however, lead to a disruption of Çetin's sense of self. They are arguably of such an extent that they might even be interpreted as reasons for a deconstruction of it. Judged from the perspective of Narrative Psychology, Michelle Crossley adopts Charles Taylor's definition of self in his essay *Introducing Narrative Psychology* as a notion which is intrinsically connected to temporality, interactions with others, and ultimately, morality. It is Taylor's main contention that concepts of self and morality are inextricably intertwined – we

are selves only in that certain issues matter for us. [...] This connection between our sense of morality and sense of self, according to Taylor, means that one of our basic aspirations is the need to feel connected with what we see as ‘good’ or of crucial importance to us and our community. (3) In the case of Çetin, who identifies as a Turk, the revelations of her grandmother distort her perception of self due to a distorted view of her moral integrity. As a Turkish Muslim woman, she feels the guilt of the perpetrator. In an interview with *Weekly Zaman* she states:

In fact, we were all perpetrators, perhaps no blood on our hands, but we hid things, we remained silent, we systematically denied. Anyone who was at all involved in these events, even those who might have carried off just one small glass to their home from Armenian houses that were looted, all of these people were partners in this. (In Ozinian 2012)

9 The paradox of being ethnically tied to the perpetrator and likewise ethically and ethnically tied to the victimised people causes a deep crisis of identity. Identifying with a nation, defining *herself* as an integrated part of a nation responsible for a genocide directed at parts of her family, smashes her “values into a thousand pieces” (66). Hence Çetin faces a dark chapter in Turkish history, she is unable to reconcile with her sense of morality, and ultimately with her sense of self. This causes an inner emotional turmoil she cannot overcome for the moment being:

Whether my eyes were open or closed, certain images would not go away: the crowd huddled in the church courtyard, and especially the pupils of the children’s eyes; the babies who’d been thrown in the water; the moment when Heranush was snatched from her mother’s arms . . . and then, after seeing all these things, I would remember the poems I recited for national holidays [...] I would recite these poems about our ‘glorious past’ at the top of my voice, and with such passion; but now I could not remember this without seeing the children’s eyes opened wide with terror, and their heads disappearing into the water, and the river that ran red with blood for days. (66)

10 Her grandmother’s stories cause a distortion, even a “crisis of self-perception”, since an “external event occurs that clearly violates the preferred view of self” (Baumeister, Dale & Sommer 1082). Baumeister, Dale & Sommer argue that “it is necessary for the self to have some mechanism or process to defend itself against the threatening implications of this event” (1082). In the case of Turkish society, the defense mechanism applied was and still is the scapegoating of the Armenians – or in other words – a projection of guilt onto the people whose stories harm Turkey’s “glorious past” (Çetin 66). In a *New York Times* interview, Çetin states that history books depict Armenians as “monsters or villains or enemies” in Turkish society (in Bilefsky 2010). She, however, cannot scapegoat the very people she knows her grandmother, and ultimately herself, to be a part of. Incapable of using a defense

mechanism to protect her self, she must feel the guilt of the perpetrator. In her memoirs, this sense of guilt is omnipresent. When she witnesses the funeral of her grandmother and her relatives are asked to give Heranush their last blessings, she is struck by guilt. She cannot stop herself and cries out: “‘Let her give us her blessing,’ I cried. ‘May she forgive us – forgive you, forgive us, forgive us all’” (49). It is precisely in this outburst that we can identify the notion of trauma, a “story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in an attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (Caruth 4). Çetin, defying Turkey’s policies of denial, is desperate to express the truth of genocide and consciously faces the truth, yet again, in her memoir.

11 But the self is, as stated by Taylor, also connected to what we consider to be “of crucial importance to us and our community” (in Crossley 3). Identifying as a Turkish Muslim, her insight into the factuality of the genocide is in stark contrast to the Turkish state’s policy of denial. The dilemma of knowing a historical event to be true whereas the rest of her surroundings are in denial causes a tremendous internal struggle. Her grandmother’s revelations are thus the catalyst for a traumatic event and consequently a disruption of identity, triggered by a disturbance of not solemnly her sense of morality but just as much of her sense of communal belonging.

12 Although Çetin identifies herself as a perpetrator in historical contexts, stating that “we were all perpetrators, [...] we hid things, we remained silent, we systematically denied” (in Ozinian 2012), she at the same time experiences the painful consequences of genocide from the perspective of the victim. Torn between feeling the guilt of the perpetrator and the powerlessness and anger of the victim, her integrity of self cannot be preserved, leading to a contradiction in identity. In the course of events, we witness Çetin’s attempt at overcoming the crisis of identity that has unraveled in her life due to her traumatic experience. In the following, a closer look will be taken at the nature of Çetin’s trauma. For this purpose, the interrelatedness of the terms trauma of detachment and trauma of departure will be discussed. Understanding the notions of detachment and departure is essential to comprehending why Çetin writes – to put it into Caruth’s words – “a history from within” (12).

Writing “a history from within” (Caruth 12)

13 Caruth sees history as a means by which an event can be retrospectively revisited and processed (cf. 12). Writing “a history from within” a traumatic experience thus can be understood as an encounter of an author, himself “in the midst of trauma”, with past traumatic events (8). On the basis of this hypothesis, she analyses Freud’s reinterpretation of

the Exodus story *Moses and Monotheism* as a story which reveals Freud's own trauma by comparing it to the circumstances in his present life. Drawing on her analysis, I argue that we can interpret Çetin's memoir likewise as a recount of trauma "in the midst of trauma" (8).

14 Caruth introduces the term "trauma of departure" (cf. 21) by juxtaposing her content analysis of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* with his life circumstances as he was writing the book, stating that due to his escape from Austria when the country was invaded by the Nazis, he suffered an unexpected trauma which he faces in his reinterpretation of the Exodus story. Hence she terms Freud's loss of home a "trauma of leaving, the trauma of verlassen" (21). And Freud himself acknowledges this loss which he thus processes in the narrative of his Exodus story. He interprets the Exodus from Egypt as a "story of departure" and not, as commonly understood, as a "story of return" to the lands of Canaan since the people of Israel never reached their destination and throughout their history remained the victims of religious persecution (14).

15 Departure is a very central term in her interpretation of the story and it cannot only be understood as a physical concept referring to Freud's departure from Vienna. Instead of merely referring to a physical distancing from a place, it is furthermore an implicit indication of a traumatised person, who stresses that in the departure from a traumatic event, he survived its deathly denotation. Caruth focuses on Freud's paradoxical evaluation of his enforced departure: "It forced me to leave my home, but it also freed me" (Freud in Caruth 20). The quote visualises that the departure, though traumatic because forced, prevented a much more threatening event in the form of the persecution by the Nazis. His statement of being forced but feeling freed is arguably a sign of stressing the ambivalence of departure – firstly as a physical concept denoting a kind of distancing but secondly as an acknowledgement of having survived a traumatic event, of being free and having departed from which could elicit even more pain.

16 This trauma of departure, in its ambivalent meaning of a physical as well as a psychological form, can also be identified in Çetin's memoir. Noticeably, Çetin's own mirrors her grandmother's. However, in Çetin's case, the trauma of departure comes in a different form. Instead of using the term trauma of departure, it would be more accurate to speak of a trauma of detachment. The terms departure and detachment both imply a kind of distancing from the familiar and from what is considered home. Çetin's detachment from herself, rooted in the perpetrator-victim conflict, is inherently connected with the process of distancing – departing – from the identity that is familiar. Likewise, Heranush's biography makes clear that she was not only physically forced to part with her mother and never

reunited with her (cf. Çetin 73), but also experienced a cultural alienation in the form of a departure from her own religion and identity. It is thus to be concluded that the trauma of departure is present in Çetin's life and reflected in the recount of her grandmother's trauma.

17 The ambivalence of departure as discussed in the case of Freud's paradox of being forced but feeling freed is also expressed in Heranush's traumatic testimony. Although little Heranush was forced to part with her mother, the most painful memory in Çetin's memoir, she then goes on to describe the garden the girls were brought to right after they had been kidnapped. In this recount, Heranush's wish to clarify that she survived the encounter with death and departed from it becomes apparent. She describes the garden in utopian and picturesque terms. It

was brilliant green, like the gardens in our village. The trees were full of fruit. There was a stream passing through the middle of the garden and its water was crystal clear. [...] They filled our stomachs with hot food, and they gave us permission to pick fruit from the trees. [...] we played in the garden. We plucked pears and apples from the trees, drank the ice-cold water from the stream. (Çetin 65)

In the midst of a traumatic event, Heranush is stranded in a haven of beauty where the atrocious realities of genocide seem temporarily forgotten. Her language becomes almost lyrical and her words are melodic and harmonious. Particularly striking is the precision of Heranush's sensual recollection of the coldness of the water and the bright colours of the garden. Her description stresses this paradisiac place, emphasising her departure from the traumatising event, and more precisely, her departure from death. The vivid pictures of fruit and water, the sincere simplicity of the garden in all its fecundity, construct not merely a haven of beauty but a picture of life. However, her memory of the garden is soon interrupted by the nightmarish memories of genocide, as she tries but fails to find her mother (cf. Çetin 65). However, being struck with full force by the horrific events of genocide, she experiences a short but striking moment of lightness and beauty. Although forced to leave her home, her mother's bosom and culture, she is feeling freed when she escapes the horror for a short moment.

18 The parallels between Çetin's and Caruth's interpretation of Freud are thus multifaceted. Conclusively, Çetin suffers a trauma of departure – more accurately a trauma of detachment – which she overcomes through narrative. Like Freud, Çetin writes a “history from within” traumatic experience (Caruth 12).

“Always in emergencies we invent narratives” (Broyard 21)

19 The pursuit of self, of resolving her contradiction in identity, is at the very core of Çetin’s story. As much as it is a story of trauma and pain it is also a story of reconciliation. The stories of her grandmother have confronted her with contradictories such as the perpetrator-victim conflict, evoking the imperative need of storytelling and narrative. Narrative can be seen as an “organizing principle for human action” which means “that the concept of narrative can be used to help account for the observation that human beings always seek to impose structure on the flow of experience” (Sabin in Crossley 3). The way in which Çetin chronicles her memoir serves to restructure the sequence of events with the clear intention of reconciling her inner conflict between the perpetrator and the victim, as well as her paradoxical perception of her grandmother as a victim and a matriarch. Thus, through her narrative she imposes a structure on her grandmother’s past and overcomes the trauma of genocide and its implications of death.

20 This is accomplished through a non-chronological plot which frames the storyline with two events that metaphorically mark the process of reconciliation. The starting point of Çetin’s story is her grandmother’s funeral, whereas the end point is marked by the eagerly awaited encounter with her grandmother’s relatives in America. But Çetin makes sure to give a second introduction to the story. The two chapters following the opening sequence deal with Heranush’s and Çetin’s earliest childhood memories. Thus death might be the starting point of the story but not the main theme of the memoir. Rather, death – the encounter with genocide – is seen as an obstacle that has to be overcome. This might be the reason why Çetin decided to fragment the funeral scene, scattering it throughout the whole memoir but not marking it as the end point (cf. Çetin 35, 49, 81). The fragmented funeral scene is framed by Çetin’s childhood stories, childhood stories of her grandmother and memories of their time spent together in her adulthood. These alternations as well as the reconciliation scene at the very end of the memoir, serve as a metaphorical overcoming of the deathly denotation of genocide which is depicted by Heranush’s funeral.

21 Divided between the positions of perpetrator and victim, of Turkish Muslim and Armenian Christian, the experience of confronting herself with the guilt of the perpetrator and the powerlessness of the victim is omnipresent and unsolved throughout the memoir and Çetin does not unite the strings of memories until the very end. Hence she “impose[s] structure on the flow of experience” (Sabin in Crossley 3) from a retrospective point of view. Visiting her family in America, Richard, a member of Çetin’s relatives, states:

All my life, I've been afraid of Turks. I nurtured a deep hatred of them. Their denial has made things even worse. Then I found out that you were part of our family but Turkish at the same time. Now I love all parts of this big family and I'm desperate to meet my other cousins. (Çetin 113)

Her long lost Armenian relative welcomes her into his family in spite of her Turkish nationality. As a consequence, Çetin can come to terms with the guilt of the perpetrator. In an interview with *Weekly Zaman* she states: "I was both Armenian and Turkish, with one side of me victim, the other side perpetrator. [...] But this is not a role I wanted. I did not want to leave this load on my shoulders for later generations" (in Ozinian 2012).

22 This process of coming to terms with the perpetrator-victim conflict is not only dealt with in the reconciliation scene at the end of the memoir. Çetin marks the reconciliation between perpetrator and victim by stressing the importance of food and music in both cultures. Çetin states about growing up in her Turkish family: "There might not have been enough money to make ends meet, but there were two things never lacking. The first was love, the second was food" (17). When she gets to meet her grandmother's sister in America, she notes: "Like her older sister, Auntie Marge loved to cook and entertain visitors. We ate royally throughout our time together" (111). The culture of eating can even be associated with a certain kind of homecoming. Feeling detached from herself and her communal belonging, Çetin experiences in her aunt's home in America a hospitality that is very alike to that of her Turkish family. Thus, the importance of food serves as a metaphor for Çetin's accomplishment of overcoming the detachment from herself by finding the familiarity of food in an unfamiliar place.

23 Çetin finds a familiarity in her aunt's home due to food but also due to music. A specific song, "Hingalla" (Çetin 112), functions as a metaphorical instrument of mediation between perpetrator and victim. It occurs at the very beginning of the memoir and reoccurs yet again in the reconciliation scene at the end of it. In the earliest recollections of her grandmother's childhood, Çetin narrates

Heranush was a child who learned fast, and she also had an ear for music. Because she loved to sing, her repertoire was growing, and she would also try to teach her sisters, brothers, and cousins. But there was one song she loved more than any other, and she would return to it as often as she could. (7)

It is this song Heranush sings when Çetin finds her Armenian-American family and announces to her that a reunion might be possible. Not long after Heranush's death, Çetin discovers the song to be Turkish as well as Armenian in a conversation with Aunt Marge.

Their instantaneous reaction to this discovery is that they begin to dance together in the kitchen.

24 The act of dancing together to a song which is rooted in Armenian and Turkish culture can be interpreted as another kind of homecoming. Çetin states in her memoir that her grandmother's parents used to dance together whenever they could: "Hovhannes and Isguhi loved to dance, and if there was a celebration in the village, they would be there; they would become one with the rhythm of the music and dance the halay for hours on end" (10). Thus dancing and music serve as a way of reconciling generations within the Turkish-Armenian family. Consequently, Çetin finds a possibility to overcome her trauma of detachment and embrace her roots in the encounter with her grandmother's Armenian family. This reunion is not only limited to her own finding of self, however, but serves as a way of carrying her grandmother's story to completion. Through her authorial competence and the restructuring of events, she marks her homecoming at the very end of the memoir. Rooted in Armenian and Turkish culture, she finally manages to find a home in both.

The implicit imperative of storytelling

25 The victim-perpetrator conflict, however, is not the most troublesome obstacle, as Çetin must face the paradoxical life of her grandmother in the most complicated fashion. In the encounter with her grandmother's fragmented identity, she faces tremendous hardship. She finds it impossible to get all the answers needed to truly comprehend her grandmother's double life. It is no surprise she asks herself: "So why, when it came to the question of her true identity, did she feel so helpless? Why could she not defend her identity, or the family into which she had been born?" (78). When she asks her grandmother why she did not convince her husband to let her visit her family in America, she answers: "How should I know?" Çetin recounts: "Whenever she did not want to explain something, whenever she wanted to avoid an argument, my grandmother would always give the same answer: 'How should I know?' Every time she said these words, it seemed to me that she was saying: 'You're right, I so longed to go; but I was helpless, so what could I do?'" (78).

26 Her grandmother's alleged helplessness is inexplicable to her, thus Çetin must reevaluate her perception of Heranush. As Chahinian states, "the author finds it difficult to reconcile the powerful and loving character of her grandmother with the story of a past full of suffering and loss" (Chahinian 2008). Aware of the impossibility of reconciling the strong woman Seher with the perceived genocide-victim Heranush, Çetin feels burdened. She must shoulder "the burden of the listener on the receiving end of a traumatic testimonial"

(Chahinian 2008) but feels powerless in the face of the cruelties of genocide. But the burden she shoulders cannot only be limited to

the transference of pain. It also consists of the imperative to act upon receiving the story. As much as the survivor is compelled to tell, the listener is compelled to act. In Çetin's case, this imperative is mandated by her grandmother's specific request to be reunited with her Armenian family members living in America. (3)

I would like to suggest, however, that another implicit imperative can be identified. It is the request of her grandmother to have her story told. Caruth sees traumatic testimonials as a "plea by an other, who is asking to be seen and heard" and a "call by which the other commands us to awaken" (Caruth 9). Heranush's alienation from her own roots and ultimately, her incapability of carrying her own story to completion, demand from Çetin to resolve Heranush's contradiction in identity. From the perspective of an omniscient narrator, Çetin fills the gaps in the memory of her grandmother by reconstructing Heranush's history – moments of suffering and loss as well as moments of strength and power.

Retrospective empowerment: Reconciling the victim and the matriarch

27 It is remarkable how Çetin manages to reconstruct little Heranush's stories of pain and sorrow without reducing her entirely to her victimisation. By resituating her grandmother's genocide experience in her happy childhood, stressing her lively attitude, her ability to lead groups, to serve as a mentor to other children, Çetin learns that Heranush was not changed entirely by the genocide experience but maintained her strength and confidence. Little Heranush "was usually the one to start games; she was the leader, the one who showed the way, and the other children were happy to go along with her" (7). Çetin proceeds and recounts: "In this crowded and colourful multitude the clever, mature and responsible Heranush stood out, winning much admiration" (11). She thus manages to relativise the image of the victimised child and recognise her grandmother's strength in her perception of young Heranush. Hence, she can draw a line to her grandmother's strong character:

The sections where Çetin recounts her childhood memories read like long dedications to her grandmother, in admiration of her strength, her outspokenness, her compassion, and her protectiveness of her grandchildren and their ambitions. Aside from her role as the matriarch within the familial household, Çetin presents her grandmother as a respected figure – guide, mentor, and mother for the larger community within the neighborhood. (Chahinian 2008)

28 This impression is given due to an abundance of stories referring to her grandmother's admirable qualities. Although Heranush was married to a Turkish man and living in a patriarchal system, she is still depicted as the only woman to confront the patriarch in the

household: “Then she told my grandfather, ‘Don’t bring that ignorant hoca’s idiotic words back into this house again.’ Having taken the matter in hand and silenced my grandfather, she then nodded for me to continue” (33). And even the Turkish patriarch, her husband, would call her “Sergeant Seher” due to her admirable resourcefulness when it came to solving problems (Çetin 25). Consequently, Çetin’s narrative renders visible that young Heranush is not merely a victim but a person who would remain strong and confident throughout her life.

29 Although Çetin perceives her grandmother to be a strong and powerful woman, she still has problems understanding why Heranush remained hidden and passive for such a long time: “So why, when it came to the question of her true identity, did she feel so helpless? Why could she not defend her identity, or the family into which she had been born? Why couldn’t she stand by her own wishes” (78). She assumes that her grandmother is helpless in the face of discrimination. However, it does not take long until she realises Heranush’s supposed powerlessness, if scrutinized in detail, is in fact the strength of a genocide survivor who tries to protect her family. Due to the discrimination of converts, as well as of so-called “convert’s spawns” (79) in the aftermath of the genocide, Heranush kept her Armenian identity a secret for a long time.

30 “Convert’s spawn” refers to the children of survivors who converted to Islam late in their lives. When Çetin’s mother tells the story of how neighbourhood children used to call them “convert’s spawn”, it is apparent how protective Heranush is of her children. Knowing that being partly Armenian could cause serious damage to her children’s lives, she “argued, reasoned, sometimes spoke sweetly, and sometimes lost her temper” to make the children stop using the term to refer to her children (79). Heranush knows she must hide her identity or otherwise, her children would face discrimination. Even the slightest mentioning of Heranush’s true identity could ruin life chances, since her son was refused at a military school due to the fact that Heranush’s birth certificate had the word “Muhtedi”, meaning convert, written on it. “When I asked my grandmother about the military school refusing my uncle, I noticed that she was still distressed about it. [...] The pain hadn’t gone away” (80).

31 Hence Heranush did not die a victim but left her granddaughter a legacy of voicing and reconciling her disrupted self by reconstructing long lost memories and imposing a narrative structure on the chaos resulting from traumatic experience. However, Fethiye Çetin’s case is just one among many, since there are “by some estimates, as many as two million Turks who have at least one grandparent of Armenian extraction” (Freely in Çetin ix). The trauma of genocide survivors and their descendants, as exemplified by Fethiye Çetin and her grandmother, clearly establishes the imperative of genocide-recognition.

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The Denotation of Room and its Impact on the Construction of Female Identity in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

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Abstract:

“A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.” According Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, money and room are the predominant items that empower a woman to gain independence and self-reliance. Thus, this article will deconstruct the idea of the room both in a physical and metaphorical sense and apply Woolf’s thesis to the life of Edna Pontellier, the protagonist of Kate Chopin’s novel *The Awakening* to show how exactly the notion of the room is able to shift a woman’s personality which has already developed in an environment dominated by the patterns of patriarchy.

1 Kate Chopin’s novel *The Awakening* tells the story of a married woman, Edna Pontellier, who, at first, devotes her life entirely to the domestic duties and to the happiness of her children and her husband, trying to meet the requirements of a Victorian woman (Bender 466). When she goes on vacation to Grand Isle with her family, she becomes acquainted with Creole women like Adèle Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz who trigger her journey of self-discovery. However, this developing process already seals her fate, since she is not able to hold on to this slowly awakening part of herself due to the social restraints of her time. This article will deal with these restraints and with the question of how the denotation of room — both its physical and metaphorical representation — stirs the process of self-discovery and finally leads to the construction of a female identity.

2 Drawing on Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, the topics of room and money will be examined, since their lack is considered as the reason for the small number of female authors, as the main statement of her essay shows: “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (4). Thus, room and money are identified as the objects that are able to offer a woman independence.

3 However, the main aim of this article is to deconstruct the idea of the room both in a physical and metaphorical sense. Woolf’s thesis will be applied to the life of Chopin’s Edna Pontellier to show how exactly the notion of the room is able to influence and to shift a woman’s personality; a personality which was developed within the confines of a patriarchal society.

4 Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* analyzes the correlation between the female deprivation of room and its ensuing intellectual poverty. The question that arises here is in what sense the female sex is considered as being poor or inferior to men and how this inferiority is able to hinder them from writing fiction and being independent. Is this lack of

fictional output caused by the environment women were surrounded by until the 20th century or does it rather lie within the nature of the female sex?

5 In general terms, it is noticeable that Virginia Woolf chooses a first-person and fictional narrator for *A Room of One's Own*. By these means, she is able to give voice not only to one woman in particular or to a few women of a specific social class, but to women in general. She emphasizes this in the very beginning by saying: "Here then was I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please — it is not the matter of any importance)" (5). Nevertheless, it becomes evident that the narrator in her essay addresses the female sex in particular: "Are you aware that you are the most discussed animal in the universe?" (30).

6 In chapter two of her essay, the narrator's argument about poverty and women (29) strikes the eye. At first glance, it seems that there are many facts supporting the assumption that the poverty of women has an impact on their ability to write fiction. It is stated that women are weaker and therefore poorer in the moral sense, that they have a small size of brain and that they thus are mentally, morally and physically inferior to men: "Hence the enormous importance to a patriarch who has to conquer, who has to rule, of feeling that great numbers of people, half of the human race indeed, are by nature inferior to himself" (40). To answer the question which was posed earlier, these assumptions give evidence for the fact that women are not able to write fiction not primarily due to their natural disposition, which means that they are naturally inferior to men, but due to the social restraints a patriarchy causes, as "England is under the rule of a patriarchy" (39).

7 With the hypothetical example of Shakespeare's sister, the narrator puts more emphasis on the social restraints of patriarchy women had to cope with. Woolf argues that if Shakespeare has had a sister, she would not have the same opportunities he had as a man. She would have very few chances of receiving education and "no chance of learning grammar and logic [,] let alone of reading Horace and Virgil" (55), since education was almost entirely denied to women. Instead, the main tasks that were expected from her lie in fulfilling domestic duties and to marry at a very young age: "her parents [...] told her to mend the stockings or mind the stew and not moon about with books and papers. [...] Soon, however, before she was out of her teens, she was to be betrothed to the son of a neighboring wool-stapler" (ibid). Since education was not considered something that women should partake in, they could not turn to writing, either. The narrator of *A Room of One's Own* assumes that, as it was not expected from a woman to write, the influence of this restraint would have been noticeable in her work, since she would have to endure "stress" and suffer a "dilemma" while

composing it and “whatever she had written would have been twisted and deformed, issuing from a strained and morbid imagination” (58).¹

8 Another argument of the narrator’s is that a woman is not able to pursue writing the same way a man does, since she is not given enough room to express herself freely and not because she is inherently intellectually inferior, but rather because “all the conditions of her life, all her own instincts, were hostile to the state of mind” (59). However, the argument of the deprivation of room and money again captures the concept of poverty both in a financial and social sense. It is stated that if a woman wants to write fiction, she has to be financially independent and also has to have a private place, ideally with a key and a lock: “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (4). This demand for room can be understood in two ways: First, in the physical way, which means that 20th century women did not have a private place of their own or, second, that they did not have the financial strength to sustain themselves or to receive education as mentioned earlier.

9 In terms of the physical realization of room, women did not usually have a private place: “In the first place, to have a room of her own, let alone a quiet room or a sound-proof room, was out of the question, unless her parents were exceptionally rich or very noble even up to the beginning of the nineteenth century” (61). Additionally, women were supposed to devote their time entirely to their domestic duties and to the happiness of their families which made a private place unnecessary. Regarding money, women were not able to support themselves without help, since this period offered them few chances to earn a living. This is shown by the narrator’s statement which presents some possible occupations for women in this period: “I had made my living by cadging odd jobs from newspapers, by reporting a donkey show here or a wedding there; I had earned a few pounds by addressing envelopes, reading to old ladies, making artificial flowers, teaching the alphabet to small children in a kindergarten” (43).

10 Usually women were financially dependent on their husband, to whom they were also legally bound through marriage. If they were not married, they were legally and financially dependent on their fathers: “Her pin money, which depended on the goodwill of her father, was only enough to keep her clothed” (61). Besides earning money, the narrator also presents another way women could be financially secured, namely through the inheritance of deceased

¹ Furthermore, it is stated that due to the fact that women mostly used a male pseudonym to veil their real identity in order to ensure that their work gets published, they, at the same time, confirmed the conventions and gave in to them.

relatives: “My aunt Mary Beton [...] died by a fall from her horse [...] she had left me five hundred pounds a year for ever” (43).

11 Furthermore, Woolf presents a very interesting view on money and its effect on the individual. It is said that money, which ensures financial security, has the power to shift the mindset by changing the emotional state of a person: “What a change of temper a fixed income will bring about. [...] Therefore not merely do effort and labor cease, but also hatred and bitterness” (44). Thus, money can almost have the effect of medicine or rather of morphine, since it is only able to suppress not to heal negative emotional conditions as emotional turmoil and stress, so that a more positive attitude can be ensured. Furthermore, its psychological effects help to broaden the horizons of women which were limited through social constraints as observed before. As a result of this, freedom of the mind and intellectual independence are accessible: “The greatest release of all came, which is freedom to think of things in themselves. That building, for example, do I like it or not? [...] Is that in my opinion a good book or a bad? Indeed, my aunt’s legacy unveiled the sky to me” (45).

12 Moreover, Woolf’s arguments on the poverty of women also apply directly to the concept of a “True Woman” (Elz 26). The concerns of a *True Woman* do not revolve around business affairs or politics, since her main occupation is to be “the moral and chaste center of the family” (ibid). This view is also mirrored in Kate Chopin’s novel where, at the beginning, Edna Pontellier resembles the characteristics of a *True Woman*, since she tries to meet the requirements of the Victorian ideal of the “Angel in the House” (Woolf: *Professions* 236). This ideal is also thematized in Virginia Woolf’s essay *Professions for Women* where she elaborates on the characteristics of this phenomenon. According to that, this ideal is attributed to women who are described as being charming, unselfish and self-sacrificial (237). Furthermore, Woolf states that this kind of woman: “[...] never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others” (ibid).

13 However, as Chopin’s novel, *The Awakening* progresses, Edna becomes more and more affiliated with the concept of a “New Woman” (Elz 26). The term *New Woman*, which also found discussion in Bram Stoker’s novel *Dracula* (1897), stands in stark contrast to the Victorian ideal of the *Angel in the House*. Although this term caused controversies among the literary critics (Dowling 446), it can be said that a woman whose characteristics are associated with the concept of a *New Woman* is one who “has access to educational opportunities that her mother did not have, is capable of using her education to achieve financial independence from the men of her family, marries not only for social alliances but also for love, and is sexual and controls her ability to reproduce” (Elz 26). Drawing on the

women's movements, it can be said that the first wave of feminist movement, perceptible in England in the 1850s (Dahlerup 3), was mostly concerned with the fight for political representation of women in government and thus with the fight for political room (ibid). The aim of the second wave, which was also termed the "new women's movement" (Dahlerup 2) and took place in the late 1960s and early 1970s in most Western countries (2), focused instead on the expression of individual or personal needs which was also reinforced by the slogan "The personal is political" (ibid).

14 However, in Chopin's *The Awakening* this very conflict between the notion of the *New Woman* and the correlated attempt to destroy the concept of the Victorian ideal of the *Angel of the house* is explored and especially catalyzed through the significant symbol, namely the room both in its physical and metaphorical representation. In terms of the physical realization of the room, Chopin uses two major settings, namely the city and the island, to illustrate how the notion of room, as a symbol, works on the issue of self-realization and the construction of female identity by allowing women to achieve freedom in different ways. As the impact of this symbol has already been analyzed, this part of the article will consider the shifts in personality which Edna, the protagonist of the novel, undergoes in each of the places she stays at. Furthermore, it will show in how far these places are able to contribute to the construction of her independence. Therefore, the first step of the investigation will concentrate on the physical rooms depicted in this novel, while the second step will deal with the metaphorical realization of room and discuss the question of whether Edna has achieved absolute independence and freedom.

15 In terms of the investigation of the idea of room as a physical place, Edna primarily enters the cottages of Madame Lebrun at Grand Isle at the very beginning of the novel, where she vacations with her husband and her two sons. This island is highly significant, especially for the progress of achieving self-awareness, since the cottages on the island are able to offer Edna partial liberation from her family. Thus, she is not occupied with the custody of her two sons, since a quadroon helps her to take care of them. She does not spend much time with her husband, since he occupies himself with his work most of the time. Thus, he does not show much interest, in, for example, accompanying his wife to the sea and bathe with her: "Mr. Pontellier finally lit a cigar and began to smoke, letting the paper drag idly from his hand. [...] The gulf looked far away, melting hazily into the blue of the horizon. [...] Beneath its pink-lined shelter were his wife, Mrs. Pontellier, and young Robert Lebrun" (Chopin 4). At Grand Isle, she is also liberated from the duties of the household by Madame Lebrun and from the society of New Orleans which demands adherence to high societal standards of her

(Jones 121). But this liberty cannot be seen as absolute, since Edna has to meet new challenges instead.

16 At Grand Isle, she is not only surrounded by her own family but also by the Creole women. In particular, she makes the acquaintance of Adèle Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reiz, whose “passion” and “candor” (Jones 120) leave a conflicting impression on her. Their personalities and their behavior, which are shown through a third-person narrator, demonstrate that the Creole women Edna meets at Grand Isle “idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals” (Chopin 9). But this holds true only for Adèle Ratignolle, since Mademoiselle Reisz is not married, as the expression “Mademoiselle” already implies, and does not have any children. However, this view of motherhood seems to be completely different from Edna’s, as the narrator emphasizes: “Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman” (9).

17 This leads Edna directly into a conflict between the predefined social role of a woman, which she is expected to perform, and her own personal views on the matter. However, it seems that this conflict is needed to make her question her own status quo and to make her aware that this suggested social role is not compatible with her character: “Even as a child she had lived her own small life all within herself. At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life — that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions” (14). Additionally, this quotation gives an insight into the social conventions of her Presbyterian household in Kentucky. She had to be reserved and modest, since the people there only allowed women to pursue freedom in their inner private, but not in the outside world. The influence of the Creole women teaches her that values and morals are relative, and automatically leads her to the kind of emotional turmoil which she has not allowed herself in New Orleans (Jones 121). Through this impact she is able to perceive freedom of expression. Faced with the more outgoing lifestyle and personality of the Creole women, Edna’s Victorian prudery vanishes. They fuel again her desire for freedom which she wants to act upon even in the outside world and thus prompt her process of gaining self-awareness more strongly (Jones 121f.).

18 The next important physical room which has to be considered is Madame Antoine’s home at the Chênrière Caminada. During this trip to the island, Edna is, in terms of physical distance, far away from her family. She is freed from the confining rules of her Presbyterian background, from her husband, from the domestic duties, from the requirement to be a good wife, and from the demands of her children. Thus, this room gives her in a sense freedom and the chance to violate social taboos with impunity (Jones 122). This offers her the opportunity

to become aware of herself as an individual. The progressing process of self-awareness is also supported by Robert, the son of Madame Lebrun, and revealed in her behavior towards him: “She had never sent for him before. She had never asked for him. She had never seemed to want him before” (Chopin 32). This quotation also shows that Edna is driven by her desires and slowly abandons her reserved behavior, although she herself is not aware of this process which accelerates in its intensity, since the island offers her the chance to perceive the world with her senses rather than with her mind: “Sailing across the bay to the Chênrière Caminada, Edna felt as if she were being borne away from some anchorage which had held her fast, whose chains had been loosening” (33). Furthermore, she learns to follow her instincts and responds directly to them. When she gets hungry, “she bit a piece from the brown loaf, tearing it with her strong, white teeth” (36) or she “pluck[ed] an orange from the [...] tree” (36-7). When she was thirsty, she “poured some of the wine into the glass and drank it down” (36).

19 Back from her vacation, Edna returns to her house in Esplanade Street, New Orleans. In the city, Edna is surrounded by both her family and the old duties of a woman, wife and mother. Furthermore, she no longer has a private place or a room of her own where she can retire or take a rest. This change of setting therefore means a new challenge for her, since she learned to yield to her instincts during her trip. Thus, she has to adapt the newly triggered process of self-awareness to the highly restricted conditions of her old life. Since she is now able to see with “different eyes” (39), her old life not only seems disconcerting to her, but also adversarial: “The street, the children, the fruit vender, the flowers growing there under her eyes, were all part and parcel of an alien world which had suddenly become antagonistic” (51). As a result of this challenge, she “breaks out of her social confinement by ignoring the temporal and spatial boundaries that limit her existence” (Jones 122). She begins to “do as she liked and feel as she liked” (Chopin 54). She starts to neglect her domestic duties and her reception days at home (Justus 117). Consequently, it is seen that although she achieves self-awareness at Grand Isle and at the Chênrière Caminada, the freedom of her inner self becomes less valuable in the city, since the highly restricted conditions of her old life make it harder for her to perform said freedom in the outside world.

20 Due to the fact that Edna’s newly achieved sensualized lifestyle is not compatible with the old patterns of her social life, she begins to suffer under an internal conflict. Consequently, she decides to move into a house around the block towards the end of the novel. She arrives at that decision “without even waiting for an answer from her husband regarding his opinion or wishes in the matter” (50) which again shows Edna’s shift of

personality from reserved and controlled behavior to a more independent manner. This is also exemplified by the things Edna considers as being worth to be taken with her: “Everything which she had acquired aside from her husband’s bounty, she caused to be transported to the other house, supplying simple and meager deficiencies from her own resources” (80). Thus, this house which is also called the “pigeon house” (81) by the servant Ellen, since it is small and looks like one, turns out to serve as a room of her own where she can pursue freedom in manifold ways. Firstly, she is physically liberated from her children, who stay at Iberville with their grandmother, and from her husband, who has to leave to New York for business. Secondly, she is also free from the things her husband purchased, which are in fact not her own. Thus, she starts to make herself comfortable in her new home, even by physical labor: “Arobin found her with rolled sleeves, working in company with the house-maid [...] She was mounted upon a high stepladder, unhooking a picture from the wall when he entered” (80). Thirdly, this house offers Edna the chance to act out her feelings and desires as she was able to do at Grand Isle and in her childhood. She also starts to pursue her sexual desires with Alcée Arobin in New Orleans more intensively than she did with Robert Lebrun at Grand Isle.

21 The physical representations of the different rooms and the progress of Edna’s independence in each of them now prompt the investigation of the idea of a cage as a metaphorical place. Thus, the following paragraphs will be dedicated to the question of whether Edna is a woman who is able to break through the restricted patterns of social life and achieve ultimate freedom and independence or whether she rather jumps from one cage into another, contenting herself merely with partial liberty.

22 Woolf’s requirements of room and money for personal freedom are met, but Chopin’s novel shows the complexity of these elements. In terms of room, the ones previously discussed show that Edna is granted only a short glimpse of freedom and independence, since she is offered them only to a limited degree. Even the last physical room, the pigeon house, does not allow her to pursue freedom and independence on an unlimited level, since her overall restricted environment prevents her from that.

23 In terms of money, Edna is able to feel its power, since it is connected with “conviviality, the enjoyment of herself as she converses with friends and pursues artistic interests” (Davis 146). Therefore, she considers money as being valuable and desirable and knows that it can allow her freedom (145-6). Although she has no need to work to earn money, she starts reflecting about selling some of her artistic work to gain financial independence (146). In context of this process, she manages to move into a house of her own

and sustains herself with “her mother’s estate, her savings, and the livelihood derived through art” (149). Thus, financial independence plays a highly significant role for women in order to let them develop their abilities, although it is also connected with some obstacles: “And when the woman, left alone with no man to ‘support’ her, tries to meet her own economic necessities, the difficulties which confront her prove conclusively what the general economic status of the woman is” (Perkins Gilman 10).

24 Although Edna attains the two requirements postulated by Woolf, it still seems that she is confined and trapped like a bird in a cage generated by patriarchy. Every attempt to break out of this cage and to fly away leads her automatically back into it: “Edna recognizes that in living she will, as her moving from her home to the pigeon house demonstrates, merely be moving from one type of confinement to another” (Elz 20). Consequently, by moving from her home in Esplanade Street to her “pigeon house” around the corner, she trades “a gilded cage for a simpler one” and even when she flees she cannot escape (22). A reason for Edna’s fate is that she does not have the “strong wings” which a “New Woman” (18) requires in order to fly as Mademoiselle Reisz points out: “The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings” (Chopin 79). But Edna does not understand her: “I only half comprehend her” (ibid). But she also cannot suppress the developing “New Woman” in order to fit the patterns society postulates for the “True Woman” (Elz 18). Thus, she has to realize that she cannot maintain a dual-life but must choose a life that fits into the social restraints of patriarchy, since the cage of marriage does not allow her to act upon her feelings the way she does at Grand Isle. This inner conflict then prompts her to resign herself and thus leads to her suicide at the end of the novel. Consequently, a parallel can be seen between her and a bird she sees with a broken wing who “was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water” (Chopin 108). A possible interpretation of this could be that due to the fact that her search for freedom and independence is in vain, she tries to find these values in death.

25 As Edna’s example shows, merely a room and money are not able to give independence to a woman, at least not for a considerable time or for her life as a whole, since the social restraints hinder a woman from developing her own identity. This identity is also not chosen by the woman herself, but allocated by her position in society as a mother, daughter, wife or widow. But in terms of Edna, these roles stand in conflict with her changing personality as Peggy Skaggs points out: “Thus woman’s existence [...] intertwines with her maternal nature. Edna’s sense of herself as a complete person makes impossible her role of

wife and mother as defined by her society [...] her role of mother also makes impossible her continuing development as an autonomous person” (111).

26 It seems that female independence is not only introduced to the society but also eventually authorized by it as well: “Edna [...] represent[s] the New Woman who was evolving in society [at] an early stage when society had not yet adapted to tolerate a New Woman” (Elz 25). Edna’s search for independence, ahead of her time, leads her inevitably into solitude.

27 The main aim of this article has been to show whether and how the denotation of room is able to encourage a woman to construct a female identity, as Woolf’s ponderous statement that “A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (4) presupposes. Thus, a woman can only pursue writing when she has already gained independence, which means that the room, as one part of the requirements, serves as a solution to escape and to break through the social restrictions a woman has to endure in society.

28 Kate Chopin’s novel *The Awakening* with its protagonist Edna Pontellier offers a chance to investigate more precisely how the room can have an impact on the construction of identity on a physical as well as metaphorical level. In a first step, it has been shown that physical realization of room has an impact on the construction of a woman’s independence. Edna becomes for the first time aware of herself as a person at the cottages of Grand Isle, away from any role society assigns her. This process of developing self-awareness is made possible by the conditions of her vacation. Thus, she is able to view the roles of wife and mother from a different perspective and to change the way she sees the nature of herself. Through this reflection she comes to the conclusion that she does not see herself in any of the roles society determined for a woman. However, this process of self-awareness and emerging independence has another side effect. She now has to maintain a dual life which appears to be rather a burden than a relief, since the slowly awakening *New Woman* in her has to be suppressed in favor of the *True Woman* which she has to be to fit the patterns of the society. Thus, she realizes that she is, metaphorically speaking, entrapped in a cage like a bird, since the freedom and independence she has achieved are limited and cannot be pursued in the outside world. This conflict leads her then to the decision to rather die in that cage than to endure life’s burden any longer.

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The Search for Identity in Black British Women's Drama: An Analysis of Jackie Kay's *Chiaroscuro* and Winsome Pinnock's *Talking in Tongues*

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Abstract:

Black British women cannot be counted amongst those female playwrights who have profited from the “revolution” within British theatre – a development which Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge have attributed to the last decade. Many, especially feminist, scholars have pointed to the fact that black women are marginalized as well as silenced in British cultural and political discourses and regimes of representation. Consequently, the search for identity very often is an issue black female playwrights are concerned with in their writings about black women's lives. Drawing on African-American, but mainly British scholarly discourses of performance and dramatic texts as well as on theories of identity and representation, this paper analyzes the ways in which Jackie Kay's *Chiaroscuro* and Winsome Pinnock's *Talking in Tongues* represent black female identities. It will argue that both playwrights portray black women's search for identity as an ongoing process of becoming and depict black female identity as complex and simultaneously influenced by and interwoven with issues of race, gender, sexuality and belonging.

1 In 1997, Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge stated: “British theatre, in the last thirty years, has undergone nothing short of a revolution – from a point where the woman playwright was almost an anomaly, to the present, in which more women are writing for the stage than ever before (ix).” However, there are only a few black¹ women amongst the twenty female playwrights they have interviewed for their book. Even though black British women playwrights finally started to play a role in theatre from the mid-1980s onwards, this “revolution” did not include them as they still are at the margins of British theatre (Griffin, *Playwrights* 35). Contrary to white women's plays, few of black women's writings for the stage are actually published after their performance (Ponnuswami 218) and have only become the subject of scholarly attention within the last two decades. Then, theatre scholars, such as Elaine Aston (1995) or Lizbeth Goodman (1993), started to include chapters on black British women playwrights in their books on feminist theatre. It was only in 2003 that the first monograph to focus on black women's plays only, Gabriele Griffin's *Contemporary Black and Asian Women Playwrights in Britain*, was published.

2 Many, especially feminist, scholars have pointed to the fact that black women are marginalized as well as silenced and othered in British cultural and political discourse and

¹ In Britain, contrary to the United States, the term black refers to black and Asian people alike, subsuming people from Africa, the Caribbean and Asia under the homogenous category “non-white” (Dahl 52). Due to the lack of a term “that does not glorify ‘race’ yet acknowledges the existence of racialism” (Ifekwunigwe 130), this paper will use the term black as a political one, including all people from Africa and the Caribbean who suffer discrimination because of their skin colour or racial descent

regimes of representation (Mirza 3). Consequently, the search for identity very often is an issue black female playwrights are concerned with in their writings about black women's lives. Drawing on African-American, but mainly British scholarly discourses of performance and dramatic texts as well as on theories of identity and representation, this paper analyzes the ways in which Jackie Kay's *Chiaroscuro* and Winsome Pinnock's *Talking in Tongues* represent black female identities. It will argue that both playwrights portray black women's search for identity as an ongoing process of becoming and depict black female identity as complex and simultaneously influenced by and interwoven with issues of race, gender, sexuality and belonging.²

Black British women playwrights in 1980s and early 1990s Great Britain

3 While a distinct black British theatre emerged in the 1950s and various plays by male black playwrights were produced by the end of the 1960s, theatre work written by black women was only encouraged as well as recognized from 1986 onwards – the year the Second Wave Young Women's Project set up a National Young Women Playwright's Festival in South London and Winsome Pinnock's *A Hero's Welcome* was staged by the Women's Playhouse Trust for the first time (Croft 85-86). Nevertheless, as Meenakshi Ponnuswami argues, some black women already played "crucial infrastructural roles in shaping black British performance arts" during earlier years (218). Pearl Connor, for example, ran the *Edric Connor Agency*, established in 1956 to represent black artists in theatre, from 1958 until 1974 and founded the *Negro Theatre Workshop* in 1963 (218).

4 Various factors were responsible for the fact that black women started to play a more prominent role in 1980s British theatre. Firstly, many were discontent with the limiting roles they had to play as actresses and the general representation of black women in theatre at the time. Black women were now eager to represent black female experiences on stage from their perspective. Secondly, the second generation of immigrants, many of whom were either born or had been raised and educated in Britain, was more inclined to openly object to the values and discriminations of the Empire than their parents had been (Goddard, *Feminisms* 27). Young black women were especially politicized by the grass-root activism and the political as well as community work of the 1970s/80s. By 1985, there were approximately twenty women's groups, such as the *Black Women's Group* or the *Organization of Women of Asian and African Descent*, and a black feminist theory had developed out of a critique of the white

² Due to the limitations of space available, the plays are mainly read as dramatic texts, even though aspects of their performance on stage are sometimes discussed as well.

feminist movement and its failure to address racial difference (Ponnuswami 221, Starck 230).³ Additionally, from the late 1970s onwards, several reports on so called ethnic minorities' arts, such as Naseem Khan's *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain* (1976), raised awareness and resulted in the government's funding of black – with no special attention paid to black women though – theatres, as the authorities were willing to act for equal opportunities after the urban riots of 1981 (Goddard, *Feminisms* 20 ff.).⁴

5 Black and feminist theatre groups, the former originally dominated by black men, the latter by white (middle-class) women, also gradually began to be more open towards black women playwrights. In 1984, for example, the *Black Theatre Cooperative* staged Jaqueline Rudet's *Money to Live* (Croft 86) and one year later the *Women's Theatre Group* presented a multi-racial policy in order to include more non-white women into their company. Since it was not easy to fulfill such policies, the company only performed its first all-black production of Sandra Yaw's *Zerri's Choice* in 1989 (Aston 81 ff.). Black women's plays at the time were mainly produced in either black or women's companies which toured nationally or in off-West End venues such as the *Tricycle Theatre* in Kilburn. Amongst the white (male) led venues the *Royal Court Theatre* was the only one to stage work by black British women on a regular basis (Goddard, *Feminisms* 23).

6 However, black women started to organize their own theatre companies in the 1980s as well. Bernardine Evaristo, Paulette Randall and Patricia Hilaire founded the *Theatre of Black Women* in 1982, for example. The company's single policy guideline announced to focus on work by black women playwrights only, making them visible by putting forth workshops and summer schools in disciplines such as acting, writing, directing and stage managing (Croft 87). Even though the company is regarded as having been “crucially important [...] in the history of the development of black women's performance in Britain” (Goddard, *Feminisms* 26), it had to disband in 1988 as it did not have sufficient money to stage its plays appropriately due to a stop in funding (Goodman 153, 155). Other theatre groups founded by black women, however, did not provide comparable opportunities for women playwrights. Talawa, for example, established in 1985 by Yvonne Brewster, who had become the first black woman drama officer in the Arts Council in 1982, did not produce a

³ For a discussion of in how far theatre by black women can be considered as feminist and how black women regarded the issue themselves in the 1980s, cf. Aston chapter six, Goodman chapter six, and Goddard, *Feminisms* 1-13.

⁴ For the problems the state's funding of black arts during that time posed for black British artists cf. Ponnuswami 222 f.

play by a female playwright until 1991 (Ponnuswami 218) and only had its first performance of theatrical work by a black British woman in 1998 (Goddard, *Feminisms* 25).

7 Therefore, and due to a relative lack of specifically black women's companies, the majority of black women playwrights was subsumed into the larger black male and/or white feminist organizations, and often had to choose between highlighting race or gender and/or sexuality in their plays (25 ff.). Lynette Goddard ascribes the absence of a sustained black women's theatre movement, inter alia, to Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberal policies of the 1980s, which promoted individuality and thus a shift away from collective identities and organizations. The Thatcher government also immensely cut its subsidies for the arts and focused more on including black arts into the mainstream than funding black companies individually. The result was a decline of many formerly subsidized black theatre groups in the late 1980s and early 1990s and thus, again, reduced the opportunities for black women in the theatre business of the new decade (28-30). Furthermore, although the 1980s saw quite a lot of productions of plays written by black British women in comparison to earlier periods, the scripts were often unlikely to be published. It was only in 1987 and 1989 that the first published collections of black British plays appeared (Ponnuswami 218). *Six Plays by Black and Asian Women Writers*, published in 1993, was the first anthology to exclusively contain work written by black and Asian women (George 5).

8 Black women's plays of this period dealt with diverse topics ranging from examining the effects of migration and history on women's lives to teenage pregnancies to notions of beauty. Many let black women tell their own stories and tried to undermine a focus on either race or class or gender or sexuality, challenging archetypal images of black womanhood (Griffin, *Playwrights* 15; Goodman 181). With regard to form, the majority of black British women playwrights resumed the realistic traditions of contemporary British theatre, but presented narratives rooted within a diasporic context which disrupted the conventional structures of realism and made women the central subjects of the play (Ponnuswami 224; Goddard, *Feminisms* 51). Nevertheless, some playwrights, such as Jackie Kay, also used alternative forms of theatre like the choreopoem, which combined poetry, music, dancing and theatre to disrupt the borders between stage and audience, reality and fiction or black, white and mixed-race (Goddard, *Feminisms* 52). Kay and others admitted they were influenced by the 1980 West End production of American playwright Ntozake Shange's *for colored girls who have considered suicide, when the rainbow is enuf*, which, according to Susan Croft, was a "revelation for black women writers" (86) as it employed poetry and dance in its search for identity.

Concepts of Identity and Representation

9 This quest for identity very often lies at the heart of plays by black British women, too. Writer, activist and filmmaker Pratibha Parmar explains why the issue is so important:

[T]he question of identity has taken on colossal weight particularly for those [...] who are post-colonial migrants inhabiting histories of diaspora. Being cast into the role of the Other, marginalized, discriminated against, and too often invisible, not only with everyday discourses of affirmation but also within the ‘grand narratives’ of European thought, black women in particular have fought to assert privately and publicly our sense of self: a self that is rooted in particular histories, cultures and languages. (58)

Initially encouraged to come to Britain after the Second World War and the decline of the Empire, a diverse group of people from former colonies migrated into the country from the late 1940s onwards. Once in the metropolis, however, they found themselves categorized as one racially and culturally homogenous out-group and considered as a problem, “an alien presence disturbing the English peace” (Dahl 42). Several political measures and acts controlling and restricting immigration in the 1960s and 1970s served to institutionalize and further the racism found in white British popular discourse (42; Joseph 199). Likewise, Margaret Thatcher still invoked the notion of a unitary English culture not to be polluted by people from abroad even though by then “an increasing proportion of those who trace[d] their descent to the ex-colonies [...] [were] born [or at least raised and educated] in Britain” (Dahl 52). However, the predominant national British identity was built upon a hegemonic white ethnicity, so that black men and women necessarily felt displaced and doubly alienated – both from their ‘homeland’ and from the ‘mother-country’, where they permanently had to explain a continued presence as ‘Others’ (Griffin, *Remains* 199; Mirza 3; Dahl 46).

10 In the late 1970s/early 1980s, the wish for greater visibility and more equality led black men and women to form alliances and organize politically based on assumptions of shared authentic subjective cultural and historical experiences as black people. While these strategically applied identity politics had the power to mobilize, they nevertheless erased all cultural, historical and individual differences and discontinuities the diverse communities and individuals were marked by (Ang-Lygate 182; Griffin, *Playwrights* 10; Mirza 3-4). Claims for the recognition of multiple identities and differences amongst black people and the growing discontent with a hierarchy of oppression – race was mostly considered as the primary identity – highlighted the limits of an understanding of blackness as an essentialist, universal and homogenizing category (Ang-Lygate 173; Mirza 8).⁵

⁵ It is important to point out, however, that “there is a radical difference between a repudiation of the idea that there is a black ‘essence’ and recognition of the way black identity has been specifically constituted in the

11 In the wake of these realizations, black cultural critics began to re-theorize the concepts of identity and difference (Ponnuswami 223 f.). Whereas cultural identity has been regarded as fixed as well as rooted in a universal, factual past and culture before, it is now seen as a fluid matter of “becoming” and “being”, transforming in a continuing process of positioning oneself and being positioned within discourses of history, culture and politics (Hall 393-395). According to the sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall, the diasporic⁶ identities of black British people are simultaneously framed by resemblances and continuity as well as by differences and rifts (395). This conception of identity “lives with and through, not despite, difference” (402). It is also closely connected to notions of meaning-making and the political and cultural construction of the social categories race, class, gender and sexuality as Hall defines identity not as an already accomplished fact, but as “always constituted within, not outside, representation” (392). Representations are generally understood to portray and constitute as well as uphold notions of what is assumed to be real and true about humankind. This means they can easily become positions from which identities are (re)constructed in culture (Brewer 1; Goddard, *Feminisms* 5). Moreover, as bell hooks claims, certain stereotypes about black women occurred in white imagination first, meaning that constructions of identities in society can be preceded by their representations (*Salvation* 50).

12 Black British women have historically been negated from Eurocentric popular as well as cultural and/or political discourse about race, class, gender and sexuality, inhabiting the empty spaces in-between and thus being denied an agency to speak for themselves and to be heard (Mirza 4). bell hooks’ critique of black women’s situation in the United States can equally be applied to their lives in Britain: “When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black *men*; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on white *women*” (Woman 7). Lacking the subject position(s)⁷ from which to derive the power to represent themselves and tell their own stories, black British women were racially and sexually othered, their identities being created inferior to the white (male) norm as well as to the ideals of (white) womanhood (Brewer 121; Goddard, *Feminisms* 5). According to Goddard, the concept of true womanhood “was construed in terms of beauty, femininity and

experience of exile and struggle” (hooks, *Blackness* 420).

⁶ Stuart Hall equates diaspora with hybridity and difference and understands it as “recognition of necessary heterogeneity and diversity” (401 ff.). Similarly, Pratibha Parmar considers it a concept that embraces a plurality of differences and “a way out of essentialism” (59).

⁷ This paper follows Mary Brewer’s understanding of subject position(s) as “a material cultural space” allowing one to speak and to be heard as well as a “political standpoint from which one may [...] define and interpret the meaning of one’s own experience.” The word position is set in the plural as subjectivities are conveyed as being “composed of multiple identities that often compete and conflict with one another” (Brewer 121).

morality that were only achievable for white upper-class women [...]; black women [...] were positioned as ugly, masculine, sexually denigrated and immoral in comparison (Goddard, *Feminisms* 5 f.). Just like blackness, black womanhood was perceived as a homogenous, given and stable category. This clearly opposed ideas about women's fluid as well as simultaneously multiple identities and subjectivities (Ang-Lygate 173-175).

13 Performance, Goddard argues, constitutes “an ideal space for explorations of cultural identity, holding within it the possibility of reconfiguring the ways that we think about each other and view the world” (*Feminisms* 1). Likewise, Brewer points to the “deconstructive mechanisms” of theatre which serve to dismantle and contest hegemonic representations of (black) womanhood (3). The following analysis will show in which ways Jackie Kay's *Chiaroscuro* and Winsome Pinnock's *Talking in Tongues* challenge and counter homogenizing representations of black female identities by portraying black women's search for identity and belonging.

Questions of identity and belonging in Jackie Kay's *Chiaroscuro* and Winsome Pinnock's *Talking in Tongues*

14 Winsome Pinnock and Jackie Kay, who both grew up “in a [British] society which denies blacks a voice and constructs itself in an exclusion of blackness” (Godiwala 249), are deeply concerned about questions of black British identity and belonging. Jackie Kay is a poet, novelist and one of the “key writers of black lesbian plays”, born of a Nigerian father and a white Scottish mother in Edinburgh and adopted by white Scottish parents as a baby (Goddard, *Feminisms* 105). In *Chiaroscuro*, written for the *Theatre of Black Women*, she explores matters of black lesbian and mixed-race identities, naming and belonging. Through the four female black/mixed-race (and lesbian) characters, Beth, Opal, Aisha and Yomi, and by combining theatre, poetry, music and storytelling, the play interrogates how communication between women can be made possible in a racist and heterosexist society. It also stages how past and heritage as well as categorizing assumptions about black lesbian women affect their perception of and search for identities. After going through several different versions in rehearsed readings and workshops, *Chiaroscuro* received a first full production at the Soho Poly on 19th March 1986, directed by Joan Ann Maynard, and was published in 1987 (Goddard, *Introduction* x-xi).

15 Winsome Pinnock was born to Jamaican parents in Islington in 1961. She has worked for radio, television and theatre and “is undoubtedly Britain's leading black woman playwright of the 1980s and 1990s” (xii) as well as “one of the very few black women

playwrights in this country [Britain] whose work has been recognized and celebrated by the mainstream” (Stephenson & Langridge 46). Her play *Talking in Tongues* was produced at the Royal Court Theatre in 1991, directed by Hettie Macdonald, and published in 1995 (45). It deals with the effects of Eurocentric racist and sexist notions of black women’s identity, examining black women’s perception and fears of interracial relationships as well as notions of a homogenous black identity, issues of belonging and the importance of finding a voice as a black British woman. *Talking in Tongues* is set in London and Jamaica and is written, as Winsome Pinnock puts it herself, “within a tradition of European playwriting, but about subjects that take in my own heritage, my own past” (49). Both plays, *Chiaroscuro* and *Talking in Tongues*, even though different in form and specific subject matters, connect black female identity with issues of race, gender, sexuality and history, addressing the topics of multiple belongings, finding a voice to express one’s identity as well as the way black female identity is affected by stereotypical assumptions about black, mixed-race and lesbian womanhood.

Living in diaspora: histories of multiple belongings

16 As pointed out earlier, black British men and women alike have struggled with double alienation. Being marked by a history of migration and constantly constructed as the ‘Other’ in opposition to a white British ‘Self’, necessarily led to a black British search for cultural identity. The experience of multi-locationality, a merging of various places and cultures, increased black British women’s need for a sense of belonging and informed as well as (re)negotiated their fractured identities (Goddard, *Feminisms* 63). The four characters in *Chiaroscuro* all have histories of multiple belongings informed by migration. Yomi was born in Nigeria, but now lives in England. Beth’s ancestors originally came from Africa, but were later deported to America as slaves. Her father, however, is from St. Vincent in the Caribbean and her mother is a white English woman. Aisha’s parents came from Asia to Britain in 1953 “to work and save and work and one day return home” (Kay 71). She describes how her parents were “invited guests” and full of dreams at first only to be “treated like gatecrashers” later on (ibid). Being discriminated against, given the feeling not to belong to Britain, Aisha yearns for the “country of origin”, “back home”, where she can get in touch with her past and “be welcomed, not a stranger/ for who I am [...]” (72). As Stuart Hall explains, alienation from one’s ancestor’s homeland, such as Aisha has experienced it due to her parents’ migration, necessarily gives rise to desires to return to “lost origins” (402). However, these can never be fulfilled nor requited and the original ‘home’ and community are no longer what

they have been before, as they, too, have been transformed by colonial politics, memory and/or desire (399). Thus, neither truly belonging to the one nor to the other place, Aisha dreams about a desired 'homeland' where she is valued for who she is but simultaneously knows she might be considered "English" there (Kay 72).

17 While *Chiaroscuro* only portrays the yearning for a return to the 'home country', the return itself is an important subject matter in *Talking in Tongues*. Pinnock takes up the problem of dual belonging by structuring the play around two acts and settings which are visibly different from one another. The first act takes place at a party in a house situated in rainy London. Pinnock stages how the black women characters' sense of not belonging in Britain is increased by black men's relationships with white women and the inherent racism of the white populace, who does not even expect white men to desire and/or get involved with black women. Claudette feels left behind by 'their' men, who, according to her, "are straining at the leash like hunting dogs on the scent of the fox" once a white woman walks by (Pinnock 126). Curly, on the other hand, has to experience being presented with a gift for a woman with white skin and to be shunned by silence after her obviously non-approving, white boyfriend's parents discover she is black (131). In the second act, colourful Jamaica, "another world" (168), is constructed against the picture of racist England as Leela retreats to the island to recover from a break up. In Jamaica, men swarm around Claudette instead of white American women and Leela has the impression that the people "seem so at ease with themselves [...] [and] have the confidence that comes from belonging" (172). There, both women think they can "walk tall" and "[s]od the angst, the wretchedness" (ibid). Likewise, Diamond tells a story of how she was "treated [...] worse than a dog" in England, but now is a lady in Jamaica (175).

18 This simplistic and idealistic notion of the 'homeland', however, is slowly deconstructed within the play. Leela and Claudette have to discover what Aisha in *Chiaroscuro* is afraid of: that they are not part of a unified black identity, that they are considered as tourists, who only care about "sex and cocktails" (173), and that a white woman, Kate, feels more at home in Jamaica than they do (cf. Goddard 2007: 65 for a similar interpretation). Moreover, the inhabitants of Jamaica in the play have to face similar discriminations as black women in Britain since they are treated without consideration for their feelings. Sugar, who is sexually harassed by white male tourists and regarded as inferior by female tourists (170), says to Leela: "I can't give you what you looking for because I ain't got it meself" (169). She, too, struggles with finding her sense of self in a racist and sexist society. By opposing England and Jamaica in her play, Pinnock captures the feeling "of

belonging neither here nor there” (174), illustrating that “nothing’s black and white” (179) and that simplistic notions of the ‘home country’ and a unitary black identity are just not true and won’t help coming to terms with a diasporic existence of multi-locationality.

19 Both playwrights also touch upon similar simplistic notions of home and belonging as physical places. In *Talking in Tongues*, Jeff describes home as a place where one was born, but also states that this does not necessarily mean that one feels at home, too (134). Likewise, Jackie Kay portrays how a home can be a metaphorical site, especially when one does not know anything about one’s past (cf. Griffin, *Playwrights* 181 for a similar interpretation). Opal does not remember her parents and always had to wait for “foster parents that never arrived” (Kay 82). When she meets Beth she feels wanted and safe, making her say: “You’re the only family I have, Beth, the only one I can call home” (ibid). Thus, both Jackie Kay and Winsome Pinnock show how a history of migration and alienation fracture and shape black British women’s identities. Never being able to feel “stateless, colourless” (Pinnock 175) in a society that marginalizes and categorizes black women as the ‘Other’, makes them lack a sense of belonging and evokes a yearning for a home, for putting “it all together/ these different bits” (Kay 72) of one’s identity.

Struggling with (hetero)sexist and racist assumptions of black womanhood

20 In addition to a lack of rootedness that ruptures perceptions of identities, the black women characters in the plays have to come to terms with common assumptions about womanhood, which place them in a position inferior to white women. Both plays analyzed in this paper demonstrate how perceptions of feminine beauty affect constructions of black female identity. They work against simplistic notions of identity and counter stereotypical notions of black (lesbian) and mixed-race womanhood by pointing to the effects they have on black women’s perception of their identities and consequently their lives. As mentioned earlier, Western cultural discourse mostly represents white women as being more beautiful than black women. According to Debbie Weekes, “[w]hitenedness and its associated outward signifiers have been used as a yardstick by which difference has been measured” (114). She also argues that many black women have internalized racist and sexist notions of whiteness and the physical attributes that are connected with it, such as long, straight blonde hair, white skin and small lips as “a norm for feminine attractiveness” (ibid).

21 Leela and Claudette in *Talking in Tongues* are visibly influenced by perceptions of female beauty. Especially Claudette voices her anger about white women being regarded as more beautiful than black women. She feels like “every blown-up picture of her [the

stereotypical white woman] diminishes us [black women]" (Pinnock 128). Inter-racial relationships between black men and white women add up to her anger and her feeling to be invisible. She reproaches black men for dating white women in order to become white: to fit in and climb the social ladder, having been "brainwashed" to think that white looks are superior (165, 128). But even though she speaks her mind and denies the wish to fit in, she clearly has internalized racist and sexist assumptions about beauty herself. Claudette wants to feel beautiful and not "walk around with [her] head [...] bowed" (172), but she cannot be herself because "you've always got to be ready to defend yourself" as there are "two different kinds of woman" (186). Hair, as "one symbol of the beauty of white women in Eurocentric discourse in opposition to notions of 'nappy' black hair as unruly, unmanageable and ugly" (Goddard, *Introduction* xiii), seems to be a particular sensitive issue for her. This becomes evident in her story about a white girl she knew when she was younger: "I envied her power. I used to pose in front of my mum's dressing-table with a yellow polo-neck on my head. I'd swish it around, practice flicking my hair back like she used to" (Pinnock 187). Claudette is not the only black woman in the play who desires long blonde hair in order to match notions of female beauty. Irma, too, seems to have tried to bleach her black hair, "undergoing one of those torturous hair treatments – [...] the kind where they put some foul-smelling cream on your head [...]" (153). However, the treatment did not work and she is left with a bald head. But whereas Irma seems confident with the new haircut and has no problem with people staring at her, Leela can never forget her black and female body (137) upon which certain subjugating notions of female beauty and identity are projected (cf. Goddard, *Feminisms* 74 for a similar interpretation).

22 In *Chiaroscuro*, Kay's black female characters have to cope with the same oppressing notions of femininity and beauty as the characters in *Talking in Tongues*. Beth tried to fit in with her girlfriends, "all white" (Kay 68), when she was six by "wearing bobbles in [...] [her] hair, as if that would make [...] [her] the same" (96). At eighteen, however, she started to buy black records and books to discover "a whole new world" (69) of similarities to other black people. In her attempt to define herself as a black woman, she rejected white culture and "dumped Dostoevsky, Dire Straits and Simon and Garfunkel" (97), pretending she never tried to match white standards and thereby, again, neglecting one part of her history that shaped her identity. She has not accepted her 'Otherness' yet and therefore is still not able to be "all of [her]self" (96; cf. Godiwala 257 for a similar interpretation).

23 Due to the construction of white beauty as superior, Opal hates her outward appearance. Discrimination and an internalized inferiority complex make her believe she is white in order to belong and escape self-hatred. She says:

My face was a shock to itself. The brain in my head had thought my skin white and my nose straight. It imagined my hair was this curly from twiddling it. Every so often, I saw me: milky coffee skin, dark searching eyes, flat nose. Some voice from that mirror would whisper: *nobody wants you, no wonder. You think you're white till you look in me. I surprised you, didn't I? I'd stop and will the glass to change me [...]*. (Kay 78)

The mirror that is talking to her seems to be a metaphor for white racist and (hetero)sexist society as stage directions at the beginning of the second act read: "*Opal stands at one end of the stage peering into her imaginary mirror (the audience)*" (96). Societal discourse, which classifies black women as ugly, permanently reminds Opal that she is not "all right" (69). The notions of what it means to be a black British woman "will always return" (97), they are Opal's "boomerang reflection" (ibid). Thus, Kay illustrates how her black women characters cannot escape the derogatory images that are perpetuated in white racist and sexist societal discourse, and that these representations consequently influence black British women to either define themselves in opposition to what they are not, such as Beth, or deny their true identities and come to hate themselves like Opal (cf. Brewer 134 and Godiwala 251 for similar interpretations).

24 However, *Chiaroscuro* does not only focus on how black women are affected by racist and sexist standards of feminine beauty, but also "stage[s] arguments circulating in the black community. [...] Do some in the black community assume that those of mixed parentage face less discrimination in white society? How does homophobia within the community strain their common effort to resist racism?" (Dahl 47) In the play, the character of Yomi represents such racist and heterosexist tendencies. Her black doll, whom she called names like "Nigger. Wog. Sambo. Dirty Doll" (Kay 67) when she was younger, is presented as a symbol for her internalized racism at the very beginning of act one. Throughout the play Yomi voices stereotypical assumptions about mixed-race women as well as lesbians. With regard to mixed-race women, she draws upon the idea of a hierarchy of blackness, regarding mixed-race women as not truly black, but "half-caste", "half-breed", "mulatto" or of "mixed blood" and less likely to become victims of racial discrimination. (89-91) Following the belief that regards mixed-race people as struggling to choose between black and white roots, between subjectivity and alterity (Ifekwunigwe 127), Yomi pities Beth for having to decide who she wants to be. She clearly has internalized racial separatist ideas relying on

assumptions about racial purity in order to uphold boundaries of difference (Goddard, *Feminisms* 113). However, such perceptions of an essential and homogenous identity are challenged in the play. Beth, at least in this case, “know[s] where [...] [she] belong[s]” (Kay 90). She identifies with blackness, “using the word black as a political statement” and not just as a phenotypic outward signifier for skin colour (ibid).⁸

25 Regarding black lesbians, *Chiaroscuro* shows how they are “prone to being subsumed under heterosexuality as black women” (Goddard, *Feminisms* 110) since homosexuality is stereotypically regarded as a “white thing” (Brewer 132). Thus, Yomi is shocked when she sees two women kissing: She “didn’t think we [the black community] produced them [lesbians]” (Kay 76). Similarly, she always envisioned a lesbian to be “a tall angular looking woman/ white with men’s things on,/ too much hair around the mouth/ and always on the prowl [...]” (110). Again, Kay seems to point towards societal discourses and representations of sexuality as being responsible for such beliefs. “Wearing masks and walking like robots”, Aisha and Yomi appear to represent a heterosexist society that constructs repressive structures like a machine (82; cf. Godiwala 256 for the same interpretation). The stereotypes the two women present in this scene are numerous. They voice that black lesbians “kill[...] off the race”, lesbian relationships are not natural but sinful, “AIDS is God’s vengeance on the men” and that homosexuality is an illness that “can be treated” by psychiatrists, diets and electric shocks (Kay 83). Assumptions about the reasons for being homosexual, such as wanting to be a man, having had bad experiences with men or being too ugly to attract men (100), and the general fear of the lesbian woman who transgresses the boundaries of gender constructions are presented as well (83, 99, 110).

26 Kay counters these stereotypes, inter alia, by revealing the effects they have on black women’s identities. The tendency to see homosexuality as a “white thing” might lead black gays and lesbians to view their racial and sexual identities as antagonistic (Brewer 131), which consequently would make acknowledging multiple identities even more difficult. Beth “searched for boyfriends to cover her terror” (Kay 79) when she first realized she might be a lesbian during her school years. During the period portrayed in the play, she has already accepted her sexual identity – contrary to Aisha, who still struggles with it. However, she is hiding this part of her identity from others, such as her mother, because she is afraid of the consequences her coming-out might yield, which in turn makes her feel lonely and offensive.

⁸ In her poem "So you think I'm a mule?" (1987), Kay highlights the same idea : “There’s a lot of us/ Black women struggling to define/ just who we are/ where we belong/ and if we know no home/ we know one thing;/ we are Black/ we’re at home with that” (quoted in Mirza 2).

Opal exemplifies best how having to struggle with both one's racial and sexual identity may lead to experiencing a crisis of self-definition, when she asks: "Which is me?" Presenting multilayered and complex female identities, the answer Kay proposes is necessarily: "Both" (100).

27 Pinnock, too, not only illustrates how difficult it is for black British women to be confident about their identities while sexist and racist discourse upholds notions that black women are inferior to white women, but she also "explode[s] [...] stereotype[s] around the issue of [a distinctive] black identity" (Stephenson & Langridge 51) and shows that black women are not the only ones who are oppressed. The character of Leela challenges ideas about black women inheriting a certain natural rhythm as she is not a good dancer and does not like parties: "It's a kind of phobia, my fears of parties" (Pinnock 137, 139; cf. Goddard, *Feminisms* 74 for a similar interpretation). Additionally, in a revengeful attempt to diminish Kate's beauty by cutting off her blonde hair, Claudette and Leela have to realize that even white women have to conform to ideals of beauty as Kate's dark roots make it obvious she has died her hair blonde (Pinnock 188). Even though no one has ever told the black women in *Talking in Tongues* that they are "all right" the way they are (187), they are not the only ones who are affected by sexist discourse. Pinnock gradually unravels that the issue is not as simple as especially Claudette wants to see it, by pointing out the fact that white women are exposed to male repression as well.

Finding a voice to identify and name the self

28 As argued above, placing black women at the centre of a play is in itself an act of allowing women to tell their stories the way they see them and to give them the space to be heard by an audience. Furthermore, according to bell hooks, "speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us [black women] nameless and voiceless" (Talking 8). Both *Talking in Tongues* and *Chiaroscuro* create the opportunity for black women to represent themselves on stage. They also portray ways in which black women can find their voices and name their various identities themselves.

29 *Talking in Tongues* unfolds how deeply connected language and identity are for black British women. Winsome Pinnock has explained that it was liberating for her to use patois in her plays (Stephenson & Langridge 50) and that she sees it as "an act of defiance – to use it on stage within a play that could easily fit the confines of a traditional proscenium theatre" (Pinnock quoted in Goddard, *Feminisms* 69). Lynette Goddard demonstrates how English,

being the language of Western discourse, establishes identities via the postulation of racist and (hetero)sexist binary constructions of 'Self' and 'Other', thereby marginalizing and silencing identities that do not fit the norm. The words *dark* and *black* as well as *female*, she argues, are negative characteristics whereas *light*, *white* and *male* are regarded as positive features in the English language (Goddard, *Feminisms*)

It's because this isn't my first language, you see. Not that I do have any real first language, but sometimes I imagine that there must have been, at some time. [...] If you don't feel you belong to a language then you're only half alive aren't you, because you haven't the words to bring yourself into existence. You might as well be invisible. (155)

Even though Leela was seemingly raised speaking English and does not have another mother tongue, she still cannot express herself within this system of words as its racist and (hetero)sexist value system "tries to stifle" (196) her. She can only "*release[...] all the rage and anger that she has repressed for so long*" (ibid) when she starts talking in tongues, thereby rejecting the language system that has broken and repressed her and finally finding a voice for herself.

30 Leela's outburst in the second act is foreshadowed by an episode narrated in the prologue. There, Sugar tells how she followed a group of women to a gully when she was younger, expecting to see a "mystery of womanness" since these women were always leaving rather depressed and came back "skipping like children" (123). She discovers that Dum-Dum, "a woman who never speak[s]" (ibid), finds a voice in a place sheltered from racist patriarchal society and its rules for communication. However, she does not speak English, but in "a language [that] must be not spoken in a million years, a language that go[s] back before race" (124). Like Leela, Dum-Dum was silenced by a language premised on racist and sexist assumptions. She can only speak using another system of words; one that does not marginalize her. (cf. Goddard, *Feminisms* 66-69 for a similar interpretation). Thus, Pinnock illustrates very distinctively how oppressive a language can be for those regarded as 'Others' and how using an alternative system of words is a challenge against marginalization.

31 In *Chiaroscuro*, Jackie Kay touches upon matters of language as well. Aisha dreams about her "country of origin" in "another language" (72) and like Leela does not regard English but the language of her 'home country', which her parents did not teach her though, as her mother tongue: "They've even taken over my tongue" (ibid). Hence, Kay shows that she also recognizes language as something deeply connected with identity, as a system that denies black women their voice, keeping them yearning for a sense of belonging. Additionally, she portrays that there are more ways to express oneself than in the dominant

language. Aisha's mother stitched "all the words she never spoke" (71) into her "beautiful, angry" quilts (ibid), which lets Yomi wonder: "In what language are these threads/ Did the imagination of some strong woman/ hold this thing together [...]?" (ibid) Yomi's grandmother and daughter were born silenced, but they came up with a new form of telling their stories by drawing and painting. These alternative ways of expressing the self empower Aisha's mother, who laughed "at them that treat[ed] her like a child" (72), as well as Yomi's grandmother, who "had powers" (86) and passed these powers of challenging racist and sexist language systems on to her grandchild's daughter.

32 Despite finding alternative ways of voicing the self, Kay argues for the importance of remembering ones (matrilineal) past in order to defy "misnaming, renaming or not naming at all" (Mirza 3) and to "make your own tales [...]. Invent yourself" (Kay 115). In *Chiaroscuro*, she portrays what Naz Rassool has described as "a journey of learning to understand past experiences in order to clarify the present – and from that position of knowledge to find a voice – and, more importantly, to define a future" (190). This fluid process of self-identification starts right at the beginning of the play when the four characters remember the stories of their names as they have been passed on to them by oral tradition (Kay 64). Aisha was named after her grandmother who "was born in the Himalayas at dawn" (ibid) and encouraged her granddaughter to "[t]ake the risk" (67). Yomi, too, bears her grandmother's name (65). Beth was called after her "great-great-great-great-grandmother on [...] [her] father's side" (64); a woman who had to experience slavery and rape but still was strong and "made change" (ibid).

33 The name *Beth*, however, is the name white people gave her grandmother after "whipping out" her original African name (ibid). Kay points out: "[T]hat history", that is, the shaping of black identity by and within white cultural discourse and institutions, "ha[s] to be remembered too" (65). It informs black British women's present identities as much as the histories of their female ancestors. This is evident in the fact that Aisha still struggles with the way her parents were treated when they first came to Britain, which in turn leads to her own sense of alienation (72). *Chiaroscuro* nevertheless puts more emphasis on remembering the histories of women, especially black lesbians, since they "are silenced as black and female and lesbian" (Goddard, *Feminisms* 110) and so many names and histories have been forgotten, withheld and "swept away" (Kay 113). Therefore, it is important for black British women to "never forget to remember/ all [...] heres and theres", all the various past and present times and places that inform black female identity. "In order to change", Kay argues,

“we have to examine who we are and how much of that has been imposed” (quoted in Aston 90).

34 In *Chiaroscuro*, this examination is an ongoing process that “doesn’t happen overnight” (Kay 114). Memories of the past, experiences and (internalized) stereotypes have to be negotiated repeatedly to arrive at a place from which to speak. Each performance brings the four women characters closer to this place, closer to acknowledging and defining who they are.⁹ “All this has happened before” (64), says Aisha at the beginning of the play and Opal describes the whole performance as a “Déjà vu vu vu” (115). Consequently, the play has no real closure and ends as it has begun: the characters sing the same song of time and change, tell the story of their names and the stage looks the same as it did in the beginning (117). Instead of seeing identity as a fixed construct, Kay describes it as a process of becoming that is open to change and shaped by both the past as well as the present and own perceptions of identity as well as societal ones (cf. Goddard, *Feminisms* 125 ff. for a similar interpretation).

35 However, in order “to find the words” (Kay 117) to express ones identity individually, the characters in both plays have to arrive at a place where they can communicate with others – despite differences within the group of black women and between black and white women. *Chiaroscuro* and *Talking in Tongues* propose that in order to find this place, the characters have to overcome internalized stereotypes first. In an afterword to the published version of *Talking in Tongues*, Winsome Pinnock posed the following question on how to bridge the gap between white and black women established by racism: “Do the brutalities of the past demand that we fight fire with fire, which leads to a vicious circle of violence, or should we be seeking other ways to heal the wounds that we have inherited as a result of historical trauma?” (quoted in Goddard, *Feminisms* 60) In her play, she shows Claudette choosing the first way. Angry and aggressive she concentrates on racial differences. She has come to hate white women for several reasons: “I hate her because she has never been my friend [...], because she takes comfort in the fact that at least she’s not bottom of the pile and delights in my oppression” (Pinnock 186 ff.). Claudette takes violent revenge for the wrongs she feels white women have caused her. The little white girl, who bossed her around when she was younger, was beaten “black” (187) and she cuts off Kate’s blonde hair as she reminds her off the same girl and has slept with Claudette’s love interest Mikie. While Leela usually does not

⁹ In her understanding of gender and sexual identity as achieved through repeated performances, Kay predates the discussion about sexual identity in the 1990s and Judith Butler’s ideas who similarly believes gender and identity to be “a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo [...]” (271).

express her anger the way Claudette does, she helps her this time. Pinnock, however, makes clear that this attitude does not support ending racism or bridging gaps. As soon as the two women realize Kate might be similarly oppressed, they cannot laugh about their prank anymore. The end of the play contains the hope that one day black and white women could focus on similarities and start communicating when Kate and Leela agree to take a walk around the island at some time (198 ff.).

36 Communication between black women is similarly important, Pinnock seems to argue. Sugar's assessment that there is "[n]o need now to go down to gully" (125), a place where women are free from rules patriarchal society poses on them, sing together "like in one voice" (124) and are able to express themselves in a language challenging the normative system of words, is contradicted by the play's end. *Talking in Tongues* is framed by two nearly identical scenes: at the end of the play Leela has the same outburst the silent woman Dum-Dum has experienced at the gully a long time ago. I would argue that Pinnock thus highlights the ongoing importance of female solidarity and communication, between both black and white women. They seem to be prerequisites for finding a voice and a space to define the self. Consequently, black women will recover and "be in touch" with their alienated bodies which prevents them from being "frightened of the pitfalls" that the racist and sexist discourse of society at large poses (199).

37 Jackie Kay, too, has emphasized the importance of communication in the afterword to the published version of *Chiaroscuro*: "My main interest has been communication. Can these four women communicate or not? [...] I wanted to show how difficult communication is in a racist and homophobic society" (quoted in Goddard, *Feminisms* 128). Since there are no white women in her play, Kay's main focus lies on black women overcoming stereotypes and accepting differences in order to "find a place to say/ those words we need to utter out loud" (Kay 95). By these means, she acknowledges diversity amongst black women. She also clarifies that communicating is not easy: "We have to have arguments sometimes" (94). After the heated discussion about being mixed-race at the end of act one Opal suggests: "Maybe they're even good for us" (ibid). I would argue that because the women have discussed their different views on their black/mixed-race and lesbian identities, they have all come to terms with certain things about themselves they have not been able to acknowledge before. After seeing Opal's and Beth's relationship defy the stereotypes about lesbians Yomi had internalized, she does not "want to run anymore" (112) and even gives Beth her doll for the baby she would like to have (115). Beth, in turn, realizes that she was still hiding her sexual identity from others and has "locked the past [...] away" (114). Opal has come to like herself

and Aisha at least starts to realize that she does not have to “chop [her]self into little bits” but “[b]e it all” (ibid). In a society where black/mixed-race (lesbian) women have to define their selves from a position of “chaos” (116), communication enables them to finally find a voice. Even though they are different from each other, the four women characters “still have something to share” (ibid), which made them find “that meeting place” (95) where communication holds them together and empowers them to finally find the words and the voice to define their selves (cf. Goddard, *Introduction* xii for a similar interpretation).

38 It has been argued that Jackie Kay and Winsome Pinnock stage black women’s identities as shifting and open to change instead of being fixed constructs. Both playwrights show that identities are negotiated through time and space as well as equally influenced by culture, history, language and black women’s present experiences. In *Chiaroscuro* the four female characters are involved in a cyclic process of performing their identities via remembrance and confrontation. Each performance (re)negotiates and transforms the women’s identities and their acceptance of who they are. Leela in *Talking in Tongues* likewise undergoes a process of self-identification as she overcomes internalized stereotypes and encounters alternative ways of expressing herself.

39 Black women’s search for identity, these plays argue, is necessarily connected to issues of belonging, race, gender and sexuality. Alienated from their ‘homeland’ and at the same time othered in the country they were born and/or raised in, Aisha in *Chiaroscuro* and Leela and Claudette in *Talking in Tongues* equally lack a sense of belonging which leaves their identities fractured. Derogatory assumptions about black and/or lesbian and mixed-race womanhood, constructed and upheld in cultural and political discourses of the Western world, further complicate the characters’ search for identity. The plays depict how the characters are unconsciously influenced by stereotypes of black women as ‘Others’ and inferior to white women in their perception and formation of identity. They force an identity constructed in opposition to whiteness on some black women characters, such as Claudette or Beth, while they make others like Opal hate themselves and/or deny certain parts of their identities as black/mixed-race (and lesbian) women. Consequently, *Chiaroscuro* and *Talking in Tongues* defy homogenous notions of female and black identity. Winsome Pinnock contrasts Jamaica and England and thus not only contradicts a supposed all-encompassing unity between black people but also unravels that simplistic assumptions about ‘home’ are inadmissible. One of *Chiaroscuro*’s strongest features is the way mixed-race and lesbian women’s struggles are never portrayed one-dimensionally. Each argument invites the audience to view the subject matter from different perspectives while Jackie Kay construes

racial and sexual identities as multilayered and illustrates that each plays an important role for being defined as well as defining the self.

40 Additionally, both plays demonstrate that finding a voice and a place from which to speak individually and as a group of women are prerequisites for positioning oneself rather than being positioned within predominant cultural discourses. Leela in *Talking in Tongues* encounters an alternative system of words, freeing herself from the racist and (hetero)sexist values transported by the English language. This also applies to Aisha's mother, Yomi's grandmother and daughter in *Chiaroscuro* since they derive their power out of representational forms other than spoken language. Jackie Kay and Winsome Pinnock both recognize diversity and differences amongst black women, but they also seem to argue for the necessity and possibility of inter-racial communication as well as exchange within the group of black women. In *Talking in Tongues* this is only implied through the framework of similar female expressions of anger and its promising ending of female bonding. The characters in *Chiaroscuro*, however, repeatedly voice the importance of a shared meeting place and seem to draw closer to finding it with each performance of their shared history as friends.

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Love and Madness in Renaissance Tragicomedies – *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *The Winter's Tale*

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Abstract:

Madness is a topic often dealt with on the Renaissance stage. The article's main interest is to analyze how the concept of madness is negotiated in tragicomedies. Before elaborating on how madness is constructed in two selected tragicomedies, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the genre will be defined. The complex relations of gender, love and madness are subsequently examined in the two plays. Madness not only sets conflicts in motion but also involves notions of gender and social criticism in both tragicomedies. The paper further analyzes how madness evolves in the protagonists and how it is treated throughout the play.

1 How is the concept of madness used in Renaissance tragicomedy? Madness is a topic often dealt with in other genres as well (for example in Shakespeare's tragedies *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* or *King Lear*). The article's main point of interest is to analyze which purposes the concept of madness serves particularly in tragicomedies. In order to highlight specific ways in which tragicomedy deals with madness, two tragicomedies of the Renaissance period will serve as the focus of attention, namely Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. In *The Winter's Tale*, madness is closely connected to the male protagonist, King Leontes, and is associated with his unfounded jealousy. In the other play, however, the Jailor's Daughter – who belongs to the subplot as she is a part of the lower social group – is afflicted with madness. Her madness arises due to an intense lovesickness.

2 The way in which madness is constructed by the playwrights as well the way in which the characters respond to it stand at the centre of this article. Moreover, the role of madness for the outcome of the tragicomedy will be analyzed. To be able to do so, the hybrid genre tragicomedy will be presented first. The new genre developed and gained popularity in the Renaissance period. Can it be seen as a mixture of comedy and tragedy only or are there other characteristics that contribute to the genre? Since all genres can be argued to be gendered, it is essential to examine features in genres like comedy, tragedy or tragicomedy which are either associated with male or female. In the following it can be specifically investigated how madness is gendered in the way male and female protagonists react to it.

3 In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes' madness is mainly related to the way he perceives the world. While none of the others can imagine Hermione's infidelities, Leontes implores everyone else to acknowledge what he believes to be obvious. His jealousy also gives evidence on his views on femininity. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, it is a woman who suffers

from madness, but this paper also wants to draw attention to the fact/likelihood/possibility that she might not be the only one. In addition, the play elaborates on the chivalric code and its relationship to love and sexual desires. Tragicomedy's connection to the chivalric romance will be closely examined in the following.

4 The genre tragicomedy cannot easily be described or grasped. The proliferation of different and often contradictory definitions makes it hard to assign early plays to the genre, especially because the term tragicomedy was not used until the Renaissance period (Banham 1120). From the early 17th century onwards, however, tragicomedy erupted "in England, France and Spain [...] among its practitioners Fletcher, Shakespeare, Massinger [etc.]" (ibid). It developed in a time of inner turmoil and conflict. Although one can argue that tragicomedy combines the 'tragic' and the 'comic' or 'sadness' and 'merriment', it is, nevertheless, not just a simple mixture of the genres 'comedy' and 'tragedy' (ibid). The term was first "coined by Plautus in the Prologue to his *Amphitryon*" (ibid).

5 John T. Shawcross proposes that tragicomedy must be treated as "a genre in its own right" (21), not just as the result of the fusion of 'tragic' and 'comedy'. According to him, the term 'tragicomedy' consists of the substantive 'comedy' which designates the genre and the adjectival element 'tragic' which denotes the mode, meaning that the adjective tragic only specifies the comic genre (21). Joseph Loewenstein, for instance, states that tragicomedy might be "described in Polonius phrase as 'tragical-comical-historical-pastoral'" and he investigates the reason why Guarini's *Il pastor fido* can be read as a pastoral tragicomedy (34). As a result, he is interested in the relation of pastoral *mode* to tragicomic *genre*. To him tragicomedy functions as the genre which will then be specified by pastoral elements (Loewenstein 34ff.).

6 In order to make an attempt of defining the hybrid genre, one has to gather features and themes that often occur in tragicomedies so resemblances can rise to surface. According to Mimi Still Dixon, "recognition" scenes are highly significant in tragicomedies (59). In these scenes long-lost characters are reunited. When the separated friends or family members finally recognize each other everything is re-evaluated. Thus, the recognition scene unites paradoxical concepts like sorrow and joy or separation and reunion. In addition, the notion of recognition is also related to the moment of "resurrection" (Dixon 57). Recognition scenes function to bring about the comedic ending. Family scenes revolve around tensions as well as reconciliation in the play. Dixon states that moments of reunion often include family members (56). A connection is established "between Providence and maternal provision" and the "theme of familial loss and the providential structure of tragicomedy" (70).

Gendered Genres

7 While tragedies have often been associated with masculinity, melodramas have been connected to femininity. And while tragedies reveal the “progress of the male hero” (Karlyn 157), women lack the chance to reach for heroic self-fulfilment: Their life stories can only be narrated “within the boundaries of heterosexual love, motherhood and loneliness” (ibid 157). Consequently, women’s stories are told “in those genres oriented toward the private sphere and the family” (ibid 157), namely in melodramas. Here women appear as the male hero’s accessory and the plot revolves around “loneliness and/or motherhood” (ibid 157). While romantic comedies which centre love are also connoted to femininity, “the implications of gender for comedy are less clear” (ibid 157).

8 “Comedy [...] paves the way for a community liberated from structures grown so rigid [...] that they threaten its very existence” (160). In comparison with the tragic genre comedies not only feature different themes, but also different protagonists. Royal characters are replaced with protagonists on “the level of Everyman, or lower” (158). Moreover, the focus of attention is shifted: Comedy concentrates on social issues while tragedies are more concerned with the individual (159). While death is a well-known element in tragedies, sexual fulfilment is more and more included in comedies. Furthermore, the comic genre is used to ironize the male hero that tragedy praises. In addition, comedies feature themes like “antiauthoritarianism”, meaning that the son, for instance, revolts against the father as well as “renewal and transformation”, revolving around stories “of birth, death, and rebirth” (160). The connection between tragedy and comedy is still difficult to define. Kathleen Rowe Karlyn argues that comedy and tragedy are interrelated insofar as “every comedy contains a potential tragedy. But every tragedy can also be seen as an incomplete comedy” (161). She stresses that point because themes like birth, death or rebirth as well as family and power appear in both genres, in the end, however, “comedy gets the last word” (161).

Gendering of Madness and Illness in Tragicomedies

9 The eruption of madness in tragicomedies can be related to various reasons, however, it often involves issues of love, sexuality or family since these topics appear in tragicomedies every so often. In the Renaissance period, it was often assumed that women’s lovesickness can develop “into full-scale madness” (Dawson 1). In connection to lovesickness one can distinguish “three other female maladies: hysteria, green sickness, and uterine fury” (ibid). In the early modern days hysteria was also called “the suffocation of the mother” and Edward Jordon, an English physician who elaborated on the malady in his book *Briefe Discourse of a*

Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother (1603), once diagnosed a patient with “hysteria rather than melancholy” (MacDonald xxix).

10 According to Jordon, the disease “is an affect of the Mother or wombe” (C 5). People suffering from hysteria are thought to have been imbalanced or disturbed, for example due to extreme emotions like jealousy or love (Dawson 13). Symptoms are for example “incoherence, delusions, and a lack of sensation” (ibid). In addition, patients are usually unable to speak, that is why hysteria is often called the suffocation of the mother (13-14). Cures involved “applying scented oils to women’s sexual organs [...] and using scents to coax the womb back into its accustomed place” (Dawson 14). Sexual intercourse was also seen to have healing powers and also had the effect to press women “into their social roles as wives and mothers” (ibid).

11 Green sickness is an illness closely connected to virginity, seeing women’s virginity as a sign for an incomplete and unnatural state. In Dawson’s opinion green sickness is a disease which is “most relevant to lovesickness” (5). However, people which suffer from lovesickness are both mentally and physically affected while green sickness not necessarily involves sexual desire. Although sexual intercourse is again a possible treatment, it is not applied to satisfy one’s sexual appetite. However, studies of this female malady also want to bring across that sex is necessary “in order to remain in physical and psychological health” (9).

12 Uterine fury, on the other hand, does involve sexual desires, but is also the least known female malady. It is assumed to arise “either from a problem of temperature in the womb, or from vapours which emanate from corrupted seed” (9). The “sexual overexcitation” (ibid) often spotted by widows or virgins is one of a few other symptoms often referred to by doctors or family members. Interestingly, uterine fury is often referred to as “love melancholy” (20), as it relates to madness that derives from (unrequited) love. In sum, one can highlight that the three maladies depicted above confirm that in Renaissance England illness and gender were closely related.

Madness in *The Winter’s Tale*: Leontes's Jealousy

13 In Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, Leontes’ jealousy initiates the play’s “tragicomic cycle” (Wright 225). Leontes’ jealousy erupts all of a sudden early in the play. Being the king of Sicilia, Leontes occupies the highest position in the social hierarchy. Moreover, he is blessed with a wife, Hermione, and a son named Mamillius. However, Leontes sees everything he holds dear endangered: “Bohemia nothing; My wife is nothing;” (I.ii. 94-95).

His jealousy erupts so fast that the event that triggers his inner turmoil is hardly recognizable and it is indeed questionable whether it can be led back to a specific event. After he unsuccessfully tried to persuade his old friend Polixenes, the king of Bohemia, he wants his wife to talk his “brother” into staying for a little while longer (I.ii. 15). Derek Cohen puts it in a nutshell: “He [Leontes] encourages Hermione to persuade Polixenes to stay through the use of – what else? – her womanly arts. Her success, paradoxically, is her undoing.” (208). And indeed this short scene turns everything on its head as Leontes begins to reinterpret his wife’s relation to Polixenes. While Leontes first appreciated the fact that his wife was able to convince Polixenes to stay, her success soon makes him suspicious. Leontes observes that Hermione gives her hand to Polixenes which serves as conclusive evidence. Leontes “steps away too far” and thereby he “places between himself and his wife a chasm of jealousy” (212). His exclamation of “Too hot, too hot!” marks the turning point: He is now convinced of her treason (I. ii. 108).

14 However, neither Hermione’s speech nor her gestures can actually be proof enough to reach the conclusion that she is betraying her husband. Leontes allows himself to be overwhelmed by the fear of her possible unfaithfulness which is so powerful that he even convinces himself of its validity. One can argue that his unfounded jealousy resembles a kind of madness which continuously intensifies. Even others cannot convince him to see reason: Camillo insists that the king is mistaken, but he cannot change Leontes’ mind (I. ii. 248-322). Henceforth, other characters refer to the king’s behavior as a sign of illness. Camillo warns Polixenes of the king’s suspicions and explains about Leontes’ “distemper” and “disease” which will affect him, too, if he does not decide to flee (I. ii. 383-384).

15 Nevertheless, Shakespeare deliberately introduced Leontes’ jealousy in the beginning of the play and might have constructed his outburst so suddenly to link his jealousy to affection. Wright argues that Leontes’ jealousy is the result of an affection which “is no longer taken to mean simply ‘lustful passions’ but rather relates a mental perturbation (227-228). Leontes bursts out:

Affection! Thy intention stabs the center; Thou dost make possible things not so held,
Communicat’st with dreams;--how can this be?— With what’s unreal thou coactive
art, And fellow’st nothing: then ‘tis very credent Thou may’st co-join with something;
and thou dost, (And that beyond commission) and I find it, (And that to the infection
of my brains And hard’ning of my brows). (I.ii.138-146)

The play centers on the notions effect, affect and experience. Leontes short speech is self-reflexive insofar as he tries to analyze the “effect which his own emotion has on him” (Neely Speech, 325). His imagination makes him believe that his jealousy is founded in reality.

16 Leontes' outburst of jealousy is based on several levels and the play alludes to some. First of all, his strong reaction might be explained by the fact that he regards Hermione as his "possession" (Schwartz 266). One could argue that madness can be distinguished "from conditions that look just like it: bewitchment, possession, or feigning" (Neely 46). Cohen points out that Leontes refers to Hermione as "my wife" and by doing so he perceives her in her "typical role[]" (213). Now his best friend seems to have won his trophy. Leontes states: "Why, he that wears her like his medal, hanging About his neck" (I.ii. 305-306). Therefore, it becomes clear at the very beginning that the play is concerned with stereotypical images of femininity and that Leontes wants to reestablish the ideal image of a woman. However, the feeling that another man might be interested in her makes him furious.

17 On the other hand one can also argue that Leontes secretly desires to take Hermione's place beside Polixenes in order to act out "the prohibited homosexual role Leontes repudiates in himself" (Schwartz 251). Hermione's lively conversation with Polixenes might have reminded Leontes of the "homoerotic memory" (Cohen 208) he and Polixenes share when they "were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk I' th' sun" (I.ii. 67). Again, the notion of affection plays a significant role in the play as it is "'rooted' between Leontes and Polixenes in their boyhoods" (Kahn 215). However, one has to bear in mind that the term 'homosexual' was non-existent in Renaissance England, although the concept was already known (Bray 13-14). Hattaway argues that Leontes' behavior indicates his rejection towards the "notion of paradisaic marriage" (101). In Hattaway's opinion, Hermione takes on the role of the intruder and might be best compared to the serpent that ends their time in paradise as well as Leontes and Polixenes' "masculine friendship" (101). In sum, this scene might just allude to their intimate male friendship or indeed refer to a homoerotic discourse.

18 Moreover, according to Cohen, a wife maintains the "social order" and "security" (207). Men rely on "feminine loyalty" as women are widely seen as "guarantors of masculine honor" (Schwartz 260). Her perceived unfaithfulness therefore comes across as "a potential threat to the sexual security and the social status of the hero" (Cohen 207). Leontes might also see his image as the masculine hero and leader at stake, fearing the humiliation which he might have to endure because of his wife's sexual infidelities. Her affair would signify that she disregards social norms and expectations and thereby she would take some of the king's authority away from him. In sum, Leontes' accusations seem to be unfounded and Cohen suggests that Leontes projected "a secret fear" on Hermione which is in fact the "fear of chaos" resulting in the reversal of "patriarchal social formations" (207).

19 Last but not least, Leontes' jealousy might be deeply rooted in his fear of women's sexual desires which he cannot control. Traub argues that the "masculine perspective of desire expresses an attitude toward female bodies that [...] is revealingly paranoid" and focuses on the relation of desire and anxiety in Shakespeare's plays (3). Greenblatt for instance classes it "a primal male nausea of the female body" which came into being due to Hermione's pregnancy (132). Cohen suggests that Leontes is frightened of "an unsatisfiable sexual appetite in woman" (213). Hermione's second pregnancy might function as a lively reminder of her sexual drives as sexual intercourse naturally precedes pregnancy and it thus supports Leontes' perception of her adultery. Consequently, Hermione is imprisoned by her own husband and awaits her verdict. Prison excludes her from society and symbolizes Leontes' way to tame the female (Greenblatt 132-133).

Perceptual Truth

20 Evidence for the fact that Leontes is trapped in a visual crisis can be provided by Stuart Clark who points out that vision's efficiency and credibility is doubted in the Renaissance period. In Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, one largely deals with the crisis of vision in the Renaissance period, too. In *Vanities of the Eye* Stuart Clark argues that "during the early modern period [...] vision was anything but objectively established or secure in its supposed relationship to 'external fact'" (1). According to Clark, humans naturally want to believe that everything they see is true (1), since "the eyes provided the most direct knowledge of things" (10). However, especially in Renaissance Europe a gap developed between what can be seen and what is true. In fact, "vision came to be characterized by uncertainty and unreliability, such that access to visual reality could no longer be normally guaranteed" (2).

21 Clark argues: "The clearest cases were those of imaginary phenomena, when illness, madness, or just fear made people see completely non-existent things" (209). "Melancholy" as well as other kinds of madness has the power to influence the visual senses, resulting in an "inability to distinguish between sensible truths and sensible fictions" (61). Leontes' behavior indeed seems to suggest a kind of "illusion and lack of correspondence with reality" (62), when he accuses his wife to be "slippery" and a "hobby-horse" (I.ii. 272 + 275).

22 Leontes sees reality differently as jealousy and passion become the dominant part of his personality. The play shows how a subjective vision of reality changes everything and it furthermore points out how destructive this kind of vision tends to be. And realism is nothing

else than an illusion and effect. Barthes differentiates between two levels of signification, the level of denotation and the level of connotation:

eliminated from the realist speech-act as a signified of denotation, the “real” returns to it as a signified of connotation; for just when these details are reputed to denote the real directly, all that they do – without saying so – is signify it; (234)

The levels of signification relate to what Barthes calls the “referential illusion” (234). At the end, “the very absence of the signified [...] becomes the very signifier of realism: the reality effect is produced” (ibid).

23 Reliance on vision is discussed in the play as well, as there are many references to perception in *The Winter’s Tale*, namely how characters see the world. According to Leontes’ view there can be no doubt that his wife betrayed him because he trusts his visual abilities completely. He believes that his eyes transmitted the truth and cannot understand how others like Camillo need so much time to reach the same conclusion:

Ha’not you seen, Camillo, - But that’s past doubt, you have, or your eye-glass Is thicker than a cuckold’s horn – or heard, – For, to a vision so apparent, [...] (I.ii. 266-269)

One can argue that Leontes’ mad jealousy erupts due to a shift of perception that makes him reflect upon everything he had once believed to be true. He begins to distrust his former perceptive abilities, believing that he had been tricked. He acknowledges to Camillo: "but we have been / Deceived in thy integrity, deceived / In that which seems so. (I.ii. 238-240)"

24 Apparently, Camillo fails to recognize the things Leontes can (or imagines) to see with his “bare eyes” (I.ii. 307). Again and again Leontes turns to Camillo: “Canst with thine eyes at once see good and evil” (I.ii. 301). He also accuses his other lords to be ignorant to the obvious truth: “You smell this business with a sense as cold As is a dead man’s nose: but I do see’t and feel’t” (II.i. 150-151). Leontes strongly believes in his judgment as he as the king of Sicilia cannot come to false conclusions. He is outraged that the others seem to be “ignorant by age” (II.i. 172) and that they seem to doubt his observations: “What! lack I credit?” (II.i. 156).

25 In order to “Give rest to the minds of others” (II.i. 191) he sends people to get the oracle’s prediction. According to Leontes, this is the only way to verify his observations and to make sure that how he perceives the world is true. Interestingly, he does not want empirical proof, but requires an oracle instead. However, he accuses Hermione of her wrongdoings in court. Thereby the court case and the oracle’s prediction become opposite and conflicting poles in the play. The court represents the legal judgment system as well as

empirical evidence while the oracle signifies a believe system. Leontes' recollection of the latter can allude to the fact that Leontes longs for old times and desires a lost certainty. He also strives for superior knowledge and tries to know and to enclose the truth. Language and vision are instruments to perceive the world, but they seem to have become unreliable.

From Jealousy to Remorse

26 The oracle's prediction functions as a reality shock in the play. Leontes has to acknowledge his error, but the oracle's judgment does not make him see reason. Quite the contrary: Leontes still cannot differentiate between truth and falsehood. He asks: "Hast thou read truth?" (III.ii. 137), but even after being reassured that the oracle's evaluation can be trusted the king exclaims: "There is no truth at all i'the oracle: / The sessions shall proceed: this is mere falsehood" (III.ii. 140). A message delivered by an attendant brings back his senses at last: "The prince your son [...] is gone" (III.ii. 143-144). Only this delivery makes the king realize his "injustice". However, the "news is mortal to the queen" (III.ii. 147), who appears to be dead. Meanwhile, Hermione's lady Paulina takes her anger and frustration out on the king himself. She exclaims: "Thy tyranny / Together working with his jealousies [...] And then run mad indeed, - stark mad!" (III.ii. 178-182). In her opinion, Leontes is "monstrous" and a "devil" (III.ii. 189 +190). Leontes lets her continue with her rage, feeling that he deserves this sort of punishment.

27 Hermione, like *King Lear*, seemingly dies of a broken heart. To be precise, the queen dies of a loss she can neither bear nor handle. The reality of death appears as the only reality that remains on the Renaissance stage. There are many examples of such shocks of perception on the renaissance stage. Tragicomedy functions to visualize the strings connecting and separating birth and death, madness and remorse as well as melancholy and sanity. While Hermione will be awakened again at the very end, Mamillius will not. His death is already foreshadowed in the first scene of Act II by himself: He wants to tell his mother "A sad tale's best for winter: I have one / Of sprites and goblins" (II.i. 24-25). This announcement not only alludes to the title of the play, but also to supernatural powers. The old wives' tale deals with a man "dwelt by a churchyard" (II.i. 29). The tale's introduction can already function as a premonition: This could be an allusion to Mamillius' later death. As a result, Mamillius indicates the turning point and therefore he takes a decisive role in the play. The cause of his death is not revealed, but Leontes will indeed visit his grave. In addition, the tale functions as a meta-commentary of the whole story. As storytelling is about capturing the audience and about having an effect on the audience, one can conclude that the

scene is not about truth but about telling. This indicates that Leontes is less interested in whether Hermione is a loyal and faithful wife but deeply self-absorbed. Leontes is confronted with the fear that he cannot rely on anybody – neither his family and friends nor his vision.

28 The topic of the supernatural is again discussed in the play when Hermione's ghost appears in Antingonus' dream. The "ghostly resurrection" again functions as a premonition (Neumeier 118). Antingonus has to realize that "the spirits o'the / dead / May walk again" (III.iii. 16-17). However, Antingonus remains skeptical. Unlike many of his contemporaries he is not a believer. In his opinion "Dreams are toys" (III.iii. 39). Paradoxically, he decides on an affective level to go along with it which is both strange and ambivalent: Why does he suddenly start believing although he claims he is not superstitious? He exclaims: "Yet, for this once, yea [...] I do believe" (III.iii. 40-41). Moreover, Hermione appears as an idealized saint. She is visualized "in pure white robes; / Like very sanctity" (III.iii. 22-23). Nevertheless, her appearance can also be compared to a demon – depending on perception: "her eyes / Became two spouts: the fury spent" (III.iii. 25-26). The two images of the saint and the demon are conflated. The nightmare or ghost story foreshadows the later resurrection scene as Hermione has "ungentle business" on earth which needs to be sorted out (III.iii. 34).

29 The fifth and final act of the play displays Hermione's awakening. The resurrection scene, which reunites the protagonists, corresponds to many traditional endings of tragicomedies. Before Hermione comes back to life, Paulina and Leontes remember the "perfect woman" (V.i. 15). Hermione was not only perfect in life, but has become an ideal in death. Leontes swears: "No more such wives" (V.i. 55) and even further exclaims: "I'll have no wife, Paulina" (V.i. 68). Paulina is sure that Leontes will marry again though. Therefore, she insists: "Yet, if my lord will marry, - if you will, sir, / No remedy, but you will, - give me the office/ To choose you a queen" (V.i. 76-78). Paulina also refers to Hermione with the phrase: "Were I the ghost that walket" (V.i. 62). Again, Paulina alludes to the fact that Hermione might exist in some form. "Leontes is still haunted by guilt" (Neumeier 118). In fact, as a ghost Hermione has an unnatural possessive hold on Leontes, mirroring the one he had on her when she was still alive.

30 The resurrection scene is highly interested in the transition of life and death which is again a central topic in tragicomedies. It "foreground[s] unsettling links between fear and desire" (ibid). A statue of Hermione was created and surprisingly the artist even managed to capture age. Leontes rightly notices that the Hermione he knew was not so "wrinkled" (V.iii. 28). Art seems to be able to capture things that memory cannot hold on to. Everyone admires Hermione's stature and Leontes even tries to kiss her twice, but Paulina points out that the

color is not dry yet (V.iii. 46-79). Finally, Paulina transforms Hermione from statue to life, but insists that “to awake your faith” is necessary for the transformation. While Leontes screens the statue for “comparisons and contrasts, his faith is awakened” (Garber 180). Hermione’s resurrection therefore revolves around the notions of art versus miracle and belief in contrast to skepticism. The ending of the play remains open. Paulina again alludes to the notion of experience and insists that the others will not require the truth but experience it. Concerning Leontes and Hermione, the play also gives no further information. Surely one could assume that Leontes suffered long enough from his own mistakes and longs to spend the rest of his life together with his wife, but Hattaway argues differently (102). He notices that Leontes – who strongly desired to kiss Hermione before her awakening – not even talks to her nor does she address him. They do embrace each other, but Leontes is more concerned with the marriage of his long lost and initially rejected daughter (ibid). Moreover, the play constantly shifted between two modes: Can truths be gathered via empirical evidence or with the help of a belief system? The tragicomedy settles for a balance between the two forces.

31 All in all, *The Winter’s Tale* is based on notions like honor and madness, but also questions ideas of love. Leontes’ love for Hermione that results in madness becomes the centre of criticism. Leontes is still linked to the past since he longs for old belief systems. However, the old order does not work any longer, but the new order cannot yet be trusted. Although tragicomedy uses madness, value systems and concepts of love to look back to conservative role models of the past to express dissatisfaction with the present, it only casts a glance at future role models. In fact, Leontes realizes the (sexual) needs of his wife, but is tremendously afraid of the reversal of social orders. As a result, his jealousy develops as a sign for his incapability to handle the situation. Jealousy is henceforth described as a disease by nearly all characters; realizing its disruptive power and force.

Madness in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*: The Chivalric Code

32 *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is about vision, power and love at first sight. The play deals less with soul mates, but rather features desire and lust. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* also refers to views on femininity, not only portraying the view of woman as a partner to man, but even going so far as likening her to a goddess. This consideration can be linked back to the chivalric romance pattern which thinks of love as something pure. The chivalric code is concerned with honor and love and the play is based on the typical love and honor conflict. In the following, it will be important to look at how tragicomedy treats this pattern and especially how love and honor are defined in the play. In connection to this, one has to

explore whether there are different versions of love displayed in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and what chivalric romance and love have to do with madness.

33 According to Mary Beth Rose, chivalry became “an international phenomenon” in medieval times (187). Fused with political history, chivalry played a significant role in “late medieval power relations” (187-188). Even when the “political functions of chivalry” vanished in the sixteenth century, a chivalric ethic remained which was deeply concerned with “ideals of honor and nobility” (188). Looking at the origins of chivalry, Rose points out that the notion can be traced back to “kighthood (la chevalerie)” (190). In the twelfth century, knights were employed by “superior castle owners” and even when they left their workplace “they adopted the idea of inheritance as a value” (ibid). Knights were eager to show themselves which could be done best in tournaments and battles. Rose stresses that the knight’s youth could be regarded as the most exhausting time as it was a period of “impatience, turbulence, and instability” (191). The knight longed to win “glory in tournaments and war” (ibid).

34 However, the knight not only wanted to gain a good reputation among his fellows, but was also on a quest for a wife (ibid). Consequently, the chivalric pattern was not rarely related to the phenomenon of ‘courtly love’ (196). Love, however, seen from the male’s perspective only, is reducing women to desirable objects and emphasizing male desire (192). Chivalry, Rose argues, also articulated the problematic relationship between private and public spheres in the sixteenth and seventeenth century: Thus in times of cultural formations chivalry “was to facilitate violent processes of change by idealizing and – potentially – denying them” (195). Tragicomedy then processes the chivalric ideal and thereby redefines “the relationship between chivalric heroism and sexuality” (199).

35 Applied to Fletcher and Shakespeare’s tragicomedy *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Rose argues that “love and sexuality” become “the exclusive focus of the play” (214). The play tries to solve the conflicts that were caused by love and sexuality in the first place and revolves around the chivalric code to articulate the new relations of private and public spheres. In the opinion of Mary Beth Rose, the contradiction of the two realms is not really the focus of attention, but conflicts erupting in the private life only will be discussed in the play (216). All in all, one can argue that main problems arise due to different concepts of love and also because of conflicting notions of “chivalric heroism and sexual love” (228).

Same-sex Relationships

36 Already in the first two acts of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, same-sex friendships are established and highly valued. During their stay in prison (Act II scene ii), the two cousins Palamon and Arcite realize how fond they are of each other. Arcite is convinced they “shall know nothing here but one another” (II.ii. 41) and remain “unmarried” (II.ii. 29). According to them being together will allow them to endure everything. Only the unfortunate situation makes them reflect upon their relationship. Moreover, the prison allows a closeness which is impossible outside. Arcite is more and more comforted by the mere presence of Palamon. He even thinks of the imprisonment as the following: “I think this our prison” (II.ii. 62). It is an isolated area which is remotely placed from society and holds the opportunity for the two kinsmen to express their feelings toward each other. The prison indeed became “holy sanctuary” (II.ii. 72). The prison insofar turned into a refuge for them as no woman can woo them “to wander from” (II.ii. 76). Instead, with the help of their imagination, they can enjoy the new form of togetherness. Arcite confesses:

We are one anothers wife, ever begetting New birthes of love; we are father, friends, acquaintance; We are, in one another, Families, I am your heire, and you are mine. (II.ii. 80-83)

The short passage foregrounds a certain homoerotic discourse in the play – a discourse to which tragicomedy has been linked to as well. Of course one could also argue that Palamon idealizes the merit of male friendship, however, utterances like “in one another” (II.ii. 82) might indeed express a particular fondness for “same-gender bonding” (Sinfield 72).

37 The two kinsmen are not the only ones who value same-gender relationships. Emilia, Arcite and Palamon’s later object of desire, also “rejects heterosexual bonds in favour of same-sex friendship” (Dawson 31). Emilia expresses that she is attracted to her childhood friend Flavia who died when they were eleven. Emiliias “idealized discourse of same-sex friendship” functions as the counter image of Palamon and Arcite’s intimate relationship (ibid). Emilia makes clear in reference to Flavia: “But was her pattern; her affections - pretty, / Though, happily, her careles were - I followed” (I.iii.72-74). She even further exclaims “That the true love `tween maid and maid may be / More than in sex dividual” (I.iii. 81-82). Thus Emilia prefers a single life and “embodies the ‘clear virginity’” (ibid).

38 The prison scene also alludes to the chivalric code as the two kinsmen talk about how they “desire the ways of honour” (II.ii. 73). Male bonding might contribute “to the ties of heroism, loyalty and self-sacrifice”, but Sinfield adds that it can be “strikingly dysfunctional” when it turns into “male rivalry” (76). The kinsmen temporarily value chivalric heroism

higher than sexual desires, but as soon as Emilia appears, Arcite and Palamon's ideal friendship seems to be forgotten. The mere side of her dissolves their precious friendship. The happening is depicted quite superficially as none of them knows Emilia at all. Instead, all that Arcite and Palamon care about is how they can manage to possess the desired object. Arcite and Palamon both fall for Emilia by love at first sight which symbolizes the starting point for their ongoing rivalry in the future. Nevertheless, one can also argue that their love seems to be "more the product of their love for one another than any actual understanding of the woman they are pursuing" (Dawson 36).

Love at first sight

39 When the two kinsmen fall in love with Emilia, she becomes a "treasured object of desire" and a price that is ought to be won (Rose 221). In this rivalry for Emilia she herself has no say in it. The kinsmen take "no notice whatsoever of her feelings, or, indeed, of her" (ibid). Instead, they remain deeply engaged in their "self-absorption" (222). Emilia on the other hand cannot decide whom she wants to marry or if she even wants to marry either one of them. Her lack of options is superficially highlighted in the play. However, the play gives her plenty of opportunities to articulate her thoughts and feelings. Although her opinion might not be valued she nevertheless had the chance to reveal her emotions. Rose also implies this view: "Is she merely a passive victim in regard to choosing a mate, or is she unwilling to assert her prerogative as a subject and make a choice?" (ibid). Nevertheless, Emilia refuses to present a kind of inner conflict and she also avoids a conflict between public and private spheres (ibid). She does not state that she is secretly in love with either Arcite or Palamon. She deliberately does not want to make a choice. Emilia knows that the two men want to fight to their deaths because of her, but she cannot reach a conclusion. Her long monologue illustrates her inner feelings: "I am a fool, my reason is lost in me, / I have no choice" (IV.ii. 34-34).

40 Emilia's long speech signifies her indifference toward her two wooers. She goes back and forth in her speech and cannot decide for one or the other as she favors none of them. In the chivalric pattern women indeed have no say. "[C]hivalric love is constructed exclusively in terms of male desire" (Rose 221). However, Emilia allows herself to be objectified even further because of her own indifference. She further makes her lovers appear indistinguishable: "Cannot distinguish, but must cry for both" (IV.ii. 54). Emilia does not seem to be in love. There is no hint of mutual affection, although the idea that marriage involves mutual affection was already a part of Renaissance ideas of love. One explanation

for her reversed behavior is brought forward by Dawson who claims that Emilia cannot decide for one or the other – or even a man at all – because her intimate friendship with Flavia goes beyond the grave (32). It is equally likely that her desire cannot be pinpointed: “Desire is thus constructed as imitative and displaced, so that it matters less what the object is, than that it is loved by the friend” (Dawson 32). In sum, Emilia decides to play the passive part till the very end while the Jailor’s Daughter gets to play the progressive part: Her decision of loving Palamon is made very early in the play. In the end, the Jailor’s Daughter is afflicted with madness as she tries to break out of her role. The Jailor’s Daughter appears as the counter image to Emilia.

Madness: The Jailor’s Daughter and the Kinsmen

41 The Jailor’s Daughter has many lines and scenes. She frees her love Palamon from prison because – like the two kinsmen – she falls in love with her object of desire at first sight. The Jailor’s Daughter is aware of the hopeless situation due to the social gap that divides their lives. She exclaims: “To marry him is hopeless; To be his whore is witless” (II.iv. 4-5). This awareness results in the Daughter’s “sense of her own unworthiness” (Dawson 30). After his escape Palamon owes his life to the Jailor’s Daughter. Both flee into the forest. She foregrounds her sexual desire and her confession cannot yet be considered mad love. The Jailor’s Daughter is interested in sexual fulfillment. She further elaborates on her absolute love. After she gave Palamon his liberty, the Jailor’s Daughter admits: “I love him beyond love and beyond reason,/ Or wit, or safety; I have made him know it;/ I care not, I am desperate” (II.vi. 11-13). To love someone beyond reason is an acknowledgement of her absolute love as a kind of madness after all. The Jailor’s Daughter not only reveals her love for Palamon, but also points out the unmanly behavior of Palamon as he not even thanked his rescuer let alone declared his feelings for her as well. With his dishonorable behavior Palamon violated the chivalric code and the Jailor’s Daughter cleverly reminds the audience of his ruthlessness: “He made such scruples of the wrong he did / To me and to my father” (II.vi. 25-26).

42 While Palamon disappears, the Jailor’s Daughter remains alone in the forest and eventually loses her identity in the woods (III.ii.). Instead of acknowledging to herself that her love has left her, she rather believes and fears that Palamon has been attacked by a wolf. Another long monologue gives evidence of her inner turmoil. Her confused state brings her so far to long for a “deathlike swoon” (Neely 85): “Least I should drowne, or stab or hang my selfe. O state of Nature, faile together in me, [...] The best way is the next way to a grave”

(III.ii.30-34). By referring to the 'state of nature' the Jailor's Daughter explicitly links her (sexual) desire directly to the instincts which are so overpowering that she cannot control her emotions any longer. Her state of being in love makes her appear mad and her female malady can also be characterized as a "delusional melancholy" (Neely 84). Dawson points out: "For lovesickness, like melancholy, is a disease that can be manifested *either* as a destructive bodily illness, *or* as an ennobling intellectual affliction" (2). In Renaissance period, Dawson elaborates further, lovesickness can be related to three other female maladies, namely hysteria, green sickness and uterine fury (1). Dawson states that in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* lovesickness is also connected with "uterine disorders" (1) as well as "green sickness" (27). One can conclude that the Jailor's Daughter undergoes several "stages of lovesickness before descending into madness" (Dawson 29). The Daughter's sickness is also insofar linked to female maladies as it is associated with her "menstrual cycle" (Dawson 22).

43 Still in the forest, the Jailor's Daughter allows herself to be dragged away by fantasies. She dreams of a "stormy sea" which can be interpreted as a metaphor for her inner turmoil. She starts singing – a behavior which is generally associated with female mental maladies. The Doctor who was later consolidated to cure her also diagnoses "madness" (IV.iii. 49), which is more specifically "melancholy" (IV.iii. 50). The Doctor comes up with a treatment based on the symptoms the Jailor informs him about: "She is continually in a harmless distemper:/ sleeps little; altogether without appetite, save often/ drinking; dreaming of another world and a better" (IV.iii. 3-5). The Jailor's Daughter becomes "increasingly unsettled from her lack of food and sleep" (Dawson 30). What makes her appear unsettled is the way she openly confesses her love to Palamon. She not only conveys the message that she is deeply in love with the kinsmen but also directly expresses her sexual desires. Quite like the two kinsmen her world revolves around the question how she can get sexual fulfillment. However, her pleading for sexual fulfillment does not go along with the images of femininity (for example virginity) and her role in society. Her longing must come across as a disease to explain her desires. Dawson states: "the distemper of the Jailor's Daughter fits into paradigms of gender and illness, which suggest that female lovesickness is sexual, irrational, and self-destructive" (30). Being lovesick or longing for sexual pleasures are henceforth seen as maladies which can explicitly be linked to the female sex. However, this does not mean that her plea for sexual fulfillment was overlooked or suppressed by male society. On the contrary: Whereas the Victorians assumed that women had or should have no sexual desire and that men had plenty, the English Renaissance assumed that women had more sexual

desire than did men. (Bach 29) In sum, the play strongly revolves around “male anxiety about female sexuality” (Thompson 3).

44 The treatment of the Daughter’s melancholy results in the loss of her maidenhead. The Wooer plays a major part in the cure as he pretends to be Palamon. The Jailor’s Daughter is not in love with the real Palamon, “but her ideal” (Dawson 36) and lets herself be fooled by the imposter. It is the Doctor in particular who approves of the illusion: “It is a falsehood she is in, which is with falsehood to be combated” (IV.iii. 93-94). Interestingly, the Doctor no longer decides on religious treatment. The play is also no longer concerned with guilt and punishment, but only with the treatment of the Jailor’s Daughter. Only the Jailor objects sexual intercourse as a possible treatment as he fears for his daughter’s honor. According to Carroll, this fear can be linked back to the “mystery of virginity” in the English renaissance (28): Due to the “cult of Virgin Mary”, virginity was strongly valued (Barber 196). However, the Doctor makes clear that the Jailor’s Daughter has long lost her honor anyway. And even the Jailor himself acknowledges that her current behavior makes her “So far from what she was, so childishly, / So sillily, as if she were a fool” (IV.i. 39-40). To avoid ruining the honor of the Jailor’s Daughter and him even further, the Wooer promises her to marry her afterwards and thereby he wants to live up to the standards set by the chivalric code. The treatment also suggests that women depend on men for a stabilized personality and a healthy condition.

45 The treatment, resembling “a kind of rape” (Sinfield 80), puts an end to the madness of the Jailor’s Daughter. However, one could claim that neither the Jailor’s Daughter nor Emilia got what they wanted. Emilia is about to get married although she would have preferred her single life and concerning the Jailor’s Daughter: “erotic satisfaction is also the moment of its loss” (Dawson 36). This goes along with Carroll’s point of view: “The state of virginity thus exists only as a condition of potential loss” (21). Dawson further points out that the Jailor’s Daughter might come to her senses in the future, realizing that her Wooer is not what he pretended to be, but that can just be related to “the delusional nature of erotic love itself” (ibid). In sum, the tragicomedy settles for “uneasy compromises” (ibid).

46 All in all, the play “tests chivalric idealism against private (primarily sexual) experience” (Rose 223). The women’s longing for sexual experience and the foregrounding of sexual desires is associated with madness. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* highlight the gendering of madness as a female malady. However, gendering madness also means that during the Renaissance period one can realize gender shifts from the one-sex theory to the two-sex theory. Originally women were seen as deficit men, but that image shifted. Suddenly

differences between men and women were recognized. One could argue that tragicomedy performs and shows the shift and indeed also displays the constructiveness and artificiality of the shift.

47 It has also been emphasized that madness in the tragicomedy cannot be linked to the subplot only which features the lovesickness of the Jailor's Daughter. In contrast, madness can be linked to the main part as well which depicts the story of the two kinsmen. They both fall in love with Emilia at first sight by neither knowing her personality nor being interest in her. Their falling in love can also be described as a love beyond reason and thus it can be connected to madness as well. As a result, madness in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* functions as a connecting link between the subplot and the main plot.

Conclusion: Depiction and Function of Madness in Tragicomedies

48 The tragicomedies *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *The Winter's Tale* reveal many differences and similarities. Both plays conclude with marriage and family celebration. However, one can argue that marriage is worked out as a compromise to comfort the protagonists in the face of the loss of Mamillius and Arcite. Rose even argues that "the heroics of marriage" emphasizes the "increasing prestige of private life" in tragicomedies (235). However, it remains dubious whether Hermione and Leontes or Palamon and Emilia actually enjoy their future life as a married couple. Madness, either erupting due to unfounded jealousy or overpowering lovesickness, not only sets conflicts in motion, but also involves notions of gender and social criticism in both tragicomedies.

49 Gendering of madness is strongly highlighted in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. One could argue that not only the Jailor's Daughter, but also the kinsmen develop an uncontrollable madness. The Daughter falls hopelessly in love with Palamon while Palamon himself as well as Arcite immediately fall in love with Emilia. One can conclude that the kinsmen are also afflicted with madness, however, they deal with it differently: The Jailor's Daughter tries to break out of her role and turns mad while the two kinsmen stick to the masculine roles expected from them and decide on a chivalric tournament to solve out their rivalry. Leontes' jealousy develops into madness and arises due to a shift in perception and a visual crisis. Unlike the Daughter's madness, Leontes' madness is not treated by a doctor, but gets cured by a reality shock. Both tragicomedies allude to gradual gender shifts. Tragicomedy acknowledges the shift, but also refers to its problems. These problems for instance involve the chivalric code and its relation to sexual love and the way women and men are still defined

by the pattern. Although both plays indicate gender shifts and reversed roles, the future is still considered in a skeptical way.

50 Linked to the expected roles of male and female are the men's views on women's sexual desires. Women's sexuality is no longer denied, but still causes anxiety and fear in the male population. The desire for sexual fulfillment of the Jailor's Daughter is consequently treated like a madness that needs to be cured. With regard to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the Palamon and Arcite are also eager to possess Emilia as she becomes their desired object, but react in the framework of the chivalric code as they fight for their loved one in a tournament. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes unconsciously cannot handle Hermione's sexual attraction and the uncontrollability of her desires and even considers her death as he fears the reversal of patriarchal social formations. Both plays depict women as objects of desire that need to be possessed by men; thereby involving the notion of social criticism. The plays not only deal with desire in the realm of heterosexual relationships, but further include homoerotic discourses. All in all, both tragicomedies dwell on madness, value systems and concepts of love to illustrate how tragicomedies remain in between a nostalgic past and a not yet optimistic future.

Author's Note

The article is based on findings from Prof. Dr. Neumeier's seminar on "Hybrid Genres: Tragicomedies" and relates to her article "Vision and Desire: Fantastic Renaissance Spectacles" (forthcoming).

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Who Will Survive? On Bodies and Boundaries after the Apocalypse

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Abstract:

Preppers and Survivalists are commonly described as people who believe in abrupt, imposing and near-in-time disasters and who are actively and practically preparing to survive this imminent apocalypse. This paper examines how the body, and the closely connected analytical categories of gender and sexuality, are used to define survivalism. In other words, how does corporeality structure survivalism – who gets to be a survivalist and who does not? In an attempt to answer these questions the paper turns to a theoretical framework that combines the notion of trans-corporeality with the performance of gender, sexuality and embodiment in virtual digital space. To bring focus the paper specifically concentrates on a recent online discussion about “if, how, and to what extent one, as a survivalist, should or would help a woman with small children alone in a forest with no survival equipment after TEOTWAWKI (The End Of The World As We Know It)” (Swedish Survivalist Forum, 2013). This particular discussion is relevant since it, as we shall see, puts analytical categories, such as gender and sexuality up front, pointing to their retained importance as objects of study. The results show a desire to protect the body from change – change that often emanates from other bodies. As such, the desire to remain bodily untouched or unaffected emerges as a foundation for survivalism.

1 Preppers and Survivalists are commonly described as people who believe in abrupt, imposing and near-in-time disasters and who are actively and practically preparing to survive this imminent apocalypse. Preparing to survive, in this context, usually focuses on collecting gadgets for defence, safety and food (‘bullets, bandages and beans’), but also on social, physical and mental preparedness. Importantly, with the internet, online discussion forums have become a central part of prepping and survivalism. In these social arenas, survivalists and preppers, who want to remain (relatively) anonymous, can engage in discussions on practices and scenarios. In combination this creates a socio-material practice where the personal body comes to the centre. The body and its capacities are co-constructed with tactics and tools in order to prepare it for the upcoming trials. In this process, the internet is used both as a source of information, but also as a way to engage with peers. Consequently, for this paper, I want to explore in more detail how preconceptions of the body affect the socio-material practice of prepping. To bring focus to the paper I will specifically concentrate on a recent online discussion about ‘if, how, and to what extent one, as a survivalist, should or would help a woman with small children alone in a forest with no survival equipment after TEOTWAWKI (The End Of The World As We Know It)’ (*Swedish Survivalist Forum, 2007-2011*). This particular discussion is relevant since it, as we shall see, puts analytical categories, such as gender and sexuality up front, pointing to their retained importance as objects of study.

2 There is very little written about survivalism and prepping in general. The only major study to surface this far is on survivalist culture in the USA. In short, this study describes survivalists as being mostly about ‘talk’ (rather than ‘action’). Again this points to the importance of online discussion forums as an arena where survivalists can co-create imagined futures and scenarios where their own preparedness will prove useful. In many ways this is a play with alternative futures. However, these futures are limited in that they always result in the necessity for survivalist skills (i.e. a preparedness for TEOTWAWKI). In a way, this becomes a kind of hypothetical justification for their current way of life. Mitchell Jr. (30) describes this as a situation where desires are efficiently balanced against both current capacities and the material objects at hand. As such, it is clear that survivalists, while perhaps mostly engaging in speculative prophesying, do not see ‘business as usual’ or ‘carrying on and keeping calm’¹ as sustainable ways forward. Arguably then, survivalism can be viewed as a norm-critical way of organizing everyday life. Their views of the future clearly go against a neo-liberal vision of a prosperous society of limitless growth. Nevertheless, the question is what norms are challenged and what norms are left in place? For this paper, I am specifically interested in examining how the body, and the closely connected analytical categories of gender and sexuality, are used to define survivalism. In other words, how does corporeality structure survivalism – who gets to be a survivalist and who does not? In an attempt to answer these questions I will firstly turn to a theoretical framework where I combine trans-corporeality with the performance of gender, sexuality and embodiment in virtual digital space. I will then go on to briefly describe the method used for collecting and analysing the empirical material (the online discussion), moving on to the more elaborated discussion of the findings.

3 Survivalism and prepping can be described as a social movement, which is also, somewhat contradictory, extremely individualized. To actively prepare for imminent catastrophes becomes a way of life for many, and a way of conduct within, what may be referred to as, a risk society. The general idea of the term risk society is that modern societies are organized in response to risks – risks that often emerge out of increased societal complexity. This complexity also produces a sense of risk for individuals, where a measure of scientific knowledge (or pseudo-knowledge) is required to both assess risks as well as understand oneself and one’s own position and ‘horizon of agency’. As such risk becomes central to survivalism as it, as a movement, deals with a growing societal complexity through

¹ KEEP CALM and CARRY ON was the slogan of a motivational poster produced by the British Government before WW2. The poster is nowadays popular in various parodies such as internet memes.

considered future scenarios. At the same time, there is also individual risk to consider for survivalists, as they constantly have to balance personal safety against (foreseen) collective agendas. For example, the constant concern with being anonymous and not revealing important strategic locations, as well as the fear of being stigmatized and met with scorn, produce a social dilemma where the interests of (survivalist) individuals and (general) collectives may collide. At the centre of this risk-orientation stands the body. It becomes a nodal point for the entanglement of theoretical discussions and physical preparations. Consequently, much like Lisa Blackman, I want to stress how bodies can be seen as ‘enacted materialities’:

Biology is socialized or enacted: it is both *real* and *made* and requires a more complex relational approach to understand its entanglement. (Blackman 130)

In line with this statement, Alaimo (20) goes on to develop the notion of trans-corporeality, which highlights how the body is never a strictly delineated autonomous object, but always sensitive to the flows of the environment that surrounds it. As such, trans-corporeality includes, for example, industrial environmental factors, as well as various social and economical forces. Humans are always entangled with an unpredictable material world. Trans-corporeality then can be understood as a way to read corporeality as constantly crossing borders and constantly shaping and being shaped by social, technical and economical forces. In this force field, characterized by emerging and enactive phenomena, Alaimo draws on theorists Tuana and Barad to propose that these forces engage in a complex interaction best explained through the concepts of “intra-action” and “viscous porosity” (Tuana 188). In brief, Barad’s theory on agential realism explains intra-action as a mutually transforming interplay between discourse and materiality involving both human and non-human actors.

Discursive practices and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to each other; rather the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity. (Barad 152)

Viscous porosity on the other hand is more focused on how the mediating membranes, which may be symbolic and/or material, are also intra-active in the performance of phenomena (in this case, the body). While these concepts have different analytical angles and subtleties to them, what they have in common is an understanding where co-evolving, co-affecting, mutually transforming relations between phenomena, cause boundaries to be continuously reworked. Thus, I want to use the concept of trans-corporeality as an analytical tool which can acknowledge the socio-material complexity of survivalism. Because, even if survivalists

conceptualize themselves as detached autonomous individuals, their stories are filled with border-crossing accounts relating to other people's bodies, technology and the surrounding environment. To rephrase, I want to trace how trans-corporeality is performed in survivalist practices and analyse

particular moments of confusion and contestation that occur when individuals and collectives must contend not only with the materiality of their very selves but with the often invisibly hazardous landscapes of risk society, which require scientific mediation. (Alaimo 17)

4 In a similarly trans-corporeal line of reasoning van Doorn asks "Where does the human body end and technology begin?" (536). As mentioned, the 'online' is no longer easily separated from the 'offline' (if it ever were). Several such dichotomies are now, being questioned. For example, 'the virtual' provides a history relating to an imagined reality, cyberspace and other 'informational environments' where the body was separated from the mind via (computer) mediation. The virtual implied that the mind went into cyberspace whilst the body was left behind, dispirited in front of the computer. Virtual reality was conceptualized as a *different* reality, with other laws and possibilities than the physical 'real' world. Even though many studies have shown that 'virtual life' on the internet is not disembodied nor decontextualized, the image of the virtual as separated from the material conditions of everyday life, is lingering. Van Doorn, drawing on Katherine Hayles, means that virtual practices are simultaneously materially real, socially determined and discursively constructed. The virtual can be understood as an immaterial potential that inhabits the same room as corporeal agency in everyday practices. Importantly, the virtual also envelops our memories, emotions and hopes, which influences and co-creates our situation even though they are immaterial. Thus, the virtual is not the opposite of the real, but the virtual is a constant part of the real. In digital spaces, the potential of the virtual can be actualized in the form of digital objects (e.g. text, illustrations, film clips). While users are not physically present in the forum, their virtual presence takes on a different, but material, form in the shape of the texts and pictures that are 'supported' (or delineated) by the digital-material architecture. The performative practices that constitute the social network of Swedish survivalists are made possible by technology. At the same time, these socio-technical assemblages are impossible without corporeality. The body, the networked self and the immediate surroundings (in the below quote exemplified by 'the city') intra-act:

the body/city metaphors have turned concrete and literal. Embedded within a vast structure of nested boundaries and ramifying networks, my muscular and skeletal, physiological and nervous systems have been artificially augmented and expanded.

My reach extends indefinitely and interacts with the similarly extended reaches of others to produce a global system of transfer, actuation, sensing and control. My biological body mashes with the city; the city itself has become not only the domain of my networked cognitive system, but also – and crucially – the spatial and material embodiment of that system. (Mitchell 19)

Conclusively, it seems clear that there is a concurrence in theories emanating from different disciplines in acknowledging how material and discursive objects and milieus are co-constructing each other. Echoing the quote by Lisa Blackman in the beginning of this section, I would argue that trans-corporeality is a concept that takes a step towards “a more complex relational approach” (35) between the body and its surroundings. When applied to online discussions, the entanglement of discourse and materiality, body and environment, becomes perhaps even more pertinent.

5 With the advent of the internet individuals engaged and interested in survivalism has been provided with new possibilities to interact and share information with each other. Before the popularization of the internet, these practices were likely even more isolated (and thereby also even harder to study). As such, the web sites and discussion fora set up by, and attracting, survivalists and preppers, provide researchers with new sources of data regarding these ‘clandestine’ practices. I have chosen to focus on one particular discussion in a survivalist internet forum. The forum is part of a larger website, which functions as a social network for people with an interest in survivalism and prepping. The website was set up in 2007 by a private person and is non-profit. To this date, the forum, which is the core of the site, holds over 70,000 posts in more than 4,000 discussion threads. It has just short of 1,500 members of which two thirds can be seen as active discussants. Membership is free and admittance is limited to creating a unique user identity. Most members of the forum have chosen to be anonymous and anonymity, or OPSEC (operation security) as it is referred to in the forum, is strongly advocated. Anonymity is regarded as very important as many survivalists experience that non-survivalists remain puzzled by their practices, but also because it is of practical importance not to reveal your BOL (Bug-Out Location) to SHEEPLE (a blend of people and sheep – i.e. the larger masses who do not prep, but rely on authorities for their post-apocalyptic safety) or other survivalist for that matter. As such, the forum is an arena where ‘secret’ and somewhat stigmatized (and thereby individualized) practices and practitioners can find common ground and share ideas, conceptualizations and scenarios. Further, the forum also becomes a ‘middle-ground’ where material and virtual practices meet and entangle. As mentioned, I am for this paper primarily interested in how ideas, conceptualizations and scenarios that relate to the body come to structure survivalism,

both materially and socially. Because of the limited scope of this article, I will only describe the method very briefly. I used basic forum data collection focused on a specific discussion. In practice this meant copying and saving every post to the chosen thread in a text file. The analysis followed a thematic approach, which implies a qualitatively oriented approach to identify, analyse and report on emerging patterns (themes). The method is characterised by an openness towards the empirical material where themes relevant to the research question are the most pertinent. A relevant theme captures something important in relation to the research question, something that is regarded as a meaningful pattern within the data material. An important part of sound research ethics is to protect informants from harm. The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) suggests that 'harm' should be understood contextually and ethical considerations should be grounded in an inductive approach. Put simply, ethical considerations state that the more sensitive the information, the more rigorous the ethical decisions. The forum I have chosen to study is publicly accessible for anyone with internet access (public and private is, however, increasingly tricky to determine). Thus, because I have regarded the risk for harm as relatively small, I have chosen to be fairly open about the choice of forum. However, informed consent is notoriously difficult to collect in online contexts. Consequently, all data have been anonymized. Also, new technology (i.e. search engines) makes it so that verbatim citations can be easily traced, why I have also chosen to paraphrase quotes, titles of threads and other potentially identifying headlines (as well as translating them from Swedish to English).

6 While digital virtual spaces open up to the possibility of transgressing the social categories of your physical body (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, dis/ability), many studies show that we rarely make much use of that potential. On the contrary, our online selves are (these days) analogous to our offline selves (also because the separation between offline and online is increasingly hard to make distinct) (Davis and Kennedy). Digital practices also tend to perpetuate and even augment already dominant ideologies and class hierarchies. Consequently, instead of separating the digital from the corporeal, it may be useful to understand how material and digital virtual practices intra-act – that is how they co-construct each other. As mentioned, the discussion I have chosen to analyse begins with the question if, and to what extent, you would, in a post-catastrophic future, help a woman stranger with two children. The exact question is:

So, the shit hit the fan, you grabbed your BOB [bug-out-bag] and left. On your third day of walking, when camping in the middle of the woods, a woman with two children approaches your fire. They are dressed in city-clothes and regular shoes and their equipment consists of one backpack with two empty half-litre bottles of mineral

water, some jewellery, a passport and some other valuable papers. They are obviously hungry, tired and freezing. What do you do?

The question in itself contains (the potential for) many assumptions and generalizations about what it entails to be a survivalist. For example, by specifying the encountered persons as a woman with children, a distance between the general survivalist (a man) and others (women and children) are made. Also, by specifying their (limited and impractical) equipment, further distance is made between ‘proper’ survivalists (men with proper gear) and others (women and children without proper equipment). As such, there is a very heteronormative undertone to the question. Over a time period of four years, 29 different forum members discuss this question resulting in a total of 51 posts and replies.

7 The larger part of the posts reply that they would help the woman and children, but put their own survival in the first room, not risking their own bodies. Possibly they would also require something in exchange for their help (e.g. jewellery or sex). Some respondents are quick to emphasize that one should wait until the children are asleep before ‘seducing’ the woman. Others reply that they would not take advantage of a female in that position. Replying to this, yet others argue that trading sex for shelter and food is not “to take advantage of” and to “shy away from the fact that the selling of sex will be an asset for women in a post-apocalyptic world is just stupid”. At this point a new argument is made about how the woman should be reprimanded for being so naive as to approach the man and the fire at all (as other men may not be as friendly as they themselves are). All these replies, and the question itself, alludes to the importance of reinforcing the body by equipping it with large amounts of, for example, lighters, chocolate and other kinds of gifts or goods for trading in order to bypass any threatening interactions with other bodies. Also, interestingly, the placement of the objects on the body (chest pocket) is described as important in terms of future interactions. Sexuality, economy, and security intra-act in ways that emphasize the norm of the male heterosexual body and the materially prepared ‘proper’ survivalist.

8 The corporeality of survivalists extends virtually through for example stories of knowledge and skills as necessary for survival, but furthermore also through the feelings that certain clothing (i.e. military/forest clothing) may invoke in others (e.g. respect, threat). The type of clothing covering the body is important: BDU (Battle Dress Uniform used by the United States armed forces), Camo (Camouflage) or M90 (camouflage patterns used by the Swedish armed forces) are seen as generating different responses with the people one may encounter. Generating discussions about being seen as a friend or an enemy. In this case the clothing becomes an additional mediating membrane between the body and other

(potentially) colliding bodies. In terms of definition, the survivalist body emerges as one wearing military clothes, being loaded with at least 30 kilos of relevant equipments and armed. Other bodies are described as female, child(ish), non-survivalists (of course), criminals, foreigners (who are described as unreliable due to potential previous war traumas) and mentally ill people (who in a post-apocalyptic world purportedly can not get hold of the necessary medication to “keep *their* bodies in control”). The descriptions of ‘the others’ are consequently not a single unified account, although the making of others is in itself consistent. Interestingly, the imaginary woman in need is described primarily as helpless, but she is also portrayed as a potential threat, since “a female bear with cuds can be dangerous”. This reference to ‘natural essentialism’ as a threat underlying superficial helplessness, can be seen a call to always be prepared, since in a situation of crisis, man is described as returning to an almost non-human primate state of survival of the fittest.

9 Users who identify as female highlight the image of the female body as threatened by male bodies. They describe a post-apocalyptic world where the female body is also made resilient through weapons. The potential threats from male bodies are met with the parole “shoot first, ask questions later”. A few stories oppose an imagined heteronormative future by describing for example how they have knocked men out, or how they wield weapons with confidence (and thereby ascribe certain agency to their ‘gun-extended’ bodies). In general, the thread can be seen as an attempt to prescribe, or at best negotiate, who is a survivalist and who is not. Many question the point of solitary survival at any price, and do not see the meaning of being “the one with the most weapons and ammo”. Their argument comes to the conclusion that the future will consist of “lonely, paranoid, armed, broken men scattered around, and then silence”. A few more stories from users defining as female speak to a more openly violent future where, mainly male, bodies continuously threaten the survival of oneself, and therefore must be eliminated:

If I were to encounter a person I deem not trustworthy, I would not risk my own life for that person. I will probably have to incapacitate that person. I may come across as raw, but that is, unfortunately, the only way to survive TETOWAWKI.

Perhaps as a joke, the strategy of SGT (trans. Shoot-Dig-Shut Up) is put forward, while others point to the necessity of cooperation and empathy as being more fruitful for survival (while at the same time also describing this tactic as probably being idealistic and utopian). The female body responds to the patriarchal future by applying the same tactic of reinforcing the body through material means (in this case weapons). In the cases where alternative (e.g.

communal) hopes are expressed they are also immediately disqualified as futile in the face of male-controlled futures.

10 Digital environments are sprinkled with material traces in the form of digital-virtual objects that actualize corporeality. As such, everyday interactions become materialized in digital spaces (van Doorn). I think it is useful to understand this discussion thread as a game or strategic play, rather than a simulation. The thread is a way to actualize what survivalism is. It is a discussion that becomes materialized through the use of new media technologies. Thoughts become text, films and other media objects, which link to other texts and visualizations where gender, sexuality and embodiment are reconfigured. Disconnecting gender and sexuality from the physical and singular human body in order to reconnect them through mediating technology does not necessarily result in subversive bodily acts. Rather, this distributed agency repeats the regulating normative system due to a limited repertoire of actualizations (van Doorn). The masculinity embedded in the texts in the thread is actualized by performing stories of heterosexuality and ‘the others’ – those who are not survivalists, not (Swedish) men as well as through stories of the good masculinity: the autonomous hero; the soldier; the survivor. What is described in the thread can be seen as a form of dynamic ‘repair work’ (Persson) where masculinities are emphasized, negotiated, patched and defended. Other survivalists are seen as “comrades” identified mainly through their clothing (i.e. military). Jeff Hearn points to the strong connection between men, militarism and the military in a historical sense. It is hard to imagine a more masculinized figuration than the soldier (Hearn). The survivalist body is described as wearing military uniform. As such, it is made masculine, and resilient, through both the virtual connotations (e.g. respect, threat) as well as materially (e.g. weapons, equipment). Stories of other survivalists as comrades, as well as the thread in its entirety can be interpreted as a homosocial activity where being masculine in front of other men becomes crucial. These stories are intimately connected to heterosexuality and exclude anyone categorized as ‘other’ (Persson). The question spurring the discussion actualizes shared ideas of ‘correct’ or normative bodies and can be seen as unifying through a masculine and heterosexual norm, but also as negotiating different preferences for future cooperation or loneliness and violent solitude. The question in itself may limit the possibilities for reconfiguration by augmenting current norms rather than challenging and problematizing gender and sexuality. Even though the discussion negotiates, troubles and repairs the survivalist figuration, heterosexuality is compulsory, male homosociality is pertinent and other identity positions are marginalized. As mentioned however, certain attempts are made at punching holes in the dominant heteronormative stories, making them

'leak' in a different ways (Shildrick). These leakages emanate from non-men who de-heterosexualize the feminized body by equipping it with weapons and pointing to its capacity for violence (against men). Somewhat paradoxically, these stories also place themselves within a future based on cooperation and empathy. Stories of the feminized body prepared for violence can be read as a resistance towards stories where the female body is sexualized, commoditized and described as *something other* than a survivalist. This can be read as a resistance against a masculinized and heterosexualized imagination of a future of controlling and accessing helpless female bodies. It can also be read as stories of being a prepper first-hand, and of camaraderie that could span gender and identity positions.

11 It would seem that survivalism acknowledges a trans-corporeal world, but consistently falls back on 'cis-corporeal' solutions. That is, the interplay with the flows of the environment and other bodies is seen as a source of threats. At the same time, this porosity of borders is what is being addressed in solutions. On a final note, this virtual actualization of bodies, gender and sexuality is materialized as archives (of memories). The thread I have been discussing in this article is part of the archive of the forum. The discussion in this thread has been going on for four years (so far) and it is part of the user-generated content that is the forum. Because of this, it could be said that this virtual play with imagined futures plays a constitutive role in the materialization of gender and sexuality in both digital and physical environments, but also opens up for possible future work of change. Survivalists seem to subscribe to the idea that bodies are like billiard balls bouncing off of each other, and the importance of being prepared circles around making the skin of the body as tough and impervious as possible. A trans-corporeal perspective acknowledges that the mediating membranes (of the body and everything else) are porous. By invoking trans-corporeality as an analytical term, I point to both the (futile?) desires to keep the personal body safe and secure as well as to the necessity to consider the sociomaterial flows that traverse bodies, technologies and environments (in order to be resilient).

If the material environment is a realm of often incalculable, interconnected agencies, then we must somehow make political, regulatory, and even personal decision within an ever-changing landscape of continuous interplay, intra-action, emergence, and risk. (Alaimo 21)

In conclusion, this creates an odd contradiction where adapting (adjusting to the situation) becomes a desire to protect the body from change. As such, the desire to remain corporeally unchanged or unaffected emerges as a foundation for survivalism.

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The Vietnamese Concept of a Feminine Ideal and the Images of Australian Women in Olga Masters' Stories

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Abstract:

Doing research on Olga Masters' life and writing helps me to understand the claim that Masters' writing often deals with many of the Australian women's matters such as taking care of the family, bringing up the children, building up their agency. Together with my own experience as a Vietnamese woman and helpful discussion with the experts in the field of Masters' writing, I put forwards a hypothesis that there are any similarities in Masters' portrayals of Australian women and the Vietnamese concept of a feminine ideal despite of cultural and geographical differences. The current paper investigates how women are portrayed in Olga Masters' writing from the point of view of Vietnamese traditional perceptions of an ideal woman who holds four essential characteristics: Industriousness, Appropriate Self-presentation, Communication Skills, and Virtue. I will explore the similarities in the reflection of that conception from the two different cultures of Vietnam and Australia. The paper will develop a textual discourse of Olga Masters' writing and attempt to show how, in spite of oceans apart, women both in Australia and Vietnam struggle to pursue the so-called feminine ideal.

1 In this paper I compare Olga Masters' portrayals of women with the ideals which are currently expected to be followed by Vietnamese women. The paper will investigate to what extend Olga Masters' work corresponds to the Vietnamese traditional expectation of feminine ideals which are based on four essential attributes: industriousness, appropriate self-presentation, good communication skills, and virtue.

2 Olga Masters is known for her writing career not simply as a female writer contributing to the canon of Australian literature or as someone who finished her first book at the age of 63, but also as a public intellectual offering critiques of Australian femininity. Masters was born Olga Lawler in 1919 and grew up in Pambula, a small country town in New South Wales, Australia.¹ Although she came to journalism early at the age of 15, Masters turned to writing fiction only in her fifties. Describing Masters' happy and satisfying feelings when she was accepted by the *Cobargo Chronicle*, Lewis writes: "From the moment she set foot in that newspaper office, Olga was bewitched. The smell of printer's ink, the clatter of the presses, the rush to get the paper ready for printing - it was something she knew was in her blood and she was happier than she had been for a long, long time" (27). Since then Masters' ambition for writing never stopped. It seems that working as a journalist (casual, part time, or full time) brought Masters lots of practical experience for writing fiction, and that her love of humanity and her careful observations of life never put her at a

¹ The information on Olga Masters is taken from Deirdre Coleman's *Olga Masters: Reporting Home - Her Writings as A Journalist* and Julie Lewis' *Olga Masters - A Lot of Living*.

loss of materials for stories. When asked in an interview with Jennifer Ellison about whether journalism helped or hindered her fiction writing, Masters stressed that journalism was “a great help, not a hindrance at all.” She further added that with fiction writing she didn’t find she had to change her style very much (218). Masters had several collection of stories and novels published between 1982 and 1988, namely *The Home Girls* (1982), *Loving Daughters* (1984), *A Long Time Dying* (1985), *Amy’s Children* (1987), *The Rose Fancier* (1988), all of which were very well received.

3 Her works of fiction made her a widely-admired participant at writers’ festivals and other literary occasions. In complimenting and recognizing Masters’ creative ability, Craig Munro, one of the judges of the SPACALS² award, described her as “one of the most talented writers [he’s] come across in the ten years or so [he’s] been reading fiction manuscripts” (qtd. in Lewis 127). Then in his covering letter to the University of Queensland Press, he added “Masters possesses not only the sure ability to tell a good story simply or effectively, but she has that rare quality, a genuinely original voice” (128). One of the critical works on Olga Masters is *Olga Masters: An Autumn Crocus* edited by McGaw and Sharrad in which most of the scholars who contribute essays argue that for Masters the ‘ordinary’ is a source of amazement. They try to answer the questions how this seemingly ordinary woman came to produce such extraordinary work. Deidre Coleman in *Olga Masters: Reporting Home* introduces her as a typical journalist who tries her best to reflect her own busy life as well as to record the rhythms and daily events of ordinary life in rural Australia with her rich imagination (xiii-xxxii).

4 It is notable that despite Masters’ own writing career, her writing features women in traditionally gendered roles, submitting to their family desires and acting as consummate homemakers. In one article, Katharine England claims that “Many of Olga Masters’ stories are about homes – homes and the families in them, and particularly about the women and girls of those families” (29). Most women are sketched in Masters’ stories as characteristically feminine, spending their time on housework, attending to the children, and preparing delicious meals for the whole family. Their place is in the home, the ‘good’ environment in which a woman undertakes responsibility for the spiritual and physical development of her children. One typical example is Mrs Jussep who “made scones every day before the afternoon milking” for the whole family (Masters “Scones Every Day” 3). The traits of traditional femininity can also be seen in Mrs Schaefer who “was a very particular

² The South Pacific Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies.

housekeeper, sweeping and scrubbing and shining her house, washing curtains when they showed the slightest sign of soiling, and she was fanatical about cleaning windows” (Masters “The Little Chest” 29). It is also demonstrated in Joan’s sacrifice in “The Children are Coming” when she refuses to go out to a Sunday movie or sit by the harbour with her husband because their adult children are coming to visit. Joan insists that “[she] should be out there in the kitchen doing things” (155). The image of traditional femininity can be exemplified in Carrie who sacrifices her own happiness to stay at home and attend to her blind father and household in “That Carrie One”. It can also be the young Enid in *Loving Daughters* who becomes fond of a newly arrived and handsome minister, but dares not express her love to him. These are just a few examples in Masters’ depiction of Australian women showing the traditional female virtues. It seems to me that some of Masters’ female characters really try their best to fulfil their domestic duties by being good wives, caring mothers, and industrious housekeepers. Her women are often community- and family-oriented.

5 From the last two years reading and studying Olga Masters’ work, together with my own experience as a Vietnamese woman and helpful discussion with the experts in Olga Masters studies, I put forward a hypothesis that there are similarities in Masters’ portrayals of traditional Australian women and the Vietnamese concept of a feminine ideal despite cultural and geographical differences. The idea for this paper is also inspired by a statement made by Olga Masters during a 1985 interview in which she claimed every story in her first book *The Home Girls* in some way “involves a home girl and because we are all home girls at heart.” The reference seems very relevant in the Vietnamese concept of ideal femininity when it mainly emphasises the feminine and familial roles women. I will now give a general overview of the Vietnamese concept of a feminine ideal before looking more closely at Masters’ writing, focusing on two central questions: first, how is the ideology of being feminine represented in Masters’ work? And second, to what extent does Masters’ work correspond to the Vietnamese concepts of feminine ideals?

6 Consistent with a common Vietnamese saying that ‘women hold up half the sky’, Vietnamese women have always been expected to be feminine, self-controlled, and virtuous, working and sacrificing themselves for the betterment of others. Femininity is defined in terms of softness, chastity, determination, and hard work, which are perceived as inner characteristics contributing to collective morality (see Furman; Wolf; Glover and Kaplan). Looking back into the cultural and social development of Vietnam, it is believed that the cultural heritage and traditional values of Vietnam have partly been derived from

Confucianism-the foundation of East Asian culture (see Keyes 185-88). One consequence of Confucianism in Vietnam was its impact on the status of women upon whom it imposed rigorous standards of feminine modesty and chastity. Confucian political culture emphasised the importance of family life for personal development and strengthened the Vietnamese family system with several cultural imperatives such as ancestor worship, filial piety, and a patriarchal family structure. Like many other countries in Eastern Asia, the Vietnamese ideal woman's characteristics are defined with the four essential characteristics of 'Industriousness, Appropriate Self-presentation, Communication skills, and Virtue' (see Binh, Van, and Khieu; Anh and Hung). The effects of modern development in Vietnam have caused many ideals to be changed. Nevertheless, these four attributes have maintained their cultural relevance and are still understood as the standard ideal of femininity in Vietnam. These values demonstrate that it is not just women's external appearance, but also the harmony between beauty of form and beauty of spirit which constitute perfect femininity (Anh; Nam). I will now comment on each idealised component of Vietnamese femininity and relate it to Masters' literary works.

Industriousness

7 To begin with, an ideal Vietnamese woman must be industrious both in her domestic and professional life. Women traditionally have been relegated to certain kinds of work (e.g. child rearing and housework, though certain occupations such as primary school teaching and nursing are also acceptable) (Lich 195-196). Generally, being 'good' at being a woman involves doing 'womanly' things at regular and appointed times. This ritualized behavior often involves to self-beautification, child-rearing, housework and cooking, all of which attests to this symbolic order. Being industrious implies a woman's involvement in female domestic labour. According to the Confucian concept, it is women's particular skill to take good care of family happiness, domestic work and raising children (Bich 212-15). In Vietnamese culture, the woman should undertake every task inside the house regardless of its difficulty, proceed with it in an orderly and efficient manner, and complete it in time. This is also what is meant by diligence in the Vietnamese views of a feminine ideal (Hy 68-69). This is a function of a familial woman and also gives women one advantage over men. Women may not compete with men in terms of physical strength but men may not compete with women for their domestic labour. Therefore, in Vietnamese culture, it is known that a good wife often symbolizes her husband's pride because she can assure a better domestic life for the whole family and provide better upbringing for the children (Bich 141). Industriousness also proves necessary if she wants to succeed in every social field she takes part in. Even

though the housewife is not endowed with any special professional qualifications, she can still achieve things that she desires. It is because she has the willingness and determination, which differentiates her from non-industrious women. There is folklore, though it is not just applied to women, saying that success includes 1% being a genius but 99% being industrious.³ It is accepted that an ideal woman should be hard working at home and at work.

8 Olga Masters' literary texts often suggest that society assumes female characters' place is in the private sphere, in the home, where they are portrayed as being in charge of all that goes on in their kitchens. Generally, female characters are portrayed as people who are expected to uphold the values of stability and morality. They must make their homes a special place, a refuge where their men can escape from the highly competitive, unstable, immoral world. It is undeniable that a woman's place was once in the home. In the past, women were merely required to fulfil the role of mother and housewife. As a mother, a wife, and a woman, and also as a writer during a time with many conflicts and changes in women's roles and opportunities, Olga Masters provides readers with truthful account of what it was like for home-bound women in the past. In her stories, she depicts many Australian women who show caring and nurturing features. There is the image of Mrs Schaefer who spends the majority of her time and energy caring for her family. In displaying her morally good character and her unfailing domesticity, Mrs Schaefer can be taken as representing the ideal compliant and domestic woman that is epitomized and considered a necessity in creating a good family life in the nineteen-thirties, but the story also implies that she often resents the situation she has been forced into. Evidence for this is shown when she bursts into tears when her husband shows no respect to her at the tennis court. She seems to fulfil her duties only as mere performance in order to meet the expectations of society and to compensate for her loneliness. Mrs Schaefer is portrayed as being a conventional homemaker in the sense that she does nearly all cleaning and caring for her husband and children, so fulfilling the household responsibilities expected of her.

9 When talking about women in the family, Masters often identifies them as 'a housekeeper' as in 'Mrs Schaefer was a very particular housekeeper' ("The Little Chest" 29) or 'Carrie was aware that she was trapped forever as her father's housekeeper' ("That Carrie One" 262). What emphasises Mrs Schaefer's industriousness is that she attends to every detail of the house, from the wooden drawer knobs to the curtains and the windows, from the chest in the hall to the glass and china in the kitchen. For every piece of the furniture, she

³ The English version is that success is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.

shows careful consideration and scrupulous care. She also spends the whole week cleaning and washing. She even makes it one of her Saturday tasks 'to polish the little chest'. She only leaves the house when all of her household duties have been fulfilled (e.g. "Providing the glass and china were washed and stacked on clean, fresh paper in cupboards, the house was without dust, and of course the little chest shined,... she would join the crowd of spectators at the tennis court") (Masters "The Little Chest" 31). She is so fanatical about household work, she undertakes a great deal of domestic labour. Obviously, Masters' depiction of Mrs Schaefer reflects the industrious nature of a housekeeper in the family as a typical example of femininity.

10 Enid in *Loving Daughters* is another example of Masters' portrayal of Australian women's industriousness. Enid is a serene and lovely girl, devoted to the care of her widowed father, Jack, and the household. She was described by van Herk in "Missing Men and Unmothered Sisters" as being "...steady, reliable, and proficient,..., replacing her mother in domestic science (cooking, cleaning, and caretaking)" (73). When writing home, Edwards, a new minister in the town, describes her as a hard-working and 'capable homemaker' and a good cook. Edwards keeps thinking of Enid in terms of her smiling competence with stoves and cool safes, with smooth linen and shining crockery, with the fragrant and beautiful harvest of her ordered garden (Masters *Loving Daughters* 120). He even talks to himself that "a man with support from a wife as beautiful and charming as that would do a better job for the church" (Masters *Loving Daughters*).

11 In Masters' stories, we can see a close link between women's virtues and domestic duties. A woman is to care for the inner (private) world, while a man cares for the outer (public) realm. Most of the time, Masters' women stick to the gardens or kitchens. They keep their hands busy all day; sometimes they complain about their hard work, but it does not mean they stop caring and serving the family. This is the image of Tad's mother in "A Dog that Squeaked". Although she shows no interest in the household tasks - "her face was shut like a window and her mouth not a kissing mouth" - she still does them. As women, they try their best and work hard to fulfil their duties. Sometimes, I think women in Masters' stories, frequently older women, are seen as feminine not because of their appearance but for their domestic skills. Apart from that, it also seems that doing housework may help women to hide their feelings and loneliness. Since they cannot control the uncontrollable things in their life, they attempt to control their physical environment. They view their homes as extensions of themselves.

Appropriate Self-representation

12 The second important characteristic of a traditional Vietnamese woman is signified in her appropriate self-presentation. Self-presentation, also known as impression management, is the effect on others from their manner of performance (Leary and Allen 1198-1203). People's outcomes in life, and how they live and interact on a daily basis with others, are greatly affected by the impressions other people form of them. People generally want to be liked and well regarded, because being thought of in a positive manner has better social and material consequences than being thought of in a negative manner (Leary and Allen 1193-94). Therefore, they should recognize how their presentation of themselves can affect that. Appropriate self-presentation does not mean a woman possesses the beauty of a pageant queen or fulfils the commercial concepts of beauty such as being tall, thin, or sexy. To Vietnamese people, beauty is about personality and productivity, not just 'gorgeousness' or 'cuteness' (Van). A woman should be full-figured, without resort to cosmetic surgery. This virtue also emphasizes the fact that under no circumstances should women appear in untidy or sloppy apparel. A good outer impression can bring them many advantages in life. Obviously, a clean, tidy, and careful self- presentation shows both self-respect and respect for others.

13 It is suggested that a woman's self-presentation is reflected by her natural beauty. Metaphorically, a woman's beauty and the natural world are often compared to each other. Women's beauty may evoke the natural environment: their eyes, faces and curves mirror flowers. Olga Masters was enchanted by the beauty of the world around her, so in her writing she would consider nature as an ideal representation of womanhood, as can be seen in the following examples: "Sybil, who was twenty and ripe like a black cherry, her body a piece of fertile ground ready for seed,..." (Masters *Loving Daughters* 147) or "[Una's] hair had been curved over her cheeks, covering her ears like birds' wings" (116).

14 From the other angle of self-presentation, there is a saying that 'no woman looks ugly; there are just women who do not know how to make themselves look beautiful'—she must learn to make the most of herself. Sharing the same view, Birtwistle and Tsim state that the feminine stereotype depicts women as being very concerned about their bodies, their clothing, and their appearance in general (664-65). Their figures and clothing, their attractiveness is the criteria by which they most often are judged. Not surprisingly then, women are conscious of their visibility. This is true in the case of the Herbert girls in Masters' *Loving Daughters* where both pay lots of attention to their appearance and dress to appear attractive. Masters notes that "the reputation of Herbert girls who are well-dressed,

gadding and unencumbered has spread far beyond the borders of Wyndham” (164). A desire to appear attractive is revealed when Enid, the elder Herbert girl hurriedly changed her clothes and “tore off her apron” knowing that Edwards had come to visit her family. She wants to her look best in Edwards’s eyes. Amy in *Amy’s Children* serves as another example. As a way of presenting herself to others during her early arrival in city, Amy promises to herself that “I’ll dress nicely and always clean my shoes” (35). The idea of being beautifully and cleanly dressed not only meets her need to look good but also satisfies her desire for social status. People will treat her differently because of her visually pleasant appearance.

15 The notion of self-presentation also indicates the modesty and appropriateness of how women dress and appear to others. One example is Martha in Masters’ “A Spread of Warm Blood”. Before going out to a social gathering, standing in front of the mirror, she “makes sure the neckline was positioned exactly right because she is proud of her neck and shoulders” (142). In many cases, women understand the effect their clothes have and assume a modest pose, imbued with ‘softness’, a quality believed to be perfectly female in many cultures. For example, at the social gathering, Martha creates a good impression on others with

a good view of [her] in the blouse, the lantern above her giving the rust colour a sheen and whitening her arms and darkening her hair, dressed looser so that fine hairs escaped the coils on her ears and were burnished too, like fine grass turned gold by the sun. (150)

Communication skills

16 Communication skill is classified as the third attribute of an ideal woman, who is characterized as speaking well and articulating words with grace and tenderness. Vietnamese society often marks a woman’s femininity by how her voice is pitched, by her excessive politeness and hesitation to speak (Nam). Women should speak words which are gentle, pleasing to the ear, and loveable - words which reach the heart and are courteous, desired by many and agreeable to many. She should speak politely in a light, warm, but not harsh or high-pitched tone. There is a Vietnamese saying that “your speech costs you nothing so speak in a manner that pleases the listeners.” A good woman should know when and what to say and how to broach a problem. She should be gentle and flexible when communicating with parents, her husband and those around her (Bich 74). Her manner of communicating also shows her confidence and knowledge and the listeners can easily judge her according to how she speaks. Thus she must not boast about herself; instead she must be modest, allowing her accomplishments to speak for themselves.

17 As Matthew Budd claims "you are what you say" (1), communication skills can be rated as one of many essential features representing women's femininity. Echoing this point, in his research Braun argues that women tend to use more intensifying adverbs such as "very" or "really" and women's sentence structures involve the more frequent use of tag questions, questions in general, and hedges (qtd in Voegeli 5-6). He also adds that, together with a female style of conversation that is more polite and contains indirect orders rather than imperatives, this could be categorized as an absence of dominant behaviour in conversation. This can be seen in Masters' writing about women's femininity.

18 In *Amy's Children*, when discussing the matter of falling in love with a married man, Kathleen tries to persuade her mother, Amy, to end that love affair, sounding very persuasive and determined. In order to achieve her aim, Kathleen is still using "her amiable, even pleasant tone" though Amy becomes so frustrated (Masters *Amy's Children* 139). Consequently, Amy listens and recognizes that: "Kathleen's voice was a kind she had never heard before. She thought of rain falling on a tree, sending the leaves brushing against each other making a whispery sound, a light and slithery noise, so gentle it was hardly audible. Hardly a noise at all, a precious sound, thin but strong, only ears trained hard would hear the vibrancy" (139). This suggests that communication skill is not only one important feature of femininity but is a tool to broach a problem in a feminine way.

19 In the novel, *Loving Daughters*, the smart and handsome minister Colin Edwards becomes impressed not only by the sweet appearance of Una but also by her 'amiable voice' which makes her more sexually appealing to him. Though after their marriage, Edwards sometimes shows his disappointment in Una's indifference to housework, he cannot help meeting her requests whenever she whispers to him in a soft and naïve voice: "Carry me!" Una said. "Pretend I've hurt my leg". He bowed his head partly to hoist her on his back, partly to shut out the frowning face of the church" (305). Edwards agreed to carry Una as requested and by doing so he also wanted to evade the scrutiny of the Church or the people therein.

20 Masters' women also show feminine characteristics in the way they suggest or ask someone to do things. They tend use modals, tag questions; hedge words such as 'I think', 'kind of', and 'sort of' because modals and these words can be used to express hesitancy. For example, when Una wants to go for a walk, she does not put a direct request to Edwards but only suggestion "We will go for a little walk and post it, shall we?" (Masters *Loving Daughters* 249). With that soft command, she makes it impossible for Edwards to say no

even if he would rather do something else. Obviously, good communication skills are not only a secret ‘weapon’ of women but also symbolize a feminine ideal.

Virtue

21 Finally, virtue is another important indicator of an ideal woman in the Vietnamese concepts. People always want to know whether a woman has been well brought up. According to how she behaves to others, people can show the appreciation or disregard. Therefore, women must be careful and sensitive in everything they do if they want to retain a good image in others’ minds. A woman occupies many positions in life and is expected to fulfil all of them. She must show her responsibility as a dutiful daughter, a devoted wife and caring mother, as well as a conscientious worker (Bich 108-10; Jamieson 134). In terms of marital virtue, an ideal woman is expected to be both faithful and honest. She treats her husband well and always tries to support her marriage because it is a long-term commitment in her life. A good woman should place a high value on the relationship and marriage. When married, it is totally unacceptable for Vietnamese women to engage in affairs or flirt with the opposite sex (O’Harrow 174-76) (in theory, men are not supported in doing this either, but they are not condemned the same way if they do). Women are expected to be strong, upright, loyal, and able to keep their dignity in any circumstances. Traditionally, women, viewed primarily in the relationships to husbands and families, have been expected to make sacrifices (Bich 37-42). According to tradition, it would be better for a widow to live single and support her children than to lose her virtue by remarrying (Van). This concept puts more pressures on widows, even very young ones, to stay with their husband’s family and not remarry.

22 According to Rosalind Hursthouse, a virtue “is the concept of something that makes its possessor good: a virtuous person is a morally good, excellent or admirable person who acts and feels well, rightly, as she should” (8). Hursthouse presents an attractive picture of virtue, for the virtuous person knows how to act in a morally appropriate way and can be relied on to do so.

23 In Masters’ writing, most of the female characters are teenagers or mature women. They show their great concern for being considered ‘a virtuous lady’ as illustrated in the character of Amy, a mother of three daughters, whose husband goes away to earn a living. Having the appearance of an 18-year-old-girl, Amy still looks attractive and always dreams of a romantic life so she develops a secret affair with her boss Lance Yates. However, she understands that this is a taboo. It is an immoral act for a married woman to have a love affair. She tries her best to forget Yates by changing her job and controlling her emotion.

When they see each other again after a short separation, Amy is still attracted to his manly appearance. However, as a married woman Amy has to “curb an impulse to reach out and take hold of Lance’s wrist, a nice strong one attached to a yellowish hand.” Her face reddens and she has to hide her passion by looking at the sea (Masters *Amy's Children* 157).

24 In *Loving Daughters*, the two Herbert girls are obsessed by the arrival of a gentlemanly minister but dare not disclose their feelings. They try to out-preen each other to impress him, deepening the rivalry that already exists between them. Even when Edwards and Una are married, Enid never stops loving him. However, as a girl, she only secretly dreams of one day being his wife or tries to capture an intimate image of him by “[smelling] his body on the sheet she held as close to her face as she dared” (Masters 267).

25 It is suggested that in whatever situation of life female characters are portrayed, from the cradle to the grave, a spirit of obedience and submission, pliability of temper, and humility of mind is required of them. Vietnamese ideas of female virtue are not only concerned with chastity but also with obedience, because in Vietnamese culture, fidelity and wifely obedience is presented as a model of feminine virtue, a virtue synonymous with a feminine submission that grounds the patriarchal order of the country (Binh, Van, and Khieu; Anh and Hung; Nam). Similarly, many female characters in Masters’ stories are portrayed as examples of the virtue that a woman should be obedient to her parents (when young), and her husband (when married). It is the image of Carrie Grant who is the eldest of the three daughters of her blind father in “That Carrie One”:

It was a natural progress that Carrie stay on in the house and care for him after her mother died. Carrie was twenty-five and not likely to marry.... Carrie was aware that she was trapped as her father’s housekeeper. The grief was already running from her face, taking the softness of it. The pupils of her tearless eyes had sharpened to arrow points. (Masters 261)

26 The description suggests that Carrie completes her exhausting duties with endurance and without any complaints. She may continue to behave with submissive devotion to her father for the whole life though sometimes she still dreams of having a job in a post-office or a shop—it suggests that Carrie may resent the situation she has been forced into. Mentioned in Masters’ *The Home Girls* are other traditional women like the mother in “The Snake and Bad Tom” who dares not show her protection for her son who is, in the father’s eyes, ‘bad’ Tom. In that story, the power of the father is so strong that the mother usually asks the kids to “behave when Father comes” otherwise it would turn into a bad day (170). The examples of Carrie and the mother illustrate that obedience or devotion to the family becomes their nature. This point also implies the fact that on one hand, Masters represents fulfilling household

tasks as one of popular indicators of traditional femininity; on the other hand she may show some disapproval in that kind of commitment.

27 As mentioned earlier, the important roles for Vietnamese women are still current in the conception of womanhood. It is believed that all the characteristics of 'Industriousness, Appropriate Self-presentation, Communication Skills, and Virtue' are indispensable in a woman (Binh, Van, and Khieu; Anh and Hung). The combination of modernization and industrialization and the persistence of traditional attitudes serve to create a unique set of tensions and strains on Vietnamese women. Women in contemporary Vietnamese society are still expected to be 'good daughters, wives, and mothers' even though the importance of their daughter/wife/mother role has been significantly reduced by demographic and technological changes. Meanwhile, qualities such as domesticity, nurturance, and softness that are believed to be uniquely female remain central to the way men view women.

Conclusion

28 However, her emphasis on traditional female roles, Masters can also be seen as a feminist writer. She is quite aware that motherhood and women's roles are not invariable and that they alter with community requirements, economy, and the women's own desires and needs. Therefore, she builds up the character Amy in *Amy's Children* as a young woman who is determined to break the traditional country-town concepts of being a wife and raising her family during the years of the Depression. Amy tries her best to get out of the circle of fatalism, deciding to leave her children with her parents to seek a better life in the city. Another example of Masters' feminism is Mrs Carroll in "The Teacher's Wife". Being known as a small, dark woman with six children, she never bothers with the garden or household chores but 'got out of the house as often as she could ... [to] play tennis ... in a dress shorter than those the other women wore' with the determined thought of 'being the first' on the Cobargo Agricultural and Horticultural Committee (Masters 76). These actions and attitudes often symbolise not only that these women have broken out of the narrow boundaries that society has sought to impose, but also their freedom of spirit and disregard of social conventions.

29 It seems to me that Masters' female characters really want to stand in between the two poles of traditional femininity and the modern version. Masters is thus looking for two kinds of 'heroines' in her writing. She wants inspiring professional 'role-models' of femininity but she also wants rebellious female images, a womanhood of shared passion and suffering, a woman who sobs and struggles and rebels. On the one hand, they try their best to fulfil their

domestic duties, being a good wife, a caring mother, and an industrious housekeeper. On the other hand, they still want to prove themselves, fighting for their freedom, escaping from the burden of housekeeping and domestic responsibility. Masters' celebration of strong, subversive female characters is contrasted with images of traditional femininity and by doing so, she reinforces their personalities rather than criticizing them.

30 It is notable that most of Olga Masters' women characters are living country areas in the period between 1920s and 1930s, the period just after the Second World War as indicated by Geordie Williamson: "[Masters' fiction] take as their background the Great War's aftermath, the biting Depression years, the vast disruptions of World War Two and the creeping modernity that followed" (127) – she was writing about a period that is earlier than the time she herself started writing. She was writing about it, looking back from the perspectives of 1970s or 1980s and although it does not mean that her concepts about how women should behave have changed totally, they have changed quite a lot. Women are not supposed to strictly abide by the aforementioned attributes: they become more economically independent, intellectual, politically conscious, and even sexually emancipated in some extents. However, the standards as industriousness, appropriate self-presentation, good communication skills, and virtue still keep their importance and practicality in society.

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Re-Thinking Wellness: A Feminist Approach to Health and Fitness

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Abstract:

Is wellness a feminist issue? Can self-care contribute to popular paradigm disruption? Fitness and wellness are often approached in decidedly non-feminist ways, with popular culture's emphasis on beauty and size detracting from the core benefit of any personal wellness practice – empowerment. This paper explores the roots of feminist critiques of sexist beauty norms and thinness mandates and analyses how these provide barriers to holistic wellness in society at large, and within the feminist community. From “besieged feminists” to athletes and sex radicals, women are affected by the negative messaging currently deployed concerning fitness ideals. Fitness ideals and beauty norms combine to promote and image of thin as ideal, rather than athletic or strong. Mindfulness-based wellness practices can build individual awareness and strength and create communities of connection that foster social change. Self-care and the embrace of our physical, emotional, and spiritual selves is a feminist notion.

1 A Christmas morning spent as a young girl comes to mind whenever she runs outdoors on a rainy day. She remembers how her family rose early, opened presents, then looked outside to see new snow falling – it was beautiful and they decided to go enjoy it. The whole family bundled up and headed out to a quiet, residential street. By then, what appeared to be light snow from inside a warm living room was coming down more like hail and icy sleet. Her little sisters were on their bicycles, and the rest of the family started off on a jog. She smiles today when she thinks of what the neighbors had to say later. She knows how crazy they looked, a ragtag group of six running along in bad weather on Christmas morning, dodging hail, laughing, and breathing hard. She remembers that day as happiness uncomplicated by age or societal expectations. It was visceral and childish – it was joy.

2 Fitness in contemporary society can often be accused of working in diametric opposition to such celebratory expressions of physicality. So often, physical endeavors are linked to pursuit of an aesthetic, with no focus on empowerment and strength. The National Eating Disorder Association estimates that ten million Americans suffer from some form of disordered eating. Physical activity has the potential to provide happiness and to celebrate the female body outside of dictates about what it should look like. If strength and movement are beautiful, not punishing, can the field of professional health promotion do a better job of communicating that?

3 To make wellness a useful construct, one has to deconstruct the vantage point from which it is currently, commonly viewed. Does pursuing self-care really mean color-coordinating sports bras and critically assessing waist size? When promoted in a healthy, feminist fashion, wellness can be a vehicle for individual, community, and social

empowerment. One only needs to sit in stillness and take a few deep breaths to innately feel it – wellness is about physical practice. Inherently selfish, personal endeavors, physical motion and meditation provide pathways to connect the external with the internal, and to revel in what can be found in that space.

4 Physical practice for many women is a thorny concept, however. It is not as simple or as pure as it might seem at first glance, as anything dealing with the body and gender carries with it the weight of societal expectations and hegemonic ideals. Queer and trans scholarship to date has been critical of fitness practices in that they are often used as a way of disciplining the body and conforming to hetero-normative notions of attractiveness and slimness. “Women’s empowerment through fitness is thus largely imagined in a very limited, individualistic, apolitical sense that does not disrupt dominant ideologies or structures” (Scott-Dixon 36).

5 Claiming that physical practice and wellness are ideal pathways to happiness can, however, be problematic for reasons outside of hegemonic beauty norms. Sarah Ahmed decries prescriptive happiness in her work on the subject. Prescriptive happiness exerts a strange, subversive form of pressure on individuals. Notions about what can and should bring what feeling work socially as directives or mandates that paint outliers as unhappy, troubled, and misguided. Ahmed’s deconstruction of the notion that happiness is a universally agreed-upon state brought about by universally understood circumstances and objects asks us to think critically about the ways in which happiness becomes a form of thought control. Should every feminist person feel welcome in today’s fitness arena? Should weight loss and self-loathing be accepted sources of motivation for joining a gym? Popular paradigms would have us believe that it is completely acceptable to judge ourselves based on Body Mass Index (BMI) and make fat-phobic statements amongst fitness-minded friends because to disagree renders one an outlier or killjoy (Ahmed 7).

6 The study of feminism as an opponent of general happiness is an interesting lesson in the power of this notion to shape the box of acceptable behavior. If a strong emphasis is placed historically on beauty, family, kinship, and heterosexual partnerships as being the sources of happiness, “feminists might kill joy simply by not finding the objects that promise happiness to be quite so promising. The word feminism is thus saturated with unhappiness” (Ahmed 107). Feminism becomes the ‘f word’ in this way. Prescriptive notions of wellness are full of recrimination, but we continue to couch them in benevolently condescending terms. “The violence of what was said or the violence of provocation goes unnoticed. However she speaks, the feminist is usually the one viewed as causing the argument, who is

disturbing the fragility of peace” (Ahmed 187). Therefore, to make wellness a construct worth using, one has to deconstruct the perspective from which it is presently viewed.

7 So where is the hope for physical activity as a source of happiness? Is there a pursuit of happiness that lies outside the boundaries of social pressures and preconceived norms? We believe the answer lies in deconstruction of the term itself, and in a return to focus on the individual. A young girl fell in love with physical activity on a snowy Christmas morning. She didn't love it because anyone told her to or because she had already internalized societal pressures about how large or small her derriere should be. The girl loved it because it was a chance to get in touch with herself and bond with family in a spontaneous, authentic way, finding a pathway to that smiling place through breath and movement. A woman can develop strength and independence simply as happy side effects of a basic love of physical movement; athleticism offers opportunity for mastery experiences in the corporeal realm and increases self-efficacy. While physical strength and independence sound like concepts that would deconstruct hegemonic ideals of femininity, fitness has been carefully commodified in contemporary society and occupies a murky space that can be simultaneously feminist and anti-feminist. Dominant wellness paradigms often prescribe appropriate physical practice for women. For example, “while men's participation in many sport and fitness activities has historically been consistent with dominant conceptions of masculinity as well as heterosexuality, women's participation has tended to bring their femininity and sexuality into question.” (Dworkin 286)

8 The result is a careful negotiation engaged in by many active women between strength and predetermined notions of femininity. In order to meet some physical ideal, many women work hard to avoid increasing muscular mass in an overt way, and focus their efforts on things like calorie-burning. This focus is tied to pursuit of an aesthetic; such physical practice is not a healthy, holistic endeavor, and does not contribute to empowerment.

9 Women who won't restrict their athletic prowess and muscularity in order to embrace a feminine ideal potentially become successful in a given sport or athletic endeavor, but don't often receive public accolades for that. The 1999 Women's World Cup provided a great example. When Brandy Chastain scored a game-winning goal against China, she celebrated by racing forward and ripping off her jersey to reveal a chiseled torso. In media outlets, she was alternately criticized for her 'indecent display' and for her muscled form. Her legions of female youth soccer fans however, cheered her on (Scott-Dixon 22).

10 Our culture trivializes women's physical activity as only associated with diet/weight loss and appearance.” (Malin 72). However, a positive physical practice embraces a “health at

any size” approach, and although the notion seems vague, it is important to let go of predetermined judgments of what each of us should weigh. Positive practice and holistic wellness requires an abdication of responsibility to make others happy, and to meet any preconceived notions about attractiveness or appropriateness of an athletic activity. The definition of fitness is less about results and more about the power to do, the power to express, the power to live fully.

11 There is, of course, a public health reality that must be discussed when one thinks about diet and physical activity. As problematic as racialized, gendered, and mysteriously-determined BMI indicators may be, national numbers rise each year. While it is hardly a secret that Americans’ waistlines are increasing on a yearly basis, it is of greater concern that lifestyles are increasingly sedentary. A review of national averages shows steadily-increasing figures. In 2001, the Center for Disease Control did a study using the Body Mass Index for measuring height and weight proportionality. Their study showed that 21% of the population was classified as overweight or obese. Today that percentage is closer to 33% (CDC 2009). The problem is not a knowledge gap. The center for American Sports Data also conducted independent studies that showed Americans know they are at risk; 61% of their surveyed respondents felt they themselves were overweight. The issue is not a problem with behavior as much as it is environment. Our bodies, minds, and spirits were never meant for the high-tech, sedentary lifestyle that most Americans currently live. Though much of the health and wellness data collected at present concerns body mass and size, savvy, contemporary health promoters must move away from an emphasis on BMI and obesity statistics, and move towards emphasis on holistic wellness and the joy of movement. Research shows that troubling BMI numbers will drop naturally as people get moving, and adherence to exercise programs is increased with positive messaging and a friendly framework (Malin 86).

12 Physical practice has to be a positive, individualized experience, not a chore put up with for the vacuous goal of moving numbers on a scale. While tracking public health statistics is epidemiologically useful, it is not useful in individual health promotion or behavioral change. Throwing medical statistics at practitioners does not motivate them to move. Body Mass Index is not the best indicator of total body composition, although total adiposity ratios may provide medical relevance. Adiposity does create health risk, but it cannot be the focus of a positive health practice either. Decreased adiposity will be an inevitable result of a holistic wellness program, and one need not self-flagellate on the way to undertaking it.

13 Positive practice is highly individual, because what speaks to one person may not another. Our bodies were made to move in constant search of unity with our minds and spirits. Those who have felt a natural stillness within them while engaged in a physical practice, love the sensation and will pursue it and fight to regain it if lost. When we discuss the lethargic, overly-cerebral lifestyle most live in modern society, we believe we MUST discuss holistic fitness and feminist approaches to wellness as part of the remedy. Holistic fitness is any movement-activity that combines an emphasis on physicality with stress management and mind-body connectivity. It can take many forms.

14 Perhaps the answer for some will lie in yoga as traditionally defined, meaning more than just the physical practice. It is the most universal fitness modality that we have ever encountered. It combines intensity with openness and quiet, and is something accessible to all different types of practitioners. It is a form of meditation and exercise that can bring love, respect, gratitude, and health into a practitioner's life. It has elements both of movement and stillness that enables one to slow down and assess, to cultivate compassion both for self and others. We came across yoga as over-trained athletes looking for something fun to try, something new to master, and something to help bend unyielding muscles a bit more easily. What we found on the mat changed our lives, and inspired us to become yoga teachers. Practice is about more than training the body, and is something anyone can practice and study while joyously never 'mastering.' We still struggle with how much there is to learn, even as we dedicate a great deal of time, energy, academic study, and personal thought to yoga. Maybe you only grasp the practice when you accept that there is no mastering it.

15 Perhaps seated meditation, Pilates, weight lifting, distance running, or traditional aerobics will be a person's movement modality of choice, or perhaps a combination of many. The goal of a positive, holistic physical practice is to feel good rather than *look* good, though. It provides a means for quieting the mind and understanding how the body is connected to every thought that crosses it. The focus in such a practice is on positive sensations happening in the present moment rather than a militant, self-loathing desire to burn fat. The feeling resulting from an hour spent holistically should be revelry, not self-criticism.

16 The feminist looking for examples of critical theory applied to the body can find parallels in the sex radicalism. Nowhere is the embracing of the physical more omnipresent than in the sex radical feminist community. Not only embracing the physical, but reveling in it, sex-positive feminists offer powerful lessons in the importance of physicality to a complete, balanced person. Not always popular in the feminist movement, "whores...are the dykes of the nineties, the lavender menace whom it is still considered okay to ostracize"

(Nagle 26). Feminism has not always created space for physically-focused, sexual women who embrace these notions with agency and thoughtfulness. It is easier to dismiss sexual women and sex workers as victims somehow manipulated by a misogynistic culture into acting out the fantasies of heterosexual men, just as it may be easier to dismiss the fitness-minded woman as being manipulated by patriarchal beauty norms, seeking to cash in on the social capital promised to the thin and beautiful.

17 It is both the definition of feminism that must change in order to include both ‘good girls’ *and* ‘bad girls,’ physical women and sedentary intellectuals, not they who must conform to a ‘good girl’ image so as to be considered feminist. Sex trade workers like Nina Hartley claim, in effect, to be feminists in exile and ask questions of the movement that apply as much to sexuality as to physical fitness. “Is it not in our best interests to become friends with our bodies, fully at home in them” (Nagle 59). Excluded from a rightful place in the feminist movement, they demand to be recognized as members of the women’s community. Feminist athletes value the physical perhaps from a slightly different perspective than the sex radical feminist, but the emphasis on connectivity, individuality, and self-knowledge espoused by both communities is markedly similar.

18 The writing of famous dancers and burlesque performers like Lily Burana and Diablo Cody celebrate the sex radical feminist’s confusing blend of celebratory exhibitionism, social capital gained through adherence to normative beauty standards, and rebellion against notions of ‘appropriate’ female behavior. Their writing thematically resonates with feminist athletes. Burana and Cody write of enjoying the physicality of exotic dancing and of embracing the foreign image of self created with costumes and artifice, whether on stage or in the dark recesses of the club. Dancing was a choice they made, a flirtation with a world they wanted to know about, and an exhilarating experience. They know that the female body can be both a site for individual empowerment and for influence by destructive, disciplinary, patriarchal beauty norms. The brave, personal way that both sex radicals and athletes navigate this quagmire is inspiring. Our feminism is complicated by such a lifetime love for the physical – this respect for the social capital that strength and beauty yield, and this understanding of the dual purpose physicality can fulfill. It empowers us even as it is weaponized against us.

19 The question of celebrating the sexual and physical is more about choice than anything else. The freedom to choose how, with whom, and whether to operate inside or outside prescribed constructs is a right that the sex-positive feminist claims that threatens dominant discourse. While a liberating proposition for the individual woman, agency of this sort is terrifying to those in the heterosexist, ‘sex-is-for-reproduction’ and ‘women’s-bodies-

are-for-others'-enjoyment' camps. Sex-positive feminists laud the individuality of human sexuality, celebrate the physical body, and bump heads with feminist activists who combat sexist notions of female aesthetics by embracing their physical selves only from the neck up. Popular notions of serious feminists are that of the beleaguered, embattled, non-sexual frump. As a result, some feminists fear naming their physicality and sexuality, as both are too easily used as weapons to discredit or silence.

20 “The female body is a site where social codes and relationships of gender, race, sexuality, and class are rehearsed, enforced, and contested” (Verbrugge 55). Acknowledging this, many feminists seek to demonstrate resistance by disconnecting from that bodily site. Sex positive feminists provide a powerful model for how to reconnect, celebrate, and affirm the power of the physical whether for sex, fitness, holistic wellness or a combination thereof. Feminists have generally accepted the wisdom that dominant beauty ideals are destructive to women, but this may have also ushered in the sometimes dangerous illusion that healthful exercise is not feminist and that fitness spaces hold only potential for negativity (Malin 82). In order to resist beauty myths, many feminists eschew self-care through physical movement altogether, and call it liberation.

21 Allison Piepmeier writes about the notion of feminist besiegement in her chapter of the *Rethinking* anthology. She argues that because the academic field of Women's Studies is often targeted for funding cuts or questioned in terms of its academic rigor, feminists have taken on a combative narrative in their theory and conversations surrounding feminism. Because feminism is under attack, serious feminists must constantly be on guard, fighting for recognition and legitimacy (Piepmeier 124). To celebrate physical movement isn't 'serious' and to champion sexuality is too risky for the feminist academic, she implies. As the field of professionalized feminist theory emerged out of activist communities in the late 1960's, it was subjected to internal and external critiques. Piepmeier argues that “program directors, especially those who were instrumental in initiating programs in the early days of the field, often had to learn to operate in hostile environments. They developed besiegement mentalities as a self-preservation strategy” (119). As this narrative became unconscious and normative among feminists, it contributed to a continuing feeling of marginality and paranoia.

22 Constantly feeling combative has held feminists back from embracing new critical theories or accepting feminism in all of its forms. There is an acceptable, canonical type of feminist and then there are unacceptable outsiders who refuse to stick to the script. Piepmeier cogently argues, “the besiegement mindset thus becomes a tool that not only differentiates

between the discipline and the outside world but that is used within the discipline to police its boundaries and ultimately hold it back from certain kinds of academic change” (134). For embattled feminists, the acceptable model is cerebral and not unacceptably-sexual; physical self-care and celebration are hardly emphasized. In fact, a focus on the physical is considered a throwback, a misplaced priority, or a concession to patriarchal beauty norms. As such, fitness becomes the province of the failed feminist.

23 Castelnovo and Guthrie examine feminist aversion to the physical in *Feminism & The Female Body*, arguing that since feminism works to change the way society perceives women and how women perceive themselves socially and mentally, there is a natural correlation to the physical realm (72). Strength of the physical form is resistance to patriarchy in its own way. Embracing the physical requires a great deal of permission to be selfish. An exercise regimen is an investment in the self; athleticism requires a great deal of time and personal commitment. For a woman to embrace this level of physical activity may not just require a reevaluation of self-care priorities and reclamation of her time, but also a feminist, holistic approach to fitness.

24 A spiritual connection is important in holistic wellness, and the goal of movement should be to foster the connection. Using physical movement to improve one’s connection to the present tense improves total quality of life and is an exercise in mindful living. The purpose behind a wellness program must be to improve quality of life, strength, and to provide empowerment to live more fully. A feminist commitment to exercise in this empowering sense can improve lives.

25 The intention of encouraging wellness, not thinness, will be met or missed depending upon the professionalism and foresight of current health promoters. Second-wave feminism was fond of the mantra, “the personal is political.” When it comes to health and lifestyle, nothing could be truer. Our failure in the health profession to create deliverables salient at the local and individual level is a betrayal of those we strive to serve. Consistently failing to approach health and wellness from a critical angle isolates, alienates, and fails to reach. The effective health promoter must be cognizant of the conundrum faced by the physical woman operating against norms that abuse or discipline, and understand the intersecting pressures of gender, race, class, and sexual identity on choices made around wellness. Feminist and queer theories provide an impetus to think critically and deconstruct before internalizing or worse, delivering harmful messaging. Critical analysis is a professional responsibility for health promoters and wellness professionals.

26 The answer lies in the personal – we must remember that the roots of the wellness profession are intensely personal, and any program and initiative must bear in mind the myriad of social, economic, environmental, and cultural factors relevant to a target population. Interventions must always be fine-tuned, referencing a specific demographic both externally and internally.

27 There is no one-size-fits-all with health programming. Using theory for guidance and reference, professionals must stay mindful of social factors when communicating about wellness. As much high-level research is being conducted to explain the neuroscience, the genetics, and the statistics of health, professionals must work incredibly hard to stay in touch with the population they mean to serve. There can be no ego in health promotion, and there can be no judgmental, normative ways of communicating health messages. With health, it is always personal.

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Body Talk: Reconsidering the Post-Feminist Discourse and Critical Reception of Lena Dunham's *Girls*

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Abstract:

This paper will address the ways in which Lena Dunham, the creator, head writer, producer, sometimes director, and star of the television series *Girls*, defies the glorification of traditional femininity and denounces the representations of what Angela McRobbie named the 21st century “postfeminist masquerade.” She also defies the televisual male gaze, as first posited in film theory by Laura Mulvey, by establishing a new form of authorship in TV. Flawlessly sculpted, sexualized female bodies from every era have long populated the landscape of HBO, the premium cable channel that airs *Girls*. Contrasting many depictions of twenty something women on television, Dunham chooses to bare the imperfections of her body in her performance. Shots of her naked figure often highlight her hardly flat stomach, double chin, and knickers not purchased from any lingerie shop. Although her character is not sexualized in the typical sense, her weight does not render her asexual or deter her from being both desired and desirable. And lastly, although the series frequently relies on romantic relationships, it is essentially about the friendships and bonds between the four *Girls*, and the ritual of undressing is not sexualized, but shows the intimacy of the characters.

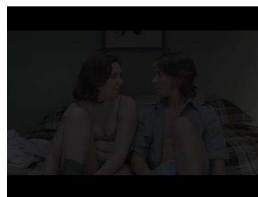
1 Since its premiere in 2012, *Girls* has continued to be a hotly debated cultural spectacle widespread in conference panels, think pieces, and numerous online outlets. Questions of the representations of privilege, race, gender and sexuality inform discussions on the series, while its creator, writer, star and sometimes director, Lena Dunham, has become the pinnacle of both praise and scrutiny. Dunham's often-naked appearance, which falls between normative Hollywood standards of attractiveness and those of comically asexual overweight actresses, remains a ubiquitous topic.

2 Straddling comedy and drama throughout each 25-minute episode on HBO, a premium cable channel with few limits (unlike network television programs such as ABC, NBC, CBS, and FOX that restrict explicit content and rely on advertising revenue), *Girls* affords ample opportunities for the 27-year-old to showcase her bare body in various graphically depicted sexual encounters. As *The New Yorker's* television critic Emily Nussbaum puts it:

Besides, I could see that there was another thing to notice about *Girls*: Lena Dunham's body, which she had placed, quite deliberately, in the spotlight. Unlike many women on TV, Dunham is short and pear-shaped. She has a tattoo of Eloise on her back, plus ink done by her friend and co-star Jemima Kirke, whom she knew in high school at St. Ann's. The filmmaker can look beautiful in the manner of twenties movie star Clara Bow: She has a small chin, a bow mouth, and very large brown eyes flecked with gold. But just as often, she lets herself look like hell. Dunham films herself nude, with her skin breaking out, her belly in folds, chin doubled, or flat on her

back with her feet in a gynecologist's stirrups. These scenes shouldn't shock, but they do, if only because in a culture soaked in Photoshop and Botox, few powerful women open themselves up so aggressively to the judgment of voyeurs.

3 Despite the amount of discourse on her body, few academic works have focused on the duality of Dunham's authorship as a showrunner and star. Her choice to defy Angela McRobbie's definition of the post-feminist masquerade, along with the frequently disseminated construction of the male gaze as first discussed by Laura Mulvey, marks a transition in the post-feminist and post-network landscape. It is our intention to initiate this focus. Possessing an unprecedented level of creative control on the HBO platform, Dunham establishes a new form of authorship and performativity within a medium that has merited heightened cultural primacy in the 2000s. Although the series is structured as a 30-minute comedy rather than an hour-long drama, it does not rely on network sitcom conventions because it holds more creative liberties. As Amanda Lotz noted in "Postfeminist Television Criticism: Rehabilitating Critical Terms and Identifying Postfeminist Attributes," "Scholars generally concur that feminist discourse is predominantly found in the comedy genre because of narrative and generic qualities that both introduce and then contain potentially subversive content."



4 While recent television studies scholarship such as Jason Mittell's *Complex TV* and Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine's *Legitimizing Television* have sharply pinpointed the various complexities behind the role of the contemporary showrunner, few works have yet to highlight female showrunners, particularly alongside feminist television criticism. For the purposes of this paper, we aim to focus on a critical feminist reading of how Dunham achieves authorial control of her work as the showrunner and star of *Girls*. The issues of gender alongside race, class, and privilege indeed remain problematic within the series because it is a series focusing on white and upper middle class characters. The latter part of this paper will then focus on an investigation of the critical reception of the showrunner and her series, and as part of this subsequent analysis, we will address commentaries on the series in relation to race and privilege. We find this especially fitting as the divisions amongst critics and audiences further illustrates a post-feminist, post-racial, and post-network cultural landscape.

5 In *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*, McRobbie asserts that the pressures of maintaining the “beauty standard” when popular media is omnipresent in everyday life leads to a representation of women through a “post-feminist masquerade” (64), a 21st century take on one of the central themes in Mary Anne Doane’s 1982 *Screen* article, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator” (74-88). The preponderance of idealized bodies in film, television, and advertising, coupled with the influence of consumer culture encompassing the business of beauty products and regimens, leads to a microscopic attention to physical appearance and self-surveillance. McRobbie asserts that this masquerade is “a new form of gender power which re-orchestrates the heterosexual matrix in order to secure, once again, the existence of patriarchal law and masculine hegemony” (64). She cites the protagonist of HBO’s last female-centered series *Sex and the City* as emblematic masquerade.¹

6 In understanding the significance of representations of women, Mulvey’s 1975 *Screen* article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” proves helpful. Mulvey propounds the concept of the “male gaze” of cinema, in which woman is the passive image/object and man is the active viewer/subject. Consequently, women only view themselves based on how they are perceived by men. Mulvey’s contributions continue to be frequently cited in academia because they remain highly applicable to today’s media. Film, and furthermore television and popular media, are hardly made from an opposing “female gaze” or the perspectives of women. The skewed onscreen representations result from inequalities with which most minorities struggle behind the camera.

7 Dunham defies the televisual male gaze widespread in HBO, Hollywood, and mainstream media. Concurrently, her character’s physicality in *Girls* does not render her character asexual or undesirable in the eyes of attractive men. She makes a point to reveal her naked body in scenes of a sexual nature as well as those depicting everyday life. The series illustrates the following:

1. An ideal body does not lead to sexual confidence or satisfaction, in spite of the idealized bodies and sex scenes pervasive in film and TV.
2. Acts of female nudity can lead to physical humor, but, this does not render the female character asexual, unattractive or undesirable as a result.
3. Women can be shown naked, even together, without the scene conforming to the male gaze by possessing a fantasized sexual connotation.

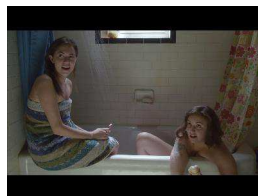
¹ The series eventually became a symbol of post-feminist consumerist fantasies in its last seasons and two film spin-offs.

8 On the subject of physical expectations foisted upon women, Dunham revealed in a 2013 *Playboy* interview what she would do if she were to wake up with the body of a Victoria's Secret lingerie model. Her answer:

I don't think I'd like it very much. I don't want to go through life wondering if people are talking to me because I have a big rack. Not being the babest person in the world creates a nice barrier. The people who talk to you are the people who are interested in you. It must be a big burden in some ways to look that way and be in public.

It should be noted that she did not pose naked for *Playboy*, and has not posed naked in other mediums not created by her, demonstrating controlled authorship of her body. While the magazine typically asks young and attractive actresses to undress for their most coveted cover or centerfold feature, the "20 Questions" section featuring Dunham typically focuses on interesting personas in popular culture, most frequently of the male persuasion.

9 Despite its many explorations of romantic relationships, *Girls* strives to be about friendship, and the only line we see Dunham's character Hannah Horvath write in her book is: "A friendship between college girls is grander and more dramatic than any romance." In the series' pilot, Hannah differentiates herself from her roommate Marnie (Allison Williams), stating she looks like a "Victoria's Secret angel" and herself as a "fat baby angel," whereupon she grabs a cupcake and asks that Marnie and her boyfriend Charlie (Christopher Abbott) avert their eyes. Hannah and Marnie fall asleep watching *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-1977), and later in the episode hang out in their bathtub together. While Hannah has no qualms with devouring a cupcake naked in the tub, and in spite of her recently uttered self-deprecating comment, she remarks to a demure Marnie, wrapped in a towel, that she never sees her naked. Coincidentally, Marnie's sex life with Charlie is absolutely lacking from her perspective.



10 In Season 1, Episode 3, "All Adventurous Women Do," Hannah's boyfriend Adam (Adam Driver) grabs the sides of her stomach during a post-coital session on his bed, and makes flapping noises and gestures to produce a comical muppet-like quality, stating that her stomach is funny. She replies that she does not wish for her body to be funny. He suggests she only needs to lose three to four pounds, and asks if she has previously attempted to lose

weight. He bursts into laughter as she turns around, and lightly yet still defensively states that no, she has not, because she had “some other concerns in my life.” With that statement, Hannah acknowledges her imperfect body, but concludes it is not one of her defining characteristics. Hannah asserts this belief to Adam, who asks her to touch his non-existent stomach fat in return. In this scene, Dunham tacitly addresses the state of American television as far as women’s bodies are concerned. Adam unsurprisingly remains unaware of the weight of her statement.



11 One of the most blatant examples of the ‘double standards’ imposed on *Girls* is observed in the reactions of its viewers, which take the form of disbelief that Hannah is attractive enough for her partners; they range from Adam to a wealthy and handsome 42-year old doctor played by Patrick Wilson in Season 2, Episode 5, “One Man’s Trash.” That Dunham has become something of an auteur brings to attention the treatment of male entertainers who retain a considerable amount of control over their work. Did we ever question or castigate Woody Allen, Jerry Seinfeld, and Louis C.K., among a hundred other performers, whenever their onscreen personas successfully woo sexual partners? Did we ever scrutinize their bodies? Did anyone ever stop to ask whether Alvy Singer was too short and spindly for Annie Hall? Perhaps it is the redeeming qualities inherent in their comedic personas – their power, success, humor or charm – that leads us to believe they could have sex and be in relationships with attractive women. And this is what we come to learn about Hannah. Dunham suggests that an ‘ideal’ body does not necessarily lead to sexual satisfaction. Taking again from the *Playboy* interview, she states:

My goal is to have a sexual verisimilitude that has heretofore not been seen on television. I did it because I felt that the depictions of sex I had seen on television weren’t totally fair to young women trying to wrap their brains around this stuff.

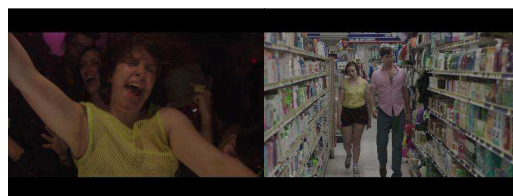
12 In contrast, Marnie, the tall and svelte “Victoria’s Secret angel,” has perpetually lackluster intercourse with Charlie. This is not to say that Hannah has not had her fair share of sexual misadventures, but she is more privy to pleasure when possible. Marnie is portrayed as being unable to experience sexual gratification, and is more interested in the socioeconomic status of men and how it can elevate her from her own circumstances.² When

² As far as the two other “Girls” are concerned, the jittery Shoshana (Zosia Mamet) is insecure about her own

nudity in the series is taken out of a sexual context, the female body is depicted for purposes heretofore unseen on television. Images of the exposed female figure, particularly Dunham's, function as a storytelling device that can not only enhance the dramatic impact of a scene, but also sustain the visual joke in a sequence.

13 In Season 2, Episode 3, "Bad Friend," Hannah takes a freelance writing job and consequently tries cocaine for the first time. The protagonist explores the concept of vulnerability and youthful adventure by doing drugs; this is a prime example of Dunham locating the comical impact of female nudity in her performance. "Bad Friend" makes use of the proverbial 'double act' dynamic in comedy, though it is quickly subverted; the female is not relegated to the position of the 'straight man.' The uncovered female body produces humor in a rave sequence where Hannah trades shirts with a stranger on the dance floor, and emerges from the crowd with a mesh top and her nipples exposed. What makes the sequence interesting is its complete lack of a sexual connotation.

14 The visual joke is sustained in the next sequence, in which Hannah finds herself in the same outfit under the dull fluorescent lighting of a drug store. Removed from the sweaty commotion of the rave, her state of undress in a mundane setting illustrates the absurdity of her dalliance with cocaine. In her performance, the viewer sees that the interpretation of the female body is inextricably tied to the context in which it is presented. And as demonstrated in this episode and many other instances throughout the series, while female nudity can be used in service of humor, it is merely one of the many devices shoring up the joke.



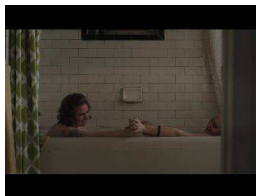
15 At the drug store, Hannah finds that her former-junkie neighbor Laird (Jon Glaser), who is attracted to her, has been following her. Although he is not as debonair as her past suitors, his attraction is signaled when he calls her "a pretty face," much to Hannah's surprise and delight, indicating that her sexual desirability is intact in spite of her antics.

status as a 20-year-old virgin in the first season, while Jessa (Jemima Kirke) understands sex as a means of dominating the opposite sex rather than that of experiencing pleasure or establishing an intimate connection. We never see Marnie, Shoshana, or Jessa as exposed as Hannah, although Jessa exposes her bare breasts, but these tendencies may very well be attributed to the actresses' choices.



The episode culminates in Hannah's tryst with Laird, an artificially created experience of vulnerability which will serve as the subject of her article (a la the confessional pieces of xoJane.com³). With that, Hannah proves herself the author of her own sex life. Throughout the series, Dunham's character is still very much a serious romantic lead with attractive partners. Dunham, then, is never rendered asexual or unattractive because of her imperfections in the form of humor or less than idealized appearances. Both her character and real-life persona never attempt to live up to a post-feminist masquerade, proving that this assumed standard is not necessary to gain personal or professional success and self-fulfillment.

16 *Girls* routinely posits images of the female body – which are, on the surface, conducive to scopophilia – in prosaic situations, confronting its viewers with the possibility of women's bodies not being titillating so much as simply existing on television. Such is the implication of scenes featuring female characters in various states of undress and engaged in everyday activities, as well as intimacy based on female friendship. Echoing the scene in the bathroom in the series' pilot, the conclusion of Season 2, Episode 4, "It's a Shame About Ray," sees Jessa seeking comfort from Hannah after the disintegration of her marriage. When she joins Hannah in the bathtub, female nudity is normalized as the turmoil experienced by the character forms the subtext of the scene. The integration of humor via bodily functions – signaled when Jessa disposes of her snot in the bathwater – further solidifies the moment as one of female bonding in which nudity is merely circumstantial to the narrative.



17 When *Hustler* magazine released a *Girls* pornography parody in May 2013, Dunham explained her reaction on her Twitter account:

³ xoJane.com is a lifestyle website aimed at a largely female readership, featuring articles replete with details of its writers' personal lives. Jane Pratt, who founded the website, has admitted to encouraging her writers to experiment with lifestyle trends as a means of generating content

Okay, I wracked my brain to articulate why I can't just laugh off a porn parody of *Girls* and here are 3 reasons:

1. Because *Girls* is, at its core, a feminist action while *Hustler* is a company that markets and monetizes a male's idea of female sexuality [sic]
2. Because a big reason I engage in (simulated) onscreen sex is to counteract a skewed idea of that act created by the proliferation of porn [sic]
3. Because it grosses me out.

It's important to me to be honest about the complexities of having that out in the world. Love, Lena (porn name: Murray Broadway) [sic]

18 There is a phenomenon in which the significance of female performers to the medium of television is skewed by depictions of their characters' sexuality. Dunham, then, stands as something of an oddity in the media, lauded for her achievements on and off screen, and scrutinized for embracing nudity in her performances. Her access to multiple creative roles parallels that of another performer-showrunner: Tina Fey, who is widely credited for advancing the position of female talent in television. As the first female head writer of *Saturday Night Live*⁴ and creator of *30 Rock* (NBC, 2006-2013), Fey's contributions have generally been made within the confines of network television, whose broadcast regulations preclude nudity. Perhaps therein lies the difference between the public reception of Hannah Horvath and Liz Lemon, and, by extension, their off screen counterparts. That is not to say that Fey has been exempt from an invidious examination of her appearance by the media, but the sexual exploits of her mostly asexual Liz Lemon, sparse and only ever implied, have somehow made her public persona more palatable than that of Dunham.

19 The disparate portrayals of these two figures in the media belie the nearly identical nature of their professional roles, which signifies the impact still inherent in female nudity. Fey's contributions are no less provocative than Dunham's; the central premise of *30 Rock* serves to lampoon the very industry which catapulted her to fame. But when Dunham bares her body in *Girls*, it is as though all attention is diverted from her status as a storyteller to a wrongly supposed request to be viewed as a sexual spectacle. Facing similar issues in network television, Mindy Kaling has sought to explore the romantic experiences of a young professional in *The Mindy Project* (Fox, 2012-present), of which she is both performer and showrunner. In response to commentary about her character's appearance, Kaling has stated that she does not view her character's weight as her problem, but a constant means by which her onscreen counterpart is defined by her sexual partners and those inhabiting her reality.

⁴ Tina Fey's tenure as head writer of *Saturday Night Live* began in 1999 and ended in 2006.

Both Kaling and Dunham have been the subjects of media coverage, but most of these features, no matter how complimentary, ultimately emphasize the ways in which their bodies deviate from the idealized female form. While the romantic prospects of Kaling's Mindy have been misinterpreted as an invitation for the audience to speculate the desirability of the performer, Dunham's character has elicited unwarranted commentary on her body. The otherness attached to Dunham and Kaling's physicality by popular media attests to a propensity to define female talent as aberrations of physical ideals without consideration of their various talents. As Kaling stated in a September 2013 feature for *Parade* magazine:

I always get asked, "Where do you get your confidence?" I think people are well meaning, but it's pretty insulting. Because what it means to me is, "You, Mindy Kaling, have all the trappings of a very marginalized person. You're not skinny, you're not white, you're a woman. Why on earth would you feel like you're worth anything?"

Kaling also remarked, "While I'm talking about why I'm so different, white male show runners get to talk about their art." As she and Dunham are the creative voices of their respective series, the chasm between media attention drawn to their bodies and their status as television auteurs could not be more pronounced.

20 In the past, discussions of body image were deemed contrary to the advancement of women. Christina Hendricks, who portrays *Mad Men's* (AMC, 2007-present) sexualized Joan Holloway, is often lauded as a healthy alternative to the waif figure, yet she frequently admonishes treatment of her body type as 'other.' When the fashion editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald* referred to her as "full figured" during a 2012 interview, Hendricks subsequently refused to comply with any other questions on body image, stating that being labeled as such was "just rude." Meanwhile, Dunham's assertion of control over the representation of her body – done in service of upsetting the Hollywood status quo – is what intellectualizes her role in *Girls*.

21 At the forefront of recent series produced by women and about women, *Girls* propounds the discussion of female bodies on television as one which is highly significant, and one which is ushering in a new era of authorship and agency. While its depictions of mainly privileged Caucasian women can be understood as a cause for contention in racial or socioeconomic terms, Dunham's voice as a showrunner and performer is undeniably making substantial strides for women in television. Dunham and her critics, with varying results, have discussed the issue to engage with the public. Interestingly enough, one of the most powerful showrunners of primetime television, Shonda Rhimes of *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-present), *Private Practice* (ABC, 2007-2013), and *Scandal* (ABC, 2012-present), is a

professed fan of *Girls*, although she has previously castigated series such as *Bunheads* (ABC Family, 2012-2013) for its lack of diversity. Rhimes' series utilize 'blindcasting' in the hope of illustrating diversity and equality in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. In a 2012 interview with CNN, Rhimes commented on diversity in contemporary TV and *Girls*:

I don't know if there is a responsibility on the part of the creator, I mean there is a responsibility on the part of the network. It's very interesting to me that HBO didn't say: why isn't the show more diverse? We believe in diversity, so why don't we make this show be more diverse? I think that's where I lay the fault. I've seen 'Girls.' I think it's delightful, I love it. And I think Lena Dunham is tremendous and interesting and a really talented writer. She made a statement where she said [she] didn't want to try to represent experiences that were not [her] own, and what [she] knew was this. The idea that she felt her experience wasn't relatable to anybody who wasn't white is disturbing to me. Because I watch the show- I find it delightful. So why couldn't one of those girls been Native American or Indian or Asian or Hispanic or black and it had been exactly the same story? I don't understand why it would have to be a different story because the person was a different color.

22 Dunham's statement about the limited representations of racial minorities in *Girls*, presented in an NPR interview in which she also remarked on her fear of racial tokenism in televisual storytelling, remains contentious. Admittedly, casting Donald Glover as her love interest in only the first two episodes of the second season did not prove an effective exercise in addressing the racial problems of *Girls*. His character, an African-American Republican, contributes to the central conflict of his storyline by admitting his dislike of Hannah's writing, which leads to a clumsy discussion of their differing politics and interracial relationship. The conclusion of his two-episode arc, however, reveals the difficulty of initiating an honest discourse on race, even if it is between two educated metropolitan twenty-somethings amidst a presumed post-racial America. Hannah, offended not by his politics so much as his remarks on her writing, is essentially apolitical and self-absorbed. Her ex-boyfriend's stance on social issues is never divulged; instead, his Republican alignment is an assumed negative trait which she uses as an excuse for their break up. Glover's presence in *Girls* possibly predated the series' racial backlash, as co-showrunner Jenni Konner mentioned in a *Salon* interview that his role was planned before the critical response. If this is unknown to the viewer, it appears as an attempt at anti-tokenism instigated by criticism. Most recently, Danielle Brooks, a recurring cast member of the commercially and critically popular, female-dominated and multi-racial *Orange is The New Black* (Netflix, 2013-present), announced in an *Ebony* interview that she will be the first black female cast member in the third season of *Girls*. However, she is only confirmed for an appearance in one episode. Perhaps the biggest problem that caused the racial backlash of *Girls* was the initial

buzz surrounding the series, a laudation of depicting the universal experience of post-college twenty-something women struggling with professional and personal problems. We have of course come to learn that while many of Dunham's more relatable scenarios may resonate with members of races and socioeconomic groups beyond her own, the series is directly inspired by the showrunner's personal experiences and social circles, many members of which appear to be white. The same can be said for some of the most popular film and television series based in New York, including *Friends*, *Seinfeld* and *Manhattan*.

23 In a *Salon* piece titled "'Girls' Still Racist," Julianne Escobedo Cabero astutely points out that the series depicts an almost completely Caucasian cast set in Brooklyn, a city that she cites as the most statistically diverse in the United States. She concluded that "despite all its frank talk about abortion and HPV and sex, this show's advances in the realm of progressive womanist television are very nearly undermined by its oblivious, exclusionist and unknowingly racist (the worst kind, no?) aspects." And Kendra James' piece for *Racialicious* propounded more personal criticism, as she has a similar upbringing as Dunham, and even attended the same university, Oberlin College. She comments on the racial stereotypes presented by minor characters and concludes:

Lena Dunham and I may have a bit in common, but regardless of what Emily Nussbaum says, I do not consider *Girls* to be For Us or By Us. Nussbaum's "Us"⁵ and Dunham's show eliminate not only the other two-thirds of Brooklyn that exist, the reality of a minority-majority NYC population, but also the reality that my friends and I are currently living. Once again, we've been erased from a narrative.

24 TV critics such as Maureen Ryan and Alyssa Rosenberg have perhaps made some of the most well-rounded commentaries on this subject in relation to the television industry, with Ryan's *Huffington Post* piece, "HBO's 'Girls' Isn't Racist, Television is Racist (And Sexist)," and Rosenberg's "Women of Color in Television, Part 1" echoing Rhimes' sentiment that the onus of dealing with a lack of diversity should fall on television networks, which happen to be dominated by Caucasian men. This also speaks to the significance of media industries studies in probing these issues, and understanding the imbalanced infrastructure of the film and television landscape. In regard to issues of class and privilege and middle class feminism, while all of the characters in *Girls* come from upper middle class families, one of the main struggles of the series' protagonists is unemployment or underemployment compounded by the loss of financial dependency from their parents. This

⁵ Nussbaum's "For Us By Us" assertion is mentioned in her March 2012 *New York* magazine article, "Its Different for 'Girls'" in which she quotes her colleague and *Salon* TV critic Willa Paskin: "the show felt, to her peers, FUBU: 'for us by us.'" Paskin and Nussbaum are here appropriating the slogan of the African-American apparel company, FUBU.

relatable component has not always been welcomed as a significant counter-critique. When it comes to a discussion of privilege and class as depicted in the series, all censure seems to be directed at Dunham and her background as a wealthy New Yorker with two famous artists as her parents. All of her series' co-stars also come from wealthy and famous families, further fueling the flames of class-based criticism.

25 Williams is the daughter of NBC news anchor Brian Williams; Mamet is the daughter of playwright David Mamet; Kirke is the daughter of Bad Company drummer Sam Kirke. As stridently as these family connections were publicized in the months following *Girls*' premiere, HBO was more likely to have offered Dunham her own series because of the success of her second independent film, *Tiny Furniture* (2010). Shot in her childhood home, the film is a more faithful portrayal of her actual lifestyle than what is depicted in *Girls*.

26 These examples of criticism aimed at the series' lack of racial and socioeconomic diversity are far more intellectually sound in contrast to those concerning her body. Drawing a slight parallel between *Girls* and HBO's other well-known series centered on four women in New York City, Andrea Peyser of the *New York Post* declared that Dunham's series was *Sex and the City* "for ugly people." The issue of appearances forms the crux of her review: *Girls*' four main characters are "20-something white gals," she writes, who "dress in mismatched consignment-shop rags." As it appears, the interpretive processes of many critics sustain arrested development as soon as they discern the surface of *Girls*. The deeper implication of Peyser, among other critics, taking umbrage with the 'ugliness' of the series is that despair runs counter to comedy.

27 Echoing Peyser's preoccupation with the explicit meaning of *Girls*' graphic content, Linda Stasi of the *New York Post* takes a more unapologetic approach in skewering Dunham's physicality as it appears in the series' second season. Comparisons to *Sex and the City* are ineluctable in her criticism, positioned front and center as the dubious paragon of feminist television. That Stasi exalts *Sex and the City* as the be all and end all of television series about women is a questionable conceit, though it further foregrounds the implication that attractiveness is analogous to success, one which detracts from the critical acuity of many who have attempted to review *Girls*.

28 The issue of conventional attractiveness has sporadically surfaced in the narrative of *Girls*, and certain critics have accordingly designated the character of Marnie as their source of reprieve from the perceived "ugliness." Of course, such an attempt is usually made at the expense of thoughtful analysis of the series' plotting and genre conventions. That the character is somehow unable to find love is most curious to Stasi, who finds fault in the

verisimilitude of the character's storyline. In response to Hannah securing a romantic relationship in the time between the first and second season, Stasi writes that "sometimes it just doesn't pay to be smart, breathtakingly beautiful, nice and kind." The fixation on images of success ultimately dissuades critics from truly examining the narrative forces at work in the series and the ways in which they are established and conjoined, as in the interweaving of tragic elements in the framework of a situational comedy.

29 What Stasi and others fail to acknowledge is that Marnie obsesses over her appearance in order to find a rich suitor to improve her own socio-economic standing. This dated practice is reminiscent of recent college graduates in the era of Betty Friedan's 1960s treatise *The Feminine Mystique*. Following Marnie's break up with long-term boyfriend Charlie, she pursues a famous conceptual artist because she is ostensibly enamored with his lavish lifestyle. Her own career is stagnant, and she remains unfulfilled when she bases her happiness on a male partner. Upon learning of Charlie's fame and success in the world of mobile applications in Season 2, Episode 8, "It's Back," she attempts to rekindle their relationship. While the two engage in physical contact again by the end of the second season, she disingenuously fawns over his new accomplishments and abilities as a lover. Upon their reconciliation in Season 2, Episode 10, "Together," Marnie claims she does not love him for his money because she does not even know how much he has. He quickly declares it is indeed "a bunch, a lot, a lot of money." The two kiss at the end of the scene.

30 A trenchant exchange between Hannah and Marnie (in Season 2, Episode 2, "I Get Ideas") delineates their differing views of their bodies as well as the patriarchy under which they operate. After being rejected for a curatorial position, Marnie becomes a hostess at a high-end restaurant with the help of Shoshanna and Ray, who encourage her to capitalize on her beauty in the professional world. Hannah is less than accepting of her friend's new job; expressing disgust over the "rich, old men" who frequent Marnie's workplace, she exalts herself for making "clean money" and not "cashing in" on her sexuality. That Marnie vocalizes her desire for someone to tell her "how her life should look" in Season 2, Episode 4, "It's a Shame About Ray," is a telling example of characterization because none of the other three primary female characters have so openly implored direction in life. To place the trajectory of the character in an economy of beauty, it could be said that Marnie, the "Victoria's Secret angel," has always stood to gain the most for adhering to expectations imposed on women, but it is clear that within the narrative, she is defined as a passive agent in such an economy.

31 Ironically, Hannah faces a similar dilemma involving her sexuality and professional prospects in Season 2, Episode 9, “On All Fours,” in which the drafts of her e-book are rejected by her editor (John Cameron Mitchell), who is not interested in her outlook on female friendship so much as her sexual history. Hannah’s editor demands to know about the “sexual failure,” the “pudgy face, liquid semen and sadness,” a comically preposterous take on female objectification in the reality of *Girls*. Nonetheless, Hannah capitulates and agrees to write about her tryst with a teenager (in Season 2, Episode 7, “Video Games”). The possibility of Hannah’s foray into the world of literature being hijacked and distorted into a lurid account of sexual encounters is left unexplored as she subsequently suffers a mental breakdown. But the outcome of her struggle is reminiscent of her ill-advised decision to write a crowd-pleasing story about death in Season 1, Episode 9, “Leave Me Alone,” and as per the narrative patterns of tragedy in which the character frequently finds herself, the possibility of Hannah achieving success – even if she succumbed to female objectification – was simply not meant to be.

32 Accusations of anti-feminism leveled against the series could be attributed to its scenes of unfulfilling sex, which, Sarah Hughes of *The Independent* suggests, are redolent of the protagonist’s “lack of self-worth.” In a bid to trace the series’ backlash to its most inflammatory elements, Hughes indicates that some have balked at the idea of watching young women displaying visceral reactions to sex. Yet it is these depictions of ungainly sexual exploration that have received the brunt of the criticism, with the assumption on the part of the media that a sex scene ought to be gratifying, especially one in a comedy. The unacknowledged irony lies in a secondary assumption apparent in many reviews of *Girls*: if the series’ depictions of sex were outright titillating, it would somehow be found more agreeable. Could the series, which eschews these simplistic notions, be alternatively accepted as a more challenging viewing experience?

33 Nussbaum locates *Girls* within a continuum of “culture-rattling narratives about young women” ranging from novels about the female experience since 1958 to the music of contemporary female singer-songwriters. A recurring interest in privilege among young women is apparent in cultural products which have often elicited criticism informed by a gender divide:

Because such stories exposed the private lives of male intellectuals, they got critiqued as icky, sticky memoir – score-settling, not art. (In contrast, young men seeking revenge on their exes are generally called “comedians” or “novelists” or “Philip Roth.”) There’s clearly an appetite for this prurient ritual, in which privileged girls, in

their rise to power, get humiliated, first in fiction, then in criticism – like a Roman Colosseum for gender anxieties.

34 A retributive undercurrent, as it appears, has long been entrenched in the genre of comedy, though whether these narratives are considered cruel or mean-spirited hinges on the existence of a dominant female perspective. Simply put, art which explores sexual politics in heterosexual relationships with a male voice tends to escape reproach. As observed in the critical reception of *Girls*, any trace of privilege or cultivation in the voice of the female artist tends to be commandeered as the thrust of criticism. There is a wealth of astute observations on relationships and sexuality in the tradition of comics debasing themselves in sitcoms, though they are often expressed from a male perspective. Nussbaum links the auteurist sensibilities and often unsavory aspects of *Girls* to an attempted reinvigoration of the tradition characterized by such series as *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989-1998) and *Louie* (FX, 2010-present). What other critics have considered a fault of the series – a narrow focus on privileged Caucasian women and their sexual misadventures – is regarded by Nussbaum as its moorings in a burgeoning medium, a “modern” mode of television which simply “makes viewers uncomfortable.” On the topic of unsympathetic characters and *Girls*’ darkly comical leanings, Hughes indicates a possible transatlantic divide in the series’ critical and public reception, writing that it would be less likely to stand out in the United Kingdom, where “the self-absorbed and unaware” are celebrated in sitcoms. American viewers, she suggests, have yet to fully accept “truly dislikeable” female characters as viable sources of amusement, precluding their enjoyment of dark comedies tempered with insufficient sentimentality. Much of the uproar in response to *Girls* is therefore a result of viewers’ visceral dislike of the series’ characters as much as its digression from the formalistic constraints of the traditional sitcom. Perhaps the critical vitriol is incited not by Dunham’s physical portrayal of Hannah so much as her character’s flaws and contradictions, which is emblematic of a certain subgenre of television embodied by women behaving badly. And as demonstrated by the reception of *Girls*, this is a subgenre struggling to ingratiate itself with television audiences due in no small part to its gendered component.

35 While it may be a series exploring the familiar terrain of issues that define Generation Y, *Girls* is, to the delight of some and consternation of others, largely shaped by the auteurist sensibility of its creator, Lena Dunham. She is by no means a female anomaly within established models of television production, and yet it is in a discussion of gendered authorship where the individuality of her status becomes apparent. Also brought to the foreground, however, is an important discourse about the qualifiers applied to a given piece

of entertainment by critics and audiences alike. These qualifiers, as demonstrated by the public reception of the series, are a product of mechanisms in the media which innately, and occasionally selectively, respond to far-reaching cultural issues of gender status, privilege and race. At its most reductive, television criticism faults for depicting a reality in which gender ideals are flouted, presenting such an affront as the defining quality of the series' and, by extension, its stars. For a more enlightening purpose, it does not attribute the intrigue surrounding Dunham to her being female or feminist in a field dominated by male showrunners, but rather the wide range of responses to her being such an entity. Indubitably, Dunham has garnered unparalleled and unprecedented creative control in the noteworthy format of HBO's original programming. But if a woman's contributions to quality television were examined with an overstated focus on her gender, her significance is ultimately minimized; paradoxically, the realm of 30-minute comedies, as well as hour-long dramas, requires an influx of female talent to make these gender qualifiers obsolete.

36 Considering the patriarchal dominance in Hollywood, Dunham and her contributions have elicited necessary conversations about the need for women to generate content. Should productive analyses of *Girls* continue to differentiate 'women's entertainment' from 'entertainment about women,' media industries will be more mindful of underrepresented media practitioners and audiences. It is our hope that future discussions of talent in television will not be stultified by gender, ethnic, racial or socioeconomic definitions, but benefit from a more tempered view of an artist's unique background and issues of underrepresentation in an entire industry. Subsequent criticism about the depiction of a limited, privileged demographic in *Girls* will pave the way for new voices which may be taken into account by its creator. In this symbiotic relationship, cultural criticism and feminist media readings will continue to prove its own value to television viewership.

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